

Dropping the Subject, Again?

The Decline of Sabbatarianism in the Old Southern Presbyterian Church and in the Presbyterian Church in America

By Chris Coldwell

“*Let us beware brethren: As goes the Sabbath, so goes the church, as goes the church, so goes the nation.*”[†]

In 1990 a study was published covering the decline of Lord’s Day observance in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). The author entitled the piece, “On Dropping the Subject: Presbyterians and Sabbath Observance in the Twentieth Century.”¹ Through its various Sabbath committees the PCUS, year after year, decade after decade, decried the decline in observance of the Lord’s Day in this country and amongst her members, and earnestly and constantly exhorted PCUS congregations to return to a proper regard for the Christian day of worship. Just a scant few years before the formation of what would be the Presbyterian Church in America, the author noted that the Sabbath had become

a dead issue in the PCUS. Promisingly, the conservative continuing church desired a return to the doctrines of Presbyterianism which the PCUS had rejected. Several years after its founding, the PCA passed a resolution affirming the sanctity of the Lord’s Day, advocating for its better observance.²

Whereas the Word of God clearly instructs men to observe the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy and to set aside this one day out of seven as being consecrated to the Lord: (Genesis 2:1–3; Exodus 20:8–11; Isaiah 58:13–14)

And whereas the Sabbath Day has fallen into widespread profanation and disuse in American society today, and various athletic, commercial, and social enterprises and activities have all but obliterated our former national reverence for this holy day.

Therefore, we the members of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America reaffirm our unwavering stand against all unnecessary encroachments upon the Lord’s Day, and exhort all citizens everywhere to worship God and to properly set aside and sanctify the Sabbath of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that we exhort each pastor and session to study the positive application of Sabbath observance to their congregation in order to bring our practice into greater conformity with the Church’s Standards.

Yet some forty years later in 2015, overtures from two presbyteries pressed for the General Assembly to erect study committees to facilitate the abandoning of the Puritan Sabbatarianism codified in the PCA’s doctrinal standards.³ The presbyteries believed it was time for the PCA to redact the words “whole day” and “recreations,” from these standards, because of the general and wide practical rejection of Westminster’s Sabbatarianism in

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[†]Cited in *The Presbyterian Predicament: Six Perspectives*, edited by Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 93. Cf. *Minutes of the Sixty-First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, A. D. 1948* (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1948), 183. Hereafter *PCUS Minutes* (year). How clear is this in our day when the Sabbath is not the only creation ordinance rejected in this nation? “Good morals cannot exist—not even according to nature itself—among human beings who do not observe and sanctify to the Lord one day out of seven.” Franciscus Junius, *The Mosaic Polity*, translated by Todd M. Rešter, edited by Andrew M. McGinnis (Christian’s Library Press, 2015), 143.

1. Benton Johnson, “On Dropping the Subject: Presbyterians and Sabbath Observance in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Presbyterian Predicament*, 90–108.

2. *Minutes of the Fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, September 13–17, 1976, Greenville, South Carolina* (Committee for Christian Education and Publication of the Presbyterian Church in America as authorized by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, 1976), 65. Hereafter *PCA Minutes* (year).

3. *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America with proof texts* (Christian Education and Publications Committee of the PCA, 2005; 2007) 109–110,

the denomination, and because the majority of elders now routinely take exception to this teaching. Since Presbyterians first adopted the Westminster Standards as their creedal statements in the late 1640s, no body of Presbyterians has defected so far from their truths to have ever proposed even minor changes regarding the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath, let alone significant changes such as those proposed. The overtures failed, not from overwhelming support of Sabbatarianism, but from a pragmatic view that the exception is allowed without controversy and from a general conservatism toward the significant step of revising doctrinal standards.

It would seem we are in danger of dropping the subject again! How did conservative Southern Presbyterianism get to this state? To attempt to answer that question, we need to begin with where Presbyterianism obtained its doctrine of the Christian Sabbath, in Puritan Sabbatarianism. Next, we will survey the decline away from honoring the Lord's Day, focusing on the PCUS as it slid into progressivism and liberalism, including a rather lengthy accounting of their Sabbath committee reports. Then we will survey the PCA's handling of the doctrine of the Sabbath before concluding.

THE PURITAN SABBATH

The refinement of English Sabbatarianism in the latter decades of the sixteenth century produced one of the key defining features of Puritan piety, which would later be systematized in Presbyterian and Nonconformist doctrine via *The Westminster Standards* (1647), *The Savoy Declaration* (1658) and the *Baptist Confession of Faith* (1677). While it is true that a generation earlier in England, the Elizabethan Puritans worked to refine and systematize a sounder doctrinal footing for Sabbatarianism, they were nevertheless building upon a conservative practical Sabbatarianism that stretched back to the middle ages, which even under the darkness and superstition of Roman Catholicism had laws against labor and pastimes on Sundays.⁴ The "evidence from the period establishes that late Elizabethan sabbatarians were not innovators, but were elaborating a doctrinal tradition which had medieval origins and was part of the authorized teaching of the English church."⁵ The theological concept "of a morally binding sabbath ... was defined first by thirteenth-century scholastics and used by such pillars of the English Reformation as Heinrich Bullinger, John Hooper, Thomas Becon, and others" (Parker, "Rogers," 334).

Without question, the doctrinal statements of the

Westminster Assembly present a Puritan or English Sabbatarian understanding of the fourth commandment. Some have noted that English Sabbatarianism consists of three major points, 1. that the fourth commandment is moral, not partly ceremonial, 2. that the day of worship was moved to the first day of the week because of the resurrection of Christ, and 3. that the day should be observed in a strict manner in putting aside our regular weekday labors and recreations.⁶ Patrick Collinson defined English Sabbatarianism as,

... the doctrinal assertion that the fourth commandment is not an obsolete ceremonial law of the Jews but a perpetual, moral law, binding on Christians; in other words, that the Christian observance of Sunday has its basis not in ecclesiastical tradition but in the Decalogue. The more important propositions of the Sabbatarians are that the Sabbath derives from the creation and so antedates both man's fall and the Mosaic law, although its use was defined in the Decalogue; that the hallowing of the Lord's day in place of the Sabbath was of apostolic or even divine appointment, and more than an ecclesiastical convention; so that the Sabbath is still in force in this altered form, commemorating the second creation in Christ's resurrection, and robbed only of some of its ceremonial detail; that the whole day should be kept holy and devoted to the public and private exercise of religion; and that this precludes all otherwise lawful recreations and pastimes as well as the work of one's calling, unlawful games and mere idleness.... The first extensively argued, dogmatic assertion that the fourth commandment is morally and perpetually binding was published in 1595, *The doctrine of the Sabbath* by the

261–263, 386–387. This is essentially a reprint of the standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with proof texts approved by various assemblies of the OPC, which have not been adopted by the PCA. For the original proof texts see *The Confession of Faith; the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture Proofs at Large...* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1855). This edition is kept in print in various forms by Free Presbyterian Publications. See also the facsimiles of the seventeenth century first editions with proofs published by Old Paths Publications in 1997.

4. David N. Laband and Deborah Hendry Heinbuch, *Blue Laws: The History, Economics, and Politics of Sunday-Closing Laws* (Lexington Books, 1987), 14–16.

5. Kenneth Parker, "Thomas Rogers and the English Sabbath: The Case for a Reappraisal," *Church History* 53, no. 3 (September 1984): 332–333.

6. John H. Primus, *Holy Time: Moderate Puritanism and the Sabbath* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1989), 11; Richard L. Greaves, "The Origins of English Sabbatarian Thought," *Sixteenth Century Journal* XII, No. 3 (1981), 19. Kenneth L. Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6–7.

Suffolk Puritan divine, sometime fellow of Peterhouse and rector of Norton, Dr Nicholas Bownd.⁷

The ministry of Nicholas Bownd (1551?–1613) exhibited the practical divinity taught by his stepfather, Richard Greenham (1543?–1594), which focused on the means of grace (Word, Sacraments, prayer, etc.). The crucial ‘mean of the means’ whereby all these means of grace were made available to the people of God was the weekly gathering on the Christian Sabbath or Lord’s Day. The Lord’s Day is a blessing that the Lord has given to His people. “God prohibits certain activities on the Sabbath day in order to free us for communion and fellowship with Him and with one another.”⁸

Bownd’s 1595 book was based on lectures given circa 1585/86 at the Monday combination lecture in Bury St. Edmunds. The book was extensively augmented in a second edition in 1606, due in no small part to the criticisms and trouble caused the Norton parson by his severe conformist neighbor Thomas Rogers.⁹ In his 1606 dedication to Bishop John Jegon, Bownd outlines the Puritan Sabbatarian position as follows:

1. First of all, that the observations [*sic*] of the Sabbath is not a bare ordinance of man, or a mere civil or ecclesiastical constitution, appointed only for polity; but an immortal commandment of almighty God, and therefore binds men’s consciences.
2. The same was given to our first parents, Adam and Eve; and so after carefully observed, both [by] them and their posterity, the holy patriarchs and Church of God, before and under the law, until the coming of Christ.
3. And it was revived in Mount Sinai, by God’s own voice to the Israelites, after they came out of Egypt, with a special note of remembrance above all the rest; and fortified with more reasons than they, and particularly applied unto all sorts of men by name; all which

7. Patrick Collinson, “The Beginnings of English Sabbatarianism,” in *Studies in Church History, volume one, Papers read at the first winter and summer meetings of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Thomas Nelson, 1964), 207–209.

8. Pilgrim Covenant Church, Singapore, 16th Annual Conference (9–11 June 2015), The Lord’s Day; Dr. Joseph Pipa, The Lord’s Day: The Market Day of the Soul, <https://youtu.be/YbzNjG9NRG4> (accessed June 26, 2015).

9. See Chris Coldwell, “Anti-Sabbatarian Scold: Thomas Rogers’ Letter to Nicholas Bownd, April 29, 1598,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 10 (2014): 113–170, and Introduction, Nicholas Bownd, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath* (Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2015).

shows how careful the Lord was that everyone should straightly keep it.

4. The ceremonies of the law, which made a difference between Jew and Gentile, though the gospel has taken away, since *the partition wall was broken down by Christ* (Eph. 2:14); yet this commandment of the Sabbath abides still in its full force, as being moral and perpetual, and so binds for ever all nations and sorts of men, as before.

5. The apostles by the direction of God’s Spirit (leading them into all truth) did change that day (which before was the seventh from creation, and in remembrance of it) into the eighth; even this which we now keep in honor of the *Redemption*. And therefore the same day ought never to be changed, but still to be kept of all nations unto the world’s end; because we can never have the like cause or direction to change it.

6. So that we are in keeping holy of a day, for the public service of the Lord, precisely bound not only to the number of seven (and it is not in our power to make choice of the sixth or eighth day); but even on this very seventh day, which we now keep, and to none other.

7. On which day we are bound straightly to rest from all the ordinary works of our calling, every man in his several vocation; because six days in the week are appointed for them, and the seventh is sanctified and separated from the others, to another end; even for the public service of God, and that by God Himself.

8. Much more, then, in it ought we to give over [*relinquish*] all kinds of lawful recreations and pastimes, which are less necessary than the works of our calling, and whatsoever may take up our hearts to draw them from God’s service; because this law is spiritual, and binds the whole man, as well as any other. Most of all ought we to renounce all such things, as are not lawful at any time.

9. Yet in cases of necessity God has given great liberty unto us, to do many things for the preservation and comforts not only of the beasts and dumb creatures, but especially of man. Not only when he is weak and sick, but being healthful and strong, both in the works of our callings, and also of recreations, without which necessity we are persuaded that men ought ordinarily to cease from them.

10. And herein more specially the governors of the Church and Commonwealth have great liberty above all others, who in such cases may upon this day do many things for the good of both, not only for war, but for peace; and may prescribe unto others, and the people ought therein to obey them. And as in other things they ought not busily to inquire a reason of all their commandments; so in this they ought to presume with reverence so much of their good consciences, that they know more cause of the things which they command and do, than themselves do, or is meet for them curiously to inquire.

11. The same day of rest ought ordinarily to be spent altogether in God's service, especially in frequenting the public assemblies, where the Word of God is plainly read and purely preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and prayer made in a known tongue to the edifying of the people; where also they ought to attend upon these things from the beginning to the ending.

12. The rest of the day ought to be spent by every man himself alone, or with others (as his family or neighbors) in all private exercises of religion, whereby he may be more prepared unto, or reap greater fruit from the public exercises: as in private prayer, reading of the scriptures, singing of psalms, meditating upon, or conferring about, the Word and works of God—and that either in their houses, or abroad in the fields.

13. And as every man particularly is bound to the observation of this commandment, so more specially masters in their families, magistrates in their precincts, and princes in their realms ought to provide for this, as much as in them lies; and hereby to look to all that are committed to their charge, and to compel them at the least to the outward observation of the rest, and the sanctifying of it, as well as of any other commandment, as of not committing murder, adultery, theft, and such like.

14. Lastly, though no man can perfectly keep this commandment, either in thought, word or deed, no more than he can any other; yet this is that perfection that we must aim at; and wherein, if we fail, we must repent us, and crave pardon for Christ's sake. For as *the whole law is our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ* (Gal. 3:24); so is every particular commandment, and namely this of the Sabbath. And therefore we are not to measure the length and breadth of it by the over-scant rule of our own inability, but by the *perfect reed of the Temple*

(Ezek. 40:3); that is, by the absolute righteousness of God himself, which only can give us the full measure of it.

As noted by Collinson, Bownd's work, while preceded by shorter works touching upon or anticipating Sabbatarian doctrine, was the first large scholarly publication to give the subject a systematic defense. The impact of the work was significant and while Bownd claimed no originality, his work helped to set the standard argumentation. From Bownd's 1595 edition until the suppression of Sabbatarian works by Laud, many works were published promoting what became an essential characteristic of Puritan piety.¹⁰ After the lifting of the press ban that began with the reissue of the Book of Sports, many more works were published just prior to, during and after the Westminster Assembly to the close of the seventeenth century.¹¹

Puritan Sabbatarianism was formally codified into Presbyterian theology by the well-known statements of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms on the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath.¹²

CF 21. §8. This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations,^o but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.^{p13}

10. George Estey, *Certain and learned Expositions upon divers parts of Scripture* (London, 1603), which includes the earlier, *A Most Sweet and comfortable exposition upon the ten commandments* (London, 1602). John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *An Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (1603, 19th edition, 1635). William Greenham, *Treatise of the Sabbath*, in *Works* (London, 1604); George Widley, *Doctrine of the Sabbath, handled in Four Severall Bookes or Treatises* (London, 1604); John Sprint, *Propositions tending to prove the necessary Use of the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's Day* (London, 1607); Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis* (1608). Lewes [Lewis] Bayly, *The Practice of Piety*, third edition (1613). Lewes Thomas, *A Short Treatise upon the Commandments, in seven sermons or exercises of seven sabbaths* (London, 1615). Edward Elton, *An exposition of the ten commandments of God* (London, 1623), an update of *A plain and easy exposition of six of the commandments* (1619). *Effigatio veri Sabbathismi* (1605) by Robert Loews may qualify but this Latin work contains criticisms of some points characteristic of what was becoming the Puritan position.

11. See the books listed in Chris Coldwell, "Calvin in the Hands of the Philistines, Or, Did Calvin Bowl on the Sabbath?", *The Confessional Presbyterian* 6 (2010): 42, fn 60.

12. Cited from *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America*.

13. ^oExod. 20:8; Exod. 16:23–30; 31:15–17; Isa. 58:13–14; Neh. 13:15–22.

LC Q. 117. *How is the Sabbath or the Lord's Day to be sanctified?*

A. The Sabbath or Lord's Day is to be sanctified by a holy resting all the day,^m not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful;ⁿ and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy)^o in the public and private exercises of God's worship;^p and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly

^lIsa. 58:13–14; Luke 4:16; Matt. 12:1–3; Mark 3:1–5. Note these are the proof texts printed by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. In “o” following Exodus 20:8, the original proofs have Exodus 16:23, 25–26, 29–30, and omit Isaiah 58:14 and Nehemiah 13:20, which is also omitted in “p”. In “p” the original also has Matthew 12:1–13; the OPC has added Mark 3:1–5.

14. ^mExod. 20:8, 10; ⁿExod. 16:25–28; Jer. 17:21–22; See Neh. 13:15–22. ^oMatt. 12:1–5; See verses 6–13. ^pIsa. 58:13–14; Luke 4:16; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1–2; Lev. 23:3; See Ps. 92:title; Isa. 66:23. ^qExod. 20:8; Luke 23:54, 56; Exod. 16:22, 25–26, 29; Neh. 13:19. The OPC adds Isa. 58:14 at “p”.

15. ^rEzek. 22:26. ^sAmos 8:5; See Acts 20:7, 9; Ezek. 33:30–32; Mal. 1:13. ^tEzek. 23:38. ^uJer. 17:24, 27.

16. ^vExod. 20:10 [8, 10]; Neh. 13:15–22; Isa. 58:13–14. ^wExod. 20:8; Lev. 23:3; Luke 4:16; Acts 20:7. ^xMatt. 12:1–13. The original proofs were for “all that day,” Exod. 20:8, 10; Exod. 16:25–28; for “b,” Neh. 13:15–22; for “c,” Luke 4:16; Acts 20:7; Ps. 92:title; Isa. 66:23; for “d,” Matt. 12:1–3 [sic 1–13; see original proofs in Westminster Standards Facsimile edition (CD), Old Paths Publications, 1997].

17. ^yNeh. 13:15–22. Isa. 58:13–14. Amos 8:4–6. The original Westminster Assembly proof texts are at “duties required,” Ezek. 22:26; Amos 8:5; Mal. 1:13; at “idleness,” Acts 20:7, 9; at “sinful,” Ezek. 23:38; and for those at the end, Jer. 17:24–26; Isa. 58:13.

18. “...the vicious classes, who had been shamed into the observance of public decency under the rule of the commonwealth and protectorate, threw off all restraint, deeming the imitation of the royal example an evidence of loyalty. Hence the era known in our annals as that of the Restoration in relation to the monarchy, was eminently an epoch of moral decline and political prostration as it respects the nation, though it was the capital that chiefly suffered from the contaminations of the court.” Thomas Milner, *The History of England: from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Year A.D. 1852: With Early Notices of the British Archipelago, Summaries of the State of the People at Different Periods, Their Maritime Operations, Commerce, Literature, and Political Progress. For Schools and Families* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1853) 620.

19. Edward Martin Allen, “Nicholas Bownde and the Context of Sunday Sabbatarianism.” Ph.D Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology, 2008, page 1. See Christopher Hill, *Society & Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1967), 213–218, 496, 501–511. Compare with Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 227–228, 300–303. “Even after the Restoration, the Puritan Sabbath remained a part of English life...” Louis B. Weeks, “The Scriptures and Sabbath Observance in the South,” *Journal of Presbyterian History*, vol. 59, No. 2 (Summer 1981): 268.

20. There was not a ban against writing in favor of Puritan

business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.^{q14}

LC Q. 119. *What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are, all omissions of the duties required,^s all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them;^t all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful;^u and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.^{w15}

SC Q. 60. *How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?*

A. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days;^b and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship,^c except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.^{d16}

SC Q. 61. *What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?*

A. The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.^{e17}

AFTER THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

After the turmoil of the English Civil War, and the subsequent persecutions of the Restoration (which had brought about the Great Ejection in England of Nonconformists and the hounding of Covenanters during the “Killing Times” in Scotland), the Glorious Revolution brought an end to the absolute autocracy of the Stuarts and ended the threat of a Roman Catholic monarchy. And despite the debauchery of Charles II which seemed to be also reflected to at least some extent in a populace eager to throw off the yoke of Puritan piety,¹⁸ Sabbatarianism “survived the Commonwealth and continued to thrive after the restoration.”¹⁹

During the reign of the latter Stuarts, strict Sabbath laws continued against unnecessary labors, and while attempts to reinstate laws against Sabbath recreations languished, there was no attempt to resurrect the Book of Sports. Laudian anti-sabbatarianism was dead, and Nonconformist and Conformist ministers alike bemoaned the carelessness of many and defended stricter observance of the Lord's Day.²⁰ Even the preaching of

Stuart loyalist Matthew Bryan (d. 1699), who would lead a Jacobean congregation after the Glorious Revolution, could pass as a paraphrase of Nicholas Bownd's Sabbatarianism. Touting the benefit of observing the Lord's Day, Bryan exhorted toward the close of a sermon published in 1686,

This is the day of feasting and banqueting for the Soul. . . . This is the Souls treasuring, it's enriching day. It lays up Treasures where neither Moth nor Rust do corrupt, and where Theives cannot break through and steal. Now the Soul is enriching it self, growing rich towards God. Now is her attiring day, wherein she buys and puts on her glorious Robes; the white Robe, the Upper Garment of her Saviour's Righteousness, and those inner Linings of inherent Holiness. These she now buys and puts on, that she may be in a readiness to meet the Bridegroom.

And this is the Market-day for the buying of this Provision, this spiritual Food and Rayment, and the getting of these Riches. *Ho, every one that thirsteth* (so runs the Royal Style of that gracious Proclamation, *Isa.* 55.1.) *Come ye to the water, and he that hath no money, come buy Wine and Milk without money and without price.* And *Rev.* 3.18. *I counsel thee to buy of me Gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white rayment that thou mayest be clothed, and the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.* And he that neglects the opportunity on the Market day for the buying of this Provision for his Soul (for the other days of the Week are taken up in making provision for the Body, in getting temporal food, and rayment, and riches) he, I say, that lets slip the opportunity on the Market day for the buying of this Provision for his Soul, this spiritual food and rayment, and the getting of these riches, when, or how will he buy and get them? How can he expect that his Soul should be nourished to eternal Life? How can he be but wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked?²¹

Earlier in his sermon Bryan excoriated those who neglected and profaned the day,

First. Some there are that keep no Sabbath at all, as the Atheist and prophane Worldling. There are a sort of men who sufficiently declare themselves to be Atheists and Mammonists, who fear not to deny God his due, who have no manner of sense of duty, which they owe to the Lords day, but purposely and designedly oppose, and slight, and prophane it. If they have any business to do, any visit to make, not out of Charity but

complement; any journey to go, any Accounts to make up, any Letters to write, or the like; God's day must be the time for't; tho it might be confessedly as well done on any other day of the week, no necessity compelling. Yea when no business offers, they will frame excuses to keep 'em from God's house, either they must sleep, or play, or drink, or talk, or walk away the time, which others devoutly spend in the publick Service of God, and preparing themselves for another World. Nothing so irksome and tiresome as what God Commands; no time so lies upon hand as on that day; they know not what to do; they are weary of themselves and of the time, and study for some diversion or other, and blame the lingring time, and wish and say with those in the Prophet, *When will the Sabbath be over, that we may set forth Corn, that we may be at our traffick and Trades again?* And if they are prevail'd with by some de-vouter Neighbour, or an argument *ab inutili & damno*, which the Law presents them upon total neglect to go to the house of God, how tedious and burdensome is the time there? What an insipid tasteless thing is the Service of God? How do they tacitely chide the slow-pac'd sands in the Preachers Glass, and grow angry with him if he exceeds his hour, when the time spent on sports, and pleasures, and business of the World is thought too swift of foot? An hour spent at a Sermon, yea and upon God's day too, is thought too long, when a play of three or four hours is done too soon. If this is not an evidence of an Atheistical and worldly spirit I know not what is. Is this the Character of a man that fears and

Sabbatarianism. Puritan works were published such as Richard Baxter's *The Divine Appointment of the Lord's Day Proved...* (1671); James Durham's *The law unsealed: or, A practical exposition of the Ten Commandments* (London: 1675), and John Owen's *Exercitations concerning the name, original, nature, use, and continuance of a day of sacred rest ...* (London: R.W. for Nath. Ponder, 1671). Conformists decried Sabbath recreations as much as Nonconformists. After worship, the "looser sort ... think they have fully discharged the Office of good Religious Christians, if they sanctify the Lord's-Day, as they celebrate other Holy-Days; that is, by resting from their ordinary Callings, frequenting the Morning-Prayer (to attend Evensong is a work of Supererogation) and trifling away the remainder in pass-times..." John Smith, rector of St. Mary's, Colchester, *The Doctrine of the Church of England, concerning the Lord's Day, or Sunday-Sabbath as it is laid down in the liturgy, catechism, and book of homilies* (1683), preface. Posthumous works by conformists Hopkins and Leighton also took a Puritan stance with regard to Sabbath recreations (Robert Leighton, *An Exposition of the Creed, of the Lord's Prayer, and Ten Commandments* [1701]; Ezekiel Hopkins, *An Exposition on the Ten Commandments* [1692]).

21. Matthew Bryan, *A perswasive to the stricter observation of the Lords day in pursuance of His Majesties pious order and directions to preachers particularly about the observation of the Lord's day* (1686), 30–31.

loves the honour of God? What and delight in nothing less, shun his company, and fly from his presence, and avoid Communion with him, and break his Laws and sacrilegiously rob him of his just dues: which the Prophet *Malachy* wonders at *Mal.* 3.8, *Will a man rob God? Will he rob God that made him, and governs him, and that has power to bless or to curse him, to save or to destroy him. This is a thing was never heard of amongst the most barbarous and Idolatrous, whomsoever they rob, they will not rob their God.*

The primitive Christians I am sure abhor'd such sacrilege. But O how unlike the Primitive sanctity is the practice of this sacrilegious Age, this perverse and adulterous generation? *They* made it their meat and drink to do the Will of God, *they* would not be absent for a World from the publick Assemblies of the Saints on the Lords day, unless invincible necessity did hinder, and would not depart thence without the *Christian viaticum*, without the heavenly *Repaſt and Banquet*, the Communion of the *Body and Blood* of their dear Lord.

