

A Plea for Confessional Integrity in the PCA regarding the Second and Fourth Commandments

By Geoff Gleason

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) celebrates its 50th anniversary. There is much to be thankful for in terms of God's provision and work in and through this relatively young denomination. Certainly, the Lord has blessed this small branch of the larger vine that is Christ's Kingdom with growth. The PCA's adopted slogan that summarizes the overall "culture" of the denomination is "Faithful to the Scriptures, True to the Reformed Faith, and Obedient to the Great Commission." It has been much more than a cheap tag-line. There has been a sincere and genuine pursuit of these things throughout the PCA's history. Specifically in regards to being true to the Reformed faith, the PCA has built its theology on the voices from the past by requiring subscription of its ecclesiastical officers to the Westminster Standards: the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. In that sense, the PCA has been confessional as a denomination.

Confessional denominations are marked by taking their governing theological positions from a system of doctrine contained in documents and doctrinal declarations adopted as binding by the denomination as a whole. In the PCA's case, the aforementioned Westminster Standards serve that end. Within the denomination, these documents are subordinate to Scripture, and yet are seen as a faithful and reliable summary of God's Word, and therefore must be subscribed. Notably, within the PCA's confessionalism there is allowance for limited disagreement with these Standards by its officers. In the language of the PCA's ecclesiology, these disagreements are called "stated differences." An officer who has them is to declare them in writing for consideration and evaluation by the Session or Presbytery which has jurisdiction

over him. The complicated part of this form of subscription has been deciding just how far those differences can go.

The PCA's form of subscription is commonly known as Good Faith Subscription and is defined as follows in its Book of Church Order (BCO):

Confession of Faith and Catechisms, it is the right and responsibility of the Presbytery to determine if the candidate is out of accord with any of the fundamentals of these doctrinal standards and, as a consequence, may not be able in good faith sincerely to receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith and Catechisms* of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures (cf. BCO 21–5, Q.2; 24–6, Q.2).¹

There are several implications that are derived from this statement. The first, and most obvious, is that officers in the PCA are allowed to differ from the Westminster Standards. As mentioned above, these differences are to be made known to his presbytery (or his Session in the case of ruling elders and deacons). The second is the impetus for this article, namely that there are limits to the extent of the differences. Differences are to be evaluated by church courts for the purpose of determining whether such a difference undermines the confessional integrity of the Standards as a whole. Stated another way, church courts are instructed to discern if a specific view causes the man who holds it to adopt a position that is internally inconsistent with essential

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1. *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2021), 21–4.e.

convictions of the Standards making his relationship to them irreconcilably inconsistent.

To that end, the court is to deliberate as to the effect this declared difference has on the man's ability to align himself with the system as a whole. If the court is convinced "the difference is neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion,"² it may grant the exception. However, acknowledged in this concession in the BCO is a limit. There are differences that are either hostile to the system or strike at the vitals of religion. Just by way of the briefest summary, those differences that strike at the vitals of religion deny the essence of the gospel. These are not the items under discussion in this paper. Instead, I intend to examine a couple of examples of what it means to be hostile to the system of doctrine. There are two specific and commonly stated differences within the PCA dealing with the second and fourth commandments. It is my intention to demonstrate that these differences create an irreparable or irresolvable conflict between the man who holds the difference(s) and the Standards, thereby making them hostile to the system of doctrine.

The common stated difference regarding the second commandment deals with the use of images of Jesus. Most often men stating this difference argue for a limited use of these images for the sake of instruction, specifically of children. Regarding the fourth commandment, stated differences often revolve around the limits of recreation, but more and more also involve limited commerce on the Lord's Day such as frequenting restaurants, consuming professional sports and other forms of entertainment, and so on. Rather than simply surrendering to popular demand, church courts within the PCA should recognize allowing such stated differences makes the man who holds them

hostile to the Confession at its most vital parts, thereby irreparably damaging his confessional integrity.

To be clear, the aim of this study is positive in nature, and limited in scope. Its goal is to consider only these two commonly held differences to aid in the PCA's commitment to be true to the Reformed faith. To that end, it asks if it is possible to state differences with the second and fourth commandments, in the way that is commonly done in the PCA, without a central part of the Standards being denied. Does the stated difference force the PCA to allow a doctrine fundamentally opposed to the central parts of the Standards to live side by side? Are these views hostile to the system of doctrine and compromise the PCA's confessional integrity? Some will seek to dismiss such a study as a push for strict subscription and making the PCA into something it is not. However, the question about form of subscription is not "on the table." Rather it is an examination as to whether the PCA is acting consistently within its chosen form of subscription defined in BCO 21-4.e. To that end, this article will spend some time looking at the Standards themselves, to see if the doctrinal integrity of the PCA is harmed by allowing these previously defined differences to the second and fourth commandments.

The language of the Standards is earnest, grave, and urgent as it describes God's Ten Commandments. These are seen as the ethical framework within which the Christian is called to glorify God and enjoy Him. This urgency is especially clear in the Larger Catechism. Therefore the question of confessional integrity at these points should not be casually dismissed. It is the goal of this article to explain what is in view when the Larger Catechism refers to the breaking of the second and fourth commandments, and outline how the PCA's current response to these stated differences undermines the confessional integrity it is called to guard in BCO 21-4.e. And as such, it is my plea that, responding to the weighty language of the Larger Catechism, the PCA earnestly reconsider its current practice in allowing such stated differences.

Theologically, Dr. Brian Cosby has written on issues of the second commandment,³ as have Ron DiGiacomo and Dr. Ron Gleason, the latter two focusing on the second commandment and portrayals of Christ in films.⁴ Grant Van Leuven has written on the significance of the fourth commandment, and I have added my own voice to the issue.⁵ These men have argued against what is perceived as abuses of these commandments in the church. In response, men such as Derek Radney have argued that differences on these issues should be considered as less significant, as they are an expression

2. *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*, 21-4.f.

3. Brian Cosby, "The Second Commandment, Westminster and Images of Jesus," March 31, 2015, <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/the-second-commandment-westminster-and-images-of-jesus> (accessed April 24, 2023).

4. Ron DiGiacomo, "The Second Commandment And Films Depicting Jesus," *Philosophical Theology*, August 8, 2020, <https://philosophical-theology.com/2020/08/08/the-second-commandment-and-films-depicting-jesus/> (accessed April 24, 2023); Dr. Ron Gleason, "The Second Commandment and the Modern Christian," March 13, 2014, <https://theaquilareport.com/the-second-commandment-and-the-modern-christian/> (accessed April 24, 2023).

5. Geoff Gleason, "The Sabbath. Now What? | theologyinshorts," June 1, 2015, <http://theologyinshorts.com/the-sabbath-now-what/> (accessed April 24, 2023); Grant Van Leuven, "The Ten Commandments: The Fourth," November 25, 2019, <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/the-ten-commandments-the-fourth> (accessed April 24, 2023).

of mission and philosophy of ministry.⁶ These articles are written at a more popular level. *The Confessional Presbyterian* has dealt with issues regarding these commandments in a more academic format in past issues, utilizing the writing gifts of David Van Druenen, Chris Coldwell, and Lane Keister.⁷ However, though related, this article has a different focus and objective.

