

American Presbyterianism and the Religious Observance of Christmas

By Chris Coldwell & Andrew J. Webb

I have not even accepted a dinner engagement for what they call 'Christmas.' I hate the whole business.

Professor John Murray[‡]

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‡Letter to Valerie Knowlton, Dec. 24, 1958, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, v. 3 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) 120.

It may come as a surprise, to those unfamiliar with the history of the beliefs of American Presbyterians, that they were opposed to the religious observation of Christmas and other 'holy days.'¹ The material presented here explores some of the historical background of Presbyterianism's opposition to such days, as well as their practical handling of Christmas in particular. It traces the views of American Presbyterians up to their embracing 'holy day' observance in the twentieth century, and closes with some considerations of some old Reformation principles with regard to such things as Christmas sermons/services.²

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: PRESBYTERIAN STANDARDS AND 'HOLY DAYS'

The roots of American Presbyterianism go back to the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, and their historic doctrine and practice are expressed in the Westminster Standards written in the mid-seventeenth century. It was

1. This is a significant revision and compilation of material previously published by the writers. Cf. Chris Coldwell, "The Religious Observance of Christmas and 'Holy Days' in American Presbyterianism," *The Blue Banner*, v. 8 #9–10 (September/October 1999) and Andrew J. Webb, "How Did Presbyterian Worship Become Episcopalian?" <https://biblebased.wordpress.com/2007/10/02/how-did-presbyterian-worship-become-episcopalian/> [accessed November 9, 2015].

2. This material only addresses the religious observance of man-made holy days such as Christmas and Easter in the worship of the church rather than the trappings, cultural observances and traditions associated with them such as Christmas trees, Easter eggs, or gift giving. Both authors agree that while arguments may rage over these traditional practices, those arguments are of secondary importance, while the question of whether Presbyterians should be observing holy days in their worship is primary. It is our hope and expectation that as Presbyterian Churches truly reform and faithfully instruct members, the love of the truth should work itself out in their homes as well, and the family's devotion to Christ will follow their church's lead, both institutions hearkening to the voice of Christ speaking in His Word.

the time of the second reformation, and those pursuing reform had sworn the Solemn League and Covenant. This covenant bound the three kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland to endeavor to come “to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church-government, *directory for worship* and catechizing...”³ To achieve this end it became the work of the Westminster assembly of divines to draw up these confessional documents.

The houses of parliament in England ordered the Westminster assembly on October 12, 1643 to turn their attention to the government and worship for the English Church.⁴ Over a year later the divines finished sending up the proposed Directory for the Public Worship of God.⁵ The divines titled it a directory because the puritans rejected liturgies in the formal sense (and opposed the imposition of them, as had been done prior to the Second Reformation), writing instead a guide for pastors to use in ordering the services of public worship. When completed this directory contained a preface, fourteen sections, and an appendix.⁶ The assembly explained their rationale in the preface.

In the beginning of the blessed Reformation, our wise and pious ancestors took care to set forth an order for redress of many things, which they then, by the word, discovered to be vain erroneous, superstitious, and idolatrous, in the publick worship of God. This occasioned many godly and learned men to rejoice much in the Book of Common Prayer, at that time set forth; because the mass, and the rest of the Latin service being removed, the publick worship was celebrated in our own tongue: many of the common people also receive benefit by hearing the scriptures read in their own language, which formerly were unto them as a book that is sealed.

Howbeit, long and sad experience hath made it manifest, that the Liturgy used in the Church of England, (notwithstanding all the pains and religious intentions of the Compilers of it,) hath proved an offence, not only to many of the godly at home, but also to the reformed Churches abroad. For, not to speak of urging the reading of all the prayers, which very greatly increased the burden of it, the many unprofitable and burdensome ceremonies contained in it have occasioned much mischief, as well by disquieting the consciences of many godly ministers and people, who could not yield unto them, as by depriving them of the ordinances of God, which they might not enjoy without conforming or subscribing to those ceremonies. Sundry good Christians have been, by means thereof, kept from the Lord's

table; and divers able and faithful ministers debarred from the exercise of their ministry, (to the endangering of many thousand souls, in a time of such scarcity of faithful pastors,) and spoiled of their livelihood, to the undoing of them and their families. Prelates, and their faction, have laboured to raise the estimation of it to such a height, as if there were no other worship, or way of worship of God, amongst us, but only the Service-book; to the great hinderance of the preaching of the word, and (in some places, especially of late) to the justling of it out as unnecessary, or at best, as far inferior to the reading of common prayer; which was made no better than an idol by many ignorant and superstitious people, who, pleasing themselves in their presence at that service, and their lip-labour in bearing a part in it,

3. “The Solemn League and Covenant” *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990), 359. Emphasis added. This publication of the Scottish Presbyterian standards is largely a reprint of *The Confession of Faith; Larger and Shorter Catechisms ...* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1855).

4. “Upon serious consideration of the present state and conjuncture of the affairs of this kingdom, the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament do order, that the Assembly of Divines and others do forthwith confer and treat among themselves, of such a discipline and government as may be most agreeable to God's Holy Word, ... and touching and concerning the Directory of Worship, or Liturgy, hereafter to be in the Church...” William M. Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, third edition (Edinburgh, 1856), 158. While mixed use is unavoidable due to quotations, the authors generally do not capitalize “assembly,” “assembly of divines,” etc.

5. “The Directory for the Publick Worship of God” *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 369–394. Observance of ‘holy days’ was one of the subjects discussed by the Assembly in preparing this directory. “Then from the records of the English journalist and orientalist Lightfoot, we get information regarding the subjects which it was agreed should be treated of in the new Service-book, and the discussion to which in turn they gave rise. The matters discussed were such as these: the use of the Lord's Prayer; preaching; pulpit quotations in foreign languages; the reading of Scripture during service; the administration of sacraments; the employment of licentiates, or, as they were styled in the Reformed Churches, “Expectants,” relieving the minister of part of the service, and thus acquiring experience; the mode of administering infant baptism by sprinkling, dipping, or pouring; the observance of days; and the contents of a preface to the new book of ritual.” C. G. McCrie, *Public Worship of Presbyterian Scotland* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1892), 186.

6. The outline of the directory is as follows: The Preface. 1. Of Assembling of the Congregation, and their Behaviour in the Publick Worship of God. 2. Of Publick Reading of the Holy Scriptures. 3. Of Publick Prayer before the Sermon. 4. Of the Preaching of the Word. 5. Of Prayer after the Sermon. 6. Of the Administration of the Sacraments: and first, of Baptism. 7. Of the celebration of the communion, or sacrament of the Lord's Supper. 8. Of the Sanctification of the Lord's Day. 9. The Solemnization of Marriage. 10. Concerning Visitation of the Sick. 11. Concerning Burial of the Dead. 12. Concerning Publick Solemn Fasting. 13. Concerning the Observation of Days of Publick thanksgiving. 14. Of Singing of Psalms. An Appendix, Touching Days and Places for Publick Worship.

have thereby hardened themselves in their ignorance and carelessness of saving knowledge and true piety.

In the meantime, Papiſts boasted that the book was a compliance with them in a great part of their ſervice; and ſo were not a little confirmed in their ſuperſtition and idolatry, expecting rather our return to them, than endeavouring the reformation of themſelves: in which expectation they were of late very much encouraged, when, upon the pretended warrantableneſs of imposing of the former ceremonies, new ones were daily obtruded upon the Church.

Add hereunto, (which was not foreſeen, but ſince have come to paſs,) that the Liturgy hath been a great means, as on the one hand to make and increaſe an idle and unedifying miniſtry, which contented itſelf with ſet forms made to their hands by others, without putting forth themſelves to exerciſe the gift of prayer, with which our Lord Jeſus Chriſt pleaſeth to furniſh all his ſervants whom he calls to that office: ſo, on the other ſide, it hath been (and ever would be, if continued) a matter of endless ſtrife and contention in the Church, and a ſnare both to many godly and faithful miniſters, who have been perſecuted and ſilenced upon that occaſion, and to others of hopeful parts, many of which have been, and more ſtill would be, diverted from all thoughts of the miniſtry to other ſtudies; eſpecially in theſe latter times, wherein God vouchſafeth to his people more and better means for the diſcovery of error and ſuperſtition, and for attaining of knowledge in the myſteries of godlineſs, and gifts in preaching and prayer.

Upon theſe, and many the like weighty conſiderations in reference to the whole book in general, and becauſe of divers particulars contained in it; not from any love to novelty, or intention to diſparage our firſt reformers, (of whom we are perſuaded, that, were they now alive, they would join with us in this work, and whom

we acknowledge as excellent inſtruments, raiſed by God, to begin the purging and building of his houſe, and deſire they may be had of us and poſterity in everlaſting remembrance, with thankfulneſs and honour,) but that we may in ſome meaſure answer the gracious providence of God, which at this time calleth upon us for further reformation, and may ſatisfy our own conſciences, and answer the expectation of other reformed churches, and the deſires of many of the godly among ourſelves, and withal give ſome publick teſtimony of our endeavours for uniformity in divine worſhip, which we have promiſed in our Solemn League and Covenant; we have, after earneſt and frequent calling upon the name of God, and after much conſultation, not with fleſh and blood, but with his holy word, reſolved to lay aſide the former Liturgy, with the many rites and ceremonies formerly uſed in the worſhip of God; and have agreed upon this following Directory for all the parts of publick worſhip, at ordinary and extraordinary times. Wherein our care hath been to hold forth ſuch things as are of divine inſtitution in every ordinance; and other things we have endeavoured to ſet forth according to the rules of Chriſtian prudence, agreeable to the general rules of the word of God; our meaning therein being only, that the general heads, the ſenſe and ſcope of the prayers, and other parts of publick worſhip, being known to all, there may be a conſent of all the churches in thoſe things that contain the ſubſtance of the ſervice and worſhip of God; and the miniſters may be hereby directed, in their adminiſtrations, to keep like ſoundneſs in doctrine and prayer, and may, if need be, have ſome help and furniture, and yet ſo as they become not hereby ſlothful and negligent in ſtirring up the gifts of Chriſt in them; but that each one, by meditation, by taking heed to himſelf, and the flock of God committed to him, and by wiſe obſerving the ways of Divine Providence, may be careful to furniſh his heart and tongue with further or other materials of prayer and exhortation, as ſhall be needful upon all occaſions.⁷

7. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, "Directory for the publick worſhip of God," preface, 373–374.

8. England was ſtill uſing the Julian Calendar, which ſet March 25th as the firſt of the year, and did not officially adopt the Gregorian until 1752. This type of format (e.g. March 13, 1644/45) is generally uſed to avoid confulion.

9. "... and paſſed them with ſome amendments on the 3rd of January. On the following day theſe amendments were the ſubject of a conference between the two Houſes, and were finally agreed upon. The Ordinance itſelf, which is prefixed to the Directory, is incorrecly dated 3rd January, 1644–45." William A. Shaw, *A History of the English Church during the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 1, 353.

10. M'Crie, 187–193.

The Parliament ordered the directory printed, March 13, 1644/45.⁸ It had been iſſued and approved on January 4 1644/45,⁹ but in courtesy ſent to Scotland for that kingdom's approval. Robert Baillie and George Gillespie conveyed it there and preſented it before the General Aſſembly of the Church of Scotland. The Directory was approved by 'Act of the General Aſſembly of the Church of Scotland' on February 3, 1644/45. The Government of Scotland approved and eſtabliſhed the Directory three days later.¹⁰ Thus this directory for worſhip was actually more widely authorized than the Confession of Faith,

or Larger Catechism, which never received the assent of the English Parliament.¹¹ It represents the approved views regarding worship of not only the Westminster assembly, but of the governments of England and Scotland, as well as the Church of Scotland.

*The Directory's Appendix Against
'Holy Days and Places'*

The appendix to the Directory is entitled, "An Appendix, Touching Days and Places for Public Worship." It reads:

An Appendix touching dayes & Places for Publique Worship.¹²

There is no day commanded in Scripture, to bee kept holy under the Gosþel, but the Lords Day, which is the Christian Sabbath.

Festival dayes vulgarly called Holy dayes, haveing no warrant in the word,¹³ are not to bee continued.

Nevertheless, it is lawfull & necessary upon ſpecial emergent occasions, to separate a Day or dayes for publique Faſting, or Thankesgiving, as the ſeveral eminent & extraordinary diſpensations of Gods providence ſhall adminiſter cauſe, & opportunity to his people.

As no place is capeable of any holynes, under pretence of whatsoever Dedication, or Consecration, ſo neither is it ſubject to ſuch pollution by any ſuperſtition formerly uſed, & now laid aſide, as may render it unlawfull or inconvenient for Chriſtians to meet together therein for the Publique Worſhip of God: And therefore wee hold it requiſite that the Places of Publique-Aſſemblings for worſhip among us, ſhould bee continued & employed to that uſe.

Conelius Burges Prolocutor, pro tempore
John White Assessor
Henry Robrough scribe
Adoniram Byfield scribe

The key clause of interest to this study is, "Festival days, vulgarly [*i.e.* commonly] called *Holy-days*, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be continued."¹⁴ The Directory is explicitly against the observance of set 'holy days,' and in light of the wide adoption of the document as noted above, it is clear that this rejection was endorsed by the governments and churches of England and Scotland.

'Holy Days' in England and in Scotland

This condemnation of 'holy days' raises the question of what the practice was in England and in Scotland leading up to the Puritan revolution of the 1640s. It appears the initial goal of the Reformed churches was to reduce observance, if not be rid of the church calendar. However, due to the concerns of magistrates the calendar came to be retained and then affixed to Reformed practice. After noting several decrees of the Reformed churches, David Demarest outlines the history of the formal appropriation of ecclesiastical days into their worship.

At first it was clearly the intention to abolish these days entirely. Then it was deemed better (as the people continued to take them for holidays), to turn them to a good account by the holding of religious services, and finally their observance was enjoined, doubtless on the ground of edification. Probably the magistrates, who are continually referred to as having authority in the matter, did not, for reasons springing out of the circumstances of the times, and the genius and habits of the people, deem it expedient to abolish, them. While they continued by authority, the Church, rightly aimed to make them promotive of piety."¹⁵

11. "It is not a little curious that those portions of its accomplished work which have remained through later times the most distinct and memorable accomplishment of the Assembly—*i.e.*, the Confession of Faith and the Larger Catechism—should have never received the assent of the Parliament which had called the Assembly into being, and at whose behest it had prepared those works." Shaw, 1.376.

12. "An appendix for the directory for public worship submitted to both houses of parliament 30 December 1644," in "Document 54, Calendar of papers of the Westminster assembly," *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly 1643–1652*, ed. Chad Van Dixhoorn, 5 volumes (Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.159; hereafter CVD. The important fifth volume of Van Dixhoorn's transcription of the minutes as published by Oxford (but not in the original dissertation) contains the text (many from the original MSS) of as many of the documents of the Westminster assembly as could be located, saving only the longer significant productions such as the Confession and Catechisms and the text of the assembly's debate with the English Independents regarding Presbyterian church polity. For the last see the recently published, *The Westminster Assembly's The Grand Debate* (Naphthali Press, 2014).

13. "Word of God." CVD, 5.159, fn 1.

14. Cf. *Confession of Faith*, 394.

15. David D. Demarest, *History and Characteristics of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church*, 2nd ed. (New York, Board of Publication of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1856), 175. The oppressed Reformed churches of France, ruled by Roman Catholic magistrates which prohibited working on the pretended holy days, "left unto the prudence of Consistories to Congregate the People, on such Holy-

In Scotland a more thorough reformation was wrought and the holy days of the Roman Catholic Church were totally rejected and not retained. The “first head, of doctrine” of the 1560 First Book of Discipline drafted by the five Johns (Winram, Spottiswood, Douglas, Row and Knox) reads,

By the contrary doctrine, we understand whatsoever men, by laws, councils, or constitutions have imposed upon the consciences of men, without the expressed commandment of God’s Word; such as . . . keeping of holy days of certain saints commanded by man, such as be all those that the Papiſts have invented, as the feaſts (as they term them), of Apoſtles, Martyrs, Virgins, of Christmas, Circumciſion, Epiphany, Purification, and other fond feaſts of our Lady.¹⁶

Just a few years later in 1566 the Kirk approved the text of the Second Helvetic Confession, with one ſpecific exception.

The Confession of Helvetia Approved. The Asſembly being adviſed with the interpretatioun of the

Days, either to hear the word Preached, or to join in common publick Prayers, as they ſhall find to be moſt expedient” (2nd Synod of Vitre, 1617). In 1594, the Synod of Montauban had agreed not to make any innovations “as to the Obſervation of Holy-days, ſuch as Chriſtmas, and the reſt,” and while in 1601 there was ſome objection raised, a ſynod left “churches at liberty to have Publick Prayers and Sermons on the Romiſh Holy-days, if it like ‘em.” John Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata, or, the Acts, Decisions, Decrees, and Canons of thouse famous National Councils of the Reformed Churches in France*, 2 vols. (London: T. Parkhurſt, 1692) 1.499, 1.166, 1.215.

16. John Knox’s *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. William Croft Dickinson, D. Lit., 2 vols (New York: Philoſophical Library, 1950), Appendix VIII, The Book of Discipline, 2.281. See alſo, *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing, 5 vols. (The Wodrow Society and The Bannatyne Club; repr. AMS Press, 1966), 2.185–186.

17. David Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, ed. Thomas Thomſon, volume ſecond (The Wodrow Society, 1843), 331–332.

18. Alexander Petrie, *A Compendious History of the Catholic Church, from the year 600 untill the year 1600. Shewing her deformation and reformation. Together with the riſe, reign, rage, and beginfall of the Roman Antichriſt with many other profitable Inſtructions* (Hague: Adrian Vlack, 1662), Part ii. p. 347.

19. James Gilfillan, *The Sabbath Viewed in the Light of Reason, Revelation, and Hiſtory, with ſketches of its literature* (Edinburgh: A. Elliot and J. Maclaren, 1861), 27.

20. George Gillespie, *A Diſpute Againſt the English Popiſh Ceremonies* (1637; Naphtali Press, 1993; rev. critical edition, 2013); hereafter *EPC*. On the baſis of this one book Gillespie’s reputation was raiſed to ſuch an extent that it earned him a place amongſt the Scottish commiſſioners appointed to attend the Weſtmiſter aſſembly of divines. Gillespie uſed the term “formaliſt” for proponents of the popiſh ceremonies. The nineteenth century term anglo-catholic will be uſed in

Confessioun of the Tigrine kirk made by Mr. Robert Pont, ordeaneth the ſame to be printed, together with the epiſtle ſent by the Aſſembly, allowing the ſame, providing a note be putt in the margin of the ſaid Confeſſioun, where mentioun is made of the remembrance of ſome holie dayes, etc. . . . obſervation of ſanct’s dayes [are condenmed]. But this Aſſembly would not allow the dayes dedicated to Chriſt, but tooke exception againſt that part of the Confeſſioun; yea, our Aſſembly meete upon the 25th of December, ſo that manie of the miniſtrie could not be at home in their owne pariſhes, to teache upon Chriſt’s nativitie.¹⁷

Alexander Petrie further explained,

The Churches of Helvetia, Geneva, and other Reformed Churches in France and Germany, ſent unto the Church of Scotland the ſum or Confeſſion of Faith, deſiring to know if wee agree in uniformity of doctrine. Wherefore the Superintendents, together with many other moſt qualified miniſters, conven in September [1566] at Santandrews, and having read the Letters and Confeſſion, ſent answer, that wee agree in all points with theſe Churches, and differ in nothing from them, except that wee aſſent not in keeping feſtival days, ſeeing the Sabbath-day only is kept in Scotland.¹⁸

In 1575 the general aſſembly again forbade the obſervance of holy days and in 1590 King James VI boated,

in conſtraſt with his ſubſequent proceedings towards his native land—when, in addreſſing the Aſſembly of 1590, he praiſed God that he was born in ſuch a time as in the time of the light of the Goſpel, and in ſuch a place as to be King in ſuch a Kirk, the ſincereſt kirk in the world: “The Kirk of Geneva,” he proceeded, “keepeth Paſch and Yule. What have they for them? They have no inſtitution. As for our neighbor Kirk in England, their ſervice is an evil-ſaid maſſ in English: they want nothing of the maſſ but the liftings.”¹⁹

This view and practice prevailed, except for a brief period when King James (now preferring an ill-ſaid maſſ) and, more vigorouſly by his ſon Charles I through Archb. Laud, tried to impoſe anglo-catholic worſhip upon Scotland. This attempted impoſition reſulted in the covenanted Second Reformation in Scotland, and alſo brought forth a definitive reply to the anglo-catholics’ attempted juſtifications for obſervance of the old ‘holy days’ and other practices in George Gillespie’s *Diſpute Againſt the English Popiſh Ceremonies*.²⁰

The 'godly' (or Puritans) in England had a different history. Because of Queen Elizabeth's freezing of the English Reformation at 'half reformed,'²¹ the Puritans had to put up with many of the old pretended holy days. William Perkins and William Fulke described the late sixteenth century practice, at least as far as the Elizabethan moderate anti-separatist Puritans viewed the subject.

This text of Paul discouers vnto vs a great part of the superstition of the Popish Church, in the obseruation of holy daies. First, beside the Lords day, they appoint many other sabbaths: whereas it is the priuiledge of God to appoint an ordinarie day of rest, and to sanctifie it to his owne honour. ... It may be said, that the Church of the Protestants obserue holy daies. *Ans.* Some Churches doe not: because the Church in the Apostles daies, had no holy days, beside the Lords day: and the 4. commandement inioynes the labour of sixe daies. Indeede the Churches of England obserueth holy daies, but the Popish superstition is cut off. For we are not bound in conscience to the obseruation of these daies: neither doe we place holines or the worship of God in them: but we keepe them onely for orders sake, that men may come to the Church to heare Gods Word. And though we retain the names of Saints daies, yet we giue no worship to saints, but to God alone. And such daies as contained nothing in them but superstition, as the conception and assumption of the virgin Marie, we haue cut off. Thus doth the Church with vs obserue holy daies, and no otherwise.²²

Although the Church in days and times, which are indifferent, may take order for some other days and times to be solemnized for the exercises of religion; or that the remembrance of Christ's nativity, resurrection, ascension, as the coming of the Holy Ghost, may be celebrated either on the Lord's Day, or any other time; yet there is great difference between the authority of the Church in this case, and the prescriptions of the Lord's Day by the apostles. For the special memory of these things are indifferent in their own nature, either to be kept on certain days, or left to the discretion of the governors of the Church, to be celebrated as any other occasion shall be offered. But to change the Lord's Day and to keep it upon Monday, Tuesday, or any other day, the Church has no authority; for it is not a matter of indifference, but a necessary prescription of Christ himself, delivered to us by his apostles.²³

The Puritans could not reconcile other 'holy' times with a right understanding of the fourth commandment, as Nicholas Bownd noted in 1595,

Yet I do not see (be it far from me that I should obstinately contend with any) where the Lord has given any authority to His Church ordinarily and perpetually to sanctify any day, except that which He has sanctified Himself. For I hold this with other learned men as a principle in divinity, that it *belongs only to God to sanctify the day*, as it belongs to him [*sic*] to sanctify any other thing to His own worship...²⁴

While Perkins, Fulke and Bownd took a moderate stance toward holding services on the old pretended holy days of Roman Catholicism, this was too much for the proto-Laudian Thomas Rogers (who was an extreme anti-Sabbatarian, practically unique for the time). In a letter to Bownd and later in a revised edition of an exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles, he attacked Bownd's Sabbatarianism, singling out his rejection of an authority in the church to appoint other holy days.²⁵ Rogers' attack

this article in reference to such authors as Lancelot Andrewes, Richard Hooker and others who defended holy days in the days of James I and Charles I. The term Anglo-Catholicism, was coined by the nineteenth century Oxford movement which claimed a continuum of ideas with the Jacobean and Caroline divines. Whether that anachronism is fair or not, the term (or one like it) is appropriate given these seventeenth century divines used the same arguments for their ceremonies, as Roman Catholics did for theirs (hence the "popish" in *English Popish Ceremonies*).

21. Cf. C. C. Cuyler, "The Anglican reformation, or the Church of England but half reformed," in *A series of tracts on the Doctrines, Order, and Polity of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, volume 4 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, c. 1843); Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (1967; repr. London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), 29ff; Ryan M. McGraw, *Heavenly Directory Trinitarian Piety, Public Worship and a Reassessment of John Owen's Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014) 106.

22. William Perkins, *A Commentarie or Exposition upon the five first chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Legat, 1604), 316.