Thus they kept the Sabbath indeed not doing their own but the Work of God, and call'd, and accounted *the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and did honour him, not doing their own ways, nor finding their own pleasures, nor ſpeaking their own Words.* But at what lame, and deficient, and prepoſterous rate do the generality of Christians now keep the day? They keep it very well, if to keep it be to break it, if to ſanctifie it be to prophane it, if to observe and honour it, be to slight and pollute it. They keep it very well who ſeldome or never attend the publick Worſhip, and are as careleſs of private Duties; they keep it very well indeed who never receiv'd the Sacrament in their lives, or at leaſt observe it as a Paſseover Feaſt in the trueſt Notion of it, as to the time, *i.e.* once in a year; and that to ſtill the clamours of the Law and their Conſciences, not being

mov'd from a principle of Love to their Redeemer, to *do this in remembrance of him*; not at all affected with what *St. Paul* insinuates and recommends in these Words, *as often as ye eat this Bread and drink this Cup, ye do ſhew the Lords Death till he come*, but

Secondly, There are others that are partial Observers of the day, who think it their duty to go to Church and be present at divine Service, and attend the publick Ordinances and performances (and in that they do well, and are to be commended, and I wish there were more that did so) but then they think that the duty of the day is over; they take little care to prepare themselves or their Families before they go to Church, and as little when they come from thence, that they may digeſt what they have heard and receiv'd there, by Catechizing, Examining, Meditation, Conference, reading, ſinging of Psalms, and Prayer; which are the private and Domeſtick duties of the day. The Sabbath muſt be our *delight*, on which we muſt not *think our own thoughts, nor ſpeak our own words, nor do our own Works, nor find our own Pleaſures*, that is, we muſt forbear and withdraw our minds and affections, from ſuch ſtudies and employments upon that day, whereby the ſame might be polluted or prophaned. It muſt be ſacred to God, and be ſpent in his ſervice, and in Spiritual Communion with him; which is to be promoted not only by publick, but private Duties.²²

While there was clearly ſtill much amiſs, yet, even in the early part of the reign of Charles II, a traveler from France could note,

There is no kingdom wherein Sunday is better obſerved than in England; for, ſo far from ſelling things on that day, even the carrying of water for the houſes is not permitted; nor can any one play at bowls or any other game, or even touch a muſical inſtrument, or ſing aloud in his own houſe, without incurring the penalty of a fine.²³

The attitude toward Sabbath recreations continued deſpite the inability Parliament had reauthorizing the laws that had been on the books during the Commonwealth. Under William III and Mary II a renewed intereſt in ſuppreſſing public recreations ſurfaced at leaſt in new laws given for governing Ireland, where apparently the problem was more ſignificant. In reſpect to the colonies, while Sabbatarianism already characterized much of New England, dating back before the New Haven “Blue Laws” of 1665 to the firſt Virginia law of 1610, the late ſeventeenth century

22. Matthew Bryan, *A perſwaſive to the ſtricter obſervation of the Lords day*, 20–22.

23. Albert Jouvin, de Rochefort, *Le Voyageur d'Europe; où ſont les Voyages de France, d'Italie et de Maltrre, d'Eſpagne et de Portugal, des Pays-Bas, d'Allemagne et de Pologne, d'Angleterre, de Danemark et de Suède: Par Monsieur A. Jouvin, de Rochefort: Dedié à Monsieur de Pomponne, Sécrétaire d'Eſtat* (Paris: 1672), cited in Henry Buckle (citing *The Antiquarian* who miſtates the author as Jorevin de Rocheford), *Miscellaneous and Poſthumous Works*, 3 vols. (London: 1872), 220. Cf. *The Antiquarian Repertory: A Miscellaneous Asſemblage of Topography, Hiſtory, Biography, Cuſtoms, and Manners...* volume 4 (London, 1809), 573. Jouvin's travels probably date to the year 1666. Cf. Corpus of Electronic Texts Edition: T100075. Albert Jouvin, *Description of England and Ireland under the Reſtoration*. <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/T100075/text001.html> (accessed Auguſt 25, 2015).

statutes governed the colonies until the American Revolution.²⁴

THE UNITED STATES AND DECLINE OF SABBATH OBSERVANCE

While the original colonies which became states in the new American nation more or less kept blue laws in place,²⁵ the doctrine and practice of the Christian Sabbath was challenged by the country's growing modernization, industrialization and urbanization, as well as by the broadening diversity brought by immigration.²⁶ With the country's westward expansion throughout the nineteenth century new states tended to be less stringent about Sunday closings and state populations with higher percentages of immigrants tended to have less stringent blue laws.²⁷ Nationally, the new federal government sparked an ongoing controversy over Sunday mail that would last for much of the country's first century.²⁸ For a century from the mid-nineteenth century, the observance of the Christian Sabbath would decline away from the Puritan concept of it.²⁹ European Protestant and Catholic immigrants brought with them their "Continental Sabbath," with looser attitudes toward leisure activities after Sunday services, particularly team sports.³⁰ The growing prosperity and advent of modern means of transportation such as the bike and later the automobile, fostered the growth of weekend commerce to meet the demands and desires of the populace, and anti-Sabbatarian movements pushed to "open up Sunday" to commerce and leisure activities.³¹

By the latter part of the nineteenth century the twentieth century's motto of living or working for the weekend had its start in holidayism. An entry in Seventh Day Baptist publication *The Outlook* for October 1884, in relating the history of the decline of Lord's Day observance, noted "Sunday holidayism, as opposed to Sunday Sabbathism, is rapidly increasing among all classes." The article particularly faulted the liquor trade, where along with other commercial enterprises, Sunday commerce made up half the sales of the entire week.³² A contemporary defender of the first day Christian Sabbath, Wilbur Crafts, posited the question,

Will the coming man keep the Sabbath? If so, will it be his holiday or his holy day? Will Scotland's Sabbath displace the Continental Sunday, or be displaced by it? Will New England's restful and worshipful Sabbath extend its leaven at last to the Pacific coast, or will

Cincinnati's convivial and commercial Sunday cyclone its way to the Atlantic?³³

This decline from Sabbatarianism did not occur without resistance. Lord's Day societies were formed, and each controversy brought new rounds of Sabbath

24. *Blue Laws*, 8, 29, 30. Charles II, "An Act for the better observation of the Lord's Day [1677]," in William David Evans, *A Collection of Statutes Connected with the General Administration of the Law...* in ten volumes (London: Thomas Blenkarn, 1836) 7:513. "A statute of the 7th of William III, chap. xvii, for Ireland, 1695, forbade general work, and specified many boisterous games, which seem to have been very prevalent. Traveling was also forbidden." Abram Herbert Lewis, *Sunday Legislation: Its History to the Present Time and Its Result* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1902), 111. See the Irish statute in Archibald John Stephens, *The Statutes Relating to the Ecclesiastical and Eleemosynary Institutions of England, Wales, Ireland, India, and the Colonies* (London: John W. Parker, West Strand, 1845), 655.

25. *Blue Laws*, 29–37.

26. Alexis McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday* (Cornell University Press, 2000), 37, 49. An essay published just prior to the American Civil War "contrasted native-born Americans' regard for Sunday—as a day of rest, of religious exercise, and of abstinence from labor and public diversions of every kind—with that of the 'natives of Continental Europe,' who dared to make it 'a day of pleasure, recreation, and enjoyment.'" *American Sunday*, 43.

27. *Blue Laws*, 48. William Baker, *Playing with God: Religion and Modern Sport* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2007), 154–155.

28. Post offices would only close for business beginning in 1912. *American Sunday*, 22–26. Wayne Edison Fuller writes of the Sunday mail controversy begun in 1810, "Keeping the Sabbath was a practice that Americans from Maine to Georgia had inherited from their Protestant forebears. Observed as a day set aside for rest and worship, it was also enforced with varying degrees of rigidity by state and local laws." Wayne Edison Fuller, *Morality and the Mail in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 1.

29. Weeks, "The Scriptures and Sabbath Observance in the South," 267.

30. Sabbatarianism "was most certainly a battle between native-born and foreign-born Americans..." and "the retention of the traditional Sabbath was decidedly a Protestant—not Catholic—concern." "European immigrants forced the issue. As Polish, Lithuanian, and Italian immigrants dominated the coal-mining towns in the Pennsylvania anthracite district, it was no coincidence that Sunday minor league baseball flourished there long before it was accepted in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh." "Early in the nineteenth century, a Protestant student at Georgetown University reported to a distant friend that Catholic officials and students at Georgetown entertained the strange notion that it was 'no harm to play Ball, Draughts or play the Fiddle and dance of a Sunday.'" Baker, *Playing with God*, 154, 155, 295–296.

31. McCrossen, "Opening Up Sunday," 65–78.

32. *The Outlook and Sabbath Quarterly*, III, No. 2 (Oct. 1884): 41.

33. Wilbur F. Crafts, *The Sabbath for Man: A Study of the Origin, Obligation, History, Advantages and Present State of Sabbath Observance, with Special References to the Rights of Working Men, Based on Scripture, Literature, and Especially on a Symposium of Correspondence with Persons of All Nations and Denominations* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1885), 9. The city council of Cincinnati had circumvented state laws to close the Saloons and other commercial

literature and movements for stricter blue laws to curb the excesses.³⁴ However, the movement was broad based and influenced by anti-Puritanism and progressivism which focused more on the day as a day off for laboring mankind, than on the day as a day of worship in which we rest in order to worship God.³⁵

PRESBYTERIANS FOR THE LORD'S DAY

Amongst the Christians who took up the defense of the sanctity of the Lord's Day, none were more vocal

establishments on Lord's Days. The lawyer for the saloons had routinely corrupted the jury process to find in favor of his clients. Subsequently, through this same illicit influence a clearly guilty client was found innocent of a murder charge, which resulted in the riots of 1884 where hundreds were injured and 50 people murdered. *Ibid.*, 112–113.

34. McCrossen, 23, 27.

35. See the Overview in Frank J. Smith, "Politics, International Relations, and the Sabbath: The 1915 International Lord's Day Congress," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 12 (2016): 126–129.

36. See the various and many publications of the doctrinal standards of the ARP, RPCNA, UPCNA, PCUS and PCUSA published from 1789 through the last century. For a general idea of the uniformity of belief and practice of various American Presbyterians see: Samuel Miller, "Introductory Essay, in *A manual on the Christian Sabbath: embracing a consideration of its perpetual obligation, change of day, utility, and duties*, by John Holmes Agnew (Philadelphia: Key & Biddle, 1834, © 1833), pp. i–xlx, and "The Most Suitable Name for the Christian Sabbath," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, 8.1 (January 1836): 64–73; Charles Hodge (PCUSA; Old School), *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (1873), 321–348; James R. Wilson (Reformed Presbyterian Church), *The Sabbath: a discourse on the duty of civil government, in relation to the sanctification of the Lord's day* (1829); Robert Lewis Dabney (PCUS), *The Christian Sabbath: Its Nature, Design and Proper Observance* (1882); Albert Barnes (PCUSA; New School), Sermon IX, The Sabbath, in *Practical Sermons for Vacant Congregations* (1841), 283; John M. Mason (ARP) "Divine Judgments," in *Works* (1849), 3.63; *Digest of the Principal Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of North America from 1859 to 1902* (United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1903), CXIV. Sabbath, 246–251.

37. In 1881 there was a case brought by a presbytery against a minister for traveling by train on Lord's Days for preaching engagements. *A Digest of the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1861–1965* (Atlanta, Ga.: Office of the General Assembly, 1966), 294–295. In 1893 there was a case against a woman who worked in a telegraph office on the Lord's Day. While the judgment of the presbytery was ultimately overturned for heavy handedness and for not following proper procedure, the General Assembly deemed it prudent "to reaffirm its immutable conviction as to the universal and perpetual obligation to remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy." *PCUS Digest*, 303–304. See also the three pastoral letters prefacing this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*, and the article "Southern Presbyterian Sabbatarianism," pp. 27–39.

38. The PCUS was originally named the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (PCCSA).

than the Presbyterians, who have always advocated for Lord's Day observance as taught in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. These standards were the creedal doctrinal statements for all Presbyterians in the United States, and thus Puritan Sabbatarianism is part of Presbyterianism's DNA no matter the flavor. Strict Sabbatarianism characterized Covenanter and non-Covenanter, Associate, United, New Side, Old Side, New School and Old School, Southern (PCUS) and Northern (PCUSA).³⁶

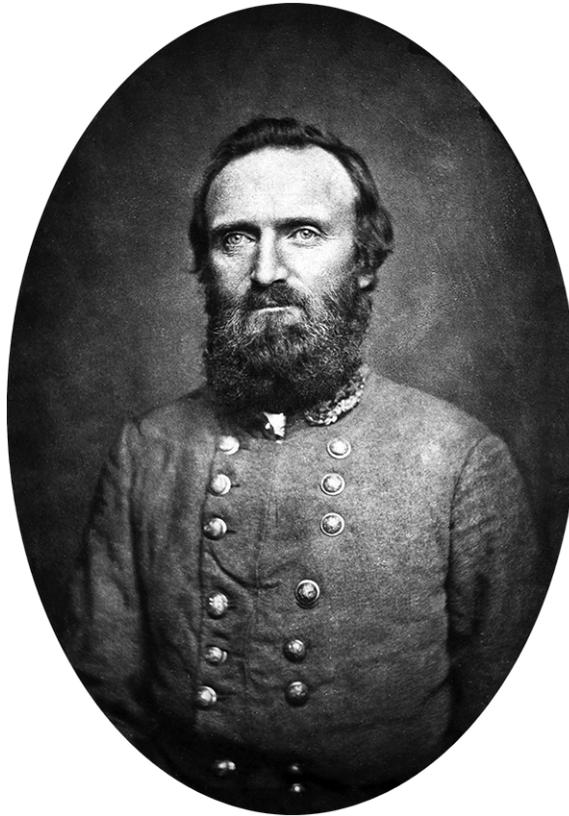
THE WITNESS OF THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), while not as active in the political sphere as other denominations because of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church to which the Southern Church tenaciously held, nevertheless not only maintained the Presbyterian doctrine of the Christian Sabbath in deliverances to her congregants and through judicial cases,³⁷ but even ventured to make the occasional appeal to the civil magistrate.

In 1862 Southern Presbyterian family members serving as soldiers in the Confederate army,³⁸ were addressed in a pastoral letter from the first General Assembly regarding the Lord's Day.

The desecration of the holy Sabbath is another crying sin of our land, which we fear abounds in our army. We are aware that this is a matter which is not wholly under your control. But we would guard you against the prevailing tendency to trample down the barriers of religion which surround that sacred day and its consecrated objects, and would entreat you to remember it in its true spirit so far as you possibly can in your present circumstances. You are denied, for the most part, the regular Services of Sabbath worship which you enjoyed at home, but still you have the Holy Bible, or New Testament — you have a throne of grace — sometimes you attend religious worship, and God is everywhere present. As you stand in the constant presence of death, make the Sabbath day, as far as possible, an occasion of preparation for it. And be encouraged by the fact that God's people are every where engaged in solemn and earnest supplication for you. Thus the Sabbath will prove a blessing and you will avert from your heads the wrath of God that comes on the land, because of the dishonor we, as a people, have placed on the day which He calls His own. Therefore, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." (*PCCSA Minutes* {1862}, 37).

Also, acting on an overture from the Presbytery of Tuscaloosa requesting that General Assembly “memorialise the Congress, or the President of the Confederate States to require our military officers to have the Sabbath respected and observed as a day of rest and religious exercises,” the 1862 Assembly sent a letter to the President of the Confederacy regarding Sabbath desecration, and urged that he ensure the day’s sanctification and “do away with dress parades, inspections, reviews, or unnecessary movements of troops on the Sabbath, and also to see that the officers shall not interfere with the observance of religious services, but on the contrary, afford all proper facilities for the same” (*PCCSA Minutes* (1862), 16). The next



In 1863 the PCCSA General Assembly spread on the minutes a letter against Sunday mail delivery from the late General Stonewall Jackson, who was a deacon in the Presbyterian church in Lexington.

year the Assembly approved a resolution against mail delivery on the Lord’s Day and spread on the minutes a letter of the recently deceased General “Stonewall” Jackson on the subject (*PCCSA Minutes* {1863}, 144–145).

The 1865 General Assembly exhorted in a pastoral letter to their congregations, “Try to do good in a Saviour’s church and a world of sin. Let piety be shown at home; let the Holy Sabbath be indeed a day for God, and let your children be trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (*PCUS Minutes* {1865}, 388). And in another letter to their congregations the Assembly of 1871 delivered a “Narrative on the State of Religion,” noting that “Outside of the Church, the sins of Sabbath-breaking, profaneness, and intemperance, are rife in many places” (*PCUS Minutes* {1871}, 42). In 1878, in another “narrative,” the Assembly again noted the “deplorable desecration of the Sabbath.”

Also at the 1878 PCUS General Assembly, the overtures committee, which included R. L. Dabney amongst its members, produced a paper in response to an overture out of Savannah Presbytery and correspondence received from the International Sabbath Association of New York calling for a concerted Christian effort

against public transit on the Sabbath. The committee’s paper called for the formation of a permanent committee for Sabbath observance to facilitate communications toward such efforts. The Assembly approved the paper which went on to admonish,

This Assembly faithfully admonishes all its pastors, officers and people against overt breaches of the Sabbath law ordained by the Lord Jesus Christ for all dispensations and times; and especially: That it is their positive and personal duty to clear their own skirts of all complicity with these sins, by refraining from Sunday travel upon Sabbath-breaking railroad trains, steamers, &c., and to refrain, as far as their knowledge may enable them, from committing to them any goods or commodities for transport on the Lord’s day.³⁹

Through this committee the PCUS along with the PCUSA helped to form the ecumenical American Sabbath Union in 1888, which became the Lord’s Day Alliance in 1908. The group’s goal “was to make Sunday a national day of rest through exhortation and political action,”⁴⁰ and in 1914 after two decades the PCUSA could tout significant success on the political front.

During these twenty-three years, notwithstanding the inroads upon the Sabbath, largely through the immigration of foreigners and the growth of commercialism among our own people, there have been marked advances.

39. *PCUS Minutes* (1878), 641–643. The 1878 permanent committee did its work until 1923 when it was subsumed under the Executive Committee on Publication and Sabbath School Work. Overtures were made in 1927 and 1928 to reconstitute the permanent committee which was finally done in 1931, only to be abolished for good in the reorganization of agencies of the assembly in 1949. *PCUS Digest*, 237–239.

40. Benton Johnson, “On Dropping the Subject,” 95.

Then, comparatively few of the States had Sabbath laws; to-day, forty-seven out of the forty-eight States in our Union have Sabbath laws on their statute books. The only exception is the fair State of California. Never has the attention of the Christian people been more faithfully directed to the need of the proper observance of the Lord's Day. Never have the legislators, State and National, been so open to the protests of the friends of the Sabbath against all weakening of the Sabbath laws; and never have the officers of the law been so ready to act on the requests of the Sabbath organizations to enforce the Sabbath laws. Never were the captains of industry and employers of labor so willing to listen to the needs of labor, as urged by the Sabbath organizations, to accord to their employees the divine right of one day in seven for rest and worship.⁴¹

THE PCUS SABBATH COMMITTEE REPORTS, 1878–1949

As for the PCUS, from 1878 to the advent of the First World War, and for periods until 1949, the General Assembly issued many statements dealing with Sabbath issues in addition to regular reports of her permanent Sabbath committee. These reports form a significant body of material underscoring a concern for the observance of the Lord's Day even while the denomination declined slowly and steadily away from sound doctrine and practice.

1890S–WWI

In 1891 in their "narrative" for that year, the PCUS General Assembly noted,

The observance of the Sabbath, as commanded in God's Holy Word, is another duty that devolves upon every child of God; and we find among professing Christians an outward observance of this solemn duty that is commendable. But we also find a sad lack on the part of many as to the spirit of the law. Too many professing Christians read secular papers on God's day, and especially the morning papers, and so till and saturate their minds with worldly things that they are in no condition to feed upon gospel truth. Some indulge in walking, visiting,

riding, and even the use of public conveyances, to their own spiritual hurt and the dishonor of Christ. Too many see no harm in going to the post-office and getting their mail, and even reading business letters. God's word repeatedly and faithfully condemns all such use of his holy day, and we, as his servants, should most carefully heed these warnings, and try to conform to this law of God in respect to Sabbath observance. It is God's day, and we have no right, under any pretext, except for works of necessity and mercy, to use any portion of it for our own pleasure or amusement; and Christians who disregard this law not only dishonor God, but harm their own souls, and set a bad and pernicious example to others. (*PCUS Minutes* {1891}, 265).

The permanent committee on the Sabbath wrote in their report for this same year,

The Permanent Committee on the Sabbath would report to the Assembly that nothing has occurred during the past year to effect any great change in the status of the Sabbath question, or to require us to modify in the least degree the utterances in our last report. The reports from the Presbyteries, as far as we have been able to gather them, have been tinged, as last year, with the same expressions of fear, if not of deep-seated conviction, as to the continual trend of sentiment, as well as practice in the direction of a greater disregard for the authority and sanctity of the day. Whilst a few of the Presbyteries report manifest improvement, and quite a number that our own people are generally yielding an outward obedience to the requirements of the day, nearly all agree in the opinion that the general tendency of the outside world is in the direction of looser views and practices, and if not totally to disregard the authority of the day, at least to convert it into a season of recreation and pleasure, and in some places this sentiment seems to be taking hold upon the mind of even some church members. As heretofore, the Sunday train, mail and newspaper, together with the Sunday saloon, and in some places the drug-stores with their soda founts, cigar and tobacco counters, and their traffic in fancy articles, are all mentioned as special factors in the matter of deterioration. In some of the Presbyteries mention is made of desecration by base-ball games and even gunning, but more generally by social visiting, and even, in some instances by what might be termed Sunday night sociables. The old-timed fashion, too, of devoting Saturday nights to preparation for the Sabbath, seems also to be passing away, as we hear of marriage festivals, as well as other entertainments, given on that, as well as

41. PCUSA, *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, New Series, volume xiv, August, 1914* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1914), 219. The progressive activism of the PCUSA appears to dominate here; at least the focus on physical rest and worship instead of the Puritan understanding of rest in order to worship, may forecast the embracing of the day as more of a family day than a day to devote to the Lord.

other evenings. Whilst all secular work and casual enjoyments have much to do with the matter of demoralization, we would continue to lay special emphasis, as we have done in the past, upon the Sunday train, the Sunday newspaper, and the Sunday saloon, as the chief offenders undermining the sacred authority of the day. These being all powerful agencies, permeating the whole country, and at the same time so open and bold in their defiance of divine authority, must of necessity be exerting a mighty influence in moulding public sentiment and in determining the amount of reverence that shall be paid the Sabbath of the Lord God by the people of this nation. It seems to be the growing practice of many, if not all the railroads, to give special excursion rates on Sunday, which amounts to virtually placing the road in a position of actually offering a bribe on Sunday travel, and a premium for Sabbath desecration. So also with the newspapers, they are making the Sunday edition their chief effort, and so multiplying the pages and the columns of reading matter as to occupy quite a large portion of the day. If this encroachment goes on in the same ratio in the future as in the past, it will not be very long before the paper will become, not only the rival, but also the substitute for the morning service, as it is already for the morning reading of the Scriptures. When the Sunday saloon, with its intoxicating and stupefying beverages; the Sunday trains, with their loads of excursionists and pleasure seekers, and the Sunday newspapers, with their mammoth sheets filled with business notices, society gossip, thrilling adventures and criminal reports, shall be substituted for the services of the sanctuary, then what is to become of the Christian Sabbath, and how much of it left to its Divine author, who claims the whole day as emphatically his own? (*PCUS Minutes* {1891}, 280–281).

In 1893, the Assembly reaffirmed all her prior deliverances regarding the Lord's Day (*PCUS GA Digest*, 239), and in 1894 the Sabbath committee again expressed concern about Sunday games which had become a great evil of the day, and about new moves to open museums and other venues on the Lord's Day.⁴² At the 1895 General Assembly held in the First Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas, the committee reported,

A general survey of the field shows a down-grade movement. Sunday travel and traffic seem to be on the increase, and there is no abatement of the evil of the Sunday secular newspaper. The perils from the attractions of Sunday amusements demand increased vigilance and concert of action. Never was there greater

need of prayer for help, in view of the dangers threatening the holy Sabbath. The growing tendency on the part of Christians to admit the secular spirit into their homes is to be deplored. Special obligations rest upon God's people to preserve the Christian Sabbath as a day of rest and worship, and to set a right example in this respect before the world. The loose practices of professing Christians, and their disregard of the principles regulating the observance of the Sabbath, are giving constant encouragement to the desecration of God's holy day by non-professors. (*PCUS Minutes* {1895}, 427–428).

While there were bright spots,⁴³ the minutes and reports from 1896 through 1901 report a steady drift "toward utter disregard" of the Lord's Day and a growing "evil within our bounds" (*PCUS Minutes* {1899}, 429; {1901}, 63). Even while there were successes with the passage of blue laws in respect to businesses and commerce on Lord's Days, the 1902 PCUS report makes clear what the real problem was:

Your Committee on the Sabbath received the report of the Permanent Committee on the Sabbath, Dr. James Stacy, chairman, and several reports of Presbyteries, which came direct to the General Assembly. We beg leave to submit that these reports present a more gloomy view of Sabbath observance than heretofore. The Sabbath is gradually losing its hold on the heart and conscience of the people in general. The strict views and practices of our fathers in the church are largely modified by the too lax faith and practice of our members today.

On the one hand, the question of the Sabbath day, and its observance is vital to national, social and religious life; on the other hand, we find that only a general interest is manifested in this subject. This is the sad condition of our church today, this church whose history has been made glorious because of its Sabbath-loving and observing people.

The reports indicate that nothing is being done in our

42. "The desecration of the holy Sabbath by games of 'base-ball' has assumed such proportions that it has become one of the great crying evils of the day, while Sunday excursions and other forms of entertainment and pleasure-seeking on that day are rapidly on the increase; and now it is proposed in the larger cities to add museums and art galleries on pretence of elevating the masses. The Assembly would enter its solemn protest against all these forms of Sabbath desecration." *PCUS Minutes* (1894), 243.

43. One bright spot was the new freedom for local communities to vote to close post offices on Sundays. *PCUS Minutes* (1896), 614, 639.

church to arrest the mighty tide of evil against this day, beyond the ordinary testimony of our ministers and a few of the members, for the rightful use of the day, and against its desecration. There is no evidence that our ministers, God's "watchmen on the walls of Zion," are lifting up their voices and sparing not in warning, instruction and rebuke. The leaven of the worldly profanation of this day is surely at work in the church, and a compromise on the Sabbath obtains, when, in the nature of the case, there should be no compromise.

It is of general information that our State Sabbath laws are sufficiently explicit and direct to break up much of Sabbath desecration, but public sentiment in and out of the church is too weak to demand that these laws be enforced. Hence great corporations and humble citizens, the highest law-making body of the land, and officers of the law, persistently transgress the law of the Sabbath day. Traffic and travel, trade and amusements, reading of secular newspapers and books, are the ordinary forms of the sin of Sabbath-breaking.

But there is a bright side to this question. All the denominations are seriously considering the best ways and means of protecting this holy day. There are great interdenominational movements along this line. Sabbath leagues are being organized throughout our country; laboring classes are beginning to realize that the Sabbath as a day of rest belongs to them, and there is a growing demand for the enjoyment of this right; in cases of Sabbath traffic and travel certain railroad presidents and high officials have declared that neither is necessary, and that their abolishment by the company would be a stroke of economy; the agitation of this question is spreading far and near; these are a few of the signs pointing in the direction of a great Sabbath reform. (*PCUS Minutes* {1902} 274-275).

The next year, in 1903, the committee noted not much had changed and there was a steady "secularization of the Sabbath," and bolder enemies regularly attacking the institution. The committee reported

If something is not done to arrest more successfully the encroachments which are being made upon the sanctity of the Sabbath, it will be a question of a short time only when the Sabbath, which is now a rich heritage to us, will exist only in name.

That such statements are not an exaggeration of condition nor the fancy of a sordid imagination may be

seen in the fact that Sunday excursions are becoming more numerous and more frequent with each passing year. Indulgence in all kinds of games, both indoor and outdoor, in many places is the rule, and not the exception. Sunday dinners have almost ceased to excite comment or wonder.

The Sunday newspaper, with its coarse and vulgar pictures in almost every case and low grade of corrupt and corrupting reading matter, has pervaded the whole land, and is read by countless and increasing multitudes.

With these and many other similar evils staring us in the face, we beg leave to submit, as other committees have done before us, that the time has come when greater and more active efforts should be put forth by the church of Jesus Christ, to the end that under the blessing of Almighty God the Sabbath may be restored to her time honored and divinely appointed place.....

That we may have a more definite plan before us, we submit that this Assembly reapprove four of the recommendations of the Sabbath Committee of the last Assembly, which are as follows:

1. That our ministers be urged to keep this subject constantly before the people, and that frequent prayer be made in public for the full restoration of this day, with its sacred rites and privileges.
2. That our members be exhorted to keep this day holy according to the teaching of God's word, abstaining from all forms of Sabbath desecration; and that they may build up, in every way possible, a healthy public sentiment on the subject.
3. That every session be urged to take up the question of Sabbath observance, and take such steps as will bring the question home to the minds and hearts of the members of the church.
4. That each Presbytery hold a popular service for the consideration of this subject. (*PCUS Minutes* {1903}, 500-502).

The next several years the concerns remained the same regarding commerce on Sundays and making it "a day of self-indulgence and pleasure-seeking." The "picture as a whole" was a dark one (*PCUS Minutes* {1906} 29; {1907} 35). The 1908 report of the committee, which had been renamed the Committee on the Sabbath and

Family Religion, is perhaps telling. The standing committee had received no report from the permanent committee from which to do any work.

No report from the Assembly's Permanent Committee has come into our hands. The chairman, Rev. W. L. Lingle, D.D., did not receive notification of his appointment as chairman of this committee until overwhelmed with the duties of two other Assembly committees, and was therefore forced to let this work pass. Your committee has been handicapped because nothing has come into its hands on which to base a report, either from the Permanent Committee or from presbyteries....

1. The Sabbath.—This is God's day and not our own. It means all that it ever meant as a day of rest from worldly cares and avocations, of the worship of God and the study of the scriptures.

Since our Lord's resurrection and his gift of the Holy Spirit, this day stands for the victory of our all-conquering Lord and King over sin and death. But our hearts of unbelief and the fact that many business enterprises, as the daily newspapers, with their Sunday editions, the railroads, telegraph, telephone, etc., know no rest day in the seven, enterprises which have commended themselves to the masses—these hearts of unbelief on the one hand have suffered these and other tempting businesses, on the other, in large degree, to lessen the regard of the masses for this holy day. Great interests have pressed upon us....

The 1908 report went on to warn that Satan's "fiercest assault is against the Sabbath, because it stands and has stood for the ages past the weekly token of the resurrection of Jesus. If he can get our minds away from that vital and glorious fact, or if he can weaken our faith in Jesus' resurrection, he is hastening to the awful end he has in view. It is impossible for us to despise or even slightly esteem a symbol without thinking less of the thing symbolized. Hence, in all sorts of plausible ways the devil is seeking to increase our disregard of this holy day." (*PCUS Minutes* {1908}, 42).