I intend to treat the theological implications of granting these common stated differences to these commandments in light of the PCA's ecclesiological commitments laid out in the BCO: that presbyteries should discern whether disregard of issues surrounding the second and fourth commandments should be tolerated in a denomination that is confessional in its own, self-conscious description as 'true to the Reformed faith.' To do so, this article will begin by grounding the position adopted in the Westminster Standards within the context of the history of Reformed confessions more broadly speaking. With that foundational context laid, it will examine the language of the Standards and draw conclusions as to the current direction of the PCA on these issues, specifically asking if it undermines the confessional integrity of PCA officers and even the denomination as a whole.

Before delving into the specifics of each commandment, I will specify what I believe must be preserved to maintain the integrity of the Westminster Standards as these commandments are considered. Foundational to the theology of the Westminster Standards is the notion of God's glory and His worthiness for worship. The Shorter Catechism begins by asking, "What is the chief end of man?" And the answer directs man to worship: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."⁸ Having established man's chief end, an examination of finer points of doctrine found in the rest of the Standards is no longer necessary. The chief and primary objective of the Standards is to direct man to worship and delight himself in the Lord. That objective goal gives sufficient clarity to guide the inquiry as to whether differences with the second and fourth commandment compromise the holder's ability to adhere to the Standards as a whole. Should the Standards indicate that the differences held attack that chief end, that would be sufficient proof to show these things are hostile to the system of doctrine.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

Before examining the Reformed expression about images of Jesus it would be helpful to give a very brief overview of this doctrinal controversy through church

history. That is because controversy regarding the second commandment is not unique to the PCA, nor is it simply a contemporary debate. In fact, the seventh ecumenical council gathered in Nicaea in 787 to resolve questions surrounding iconography and the making of images of Christ, questions that had been raised in earnest beginning in 726. Though it is often assumed that theological controversy begins in the Church, that is not the case with the disagreements surrounding the second commandment.

A Brief Historical Overview of Controversy Surrounding the Second Commandment

Controversy surrounding what we currently describe as iconoclasm was brought to the forefront through the political policies of emperor Leo III. Though there was some discussion on whether images of Christ are acceptable prior to his reign,⁹ he was responsible for making iconography a burning issue of his day.

Also known as the Issaurian, Leo was emperor of the Byzantine empire from 717 to 740 A.D. While his motivations for opposing images of Christ are not entirely clear, he began his assault on images in 726. It appears that his iconoclastic agenda was driven by his belief that "images depicting divine or saintly persons are equivalent to idols and should be banned."¹⁰ The response of his theological opponents was swift, led by John of Damascus.

John was born around 675, and he is estimated to have died prior to 750. John became a monk around 706, taking up his residence near Jerusalem. There,

6. Derek Radney, "Framing Doctrinal Disagreements - Part 2," *Semper Ref*, June 3, 2022, <https://www.semperre.org/articles/raming-doctrinal-disagreements-part-2> (accessed April 24, 2023).

7. David VanDruenen, "Pictures of Jesus and the Sovereignty of Divine Revelation," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 5 (2009): 214-227. Chris Coldwell, "In Brief: The Intent of Westminster Larger Catechism 109 Regarding Pictures of Christ's Humanity," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 5 (2009): 227-228; 323. Lane Keister, "The Sabbath Day and Recreations on the Sabbath," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, no. 5 (2009): 232-238; 323.

8. "The Westminster Shorter Catechism," in *The Confession and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education & Publications, 2005), Q. 1, 355.

9. George Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Church History* 19, no. 2 (June 1950): 77-96. Norman H. Baynes, "The Icons before Iconoclasm," *The Harvard Theological Review* 44, no. 2 (April 1951): 93-106. Ann Eljenholm Nichols, "Books-for-Laymen: The Demise of a Commonplace," *Church History* 56, no. 4 (1987): 457-473.

10. Deborah Mausekopf Deliyannis, "Agnellus of Ravenna and Iconoclasm: Theology and Politics in a Ninth-Century Historical Text," *Speculum* 71, no. 3 (July 1996): 559-560.

living outside Leo's jurisdiction, he responded to his iconoclastic policy. He did so by writing three treatises, now published in one volume called *Three Treatises on Divine Images*. His most forceful arguments in these treatises are derived from his understanding of the hypostatic union, or the relationship between the two natures of Christ. John agrees that the divine nature of God cannot be represented, but when the divine takes on human flesh, images of that visible nature become acceptable and even helpful. Leo's son, Constantine V, challenged these views.

Constantine V was born in the fall of 718. He became the sole ruler of Byzantium in 740 when his father died. Due to urgent political pressures within his own family, it was not until the year 752 that he took up his father's iconoclastic policy and that from a more theological angle.¹¹ Like John of Damascus, Constantine's appeal is Christological in nature, dealing with the hypostatic union of Christ. However, his conclusion is far from the same.

Constantine refuted the lawfulness of representing Christ in light of the union of the human and divine natures in the one Person. He argued that "the depiction of the prosopon (or hypostasis) which came into existence as the result of the union of the two natures cannot be accomplished, since of necessity this would involve the circumscription of the immaterial, divine nature."¹² In other words, though Christ is presented as truly man in Scripture, it does not present Him as merely a man. Christ is truly God and truly man and these two natures, though entirely distinct cannot be separated from each other. Constantine reaches back to the statements of the fourth ecumenical Council of Chalcedon of 451 which formally declared the human and divine natures of Christ to exist without confusion or separation. The iconoclasts sought further to solidify their theological advantage through formal ecclesiastical declaration. To that end, a council was called by Constantine in 754, the Council of Hieria.

Hieria was not considered an ecumenical council due to the absence of representatives from Rome and the Eastern Patriarchs. However, "it did establish the

norm of Byzantine orthodoxy for much of the eighth century."¹³ The 338 bishops that made up the council affirmed the theology of Constantine and established iconoclasm as the official doctrine of the Eastern Church. However, the Council of Hieria's gains were only temporary and did not end the controversy around images of Jesus.

Following several decades of political intrigue after Constantine V's death, Constantine VI, his grandson, called Nicaea II, today counted as the seventh official ecumenical council. Nicaea II began meeting on September 24, 787 under the influence of Constantine VI's mother and guardian Irene, who was a staunch promoter of the use of images. The ultimate result was the renunciation of the acts of the Council of Hieria and reinstatement of the use of images in the Church. After approximately sixty years of additional controversy, iconography was adopted as the settled position of the Eastern Church.

