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THE DOCTRINE AND HISTORY OF WORSHIP IN THE REFORMED
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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Approved by


Adviser


Reader

PREFACE

Why does a man write a thesis? In this case it was because I was interested in the subject of worship. As a Reformed Presbyterian, it was easy to develop this interest. The first-time visitor to a Reformed Presbyterian Church will generally ask, Why do you only sing Psalms? Why don't you use an organ? At that time a Reformed Presbyterian must be able to give a good answer for his beliefs. There were other reasons for writing on this topic: My belief in the importance of worship, and the desire to know more about it; a desire to see the visible church become one; and the hope that by offering a clear statement on Reformed Presbyterian worship and its Biblical foundation Christian unity would be advanced.

Like every thesis, the scope of this one is limited. The denominational limit is the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, although much that is said here applies to other Reformed churches. The thesis is also limited to congregational or corporate worship. To have included much information on personal, family and small group worship would have made too long a thesis.

The goal of this thesis is to summarize Reformed Presbyterian worship from historical and doctrinal viewpoints. The history is illustrated by numerous examples of worship practices, and some accounts of individual experiences of worship. The attempt is made to show how men reacted subjectively to their worship, as well as what they did. The

doctrinal sections include numerous references to the Bible, because Reformed Presbyterians regard the Bible as the source of Christian doctrine, and therefore as the final authority for the doctrine and practice of worship.

While this thesis was written by one person, it would have been impossible to complete without the help of many people. There were librarians, particularly Rachel George and Susan Stazen; the advisor and reader, William Schmelder and August Suelflow; typists, Peggy Smith, Roseann Charlton, Leslie Schutz, Dale Didier, Karen Woods, and Judy Linhart; proof readers, David Carson, Betty Hainer, Mary Ruffing, Ruth Jacobs, and Tim Russell; and the faculty and staffs of Concordia Seminary and Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Finally, my thanks must go to the triune God, who gives students the strength to write their dissertations.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As the smaller, conservative Presbyterian churches have moved towards merger, one doctrinal problem has emerged. It is the position of the Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanter) Church of North America (RPC) on worship. The Reformed Presbyterian Church holds to the traditional Reformed positions of a capella singing and the exclusive use of the Psalms for singing in worship. This thesis was written to explain Reformed Presbyterian worship. The questions that it attempts to answer are: What is the historical basis for Reformed Presbyterian worship? What is the doctrinal basis for Reformed Presbyterian worship? What, if any, have been the changes in Reformed Presbyterian worship? What kind of changes were made? What explanations are there for the refusal of the Reformed Presbyterian Church to depart from traditional Reformed worship?

The method of research was to gather information from Reformed Presbyterian and other Reformed churches. Primary material was gathered from Reformed Presbyterian Minutes of Synod, denominational periodicals, autobiographies, and so forth. These were supplemented by denominational histories and other secondary material. Doctrinal material often came from Reformed Presbyterians. Where it was necessary to supplement them, the information was taken from Reformed authorities that have been influential on and/or respected by Reformed Presbyterians. In particular, the

American Princeton School and the Scottish Free Church School theologians were cited. When secondary sources cited primary sources, attempts were made to find and use primary sources.

The thesis begins by giving the readers brief denominational and confessional histories. These lay a foundation for the two chapters on the doctrine of worship which includes sacraments. These chapters begin with the Reformed view of Scripture and the extent of its authority, move into the Biblical evidence for the Regulative Principle of Worship, and conclude with a commentary on the chapters of the Westminster Confession-Reformed Presbyterian Testimony dealing with worship and sacraments. For contrast, the Reformed positions are compared with Anglican and Roman positions. The sixth chapter traces the practices of worship. It uses the 17th century Directory for Worship written by the Westminster Assembly, R. J. George's The Covenanter Pastor (1911), and the 1945 Reformed Presbyterian Directory for Worship as three pegs to trace worship practices through history.

The final chapter is a summary. To no one's surprise, it concludes that Reformed Presbyterian worship is traditional Reformed worship, and that it shares the marks of Reformed worship. The Reformed Presbyterian doctrine of worship has not changed since the Westminster Confession. In the practice of worship, Reformed Presbyterians have changed some circumstances of worship (non-doctrinal practices like time, place, sanctuary, order of worship, things surrounding, but not part of worship), but parts of worship (doctrinally required actions done during the service like preaching, singing Psalms, and reading Scripture) have not changed. The historical and sociological reasons for this refusal to change are

evaluated and considered minor. The theological reasons and the educational system of the denomination are considered the primary reasons for the stability of Reformed Presbyterian worship.

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA (RPCNA)

Scottish Background of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

This chapter is a brief sketch of the History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.¹ The story begins with the Reformation. After Martin Luther and his followers began the Reformation, it spread rapidly through Western Europe. In France it affected a young man named John Calvin, who was forced to leave France because of his beliefs. In 1536 he visited Geneva, Switzerland intending to stay only a short time. William Farel asked him to join in the work of Reformation which he reluctantly did. Under Calvin's leadership Geneva became a center for Protestant refugees from other countries, people who were sheltered and taught Reformed doctrine.

¹Since the material in this section is familiar to anyone acquainted with Scottish Church History, it has not been footnoted. The literature on this period is voluminous. The reader is referred to John C. Johnston, Treasury of the Scottish Covenant (Edinburgh: A. Elliot, 1887), a bibliography of older works. Some more recent sources are, for Knox himself, John Knox, The History of the Reformation in Scotland, ed. Cuthbert Lennox (London: A. Melrose, 1905); for the Reformation and Covenanter period, James King Hewison, The Covenanters, 2 vols. (Glasgow: John Smith, 1913); for the Covenanter period alone, J. D. Douglas, The Light in the North (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) and for the Scottish Reformed Presbyterian History, Matthew Hutchison, The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland (Paisley: J. & R. Parlane, 1893).

We will follow one particular refugee, John Knox, the Scottish Reformer. Knox was born in Haddington around 1513. He was educated at Glasgow, received minor orders and may have been a priest. Under the influence of George Wishart, he joined the Reformation cause and became a preacher at St. Andrews in 1547. When the castle fell to the French, he was sent to the galleys. After his release in 1549, he went to England and served the Church of England. There he became Chaplain to Edward VI and assisted in the revision of the Second Book of Prayer. When the Catholic Mary succeeded Edward, Knox fled to Geneva in 1554. He returned to Scotland the next year, but continuing persecution forced him to flee abroad again. While he was gone, the Reformation gained strength in Scotland, and Knox returned in 1559. He became the leader of the Reformation party, held numerous disputes with its enemies, and died in 1572 before the completion of the Reformation. John Knox was one important reason why Scotland followed the Reformed system of doctrine and worship.

Under Knox, the Reformed Church gained her independence from the Pope, but a new battle began for independence from the King. This struggle gave birth to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland. James Stuart disliked the independence of the Church of Scotland, but could do little to bring it under control. However, when he became James I, king of England and Scotland, he had the power to begin a serious attempt to control the Church of Scotland by changing its form from presbyterian to episcopalian. (Bishops appointed by the king are easier to control than presbyteries.) Many ministers and elders opposed the intrusion of James I on the basis that Jesus Christ was the King of the Church. Tensions grew and erupted in a near riot in Edinburgh in 1637 when Charles I

imposed a prayer book in the Scottish Church. In 1638 men from all parts of Scotland signed the National Covenant, in which they promised to work for the independence of the Church of Scotland. The Scots gained the support of the Parliamentary party in England, who wanted more rights for Parliament. In 1643, the two parties signed the Solemn League and Covenant, which bound them to work for the rights and privileges of Parliament and the establishment of Presbyterianism in England and Scotland. The failure of both sides to compromise led to a civil war. The king lost, and was beheaded. The Puritans took control of Parliament and convened the Westminster Assembly to develop statements of doctrine and practice, which became the standard of confessional Presbyterianism.

The immediate result of the English Civil War was to bring Oliver Cromwell to power. The failure of his son, Richard, to wield that power effectively led to the restoration of the Stuarts. Scotland agreed to help Charles II come to power if he signed the Covenants. He signed them, but he did not keep them. Like his father and grandfather, he wished to control the Church of Scotland. Like their fathers and grandfathers, the Scots resisted. In 1664, four years after Charles' ascension, four hundred ministers quit their churches in protest. The King, not content to have two churches in Scotland, offered indulgences (that is, pardons that included restoration to their status as clergy) and positions to ministers willing to join the episcopal church. But there were ministers who would not be swayed and laymen who would not listen to indulged ministers. The lines became more and more firmly drawn. Troops were sent to enforce the Anglican system. Bloodshed and persecution resulted. The most provocative incident came in 1680 when Rev. Richard Cameron rode into the village

of Sanquhar and excommunicated Charles II, adding treason to the religious crimes of Cameron and his associates.² The next eight years were the bloodiest period, the "killing times." In this time worship services, including sacraments, were held on the moors with armed guards. Many found themselves in prisons or martyr's graves.

The continued persecution was in part responsible for the demise of the Stuarts. The British nation, tired of Stuart autocracy and the drift towards Romanism, forced the abdication of James II, brother of and successor to Charles II. When William and Mary came to the throne in 1668, they realized that the religious problem could be solved only by a compromise in which Scotland became Presbyterian and England Anglican.

If this compromise had been acceptable to all Scotland, there would be no Reformed Presbyterian Church. The Covenanter laity rejected the settlement (the few remaining Covenanter clergy joined the State church) for two reasons. First, they had fought for a church controlled by King Jesus, and now the Church of Scotland could meet only if King William's commissioner was present. Second, England and Scotland had promised in the Solemn League and Covenant that the churches of both kingdoms would be Presbyterian. They therefore dissented from a government that had broken its promises. These dissenting laymen were the root that would grow into the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The common experiences of persecution created a strong bond of fellowship. The stories of persecution were passed on to later generations and became part of their

²The followers of Cameron were known as Cameronians. The name Covenanters was widely applied to the Presbyterian party in Scotland in the 17th century and has survived as a colloquial name for the Cameronians, now formally called Reformed Presbyterians.

existence and heritage. A love for doctrinal truth, strengthened by persecution, was also passed on. (The Covenanters had not been persecuted for being Christians. They had been persecuted for believing and practicing some doctrines different from those held by the state church.)

They also had a shared view of Church and State. On the positive side, the church was to be presbyterian, independent of the state, and the state was to support the presbyterian church. On the negative side, it meant a separation from a state-controlled church, and dissent from a state which established an episcopal church. The Covenanters believed that the state was to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ in the same way as the church and to pattern its practices by the Bible.

Finally the Covenanters were strengthened by a shared worship. After they were forced to leave the church buildings in 1664, they worshipped in hidden locations because death was the penalty for attendance. They met on the moors of Scotland and their ministers emerged from hiding to preach and administer the sacraments. They worshipped with guards posted and weapons ready to fight patrolling soldiers. In smaller groups called "societies" they gathered for worship conducted by laymen. Since there were no longer presbyteries and synods, the societies would send delegates to "general meetings" which made decisions concerning reaction to government policies, training of clergy, times and places for worship, and so forth.

For many years after the Restoration settlement this group had no name and no ministers. They were most often called "society people" and the laymen carried on the church without the administration of the sacraments. In 1706, Rev. John McMillan of the Church of Scotland joined

their ranks. Later, in 1743, Thomas Nairn joined from the Associate Presbytery. With two ministers a Presbytery could be formed and thus the first "Reformed Presbytery" was founded.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church
in the U. S. A.

Most Reformed Presbyterians came from Scotland to America by way of North Ireland. There were two causes for this indirect migration. The first dealt with Scottish nature. Being less adventurous than the English they took the more conservative migration to Ireland. Second, they were attracted by land. King James I had seized much land from Irish landlords after the rebellion of Tyrone and opened it for settlement.

During this period the gap between Covenanters and other Presbyterians became more clearly defined. The Covenanters developed their own identity and became the group from which the American Reformed Presbyterians came.³

A large-scale migration from North Ireland to the United States, including many Covenanters, began about 1720, caused by economic and social problems. English legislation restricted the Irish economy. For example, when the Irish raised cattle, the English forbade the importation

³Not much work has been done in Reformed Presbyterian history. The two important works are William Glasgow, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Baltimore: Hill and Harvey, 1888) and David Carson, "History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America to 1871" (Ph D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1964). In addition are the two books of biographical sketches of ministers, Owen Thompson, Sketches of the Ministers of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America from 1888 to 1930 (Pittsburgh: Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1930) and Alvin Smith, Covenanter Ministers 1930-1963 (Pittsburgh: Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1964); which also contain summary histories of various Reformed Presbyterian Church institutions.

of meat. When they produced wool, high duties were placed on it. Tenants worked hard to improve their land and were rewarded with higher rent. America offered men a chance to own their own land and buy it cheaply for their sons.

Religious problems were caused by the establishment of the Anglican Church in Ireland. This put Presbyterians under great pressure, because their marriages were not valid, and inheritances were handled in church courts. Citizens were fined for not attending church and were taxed to support Anglican Clergy. Covenanters refused to pay the tax.

So the Covenanters came to America. The early settlers concentrated in southeastern Pennsylvania, South Carolina, New York City, the Hudson valley, with some in Vermont. The total was under 10,000 members.⁴

Having no ministers, the Covenanters depended on the society meetings to maintain their religion. David Carson described the functioning of the societies as follows:

For these unshepherded people the society meeting proved its worth (as it had done in Scotland and would continue to do in America), for it was a means by which laymen could continue their fellowship in worship and belief. This device, worked out for times of persecution in Scotland, had an obvious usefulness when the problem was instead the lonesomeness of the American frontier and the scattered membership. When groups of Covenanters found themselves living near each other, there was an organizational device ready for them. They gathered for "society". They conducted worship services themselves, either reading from accepting authors, or by proposing some subject for consideration, a Bible passage, a question of Christian faith or practice, or the proper behavior by which to maintain a faithful testimony.

The "society" not only provided for the worship of God, but also in the beginning carried on such governmental functions as were necessary: the admission of members, any necessary financial matters (though occasions for financial dealings were few), decisions on doctrine, and the exercise of discipline. Over the societies was the General Meeting, to which accredited representatives of each organized society

⁴Carson, "History," p. 18-20.

were sent. These periodic General Meetings continued to be the highest authority in America until the organization of a presbytery in 1774.⁵

While the society provided worship, discipline and fellowship, a minister was needed to provide for the formal preaching of the Word and for the administration of sacraments. The need for a minister was met for a short time by the Rev. Alexander Craighead who joined the Covenanters in 1742. For seven years he served the Reformed Presbyterians before returning to the Presbyterian Church.⁶

The reasons for Craighead's joining the Covenanters give an important insight into their religious character. During the 1730's and 1740's the Great Awakening brought revival to the American church through the preaching of such men as George Whitefield and John Wesley. The Awakening led to a tension in the Presbyterian Church between the revivalists, who stressed personal conversion and the experimental aspect of religion, and confessionalists, who stressed doctrinal orthodoxy. Craighead, in contrast to many of his colleagues, kept a balance between the two viewpoints. Glasgow described him as ". . . an earnest fervid preacher, and a zealous promoter of revivals. He was a great admirer of Whitefield, and accompanied him upon some of his tours." At the same time, "he contended that his ministerial brethren were too liberal in their views and lax in the application of discipline."⁷ When in 1741 the Presbyterian Church split into revivalist and confessional presbyteries,

⁵Ibid., pp. 21-22. A manual on Society worship was published, The Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Scotland, Guide to Private Social Worship (Philadelphia: Covenanter's Publishing Society, 1854).

⁶Glasgow, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, p. 467.

⁷Ibid., p. 465.

Alexander Craighead joined the revivalist New Brunswick Presbytery. Because of this group's insufficient emphasis on the Westminster Standards and refusal to adopt the Solemn League and Covenant,⁸ Rev. Craighead joined the Covenanters in 1742. The next year he led the Covenanters of eastern Pennsylvania in a renewal of the Scottish Covenants. Soon he opened a correspondence with the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland asking for additional clergy. When this was not forthcoming, he returned to the Presbyterian Church in 1749.⁹

We note an important balance in Craighead's ministry. He attempted to combine doctrinal orthodoxy and "experimental" religion, or, in today's terminology, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Rev. Craighead joined the Covenanters to find this balance, and as their first minister had a great opportunity to strengthen it. This balance has been a key element in preserving the Reformed Presbyterian Church from the extremes of Fundamentalism and Liberalism. While the balance has been threatened many times, it has never been totally lost. As we look at Covenanter worship this balance should be kept in mind.¹⁰

Rev. Craighead wrote to Scotland for assistance, but it was 1751 before the Scottish Reformed Presbytery, which had few clergy herself, could send a man, a very good man, the Rev. John Cuthbertson. Cuthbertson was born in 1718 of a Covenanter family. He studied theology under

⁸Leonard J. Trinterud, The Forming of an American Tradition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949), p. 112.

⁹Glasgow, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, p. 467.

¹⁰For an excellent study of how the Great Awakening contributed to the formation of Fundamentalism and Liberalism, coming respectively from the revivalist and the confessional schools, see Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (New York: Vintage, 1963), chapters 3-5.

Rev. John McMillan, was licensed to preach in 1734, ordained in 1747, and served as missionary to Covenanters in Ireland in 1750. In 1751 he was sent to America. His work centered in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, but included extended missionary tours of New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New Jersey, Maryland and western Pennsylvania. In his thirty-nine years of ministry he preached on two thousand, four hundred and fifty-two days; baptized one thousand, eight hundred and six children; married two hundred and forty couples; and rode on horseback seventy thousand miles in the days before bridges and roads. The inscription on his grave is from Psalm 112:6: "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance".¹¹

Let us now look at worship services under Cuthbertson's ministry. David Carson described a typical Sabbath service of Cuthbertson's as follows:

The word of the minister's arrival in the community would bring church members together at the meeting house, in a farm kitchen or barn, or at the "tent"--a misnomer, for the "tent" was out of doors, often in a grove where trees had been felled to make rude benches and another tree cut off at an appropriate height for a sort of rough pulpit. A customary Sabbath service consisted of three parts: the explanation of a psalm or part of one, a lecture, and a sermon. Cuthbertson's diary faithfully records the texts from which he preached. In the explanation of the psalm, he followed a pattern. Sabbath by Sabbath he explained consecutive sections of the psalms. The first recorded is Psalm 8. In 1770, he reached Psalm 150 and began again. At the close of the diary he was in the midst of Psalm 119. But when, as often happened, he preached during the week, he apparently chose the psalm at random, the 46th, the 84th, the 102nd, and 76th, the 23rd, the 121st appearing during the first month of his preaching in America.

The lecture was the exposition of a section of Scripture, usually longer than one verse. In this, also, he followed a pattern. After his arrival in America, he lectured through the twelfth chapter of

¹¹Glasgow, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, pp. 476-78.

Luke, a collection of Christ's sayings. That done, he lectured through Galatians during the winter and turned his attention to the Song of Solomon the next summer. This was before the days of Sabbath Schools, and this was one important means of Bible teaching.

After the lecture, with perhaps a break to eat a simple meal, came the sermon. In his preaching, Cuthbertson was concerned with the great themes of the gospel. Even when the texts were chosen from the Old Testament, they were quite likely to be ones applicable to the salvation offered through Christ: Amos 4:12, "Prepare to meet thy God;" Genesis 49:18, "I have waited for thy salvation O Lord:" or with the prophecies of Christ's coming: Daniel 7:13,14, "I saw . . . one like the Son of Man," or Isaiah 28:16, "I lay in Zion . . . a precious corner stone." In the New Testament, the texts are similar: Hebrews 3:19, "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief;" Acts 10:42, regarding Christ as "ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead." A sermon that Cuthbertson must have liked, for he preached it five times during September, 1751, was on the text Galatians 5:1, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." Regarding his first use of it he makes one of his few comments on his sermons, "a large offer of Christ."

This sort of preaching is a reminder of the importance of personal piety to these people. The records they have left concern themselves more with doctrine, and especially with disputes over doctrine. But they were also concerned with personal faith, they were humbled by their sinfulness, they set themselves the goal of personal obedience to the law of God.¹²

For theological reasons to be explained in Chapter VI, Covenanters did not celebrate Christmas, Easter and other holidays. By the elimination of these competing events, the sacraments, particularly Communion, are emphasized. The Lord's Supper was also significant for historical reasons. It bound Covenanters to their ancestors who celebrated the sacraments on the Scottish moors threatened by British troops. Supreme, therefore in the Covenanter church year, is the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Dr. Carson says the Sacrament was a source of great emotion that is difficult to appreciate and describe. Part of this came from history.

Covenanters were very conscious of their history; their church had been born, in a special sense, out of the rough and tumble of events. More than any other aspect of the church, the communion service bound

¹²Carson, "History," pp. 38-40.

Covenanters with their forefathers who had suffered and died for the faith and with the traditions of the country from which they had come. One of the "terms of communion" always read and explained during the service was "The owning of all the scriptural testimonies and earnest contendings of Christ's faithful witnesses, whether martyrs under the late persecution, or such as have succeeded them maintaining the same cause, . . ." Contributing also to the emotion of the occasion was the sense of fellowship. From the widely-scattered societies the people came, hungry for communion with those of like faith, to pledge to each other their renewed loyalty to their common beliefs. Most important, for these earnest men and women, was the symbolism of union with their Lord. On the fast day preceding, they had humbled themselves in confession and repentance of sin. They had been reminded, by the words of institution quoted from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians of the death of the Lord for them. At the climax of the service, as they ate the bread and drank the wine, they felt themselves in symbol partaking of the very body and blood of the Lord.¹³

David Carson continues by describing the first sacrament after Cuthbertson's arrival, one typical of the early Society communion services. Saturday, August 22, 1752, was a fast day with preaching from the 110th Psalm and from Gen. 24:58. The session met, communion tokens were distributed (they were required for admission to the sacrament), and Cuthbertson exhorted the people.¹⁴

The Sabbath day was the celebration of the Sacrament. The service lasted nine hours. Rev. Cuthbertson preached from Psalms and from John 3:35. After prayer and singing, he gave an address on the sacrament, debarred (warned the unworthy not to commune), and invited the worthy to the sacrament. The 150 communicants came forward to the communion tables singing the twenty-fourth Psalm:

Who is the man that shall ascend
into the hill of God?
Or who within his holy place
shall have a firm abode?

¹³Ibid., pp. 42-43.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 43.

Cuthbertson read the words of institution. The people celebrated the sacrament. The minister exhorted, prayed, and the service closed with Psalm 103:

O thou my soul, bless God the Lord:
and all that in me is
Be stirred up his holy name
to magnify and bless.

There was a twenty minute intermission and the minister preached again from John 16:31. To conclude the Communion season the customary Monday services were held. John Cuthbertson explained the 148th Psalm and preached on Ephesians 5:15.¹⁵

While worship met a spiritual need, the organizational need of the church also had to be met. In Presbyterian practice, two ministers were needed for the formation of a presbytery, and there was only one in the United States. Appeals were sent to the Scottish and Irish Presbyteries, which resulted in the addition of Matthew Lind and Alexander Dobbin. With these two men, Cuthbertson formed the first Reformed Presbytery in America in 1774 at Paxtang, Pennsylvania.¹⁶ The Covenanters were now successfully transplanted into the new world.

The new presbytery was short-lived. In 1782 it merged with the Associate Presbytery to form the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. In Scotland the two groups had differed only in their doctrine of political dissent. In the United States, with the coming of independence, there was a different political situation. The argument was thus made that Americans were no longer bound by the Scottish Covenants. Most Covenanters accepted this argument, with the result that all the ministers and

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 43-45.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 47.

most of the laity joined the new denomination. However, the cause of the Covenanters did not die. A minority of laymen remained out of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. They again petitioned Scotland for ministers. In answer to the appeal Rev. James Reid came to America. His immediate reason for coming was a health problem that doctors thought could be helped by a sea voyage. He stayed about a year and encouraged the brethren.¹⁷

The revival of the Covenanter cause would wait for the coming of James McKinney. Rev. McKinney was forced to leave Ireland for political reasons in 1783. One of his important contributions was the furnishing of the intellectual basis for a doctrine of the State different from that held by the Associate Presbyterians. He reformulated the negative aspect of the political dissent doctrine, and took the old ideal for Great Britain, a Reformed Church with a government that supported it, and generalized it for the American situation.¹⁸

The political dissent position was developed beyond Rev. McKinney's position. After 1800 the nature of the United States Constitution kept Covenanters from giving their allegiance to it. Rev. Samuel Wylie listed several defects: First, the "constitution . . . does not even recognize the existence of God." Second, both state and federal constitutions allow "heresy, blasphemy, and idolatry under the notion of liberty of conscience," (that is, they allow freedom of false religion). Office holders are required to take an oath to support the constitution, which means they bind themselves to defend heresy, blasphemy, and idolatry. Third,

¹⁷Glasgow, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, p. 76.

¹⁸Carson, "History," p. 80.

the federal constitution makes "no provision for the interest of true religion" (that is, Protestant Christianity). Fourth, the state, by refusing to accept the Bible as the supreme law of the land is in rebellion against God. Fifth, there is no religious test for office holders, "Deists, even atheists may be chief magistrates." And finally, because slavery was legal.¹⁹ How did dissent work out in practice? Covenanters dissented primarily by a refusal to take an oath to the constitution, and therefore to hold office and by extension to vote for office holders. They did not raise the problem of paying taxes and obeying laws, though logically they might have. Their goal was reform not revolution.²⁰

Many readers of this thesis will recognize the above as an application of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God to politics. The Father gives Christ the kingship of the creation (Col. 1:15-17).²¹ Rev. Glasgow gave the application of the doctrine to the United States Constitution as follows: The Constitution does not recognize the supremacy of Christ as King of the world and the Bible as the supreme law. Thus the nation is in the same relation as a subject who refuses to recognize his sovereign. The Christian has his highest allegiance to Christ. Therefore, if the government refuses to recognize Jesus as King, it is the Christian's duty to stand aloof from such a government and refuse to

¹⁹Samuel B. Wylie, The Two Sons of Oil (Bowling-Green, Ohio: Stephen Young, 1806), pp. 45-61.

²⁰Glasgow, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, pp. 54-55.