The next year the committees were able to do work but the picture was darker, as they reported there was "a large and growing neglect of religion in our homes." And as to the Sabbath, the committee echoing the previous year's report, wrote

I. The Sabbath.—The Church of God is called to

contend in our day against a strong and growing current, both in the world and in the Church, against any strict observance of the day as one to be entirely devoted to God and his worship. Hence it is necessary that the Assembly should continually bear its testimony to the Sabbath and to its supreme importance in maintaining godliness in the world. Again, therefore, the Assembly would remind our people that the Sabbath is God's ordinance, to the observance of which he attaches very great importance. The Sabbath, containing as it does, in itself the doctrine of God's supreme right to rule in this world, and of Christ's triumph over death, has always been and is now God's battle-flag amid the sinful rebellions of earth. Devotion to the Sabbath is therefore an expression and test of our allegiance to God. Therefore we earnestly exhort all our people, and especially our Ministers and Elders, that this day be kept holy unto the Lord our God. That they abstain from all use of Sabbath trains, mails and papers, the most potent means in our day for breaking down and dishonoring God's day. We would also exhort our Ministers to preach upon this subject at least once during the year, and as far as possible through local papers to press this subject upon the hearts and consciences of God's people. (*PCUS Minutes* {1909}, 34).

The concerns and prospects continued the same, the committee noting in 1910 that the enemies of the Lord's Day were on the increase, and the next year linking the vital importance of the Sabbath and family religion together, in particular warning parents "of the sinful and injurious effect of permitting or condoning the evil of their children's prostitution of the Sabbath hours in absorbing the flood of secular and of pernicious fiction which sweeps in upon us" (*PCUS Minutes* {1910}, 58; {1911}, 31). While the next year in 1912 the committee took encouragement of thousands of postal workers no longer working on the Lord's Day, it was discouragingly clear that profaning the day in pastimes and recreations had not abated, but increased (*PCUS Minutes* {1912}, 69).

The committee reports continued year by year, sometimes noting positive developments, but constantly warning about the ever growing secularization of the Lord's Day and decline of family religion.⁴⁴ With the country's entrance into the First World War, new concerns emerged along with the same old ones. In 1918 the General Assembly received overtures from presbyteries concerned about Sabbath desecration in "certain

44. See *PCUS Minutes* (1913), 126; *PCUS Minutes* (1914), 75; *PCUS Minutes* (1916), 50.

cantonments and in cities near such training camps” (*PCUS Minutes* {1918}, 55). And the previous year the committee had warned,

It is hardly necessary to say that the Sabbath and Christianity stand or fall together. If the Sabbath shall continue to be more and more given to business and amusement, spiritual values will be largely forgotten. We are face to face also with the tendency of war to destroy reverence for the Lord’s Day. Religious worship, service, and training in the home are wrought into the life of our Church. We stand or fall as a Church with our Christian homes. (*PCUS Minutes* {1917}, 38).

In 1919 in one of their longer productions, the permanent committee report forecast the fact that WWI would usher in societal changes with regard to Lord’s Day observance.

VII. Report on the Sabbath and Family Religion.
Your committee on the Sabbath and Family Religion would respectfully present the following report:

The Sabbath.

There is one great ominous fact confronting the Church today and that is, that the Lord’s day is in greater danger than at any previous time in the history of this nation. It is true, that, with the exception of California and Oregon, every State in the Union has on its statute books laws designed to protect the Sabbath; this is encouraging, but our joy in this fact is greatly tempered by the knowledge that in not one single State, so far as we can learn, are the laws adequately enforced; in some they are notoriously and openly violated with little or no protest, or interference. And also, by the knowledge that in every State the most determined efforts are now being made to destroy the Divinely-appointed day of rest.

The methods being pursued by the enemies of the day vary to suit local conditions. According to the Christian Statesman, they take the following directions: efforts to secure court decisions declaring the laws unconstitutional; attempts to persuade legislatures to repeal; to make modifications so as to place in the list of exceptions [*sic*] a greater or less number of things formerly forbidden; by degrees rendering the law a dead letter by scaring the public conscience, by weakening public protest against Sabbath desecration; by placing men in office who take no interest in the enforcement of the laws.

In 1811, Chief Justice Kent declared that this was so truly a Christian nation that to profane the name of Jesus Christ was “a gross violation of decency and good order.” This theory has been generally held ever since; and new and later emphasis was given it by Justice David J. Brewer, of the United States Supreme Court, who said, “this is a Christian nation—the morality of the country is deeply engrafted upon Christianity. The principles of Christianity are the foundations of our social and political life. It requires no judicial decision to determine this fact.”

It is to be expected of a Christian nation that it will make the will of God its supreme law. A Christian nation like an individual Christian will seek Divine favor always; and particularly in times of peculiar stress. It is, and always has been, characteristic of the Christian to draw near to God as his Shield and Helper when assailed by aggressive and determined enemies, and unusual perils were impending. And so, in early days, God encouraged Israel to rest in Him, promising that if they would submit to His will, and obey His laws, He would protect them, and they need have no fear, even though they were few in number and weak in resources, and their enemies numerous and strong. And their history stands out, clear and impressive, teaching all nations that obedience to God is life and health, and disobedience disaster and death.

As a Christian nation, then, it was to be expected that we would earnestly seek God’s favor as we entered [*sic*] into this terrible war, and would so order our civil and military activities as to hold in constant view our Christian character. And certainly it was to be expected that we would avoid any deliberate transgression of those fundamental divine regulations without which no nation can survive.

But what are the facts? Under the plea of war necessity, things were done in our great military camps which were not only violations of the laws of God, but also, in some cases, at least of the laws of the States in which the camps were located. To prove that these things were known to be wrong we have only to quote the following extract from a communication from the Chairman of the Commission on Training Camp Activities, to Dr. Edward R. Leybum, Chairman of a Committee of Orange Presbytery, who entered a protest against these things: “I feel that we shall be compelled to resort to many expedients which under ordinary circumstances might never be thought of.” Of course, such a reply was totally unsatisfactory to that

large and respectable section of our citizenship who believe that disobedience to God, and things hurtful to the Christian standard of morals, can never be justified; and least of all when the nation faces a test that may try it to the utmost.

That they did resort to “many expedients” is clearly set forth in the following exhibit of objectionable Sunday performances in the camps, gathered by the Lord’s Day Alliance of the United States, and presented to President Wilson, with an appeal for relief. Theatrical performances at Camp Meade, vaudeville and burlesque shows at Plattsburg and at Pelham Bay Naval Station, boxing exhibitions by professionals at Pelham Bay, athletic contests, football, baseball, etc., at Camp Mills. Dancing at Camp Dix and Fort Hamilton. And these things were going on while the President was saying, “If you would help the government then keep the church at the

floodtide of her spiritual power.” We greatly rejoice to record when the President was shown the conditions existing he issued that ringing order:

“The President, Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, following the reverent example of his predecessors, desires and enjoins the orderly observance of the Sabbath by the officers and men in the military and naval service of the United States. The importance for man and beast of the prescribed weekly rest, the sacred rights of Christian soldiers and sailors, a becoming deference to the best sentiment of a Christian people, and a due regard for the Divine Will demand that Sunday labor in the Army and Navy be reduced to the measure of strict necessity. Such an observance of Sunday is dictated by the best traditions of our people and by the convictions of all who look to Divine Providence for guidance and protection, and in repeating in this order the language of President Lincoln, the President is confident that he is speaking alike to the hearts

and to the consciences of those under his authority. (Signed) “Woodrow Wilson.”

But how is it possible for a Sabbath desecrating people to maintain themselves at the “flood-tide of spiritual power?” Is it not to our great discredit that such an executive order was necessary to compel the performance of those things whose voluntary observance

at such a time would be the most natural act of a Christian nation? It is certainly true that we “cannot build the American republic upon the ruins of the American Sabbath.” Bishop Sabine has well said, “When our country turns its back upon the Lord’s day, it will not be far from the grave of empires.”

It is well enough to recognize that the Sabbath desecration in our military camps was not a spontaneous manifestation without antecedent favorable conditions. The seed had been sown long before, and for decades

had been maturing in the congenial soil of neglected home training, and growing commercialization of the Lord’s day. They awaited just such conditions as the war brought about to leap into amazing activity under official sanction.

The enemies of the Lord’s day, encouraged by the countenance given them, have become bolder and more persistent in their efforts to achieve success, and are pushing the fight into every section of the country. They employ every weapon, money, falsehood, ridicule, and we must be on our guard as never before. Marshal Foch said, “no great battles are won on the defensive;” so we must not content ourselves with defending the day, we must meet the enemy more than half way and push the struggle into his territory, and happily, we have an energetic and militant auxiliary in the Lord’s Day Alliance of the United States, through whose efficient agency important battles have already been won. We must, in Christian pulpits and through the Religious Press,



train the coming generation to a larger respect for the Lord's day than have their immediate forbears [*sic*], and to hold and guard it as the priceless heritage of a liberty-loving people. If we really want a Christian Sabbath we will have to fight for it. They are not going to make us a present of it.

The greatest dangers which now beset the Lord's Day are picture shows, theatres, baseball, football, golf, Sunday excursions, and Sunday newspapers. Those who appeal for amusements on that day rest their plea upon the supposed need of the working man for recreation. They would pose as friends of the poor man. To such, Joseph Cook well says: "The enemies of Sunday in a republic are the enemies of the poor man, and of the political sanity of the community at large." It is not the poor man they are thinking of, it is the admission fee, the gate receipts, the ticket money. No one dare claim that the things found in the shows are such as tone up the immortal spirit and lift a man nearer to God. Golf is the recreation of the well-to-do. Its patrons are therefore in a position in which it is possible to exert strong influence. We are told that 150,000 caddies in this country are robbed of all opportunity to attend Sunday School and church. Add to this the large number of chauffeurs, club and green attendants, and it is an impressive exhibition of the selfishness of men who could just as easily have their sport on any other day. As for the Sunday paper, when we think of the vast army of men needed to handle and transport it, and the many thousands of boys who sell it; to say nothing of the army of men who produce it, working until three or four o'clock Sunday morning, and going home too weary to think of church or Sunday School, we have enough to condemn it without a word about its usual quality, or the thousands who stay at home to read it.

There is also a growing tendency to Sunday travel on the part of ministers, evangelists, Y. M. C. A., and Y. W. C. A. secretaries, and others in positions of Christian leadership, which ought to be checked. Many business men, in order to save their own time, steal God's time and think they are gaining something thereby. They forget that while they think they are saving, thousands are losing. Secretary Daniels, in an address last November, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Lord's Day Alliance, said, "The world has learned, even in war, that Sabbath observance is not only a Christian duty, but an industrial necessity. We have been fighting for eighteen months to guarantee the civilization of which the Nazarene was the inspiration, and any relaxation

of the observance of the Sabbath of the Christ would lessen the American morale."

We believe that "after-the-war" reconstruction work must include increased respect for the Lord's Day. And while we are in fullest sympathy with every international agreement looking toward the elimination of war, we do not believe war will ever be removed as a menace from the nations until the nations of the world learn respect for the Lord's Day...

God has ordained a trinity of safeguards for the protection of the highest interests of man; the Christian home; the Christian Church; and the Christian Sabbath; these must stand or fall together. Humanly speaking, their fate is in the hands of this generation, that is, in our hands. May God help us to face the duty, and enter upon the warfare with true Crusader's zeal.... (*PCUS Minutes* {1919} 120-124).

THE 1920S

As the PCUS entered the roaring twenties, it continued to produce annual reports until 1923. The 1920 standing committee observed "with concern the widespread desecration of the Sabbath, the general neglect of family worship, the failure of Christian parents to present their children for baptism, ... and the neglect of home training in the Scriptures and Catechisms of the Church... All of these things are so fundamental to the permanence of our civilization and free institutions, and so essential to vital Godliness, and to the continued efficiency of the Church, that we deeply deplore their neglect" (*PCUS Minutes* {1920}, 10). That year's permanent committee reported,

During the terrible days of the Great War thousands of earnest Christians were daily praying that the horrible slaughter might soon end, and the nations of the world return to pursuits of peace. The war has ended, but the nations have not returned to normal life....

Coming nearer home, what do we see? We see the lawless forces of disintegration everywhere at work. The laws are openly and flagrantly defied: human life is held so cheap that recent decisions in some of our courts make it cheaper to kill a man than to steal his property. Selfishness, greed, injustice are everywhere in evidence....

Religion is held in light esteem. The Lord's Day is

desecrated, openly desecrated, even in states on whose statute books are laws, wise and wholesome laws, sufficient if enforced to protect all who are forced to unnecessary labor. Public bodies and newspapers protest against the enforcement of these laws and thus arouse such a sentiment as makes it impossible for conscientious men to do their duty.

Our own Church, if it has any reason for existing at all, has a responsibility in this time of world need....

Let us look at the points of weakness we ourselves acknowledge.

I. The Desecration of the Sabbath

A little more than a hundred years ago, De Tocqueville made a protracted tour of the United States. On his return to France he was asked which of our institutions made the greatest impression upon him. He immediately replied, "The American Sabbath. On that day the business houses and places of amusement were all closed; fires were banked in the furnaces, hammers lay still on the anvil and it seemed as if all the people were either at home or on their way to church." What a different spectacle would greet him could he return today! In one city in the South not long since it was established by actual count that more people went into a few moving picture theatres on Sunday evening than attended all the churches in the city at the same hour. At the same time the streets were alive with automobiles, the street cars loaded, and the cold drink emporiums overflowing.

The mind of God with reference to the day is written large in the sacred Scriptures. It was established, the first sacred institution, after the creation of man. It was written into the indestructible law. Neglect of it was threatened with desolation of the land, and utter dispersion of the people.... (*PCUS Minutes* {1920}, 127-129).

In 1921 the standing committee could report some success in their efforts to spread family religion in the PCUS, the concerns for Lord's Day observance continued, and they offered the following assessment,

Unfortunately, a similar optimistic view of the Sabbath situation is not justified by the facts.

But while we note these signs of a rising tide in the family religion of our own Church, we must realize that little indeed has been attained of all that we desire, and that for the coming year increased vigilance and effort are

necessary. Conditions are most distressing in the matter of Sabbath desecration, all too prevalent in our congregations, and so nearly universal in our country at large, as to have become a mighty current, before which we find ourselves almost helpless. Many evident forces are at work to weaken the foundations of family piety and to neutralize the witness of our pulpits and of consistent Christians. Some of these are:

1. In the Great War's aftermath the unwillingness, or tardiness, of communities and individuals to rid themselves of the abnormally free and easy practices which were brought in by the Sunday sports and the recreation halls of War Camps and Communities. It seems to be the interest and intention of irreligious elements to make the excessive conditions and practices of war times the normal practice of peace times.

2. To commercialized amusements of the time, financed in alarming proportion by the avowed enemies of the Godly home and of our Protestant faith, are dependent for the floating of their stocks and the swelling of their dividends on robbing our cities of their quiet and holy Sabbath and on drawing young and old to their amusement places by sensational and depraving allurements. The moral bread of our children is taken to feed the dogs.

3. A general tide of worldliness, which came with easy money and with the rise of the irresponsible rich, unfortunately, has drawn into itself a much younger part of our population than ever before. Now the high school boy and girl know all and do all that years ago may have been known and done by their college elders. Illicit traffic in intoxicants makes our young boys the shining marks for its attacks. The public, promiscuous dance is the frequent recreation of our high school children. Just here home and Church care seems to be most indifferent. This Assembly would stir up the pure minds of Presbyteries and churches to remember the clear and explicit deliverances of other Assemblies on the dangerous drift of worldly amusements.

4. There is an alarming lack of knowledge and of appreciation of what the Sabbath and family religion mean both to our faith and to our land. It is our urgent business speedily to supply this lacking knowledge.

In view of these menacing tendencies and conditions the Assembly enjoins on our Presbyteries more serious concern for the threat to Home and Sabbath, and

the use of all possible means to overcome the attacks of shrewd, designing and greedy forces which would profiteer in the destruction of vital godliness. In addition to the ordinary aids of pulpit, Sunday School and home instruction, it is earnestly recommended that our churches use the equipped, intelligent and approved service of the Lord's Day Alliance and of the Family Altar League.

Distressed by the amazing increase of divorces and of broken homes, by the pathetic spectacle of tender childhood orphaned, not by death but by parental infidelity and civil law, so that our own land has become a reproach even in pagan lands, the Assembly urges every minister to present often and plead for the mutual duties and the Christian graces of the Bible home, and to exercise exceeding care lest by him persons be joined in holy matrimony unlawfully and contrary to the Word of God. (*PCUS Minutes* {1921}, 60–61).

The 1921 report of the permanent committee regarding the Sabbath appears to show some wavering, the committee feeling the need to warn against over strictness in observance, although it is not clear what practices were in view, and as will be seen, the following year the exhortations continue just as strong for a strict observance of the Lord's Day.

... So far as reports indicate, there were never in any year so many sermons and addresses in the interest of Sabbath observance delivered as this last year. The Sabbath question is not a simple one. The New York Sabbath Committee is at the present time prosecuting researches to discover, if possible, the influence of the weekly rest day upon man as to his mental, physical, domestic, industrial, civil and political, and religious well-being. Neither is it easy to say just how far the Church shall go in her dealing with these important relationships of the human being. That the Church should deal primarily, or exclusively with the religious side of man, most Presbyterian [*sic*] will allow; but where is the line of demarcation to be drawn? Here is where care must be taken to discriminate between what Christian men may do when speaking as a Church, and what is entirely proper for them when acting simply as individual citizens of the State.

As we see it, after seven years of close and careful examination of the question in every phase of it, and from every angle, there are two [*sic*] dangers to be guarded against. It is possible to put a strictness of construction upon the observance of the Lord's Day that is

not warranted by the Scripture. The result is to arouse antagonism, active and belligerent from many sides. Even friends of the Lord's Day, who truly seek to see the Christian Sabbath covering the land with its benign atmosphere, revolt from this unwarranted narrowness, as they understand it.

On the other hand, we have the advocates of a wide-open Sabbath who would cast aside all restraint, and make the Lord's Day the least blessed of all the days of the week. We believe that few things are more needed now than a very careful and prayerful re-study of the principles underlying the Sabbath, in order to be able to give something like definiteness to its precepts, and to enable our people to more intelligently discriminate between what is, and what is not allowable, on the Lord's Day... (*PCUS Minutes* {1921}, 150–151).

In 1922 the standing committee expressed great optimism, "that the past year has been the most satisfactory, both in work done and results obtained, that we have ever been able to report." Yet they noted they were not oblivious to the strength of the forces against Sabbath observance, and insisted the only remedy was "systematic, continuous, wise and aggressive" education of the young. These forces' "specious plea for recreation, innocent amusement, and the like deceives many good people who think superficially into a sympathy with them, which they exploit skilfully to advantage. Education in the home, in the Sunday School, and from the pulpit, is the only thing that will meet the need" (*PCUS Minutes* {1922}, 145–146). That year their report was turned into a pamphlet, "Sabbath and Family Religion," the first part of which made the following appeal,

Your Standing Committee on the Sabbath and Family Religion would respectfully urge this Assembly to lay upon the heart of each minister within its bounds, and with the largest possible emphasis, the duty and privilege of calling his people in terms of clear and compelling challenge to a rededication of the Sabbath and the home to the Service of Him who in the beginning called them into being.

This Assembly would declare its unaltered belief in the Sabbath as a Divine Institution far older than Sinai, and which must endure until time shall be no longer. "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy," proclaimed with accent divine from the midst of "the Mount that might be touched and that burned with fire," was not a new command. It was merely the redeclaration in

concise and unforgettable phrase of the great truth written upon the soul of the first man as he stood in the midst of Eden's sinless life. At Sinai, God wrote it into the heart of the Decalogue and thus linked it inseparably with those other great moral precepts that stand unchanged and changeless forever.

Its enduring character was not amended in anywise as it framed itself upon the lips of the Christ in the memorable sentence: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." The Master was merely indicating that the Fourth Commandment was, above all, "the kind commandment," and fitted perfectly into man's deep and abiding needs. The Sabbath was made for man because man was made for God, and without the Sabbath could not attain the great purpose of his creation—"to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." He rests from work that he may worship the Ruler of Heaven and earth; that wearied brain and body may be refreshed; that wasted cell and tissue may be restored; that the spirit may be lifted above the drive and drudgery of material things, and that the heart of the creature be linked anew with the heart and hand of his great and gracious Creator.

Every Sabbath breaker is, therefore, not less an enemy to all that is best in man than a foe to divine law. Every subtle appeal to so-called personal liberty in respect to Sabbath observance is, in fact, Satan's effort to clamp the more tightly upon us the chains that bind us to the things that are passing and perishing, and so to blind us to the beauty and power of the things that are unseen and eternal.

Every sneering reference to a "Puritan Sabbath," every bitter assault upon so-called "Blue Laws" (which, in fact, never existed), is in reality an attempt to undermine the hold of the Sabbath upon the heart and conscience by a calculated appeal to ignorance and prejudice.

Every organized effort to commercialize the Lord's Day under the specious plea that man needs recreation, and has a right to such amusement as he may care to seek, is but the thinly disguise attempt of selfishness and greed to seize man's silver and starve his soul, and to render more hazardous the journey of life for those who seek to travel the straight and narrow way that leads to life eternal.

Let every watchman upon the walls of Zion, mindful of the manifold menace, "cry aloud and spare not" lest the enemy capture the citadel that throws its protecting

walls around the Word and Worship of our God, and the hungering and thirsting soul of man, and thus "leave us naked to our enemies."

He who ordained the Sabbath Day likewise ordained the home... (*PCUS Minutes* {1922}, 69-70).

The next year the standing committee recommended that the 1923 report of the Permanent Committee on the Sabbath and Family Religion be published in the appendix, which they believed "fully and expressly sets forth the testimony and teaching of our Church in respect to the holy Sabbath..."). However, this year the committee was also abolished and its duties assigned to the Executive Committee on Publication and Sabbath School Work.⁴⁵ The permanent committee did produce a final report that focused more on family religion, addressing the Sabbath only in that context.

The report opens by stating, "All readers of religious periodicals know how great is the concern felt by thoughtful people everywhere over the failure of the modern home to function according to the principles of the Word of God. This failure is so colossal, so tragic, so open, and withal so little thought of by the great mass of the people that it constitutes the greatest menace which faces this nation today." The report then unfolds under the topics of The Divinely-Ordained Position of the Home, Discipline in the Home, Instruction in the Home, Dangers Threatening the Home, The Home and the Sabbath, and The Hope of the Home (Jesus Christ). In the six page report, the single paragraph on the Home and the Sabbath contrasts with previous optimism:

It is hopeless to expect a dominant Sabbath-keeping spirit in a land in which so large a proportion of homes is without God. It is hopeless to expect laws to be made adequately safeguarding the Sabbath in such a land. Laws are made by men, and men come from homes and carry into the world the sentiment prevailing in the homes from which they come. If laws are made, it is hopeless to expect them to be honestly enforced by officers who have no inherent respect for the institutions the laws are intended to safeguard. That any laws exist in defence of the Sabbath is a tribute to the influence of that minority of our population who worship God, and have consideration for the toilers. That one day in seven is needed for rest of body and mind and refreshment of spirit, cannot be questioned by any who

45. *PCUS Minutes* (1923), 33. Cf. Louis B. Weeks, "The Scriptures and Sabbath Observance in the South," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 59 No. 2 (Summer 1981): 274.

have respect for the teachings of the Word of God, and are informed upon the effect of continuous labor on the human machine. But the cupidity of man, the love of pleasure, the natural disobedience of the evil heart of unbelief ignore all arguments, human and divine. The wicked heart of man is blind, even to its own interests, and deaf to all entreaty. It is enough to excite its most determined opposition to any measure that religion upholds it, and the Church of Jesus Christ endorses it. (*PCUS Minutes* {1923}, 84–85).

THE 1930S

After continued petitions to do so, a committee on the Sabbath was reestablished in 1931. Reports throughout the 1930s continued to sound the alarm. In 1933, the Standing Committee on the Sabbath warned, “The widespread desecration and disregard of the Sabbath constitute grave perils to the spiritual life of the Church. There is growing indifference to the claims of the Christian Sabbath, and the day is being used more and more as a day of recreation to the neglect of public and private worship. The Church should sound a note of warning and cry aloud against this neglect of the worship of God on the Lord’s Day. In many quarters stores and places of amusement are being opened and the commercial interests have made great inroads on the day. Men are being forced to work on this day against their own will. This growing desecration means disaster; this nation cannot survive unless the Christian Sabbath as a divine institution is preserved” (*PCUS Minutes* {1933}, 81–82). The committee went on to call for constant preaching, teaching and publishing on the subject of the proper regard to the Lord’s Day.

In 1934 the new committee issued another long, strong, but stark assessment of the situation in one of the more significant of these many reports.

Perhaps no question concerning the life of the Church in the present day is more hedged about with intricate, delicate and, for the most part, unsettled questions than is that of the Christian Sabbath.

There was a time when the Church appeared to have a *settled conviction* touching the Divine purpose of the Sabbath and its consequent place and value in the Divine scheme for the development and growth of the Kingdom of God in the hearts and lives of men. And, in that day, there was a reasonable consistency on the part of the Church in proclaiming and of its membership in observing the divinely appointed ends and

uses of the Day. True it was, that even then there were those both within and without the Church who felt that both the conceptions of and demands for the Day, were overexact, if not positively harsh; and yet, this must be admitted by both proponents and opponents of the ancient conception—that the Sabbath Day, as formerly conceived and observed, largely aided in giving to the Church and to the world a generation of men and women who, in clarity of spiritual vision, in enlightened Scriptural knowledge, in moral and intellectual force, and in unswerving loyalty to the faith once delivered unto the fathers, have had few equals and no superiors in the entire history of the Church. It is scarcely conceivable that in their day it would have been possible to find any considerable group of spiritual leaders who would have frankly admitted that the Day was very generally being transformed from a “holy day” into a “holiday”; and then have gone on to say “that nothing was being done to stop it.” Yet, in our day, these admissions and this assertion come from the leaders of the life of our Church in one of our representative Synods. From a large group of ministers and Church officers of this same Synod, representing very fairly, we believe, a cross section of observance of Sabbath conditions as they obtain in that State, we have these conclusions: From one to nine types of outdoor sports, or indoor recreations, either amateur or commercialized, prevail generally over the State on Sunday; in a large majority of places some form, or forms, of unnecessary business are being carried on; with few exceptions, the community approves, or is indifferent to, their operation; practically no efforts are being made to abate them; the use of automobiles generally is tending to decrease rather than increase Church attendance on Sunday; with few exceptions, the effect of these things upon “the spiritual life of the people” is said to be: “bad,” “depressing,” “paralyzing,” “developing worldliness,” etc., etc., while many correspondents see “marked spiritual decay as directly attributable to growing Sabbath desecration.”

In the light of these facts and others which might be even more startling were they arrayed before you, your Committee believes that it is not in error when it says that—the day of a *settled conviction* touching the Divine purpose in the Sabbath and its rightful place in the hearts and lives of men and of the Church, appears to have passed. True it is, that in the Word of God and in our interpretations thereof, the Standards of our Church, *the old definitions still stand*; but our Church and its membership, largely, *is not standing on them or by them*.

It would, therefore, appear to your Committee that the phase of this issue of prime consideration is “Whether the purpose and place of the Sabbath in the life of the Church and its membership shall still conform to Divine revelation or be adjusted to purely human desires and convenience and be interpreted in the light thereof?” And, “with what voice shall the Church of the Living God speak, on this issue?”

It is evident from the Bible that the establishment of the Sabbath sounded the first audible note of the spiritual nature of God in the ears of a virgin creation; and, in the light of the fact that the Sabbath antedated the written revelation, it is to be doubted if the WORD could survive the complete destruction of the Sabbath, as such. God gave the created world and that with which He had stocked and clothed it for the support of the physical being of man, the Sabbath for the nourishment of his spiritual being. The fingers of the divine artist touched the face of nature that its beauty might inspire the mental and aesthetic senses of His creatures; but, in a diviner way, the breath of a resting Deity sanctified and glorified the Sabbath, that, through its hallowed hours, the souls of His creatures might look into the heart of God and come to know His purposes and adore His grace.

Has the purpose of God been altered? Has His plan been amended? Does the human soul no longer need the “seventh-day” visions and visitations with God? Is the Sabbath Day obsolete in God’s scheme of things in the present day? Is there anywhere Divine warrant for a failure on the part of His Church and its prophets to continue to denounce sin and summon a wayward people to repentance? Can the Church any longer justify itself in an increasingly false conception and use of the Sabbath? Do we dare assert, by inference, that the God, whose word of power brought worlds and life and human souls into being, did not possess and exercise the omniscient knowledge, in His appointment of the Sabbath Day, of all of the intricate complexities of modern life; and know, with a divine and eternal knowledge, that this generation needed the Sabbath, as He appointed and designed it, as much, if not more, than those first two creatures in the sacred and peaceful shades of Eden?