The Theology of Continental Confessions

However settled the matter was in the East, the controversy around images of Christ was not resolved in the Western church. Public debate resurfaced during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Reformers pushed back against the use of images and recorded their views in confessional statements which were adopted as the official doctrinal position of several denominations. Two such confessions are the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession.¹⁴ These confessions serve as case studies for the theological foundation that undergird the conclusions later drawn by the Westminster Assembly and summarized in the Westminster Standards.

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism is preeminent among Reformed catechisms of the sixteenth century. It was, and continues to be, a bastion of Reformed theology. Written primarily by Zacharius Ursinus, and published in 1563, this catechism quickly came to be viewed as the best summation of the teachings of Reformed Christianity. Divided into 52 Lord's Days to aid instruction in the Church over a calendar year, Lord's Day 35, and specifically questions 96–98, are significant in explaining Heidelberg's view of the second commandment.

In Q. 96 the Catechism asks its initial question about the second commandment: "What does God require in

11. Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V* (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1977), pp. 9–24.

12. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, p. 41.

13. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, p. 53.

14. In the interest of space constraints, it is not possible here to expand this article's investigation into a more comprehensive survey of Protestant creeds and confessions on the worship of God. However, readers interested in those documents which are particularly influential on the Westminster Standards may wish to refer as well to the Irish Articles of 1615, paragraphs 53 to 55, 'On the Service of God.'

the second commandment?” The answer states, “That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.”¹⁵ In response it could be asked whether Ursinus opposes all images, including those of the human nature of Christ. Further clarity is gained by referring to a compilation of his own comments on the catechism he authored.

Ursinus’s *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* is a record of his annual lectures through the entirety of the Heidelberg Catechism which he commenced shortly after its publication in 1563.¹⁶ These writings clarify his own thinking on issues regarding the commandments. Kyle Dieleman in his doctrinal dissertation on the controversy on the fourth commandment in the Dutch Reformation asserts about this work, “Ursinus’s *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* is his most elaborate explanation of the Sabbath commandment and, as a result, is extremely important for understanding Ursinus’s theological understanding of the Sabbath.”¹⁷ As explained by Dieleman, the commentary allows a more thorough understanding of Ursinus’s views of the fourth commandment, and if true of the fourth, it is certainly also true of the second.

In this commentary, Ursinus addresses the making of images of Christ in His human nature by describing the view of his critics. He states they taught that Christ “formerly manifested himself in bodily forms”¹⁸ which justified the making of His image. According to his critics, though the divine may not be portrayed, the material form God takes on in the incarnation may be depicted. This line of reasoning closely follows the theology of the Eastern Church as codified for them at Nicaea II. Ursinus answers this objection by drawing a distinction between God and man: “God may manifest himself in any way in which he may please to do so; but it is not lawful for any creature to represent God by any sign which he himself has not commanded.”¹⁹ God’s prerogative in manifesting himself does not entitle the creature to depict Him according to the imagination of an artist. To depict God requires divine command. That issue comes more clearly under attack when the Heidelberg discusses “books of the laity”. These books of the laity were widely used within the Roman Church during the time of the Reformation and before. Using visible stained glass, frescoes, sculpture, and other mediums, artists represented God and His works so that the illiterate might be made familiar with the biblical accounts.

Ursinus’s commentary on Q. 98 moves the discussion beyond representations of the divine nature only by

treating the books of the laity which included depictions of Jesus of Nazareth, who is truly man. Question 98 asks, “But may not images be tolerated in the churches, as books to the laity?” This question is of significance especially in considering the argument for the use of images of Christ for didactic or pedagogical uses. The answer from the Heidelberg Catechism states, “No: for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have his people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of his word.”²⁰ Specifically regarding the use of images for instructional purposes, man is not free to invent ways to teach about Christ, His humanity, or salvation. The Heidelberg Catechism identifies the means for such instruction to be preaching. As Ursinus comments on this question, he demonstrates his opposition to the use of images both in worship or simply in making them by saying, “Images are to be rooted out of the hearts of men by the preaching of the gospel. Therefore they are also to be cast out of our churches: for the doctrine revealed to us from heaven does not merely command us not to worship and adore them, but likewise not to make, or have them.”²¹ For Ursinus it is not simply a case of images used in worship, but whether images of Christ are acceptable at all. His opposition is clear. In line with Ursinus’s opposition to the use of images of either nature of Christ, Heinrich Bullinger is another leading Reformed voice. His views can be considered from the Second Helvetic Confession.

Heinrich Bullinger

The Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger was the successor to Huldrych Zwingli in Zurich and produced the Second Helvetic Confession. It was published in 1566, though it was originally written for his personal use in 1561. The fourth chapter of the Second Helvetic is

15. Zacharias Ursinus, “Heidelberg Catechism,” *Free Reformed Churches of North America*, n.d., <https://frcna.org/heidelberg-catechism> (accessed August 14, 2023).

16. Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans by G. W. Williard (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1852), p. xx.

17. Kyle James Dieleman, “The Battle for the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformation: Devotion or Desecration” (Ph.D., United States—Iowa: The University of Iowa, 2017), pp. 116–117, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1929620500/abstract/D5E197700D1644B7PQ/1> (accessed February 3, 2020).

18. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 527.

19. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, pp. 527–528.

20. Ursinus, “Heidelberg Catechism”, Q. 98

21. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, p. 534.

entitled “Of Idols; or of Images of God, of Christ, and of Saints.” In the second paragraph of this chapter, Bullinger objects to the idea that Christ can be pictured and grounds his opposition in the Incarnation. He states, “We do therefore reject not only the idols of the Gentiles, but also the images of Christians. For although Christ took upon Him man’s nature, yet He did not therefore take it that He might set forth a pattern for carvers and painters.”²² In other words, the Incarnation does not justify representing Christ in picture or sculpture. According to Bullinger, images of Christ create an inconsistency in Scripture. Speaking of Christ, he says: “He denied that He came ‘to destroy the law, or the prophets’ (Matt. 5:17), but images are forbidden in the law and the prophets (Deut. 4:15; Isa. 44:9).”²³ The conclusion is that it is incompatible with Scripture to argue that Christ would approve of His own representation because it is not lawful to make images of God and Christ is God.

Bullinger also makes the observation that Christ “denied that His bodily presence would profit the Church, but promised that He would by his Spirit be present with us forever (John 16:7; 2 Cor. 5:5).”²⁴ In Bullinger’s view, it is the Holy Spirit who profits the Christian, not a picture or sculpture of Christ. In fact, Jesus was taken out of the world into heaven, meaning there would be no profit from His picture. According to Bullinger, images of Christ have no value to the Church, including when they are used as part of the books of the laity.

Bullinger, like Ursinus, objects to the use of the books of the laity on the basis of God’s direction: “But that men might be instructed in religion, and put in mind of heavenly things and of their own salvation, the Lord commanded to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15) – not to paint and instruct the laity by pictures; He also instituted sacraments, but He nowhere appointed images.”²⁵ The knowledge of God comes by preaching, and that remains true for all ages. Since there is no biblical command for the use of images, the books of the laity are a human invention and oppose God’s direction, which by consequence assert that man is wiser than God.

22. Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 140.

23. Beeke and Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, p. 140.

24. Beeke and Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, p. 140.

25. Beeke and Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, p. 140.

26. “The Westminster Larger Catechism,” in *The Confession and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education & Publications, 2005), Q. 108, pp. 246–247.

27. Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: a Commentary* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2002), p. 285.

These confessions inform the thinking of the authors of the Westminster Standards and were the theological standard for the Reformed Churches. It remains then to consider the Westminsterian view of issues surrounding the second commandment.

The Theology of the Westminster Standards

Ultimately, the PCA’s confessional distinctives are not found in Constantinople, Heidelberg, or Zurich. They may provide context and history, but the PCA’s confessional system of doctrine is summarized in the Westminster Standards. As the Assembly met beginning on July 1, 1643 its task included refining and correcting the theology of the Church of England. The summary of the divines’ theological deliberations and doctrinal convictions are contained most popularly in the Westminster Confession of Faith, together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

Of the documents produced by the Assembly, the Westminster Larger Catechism deals most thoroughly with the second commandment. Questions 107–110 specifically tackle the second commandment. Question 108 asks, “What are the duties required in the second commandment?” As part of its answer, the Larger Catechism states that each Christian is to be engaged in, “removing it (false worship), and all monuments of idolatry.”²⁶ It is the phrase “monuments of idolatry” that has special bearing in considering Westminster’s understanding of images of God.

In his commentary on the Larger Catechism, Johannes Vos defines monuments of idolatry as “the altars, images, temples, etc., of false religions.”²⁷ Vos notes that Christians are to eliminate false worship, which includes representations of God in all the places they are able to do so. In doing so, Q. 108 helps Christians deal with existing violations of the second commandment, including visible representations of God. However, the Catechism in the next question also gives guidance by providing a theological rationale behind whether visible representations of God should be created or used going forward.

In Q. 109, the Larger Catechism looks at the prohibitions flowing from the second commandment, and asks, “What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?” One part of its answer deals with giving the True God false worship not commanded in His Word. As part of this answer, the Catechism singles out “the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any

creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it;"²⁸ The Larger Catechism is unmistakably clear. Making an image of any Person of the Trinity, in any medium, is denied as much as worshipping God in or by them. This statement has a special clarifying consequence regarding representations of Jesus.

The human nature of the second Person of the Trinity still belongs to one of the Persons of the Trinity, and therefore is not to be depicted through the artistic imagination and craft of men. Vos states the following about making images of Jesus: "According to the Larger Catechism, this is certainly wrong, for the catechism interprets the second commandment as forbidding the making of any representation of any of the three Persons of the Trinity, which would certainly include Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, God the Son."²⁹ The Larger Catechism decries representations of Jesus and calls them "monuments of idolatry." That will be significant in considering the confessional impact of differences with the second commandment.

Confessional Integrity

With the theology established and clearly stated, it remains to examine what happens when a denomination allows men to differ with this part of the system of doctrine contained in the Standards. Larger Catechism Q. 110 examines the reasons given in the second commandment. Specifically considering the language of the commandment that refers to "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,"³⁰ the Larger Catechism speaks of God's "revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom; accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate him."³¹ The issue, then, is whether holding these positions, which the Larger Catechism defines as spiritual whoredom, and giving places of leadership to "such as hate" the Lord, is hostile to the system of doctrine. In other words, can a man hold this difference or would it cause the integrity of the Standards to crumble on itself with regard to man's obligation to glorify God and enjoy Him? The question is not whether individuals can see how someone could hold such a view and yet be a Christian. The question relates to the system of doctrine presented in the Standards. It is the responsibility of a church court to decide if a man's view is hostile to that system. It stretches credulity to suggest that a man can rightly exercise man's chief end of glorifying God according to the Standards, while simultaneously holding positions which those same

Standards consider to be idolatrous, and evidences of 'spiritual whoredom.' The system of doctrine states that those who hold their position (i.e., in favor of permitting images of Christ) are counted as those who hate God. And yet such a co-existence is being granted in the PCA.

For example, in the PCA's 50th General Assembly report of the Theological Examinations Committee there were three theological exams. Of those three exams, two Teaching Elders stated a difference with Larger Catechism Q. 109. Both men held that images of Jesus were permissible for didactic purposes.³² The PCA's Theological Examinations Committee unanimously approved these men and "deemed the differences to be more than semantic but neither hostile to the system of doctrine nor striking at the vitals of religion."³³ But that assessment is incorrect if taking the language of the Standards as a whole. The Standards refer to images of any of the Persons of the Trinity as "monuments of idolatry" (Q. 108), "spiritual whoredom" (Q. 110), and state that God considers "the breakers of this commandment such as hate him" (Q. 110). To allow a view of images of Christ as appropriate for teaching purposes is counted as idolatry, whoredom, and an act of hatred against God by the Larger Catechism. These things are fundamentally hostile to the Catechism's stated chief end of man which is to glorify God and enjoy Him.

An honest reading of the integrity of the system of doctrine, using the words of the Standards themselves makes it abundantly clear that the keeping of this commandment based on the terms laid out in the Larger Catechism is essential to the confessional integrity of the PCA. Idolatry, spiritual prostitution, and hatred of God cannot be seen as either incidental or non-essential, especially in light of the chief end of glorifying God. Members of the PCA may think the Larger Catechism overstates its case. However, to adhere to the use of images of Jesus for some didactic end is to adopt the doctrine of the Eastern Church, or the Roman Catholic view of the books of the laity. The language of the Larger Catechism, adopted by the PCA as an accurate summary of biblical doctrine, does not allow views that in essence return the Church to a "books of the laity" intended for children. This view, in the words of the

28. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 109, pp. 246–247.

29. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, pp. 291–292.

30. Exodus 20:5b.

31. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 110, 251.

32. Presbyterian Church in America 50th General Assembly, *Commissioner Handbook*, pp. 1101–1102.

33. 50th General Assembly, *Commissioner Handbook*, pp. 1101–1102.

Larger Catechism, is completely opposite to the call to glorify God, and to allow it undermines the system of doctrine and compromises the confessional integrity of the man holding such views.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

The second issue of theological disparity affecting a man's relationship with the Standards adopted by the PCA being examined in this article is differences with the fourth commandment touching on issues surrounding recreation and limited commerce on the Sabbath. When it comes to this commandment, it is more challenging to present a focal point of dispute in broader church history. Unlike the second commandment, which was treated at the seventh ecumenical council, I am unaware of controversy at the same level surrounding the fourth commandment. From a church history perspective, then, it is possible to consider views and practices of influential individuals on this point, such as has been done by Dr. Richard Gaffin in his book, *Calvin's View of the Sabbath*. However, the challenge in studying the views of individuals is deciding whose views should be examined for such a project. And as part of that selection process, it would further have to be ascertained that the views and practices of these individuals represented those of a significant part of the church. Instead, it seems more profitable to examine the doctrinal documents adopted by denominations and Churches, which is my intention for this section of this article. Examining theological ancestry demonstrates the Westminster Standards' consistency or aberration when it comes to the position articulated by the Westminster divines. To that end, here again follows a brief study of those creedal and catechetical documents published by Heinrich Bullinger and Zacharias Ursinus (and their views on this subject), albeit in reverse order.