²¹The fullest statement of this doctrine, called the mediatorial kingship of Christ is found in William Symington's Messiah the Prince (London: T. Nelson, 1881). A shorter summary is found in A. A. Hodge's Outlines of Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), chapter xxiv.

incorporate himself into the political body.²²

With their doctrinal position secured, the society people were able to reorganize the Reformed Presbytery in 1798. The small presbytery grew rapidly, largely from immigration. By 1832 there were 36 ministers, four to five thousand members, and sixty congregations.²³

The records for this period show a busy church working at the task of organization. Men were trained and ordained for the ministry; Samuel B. Wylie was the first in 1800. The original presbytery divided into three smaller ones in 1802. The recognition of the new presbytery by the Reformed Presbyterian Churches of Scotland and Ireland was asked for and secured. The Church continued her dissent from society by taking stands on moral issues. Slaveholding was outlawed. In 1809 The Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary was founded in Philadelphia. Duties to God were not forgotten in the rush to become organized. In meeting after meeting of presbytery we read of Days of Prayer and Fasting being set aside for the sins of the nation; and days of Thanksgiving for God's blessing. Presbyteries checked to be sure congregations observed these days. The maturing was also shown by a name change when in 1809 the Reformed Presbytery became the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

Complicating the task of organization was geographical expansion. The immigrants from Ireland wanted land, and the cheapest and sometimes the best land was in the west. The church had to follow her members. A typical family would move from eastern Pennsylvania to western Pennsylvania

²²Glasgow, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, pp. 54-55.

²³Carson, "History," p. 66.

and on to Iowa in three generations.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church was infected with a spirit of optimism in the early 1800's. This was due largely to the post-millennial view held by the denomination and to her success in the new world.²⁴ The Church grew, young men went into the ministry, Reformed Presbyterian ministers became major figures in some communities, periodicals were published, a tract society was formed, and members were educated. Yet there were serious problems. Membership increased, but from immigrants instead of converts. Society still did not accept her viewpoints. So dissatisfaction grew.

There were several possible solutions to this problem. The church could die, she could withdraw from the world, she could hold her position, or change to fit society. The Reformed Presbyterian Church divided over which of the latter two possibilities was appropriate. In 1833, over the question of political dissent, the Church separated, with about half the denomination going each way, both parts claiming to be The Reformed Presbyterian Church. The "new light" group changed their position on political dissent. They eventually became known as the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.²⁵ This thesis will deal with the "old

²⁴The post-millennial view caused optimism because it viewed the world as improving until the second coming. For a discussion of the effect of the post-millennial viewpoint on Reformed churches, see Iain Murray, The Puritan Hope (London: Banner of Truth, 1971).

²⁵The General Synod merged with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in 1965 to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod. This group presently controls Covenant College and Covenant Theological Seminary. For a history of both sides of this merger see George P. Hutchinson, The History Behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (Cherry Hill, N. J.: Mack Publishing Co., 1974). In 1981-82 this denomination voted on joining the Presbyterian Church in America.

light", the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, (nicknamed the Covenanter Church), who maintained their stand on political dissent.

Up to this point we have followed a chronological outline. At this point we will shift to a topical approach and look at the history of various aspects of the Reformed Presbyterian Church's life.

The first area we will look at is membership. The communicant membership grew from roughly a thousand in 1798 to a high of 11,289 in 1890,²⁶ then declined to 3,866 in 1980.²⁷ The number of congregations was 125 in 1890²⁸ and 69 in 1980.²⁹ The causes of the gradual decline are several. The Reformed Presbyterian Church was and still is largely a rural denomination, and the population of rural areas has been decreasing. The denomination has lost many of her children, having failed to convince them of her doctrines. In the 1960's and 1970's many congregations cleaned their roles of inactive members.³⁰ While there are signs that the decline has been reversed, such as an increase in baptized membership and an increasing emphasis on evangelism, this is impossible to prove.

Geographically the denomination has spread across the United States. Congregations range from New York to Los Angeles, and Orlando, Florida to Anchorage, Alaska. The main concentrations of members are in Kansas and

²⁶Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, Minutes of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America 1890, p. 325. Hereafter called Minutes.

²⁷Ibid., 1981, p. 37.

²⁸Ibid., 1890, p. 325.

²⁹Ibid., 1981, p. 38.

³⁰Ronald W. Nickerson, "Terminal?" Covenanter Witness, August 27, 1975, p. 2.

western Pennsylvania.

The denomination has a Presbyterian form of government. Elders rule the congregations and deacons handle finances, property, and the ministry of mercy. Above the congregations in a geographical area are the presbyteries composed of one minister and one elder from each congregation. Some of presbytery's responsibilities are discipline cases involving ministers, matters appealed from a congregation, presbytery conferences, handling calls for ministers, visiting and evaluating congregations, and home missions.

The highest governmental body is the Synod, which meets annually. It is composed of one elder from each congregation plus all ordained ministers. It handles denominational enterprises such as the Seminary, missions, and publications through boards. It is the final court of appeal in discipline matters, and in conjunction with the elders of congregations decides questions of doctrine and polity.

In 1979 Synod made an important change in polity when it concluded that the offices of teaching elder (that is, minister) and ruling elders were the same office with different functions.³¹ The implications of this decision will take several years to understand and apply.

Finances are always a problem for churches. The Reformed Presbyterian Church has them too. The early American settlers did not have the habit of giving, because there was no church to be the object of giving. The early ministers were supported by subscription from the members of the congregations. This system did not work and was eventually dropped in favor of weekly contributions. Gradually the practice of tithing spread.

³¹Minutes, 1979, p. 87.

Denominational programs likewise had the problem of support. At first, voluntary offerings were taken by the congregations for each board. This was effective for the popular boards such as Foreign Missions; however, less popular ones such as Widows and Orphans suffered. In 1920 the denomination went to a central budget system and congregations began to donate from general funds. Moneys donated to congregations totaled \$238,615 in 1890³² and \$2,390,428 in 1980.³³ There were also successful drives to build up an endowment fund. There are presently four million dollars in funds functioning as endowment.

Like most Presbyterian churches, Covenanters emphasized education. The Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary was founded in 1809,³⁴ and is probably the oldest of conservative American seminaries. In its early years it moved often, as it followed the pastorates of men designated as professors. In 1856, the Seminary moved to Pittsburgh where it still remains. The Seminary is a small one reflecting the needs of the denomination, and her desire to give free training to Reformed Presbyterian candidates for the ministry. After a period of decline, the Seminary recovered in the 1960's and 1970's. In 1890-91 the Seminary had twenty-three students.³⁵ In 1980-81 it had four professors and fifty-five students.³⁶

³²Ibid., 1890, p. 325.

³³Ibid., 1981, p. 37.

³⁴While founded in 1809, the first students did not appear until 1810. The latter date is generally used as the starting date of the Seminary.

³⁵Minutes, 1891, p. 262.

³⁶Ibid., 1981, pp. 65-66.

The other pillar of Reformed Presbyterian education is Geneva College. Geneva was founded in 1848 at Northwood, Ohio by the Lakes Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. It eventually came under the care of the Reformed Presbyterian Church Synod and moved to its current location in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. After the Civil War it served as a training ground for Negro freedmen. In 1890-91, Geneva had 123 students.³⁷ Geneva grew and had 1,164 day students in 1980-81.³⁸ Geneva is particularly strong in the science-engineering area and has historically attracted a large percentage of non-Christian students.

In recent years Reformed Presbyterian parents have joined the Christian School movement in increasing numbers. This movement deals with pre-college training, and runs parent controlled schools, rather than parochial schools.

Denominations also have periodicals, and the Covenanters have had several. The main ones have been the Reformed Presbyterian, begun in 1837, and the Covenanter begun in 1845. These merged in 1863. The desire for a weekly paper eventually resulted in the Christian Nation, which was finally superseded by the current Covenanter Witness. On the whole, these publications have assumed a readership educated in the basic Christian faith.

Foreign missions have also been an important part of the church's life. The first missionary was sent to Haiti in 1847. He unfortunately adopted the view of some neighboring Seventh-day Baptists and was suspended from the ministry. The Board of Missions tried again and opened

³⁷Ibid., 1891, p. 264.

³⁸Ibid., 1981, p. 62.

a more successful work in Syria in 1856. Since few people would come to a worship service, the missionaries opened a school and began to offer medical services. These provided opportunities for the spread of the Gospel. The mission lasted almost a century being forced to close by the Syrian government.

The Cyprus mission began in 1887. Originally, plans were to work with the Turkish population, but the first success came with Armenians. The Armenian church eventually decided to break with the Covenanter Church. Officially the difference was over exclusive psalmody, but older missionaries think the real reason was the desire to be in a denomination with other Armenians. The mission's work in education proved to be its greatest success and greatest failure. Since Cyprus had no university it was important that the children go to preparatory schools which would teach courses in English so the students could go to other countries for university training. The Reformed Presbyterian mission ran two of the finest schools of this type in Cyprus. While many students became Christians through the witness of the school, they went to foreign universities, and stayed in other countries. Since both students and a large number of other Cypriots knew English (Cyprus is a former British colony), some of the missionaries never did learn Greek. Complicating matters even more, the students who did become converted would spend much of their time discussing Christianity with teachers and students in English. This created a language problem as Greek was their normal language, and English their religious one, so it became more difficult to communicate the Gospel in Greek. (Preaching was in Greek, however.) The final problem was that missionaries were so busy with the school, that they were not

building churches. A few congregations were formed in spite of the problems. Because of nationalism in the church and anti-Americanism following the Turkish invasion, the mission was closed. In 1976 the Cypriot church was given autonomy.

The south China mission began in 1895 with the usual school, church and hospital combination. The project was one of the more successful Reformed Presbyterian missions; 1938 statistics showed sixteen mission stations with 615 members.³⁹ While Communism destroyed much of the work, some still remains. A few years ago a message reached Rev. Samuel Boyle, former head of the South China mission, from a former Chinese Reformed Presbyterian pastor. After the Communists took over, he was forced to leave the pastorate and take a secular position. During the Cultural Revolution, he was publically humiliated, and his wife suffered a stroke that left her unable to speak. After President Nixon's visit, he was given some money as restitution and a small pension. He still witnesses, when he goes to the required public meetings, he introduces himself as a Christian minister. He wanted Dr. Boyle to know that he still kept the faith.

In the 1930's work began in Manchuria but did not last long due to the Japanese invasion and the Communist Revolution.

After closing of the Chinese mission, Synod decided to transfer the men and resources into Kobe, Japan. Having learned from past experience there was no school or hospital, just evangelism and church building. In 1980 there were three churches with Japanese pastors, two mission

³⁹Ibid., 1939, p. 160. A history of the south China mission can be found in Alice E. Robb, Hoi Moon, Pittsburgh, Board of Foreign Missions, 1970.

stations, and 113 communicant members.⁴⁰

The Reformed Presbyterian Church has always had a strong commitment to foreign missions. The strength of this commitment is shown by the ratio of missionaries to members. In 1890 there were thirteen missionaries,⁴¹ about one per thousand members. In 1973, before problems in Cyprus, there were twenty-three missionaries,⁴² about one per 200 members. In 1980 there were nine missionaries,⁴³ about one per 430 members. The high was reached in 1919 with thirty-four missionaries for 7,800 members.⁴⁴

Like other denominations, Covenanters dealt with controversial questions. The first major question concerned slavery. In 1803 the church decided her members could not hold slaves. The test of this position came when a committee was sent to South Carolina to inform the local congregations of the decision. To a remarkable degree the congregations acceded to the demand, and members became active in anti-slavery associations and the underground railroad. The Covenanters were extremely enthusiastic about the Civil War and many enlisted to help abolish slavery.

The prohibition movement was strong in the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The Reformed Presbyterian Church Synod concluded in 1857 that the scriptures forbid the use of beverage alcohol, and made total abstinence a requirement for membership. The members have a long history of participation in temperance groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance

⁴⁰Ibid., 1981, p. 202.

⁴¹Ibid., 1891, pp. 307-09.

⁴²Ibid., 1974, p. 8.

⁴³Ibid., 1981, p. 38.

⁴⁴Ibid., 1919, insert following p. 76.

Union. This position is presently being questioned by younger members of the denomination who believe that drinking is a matter of adiaphora, and believe that the church should make recommendations on matters of adiaphora rather than requirements. The recent revision of the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony addressed this issue but has not resolved it.

Closely related to the prohibition question has been the issue of "national reform." Reformed Presbyterians have not only seen the Gospel as a message of individual salvation, but also as a transformer of culture. The Christian is not only to bring men, but also society under the Kingship of Jesus Christ. The application in this area has been to support movements that attempt to bring civil laws into conformity with the biblical moral code. Covenanters have therefore supported and continue to support blue laws, anti-abortion laws, drug reform, and so forth. The most visible form that this movement has taken is the National Reform Association founded in 1863 and still is operating. Its mainstay has been the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The denomination has also dealt with doctrinal questions. Perhaps the longest controversy is on the issue of political dissent. We have already mentioned it as a cause of the 1833 split. In the early 1960's a change was made in the position that many members felt allowed them to vote and to hold office. Yet dissatisfaction remains. The feeling remains that the church has not totally resolved the problem on what the relation of the Christian, the Church, and the State should be.

The largest dispute of the nineteenth century was the question of whether congregations should have deacons. The reason for the dispute was hard to understand. The one group argued that they were unnecessary as they were to care for the poor and the congregations had few poor. The

opposition argued that they should function as trustees and care for the property of the congregations. This caused great division in the denomination, but there was no open split. The dispute began in the 1840's and died down after the Civil War. David Carson best summed up the controversy, "Why the deacon question reached such proportions and developed such an emotional drive remains mystifying."⁴⁵

On the whole, there has been surprisingly little doctrinal controversy. The doctrinal debates were concerned more with restating the faith and applying it, rather than changing it. Liberalism must be mentioned primarily because it has largely bypassed the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Some reasons for this are obvious. Liberalism is often linked to pride, and the lack of status and large congregations does not attract proud men. Presbyteries refuse to allow ministerial candidates to attend liberal seminaries. Smallness also helped. Seminary professors are elected by the entire Synod, who know the men for whom they vote. Thus it is easy to screen out unqualified men. Also, a minimum of five years pastoral experience is required to be a professor. Most important, the Holy Spirit has worked to keep the church orthodox.

How would we evaluate the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America? Has she been successful? It depends on how success is measured. Numerically, the church has not done well, being at less than half her 1890 size. As far as maintaining reformed orthodoxy is concerned her record is admirable. Her service to Christian education has been amazing considering her size. She has been diligent if not particularly successful in foreign missions. However, times are changing. There is a renewed interest in

⁴⁵Carson, "History," pp. 153-55.

orthodox Christianity in the last half of the twentieth century, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church has both encouraged the movement and profited from it.

CHAPTER III

THE DOCTRINE AND CONFESSION OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA

In this chapter we will briefly consider the doctrine and the confession of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. We will look briefly at the Reformed system of doctrine, at the rather unusual confessional position of the Reformed Presbyterians, and finally at the process of revising doctrine.

Calvinist Background

As noted in the last chapter, the Reformed Presbyterian Church grew from the Calvinist Reformation. It is, therefore, no surprise to learn that the Covenanters are Reformed in doctrine and practice, which means they follow the theological system developed by John Calvin in The Institutes of the Christian Religion and by later Reformed theologians. Calvinism holds that the Bible is the source of theology, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Thus, the Bible is the only trustworthy source of man's knowledge of God and is necessary to enable man to understand God. God and the Bible must be accepted on the basis of faith¹ and

¹The Westminster Larger Catechism, question 72, defines justifying faith as "a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner, by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness therein

only with the assistance of the Holy Spirit can they be believed and understood. The Bible also teaches men how to live, how to worship, how to be holy, how to govern the church, and that man's purpose is to glorify God.

The unifying principle of Calvinism or Reformed Theology is the sovereignty of God. Calvinists see this as the central thought of Scripture. God exists as the trinity, self-sufficient and totally independent of all else. Everything else that exists, exists only by the creative and providential action of God, who is separate from His creation, but sustains it. In His plan, God allowed man to sin by man's own fault, at the same time planning to redeem man by the plan of salvation explained in the Bible and culminating in Jesus Christ. Through the work of Christ, God saves only the elect, not on the basis of their deeds, but solely on the basis of His own choice. After He brings the elect to faith, He constantly works in their lives so that they become more closely conformed to His image. While God predestines men to salvation, or damnation, men are still responsible moral agents. He created men to be responsible to God for their own lives, for their neighbor and for all of creation. The final end of Calvinism is the glory of God. Social service, evangelism, worship, and so forth are not ultimately for man's benefit but God's.

Calvinism has developed since Calvin's time. The Synod of Dort summarized what are today known as the "Five points of Calvinism," also known by the acronym "TULIP." The five points are the total depravity of

held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation."

Question 73 tells how faith justifies a sinner, "only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness."

man, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. These doctrines are included in the Westminster Confession in use by the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The Westminster Confession

Let us now look briefly at the history of the Westminster Confession and its related documents. The Westminster Standards were composed by the Westminster Assembly from 1643-1646. The Assembly was called to meet by the British Parliament as part of a program of reforms that included establishing a form of Church government more agreeable to God's word, thus bringing the Church of England into greater conformity with the Church of Scotland and other Reformed churches. The Assembly consisted of 157 delegates including six from Scotland. While the Assembly had little problem agreeing on most doctrines, there was great debate on church government, which the Presbyterians won. The main work of the Assembly was the preparation of the Westminster Confession, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Church Government, and the Directory for Public Worship. The Westminster Standards became the doctrinal and practical standard for historic presbyterianism.

The Westminster Confession consists of the thirty-three chapters listed below:

1. Of the Holy Scriptures.
2. Of God, and of the Holy Trinity.
3. Of God's Eternal Decree.
4. Of Creation.
5. Of Providence.
6. Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof.
7. Of God's Covenant with Man.
8. Of Christ the Mediator.
9. Of Free Will.
10. Of Effectual Calling.
11. Of Justification.

12. Of Adoption.
13. Of Sanctification.
14. Of Saving Faith.
15. Of Repentance unto Life.
16. Of Good Works.
17. Of the Perseverance of the Saints.
18. Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation.
19. Of the Law of God.
20. Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience.
21. Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day.
22. Of Lawful Oaths and Vows.
23. Of the Civil Magistrate.
24. Of Marriage and Divorce.
25. Of the Church.
26. Of Communion of Saints.
27. Of the Sacraments.
28. Of Baptism.
29. Of the Lord's Supper.
30. Of Church Censures.
31. Of Synods and Councils.
32. Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead.
33. Of the Last Judgment.

Our primary interest in the Confession is with Chapter 21, titled, "Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day." Paragraph 1 of it states the basis for Presbyterian worship, the Regulative Principle of Worship,

But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy scripture.²

Paragraph 2 states that worship is due to the Triune God alone through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and not to saints, angels or anything else.

Paragraphs 3 and 4 are on prayer. Prayer is to be made by all men in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit according to His will. It is not to be made for the dead. Paragraph 5 lists the parts of worship: the

²All quotations from the Westminster Confession are taken from the edition found in Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (Pittsburgh: Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1949). This uses the text edited by S. W. Carruthers.

reading of Scriptures, the sound preaching and hearing of the Word, the singing of Psalms, the proper administration and reception of the sacraments are the ordinary parts of worship. On some occasions oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings are to be used. Paragraph 6 says that one place is not better than another to worship God, but God is to be worshipped everywhere, including in families, personal devotions, and in public assemblies. Paragraphs 7 and 8 relate to the moving of the Sabbath to Sunday, and say that Sunday is a day of worship and rest from all acts but those of necessity and mercy.

Reformed Presbyterian Confessionalism

The general practice among larger Presbyterian churches has been to keep the Westminster Confession as their doctrinal standard and to delete or change sections of it which the particular denomination disagrees with.³ Reformed Presbyterians have used the different approach of writing an additional document, The Reformed Presbyterian Declaration and Testimony, generally called the "Testimony."

Why was the Testimony written when the denomination already had the Westminster Confession? Rev. Thomas Sproull, a contemporary of some of the men who wrote the first Testimony in 1806, said the major reason for it was to adapt the truth of the Reformed faith to the American culture. He wrote:

Truth is unchangeable. But the manner of its exhibition, the form in which it is to be presented in order to commend it to the minds of men, and make effectual as the divine agency in building and kingdom

³S. Bruce Willson, "The Value and Purpose of a Contemporary Testimony," Covenanter Witness, January 26, 1977, p. 7. Dr. Willson was professor of Church History at The Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary from 1953 to 1978.

of Christ, need to be varied in order to be adapted to the condition of society in which it is promulgated.⁴

The next question which faced the early Covenanters was the relation of the Testimony to the Westminster Confession. Rev. Sproull concluded that the denomination probably faced three options. The first was to replace the Confession with the Testimony. The objection to this was a dislike of breaking with the Scottish and Irish Reformed Presbyterian churches. A second possibility was to make the Testimony a supplement to the Confession, which implied the Confession was defective, and this again broke the relation to Scotland and Ireland. The third, and accepted, alternative was to consider the Testimony an application of the truth, which meant that the Confession was looked on as general truth, and the Testimony its application to American society.⁵ The original Testimony of 1806 was published in a work called Reformed Principles Exhibited.

How do the Confession and Testimony relate to the Bible? Reformed Presbyterians hold that the confessions are subordinate to the Scriptures, having authority derived from the Scriptures, and being summaries of Scripture. There is, however, the problem of those who take the "subordinate standards" too seriously, tending to canonize them. Dr. S. B. Willson wrote:

In spite of this official stance of the church, there has been a tendency on the part of all our churches to virtually canonize the "subordinate standard", rather than allow them to function as the

⁴Thomas Sproull, "The Reformed Presbyterian Church in America: Sketches of her Organic History," Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter, xiv (February 1876):42. Rev. Sproull (1803-1891) was a professor at The Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

⁵Ibid., (March 1876):78-79.

writers intended, as implementation and application of the systematized teaching of God's Word as defined in the historic creeds and confessions.⁶

Rewriting the Testimony helps prevent canonization by reminding members that it is man-made and temporary.

Since Rev. Sproull's time Reformed Presbyterians have modified their position concerning confessions. For a contemporary summary of their position, we will turn to Dr. Wayne R. Spear, professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Professor Spear sees confessions as man-made documents which do not have the attributes of inerrancy and unchangeability. Two factors make new confessions necessary: The first is the church's growing understanding of truth. Confessions express the church's common understanding of truth at a particular time in history, but that understanding should be growing as the church benefits from her experience and study of the Bible across succeeding generations. Secondly, the church faces different forms of error at different times in history, and must identify them and warn believers against them. While the Westminster Confession has served as an excellent confession, it omits some of the important problems. The Reformed Presbyterian Church is dealing and has dealt with problems like requirements for church membership, the task of deacons, the family, Christian education and foreign missions. The Reformed Presbyterian Church wrestled with some of these questions and, as agreement was reached on the Scriptural teaching about them, summarized the teachings in her Testimony.⁷

⁶Willson, "Value and Purpose," p. 7.

⁷Wayne R. Spear, "Why our Denominational Testimony Needs Revision," Covenanter Witness, January 12, 1977, p. 7.

Dr. Spear's article was written during the Testimony revision of the 1970's, the first total revision since the Testimony was written in 1806. He summarized the reasons given to Synod in 1969 for undertaking the revision as follows:

1. The Confession of Faith provides the stability and constancy necessary as a statement of our doctrinal commitment, while the Testimony needs to be a contemporary document to meet the challenges of the day.
2. The Testimony may well be shortened by eliminating matters which overlap with the Confession of Faith.
3. There are many issues in our contemporary society which are not issues at the time of the composition of the Testimony.
4. Rewriting the Testimony could be a means of achieving greater unity with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.
5. The present structure of the Testimony is confusing, especially because of the listing of errors at the end of each chapter, and because of the language used.⁸

We must note that the church now regards the Testimony as a supplement to, as well as an application of the Confession, a contrast with her earlier position which considered it only as an application.

How has the Reformed Presbyterian Church revised her Testimony? Until the most recent revision it was done on a chapter by chapter basis as questions and problems occurred. For example, Chapter 8 of the Testimony titled, "Of the Holy Spirit" was rewritten in the 1960's because of the Charismatic movement.⁹ The procedure has been for a committee to rewrite a chapter until Synod is happy with it. Sometimes, as with the political dissent question, this took several rewritings. Synod, if a

⁸Ibid., p. 12.

⁹Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, Minutes of the Synod and Yearbook of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1966, (Pittsburgh: Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1967), pp. 21-23.

two-thirds majority approved, would submit the chapter to the congregations in overture. The Clerk of Synod would send enough copies of the overture to each congregation so that each elder would have one. These would be passed out ten or more days before a vote on the overture. An overture would require passage by two-thirds of the sessions and a majority of the elders voting in favor of it.¹⁰

Due to its importance, and as an example of the revision process, we will look in some detail at the complete Testimony revision of the 1970's. This summary comes from an article by Rev. James D. Carson, who served as the chairman of the Testimony Revision Committee.

The first move of the Committee was to devise a format designed to put material on the same subject in one place (previously it had been in four places, reflecting the division of the denominational Constitution into Westminster Confession, Reformed Presbyterian Testimony, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms). The solution was in the words of Rev. Carson, to print the Confession

in one column on the left hand side of each page. In a parallel column to the right, the Committee has inserted parallel subject matters of the Testimony. Then at the top of each chapter, the related references are given to both the Larger and Shorter Catechism.¹¹

After the format was determined some general policies were adopted. If the treatment in the Confession was adequate, nothing would be added in the right column unless clarification was needed, or the issue was particularly controversial today.¹² Examples of additions to the Confession

¹⁰Constitution, pp. 300-01.

¹¹James D. Carson, "Revising the Testimony," Covenanter Witness, January 26, 1977, p. 5.

¹²Ibid.

include the family, Christian education, and abortion. Examples of comment on controversial issues include Biblical inerrancy, neo-orthodoxy, and baptismal regeneration. An example of a clarification is the section on administering Communion to shut-ins.