Your Committee would solemnly register before God and His Church this indictment against the modern-day misconceptions, misuse and desecration of the Sabbath Day, as appointed by God in creation; as used and upheld by Christ in life and word; as given by grace into the life of man and of the Church of God for the highest

and holiest ends which God, Himself, could conceive—His own glory and man’s eternal good:

1. It denies the Bible as the Word and the Will of God with the same intensity and infinitely more effect than the most blatant denunciations of the vilest infidel who ever lived;
2. It registers a rebellion against the will of God which vitiates all vows of acceptance of Christ and loyalty to His Love and Life-mission;
3. It takes the holiest thing that God ever entrusted into the hands of men, save only the life of His blessed Son, and besmears it with the utterly callous mire and filth of hopeless selfishness;
4. It denatures the individual Christian, or the Church of Christ which permits it, and brings scorn and reproach upon the word and purpose of God;
5. It nails a question mark upon the Cross itself and shames its sacred burden in the eyes of men;
6. It affirms that the Church has missed the vision of God and that the souls of men stand in no need of spiritual culture and growth in God-likeness;
7. It stamps as insincere in the eyes of the youth of the land, the professions of thousands of parents and Church leaders and workers; and leaves these children of the Church an easy prey to disbelief, indifference and sin;
8. It renders impotent the futile efforts of Church men and Church women to stem the tide of commercialized desecration and destruction of the Christian Sabbath.

In the light of these things and in the hope and prayer that God may quicken our consciences and lead us by His Spirit back into a wholly reverent and loyal acceptance of His will, touching the Sabbath Day and our use of its priceless privileges and powers, your Committee would offer for your consideration the following recommendations:

- I. We recommend that the General Assembly adopt the following restatement of its conception of God’s purpose in the gift of the Christian Sabbath into the lives of men and of their obligation, under the authority of the Scriptures, so to use this gift that God may

be glorified; man's spiritual nature may be cultivated; his powers enlarged; his influence broadened; and, an adequate and loyal witness be borne by the Church and its membership to its acceptance of His revelation touching the Day:

"RESTATEMENT OF THE ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF THE SABBATH"

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States hereby declares to its membership and to the world its belief that the Holy Scriptures teach that the Christian Sabbath is of Divine appointment and to these ends:

1. To bear eternal witness to the creative power; the Divine rights; the omniscient wisdom; the compassionate purpose; the unchanging grace; and, the infinite love of God—thus ministering to His eternal glory.
2. To meet the needs of the physical, mental, moral and spiritual nature of man in providing a period of rest each week for the recreation and refreshment of the faculties and functions of man's nature and being.
3. To provide a specific time when the divine element of man's nature might have opportunity for special culture and development through a complete separation from the distracting demands of material things, whether of toil or pleasure; and enjoy a meeting together with God at a time and in a way which guarantees a peculiar visitation of the Holy Spirit's power and an outpouring of the Father's blessing.
4. To afford the Church, as the custodian of the Word and the Evangelistic arm of Christ in the world, an opportunity to do its work of educating the minds and cultivating the hearts of men in the Truth of God.

The General Assembly further declares:

1. That every minister, officer and member of the Church is obligated in the most sacred way by his vow of allegiance to Christ to study the Scriptural warrant of the Sabbath Day and the divine purpose contained therein and to use the day in his life, his home and his Church connection and service as God has given and designed it.
2. That the use of the day for other purposes is unwarranted by the Word of God; is an act of disloyalty in

witness-bearing; is hurtful in the highest degree to the spiritual life of the individual Christian; and lends aid and comfort to the enemies of God and His Church.

3. That, to the misuse of the Sabbath Day and its diversion from its divinely appointed purpose in the life of men, there is directly attributable much of the spiritual decay and stagnation so evident in the present day life of many individual Christians and of the Church.

II. We recommend that the General Assembly direct its Executive Committee on Religious Education and Publication to publish the foregoing restatement in leaflet form for distribution to all the Churches of the Assembly.... (*PCUS Minutes* {1934}, 89–92).

The committees continued their exhortations throughout the 1930s. The standing committee on the Sabbath of 1938 commented,

It is trite to say that the preservation of the Christian Sabbath is vital, if our civilization is to endure; but not more trite than true. The Sabbath, as a cornerstone of home, church and state, must be protected.

The difficulties that confront the Church are so great, and increasingly powerful, that the situation is often tragic. Human avarice on one hand and inordinate love of pleasure on the other, exert constant and potent influences against Sabbath observance.... The Fourth Commandment has not been erased from the Decalogue....

And the permanent committee reported the same year,

Since our last report to the General Assembly there have been very few encouraging signs that the observance of the Lord's Day has improved. Again we are confronted with a serious situation which is having a disastrous effect upon the life and work of the Church. There is a vital relation between the observance of the Lord's Day and the progress of the Church. This effect is noticeable in the decline in attendance of members upon many of the services of the Church, in the alarming decrease during the last few years of the membership of our Sunday Schools, in the attitude of youth to the appeals of religion and in the careless conduct of many Church members.

The Lord's Day is being generally recognized as a holiday instead of a holy day and is more and more being used for amusements and pleasures. This attitude

and this practice tend to undermine the religious life of the people.

The observance of the Lord's Day is of prime importance for it is vital to the safety and security of the Church, the home and the nation. Moral standards and spiritual ideals will inevitably suffer and law and order cannot be promoted when there is wide unconcern for the observance of the Lord's Day. (*PCUS Minutes* {1938}, 66, 115).

The 1939 Standing Committee on the Sabbath reported that they had "carefully reviewed the report of the Permanent Committee regarding the widening breach between the teachings of the church and the practices of its members. We deplore the attitude of many Christians to disregard the sacredness and binding obligation of the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship." In this report the 1939 permanent committee for the first time adduced the questions and thinking of the membership which had long been defecting from Presbyterian doctrine and practice, exhibiting also for the first time some wavering or uncertainty at least in the questions posed for consideration.

The gap between the teachings of our Church Standards respecting the Sabbath and the practice of our members is steadily widening. The cause may be deeper seated than thoughtlessness and indifference. There is in a large section of the lay mind a feeling manifested more in act than in word that the "Presbyterian Sabbath" is not well supported by the New Testament and early church practice, and even that the Fourth Commandment is no longer of force. It may not be amiss to state the trend of the argument. It is this: The law of Moses was a blending of religious and civil obligations, being the law of a theocracy. The Fourth Commandment has this double aspect. It commands three things: (a) Remembrance of the Sabbath day to keep it holy, which is religious. (b) Labor for the six other days, which is a civil anti-vagrancy law. (c) Rest from labor on the Sabbath, which is a social and health law, helping also the observance of (a). The Church and State are now separated, so that (b) and (c) are taken over by municipal laws, and (a) alone remains for the Church to enforce. The conclusion drawn is that occupational work on the Sabbath is a matter of State law, and whether one's work or pleasure prevents one keeping the Sabbath holy must be determined by each individual for himself, being largely a question of whether he "remembers" it.

The questioning goes further yet, as to whether the

Sabbath law still exists as religious law, and whether it has by competent authority been transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week. On the latter point it is said that the New Testament Church began to regard the first day as a memorial of the resurrection, making it a holy day, but not confusing it with the Sabbath, and that the Sabbath was gradually dropped with other parts of Judaism. As a result the observance of the Lord's Day rests not on the Fourth Commandment but on the example of the Apostles, who did not make it a strict Sabbath; it was a day not of law but of liberty and grace. It is said this proceeded from the attitude and example of Jesus, who at no time quoted the Fourth Commandment specifically as a rule of conduct, but who, though not denying it, threw His authority against its strict observance. His statement: "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath day," was an assertion that he could and would change the established observance of that day. The statement that "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" is in the same direction, and indicates that the relaxation is not peculiar to Jesus' work on earth, but extends to the life of all men. Finally, the statement of Jesus in connection with the Sabbath: "My father worketh hitherto and I work," is pointed to as a rejection of the basis put forward for the Sabbath: that though God rested from the work of special creation he never rests from his work of governing and upholding, and the activities of nature are the same on one day as on another. The conclusion drawn is that any work which is useful or any activity which is pleasant and not wicked is according to the example of God our maker.

These thoughts, thus boldly and baldly stated, deserve careful consideration, and so far as they are wrong, clear refutation. We live in a time when everything is being reconsidered. Nothing is accepted as correct because it is old. The general idea is that whatever is is probably wrong. In our teaching and in our preaching it will not do to assume that human authority, however ancient, will be accepted. The hearer believes that our times and circumstances are so changed that only a clear divine command, or a clearly demonstrated moral reason binds.

Of course the municipal work and rest laws do not exhaust the moralities. A five-day work week established by law would not destroy the moral duty to use well all our time. Municipal laws against murder, theft and adultery have never been supposed to abrogate or limit the moral duties in those spheres. The need of physical and

mental rest one day in seven has been demonstrated by experience and would be a moral duty if there were no law about it. That it takes time to be holy, that a set day, often recurring, is necessary to religious development and communion between man and man and between man and God is plain. No one reasonably would quarrel with the Christian choice for these purposes of the first day of the week, except for the effort to apply the seventh day Commandment to it. When our Church seeks so to apply it, the basis of the application must be made clear. When this ancient statute is put alongside modern conditions, and the question is whether the use of automobiles and trains on Sunday is sinful or not, we must show where the sin lies—Is it prohibited work? Is it prohibited pleasure? Is it forgetfulness of the day? The same question arises about Sunday golf and social gatherings. To the aging whose raising has been strict, whose accustomed practices seem right and even sacred, the answer is easy. To the young whose surroundings are different the answer seems difficult. Is conduct on Sunday as respects amusements not in themselves sinful a matter of law, or is it a matter of self-sacrifice? Can one answer for another as to what is right or wrong, or must one answer to his own conscience only? Is the teaching of our Catechism a recommendation of what will be helpful to Christian life and example, or does it define sins which the Church should not only denounce but punish in its members? Ought we to say to our people this is the law—thou shalt not? Or shall we say this is the Lord's Day—let us learn of him, let us worship him and serve him fully today—let us as a loving sacrifice put aside our will and pleasure, and our work, to see how much peace and love and helpfulness we may put into it?

We recommend that the General Assembly request our ministers each to talk with intelligent members of his congregation who seem lax in Sabbath observance and obtain their viewpoints, consider fully and prayerfully what is learned, reach fearless and honest conclusions and present them to their congregations; and that before the next meeting of the Assembly the ministers communicate to this Committee such facts and conclusions on this subject as are deemed of interest or importance. (*PCUS Minutes* {1939}, 42).

THE 1940S

In 1940 the standing committee repeated previous warnings of the dire consequences of neglecting the Sabbath. That year's report of the permanent committee, however,

begins to show the sea change was hitting those tasked with championing the doctrine of the Sabbath. The committee, which was itself sounding an uncertain note as to the doctrine (recreations or no?), found that it was being ignored!

The definite recommendation made in our last report was not adopted; we have received no communication from any minister; and have no more information than we had before. We have endeavored to correspond with one another and somewhat divergent views have been expressed, but all having weight.

One committeeman writes: "Is the Sabbath lost? Is it worth recovering? Who was the cause of its being lost? Who can recover it? Now I believe the whole thing is to be put on us preachers. We have lost it, because we have not presented it from the pulpit and in our lives. We have neither practiced nor preached it. The preachers alone can recover it."

Another writes: "The Sabbath question is not an easy one; and yet it seems to me the general principles are pretty clear as shown by the teaching and in the example of Christ. (1) He did not abrogate the Fourth Commandment, but corrected misinterpretations of its meaning and application. (2) His great saying, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" implies very clearly (a) the perpetuity of the Sabbath: as long as man is man he will need the day. (b) The Sabbath is a beneficent institution for mankind: its privileges are to be shared by all individuals and protected for the race against selfishness and greed. The great privileges are the privilege of worship according to conscience, and the privilege of rest. A commercialized Sabbath, including commercialized sports, interferes with these privileges as a beneficent institution. As to Christ's example, it is clear that He observed the day as a day of worship in the synagogue; Luke 4:16. As a day of doing good to others; Matt. 12:10-13. Such work as is necessary to health or comfort is authorized; Matt. 12:1-8. His walk through the fields with the disciples seems to imply that exercise in the open air and some forms of recreation are not to be condemned; Mark 2:23.... We should in no uncertain way stand for the perpetuity of the Sabbath" on the basis outlined.

Another writes asserting belief in a strict Sabbath, but confessing his own failures in practice and noting the wide differences in the ideas of others. "If we had some way of ascertaining the beliefs of our church members

on the question whether certain common practices are violative of the spirit of the Sabbath, as by a questionnaire, we should have a confused set of answers. Suppose each local church should distribute to its members such a questionnaire asking what they thought of the following practices on the Sabbath: (1) fishing and hunting; (2) family or group picnics; (3) attending picture shows; (4) playing golf; (5) attending baseball games and other sports; (6) taking long pleasure trips by automobile; (7) working in the yard and beautifying the premises—what would the answers be? Would not some such plan be a good idea to stimulate thought on their part and bring them to realize more fully what the Sabbath means?”

Still others say we should simply reiterate our last report.

On the validity and necessity of a Sabbath of worship and rest we all of course agree, as well as on the fact that it is slipping away. The extent of the slipping, and its causes, we do not fully know; and they may vary in different localities and among persons of different ages and contacts. Remedies can be intelligently applied only when actual conditions and what has produced them are known. We think these ought to be systematically and courageously enquired into; and we think of no better way than that recommended in our last report. We repeat that recommendation:

“We recommend that the General Assembly request our ministers each to talk with intelligent members of his congregation who seem lax in Sabbath observance and obtain their viewpoints, consider fully and prayerfully what is learned, reach fearless and honest conclusions and present them to their congregations; and that before the next meeting of the Assembly the ministers communicate to this committee such facts and conclusions on this subject as are deemed of interest or importance.” (*PCUS Minutes* {1940}, 81, 129–130).

“WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH OUR MINISTERS?”

The 1941 Standing committee in recommending the permanent committee report briefly deplored the state of Lord’s Day observance (*PCUS Minutes* {1941}, p. 81). The report paints a sad picture. The problem was not just the lax practice of PCUS congregants, but irresponsible PCUS ministers.

That a duly observed Sabbath is both a duty and a blessing, essential to Christian growth and an important

sign to the world, is beyond dispute. That we are slipping in maintaining the Presbyterian ideal is acknowledged. In our report in the year 1939 we presented views of the Sabbath which are becoming common and which we thought might be influencing the situation, and recommended an enquiry, None was ordered. In 1940 we renewed the recommendation, and the Assembly directed each minister to make certain enquiries among his members tending to the ascertainment of causes, and to report results to this Committee. The two active pastors who are members of this Committee made an effort to this end, but their reports are too fragmentary to be of use as information. No other minister has communicated with us. The question we now have is not, What is the matter with our members? but What is the matter with our ministers? Did they overlook the request of the Assembly? Did they think the matter unimportant? or ill-judged? or too explosive and likely to be embarrassing? Enough ministers will be present at the Assembly to resolve this question by frank expression on some appropriate resolution, if the Assembly so desires. As for ourselves, we still think the bottom causes for departure from the Presbyterian ideal ought to be definitely ascertained. If our people are thinking wrongly about it they must be persuaded otherwise. They cannot be driven. We have to know what they are really thinking before their thought can be weighed, and if wrong corrected.

Instead of, or in addition to, dealing with those members not disposed to a strict Sabbath observance, we might approach those otherwise disposed, particularly in the young peoples’ societies, and see if groups can be formed who will commit themselves thoroughly, say for six months, to a full and complete observance of the Sabbath, resolved to give every Sunday recreational or social activity in which they may engage a religious turn as Jesus did, all as part of that “living sacrifice which is our reasonable service.” Would not the spiritual fruits, and the experimental joy and satisfaction sure to follow, be a demonstration of the Sabbath’s worth to such groups, and enable them to testify as missionaries thereof to others ‘?

We make no definite recommendation this year, because it seems that leadership must be undertaken by the ministers, and the practical question is, What are they willing to undertake to do? The Assembly is better able to answer that than we.... (*PCUS Minutes* {1941}, p. 67).

WWII

With the USA's entry into WWII, the standing committee had more to say, noting a special committee on the Sabbath, as well as recommending the report of the permanent committee. The standing, special and permanent committee reports are as follows:

In view of ALMIGHTY GOD'S COMMAND that we "REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY"...

And, in view of the deeply deplorable fact that our failure as a Nation to observe the Sabbath as a Day holy unto Almighty God is now having a very serious effect upon the life of our Church and Nation; And, in view of the widespread failure of many of our churches to teach by definite instruction what we believe the Bible teaches concerning the proper observance of the Sabbath Day;

And, in view of our deep-seated conviction that God's Word teaches and our people have learned by bitter "Wilderness Wanderings" in the past that there can be no "Advance In This Time Of Crisis" unless we as individuals, as a Church, and as a Nation observe the Lord's Day with more reverence and respect; We accordingly submit the following Recommendations to this General Assembly for its proper and prayerful consideration:

1. That the Report of the Assembly's Permanent Committee on the Sabbath ... be approved, and that its recommendations be adopted.
2. That Overture (No. 56) from the Synod of North Carolina asking that the Assembly request every presbytery to prepare for parents detailed suggestions for the Christian observance of the Lord's Day, and that these suggestions be sent to the Presbyterian Committee of Publication with the request that they be edited and made available to the Church by printing, be answered in the affirmative....
3. That the Overture (No. 57) from the Presbytery of Cherokee asking that the Assembly make known to our National Government our Church's position on Sabbath observance be answered in the affirmative... (*PCUS Minutes* (1942), 83-84).

Be it Resolved, That the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., in its Eighty-second General Assembly Meeting in Knoxville, Tennessee, on June 2,

1942, instruct the Stated Clerk of the Assembly to address The President of the United States in behalf of the General Assembly and its more than five hundred thousand constituents, as follows:

Whereas, The Presbyterian Church in the United States believes and teaches that Almighty God, Who is the rightful Lord and Creator of all men everywhere, has commanded that we "REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY"...

This General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States declares that the historic position of our Church regarding the meaning and claims of the Fourth Commandment involves the preservation of one day in seven as the divine right of man for worship and for rest from all works except such as are involved in deeds of necessity and mercy.

Further, this General Assembly feels that there are two aspects to the observance of such a Day: namely, the aspect of religious sanction which is binding according to the revealed will of God, and the aspect of practical economy whereby men are better able to render effective service through the observance of one day in seven for rest and worship.

In sympathy with the ultimate objectives which the present national emergency has forced upon us, we earnestly petition the President of the United States, and all others in authority, to consider that the success of our efforts in this present national emergency demands an economic efficiency and a moral security, neither of which can be fully had apart from an observance of the Sabbath in accordance with the divine purposes for which it was given for the good of man and the glory of Almighty God... (*PCUS Minutes* (1942), 93-94).

In the New Testament the rest day, or Sabbath day, is no longer the seventh day of the week, but the first day of the week in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. The very recurrence of this day reminds us constantly of that great miracle of our faith, the resurrection of Jesus. This day, therefore, is the Lord's Day and should be so recognized. The Apostle John in recounting his vision said, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day." It is highly important that we should emphasize the fact that the first day of the week, or Sunday as it is called, is the Lord's Day, and as such should be observed with due reverence. It is primarily a day of worship, and

anything that tends to deprive this day of that important and vital fact is a danger.

It is imperative that there should be a day of physical rest. The very constitution of our nature requires that our bodies need rest and relaxation in order to restore the loss of physical and nervous energy which have been used up in consecutive days of work. It has been shown scientifically that a rest day every seventh day tends to restore physical and nervous energies and not only to create a greater interest and pleasure in work but also to make us more efficient.

It is imperative that there should be a day set apart for meditation and prayer and worship. Since we have six days in which to labor and do all our work, during which time we give ourselves to material interests and purposes, there is a moral and spiritual need for a day, in which, apart from all these distractions and cares and interest, we might devote ourselves to worship and prayer. To neglect the observance of the Lord's Day as a day of worship is to starve the soul. We give much attention to the care of our bodies and to the cultivation of our minds, but we are entirely too careless in the care of spiritual natures. "Thou shalt not kill," is a commandment that means not only that human life must not be taken, but also implies that to neglect our spiritual natures is equivalent to killing the soul. We cannot survive materially if we neglect our spiritual lives.

We face a tragic condition today in our country. The Lord's Day has become a day of business, recreation and pleasure-seeking for a vast number of people. Many who are church members and who profess to be followers of Christ neglect their church attendance, neglect their spiritual duties, neglect the worship of God, and use the Lord's Day for their business and pleasure. The tendency to make the Lord's Day more and more a day of convenience and pleasure means not only a distinct loss to the church but also a breaking down of the morale of the people. The standards of life and thought have declined to a lower level because there is so little regard for the Sabbath-Day and because the worship of God and the performance of spiritual duties are continually neglected. Sunday, or the Lord's Day, has become a wide open day. In our large cities the day has become anything but a day of rest. Motion picture theatres, sports of every sort, automobile joy riding, night clubs, pool rooms and places where spirituous liquors can be bought, which latter includes many cheap restaurants and drug stores, are

to a large extent wide open on the Lord's Day not only in our cities but also in the towns and outlying districts. We cannot continue at the present rate without facing moral disaster.

The effect on the home of the failure to observe the Lord's Day is evidenced by the fact that the home does not train children and youth as it formerly did and consequently there is too little discipline and a growing lack of reverence. What can we expect of the children and youth of today if there is in the home an unconcern for the observance of the Sabbath, a failure to observe the day as a day of worship and a neglect of the performance of spiritual duties?

The effect on the church of the failure to observe the Lord's Day is evidenced by the fact that many children who ought to be in Sunday School are not encouraged to attend Sunday School and therefore are deprived of spiritual instruction because of the indifferent attitude of parents. It naturally follows that this condition creates a serious loss in membership. There is a distinct loss also in church attendance because there is no great sense of obligation to observe the day as a day of worship. Many families are so careless about church attendance that children and young people, who should be encouraged to attend church services, fail to do so because of the unfortunate example which is set before them.

The failure to observe the Sabbath as a day of worship has a very serious effect upon the life of the nation. The church, through instruction and worship, puts into the life of the nation high moral standards and spiritual ideals. When a day of worship has become a day of business interests, of pleasure and self-indulgence, there is a distinct lowering of moral standards and a serious loss of spiritual ideals. Lawlessness is the inevitable result. Many who complain about the moral and spiritual state of our nation are themselves contributing to this very condition of affairs by their failure to observe the Lord's Day and to use it as a day of worship.

Unless as individuals and as a Church and as a nation we observe the Lord's Day with more reverence and respect, we shall certainly suffer the inevitable consequences... (*PCUS Minutes* (1942), 139-140).

In 1943 the standing committee prefaced their recommendations of the permanent committee report and other motions in all caps:

IN VIEW OF THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH AND BECAUSE OF THE DISTRESSING NEGLECT AND TREMENDOUS PROFANATION OF THIS SACRED DAY AND THE CRYING NEED THAT THIS DAY BE PROTECTED AND PRESERVED FOR ITS HIGH AND HOLY PURPOSES, The Standing Committee on the Sabbath most respectfully begs leave to make the following recommendations.... (PCUS Minutes {1943}, 89).

The permanent committee report for 1943 chastised the entire denomination,

What more can be said to the Church, Fathers and Brethren, about Sabbath Observance than has been said already in the splendid reports of your Permanent Committee on the Sabbath, which have been made to you from year to year for many years past? These reports have been lucid and strong, reasonable and Biblical. They have wisely called attention to the increasing disregard of the Divine Sabbath command, the tragic conditions which militate against the sanctity and proper observance of the Day, the privileges and blessings involved in keeping the Day holy, and have laid upon the consciences of our ministers, church officers and people the solemn duty of remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy. But despite their earnest efforts to stir the Church to some worthwhile action in regard to the neglect and desecration of the Lord's Day, there apparently prevails a pacific attitude and lack of militant concern on the part of a majority of our ministers, elders, deacons and members toward the increasing disregard and violation of the Sabbath law. Instead of improvement in Sabbath observance, non-observance is becoming, more and more pronounced and universal. Our report to you for this year is the same story, as of old. The disregard and violation of the Fourth Commandment are more extensive and more flagrant today than they have ever been in the history of our country.

What is the trouble? What can be done about the situation? It can still be "line upon line, and precept upon precept," until our convictions are established according to truth, our consciences quickened in justice, our hearts moved in love and our wills stimulated to action. We must face the Command of God to keep the Sabbath day holy, and must ever seriously remind ourselves that any violation of this Command is disobedience to God, destructive of personal piety, righteousness, true religion and the Church, and tends toward profaneness,

apostasy and atheism. The transgression of the Fourth Commandment is a sin just as truly as is the violation of any other of the Commandments of the Moral Law. We affirm the supreme and eternal authority of God's law over all Christians and also over all others. The Fourth Commandment, being a part of the Moral Law, is solemnly binding on all men in all ages.

Is there uncertainty as to the meaning of the Commandment? Is the language ambiguous? Surely not. The language is simple, perfectly plain and understandable. One part of the Law is positive, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," to teach us what we are to do on this day; the other part is negative, "In it thou shalt not do any work, etc.," to teach us what we are not to do on this day. And the only exceptions to this general rule given us in the Scriptures are works of mercy and necessity.

Well, it may be that our ministers, church officers and people are not so unconcerned about the matter as appears. Then may we not do something more about the situation than we have hitherto done. May we not critically examine our own conduct in respect to Sabbath observance, our own witness to the sanctity of the Day and our own duty in proclaiming the Law and upholding its integrity[?] To all who have grown liberal in their interpretation of the Law, or careless and indifferent towards its proper and beneficent observance we would lovingly say, Brethren, let us repent; trust and obey; and come back to absolute loyalty and fidelity to God and His will.

The Assembly of last May requested "every presbytery to prepare for parents detailed suggestions for the Christian observance of the Lord's Day, and to send these suggestions to the Presbyterian Committee of Publication with the request they be edited and made available to the Church by printing." Your Committee followed up this request of the Assembly, and communicated through the *Christian Observer* and the *Presbyterian of the South*,⁴⁶ with the presbyteries. The result is that the Committee of Publication, to the time of the writing of this report, has received the actions of only TWO of the eighty-eight presbyteries.

During the year, articles on Sabbath Observance have been written and published in the religious papers, and the Publication Committee has given special emphasis to Sabbath Observance in the Sunday-school materials. Each Department of the Sunday-school has contained a suitable presentation of the subject. Articles

46. Italic face added.

have been published in the *Presbyterian Survey* and *Tracts*; and there are in hand several articles which will appear soon in one form or another. The titles of these articles are: Abolish the Sabbath and Forget God, The Christian Sabbath, Make Sunday Different, For the Lack of a Day, Idols of the Market Place, Save the Sabbath and You Save All, Catechism on the Sabbath.

We recommend:⁴⁷

1. That the Assembly repeat the request of last year to the presbyteries to prepare for parents detailed suggestions for the Christian observance of the Lord's Day and send the same to the Committee of Publication.
2. That our ministers and church officers secure and distribute to their people copies of the articles on the Sabbath, which are being issued by our Publication Committee.
3. That the pastors of all of our churches preach more frequently and positively upon the Fourth Commandment and read to their congregations the recommendations of the Permanent Committee on the Sabbath made to the 1942 Assembly and adopted by that Assembly.... (*PCUS Minutes* {1943}, 149–151).

In 1944 the standing committee stepped in and redacted some of the permanent committee's report and replaced it with their own recommendations

Your Committee recommends:

- I. That the Assembly approve the statement of the teaching of the Scriptures on the Sabbath as presented in the report of the Permanent Committee on the Sabbath ... and commend it to our people for their prayerful study.
- II. That as a substitute for the remainder of the report the following recommendations be adopted.

First, That our people be called upon to praise the Giver of every good and perfect gift for making the Sabbath for man that he might be free for the whole day not only to rest but also to enjoy the blessings of public and private worship, of Christian fellowship, and of Christlike service.

Second, That we humbly confess that our ministers and people have failed to use the day as did Christ the Lord of the Sabbath, but have allowed the pleasures of this

world, the complexities of our living, and indifference to spiritual things to rob each one in greater or lesser degree of the blessings which God desires to bestow upon all who rightly use His day.

Third, That the Assembly urge all our ministers and members to emphasize by precept and example the joy and the benefit to be derived from sincerely doing those things for which the Sabbath was given so that others may be attracted to join them in thus using the Lord's Day.

Fourth, That our churches do everything in their power so to provide an adequate and attractive program for the Sabbath and so to guide those attempting to use the day aright as to make the Sabbath not a burden but a delight.