The Second Helvetic Confession

Bullinger's work in the Second Helvetic Confession was previously introduced in connection with its treatment of the second commandment. Relevant to the fourth commandment, the twenty-fourth chapter deals with the issues of the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath.

In the opening paragraph Bullinger argues that it is necessary for the church to set apart a certain time for "public prayers," the "preaching of the Gospel," and "the celebration of the sacraments."³⁴ In addition, the establishment of the Christian Sabbath as the Lord's Day is confirmed by recognizing the authority of the church to select which day it will set apart for such exercises. It is to be acknowledged that Bullinger's view that the church selected the day of the week which was to be the Lord's Day is certainly different from Westminster's. However, this difference only touches on the origins of the first day of the week as the Lord's Day and not the actual practice of the day, which is the source of dispute in the PCA. Bullinger notes that, now that the day has been chosen, it cannot be changed, when he says: "no one is permitted to overthrow this appointment of the Church at his own pleasure."³⁵ To protect this chosen day, Bullinger requires a specific and corporate rest from daily labors when he says "due time and leisure" are necessary to prevent men from being "drawn away from it by their own affairs."³⁶ Bullinger's point about the primacy of worship of the Sabbath is further reinforced in the second paragraph.

As with the other Reformed documents, Bullinger did not desire to introduce something new, but desired to maintain fidelity to and continuity with apostolic teaching. He makes an intentional connection from his teaching to the Apostles when he states, "Hence we see that in the ancient churches there were not only certain set hours in the week appointed for meetings, but that also the Lord's Day itself, ever since the apostles' time, was set aside for them and for a holy rest, a practice now rightly preserved by our Churches for the sake of worship and love."³⁷ Thus, the Confession presents an abiding obligation to honor the Lord's Day as the New Testament Sabbath rooted in the Apostles' practice for the purpose of attending the corporate "meetings" of the church.

The third paragraph of chapter twenty-four deals with ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath. In defining these obsolete aspects abrogated in the Lord's Day, the Confession states, "we do not yield to the Jewish observance and to superstitions. For we do not believe that one day is any holier than another, or think that rest in itself is acceptable to God. Moreover, we celebrate the Lord's Day and not the Sabbath as a free observance."³⁸ The Second Helvetic Confession's view of what is ceremonial in the Sabbath is grounded in two specific aspects, one more obvious than the other. The first and more obvious one deals with the mode and day of celebration as compared to the Jewish Sabbath. The

34. "The Second Helvetic Confession," Chapter 24.1, n.d., <https://www.ccel.org/creeds/helvetic.htm> (accessed February 24, 2020).

35. "The Second Helvetic Confession," Chapter 24.1

36. "The Second Helvetic Confession," Chapter 24.1.

37. "The Second Helvetic Confession," Chapter 24.2.

38. "The Second Helvetic Confession," Chapter 24.3.

second and more obscure one stresses the condition of the heart as it rests on the Lord's Day. In the first instance, Bullinger is not taking issue with the abiding nature of one day in seven set apart for worship and rest, but in the trappings of the Jewish observance of it and in the difference on the day chosen on which to rest. And in the second instance, he more subtly points out the heart behind the keeping of the Sabbath. For the Christian, there is a free observance of the Sabbath, not under constraint or compulsion of the ceremonial law, but out of gratitude for the work of Christ who has purchased the rest which the Christian enjoys by suffering the turmoil of divine wrath on the cross.

To summarize Bullinger's Confession, he notes the establishment of the Lord's Day by the Apostles on which the public worship of the church is to be preserved, with the change of the celebration of this Lord's Day explained by an appeal to the abrogation of the ceremonies of the Jewish observance. The Second Helvetic Confession articulates an *abiding* Sabbath in which rest is a necessary and central component. Indeed, there is a ceremonial aspect to the Sabbath that affects the day on which it is celebrated – which is certainly not emphasized in the Westminster Standards – but as an abiding principle, rest from regular work, and the gospel ministry of the church is to be continued also in the New Testament church with one day in seven set apart for that purpose. Ursinus concurs with his Swiss contemporary.

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches on the fourth commandment in Q. 103, where it asks: "What does God require in the fourth commandment?" The answer in response is given as follows:

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, as becomes a Christian. 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.³⁹

The answer from the catechism divides the significance of the fourth commandment into two parts. First, it considers the fourth commandment relating to the formal worship of God's people through the ministry

of the gospel, the schools, and the Sabbath. Second, it also considers the expansion of the joy of the Christian in Christ in our everyday striving to rest from evil by the power of the Holy Spirit. Considering the ongoing implications for the fourth commandment as it touches the formal, corporate worship of God's people, several conclusions about the Catechism's position can be drawn.

As part of its first point regarding the ministry of the gospel and the schools, the Catechism singles out the Sabbath day as the day of rest on which the Christian is to join in hearing the Word of God preached, benefit from the administration of the sacraments, and join with God's people in calling on the Lord, a clear reference to prayer. In other words, far from being a day of idleness, or simply ceasing from bodily labors, the Sabbath is to be a "day of rest," spiritually speaking. The Catechism is clear that this "resting" has a specific direction, or activity. The Christian, on this day, is to be engaged in the spiritual tasks assigned for his rest, which is not comprehended as resting from *all* activity.

Second, the Heidelberg Catechism outlines specific *daily* application for the Christian regarding the fourth commandment. Beyond the implications of participation in the corporate worship of the church on the Sabbath, there is also the consideration of the Sabbath as a reflection of the heart of the believer. The believer is urged to cease from "evil works" and rely on God to work change in him through the Holy Spirit. The rest to which the Sabbath enjoins the Christian is already in effect according to the Catechism. These observations have led commentators to surmise that the Heidelberg Catechism presents the Sabbath as a binding day of rest to be observed by the Christian community. As R. Scott Clark has observed, "There can be no doubt that the authors understood the Lord's Day to be a Christian Sabbath. The German and Dutch Reformed churches certainly adopted it with the understanding that it required Reformed Christians to set aside one day in seven for rest, worship, and anticipation of the consummation."⁴⁰ That means because that rest is inaugurated but not yet fully realized, an obligation of sabbath-keeping remains.