23. William Fulke, *Confutation of the Rhemish Testament* (1589; New York: Leavitt, Lord, 1834), 389. Cited in Nicholas Bownd, *Sabbatum Veteris Et Novi Testamenti: or, The True Doctrine of the Sabbath* (Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 94.]

24. Bownd, p. 89.

25. "Item wee believe that this Church hath none auctoritie 'ordinarily, and perpetualie to sanctifie anie daie' besides that the Lord himself hath sanctified" (book one, page 31, 1595 ed.). Thomas Rogers, "Copy of Thomas Roger's refutation, April 29, 1598, of Nicholas Bownd's Doctrine of the Sabbath, 1595 [MS], 1607?" Folger Shakespeare Library. X.d.547. For details on Rogers and Bownd and the first Sabbatarian controversy in English literature and for a transcript of Rogers' letter, see Coldwell, "Anti-Sabbatarian Scold: Thomas Rogers' Letter to Nicholas Bownd, April 29, 1598," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, 10 (2014), 152–167. For Rogers exposition of the English Articles see, *The Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England*, ed. by J. J. S. Perowne (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1854), 187, 322. While Bownd's comment is almost in passing, Rogers singled it out and devoted a full section of his 1598 letter to the topic, titling it "Against prescribed holie daies," a heading that nowhere appears in Bownd's work (MS letter, 7v–8r; transcription, 156).

on Bownd ultimately failed, and in a section in a second edition of his book on the Sabbath, clearly added in response and in reference to Rogers, Bownd wrote,

And so I conclude with the saying of St. Augustine: *This is the day which the Lord hath made.*²⁶ It was appointed by the Lord Jesus himself; therefore it cannot be changed but by the Lord. And all men are necessarily bound unto it, neither can they in the room of it place any other. And though the Church may in every kingdom appoint days for God's service commonly called *holy days*, yet no man is so simple to think that they are equal in authority with the Lord's Day, and that the one has no better warrant than the other, and so may be changed as well as the other, yea taken clean away; whereas the truth is, that the holy days may not only be changed, but taken clean away, as coming from men, and the Lord's Days as coming from God, not so much as once to be changed.²⁷

But while Rogers failed, he was merely ahead of his time. The imposition of the necessity of observing holy days upon the bare authority of the church's appointment came back with a vengeance after his death. The

26. Augustine, *Sermones de Tempore*, serm. 36. [The *Sermones de Tempore* are no longer ascribed to Augustine. Sermon 36 is CXXXV (135) in Migne (*PL* 39, col. 2011–2012), but that text does not cite Psalm 118:24. Possibly 136 was intended which is 159 in Migne. But whatever the reference should have been, it appears Bownd is simply adducing the bare statement and then wrapping up the section with his own conclusions, perhaps broadly drawing on what he has drawn from Augustine to this point. Cf. Sermo CLIX (olim 136), "De Pascha, i," Migne, *PL* 39, col. 2058.

27. Bownd, p. 136.

28. Cf. CVD, and *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly 1643–1652*, and *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, ed. Rev. Alex F. Mitchell, D. D. and Rev. John Struthers, LL.D. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1874); hereafter Struthers. Unless noted otherwise, the text is rendered as given by Van Dixhoorn.

29. Dr. Leishman comments, "Apparently we owe this appendix to the accidental circumstance that on a certain day in November, the Assembly, through a derangement of their plans, found themselves without work to do. First they ordered 'that in the directory for the Sabbath-day something be expressed against wakes and feasts, commonly called by the name of rush-bearing, as profane and superstitious, whitsunales and garlands.' Then they spoke of declaring against holy days as such, and yet keeping up some days for relief of servants. Having thus opened up the whole subject, they agreed to 'consider of something concerning holy days and holy places,' and the result was that this appendix was brought up on the 10th of December. There was some debate about the mention of the Sabbath in it. The views of the divines on holy days had somewhat changed during the year. On the 22nd of December 1643 they had adjourned till the 28th, refusing to give any opinion on the propriety of having services on Christmas Day. The London ministers, however, with few exceptions did have it, resolving to cry down the superstition of the day. But this year the

pretended holy days were forced upon Scotland at the 1618 Perth assembly and Laudian anglo-catholic arguments for such days betrayed a superstitious regard of them well beyond the role the Elizabethan Puritans would have been willing to allow, and against which the later Puritans would take a stand. With the advent of the Puritan revolution, the opportunity came to dispense with the pretended holy days via the appendix to the Westminster assembly's directory for public worship.

The Development of the Directory's Appendix Against 'Holy Days'

The development of this appendix can be traced in the assembly minutes.²⁸ It seems to have been proposed as a possible addition to the portion of the directory for worship regarding the Sabbath day, and evolved into a separate section.²⁹ It is finally noted as an appendix and approved in that form.³⁰

Sess. 324. (Novemb. 18, 1644). Munday morning. "Ordered to report the Preface to the directory, and that concerning the Sabbath day."³¹

Assembly applied to Parliament for an order for the observance of the next *fast* day, "because the people will be ready to neglect it, being Christmas Day." This was a matter on which the Scots held decided opinions. Their historical position in reference to it is stated in Act of Assembly 1638, session 17. The Assembly of 1645 so far confirmed the Directory Appendix by an Act of great stringency against the observance of Yule Day. Between the Restoration and the Revolution the holy days were little regarded. No act of Queen Anne's government was more unpopular than the repeal of a law which forbade a *Yule vacance* or Christmas recess in the court of Session." Thomas Leishman, *The Westminster Directory, Edited, with an Introduction and Notes* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1901), 152–153. Leishman appears to make too much of this "change" in the Assembly's opinion. The Assembly had determined not to decide the matter of services on Christmas at that earlier time, because they believed it would be appropriately treated in the due course of their deliberations. As Lightfoot writes, "Friday, Dec. 22.] ... After this vote, was a proposal made by some, 'That the Assembly would determine whether there should be any sermon upon Christmas-day:' but it was waived to treat of it, because we are not yet come to it." John Lightfoot, "Journal of the Assembly of Divines," *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot* (London: 1824), 13.91–92.

30. "The appendix touching Days and Places for Public Worship was sent into the House on 1st January 1644–45, and adopted the same day." The House of Lords approved the Directory with some amendments on January 3rd. A conference between both Houses took place the next day and the Directory was officially approved on January 4, 1644/45. Shaw, 1.353.

31. Struthers, 3; CVD, 3.457. Text inserted interline in the manuscript minutes are noted by <arrow brackets> in CVD, and [square brackets] are editorial insertions. See CVD for definitions of these superstitious observances.

Sess. 325. Novemb. 19, 1644. Tuesday morning. "Ordered: That in the Directory for the sabbath day something be expressed <against parish feasts, commonly called by the name of Rushbearing[s], whitsunales,> wakes, as prophane and superstitious."

"Some motions made about holy dayes, to expresse something against them."

"Ordered: [The Lord's Day]³² being the standing holy day under the New Testament to be kept by all the churches of Christ, consider of something concerning holy dayes <& holy places> & what course may be thought upon for the releife of servants. To meet tomorrow in the afternoone. Wakes & feasts Whitsunales, Rushbearings & garlands [and] all other <such like> superstitious customes."³³

Sess. 329. Novemb. 25, 1644. Munday morning. "Mr. Coleman made report of the directory for Holy dayes and holy places; it was read."³⁴

Sess. 338. Decemb. 10, 1644. <Tuesday> morning. "Report 'of holy places' debated." "Ordered: To proceed in the debate tomorrow morning <upon a motion that the committee for the drawing up the directory or others that may be gotten.>"³⁵

Sess. 339. <Decemb. 11, 1644.> Wensday morning. "Debate upon the Directory for dayes."³⁶

Sess. 340. Decemb. 12. <Thursday> morning. "Neg: Resolved: the report concerning holy dayes shall not be waved."³⁷

Sess. 348. Decemb. 27, 1644. Fryday Morning. "Report of the Appendix concerning dayes and places for public worship." "Debate about holy dayes."³⁸

Sess. 349. Decemb. 30, 1640 [sic 1644], Munday morning. "Ordered: That the Appendix be sent up tomorrow morning."³⁹

From George Gillespie's notes for December 30, 1644, we also learn:

December 30. There were many abuses spoken of to be condemned in the Directory, as Wakes, etc. I said, if these be put in the Directory, the Church of Scotland must put in abuses among them in the Directory too, and it is not fit to make public in both kingdoms what

is proper to either. So it was agreed to send up this in a paper by itself to the Parliament.⁴⁰

As the Westminster divines perceived many corruptions in the English worship, there was an idea suggested during the forming of the directory, to add a list of condemned abuses in worship to the directory's preface. As noted, Gillespie opposed this, as it would require enumerating practices in one kingdom not practiced in the other. Subsequently it was determined to send a separate paper to Parliament regarding the matter. C. G. M'Crrie writes:

From Gillespie's 'Notes of Debates and Proceedings,' however, we learn that at a certain stage of the discussion as to what should find a place in the book, it was proposed to insert a statement of abuses 'to be condemned, as Wakes, etc.' The proposal was resisted by Gillespie on the ground that, if English abuses were to be specified, then the Church of Scotland would claim an enumeration of abuses peculiar to that kingdom, and he did not think it 'fit to make public in both kingdoms what is proper to either.' Ultimately, it was agreed to send up a separate paper to Parliament containing a list of such abuses.

Interesting light would seem to be thrown upon this document by a loose paper in Gillespie's writing preserved by Wodrow, and printed among the 'Notes' of the

32. CVD inserts "The Lord's Day" while Struthers reads "the only standing holy day..." Struthers, 4; CVD, 3.458. Struthers has other minor variations in his rendering.

33. CVD, 3.458; Struthers, 3. "Tuesday, Nov. 19.]—Then was there speech about Holydays, and some motion about declaring against them. This held us much canvassing; and it was well approved that the superstition of Holydays should be cried down, but yet some days allowed for relief of servants. The conclusion was, that the business was recommitted to the first committee to consider of it." Lightfoot, 13.332–333.

34. CVD, 3.468; Struthers, 11. "Monday, Nov. 25, Thursday, Nov. 28.] These days was I at Munden." Ibid, 337.

35. CVD, 3.477, 478; Struthers, 17, 18. In this session an exchange takes place concerning "holy places" between Palmer, Rutherford, Gillespie, Burges, Seaman and Marshall. Lightfoot records some of this debate as well. Ibid, 341–342.

36. CVD, 3.479; Struthers, 19. "Next did we fall upon the debate about holy days; and had some debate about one proposition concerning the Sabbath..." Ibid, 342.

37. CVD, 3.480; Struthers, 19. Struthers reads "waived. (?)"

38. CVD, 3.489; Struthers, 23.

39. CVD, 3.491; Struthers, 24.

40. George Gillespie, "Notes of Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster" *Works: The Presbyterian's Armoury* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1844–46), 97.

former. On the one side of the MS. is an incomplete list of eight practices or ceremonies, beginning with 'Gloria Patri,' and breaking off with 'the people's responsals.' On the other side is a statement 'concerning other customs or rites in the worship of God formerly received in any of the kingdoms,' to the effect that, 'though not condemned in this Directory,' yet if 'they have been, or apparently will be, occasions of divisions and offences,' it is judged 'most expedient that the practice and use of them be not continued, as well for the nearer uniformity betwixt the Churches of both kingdoms, as for their greater peace and harmony within themselves, and their edifying one another in love.'

If, as it appears likely, the list on the one side of this paper consists of an unfinished enumeration of 'customs or rites' spoken of on the other, then it is probable the latter was drafted as a proposed, but not accepted, addition to the preface as it now stands. In that case the Doxology, along with the Creed, standing up at the reading of the Gospel, preaching on Christmas, funeral sermons, churching of women, saying the three Creeds after reading of Scripture, and congregational responses, will rank among practices 'not condemned in this Directory,' but the observance of which Gillespie and his fellow-commissioners judged it expedient to be discontinued in the interests of uniformity, peace, harmony, and mutual edifying in love.⁴¹

Preaching on Christmas in 1640s London

As M'Crie indicates, apparently apart from any consideration of superstition and will-worship, George Gillespie believed the English practice of preaching on Christmas which the Puritans had previously accommodated, was one of the "customs or rites" which was to be discontinued for harmony's sake. This arose as a concern in 1643, as Lightfoot records:

Friday, Dec. 22.] ... After this vote, was a proposal made by some, "That the Assembly would determine whether there should be any sermon upon Christmas-day;" but it was waived to treat of it, because we are not yet come to it. Then was there some question how long we should adjourn, and some few would have had us to have sitted on Christmas-day; but it was more generally thought

otherwise; and so we adjourned till after the fast, viz. till Thursday. In the afternoon, the city-ministers met together to consult whether they should preach on Christmas-day, or no. Among them there were only Mr. Calamy, Mr. Newcomen, and myself, of the Assembly. And when Mr. Calamy began to incline that there should be no sermon on that day, and was like to sway the company that way, I took him aside, and desired him to consider seriously upon these things. 1. That one sermon preached at the feast of the dedication, which had but a human original, John x. 2. That the thing in itself was not unlawful. 3. That letting the day utterly fall without a sermon, would most certainly breed a tumult. 4. That it is but this one day, for the next we hope will be resolved upon about it by authority. 5. That he, being an Assembly-man, and advising them, would bring an odium undeserved upon the Assembly. With these things I prevailed with him to change his mind; and so he also prevailed with the company; and it was put to the question, and voted affirmatively, only some four or five gainsaying, that they would preach, but withal resolving generally to cry down superstition of the day.⁴²

As Lightfoot noted, the assembly determined not to address the propriety of preaching on Christmas until a later time, and he convinced Calamy to take a moderate stance, particularly as by the next year an authorized course would no doubt be in place. The next year Lightfoot makes the following observation:

Thursday, Dec. 19.] Then was there a motion made, and order accordingly, that some of our members should be sent to the Houses, to desire them to give an order, that the next fast-day might be solemnly kept, because the people will be ready to neglect it, being Christmas-day."⁴³

The parliament did issue such an order. Neal writes:

But that which occasioned the greatest disturbance over the whole nation, was an order of both houses relating to Christmas-day. Dr. Lightfoot says, the London ministers met together last year to consult whether they should preach on that day; and one of considerable name and authority opposed it, and was near prevailing with the rest, when the doctor convinced them so far of the lawfulness and expediency of it, that the question being put it was carried in the affirmative with only four or five dissenting voices. But this year it happening to fall on the monthly fast,⁴⁴ so that either the fast or the festival must be omitted, the parliament, after some debate,

41. M'Crie, 208–210. See Leishman, 83–85.

42. Lightfoot, 91–92.

43. Lightfoot, 344.

44. Writing about an ordinance prohibiting public diversions and recreations during England's civil war, Neal explains, "The set times

thought it most agreeable to the present circumstances of the nation to go on with fasting and prayer; and therefore published the following order:

“Die Jovis 19 Dec. 1644. Whereas some doubts have been raised, whether the next fast shall be celebrated, because it falls on the day which heretofore was usually called the feast of the nativity of our Saviour; the lords and commons in parliament assembled do order and ordain, that public notice be given, that the fast appointed to be kept the last Wednesday in every month ought to be observed, till it be otherwise ordered by both houses; and that this day in particular is to be kept with the more solemn humiliation, because it may call to remembrance our sins, and the sins of our forefathers, who have turned this feast, pretending the memory of Christ, into an extreme forgetfulness of him, by giving liberty to carnal and sensual delights, being contrary to the life which Christ led here on earth, and to the spiritual life of Christ in our souls, for the sanctifying and saving whereof, Christ was pleased both to take a human life, and to lay it down again”

The royalists raised loud clamours on account of the supposed impiety and profaneness of this transaction, as what had never before been heard of in the Christian world, though they could not but know, that this, as well as other festivals, is of ecclesiastical appointment; that there is no mention of the observation of Christmas in the first or second age of Christianity; that the kirk of Scotland never observed it since the Reformation, except during the short reign of the bishops, and do not regard it at this day. Some of the most learned divines among the Presbyterians, as well as Independents, were in this sentiment. Mr. Edmund Calamy....⁴⁵

Neal goes on to cite the fast sermon preached by Mr. Calamy on this occasion. James Reid records Calamy's comments about the circumstances of this fast:

This day is commonly called *The Feast of Christ's nativity*, or, *Christmas-day*; a day that has formerly been much abused to *superstition*, and *profaneness*. It is not easy to say, whether the superstition has been greater, or the profaneness.... And truly I think that the superstition and profanation of this day is so rooted into it, as that there is no way to reform it, but by dealing with it as Hezekiah did with the brazen serpent. This year God, by his Providence, has buried this *Feast* in a *Fast*, and I hope it will never rise again.⁴⁶

It does not appear that the parliament issued any directive about the Assembly's list of customs or rites to be discontinued, including this custom of preaching on Christmas.⁴⁷ However, the parliament did move in June of 1647 to outlaw all 'holy days,' and tried to meet the concern for servants, expressed earlier by the assembly. Neal writes.

Among the ordinances that passed this year for reformation of the church, none occasioned so much noise and disturbance as that of June 8, for abolishing the observation of saints' days, and the three grand festivals of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide; the ordinance says, “Forasmuch as the feast of the nativity of Christ, Easter, Whitsuntide, and other festivals, commonly called holy-days, have been heretofore superstitiously used and observed; be it ordained, that the said feasts, and all other festivals, commonly called holy-days, be no longer observed as festivals; any law, statute, custom, constitution, or canon, to the contrary in anywise notwithstanding.

And that there may be a convenient time allotted for scholars, apprentices, and other servants, for their recreation, be it ordained, that all scholars, apprentices, and other servants, shall, with the leave of their masters, have such convenient reasonable recreation, and relaxation from labour, every second Tuesday in the month throughout the year...⁴⁸

of humiliation mentioned in the ordinance refers to the monthly fast appointed by the king, at the request of the parliament [January 8, 1641], on account of the Irish insurrection and massacre, to be observed every last Wednesday in the month, as long as the calamities of that nation should require it. But when the king set up his standard at Nottingham, the two houses, apprehending that England was now to be the seat of war, published an ordinance for the more strict observation of this fast, in order to implore a divine blessing upon the consultations of parliament, and to deprecate the calamities that threatened this nation.” Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans*, 3 vols. (London, 1837), 2.155.

45. Neal, 2.284–285.

46. James Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster divines* (1811; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 186.

47. Regarding disputed practices, the Scots appear to have been more thorough in removing impediments to uniformity. While affirming there was nothing unlawful in the action, the Church of Scotland would some months after this determine to lay aside their practice of bowing in the pulpit. They also determined to cease singing the doxology without addressing the lawfulness of the question, or as Gillespie suggested, “to make no Act about this, as there is made about bowing in the pulpit, but to let desuetude abolish it.” McCrie, 210–212.

48. Neal, 458. ‘Holy days’ were outlawed until the Restoration, though personal observation of Christmas was left as a matter of indifference. Ibid, 459.

The Westminster Confession of Faith

The parliament had pressed the issuing of the directory to meet the urgent need for settling the worship practices of England. The Westminster divines would later express the doctrinal substance of their practice in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.⁴⁹ The Confession's statement regarding the parts of the worship of God is found in 21:5.⁵⁰ Carruthers' critical text of this paragraph reads:

The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence; singing of psalms with grace in

49. It may be that at least part of the reason lawful oaths and vows received treatment in their own chapter (WCF 22), is because the directory for worship does not really address them as part of worship. Vows and oaths are mentioned in the answer to Larger Catechism 108, 112 and 113 as well. Religious fasting is mentioned in the answer to LC 108. A *Memorandum* was noted when the assembly was discussing this question, "To consider of days of thanksgiving in the fourth commandment." (Struthers, 408; cf. CVD, 4.664). Unfortunately, the surviving minutes following this session do not record if this was discussed. Whether it was discussed or not, the outcome suggests they determined not to address the issue in that commandment, as the questions and answers in the Larger Catechism dealing with the fourth commandment contain no reference to days of thanksgiving (LC 115–121). Thus the occasional ordinance of "thanksgiving" is not specifically mentioned in the Larger Catechism.

50. One would think the relationship and connection between WCF 21:5 and the directory would be apparent. "Now, your Committee beg leave to observe, that the outline of the Public Worship of God, to be used in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, is specifically and clearly stated in the 21st chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith; which, in fact, contains the sum and substance of the Directory relative to the reading of the Word—to Prayer—to Preaching—to the celebration of the Sacraments—and to Praise,—the five distinct heads under which the Reformed Presbyterian Churches arrange Public Worship. The Confession of Faith was framed in the year 1647, confirmed by Act of Parliament 1649; and therefore it is certain that the framers of it had distinctly in their view the Directory for Public Worship, approved by the General Assembly in February 1645, and confirmed by Act of Parliament in the same year." *The Organ Question: Statements by Dr. Ritchie, and Dr. Porteous, for and against the use of the organ in public worship* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1856), 146–147.

51. 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]), 130.

52. The divines also refer to Psalm 107 throughout, which says nothing to the subject of recurrence.

53. Shaw, 1.361–364. Struthers, 295. Hetherington, 346. Especially see, Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly its History and Standards* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1897), 377–378.

the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in a holy and religious manner.⁵¹

Recurring Fast Days and Days of Thanksgiving

One of the many textual errors that had crept into this portion of the Confession over time was a comma misplacement, which made the text to read, "vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions...". Dr. Carruthers comments, "Its omission makes the words 'upon special occasions' refer only to the thanksgivings. It must be remembered that the divines used the word 'occasion' in its stricter sense, that of 'suitable opportunity,' or as Dillingham translates it, *pro varietate eventuum*. The next clause" [times and seasons] "deals with 'occasions' in the looser modern sense." This phrase—"times and seasons"—applies to all four of the extraordinary parts of religious worship: vows, oaths, fastings, and thanksgivings.

Though the assembly refers to Esther 9:22 as a proof text for times of thanksgiving,⁵² the words of WCF 21:5 do not address annually recurring thanksgiving times or days. To such a suggestion that it does, it first must be objected that the divines do not reference the broader context of the proof text, which would have only required adding the immediately preceding verse or two. Since they do not, it seems clear the assembly was simply adducing an example of a time of thanksgiving, and not addressing the subject of annual recurrence of such observances. It should also be remembered that the Scripture proofs are not provided to add propositions to the Confession, but are there to support the actual statements and propositions given. This role is additionally supported by the fact that the references were only added at the insistence of the House of Commons—it was not the original design of the assembly of divines to 'proof text' the propositions of the Westminster standards.⁵³

That being said, Thomas M'Crie's comments on the book of Esther may help to explain the appeal to this passage as a proof text, in which he addresses the nature of the days of Purim, the authority of their appointment, and the relevance of these days to 'holy days' and the Westminster Confession's days of fasting and thanksgiving.

The feast referred to in our text is called the feast of Purim, or Lots, from the Persic word *pur*, which signifies the *lot*; and the name was given it because Haman had cast lots to determine the day on which he should destroy all the Jews; but He who has the disposal of the lot, “caused his wicked device to return on his own head,” and saved his people.

There are two questions respecting this feast. What was its nature? And by what authority was it enjoined?

What was its nature? Was it religious, or merely civil? Some interpreters are of opinion that it was entirely civil or political, and intended to commemorate a temporal deliverance, by such expressions of outward joy as are common among all people on such occasions. In corroboration of this opinion, they observe that nothing peculiarly sacred is mentioned as belonging to its celebration, but only eating and drinking, rejoicing, and sending portions to one another, and gifts to the poor; that they were not restricted from ordinary work, but merely rested from the trouble and sorrow which they had lately felt. But though it should be granted that the description contains nothing but expressions of secular joy, we would scarcely be warranted to maintain that this feast had no religious character. It is of the nature of this Book not to bring forward religion expressly, for reasons that we formerly assigned. Would we say that the fast formerly observed by Esther and the Jews in Shushan consisted solely in abstinence from food, because there is no mention of prayer combined with it? Nay, we find this exercise specified in the account of the feast: “they had decreed for themselves and for their seed the matters of their fastings *and their cry*,” that is, their prayer (v.31). Now, though this should be understood as looking back on their exercise when the murderous edict was first promulgated, yet its being named here gives a religious character to the feast. Can we suppose that they would fast and pray during their distress, and not rejoice before the Lord, and give thanks to him after he had hearkened to them? But it is more natural to understand the words prospectively, and they may be translated thus—“adding fasting and prayer.” Accordingly, in after times, the Jews kept the thirteenth of Adar as a fast, and the two following days as a feast.