Fifth, That the Assembly urge the Lord's Day Alliance and all our people to be ever vigilant in their effort to protect the Sabbath from the demands of patriotic exercises and activities, from unnecessary labor required by industry and commerce, and from anything else that would deny man the privilege of using the day as God intended.

Sixth, That the Assembly hereby express its appreciation of the fine work already done by the Lord's Day Alliance of the United States in thus protecting the Sabbath and in promoting its right use and commend it to the continued support of our people through their prayers and gifts.

Seventh, That the Assembly express its gratification over the orders given by the Secretaries of War and Navy reducing Sunday labor in the armed services "to the measures of strict necessity" and encouraging enlisted men to attend services either in the camp or neighboring churches.

Eighth, That the Assembly express its appreciation of the assistance given by Senator Capper and Third Assistant Postmaster General Black in making possible the stamping of all mail with a slogan urging Sabbath observance.

Ninth, That the Assembly hereby express its appreciation of the work done by Drs. Andrew R. Bird and R. F. Campbell, our representatives to the Lord's Day Alliance.

47. All the reports close with recommendations of which these and those cited previously are representative.

Tenth, That the Assembly designate September 24, 1944, as Sabbath Observance Day.

Eleventh, That in reply to a communication received from the Colored Mortician's Bulletin urging that the holding of funerals on the Sabbath be discouraged, the Assembly state that while appreciating the point of view expressed in the communication it deems it unwise to make any deliverance on this subject.

Twelfth, That the Assembly accept the resignation of Rev. John L. Fairly from the Permanent Committee on the Sabbath and that Rev. J. M. Wells be elected to fill out his unexpired term. (*PCUS Minutes* {1944}, 66–67).

The permanent committee report of 1944, as much as we have it preserved, reads:

The appointment of a Permanent Committee on the Sabbath by the General Assembly is an indication that it regards the observance of the Lord's Day as a vital and important matter. For many years the Permanent Committees have presented strong and, stirring reports which have been approved by the Assembly and printed in its Minutes. But, as was said in the report last year, "Despite the earnest efforts to stir the Church to some worth-while action in regard to the neglect and desecration of the Lord's Day, there apparently prevails a pacific attitude and lack of militant concern on the part of a majority of our ministers, elders, deacons and members toward the increasing disregard and violation of the Sabbath law. Instead of improvement in Sabbath observance, non-observance is becoming more and more pronounced and universal."

God's Name, God's Book, God's Son, God's Church and God's Day are ESSENTIAL factors in the spiritual life of the individual, the Church and the nation. Each is of supreme importance in itself; but the full blessings of God's Name, God's Word, God's Worship and God's Son will be largely lost if God's Day is lost. Inasmuch as the attitude toward God's Day is vitally linked with the attitude toward God's name, God's Book, God's Son and God's Church, the attitude toward God's Day should be of vital concern to God's people. Furthermore, in view of the present-day sad and alarming situation in our nation, in the nations of the world and in the Church, your Committee feels that there are added reasons for seriously facing now the facts concerning Sabbath desecration, and taking some more definite and positive action about the matter.

Well, what more can be said or done? It may be that the reports of the Committee and actions of the Assembly in the past have not been sufficiently practical and specific for the desired effect. Considering this possibility, and encouraged by communications from interested persons throughout the Church, your Committee has sought to make this report more practical by applying the principles to specific practices in modern life, which, to it, appear to be in violation of the Fourth Commandment.

The Committee has held two meetings during the year, and has earnestly sought Divine guidance for its course of action and the subject matter of this report. It presents to you: *First*, its convictions concerning the Sabbath; and *Second*, its recommendations as to some actions which the Assembly may take.

First, In dealing with Sabbath Observance we are dealing with the Fourth Commandment, God's Law, God's Will. For instruction and guidance in the interpretation and application of the Commandment, we do well to sit at the feet of God Himself and there learn from His own infallible and authoritative teaching what His will is. Permit us, therefore, to cite some of the numerous passages of His Word concerning the Sabbath Law. Would that space and time permitted us to quote in full the passages referred to that they might impress upon our hearts something of the sacredness and importance of the weekly Sabbath in God's sight. But it will be a greater blessing to you, if you yourselves will go to the Word and search them out and read them thoughtfully and prayerfully.

"The Sabbath Was Made For Man." Mk. 2:27. The Lord.

Instituted by God.

Gen. 2:2–3.

A Moral Law.

Ex. 20:8–11.

A Covenant Sign.

Ex. 31:13; 31:17; Ezek. 20:12.

Observance Commanded.

Ex. 20:8; 34:21; Lev. 19:3; 19:30; 23:3; 26:2; Deut. 5:12–15; Neh. 9:13–14; 10:31; Ezek. 44:24; Lk. 4:16; Acts 20:7; Heb.10:25.

A Weekly Day for Holy Rest.

Gen. 2:2–3; Ex. 16:23–30; 20:8–11; 23:12; 31:14–15; 34:21; 35:2–3; Lev. 23:3; Lk. 23:56.

A Weekly Day for Holy Exercises.

Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:8; Lev. 23:3; Num. 28:9–10; Is. 66:23; Ezek. 46:1; Mk. 6:2; Lk. 4:16; 4:31; 6:6; 13:10; Acts 13:14–16; 13:44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10.

Works of Necessity and Mercy Permissible.

Matt. 12:1–8; 12:10–13; Mk. 2:23–28; Lk. 6:1–10; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; Jno. 5:5–14; 7:21–24; 9:1–7, 14.

Profanation illustrated and Punished.

Ex. 31:14–15; 35:2; Num. 15:32–36; Neh. 13:15–22; Jer. 17:27; Ezek. 20:13–16.

Observance Illustrated and Rewarded.

Is. 56:2; 56:6–7; 58:13–14; Jer. 17:21–25; Jno. 20:19; 20:26–28; Rev. 1:10.

Perpetual and Universal.

Ex. 20:8; 31:16; Is. 56:6; Mk. 2:27; 16:9; Lk. 4:16; Jno. 20:19; 20:26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10.

Not Annulled by Christ.

Matt. 5:17–19; Mk. 2:27–28; Lk. 4:16; 4:31; Jno. 20:19; Rev. 1:10.⁴⁸

In 1945 the standing committee again substituted a portion of the permanent committee's report.

Your Committee recommends:

1. That the Assembly approve the first two and the last three paragraphs of the report of the Permanent Committee on the Sabbath. (See Appendix, p. 152.)

II. That in lieu of the remainder of the report of the Permanent Committee, the following recommendations be adopted:

1. That September 30, 1945 be set aside as a day for special emphasis on Sabbath Observance, with ministers bringing to their people a message on the importance of this aspect of worship, urging them to examine their own habits on the Lord's Day in the light of the historic position of our Church with regard to this matter.

2. That the Assembly urge local ministers to approach ministers of other local Protestant groups with a view to organizing their lay people, especially business men, for the purpose of encouraging Sabbath Observance and of counteracting all influences that are calculated to destroy reverence for the Lord's Day.

3. That the Assembly authorize the Stated Clerk to make every effort to communicate to the major Protestant groups in this country our sincere hope that they will join with us in our efforts to restore the Christian Sabbath to its God-given place.

4. That the faculties of our theological seminaries stress the teaching of the standards of the Presbyterian Church touching the holiness of the Lord's Day and its observance by precept and example.

5. That all leaders of Young People's groups, conferences and conventions be urged to give particular attention to the matter of Sabbath Observance in all plans and programs for young people's activities, especially with regard to planning meetings which would involve travel on the Lord's Day.

6. That the Assembly hereby express our appreciation of the fine work already done by the Lord's Day Alliance of the United States, such as the release from Sunday duty of 300,000 letter-carriers through the closing of first and second class post offices of the nation; the defeat of an average of 80 commercial Sunday bills every year in our State legislatures; and efforts to eliminate all liquor advertising on the Sabbath Day over the radio.

7. That the Assembly urge the Lord's Day Alliance and all our people to be ever vigilant in their effort to protect the Sabbath from the demands of patriotic exercises and activities, from unnecessary labor required by industry and commerce, and from anything else that would deny man the privilege of using the day as God intended.... *PCUS Minutes* (1945), 94.

The permanent committee report for 1945 read in part,

Another year has come and gone and your Permanent Committee, by its reading and observation, is forced to the conviction that the observance of the Sabbath, according to Scriptural requirements, has not improved. Indeed, there are evidences that the desecration of the Day is on the increase. Forces of the individual, the world and the devil are arrayed against the Biblical ideals and standards of the Day, and commercialized business, pleasure and transportation are organized in antagonism to it. We have grounds to fear that, after this war is over and the people in the armed forces of the

48. "Note: For the remainder of the Permanent Committee's report the General Assembly Substituted the report of the Standing Committee..." *PCUS Minutes* (1944), 162–163.

country return home, there may prevail the idea of the Continental Sunday. We would sound a warning! The conflict is now on. It is truly sad that in our Christian nation, yea, in our Christian Church the Christian Sabbath has to be defended, and that we have to contend for the preservation of holiness.

As goes the Sabbath so goes the Church. The Church cannot long maintain its visible existence without the Sabbath. If the Sabbath Day is saved to America, the Church must save it. Nevertheless, there seems to be among the leaders and people of the Church a spirit of lethargy about the situation and danger. During the past half-century or more the increasing secularization and desecration of the Day have been clearly a drift toward a "Continental Sunday;" and this drift has not received the attention and militant concern of the Church which its importance justifies and loyalty to the Kingdom interests demands. Let us be concerned, Fathers and Brethren. Next to Evangelism, and, indeed, as a vital aid to Evangelism, the Church probably has no greater duty and responsibility than to declare and enforce the COMMAND of God to remember the Sabbath Day and to keep it holy according to the requirements laid down by God in His Word.

Such a campaign of education and program of worship and service are greatly needed and would do much to check the growing profanation of the Sabbath Day. But if our teaching and exhortation are to reach the conscience and command the obedience of the people they must be based upon and enforced by the "Thus saith the Lord". There are many benefits, joys and humanitarian values in obeying the Sabbath Law, but the compelling reason for its observance is the COMMAND of God. We agree with Prof. James Orr of Glasgow that "The purely ecclesiastical view has never been able to secure observance of the Day. The testimony of history here is singularly decisive. The only view which in practice has proved capable of producing really salutary effects is that which goes back to the solid grounds of Scriptural COMMAND. The Puritans knew where to go for leverage in bringing the obligations of Sabbath observance to bear upon men's consciences, and until we imitate them in basing our claims for observance of the Lord's Day broad and deep on the strong foundations of God's Word we may labor in vain to check the present powerful tendencies to Sabbath desecration."

The manner in which the Sabbath is observed among us today is a symptom of a worldly-minded Church

and a paganizing State. Let us ever be mindful of the truth that as goes the Sabbath so goes the Church, and as goes the Church so goes America. We cannot build a Christian Church and a Christian country on the debris of a broken-down Sabbath. When the Sabbath is lost worship ceases, religion declines, the Church apostatizes, the nation becomes pagan and men, women and children are lost. May Church and State REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY . . . (*PCUS Minutes* {1945}, 152-153).

In 1946 the standing committee found the permanent committee report worthy of no changes.

It is the conviction of this Committee that the Law of the Sabbath was ordained by God in the time of man's innocency, was incorporated in the Code of Moral Laws proclaimed by God and written by Him upon tables of stone and recorded by inspiration in the Holy Scriptures; that it has never been abrogated in either the Old Testament period, or by Jesus or the inspired writers of the New Testament. The Law, in its essential elements, is a Moral Law and is universal and perpetual, binding upon all people alike, believers in Christ and unbelievers. Revelation, reason, the results of scientific experiment, and economic and social investigation prove conclusively that the worship of Almighty God and the weekly rest from toil at least one day in every seven fulfil the imperial demands of both the body and soul of man.

But notwithstanding the command of God and the blessings involved in and flowing from a Scriptural observance of the Law, its violation and desecration have increased and are increasing at an alarming and destructive rate. If the pace of this apostasy continues for another generation little will be left of the high values and sacredness of this Divine institution.

In the Sixth of the old McGuffey Readers, which were assigned readings in the schools of a generation or two ago, is an article which the General Assembly might well declare "assigned reading" for all the people, young and old, of our Church. The article is entitled, "Observance of the Sabbath".

The committee went on to quote the "greater part of" McGuffey before continuing,

We believe it to be the duty of the State to appoint and maintain a civil Sabbath free from worldly toil, worldly business and worldly sports, so that the people may have

the time to devote to the worship of God and to the performance of religious duties and activities. Never in the history of our country has Sunday been more commercialized and maliciously desecrated than it is today. It should be of first concern to every true and loyal citizen to maintain the holiness of Sunday, for this is fundamental to the highest well-being of the State and society. The Continental conception of Sunday is both un-American and un-Christian.

We believe it to be the duty of the Church to proclaim and properly enforce the Divine command to observe the Sabbath-day Law as God has instructed. We summon all Christians, ministers, officers and members of the Church—men, women and young people—to abandon the compromising, defeatist attitude in respect to a Scriptural observance of the Sabbath, and surrender not the Church's historic position, or lower its standard in reference to the proper observance of the Day.

The weekly Sabbath must be saved. The responsibility for saving it rests, by Divine command, upon the individual, the family, the Church and the State. A united front of these agencies can, under the blessing of God, save the Day. Jesus, in an aggressive and courageous manner, met the apostasy of false-traditionalism, ultra-conservatism and extreme formalism of His time on earth, and He challenges us in our time to meet a like apostasy of ultra-liberalism, selfish commercialism and worldly pleasure-seeking and to restore the Holy Day to our Lord. A holy Sabbath and a secular Sunday cannot prevail contemporaneously. They are opposites, and one is subversive of the other. An ideal life and culture, a Christian Church and civilization cannot be built out of the debris of a broken down Sabbath. Secularize the Sabbath and you paganize the people. Justice John McLean of the Supreme Court of the United States truly said, "Where there is no Christian Sabbath, there is no Christian morality, and without this our free institutions cannot long be maintained."

We very earnestly call upon all who love our Lord and who love and cherish His Day to live by and proclaim the Law of the Sabbath as Divine in its origin; unrepealed and unrepeatable, and most beneficent in its purpose and values, for the glory of God and our enjoyment of Him.

We recommend, that September 29, 1946, be designated as Sabbath Observance Day, and that our ministers be urgently requested to preach a sermon on Sabbath

Observance on that day and to read this report to their congregations. (*PCUS Minutes* {1946}, 96, 168–170).

In 1947 amongst other recommendations, the standing committee commended the permanent committee's report, and added,

We find that the same disregard for the Sabbath, as is reported from year to year, is most evident from all angles of observation, with this addition: a more alarming drift in this country toward a continental Sunday. Too, it appears that Christian people are becoming more oblivious to the consciousness of all responsibilities relative to the Sabbath. Yet, in spite of all the discouraging factors confronting them, our constituted agencies are most enthusiastically contending for the ordinance and benefits of the Sabbath. (*PCUS Minutes* {1947}, 96).

The permanent committee report for 1947 opened with the words of Voltaire,

We may take as a text for this report a saying of the famous infidel, Voltaire: "*There is no hope of destroying Christianity so long as the Christian Sabbath is acknowledged and observed as a sacred day.*"

The duty of observing one day in seven as a day of worship and rest from toil is based on the will and decree of the Creator, the universal need of mankind for periodical relaxation of body and mind, and the need of some homage being paid to God as Creator, Preserver and Redeemer.

Save the Sabbath for the Church, for America and for the World is a call that should go out from the 1947 Assembly as one of its most important actions.

There is no need for us to recite evidence to show that in all departments of life in our country today, the Sabbath is disregarded and desecrated, rather than being "acknowledged and observed as a sacred day." Of all the sad and tragic facts in the present alarming situation of our drift toward a Continental Sunday, the saddest and most tragic is the apparent indifference of the Church of Christ to this drift and the neglect and dishonoring of the Lord's Day by the vast majority of church members.

Our Church, together with others, is longing for a revival and a genuine revitalizing of spiritual life, but is not giving due consideration to one of the great factors in the spiritual lethargy—the neglect and desecration of the Sabbath.

“If thou turn away ... from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, ...”
Is. 58: 13–14.... (*PCUS Minutes* {1947}, 188–189).

In a comment that seems to sum up how the many pleas of the Sabbath committees had been received over the decades, the 1947 report concludes,

This report is respectfully submitted with the hope that it will not be received and considered just an ordinary annual report, to be adopted, or rejected, and forgotten, but as a call for a new and definite effort on the part of the Assembly and of the Presbyterian Church in the United States to save the Sabbath. “There is no hope of destroying Christianity so long as the Christian Sabbath is acknowledged and observed as a sacred day.” *Ibid*, 189.

In 1948 the standing committee recommended the permanent committee report as follows,

The General Assembly recognizes that in the Reign of Grace our Saviour and King, the Lord Jesus Christ, writes His laws upon our minds and upon our hearts. Thus when our ministers faithfully proclaim the teaching of God’s Word upon the Sabbath there is a response in the Christian conscience. In the Ten Commandments we are called to remember the Sabbath by abstaining from our labors and from those things which require others to labor for us. In the prophecy of Isaiah (58:13) God directs His people to abstain from their worldly pleasures that His Holy Day may not be turned into a mere holiday. In Jeremiah 17:19–27, He promises the continuation of those cities which observe this sign of covenant loyalty to God and warns against the destruction of those cities which turn the day into a time of commerce and amusements. In the New Testament our Saviour calls us to use the Lord’s Day as a time for worship, for preaching and teaching the Gospel, and for ministering to human needs.... (*PCUS Minutes* {1948}, 96–97).

The permanent committee in a longer report this year tried to address common objections against Sabbath observance and, in a rare move, actually cited the doctrinal standards of the PCUS,

With this report your present Permanent Committee on the Sabbath concludes its six-year period of service. In former reports the committee has sought to expound

the Law of the Sabbath, to inculcate the blessings which attend its observance and to warn against its neglect and profanation. However, it must now record its clear and solemn conviction that the neglect and profanation of the Day has continued and increased to an alarming and distressing degree. The divine design of the Day is being more and more disregarded and its precepts violated by both professing Christians and the people of the world.

Organized selfishness, greed and pleasure-lust are making powerful and deadly attacks on the Sabbath with the purpose of undermining respect for the Day as holy, or of destroying it altogether. For evidence of this just observe the activities of the pleasure resorts, the moving-picture industry, commercial sports, the liquor interests, the racing and gambling factors and the social and business conventions and conferences of the large unchurched element of the population of our country. These all are in hostile array, as forces of the world, in an all-out campaign to destroy this holy and beneficent institution.

This truly is bad enough. “But”, as Dr. Jerome Leinbach points out, “there is something still worse; there is an enemy far more dangerous than these enemies from without. I refer to that enemy from within the ranks of so-called Christian people—the apathy on the part of a large element of our church members who make no effort to combat the evil forces, who frequently fall under the lure of the tempter, even betraying the cause by acquiescence with the philosophy of the worldly enemies. These piously recite the Ten Commandments, the confession and creeds, observe the sacrifices and feasts on a Sabbath morning; go to the movies, the races or athletic contests on the afternoon; to a cocktail party in the evening; and to the polls the following election day to vote for the so-called ‘open Sunday’; what a sorry spectacle; what are the reasons?”

WHAT IS SAID ABOUT THE SABBATH

What some people say: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; I may, therefore, use the day for whatever worldly work or worldly recreation seems to me good for me as a man.”

To which we reply: This interpretation of this statement of Christ is entirely erroneous and unscriptural. Christ also said, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” As the Lord of the Day He alone has the right and authority to decree how it is to be used and observed for the true benefit of man.

What some other people say: “There is no positive command in the New Testament to observe the Fourth Commandment.”

To this we reply: No such command was needed. The Fourth Commandment being a moral law, and having been once announced and enjoined in the Old Testament, and having never been repealed, remains in full force in the New; and was so recognized by both Christ and His apostles.

What still other people say: “For the non-observance of a weekly-Sabbath we appeal to such Scriptural passages as Col. 2:16 and Rom. 14:5, referring to judging Christians regarding the observance of special days.”

To this we reply: These passages have no reference to the Moral Law of the Sabbath, which, like every other moral law, is universal and perpetual. They refer to the ceremonial law.

What still other people say: “A strict religious observance of the Sabbath works a hardship on the business man and the labouring man who need Sunday as a day for recreation.”

To which we rejoin: If employers overwork themselves and their employees during six days in the week, this grievous evil cannot righteously be amended by ignoring and violating an expressed command of God. Such a sin cannot be atoned for by making the Sabbath a day of worldly amusement. Two wrongs do not make a right.

What some good people say: The Old Testament law of the Sabbath is contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, which requires the full consecration of all our time to God. The Christian is not under law, but under grace. Every day is holy, and one day is not more holy than another.”

To this we respond: It is not true that the New Testament requires greater consecration to God than does the Old, and it is clearly a misapplication of the Gospel principle that we, as Christians, are not under law but under grace, to refer it to the law as a rule of life. We are not under the law for our justification but under grace; but the law as a rule of life is not thereby abrogated. “God gave to Adam a law. This law after Adam’s fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon the mount of Sinai in ten commandments, and written in two tables; the first four commandments containing our duty

towards God, and the other six our duty to man. The Moral Law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that not only in regard to the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator who gave it. Neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen, this obligation.” (Confession of Faith: Chap. XIX: I, II, V.) “Religion cannot be exclusively a matter of the heart so long as man is in the flesh.” The spiritual needs of believers require the ordinances of a stated ministry of the Word, Sacraments and a communion of prayer and praise, all of which have been divinely appointed, and a special weekly day ordained and sanctified for their observance.

What God says: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son; nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” (Ex. 20:8–11.)

To this what should we reply? Yes, Lord, Thy Day, the Christian Sabbath, “Is to be sanctified by an holy resting all that Day not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful: and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God’s worship”. (Larger Catechism: Q. & A. 117.)

But, ‘alas: What is the prevailing response to this today? NEGLECT AND DESECRATION: THE DOING OF WHATEVER KIND OF WORK SEEMS WORLDLY PROFITABLE; A HOLIDAY FOR WORLDLY PLEASURE:

Christian people, ministers, officers and members of the church, surely do not realize what they are doing, when by their example and teaching, they encourage, approve or practise the neglect and profanation of the Lord’s Day, the Christian Sabbath. God has expressly commanded: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me,” “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” “Thou shalt not kill,” “Thou shalt not steal,” AND “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” The latter command is as absolute, universal and perpetual in its obligation as the

others. Now if thou worship no other gods, if thou commit no adultery, nor kill nor steal, yet if thou remember not the Sabbath day to keep it holy, “thou art become a transgressor of the law.” (James 2:11.) The violation of the one is as truly a sin against God as is the violation of the others. “Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?”

Let us beware, brethren: As goes the Sabbath, so goes the church; as goes the church, so goes the nation. Any people who neglect the duties and privileges of the Sabbath day soon lose the knowledge of true religion and become pagan. If men refuse to retain God in their knowledge; God declares that He will give them over to a reprobate mind. Both history and experience confirm this truth. The knowledge of God would become fatally insufficient without the institution of the Sabbath.

Your Committee, brethren, fervently entreats you to send forth a clarion call to the whole Church, its ministers, officers and members, to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

We are pleased to report that the Lord’s Day Alliance has kindly consented to cooperate with the Assembly in an effort to unite the Christian bodies of the world in a common drive for Sabbath ideals and the adoption of some special Sunday each year to be observed as World Sabbath Observance Day.

There was referred to our Committee the matter of a proposed change of the Gregorian Calendar to a new World Calendar.

As historic Christianity, almost without exception, has held to the continuity of the seven-day week and the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath; and as the proposed World Calendar would violate the weekly cycle of the Sabbath, and thereby eliminate some of the Sabbaths over a course of years, we recommend that the Assembly declare its opposition to the proposed change to the World Calendar, or any other calendar which will not maintain the integrity of the weekly cycle in perpetuity.... (PCUS Minutes {1948}, 181–184).

In what would be the last report of its kind, the 1949 standing committee mostly paraphrased or cited the permanent report but prefaced with these words:

We, as Christians, are prone to forget Jesus Christ. Jesus, therefore, instituted the Lord’s Supper and said,

“This do in remembrance of Me.” We, as Christians, are prone to forget the Sabbath, and God said, “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.”

And they concluded the summary with the following,

Today in Christian America the Sabbath is a far cry from what Jesus taught about the Sabbath and what He did on the Sabbath. Members of the church should not lend their support to the breakdown of the Sabbath by attending amusements—paid or for charity—on the Sabbath. (PCUS Minutes {1949}, 213–215).

The permanent committee for 1949 reported,

All real Christians accept Jesus as the authoritative and final Teacher and Example on all matters of morals and religion. What He said and did are for them Law and Gospel. His teaching, therefore, should be obeyed and His example followed, and anything to the contrary is wrong and sinful.

The Biblical answer to the question, What did Jesus teach and what did He do about the observance of a weekly Holy day? declares our duty for all time in reference to Sabbath, or Lord’s Day, observance.

WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE SABBATH:

1. “I came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it.”
2. “The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.”
3. “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”
4. “Wherefore it is lawful to do good on Sabbath day.”

WHAT JESUS DID ON THE SABBATH:

1. He kept the Sabbath day holy, sanctifying it by an holy rest all the day from worldly works and worldly recreations.
2. He engaged in private and public worship.
3. He went about giving religious instruction to the people and doing good.
4. He dined as a guest in private homes and there engaged in conversation about spiritual things.

5. He did secular works of necessity and works of mercy.

6. He rose from the dead, and met, instructed and ministered to His disciples. "All hail ... Go tell ... Peace be unto you."

Summarizing and interpreting what Jesus said about and did on the Sabbath, we have the answer to the question as to how the Sabbath, the Lord's Day, should be observed and what our duty is in reference thereto.

Neither anything Jesus said about or did on the Day annulled the essential moral principle of the Fourth Commandment. By what He said and did we are taught that the entire Sabbath or Lord's Day is to be sanctified by an holy rest from all worldly works and worldly recreations and spent in CHRISTIAN WORSHIP (private and public), CHRISTIAN SERVICE (religious instruction and other religious activities), CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP (in the church and in the home with conversation about spiritual things) and OTHER CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES (secular works of necessity and works of mercy).

The Lord's Day is one of God's great gifts to men, and to observe it as Jesus did is to make it for the real Christian what it is intended to be, a day of joy and gladness, not a burden but a delight, an "emblem of eternal rest."

It is the purpose of this report to contrast the Divine ideal of the observance of the Lord's Day, as taught by Jesus, with the way the Day is now spent in America and by the multitudes among us.

Instead of an holy rest on the Lord's Day from all worldly works and worldly recreations and a spending of the entire Day in Christian worship (private and public), Christian service (religious instruction and other religious activities), Christian fellowship (in the church and in the home with conversation about spiritual things) and other Christian ministries (secular works of necessity and works of mercy), what have we today?

Sunday becoming more and more a work day instead of a rest day; business and labor for production, distribution and exchange of worldly goods being carried on to such an extent that Sunday is scarcely distinguishable from the other days of the week; individuals, corporations and governments persistently working in all kinds of secular employments and recreations;

Sunday becoming more and more a day for the meetings

of secular conventions. Governmental, political, financial and social organizations are making Sunday a priority day for the meetings of regular sessions, committees, directors and other groups; Sunday becoming more and more a holiday. Multitudes, many of whom are professing Christians, spending the Day racing up and down the highways in automobiles, trains and buses, or attending worldly games and sports, such as moving pictures, football, basketball, baseball, auto and horse races, airplane shows and the like, or attending, social parties and receptions of a worldly nature, or playing golf, hunting, swimming, fishing and other worldly amusements at pleasure resorts.

Mark the contrast, brethren, between the Divine ideal, as Jesus taught it, on the way the Lord's Day should be spent and the way it is being spent in our generation. If we keep on in the way of neglect and desecration of the Day as we have been going, soon we will have no Christian Sabbath in this land. There will be no difference with us between the Lord's Day and the six other days of the week.

Is that what we want? Surely NOT. Since the institution of the Lord's Day is basic and vital to the well-being of ourselves, our homes, our churches, our country and the Kingdom of God among men, we surely want the Lord's Day preserved in its integrity as a Divine, universal and perpetual institution, and observed as Jesus taught that it should be observed.

What, then, do we think should be done to check the apostasy from the Jesus ideal of the Day, its secularization, neglect and desecration, and to restore its proper observance?

We would suggest a program somewhat like the following... (*PCUS Minutes* {1949}, 90).