The third major step was to examine the old Testimony to be sure every area was either covered by the Confession or included in the Testimony. Both old and new Testimonies include a listing of some errors. These begin with "We reject" or "We deny." For example, "We reject the teaching that a person cannot be saved with baptism; or that persons are regenerated by baptism." The temptation to name groups holding these heresies was resisted because more than one group often holds them.¹³

The fourth step was to collect and process comments on the work. The Committee sent copies of the revision to every pastor and elder. These men gathered as sessions to evaluate the work, and respond to the Committee. The Committee then reviewed the correspondence. Rev. Carson wrote:

We can assure you that every letter and every comment was considered by the Committee. That does not mean the Committee concurred with the correspondents in every case, although many changes were made as correspondence was reviewed. The Committee placed a high emphasis on this for the reason that the Testimony, if it is to be valid for the church, has to come from the church, not just a Committee of the church.¹⁴

Rev. Carson closed with a plea for prayer "that the Lord will be pleased to use the 'Testimony' as a unifying force among us as we seek to witness effectively for the truth of the Scriptures in our generation."¹⁵

After the Committee had finalized their draft of the chapters they were presented on the floor of Synod under the following rules: fifteen minutes of debate was allowed for each chapter followed by a call for a

¹³Ibid. ¹⁴Ibid. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 8.

vote, if the chapter did not receive a two-thirds majority it was returned to the Committee for revision in light of the debate. The Committee would then resubmit the revision. When all chapters were finally adopted, a final vote was taken on whether to adopt the new Testimony.¹⁶ In 1979, the final chapters were approved, and the new Testimony sent to the congregations in overture. Each chapter was voted on separately, and all were approved by majorities well over the required two-thirds. At the 1980 Synod, the new Testimony became the law of the church.

Does the new Testimony differ significantly from the Confession? A few minor sections of the Confession were rejected. Two were the prohibition of a man or woman marrying any kindred in their spouse's family closer than they could in their own (Chap. 24:4), and the provisions allowing the state to call church synods (Chap. 31:2). The significant changes were the additions and clarifications. These included sections on Scripture, the Holy Spirit, the stewardship of creation, evangelism and missions, the civil government, and the family including the education of children. Many of these were applications of the Confession's theology to current problems (like abortion), rather than new doctrine.

We will close this chapter with some observations on the Testimony revision. First, laity played an important role in the Testimony revision process. Three members of the original Testimony Revision Committee were laymen. Since the different drafts of the Testimony were reviewed by the elders, laymen had additional opportunities to help revise the Testimony. The study of the various drafts left the laymen better informed voters when the Testimony was finally sent down in overture.

¹⁶Minutes, 1977, pp. 7-8.

Secondly, we note the time when the Testimony was written. The twentieth century in American churches has been a time of theological anarchy. Major denominations such as the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have had splits over doctrinal matters since 1965. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in contrast showed sufficient unity not only to rewrite her Testimony, but to expand its application to controversial questions and to clarify her position on several controversial questions.

Thirdly, this revision showed the nature of Reformed Presbyterian Church conservatism. Traditionally, Reformed Presbyterians have been regarded as the most conservative of Presbyterians, the last to change anything. The radical Testimony revision of the 1970's shows the nature of Reformed Presbyterian Church conservatism lies not in traditionalism, or in keeping out-dated forms (such as the "canonized" Westminster Confession), but a conservatism based on her understanding of Biblical truth. Because of the priority of the Bible in Reformed Presbyterian theology, the Reformed Presbyterian Church felt free, and indeed compelled, to revise her Testimony to testify from God's Word to our generation.¹⁷

¹⁷For information comparing the various smaller presbyterian churches see Presbyterian Church in America. Ad Interim Committee on Inter-Church Relations. Information Introducing and Comparing the Presbyterian Church in America, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (Greenville, SC: Presbyterian Church in America, 1981). Unfortunately this document fails to deal with the question of worship, and does not use the most recent revision of the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony. Nevertheless, it is, to our knowledge, the most complete comparison of the denominations available.

For a good summary of Reformed theology we would recommend Leonard Coppes, Are Five Points Enough? Ten Points of Calvinism (Manassas, VA: Reformation Education Foundation, 1980). This book goes beyond "TULIP" and discusses other important Reformed doctrines like scripture, church government, the Covenant of Grace, and the sacraments. Dr. Coppes holds a Th.D. from Westminster Theological Seminary.

CHAPTER IV

THE DOCTRINE OF REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN WORSHIP

In this chapter we will examine the doctrine of Reformed Presbyterian worship in some detail. The approach will be to discuss the Reformed view of Biblical authority and then treat the chapter of the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony dealing with worship, commenting on the controversial sections in more detail. In chapter V the sacraments will be discussed, and in chapter VI the practice of worship.

The Regulative Principle of Worship is the basis for Reformed Worship. Chapter 21 of the Testimony states it in this way, ". . . whatever is not commanded in the worship of God, by precept or example, is forbidden." This principle was taught by Reformers, such as John Calvin and John Knox, and Puritan-Presbyterians, such as John Owen and Samuel Rutherford. It was incorporated into the Belgic Confession (Article VII), the Heidelberg Catechism (Question 96) and the Westminster Confession (Chapter 21).

The Normative Character of Scripture

Before dealing with the question of worship in more detail, we must first consider the normative character or function of Scripture which is the hermeneutical basis for Reformed worship. The normative character is perhaps the most distinctive mark of Calvinism. In general, Protestants, including Calvinists, accept the Bible as an authority, for the

church. However, the degree and extent to which they accept it as an authority differs. Calvinists see the authority of the Scripture as extending to all church matters: to doctrine, discipline (that is, ethics plus procedures for the church to deal with ethical problems), worship and government. Many other Protestants do not believe the authority of Scripture extends that far. There is an agreement among most evangelicals that the normative function of Scripture extends to doctrine. Many see other areas as matters of indifference, or else hold that in worship, government and discipline the Scripture is only negatively normative, as opposed to constitutively or positively normative. This means that they believe we need only avoid violating the Biblical commands, but do not need to totally conform to an appointed Scriptural pattern in these areas. This can be seen in the difference in observances of Christmas, Lent and Easter. Puritan churches find no Scriptural basis for them, and thus don't observe them. Liturgical churches see no command against holy days and feel free to add them to their worship.¹

We will explore the meaning and implications of the normative character of Scripture further, using the work of B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. Dr. Warfield shows that the Westminster Confession, Chapter 1, teaches that the Bible is the only rule of faith and life. This doctrine does not affirm that the Bible contains all knowledge, or even all religious knowledge. "There is only a strong assertion of the completeness and the finality of

¹J. G. Vos, "At What Points do Doctrinal Differences Separate Reformed Churches?" Blue Banner Faith and Life 23(July-September, 1968): 99-100. Dr. Vos is the leading Covenanter theologian of this century.

the revelation of truth, for the specific purpose for which Scripture is given."² The doctrine does not deny the existence of truth obtained or preserved by other methods, "But it does deny the need of such sources to supplement what is set down in Scripture, in order to instruct us what 'man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.'" No duty can be added from any other source. Professor Warfield makes a strong conclusion,

This, it is to be observed, is to make Scripture something more than a rule of faith and practice: something more than the rule of faith and practice, in the sense of merely the fullest and best extant rule; something more even than a sufficient rule of faith and practice. It is to make it the only rule of faith and practice, to which nothing is to be added to make it altogether complete as our authoritative law. It contains not only enough to serve all the purposes of a rule of faith and practice, but all that is to be laid as the authoritative law of life on the consciences of Christians.³

The authority of the Scriptures extends to what they imply as well as what they say. A too literal approach can lead to an ignoring of the applications of Scripture. Prof. Warfield comments on the dangers of too much and too little reason.

We must depend upon our human faculties to ascertain what the Scripture says: we cannot suddenly abnegate them and refuse their guidance in determining what Scripture means. This is not, of course, to make reason the ground of authority of inferred doctrines and duties. . . . It is the Reformed contention, . . . that the sense of Scripture is Scripture, and that men are bound by its whole sense in all its implications.⁴

²Benjamin B. Warfield, The Westminster Assembly and Its Work (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 224. (Emphasis mine.) A different interpretation of the Westminster Assembly's doctrine of Scripture is taken by Jack B. Rodgers, Scripture in the Westminster Confession (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967).

³Ibid., pp. 224-25.

⁴Ibid., p. 226.

For example, abortion is not mentioned by the Bible as a sin. However, many Christians conclude by implication that the commands forbidding murder apply to abortion. Prof. Warfield continues by saying that the Bible cannot be understood without the Holy Spirit, who uses reason to help men understand the Scriptures.⁵

Scriptural Evidence for Reformed View of Biblical Authority

As has been mentioned above, the Reformed view of Biblical authority extends further than that of many other non-liberal Protestants, because the Bible is considered the only source of practice as well as doctrine. Like any theological position, this one must be tested by the Word of God. Calvinists believe that the normative character of Scripture is taught in the Bible and offer the passages below in support of it. These passages have in common warnings against adding to or subtracting from God's Word.

Num. 15:39-40 emphasizes that no command of God is to be omitted. "Remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them: and that ye seek not after your own ear and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God."

In Numbers 20, the story of Moses at the rock of Kadesh, God punished a man for adding to His command. The people needed water, so God told Moses to speak to the rock and strike it once. Instead, Moses spoke to the people and smote the rock not once but twice. For this sin, Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land. Rev. John Girardeau

⁵Ibid.

(1825-1898), an important Southern Presbyterian theologian, observed that Moses

. . . after having brought them out of Egypt, conducted them through the parted waters of the Red Sea, mediated between them and God amidst the terror of Sinai, led them through the horrors of the waste and howling desert--this glorious man, now in the sight of the Jordan, which like a thread separated them from the long sought, long-coveted goal of their hearts, is doomed for one addition to God's command, which no doubt seemed to him but a slight deviation from his instructions, to die short of the promised land.⁶

One of the constant temptations facing the church is to require things that God has not commanded, and ignore things He does require. When Moses urges the people to obey the law in Deuteronomy 4, he emphasizes that there are to be no additions or deletions. "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." (Deut. 4:2; see also Deut. 12:32).

What is the purpose of revelation? Deut. 29:29 says obedience to all that God has commanded. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." The obvious conclusion from these Deuteronomy passages is that the Bible is the sole authority not only for doctrine, but also to every other matter it speaks to, including "practical" areas such as worship, polity, and ethics.

In the story of Uzza's death (I Chron. 13:9-14), David decided to move the Ark of the Covenant. Instead of obeying the law and having Levites carry it, David had it hauled on an ox cart. When the oxen stumbled,

⁶John L. Girardeau, Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church (Richard, Va.: J. L. Girardeau, 1888), p. 16. The Biblical passages in this section are largely from this work. This is a standard work defending a capella singing as the Biblical standard of worship.

Uzza did the seemingly virtuous act of reaching out to steady the Ark. For his virtuous act, the Lord struck Uzza dead. In I Chron. 15:13, David explained the cause of Uzza's death. "It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the LORD our God broke out in anger against us. We did not inquire of Him about how to do it in the prescribed way." So the punishment came for not doing this in God's way.

Michael Bushell wrote about this passage:

No other example of Scripture shows more clearly than this the folly of ignoring God's own instructions as to how He is to be approached. Seen from a limited point of view, Uzza's intentions were certainly "good." But "will-worship," even when offered with the best of intentions, is still sacrilege. It is worth noting that the Philistines had not incurred such severe punishment for touching the Ark (I Sam. 4-6). This shows that the Lord is especially jealous that His own people approach Him in a fitting manner.⁷

Prov. 30:5-6 is another warning against adding to the teaching of Scripture. Note that the reader is told not to add his own words to those of Scripture on any subject. "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add not thou unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

Isa. 8:20 implies that those who add to or subtract from Scripture, by not speaking according to God's word, have moral deficiencies. "To the law and the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

2 Tim. 3:16-17 says that "All scripture⁸ is given by inspiration

⁷Michael Bushell, The Songs of Zion (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant Publications, 1980), p. 42. Mr. Bushell holds an M.Div. from Westminster Seminary.

⁸For our purposes it makes no difference whether this passage is translated "all scripture" or "every scripture" as is done by the RSV.

of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." This passage says that the Bible provides men with not only authoritative doctrine, but also with an authoritative standard for practice as well. This implies that Scripture has the same authority in practice that it has in doctrine. This author has faced the question of whether the doctrinal and descriptive passages of Scripture have the same authority. By saying "all scripture . . . is profitable" equal authority is given to descriptive and doctrinal passages.

The above passages make a strong case for the Reformed contention that the Bible is the only rule of faith and practice in doctrine, in worship, in discipline, and in government.

There are some problems and qualifications concerning the normative character that need comment. Since most of these will be examined in more detail when the Regulative Principle of Worship is treated, we will only discuss a few of them briefly here. The Calvinist realizes the need for qualification in his interpretation of Scripture. He forgets neither the disabilities of fallen man nor man's needs outside the spiritual realm. The illumination of the Holy Spirit is necessary to compensate for man's sin, and there are situations which the Scriptures do not address. These must be determined by cultural conditions and Christian wisdom.⁹

There are also objections to the normative character of Scripture, these including the view that tradition is an authority for the church, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the question of legalism. Since these

⁹Warfield, Westminster Assembly, p. 227.

will be repeated when worship is discussed we will here limit ourselves to a hermeneutical problem. This objection says that if there are interpretative problems with a hermeneutical principle it is invalid. Merely because a hermeneutical principle has problems does not mean it is invalid. It is difficult to think of a hermeneutical principle without a problem. Prof. William Cunningham (1805-1861), former principal of New College, Edinburgh, answered the objection, saying,

But this doubt or uncertainty as to some of the applications of the principle affords no ground for the use of which some have made of it in rejecting the principle altogether, and denying that apostolic practice, ordinarily and as a general rule, forms a binding law for the regulation of the affairs of the church.¹⁰

To summarize the normative character of Scripture, we offer the following chart. It contrasts the view of Biblical authority taught by the Westminster Confession as interpreted by Reformed Presbyterians with the Anglican viewpoint on Biblical authority taught by Richard Hooker. Hooker's Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity served as the standard apologetic for the Church of England till World War I.¹¹

	Does the Bible allow additions in this area?		Does the Bible allow deletions in this area?	
	Reformed	Anglican	Reformed	Anglican
Doctrine	no	no	no	no
Discipline	no	no?	no	no?
Worship	no	yes	no	yes
Church government	no	yes	no	yes

¹⁰William Cunningham, Historical Theology, 4th ed., 2 vols. (London: Banner of Truth, 1960), 1:67.

¹¹James I. Packer, Knowing Man (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1979), pp. 73-74.

(This chart is somewhat oversimplified. For example, even though Anglicans allow additions to worship, few would knowingly allow idolatry in their worship. While Calvinists pattern their church polity on the Bible, they will use modern parliamentary procedure. The question mark beside the Anglican "no" on discipline is because there is some dispute on Hooker's position in this area. We will learn more of Richard Hooker below.)

Circumstances and Parts of Worship Defined

Before going farther we must define one of the most important distinctions in Reformed worship; it is the difference between circumstances of worship and parts or elements of worship. Parts or elements of worship are the actions that begin with the Call to Worship and end with the Benediction. The acts of worship are preaching, Psalm-singing, reading of the Bible, sacraments, oaths, fastings, thanksgivings, prayers, and offerings. They have a common center in God's Word. Scriptures are read, preached and sung. The sacraments have their effect through the Word. Prayers are guided by the prayers and commands of the Bible such as the Lord's prayer and 1 Tim. 2:1,2. The reasons for oaths, fastings, offerings and thanksgivings are found in the Bible. The Reformed believe that nothing should be a part of a worship service unless the Bible commands it.

Circumstances of worship are things that surround the worship service, as opposed to being acts of worship. For example, the starting time of the service, the building it is in, the type of pews, and the tunes in the Psalter are all examples of circumstances. While circumstances surround and are used in worship, they are not acts of worship.

They relate to parts as a frame does to a picture. The frame can be changed without affecting the picture. So circumstances can be changed without affecting worship. Much more freedom is given by God in circumstances of worship, than in parts of worship which are dictated by the Bible. General commands are given, and the believers fill in the details. For example, while the Bible teaches worship is to be on the Lord's Day, the exact time is up to the congregation. The Bible also teaches Psalms are to be sung in worship, but gives worshippers a choice of tunes.

Who decides what parts are taught in Scripture, and how to settle circumstances? In the Reformed churches the practice has been for the denomination through its Scripture study to decide what the parts are and publish a Directory for Worship. The congregations, under the authority of their elders, decide about the circumstances using the general rules of Scripture on worship.

The Regulative Principle of Worship

We will now begin our discussion of the Reformed doctrine of worship, called the "Regulative Principle of Worship." Our approach will be to define it, show scriptural support for it, and discuss the objections and problems connected with it. Historically, Presbyterians have contrasted their worship with that of the Anglican Communion. To help clarify the Presbyterian position, we have followed this practice. We would stress that the Presbyterian and Anglican positions discussed here are the Classical positions of the Westminster Confession and the Thirty-Nine Articles. The information would not necessarily apply to theological liberals in either tradition.

We will now consider both a simple and a technical definition of

the Regulative Principle of Worship. The simple statement is that the purpose of worship is to worship God, and not please men. Therefore, since our sole purpose is to please God, we only do what He commands in worship. In the same manner, if we honored a friend, we would do that which pleases the friend, and not what pleases ourselves. The assumption is that what God commands, pleases Him most. The technical statement of the Regulative Principle comes in three parts. First, nothing should be admitted into the worship of the church without Scriptural warrant or apostolic example.¹² Second, Biblical proof of any non-supernatural (that is, non-charismatic) practice having existed in the apostolic church's worship imposes an imperative and unlimited obligation to adopt it.¹³ (The use of supernatural gifts, such as tongues, in worship has never been discussed in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and this author knows of no other Reformed Church that has dealt officially with charismatic gifts in worship.) Third, the burden of proof lies on those who propose to omit anything that has the sanction of apostolic practice. They must prove their position either from a general Biblical principle, or from a specific statement of Scripture that the practice was local and temporary.

Scriptural Evidence for the Regulative Principle

Let us turn to the Bible and see passages used by theologians to

¹²Ibid., 1:68.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

support the Regulative Principle of Worship.¹⁵ In Genesis 4, Cain's first recorded sin was worshipping God in a sinful manner. God rejected the sinful action of the sacrifice of fruit (1 John 3:12). This passage shows that God commanding a certain form of worship predates the Mosaic law.

One important passage that appears in most Calvinistic discussions on worship is the Second Commandment, Exod. 20:5-6, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . ." This passage is understood by Calvinists as applying not merely to images, but to any human innovation in worship. For example, in the Westminster Larger Catechism Questions 99 and 100 teach this command forbids human inventions in worship. The Reformed interpretation of this passage is based on Scripture passages that interpret it such as Deut. 4:2, 12:32; Ex. 25:40 and Heb. 8:5.¹⁶ We would note that in most Calvinist theology, like the Larger Catechism, worship is an ethical matter. This contrasts with the Anglicans, who view worship as a practical matter.

Ex. 25:40 and Exodus 40 both describe the building of the tabernacle, the place of worship. God did not say, build a tabernacle in any

¹⁵These Biblical references in this section come from Bushell, Songs of Zion, pp. 37-47, and Girardeau, Instrumental Music, pp. 10-21. Other passages cited are: Lev. 16:12; Num. 4:15; 20:1-13; Deut. 4:2; Josh. 22:10-11; Ezra 3:10, 11; 2 Sam. 6:6-7; 2 Chron. 26:16-21; 29:25-30; Prov. 30:6; Jer. 7:31; Matt. 15:6-9; 21:12-13; Mark 7:7-13; 11:15-17; John 2:14-17; 5:19; 8:29; 12:49-50; 14:31; Acts 4:19; 5:29; 15:29; 17:25; 1 Cor. 8:12-13; 14:25-30.

¹⁶For more on the Second Commandment and worship see William Young, "The Second Commandment," in The Biblical Doctrine of Worship, ed. by Edward Robson (Pittsburgh: Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1974), pp. 307-15.

way you want to, but gave a specific design to follow. God wanted worship done in His way.

God judges those who worship improperly. Lev. 10:1-3 gives a specific example of what happens when God's commands on worship are disobeyed. Abihu and Nadab die for offering strange fire to the Lord. The Bible says,

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there sent fire from the LORD, and devoured them and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said unto Aaron, this is that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.

Bushell says about this passage, "On the surface of the matter, the actions of Nadab and Abihu may appear pious or commendable, but as the passage indicates, religious zeal is never commendable when it degenerates into a zealous disregard of God's holiness."¹⁷ We conclude that God wants to totally direct His worship.

In Numbers we see another example of judgement for sacrilege. Numbers 16 tells of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. These men wanted to be priests without God's permission. For this sin, God, in His wrath, had them swallowed by the earth.

God judges kings as well as lesser men for sins in worship. Samuel was late for a sacrifice, Saul made it instead and paid for it with the loss of his throne (1 Sam. 13:8-14). John Girardeau commented on this passage: "The king had no command . . . and performed a function for which he had no authority. The circumstances seemed to him to justify

¹⁷Bushell, Songs of Zion, p. 40.

the act. But he gained the divine disapprobation and lost his kingdom for the blunder."¹⁸

Unfortunately, the succeeding kings did not learn from Saul's fall. Jeroboam sets up a false worship of the true God via golden calves in 1 Kings 12:26-33. "And this thing became a sin . . ." John Owen, the great Puritan theologian, said that God "expressly rejects that which was so added as to days, and times and places, though of the nearest affinity and cognation to what was appointed by himself, because it was invented by man, yea, by a king . . ."¹⁹ Neither a king nor anyone else is allowed to add to God's worship even by slight changes.²⁰

Now we will look at New Testament passages on worship. In Mark 7:7-8 Jesus rejects the traditions of men that had crept into Jewish worship. This is clearest from the Isa. 29:13 passage which Jesus quotes, "Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men." (NIV)

In John 4:20-24 a contrast is made between New Testament and Old Testament worship. We will follow the interpretation of Michael Bushell,

¹⁸Girardeau, Instrumental Music, p. 16.

¹⁹John Owen, The Works of John Owen, edited by William H. Goold, 16 vols., vol. 13: Truth and Innocence Vindicated (London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850-53; reprint ed., London: Banner of Truth, 1967), p. 477.

²⁰The exact meaning of this passage is debated due to the use of the term "Elohim" which can mean either "God" or "gods." C. F. Keil supports "God," "What Jeroboam meant to say by the words, 'Behold thy God,' etc., was 'this is no new religion, but this was the form of worship which our fathers used in the desert, with Aaron himself leading the way.'" (The passage on Aaron and the golden calf, Ex. 32:4, also uses "elohim.") Keil continues, "But this institution became a sin to Jeroboam, because it violated the fundamental law of the Old Testament religion. . . ." C. F. Keil, The Books of the Kings (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 198-99.

found in The Songs of Zion, a defense of exclusive Psalmody. He argues first, the differences between Old Testament and New Testament worship are divinely legislated; as is shown by God tearing the veil of the temple (Matt. 27:51). Second, there is not an absolute contrast between New Testament and Old Testament worship. Worship is based on spirit and truth under both covenants (verses 23-24), as this depends on the unchanging character of God. Third, because of the context and general use of John (3:5-8; 6:36; 7:38; and so forth), spirit here means the Holy Spirit, who is the only true source of worship. Fourth, in verse 23 Jesus says that worship is dependent on the Holy Spirit rather than the location of the worshipper. Finally, in verse 24 spirit and truth refer to the Holy Spirit as the source of worship, and truth refers to the Bible (John 16:13). Bushell concludes, "Acceptable worship must be consonant with the character of God as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures and must therefore be in conformity with that sufficient rule at every point. Only that worship which proceeds ultimately from the Spirit through His Word is pleasing to God."²¹

In 1 Cor. 11:27-30 several things are taught. The one that interests us is the application of the principle that those who worship God in an unworthy manner will be punished by God. God requires men to examine themselves (verse 28) to prepare themselves to properly celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Bible says of those who eat unworthily, "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." (verses 29-30 NASV) Our point here

²¹Bushell, Songs of Zion, pp. 43-46.

is that we must keep all God's commands about worship under the new covenant, as well as the old.²²

In Col. 2:16-23 the opposite is taught, that there should be no addition to worship. Paul attacks men who add nice sounding ideas to God's law, by showing that this is a kind of enslavement. He discusses "worship" in verse 16, observing religious festivals, in verse 18, worshipping angels, and in verse 23, he condemns "will-worship" (AV) or "self-made religion" (NASV). Paul rejects all of these additions to worship as sinful.

Objections to and Problems with the Regulative Principle

There are several objections to and problems with the Regulative Principle of Worship. The problems of Biblical interpretation will be dealt with first. The first hermeneutical problem exists because the Scriptures are unsystematic on this subject and indeed all others. Work is needed to bring together and harmonize Scriptures on this subject. One person can overlook a fact another sees, and if two facts are there, one may be more important. By systemizing and comparing passages we can obtain an accurate outline of apostolic worship. While this will not

²²Commentators taking the position that God punishes those who partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner include: F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), pp. 273-76; John Calvin, The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), pp. 250-54; Hans Conzelman, 1 Corinthians, trans. James W. Leich (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp. 202-3, and R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), pp. 475-84.

solve all the problems, we can find enough to do our duty.²³

Second, there are some aspects of worship on which we would like more information than the Scriptures contain. While the Bible contains all necessary information on the subject that the Holy Spirit decided proper to convey to us, there seems to be a certain incompleteness. On some matters, such as buildings and order of worship, the Scriptures are silent. On other matters, such as the use of charismatic gifts in worship, the Scripture presents facts that seem unsuitable to many churches. Prof. Thomas Witherow states the problem as follows:

At every turn we ask ourselves, could the New Testament system in all its parts be restored? If so, would it work? And if so, would it be permanent? Would there not be in it, as at first, a strong tendency to pass into something else, and to leave in its place something quite at variance with itself?²⁴

By qualifying this problem, we will answer much of it. The silence of the Bible in some areas relating to worship is not always a problem. In some cases it is great advantage, particularly on matters surrounding the worship service (that is, circumstances) such as the building, the order of parts, the tunes for singing, the time of day for worship, and so forth. Because the Holy Spirit did not specify these things, Christianity has the advantage of greater adaptability to differing cultural conditions. William Cunningham summarized it in this way, "Christianity is adapted for permanence and for catholicity by the very

²³Thomas Witherow, The Form of the Christian Temple (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), pp. 2-3, 5. Although this classic is concerned with church polity, its arguments apply equally well to Reformed worship. The author taught Church History at Magee College in North Ireland in the 19th century.