By what authority was it enjoined? Or, in other words, did the observance of it rest on mere human authority? Did Mordecai, in proposing it, act from the private motion of his own mind; and, in confirming it, did he proceed entirely upon the consent of the people? Or was

he guided in both by divine and extraordinary counsel, imparted to him immediately, or by some prophetic person living at that time? That the vision and the prophecy were still enjoyed by the Jews dwelling in Persia, cannot be denied by those who believe the canonical authority of this book, and what is contained in that of Ezra. We have already seen reasons for thinking Mordecai acted under the influence of the faith of Moses’ parents, from the time that he proposed his cousin Esther as a candidate to succeed Vashti the queen. There can be no doubt that he was raised up in an extraordinary manner as a saviour to Israel; and in the course of this Lecture we have seen grounds for believing that, in addition to his other honours, he was employed as the penman of this portion of inspired scripture. From all these considerations, it is reasonable to conclude that the feast of Purim was not instituted without divine counsel and approbation. Add to this, that the decree of Esther confirming it, is expressly said, in the close of this chapter, to have been engrossed in this book, by whomsoever it was written.

From what has been said, we may infer that this passage of Scripture gives no countenance to religious festivals, or holidays of human appointment, especially under the New Testament. Feasts appear to have been connected with sacrifices from the most ancient times; but the observance of them was not brought under any fixed rules until the establishment of the Mosaic law. Religious festivals formed a noted and splendid part of the ritual of that law; but they were only designed to be temporary; and having served their end in commemorating certain great events connected with the Jewish commonwealth, and in typifying certain mysteries now clearly revealed by the gospel, they ceased, and, along with other figures, vanished away. To retain these, or to return to them after the promulgation of the Christian law, or to imitate them by instituting festivals of a similar kind, is to doat on shadows—to choose weak and beggarly elements—to bring ourselves under a yoke of bondage which the Jews were unable to bear, and interpretatively to fall from grace and the truth of the gospel. “Ye observe days and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holiday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come.” Shall we suppose that Christ and his apostles, in abrogating those days which God himself had appointed to be observed, without instituting others in their room, intended that either churches or individuals should be

allowed to substitute whatever they pleased in their room? Yet the Christian church soon degenerated so far as to bring herself under a severer bondage than that from which Christ had redeemed her, and instituted a greater number of festivals than were observed under the Mosaic law, or even among pagans.

To seek a warrant for days of religious commemoration under the gospel from the Jewish festivals, is not only to overlook the distinction between the old and new dispensations, but to forget that the Jews were never allowed to institute such memorials for themselves, but simply to keep those which infinite Wisdom had expressly and by name set apart and sanctified. The prohibitory sanction is equally strict under both Testaments: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it."

There are times when God calls, on the one hand, to religious fasting, or, on the other, to thanksgiving and religious joy; and it is our duty to comply with these calls, and to set apart time for the respective exercises. But this is quite a different thing from recurrent or anniversary holidays. In the former case the day is chosen for the duty, in the latter the duty is performed for the day; in the former case there is no holiness on the day but what arises from the service which is performed on it, and when the same day afterwards recurs, it is as common as any other day; in the latter case the day is set apart on all following times, and may not be employed for common or secular purposes. Stated and recurring festivals countenance the false principle, that some days have a peculiar sanctity, either inherent or impressed by the works which occurred on them; they proceed on an undue assumption of human authority; interfere with the free use of that time which the Creator hath granted to man; detract from the honour due to the day of sacred rest which he hath appointed; lead to impositions over conscience; have been the fruitful source of superstition and idolatry; and have been productive of the worst effects upon morals, in every age, and among every people, barbarous and civilized,

54. Thomas M'Crie, *Lectures on the Book of Esther* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1838), 279–286.

55. J. Cameron Fraser, "Occasional Elements of Worship" *Worship in the Presence of God*, ed. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman (Greenville, SC: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press, 1992), 263, 267.

56. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964, 1980), 169.

57. Fraser, 269, 270.

pagan and Christian, popish and protestant, among whom they have been observed. On these grounds they were rejected from the beginning, among other corruptions of antichrist, by the reformed Church of Scotland, which allowed no stated religious days but the Christian Sabbath.⁵⁴

Thus far M'Crie. As to the actual text of WCF 21:5, it must be objected that requiring the words "times and season" to mean recurring observances necessitates applying this to all four extraordinary acts of worship. This is highly unlikely given the reformed understanding of these ordinances, and the directory for worship is clear the reasons for appointing such from immediate and current providential events must be "eminent" (obvious and notable) and "extraordinary" (not commonplace). Let the following suffice to explain the difficulty of insisting on this erroneous reading:

Since oaths and vows are voluntary in nature, they are truly occasional and cannot be imposed in an arbitrary manner. . . . The age of the Spirit is not to be one of perpetual fasting. But as those possessing the first fruits of the Spirit, yet, groaning in anticipation of our complete redemption (Rom. 8:23), it is surely appropriate that we fast on occasion as we long for the return of our divine Bridegroom.⁵⁵

In Roman Catholicism (and following the lead of the roman church are many Protestant Churches today) certain days and seasons are designated for fasting. This is contrary to Scripture which teaches that fasting is not acceptable unto God when it arises out of such mechanical regulation (see Mark 2:18–20, Matt. 6:16–18). . . . Observe once more the admirable consistency of the Confession. Fasting is an element of true worship only if it remains spontaneous or occasional, rather than being made a fixed part of the worship of God.⁵⁶

However, when the Confession speaks of "thanksgivings upon special occasions" it has in view more specific acts of thanksgiving for particular acts of providence and grace. An example would be annual harvest thanksgivings. Less regular and more truly occasional would be times of thanksgiving for national deliverance in times of war or other emergencies. . . . In any case, the principle of thanksgiving is clearly taught and this suggests the appropriateness of specific acts of thanksgiving, provided these occasions be truly occasional and do not become part of a religious calendar imposed on the church with binding authority.⁵⁷

Even without these difficulties, there is no compelling reason to understand this phrase to mean anything beyond what Carruthers indicated. When we speak of a season of prayer, communion season, or time of fasting, there is no necessity to understand that an annually recurring observance is implied. That is not to say that they cannot be providentially recurring, as thanksgiving for a good harvest would certainly be appropriate and such obviously would occur at about the same time in the seasons of harvest each year. Of course the next year there may be cause for fasting rather than thanksgiving, which belies the idea that any recurring observance can be imposed, as it must remain open to the changing providences of God in the lives of individuals, families or larger societies.⁵⁸ Nor is it being said that recurrence if voluntary is not in and of itself unlawful, only that the divines do not address the topic. In our liberty we may do much to put the remembering of the events and workings of God in our lives to good use. Samuel Miller remarks upon a good example of this in the life of John Rodgers.⁵⁹

Besides other seasons, both of ordinary and special devotion, he [Rodgers] seldom failed to observe the anniversaries of his *Birth*, of his *Licensure*, and of his *Ordination*, as days of solemn humiliation, fasting, and prayer. And on these occasions he was accustomed to commit to writing reflections and prayers, which were found among his papers after his decease, and which indicate piety of a very fervent and elevated character.

However, while not strictly unlawful, beyond personal observance, binding similar recurring devotions upon others in a family, church or nation, would seem to endanger Christian liberty, or at the very least engender formality in religious duties. Samuel Miller expressed this concern regarding fast and thanksgiving days:

But we are persuaded, that even in the keeping of these days, when they are made stated observances, recurring, of course, at particular times, whatever the aspect of Providence may be, is calculated to promote formality and superstition, rather than the edification of the body of Christ.⁶⁰

Fast and Thanksgiving Days Versus 'Holy Days'

The fact that recurrence is not even being addressed by the Westminster divines dispels any idea that the confession itself may allow for recurring 'holy days.' However, more serious to such a contention is the historic use and understanding of words. "Solemn fastings,

and thanksgivings" have a definite meaning as used in WCF 21:5 and in the directory for worship.⁶¹ These times should not be confused with the 'holy days' condemned in the directory's appendix. Setting aside days to remember specific acts of redemption is not the same thing as separating "a day or days for publick fasting or thanksgiving, as the several eminent and extraordinary dispensations of God's providence shall administer cause and opportunity to his people."⁶² As the Southern Presbyterian, William S. Plumer makes clear:

Even days of fasting or thanksgiving are not holy days; but they are a part of secular time voluntarily devoted to God's service. And if we are to perform these things at all, we must take some time for them. Yet none but God can sanctify a day so as to make it holy. The attempt to do this was one of the sins of Jeroboam, 1 Kings 12:33.⁶³

58. The original constitution of the Associate Reformed Church indicates that only clear providence can bind such observances and when clear they should not be avoided except upon clear and weighty reason. "The reasons of devoting any part of our time to extraordinary religious worship, being laid, not in the will of man, but in the will of God, declared in his Word, and manifested in the extraordinary dispensation of his providence, no human authority can create any obligation to observe such days. Nevertheless when the call of providence is clear, civil or religious rulers may, for centering the general devotion, specify and recommend a particular season to be spent in fasting or thanksgiving. Nor, without very weighty reasons, are such recommendations to be disregarded." *The Constitution and Standards of the Associate-Reformed Church in North-America* (New York, 1799), 563–564.

59. Samuel Miller, D. D., *Memoirs of the Rev. John Rodgers, D. D.* (New York: Whiting and Watson, Theological and Classical Booksellers, 1813), 70, cp 309.

60. Samuel Miller, D. D. *Presbyterianism the truly primitive and Apostolical Constitution of the Church of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1835), 73. G. I. Williamson's recent observation is apt. "The teachings of the Bible are like the parts of the human body: each has its proper place and proportion. No one wants a picture of a man in which there is a giant nose, out of all proportion to the rest of his body. But that is what we have every year with all this emphasis on the birth of Jesus. Yes, the virgin birth of Christ must be part of our teaching. But it should be brought back to the relative status that it has in the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 14, Q/A 35-36 – two out of 129)." "A Defense of Calvin's Rejection of Christmas," *The Aquila Report* [December 28, 2013], <http://theaquilareport.com/a-defense-of-calvins-rejection-of-christmas/>.

61. "Concerning Publick Solemn Fasting;" "Concerning the Observation of Days of Publick Thanksgiving," *Confession*, 391–393. As per the Solemn League & Covenant, the Westminster documents were a unit. Often the divines would debate whether to handle a particular subject in a directory, or in the Confession or Catechisms. It is not credible to force a meaning on the words of one document, where some topic may not be as clear, that contradicts plain statements in another.

62. *Confession*, 394.

63. William S. Plumer, *The Law of God, As Contained in the Ten Commandments* (Philadelphia, 1864). This reference may be incorrect as we have been unable to re-confirm it in Plumer.

The differences between these lawfully appointed times and ‘holy days’ are clear. The former are prescribed acts of worship, clearly warranted in the Scriptures. ‘Holy days’ have no such prescription—there is no Scriptural command, approved example, or good and necessary inference, which warrants tying specific acts of redemption to ‘holy’ days or times of our own choosing.

God has given his church a general precept for extraordinary fasts (Joel 1:14; 2:15), as likewise for extraordinary festivities to praise God, and to give him thanks in the public assembly of his people, upon the occasional motive of some great benefit which, by the means of our fasting and praying, we have obtained (Zech. 8:19 with 7:3). If it is said that there is a general command for set festivities, because there is a command for preaching and hearing the word, and for praising God for his benefits; and there is no precept for particular fasts more than for particular festivities, I answer: Albeit there is a command for preaching and hearing the word, and for praising God for his benefits, yet is there no command (no, not in the most general generality) for annexing these exercises of religion to set anniversary days more than to other days; whereas it is plain that there is a general command for fasting and humiliation at some times more than at other times.⁶⁴

While there is a general warrant for fast or thanksgiving days, since the circumstances, causes, etc. are infinite, there is no such general warrant for anniversary ‘holy days’ to remember specific acts of redemption, a list of which by its nature would not be endless. If it had been God’s desire these could easily have been enumerated in Scripture.

And as for particularities, all the particular causes, occasions, and times of fasting could not be determined in Scripture, because they are infinite, as Camero says. But all the particular causes of set festivities, and the number of the same, might have been easily determined in Scripture, since they are not, nor may not be infinite; for the Bishop himself acknowledges that to appoint a festival day for every week cannot stand with charity, the inseparable companion of piety. And albeit so many were allowable, yet who sees not how easily the Scripture might have comprehended them, because they are set, constant, and anniversary times, observed for permanent and continuing causes, and not moveable

or mutable, as fasts which are appointed for occurring causes, and therefore may be infinite.⁶⁵

Fast and thanksgiving days have a necessary use, whereas ‘holy days’ are not necessary at all. As Gillespie writes, “The celebration of set anniversary days is no necessary mean for conserving the commemoration of the benefits of redemption, because we have occasion, not only every Sabbath day, but every other day, to call to mind these benefits, either in hearing, or reading, or meditating upon God’s word.”⁶⁶

Fellow Westminster divine Jeremiah Burroughs, saw the need to explain to his congregation the differences between the fast and thanksgiving days the assembly believed the scriptures gave warrant to the church to set aside on occasion, and the pretended holy days of Roman Catholicism. As he was one of the English Puritan authors/approvers of the directory for worship, we cite him at length.

Now arises the question, whether there may be holy feasts (taken so in a proper sense) by man’s appointment? Jeroboam is accused of it plainly: and in Gal. iv. 10, 11, there is a very severe charge upon the Galatians, “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” It appears by this, that people’s hearts were mightily set upon their feasts, their days, and months, and years, they were loth to be taken off from them; so that the apostle speaks with bitterness of spirit, “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” And indeed when godly ministers take pains amongst people whose hearts are set upon such things as these, for the most part they lose their labour, little good is done.

Yes, some will say, to observe the Jewish days after they were abolished by God, was sinful and dangerous, but we do not keep Jewish days. But mark what these men say, God abolishes his own, and yet they think he gives liberty to man to set up others. If upon God’s abolishing his own, men have liberty to set up theirs, then Christians are under a more heavy bondage, and grievous pedagogy, than ever the Jews were, for it is better to have a hundred days of God’s appointing, than one of man’s, and more honourable. Further, if God appoint, there needs no scruple, as if man appoint: yea, if God appoint, we may expect a special blessing, and efficacy, and presence of God; we cannot expect such things in man’s appointment. Now, if when God has taken away Jewish ceremonies and days, man might lawfully

64. Gillespie, *EPC*, part 1, chapter 7, section 6 (1.7.6.).

65. *EPC*, 1.7.6.

66. *EPC* (2013), 50.

appoint others as he pleases, we may pray to God with good reason to bring us under the bondage of the law again, rather than to be thus under man's power.

Thus far we grant, that upon any special work of God, the revolution of the year naturally reminds of it; and so far as it is natural, it is good, I may make use of it. Therefore, I dare not say that it is altogether unlawful at such times to have some outward rejoicing, when God does not call for mourning some other way (except the argument from the extraordinary abuse there has been of it may be of force). Nay, that there may be advantage taken of the people's leisure, to preach the word and to hear sermons upon such days, we deny not. We know that Christ was in the porch of the temple at the feast of dedication, which was one of the days of their own appointing, not that he was there to countenance or honour the feast, but because he had been there before, at another feast of God's appointment. Now there being a multitude of people at that time also gathered together, he took advantage of the concourse, to come to the outer porch to preach to them. So much therefore as we may grant, we will not deny.

For the right understanding of setting apart days, I suppose these two things will be questioned.

First, Why may not governors of the church set apart days, as well as appoint times for preaching; or as well as others who appoint such times, as once a week so much time set apart for a lecture? Secondly, We may appoint fast days, and days of thanksgiving, these are set apart by man: how happens it that a man may appoint a time for preaching constantly once a week, and he may appoint times of fasting, and days of thanksgiving, and yet not have this liberty, to make a day that may properly be called a holy-day?

We must clear that point from this objection, or else we do nothing; and for the clearing this we must know there is a great deal of difference in these three things, the right understanding of which will clear all the matter:

Between the deputation, and the dedication, or sanctification of a thing.⁶⁷

I may depute a creature to be used to help me in holy things, and yet this creature is not sanctified by its deputation; and so for a lecture, such an hour in such a day is deputed, but the time is not made holy by it; the place

is deputed, but is not made holy by it. Yea, I will appoint such a garment when I am in such a service such a day to wear, but yet the garment is not made holy by it. A creature is not made holy merely by being used at a holy exercise, or in a holy thing. As thus, suppose I read the holy Scripture, I make use of a candle to read it by, I do not make the candle holy by this. If the using of a creature in a holy duty did make the creature holy, then it would be the same in all creatures. I use the very light of the air when I am reading and speaking holy things in public assemblies, but I do not make the light and air holy because I use them in holy things; so I use this hour to preach in, though I use it in a holy duty, I make it no further holy than a man does his spectacles that he reads the Scripture by. A deputation is this, when such a creature as I shall think most commodious for such a service, shall be set apart for such a service; or when such a creature as I use for such a service, will be a natural and useful help to me, to appoint it for that service upon that ground.

The second is dedication, that is, when I give a thing out of my own power for a pious use, so that I cannot use it for any thing again. As when a man has given so much of his estate to build a school or an hospital, it may be said to be a kind of dedication; he has devoted, given away, so much of his estate to that end, so that he cannot make use of it for another purpose. Now we do not so set apart the time of preaching, as that we cannot use this time for any other end, we may, as we see cause, alter it, where it is from nine to eleven we make it from two to four; whereas, if it were a thing that we had dedicated, that is, given out of our own power, then it cannot be changed by us. That is a second degree. Now sanctification is beyond dedication, that is, when any creature or time is so set apart for holy things, as it must not be used in any thing but that which is holy; and though the same holy actions be done at another time, and with the use of another creature, they shall not be accounted so holy as at this time, and when this creature was used. Sanctification is the setting apart of any day which God gives me to use for my ordinary avocations, and so to devote it for such a business that it may not, without sin to me, whatever happens, be used for any other occasion. And, secondly, when I have set it apart, if I so exalt it, as if the same holy actions performed at another time, shall not be accounted as holy as at this time, although that time has as much natural fitness in it, then I sanctify a time to myself; but this I cannot do without sin. There are

67. See Gillespie's discussion of the same distinctions in *EPC* (2013), 132ff.

two things in all holy feasts, and, indeed, in all things which are accounted holy. First, it was a sin for them to use that time for any other thing, or in any other way, than God had appointed. Secondly, the actions they did at that time were such as were more acceptable to God than if they had done the same things at another time. Yea, it was so in their very days of humiliation. The day of expiation must not be used for any thing else; if they humbled themselves or fasted upon another day, that would not have been so acceptable to God as upon this day. So in all superstitions of men, when they set apart either days, or places, or things, they put these two upon them. As for places, they say we may appoint a place for people to meet in a religious way. Yes, but it becomes superstitious, first, when it is so set apart, as I shall make conscience of using it for no other purpose. Secondly, when I am persuaded in my conscience, that God accepts the service in this place better than in any other, though as decent as this. So for superstitious garments. You say, May not ministers be decent? I have heard a great doctor give this argument for a surplice: Sometimes I ride abroad to preach, and my cloak is dirty, is it fit for me to come into a pulpit with a dirty garment? and therefore there is always appointed somewhat to cover it; it is decent. Suppose it be so, but if this garment must be used only for such a holy exercise; and, secondly, if I think the wearing of it honours the service, and that God accepts the service performed in such a garment rather than in another; this is superstition: as in one place in Suffolk, when that garment was lost, there was a strict injunction to the poor countrymen that there might not be any service or sermon till they had got another; for which they were appointed ten days, and this being upon a Friday, there were two sabbaths without any service; therefore it is apparent they put the acceptance of the duty upon it. So for days, if any man set apart a day, so that his conscience condemn him before God as sinning against him if he do any thing upon that day but such holy duties; secondly, that though the same holy duties be done upon another day, they shall not be accounted so acceptable to God as done upon that day; this is superstitious. Yet, certainly, of this nature have many of our days been, for if you opened your shops what disturbance was there in the city! it was profaning the day, every proctor had power given him to molest you. Did not they also account it a greater honour to God to have service read that day than to have it read upon an ordinary Tuesday or Thursday? yea, preaching upon a lecture day that was not one of their holy-days,

68. Burroughs refers to the fast days appointed by Parliament during the English Civil War.

they accounted not so acceptable to God as upon one of them. Here comes their institution, which puts more upon it than God does, and thus it becomes sinful. So if you set apart the time you call Christmas, so as to make conscience of not doing any other service or work on that day, and think that to remember Christ, and to bless God for Christ, upon another day, is not so acceptable to God as to do it upon this day, here is the evil of man's instituting days.

Well, but this is not cleared except we answer another objection: Do not the king and parliament command days of fasting and of thanksgiving, and are not they of the same nature? Will not you say it is sin for us to open shops upon these days? I answer, our days for fasting and thanksgiving have not those two ingredients in them, for, first, if God by his providence call any individual to special business in his family, then he need not have his conscience condemn him though he spend all that day in that business. They may set apart a day to be spent publicly, yet with this limitation, not to enjoin every individual, that to whatever God's providence specially calls him, he must leave off all, and make as much conscience of doing this as upon the Lord's day.

You will say, Upon the Lord's day, if any thing extraordinary happen, we may go a journey, or transact business, as a physician may ride up and down, works of mercy may be done, therefore this makes no difference between God's day and these of man's appointment.

I answer, though a physician do a work of mercy upon the sabbath day, yet he is bound to do it with a sabbath day's heart; whatever calls him from those services that are God's immediate worship, he sins against God if he follow it as the business of his calling, as upon another day; but if he do it with a sabbath day's frame of heart, as a work of mercy, he keeps the sabbath in that. But if there were a necessity to ride upon a fast day, a man's conscience need not to condemn him before God, if he went about that work as the work of his calling. It is not therefore so dedicated, but God's providence may oblige us to do other civil actions, and that as the works of our calling. Secondly, neither is it so sanctified, as if the same works done on another day were not so acceptable to God as when done upon this day. Our fast days⁶⁸ are fixed for the last Wednesday of the month, but to think that the work done upon another day were not so acceptable to God as done upon that day, is to sanctify the day, and such a sanctification is sin. The same answer may be given for days of thanksgiving.

Besides, there is another thing to be considered, that is, in stating the time. Though men may thus depute and appoint days to worship God, yet they cannot state any such days, but as God's providence permits, according to the present occasion. Therefore it would be a sin for a state to appoint nominally a day for religious fasting: God did so, but men have no power to do so, because they do not know but God may call them to rejoicing upon that day, they have not knowledge of the times. All that we can do is this, when God calls us to fasting, we must appoint days of fasting; when God calls us to rejoicing, we must appoint days of rejoicing. Therefore to appoint the time of Lent as a religious fast is sinful, and the statute itself threatens a mulct upon that man who shall call it a religious fast: stated fasts, which are not limited by Providence, are certainly evil. The monthly fasts now enjoined, if we should say we will have them once a month till this day twelvemonths, or two years, I persuade myself the state should sin; but to have it as long as God's hand is upon us, as long as the occasion lasts, and God's providence calls us to it, is justifiable.

Our brethren in Scotland wholly deny the appointment, both of stated fasts and feasts: nay, they will scarce agree to the monthly fasting we have, because they are so loth to yield to any *stata jejunia*. King James once made a speech in Scotland, in which he blessed God that he was born in such a time, and was a member of such a church; the reason he gave was this: The church of Scotland exceeds in this all other churches. England, though it has pure doctrine, has not pure discipline; other reformed churches have pure doctrine and discipline, but they retain the observation of many holy-days; but the church of Scotland has pure doctrine and discipline, and keeps no holy-days, and therefore it is a purer church than any in the world.

Thus I have endeavored to show you how far things may be set apart, and how far not, when it becomes a sin for any one to sanctify a day. By this we may see what a mercy it is to be delivered from those men who have robbed the kingdom of many days, and put many superstitious respects upon them, and so have involved us in much guilt; bless God for delivering us from them, and for those days in which God gives us liberty to exercise ourselves in his worship. Thus much for those feasts called their feasts, that were of their own appointment. ⁶⁹

Presbyterians (and other nonconformists) carried this position against 'holy days' over to the colonies and it

continued within American Presbyterianism, until a practical decline began in the late 19th century. Explicit denominational approval came in the mainline churches within the first half of the 20th century.

II. 'HOLY DAYS' AND AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM

From the early days of Presbyterianism in the American colonies through the founding of the United States, the Presbyterians in this country continued their opposition to the observance of 'holy days.'