PCUS SABBATH VOICE MUTED

In 1950 the Sabbath committees "abruptly" disappeared, silencing the annual voice that had been long advocating for a better observance of the Lord's Day in the PCUS (Johnson, "On Dropping the Subject," 103-104).

... in 1950 the committee abruptly disappeared, a victim of a reorganization of General Assembly committees. The body charged with planning the reorganization explained that the General Assembly had far too many committees, and that "some commissioners elected or

appointed to ... minor committees felt a sense of frustration and deflated ego by being shunted to such committees." Among the "minor" committees mentioned was the Permanent Committee on the Sabbath (GA, PCUS, 1949, p. 165), which the General Assembly then proceeded to abolish, assigning its duties to an agency that would eventually become the Permanent Committee on Interchurch Relations (GA, PCUS, 1949, pp. 143, 166). No protests were recorded and no overtures on the matter were ever presented. By the end of the 1940s the bulk of Presbyterians all over the country had lost interest in the Sabbath as traditionally observed. The southern church, like the northern church, continued its affiliation with the Lord's Day Alliance for years to come," and summaries of the Alliance's annual reports were duly printed in the General Assembly minutes, but on only one occasion did the Permanent Committee on Interchurch Relations issue a report of its own on Sabbath matters, and it was very brief.⁴⁹

There were apparently some continuing concerns for the observance of the Lord's Day, and in 1958 the PCUS gave out a more thorough and scholarly report on the whole matter of the Sabbath than it had to this point; but it was to be the last word of any support for Lord's Day observance. Johnson writes,

... a concern with Sabbath observance evidently lingered in some quarters of the southern church, for in 1957 the General Assembly concurred with an overture from the Presbytery of Potomac asking for a study of "Biblical teaching regarding the proper observance and use of the Lord's Day on the part of Christians" (GA, PCUS, 1957, pp. 30, 66). The next year the Assembly adopted the study committee's long and scholarly report, which incorporated a careful review of Old and New Testament teachings as well as some recommendations for how the Sabbath should be kept. The committee admitted that "the Day which God wanted to be a delight has become for many a dreary series of 'don'ts'" (GA, PCUS, 1958, p. 182), but instead of denouncing the church once more for its laxity, it acknowledged

49. "In 1957 the Permanent Committee warned of 'the moral and spiritual disaster to the churches and the nation which would follow the complete secularization of the Lord's Day (GA, PCUS, 1957, p. 162)." Johnson, p. 103, 171.

50. Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South 1890-1972*, volume 3 (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1973), 514.

51. The committee covered its subject in three sections, "Biblical Teaching," "Difficulties and Dangers," and "How Far Can We Go on the Sabbath." Cf. Louis Weeks summary in "The Scriptures and Sabbath Observance in the South," 277-280.

how hard it is "to keep the Lord's Day effectively" under modern conditions (GA, PCUS, 1958, p. 185). The committee was happy, however, to "discover in the Word of God positive guiding principles for the refreshing and fruitful uses of God's Holy Day" (GA, PCUS, 1958, p. 182). The Sabbath, it found, is a day for worship, for instruction, for rededication, for family activities, for rest, and for Christian service and rejoicing. As for family activities, the committee suggested "playing games" and "serving special refreshments" (GA, PCUS, 1958, pp. 186-187). But despite the positive and unlegalistic tone of the report, and the green light it gave to family fun on Sunday, it did not break radically with the old standards. The committee did not, for example, say that it is perfectly acceptable to conduct ordinary business on Sunday. With this irenic but relatively traditional report of 1958, however, the southern church made its last formal pronouncement on the subject of how Presbyterians should observe the Sabbath.

Eleven years later, by deed rather than by word, it too announced that the Sabbath was now a dead issue. In 1969 the General Assembly itself conducted regular business on Sunday. No commissioners' protests were recorded and no overtures were received on the subject (Johnson, 104).

Ernest Trice Thompson also characterized this report as a significant break with the past.

... then in 1958 came a long ad interim committee report, adopted by the Assembly, which for the first time took into account the realities of modern life. A legalistic interpretation of the Scriptural teaching was avoided. 'Anything that detracts from the public worship of God or leaves us less than our best when we come into his presence' was deplored. But it was the positive that was accentuated, not the negative. The Sabbath is intended to be a day for the worship of God, for instruction, for rededication, a family day (but not an occasion of dreary discipline: 'The reading of good books, playing games, listening to great music, even the serving of special refreshments,' it was said, 'can be a glad part of the family's day of rest and renewal'), a day of rest (but not necessarily of physical inactivity: 'For exercise can be a means of rest'), a day of Christian service, a day of rejoicing.⁵⁰

What is clear is that while more scholarly than the many prior Sabbath committee reports,⁵¹ at least two serious flaws should have portended the passing of

Sabbatarianism in the PCUS.⁵² The determination to downplay the negative side of the fourth commandment as a dreary set of ‘thou shalt nots,’ rather than stressing the proper place for teaching what the command prohibits (the sins forbidden), and surrendering the Lord’s Day at least in part as a family day, allowing for activities (i.e., recreations) without any worship quality to them, essentially gave over any pretense of contending for the Puritan Sabbath of the Westminster Standards.

While the progressives who tended to focus on the benefit of the day as a day off for laboring man,⁵³ were in control by 1941, that in itself may not solely explain the shift.⁵⁴ It is not as though the committees over all the previous decades attracted only conservatives. Long-serving members included conservatives like C. T. Caldwell and Robert Crawford McQuilkin,⁵⁵ but also more progressive men such as R. F. Campbell and W. L. Lingle.⁵⁶ The problem seems to have been a broad decline finally finding expression at the General Assembly level. Thompson remarks that in the PCUS “the old Puritan ideal for the Sabbath was retained theoretically long after it had been abandoned in practice.”⁵⁷



Robert Crawford McQuilkin (1886–1952). Courtesy PCAHC

It may also be that any conservative views had been weakened as well through anti-Sabbatarian influences such as dispensationalism.⁵⁸ The report tries to maintain a Christian Sabbath without the full Puritan doctrine of the Confession and Catechisms. But as noted, this report simply was a pause on the way toward giving over the day altogether as something sacred. By the end of the next decade even this report would have seemed too

old fashioned and too strict. We do not see any concern again for the doctrine of the Sabbath in Southern Presbyterianism until 1976 in the Presbyterian Church in America.

THE PCA AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE SABBATH

From the middle of the nineteenth century the Puritan concept of the Sabbath had been under assault, and while there was resistance by some churches such as the old PCUS, even this broader movement was weakened within as it came to be dominated by animas toward the Puritan view.

The surrounding culture in which the PCA found itself at its birth was one that had steadily declined away from one of conscious regard to the Lord’s Day. After

52. The committee members were: John Bright, Graham M. Connell, John Deifell, James E. Hayes, M.D., A. H. Hollingsworth, Jr., James A. Overholser, J. Sherrard Rice, and Andrew R. Bird, Jr., Chairman. The teaching elders (Bright, Hollingsworth, Overholser, Rice and Bird) were graduates of Union Theological Seminary and all studied during the tenor of the enormously influential progressive, Ernest Trice Thompson who taught at Union from 1922 until 1964. The committee appears to have been dominated by progressives, which is not surprising as they had taken control of the denominational ‘machinery’ nearly two decades earlier. “No man had more influence on the Presbyterian Church in the United States...” *Ernest Rice Thompson: An Appreciation* (Richmond, Va.: Union Theological Seminary, 1964), 7. “... conservatives attempted to charge the most prominent and popular progressive minister in the church, E. T. Thompson, with violating his ordination vows by teaching contrary to the Westminster Standards. When the church not only failed to discipline Thompson but exonerated him in 1941, conservatives became convinced that the progressives had captured the machinery of the church.” Sean Michael Lucas, *For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (P & R Publishing, 2015), 6. The

paper “took into account the higher criticism by this time taught in PCUS seminaries. ‘Whatever its ultimate origins may have been...’ the narrative began, the Sabbath came to uniqueness with Moses...” Weeks, “The Scriptures and Sabbath Observance in the South,” page 277.

53. See the Overview in Frank J. Smith, “Politics, International Relations, and the Sabbath: The 1915 International Lord’s Day Congress,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 12 (2016).

54. See previous note #52. Lucas, 67.

55. Contrary to Thompson (3,487), McQuilkin himself was not a dispensationalist. Though he did hold to Keswickian views of sanctification, his views on the Lord’s day appear solid. See R. Todd Mangum. *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Paternoster, 2007), 145, 154, fn 141; and Robert Crawford McQuilkin, *God’s Law and God’s Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1958), 61.

56. Lucas, 14, 168; Thompson, 3,328.

57. Thompson, 3,514.

58. See the views expressed in the 1939 report above. W. L. Lingle,

two World Wars, the expansion of means of amusement via easy travel, increasing commercial activity, and invention of the radio and television, brought new distractions from Lord's Day observance. This trend toward turning the Christian Sabbath into no more than a second Saturday continued in the twentieth century. Even though blue laws were on the books, those cultural and legal barriers peaked in strength in the 1950s and 1960s—the same decades which marked the zenith of worship service attendance.

DECLINE OF THE SABBATH SINCE THE 1960S

We live now in a post-Christian secularized society where fewer people than ever regularly attend church. In a 2007 book, dispensationalist church growth guru Aubrey Malphurs noted one of the reasons people do not attend church, describing a large metropolitan area in the Bible Belt.⁵⁹

A third reason people no longer attend church is that Sunday morning is no longer sacred. The church reached its highest attendance levels between 1954 and 1962, according to Gallup's statistics. For the Builder [i.e. WWII] generation, church attendance offered respectability. Going to church was what proper, middle-class suburban people did on Sunday mornings, especially in the South. Participation in church concurred with an emphasis on the family. It was also associated with patriotism and a strong belief in government and most major institutions. During this time in some parts of the United States, American culture also became largely a church culture. Church is what many people in the South and some parts of the North did on Sunday mornings. Some cities had "blue laws" that prohibited stores from opening on Sundays as well. For

who was a progressive, voiced similar concerns in an article for the *Christian Observer* that same year. Thompson reports that he wrote, "We might as well face the fact ... that there has been growing up in the Presbyterian churches teachings which are utterly foreign to those set forth in the Confession and catechisms of the church," noting amongst other errors the belief that the ten commandments "were not intended for the present age." The PCUS would declare dispensationalism out of accord with the church's standards in 1944. Chafer and others felt it was hypocritical to come after dispensationalism for being contrary to the standards of the church and not similarly take on the spreading liberalism in the PCUS. McQuilkin who was on the dispensationalism committee hoped to use the situation to produce a minority report to bring liberalism under the same sort of scrutiny. However, as already noted, the progressives were in control of the denomination by this time. Thompson, 3,487; Mangum, 123.

59. Aubrey Malphurs, *A New Kind of Church: Understanding Models of Ministry for the 21st Century* (Baker Books, 2007) 32–33.

some people church was the only thing to do on Sunday mornings besides sleep in.

However, all that has changed in most of America. Sunday mornings are sacred no longer, and a number of rivals have surfaced to compete with the church for the hearts and souls of the American citizenry on Sunday. With the repeal of the blue laws, stores can be open on Sunday as well as the other six days of the week. This means that many people have to or choose to work on Sunday.

I was pastoring my second church when the blue laws were repealed in Texas in the 1980s. I didn't support the blue laws, naively thinking that the church could hold its own, even if stores were open. However, I came to understand the impact on the church when one of my members told me that he wouldn't be around much on Sundays anymore because his store would be open and he had to work to keep his job.

Another rival is sports, both participant and spectator. Early in the second half of the twentieth century, only professional football and later basketball competed with churches for customers on Sunday. At the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, all that has changed. On a Sunday in December in Dallas, one can attend a Dallas Cowboys football game, a Dallas Mavericks basketball game, or a Dallas Stars hockey game. If one prefers to actively participate in a sport, there's touch football, softball, and numerous soccer leagues—all on Sunday. Other favorite Sunday activities are jogging around area lakes or working out at a local fitness center for weight control and other health-related benefits.

My community is a great example. Not far from my house in Dallas is White Rock Lake, the largest man-made lake within a city's limits in America. When I leave for church on Sunday morning, usually there are numerous sailboats darting around on the lake as well as people jogging or biking on a track that circles the lake. Right up the street is the Dallas Arboretum, a large flower and plan garden, where many go to participate in events called Dallas Blooms. In addition to all this, a well-maintained public golf course is one-half mile in the opposite direction, not to mention two Starbucks within a mile of my residence. All of this coupled with the Dallas Cowboys or any professional football team on cable television makes it difficult for our Dallas churches to draw people. The competition is not other



White Rock Lake, Dallas, Texas (photograph by the author)

churches but all the leisure activities that are available on Sunday morning.

Malphurs does describe well the state of modern society, even worse now nearly a decade later,⁶⁰ and the various attractions/distractions competing for our attention on the Lord's Day. But the pragmatic consumerism approach of the church growth (aka attractional church) movement has no solution because it has no problem subjugating the Lord's Day to their customers' interests, since they reject that God retains propriety in a whole day for His worship.

THE PCA'S DOCTRINE OF THE SABBATH

Early in its life the Presbyterian Church in America committed itself to the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath as articulated in The Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The PCA's Directory for Worship states:⁶¹

CHAPTER 48

The Sanctification of the Lord's Day

48-1. "The fourth commandment requireth the keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy sabbath to himself" (WSC 58).

48-2. God commanded His Old Testament people to keep holy the last day of the week, but He sanctified the first day as the Sabbath by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. For this reason the Church of the new dispensation has from the time of

the apostles kept holy the first day of the week as the Lord's Day.

48-3. It is the duty of every person to remember the Lord's Day; and to prepare for it before its approach. All worldly business should be so ordered, and seasonably laid aside, as that they may not be hindered thereby from sanctifying the Sabbath, as the Holy Scriptures require.

48-4. The whole day is to be kept holy to the Lord; and to be employed in the public and private exercises of religion. Therefore, it is requisite, that there be a holy resting, all the day, from unnecessary labors; and an abstaining from those recreations which may be lawful on other days; and also, as much as possible, from worldly thoughts and conversation.

48-5. Let the provisions for the support of the family on that day be so ordered that others be not improperly detained from the public worship of God, nor hindered from sanctifying the Sabbath.

60. This writer, having grown up on the west side of White Rock Lake, lives now on the east side, and he can affirm one cannot tell the difference between Saturday and the Lord's Day as far as the numbers out in the parks and trails.

61. In its forty-five year history the PCA has only granted constitutional status to the three chapters of the directory dealing with the sacraments. "Temporary statement adopted by the Third General Assembly to preface the Directory for Worship: The Directory for Worship is an approved guide and should be taken seriously as the mind of the Church agreeable to the Standards. However, it does not have the force of law and is not to be considered obligatory in all its parts." *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*, Sixth edition (2014 reprint), The Directory for the Worship of God, Chapter 48. Cf. *PCA Minutes* (1973), 155; (1975), 55.

48–6. Let every person and family, in the morning, by secret and private prayer, for themselves and others, especially for the assistance of God to their minister, and for a blessing upon his ministry, by reading the Scriptures, and by holy meditation, prepare for communion with God in his public ordinances.

48–7. Let the time not used for public worship be spent in prayer, in devotional reading, and especially in the study of the Scriptures, meditation, catechising, religious conversation, the singing of psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs; visiting the sick, relieving the poor, teaching the ignorant, holy resting, and in performing such like duties of piety, charity, and mercy.

Three years after the PCA's founding, the fourth General Assembly of 1976 approved the overture out of Calvary Presbytery cited at the top of this article (*PCA Minutes* {1976} 65).

In 1981 the PCA General Assembly approved the following:

Whereas, a bill has been prefiled in the Congress of the United States of America to change the day of national elections from Tuesday to Sunday, and

Whereas, the Lord of the Sabbath has instructed his people to, "Give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's,"

Be it therefore resolved that the Ninth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, on clear Scriptural principles, opposes this proposed usurpation of God's prerogatives by the civil magistrate.

Grounds:

1. BCO 11:2.1; 14:6.
2. WCF Chapter 21, paragraph 7.
3. A change in national election day to Sunday would force many PCA members to violate their consciences in matters of obedience to God's Word. *Adopted*

By motion duly seconded, the Stated Clerk was directed to send a copy of this Resolution to the President and to the Congress of the United States of America. *Adopted* (*PCA Minutes* {1981} 149).

Also in 1981 the General Assembly received a resolution

which it answered at the 1982 Assembly (the year the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod {RP-CES} was received into the PCA), regarding the extent of subscription to the confession and catechisms and specifically whether it was allowable for a man to take explicit or implicit exception to the five points of Calvinism, baptism only once, and to "Sabbath Observance as set forth in the Confession." The answer adopted by the assembly included the following:

It would be unwise, improper, and unconstitutional for the General Assembly to determine abstractly apart from the proper processes afforded by our constitutional standards what would disqualify a man from holding office in the Presbyterian Church in America. The constitution provides that the standards of our church may be modified if it should be proved from the Word of God, our only inerrant and unalterable guide to faith and practice, that the standards are in any way not in agreement with that Word. Also, as the result of proper judicial processes, judgments may be made which determinately interpret what may or may not be in accord with our standards. Any other procedure of setting forth or compiling a list of essential or nonessential doctrines would, in effect, amend the standards by an unconstitutional method. *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* are already held by our church as "standard expositions of the teaching of Scripture in relation to both faith and practice" (BCO 29–1) and all officers and candidates for office in the Presbyterian Church in America are required to adopt our standards sincerely and without mental reservation (WCF 22–4) as faithful expositions of Bible truth.

The approval of any man for office belongs, in the first place, to the court of jurisdiction (BCO 21–5). The Church has always reserved to herself the prerogative of determining what views shall not be in accord with the standards. No officer should presume to have the right of making a self-evaluation regarding the conformity of his view.

Any exception to the constitutional standards may have the potential of striking at the vitals of religion (see BCO 34–5), even one which some may consider to refer to an obscure or very technical point of doctrine. A system of doctrine is made up of constituent parts, so that a variation in one of these parts may logically effect a change in the system as a whole. Any court of jurisdiction should therefore give careful consideration to any exception a man might reveal or take with regard to the

constitutional standards before determining that an exception is or is not in conformity to the standards and/or proceeding to receive, ordain, and/or to install him (*PCA Minutes* {1982}, 103).

About a decade later, in 1993, the General Assembly approved a resolution rebuking the PCA's Mission to North America (MNA) about a Super Bowl video:

OVERTURE 21 From the Presbytery of Eastern Canada

"Rebuke MNA for Promoting Activities Contrary to our Constitution and Instruct MNA to Conform to the Doctrines of PCA"

Whereas, Mission to North America, on November 20th, 1992, circulated the churches of the PCA promoting evangelism through Superbowl parties; and

Whereas, the Superbowl parties meant inviting people into your home or church on the Lord's day to watch the Superbowl and a half-time evangelistic video, and

Whereas, this is clearly contrary to the confessional standards of our church, which declare that "The sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship" (*Larger Catechism* question 117, emphasis added); and

Whereas, the drift from biblical presbyterian principles to unbiblical neoevangelicalism comes most readily through misplaced zeal for reaching the lost, which leads to carelessness about scriptural principles in our outreach; and

Whereas, MNA was asked in a letter dated December 2, 1992, from Bedford Presbyterian Church, to correct this breach of God's law as it is understood in this church; and

Whereas, MNA did not to our knowledge make any effort to discourage the error it had promoted; and

Whereas, MNA has not to this time responded to the challenge at all (though the individual with responsibility has responded personally); and

Whereas, the committees of the General Assembly are charged to be servants of the General Assembly, and are to operate according to the rules of the PCA, and in particular, in conformity to the Scripture as understood by the PCA,

Therefore, the Presbytery of Eastern Canada overtures the Twenty-First General Assembly:

1. to commend the Committee on Mission to North America and its staff for its zeal for evangelism of the unchurched; but
2. to rebuke the committee for its promotion of an activity which does not conform to our standards;
3. to instruct the committee that it is to be careful to conform to the doctrine of the PCA in all that it does, and particularly that it should examine new proposals closely to be sure they conform to our doctrine, before promoting them; and
4. to warn the whole church against yielding to the pragmatic spirit of our age, reminding all that we cannot expect to do good by disobedience to God. (*PCA Minutes* {1993}, 98-100).

THE PCA'S AMBIVALENCE TOWARD SABBATARIANISM

Having noted the PCA's directory for worship and several positive resolutions regarding the Lord's Day, we return to the question asked at the opening of this article. How did the PCA decline from the high aspirations of the preceding decades to the point two presbyteries were of such a mind to petition the General Assembly to significantly change the wording of the PCA's doctrine and commitment to a high view of the Lord's Day?

It is difficult to discern at the founding of the PCA just how unified or clear the majority were in how strictly to enforce subscription to doctrinal standards. One can surmise from wounds the conservatives would have been smarting from over the decades previous to the founding of the PCA, that they would favor full subscription,⁶² given battles fought against

62. "Beginning in the late 1920s, progressive ministers—especially those serving in East Hanover Presbytery, which had Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, within its boundaries—determined to bring change to their church. With an eye on the larger goal, reunion with the northern Presbyterian church, these ministers brought several overtures to the General Assembly that attacked two

the progressive push for confessional revision and against maintaining full subscription to doctrinal standards, progressives favoring “subscription to the ‘system of doctrine,’ without trying to tie men down to every statement of detail.”⁶³ And however imperfect it was in reality, or even in concept amongst the founders, the founding Message to All Churches seems clear that in principal the continuing church would be a conservative “Old School” rather than “New School” successor to the PCUS. As such it would be a faithful adherent and propagator of the doctrines and piety of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as held in Old School Southern Presbyterianism. The founders of the PCA declared:

Change in the Presbyterian Church in the United States came as a gradual thing, and its ascendancy in the denomination, over a long period of time. We confess that it should not have been permitted. Views and practices that undermine and supplant the system of doctrine or polity of a confessional Church ought never

key conservative commitments: the ‘spiritual mission of the church’ and full subscription to the Westminster Standards as the doctrinal statement of the church.” *For a Continuing Church*, 39.

63. This was the opinion of the ‘conservative progressive’ Walter W. Moore, expressed in a letter to Dr. A. J. McKelway, circa 1903. Moore instructed many seminarians as professor at what would become a dominant progressive influence, Union Theological Seminary in Richmond. Seeing a disastrous ‘explosion’ ahead if liberty was not granted to have system subscription, Moore thought it “better to profit by the experience of our church in Scotland and at the North than to have an experience of our own.... If we only have sense enough we can have such a state of things in our Church by the time the questions of the Higher Criticism, for instance, really reach the body of our ministers, that we shall not be torn into bloody pieces by the discussion”... “The Church may quietly grow to the apprehension that many of the points that now seem to so many essential are but points of purely incidental interest...” *The Life and Letters of Walter W. Moore, second founder and first president of Union theological seminary in Virginia*, by J. Gray McAllister (Richmond, Va.: Union Theological Seminary, c1939), 208–209. See also, Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, 16.

64. “Message to All Churches,” December 7, 1973. <http://www.pca-history.org/documents/message.html> (accessed February 12, 2016).

65. This division harkened back to a similar earlier divide between Old Side and New Side Presbyterians over the revivalism of the First Great Awakening.

66. William H. Smith, “What is the PCA? A New Side - New School Church,” <http://thecristiancurmudgeonmo.blogspot.com/2013/07/what-is-pca-new-side-new-school-church.html> [accessed June 22, 2015].

67. Cited in D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, “Turning Points in American Presbyterian History Part 12: 1973: The Presbyterian Church in America,” *New Horizons*, http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=65 (accessed February 9, 2016).

68. The Layman and his Church, “Presbyterian Cannibals,” Presbyterian elder’s wife, name withheld, *The Presbyterian Journal*, vol. XXX, No. 26 (October 27, 1971): 13.

to be tolerated. A Church that will not exercise discipline will not long be able to maintain pure doctrine or godly practice.

When a denomination will not exercise discipline and its courts have become heterodox or disposed to tolerate error, the minority finds itself in the anomalous position of being submissive to a tolerant and erring majority. In order to proclaim the truth and to practice the discipline which they believe obedience to Christ requires, it then becomes necessary for them to separate. This is the exercise of discipline in reverse. It is how we view our separation.

... We declare also that we believe the system of doctrine found in God’s Word to be the system known as the Reformed Faith. We are committed without reservation to the Reformed Faith as set forth in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. It is our conviction that the Reformed faith is not sectarian, but an authentic and valid expression of Biblical Christianity.⁶⁴

The terms Old School and New School go back to the division in the PCUSA in the mid-nineteenth century over subscription to the Westminster Standards, rooted in the Old School’s stricter confessionalism and rejection of the Second Great Awakening, which was characterized by its Arminian theology and the emotion-driven ‘new measures’ of Finney revivalism.⁶⁵ As to the New School,

The New School, in order to defend the theology of the Second Awakening, had to argue for a much broader view of the essentials of the Westminster theology and for a much weaker view of what commitments an officer made to the Standards when he took his vows. The New School strongly favored mission over theology while the Old School held that theology defines and directs mission.⁶⁶

Despite the Message’s strong expression of principle, however, the state of things was not very sound at the PCA’s founding as far as the doctrine of the Sabbath. Anecdotally there were signs of weakness in those interested in a ‘continuing church.’ *The Presbyterian Journal*, the renamed *Southern Presbyterian Journal* which was founded in 1942, served to call the old PCUS “back to her original position, a position unequivocally loyal to the Word of God and the Standards of our church which God has so signally blessed....”⁶⁷ In 1971 in a column titled “Presbyterian Cannibals,” the writer observed,⁶⁸

Have you ever noticed the exodus from the sanctuary which begins when the closing hymn is announced? Certain members occupy the back pews in order to leave before the service is over and to be first out of the parking lot and into a restaurant!

And Dr. Morton Smith at the dawn of the PCA “observed that the general observance of the Sabbath has declined markedly across the board in our Church. This is true not only among our liberal friends but also within our conservative circles.”⁶⁹

Just a couple of years later another correspondent with *The Presbyterian Journal* wrote,⁷⁰

The news item, “Restaurant Doing Well on Christian Principles” (*Journal*, Sept. 17, [XXXIV, No. 20, page 5]), noted that Hayable’s Hearth Restaurant is closed on Sundays so the staff can attend church. They are to be commended. I never cease to be amazed at ministers and laymen alike who attack department and other stores for opening on Sunday, yet they go directly from church to a public restaurant or to a club to eat. It is quite easy to prepare food on Saturday for Sunday eating at home, or a meager meal of ready prepared food such as bread and cheese can be taken, or better still, why not fast on Sunday?—H. Raworth Walker, Evans, Ga.

Nevertheless, it should have been an encouraging sign that the Presbyterian Church in America, following at least in a small way all the many precedents made over nearly eighty years in the PCUS, made such a plea in 1976 for better observance of the Lord’s Day. However, it is not clear that anything other than the pronouncement was made. Did this resolution result in churches teaching on the doctrine of the Sabbath more diligently? It is difficult to ascertain what effect there was. Perhaps it is telling, that the overture itself seems to have had some initial push back. The plea began as an overture sent to Calvary Presbytery from the session of Roebuck Presbyterian Church (pastored by Fred Thompson).

Overture to Calvary Presbytery from the Sessions of Roebuck Presbyterian Church and the Center Point Presbyterian Church requesting the Presbytery to overture the General Assembly to reaffirm its position on the Sanctity of the Sabbath Day and its stand against the profanation thereof.

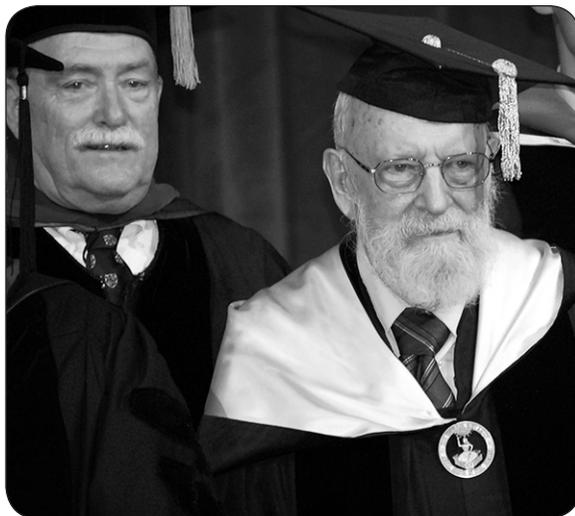
Whereas the Word of God clearly instructs men to observe the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy and to set aside this one day out of seven as being consecrated to the Lord,

And whereas the Sabbath Day has fallen into widespread profanation and disuse in American society today, and various athletic, commercial, and social enterprises and activities have all but obliterated our former national reverence for this holy day,

Therefore, we the members of Calvary Presbytery Overture the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America to reaffirm our

unwavering stand against all unnecessary encroachments upon the Lord’s Day, and to exhort all citizens everywhere to worship God and to properly set aside and sanctify the Sabbath of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷¹

From the presbytery minutes it is clear there was some discomfort over talk of profanations and abuses, and the overtures committee proposed that the entire second paragraph be omitted. This may have been from concern for over stressing prohibitions, favoring stressing positive duties; but it is also true that at this time there were anti-Sabbatarian views amongst conservative Presbyterians.