Ursinus's exposition of the fourth commandment in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism is his most lengthy treatment of any of the commandments. In this critical section, he makes the same distinction Bullinger made dividing the fourth commandment

39. Ursinus, "Heidelberg Catechism", Q. 103.

40. R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Pub, 2008), p. 321.

into an abiding and ceremonial aspect. He says, “there are two parts – the *one* moral and perpetual, as that the Sabbath be kept holy; the *other* ceremonial and temporary, as that the seventh day be kept holy.”⁴¹ According to Ursinus, there remains a moral, perpetual obligation to keep the Sabbath holy, while at the same time the observance of the seventh day is no longer binding, but is instead to be considered ceremonial. It is that distinction between moral and ceremonial that drives Ursinus’s thought throughout his explanation of the Sabbath. The ceremonial is limited specifically to the day chosen to observe the Sabbath: “Hence the Sabbath, in as far as it has respect to the seventh day, was, together with other ceremonies and types, fulfilled and abolished by the coming of the Messiah.”⁴²

There is clearly harmony between Bullinger and Ursinus on the issue of the ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath, primarily to do with the day on which it is celebrated. Ursinus, like Bullinger, believed the day of the Sabbath was changed due to the liberty purchased for the New Testament church by Christ. He states, “The apostolic church, to distinguish itself from the Jewish synagogue, chose, in the exercise of the liberty conferred upon it by Christ, the first day of the week in the place of the seventh, because on that day the resurrection of Christ took place.”⁴³ Ursinus deflects attention away from a specific day, viewing the actual day as ceremonial, and in some sense almost unimportant. And yet, his assigning part of the Sabbath to the ceremonial should not be understood to imply that the weight of the fourth commandment has in any way been eased.

Although Ursinus identifies ceremonial aspects of the Old Testament Sabbath, he also teaches a moral and perpetual aspect to its observance. Ursinus explained that the ongoing aspect can be recognized in the ultimate goal for the Sabbath: “The *end* or design of the commandment is the maintenance of the public worship of God in the church; or the perpetual preservation, and use of the ecclesiastical ministry.”⁴⁴ According to Ursinus, the goal of the Sabbath is the worship of God. And since the worship of God is at no time to be neglected, the commandment is still in force. He says, “It follows that God will always have the ministry of the church preserved and the use thereof respected, so that

the moral part of this commandment binds all men from the beginning to the end of the world, to observe some Sabbath, or to devote a certain portion of their time to sermons, public prayers, and the administration of the sacraments.”⁴⁵ There is not a lessening of the moral force of the fourth commandment. Instead, it continues to be binding on all men. There is a continuing and abiding nature to the fourth commandment because it concerns the worship of God. And since the worship of God can never be suspended, if for no other reason than human necessity, daily labors must be suspended on a day to make allowance for worship.

Ursinus stresses the Sabbath rest requirement to the church *and* those outside of Christ. His reason is not to force the pagan to worship. Rather it is to keep the pagan’s activity or lack thereof on the Sabbath from being a temptation to the Christian. Using as an example the Jewish nation he observes: “The strangers who lived among the Jews were not bound or compelled to conform to all the ceremonies, nor to the Jewish religion itself, but only to such external discipline as was necessary for the purpose of avoiding offence to the church in which they lived.”⁴⁶ According to Ursinus, the moral obligation is applied to all and continues today, void of the ceremonial trappings of the specific day.

By way of summary, Ursinus’s understanding of the fourth commandment is *partially* ceremonial, but *predominately* moral and abiding. The ceremonial part deals with the day on which daily labors are set aside to enjoy the rest of God’s work in man. The moral aspect deals with the actual resting from labor and participation in the worship of God with His people. No man may neglect the eternal obligation. These are foundational considerations of theological context, which aid in seeing the unity of the Reformed, confessional doctrine of the Lord’s Day as it is later articulated in the Westminster Standards.

The Theology of the Westminster Standards

Within the Westminster Standards, the clearest treatment of the fourth commandment is found in the Westminster Larger Catechism, questions 115–121. As seen in both Bullinger and Ursinus, the most notable difference between 16th century views on the Lord’s Day and that which is articulated in the Westminster Larger Catechism is in how they formulate the reason for celebrating the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath. Whereas the Heidelberg Catechism and Second Helvetic Confession viewed the day to be celebrated as ceremonial and left the choosing of the day to the

41. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 557.

42. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, pp. 557–558.

43. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, p. 563.

44. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, p. 557.

45. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, p. 557.

46. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, p. 560.

church, the Westminster Larger Catechism teaches that the timing of the Lord's Day as given by divine appointment. In question 116, the Larger Catechism is quite specific that the Lord appointed the seventh day for rest and worship after creation, but subsequently changed the day to the first day of the week after the resurrection of Christ: "The fourth commandment requireth of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his Word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world."⁴⁷ In assigning the day when the Lord's Day is to be celebrated, the Westminster Larger Catechism (and Shorter Catechism) explicitly identifies the first day of the week as God's appointment in His word. But as has been pointed out before, this view distinguishes the Westminster Standards from the earlier Continental documents only in considering how the day was chosen. The actual practice of the day is not distinguishable between the two streams of thought.

As the Larger Catechism defines its view of the fourth commandment and the observance of the Lord's Day, it notes what should be done: "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."⁴⁸ Like the continental Reformers, the Westminster divines held that rest and worship are to predominate the Lord's Day. Allowance for works of necessity and mercy are granted, but the focus is on rest and worship. That focus is important because the system is defining its ethics in relation to man's chief end, which is to glorify God and enjoy Him. Beyond the positive "thou shalt" of the Larger Catechism, it also turns to what is forbidden.

Within that structure of worship and rest, the Larger Catechism defines the sins against the Lord's Day as including the neglect of worship, idleness and giving way to the distractions of regular, or worldly "employments and recreations" (Larger Catechism Q. 117 and 119). This language regarding employments and recreations has been the cause for much confusion in the PCA. A case in point can be found in the stated difference noted in the Theological Examination Committee's report to the 49th General Assembly. There the candidate summarizes his difference with the Standards' view of the fourth commandment as

follows: "My exception is with the Confession and Catechisms including recreations as forbidden on the Sabbath. Recreation does not equate to toil or labor. It may regularly be restful and refreshing."⁴⁹ The stated difference is taken with Confession of Faith 21.8, Larger Catechism Q. 117, and Shorter Catechism Q. 60. This view expresses a common confusion surrounding the fourth commandment, as has been previously pointed out by Lane Keister by dividing obedience to the Lord's Day into three parts.

Keister has argued previously in *The Confessional Presbyterian* that making the recreation clause an occasion for difference is founded on a neglect or misunderstanding of Isaiah 58:13–14. Regarding that text he notes, "the way of Sabbath-keeping which is forbidden here is 'one's own way' The way of Sabbath-keeping which is commanded here is 'the delight in the Lord.'"⁵⁰ That observation changes the question from one of labor, which is primarily in view in the commandment itself, to why it is being done. The question to be asked about recreations is not whether they are labor. There is a more important question being asked in Isaiah 58. And to that end Keister concludes, "Rather than asking about a specific activity, as to whether or not it is lawful (and usually with the mindset of what the person can get away with), it is more helpful to remember that the rest in view is not simply physical rest, but rather a rest of worshipping the Lord."⁵¹ Keister directs the reader to a proper understanding of the Puritan view of the Sabbath: as a day of rest to be enjoyed in the spiritual works of worship and the things that tend to assist man in those works.