American Presbyterian View of Holy Days' Before 1788

From the beginning of their arrival in the America colonies, the Presbyterians, who were mostly transplanted Scots and Ulster Scots,⁷⁰ did not observe Christmas or other 'holy days.' As has been shown, the Presbyterian view is clearly stated in the appendix to the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God, Touching Days and Places for Public Worship.

Constitutional Status of the Directory

Prior to 1788, the major body of American Presbyterians constitutionally approved of the Westminster Directory. The Synod of Philadelphia recommended the Directory in 1729.

A motion being made to know the Synod's judgment about the directory, they gave their sense of that matter in the following words, viz: The Synod do unanimously acknowledge and declare, that they judge the directory for worship, discipline, and government of the church, commonly annexed to the Westminster Confession, to be agreeable in substance to the word of God, and founded thereupon, and therefore do earnestly recommend the same to all their members, to be by them observed as near as circumstances will allow, and Christian prudence dictate.⁷¹

69. Jeremiah Burroughs, *An Exposition of the Prophecy of Hosea* (1643; Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863), 108–110.

70. James T. Dennison has given new support to the position that the majority of the founders of American Presbyterianism were from Ireland and Scotland. Thus 'old world Presbyterianism' and not New England Congregationalism is the founding character of Presbyterianism in America. James T. Dennison, "New Light on Early Colonial Presbyterian Ministers," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 60 (1998): 153–157.

71. *Records of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1904), 95.

While still maintaining its exceptions to certain clauses regarding the civil magistrate in WCF 20 and 23, the Synod reaffirmed its position again in 1736, declaring: "... that the Synod have adopted and still do adhere to the Westminster Confession, Catechisms, and Directory, without the least variation or alteration, and without any regard to said distinctions."⁷²

During the time of the Old Side / New Side schism, the Synod of New York affirmed its adherence to the Westminster Standards, Catechisms, and Directory for worship and government. In 1751 the synod declared:

The Synod being informed of certain misrepresentations concerning the constitution, order, and discipline of our churches, industriously spread by some of the members of the Dutch congregations, interspersed among or bordering upon us, with design to prevent occasional or constant communion of their members with our churches; to obviate all such misrepresentations, and to cultivate a good understanding between us and our brethren of the Dutch churches, we do hereby declare and testify our constitution, order, and discipline, to be in harmony with the established church of Scotland. The Westminster Confession, Catechisms, and Directory for public worship and church government adopted by them, are in like manner received and adopted by us. We declare ourselves united with that church in the same faith, order, and discipline.⁷³

Meeting for a plan of union in 1758, the Synods of Philadelphia and New York declared:

Both Synods having always approved and received the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as an orthodox and excellent system of Christian doctrine, founded on the word of God, we do still receive the same as the confession of our faith, and also adhere to the plan of worship, government, and discipline, contained in the Westminster

Directory, strictly enjoining it on all our members and probationers for the ministry, that they preach and teach according to the form of sound words in said confession and Catechisms, and avoid and oppose all errors contrary thereto.⁷⁴

As late as 1786, in response to queries from the Low Dutch Reformed Synod of New York and New Jersey, the Synod of New York and Philadelphia reaffirmed that it:

... receives the directory for public worship and the form of church government recommended by the Westminster Assembly as in substance agreeable to the institutions of the New Testament. This mode of adoption we use, because we believe the general platform of our government to be agreeable to the sacred Scriptures; but we do not believe that God has been pleased so to reveal and enjoin every minute circumstance of ecclesiastical government and discipline as not to leave room for orthodox churches of Christ, in these minutiae to differ with charity from one another.⁷⁵

Adherence to the Directory was part of ordination vows during the 18th century as well. "John Tennent, September 18, 1729, subscribed the following subscription: 'I do own the Westminster Confession of Faith, before God and these witnesses, together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Directory thereto annexed, to be the confession of my faith, and rule of faith and manners, according to the word of God.'⁷⁶ In the Philadelphia Presbytery Samuel Evans in his subscription "adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith, Catechisms and Directory, according to the adopting act of Synod." Donegal Presbytery, which was formed in 1732, required the following subscription: "I, having seriously read and perused the Westminster Confession and catechisms, do declare in the sight of God, and all here present, that I do believe, and am fully persuaded, that so far as I can discern and understand said Confession and Catechisms, they are, in all things, agreeable to the word of God... I also believe the Directory for the exercise of worship, discipline, and government, commonly annexed to the said Confession, to be agreeable to the word of God, and I do promise to conform myself thereto in my practice, as far as in emergent circumstances I can attain unto."⁷⁷

The only apparent American Presbyterian version of the Westminster Standards prior to 1788 contains the Directory for Worship.⁷⁸ About this edition Warfield writes:

72. *Records of the Presbyterian Church of the United States*, 126–127.

73. *Records of the Presbyterian Church of the United States*, 245.

74. *Records of the Presbyterian Church of the United States*, 286.

75. *Records of the Presbyterian Church of the United States*, 518–519. "The 'substance' of the Directory is of course its Presbyterianism. What is not substantial about it, is its numerous directions, having reference in many cases either to unimportant, or to local and temporary circumstances. A stricter adoption of the Westminster Directory, in this country, was impossible." Charles Hodge, *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1851), 1.14.

76. Hodge, 1.88.

77. Hodge, 1.163.

78. The first American edition of the confession published in Boston

It can hardly be doubted, on the other hand, that the second American edition which we have met with, was called out by a purely Presbyterian demand. This was issued in 1745 at Philadelphia, from the press of Benjamin Franklin, and was a finely manufactured 16mo volume of 588 pages, following the type of the normative Edinburgh edition of Lumisden and Robertson of 1728, and containing all the documents included in that edition and ever subsequently constituting the fixed contents of Scotch editions. It came from the press, it will be observed, the year of the formation of the Synod of New York, and it may well be that the disruption of the Synod of Pennsylvania, and the controversies out of which that disruption grew and which had been disturbing the Church since 1740, were the occasion of its preparation. That only these two editions were issued in America until, as the century was drawing to a close (1789, 1799), the two greater Presbyterian bodies established in this country began to publish their amended editions of the Confession, is readily accounted for by the continued dependence of Presbyterians at large on Scotland for their supply of Confessions. This dependence is attested by the very large number of Scotch Confessions bearing dates in the eighteenth century which are found scattered through America to-day.⁷⁹

Pardovan's Collections: An Early Book of Order and Secondary Standard

The rejection of 'holy days' was also embodied in a secondary standard, the *Collections* of Steuart of Pardovan. The early American Presbyterians used this book as an exposition of their discipline.⁸⁰ "One manual, by Steuart of Pardovan, is referred to in early American Presbyterian records as designed to serve the future as a paradigm of polity."⁸¹ Robert J. Breckinridge (1800–1871) wrote in 1843, "From the earliest period of the church in America, the *Collections* of Pardovan have been its rule of discipline, and the general principles therein embodied as essentially our own; and that work was made the basis of a portion of our present standards when they were compiled."⁸² Ashbel Green recalled, "When I was preparing for the gospel ministry, I was directed to read the Scotch collections of Steuart of Pardovan, as a book of authority on the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church."⁸³ Official records make this clear as well. "Article 5th: The rules of our discipline and the form of process in our church judicatures, are contained in Pardovan's (alias Stewart's) collections in conjunction with the acts of our own Synod...."⁸⁴

Pardovan's *Collections* state: "This church hath no anniversary feast or festival days, but doth only set apart a day or days for thanksgiving or humiliation, as emergent providences do call for."⁸⁵

The Practical Handling of Christmas and 'Holy Days' in 18th Century American Presbyterianism

In the New England colonies, Christmas day was largely ignored. In those colonies where the Church of England held sway, there was much more observance of the day. However, at this time there was also an overriding concern in all parts for the immoral reveling during Christmas. One mid-nineteenth century writer noted this customary immorality associated with 'Christmastime':

The moral and religious influence of the observance of Christmas has never been good. It has usually been a day of unhallowed mirth... The mode of its observance has, nowhere, been suitable to the anniversary of the birth of the author of a spiritual religion and the Saviour of the world. We would object to its observance, even if performed in a better spirit: for the experience of the church has shown that to observe periodically other religious days than God has appointed inevitably diminishes the respect that ought to be paid to the day that God has certainly hollowed.⁸⁶

This of course was not new, but had long been a problem

in 1723 was probably Congregationalist in origin. Benjamin Franklin published an apparently Presbyterian oriented printing of the Westminster Standards in 1745. *The confession of faith, the larger and shorter catechisms, ...* (Philadelphia: Printed and sold by B. Franklin, 1745), [483]-521.

79. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Printing of the Westminster Confession," *The Westminster Assembly and its Work* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1959), 354–355.

80. Walter Steuart of Pardovan, *Collections and Observations Concerning the Worship, Discipline, and Government of the Church of Scotland in four books*. There are many editions of this work (first edition, Edinburgh, 1709). It is referenced by book, chapter and paragraph.

81. *Paradigms in Polity: Classic Readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government*, ed. David W. Hall and Joseph H. Hall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 23.

82. *Paradigms in Polity*, 519.

83. *The Life of Ashbel Green begun and written by himself in his eighty-second year and continued to his eighty-fourth prepared for the press at the author's request by Joseph H. Jones* (New York: R. Carter, 1849), 180.

84. *Records of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America*, 519.

85. Pardovan's *Collections*, 3.VI.6.

86. "Plea for Amusements," *Southern Presbyterian Review*, vol. II, No. 4 (March 1849), 561; Cited in Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1963–73), 1.464–465.

in England, as noted earlier by the comments of Edmund Calamy.⁸⁷ Regarding the Puritan view of 'holy days,' one non-Christian writer has astutely observed, "Christmas has always been an extremely difficult holiday to *Christianize*."⁸⁸

The Puritans knew what subsequent generations would forget: that when the Church, more than a millennium earlier, had placed Christmas Day in late December, the decision was part of what amounted to a compromise, and a compromise for which the Church paid a high price. Late-December festivities were deeply rooted in popular culture, both in observance of the winter solstice and in celebration of the one brief period of leisure and plenty in the agricultural year. In return for ensuring massive observance of the anniversary of the Savior's birth by assigning it to this resonant date, the Church for its part tacitly agreed to allow the holiday to be celebrated more or less the way it had always been. From the beginning, the Church's hold over Christmas was (and remains still) rather tenuous. There were always people for who Christmas was a time of pious devotion rather than carnival, but such people were always in the minority. It may not be going too far to say that Christmas has always been an extremely difficult holiday to *Christianize*. Little wonder that the Puritans were willing to save themselves the trouble.

87. Increase Mather echoed the same concerns in New England. See chapter three, "Against Profane Christ-mass Keeping," in *A Testimony against several profane and superstitious customs now practised by some in New-England* (London, 1687).

88. Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas: A social and cultural history of Christmas that shows how it was transformed from an unruly carnival season into the quintessential American Family Holiday* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 7–8. This is a secular treatment from the standpoint of a cultural and social historian who was raised in an Orthodox Jewish family. In the late 1990s, Nissenbaum was Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts.

89. Nissenbaum, 4.

90. Nissenbaum, 8.

91. Rev. Samuel Davies, "A Christmas-Day Sermon" *Sermons* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864), 3,562–586. This sermon was delivered on December 25, 1758. Davies preached the same sermon again in Nassua Hall one weekday, December 25, 1760. He had accepted the call to replace Edwards as president of the College of New Jersey in 1759. He died little more than a month later on February 4, 1761 at the age of thirty-six.

92. While based in Hanover, Davies also filled the pulpits of many meetinghouses in the area. During two months in 1757 he traveled five hundred miles, preaching forty sermons. During his ministry he contended much with the civil authorities for the right to preach to the dissenter congregations, being called upon to travel to England in 1753–54 to represent the right of dissenter congregations in Virginia to obtain license for their meetinghouses. Rev. Richard Webster, *A History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Phila.: Wilson, 1857), 549–563.

The Stephen Nissenbaum also observes that Christmas was "nothing but a pagan festival covered with a Christian veneer."⁸⁹

The Puritans understood another thing, too: Much of the seasonal excess that took place at Christmas was not merely chaotic "disorder" but behavior that took a profoundly ritualized form. Most fundamentally, Christmas was an occasion when the social hierarchy itself was symbolically turned upside down, in a gesture that inverted designated roles of gender, age, and class. During the Christmas season those near the bottom of the social order acted high and mighty. Men might dress like women, and women might dress (and act) like men. Young people might imitate and mock their elders.... Increase Mather explained with an anthropologist's clarity what he believed to be the origins of the practice: 'In the Saturnalian Days, Master did wait upon their Servants ... The Gentiles called Saturns time the Golden Age, because in it there was no servitude, in Commemoration whereof on his Festival, Servants must be Masters.' This practice, like so many others, was simply picked up and transposed to Christmas, where those who were low in station became 'Masters of Misrule.' To this day, in the British army, on December 25 officers are obliged to wait upon enlisted men at meals.⁹⁰

Samuel Davies

This concern for the general licentious and/or superstitious use of the day seems to have been the reason the Presbyterian minister Samuel Davies decided to preach a Christmas sermon at a weekday gathering in 1758.⁹¹ He appears to be one of the few who did, as Presbyterians and Non-conformists generally ignored the 'holy days' celebrated in the Episcopal and Lutheran churches at this time. This was no doubt due to the fact that he ministered in Virginia,⁹² where religious observance was more the norm than in New England. Davies observed:

This is the day which the church of Rome, and some other churches that deserve to be placed in better company have agreed to celebrate in memory of the Prince of Peace, the Saviour of men, the incarnate God, Immanuel. And I doubt not, but many convert superstition into rational and scriptural devotion, and religiously employ themselves in a manner acceptable to God, though they want the sanction of divine authority for appropriating this day to a sacred use. But, alas! It is generally a season of sinning, sensuality, luxury, and

various forms of extravagance; as though men were not celebrating the birth of the holy Jesus, but of Venus, or Bacchus, whose most sacred rites were mysteries of iniquity and debauchery....

To remember and religiously improve the incarnation of our divine Redeemer, to join the concert of angels, and dwell in ecstatic meditation upon their song; this is lawful, this is a seasonable duty every day; and consequently upon this day. And as Jesus improved the feast of dedication, though not of divine institution, as a proper opportunity to exercise his ministry, when crowds of the Jews were gathered from all parts; so I would improve this day for your instruction, since it is the custom of our country to spend it religiously, or idly, or wickedly, as different persons are differently disposed.

But as the seed of superstition which have some times grown up to a prodigious height, have been frequently sown and cherished by very inconsiderable incidents, I think it proper to inform you, that I may guard against this danger, that I do not set apart this day for public worship, as though it had any peculiar sanctity, or we were under any obligations to keep it religiously. I know no human authority, that has power to make one day more holy than another, or that can bind the conscience in such cases. And as for divine authority, to which alone the sanctifying of days and things belongs, it has thought it sufficient to consecrate one day in seven to a religious use, for the commemoration both of the birth of this world, and the resurrection of its great Author, or of the works of creation and redemption. This I would religiously observe; and inculcate the religious observance of it upon all. But as to other days, consecrated by the mistaken piety or superstition of men, and conveyed down to us as holy, through the corrupt medium of human tradition, I think myself free to observe them or not, according to conveniency, and the prospect of usefulness; like other common days, on which I may lawfully carry on public worship or not, as circumstances require. And since I have so fair an opportunity, and it seems necessary in order to prevent my conduct from being a confirmation of present superstition, or a temptation to future, I shall, once for all, declare my sentiments more fully upon this head.⁹³

Davies warns against a factious prosecuting of this difference in religion in those who may observe the day to worship, though without superstition, for which he adduces Paul and the use of things indifferent. He then adduces Paul to the Galatians to demonstrate that warning

is warranted to those who would place a “great part of their religion in the observance of them.” He concludes, “The commandments of God have often been made void by the traditions of men; and human inventions more religiously observed than divine institutions; and when this was the case, St. Paul was warm in opposing even ceremonial mistakes.”⁹⁴ Davies then proceeds to reason why Christmas should not be religiously observed, before continuing to preach from Luke 2:13–14.

American Presbyterian View of ‘Holy Days’ After 1788

In 1788 the Presbyterian Church in the United States was formed, and new standards were drafted. The Directory was extensively streamlined to remove dated, inapplicable and/or unnecessary references and directions. From the two chapters on days of Fasting and of Thanksgiving, and the Appendix, a single new chapter was created—*Of Fasting, and of the Observation of the Days of Thanksgiving*. The first two paragraphs of the new chapter were derived from the appendix.

I. There is no day under the Gospel commanded to be kept holy, except the Lord’s day, which is the Christian Sabbath.

II. Nevertheless, to observe days of fasting and thanksgiving, as the extraordinary dispensations of divine providence may direct, we judge both scriptural and rational.

The first paragraph is a slight rewording of the first paragraph from the old appendix. The second is a reworking of the third paragraph. Both the original second paragraph stating that observance of ‘holy days’ should no longer be continued for lack of Scriptural warrant, and the fourth paragraph, affirming the continued use of buildings where superstitious worship had taken place, were dropped. The reason is obvious. The American Presbyterians never had observed festival days, nor had their church buildings been places for superstitious and idolatrous worship. With the retention of the first paragraph of the appendix, the substance of the opposition to ‘holy days’ remained in the new directory.

This is easily confirmed. From 1816 to 1819 Samuel Miller, Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government at Princeton, served on the committee to revise the 1788 directory. This committee did not revise the section in question. Two years prior to the

93. Webster, 562–564.

94. Webster, 566.

Old School / New School schism,⁹⁵ Miller gave the following understanding of this portion of the directory:

Presbyterians Do Not Observe Holy Days. We believe, and teach, in our public formularies, that “there is no day, under the Gospel dispensation, commanded to be kept holy, except the Lord’s day, which is the Christian Sabbath.” We believe, indeed, and declare, in the same formula, that it is both scriptural and rational, to observe special days of Fasting and Thanksgiving, as the extraordinary dispensations of Divine Providence may direct. But we are persuaded, that even the keeping of these days, when they are made stated observances, recurring, of course, at particular times, whatever the aspect of Providence may be, is calculated to promote formality and superstition, rather than the edification of the body of Christ.⁹⁶

This book, one of the most widely published of Miller’s works, was prepared at the request of The Tract Society of the Synod of New York, and was published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication. It was published

95. In general the Old School was concerned with scriptural warrant and decorum. The New School emphasized evangelistic effectiveness. Yet it does not appear that this New School pragmatism led to observance of days, at least not at this juncture. In a publication issued after this schism, Ashbel Green articulates the same position as Samuel Miller. “It follows from what has just been stated, that those churches that appoint fasts and festivals, to be observed regularly, or at set times, need, in this particular, to be reformed.” Ashbel Green, *Lectures on the Shorter Catechism of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America addressed to Youth* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1841), 2.105–106. Katherine Lambert Richards notes, “The various divisions which marked the history of American Presbyterianism from 1810 to 1860 did not materially affect the attitude toward Christmas of the different groups. If anything the separating bodies were the more vigorous in their rejection of the day.” Katherine Lambert Richards, *How Christmas Came to the Sunday-Schools: The Observance of Christmas in the Protestant church schools of the United States, an historical study* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1934), 92.

96. Samuel Miller, D. D., *Presbyterianism the truly primitive and Apostolical Constitution of the Church of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1835), 73–78.

97. And even this may not be the full story on the wide circulation of this work. As Miller’s granddaughter Margaret Miller notes, “it is impossible to specify all editions and reprints of his books; the Presbyterian Board of Publication having republished a number of them repeatedly; in some cases, even to this day.” See: “A List of the Writings of Samuel Miller, D.D., LL.D., 1769–1850, Second Professor in Princeton Theological Seminary 1813–1850,” *The Princeton Theological Review*, vol. IX, No. 4 (Oct. 1911): 636.

98. “The Worship of the Presbyterian Church” *A series of tracts on the doctrines, order, and polity of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: embracing several on practical subjects* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.) Tract 197.

many times, sometimes in several printings and places in a given year, in 1837, 1840, 1842, 1847, and 1848.⁹⁷ It was published in Italian in 1855. The section on worship was extracted and turned into a Presbyterian tract by the Board of Publication.⁹⁸ Miller’s comments therefore can be taken as expressing the common view of his church.⁹⁹

Another indication of the continued adherence to this stance against observing ‘holy days’ is apparent in examining the American Presbyterian edition of a popular exposition of the Westminster Confession. In 1846 the Presbyterian Board of Publication published Robert Shaw’s exposition of the Confession of Faith. Shaw comments at WCF 21:5:

Solemn fastings and thanksgivings. Stated festival-days, commonly called *holy-days*, have no warrant in the Word of God; but a day may be set apart, by competent authority, for fasting or thanksgiving, when extraordinary dispensations of Providence administer cause for them. When judgments are threatened or inflicted, or when some special blessing is to be sought and obtained, fasting is eminently seasonable. When some remarkable mercy or deliverance has been received, there is a special call to thanksgiving. The views of the compilers of our Confession respecting these ordinances may be found in “The Directory for the Public Worship of God.”¹⁰⁰

The preface to this American edition notes that the Presbyterian Board of Publication took the liberty to change the sections of the Exposition dealing with 31:1; 25:1–3, 23:3, deleted other local allusions to the civil magistrate, and dropped the introduction by William Hetherington.

99. Dr. Miller had made his position against Christmas observance clear earlier in a letter to a New York newspaper. “For the Commercial Advertiser,” *Commercial Advertiser*, New York, NY, December 29, 1825. The American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts has this issue in their collection. “Is it any wonder, then, that the Puritans, perceiving the tendency in all churches to go to extremes in multiplying such observances, whenever they began to be introduced; and knowing that there was no way to prevent this, but by shutting them out altogether: deliberately preferred the latter as the safer course?—and truly, if there be no Bible warrant for festivals;—no solid warrant for them in the practice of the Christian Church for the first 300 years, and, above all, none for *Christmas*; if the whole business of bringing institutions into the Church for which there is no Divine authority, be unlawful and of dangerous tendency; and if, whenever the practice has been admitted, it has been almost always abused, that is, carried much further than it ought to have been, I cannot help thinking that the Puritans had at least *plausible*, if not *conclusive*, reasons for taking the course which they did.”

100. Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board of Publication, c. 1846), 251–252.

They did not change this section on chapter 21 where Shaw presents the Westminster Directory as commentary on the meaning of WCF 21:5, and in fact uses the language of the original directory in his exposition.¹⁰¹

Other sources of the American Presbyterian viewpoint regarding ‘holy days’ abound, from both the Northern and Southern churches, as well as the Associate Reformed, Reformed, and United Presbyterian churches.

But as it was found that this did not suit the actual Christian state of most Christians, human authority was allowed, and even encouraged, to appoint Sundays, Easters and Whitsuntides for them. The objections are: first, that this countenances ‘will-worship,’ or the intrusion of man’s inventions into God’s service; second, it is an implied insult to Paul’s inspiration, assuming that he made a practical blunder, which the church synods, wiser than his inspiration, had to mend by a human expedient; and third, we have here a practical confession that, after all, the average New Testament Christian does need a stated holy day, and therefore the ground of the Sabbath command is perpetual and moral.¹⁰²

Under the Jewish economy there were other set times and modes of worship, which were abolished when the Christian economy was introduced. Since then no *holidays* (holy days) but the Sabbath, are of divine authority or obligation.¹⁰³

No human power can make it unlawful for men to pursue their industrial avocations during the six secular days. The New Testament plainly discourages the attempt to fill up the calendar with holidays, Gal. 4:9–11; Col. 2:16–23. Even days of fasting or thanksgiving are not holy days; but they are a part of secular time voluntarily devoted to God’s service. And if we are to perform these things at all, we must take some time for them. Yet none but God can sanctify a day so as to make it holy. The attempt to do this was one of the sins of Jeroboam, 1 Kings 12:33.¹⁰⁴

To those who believe in this form of regimen it forms “the golden hours” of time; and finding no command nor fair deduction from Scripture warranting them to keep any other day, whether (in honor of the Saxon goddess Eostre, that is, the Prelatic) “Easter,” “the Holy Innocents,” or of “St. Michael and all the angels,” they believe that “festival days, vulgarly called holydays, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be observed.”¹⁰⁵

Q. 7. Is it not a daring intrusion upon the prerogative of God to appoint as a stated religious festival any other day or season, such as Christmas or Easter? A. It is an impeachment of the wisdom of God and an assertion of our right and ability to improve on his plans.¹⁰⁶

The erection and regular observance of other holy days. Had God seen their regular recurrence was desirable they would have been appointed. Their use has been spiritually damaging. They often become centers of ceremonialism and sensual worship.¹⁰⁷

In former times the Reformed Presbyterian Church was solidly opposed to the religious observance of Christmas, Easter and other special days of the same kind. ... [W]e should realize that we Covenanters, in opposing the observance of Easter and other “holy” days, are only holding to the original principle which was once held by *all* Presbyterians everywhere. It is not the Covenanters that have changed. ... [T]he apostle Paul regards this observance of days as *a bad tendency*: “I am afraid of (for) you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.”... Paul wondered what was wrong with their religious knowledge and experience, that they should have become so zealous for the observance of days.”¹⁰⁸

No doubt even more testimonies could be gathered, but they are not necessary. The general rejection of ‘holy days’ by American Presbyterians is confirmed by one of the most important Southern Presbyterian historians. Ernest Trice Thompson writes:

The Presbyterian Church in this period [1607–1861] had

101. Shaw, “Advertisement to the American Edition,” 7–10.

102. Robert Lewis Dabney “The Christian Sabbath: Its Nature, Design and Proper Observance,” *Discussions: Theological and Evangelical* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1890), 1. 524–525. See also, “The Sabbath of the State,” 2.600.