²⁴Ibid., p. 5.

absence of any detailed standard or directory of external arrangements and observances."²⁵ One caution is necessary in interpreting this paragraph, it refers only to circumstances of worship and not parts, which are commanded by Scripture. Problems remain concerning parts of worship.

Third there is the problem of the relation between Old and New Covenant worship. All Christians agree that the work of Christ fulfilled the sacrificial part of Old Testament worship, and hence Christians do not sacrifice lambs and bulls. But understanding of what parts of worship were fulfilled by Christ, and what parts are still to be used in worship is sometimes difficult. For example, among Reformed Churches, the dispute over whether to use musical instruments in worship is based on arguments over whether the instruments were used only as part of the sacrifice or not. If they were part of the sacrifice, then they should not be used because Christ fulfilled the sacrifice. If not, they can be used in worship.

This question as debated by Reformed against other Protestant churches is, when Christ fulfilled the worship of the Old Testament, did he free us from the Regulative Principle? No, the Reformed answer. While Christ did fulfill the law, He did not abolish it (Matt. 5:17). As Michael Bushell shows, Christian liberty comes from our ability to obey the law. Our freedom from the law

lies in the very fact that through the Spirit we are enabled to obey it (Rom. 13:8-10; 7:12; 6:15-23; etc.) The termination of the temple ritual and all of its minute prescriptions does not absolve us of the responsibility for heeding the Regulative Principle upon which they were founded, any more than the abrogation of certain aspects of the Jewish law absolves us of the responsibility for obeying the Decalogue

²⁵Cunningham, Historical Theology, 1:70.

which was their foundation.²⁶

Fourth there is the problem of interpreting the Bible by reading our cultural situation into it. It is difficult to look at the past without reading the present into it. Since, for example, in Presbyterian synods, each congregation is represented by a minister and elder, Presbyterians tend to assume the apostolic council of Acts 15 had the same composition. Also many cultural circumstances are not addressed in the brief and scanty historical records of the New Testament churches.²⁷ Principal William Cunningham began his discussion of this problem by admitting that there were some local and temporary things in the New Testament church, which introduce some degree of doubt into the application of Scripture. He continued:

But this doubt or uncertainty as to some of the applications of the principle affords no ground for the use of which some have made of it in rejecting the principle altogether, and denying that apostolic practice, ordinarily and as a general rule, forms a binding law for the regulation of the affairs of the church.

He concluded by saying some of the practical problems are not easy to solve.²⁸

Who has the final responsibility for interpreting the Bible on worship? In Reformed circles it is the denomination that has the responsibility. The Reformed Presbyterian Church through her confessions and her Directory for Worship has stated how she believes God is to be worshiped. The hermeneutics used are those common to Reformed and many evangelical churches, such as the historico-grammatical method, scripture being

²⁶Busshell, Songs of Zion, p. 39.

²⁷Witherow, Form of the Christian Temple, p. 4.

²⁸Cunningham, Historical Theology, 1:67.

the interpreter of scripture and the unity of the two Testaments.²⁹ In the final analysis, there will always be some doubt on some interpretations. The Church can only depend on God's wisdom, and pray for His mercy when errors occur.

Now that we have looked at the hermeneutical problems, we will move to other problems. A second problem facing us is the role of the supernatural in the apostolic church. This affects us as we look at worship, particularly in 1 Corinthians 14. The supernatural gifts of tongues, interpretations, and prophecy are present. It is not easy to determine how these should affect today's worship. However, since these supernatural gifts were not all of the worship service, we can deal with the question of how to worship when the supernatural gifts are not present.

The problem of the supernatural occurs again when we recall that the apostles had supernatural gifts. These gifts greatly influenced the early church, and it is hard to conceive what the church would have been if they had not been present. Nor is it always easy to decide how much of the authority the apostles exercised apart from supernatural gifts was intended to be permanent. Did their authority or a portion of it continue after the supernatural gifts which authenticated it were gone? Fortunately, we do not have to answer these questions in order to have the church function. The important question is what is the ordinary system of worship set up by the apostles, and left in operation when they left the world? Knowing this we can worship in a way pleasing to God. Our goal,

²⁹Some books on hermeneutics used by Reformed Presbyterians are: Louis Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Interpretation, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), A. Berkeley Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), and Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1890).

then, is to use the Bible to determine what principles or worship had apostolic sanction.³⁰ The Reformed answer to questions of the extent of apostolic authority is to refuse to be drawn into arguments. Instead, having accepted the Bible as the sole authority on worship, we ask what does the Bible say about worship?

A third problem is the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding men to worship properly. Presbyterians believe that the Holy Spirit teaches men to worship through the teaching of the Bible, the same way He teaches men doctrine. Some Anglicans disagree with this view. E. J. Bicknell, an evangelical Anglican scholar, said this about the Puritan-Presbyterian position against Anglican worship,

Their objection rested on a misapprehension of the purpose of Scripture, which was not given to be a handbook of ceremonial but an instructor in moral and spiritual truth. They took a purely individualistic view of the Christian life. If the church is faithful to Scripture, she may be trusted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to work out for herself in each age that system of common worship which is best able to express her devotion and her obedience, and she can claim from her members adherence to it.³¹

Bicknell continued saying that he considered Scripture to be the source of doctrine.

Since our time is particularly sensitive to arguments allowing "freedom in the Spirit," we will attempt to answer this viewpoint in some detail. A Calvinist would reply to this viewpoint as follows: First, it contradicts the normative character of Scripture discussed earlier in this chapter. Since the Bible is the sole authority, the church guided by the

³⁰Witherow, Form of the Christian Temple, pp. 3-4, 6.

³¹E. J. Bicknell, A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, 3rd ed., rev. by H. J. Carpenter (London: Longmans, 1955), pp. 252-53.

Holy Spirit must return to it in each generation to be sure that her worship is true to the Bible. This is different from Bicknell's view that the church can change her worship in each age. Bicknell says that the church has a certain authority to legislate worship, while the Calvinist believes the church only has authority to execute worship because God has legislated worship in the Bible. Presbyterians would also show that the Bible, particularly the Old Testament Law, is a "handbook of ceremonial." (Both Presbyterians and Anglicans would agree that the church may change circumstances of worship such as the time of the service. The debate is over parts of worship.) Second, the Anglican position contradicts the Regulative Principle of Worship also discussed earlier in this chapter. The Bible teaches that it is to have the same authority for worship as it does for doctrine and ethics. Third is the problem of consistency which we will divide into two parts. The first concerns the consistency of God. If God is unchangeable, as virtually all evangelicals will agree, then He is consistent. Since the Holy Spirit is God, He works in a consistent manner. For the Holy Spirit to work one way in helping the Church understand and apply doctrine and ethics, and another way in helping it understand and apply worship, seems to strike at the heart of God's consistency. The second problem with consistency relates to Biblical interpretation. Both Anglicans and Presbyterians agree that the Bible contains many important teachings about worship, and that these should be studied to better understand worship. The difference comes when the Presbyterians say the Bible should be the source of all our theology (which includes practice) of worship, and the Anglicans say that it should only be the source of part of our theology of worship, on what basis is that part to

be decided? Why is only part to be accepted? Why not all? Clearly there is an inconsistency with respect to the authority of the Bible here. Finally, Presbyterians consider the Biblical system of worship to be better than any other human system. As Prof. Witherow said: "The advantages of a divine system over the most cunning construction of human wisdom are so obvious, that notwithstanding all difficulties we are always encouraged to attempt its recovery."³²

A fourth objection raised to the followers of the Regulative Principle of Worship is legalism. The charge takes this form: Since you forbid the use of parts of worship that are not commanded by the Bible you are being legalistic. More specifically, since the Reformed churches forbid extra-scriptural parts of worship such as crossings, vestments, altars, prayerbooks, and so forth, they fall into the error of legalism. In answer the Reformed churches deny that following the Bible is legalism, and launch a counterattack. The Reformed charge some other churches, particularly liturgical ones, with legalism. You say that you allow freedom in worship, but you require or virtually require parts of worship the Bible does not such as vestments, crossings, altars, prayerbooks, and so forth. You add rubric to rubric and ceremony to ceremony. Is this not legalism? The charge of legalism can, on some occasions, be brought validly against Calvinists. As William Cunningham shows, one extreme is "to stick rigidly and doggedly to a general principle, refusing to admit that any limitations or qualifications ought to be permitted in applying

³²Witherow, Form of the Christian Temple, p. 5.

it . . ." ³³ J. H. Thornwell, regarded by many as the best Southern Presbyterian theologian of the last century, considered the "legalism" caused by the Regulative Principle as an advantage, after all, what is wrong with being subject to God's will? He said,

The simple question is, what was the bondage of the Jewish Dispensation? Did it consist in the subjection of the people to the Divine will? . . . One would think that it was the great advantage of the Jews, that they knew their worship was acceptable because it was prescribed. Moses evidently regarded it as a singular favor, that the Lord was nigh to them, and directed them in all their ways. He knew nothing of the freedom which counts every man a slave who is not permitted to walk in the light of his own eyes, and after the imagination of his own heart. Jewish bondage did not consist in the principle that the positive revelation of God was the measure of duty--that was its light and glory--but in the nature of the things enjoined. It was the minuteness and technicality of the ritual, the cumbrous routine of services, the endless rites and ceremonies--these constituted the yoke from which Christ delivered His people. He did not emancipate us from the guidance and authority of God: He did not legitimate any species of will-worship: but He prescribed a worship simple and unpretending, a worship in spirit and truth. ³⁴

A fifth criticism is that the Regulative Principle of Worship leaves no room for "Tradition." We define "Tradition" as "the teaching and practice of the Church, formally distinct from the words of Scripture, as this teaching and practice has been carried on continuously from the beginning." ³⁵ The critics are correct. Calvinists reject Tradition as an authority in their churches because there is no Biblical evidence of it being an acceptable authority for the church, and because churches such

³³William Cunningham, "The Reformers and the Regulative Principle," in The Reformation of the Church, ed. Iain Murray (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), p. 39.

³⁴James Henley Thornwell, The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell, 4 vols. (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee on Publication, 1871-73), 4:254.

³⁵A Dictionary of Christian Theology, s. v. "Tradition," by R. P. C. Hanson.

as the Roman Catholic, where Tradition is an authority, have adopted many errors.³⁶

Not content with the other five arguments, Anglicans also used philosophy to attack the Reformed position on worship. The most famous attack was Richard Hooker's Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, written in the sixteenth century. Hooker argued that the Bible gave man the information that he could not obtain by reason. If the Bible was the only criterion, the laws of reason and nature which both reflected their Creator would be abrogated by the Scriptures. Therefore, while Hooker saw the Bible to be authoritative in doctrine and in prescribing some parts of worship such as the sacraments, he felt it was never intended to be an authority for the details of worship.

For him the Bible was the revelation of the nature of God and His purposes for mankind, but God had not intended his Word to prescribe the detailed offering of worship, the method of church government, and the details of conduct. All these he left to the discretion of men. Such matters were to be determined by the use of reason: reason would take into account propriety, decency, proportion, according to the circumstances of the case.³⁷

As might be expected, this sent up howls of protests from the "less reasonable" Puritans.

The Puritans replied, in effect, that the Anglican accepted the authority of the Bible in theory, but not in practice. It was inconsistent of the Anglican, he charged, to accept the biblical authority for doctrine but not for ecclesiastical government or worship. The Anglican seemed to set aside any parts of the Bible that seemed to go against the contemporary usages of the Anglican church by dismissing them as appropriate only for the times of their origins and therefore

³⁶Wetherow, Form of the Christian Temple, p. 7.

³⁷Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965-75), 1:53.

no part of the eternal law of the Christian religion. It was too convenient to be true.³⁸

We should add, the Puritans also found Hooker's position in conflict with their understanding of the Bible's teaching about its own authority and about worship described earlier in this chapter.

The Reformed Presbyterian Application of the Regulative Principle

A Comparison with the Old Testimony

Before seeing how the Regulative Principle of Worship is applied in the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony, one "housekeeping" chore must be dealt with. Chapter III mentioned that the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony had recently been rewritten, which may lead the reader to wonder what effect this had on the chapter on worship. We will answer that question by looking at the Old Testimony's chapter on worship, and briefly comparing with the new chapter. This section was originally written in 1809. References in it (1a, 2b, and so forth) refer to the new Testimony sections below.

³⁸Ibid. For those wishing to learn more about this controversy the following sources are suggested: The Anglican side includes John Jewel, Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae and Defense of the Apology and John Whitgift, Defense of the Answer to the Admonition.

The Puritan-Presbyterian side includes Thomas Cartwright, A Replie to an Answere made of M. Doctor Whitgifte Agaynste the Admonition, The Second Replie of Thomas Cartwright, The Rest of the Second Replie of Thomas Cartwright Agaynst Master Doctor Whitgifts Second Answer; Walter Travers, Full and Plain Declaration and A Defense of the Ecclesiastical Discipline; William Ames, A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God's Worship; John Owen, Truth and Innocence Vindicated and A Discourse Concerning Liturgies and their Imposition, and Samuel Rutherford, Divine Right of Church Government. Most better theological libraries will have some of the above works. All of them can be found in the microfilm series, Early English Books distributed by Xerox-University Microfilms and owned by some universities and colleges.

CHAPTER XXIV: OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

1. God is to be worshipped by all his intelligent creatures, in such a manner as he himself shall prescribe; and as no sinner can have access unto him, but in Christ Jesus, divine revelation is the supreme standard by which all modes of worship must be regulated.

The three parts of this paragraph are repeated. The Command to worship is repeated in 1b, Jesus as the only way in 2a, and the Regulative Principle in 1c.

2. Conscience is not a rule of faith or practice; but a power of the human mind, which is natural to man, and necessarily implies our accountableness to God. The exercise of a good conscience consists in comparing our motives, intentions, and actions, with the divine law, and in approving or disapproving of them, as they appear to be agreeable unto, or contrary to the law. The approbation of moral sense is accompanied with pleasure, and its disapprobation with pain.

3. Every man is bound to act conscientiously in every part of religious worship; but the dictates of conscience cannot render false worship lawful in any man or body of men. The rights of conscience consist in the conscientious performance of every part of appointed worship, uninfluenced by the fear of man; and liberty of conscience consists in enjoying these rights without restraint.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 are summarized in 1b where it says that sincerity is not enough to make worship acceptable to God.

4. It is the duty of every man to maintain a devout frame of mind, and devote to secret prayer at least a part of every evening and morning. Families are under obligation to worship the great God socially, by singing psalms, reading the Scriptures, and prayer each night and day; and the head of the family should take care that these duties be performed, and that regular attendance be given by every member of the family.

This paragraph is repeated in paragraph 6 of the Testimony.

5. Christians should frequently meet, at stated times, for acts of private social worship, in order to strengthen each other in piety and zeal, and maintain sincere friendship upon evangelical principles.

Paragraph 6c repeats this encouragement to join small groups.

6. The Lord of life and time hath set apart one seventh part of time, from the common work of life, to be employed in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much of it as may be taken up in

the works of necessity and mercy; and since the resurrection of Christ, the first day of the week, comprehending twenty-four hours, from midnight to midnight, is the weekly Sabbath.

This is repeated in paragraphs 6 and 7.

7. Those who are ordained by the head of the Church to preach the gospel, should labor faithfully in explaining and applying the word of God to the assembled congregation, every Lord's day; and all should conscientiously attend this public school of instruction and sanctuary of devotion. The ministers of religion have no warrant for reading their sermons to the congregation.

The only part of this section that was kept was the bias against liturgies implied by forbidding the reading of sermons. See 1b.

8. Singing God's praise in a part of public social worship, in which the whole congregation should join: the book of Psalms, which are of divine inspiration, is well adapted to the state of the Church, and of every member, in all ages and circumstances; and these Psalms, to the exclusion of all imitations and uninspired compositions, are to be used in social worship.

Paragraph 5c continues the position of exclusive Psalmody and strengthens it by explaining the exegesis behind it.

9. Public prayer is to accompany the word preached: written forms of prayer, whether read or repeated, are not authorized in the Scriptures--are not calculated to exercise the mind in the grace of the Holy Spirit--are not adapted to the varieties of the state of the Church and its members, and are not to be used in approaching the throne of grace.

Paragraph 1b repeats the bias against liturgy. Paragraph 5b repeats that prayer is to accompany preaching.

10. The ministers of the Gospel are to pronounce publicly the apostolic benediction in some such words as these: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.

This has been dropped from the Testimony, but benedictions are considered prayers, which are still part of worship.

We therefore condemn the following errors, and testify against all who maintain them:

1. "That it is immaterial what form of worship is used."
2. "That man has a right to worship God whatever way conscience may

- dictate, although that way should be opposed to God's commandments."
 3. "That any body of men may recognize such a right."
 4. "That it is unnecessary for families to worship God every day, and particularly to make singing Psalms part of their worship."
 5. "That private fellowship meetings among the saints are not of divine appointment."
 6. "That there is no Sabbath under the Gospel."
 7. "That any unauthorized person may take upon him to preach the Gospel."
 8. "That the Scripture Psalmody is unfit for Gospel worship."
 9. "That the Church should use a liturgy of Prayer."³⁹

Only error 6 was repeated as a rejection in the new Testimony.

See 7b for it.

There were four additions to the new Testimony chapter on worship. They were 1d, on the use of pictures of Christ in worship, 5d, that instruments are not to be used in worship, 5e, on fasting, which replaces chapter 26 of the old Testimony, and 5f, on tithes.

Commentary on Reformed Presbyterian Worship

We will now proceed with a commentary on Chapter 21 of the Confession-Testimony.

CHAPTER 21: OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP AND THE SABBATH DAY⁴⁰

(Larger Catechism: 103-121, 178-196;
 Shorter Catechism: 45-62, 88-90, 98-107)

³⁹Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (Pittsburgh: Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1949), pp. 193-96.

⁴⁰Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, The Westminster Confession of Faith (Adopted 1648) and The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (Adopted August, 1980) in Parallel Columns (Pittsburgh: Board of Education and Publication, 1981), pp. 50-54. All Testimony references following are to this document. Hereafter only chapter and paragraph will be given.

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION

1a. The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture. Rom. 1:20; Acts. 17:24; Psalm 119:68; Jer. 10:7; Psalm 31:23; Psalm 18:3; Rom. 10:12; Psalm 62:8; Josh. 24:14; Mark 12:33; Deut. 4:15-20; Exod. 20:4-6; Col. 2:23.

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN
TESTIMONY

1b. All people are required to worship the true God, in a scriptural manner, with sincerity of heart. Sincerity cannot make unscriptural worship acceptable to God. Proper worship is to be conducted in an orderly manner. The tendency to emphasize ritual, liturgy and ceremony is contrary to the Scriptures. Acts 24:16; John 16:2; Isa. 1:11-15; John 4:24; Heb. 10:19-22.

1c. Worship is to be offered only in accordance with God's appointment, and in harmony with the scriptural principle that whatever is not commanded in the worship of God, by precept or example, is forbidden. Lev. 10:1-3; 2 Sam. 6:1-11; Matt. 15:8-9.

1d. The use of pictures or images of Jesus in worship, or as aids to devotion, is unscriptural. The Scriptures do not provide a sufficient description of his physical appearance to picture him. The work of artists should not be received as accurate representations of his person. Exod. 20:4-5.

The Confession says in the above paragraph that it is the responsibility of all men to call upon God in worship, and it explains how men are to worship. God is to be "feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might." One of the most important aspects of this chapter is the practical concern with how the heart of the believer is to approach God.

Edward D. Morris said it this way:

The presence of so much judicious instruction and counsel is another illustration of the fact that the Westminster divines were after all less concerned with the grave matters of doctrine which they expounded than with those practical matters of duty and spiritual experience which in a sense rise far above all merely doctrinal issues, because they more directly affect the Christian life at its very centers.⁴¹

In section 1b the Testimony largely repeats the Confession, with some different emphases. The Testimony stresses that sincerity in worship is not enough, because obedience in worship is also required. This section rejects two extremes: the uncontrolled worship of some extreme charismatic groups, and the liturgical worship used by many denominations.

Section 1c restates the Regulative Principle while 1d deals with a special application of the commandment against idols. Pictures and other images of Jesus are rejected in worship and devotion. The reasoning of the Testimony Revision Committee was that since Jesus was a man, it is lawful for us to make pictures of Him as we would of any other man. (The Reformed Presbyterian Church does not encourage men to make pictures of Jesus.) However, since images are forbidden in worship, it is wrong to have Jesus' picture or image in worship.⁴²

We would note that this position contradicts the traditional Reformed position, expressed in Larger Catechism Question 108, that the

⁴¹Edward D. Morris, Theology of the Westminster Symbols (Columbus, Ohio: Champlin Press, 1900), p. 703. Prof. Morris taught Systematic Theology at Lane Theological Seminary in the 19th century.

⁴²Interview with Dr. E. C. Copeland, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, 11 November 1980. Drs. Copeland, Spear, and Wright, who were interviewed for this paper, were members of the Testimony Revision Committee and are presently faculty at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

making of any image of God is a sin, no matter what purpose it is used for.

CONFESSION

2. Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to Him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creature: and since the fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone. Matt. 4:10 with John 5:23 and 2 Cor. 13:14; Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; Rom. 1:25; John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; Eph. 2:18; Col. 3:17.

The Committee found paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 of the Confession did not need any addition or change. Paragraph 2 teaches that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. Man needs a mediator because he is guilty, and a just God has decided to deal with men only through a mediator. This is aimed at the Roman position that holds that an "inferior" worship can be given through prayers to saints.⁴³

The Parts of Worship

3. Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men: and that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of His Spirit, according to His will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and, if vocal, in a known tongue. Phil. 4:6; Psalm 65:2; John 14:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:5;

⁴³A. A. Hodge, A Commentary on the Confession of Faith (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1869), p. 370. Prof. Hodge (1823-1886) taught at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Rom. 8:26; 1 John 5:14; Psalm 47:7; Eccles. 5:1-2; Heb. 12:28; Gen. 18:27; James 5:16; James 1:6-7; Mark 11:24; Matt. 6:12, 14-15; Col. 4:2; Eph. 6:18; 1 Cor. 14:14.

4. Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter: but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death. 1 John 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; John 17:20; 2 Sam. 7:29; Ruth 4:12; 2 Sam. 12:21-23 with Luke 16:25-26; Rev. 14:13; 1 John 5:16.

Paragraphs 3 and 4 are on prayer. Prayer with thanksgiving is to be made by all men. It is to be through the mediation of Jesus, whose atonement and "intercession on our behalf are the basis of all true prayer."⁴⁴ The Holy Spirit helps us in prayer, as we pray "with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love and perseverance." Prayer is to be in a known tongue and not in Latin, as the Mass was. Prayer is to be for things "lawful," and not for sinful things. The Roman custom of prayer for the dead is rejected.

CONFESSION

5a. The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear: the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, reverence; singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by

TESTIMONY

5b. Public prayer is to accompany the reading and preaching of the Word. Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:13-19.

5c. Singing God's praise is part of public worship in which the whole congregation should join. The Book of Psalms, consisting of inspired psalms, hymns and songs, is the

⁴⁴G. I. Williamson, The Westminster Confession of Faith (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964), p. 163. Rev. Williamson is a former Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America pastor.

Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in a holy and religious manner. Acts 15:21; Rev. 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:2; James 1:22; Acts 10:33; Matt. 13:19; Heb. 4:2; Isa. 66:2; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; James 5:13; Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-29; Acts 2:42; Deut. 6:13 with Neh. 10:29; Isa. 19:21 with Eccles. 5:4-5; Joel 2:12; Esther 4:16; Matt. 9:15; 1 Cor. 7:5; Psalm 107 throughout; Esther 9:22; Heb. 12:28.

divinely authorized manual of praise. The use of other songs in worship is not authorized in the Scriptures. The Greek words in the New Testament which are translated "psalm," "hymn" and "song" all appear in the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Book of Psalms. Psalm 95:2; 40:3(4); 96:1; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; Mark 14:26; 1 Cor. 14:26; James 5:13.

5d. The Psalms are to be sung without the accompaniment of instruments, which are not part of the New Testament pattern of worship. Musical instruments were commanded for use with the offering of sacrifices in the Old Testament temple worship. The death of Christ being the perfect and final sacrifice brought an end to this way of worship. There is neither command for nor example of the use of musical instruments in the words or practice of Christ and the apostles. The command of the New Testament is to offer the sacrifice of praise--the fruit of our lips. Num. 10:10; 2 Chron. 29:25-30; Heb. 9:12; 13:15.

5e. Religious fasting is an ordinance of God in which the believer voluntarily abstains from food for a season for the purpose of seeking the will of God, strength for service or deeper spirituality. It should be accompanied by meditation, self-examination, humiliation before God, confession of sin, repentance and renewed dedication to a life of obedience. Exod. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Dan. 10:2-3; Joel 1:14; 2:12-13, 15; Matt. 4:2; 6:16-18; Mark 9:29; Acts 13:2-3.

5f. The presentation of tithes and offerings is warranted as part of worship. 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Mal. 3:10; 1 Chron. 29:6-13; Exod. 23:15.

The fifth paragraph, which lists the parts of worship, is the most controversial among Calvinists. Before going into the controversies, we would note the devotional content of this paragraph. The Bible is to be read with "godly fear," preaching is to be heard in a "conscientious" manner and Psalms are to be sung with "grace in the heart."

We will briefly summarize the parts of worship listed in 5a. Probably the most universally accepted element of worship is the reading of the Scriptures. The Westminster Divines viewed this as such an important part of worship that they limited it to pastors and teachers.⁴⁵ The Reformed Presbyterian Church has always included Bible reading in worship. Generally the pastor reads, but any responsible male is allowed to read. The preaching and hearing of the Word are also elements of worship. One of the great achievements of the Reformation was to restore preaching to its central place. Psalm singing, prayer, and sacraments conclude the regular parts of worship. On special occasions religious oaths, vows, fastings and thanksgivings are to be used in worship.