Dr. Morton H. Smith (right) with Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, GPTS Commencement, May 20, 2011. Courtesy of Tricia Stevenson.

69. “A Message delivered to the Convocation of Sessions Atlanta, Georgia May 18, 1973,” Morton H. Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim*. <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/convocation/smith-gold.html> (accessed July 7, 2015).

70. Mailbag, H. Raworth Walker, “Sunday Dinner,” *The Presbyterian Journal*, XXXIV, No. 24 (October 15, 1975): 2.

71. Minutes of Calvary Presbytery, Twelfth Stated Session, April 22, 1976, page 14 of bound minutes. Box 404, file 24, PCA Historical Center, St. Louis, Mo. Our thanks to Wayne Sparkman for providing the transcription.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church had produced their 1972 study committee reports regarding the Sabbath in 1973.⁷² While the majority report was sound, two minority reports indicated acceptance of the doctrine of the Sabbath expressed in the Westminster Standards was not uniformly embraced. A minority report by Richard M. Lewis (of the Presbytery of Northern California) outright rejected the Sabbatarian view of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms. In another minority report D. Clair Davis raised the question of why was this being brought up in conjunction with the then-potential merger of the OPC with the RPCES, and the indication was that at least on somebody's part there was a question as to whether ordination vows required holding to the Sabbatarianism of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms (*OPC Minutes* {1973}, 112).

In considering the overture from the Presbytery of Southern California which requested the Committee on Sabbath Matters to study, in connection with possible union with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, "the question as to whether the second ordination vow requires the acceptance of the teaching of our secondary standards regarding the Christian Sabbath or Lord's Day," the undersigned, differing from the committee, considers that it is unwise and inexpedient to answer this question in the abstract (*in thesi*), and without giving attention to the very concrete occasion of the question, namely possible church union. Surely absolute candor and forthrightness in considering the specific "some difference of opinion as to the meaning of the second ordination vow" is demanded.

While both the OPC and RPCES were sound on paper as to the fourth commandment, just as in the PCA all was not necessarily well in practice. Obviously it is concerning to see that one of the OPC's ministers would take such a drastic departure from the doctrine of the fourth commandment as the Rev. Richard Lewis did in his minority dissent. However, things were not well elsewhere at this time either in the OPC. The Presbytery of Southern California from which came the question

before the Sabbath committee on whether ordination vows required holding to the teaching on the fourth commandment, was careless in regard to the observance of the Sabbath.⁷³

As to the RPCES, just a few years after this, an anecdotal story may indicate an uncertain voice on the Sabbath there as well. In 1979 an article in *The Presbyterian Journal* reported on the decision of a restaurant to be closed on the Lord's Day despite the fact he would lose a considerable amount of income. The owner had consulted his RPCES minister, who advised, "God does allow for helping the ox that falls into the ditch. You'll just have to decide after studying your Bible whether you're dealing with that kind of situation."⁷⁴ Despite the minister failing to provide a clear teaching, the owner saw clearly that he shouldn't be pushing that proverbial ox into that proverbial ditch every week, and chose not to remain open on the Lord's Day.

All this is to say, it would not be surprising if there were similar problems regarding the doctrine of the Sabbath in PCA's Calvary Presbytery at this time. But whatever the reason for the committee's reticence, the overture was passed onto the PCA General Assembly intact.

The Committee is in agreement with the petitioners that Sunday observance leaves much to be desired and a reminder is always appropriate in this matter. However, the committee questions the wording of the second paragraph above and approves the positive statement of the other paragraphs.

This Committee recommends that Calvary Presbytery overture the General Assembly in accordance with this request omitting the second paragraph. A motion was made to amend the committee's recommendation to delete the words "omitting the second paragraph." The amendment was adopted.

A motion was adopted that the above overture as amended be approved. Calvary Presbytery Minutes, *ibid*.

The overture made it through bills and overtures at the PCA General Assembly in 1976 without any redactions. The committee added some Scripture proof texts and a concluding statement pressing positive duties in conformity with the PCA's doctrinal standards. "And that we exhort each pastor and session to study the positive application of Sabbath observance to their congregation in order to bring our practice into greater conformity with the Church's Standards."

72. *Minutes of the Fortieth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1973), 92–112.

73. This is the testimony of Carl Erickson, who particularly noted that going to the beach on the Lord's day was common in the early seventies when he first began ministry. Correspondence with Christopher Myers, February 15, 2016. See "The Fourth Commandment: Annulled or Sustained?" in this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

74. "Restaurant not Hurt by Sunday Closing," *The Presbyterian Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 37 (January 10, 1979): 7–8.

PCA MERGER WITH THE RPCES

In 1982 the complexion of the PCA changed with the joining and receiving of the RPCES. While on paper the RPCES had the same or similar doctrinal statements with regard to Sabbath doctrine and practice, there was a significant difference as to subscription to doctrinal standards. The RPCES came from a New School background as far as the question of subscription and exceptions to doctrinal standards. Bill Smith provides a helpful analysis of the merger:

It was not clear at the time of Joining and Receiving (J&R) in 1982 what the impact of the *influx of the RPCES* would be, but time has proved that it broadened and strengthened the New Side/New School segment of the PCA. The RPCES was the result of the union of the dwindling Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, General Synod (a “new light” break-off from the older Covenanter denomination), and the larger Evangelical Presbyterian Church (formerly the Bible Presbyterian Church).

It is the dominant Evangelical Presbyterian Church that concerns us in trying to understand the PCA. In 1936 the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) was formed by those, both Old School and New School, who left the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) during the Modernist controversy. However, the unity of this new denomination was not to last for long. In 1937 a group left the OPC and formed the Bible Presbyterian Church. The Bible Presbyterian Church itself split in 1955, with a minority following Carl McIntire. The result was that there were two BPCs: the Columbus Synod (the majority) and the Collingswood Synod (the McIntire group). Eventually, the Columbus Synod renamed itself the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, merged with the New Light Covenanters to form the RPCES in 1964, and was received into the PCA in 1982.

To understand the RPCES and its impact on the PCA we have to ask why the OPC split in 1937. D. G. Hart has demonstrated, in *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America*, that the “split paralleled almost exactly the division earlier between Old School and New School Presbyterians” (p.165). The need to stand against modernism and unbelief had papered over the differences among conservative Presbyterians, but these were soon revealed.

Machen stood for Old School strict confessionalism. He heartily adopted strong Westminster Confession

Calvinism. Though he had led the formation of the Independent Board for Foreign Missions, he was a Presbyterian by conviction and practice and wanted the Board to support only missionaries who accepted Reformed theology and Presbyterian polity (which led to his ouster from the Board even before the split). Machen believed in the spirituality of the Church and in the liberty of the Christian conscience; hence, for instance, he did not endorse Prohibition.

These things proved too much for those who desired a milder confessionalism (tolerant of not only pre-millennialism but of dispensationalism), a minimizing of Presbyterian distinctives and denominational differences, and a Christian life characterized by separation from “worldly practices.” Even though the side of the BPC which became the EPC then the RPCES, was more Reformed and Presbyterian and less combative than the McIntire group, the roots remained New School; and, though there was some indication the RPCES might move toward Princeton Old School positions, this did not materialize. The RPCES that joined the PCA was and is predominantly New Side/New School and has infused another stream of New Side/New Schoolism into the PCA.⁷⁵

FACTIONALIZATION OF THE PCA AND GOOD FAITH SUBSCRIPTION

Whatever the unity or lack thereof on the question of adherence to doctrinal standards before 1982, the merger of the PCA and RPCES created a clear bifurcation or trifurcation in the denomination, the confessionalists in favor of strict adherence to doctrinal standards, the progressives who are not, and the mushy middle or ‘neutrals.’⁷⁶ This resulted in years of contentions in the denomination. In an effort to put an end to doctrinal controversies over what are acceptable exceptions to the

75. Smith, “What is the PCA? A New Side—New School Church,” *ibid.*

76. Bryan Chapell calls the groups, traditionalists, progressives, and neutrals. However, those Chapell calls traditionalists, self identify as confessionalists. See Chapell, “The State of the PCA: The ‘Great Battle’ Will Force Us to Find New Ways to Reveal God’s Grace,” *ByFaithonline*, May 12, 2015, <http://byfaithonline.com/the-state-of-the-pca/> (accessed February 13, 2016); Rick D. Phillips, “Dear Bryan: Replying to ‘The State of the PCA,’” *Reformation21*, May 14, 2015, <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2015/05/dear-bryan-replying-to-the-sta-1.php> (accessed February 13, 2016); and Benjamin Shaw, “The State of the PCA: Further comments on the present state of the Presbyterian Church in America,” *The Aquila Report*, May 16, 2015, <http://theaquilareport.com/the-state-of-the-pca/> (accessed February 13, 2016).

doctrinal standards of the PCA, the progressives forced through 'good faith subscription' at the General Assembly of 2002 by a roughly 60/40 vote. "The practice of 'good faith' subscription has been understood as legitimizing doctrinal and practical 'exceptions' to the Presbyterian Standards by allowing individual presbyteries to determine what are or are not acceptable divergences from these Standards among her church officers."⁷⁷

Even before 2002, while there were no pronouncements such as the 1976 resolution, the PCA General Assembly was not wholly silent on the subject of the Sabbath. There were a few judicial cases that touched upon the subject. Also, since 1982 it had become routine in examinations for licensure and ordination to grant exceptions to the standards' teaching regarding the fourth commandment. These exceptions took the form of everything from "I think I should be able to toss a ball with my kid" to holding very few if any restrictions as to what is permissible outside the public worship services on the Lord's Day. The fact of doctrinal diversity, as reflected by numerous and various exceptions being taken to the Westminster standards, is traceable through the years by perusing the minutes of the PCA General Assembly with respect to the work of the committee responsible for reviewing presbytery records (originally called the Committee of Commissioners for Review and Control of Presbyteries, and now called the Committee on Review of Presbytery Records [RPR]).⁷⁸

One year after the 1982 merger between the PCA and

RPCES, the General Assembly sustained a complaint against the action of Ascension Presbytery in ordaining a man with several exceptions to PCA standards, including his rejection of "the prohibition of recreation and the admonition to give the 'whole time over to public and private worship'" and his belief that in allowing recreation on the Sabbath, "commercial recreations" would be permitted "without any explicit or implicit exceptions." The Assembly directed "the Presbytery of the Ascension to correct the aspects of the trial for ordination which are contrary to the Constitutional Standards of the PCA" and instructed the Presbytery's Pastoral Committee "to pursue orderly discipline" against the minister "if his views continue to fail to conform with the Word of God, the Standards of this Church, and the Book of Church Order, after due pastoral counsel." Though a protest was lodged with regard to the case, that protest did not address the issue of the Sabbath.⁷⁹

At the same Assembly, a complaint was sustained against North Georgia Presbytery for its approval of a transfer of licensure exam from another presbytery, in which the candidate "clearly stated that he did not believe that the first day of the week is, from the resurrection of Christ to the end of the world, the Christian Sabbath." In adjudicating the matter, the commission stated that the issue in the case "was whether or not a strict view of the Christian Sabbath as defined by the Westminster Confession of Faith (XXI.7) is necessary for a man to be licensed." The Assembly accordingly annulled the sustaining of the theological exam, and directed the Presbytery "to instruct [the candidate] in this fundamental element of doctrine; and if and when his view is brought into conformity with Scripture, the doctrinal standards and the BCO to re-examine him in this area."⁸⁰

However, the next year, in 1984, the Assembly did not sustain a complaint against Central Carolina Presbytery for approving for ordination a man who believed that "since the Fourth Commandment was not covered by the New Testament it did not have to be observed." The Assembly's commission that adjudicated the matter stated that it "was in disagreement about what the position at issue (Sabbath and Subscription) ought to be. The action taken was largely on the basis that the specifications in the complaint did not substantiate the complaint." Fifty-seven commissioners to the Assembly recorded their negative votes to the Assembly's action.⁸¹

For the next couple of years, the General Assembly continued to take exception to presbytery minutes with regard to ministerial exceptions to the doctrine of the Sabbath. In 1986, Northeast Presbytery was cited with

77. See Ryan M. McGraw, "A Church Without a Confession: Some Practical Reflections on 'Good Faith' Subscription in the Presbyterian Church in America," <http://katekomen.gpts.edu/2010/11/church-without-confession-some.html> (accessed July 7, 2015). Ryan McGraw makes the case that the passage of good faith subscription unhinged the PCA from any real attachment to its confession and catechisms. With good faith subscription, 1. "the Westminster Standards have become a mere starting point for discussion, rather than a common profession of unity among ministers;" 2. "presbyteries redefine the standards for doctrinal unity among ministers as often as new candidates for the ministry are examined;" 3. "any denomination-wide standard for ministerial unity and trust," is dissolved and "a stable profession of faith and practice to the world" is undermined; 4. "doctrinal exceptions to a public Creed or Confession of Faith potentially hinder the consciences and undermine the integrity of ministers;" 5. "'Good faith' subscription provides an unconventional means of amending the Confession of Faith and Book of Church Order;" 6. Good faith subscription "dismantles an agreed upon denomination-wide standard for Church discipline."

78. The PCA started the practice of reviewing presbytery minutes beginning with the GA of 1974.

79. *PCA Minutes* (1983) 140–143. The protest was presented by Dr. William S. Barker, who was joined by more than 60 commissioners.

80. *Ibid.*, 137–138.

81. *PCA Minutes* (1984), 157–159.

respect to the reception of Rev. Robert Milliken, whose “only views stated by him on the Sabbath are contrary to WCF, WSC, and WLC. He believes that the Lord’s Day is not the Christian Sabbath, and we can observe the Lord’s Day on any day of the week! See WCF XXI.7–8; WSC 58–61; WLC 116–119 for direct conflict. The minutes do not state how Mr. Milliken clarified his views—or if he did—when re-examined.” That same year, Pacific Presbytery was cited for approval of licensure exams for a couple of men who took exception to the Westminster Confession of Faith regarding recreations on the Sabbath, and for approval of an ordination exam in which the candidate “stated exceptions to WCF on Sabbath and civil magistrate.” While Pacific Presbytery’s response to the 1987 General Assembly was deemed adequate (though what that response was is not indicated in the General Assembly’s minutes), Northeast Presbytery’s response was rejected, in that the clarification offered regarding Mr. Milliken’s views on the Lord’s Day “do not demonstrate conformity to PCA standards. It is improper to clarify an exception by amending the minutes of the previous meetings by the addition of new information not presented at the previous meeting.” When Northeast Presbytery did not respond, the 1988 General Assembly cited the court again; finally, in 1989, the Assembly approved the presbytery’s response.⁸²

Meanwhile, the 1987 General Assembly cited Eastern Carolina Presbytery in granting to a licentiate “exceptions concerning the sabbath [*sic*] as found in chapter 21 of WCF & BCO, 48–3 and 48–4. These sections concern sabbath [*sic*] keeping.” That same Assembly cited Missouri Presbytery for sustaining a man’s licensure examination “despite his explicit approval of ‘playing’ on the Sabbath (cf. WCF 31:8, etc.) and of women being ordained to the office of deacon.” Southeast Alabama Presbytery was cited because an exception taken on the Sabbath by one man being examined “was not explained” by the court.⁸³

In 1989, while the issue of the Sabbath was not addressed via the review of presbytery records, there was a case which dealt with it. Immanuel Presbyterian Church, a congregation in Southern Florida Presbytery, had sponsored the playing of games on the Lord’s Day. David A. Stine, a member of Immanuel, complained this activity by which, according to the complaint, “the Session . . . did willfully and unrepentantly violate Article 21, section of the Westminster Confession of Faith” as well as “the Second Constitutional Question for Ordination and Licensure” (which deals with sincerely receiving and adopting the doctrine of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms). The Assembly’s commission

voted 6–13–1 not to sustain the complaint with regard to violating the Confession of Faith, and 6–14 not to sustain the complaint regarding the violation of the ordination vow. The commission then voted 11–6 to confirm the decision of the Presbytery of Southern Florida in the matter. The commission voted unanimously (19–0) that it “affirms that all Christians should take delight in the Lord’s Day as a special day of godly celebration and worship”, and added: “Therefore, we encourage all sessions to consider carefully the activities which their churches sponsor on the Lord’s Day.” The six-man minority issued a strongly worded dissent, as follows:

1. The majority opinion is based on a looseness of belief and practice within the church, rather than an accurate rendering of our constitutional standards, which standards the church affirms as “founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God.”
2. That exceptions of belief have been granted to some teaching and ruling elders does not carry with it a right to teach or practice such contrary views, and a church session, while having sole authority in the oversight of congregational worship, is nevertheless bound to exercise this authority within constitutional limits and is not permitted collectively to teach or practice views contrary to the constitution.
3. A judicial commission should not judge on the basis of the opinion of practice of a portion of the church, nor is it to try and “correct” the confessional standards. The judicial commission should have one primary task, namely, to rule according to the constitutional standards of the church.
4. Recreations, lawful on other days, are clearly forbidden in the WCF 21:8, WLC Q. 117, 119, WSC Q. 60, 61, and BCO chapter 48. Only public and private worship, as well as acts of necessity and mercy, are permitted according to our standards.
5. Therefore it is wrong to deny this complaint by saying recreations, lawful on other days, are also lawful on the Sabbath according to our constitution. If we say that recreation on the Sabbath is not doing our own pleasure and is rather a means of sanctifying the Sabbath,

82. *PCA Minutes* (1986), 201–203; *PCA Minutes* (1987), 217–218; *PCA Minutes* (1988), 164; *PCA Minutes* (1989), 200.

83. *PCA Minutes* (1987), 204, 211, 214. These exceptions are also found in next year’s report of the Committee on Judicial Business; *PCA Minutes* (1988), 153, 158, 161.

we should have the courage to change our standards or at least admit we are departing from them.

6. We are concerned about the future of our church with regard to her integrity as a confessional church. To receive and adopt a confession only to ignore portions of it is opening the way for a broadening church open to charges of hypocrisy and a lack of integrity.

7. We would also dissent, finally, to the report itself, in as much as the complainant's first specification of error is only partially reported, thus denying the Assembly an opportunity to know fully the alleged error charged.

With the entire commission we do concur with the admonition to "take delight in the Lord's Day" and "to consider carefully the activities" authorized by our churches. The Lord declares that the Sabbath is a sign between Him and the children of Israel forever (Ex. 31:17). Delight in the Lord comes, "if thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, not speaking thine own words." (Isa. 58:13).

In addition to this dissent, two protests from other commissioners were also filed. The first of the protests

84. *PCA Minutes* (1989), 231–234, 239–240. There were 23 signers of the first protest, including Dr. J. A. Pipa, Jr., and Vaughn Hathaway, who, along with Howard Griffith, also signed the second protest.

85. A 1996 exception granted by Northern California Presbytery for belief in the legitimacy of "work and employment in labor other than for deeds of necessity and mercy" was rescinded after RPR made an exception of substance to this action, that this was "contrary to PCA Standards. *PCA Minutes* (1998), 247. A drawn-out dispute with New River Presbytery which granted an exception to a licentiate who denied "that the Sabbath Day and Lord's Day are the same," was finally resolved with the presbytery in agreement the license should not have been given. The man was reexamined and changed his exception to the "continental view" which the presbytery maintained has always been granted by New River Presbytery and granting this exception "appears to be the practice of most Presbyteries...." *PCA Minutes* (2003), 240–241.

86. *PCA Minutes* (1997), 87, 211, 212; (1998), 234, 236, 238–239, 244; (1999), 191–192, 199–200; (2000), 333–334; (2001), 240; (2004), 239; (2007), 182, 200, 203; (2008), 223, 224; (2009), 83; (2010), 79; (2011), 487; (2012), 443; (2013), 429, 445, 448, 516; (2014), 400, 415, 445–446, 428–429.

87. *PCA Minutes* (2008), 248–251. The exception to recreations ranged from calling the prohibition on recreations a flirtation with "pharisaical religion," to believing it "not a violation of the fourth commandment for a person to go on a hike with their family, plant flowers, read a book, play a game with friends, etc. that do not require others to work," or to "enjoy recreational times with his friends and family."

merely expresses agreement with the grounds stated in the dissent. The second one says, among other things, that the "question at issue is not the possibility of widespread divergence across the Church from the practice enjoined in WCF 21.8. Rather, the question is one of simple honesty. The Assembly failed to maintain the basic claim of truth." The protestors also alleged that the Assembly's action in approving the commission's judgment will provoke "confusion and disharmony ... among the members of the Church at large and particularly for Mr. Stine. Such obvious disregard of our confessed faith subverts the confidence on the part of the members and lower courts of the Church which is so important to the edifying use of its declarative power to determine cases of conscience and maladministration."⁸⁴

From the 1990s and, despite the passage of 'good faith' subscription, through 2014, RPR continued to take exceptions of substance to presbytery minutes regarding sabbath views and exceptions voiced by ordinands, licentiates and ministers of the gospel.⁸⁵

RPR routinely accepted a presbytery's response when the exception was rescinded or otherwise resolved, or problematic language rephrased or if the exception was explained as being to the restriction on recreations,⁸⁶ and views were found "not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine."⁸⁷

In 1991 RPR took an exception of substance to a presbytery approving exceptions to the necessity of observing "the whole day as holy unto the Lord" which exception "compromises a fundamental of our system of doctrine," and to the Lord's Day being the Christian Sabbath (*PCA Minutes* {1991}, 181). Both men clarified their views (which the presbytery found acceptable), the one by explaining he only objected to some wording in the standards regarding the Lord's Day (which was not explained by the presbytery), and the other by explaining that by rejecting a Christian Sabbath he meant the old Saturday Sabbath. In addition, in what might qualify as 'protesting too much,' the presbytery responded in general to the exceptions of substance to "the whole day as holy unto the Lord":

RESPONSE CONCERNING EXCEPTION OF SUBSTANCE REGARDING THE SABBATH:

1. Concerning Freedom of Interpretation ... that it is the opinion of Heritage Presbytery that some degree of freedom must be granted to the individual conscience when it comes to determining: (a) Precisely how "an holy resting all the day" is to be understood, (b) What are "worldly employments and recreations." (c) What

precise meaning is to be attached to spending “the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship.” (d) How “works of necessity and mercy” are to be defined. LC 117. M/S/C [moved/seconded/carried] to amend by adding the following: This is no way meant to be construed as a rejection of or softening our commitment to scripture or the Westminster Standards or Biblical Presbyterianism.⁸⁸

OVERTURE TO CHANGE THE PCA STANDARDS

That the issue of the Sabbath continued to come up in RPR as men continued to take exception in various way to the doctrine of the Sabbath likely had much to do with the 2015 overtures calling the General Assembly to move toward negating the Sabbatarianism of the confession and catechisms. The overture (43rd PCA overture 2) out of North Texas Presbytery (NTP) “called for the formation of an ‘Ad Interim Committee to Prepare Proposed Revisions to WCF 21–8; WLC 117, 119, and WSC 60, 61 Regarding Sabbath.’” The second overture which had come from Tennessee Valley Presbytery (overture 9) also called for a study committee. Overture 9 was handled by reference to overture 2 and will not be examined.

Like much of the PCA, North Texas Presbytery routinely grants exception to Westminster Sabbatarianism.⁸⁹ Practice of the presbyters varies from a few conscientious Sabbatarians to those who have no conscience about engaging in commerce or attending public entertainments (e.g., Texas Rangers and Dallas Cowboy games). In November 2012, because so many were taking exception to aspects of Sabbatarianism, and because of clear confusion or ignorance on the subject,⁹⁰ and because of the range of reasons given during examinations (from the usual “throw a ball with my kid” to freedom claimed to frequent commercial establishments on the Sabbath even when not a work of mercy or necessity), the Rev. John Owen Butler requested NTP erect a study committee to look at the question of Sabbath recreations. On January 8, 2013, the administrative committee voted to recommend to NTP its revision of this proposal, which the presbytery approved at its meeting on February 1.⁹¹

That the presbytery erect an ad hoc committee to research and report to the presbytery its recommendations on the following matters:

1. What is the original intent of the term “recreations” as mentioned in WCF 21:8, LC 117 & 119, and SC 60 & 61.

2. Based on its findings in #1 above, the committee is to recommend what “declared differences are not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine because the difference is neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion” and whether such exceptions as may be granted by the presbytery from time to time may be privately held or whether these exceptions may be taught alongside the Standards of the PCA (BCO 21–4 e & f).

At the same time as this, the Rev. David Clelland proposed an overture to the administrative committee in January 2013 which was reported to and approved at the same February meeting of NTP. The overture called for the appointment of a study committee to look at stripping the PCA Standards of their Sabbatarianism. Despite objections to some of the whereas clauses and to the overture itself in the committee, this was approved by the presbytery. The overture as received by the 2013 General Assembly reads:

Whereas, The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) XXI.VIII states that we are to (“...observe a holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts, about their worldly employments and recreations...”); and

Whereas, a large number of officers ordained in the PCA

88. *PCA Minutes* (1992), 243–244. The definition of “all the day,” “worldly employments and recreations,” and “whole time,” have always been clear in Lord’s Day literature and in expositions of the Confession and Catechisms. The degree to which we are free in respect to any latitude in these is precisely set by determining whether a specific act is one of necessity or a work of mercy.

89. Anecdotes and general observations are based on comments from friends who are members of presbytery or who were in attendance at meetings of General Assembly and committees.

90. An anecdote told this writer may illustrate. One presbyter during an examination asked an ordinand who had exceptions to the Standards, what exactly was his theological position on the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath or Lord’s Day. The reply was that he took “the continental view.” He was read the doctrine of the Heidelberg Catechism regarding the fourth commandment and asked if that was his view, to which the reply was in the negative. The examinee was then told this was the continental position. The reply was along the lines of ‘oh, but I hold to the other continental position.’ Correspondence with John Owen Butler, June 24, 2015. NTP Minutes, November 2013 stated meeting.

91. North Texas Presbytery Administrative Committee, “Minutes of Stated Meeting and Report to the 113th Stated Meeting of North Texas Presbytery, February 1, 2013.” My thanks to John Owen Butler for confirming dates and facts and documentation. The ministerial members of the committee were Michael Philliber (Chairman), Doug Serven (Secretary), Paul Fowler, and Chad Scruggs; and the ruling elders were Ryan Tompkins, Greg Anderson, and Steve Fults.

take stated differences to the requirements for keeping the Sabbath or Lord's Day as set forth in *WCF XXI. VIII*, *WLC Q&A 117* and *119*, and *WSC Q&A 60* and *61*, with particular focus on the prohibition of any recreation on that day; and

Whereas, those differences are commonly allowed; and

Whereas, having taken and having been allowed those differences, the officer is permitted to teach his view of "keeping the Sabbath," and his personal practices almost always put him at odds with the Confessional Standards; and

Whereas, such a situation both widely confuses biblical teaching of "keeping the Sabbath" and is a cause of continuing debates on a candidate-by-candidate basis, which tend to be unprofitable for the courts of the Church:

Be it therefore resolved that the North Texas Presbytery overtures the Forty-First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America to appoint a study committee to examine this issue and consider whether there are necessary amendments to the appropriate items in the Westminster Standards that are true to the Scriptures, not unduly restrictive nor overly permissive, and are agreeable to men of sound faith and good conscience.

And be it further resolved that the budget for the study committee be set at \$15,000/year and that funds be derived from gifts to the AC [Administrative Committee] designated for that purpose. North Texas Presbytery will provide \$2,000 in funding for the study committee. (*PCA Minutes* {2013}, 827–828).

The 2013 General Assembly adopted the Overtures Committee's recommendation to answer this overture in the negative (*PCA Minutes* {2013}, 68).

That *Overture 7* from *North Texas* ("Establish Study Committee on Sabbath Issue in Westminster Standards," p. 827) be answered in the *Negative*. Adopted

Grounds: It would be better if Presbyteries that have concerns or questions with *WCF 21:8*, *WLC 117* and *119*, and *WSC 60* and *61* would adopt overtures proposing specific changes to the Westminster documents so that the General Assembly can be clear as to the scope of the issues and whether a study committee is necessary.

NTP presented a revised overture two years later for the 2015 General Assembly.