103. James R. Boyd, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: with analysis, Scriptural proofs, explanatory and practical inferences, and illustrative anecdotes* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1860), 145.

104. William S. Plumer, *The Law of God, As Contained in the Ten Commandments* (Philadelphia, 1864), 325.

105. Alexander Blaikie (ARP), *The Philosophy of Sectarianism, or, A classified view of the Christian sects in the United States: with notices of their progress and tendencies: illustrated by historical facts and anecdotes* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1854), 135–136.

106. James Harper, UPC professor at Xenia Theological Seminary, *An Exposition in the Form of Question and Answer of the Westminster Assembly’s Shorter Catechism* (1905).

107. J. A. Grier (UPC), *Synoptical Lectures on Theological Subjects* (1896).

108. J. G. Vos, “The Observance of Days,” *Blue Banner Faith and Life* (1947).

no interest in a "Church Year." Easter was completely ignored, and Christmas, however popular as a holiday, was not a day of religious observance.¹⁰⁹

In the antebellum South, Christmas had been observed in accordance with the English custom as a day of jollity and goodwill, families were united, slaves enjoyed a rest from labor, and school-children looked forward to a four-day holiday from school. There was, however, no recognition of either Christmas or Easter in any of the Protestant churches, except the Episcopal and Lutheran. For a full generation after the Civil War the religious journals of the South mentioned Christmas only to observe that there was no reason to believe that Jesus was actually born on December 25; it was not recognized as a day of any religious significance in the Presbyterian Church.¹¹⁰

The changing tide of opinion

The observance of 'holy days' crept slowing into the Presbyterian Church through popular and cultural pressures.¹¹¹ The tide began to turn in the late nineteenth century. In 1889, Robert L. Dabney could still write that the use of organs in worship would open the door to 'holy days' and more ritualistic worship in the Southern Presbyterian Church.¹¹²

That a denomination, professing like ours to be anti-prelatic and anti-ritualistic, should throw down the bulwarks of their argument against these errors by this recent innovation appears little short of lunacy. Prelatists undertake every step of the argument which these Presbyterians use for their organ, and advance them in a parallel manner to defend the re-introduction of the Passover or Easter, of Whitsuntide, of human priests and priestly vestments, and of chrism, into the gospel church.

Thompson observes, "The breakover seems to have come first in the Sunday schools, or in festivities

arranged for the Sunday school children in the church auditorium."¹¹³ Katherine Lambert Richards notes:

A résumé of the development of Christmas observance in the Protestant Sunday-schools of the United States makes one thing clear; Christmas returned to Protestant church life because the rank and file of the membership wanted it. It made its way against official opposition in many denominations until there were so many local groups celebrating December twenty-fifth as the birthday of Jesus that opposition was futile and indifference impossible. Even when the denomination accepted Christmas as part of the church year its position was magnified and its celebration increased in response to popular desire. As time went on, Sunday-school and other denominational leaders played a larger part in the promotion of certain types of Christmas observances but as a rule the local schools have remained the chief experiment stations. Christmas preceded other church festivals in general recognition and has continued to overshadow them in popular esteem.¹¹⁴

Regarding Presbyterians, Richards also writes:

Like the Congregationalists, the Baptists and Presbyterians repudiated 'all the saints' days' and observed "the Lord's day as the Sabbath and the only season of holy time commanded to Christians." It was 1851 before the Presbyterians produced a Sunday-school magazine, *The Sabbath School Visitor*. Its first approach to a Christmas reference came in the number for December 1, 1853, where, in a serial history of the Presbyterian Church, the action of the Assembly of 1618 at Perth in assenting to the observance of holidays was disapproved. December fifteenth of the following year brought an article on the birth of Christ which urged the careful instruction of children in the Scriptural accounts of the nativity and the correction of all impressions received from tradition only. Although this procedure was expected to convince the children that Christmas was a most unlikely date for Jesus' birth no objection was made to its observance; indeed the author used the occasion to urge the worship of the risen and exalted Saviour. The December numbers from 1855 to 1858 contained poems, pictures and articles, on the nativity of Jesus but from 1859 to 1865 the subject of Christmas was dropped from the pages of the *Sabbath School Visitor*. Apparently the fires of the Christmas controversy were burning low. Though not yet accepted by the denomination as a whole, it could be mentioned and its religious as well as holiday, character could be recognized.

109. Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963-1973), 1.464.

110. Thompson, 2.434.

111. For treatments on the history and cultural development of Christmas observance in America see Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*; Penne L. Rested, *Christmas in America A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Katherine Lambert Richards, *How Christmas Came to the Sunday-Schools*.

112. Dabney, "Dr. Girardeau's Instrumental Music in Public Worship," *The Presbyterian Quarterly*, July 1889.

113. Thompson, 2.434-435.

114. Richards, 220.

The drift of the Presbyterian attitude toward Christmas is further described in the letters of James W. Alexander, son of a Presbyterian minister and himself, teacher at Princeton Seminary, pastor of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City and prolific writer for the American Sunday-school Union. On December 25, 1838, Dr. Alexander ventured to wish his correspondent a Merry Christmas; on Christmas Day of 1843, he made one of a family reunion at his father's house in Princeton. In 1845 he speaks of Christmas meetings as common in New York City on Christmas. In 1851 Christmas saw Dr. Alexander in nine churches—five Roman Catholic, one Unitarian, and three Episcopal. His own longing for “anniversary festivals” was openly expressed next year, only to be set aside in obedience to Presbyterian tenets, as “against the second commandment.”¹¹⁵ Another three years and “three hundred and fifty urchins and urchinesses” assembled on Christmas Day for a cake and candy fête in the Mission Chapel of the Fifth Avenue Church. Christmas, as a holiday, seemed to hold fewer dangers than Christmas as a religious festival. At all events it enabled Presbyterians to join in the pleasures of the season without a complete rejection of the historical attitude of the denomination on the matter of “set days.” The various divisions which marked the history of American Presbyterianism from 1810 to 1860 did not materially affect the attitude toward Christmas of the different groups. If anything the separating bodies were the more vigorous in their rejection of the day.¹¹⁶

The Liturgical Movement in American Presbyterianism

But while the practice of observing holy days was growing informally amongst congregants and clergy in denominations that had formally eschewed them, there was as yet no formal acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the practice. In many cases the practice of attending a church that celebrated a holy day was a guilty thrill that the individual knew the guardians of doctrine in their own denominations would frown upon.

It was not until the liturgical movement that a means was created within Presbyterianism that might have real success in gaining *official* recognition for the observance of the ‘church year’ Year at a denominational level.

As already noted, Presbyterians had rejected written liturgies. The Westminster divines had made a conscious decision not to create a formal liturgy that would restrict their freedom in worship and for which they saw no warrant in Scripture, but they decided instead to write a simple directory that would give guidance

to ministers in preparing their worship. The colonial Presbyterians had inherited the same distrust of liturgies as their Puritan forbears, but their distrust went even further. In 1729 when the American Presbyterians decided to formally adopt the Westminster Standards, they did not officially adopt the Directory for Publick Worship, which had been considered an integral part of the Standards by the Puritans who framed it. This was because of the hostility of many American Presbyterians to any document that smacked of usurping the role of Scripture in guiding and shaping their worship. As a result the Adopting Act framed by the Synod of 1729 only “recommended” the directory to its members. In 1786 when the Presbyterian church of the newly formed United States again adopted the Westminster Standards as their Creedal statement they opted to “receive” the the Directory as “in substance agreeable to the institutions of the New Testament.”¹¹⁷

This was an important distinction, for of all the documents produced by the Westminster assembly *only* the Directory contained an explicit repudiation of the practice of observing Holy Days. As we have seen, holy days are clearly inconsistent with the idea of biblical worship as it is abundantly set forth in the Confession, but in later years the concept that biblical worship was only that which was explicitly authorized in scripture (this concept is often referred to as the *regulative principle of worship*) was to come under attack within the Presbyterian church.

Until the mid-1800s, both the regulative principle and tradition were usually enough to ensure that the Church Year had no place in the Presbyterian Church. In 1837 the Presbyterian Church in the United States had split into two separate camps, the “New” and “Old” school. The issues that had caused the split had to do with the feelings of ministers in either wing towards Calvinism and the traditional polity and practice of the Presbyterian church. The New School, which had been profoundly influenced by the sweeping revivals of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, tended to believe that evangelistic considerations outweighed issues like strict adherence to Confessional standards. Their

115. Dr. Alexander had written “The degree of excess and abuse which occurs on set days, will be in proportion to the decay of religious feeling among a people; but I am by no means sure that these are greatly increased by set days. Yet as a good son of Mother Church, I subside into the tenet, that all such feasts are against the second commandment.” John Hall, *Forty years’ familiar letters of James W. Alexander, D. D.* (New York: Scribner, 1860), 2.181.

116. Richards, 90–92.

117. Julius Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America* (Richmond VA: John Knox Press, 1967), 17.

worship tended to be less constrained by the regulative principle and more inclined to incorporate elements that were to be found in the Protestant traditions that did not descend from Puritanism, or which had moved further away from their roots. Despite this tendency towards adopting new methods, the New School does not seem to have initially been any more eager than their more conservative counterparts to incorporate the observation of the old holy days of the ecclesiastical calendar into their worship. Before that could happen there was to be a more thoroughgoing revolution in Presbyterian attitudes towards worship.

In 1855 a book that began to change the way Presbyterians of both the Old and New Schools thought about worship was published by a Presbyterian minister by the name of Charles Baird. Baird had been heavily influenced by the history of the continental Reformed churches, and in particular he began to discover that the Reformed tradition outside of England and Scotland had a rich tradition of using liturgies. His book *Eutaxia, or the Presbyterian Liturgies: Historical Sketches*, was the result of his discoveries.¹¹⁸ By examining the liturgies used by the likes of Calvin, Knox, and the Huguenots, Baird was able to construct an argument for the reintroduction of liturgical worship into the Presbyterian Church.

While Baird did not advocate a reintroduction of the ecclesiastical calendar in *Eutaxia*, and his comments on the subject were limited to an observation that even Calvin had observed Christmas on a few occasions, his work paved the way for two important developments.

The first was a reassessment of the use of liturgies in Presbyterianism and the second was the opening of a window in which the practices of Reformed churches that had pursued a less thoroughgoing reformation of Worship than the Scots and English Puritans might be introduced. Both played on the growing distaste of some within the Presbyterian church for purely extempore worship.

Baird's book was to create an opportunity for other Presbyterians who wanted to "improve" Presbyterian worship by making it more liturgical, and in many cases, directly tied in to the Church year. One such individual

was a Presbyterian elder and businessman by the name of Benjamin Bartis Comegys. Comegys had no sympathy whatsoever for the older Puritan view of worship. His views were highly colored by his romanticism and attachment to all things Medieval. His sympathies lay so thoroughly in the Anglican camp that one friend commented, "A stranger visiting his library would probably conclude that its owner was a clergyman of the Church of England, as few clergymen in this country, even those of the Episcopal Church, possessed so complete a liturgical library."¹¹⁹

This combination of Romanticism and sympathy for high-church Anglicanism led Comegys to an almost total rejection of the regulative principle of worship and in particular the Puritan rejection of Holy Days. Consequently, he endeavored to see Holy Days restored, and while he agreed that these Holy Days had no warrant in scripture, he pointed out that the Presbyterian Church had been gradually introducing other innovations that did not square with the regulative principle and that "no bad effects have followed." From this he concluded that the average layman (and presumably himself) could not "see why other changes may not be adopted."¹²⁰

Comegys even went so far as to say that preaching was not the primary element in Sunday worship: "The grand object of the church service was prayer and praise." He hoped therefore to make Presbyterianism into "a people who express their devotions in well-ordered prayer and praise."¹²¹ To this end Comegys published *An Order of Worship with Forms of Prayer for Divine Service* in 1885 and then *A Presbyterian Prayer Book for Public Worship*.¹²² His stated intention was to "create a public opinion which will not be startled" by the move away from traditional Presbyterian Worship according to the regulative principle to a more expressly liturgical and Anglican model. Both books had an impact on American Presbyterian practice that was so deep that one need not hesitate in concluding Comegys achieved his stated intention. Needless to say, both of Comegys's books included mention of the ecclesiastical year. But as yet, there was no *official* Book of Common Worship that would officially tie the Presbyterian Church to the observation of Holy Days.

The stage had been set for the creation of such a book by the publication of several smaller books of "forms" of worship by the Denominational press—the Presbyterian Board of Publication. The advantage of creating a book of forms for worship over a set liturgy was that it seemed to tie in better with the Presbyterian practice of not forcibly determining exactly how worship should proceed. The first of these books was A. A. Hodge's *Manual of*

118. Charles W. Baird, *Eutaxia, or, The Presbyterian Liturgies Historical Sketches* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1855).

119. Melton, 102.

120. Melton, 103.

121. Melton, 104.

122. Benjamin Bartis Comegys, *An Order of Worship with Forms of Prayer for Divine Service* (Philadelphia: Garner, 1885); *A Presbyterian Prayer Book for Public Worship, With Services for Thirteen Sundays* (Philadelphia: Sherman & Co, 1895).

Forms published in 1877.¹²³ Hodge's manual was really quite conservative and certainly did not advocate the observance of the church year in any way. The second of these was *Forms for Special Occasions* by ex-moderator of the General Assembly, Herrick Johnson.¹²⁴ Johnson's book published in 1889 wasn't that much more radical than Hodge's work, but it did take another step closer to a set liturgy by including liturgical diction in prayer.

While Hodge and Johnson were cautiously moving towards a more expressly liturgical format in worship by producing books that were safe enough for the denomination to publish, private individuals like Comegys were producing other volumes that moved considerably more quickly. Eventually these two streams were to merge in the production of an official Book of Common Worship. An important agency that was to pave the way for this was the *Church Service Society*, formed in 1897 by two influential American Pastors—Henry Van Dyke, pastor of the prestigious Brick Presbyterian Church of New York City, and Louis Benson, an influential Philadelphian and pastor of another prestigious church in the suburbs of that city. Both had worked extensively to privately produce liturgical materials that included the observation of the church year.

The effect of forming the *Church Service Society* was to create an organization that unified the various men fighting for the institution of a standardized Presbyterian Liturgy. Most of these men were gentlemen of "pastoral, esthetic, and literary inclinations"¹²⁵ and *not* the foremost theologians of Presbyterianism. One author observed that this was because "most of Presbyterianism's theologians were too busy fighting in the opening engagements of the fundamentalist-modernist war and defending scholastic Calvinism to take an active part in what became a significant movement"¹²⁶ While the organization stated their commitment to the Presbyterian Standards in their "Statement of Principles," it seems clear that with individuals such as Comegys on board, this commitment was to a very broad definition of these Standards in regard to worship. The group did no more than survey the practices of churches and the way in which ministers were trained concerning worship, but the effects of the surveys themselves were far reaching. They stirred the church into concerted action on the issue of worship and led several presbyteries, most notably that of New York, to comprehensively examine the issue themselves.

The fruits of this examination were quickly to become apparent. In 1903 both New York and Denver Presbyteries overtured the General Assembly of the PCUSA to produce forms for public worship. With Henry Van

Dyke acting as the chairman of the all-important Committee on Bills and Overtures, the committee quickly resolved to answer the two overtures favorably and appointed a committee to consider the preparation of a simple common book of worship for voluntary usage in Presbyterian churches. This measure too was approved and eventually resulted in the publication in 1906 of the Book of Common Worship. While the General Assembly stressed that the use of this book was strictly voluntary and not officially recommended (the title page simply stated "Prepared by the Committee of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. for Voluntary Use") it had far-reaching effects—it was, after all, an official publication of the denomination. More importantly, as far as the question we are considering was concerned, it contained prayers for Good Friday, Easter, Advent, and Christmas. Barely seventy-one years since Samuel Miller had declared that "Presbyterians do not observe Holy Days" the denomination had boldly proclaimed that this was no longer true.

The 1906 edition of the Book of Common worship was eventually replaced twenty-two years later by the edition of 1932. The 1932 edition continued the advance towards a liturgical format and included even more emphasis on the church year, with prayers provided for Lent, Palm Sunday, Pentecost, and All Saints' Day. The 1932 edition was also the first edition to be officially accepted by the Southern Presbyterian Church. This was even more startling in light of the fact that in 1899 the Southern General Assembly had declared,

There is no warrant in Scripture for the observance of Christmas and Easter as holy days, rather the contrary (see Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16-21), and such observance is contrary to the principles of the Reformed Faith, conducive to will worship, and not in harmony with the simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹²⁷

Apparently the intervening thirty-three years and the

123. Archibald Alexander Hodge, *Manual of Forms: For Baptism, Admission to the Communion, Administration of the Lord's Supper, Marriage and Funerals, Conformed to the Doctrine and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1877).

124. Herrick Johnson, *Forms for Special Occasions Marriage, Burial, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Ordination, Dedication, Etc., with Scripture Selections for the Chamber of Sickness, the House of Mourning, the Service at Funerals* (Chicago: C.H. Whiting, 1889).

125. Melton, 121.

126. Melton, 121.

127. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, vol. x. A. D. 1899* (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1899), 430.

obvious influence of the 1906 edition of the Book of Common Worship had made a world of difference in Southern Presbyterian Attitudes. It is important to note however, that the original declaration of the 1899 General Assembly was *never repealed*.

As the Book of Common Worship continued to be revised, subsequent editions indicated that Presbyterians continued to become more and more comfortable with the observance of the old pretended holy days. The 1946 edition included prayers for Maundy Thursday, Ascension Day, Trinity Sunday, and thirteen Sundays after Trinity.

By 1955, when Northern Presbyterians were once again considering another revision of the Book of Common Worship, it had become painfully obvious that the Directory of Worship of 1788, which was still technically in force, had little or nothing to do with the actual worship of Presbyterians. Indeed it was questionable whether the Presbyterian practice could even claim to follow the regulative principle of worship outlined in chapter twenty-one of the Westminster Confession, especially now that the gap between Presbyterian and Anglican worship was rapidly closing. The solution, of course, was to revise the Directory for Worship of 1788 and to produce a modern edition that would finally put an end to the need to give lip service to the principles that had guided the worship of the Puritans.

128. See a discussion of these other moral declines in the Southern Presbyterian Church in Benton Johnson, "On Dropping the Subject: Presbyterians and Sabbath Observance in the Twentieth Century," in *The Presbyterian Predicament: Six Perspectives* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990) and "From Old to New Agendas: Presbyterians and Social Issues in the Twentieth Century," in *The Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990).

129. Richards, 186.

130. Thompson, 3.350–353.

131. *The Confessional Statement and The Book of Government and Worship* (Pittsburgh: The United Presbyterian Board of Publication and Bible School Work, 1926). This denomination merged into the Northern church in 1958. The change in practice had already begun as in other denominations. G. I. Williamson writes, "I once had opportunity to discuss this subject [bringing in worship practices without scriptural support] with an elderly minister of the old United Presbyterian denomination. I asked him what brought that church to change its stand on the exclusive use of psalms in worship, as it did in the 1925 creedal revision. His answer was both interesting and revealing. He said the church had already started, some years before, to celebrate such days as Christmas. After these had become well-entrenched, he said, the pressure began to grow to bring in 'appropriate' music." *The Scriptural Regulative Principle of Worship* (Paper presented at the 1990 Psalmody Conference, Bonclarken, Flat Rock NC, 1990).

132. *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America Being Its Standards Subordinate to the Word of God The*

Accordingly, the new directory, published in 1961, stated that worship should draw its order and content not only from Scripture *but also from the historical experience and resources of Christianity*. At last the Northern Presbyterian Church (by then the UPCUSA) had altered its theological foundations to allow for what they had already been officially practicing for over fifty-five years.

This new directory was not accepted by the Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) however, and the directory they produced was far closer to the content and format of the worship directory of 1788. It differed markedly from these documents however, in that it too gave a notable prominence to the Christian year, but without clearly admitting, as the Northern Directory had, that the new worship model followed by the PCUS was not strictly scriptural.

However, the PCUS sanction and religious observance of 'holy days' did not come quickly. In addition to proclaiming in 1899 that there was no Scriptural warrant to observe Christmas and Easter, the PCUS GA, renewed the objection in 1903, 1913 and 1916. But as with the spreading observance of "worldly amusements" and declining observance of the Lord's Day,¹²⁸ opposition was collapsing in the face of wide observance and acceptance of such days.

With the twentieth century the Southern Presbyterian, or the Presbyterian Church in the United States, to use its official title, joined the ranks of Christmas-keeping denominations. The process followed the familiar lines of official disapproval and ignoring of the day, of an increasing number of local celebrations, many of which were of the holiday, Santa Claus, party type, and finally of official recognition and attempts to change the character of the local observance.¹²⁹

In 1921 the PCUS GA did not repeat its former injunctions against Christmas and Easter observance. In 1950 the religious observance of days finally received official sanction by the Assembly.¹³⁰ Other churches faced similar declines. The United Presbyterian Church, as late as 1926, did not officially recognize 'holy days,' but did by the time of the merger with the PCUSA just a few decades later.¹³¹ The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America adopted a new directory for worship in 1945, and its ambiguity allowed observance of days to spread in that church, though some still contend against the practice. This occurred despite the fact that the RPCNA Covenant of 1871, which they affirm is still binding, requires adherence to the original Westminster Directory.¹³² The Associate Reformed

Presbyterian constitution contained the wording of the Westminster Directory appendix against “Festival days, commonly called holy-days” until 1975.¹³³

III. CONTINUING WITNESS AND OBJECTIONS TO CURRENT PRACTICES

In the preceding historical overview, the relationship between the Westminster Confession and directory for worship has been demonstrated, and rejection of ‘holy days’ by the Westminster divines and those approving the directory is clear. There is no room for ‘holy days’ in the doctrine of the Westminster Standards, if history, grammar, and intent of authors are to be observed. This opposition to ‘holy days’ continued strong in the American branches of Presbyterianism until a decline from orthodoxy began, with the various denominations officially approving these days throughout the early to latter part of the twentieth century.¹³⁴

Modern Presbyterian ‘holy day’ Sermons

With the passing of any remnants of a nonconformist Puritan culture in this country, we are once again at a period where most churches from that tradition have no

Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Testimony, the Directory for Church Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for the Worship of God. Together with Official Vows and Forms (Pittsburgh: RPCNA Board of Education..., 1989).

133. *Constitution of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* (1799, 1908; 1955). Compare with *The Book of Worship of the ARP Church, as Approved by the General Synod in 1975*.

134. John Murray had at least a witnessing influence in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and at Westminster Seminary (“Life of John Murray,” *Collected Writings of John Murray* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982], 3, 102, 120). Joseph Duggan (OPC) also wrote a tract about 1959, which continues to circulate (*Should Christians Celebrate The Birth Of Christ* [2/4/1959; repr. Havertown, Pa: New Covenant Publication Society, nd]). In 1962, G. I. Williamson defended the good old way in an article for the RPCNA’s *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, and long continues that witness in the OPC today (“Holy Days of Men and Holy Days of God,” *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, July–September 1962; *The Regulative Principle of Worship* [1990 Psalmody Conference]; *On the Observance of Sacred Days* [Havertown, Pa: New Covenant Publication Society, nd]; “Is Christmas Scriptural,” *New Horizons*, December 1998; “A Defense of Calvin’s Rejection of Christmas,” *ibid.*).