Section 5b of the Testimony was designed to show more clearly that prayer is a part of worship by linking paragraph 5 with paragraphs 3 and 4.⁴⁶

Exclusive Psalmody

Section 5c addresses the first controversial issue, that of exclusive psalmody. While all Reformed churches agree that Psalms should

⁴⁵Morris, Theology of the Westminster Symbols, p. 707.

⁴⁶Interview with Dr. J. R. Wright, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, 7 November 1980.

be sung in worship, the debate rages over whether human compositions (hymns) and other portions of Scripture can be sung as well as Psalms. The Reformed Presbyterian Church position follows the Westminster Assembly which taught exclusive psalmody. In the Testimony a summary of the scriptural proof for this position is given.

Does the Westminster Confession teach exclusive psalmody? Some recent works have argued that it does not. For example, Dr. Robert Rayburn, professor of Practical Theology at Covenant Seminary, said, referring to Chapter 21, section 5a above that it includes the phrase, "'singing of psalms with grace in the heart,' but no mention is made of hymns and spiritual songs. This omission does not mean that we should sing the Old Testament Psalms only. The Confession uses the word in a wider sense to refer to hymns sung to God."⁴⁷ Charles Dunahoo expressed a similar sentiment in The PCA Messenger.⁴⁸

The historical evidence proves that the Westminster Confession teaches exclusive psalmody. Horton Davies shows that the Puritans and Presbyterians (who wrote the Confession) chose metrical Psalms in contrast to the Anglicans who sang hymns.⁴⁹ Since there was an ongoing controversy over Psalms and uninspired hymns, the Westminster Assembly would have watched its language carefully, and not said Psalms when hymns were meant. Second, Chapter 21 of the Confession is to be interpreted by the

⁴⁷Robert G. Rayburn, O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 94-95.

⁴⁸Charles Dunahoo, "Foundation and Authority for the Christian Faith: Chapter XXI Westminster Confession of Faith," The PCA Messenger (September 1980):12.

⁴⁹Davies, Worship and Theology, 2:253, 268.

Directory for Public Worship, which was also written by the Assembly. This mentions only Psalms as suitable for singing. H. Davies puts it this way, "The duty of Psalm-singing was canonized in the Westminster Directory for both public and private worship. It encouraged psalmody strongly as unison singing and so apt for congregations," in contrast to "the elaboration of anthems to be sung only by expert musicians, and it [psalmody] was recommended as Scriptural and non-traditional."⁵⁰ Finally, the Assembly chose a Psalter, the third edition of Rous, and ordered it printed.⁵¹ If the Assembly had meant for hymns to be sung, it would have recommended a hymnal as well.

Do the Scriptures support the position of exclusive psalmody? If one accepts the Regulative Principle, nothing can be sung unless it is commanded, we must look at the Bible and ask: what was sung in worship? The Reformed agree that Psalms were the content of Old Testament praise, but disagree as to whether their exclusive use was continued in the New Testament. The debate rages over the phrase "psalms, hymns and spiritual sings" found in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16. Do the three words refer to the Biblical Psalms? If not, what do they mean?

Reformed Presbyterians see these three terms as referring to the Biblical Psalms. The argument is based largely on the Greek Old Testament's use of these terms. For example, the Greek heading of Psalm 76 reads "For the Presenter in hymns, a Psalm of Asaph, a Song with reference

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2:176.

⁵¹ Ibid., 2:278.

to the Assyrians."⁵²

The word "psalms" refers to the Book of Psalms in most of its Biblical usages. It occurs 87 times in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint), and 7 times in the Greek New Testament. In the Septuagint some 78 of the uses are in the Book of Psalms and 67 are in Psalm titles. In the Greek New Testament the word is used 7 times. Two uses are in the passages in question, Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16. In the other five, two are used with the phrase "Book of Psalms" and a third refers to the second Psalm. It is significant that 70 of the Bible's 94 usages refer to the Book of Psalms. It is also significant that none of the New Testament usages give any warrant for supposing "psalms" refer to uninspired human compositions.⁵³

The word "hymn" occurs 17 times in the Septuagint and twice in the New Testament. Of the 17 Old Testament passages 6 are psalm titles, and the remaining 11 refer to songs of praise to God. The verb form "to hymn" is found four times in the New Testament (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26;

⁵²Frank D. Frazer, "Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs," in The Biblical Doctrine of Worship, ed. Edward Robson (Pittsburgh: Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1974), p. 336.

⁵³Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Minutes of the Fourteenth General Assembly (n.p.: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1947), pp. 61-62. In the late 1940's the Orthodox Presbyterians who practiced hymn-singing debated the issue of exclusive psalmody. The advocates of exclusive Psalmody were defeated. The Minority Report, which we refer to, was written by William Young and John Murray. J. Murray served as professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary at the time of this dispute. A summary of the entire controversy, including exegetical arguments, was done: G. I. Williamson, "Trinity Hymnal: The Content of the Book of Praise in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," in The Biblical Doctrine of Worship, ed. Edward Robson (Pittsburgh: Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1974), pp. 265-74.

Acts 16:25; and Heb. 2:12). The synoptic passages probably refer to Jesus and the disciples singing the great Hallel (Psalm 113-118). Acts 16:25 refers to Paul and Silas singing in prison, and Heb. 2:12 is an Old Testament quotation. Again no evidence can be adduced for uninspired hymns.⁵⁴

The word "song" occurs 80 times in the Septuagint and 6 times in the New Testament. Of the Old Testament references 45 are in the Book of Psalms and 36 are Psalm titles. Two of the New Testament passages are the ones under discussion, and the remaining four are found in Revelation. Even though it is used in Revelation to refer to songs other than Psalms, the songs referred to are inspired by God. Again there is no reference to the use of uninspired human compositions.⁵⁵

The word "spiritual" (pneumatikais) is also significant in this discussion. Does this word modify "songs," or the whole phrase "psalms, hymns and songs"? Prof. John Murray supports the latter idea.

A reasonable answer to this question is to say that "pneumatikais" qualifies all three datives and that its gender (fem.) is due to attraction to the gender of the noun that is closest to it. Another distinct possibility, made particularly plausible by the omission of the copulative in Colossians 3:16, is that "Spiritual songs" are the genus of which "psalms" and hymns" are the species.⁵⁶

Now it is possible that "spiritual" only modifies "songs." If this is true, then the songs are inspired or indited by the Holy Spirit. The questions arises, is it only the "songs" that need to be inspired while the "hymns" and "Psalms" do not?

In the usage of Scripture there was no hard and fast line of distinction between psalms and hymns, on the one hand, and songs on the other. It would be quite impossible to find any good ground for such

⁵⁴Ibid. ⁵⁵Ibid. ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 63.

discrimination in the apostolic prescription.⁵⁷

In conclusion, there is no ground for the use of uninspired songs in worship. There the Biblical Psalms alone must be sung.

Instrumental Music in Worship

The next area of dispute among the Reformed relates to the use of instrumental music in worship. Again, there are those who believe that the Westminster Confession does not forbid the use of instruments in worship.⁵⁸ Their argument seems to say, since the Confession does not forbid it, it is allowed. This line of reasoning is in contradiction to the Regulative Principle that whatever is not commanded in worship is forbidden. Our conclusion is that The Westminster Assembly did not include instruments in the list of parts of worship or in its Directory for Worship because they considered them as forbidden.

The historical situation in the seventeenth century gives strong support to the Westminster Assembly favoring a capella singing in worship. Horton Davies shows, that while Puritans loved instrumental music, they had religious reasons for not using it in worship. "Puritans privately encouraged music, dancing, and portrait painting. If they were unable to encourage the use of organs and orchestras in divine worship, it was not that they disliked art, but that they loved religion more."⁵⁹ Percy Scholes records that Scottish Presbyterians, dedicated followers of

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁸Dunahoo, "Foundation and Authority," 4:12.

⁵⁹Davies, Worship and Theology, 2:254.

Westminster, did not use organs till the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ For a final piece of evidence, the Scottish General Assembly in 1644 congratulated the Westminster Assembly on the removal of organs at Westminster Abbey.⁶¹ The implication is that the Westminster Assembly had successfully protested their use.

At this point we will consider the Scriptural argument for a capella singing in worship. We will follow the argument of Rev. Paul Copeland, minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, which says that instruments were typical under the Old Covenant, rather than examples for us today. He gives three reasons for this position:

First, the whole ceremonial law was typical including the instruments which were commanded by God. Under the tabernacle instruments were used in worship with the sacrifice (Num. 10:10). They were not used with praise until the temple service (1 Chron. 29:25), and then only at the command of God.⁶²

Second, the typical character of the instruments can be seen more clearly from the context in which they were introduced. The temple is a part of Old Testament typology which preserved the heart of the ceremonial system and amplified the praise. It is applied to both Christ's body and the church. Rev. Copeland gives the key to his argument:

Thus, the whole temple worship ushered in a new dimension of typology

⁶⁰Percy A. Scholes, The Puritans and Music in England and New England (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 245.

⁶¹William McMillan, The Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church, 1550-1638 (Edinburgh: Lassodie Press, 1931), p. 99.

⁶²Paul Copeland, "The Sacrifice of Praise" (Pittsburgh: Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1981), pp. 6-7. (Mimeographed.) Girardeau, Instrumental Music, deals with this same topic.

in Old Testament worship. It is exceedingly difficult to argue that the temple was typical, and at the same time exclude the instrumental praise which became so integrally distinctive of temple worship from that typical significance.⁶³

The typical nature of instruments is also seen from the role of the Levites and sacrifice. The Levitical families of Asaph, Heman, and Juduthan were given responsibility for the instruments. Furthermore the instruments were used almost exclusively with the sacrifices. For example, in 2 Chron. 29:27-28, we learn that the song and instruments were sounded from the time when the offering began to when it ended. Since the priests and the sacrifice were typical, it is only reasonable to assume that the instruments which were associated with them were typical as well.⁶⁴

Third, John's use of instruments in Revelation is typical. It should be remembered as we look at passages from this book that it is full of symbolism and thus great care is required in determining whether a passage is to be taken literally or symbolically. In Rev. 5:8 twenty-four elders fell before the lamb each having a harp and bowls of incense, "which are the prayers of the saints." The incense is the prayers of the saints, and by implication the harps represent the praises of the saints. It should be added that these are God's harps, and Eph. 5:19 makes it clear that the human heart is the harp of God.⁶⁵ In Rev. 14:2, John hears a sound like the sound of harps being played. The sound is the new song

⁶³Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 9. The elders could not have been playing the harps, as they had "fallen down" before the lamb and were also carrying bowls of incense. Their only possible use was symbolic.

of salvation. Here the harp is presented as a symbol of joyful praise. This gives more evidence of the typical nature of instruments.⁶⁶

Rev. Copeland summarizes his position by showing Christ as the fulfillment of the typical temple worship:

Everything necessary to bring us into the presence of God has been accomplished by the finished work of Jesus Christ. . . .

The simplicity of New Testament worship serves to hold this blessed reality before us each time we gather together as a church in obedience to the ordinances of Christ for His worship. We no longer need a priest to burn incense before God for us continually. We have a High Priest in heaven who hears those prayers with which His people cry to him day and night. We no longer need to bring an animal for sacrifice each time we come together to worship. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. We no longer need the descendants of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthan to sing praise on our behalf to the accompaniment of instruments. God has made us all priests before Him and has given us each an instrument which only He can teach us to play--namely, a heart overflowing with the thankful song of salvation.⁶⁷

Other Parts of Worship

The next matter discussed in the Testimony (5e) is fasting. The practice of corporate fasting has all but died in the Reformed Presbyterian Church today, however the Testimony Revision Committee included this section in the hope of encouraging the practice.⁶⁸

Section 5f is new to both the Testimony and Confession. The practice of taking an offering during worship was not done in the early

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 11-12. The literature on the question of instruments in worship is extensive. On the practice of the Puritans see Scholes, The Puritans and Music, particularly chapters 14 and 15. On instruments in the early church see James W. McKinnon, "The Church Fathers and Musical Instruments" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1965). The fathers were against instruments.

⁶⁸Interview with Dr. Wayne Spear, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, 10 November 1980.

Puritan and Presbyterian churches in part, because England and Scotland had state churches which were supported via taxation.⁶⁹ While the Revision Committee did some studies on this topic, not every one was happy with considering the offering a part of worship. Dr. J. R. Wright, professor of New Testament at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, is one of the dissenters. He argues that while the offering was collected on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2), this does not prove it was an act of worship. He points to the practice of the Church of Scotland, where the offering is collected before the service.⁷⁰

CONFESSION

6a. Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now under the Gospel either tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed; but God is to be worshipped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself; so more solemnly, in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or wilfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by His Word or providence, calleth thereunto. John 4:21; Mal. 1:11; 1 Tim. 2:8; John 4:23-24; Jer. 10:25; Deut. 6:6-7; Job 1:5; 2 Sam. 6:18, 20; 1 Pet. 3:7; Acts 10:2; Matt. 6:11; Isa. 56:6-7; Heb. 10:25; Prov. 1:20-21, 24; Prov. 8:34; Acts 13:42; Luke 4:16; Acts 2:42.

TESTIMONY

6b. Heads of families are responsible for leadership in family worship. Gen. 18:19; Eph. 6:4.

6c. Worship in small groups is also encouraged by the Scripture. Acts 5:42; 12:12.

⁶⁹Ibid. The Directory for Public Worship written by the Westminster Assembly did have provision for an offering for the poor. It is not entirely clear if the offering was a part of the service or not.

⁷⁰Interview with Dr. J. R. Wright, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, 7 November 1980.

Paragraph 6 teaches that men are responsible to worship in families and in "secret" (personal devotions) as well as in small groups. In the Bible, we see godly men such as Abraham, Job and Joshua worshipping with their families. Rev. Robert Shaw listed some advantages of family worship:

The practice of family worship tends to promote even the temporal prosperity of families; for it is the blessing of God that maketh rich and prosperous; and what more likely way to obtain that blessing than for a whole family to join in prayer and ask it daily of God? (Prov. 3:33) Much more does family worship tend to promote the spiritual and eternal interests of families, while it is also the most effectual means to propagate religion from generation to generation.⁷¹

The example of Jesus in daily devotions is frequently used to motivate men. Rev. Shaw endorses personal devotions as "an eminent means to promote genuine piety; and the regular and conscientious practice of this duty is one of the best evidences of Christian sincerity."⁷² Finally paragraph 6 says that the limitation of worship to some holy places is done away with.⁷³

The Testimony adds two comments to this paragraph. The first makes the head of the family, generally the father, responsible for family worship, and the second is an encouragement to meet in small groups. The latter comment is from the old Testimony section on society meetings, and attempts to make it more contemporary.⁷⁴

⁷¹Robert Shaw, An Exposition of the Confession of Faith of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1846), p. 253.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 253-54.

⁷³Hodge, Commentary, p. 378.

⁷⁴Interview with W. Spear.

CONFESSION

7a. As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages, He hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath to be kept holy unto Him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath. Exod. 20:8, 10-11; Isa. 56:2, 4, 6-7; Gen. 2:2-3; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 22:7; Rev. 1:10; Exod. 20:8, 10 with Matt. 5:17-18.

8a. 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. Exod. 20:8; Exod. 16:23, 25-26, 29:30; Exod. 31:15-17; Isa. 58:13; Neh. 13:15-19, 21-22; Isa. 58:13; Matt. 12:1-13.

7b. We reject the teaching that the Fourth Commandment is no longer binding under the New Testament.

8b. God promises rich blessings for keeping the Lord's Day holy. Isa. 56:2-7; 58:13-14; Mark 2:27.

The last two sections, 7 and 8, on Sabbath-keeping, are beyond the scope of this paper. We would note that the Sabbath is to be a day of corporate worship services, and a day of rest. Both practices are still

the rule in the Covenanter church. The Testimony additions condemn the rejection of the Fourth Commandment, and encourage Sabbath-keeping by mentioning the blessings resulting from this practice.

Summary

We would make the following observations on this chapter. First, the theology and practice of the Reformed Presbyterian worship are almost identical to that of the Westminster Assembly. With the exception of the offering, there has been no addition to the parts of worship, and no element has been deleted. The additions in the Testimony have mainly been for defense or clarification, and not for theological invention. Thus a 17th century Presbyterian would be at home in a modern Reformed Presbyterian worship service. The clothes would be different, the style of worship more informal, the building would have heating and/or air conditioning, but the parts of the worship service would be the same. Indeed, the old Presbyterian would find a few Psalms, like Psalm 100, to which he knew both the words and the tune.

How does the doctrine of Reformed Presbyterian Worship differ from that of other Presbyterian churches? From some it does not. The Reformed Presbyterian Churches of Scotland, Ireland, Japan, and the Free Church of Scotland worship the same way. The position of exclusive Psalmody and a capella singing is more unique in the United States, where only a small number of groups sing in the same way. The smaller, more conservative Presbyterian churches such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the other Reformed Presbyterian Church (the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod) sing hymns with instruments, but still profess to hold to the Regulative Principle of Worship. Among the larger Presbyterian

churches the Regulative Principle is all but forgotten. Indeed, there is now liturgical movement in the large Presbyterian churches. The United Presbyterian Church, for example, has even adopted an optional liturgy. In contrast, Reformed Presbyterians still remember their heritage, and still desire scriptural fidelity in worship.

CHAPTER V

THE SACRAMENTS

No study of worship can be complete without a section on the theology of the sacraments. In this chapter we will survey the sacraments using the appropriate sections of the Westminster Confession-Reformed Presbyterian Testimony, and discuss some of the problems in applying these doctrines. Our readers will find that the Covenanter doctrine of the Sacraments is in the mainstream of classical Reformed thought.

General Teaching on the Sacraments

The Westminster Confession has three chapters on the sacraments. Chapter 27 is on the sacraments in general, Chapter 28 on Baptism, and Chapter 29 on the Lord's supper. We will begin with Chapter 27.

CHAPTER 27: OF THE SACRAMENTS (Larger Catechism: 161-177; Shorter Catechism: 91-97)

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION

1. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and His benefits; and to confirm our interest in Him; as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His word. Rom. 4:11; Gen. 17:7, 10; Matt.

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The sacraments are signs of our covenant union with Christ and His Church, and our common profession that we are owned by him. They are to be observed under the direction of the elders in a service of worship in which members of the congregation are present. 1 Cor. 11:23-24; 10:21; Acts 2:42; Num. 9:14.

28:19; 1 Cor. 11:23; 1 Cor. 10:16;
 1 Cor. 11:25-26; Gal. 3:17; Rom.
 15:8; Exod. 12:48; Gen. 34:14;
 Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 10:16, 21.

2. There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other. Gen. 17:10; Matt. 26:27-28; Titus 3:5.

Paragraph 1 teaches that sacraments are instituted by Christ, that they are signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace, that they represent the benefits of Jesus to us, encouraging our interest in Him, that they show a visible difference between church members and the world (non-Christians cannot partake of the sacraments), and engage believers in the service of Christ.

At the time of the Westminster Assembly the use of the sacraments outside some branch of the visible church was unthinkable. In twentieth century America, however, there is much "religion" outside the churches in groups such as Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade, and so forth. In addition to these organized groups, there are numerous Bible study and prayer groups having no affiliation with any organization. What role do these have with respect to the sacraments? The Testimony answers this question by saying that sacraments should only be observed by the church in regular worship services. Against modern individualism, the Testimony says that the sacraments are signs of our union with the other believers in the church, as well as our union with Jesus Christ. Therefore, they can only be observed properly as a corporate act of the whole

congregation¹ (see 1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Paragraph 2 discusses the relation between the signs of the sacrament and the sacrament itself. What is said of the elements used in the sacraments, and generally of the sacramental action, is strictly true only of the action it represents. For example, the washing of water in baptism is not regeneration, but has a sacramental relation to the receiving of the Holy Spirit, which constitutes the principle of regeneration. The eating of bread and wine is not the securing of the gift of forgiveness, but symbolizes the saving act of Christ.²

CONFESSION

3. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them: neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it: but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers. Rom. 2:28-29; 1 Peter 3:21; Matt. 3:11; 1 Cor. 12:13; Matt. 26:27-28; Matt. 28:19-20.

4. There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained. Matt. 28:19;

TESTIMONY

The administration of the sacraments is to be accompanied by the reading and preaching of the Word. Acts 2:42; 20:7.

We reject the view that sacraments are mere symbols and not means of grace.

We reject the view that the sacraments are not necessary in the church.

¹Interview with Dr. E. C. Copeland, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pa., 13 January 1981.

²Archibald A. Hodge, A Commentary on the Confession of Faith, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1869), pp. 448-49.

1 Cor. 11:20, 23; 1 Cor. 4:1;
Heb. 5:4.

5. The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New. 1 Cor. 10:1-4.

Paragraph 3 explains what makes the sacrament effectual. The efficacy does not depend on the power contained in the Sacrament nor the piety or the intention of the administrator as Rome claims.³ Instead it depends on the work of the Holy Spirit and the (Biblical) word of institution which contains a promise of benefit to worthy receivers, and a promise of judgement to non-believers and unworthy believers who eat or are baptized not having confessed and turned from their sins. The purpose of the sacraments is to strengthen our faith. While the efficacy is not found in bread, wine, or water, they are a visible sign of God's promised work in believers so that believers may have full assurance of faith.⁴

The Testimony adds to this paragraph that the sacraments are to be accompanied by the reading and preaching of the Word. The ideas behind this are first, that the Holy Spirit works through the reading and preaching of the Word. Incorporating other means of grace with the sacraments gives the Spirit more opportunity to work.⁵ Second, the sacraments are acts of worship, and should be part of a worship service. They should not be administered to some non-church group outside of worship.

³Ibid., pp. 452-53.

⁴John Murray, Collected Writings of John Murray, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 2:368.

⁵Copeland, Interview.

Paragraph 4 says that there are two Biblical sacraments in opposition to the seven of Rome. The Reformed believe that the criteria established by the Lord's Supper and Baptism must be satisfied for a ceremony to be called a sacrament. These include institution by Christ, an outward sensible (obvious to the five senses) sign which signifies an inward spiritual grace, a purpose that represents, seals and applies the benefits of Christ and the new covenant to believers, and a pledge of the believer's loyalty to Christ which in a visible way separates him from the world.⁶

The Testimony, in an addition to paragraph 4, rejects the Zwinglian view that the sacraments are mere symbols, and the Quaker view that they are not necessary to the church.⁷ Reformed Presbyterians see the sacraments as means of grace given to the church for administration.

Another point made in paragraph 4 is that only ordained ministers can administer the sacraments. This does not support a priestly theory of the ministry, but supports the view that sacraments are only to be administered by the visible church. Since sacraments are badges of church membership, they "can properly be administered only by the highest legal officers of the Church, those who are commissioned as ambassadors for Christ to treat in his name with men."⁸

Paragraph 5 teaches that the Old Testament sacraments were the

⁶Hodge, Commentary, pp. 446-47.

⁷Interview with Dr. J. R. Wright, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pa., January 1981 (Exact date uncertain).

⁸Hodge, Commentary, pp. 455-56.

same in substance as those of the New Testament. This assumes one covenant of grace with the Passover becoming the Lord's Supper and circumcision becoming baptism. The differences are that the new sacraments are commemorative and spiritual, while the Old were more typical and prospective.⁹

Baptism

We now turn our attention to the sacrament of baptism. We will follow the organization of a commentary on the Confession-Testimony including discussions of other matters relating to baptism in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

We now turn our attention to Chapter 28 of the Confession-Testimony.

CHAPTER 28: OF BAPTISM (Larger Catechism: 161-177; Shorter Catechism: 92-95)

CONFESSION

1. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, or regeneration, or remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world. Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 4:11 with Col. 2:11-12; Gal. 3:27;

TESTIMONY

All those who have received baptism are to be considered part of the covenant people of God. Gen. 17:12-14; Col. 2:11-12; Acts 16:31-34.

⁹Ibid., p. 456.

Rom. 6:5; Titus 3:5; Mark 1:4;
Rom. 6:3-4; Matt. 28:19-20.

2. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, where- with the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the Gospel, law- fully called thereunto. Matt. 3:11; John 1:33; Matt. 28:19-20.

3. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person. Heb. 9:10, 19-22; Acts 2:41; Acts 16:33; Mark 7:4.

We reject the teaching that an essen- tial feature of baptism is immersion. 1 Cor. 10:2; Heb. 6:2; 9:10; Luke 11:38.

Paragraphs 1-3 discuss the function and means of Baptism. Baptism is a sacrament instituted by Jesus for admission into the visible church and as a seal of the covenant of grace which included remission of sins, union with Christ, and sanctification. Water is an outward sign of the sacrament. The person is to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by an ordained minister. Baptism is limited to ministers because it is an ordinance of the visible church. The Confession goes on to say that the proper way to administer baptism is by sprinkling or pour- ing. Immersion, while not forbidden, is not regarded as proper.

The Mode of Baptism

In the past the Synod has discussed the mode of baptism. The Re- formed Presbyterian Church holds that the proper mode of baptism is sprin- kling or pouring as the Westminster Confession teaches. The reasoning be- hind this view is that the ceremonial cleansings in the Old Testament were done by sprinkling, so the cleansing by baptism should be by sprinkling. The argument continues that John the Baptist originally used sprinkling

because it would have meant more to Jews. They would have been reminded of the temple cleansing, while immersion would have meant nothing to them.¹⁰

There is also the linguistic evidence for baptism by sprinkling. For example, Mark 17:4 uses the Greek word for baptize in the phrase "when they" (the Pharisees) "come from the market, except they baptize they eat not." It is hard to believe that the Pharisees submerged themselves after every trip from the market. The same verse speaks of baptizing couches or tables, a reference to the ceremonial cleansing by sprinkling of Num. 19:18. It would be difficult to immerse the couches or tables.¹¹ While there is more evidence that sprinkling is the scriptural mode of baptism, we can offer only this brief outline.

Since Reformed Presbyterians do not consider immersion as a proper mode of baptism, will they accept baptism by immersion as valid? The answer is yes. In 1883 the Synod was asked whether congregations should consider baptism by immersion as valid. The Synod said yes because:

1. It is our custom to accept baptism by immersion.
2. While immersion is an unbiblical mode, we cannot admit that an imperfection in mode of baptism invalidates it. Thus when the sign is there and ". . . when it is applied as directed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and that in an avowed symbolic and sacramental sense, and for a symbolic and sacramental purpose, then there are present

¹⁰Robert G. Rayburn, What About Baptism? (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 31-32. Dr. Rayburn is professor of Practical Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 26-29.

all the elements constituting a real administration of that ordinance."