Building on Keister's work, the way of evaluating the Lord's Day's activities as laid out in the Larger Catechism can be clarified on the basis of three questions: two based on the commandment itself, and the last one based on Isaiah 58:13–14. In the commandments, God forbids His people either from working or from having someone work for them. Isaiah 58 calls God's people to delight in Him. So the questions to be asked are quite simple: 1. Am I working? 2. Am I making someone work for me? 3. Am I delighting in the Lord? Perhaps a follow up to an affirmative answer to either of the first two questions would be to clarify if it is a work of

47. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 116, 260.

48. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 117, 261.

49. *Minutes of the Forty-ninth General Assembly*, vol. 1 (Lawrenceville, GA: Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2022), p. 480.

50. Lane Keister, "The Sabbath Day and Recreations on the Sabbath," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, no. 5 (2009): 238.

51. Keister, "The Sabbath Day," p. 323.

necessity or mercy. However, if the first two questions are answered in the negative, and the third in the positive, the vast majority of questions about the Lord's Day will be answered, because they address the two-fold purpose of the Lord's Day as laid out in the Larger Catechism: resting in the Lord and giving Him glory on His day according to His appointment. However, the confessional integrity regarding the Sabbath within the theological system of the Westminster Standards is brought to the forefront later in the Larger Catechism's exposition of the doctrine.

Confessional Integrity

Remembering the Moral Law summarized in the Ten Commandments as the ethical framework defined in the Standards by which the Christian will glorify and enjoy God, the Larger Catechism probes further as it examines why the law stresses that the Sabbath Day is to be remembered. Question 121 asks, "Why is the word *Remember* set in the beginning of the fourth commandment?" The answer is provided in several parts, and each one demonstrates the gravity of the fourth commandment within the broader structure of the system of doctrine.

The first observation about the urgency to remember the Sabbath is "because of the great benefit of remembering it, we being thereby helped in our preparation to keep it, and, in keeping it, better to keep all the rest of the commandments, and to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption, which contain a short abridgment of religion."⁵² Here the Catechism explains that keeping the fourth commandment's obligations to worship and rest prepares the Christian better to keep the other nine. Formulated negatively, to neglect the Sabbath is to make keeping the other commandments more difficult for the believer. And this observation is certainly plausible, for if the Christian neglects the worship of the True God, he will be prone to replace the worship of the Creator with that of the creature (Romans 1:25). However the urgency regarding the confessional integrity of the fourth commandment is seen more clearly still later in the same answer.

The second, more crucial reason regarding the urgency of the fourth commandment given in Q. 121 is that "Satan with his instruments much labor to blot out the glory, and even the memory of it (the Lord's Day), to

bring in all irreligion and impiety."⁵³ Here the Catechism posits that the neglect of the fourth commandment is a strategy and tool used by Satan and the other fallen angels to corrupt the Christian. The result of breaking the Sabbath in the Larger Catechism is the corruption of worship in irreligion and the corruption of holiness in impiety. Therefore, according to the system of doctrine outlined in the Catechism itself, the neglect of the fourth commandment is so grave that it attacks worship and holiness, leading to idolatry and ungodliness.

The question of confessional integrity starts with an evaluation of the harmony between a man and the Standards, as defined within the document with which the differences are taken. It is not primarily a question about how the man views his relationship. The question is whether a man's professed beliefs about certain doctrines are hostile to the system of doctrine as internally defined. In other words, in examining confessional integrity it is significant to ask the Standards themselves if something is hostile to its system. To approach the question from the point of view of personal approval or disapproval of a theological position is to impose an individualism on a denominational theological standard, an approach obviously contrary to the PCA's current ecclesiology. With the chief end of man described as glorifying God and enjoying Him forever in Shorter Catechism Q. 1, His worship and glory is primary in the system of doctrine of the Westminster Standards. Anything that attacks or damages God's glory or man's enjoyment of Him must be seen as hostile to the system of doctrine. When it comes to the fourth commandment, the Larger Catechism views neglecting the Sabbath as bringing in irreligion and impiety. Neglect of the Lord's Day is hostile to the system in that it is neither preserving the glory of God nor living in His joy. It is rather the opposite. Therefore, confessional integrity in the PCA demands upholding the Sabbath and it should not allow officers to hold stated differences that allow worldly employments, except in cases of mercy and necessity, nor positions that consider an individual's personal delight instead of God's.

CONCLUSION

The question being asked about confessional integrity often begins at the wrong point. Instead of asking whether a presbytery thinks a stated difference undermines the Westminster Standards, the first question should be whether the Standards themselves describe a theological position as undermining its

52. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 121, pp. 263-264.

53. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 121, pp. 264-265.

integrity and theological unity. That is what it would mean to say something “strikes at the vitals” of a system of doctrine. In the case of the second commandment, the Larger Catechism describes those who break the commandment (as presented in the Catechism) as engaging in ‘spiritual whoredom.’ In the case of the fourth commandment the Larger Catechism explains neglect of the Sabbath (as presented in the Catechism) as Satan’s effort to bring in ‘all irreligion and impiety.’ And since the Standards’ self-professed chief end of man is the glory of God, stated differences to either of these commandments are blatant attacks on God’s glory and therefore undermine the confessional integrity of the Standards themselves.■

In Brief: James Durham on the Unlawfulness of Making Images of any Person of the Trinity. From James Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 43–46.

Hence will it clearly appear, that this command is to be reckoned a distinct command from the former; because: 1. It contains distinct matter, forbids sins of another kind and commands duties of another kind. 2. Because they are certainly ten in number and there cannot be such a reckoning made up if these first two be one; it being clear (as after will appear) that the last is only one and cannot be divided into two. 3. Beside, it is the common reckoning of the ancient Jews, as may be seen from Josephus (lib. 3. 9. [*sic?*]), Ainsworth, and others.¹

This then being laid down as a truth, we shall, I. Shortly put by some questions concerning images, for clearing the words. II. Come particularly to show what is required and what is forbidden in this commandment and how we break it in our ordinary practice. III. Then open the reasons that are annexed.

I. Concerning images two things are to be enquired. i. If no image is lawful; and if any is lawful, what [are they]? ii. If any use, especially religious, of images is lawful? And if adoration of any kind is to be given to them? We say for answer:

i. 1. That making of pictures of creatures which are visible or may be comprehended or historical fancies (to speak so) such as the senses and elements uses to be [*commonly are*] held forth by (which are rather hieroglyphics than real pictures); these, I say, are not simply unlawful but are so when they are abused. So Solomon made images of lions for his use and thus the gift of engraving and painting, as well as others which God has given to men, may be made use of when (as has been said) it is not abused. As:

(1) When such pictures are obscene and filthy and against

Christian modesty to behold, such break this commandment, but more especially the seventh; because, as filthy communication pollutes the ears, so do they the eyes. (2) When men become prodigal in their bestowing either too much time or too much expense on them. (3) When they dote too much on them by curiosity. (4) And many other ways they may be abused; but especially, in the fourth place, if they be abused to any religious use, then they become unlawful, as afterward shall be cleared.