135. Within the last thirty years or so several tracts or short works have appeared in print and online arguing against ‘holy day’ observance. We note in particular: Douglas F. Kelly, “No ‘Church Year’ for Presbyterians” *Presbyterian Journal* (November 14, 1979); Kevin Reed, *Christmas: An Historical Survey Regarding Its origins and Opposition to It*. Michael Schneider, *Is Christmas Christian* (these tracts appeared in the 1980s and were bound together and published as *Christmas: A Biblical Critique* [Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, revised edition 1993]); Douglas Comin, *What Fellowship Hath Christ With*

ecclesiastical rule or standing custom in practice against some observance of the old superstitious holy days. It is common for Presbyterian churches to have special services and/or sermons, such as on Christ’s nativity, keyed to the ‘ecclesiastical calendar.’ While there continues to be a Presbyterian witness against observance of ‘holy days,’¹³⁵ it sadly remains very much a minority view. Yet the notion of sanctified times is nothing but ‘popish’ superstition, and there should be no question as to the rejection of a church calendar of pretended holy days.¹³⁶ The church simply has no authority to appoint such times, and a biblical Presbyterianism holding to its principles should really have nothing to do with affirming these days which had been formally and solemnly cast out of their worship practices as an idol to be forsaken, buried and forgotten.¹³⁷

But the question is raised, why can we not simply take a cue from ‘the way things are’ and have something like a sermon on Christ’s birth at the end of December without any regard for pretended sacred times not appointed by the Lord? A rehearsal of biblical principles is necessary before concluding this survey by addressing several arguments made in support of such special services and/or sermons.

Presbyterian Reformation Principles

Church Authority and Presbyterian Worship

George Gillespie wrote on the limitations of church authority regarding practices in the worship of God,

Belial? An examination of the religious celebration of Christmas in light of the Scriptural duty of separation and the Regulative Principle of worship (Sermon preached December 22, 1991, published on the web, 1997); Douglas Comin, *God’s Word and the Church Calendar* (abt 1997, Internet article); Andrew J. Webb, “How Did Presbyterian Worship Become Episcopalian?” (Oct. 2, 2007), <https://biblebased.wordpress.com/2007/10/02/how-did-presbyterian-worship-become-episcopalian/>; “Why do Presbyterians Observe Holy Days?” (Sept. 11, 2002), <http://www.providencepca.com/essays/holydays.html>. J. V. Fesko, “Why Don’t We Use the Church Calendar?” <http://www.genevaopc.org/articles/means/45-why-dont-we-use-the-church-calendar.html>; Robert McCurley, “A Holy God and Holy Days,” a sermon preached on December 25, 2011.

136. *EPC* (2013), 141.

137. Cf. The National Covenant (Confession of Faith, 344); Glasgow Assembly, Nov. 1638 (*EPC* [2013], xxxii). The high watermark of Presbyterianism was the November 1638 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, which amongst other reforms cast out the superstitious holy days which had been imposed by the King and bishops in 1618 at the assembly at Perth. Alexander Henderson dismissed the famous assembly with the words: “We have now cast down the walls of Jericho; let him that rebuildeth them beware of the curse of Hiel the Bethelite.” *EPC* (2013), xxxiv.

[T]here is nothing which any way pertains to the worship of God left to the determination of human laws, beside the mere circumstances, which neither have any holiness in them, forasmuch as they have no other use and praise in sacred than they have in civil things, nor yet were particularly determinable in Scripture, because they are infinite; but sacred, significant ceremonies, such as cross, kneeling, surplice, holy days, bishopping, etc., which have no use and praise except in religion only, and which, also, were most easily determinable (yet not determined) within those bounds which the wisdom of God did set to His written Word, are such things as God never left to the determination of any human law.¹³⁸

W. D. J. McKay elaborates further in his study of the writings of Gillespie,¹³⁹

Gillespie stresses at the outset that ecclesiastical power has nothing to do with people's bodies, goods, dignities or civil rights, but rather 'is employed only about the inward man or the soul.'¹⁴⁰ No man can search the heart: God alone is able to do that. Nevertheless ecclesiastical power,

hath for its proper object those extremities which are purely spiritual, and do belong properly and most nearly to the spiritual good of the soul.¹⁴¹

...the power of synods and presbyteries is threefold, *dogmatike, diataktike, and kritike*....

The second type of ecclesiastical power Gillespie designated the diatactic power, which he describes thus:

a synod may institute, restore, or change,

138. EPC (2013), 16.

139. W. D. J. McKay, *An Ecclesiastical Republic: Church Government in the Writings of George Gillespie* (Edinburgh: Paternoster Publishing for Rutherford House, 1997), 85, 88, 92–96.

140. "George Gillespie, *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions Concerning the Ministry and Government of the Church*, (Edinburgh, 1647), in *The Presbyterian's Armoury* edition, no 53, p. 14."

141. "Ibid." Footnotes in quotation marks are McKay's.

142. "George Gillespie, 'An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland,' in *Works: The Presbyterian's Armoury* (Edinburgh: Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1846). Part 2, chapter 4, page 49."

143. McKay is quoting from the text in: George Gillespie, "A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies obruded on the Church of Scotland," in *Works: A Presbyterian's Armoury* (Edinburgh: Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1846).

144. "Dispute, 3:7, p. 126." Cf. EPC (2013), 254.

145. "Dispute, 3:7, p. 130." EPC (2013), 260.

146. "Dispute, 3:7, p. 131." EPC (2013), 261.

according to the condition and exigence of the church, the external circumstances in the worship of God, and ecclesiastical discipline.¹⁴²...

An illustration of Gillespie's view of the diatactic power of the Church is to be found in his 1637 work *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies*.¹⁴³ Gillespie structures his treatise around the four lines of argument used by those who support the introduction of such 'popish ceremonies' as kneeling at communion (with its suggestion of adoration of the elements), making the sign of the cross, wearing vestments such as the surplice and observing holy days ('holidays'), namely that they are necessary, expedient, lawful or indifferent matters. The part which is relevant to our discussion is Part 3, dealing with the lawfulness of these ceremonies.

In chapter 7 Gillespie argues that the 'lawfulness of the ceremonies cannot be warranted by any ecclesiastical law, nor by any power which the church hath to put order to things belonging to divine worship.'¹⁴⁴ After listing examples of false views, drawn from such writers as Field and Lindsey, Gillespie sets out his own positive case regarding the true limits of the Church's power to enact laws relating to the worship of God.

Three conditions must be met if a matter can be the object of prescription by the laws of the Church:

(i) It must be only a circumstance of divine worship; no substantial part of it; no sacred significant and efficacious ceremony.¹⁴⁵

In Gillespie's view 'circumstances' are left to the Church to determine whilst the ceremonies are not. The Church must observe order and decency in all it does, the same order and decency that should apply in civil matters, but this is not to be confused with the ceremonies themselves.

(ii) That which the church may lawfully prescribe by her laws and ordinances, as a thing left to her determination, must be one of such things as are not determinable by Scripture ... because *individual are infinita*.¹⁴⁶

Gillespie says he is not trying to limit God but rather presupposes the limits set in the written Word, which are not to be exceeded. As he rightly points out, for all the changeable circumstances of worship we would

need a world of books. On the other hand, the actual elements of worship are not numerous or changeable, and are ‘most easily and conveniently determinable in Scripture.’¹⁴⁷ He adds that the value of the written form of the Word lies in avoiding ‘Satanical subtlety [sic]’ and also in ‘succouring human imbecility.’¹⁴⁸

(iii) If the church prescribe anything lawfully, so that she prescribe no more than she hath power given her to prescribe, her ordinance must be accompanied with some good reason and warrant given for the satisfaction of tender consciences.¹⁴⁹

This condition is clearly very important to Gillespie and counts strongly against any portrayal of the Church of Scotland of the Second Reformation as exercising a spiritual tyranny. Gillespie says that the Church is not to command imperiously but in a spirit of meekness such as becomes the spouse of Christ. Since the aim is to edify, the Church’s laws must have ‘a manifest utility.’¹⁵⁰ Gillespie argues that the ‘conveniency’ of a thing must go before the Church’s prescribing it, ‘neither can the church prescribe anything lawfully which she showeth not to have been convenient, even before her determination.’¹⁵¹

Gillespie applies these criteria to the ceremonies in question and finds that none of them is met. The ceremonies are, according to their supporters, not mere circumstances of worship but ‘sacred, mystical, significant, efficacious ceremonies.’¹⁵² In the second place, they are not the kind of thing which is not determinable from Scripture, since there is not an infinite number of them. In the third place, these laws regarding ceremonies are not backed by reasons to satisfy tender consciences.

Gillespie finally stresses that the Church is forbidden to add to God’s commands regarding his worship and service. The Church may not lawfully prescribe anything relating to divine worship unless it is a mere circumstance not determinable by Scripture. His opponents try to defend their additions by distinguishing *additio corruptens*, which is forbidden, and *additio perniciens*, which is allowed. Gillespie points out that this distinction itself adds to the Word and blasphemously says that the commandments of God are imperfect and need additions.¹⁵³

In this argument Gillespie is clearly defending what later came to be known as the Regulative Principle of

worship, which in essence states that what is not commanded in Scripture regarding the worship of God is forbidden.¹⁵⁴ This principle distinguished the attitude to worship of the Calvinistic branch of the Reformation from that of the Lutheran, which followed the principle that what is not expressly forbidden in worship is allowed. As William Cunningham states,

The Calvinistic section of the Reformers, following their great master, adopted a stricter rule, and were of opinion that there are sufficiently plain indications in Scripture itself, that it was Christ’s mind and will, that nothing should be introduced into the government and worship of the church, unless a positive warrant for it could be found in Scripture.¹⁵⁵

It is not necessary to set out here a defence of this principle which was adopted by, among others, English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians. We note simply that the fundamental issue is the extent of the authority of God’s revelation in Scripture. For Gillespie, the regulations of Scripture are the final word with regard to worship. The authority of the Word of God is not limited to matters of doctrine or conduct, but extends to the area of worship. This has been the conviction of the churches taking their origin from the Calvinistic Reformation. The Scriptures provide a sufficient rule for the way in which God is to be worshipped, this being the highest activity in which men and women can engage.

God’s Prerogative to Order His Own Worship vs. Commemorating Specific Acts of Redemption

As noted by McKay, apart from the attending circumstances, it is solely the Lord’s prerogative to order the substantial parts (or “elements”) surrounding His worship, which principle has become known in the last century as the regulative principle of worship. The

147. “Ibid.”

148. “Ibid.”

149. “Ibid.”

150. “Ibid.”

151. “Dispute, 3:7, p. 132.” *EPC* (2013), 263.

152. “Ibid.” *EPC* (2013), 264.

153. *EPC* (2013), 266.

154. “For a concise survey of the Regulative Principle see Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, (Pittsburgh, 1980), pp. 10–47.” A fourth significantly revised edition was published in 2011. http://www.crownandcovenant.com/Songs_of_Zion_p/ds210.htm.

155. “William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, (1862, Edinburgh, 1967), pp. 31–32.”

Westminster assembly determined: “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.”¹⁵⁶ The Princeton professor, Dr. Samuel Miller, gave a succinct statement of the principle when he wrote that since the Scriptures are the “only infallible rule of faith and practice, no rite or ceremony ought to have a place in the public worship of God, which is not warranted in Scripture, either by direct precept or example, or by good and sufficient inference.”¹⁵⁷ A briefer statement still which sums up the Presbyterian principle of worship, is that in the worship of God, “Not to Command is to Forbid,” or “Whatever is not commanded is forbidden.”¹⁵⁸

Specifically with regard to an ecclesiastical calendar of pretended holy days, such is clearly not within the power of the church to appoint.

[The Lord has given no] authority to His Church ordinarily and perpetually to sanctify any day, except that which He has sanctified Himself. For I hold this with other learned men as a principle in divinity, that *it belongs only to God to sanctify the day*, as it belongs to him to sanctify any other thing to His own worship.... And as we know not how to worship Him, but that we are sure by His Word that He has sanctified such and such things to that end: namely, has appointed the preaching of His Word, the administration of the sacraments, and calling upon His name for that purpose. And therefore in using of these, we promise ourselves to be blessed of Him, for He has Himself established them by His own mouth, and therefore His blessing must needs accompany them; so at what time we should neglect all other things, and wholly apply ourselves unto these, we are wholly ignorant but that we know *He hath sanctified the seventh day, and blessed it for this cause.*¹⁵⁹

The church does not have any authority from the Lord to set aside special times based upon the acts of New

Testament redemptive history in imitation of His setting aside days in the Old Testament economy. As Jeremiah Burroughs writes, “This reason many think will justify their superstitious way, they do but imitate what God did, as thus, God had an Ephod for the priests, therefore they will have a holy garment; God had a temple consecrated, they will have one so too; God had his feasts days and holy days, they will have theirs too in imitation of God.... they will do such and such things in God’s worship, why? God has done so before, and they do but imitate God....”¹⁶⁰

And as cited earlier, Gillespie made an entirely different use of the fact that no days are set aside to commemorate New Testament acts of redemption (which being few could easily have been enumerated).

§6. The Bishop has yet a third dart to throw at us: *If the church (he says) has power, upon occasional motives, to appoint occasional fasts or festivities, may not she, for constant and eternal blessings, which do infinitely excel all occasional benefits, appoint ordinary times of commemoration or thanksgiving?* Answer. There are two reasons for which the church may and should appoint fasts or festivities upon occasional motives, and neither of them agrees with ordinary festivities. 1. Extraordinary fasts, either for obtaining some great blessing, or averting some great judgment, are necessary means to be used in such cases; likewise, extraordinary festivities are necessary testifications [*testimonies*] of our thankfulness for the benefits which we have impetrate [*procured*] by our extraordinary fasts; but ordinary festivities, for constant and eternal blessings, have no necessary use. The celebration of set anniversary days is no necessary mean for conserving the commemoration of the benefits of redemption, because we have occasion, not only every Sabbath day, but every other day, to call to mind these benefits, either in hearing, or reading, or meditating upon God’s Word. *I esteem and judge that the days consecrated to Christ must be lifted*, says Danæus: *Christ is born, is circumcised, dies, rises again for us every day in the preaching of the Gospel.*

2. God has given His church a general precept for extraordinary fasts (Joel 1:14; 2:15), as likewise for extraordinary festivities to praise God, and to give Him thanks in the public assembly of His people, upon the occasional motive of some great benefit which by the means of our fasting and praying we have obtained (Zech. 8:19 with Zech. 7:3). If it is said that there is a general command for set festivities, because there is a command for preaching and hearing the Word, and for praising God

156. Confession of Faith, 21.1, emphasis added.

157. *Presbyterianism the Truly Primitive and Apostolical Constitution of the Church of Christ*, “The Worship of the Presbyterian Church” (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1835), 64–65.

158. Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London, 1646), 96. John B. Adger, “A Denial of Divine Right for Organs in Public Worship,” *Southern Presbyterian Review*, 20.1 (January 1869): 85.

159. Bownd, 89–90.

160. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Exposition of Hosea 1–3* (1643), 401–402.

for His benefits; and there is no precept for particular fasts more than for particular festivities, I Answer: Albeit there is a command for preaching and hearing the Word, and for praising God for His benefits, yet is there no command (no, not in the most general generality) for annexing these exercises of religion to set anniversary days more than to other days; whereas it is plain that there is a general command for fasting and humiliation at some times more than at other times.

And as for particularities, all the particular causes, occasions, and times of fasting could not be determined in Scripture, because they are infinite, as Camero says. But all the particular causes of set festivities, and the number of the same, might have been easily determined in Scripture, since they are not, nor may not be infinite; for the Bishop himself acknowledges that to appoint a festival day for every week cannot stand with charity, the inseparable companion of piety. And albeit so many were allowable, yet who sees not how easily the Scripture might have comprehended them, because they are set, constant, and anniversary times, observed for permanent and continuing causes, and not moveable or mutable, as fasts which are appointed for occurring causes, and therefore may be infinite.

I conclude that, since God's Word has given us a general command for occasional fasts, and likewise particularly determined sundry things about the causes, occasions, nature, and manner of fastings, we may well say with Cartwright, that days of fasting are appointed at *such times, and upon such occasions [causes], as the Scripture does set forth; wherein because the church commands nothing but that which God commands, the religious observation of them falls unto the obedience of the fourth commandment, as well as of the seventh day itself.*¹⁶¹

The last statement brings the Christian Sabbath back in view. The Lord has already set aside by His fourth commandment a day for worship, the precise day of which was moved from the last to the first day of the week because the whole work of Christ's redemption was accomplished on the Lord's Day. Again, according to Burroughs:

Many think it a strange thing for men not to pay regard to such festivals; Why may not we keep the birth of our Saviour? Now, that you may not think it so, do but consider this, that when God has set apart any thing for a holy use, it is no strange thing; but it would be strange in man to venture to imitate God in the things of his

worship, to do that in God's worship which God himself has done before. Thus God has set apart a holy time, viz. the sabbath; it is set apart to solemnize the whole work of redemption, the nativity of Christ, his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Holy Ghost; God, I say, has set the sabbath apart that we might have a holy-day to keep the remembrance of them all. Now, when God has appointed one day, for man to dare to venture to set another apart, this is presumption.¹⁶²

When God has set aside a full day once a week for His worship in honor of the whole work of our redemption by Christ, how is it not some kind of presumption to deign to select out a few redemptive acts for special recurring treatment? On what authority do we highlight some and not other acts? As Gillespie objected to the anglo-catholic bishops' selectivity, why not have holy times for every head of catechism?¹⁶³ Was God's prescription some way insufficient?¹⁶⁴ If we had need to single out this or that act, wouldn't God have left some directive to know which and what acts to highlight? Rather, is it not clearer to presume since none were singled out, we

161. EPC (2013), 50–51.

162. Burroughs, *Hosea 1–3*, 379.

163. EPC (2013), 82–83. "Tilen sets out the expediency of holy days for imprinting in the minds of people the sense and knowledge of the benefits of redemption. Answer. 1. There is no means so good for this purpose as catechizing and preaching, out of season and in season. 2. What could he say unto them who have attained his end without his means? I find people better instructed and made more sensible of those benefits where the feasts are not kept than where they are. 3. Think they their people sufficiently instructed in the grounds of religion, when they hear of the nativity, passion, etc.—what course will they take for instructing them in other principles of faith? Why do they not keep one way, and institute a holy day for every particular head of catechism?"

164. [The Lord] "is to be worshipped with grace in the heart, by a Mediator, in such a manner as He Himself has appointed for going about the duties of His worship; rejecting all the inventions of men, either as to the matter or manner of our worship, as being nothing but will-worship: *In vain they do worship me teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men* (Matt. 15:9). To admit what they call significant ceremonies of men's invention into the worship of God, is to deny that Christ has dealt prudently in the ordinances He has instituted, and the directions He has given as to our worship, as the great Lawgiver of the church. It is observable, that, in the reasons annexed to the second commandment, God declares the breakers of this commandment such as hate Him, which expression we find not in any other of the commandments; while yet they pretend the greatest love to God, and regard for His honor; alleging, their inventing and proposing the observance of such and such things in our worship, is for the greater decency, reverence, or the like." Alexander Moncrieff, *A Banner Displayed Because of the Truth, matter of praise to all the wellwishers thereof: a sermon preached at the opening of the Associate Synod at Edinburgh, August 19, 1755* (Edinburgh: Printed by Sands, Murray, and Cochran, MDCCLV), 32–33.

should not presume to do it for Him? Are we not ‘dotting on Jewish shadows,’ per M’Crie’s admonition in his comments cited above? And if some conceivable circumstance made it necessary to single out some act of redemption to touch upon topically, because of error or scandal or what have you, the need for this would certainly cease at some point, and the answer to a specific circumstance is not to fix a perpetual practice of fixating on that topic at a special time every year in perpetuity.

A Cyclical vs. a Linear View of History

This raises another objection as to whether the ecclesiastical calendar has more to do with a pagan view of history than a biblical one, which also brings us back to the Lord’s Sabbath. Professor J. V. Fesko writes,

Note the language that is used to describe the Church Calendar: “In the liturgical year the various aspects of the one Paschal mystery unfold. This is also the case with the cycle of feasts surrounding the mystery of the incarnation.”¹⁶⁵ Notice that the church calendar operates on a cyclical pattern. It is ancient pagan religions that have a cyclical view of history: “The world-cycle runs its course, obeys its stars, absolves its round, and then the end links on to a new beginning, ushering in a repetition of the same sequence.”¹⁶⁶ A cyclical view of history is at odds with the biblical view, which is linear—a definite beginning and end, not an endless repetitive cycle. The Church should not expect “a quasi-consummation, which would bear on its face the Sisyphus-expression of endless toil.”¹⁶⁷ In other words, the Church Calendar repeats the same endless cycle, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, only to start over again with Advent. The biblical view, on the other hand, recognizes that the events of Christ’s ministry are in the past and that we are moving forward to a goal—the consummation of history, the return of Christ, the final judgment, and eternity with our triune Lord.

165. “*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 303, § 1171; emphasis.” Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994; London: Burns and Oates, 2006), 269.

166. “Geerhardus Vos, *Pauline Eschatology* [(Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co, 1986)], p. 334.”

167. “Vos, p. 334.”

168. “Richard B. Gaffin, ‘The Sabbath: A Sign of Hope,’ OPC Position Paper, [*New Horizons* (Feb. 1991),] p. 6.”

169. J. V. Fesko, “Why Don’t We Use the Church Calendar?” <http://www.genevaopc.org/articles/means/45-why-dont-we-use-the-church-calendar.html> [accessed, December 2, 2015].

God reminds us of this linear understanding of history, a beginning and an end, by the Sabbath. For example, the author of Hebrews writes: “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4.9). He reminds his recipients that just as God concluded His creative work and entered His Sabbath rest (Gen. 2.2; cf. Heb. 4.1-11), so too we must desire to enter God’s Sabbath rest. We get a foretaste of that final eschatological rest each and every Sunday. For this reason, OPC Minister and professor at Westminster Seminary, Richard Gaffin, notes that “the pattern of six days of activity interrupted by one of rest is a reminder that human beings are not caught up in a meaningless flow of days, one after the other without end, but that history has a beginning and ending and is headed toward final judgment and the consummation of all things.”¹⁶⁸ In a sense, God has given the Church a calendar—observe a Sabbath rest and worship Him on this day (Exo. 20.8-11; cf. Acts 20.7; 1 Cor. 16.2). On the Sabbath we recall the great redemptive events of the past, namely Christ’s first advent, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension, and look forward to the consummation of the age and His second advent.¹⁶⁹

Circumstances of Worship and Things Indifferent

Setting aside the illicit and unbiblical nature of the church calendar, it is clear from what has been noted out of Gillespie, that choice of sermon topic and whether to have a week day service are amongst that infinite number of circumstances left to the church’s determination. There is nothing inherently (in the nature of it) wrong for a minister to preach from the first part of Luke chapter two in December; he may very well find himself there in the normal course of his preaching. A bit beyond that happenstance, as already indicated, there are Presbyterians who say they are merely taking a cue from the old pretended holy days to depart from their regular exposition of the Scriptures to preach topical sermons in the regular or in a specially called worship service, such as nativity sermons/services in late December.

Even at the time shortly after the adoption of the original Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God, the Scottish Presbyterian James Durham recognized this as a question of a circumstance of worship.

Whence arises another distinction of offenses, viz. from the matter of a practice, or from the manner of [the] performing of it, or the circumstances in the doing of it. For as it is not an act materially good that will edify, except it is done in the right manner, so will an act

materially good not keep off offense, if it is not done tenderly, wisely, etc. And often we find circumstances have much influence on offense, as times, persons, places, manner, etc. For it is not offensive [for] one to pray or preach, but at some times, as before an idol, or on a Holy-day, it may be offensive.¹⁷⁰

Circumstances left to the church leaders' determination, such as sermon topic and extra services, are by their nature in theory matters of indifference. However, this does not mean they are free of any Scripture regulation. The most immediate rules that come to bear are those that regulate the use of things that in theory are neither good nor evil. In the fourth and final part of his *Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies*, 'against the indifference of the ceremonies,' Gillespie articulates several important rules regarding the use of things indifferent.

Every thing which is indifferent in the nature of it, is not by and by indifferent in the use of it. But the use of a thing indifferent ought evermore to be either chosen or refused, followed or forsaken, according to these three rules delivered to us in God's Word: (1) The rule of piety. (2) The rule of charity. (3) The rule of purity.