3. We don't believe the validity of the sacrament depends on the amount of water used, but on the spiritual cleansing. 4. If we don't accept immersion we would say the Baptists are not a true church. This we refuse to do, on the other hand, "This we do in relation to Rome by refusing to accept her baptism and ordination, but we think it would be utterly unjustifiable to place Baptist churches in the same category."¹² Thus immersion baptism is accepted as valid.

The Testimony adds statements to this section of the Confession. The first relates to the status of baptized persons with respect to the visible church. When an adult is baptized, it is after conversion, and he is almost always received into the congregation the same day on confession or profession of faith. However, when an infant is baptized, he is unable to make a profession of faith. What status should baptized infants have? Should they be considered church members? The Reformed Presbyterian answer is yes. After the infant is baptized he is added to the roll of the congregation as a baptized member. When he becomes older and can make a creditable profession of faith, he will become a communicant member.

The second Testimony addition is on baptism by immersion. Against the Baptists and other immersionists, the idea that the efficacy of baptism is dependent on the amount of water used is rejected. This simply strengthens the Confession's position.

¹²Minutes, 1883, pp. 220-21.

CONFESSION

4. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents, are to be baptized. Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:37-38; Gen. 17:7, 9-10 with Gal. 3:9, 14 and Col. 2:11-12 and Acts 2:38-39 and Rom. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 7:14; Matt. 18:19; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15.

TESTIMONY

The children of believing parents are to receive baptism because of their covenantal relationship. Acts 2:38-39; Gen. 17:7; Acts 16:31; Col. 2:11-12.

The baptism of infants sets before parents the obligation to do all in their power to lead their children to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. Gen. 18:19; Matt. 28:19-20; Prov. 22:6.

Baptism is not to be administered to the infants of persons who, though members of the Church, have so neglected the means of grace as to cast doubt on their profession, or their intention to fulfill the baptismal vows. Psalm 76:11.

In recent years the Reformed Baptist movement has grown stronger. This has led to increasing debate with orthodox Presbyterians over the question of infant baptism. The Westminster Confession states only that infants of one or more believing parents are to be baptized. The Testimony, in answer to the Baptists, goes farther by giving the covenant relationship that extends to parents and their children as the reason for infant baptism. The thinking behind this is that baptism parallels circumcision in the new covenant-old covenant relationship. Since circumcision was done to infants and was a mark of their admission to the Covenant people, it is concluded that baptism should be applied to infants as well.

Baptism and Regeneration

Let us now consider how Reformed Presbyterians see baptism as affecting the spiritual state of infants.

Since the Reformed Presbyterians do not accept the doctrine of

baptismal regeneration, what relationship do they see between regeneration and baptism for infants? Rev. Dean Smith, minister of the College Hill Reformed Presbyterian Church in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, studied this question in a paper comparing the baptismal vows of various Reformed denominations. He concluded that three views of regeneration were taught in the baptismal vows. "Presumptive regeneration" is the view that the "children of believers who are presented for baptism are presumed to be regenerated." This view is implied by the baptismal vows of the Christian Reformed Church. "Anticipatory regeneration" teaches that "children of believers are presented for baptism on the basis of the covenant of grace in anticipation that God will regenerate them in his appointed time." This view allows that God may have already regenerated the child. While the "appointed time" can never be known for certain, however the church indicates her belief that it has come by accepting the believer's profession of faith (evidence of a personal, experiential relation with God in Christ Jesus, evidence of repentance and faith, a commitment to live by Biblical ethical standards, and a basic knowledge of Christian doctrine), in the process of church membership. The third view is "presumptive non-regeneration" which "means that the child is viewed as non-regenerated and in need of regeneration and conversion." The ordination vows of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (not the denomination discussed in this paper) are broad enough to allow this view. (However, not all men in that denomination hold this position.)¹³

¹³Dean R. Smith, "The Theology of Baptismal Vows: A comparison of Four Presbyterian and Reformed Churches," a paper presented to Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary for ST 37, Readings in Theology, May, 1980, pp. 2-3, 12, 19.

The baptismal vows of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America take the position of anticipatory regeneration with a slight ambiguity. When the baptismal vow calls for parents to acquaint the child with his lost condition, it does not specify whether it means naturally lost condition as a descendant of Adam or that the child is presently lost as the parent deals with him. The former implies anticipatory regeneration, the latter presumptive non-regeneration.

Parents and Infant Baptism

The next question answered is what are the responsibilities of the parents after baptism? Parents are not to assume their children are saved, but are to do all they can to lead their children to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. The ways of doing this listed in the baptismal vows include: praying with and for them, family worship, acquainting them with their lost condition, instructing them in the plan of salvation, attending worship with them, and using parental authority with love.

The final Testimony addition gives a partial definition of the term "believing parent" found in the above paragraph of the Confession. While we hope all church members are Christians, we find some members we wonder about. These members are not the ones involved in serious sin, this class of members is either repenting or undergoing discipline. Rather these are the people who come to church occasionally, who donate occasionally, but who do not have family devotions or private devotions or otherwise regularly use the means of grace. Since these people have not kept their membership vows which require a diligent use of the means of grace, there is a serious doubt as to their intention to fulfill the baptismal vows. Their children cannot be baptized until there is repentance

and better behaviour.

Baptism and Salvation

Paragraphs 5-7 deal with the relation between baptism and salvation.

CONFESSION

5. Although it be great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it; or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated. Luke 7:30 with Exod. 4:24-26; Rom. 4:11; Acts 10:2, 4, 22, 31, 45, 47; Acts 8:13, 23.

6. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will in His appointed time. John 3:5, 8; Gal. 3:27; Titus 3:5; Eph. 5:25-26; Acts 2:38, 41.

7. The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered unto any person. Titus 3:5.

TESTIMONY

We reject the teaching that a person cannot be saved without baptism; or that persons are regenerated by baptism. Luke 23:39-43; Acts 8:13; 8:18-23; 10:47.

Paragraph 5 begins the discussion of the relation between baptism and salvation. While the failure to be baptized is a sin, baptism and salvation are not so closely connected that salvation is impossible without it or that all who are baptized are regenerated by baptism (baptismal

regeneration).

When and to whom is baptism efficacious? Paragraph 6 teaches that the time of baptism is not necessarily the time of efficacy. While God may choose to regenerate a child at baptism, He may also wait several years to make baptism efficacious in the life of a person baptized as an infant. But God will confer the promised grace on all the elect, according to His will and His time.

The Testimony simply repeats the Confession on baptismal regeneration. Why? Because there are still many who believe in baptismal regeneration, such as Roman Catholics and some Anglo-Catholics. The new Episcopal Book of Common Prayer assumes it in some prayers for baptism. Because this belief is still with us, the Testimony speaks against it.

The Validity of Baptism

Paragraph 7 concludes by saying that baptism is only to be administered once to every person. This concludes the commentary on the Confession and leads us to one of the more interesting positions held by Reformed Presbyterians, that the baptism of some "churches" is invalid.

Few, if any, Christian denominations would accept the baptism of a cult, like the Mormons, as valid. However, where is the line drawn between a cult and a church? How much heresy can a denomination have before it is no longer a true church? The Reformed Presbyterian "solution" was to accept only baptisms from "evangelical" churches. The Reformed Presbyterian Book of Church Government says, "The church accepts as valid the baptism which has been properly administered by a recognized minister

of an evangelical church."¹⁵ Historically, this meant that Roman Catholic baptism was not accepted as valid, but the baptism of any Protestant or Orthodox church was.

With the growth of liberalism and cults in recent times it was decided to more closely define "evangelical church." The 1974 committee report defined an "evangelical church" as one that held to salvation by grace alone and not to salvation by works. The report read, "An evangelical church is one which confesses in her creed and maintains in her preaching ministry, sacraments, and discipline, the doctrines of grace so that one adhering to such a church as a member might be reasonably assumed to be saved unto life eternal." Synod accepted the definition, reconsidered it and took no action.¹⁶ This probably showed a reluctance to judge other denominations and some dissatisfaction with the definition. The unfortunate result is that sessions must reach their decisions on the validity of baptism without guidelines. The practice of accepting the baptism of all Protestant and Orthodox churches will probably continue.

Summary

In this section we have briefly viewed the Reformed Presbyterian position on baptism. We have seen that it follows the classical Reformed doctrine of baptism and that it has answered some problems concerning infant baptism and the relation between baptism and regeneration, but still faces the problem of deciding what denominations' baptism is acceptable.

¹⁵Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, p. 230.

¹⁶Minutes, 1974, pp. 18, 55, 129-30.

The Lord's Supper

Having discussed baptism we will now move to Chapter 29 of the Confession and discuss the Lord's Supper.

CHAPTER 29: OF THE LORD'S SUPPER
(Larger Catechism: 168-177; Shorter Catechism: 92-93, 96-97)

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION

1. Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in His Church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death; the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body.
1 Cor. 11:23-26; 1 Cor. 10:16-17;
1 Cor. 12:13.

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN
TESTIMONY

The Lord's Supper is to be repeatedly administered to a Christian congregation, at such times as the session deems advisable, according to the needs of the congregation. Observance of this sacrament is a corporate and personal profession of continued adherence to the covenant bond entered into at baptism. 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

In the first paragraph we learn that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the night that He was betrayed to be observed till the end of the world for the perpetual remembrance of His death. Its purpose is to be a commemoration of the death of Christ. It encourages the spiritual growth of Christians, and is a pledge of their Communion with Him and each other, as members of His body.¹⁷

The Testimony's addition to this paragraph answers a question and discusses the church's role in the sacrament. How often should the sacrament be administered? Answer, as often as the session feels it is

¹⁷Hodge, Commentary, pp. 483-84.

needed. This makes the elders of each congregation responsible for determining the frequency of the Lord's Supper. The Testimony gives no criteria for determining need, because it is assumed that the session will be close enough to the people of the congregation to know their need. The Testimony also states that the observance of the sacrament is a corporate as well as an individual observance. This is against the common error that "religion is a private matter between me and my God." The Testimony says that religion is a matter between God, individuals, and the body of Christ.

In paragraphs 2-6 the Reformed view is contrasted with the Roman.

CONFESSION

TESTIMONY

2. In this sacrament, Christ is not offered up to His Father; nor any real sacrifice made at all for remission of sins of the quick or dead; but only a commemoration of that one offering up of Himself, upon the cross, once for all: and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same: so that the Popish sacrifice of the mass (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christ's one, only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of His elect. Heb. 9:22, 25-26, 28; 1 Cor. 11:24-26; Matt. 26:26-27; Heb. 7:23-24, 27; Heb. 10:11-12, 14, 18.

3. The Lord Jesus, hath, in this ordinance, appointed His ministers to declare His word of institution to the people; to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to a holy use; and to take the cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the communicants; but to

none who are not then present in the congregation. Matt. 26:26-28 and Mark 14:22-24 and Luke 22:19-20 with 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20.

4. Private masses, or receiving this sacrament by a priest or any other alone; as likewise, the denial of the cup to the people, worshipping the elements, the lifting them up or carrying them about for adoration, and the reserving them for any pretended religious use; are all contrary to the nature of this sacrament, and to the institution of Christ. 1 Cor. 10:16; Mark 14:23; 1 Cor. 11:25-29; Matt. 15:9.

5. The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to Him crucified, as that, truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ; albeit in substance and nature they still remain truly and only bread and wine, as they were before. Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:26-28; Matt. 26:29.

6. That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood (commonly called transubstantiation) by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason; overthroweth the nature of the sacrament, and hath been, and is the cause of manifold superstitions; yea, of gross idolatries. Acts 3:21 with 1 Cor. 11:24-26; Luke 24:6, 39.

When a congregation is observing the Lord's Supper, worship services in which this sacrament is observed may be held for the sick and invalid who are of sound mind in the presence of members of the session and congregation. There is no instance in Scripture of private communion. 1 Cor. 11:33; Acts 20:7.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is not to be exalted above the regular preaching of the Word.

Paragraph 2 teaches that the eucharist is a commemoration and not

a sacrifice. The Roman church sees the body of Christ as being resacrificed each time there is a Mass. The Reformed see the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as done once, perfectly, and the Lord's Supper a commemoration of His finished work.

Paragraphs 3 and 4 teach that the ministers declare the word of institution to the people, and set apart the bread and wine by prayer. Both bread and wine are to be given to those present, but nothing is to be given to those not present. This contrasts with the traditional Roman practices of denying the cup to the laity, private Masses, and the priest administering the sacrament alone.

The Testimony includes a qualification on the Reformed doctrine of communion. In the case of sick or invalid, a delegation from the congregation including elders may visit the sick and invalid, and perform an abbreviated worship service that includes the Lord's Supper. The difference between this and the Roman custom is the presence of the members of the congregation.

The second matter addressed by the Testimony under paragraph 4 is the place of the Lord's Supper among the means of grace. In the Reformed Presbyterian Church there is a tendency to exalt the Lord's Supper above the other means of grace. Since the Testimony Revision Committee found no Biblical support for any one means of grace being more important than any other, it attacked the view. In conformity with the Reformed view of Biblical authority, the Committee believed that it was wrong to teach or believe doctrines that the Bible does not teach.¹⁸

¹⁸Wright, Interview.

In paragraphs 5 and 6 the effect of the sacrament on the bread and wine is discussed. While the bread and wine are set apart from a common to a sacred use in the sacrament and represent the body and blood of Christ, they do not become the body and blood of Christ. The Roman position is that the wine and bread become the body and blood by transubstantiation.

Paragraph 7 discusses how believers feed on the sacrament, and paragraph 8 discusses the judgement of unworthy partakers.

CONFESSION

7. Worthy receivers outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses. 1 Cor. 11:28; 1 Cor. 10:16.

8. Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament: yet they receive not the thing signified thereby, but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord to their own damnation. Wherefore, all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with Him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table; and cannot, without great sin against Christ while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto. 1 Cor. 11:27-29; 2 Cor. 6:14-16;

TESTIMONY

Previous preparation, by self-examination, repentance of sin, meditation upon God's grace, and resolution of new obedience is required of those who make this profession of their union with Christ and love to Him. 1 Cor. 11:27-32; 10:21-22.

The Lord's Supper is to be administered only to those who are accepted by the session dispensing the sacrament.

We deny that the individual is sole judge of his fitness to partake of the sacrament. 1 Cor. 5:1-3.

We reject the practice of offering the sacrament of Communion to any one who is not a member of the visible church.

Paragraph 7 teaches that worthy receivers (that is, Christians who have properly prepared for the sacrament as described below) partake of the bread and wine and feed on Christ crucified by faith. The body of Christ is spiritually present to the faith of believers in contrast to the Lutheran position that Christ is present "in, with and under" the elements. The Confession says that the bread and wine, while always remaining bread and wine, represent the body and blood of Christ. The body and blood are only present as virtues and effects of the sacrifice of Christ's body and are conveyed to the worthy receiver by the Holy Spirit. When it is said that believers feed on Christ, it means that they receive by faith the benefits of His death.¹⁹

The Testimony adds preparation to this paragraph. For centuries Presbyterian churches have taught that preparation is necessary before taking communion. The Testimony Revision Committee included this common Reformed Presbyterian practice to emphasize its importance in a time when many American Presbyterian churches have dropped the practice. The listing of steps of preparation, such as self-examination, repentance, meditation and new obedience, show a pastoral concern.

Paragraph 9 teaches that non-Christians and Christians who refuse to repent and turn from sinful practices cannot receive more than the outward elements of the sacrament. Instead, they commit great sin and are guilty of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

The Testimony adds three items to this paragraph. The first puts the responsibility of admission to the sacrament on the session dispensing

¹⁹Hodge, Commentary, p. 492.

the sacrament. In Presbyterian churches the elders are responsible for maintaining the purity of the Church, and part of this responsibility is to bar non-Christians and unrepentant Christians from the sacrament. In Reformed Presbyterian practice this means that the session interviews everyone who desires membership (which includes permission to commune) in the local Covenanter congregation. The session also interviews members of other Christian churches who wish to take communion with the purpose of learning if there is evidence of conversion and good morals, and the session bars members living in unrepentant sin and persons not given permission from communing at the Lord's Table.

The Testimony also denies that the individual is the sole judge of his fitness to take the sacrament. The Scripture passage cited in support of this is informative. In 1 Cor. 5 Paul tells the Corinthian Church to remove a wicked man from among them. This shows that the church has a say in determining the fitness of a person to partake the sacrament.

The final rejection is against the practice of offering the sacrament to persons who do not belong to the visible church. For example, the Protestant Episcopal Church allows any baptized person to partake of the sacrament. In contrast Reformed Presbyterians allow only communicant members (children are not permitted to commune) to partake of the sacrament. The thinking behind this is since the sacraments are the responsibility of the visible church to administer, only those who commit themselves to the church via membership can partake.

Close and Session Controlled Communion

The Reformed Presbyterian Church has had no doctrinal disputes on the theology of the Lord's Supper, but she has had a number of practical

ones. The one which is most informative to the whole Christian church is the change from close communion (only members of the denomination are allowed to commune) to session-controlled communion (only members of the local congregation and members of other churches, including other Reformed Presbyterian congregations, who have been interviewed by the session are allowed to commune).

To understand the controversy over admission to communion, we must approach it from the doctrine of the church rather than the doctrine of the sacraments. This issue involves such questions as denominationalism, the requirements for church membership, the nature of the church, and the responsibility of the visible church in discipline.

Before continuing, we will define four terms. Congregation refers to a local church, for example the First Church of Xville, Catholic church refers to the whole visible church, church refers to a particular denomination, and churches refers to more than one denomination.

The first thing we will consider is denominationalism. Is it the intention of Jesus that the sacrament be administered along denominational lines? No, but it is not our problem today. While the divisions are caused by sin, they do exist, and since we can't ignore them we must ask, "In view of the deplorable fact that denominations do exist what is the bearing of the Lord's will, as revealed in His Word, on the requirements for admission to the Lord's Supper in a Church which believes its principles to be scriptural?"²⁰

A second problem is the requirements for church membership. Since the Lord's Supper is a privilege of members in good standing (believers

²⁰Minutes, 1953, p. 140.

who have joined a church and live according to Christian moral standards), the real question is "What does Scripture teach as to the requirements for membership in good standing in the church?"²¹ It has always been the position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church that the "terms of membership" (that is, qualifications for membership) are the same as the "terms of communion" (formerly a summary of Reformed Presbyterian doctrine in the form of six questions which by implication was changed to the present meaning of qualifications for partaking of communion). The denomination did drop close communion till it was decided that the terms of membership should be less restrictive. The terms of membership were changed from a belief in Christ for salvation and obedience, a submission to the church, and a full belief in Reformed Presbyterian Doctrine to a belief in Christ for salvation and obedience, a submission to the church, a belief in the authority of the infallible scriptures and a few other basic doctrines.

To deal with the questions asked above we must now consider the doctrine of the Church as seen by Reformed Presbyterians. There are two views of the visible church, the "low" and the "high." The "low" view says that

. . . membership in a church and participation in its sacraments does not involve moral responsibility for the faith and life of other members nor a responsibility for the denomination as a whole. Those who unite with a denomination do not feel that they thereby become responsible, before God, for its faith, practice and purity. Rather, membership is felt to be an individual matter, and the choice of a denomination is regarded as a matter of expediency or "preference" rather than as a matter of moral obligation or principle.²²

²¹Ibid., p. 138.

²²Ibid., p. 143.

The "high" view of the church stresses the corporate character and joint moral responsibility of the church. It is stated briefly as follows:

The Church is responsible for all its members: each member is responsible for the other members and for the Church as a whole. Membership is understood to imply approval of the creed and principles of the Church. People who hold the "high" view of the Church do not leave one denomination and join another for reasons of convenience or expediency. They retain membership in the denomination which has their approval, regardless of the inconveniences and sacrifices which may be involved.²³

The high view of the church has traditionally been held by Reformed Presbyterians.

The high view of the church cannot be understood apart from the Church discipline associated with the Lord's Supper in Reformed circles. Discipline must be practiced because the congregation must be corporately as well as individually pure, (see Joshua 7 and Acts 5:1-16) and because love for the sinner motivates the elders to try to gain the sinner's repentance. The difficulty of taking disciplinary action against someone who is not a member of the congregation was an argument in favor of close communion.

Discipline relates not only to actions, but also to beliefs. As the Bible teaches in Gal. 5:20 and other passages, heresy, or wrong belief, is a sin. Now since the church believes that unrepentant believers may not commune, only those who have repented of wrong beliefs, and adopted true ones may commune. Therefore if someone comes to our congregation from another denomination whose beliefs differ from ours, he is a heretic and may not commune, until he repents of his errors. This, briefly, was the rationale for the former Reformed Presbyterian position on close

²³Ibid., p. 144.

communion.

There were a number of problems with close communion. Not all Reformed Presbyterians believed every point of their denomination's doctrine. Other Reformed Presbyterians did not understand parts of their denomination's doctrine well enough to know if they believed it or not. Probably the best argument against close communion was brought by those who argued that the Apostles did not require a long learning process before allowing new believers to be baptized and commune, as in Acts 2. The New Testament pattern seemed to be to allow new converts to join the church and then instruct them, rather than the opposite. In the 1970's matters came to a debate in Synod. In 1977 the denomination voted to change the terms of membership (that is, questions asked new members) and replace close communion with "session controlled" communion.²⁴

At this time we will present a proof for session controlled communion. Interestingly, this was first used in 1953 to defend close communion. The only major change is that the understanding of what the rules of the Lord's house are have changed to make them less restrictive. Standards of doctrinal orthodoxy and moral practice must now take into account individual differences, such as mental ability, age, length of time since conversion, and so forth.

Having completed the above qualifications, we offer the proof:

1. Since the Church is the Lord's House, everything in it should be done by the rules of the Lord's House. Eph. 5:24, 1 Tim. 3:15. 2. Since the Lord's Supper is a Church ordinance it must be administered according to

²⁴Synod, 1977, p. 14.

the rules of the Lord's House. It is the Lord's Supper, and not man's.

3. The rules of the Lord's House are found in the Bible both by explicit statements and by implication. 4. Every Church must study the Scriptures to determine what the rules of the Lord's House are. 5. After deciding what the rules of the Lord's House are, a Church is to admit to the Lord's Supper only those who, in the opinion of the Church conform to these rules. 6. In the questions asked new members, the Reformed Presbyterian Church sets forth what it believes to be rules of the Lord's House. 7. It is not correct for one denomination to administer the Lord's House by the rules of another denomination, because this denies each denomination responsibility for what it teaches. 8. The Bible requires the exclusion from the church of all who teach or hold false doctrine. Rev. 2:4, 6; Titus 3:10; 2 John 10, 11; Rev. 2:20. 9. The Bible also requires the exclusion of moral offenders. 1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15. 10. We must conclude by saying that since the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the Visible Church, the Church is responsible for deciding who shall and shall not be admitted to it. The church is required by the texts cited above to decide what constitutes heresy and who is guilty of it. The Church is also required to decide with respect to other sins. Advocates of open communion (allowing the individual to be the sole judge of his fitness to commune) ignore the obligation of the Church to decide what is what and who is what.²⁵

Thus far we have seen the Reformed Presbyterians were unhappy with open communion because they did not feel it protected the purity of the church since unrepentant sinners were being allowed to take communion.

²⁵Minutes, 1953, pp. 145-46.

They were also unhappy with close communion because the apostolic church seemed to set a lower standard for admission to the sacrament than close communion allowed. The solution was "session controlled" communion.

"Session controlled" communion involved several things. First, membership requirements were changed. They originally included a profession of belief in Christ for salvation, an acknowledgement of the Bible as the "only infallible rule of faith and life," a willingness to submit to the church, and an acknowledgement that the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony was true to Scripture. The new membership vows changed the last item to a willingness to be taught by the Church. The objective of this change was to make the requirements for admission to the visible church the same as the requirements for admission to the invisible church. Second the Terms of Communion were changed. Requirements for membership in the invisible church are also the requirements for admission to communion.²⁶ The conclusion to this line of thought was that any repentant sinner who met Reformed Presbyterian membership requirements, member or non-member, should be allowed to commune.

The mechanics of session controlled communion work this way. The Lord's Supper is only to be administered to baptized persons in some branch of the true visible church. It is not to be administered to immoral persons nor those unknown to the session. "Casual visitors are not invited to commune." Every session must keep good oversight of its members, and not assume church membership is a sufficient basis for admission to the sacrament. Persons not under the care of the session,

²⁶Minutes, 1974, pp. 126-27.

including members of other Reformed Presbyterian congregations, must be examined by the session.²⁷ The intention seems to be to have the same rule for admission to the sacrament for members as non-members (Exod. 12:49). The North Hills Reformed Presbyterian Church (Pittsburgh) applies this principle by using the membership vows as a basis for the examination of non-members wishing to commune.

As was mentioned above persons wishing to commune must be members of a "true visible church." What is a "true visible church"? A committee was appointed to answer this question, and concluded that the Westminster Confession, Chapter 25:5, which says that in a true church ". . . the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them." The committee recommended that the non-member applicant be examined with respect to his denomination's history, creed, worship, and administration of the sacraments.²⁸

Another question is whether Reformed Presbyterians should commune in other denominations? This question was also referred to a committee. The final conclusion was that members communing in other denominations should seek the approval of their session, and be sure the church where they commune is a true one.²⁹

Session controlled communion has been a problem to many elders. They must be careful not to have a double standard for members and

²⁷Minutes, 1975, p. 57. This gives the revised Chapter 3, section 10 of the Directory for the Worship of God.

²⁸Minutes, 1977, p. 76.

²⁹Minutes, 1979, pp. 148-49.

non-members, they must accept responsibility for judging a man's profession of faith, and determining whether denominations are true churches or not. One elder, after realizing the problems with this position, said if he had known the problems involved, he would not have voted for session controlled communion.