OVERTURE 2 from North Texas Presbytery (to OC, CCB, AC)

"Form Ad Interim Committee to Prepare Proposed Revisions to *WCF 21–8*; *WLC 117, 119*; and *WSC 60, 61* Regarding Sabbath"

Whereas the grounds stated in *Overture 7* to the 41st General Assembly of the PCA by North Texas Presbytery are still of valid concern; and

Whereas the 41st General Assembly responded to *Overture 7* in the negative with the following *Grounds*: "It would be better if Presbyteries that have concerns or questions with *WCF 21:8*, *WLC 117* and *119* and *WSC 60* and *61* would adopt overtures proposing specific changes to the Westminster documents so that the General Assembly can be clear as to the scope of the issues and whether a study committee is necessary." (*M41GA*, p. 66) In submission to the direction and counsel of the 41st General Assembly; and

Whereas a growing number of teaching elder candidates have taken and have had approved stated differences to these portions of the Westminster Standards; and

Whereas this reality, at least, causes the appearance of conflict between what we officially confess and what we actually believe and practice; and

Whereas we understand the resolution of this situation will take considerable study, work, and debate;

Therefore be it resolved that the North Texas Presbytery overtures the Forty-Third General Assembly of the PCA to erect a study committee, as requested in *Overture 7* to the 41st General Assembly, to consider changes to the portions of the Westminster Standards [*WCF 21–8*; *WLC Q&As 117, 119*; *WSC Q&As 60, 61*] referred to in the "Grounds" for the 41st Assembly's response, above. The budget for such study committee is not to exceed \$5,000 funded by North Texas Presbytery.

Adopted by North Texas Presbytery at its stated meeting February 07, 2015.

Attested by /s/ TE David M. Frierson, stated clerk.

Possible language for study committee to consider, approved by North Texas Presbytery:

[Strike-through for deletions; underlining for new wording:]

WCF 21–8. This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments ~~and recreations~~, but also are taken up, ~~the whole time~~, in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

WLC Q. 117. *How is the Sabbath or the Lord's Day to be sanctified?*

The Sabbath or Lord's Day is to be sanctified by a holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments ~~and recreations~~ as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend ~~the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy)~~ in the public and private exercises of God's worship; and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day, including focusing on public and private worship as well as works of necessity and mercy.

WLC Q. 119. *What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment?*

The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are all omissions of the duties required, all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them; all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful; and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments ~~and recreations~~.

WSC Q. 60. *How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?*

The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments ~~and recreations~~ as are lawful on other days; and spending ~~the whole time~~ in the public and private exercises of God's worship, ~~except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy as well as engaging in works of necessity and mercy.~~

WSC Q. 61. *What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?*

The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments ~~or recreations~~.⁹²

The General Assembly Overtures Committee took up the discussion of this second overture on June 9, 2015. The discussion at some point became a bit heated when one member objected that making these changes and removing the prohibition of recreations would be like a proposal to remove from the sins against the seventh commandment noted in Larger Catechism 139, "adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts..." A pragmatic reasoning governed the outcome and by a vote of 53 to 38 the committee recommended the General Assembly answer the overture in the negative, because, "Our Standards [are] sufficiently clear in their explanation of the Scripture's teaching on the Sabbath. Furthermore, an adequate vehicle already exists for men to express their differences to the Standards and their teaching regarding recreation on the Sabbath."⁹³ The General Assembly overwhelmingly approved the recommendation to reject the NTP overture by a vote of 662 to 248, with nine abstentions.⁹⁴

In between the time the action on these overtures unfolded, the NTP study committee met and worked on a report. Reflecting the division in the presbytery, the minority (which included the chairman) were of more or less a confessional mindset, while the majority did not hold to the confession's Sabbatarianism, and it was with great difficulty the majority were brought to agree that the fourth commandment had abiding moral application.⁹⁵

92. The text of the overture is online at <http://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Overture-2-NTX-Sabbath-Study-Committee.pdf> (accessed June 23, 2015).

93. Staff, "OC Recommends: Answer Overtures 2, 9 in Negative," Byfaith, The online magazine of the Presbyterian Church in America, June 9, 2015, <http://byfaithonline.com/oc-recommends-answer-overtures-2-and-9-in-negative/> (accessed June 23, 2015).

94. Blogs, Kevin DeYoung, guest blogger, Jason Helopoulos, "PCA General Assembly Report 2015," <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindyoung/2015/06/17/pca-general-assembly-report-2015/> (accessed June 23, 2015). The Tennessee Valley overture was answered by reference to the defeated NTP overture.

95. Committee member Dr. Paul Fowler brought the two sides to agreement as to some abiding moral application of the fourth commandment, but other than correctly defining the historical confessional view the report has no affirmation of this. Correspondence with Dr. Michael Philliber, June 23, 2015.

A report was produced and reported to the November 2, 2013 stated meeting of the presbytery.⁹⁶ After an introduction rehearsing the committee's purpose, the report reads,⁹⁷

96. Points 2 and 3 were sent to the theological examinations committee for perfecting, along with a motion from John Owen Butler that "That the presbytery instructs its members and candidates that frequenting of commercial establishments on the Lord's Day ought not to be engaged in except in so far as such actions are to facilitate the duties of the day, namely, worship, holy resting, and works of mercy and necessity." According to Pastor Butler, no essential changes were made to the report and the examinations committee essentially avoided addressing the motion about commerce by referring to the report, which does not even deal with the question. Correspondence with John Owen Butler, June 24, 2015. NTP Minutes, November 2013 stated meeting.

97. Final Report on the Sabbath "Recreations" and Exceptions to the 116th Stated Meeting of North Texas Presbytery.

98. The committee did consult a number of works. A prefatory statement drafted by the chairman which was removed by vote of the committee, states: "Based on our reading of the 'Directory of Publick Worship,' Kenneth Parker's, *The English Sabbath*, Aliſtair Dougall's, *The Devil's Book*, the 'Sabbatum' (a large piece written by Daniel Cawdrey and Herbert Palmer who worked on the Westminster Confession of Faith), the 'Book of Sports' (reissued under King Charles I & Archbishop Wm Laud in 1633), and various other sources, the following lays out our conclusion of the "original intent of the term "recreations." The "Sabbatum" refers to Cawdrey and Palmer's *Sabbatum Redivivum: or, The Christian Sabbath Vindicated* (1645, 1652). The key works for the committee were Parker and the Palmer/Cawdrey and on recreations, the Dougall. Correspondence with Dr. Michael Philliber, June 20 and June 23, 2015. It should be noted that Parker, a Roman Catholic, must be read in balance with other writers as his concern is continuity with the medieval English Church, and while not ignoring Puritan distinctives, he does not focus on any innovations with Puritan thought, to the consternation of other writers on the same period and topic, such as Primus and Greaves.

99. This is not correct or at least it is an over-generalization which may mischaracterize English Sabbatarianism. It was common before the framing of the Puritan view by Nicholas Bownd, to state that the fourth commandment was partly moral and partly ceremonial. The Puritan view from Bownd through Westminster rejected any ceremonial aspect of the fourth commandment. Any temporary adjuncts of the OT dispensation were put in the category of figurative helps (as Greenham) or ceremonial addendums (Bownd), but Puritanism in general (Presbyterian, Congregational, etc.) did not place any ceremonial aspects in the fourth commandment itself. Such ceremonial addenda might be said to attach to all ten of the commandments given to OT Israel. Cf. Nicholas Bownd, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath* (Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), cvi, 67, 155–156.

100. See the significance of Dort's sabbath regulations in Danny Hyde's "Regulae de Observatione Sabbathi: The Synod of Dort's (1618–19) Deliverance on the Sabbath," also published in this edition of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

101. The day was also to be taken up with family and private worship, which are included amongst the general term "worship" from which recreations are not to distract.

... The members of the committee read numerous sources that were germane to original intent,⁹⁸ as well as reviewed the findings of a similar study committee of the Gulf Coast Presbytery, and met several times, mostly by phone conference call.

Committee's Conclusions and Recommendations:

Background information: (1) The reigning view in the English Church prior to the Reformation and beyond, held by Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists alike, was that the fourth commandment was believed to have moral and ceremonial aspects.⁹⁹ The moral aspect was considered perpetually binding, whereas the ceremonial was considered fulfilled in Christ. (2) The Continental position also embraced the perpetual moral nature of the fourth commandment, as stated in the Heidelberg Catechism #103:¹⁰⁰ "What does God require in the fourth commandment? Answer: First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the Sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear his word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath." (3) There was a strong consensus in the Reformed churches of England and Scotland that, at a minimum, "recreations" should not intrude on Lord's Day worship. At that time, such worship normally included both morning and evening gatherings.¹⁰¹

In after the English Church, the primary difference regarding the Lord's Day as Sabbath amounted to this: One side believed "recreations" could be lawfully enjoyed evening worship (as codified in King James' "Declaration of Sports": "dancing, either men or women; archery for men, leaping, vaulting, or any other such harmless recreation, nor from having of May-games, Whitsun-ales, and Morris-dances; and the setting up of May-poles and other sports therewith used: so as the same be had in due and convenient time, without impediment or neglect of divine service: and that women shall have leave to carry rushes to the church for the decorating of it, according to their old custom"). The other side, often called "the precisionists," felt that no recreations should be allowed at any time on Sundays. The latter is the position affirmed by the Westminster Assembly: "The Sabbath or Lord's Day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly

employments and recreations as are on other days lawful” (WLC, 117).¹⁰²

Conclusion of Research: In answer to question one above: When the Westminster Assembly used the word “recreations”, the committee is convinced that the Westminster Divines were describing a general category of practice meant to include all amusements permissible during other days. Our forbearers were interested in sanctifying Sunday from all recreations as a general category of practice, so that we would make it “our delight to spend the whole time (. . .) in the public and private exercises of God’s worship” (*Ibid*).

Recommendations: In answer to question two above: Based on our findings concerning the meaning of “recreations” by the Westminster Divines, the committee recommends the following to North Texas Presbytery (NTP):

1. We propose that an exception be granted to men who do not hold to the recreation clause in Westminster’s teaching on the Sabbath. Because it is difficult to specify God’s will in these areas, and because there are widely varying practices within our Presbytery in these areas, not only among our membership, but among our officers and pastors, practices that we do not think the Presbytery is willing or able to address, these areas will be understood by the Presbytery to be areas of personal conscience and personal liberty.

Because the phrase “Continental view” has been used several times in the examinations, and because many different meanings are attached to that phrase and because we value a shared Reformed tradition and theology, we propose that an exception be granted to those candidates who state that they hold to the language of the Heidelberg Catechism in regard to the Sabbath, namely:

Lord’s Day 38

Q & A 103

Q. What does God require in the fourth commandment? A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the Sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear his word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.”

2. That an exception regarding “recreations” on the Sabbath is not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine and is neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion. Such exception should not be understood as compromising the ongoing validity and application of the moral law of God (WCF 19.5).

3. That an exception approved to be acceptable by NTP may be both privately held and publicly taught alongside the Standards of the PCA, provided the Confession’s position is presented as the standard.

4. That the Committee to study “recreations” on the Sabbath be dismissed.

From the viewpoint of the morality of the fourth commandment this report is, of course, disappointing. However, the report acknowledged, despite some clumsy summarizing, that the historic and confessional view of both Presbyterians and Reformed, is that the fourth commandment is moral and perpetually binding, and that the unfortunate moniker “continental view” has become meaningless by individualized interpretation. It also correctly defines what the Westminster Assembly meant by prohibiting lawful recreations on the Lord’s Day.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE SABBATH IN THE CONFESSION AND CATECHISMS

So, what is this really about? Is it really a matter simply of, as many exceptions are phrased, “why can’t I toss a ball with my son after church?” If it were only that there would be no need for any changes, and certainly not the significant redactions proposed. It is one thing to take exception to Westminster’s Sabbatarianism from the belief there should be no proscribing of personal recreating that day, and quite another issue if someone is only concerned that he have the freedom

102. The “English” view had been almost unchallengeable Sabbatarian until the first real Sabbatarian controversy under Laud in the 1630s (real as opposed to the one manufactured by Thomas Rogers against Nicholas Bownd, circa 1598–1606). In 1617, James’ Book of Sports was not well received by the majority of the country from the simple parishioner to Archbishop Abbot himself. See Chris Coldwell, “Anti-Sabbatarian Scold: Thomas Rogers’ Letter to Nicholas Bownd, April 29, 1598,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 10 (2014): 113–170, and, Introduction, Nicholas Bownd, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath* (2015). Kenneth Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6, 133.

to toss a ball with his son who needs to blow off some steam between services. The first is a rejection of Westminster's view, while the second at the very least is open for discussion within the confines of the exceptions of necessity and mercy.¹⁰³

More significantly, the redacting of 'whole day' goes to the heart of the teaching of the fourth commandment. The implication for laboring is that even that is no longer fully prohibited on the Lord's Day. And it is more than an implication, but is already in practice. An attempt last year by John Owen Butler failed, the aim of which was to get NTP to go on record that Christians should avoid commercial establishments and activities on the Lord's day.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, not long after last year's General Assembly, NTP sustained an exam where the exception was taken that while not 'ideal,' it is not necessary to refrain from our normal week day laboring on the Lord's Day, referring to it as a common exception in the PCA.¹⁰⁵ If this is indeed the case, while the overtures to amend the teaching of the confession and catechism failed, practically speaking, the PCA is anti-Sabbatarian.

This teaching of the Sabbath in the confession and catechisms is not some minor insignificant doctrine. As the 1991 RPR committee noted, denying the Lord's Day is to be observed for a "whole day" "as holy unto the Lord" "compromises a fundamental of our system of doctrine" (*PCA Minutes* {1991}, 181). Even for

103. On this subject, see the updated revised article by Lane Keister, "The Sabbath Day and Recreations on the Sabbath: An Examination of the Sabbath and the Biblical Basis for the 'No Recreation' Clause in Westminster Confession of Faith 21.8 and Westminster Larger Catechism 117," published in this same issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

104. See footnote 96.

105. "The committee moved and it was passed to judge the written stated differences (see Attachments 12–15) ... to be more than semantic, but 'not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine'" A motion moved and second failed that would have restricted "all four transfers from teaching their stated differences." The Motion Failed. One negative vote regarding these examinations was recorded. "Minutes Uncorrected 123rd Stated Meeting August 14–15, 2015, North Texas Presbytery (file dated September 13, 2015), 7. "Like many in the PCA, I have an exception with WCF 21:8 in regards to work on the Lord's day. I was greatly influenced by the 1973 Minority Report of the OPC General Assembly on the Sabbath. I believe work is permissible though not optimal on the Lord's Day." "Minutes," *ibid.*, Attachments, "Theological Questions for Licensure/Ordination Candidates and Transferring Ministers," p. 1. For more on the OPC Minority Report see two articles in this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*, Geoffrey L. Willour's "Is the Westminster Confession's Doctrine of the Sabbath a Judaizing Doctrine? A Critique of the first Minority Report of the OPC's Committee on Sabbath Matters," and Carl Erickson's "The Fourth Commandment: Annulled or Sustained?"

106. "Letter to the Editor, from John Murray, Badbea, Scotland," *The Presbyterian Guardian* 38, No. 6 (June 1969), 85–86.

denominations that don't "own" or take full subscription to the Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Westminster's Sabbath ethic is clearly part of the system of doctrine it teaches is taught in Scripture. Professor Murray addressed this in a letter to *The Presbyterian Guardian*.¹⁰⁶

Dear Sir:

Perhaps you will permit a few words *a propos* of matters discussed in recent issues of *The Presbyterian Guardian*, especially in the April issue. Because of delays in surface mail the April issue did not reach me until the latter part of June. Hence the word "recent" has to be understood in the chronology of delivery to my domicile.

Space will not permit a survey of the history antecedent subscription to the Confession of Faith and Catechisms in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. But I do believe the history will show that the said Church had never officially determined the precise intent and effect of Question 2 of the formula of subscription as it was taken over by The Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The position argued by Dr. Charles Hodge in the article frequently referred to (in *the Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* for 1958 [*sic* 1858]) has, no doubt, been the understanding upon which many of those subscribing to the formula have proceeded for generations. And it is easy to understand how this interpretation could be construed as the true intent. It should be observed, however, that it is not accurate to speak of subscribing to the system of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechisms. At least it is not sufficient. It is true that in these documents there is a system of doctrine and the formula implies that this system of doctrine is the same as *the* system of doctrine "taught in the holy Scriptures." Subscription is, therefore, to nothing less. But, on subscribing, we "sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms... as containing the system of doctrine taught in the holy Scriptures."

Respecting the teaching of the Confession and Catechisms on the question of the Sabbath, please allow me a few observations. When the [subscription] formula refers to the system of doctrine taught in the holy Scriptures and to the Confession and Catechisms as containing this system, it will surely be granted that the system includes ethics as well as what is sometimes, more specifically, called doctrine. The space devoted to ethics in the subordinate standards, especially in the Catechisms, would permit no other conclusion. And,

of course, to exclude ethics from the system of doctrine taught in Scripture would be preposterous. Now, on the assumption that the formula involves subscription to the system of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechisms, an assumption not in question in the articles that have appeared in *The Presbyterian Guardian*, I submit that the teaching respecting the Sabbath and its continuing obligation belongs integrally to the system of doctrine set forth in these documents. More specifically, this teaching belongs to the *ethic* of these standards.

Sabbath Question

This appears, first of all, in the Confession, Chapter XIX, Section II. The implications for the Sabbath are set forth in Chapter XXI, Sections VII and VIII. In the Catechisms this position is more fully expanded (1. C. QQ. 116–121; S. C. QQ. 58–62). To maintain that this sustained and explicit block of teaching is outwith the scope of the ordination pledge in Question 2 of the formula is surely to renounce what is involved in receiving and adopting the Confession and Catechisms even on the most restricted interpretation of the intent of the Question concerned. The gravest ethical issues are here at stake. A confessional creed is a bond of fellowship as well as an instrument of witness. It is one thing to question *obiter dicta* of which Dr. Clair Davis gave an example in the April issue (p. 48, col. 3). It is another to diverge from a principal position woven into the texture of confessional documents and belonging to the system formulated....

The doctrine of the Sabbath is, as Professor Murray noted, woven into the warp and weft of the Westminster Standards. Indeed, as one recently remarked to this writer, “the Sabbath is woven into the fabric of whole ten commandments.... it is like a keystone in an archway. It relates to both tables of the law.” “It is woven into the whole fabric of our moral obedience and life.”¹⁰⁷ As the answer to Larger Catechism 121 notes, the fourth commandment begins with the word “remember” in part because in remembering and keeping the Sabbath it aids us to “keep all the rest of the commandments.” In Scripture it is the fourth commandment that is often adduced to stand for the whole of our obedience and sanctification (Psa. 92:1, 13–14; Ezekiel 20.12–13, 19–20; 22.26; 44.24; Nehemiah 9.14).

Removing the phrases “whole day” and any reference to recreations (and the implication as to labors) implies a rejection of the Sabbatarianism central to the ethic of the Westminster Standards. This can be seen in how the

changes would run afoul of the answer to question 99 of the Westminster Larger Catechism.

LC 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:

1. That the law is perfect, and bindeth everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience forever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.
2. That it is spiritual, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures.
3. That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments.
4. That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded: so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.
5. That what God forbids, is at no time to be done; what he commands, is always our duty; and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.
6. That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes,

107. Correspondence with Matthew A. Vogan, February 15, 2016. James Durham (1622–1658) observed, “This command is placed in a manner between the two tables, because it is a transition as it were from the one to the other, and contains in it duties of immediate service to God, and of charity towards men, and so in some sort serves to reconcile (if we may speak so) the two tables, and to knit them together, that so their harmony may be the more clearly seen. It is also more largely and fully set down for plurality and variety of expressions and words than any other in either of the tables; yet has it notwithstanding, been in all times in a special manner assaulted and set upon, and endeavors used to overturn it. Satan aiming sometimes to darken the meaning of it; sometimes to loose from the strict tie of observing it, and that not only by old Sabbatarians, anti-Sabbatarians, and corrupt schoolmen, but even by those whom God has made orthodox in the main; and especially by a generation in these days, who having a hatred at all ordinances, and at all the commands of the decalogue, yet do especially vent it against this command; because in it is contained a main foundation of godliness.” James Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 2002), 205–206.

means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto.

7. That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.

8. That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them; and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them.

A cursory glance at several of these eight principles reveals the truth that to deny the extent of the commandment as to time (whole day) and application (to recreation and labor) denies the fourth commandment's like perfection and reach as the other commandments (rules 1, 2, 4), and like correlation to the other commands (rule 3), and our moral duty to others (rules 7 and 8).

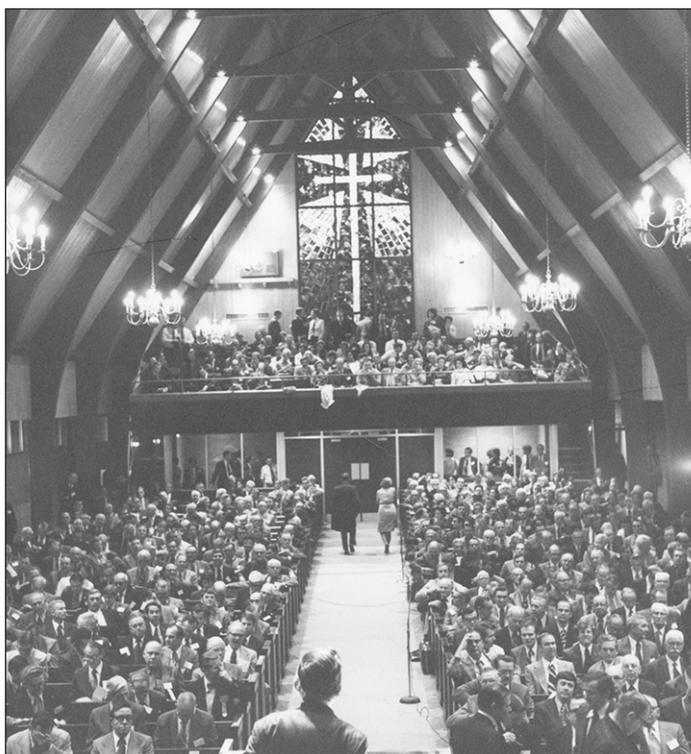
More extensively, consider the meaning of rule six:

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.

Our works of laboring are forbidden on the Lord's day, and consequently our lesser works of recreation which merely fit us to do our lawful laboring. "If *honest labour* be forbidden, much more *honest recreations*; for *recreation* is but the *means* to prepare and fit men for *labour*; therefore if labour, which is the end of recreation, be forbidden; much more *recreation*, which is but the means to labour. And indeed (which may be added) *Recreation* is a *week day's* work, as well as labour; *Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do*: But moderate *Recreation* is a work we have to do on the *weekdays*, otherwise we are cruel to ourselves and ours."¹⁰⁸ "Hence buying, selling, sowing, reaping, which are done for

108. Herbert Palmer and Daniel Cawdrey, *Sabbatum Redivivum: or The Christian Sabbath Vindicated: The Second Part* (London: Printed by Thomas Maxey for Samuel Gellibrand, 1652), 37.

109. Thomas Shepard, "Theses Sabbaticæ," *The Works of Thomas Shepard*, 3 vols. (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1853), IV Of The Theses Concerning the Sanctification of the Sabbath, 3, 257.



The first General Assembly of the PCA, Birmingham, Ala., December 4–7, 1973. Courtesy of the PCA Historical Center (cropped from the supplied image).

worldly gain, are unlawful on this day, being therefore servile works; hence also worldly sports and pastimes (which are ordained of God to whet on worldly labor, not necessary every day, but only at some seasons) are therefore most proper appurtenances unto days of labor, and are therefore unlawful upon this day."¹⁰⁹

The fifth rule also has a bearing on the matter:

5. That what God forbids, is at no time to be done; what he commands, is always our duty; and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.

Lawful recreations are good in that they fit us for our laboring for our living to which God has called us (fourth and eighth commandments). But not all things good are to be done at all times. That our works of laboring and of recreation which fit us for our laboring are good, does not make it lawful that they be done on the day we are to refrain from *our* six day works (of labor and of pleasure) to devote a day to worship God as commanded.

In a manner, each proportion of time (our laboring days, and the Lord's Day) has its main duty or purpose, and accessory duties or exercises to that main purpose. Our recreations and pleasures correlate with our six work days even as acts of necessity and mercy

correlate with the Lord's Day. On the Lord's Day 'works of mercy and necessity are our 're-creation.' They relieve us in order to fit us for the worship of the day as our recreations refresh and fit us for the labors of the work week. Thus to do our own recreations and pleasures on the Lord's Day is a double evil, not only distracting and detracting from the true purpose of the day which is to worship God, but from the 're-creative' acts we have Christ's warrant to perform on that day (Matt. 12:1-13). Further, each proportion of time has its proper recreation. To do our own pleasures on the Lord's day displaces that spiritual recreation called for on that day. As Daniel Cawdrey remarked, "There is indeed, a *spiritual Recreation*, which is an *holy joy*, rejoicing, delighting in God, in his services, in his ordinances, &c. and this is the *Recreation* not only permitted, but required on the Sabbath (Isaiah 58) and is (as we may so say) the *Spirituality* of this 4th commandment." In the critical passage of Isaiah 58, the people should have embraced the worship ordinance of fasting, which, after all, was God's choice. Choosing the Sabbath means choosing the path of delighting in His worship and not our own pleasures, which worship, by like reason, is characterized by acts of mercy (Isa. 58; cp. Matt. 12).

CONCLUSION

Thus ends this survey of how the Presbyterian Church in America got from the point in 1976 it could affirm a resolution pressing better observance of the Lord's Day, to the point overtures were sent up last year to strip the Sabbatarian nature from the PCA's confession of faith and catechisms. We have seen what the true doctrine of the Sabbath is from its Puritan beginning, sketched the cultural decline in this country since the nineteenth century, documented the pleas for the Sabbath in the PCUS even as it slid into liberalism, similarly traced an even further decline in the culture and in the PCA in the last forty-three years, and drawn the conclusion that the Presbyterian Church in America is functionally anti-Sabbatarian.

If one assumes that the forty percent in the PCA General Assembly opposing good faith subscription in 2002 would hold today and represents the number desiring stricter adherence to the PCA's doctrinal standards (both questionable), why since 1976 has there not been one attempted overture, let alone a successful one, pressing for better observance of the Lord's Day? Could it be, that what Morton Smith observed about the two camps in the old PCUS, is not only true now of PCA progressives and "neutrals," but of most confessionalists

as well? That, "the general observance of the Sabbath has declined markedly across the board in our Church. This is true not only among our liberal friends but also within our conservative circles."

It is to be feared that the PCA's decline with regard to the defense and honoring of the Lord's Day portends further decline just as it did in the old PCUS. The words of a retired PCUS minister writing about the PCA at the time of its founding are prescient,

The Pattern of Success. The Continuing Church appears now to be well under way. However, we ought to keep uppermost in our planning the kind of organization we intend to build. Are we to be content with simply a proper theology, Church aims that conform to the Great Commission, and right attitudes toward morals? These things are essential, and we must have them. However, it is necessary ever to keep in mind that what we are striving for is quality and not quantity—not number of churches, number of members, number of dollars, but discipline. We must have a return to the old Presbyterian emphasis on character building, on Sabbath observance, family worship, Bible study, catechism, and plain common honesty and truthfulness. And of course all this must be suffused with the love of God and the compassion and tenderness of Christ. There wasn't much the matter with our Church from 1861 to 1920. But then we relaxed and began to slip along all these lines. In 1921 there were over four thousand recitations of the catechisms, and numerous family altars were reported. Today such things have almost vanished. From the very infancy of the new Church we must turn over a brand new leaf and make a completed fresh start. Every minister, every session, every Sunday school teacher should be dedicated to the supreme task of building character, and be satisfied with nothing less. Any other course will bring us fifty years hence to another division. But only as long as the new Church is solid in its faith and moral character will it be permanent in fact as we all so earnestly pray.—Rev. J. W. Hassell, Hickory, N.C.¹¹⁰ ■

110. J. W. Hassell, "The Pattern of Success," Mail Bag, *The Presbyterian Journal*, Volume XXXII, No. 17 (August 22, 1973): 2. James Wodrow Hassell (1886-1979) was a missionary to Japan and served a number of Southern Presbyterian churches, including the First Presbyterian Church in McAllen, Texas. "Following his retirement, he served many churches in the Statesville area and was supply pastor for Sweetwater Presbyterian Church and Belk Memorial Presbyterian in Hickory." *Hickory Daily Record*, "Area Deaths, Funerals. Dr. J. W. Hassell" (Tues., July 31, 1979): 12A.