The first of these rules we find [in] 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;" and Romans 14:7-8, "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord:" where the apostle, as Calvin notes,¹⁷¹ reasons from the whole to the part. Our whole life, and by consequence, all the particular actions of it, ought to be referred to God's glory, and ordered according to his will. Again (Col. 3:17), "And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." In the expounding of which words Dr. Davenant says well, that *Even those actions which are indifferent by their own nature, ought nevertheless to be done by Christians in the name of Christ, that is, according to the will of Christ, and to Christ's glory.*¹⁷²

The second rule is the rule of charity; which teaches us not to use anything indifferent when scandal rises out of it. "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. 14:21); yea, though it do not weaken, if it be not expedient for edifying our brother, be it never so lawful or indifferent in its own nature, the law of charity binds us to abstain from it. "Let us therefore follow after the things which make

for peace, and the things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification" (Rom. 15:2). "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (1 Cor. 10:23): where the apostle teaches, that *in cibo*, etc., *In meat, drink, and the whole kind of things indifferent, it is not enough to look whether they be lawful, but that, further, we are to look whether (to do or omit) the same be expedient, and may edify.*¹⁷³

... The third rule is the rule of purity, which respects our peace and plerophory [*certainty*] of conscience, without which anything is unclean to us, though it is clean and lawful in its own nature. "To him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean" (Rom. 14:5); therefore *if someone imagines there is any uncleanness in the food, he cannot be permitted to make use of it.*¹⁷⁴ Whatsoever indifferent thing a man in his conscience judges to be unlawful, he may not lawfully do it; "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:14); and "He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (v. 23). *It is utterly wrong, says Calvin, to come near in any respect to what you think displeases him (the Lord), yes indeed, even to what you are not convinced is pleasing to him.*¹⁷⁵ Now if a thing indifferent is used according to these three rules, the use of it is not only

170. James Durham, *Concerning Scandal* (Naphtali Press, 1990), 5; (2014), 47. The Puritans commonly pressed the need to abandon abused practices. Regarding the notorious 'Christmas' abuses of his day, Increase Mather wrote, "The Scandal of them calls for their Abolition. The School Doctors affirm rightly, *Etiam Spiritualia non-necessaria sunt fugienda, si ex iis Scandalum oritur*. Things of an indifferent nature, when they become an occasion of Sin, should not at all be used." *A testimony against several prophane and superstitious customs now practised by some in New-England* (London, 1687), end of chapter three.

171. Com. in illum locum. [Cf. *Commentaries*, vol. XIX, 2.499.]

172. *Etiam illæ actiones quæ sunt suâ naturâ adiaphoræ, debent tamen à Christianis fieri in nomine Christi, hoc est, [(ut exposuimus)] juxta voluntatem Christi, et ad gloriam Christi.* [In Colossians 3:17; cf. 1655 ed., 373; cf. Allport trans. (1831), 2.147.]

173. Pareus, Com. in illum locum. [Cf. *Ad Corinthios priorem* (1609), col. 650. "In cibo, potu, & toto genere indifferentium rerum non satis esse spectare, an liceant, sed præterea videndum, an facere aut omittere expediat & ædificet."]

174. Calv., Com. in illum locum. *si quis aliquam in cibo immunditiam imagineter, eo libere uti non potest.* [CR 77 (CO 49), 264; *Iohannis Calvinii Commentarius in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, ed. T. H. L. Parker (Brill: 1981), 299; *Commentaries*, vol. XIX, 2.499.]

175. In Rom. 14:7-8. *Nefas est omnino quippiam aggredi quod putes illi (domino) displicere, imo quod non persuasus sis illi placere.* [Cf. CR 77 (CO 49), col. 261 (but *quidpiam* for *quippiam*); *Pauli ad Romanos*, Parker (Brill: 1981), 296; *Commentaries*, *ibid.*, 499.]

lawful but expedient also; but if it is not used according to these rules, the use of it is altogether unlawful.

§3. And since a thing indifferent in the nature of it can never be lawfully used, except according to these rules, hence it follows, that the use of a thing indifferent is never lawful to us when we have no other warrant for using the same beside our own will and arbitrament [pleasure].

*The Obligation to Purge Monuments of Idolatry
from the Worship of God*

Again, disclaiming any superstitious regard of the old church calendar, the ‘indifferent’ circumstantial practice in question would seem to concern the voluntary and even customary departure from the normal course of preaching because of a topic ‘dictated’ some way by a pretended holy day, now become a ubiquitously observed holiday. Before applying the rules regarding indifference however, another clear biblical principle must be reviewed to apply along with them. It is not simply some free choice or free ordering of new days or times, but acts previously chosen and timing previously set in the old idol calendar which Presbyterianism rejected at the Reformation and removed once more at the Second Reformation to never be taken up again.¹⁷⁶

As covered in the historical review above, the church in Scotland rejected any countenancing of the old pretended holy days, because they were notoriously part of the idolatrous worship of Roman Catholicism. It was determined that these were no longer indifferent observances to be retained or rejected at our good pleasure. They must be rejected according to the argument Gillespie framed in his *Dispute*:

All things and rites which have been notoriously abused to idolatry, if they are not such as either God or nature has made to be of a necessary use, should be utterly abolished and purged away from divine worship, in such sort that they may not be accounted nor used by us as sacred things or rites pertaining to the same....¹⁷⁷

I say, *all things and rites*, for they are alike forbidden, as I shall show. I say, *which have been notoriously abused to idolatry*, because if the abuse is not known, we are

blameless for retaining the things and rites which have been abused. I say, *if they are not such as either God or nature has made to be of a necessary use*, because if they are of a necessary use, either through God’s institution, as the sacraments, or through nature’s law, as the opening of our mouths to speak ..., then the abuse cannot take away the use. I say, *they may not be used by us as sacred things, rites pertaining to divine worship*, because without [outside] the compass of worship they may be used to a natural or civil purpose. If I could get no other meat to eat than the consecrated host, which papists idolatrise [idolize] in the circum-gestation¹⁷⁸ of it, I might lawfully eat it; and if I could get no other clothes to put on than the holy garments wherein a priest has said mass, I might lawfully wear them. Things abused to idolatry are only then unlawful when they are used no otherwise than religiously, and as things sacred.

Gillespie pursues five proofs for this rule for dealing with monuments to idolatry (3.2.3–6):

1. From God’s precept out of Isaiah 30:22; Jude 23; Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:25, 26; Numbers 33:52; Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:2, 3.
2. From Numbers 33:52, 53 and Isaiah 27:9 that the abolishing of relics of idolatry is clearly acceptable service toward God.
3. From the negative example in Revelation 2:14–20 where the churches of Pergamos and Thyatira were re-proved for tolerating idolothites.
4. From the approved examples of Jacob (Gen. 35:4); Elijah (1 Kings 18:30); Jehu (2 Kings 10:22–28); Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4); Josiah (2 Kings 23); Manasseh (2 Chron. 23:15); Moses (Exod. 32:17–20); and Daniel (Dan. 1:8).

In a fifth proof Gillespie supports this proposition necessitating the purging away of monuments of idolatry with a twofold reason, that such things preserve the memory of idols (cf. Exod. 23:13; Deut. 12:3; Josh. 23:7; Esth. 3:2; Deut. 25:19), and “such idolatrous remainders move us to turn back to idolatry.” “God would have Israel to overthrow all idolatrous monuments, lest thereby they should be snared” (Deut. 7:25; 12:30).

While they were more consistent in applying it to the matter at hand, this necessity to destroy and remove monuments or marks of idolatry was not some strange doctrine invented by Scottish Presbyterians. The Debrecen Synod (1567) stated that “all marks and organs of idolatry and the Mass are totally forbidden in the second commandment— indeed, everywhere in the New Testament,” and with several proofs from Scripture prove that “idols and the marks and purposes

176. Cf. *EPC* (2013), xxxiii–xxxiv.

177. See the argument in *EPC*, part 3, chapter 2.

178. [Meaning to carry around; obviously a scornful remark respecting the papal practice of uplifting, displaying, and carrying the elements around to be adored by the people.]

of idolatry are to be avoided.” Indeed, “the defilements of the Antichrist (the Mass, the wafer, the idols, and every tradition of the doctrine of the Antichrist) are condemned because they are fornication, the tokens of idolatry, pretences, sins, scandals, offenses, darkness, dung, deceptions, *tohu bohu* (i.e. *keni apati*, that is ‘vain deceptions’), skeletons, basilisks’ eggs, spider’s webs, scorpions, frogs, toads, poisonous things (Isa. 59; Rev. 8–9, 16–17).”¹⁷⁹

The Synod at Szikszó (1568) rejected the use of the host because it could not by its nature be converted to pious use, as “it is the head and cause sine qua non of an idolatrous Mass”; and “Scripture commands the name, memory, figure, use, and signs of idolatry to be abolished.”¹⁸⁰

The Nassau Confession (1578) remarks, “It were much to be wished that suitable steps against this evil [of idolatrous images] had been taken in the Protestant churches soon upon the initial purification of doctrine. And moreover, that the idolatrous images, which have been and still are one of the principal abominations under the Papacy, had been everywhere abolished by the Protestant estates for the recovery and preservation of the proper service of worship and for the possible prevention of various disgraces to the Christian religion and to its reputation...”

And even if all the people of this age had their eyes opened so widely that there would now be no more residue of offence or scandal on account of images, nevertheless all manner of injury could be sustained among their descendants no less than formerly as a result of the surviving idols.

And even if this were not encountered, still it is right in itself. And, as has previously been often stated, it is commanded by God that one should do away with the monuments of idolatry or memorials by means of which great idolatry was being promoted a few years ago. And this accords with the approved example of Holy Scripture.

For King Hezekiah broke up the brazen serpent after the children of Israel had burned incense to it, though Moses had made it at God’s command as a type of Christ, 2 Kgs. 18[:4]....¹⁸¹

And the Bremen Consensus (1595), while not using the term, elaborates,

II. Some ceremonies are devised and established by men are properly called *adiaphora*, that is, a thing neither evil

nor good, or an act which is left free, or an ecclesiastical rule. ... They do not take the place of the indispensable worship service, such as the use of the holy sacraments and the hearing of God’s Word. Rather, they are external ordinances of men and thus they serve only for a convenient performance of the worship service. Beyond this, no necessity should be placed in them for conscience sake, nor any confidence or special reverence or sanctity, for as soon as that occurs such ceremonies will be much too highly elevated above their ordinary allowed use and are made into an evident superstition....

5. Fifth and similarly, should the ceremonies ordained by men come to be regarded no longer as something left free, and if one makes them to be a service especially pleasing to God or wants to insist upon them as if they were necessary for conscience sake, or if one wants to persuade the people that it would be meritorious or an action by which one could obtain grace with God, reconciliation, the forgiveness of sins, or satisfaction from some transgression, then on that account and in such circumstances they should be entirely abolished. This should be done regardless of the preceding custom and regardless of its past beneficial use because by this time they have been so greatly altered that they henceforth are a thing repugnant to the truth and liberty of the gospel and rob Christ of His glory.

6. Sixth, if the ordinances of men in the church assume a form that, for the sake of similarity, is closer in these matters to the enemies of the truth than to the orthodox so that the weak are offended by this and kept in error and the enemies would become more stiff-necked, then it is best to remove them, in part to obviate offence and in part to avoid dangers either present or apprehended as future. When there is a form with fasts, days of the deceased saints, vestments, wafers, elevation, images and the like, these are nothing other than papal ensigns and the colors of his court. They should no more be retained than a respectable woman should be accustomed to going thoughtlessly clothed among immodest people or than soldiers should undertake to carry the ensigns of the enemy.¹⁸²

179. *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, 4 vols. (Reformation Heritage books, 2008–2014), 3:12, 14–15.

180. *Reformed Confessions*, 3:155.

181. *Reformed Confessions*, 3:529, 531.

182. *Reformed Confessions*, 3:700–701. See also for other examples, The Synod of Gönc (1566), “21. The relics of idolatry are to be thrown out,” 2:898; The Second Confession of the London-Amsterdam Church (1596), 3:761, and The Points of Difference (1603), 4.4.

And in answering a significant objection to the necessity of removing such signs, ensigns and monuments (that it is sufficient to restore such things to a right use), Gillespie adduces Calvin himself.

Calvin, answering that which Cassander alleges out of an Italian writer, *abusum non tolli bonum usum* [abuse does not take away the good use], he admits it only to be true in things which are instituted by God Himself, not so in things ordained by men, for the very use of such things or rites as have no necessary use in God's worship, and which men have devised only at their own pleasure, is taken away by idolatrous abuse. *Pars tutior* [The safer part] here, is to put them wholly away, and there is, by a great deal, more danger in retaining than in removing them.

In that tract against Cassander, Calvin, drawing on the example of Hezekiah, wrote:

Similarly, what is alleged of an Italian writer, that abuse does not take away good use, will not be true if one holds to it without exception: because it is clearly commanded to us to prudently watch that we would not offend the infirm brothers by our example, and that we should never undertake what would be illicit. For Saint Paul prohibits offending the brothers in eating flesh that was sacrificed to idols [1 Cor. 10:28], and speaking to this particular issue he shows a general rule that we are to keep ourselves from troubling the consciences of the weak by a bad or damaging example. One might speak better and more wholesomely if he were to say that what God himself ordains may not be abolished for wrong use or abuse that is committed against it. But even here, it is necessary to abstain from these things if, by later human ordinance, they have become corrupt with error, and if their use is harmful or scandalizes the brothers.

Here I marvel how this "Reformer," after granting that superstitions sometimes have such strong popularity that it is necessary to remove from the realm of man those things once ordained by public authority (as we read of Hezekiah doing with the bronze serpent), finally

does not consider even a little that his shrewdness is a horror to the ways of good action: as if in defending supportable rituals, he would oblige that all superstitions should be considered as safe and whole because they are weighty. For what is there in the papacy now that would not resemble the bronze serpent, even if it did not begin that way [Num. 21:9]? Moses had it made and forged by the commandment of God: he had it kept for a sign of recognition. Among the virtues of Hezekiah told to us is that he had it broken and reduced to ash [2 Kings 18:4]. The superstitions for the most part, against which true servants of God battle today, are spreading from here to who knows where as covered pits in the ground. They are filled with detestable errors that can never be erased unless their use is taken away. Why, therefore, do we not confess simply what is true, that this remedy is necessary for taking away filth from the church"¹⁸³

This necessity of removing monuments of idolatry was also adduced by the Westminster assembly both in its first petition to parliament and later in its work on the Larger Catechism. In its petition of 19 July 1643 (before the arrival of Gillespie and the Scots commissioners), the assembly requested the parliament, "That all monuments of Idolatry and Superstition, but especially the whole body and practice of Popery may be totally abolished."¹⁸⁴ And in their detailing the moral duties of the second commandment in their larger catechism, the divines included, "the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry."¹⁸⁵

Following the adducing of Calvin's answer to Cassander, Gillespie continued his argument to put completely away practices notoriously abused to idolatry lacking any necessary use in the worship of God.

(2) The proofs which I have produced for the proposition about which now we debate, do not only infer that things and rites which have been notoriously abused to idolatry should be abolished, in case they be not restored to a right use, but simply and absolutely that in any wise they are to be abolished. God commanded to say to the covering, and the ornaments of idols, "Get thee hence" (Isa. 30:22). It is not enough they be purged from the abuse, but *simpliciter* they themselves must pack them and be gone. How did Jacob with the earrings of the idols; Elijah with Baal's altar; Jehu with his vestments; Josiah with his houses; Manasseh with his altars; Moses with the golden calf; Joshua with the temples of Canaan; Hezekiah with the brazen serpent?

183. *Responsio Ad Versipellem Quendam Mediatorem*, p. 41–44. [Cf. CR 37 (CO 9), 542. Cf. [French] "Réponse à Un Certain Moyenneur Ruse," *Recueil des Opuscules* (Geneva: Stoer, 1611), 2191–2192. This tract was published in English translation for the first time in a past issue. See R. Victor Bottomly, "In Translatione: Calvin's Response to a Certain Tricky Middler," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012).

184. CVD, *Minutes*, 5.12

185. CVD, *Minutes*, 4.664.

Did they retain the things themselves, and only purge them from the abuse? Belike [*Suppose*], if these our opposites had been their counselors, they had advised them to be contented with such a moderation; yet we see they were better counseled when they destroyed utterly the things themselves, whereby we know that they were of the same mind with us, and thought that things abused to idolatry, if they have no necessary use, are far better away than a-place [*in place*]. Did Daniel refuse Bel's meat because it was not restored to the right use? Nay, if that had been all, it might have been quickly helped, and the meat sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. Finally, were the churches of Pergamos and Thyatira reprov'd because they did not restore things sacrificed to idols to their right use? Or, were they not rather reprov'd for having anything at all to do with the things themselves?

§8. (3) As for that which Dr. Forbes objects to us, we answer, that temples, places of prayer, chairs, vessels, and bells, are of a necessary use, by the light and guidance of nature itself; and matrimonial benediction is necessary by God's institution (Gen. 1:28); so that all those examples do except themselves from the argument in hand. But the Doctor intends to bring those things within the category of things indifferent,¹⁸⁶ and to this purpose he alleges, that it is indifferent to use this or that place for a temple, or a place of prayer; also to use these vessels, and bells, or others. And of matrimonial benediction to be performed by a pastor, he says there is nothing commanded in Scripture.

ANSWER. Though it be indifferent to choose this place, etc., also to use these vessels or other vessels, etc.; yet the Doctor, I trust, will not deny that temples, houses of prayer, vessels and bells, are of a necessary use (which exempts [*exempts*] them from the touch of our present argument); whereas, beside that it is not necessary to kneel in the communion in this place more than in that place, neither to keep the feast of Christ's nativity, passion, etc., upon these days more than upon other days, etc. The things themselves are not necessary in their kind; and it is not necessary to keep any festival day, nor to kneel at all in the act of receiving the communion.

Arguments for 'Holy Day' Themed Sermons

We may hopefully now at this point have all the principles needed to bring to bear on this question of special themed sermons and/or services timed to the

ecclesiastical calendar rejected by Presbyterianism at the Reformations. Several defenses of this practice are often made.

Some defend the practice of regularly preaching something like a nativity sermon from the circumstances as they find them. Such say the observance of Christmas is ubiquitous in our culture and it would be as acceptable to make use of it to inform sermon content as any other similar circumstance (the Fourth of July, the turning of a new year, or what have you).

Others build upon this by making a positive justification from the power of the church to order the circumstances of worship. Such say that observing the holy days of the old calendar with special services, sermons, etc., if free of superstition, are nothing but a thematic structuring of worship services, a circumstantial matter which should be no less lawful than a minister choosing to preach a particular topical series for a length of time, or following the Heidelberg Catechism regularly, or preaching through a book of the Bible for a number of years.

And others still justify special sermons/services built around some of the old pretended holy days from the authority of the church to set aside days of fasting and thanksgiving. If the church is permitted to set aside a day of thanksgiving for providential deliverance, how much more might Christians voluntarily choose on any convenient arbitrary day to celebrate the mighty works of redemptive history without any intention of creating holy days?

The last argument is a flat misunderstanding if not a contortion of the doctrine of the prescribed occasional elements of thanksgiving and fast days and the warrant that is given to the church to call such. This was covered in the historical survey. As also already covered, the second and third arguments both run afoul of treading on the Lord's prerogative for deeming it within the church's authority to pick winners and losers amongst Christ's acts of redemption for special recurring treatment. And to all three, but more specifically to the first argument, something like a mere sermon on the subject of Christ's nativity as proposed is not wholly indifferent without some qualification.

Certainly as has been noted in the historical survey, there have been ministers in the past with unquestionable commitment to Presbyterian principles, who on occasion preached sermons on the subject of Christ's birth around 25 December, when they believed it would serve to help keep their charges from the idolatry and

186. Ubi Supra [Forbes, *Irenicum*].

the debauchery of the day as it was observed in their times. However, preaching on Christ's birth without any such warnings, might give the impression of the approval of pretended holy days. The interruption of the normal preaching order must have a purpose. The choice is not strictly neutral. As Gillespie noted in his third qualification of a thing indifferent, it cannot be merely from 'will' but must have considerable (and sound) reasons for departing from the regular preaching to satisfy consciences. Clearly, the correction and warning against abuses has been a stated and historically approved reason for such a departure.¹⁸⁷ Given Presbyterian doctrine and history, it would seem not only

be prudent but necessary to warn against abuses. And if imprudent not to do so, it is no longer indifferent to preach without such exceptions and explanations. If, to forecast the examples cited by Gillespie below, we hedge dangerous places about under our purview to prevent injury (Exod. 21:33; Deut. 22:8), surely in creating this preaching scenario we should hedge it about against spiritual injury and offense?

But it may be objected, 'that was then; we are not so affected with the old abuses of will-worship and idolatry.' The problem in such an argument is the presumption that such observances are free of superstition, and that they are not as Gillespie noted, substantial parts of worship with sacred significance. Those who claim there is no superstition in their practice have to contend with the fact that their sister church down the street in the very same denomination, may have all the trappings of superstition: liturgical colors, holiday music and unique rites (e.g. advent candles) to make the service 'special.'¹⁸⁸ But still, to the objection that the Presbyterian church is far better off than in the past and that there is no necessity to essentially turn every proposed 'holy day' themed sermon into a warning against superstition and will-worship, the following is offered from a leader within conservative Presbyterianism:

187. And as already noted, before the observance of Christmas was abolished, Lightfoot, Calamy and many of the ministers of London preached on the day, but warned against the "superstition of the day" (Lightfoot, 91–92), which was similarly done by later Presbyterians such as Samuel Davies when choosing to preach at that time. This was not unusual for the Reformed either when magistrates enjoined regular preaching on such times. When the Genevan council reinstated services on some of the old pretended holy days, Calvin complied and He preached at least several times in the early to mid 1550s; yet he clearly preached against pretended holy days in doing so (Cf. *Sermons on the Book of Micah*, trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley [Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2003], 302ff). And the 1579 Synod at Dordrecht instructed that in preaching at such times, "the people be admonished of the abolition of the feast-days" (Demarest, 174).

188. Setting a precedent in a minor case often leads to greater abuses. One church may allow special sermons on the pretended holy days and another may add to that some special rites, a pattern not infrequent nor in the distant past in Presbyterianism, as the historical survey indicates.

189. R. C. Sproul, Sr., "Don't Be a Scrooge This Christmas," <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/dont-be-scrooge-christmas/> [accessed, November 13, 2015].

190. See the citation from Burroughs above regarding consecration etc., and the argument in *EPC* (2013), 132ff. "Hooker thinks festival days clothed with outward robes of holiness; nay, he says plainly, *No doubt, as God's extraordinary presence has hallowed and sanctified certain places, so they are His extraordinary works that have truly and worthily advanced certain times, for which cause they ought to be, with all men that honor God, more holy than other days.*"

191. The 'godfather' of the Federal Vision, James B. Jordan, through liturgical musings which began decades ago in the now defunct wing of the Theonomy movement that was in Tyler, Texas, no doubt has some influence (see the review of some of Jordan's views in Kevin Reed, "The Canterbury Tales: An Extended Review and Commentary Based upon The Geneva Papers" [1984; 1989; third edition, 1996]). However, far more significant damage is done by prominent teachers from within conservative Presbyterianism who undermine basic Presbyterian principles of worship. See the substantial survey by Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman which appeared in the inaugural issue of this journal, "Reframing Presbyterian Worship: A Critical Survey of the Worship Views of John M. Frame and R. J. Gore," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005): 116–150).