The Frequency of Communion

Another practical question that has been discussed often in Reformed Presbyterian circles is the frequency of communion. The "official" solution is to let the session of each congregation decide the frequency. Members can petition their session for a more or less frequent celebration. The Reformed Presbyterian tradition has been to observe the sacrament twice a year. The congregations have been tied to this practice because of the custom of having a second minister "assist" with the services of the communion season. The main function of the assistant is preaching and other acts of worship. The contracts of most ministers specify that on two week-ends per year they will be free to assist with the sacrament at other congregations. In recent years there has been a move toward having more frequent observances. Generally there will be two communions with assistants, and one or two more without assistants.

The attacks on the twice a year frequency have come from both sides. The less frequent side argues that since the Passover was only celebrated once a year, the frequency of communion should be the same as its Old Testament counterpart. In reference to 1 Cor. 11:26, where the phrase "osakis ean," is translated "as often as" in the AV, it is shown

that "osakis ean" can mean "whenever."³⁰ This argument is not taken seriously in the Covenanter church today. Gradually the congregations are moving toward more frequent communion. Presently Covenant Fellowship, for example, has it six times a year.

Preparation for Communion

The most prominent feature of the Covenanter communion season is the Communion Preparatory services. These services, which we will describe in more detail in the next chapter, are regular worship services, generally held on week-days, whose function is to help believers individually and corporately examine themselves and otherwise prepare for the sacrament. Several reasons have been given for the continuation of this early Scottish Presbyterian practice. First, the Lord's Supper is a very important event to believers. Second, no objection can be raised to these services because they are merely the preaching of the Word and the gathering of believers for worship, things that the Christian community should do. What is wrong with more of a good thing? Third, the Lord's Supper forms an excellent topic for preaching, and doing it before the celebration helps the people to develop a humble and repentant frame of mind for it. Fourth, preparatory services are an application of the church doing things decently and in order. They guard against indiscriminate admission to the Lord's Supper and rash partaking of it. Fifth, the goals of the services are good. If such goals as increasing in the knowledge of the truth, reviving virtues, causing self-examination, renewing repentance, and building faith are good at other times, are they not also

³⁰"The Lord's Supper to be Eaten Only Once a Year," The Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter 10 (February 1872):38.

good when connected with the Lord's Supper? Sixth, there is scriptural evidence for additional services in connection with the Lord's Supper. We read in Matt. 26:26 that Jesus celebrated the Lord's Supper after the celebration of the Passover. We also read in Exod. 13:3-20 that several services were connected with the Passover. Together these imply that these services had an important role in instructing men concerning the sacrament.³¹

The major function of the preparatory service is to encourage self-examination. This idea is from 1 Cor. 11:28 where a strong warning is given that men should examine themselves before the sacrament. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." The self-examination process involves the use of the means of grace to the ends of repentance, love, and new obedience.

Controversy on Fermented Wine

A final dispute raged in the last century over the use of fermented or unfermented wine in the sacrament. Since the Scripture shows no evidence linking the efficacy of the Lord's Supper with its alcohol content, we will treat the controversy briefly. In the last century the temperance movement gained strength among Protestant churches, and many denominations, including the Reformed Presbyterian Church, forbid the use and sale of alcoholic beverages by members. The question arose

³¹"An Apology for Religious Services Accompanying the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," The Reformed Presbyterian 7 (July 1843):137-42.

from this context, if we do not allow our members to drink alcohol out of worship, should we use for the sacrament? Or should we switch to grape juice? Arguments from Scripture were advanced both for and against fermented wine.³² As far as can be determined from the Minutes of Synod, the decision to recommend that congregations use unfermented wine was made for pragmatic reasons. The report of the Committee of Temperance of 1874 argued that it was inconsistent for Synod to forbid members to use or sell alcohol while allowing its use in the Sacrament. Synod therefore voted to recommend that congregations not use intoxicating wine in the Lord's Supper.³³

Summary

As we have seen, the Reformed Presbyterian view of the Lord's Supper is in the mainstream of classical Reformed thought and practice. The controversies she has faced, such as close communion and fermented wine, have been controversies of application of doctrine, and not controversies of doctrine. The question of defining a true church is still a problem.

³²A few sample articles on this controversy are "Should Fermented Wine Be Used in the Lord's Supper," The Reformed Presbyterian 13 (January 1850):332-35 (pro), and Robert Shields, "Wine," The Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter 14 (January 1876):14-17 (con).

In the scriptural evidence given in articles the pros argued for fermented wine, and the cons showed not every scriptural reference to wine meant fermented wine.

³³Minutes, 1874, pp. 247-48.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRACTICE OF REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN WORSHIP

In this chapter we will see how Reformed Presbyterian worship is conducted. In the first part of this chapter we will consider the non-sacramental worship services using the two Directories for Worship as a basis. In the later part of the chapter we again use the Directories as we consider the sacraments and other forms of special worship such as oaths and fastings.

One of the problems in writing this chapter was the lack of material on Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America worship. In my talks with Dr. David Carson, an authority on Reformed Presbyterian history, he noted that if something was common no one wrote about it. We do, however, have three documents that give us a good deal of guidance in determining the practice of worship. These are the Westminster Assembly's Directory for the Public Worship of God, from the 1640's which guided Reformed Presbyterians for centuries, Rev. R. J. George's book The Covenanter Pastor, which served as his lectures to seminary students at the turn of the century, and The Directory for the Worship of God, adopted by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1945. The problem with using these Directories as sources of information on how congregations do and did worship is that the Directories were designed to be recommended guidelines rather than required orders of worship.

History Behind the Directories for Worship

We will now look at the history behind the Directories for worship, their function, and their introductions. We will then look at the orders of worship as a whole, and conclude this section on non-sacramental worship by examining each part of worship in some detail. The amount of detail on each part of worship will depend upon the uniqueness and historical importance of that part to Reformed Presbyterians.

In the 1640's the Westminster Assembly was called with the intention of bringing Reformed uniformity to the churches of Scotland and England, and Wales. Part of this uniformity lay in the area of worship. In dealing with this problem, the Assembly decided to write a directory for worship, thus taking a middle course between complete freedom of form in worship, and the rigidity of a liturgical service. Charles G. M'Crie quotes David Calderwood, a Scottish Church historian and contemporary of the Westminster Assembly, as saying,

Whenever the former [that is, a liturgical form] is used, nothing is left to the choice of the minister, who must conduct the services according to the forms laid down, and the words prescribed. In the Church of Scotland . . . we have . . . our agenda and an order to be observed in conducting divine service: yet no one is tied down to the prayers or exhortations which are given as so many examples, in which, while structure and substance are indicated, there is no intention of binding ministers to the exact terms employed. For a book the compilers of which aimed at conserving ministerial liberty, giving scope for exercise of gifts and graces, but at the same time preserving order and a measure of uniformity, no more felicitous term than Directory could have been employed.¹

The introductory material to the Assembly's Directory gives the conditions for worship: an intelligent belief in the true God, a

¹Charles Greig M'Crie, The Public Worship of Presbyterian Scotland (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and sons, 1892), pp. 194-95.

recognition of the attributes and qualities of God that give Him supreme claim on our adoration, a realization that the relation that God sustains to us as Father and Sovereign make claim to our veneration, an acceptance of the scriptural ways of approaching Him and conforming to the Law, a sense of dependence on Him as the only true source of life, a frame of soul that has holy aspirations befitting His revelations of Himself, and a commitment of self to the intercessory ministrations of Christ and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.²

The Westminster Assembly's Directory served as the standard for Reformed Presbyterian worship till 1945. In that year the present Directory for the Worship of God was adopted. This was not the first North American directory. Another was adopted in 1819, but since it was never published, the Westminster Directory remained the denominational standard.³

Orders of Worship

The 1945 Directory begins with a practical note. Its purpose is to set forth the Biblical form of worship. Worship is considered the highest act of the soul, essential to spiritual growth and life. Worship is to be on the Sabbath day (Sunday), which is to be kept free from unnecessary labor. Congregations are expected to have suitable, dignified places for worship and take good care of them. Worship should be in

²Edward D. Morris, Theology of the Westminster Symbols (Columbus: Champlin Press, 1900), pp. 704-05.

³Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (Pittsburgh: Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1941), p. v. The 1945 Directory for Worship is contained in this volume.

spirit and truth, and while there is no changeable order of worship, some order is necessary, and the Directory suggests one.⁴ We would emphasize that the 1945 Directory, like the Westminster Directory, is designed to be advisory rather than required.

The third document we will look at is Rev. R. J. George's The Covenanter Pastor. Professor George was pastor in Beaver Falls from 1875 to 1891, when he began a professorship at Reformed Presbyterian Seminary that lasted till 1911. In these two positions he was able to influence many ministers both as minister to Geneva College students (the Reformed Presbyterian college) and as a seminary professor. His course lectures, printed in The Covenanter Pastor, go into much greater detail on the conduct of worship than either of the Directories. While there is not much evidence to back this conclusion, it is my opinion that Prof. George's work was more descriptive of how worship was conducted, than prescriptive of how he thought it should be conducted. My main source of evidence is the number of Scottish worship practices that have persisted to our own day, such as the Psalm meditation, largely without significant change. Some of these will be mentioned below.

Now that we have introduced our main sources, we will show their orders of worship.

⁴Ibid., pp. 305-07.

Westminster Directory	Carson ⁵ Early American	1945 Directory
Call to Worship	Call to worship	
		Praise
Prayer	Short Prayer	Invocation
Scripture reading (Old and New Testa- ment)	Psalms meditation	Psalms meditation
Praise (optional)	Sing meditation psalm	Sing meditation psalm
Prayer of Confession	Pastoral prayer	Pastoral Prayer
	Scripture reading	Scripture reading
		Offering
Sermon	Sermon	Sermon
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
	Collection for poor	
Praise (optional)	Praise	Praise
Benediction	Benediction	Benediction

As can be seen above, modern Reformed Presbyterian worship is similar to the order suggested by the Westminster Assembly. We would observe the following differences: The addition of the Psalms meditation, regular offerings (the Westminster Directory provided for occasional ones for the poor), more praise, and no call to worship. We will comment more on these parts of worship below.

How well was the Westminster Directory followed? It seems to have been followed closely based on our limited information. As can be

⁵David Carson, "History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America to 1871" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1964), p. 106.

seen above the only significant change between the 1640's and the 1800's was the addition of the psalm meditation. There was not much change in two centuries.

How well has the 1945 Directory been followed? On the whole it is used as a guide. In an examination of 16 bulletins of different congregations from the year 1966 the following observations were made. Five congregations added calls to worship. Three did not have Psalm meditations. Virtually all congregations added an extra Psalm between the singing of the meditation Psalm and the sermon. Announcements were often added at the time of the offering. To summarize: the parts from the sermon to the end of the service were always the same. The beginning of the service to the singing of the Psalm meditation Psalm was usually the same. Most changes came between these two areas, usually consisting of order changes and the addition of a Psalm.

What we have described above is the morning service. Evening services, presently held by most Reformed Presbyterian congregations, evidence a much greater diversity. They are more informal, but still contain the same elements of worship, prayer, preaching, scripture and Psalm singing. The offering is omitted by most congregations. There is no Psalm meditation, and the invocation will often be combined with the evening prayer. The sermon will often be more profound. It is the custom of many clergy to give the "milk of the Word" in the morning when visitors and new members are present, and the "meat" in the evening when only the more dedicated are present. There is frequently more lay participation in the evening service. For example, members of the congregation are sometimes invited to pick their favorite Psalms to sing. One pastor,

Dr. Bruce Stewart, even allowed ten minutes for questions and answers after the sermon.

A "typical" evening service would have an order similar to that below:

Psalm

Evening Prayer

Psalms selected by the congregation

Scripture reading

Sermon

Psalm

Benediction

Regular Parts of Worship

Prayer

Beginning with prayer, we will now consider the individual parts of regular worship in some detail. (The reader may find it helpful to refer to the outline on page 128.) The Westminster Directory includes three prayers in the worship service with outlines of them. The first one is an invocation coming after the call to worship. Its purpose is to acknowledge the greatness of God, the sinfulness of man, and request God's blessing on the service. The second prayer comes between the reading of scripture and the sermon. In this prayer of confession, the minister tries to reach his own and his hearers' hearts. The final prayer, coming after the sermon, is to give thanks for the gospel, include some parts of the sermon outline, and prepare Christians for death. At the end of the service, the minister is to dismiss the congregation with a blessing.

The 1945 Directory uses prayers in the same places as the older Directory, but changes their content. In the invocation, the minister is to seek the presence and power of the Holy Spirit for the hearts of the people and His guidance and blessing in every part of the service. The intercessory or pastoral prayer, which replaces the prayer of confession, is to be well planned. It is to be comprehensive, but not long, and include adoration, thanksgiving, confession, and petition for the needs of worshippers and others. Content can include congregational requests, denominational concerns, the Christian church, governmental bodies and their officials, every class of men, and for the "universal knowledge of Christ as Saviour and King." The after-sermon prayer asks God to impress His truth on the hearers and accept the worship. The service is to be concluded with the benediction.

The Directory also comments on the position for prayer. "The posture in prayer is not a matter of indifference. Kneeling or standing are Scriptural and are expressive of the spirit of reverence and devotion."⁶

R. J. George has suggested additional topics for the intercessory prayer. He mentioned those with special responsibilities such as church officers, teachers, parents and public officials, those with special trials such as the sick, bereaved, tempted and fallen, those who have special promises from God like widows and orphans, and people on the hearts of

⁶Constitution, p. 309.

the congregation, such as those at school, traveling, or at dangerous jobs.⁷

Psalm Singing

The part of worship that is presently most identified with Reformed Presbyterians is the exclusive singing of the Psalms without instrumental accompaniment. While in the 17th century exclusive psalmody was the common practice of the Presbyterians and Puritans, the singing of the Psalms has declined to such an extent that most modern American hymnals have only a small selection of Psalm portions. The result has created a situation in which Reformed Presbyterians take much of their identity from their Psalm-singing.

The Westminster Directory contains surprisingly little about the singing of Psalms, because singing was regarded as minor and optional at that time. The Directory mentions Psalm-singing as an option before the prayer of confession, and as an option before the benediction. M'Crie summarized the opinion of the Westminster Assembly on singing as follows: "Evidently the majority of the Westminster divines regarded congregational singing in much the same light as did the framers of the Book of Discipline, who . . . styled it 'a profitable, but not necessary act of worship.'"⁸ The Assembly also adopted the Rous Psalter as a recommended version of the Psalter.

Since the time of the Westminster Directory, singing has come to be considered a necessary part of worship. Prof. George reflects this

⁷R. J. George, The Covenanter Pastor (New York: The Christian Nation Publishing Co., 1911), p. 104.

⁸M'Crie, Public Worship, p. 203.

change of thinking in his writing. He considers praise very important because it is directed to God, in contrast to preaching and Scripture reading which are directed to man. Praise prepares men to hear the gospel, and is a great influence in molding spiritual life. The pastor should remind the people that it is praise and mention the old call to praise, "Up with your hearts." Rev. George recommends that the Psalms be carefully selected. The Psalm after the invocation should be a call to worship, like Psalm 15. Another should refer to the approaching sermon, or anything special about the day, such as a sacrament. George also makes suggestions for improving singing, such as encouraging the best leadership, insisting on the whole congregation singing, and not substituting congregational singing with choirs or solos.⁹

The 1945 Directory also gives recommendations on the practice of singing Psalms. Psalms are to be sung in worship exclusively without instruments using Psalter versions approved by the denomination. Singing should be congregational, by congregations which have been trained in singing, and led by a leader (precentor) of recognized Christian character. Choirs singing by themselves should be the exception. The sessions have oversight of praise, which means they can choose precentors, determine how and if a choir is to be used, and do what is necessary to improve congregational singing.

We would make some observations on Reformed Presbyterian Psalm-singing today. The quality of the singing varies. In larger congregations, like College Hill (Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania), the congregation

⁹George, Pastor, pp. 111-16.

carries a four-part harmony well. In smaller congregations there is only one part sung, and sometimes it will be a little flat or sharp. Some congregations can pick up an unfamiliar tune by the third stanza, others will require its repetition for three or four weeks.

The following example is used to illustrate the quality of Reformed Presbyterian singing. In 1961 the Greeley, Colorado Congregation (membership about 145) had its (unpaid) choir present a musical program for the music department of what is now Northern Colorado University. They sang around five Psalms. At the end the chairman of the music department asked if they could sing another Psalm chosen by him. They did. The chairman asked if there were more they could sing. The leader of the choir said they could sing any of the approximately 360 selections in the Psalter then in use. The chairman was amazed, as most church choirs could only sing 20-30 selections.¹⁰

One of the famous Psalmody practices has died out. The practice of "lining out" died because people learned to read and because it often destroyed the context of the psalm. In this practice the precentor would read a portion of the Psalm, the congregation would sing it, another portion would be read, and so forth. We have a description of its use from the 19th century Wilkinsburg (Pennsylvania) congregation.

When the psalm was announced, the precentor would stand in front of the pulpit, tuning fork in hand. He read two lines of the psalm, then started the singing, in which the congregation joined. When

¹⁰Interview with Bruce C. Stewart, President, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 12 February 1981.

these two lines were finished two more were read and sung, and so on until the end of the selection.¹¹

Psalter Revision in the Reformed Presbyterian Church

In order to sing Psalms, a denomination must have a metrical psalter. The history of Reformed Presbyterian psalter revision is interesting, not only for musical reasons, but also because it reveals a number of characteristics about Reformed Presbyterians. Most important of these is a love for the Bible, and thus a desire to accurately translate the Psalms for singing. As Dr. Robert Copeland, a member of the latest psalter revision committee, said, "It is important to realize from the outset that, to Reformed Presbyterians, the translation of the Psalms is a work for theologians, not for aesthetics or poets." The primary objective of psalter revision is therefore accuracy, thus smoothness and versification are sacrificed for it.¹²

The original American Covenanter psalter was the Scottish Psalter of 1650. As was mentioned earlier, the Westminster Assembly suggested the adoption of a revised Rous Psalter. The Scottish General Assembly decided to further revise Rous before adopting it. The final version of 1650 is known today as the "Scottish Psalter" and is often referred to as the "Rous version." From this revision the Covenanters sang during the Scottish persecutions, and during the clearing of the American wilderness.

¹¹Elizabeth M. Davidson and Ellen B. McKee, eds., Annals of Old Wilksburg and Vicinity (Wilksburg, Pa.: Group for Historical Research, 1940), p. 214.

¹²Robert M. Copeland, "The Translators of the Psalter," in Psalm Singing of the Covenanters, ed. Peter Lippincott (St. Louis: Prairie Schooner Records, 1979?), p. 83. Dr. Copeland holds a Ph.D. in musicology, and is professor of music at Geneva College.

"No other metrical Psalter in English has endured so long or has meant more to its users, and the Covenanters were emphatically singers of the Scottish Psalter."¹³

As times changed the need for a revised Psalter became apparent. While there was earlier support for a psalter revision, the first Psalter Revision Committee did not begin work until 1882. The Committee, composed of two laymen and six ministers, finished its work in 1889.¹⁴ Rev. N. R. Johnston said there was much dissatisfaction with this version, because it was "full of imperfections."¹⁵

In 1893 the Covenanter Church was invited to join in an inter-denominational committee to write a "uniform version" of the Psalter. The revision process dragged on till 1909 when a final report was distributed. As this version valued poetry and aesthetics over faithfulness to scripture, the Covenanter representatives recommended its rejection and Synod agreed.¹⁶

Forseeing the above rejection, Synod in 1908 authorized a new revision committee. This committee did not do any translating but instead picked versions, stanzas, and lines from other psalters, revising and correcting them where necessary. Because some of the tunes were too difficult for congregations, the Psalter did not gain immediate acceptance. The result was the Psalter's tunes were redone and a new edition published in 1920. One hundred tunes were changed, but the text was left intact.¹⁷

¹³Ibid., pp. 84-85. ¹⁴Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁵N. R. Johnston, Looking Back from the Sunset Land (Oakland, Calif.: N. R. Johnson, 1898), p. 364.

¹⁶Copeland, "Translators," p. 86.

¹⁷Ibid.

For unclear reasons, the Psalter was revised again in 1929. The committee, composed of four ministers and three laypersons, two of whom were women, worked so rapidly that they finished the revision in one year.¹⁸

The 1950 Psalter began with a proposal to review the tunes. When the committee appointed for this task reported in 1948, they asked for a committee on the text as well. The completed committee of eight ministers and four laypersons, including two women, reported in 1949. It recommended 22 minor changes in the text, punctuation or capitalization, two new versions, and the reintroduction of three versions from the 1889 Psalter.¹⁹

The most recent revision, which we will consider in more detail, is the 1973 Psalter, titled The Book of Psalms for Singing. In 1965 the Reformed Presbyterian Church appointed a committee to consider the possibility of an international Psalter for Covenanter churches, and to investigate the possibility of revising the 1950 Psalter. When the international Psalter proved to be impossible, the committee voted in 1968 to go ahead with a new revision.²⁰

The following procedure was used in the revision: Each Psalm was analyzed for accuracy and smoothness. Revisions and new translations were made if existing versions were unsatisfactory. Hebrew scholars worked with the literarily skilled, with the former having the final word. The New American Standard Version was used with the commentaries of Delitzsch and Briggs for those not trained in Hebrew. The structure of

¹⁸Ibid., p. 87. ¹⁹Ibid., p. 88.

²⁰Robert M. Copeland, "The Story of the 1973 Psalter," in Psalm Singing of the Covenanters, ed. Peter Lippincott (St. Louis: Prairie Schooner Records, 1979?), p. 91.

Hebrew poetry created a problem in the selection of meters. The Hebrew use of parallelisms in poetry did not fit the common meter of the many Scottish ballad tunes in the old Psalter, causing the committee to make changes. Dr. Copeland gave an example:

For example, Psalm 66, containing 14 common-meter stanzas, was recast in five longer stanzas (887.887.48.48) to fit the 15th century Lutheran tune *Wie Leuchtet der Morgenstern*; in this form it more nearly reflects the thought patterns, line lengths, and structure of the Hebrew original.²¹

Tunes were also evaluated. They were rated for beauty, value for congregational singing, and appropriateness for the words. Some musically inferior tunes were kept because of their popularity. Charles McBurney, the chairman for the committee, suggested the following criteria for selecting music.

1. Tunes must be simple enough that most can learn them.
2. All melodies must be strong enough to be effective without parts.
3. Tunes must be within the pitch range of average, uninhibited singers.
4. Parts must be arranged in easy, effective intervals, so average readers of music can sing with confidence, enough to lead others, without needing an instrument.
5. Tunes must be selected to fit the mood and purpose of the words.
6. Tunes should encourage the use of whole Psalms or long selections.
7. Within the compass of the Psalter should be a variety in difficulty, movement, and mood to help maintain the interest and effort of singers and to increase their appreciation and use of the Word of God.
8. Any selection of words rarely used should always have assigned to it a tune kept familiar by frequent use elsewhere in the Psalter.²²

To conclude this section, we will list the significant features of the 1973 Psalter. Dr. Copeland tells us that the most important feature is that it is Scripture. "The most significant feature of the Book of Psalms for Singing (from the standpoint of the people who sing it) is that, like its predecessors, it constitutes part of the Scriptures

²¹Ibid., p. 95. ²²Ibid.

arranged for singing by Christians." Another feature was the large extent of change. Of the 438 Psalm portions, only 78 remained unchanged, 172 had minor changes, 96 had major revisions but kept the same meter, and 92 were new versions. Other changes are: The Psalter has been divided into five books like the Hebrew Bible. English verse numbers are given in superscript as well as stanza numbers. The page format has changed from putting one stanza between the music to the more common American form of up to five stanzas between the music. Instead of numbering the consecutive pages, the Psalm has its (English Protestant) Biblical number and a letter for each section or version. For example, 23C is the third version of the 23rd Psalm.²³ A final addition to the Psalter is a selection of chants.

As can be seen the Psalter of 1973 was a major revision and a successful one. It has gained a following beyond the Reformed Presbyterian church, and some hymn-singing congregations have adopted it as a second "hymnal." Sales of Psalters as of summer 1981 were approximately 21,000, the majority of which were sold to members of other denominations.

Subjective Impact of Psalmody

Several years ago I had a conversation with a young woman. She had attended a Reformed Presbyterian congregation while in college, and later moved to an area without any such congregations. I asked her, what do you miss most about the Reformed Presbyterian Church? She replied, "Psalm singing and preaching from the Bible." I smiled. The two great loves of Covenanters are Psalm-singing and preaching from the Bible.

²³Ibid., p. 96.

Because of the emotional importance of Psalmody, we must learn how Reformed Presbyterians feel about it. Indeed, no thesis on worship can be complete without attempting the difficult task of looking into the hearts of believers and seeing how they feel and what they believe about their encounter with God.

While Reformed Presbyterians appreciate the other parts of worship, especially preaching, it is Psalmody that most deeply moves their hearts. Why? There are some historical reasons. Many Covenanter martyrs went to their deaths singing Psalms such as 25, 32, and 44. There are also sociological reasons. Exclusive psalmody without instrumental accompaniment is the distinctive feature of Reformed Presbyterian worship. Yet these explanations are insufficient. Martyrs would not have died singing Psalms if they had not loved them. And Covenanters loved Psalm-singing when it was the regular practice of every other Presbyterian Church. Nor do the above explain why new members, adherents, and friends often love psalmody.

We must therefore weigh the theological impact of the Psalms. Since the Psalms are God's inscripturated word, they carry great promises that the Holy Spirit will use them to work graciously in men's lives. Given that music often affects men on a deep level, and that Psalms were originally written for singing, the implication is that Psalm-singing will have a strong, sanctifying effect on believers, filling their hunger for God's word. This is what Reformed Presbyterians believe. We have therefore included some testimonies on the effect of psalmody on believers and on the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The Rev. N. R. Johnston, a minister of the last century, wrote in his autobiography:

And now after nearly half a century I leave my testimony that I love the Psalms of the Bible more than ever. As the years of my life passed, and even now in old age, those divine songs have been and are my solace and my joy. The study of them was of great use to me, and I hope that in explaining them on Sabbath morning I was useful to the people of God. If Covenanters have more spiritual vigor than others it is owing largely to their familiarity with the Psalms and their love of them. Those who do not use them in praise suffer great loss.²⁴

Michael Bushell, our contemporary and a practicing physicist, said:

The strongest argument for Exclusive Psalmody is the one that inevitably wells up from within when a sincere Christian begins to sing the Psalms with Grace in his heart. Once these Divine Hymns have entered into the heart of a man and he has been fed by the heavenly manna which lies embedded there, he will never be satisfied with earthly counterfeits.²⁵

Psalms comfort Reformed Presbyterians in death as well as life. Rev. N. R. Johnston tells the story of Corporal Charles Divoll, who died during the Civil War. While Corporal Divoll was dying in a hospital in Alexandria, Virginia, N. R. Johnston made the journey from Vermont to see him. When Rev. Johnston arrived he found the Corporal dead, so he sought out the male nurse who attended him.