2. Though making of images simply is not unlawful and discharged by this commandment, yet thereby every representation of God (who is the object to be worshiped) and every image *religiously made use of in worship* is condemned (though civil and political images and statues, which are used as ornaments or badges of honor or remembrancers of some fact, etc., are not condemned). (1) Because such images cannot but beget carnal thoughts of God (as {Acts 17:29}), contrary to this commandment. (2) Because God discovered Himself (Deut. 4:15–16, etc.) by no likeness, but only by His Word, that they might have no ground of likening Him to anything. (3) Because it is impossible to get a bodily likeness to set Him out by, who is a Spirit and an infinite Spirit. So then, every such image must be derogatory to God, as turning the glory of the invisible God to the shape of some visible and corruptible creature, which is condemned (Rom. 1:22–23), for every image supposes some likeness. Now, there can be no conceivable or imaginable likeness between God and anything that we can invent; therefore it is said by the Lord (Isa. 40:18): “To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?” Where it seems it was no idol, but God they aimed to represent by their images, which was the fault condemned in Isaiah 40:25. As also, when we cannot conceive of God and of the mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation, as we ought, what presumption must it be to paint them?

Therefore upon these grounds, (1) We simply condemn any delineating of God or the Godhead or Trinity, such as some have upon their buildings or books, like a sun shining with beams and the Lord’s name, Jehovah, in it or any other way. This is most abominable to see and a heinous wronging of God’s majesty.

(2) All representing of the persons as distinct, as to set out the Father (personally considered) by the image of an old man, as if He were a creature; the Son under the image of a lamb or young man; the Holy Ghost under the image of a dove: all which wrongs the Godhead exceedingly. And although the Son was and is man, having taken on Him that nature and united it to His Godhead, yet He is not a mere man. Therefore

1. [See Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 3, chapter 5, §5. Cf. *Works*, translated by William Whiston, vol. 1 (1829), 88. Henry Ainsworth (1571–1622), *Annotations on Exodus* (1617). Cf. *Annotations* (London: Blackie, 1843), 1.338.]

that image, which only holds forth one nature and looks like any man in the world, cannot be the representation of that person which is God and Man.

And, if it is SAID, *Man's soul cannot be painted, but His body may and yet that picture represents a man*; I ANSWER: It does so because he has but one nature and what represents that represents the person. But it is not so with Christ. His Godhead is not a distinct part of the human nature, as the soul of man is (which is necessarily supposed in every living man), but a distinct nature, only united with the manhood in that one person Christ, who has no fellow. Therefore what represents Him must not represent a man only, but must represent Christ, Immanuel, God-Man. Otherwise it is not His image. Besides, there is no warrant for representing Him in His Manhood, nor any colorable possibility of it, but as men fancy. And shall that be called Christ's portraiture? Would that be called any other man's portraiture which were drawn at men's pleasure without regard to the pattern? Again, there is no use of it. For either that image behooved to have but common estimation with other images and that would wrong Christ, or a peculiar respect and reverence and so it sins against this commandment that forbids all religious reverence to images. But He being God and so the object of worship, we must either divide His natures or say that image or picture [does] not represent Christ.

Again, as to what may be objected from the Lord's appearing sometimes in the likeness of a man or the Spirit's descending as a dove or as cloven tongues of fire, it is ANSWERED:

(1) There is a great difference between a sign of the Spirit's presence and a representation of the Spirit. (2) Between what represents the Spirit, as He is one of the persons of the blessed Trinity, and what resembles some gift of His. The similitude of a dove descending upon Christ was to show His taking up His residence in Him and furnishing Him with gifts and graces, and particularly holy simplicity and meekness without measure; and so His appearing in cloven tongues was to show His communicating the gift of tongues to the apostles. (3) Neither is there any warrant for drawing Him in these shapes, more than to look on every living dove as representing Him. And the like may be said of God's appearing sometimes in human likeness; it was but that men might have some visible help to discern something of God's presence, but not to give any representation of Him, and these bodies were but for a time assumed, as a prelude and fore-running evidence of the Son's being to become man.

From this ground also it would seem, that painting of angels might be condemned as a thing impossible, they being spirits which no corporeal thing can represent. Beside that, the representing of them has some hazard with it. And for those cherubims that were made by God's direction under the Old Testament, they were rather some emblem of the

nature and service of angels, as being full of zeal and always (as it were) upon wing ready to obey God's will, than any likeness of themselves. And it is hardly possible to fancy representations of spirits, good or evil, but thereby men will wrong themselves in the right description of them, though we grant angels, being but finite spirits, there is another kind of danger and impossibility of representing God who is an infinite Spirit. Also, some say that these cherubims mentioned did not represent the nature of angels, but angels appearing under such a visible shape. And we find (Ezek. 1), there are divers shapes by which they are pointed out, but it is as to their fitness and readiness for service and not as to their nature.

3. We say that no image whatsoever, made use of for religious ends, and without [outside] the bounds of civil and politic uses, is allowable; but is by this commandment condemned as unsuitable to the Lord's nature and revealed will. So by this images (otherwise lawful) when abused to idolatry, become unlawful and are not to be suffered, but orderly to be removed. We call that more than a civil or a common use, when religious worship or reverence is purposely intended to them or there is by some one occasion or other, danger, lest they may be so abused. And of this sort (*viz.* dangerous ones) are (1) *Images in places of worship*; but it is not idolatry to have dead men's images on their tombs or monuments in churches. (2) Images of such angels, saints, etc., which have been abused to idolatry by being worshiped or most readily may be so abused. (3) Images erected for helping our prayers to be accepted and which have altars, lights, or temples appointed for them (which will be clearer when we come to speak of religious worship and *bowing*); thus peregrinations and vows to images, touching of them with some apprehension of fruit and advantage thereby, especially when healing is expected from them, and so are they abused also, though help be expected not from the image, but from Him whom it is said to represent. And thus also, when any image, once lawful, comes to be abused, it ought to be removed, as the brazen serpent was by Hezekiah: and under this prohibition come in the images of false gods, as Cupid, Venus, Apollo, Jupiter, etc., which were once abused. Besides, some of these idols being nothing, the portraying of them makes them appear something. And if it was the Lord's way to command the breaking and destroying of all idols and images of false gods, can it be suitable to retain them in memory, that a generation following might have that occasion and help to idolatry (*viz.* the images of old idols) from Christians? And if it was David's and the saint's way (Ps. 16:4), not so much as to mention their names but with detestation, ought God's people for sport or delight to look on these images? Zeal for God would abhor these curiosities and what edification can be in them? ■