192. Tim Bayly, "Worship wars: Jeff Meyers and Peter Leithart have won...." BaylyBlog, <http://baylyblog.com/blog/2015/11/worship-wars->

Christmas is a holiday, indeed the world's most joyous holiday. It is called a "holiday" because the day is holy. It is a day when businesses close, when families gather, when churches are filled, and when soldiers put down their guns for a 24-hour truce. It is a day that differs from every other day.... When God touches earth, the place is holy. When God appears in history, the time is holy. There was never a more holy place than the city of Bethlehem, where the Word became flesh. There was never a more holy time than Christmas morning when Emmanuel was born. Christmas is a holiday. It is the holiest of holy days.¹⁸⁹

Dr. Sproul here is rejecting the Presbyterian view and borrowing consciously or unknowingly, from the anglo-catholic argument which among other things precipitated the Second Reformation in Scotland!¹⁹⁰ Apart from poor practices held over from Presbyterianism's decline into liberalism and the damage done by our prominent teachers, others in the ritualistic camp are influencing conservative Reformed thought, such as adherents of the Federal Vision movement,¹⁹¹ some of whom are quite clear in their desires for accommodation with Roman Catholicism.¹⁹² It is also clear that there is a movement in conservative Presbyterianism to

go beyond simply aping the old idol feast days to borrowing from the old fast days as well (e.g. Lent; Ash Wednesday).¹⁹³ With the surrounding culture and religions showing just as much regard to times and seasons as they ever have, with such clear (albeit consistent) expansion of observance of the old pretended holy days taking place in evangelicalism, with teachers in our corner of Christendom positively advocating the following of the church calendar with the arguments of anglo-catholicism, and with confessional Presbyterianism at such a low ebb,¹⁹⁴ how exactly are we better off now and less needful of such warnings, when the generality of teachers and congregants are less godly, less learned, and far less committed to Presbyterian principles than in the past?¹⁹⁵

Patterning Worship after Monuments of Idolatry

But again, to all these arguments for special sermons and services, even granting it to be the case that such are free of superstition, this is not a question of whether a minister is free to adopt any manner of recurring

jeff-meyers-and-peter-leithart-have-won [accessed November 6, 2015]. "At the center of Jeff Meyers's Covenant Renewal Worship is the recapitulation of Old Testament sacrificial ritual. Showing they hold a sacramentalist DNA in common, Meyer's Theopolis House colleague, Peter Leithart, seeks reunion with Rome and his Protestant wish list for Rome does not quibble with Rome's sacramentalism, transubstantiation, or perpetual sacrifice of our Lord. Instead Leithart complains that Rome will not allow him to eat and drink their idolatrous mass with them: 'When I attend Mass, I want Catholic priests to let me share the Eucharist with my Catholic brothers.'" 193. It is clear that in some conservative Presbyterian churches, a path for appropriating of Lent has been cleared by widespread acceptance of Easter and other pretended holy days. Cf. Brian Allred, "Considering and reconsidering Lent" (March 21, 2013), <http://www.newlifepca.org/considering-and-reconsidering-lent/>. John Otis and D. G. Hart note the teaching of PCA minister Craig Higgins regarding the observance of Lent. John M. Otis, "Discerning Roman Catholic Tendencies Among Professing Reformed Churches" (March 16, 2010), <http://theaquilareport.com/discerning-roman-catholic-tendencies-among-professing-reformed-churches/>; D. G. Hart, "Lent is like Spring Training" (April 22, 2009), <http://oldlife.org/2009/04/lent-is-like-spring-training/>; cf. Craig R. Higgins, "On Keeping a Holy Lent," http://rezchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/on_keeping_a_holy_lent.pdf. Higgins' article appeared in an earlier form in two parts on a now defunct website (cf. <https://web.archive.org/web/20120607003809/http://www.pcaconversations.org/2009/03/on-keeping-a-holy-lent-part-1/> and <https://web.archive.org/web/20110309044937/http://www.pcaconversations.org/2009/03/on-keeping-a-holy-lent-part-2/>). For more on the spread of this practice in evangelicalism see: Scott Aniol, "Liturgy is Cool" (February 18, 2015), <http://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-worship/liturgy-is-cool/>; Keith Miller, "Young, Restless, and Reformed Homeboys on Lenten Fasting" (March 4, 2014), <http://mereorthodoxy.com/young-restless-reformed-homeboys-lenten-fasting/>; R. Scott Clark,

themes, but those of the 'Christian year'—Christmas, Easter, etc., the very pretended holy days rejected by Presbyterianism. The bare following of the same themes and times, indeed calling such things Christmas sermons and services and such, symbolizes (identifies) with the old idolatry and superstition, which should have been kept in oblivion. It is not a matter of indifference. These holy days remain monuments of idolatry¹⁹⁶ and badges and symbols of present idolatry.

By communicating with idolaters in their rites and ceremonies, we ourselves become guilty of idolatry; even as Ahaz, was an idolater, *eo ipso* [for that very reason], that he took the pattern of an altar from idolaters (2 Kings 16:10). Forasmuch, then, as kneeling before the consecrated bread, the sign of the cross, surplice, festival days, bishoping, bowing down to the altar, administration of the sacraments in private places, etc., are the wares of Rome, the baggage of Babylon, the trinkets of the whore, the badges of Popery, the ensigns of Christ's enemies, and the very trophies of AntiChrist: we cannot conform, communicate and symbolize with

"Lent: Of Good Intentions, Spiritual Disciplines, and Christian Freedom," <http://heidelblog.net/2014/03/lent-of-good-intentions-spiritual-disciplines-and-christian-freedom/>; Steve Simmons, "Lent... if borrowed should be returned" (March 5, 2014), <http://www.fifthstreetpca.org/pastor-simmons-blog/post/lent---if-borrowed-should-be-returned->; D. G. Hart, "Playing with Lenten Fire" (February 13, 2013), <http://oldlife.org/2013/02/playing-with-lenten-fire/> [accessed November 25, 2015]. Also see the following article which appeared in a previous edition of *The Confessional Presbyterian* journal, Roland S. Barnes, "The Practice of Lent and the Reformed Tradition," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 10 (2010): 89–99.

194. The Presbyterian Church in America never adopted a full directory for worship, and the few chapters regarding the sacraments that are part of their constitution are not particularly strictly followed. It is also arguable that the PCA effectively abandoned any real means of retaining faithful subscription to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms with the adoption of 'good faith' subscription in 2003. See Ryan M. McGraw, *Katekōmen*, "A Church Without a Confession: Some Practical Reflections on 'Good Faith' Subscription in the Presbyterian Church in America" (November 30, 2010), <http://katekomen.gpts.edu/2010/11/church-without-confession-some.html> [accessed November 25, 2015].

195. The widespread ignorance and neglect of the Christian Sabbath alone would make this case; and it has always been a maxim in Puritanism and Presbyterianism that neglect of the sabbath and the preference for our own 'holy days' go together. "The observance of the uncommanded holy-days is ever found to interfere with the due sanctification of the Lord's day." Miller, *Presbyterianism* (1835), 78.

196. The holy days and other popish ceremonies "are thrice idolatrous: "because they are monuments of by-past idolatry;" 2. "because they are badges of present idolatry;" 3. "because they are idols themselves." Ceremonies such as the old holy days "are unlawful, because they are monuments of by-past idolatry, which not being necessary to be retained, should be utterly abolished." *EPC* (2013), 149ff.

the idolatrous papists in the use of the same, without making ourselves idolaters by participation.¹⁹⁷

Following the same calendar, topics and even names of the old idol-days symbolizes with that idolatry which we ought not to do, whether we do so superstitiously or claim to do so for different reasons than the Roman church. The old anglo-catholics claimed they were not observing the pretended holy days for the same reasons as Romanists, but this was not true. “[A]s touching the exercise and worship whereunto holy days are applied, papists tell us, that they keep Pasche and Pentecost yearly for memory of Christ’s resurrection, and the sending down of the Holy Ghost; and, I pray, to what other employment do formalists profess that they apply these feasts, but to the commemoration of the same benefits?”¹⁹⁸ “The very external use, therefore, of any sacred ceremony of human institution, is not to be suffered in the matter of worship, when in respect of this external use we are sorted with idolaters.”¹⁹⁹

Claiming a different reason is insufficient to escape symbolizing with the idolatry. Romanists who kept some of the old Jewish ceremonies but claimed they did so for a different reason, are rightly condemned from the condemnation Paul makes of Peter (Gal. 2:11). And if it would be sufficient to simply cite a different reason, then “why did God forbid Israel to cut their hair as the Gentiles did? Had it not been enough not to apply this rite to a superstitious use, as Aquinas shows the Gentiles did? Why was the very external use of it forbidden?” Neither is claiming the pattern of the pre-Romanist ancient church sufficient to remove this idolatrous symbolizing. Otherwise Hezekiah could have avoided destroying the serpent of brass which did not pretend a purer antiquity, but the very command and appointment of the Lord!²⁰⁰ So in general, for pleading the freedom to pattern our practice after the old holy days, it is not sufficient to plead a different meaning

disclaiming superstition and will-worship. Otherwise, why is it fine to adopt this same pattern of holy day observance, but scandalous to introduce again into Presbyterian worship the sign of the cross or the surplice, if one could simply argue it is not done for the same superstitious reason?

Idol Monuments are Enticements to Return to Idolatry

As said previously, at the end of Gillespie’s proofs for the proposition for removing monuments of idolatry, the young Scot reinforced them with a twofold reason.²⁰¹

§6. 5. Fifthly, our proposition is backed with a twofold reason, for things which have been notoriously abused to idolatry should be abolished: (1) *Quia monent* [because they remind]. (2) *Quia movent* [because they move]. First, then, they are monitory [admonitory; give a warning], and preserve the memory of idols; *monumentum* [a monument] in good things is both *monimentum* [a memorial] and *munimentum* [fortification]; but *monumentum* in evil things (such as idolatry) is only *monimentum*, which *monet mentem* [instructs the mind], to remember upon such things as ought not to be once named among saints, but should lie buried in the eternal darkness of silent oblivion. Those relics therefore of idolatry, by which succeeding generations, as though by a memorial, may be reminded (as Wolphius rightly says),²⁰² are to be quite defaced and destroyed, because they serve to honor the memory of cursed idols.

God would not have so much as the name of an idol to be remembered among his people, but commanded to destroy their names as well as themselves (Exod. 23:13; Deut. 12:3; Joshua 23:7); whereby we are admonished, as Calvin says, how detestable idolatry is before God, whose memory a repentant man wants to be erased so no trace of it may be seen afterward.²⁰³ Yea, he requires, that the memory be erased [abolished; put away] of all those things which were at anytime consecrated to idols.²⁰⁴ If Mordecai would not give his countenance (Esther 3:2), nor do any reverence to a living monument of that nation whose name God had ordained to be blotted out from under heaven (Deut. 25:19), much less should we give connivance, and far less countenance, but least of all reverence, to the dead and dumb monuments of those idols which God has devoted to utter destruction, with all their naughty [bad, wicked] appurtenances, so that he will not have their names to be once mentioned or remembered again.

197. EPC (2013), 172ff.

198. EPC (2013), 184.

199. EPC (2013), 185.

200. EPC (2013), 185, 186.

201. EPC (2013), 154–155.

202. Com. in 2 Reg. 23:6. *quibus quasi monumentis posteritas admo-
neatur* [Melachim; id est, 1599 ed., ibid., p. 398r].

203. Com. in Isa. 27:9. *cujus memoriam vult penitus deleri, ne posthac
illum ejus vestigium appareat*. [Cf. CR 63 (CO 26), 456; Commentar-
ies, vol. VIII, 2.261.]

204. Calv., Com. in Exod. 23:24. *eorum omnium memoriam deleri
[sic aboleri], quae semel dicata sunt idolis*. [CR 52 (CO 23), 546; Com-
mentaries, vol. II, 2.387. The composer of the 1637 text may have
transposed the *deleri* from the citation from Isaiah just prior.]

But, secondly, *movent* [they move] too; such idolatrous remainders move us to turn back to idolatry. For *by experience we have verified, that, even after superstitions have been cast out, if any monuments of them be left to remain, not only has the memory of those persisted, but in the end it has obtained that they might be revived*, says Wolphius;²⁰⁵ who hereupon thinks it behoveful [necessary] to destroy *funditus* [utterly] such vestiges of superstition, for this cause, if there were no more: *so that both for those aspiring to resume idolatry, hope may be diminished, and for those attempting new things the opportunity and material may be forestalled.*²⁰⁶

God would have Israel to overthrow all idolatrous monuments, lest thereby they should be snared (Deut. 7:25; 12:30). And if the law command to cover a pit, lest an ox or an ass should fall therein (Exod. 21:33), shall we suffer a pit to be open wherein the precious souls of men and women, which all the world cannot ransom, are likely to fall? Did God command to make a battlement for the roof of a house, and that for the safety of men's bodies (Deut. 22:8), and shall we not only not put up a battlement, or object some bar for the safety of men's souls, but also leave the way slippery and full of snares? Read we not that the Lord, who knew what was in man, and saw how propense he was to idolatry, did not only remove out of His people's way all such things as might any way allure or induce them to idolatry (even to the cutting off the names of the idols out of the land (Zech. 13:2), but also hedge up their way with thorns that they might not find their paths, nor overtake their idol-gods, when they should seek after them (Hosea 2:6, 7)? And shall we by the very contrary course not only not hedge up the way of idolatry with thorns, which may stop and stay such as have an inclination aiming forward, but also lay before them the inciting and enticing occasions which add to their own propension, such delectation as spurs forward with a swift facility?

Of Indifference and Idolatry

Now, this may all be brought to an end with some reiteration. In general, in order to lawfully appoint special sermons or services coordinate to the old holy days, this must truly be a matter of indifference. That the old holy days are badges, tokens and monuments of old idolatry seems to largely remove any such 'neutrality.' This requires that such cannot be justified on an erroneous basis (a misunderstanding of days of fasting and thanksgiving; or from anglo-catholic-like reasoning). And to be justifiable at all, such sermons would require a certain

element of 'anti-holy day preaching,' rather than simply preaching on the topic of the pretended holy day being patterned, as if no warnings were necessary. Otherwise, does it not give tacit approval to the superstition of the church at large, and therefore constitute an appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22)? Is it consistent with the provocation unto good works (Hebrews 10.24–25) or tend to the opposite provocation? It could be argued that preaching on the birth of Christ at the end of December, apart from the enumeration of potential abuses associated with it in the world around us presents an occasion to superstition and will-worship. Such occasions are forbidden in the right use of the Law.²⁰⁷ Specifically as to Gillespie's rules on idolatrous practices and the rules governing the use of indifferent things—

How can such special sermons/services fulfill the rule of piety when it takes up again something Presbyterianism cast out as a detestable idol, which only came back into practice through defectors from biblical principles at a time the churches were going liberal? How can we use a monument of idolatry to God's glory, when He Himself has prescribed that such be wholly cast into oblivion? None of us live or die to ourselves (Rom. 14:7). When something otherwise indifferent and unnecessary is abused to idolatry, it must be laid aside for the simple reason that it has an immoral influence on others, and how can that be Christ's will and "to Christ's glory"?

How is it in keeping with the law of charity? Is it not an offense and scandal to ape or parrot these old idols, the condemnation of which fills Presbyterian literature, histories and commentaries? How is it edifying if rather than building up the people in sound views and practices, it makes them ripe for anglo-catholic and ritualistic errors, and hinders reformation and reinforces continuing defection from Presbyterianism's biblical principles? How can we return to a faithful adherence to the Presbyterian regulative principle of worship by retaining practices that are tied to a rejection of it? If

205. Ubi Supra [2 Kings 23:6]. *usu compertum habemus, superstitiones etiam postquam explosæ essent, si qua relicta fuissent earum monumenta, cum memoriam sui ipsarum apud homines, tum id tandem ut revocarentur obtinuisse.* [Melachim; id est, 1599 ed., ibid., p. 398r.]

206. *ut et aspirantibus ad revocandam idololatram spes frangatur, et res novas molientibus ansa pariter ac materia præripiatur.*

207. Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 99, "What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the ten commandments?" "A. For the right understanding of the ten commandments, these rules are to be observed: . . . "6. That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto" (emphasis added). Matthew 5:21–22, 27–28; Matthew 15:4–6; Hebrews 10:24–25; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Jude 23; Galatians 5:26; Colossians 3:21.

‘cold ceremonies and idle gestures’ ought to be banished from the church,²⁰⁸ how much more unbiblical observances primed by ages held superstitious regard?

How can the appointment of such sermons or services square with the law of purity, when even still today some believe, and the clear testimony of our tradition states, that the old calendar of holy days was an idol to be wholly cast away? How can we use monuments of idolatry in God’s worship with a clear conscience, which the Lord commands to discard?

How can it in any way be indifferent to take as our pattern the pretended holy days of Roman Catholicism whose idolatry remains unto this day, which all the preceding arguments demonstrate we should not do? These things which Presbyterians had vowed never to take up again, not only serve as tokens hearkening back to unfaithfulness, but are badges of the corruptions introduced once again in the apostatizing liberal church.

For a true church, as it retains pure doctrine, so also it keeps simplicity of ceremonies, etc.; but a hypocritical church, as it departs from pure doctrine, so for the most part it changes and augments the ceremonies instituted of God, and multiplies its own traditions, etc.²⁰⁹

One can imagine the cry of exasperation of some at this point. ‘Christmas is generally the one time of year that people might want to actually talk about Jesus, and you

want to ignore that opportunity to save souls?!’ As hopefully is clear, we ought to even redeem this pretended holy day for good where we may, just as any occasion (John 10), and such sermons, if properly hedged, may be useful. But it must be said that while in the past it might have been the case that folks were more willing to hear of Christ around Christmas in some respects (but not in others), Christmas is a secularized celebration in this post-Christian nation, and this is just less and less the case. But beyond that, we have no power to save souls; that is, the saving of souls is a sovereign act of the Lord, by His appointed means. And while He may work in the midst of illicit means, we will be judged for using them. Further, we have no permission at all to use evil, that good may come. We do not erect and adorn monuments of past idolatry in order to create opportunities to preach the gospel.

Other Presbyterians may object that in observing some of the old pretended holy days they are simply following our Reformed brethren.²¹⁰ ‘Calvin preached on Christmas after all?’²¹¹ While there is little edification in disputing ‘who is more Reformed,’ it may suffice to say that if Presbyterians believe Presbyterianism has the more scriptural stance regarding holy days, why would we follow a church less biblical in this particular practice? Or why is it Presbyterians have to downgrade from their standards? It is not as though the Reformed are fighting to recover their principles in this matter.

208. *EPC* (2013), 377. “How much more ought Christians to understand that we are not born for ourselves, but for Christ and His Church. And as in the whole course of our life, so especially in the policy of the Church, we may do nothing (be it never so indifferent in itself) which is not profitable for edification: ‘Let all things be done to edifying’ (1 Cor. 14:26). From which precept Paræus infers, that nothing ought to be done in the Church which does not manifestly make for the utility of all and every one; and that therefore not only unknown tongues, but cold ceremonies and idle gestures should be exploded [*banished*] out of the Church.”

209. Magdeburg Centuries, second century, chapter 6, *De Ceremoniis et ritibus* (1559 ed.), 109, 20. Cited in *EPC* (2013), 11.

210. It should be noted that the Nadere Reformatie (Dutch Further Reformation) followed the Puritans and Presbyterians in rejecting the observance of the ecclesiastical calendar. Cf. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992–1995), 1.lvii, 38–39.

211. Calvin’s tolerance of following the calendar to a degree hardly constituted endorsement. The clergy of Montbéliard “were fearful of anything that looked even remotely like a return to the ceremonies of Catholicism such as the celebration of feast days.” In 1543–44 Calvin advised the church, that “the observation of feast days was also to be rejected since it so easily led to superstition.” “Calvin advised the ministers of Montbéliard to stand firm on these matters of principle but to yield wherever else their consciences would allow” (Jill Raitt, *The Colloquy of Montbéliard Religion and Politics in the Sixteenth Century* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 21). The Geneva council

which had abolished holy days, later reinstated some observance, and Calvin complied and preached on such occasions to avoid contention for the good of the distressed church at the time. However, in 1557 Calvin reiterated a firm opinion in a letter dated December 25, 1557, “With respect to ceremonies and above all the observance of holy days [I offer the following]: Although there are some who eagerly long to remain in conformity with such practices, I do not know how they can do so without disregard for the edification of the church, nor [do I know] how they can render an account to God for having advanced evil and impeded its solution.... Nevertheless, since we have to endure a number of imperfections when we cannot correct them, I am of the opinion that no brother ought to allow the above to be the cause of his leaving his church, unless the majority support the opposite” (*Calvin’s Ecclesiastical Advice*, trans. by Mary Beatty and Benjamin W. Farley [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991], 90). From Calvin’s practice and correspondence, Gillespie concluded, “Because he would have tolerated holy days, because he durst not at that time, and as the case then stood, have spoken of the abolishing them, can it be hereupon concluded that he allowed of them? No, sure[ly].... If holy days, in Calvin’s judgment, be fooleries; if he gave advice not to approve them; if he thought them occasions of superstition; if he held it superstition to distinguish one day from another, or to esteem one above another; if he calls them Judaical, though kept to the honor of God, judge then what allowance they had from him.” *EPC* (2013), 64, 68. See translations of portions of the correspondence between Calvin and the church in Montbéliard (Monbelgarden), in *EPC*, p. 67, note n1, p. 68, n1.

Presbyterians for the most part on the other hand defected for all the wrong reasons to this practice less than a century ago, against their Reformational principles and contrary to vows never to take up these days again. Besides, Presbyterians have already had occasion to lament this kind of ‘trading down.’

And now, though some of the controverted ceremonies have been kept and reserved in many (not all) the reformed churches, yet they are not therefore to be the better liked. For the reason of the reservation was because some reverend divines who dealt and labored in the reformation of those churches, perceiving the occurring lets and oppositions which were caused by most dangerous schisms and seditions, and by the raging of bloody wars, scarcely expected to effectuate so much as the purging of the church from fundamental errors and gross idolatry, which wrought them to be content, that lesser abuses in discipline and church policy would be then tolerated, because they saw not how to overtake them all at that time. In the meanwhile, they were so far from desiring any of the churches to retain these popish ceremonies, which might have convenient occasion of ejecting them (far less to recall them, being once ejected), that they testified plainly their dislike of the same, and wished that those churches wherein they lived might have some blessed opportunity to be rid of all such rotten relics, riven rags, and rotten remainders of Popery. All which, since they were once purged away from the Church of Scotland and cast forth as things accursed into the lakes of eternal de-station, how vile and abominable may we now call the resuming of them? Or what a piacular prevarication is it to borrow from any other church, which was less reformed, a pattern of policy for this church which was more reformed?²¹²

CONCLUSION

This survey traced how some Presbyterians—pining for a ritualistic worship in a church weakened by liberalism and apostasy—re-embraced what the Presbyterian Reformation had cast out to never be embraced again. What was the mindset that drove this? From whence did the psychological impetus for these changes come, which remain today even in the evangelical and conservative enclaves of American Presbyterianism? Perhaps it was an unconscious desire to return to the comforting traditions and symbolism of medieval Roman Catholicism?²¹³ Or perhaps Alexis de Toqueville, the French Statesman and observer of the new American society,

predicted such a decline when he wrote, “All the clergy of America freely adopt the general views of their time and country and let themselves go unresistingly with the tide of feeling and opinion which carries everything around them along with it.” The late nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian R.L. Dabney, who had observed the beginnings of American Presbyterianism’s decline from their confessional standards regarding worship, offered this diagnosis of the fundamental problem:

The reader has by this time seen that I ascribe this recent departure of our Presbyterian churches from the rule of their fathers in no degree to more liberal views or enlightened spirit. I know, by an intuition which I believe every sensible observer shares, that the innovation is merely the result of an advancing *wave of worldliness* and ritualism in the evangelical bodies. These Christians are not wiser but simply more flesh-pleasing and fashionable.²¹⁴■

212. Gillespie, *EPC* (2013), 13–14.

213. This is the supposition advanced by James Hastings Nichols, who notes that Catholic conceptions and forms of worship “established themselves in a few Reformed centers in the day of cultural romanticism and political reaction” and from thence “they have increasingly penetrated the main Reformed bodies....” James Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1968), 153. Nichols goes on to point out that while the Catholicizing tendency has often been blunted by the “legacy of anti-Romanism” it has “established it’s right to exist in these churches and won official toleration.”

214. Criticisms and Reviews, R. L. Dabney, “Girardeau’s *Instrumental Music in Public Worship*,” *The Presbyterian Quarterly*, No. 9 (July, 1889): 468. In the last decades some conservative Scottish Presbyterian churches have caught up to the American downgrade in their observances, bringing similar warnings. “In a helpful article on ‘Sensual Worship – A Sign of Impending Apostasy’ (*Banner of Truth Magazine*, November 2010) Iain Murray wrote: ‘When interest in the churches begins to centre around the visual and the sensual it is commonly a sign of impending apostasy.’ The Epistle to the Hebrews shows us how, in contrast to the Levitical system, we have in the New Testament era ‘the naked simplicity of gospel institutions’. As with the Hebrew Christians, when spiritual decline occurs there is a tendency to turn to liturgy and ceremonies. As the Protestant martyr, Hugh Latimer warned: ‘When candles go up, preaching comes down.’ John J. Murray, “Candles Up, Preaching Down” (December, 2015), <http://www.freechurchcontinuing.org/publications/articles/item/candles-up-preaching-down> [accessed December 4, 2015].