²⁴Johnston, Looking Back, p. 362.

²⁵Bushell, Psalms of Zion, p. iii. I personally have enjoyed the Psalms. My fondest memories of Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary are gathering around the table after supper and singing Psalms. When I am discouraged, I sing the 33rd and 22nd Psalms. When I need a comforting reminder of God's care and love, or wish to remind another of it I sing the 91st Psalm. In times when forgiveness is needed, I think of the words of 103:7-14. In times of melancholy Psalms 90 and 139:1-12 express my emotions and thus bring relief. I have heard Psalms sung by Covenanters walking down streets, in cars, at parties, campfires, in the morning and evening. From many I have heard snatches of Psalm tunes hummed or whistled in an unconscious manner. God's Word was on their minds and in their hearts.

He told me that Corporal Divoll was in a nearly dying condition when he was brought to the hospital. In his last hours he repeated Scripture verses and what the nurse called "a hymn." I asked him if he remembered what hymn it was. He remembered only some words or what it was about. I knew at once it was the twenty-third Psalm. Thus died Charles Divoll . . .²⁶

In life and in death Reformed Presbyterians sing Psalms.

Reformed Presbyterians in Hymn-Singing Churches

Since Reformed Presbyterians believe that it is wrong to sing hymns and use instruments in worship, what do they do when worshipping in denominations where hymns and/or organs are used? This question was asked of Dr. J. G. Vos, a well-known editor and theologian among Reformed Presbyterians. Dr. Vos answered, "My practice is to remain silent under such circumstances." To the credit of other Christians, Dr. Vos continues, "I often attend such churches, and find that where my convictions are known, they are usually respected by others."²⁷ This would reflect the normal practice among Covenanters.

There is also the question of what ministers should do when leading worship in other denominations. In 1886 Synod recommended the following policy for ministers preaching in hymn-singing churches:

1. That in all cases our ministers should use our own version of the Psalms, if possible, but use any good version when it is necessary.
2. That in accordance with our received principle, that worship must be of divine appointment, our ministers cannot consistently give out hymns of human composition in religious worship.
3. That ministers may preach the gospel where hymns and instrumental music are used, provided it is understood that they do not sanction

²⁶Johnston, Looking Back, p. 368.

²⁷J. G. Vos, "Blue Banner Question Box," Blue Banner Faith and Life 22 (April-June 1967):115.

the use of them, but they may not conduct the services or worship unless allowed to use the Scripture Psalms.²⁸

The common practice of recent times when preaching in churches that use hymns and instruments is for the Reformed Presbyterian minister to ask one of the elders or deacons (depending on polity) to preside. This avoids the problem of seeming to approve hymns by announcing them. While the hymns are sung, the Reformed Presbyterian minister will remain silent.

The Psalm Meditation

The least familiar part of the Reformed Presbyterian service to Americans is the Psalm meditation. The Psalm meditation which occurs early in the service, begins with the reading of a Psalm or Psalm portion. The Psalm may be read by the minister alone, responsively, or in unison. The minister will then give a three to five minute message on the Psalm, and the congregation will sing the entire Psalm or part of it.

The history of the Psalm meditation goes back to the earliest days of the Covenanter Church in America. The first evidence we have for its use in this country is from the Rev. John Cuthbertson's diary. Rev. Cuthbertson began with Psalm 1 and examined each of the Psalms in order. When he reached Psalm 150, he returned to Psalm 1 and started again.²⁹

Let us now see how the Psalm meditation was used in the Covenanter Church. Rev. N. R. Johnston, who ministered in the last century, prepared for the Psalm meditation in this way:

²⁸Minutes, 1886, p. 271.

²⁹Carson, "History", p. 39.

My habit was first to read critically the Hebrew of the psalm, then analyze the portion, then read the commentators. In the analysis I was helped by Adam Clarke and [Matthew] Henry, both of which follow the analytical plan. Otherwise Clarke could not be followed safely. He rarely finds Christ in the Psalms if he can avoid it.³⁰

Rev. Johnston also told his goals with respect to the Psalm meditation.

"My earnest desire is that I may be directed by the Spirit of God so that I may explain truthfully and in such a way as to instruct, convince, convert, sanctify and comfort."³¹

Prof. R. J. George, around the turn of the century, lectured his students as follows concerning the Psalm meditation: Psalm meditations were once more common among Presbyterian churches, but at the time he wrote (1900) only Covenanters continued the practice. Expositions are essential to the intelligent use of the Psalms. They should be clear, pointed toward human experience, "Set all the chords of the soul vibrating in harmony with the notes of praise," show spiritual enthusiasm in the delivery, and be brief (15-20 minutes).³² The following suggestions are offered: explain the Psalms in order from 1 to 150, select suitable Psalms for special occasions such as communion, discriminate on the length of the portion where the Psalm is long, read and examine them in Hebrew, study to find Christ in the Psalms, and use good commentaries such as Calvin, Delitzsch, Spurgeon and Henry.³³

The 1945 Directory reaffirms the practice of the Psalm meditation. Since the depth and beauty of the Psalms cannot be appreciated without

³⁰Johnston, Looking Back, pp. 162-63.

³¹Ibid., p. 362.

³²This assumes a two hour service. The typical 1980 Psalm meditation will be 3 to 5 minutes of a one hour service.

³³George, Pastor, p. 120-24.

careful study, the meditation was to be maintained. It suggested the explanation present the central thought of the Psalm, the interpretation of obscure passages and the presence of Jesus in the Psalm. "It should be brief and a stimulus to spiritual worship."³⁴

Today most Reformed Presbyterian churches still have Psalm meditations. It is my observation that the majority of the pastors follow many of Prof. George's suggestions on methods. Some ministers have dropped the Psalm meditation and instead spend time explaining something about each Psalm sung. Whether by Psalm meditation, or some shorter form of explanation, the almost universal feeling and practice among Reformed Presbyterian clergy is that the Psalms must be explained.

The Reading of Scripture

The public reading of Scripture is also a part of worship. Section 2 of the Westminster Directory said that the Scriptures were to be read clearly and understandably from the Old and New Testament (but not the Apocrypha) from the best translation. Both Testaments were to be read weekly in a chapter-after-chapter order so that people would learn the whole of the Scriptures.

Prof. George has no section on the reading of Scripture. The reasons for this omission are unknown.

The 1945 Directory sees Bible reading as a necessary part of worship. The passage(s) should be selected beforehand and studied so that

³⁴Constitution, p. 308.

its meaning will be conveyed to the worshippers' hearts. It can be done responsively or in unison.³⁵

While Scripture is generally read twice in most Reformed Presbyterian services (before the Psalm meditation and before the sermon), some ministers have it occupy a minor place in worship. One result of this tendency is to read just a few verses as the preaching text instead of a longer passage. The probable reason for this tendency is the idea, which the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony refutes, that the sermon is a more important means of grace than the reading of Scripture. The result is that preaching tends to absorb the Scripture reading, rather than complement it.

This is not a new tendency in Presbyterianism. C. G. M'Crie points out that the Scots and the English independents of Puritan times viewed the reading of Scripture by the minister as a lowering of the position of preaching.³⁶ The influence of this thinking still persists.

Preaching

Reformed worship is best known for its preaching. Preaching was strong in the early church, but became supplanted in the Greek and Roman communions. The Reformation restored preaching to its true place among acts of worship. The Westminster Directory views preaching as ". . . the power of God unto salvation, and one of the greatest and most excellent works belonging to the ministry of the gospel, should be

³⁵Ibid., p. 310.

³⁶M'Crie, Public Worship, p. 201.

so performed, that the workman need not be ashamed, but may save himself and those that hear him."³⁷ The Directory continues by giving a good essay on homiletics. Prof. Morris finds the following parts of a sermon in it: Subject, introduction, text, division, proposition, statement of doctrine, arguments, objections met, application, and practical suggestions.³⁸

As preaching evolved over several generations, the Covenanters came up with a sermon form called a "lecture," which is very similar to an expository sermon. R. J. George noted the differences between a sermon and lecture as follows: A lecture is based on longer portions of Scripture, it explains a portion of Scripture while a sermon discusses a specific doctrine or duty, lectures view Biblical theology while sermons view systematic theology, the lecture is more general, while the sermon is more profound. After giving suggestions on preparation of lectures similar to those found in works on expository preaching, Prof. George gave some examples of different lecture series from Genesis. There is the character method: Adam, Cain, Hagar, and so forth; the topical method: creation, fall, flood, covenant, and so forth; and the scriptural portion method of a whole or a half chapter per sermon.³⁹

From Rev. N. R. Johnston's autobiography we find examples of what a pastor preached. He liked "lecturing." In his first pastorate, he

³⁷The Confession of Faith (n.p.: The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1976), p. 379. All references to the Westminster Assembly's Directory for Public Worship are to the edition printed in this volume.

³⁸Morris, Theology, pp. 710-11.

³⁹George, Pastor, pp. 125-32.

began with the book of John and lectured through the book using the number of verses in each paragraph for topics. Other series preached in Topsham, Vermont (1852-68) included 65 chapters of Isaiah (he regretted not finishing it), the Ten Commandments, Acts, 1 Peter, the Lord's Prayer, and the Beatitudes. He also preached on controversial topics such as the Civil War draft, the New York City anti-draft riots, and national reforms such as Christian government and slavery. His favorite topic was the Gospel. He said that a

. . . very large majority of the discourses preached were what are commonly called "gospel sermons." Purely doctrinal discourses and especially controversial were rare. The cross, the doctrines of the atonement, and all the many coordinate themes were kept ever before the people whatever other important subjects might demand attention.⁴⁰

The 1945 Directory defines a sermon as a discourse based on a passage of the Bible. It is to teach truth, appealing it to the hearts of the hearers including children. Its purposes include convicting and converting sinners, building up saints, and filling them with a zeal for the kingdom. Sermon preparation is to be done by Bible study and prayer. The pastor shall keep current with the social and doctrinal issues of the time, and seek the aid of the Holy Spirit in declaring the whole counsel of God. Worshippers have an important role in preaching as they listen with diligence, prayer and preparation. The Word is to be received with love and faith, be laid up in their hearts, and practiced in their lives.⁴¹

Some observations on contemporary Reformed Presbyterian preaching are due. It is the objective of her ministers to go beyond the basic

⁴⁰Johnston, Looking Back, pp. 163, 215, 357, 355-56, 140, and 194.

⁴¹Constitution, pp. 310-11.

doctrines needed for salvation and preach also the other truths found in the Westminster Confession and in the Bible. As a result of this, many who have transferred to the Covenanter Church from liberal denominations have commented on how much better fed they are in the Word. Since the better teaching matures the minds of the believers, the minister can preach even more profoundly. For example, Dr. J. R. Wright, after five years at the Geneva Reformed Presbyterian Church in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, proceeded to preach through the Pastoral Epistles verse-by-verse with discussions of Greek grammar and etymology where they were helpful to understanding the passage. The laymen of the congregation seemed to appreciate the series. It was unusual to see such a large percentage of the congregation taking notes on the sermon. When Dr. Wright left the Geneva Congregation, she was the largest in the denomination. With some exceptions, the Reformed Presbyterian clergy are using the sermon to educate their people.

Offering

The Westminster Directory mentions the offering only briefly. At the end of the section on the Lord's Supper, it says a collection is to be taken for the poor in such a way that no part of worship be hindered.⁴² One reason the offering did not occupy a more important place was that the churches at that time were supported by the government, thus the need was not great.

⁴²Confession, p. 386.

It is difficult to determine when the offering appeared as a part of Reformed Presbyterian worship. David Carson records that an offering was taken for the poor in the early 19th century.⁴³ It is clear that the importance of the offering grew as the Synod adopted more denominational projects and congregations shifted from paying ministers' salaries by subscription to paying them by offerings.

The 1945 Directory considers the offering to be an appointed part of worship. Offerings are to be proportional to income and have the tithe as a minimum. The offering may be followed or preceded by a prayer. Instruction in giving is to be part of the education of the congregation. The first priority in giving is to be the home congregation and the denomination. Permission is to be requested from the session before offerings are taken for objects not connected with the denomination.⁴⁴

All Reformed Presbyterians have weekly offerings. Where there is an evening as well as a morning service, the offering will generally be omitted in the former. Offerings are usually collected by the deacons. There is normally prayer before or after the offering and sometimes both times. Sometimes a verse of Scripture on tithes and offerings will be read before the offering, like Mal. 3:10. Some congregations sing a Psalm while the offering is taken while others do not. Tithing is widespread in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

⁴³Carson, "History," p. 106.

⁴⁴Constitution, pp. 309-10.

Special Forms of Worship

In addition to the "regular" acts of worship discussed above, there are special acts of worship used occasionally by the church. These are fasting, thanksgiving, and oaths or vows. We will also consider the lack of holy days under this heading.

Fasting and Thanksgiving

Two special, or less frequently used, acts of worship are fasting and thanksgiving. In the first half of the 19th century, Reformed Presbyterians observed them more diligently than now. Synod would annually set days of fasting and thanksgiving, list reasons for them, and make certain presbyteries checked to see if congregations observed them. For example, in 1838 Synod called for fasting for the following reasons:

1. The decline in spiritual zeal, the blighting influence of our age, the form of religion without godliness, the world and personal sin. "We have been too much conformed to the world; we have been neglectful and formal in God's service; we are not frequent, earnest and persevering at the throne of grace; we are not harmonious in council, because we are too seldom united in prayer."
2. The condition of churches and the world around us. There is revival without an insistence on truth, division in the visible church, heresy and schism, a love of wealth and growing Romanism.
3. The sinful political state of the nations. A large part of the world is without Gospel, the Sabbath is profaned, there is slavery, individual and corporate guilt. The fast day was set for the second Thursday of February.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Minutes, 1838, pp. 304-07.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church went beyond the Westminster Directory in her fasting. The Westminster Assembly saw fasts as needed only at special occasions. "When some great and notable judgments are either inflicted upon a people, or apparently imminent, or by some extraordinary provocations notoriously deserved; as also when some special blessing is to be sought and obtained . . ."46 The Reformed Presbyterian Synod went beyond this in an annual call for a day of fasting. Fasting has also been done by the church when asked by the state, as when President Lincoln called for a day of national fasting on April 30, 1863.⁴⁷ The most frequent use of fasting has been by congregations in conjunction with the Lord's Supper, a matter we will discuss below.

The 1945 Directory considers fasting as always being appropriate, but especially when God's judgments are on the land. It is good to observe fasts in conjunction with the Lord's Supper. Fasts should be observed by a worship service. "Psalms of penitence should be sung, and prayer of confession of sin and petitions for pardon should be offered. Abstinence from food and from ordinary pleasures and occupations may serve to center attention upon the deeper and more serious things involved in the occasion."⁴⁸ At the present time (1981) there is little if any corporate fasting in the church.

In the past, the Reformed Presbyterian church has also been more diligent about the "opposite" of fasting, thanksgiving. In the first

⁴⁶Confession, p. 391.

⁴⁷Johnston, Looking Back, p. 348.

⁴⁸Constitution, p. 319.

half of the 19th century Synod decreed annual days of thanksgiving, and gave reasons for them. In 1838 the following reasons were found for thanksgiving: 1. That in spite of our sins the church grows and prospers both spiritually and numerically and that there is peace in our church courts (there had been a split in 1833). 2. That there is a spirit of inquiry in the world. Both church and civil government are under investigation. Attempts at reform are being made. The Bible is being widely circulated. There is freedom of religion in the United States and freedom from war in the world. 3. That there is a good life in the United States with a lot of food. The economic depression is at an end, and there are many honest men and Reformers. The second Thursday of December was chosen as a day of thanks.⁴⁹

In more recent times there has been less emphasis on thanksgiving. The 1945 Directory says that there are special seasons for thanksgiving and that we should support the annual call for national thanksgiving. "A suitable service of public worship should be conducted at which people recount God's blessings, sing His praises, and thank Him for the multitude of his tender mercies to our nation and to ourselves. An opportunity should be given for the people to prove their gratitude by making a contribution to some benevolent cause."⁵⁰ Some congregations still hold annual Thanksgiving Day services.

⁴⁸Minutes, 1838, pp. 306-07.

⁴⁹Constitution, pp. 319-20.

Vows

The Westminster Confession, Chapter 21, paragraph 5, teaches that religious oaths and vows are part of worship. While the Westminster Directory is silent on vows, the 1945 Directory is not. "Covenanting" is an ordinance of God to be observed by men and nations. The Directory defines it as follows, "a solemn act of worship in which individuals, churches, or nations declare their acceptance of Him as their God and pledge their allegiance and obedience to Him."⁵¹ The main applications in today's church are in respect to the "Covenant of Church Membership" and baptismal vows.

How do members feel about their vows? It varies from those who take them very casually to those who take them very seriously. As an example of the latter, we offer this description of Rev. Clarence Macartney taking his membership vows in the last century.

When I was eleven years of age I united with the Church. I have heard men say, "I joined the church when I didn't know what it meant, or what I was doing." I could never understand that. The sublime mystery of the Trinity, the Atonement, the Life hereafter--that, of course is too great and high, even for the mightiest intellect; and as for the majestic fact and truth celebrated at the Lord's Supper, the death of Christ for our sins, as for that, the very angels, Peter said, "Desire to look into it." Yet, in a certain sense, I certainly knew what I was doing when I united with the Church. I knew that I was trying to draw nigh to God; that I was giving my heart to the Saviour of men; and that I was associating myself with the followers of the Lamb of God in all ages, on earth and in heaven. I was not urged by my parents to join the Church, but was told how great

⁵¹Ibid., p. 320. The term "Covenants" has been used in a much wider, but still religious sense, in the Covenanter Church. In Scotland men had the practice of "bonding" themselves to seek a common cause. This idea became incorporated with the Biblical concept of covenant, served as a basis for Scottish national covenants, and various church covenants. For more information see Minutes, 1978, pp. 138-50, and Minutes, 1979, pp. 112-34.

and high a privilege and how great a duty it was, to confess the name of Christ before the world. In the little bedroom off the bathroom in our house, I knelt by the bedside and gave myself to the Lord. On the Communion Sabbath, having been examined by the pastor and the Session, and having answered satisfactorily the questions of the Shorter Catechism, I joined the procession down the aisle and sat down at the Communion Table, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." And sweet ever since it has been.⁵²

Holy Days

Except for the Sabbath and days of fasting and thanksgiving, holy days, such as Christmas and Easter, are not celebrated by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. The reasoning for this position comes from the Regulative Principle of Worship, which says if holy days are not commanded they are forbidden. Thus Reformed Presbyterians believe they are forbidden to celebrate such days. Rev. Dean Smith, presently a Covenanter minister and formerly an Episcopalian, gave the following argument against holy days. The scriptural evidence is against the celebration of holy days (Gal. 4:9-11; and Rom. 14:5) on grounds of adding laws to Scripture. Instead God has instituted the Sabbath as the regular commemoration of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection.⁵³ The result is that Covenanters do not worship on holy days, instead spending the time with their families. Corporate worship is generally reserved for the two Sabbath services.

Sabbath keeping, while not an act of worship, has always been

⁵²Clarence E. Macartney, The Making of a Minister (Great Neck, N.Y.: Channel Press, 1961), pp. 67-68.

⁵³Dean R. Smith, "Bah Humbug!" Covenanter Witness 89 (December 19, 1973):4-6.

connected with it. The Sabbath is still observed by Reformed Presbyterians as a day of rest and worship, and a day to instruct children in the things of God. Below is a description of Sabbath-keeping in pre-1900 Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania. As the description is read it should be kept in mind that the second Sabbath worship service was held after lunch, and the children were taught to memorize both the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly.

Sabbath was kept as a holy day. No unnecessary work was done as most of the food was prepared on Saturday. After the church services on Sabbath, the children spent the remainder of the afternoon committing portions of the psalms and scripture verses and, last but not least, the catechism. And these, especially the catechism, were recited to the father or mother in the evening.⁵⁴

Sacraments

The first sacrament we will examine for procedure is baptism. The Westminster Directory gives the following steps to the sacrament. The Father presents his child. The minister then gives instruction on the sacrament, its nature, use and ends. He admonishes the congregation to look back on their baptism and improve their lives. The parents are exhorted to bring the child up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Prayer is to be joined with the word of institution for the sanctifying of the water. Then the minister is to call the child by name and say, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The baptism is finalized by sprinkling or pouring the water on the face of the child, and concluding with prayer.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Davison, Annals, p. 215.

⁵⁵Confession, p. 294.

Professor R. J. George suggests the Sacrament be administered in a similar manner. Baptism can be done before or after the sermon, if an infant is involved it is easier to do it before. The parents present themselves after singing a Psalm, the minister gives a brief explanation of the sacrament, the profession of faith is taken from the candidate or parents, the minister imposes the baptismal vows, consecrates the sacramental element by prayer, and performs the ceremony. The ceremony is performed by the minister taking a position in front of the parents with the baptismal bowl in the left hand, pronouncing the name distinctly and saying the words of institution. "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost--one God, blessed forever--Amen." He concludes by ascending to the pulpit and praying.⁵⁶

The 1945 Directory gives a slightly different order. The minister gives a brief explanation on the meaning and purpose of the sacrament. The candidates and parents come forward either before or after the explanation and stand for the sacrament. If an adult is baptized he will take vows based on either the Terms of Communion or the Terms of Membership. Parents will take the Terms of Communion as vows, or a summary thereof, in addition to the vows with respect to the raising of the child. After the vows the minister is to say "Remember the vows of God are upon you," and may add, "and for the same you shall answer at the last Great Day." The congregation will rise and the minister will consecrate the water with the following prayer.

⁵⁶George, Pastor, pp. 137-39.

Bless so much of the element of water as shall be used upon this occasion, which we hereby, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, set apart from a common to a sacramental use.

Without closing the prayer he will leave the pulpit and place water on the head of each person to be baptized, speaking their name and saying, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." After the last baptism, he will lengthen the formula by adding the words, "one God over all, blessed forever. Amen." He will conclude the prayer to end the sacramental portion of the worship service.⁵⁷ Baptism is usually placed between the Psalm meditation and the sermon in the order of worship.

The Lord's Supper is a more complex matter to discuss due to its ties to other matters, like preparation and discipline, and the changes that history has wrought with respect to its celebration.

As before we will begin with the service described in the Westminster Directory. Behind the Directory is the theology discussed in chapter V, that the worthy partakers of the sacrament must examine themselves. Therefore the Directory begins with the preparation for the Lord's Supper. Where the sacrament is not frequently administered, warning is to be given the preceding Sabbath, and on that day or another something about the sacrament, preparation for it and the responsibility of taking it are to be taught. The celebration of the sacrament is to begin after the minister finishes his sermon and the prayer following it. He shall make a short exhortation, with a warning and invitation expressing the great benefit of the sacrament, the great danger of the unconverted and

⁵⁷Constitution, pp. 313-15.

immoral eating, and invite all those who feel the burden of their sin to "come to the Lord's table; assuring them, in the same name, of ease, refreshing, and strength to their weak and wearied souls." The communicants may either take their places at the table, or the minister can begin the action by blessing the elements, saying they are to be set apart and doing so by prayer and the words of institution from either the Evangelists or 1 Cor. 11:23-27. The minister shall take the bread, and pass it with the words, "Take ye, eat ye; this is the body of Christ which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of him." In the same way the cup shall be taken and passed to the communicants with the words, "This cup is the new Testament in the blood of Christ, which is shed for the remission of the sins of many: drink ye all of it." After all have communed the minister may put in mind the people of the grace of God in Christ as shown in the sacrament and their responsibility to walk worthy of it. The minister shall conclude with thanks.⁵⁸

In Scotland the churches worked the theology of the Westminster Assembly into church practice. One area which had an effect on the celebration of the Lord's Supper was church discipline. In the Scottish Church the minister and elders attempted to examine all members before the sacrament.⁵⁹ However, there was always a chance that some one would slip through the discipline process and eat unworthily. Thus the last step in the discipline process, "the fencing of the table," occurred at

⁵⁸Confession, pp. 384-86.

⁵⁹George Burnet, The Holy Communion in the Reformed Church of Scotland, 1560-1960 (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), pp. 161-62.

the worship service. The term "fencing" may come either from the open space in front of the church fenced off by the travess, or it may come from the legal term "fence" meaning to proclaim. George Burnet described the fencing in this way.

The fencing was meant to be a final or last-minute challenge to the conscience of the communicant to examine himself. Despite all laws and sactions of the Kirk, a communicant might still know himself to be guilty of unconfessed and undisclosed sins, and while appearing worthy "according to the view of man," could not approve himself "as in the great taskmaster's eye." . . . from the first the fencing lacked nothing in serious admonition and dire warning to all about to eat and drink at the sacred feast, especially to all who were secretly resolved to continue in sin.⁶⁰

It should be remembered that the fencing was implied by the Westminster Directory in its warning to immoral and unconverted persons. The Scots merely strengthened the warning.

Another Scottish practice was the distribution of communion tokens. Authorities are divided on their origin, however some believe that their purpose was to replace the Roman "medalli" issued to those going to mass. For Presbyterians it served to indicate that the church officers had approved the communicant and was his admission token to the sacrament. As George Burnet observed, the token became an object of great value. "The token was regarded with reverence as the visible symbol of the covenant between the communicant and his God. Consequently, every precaution was taken to safe-guard it from abuse or fraud." He cited a few examples of fraud and counterfeiting of tokens.⁶¹ The tokens were the symbol of the highly regarded privilege of admission to the sacrament.⁶² This

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 39-40. ⁶¹Ibid., pp. 62-63. ⁶²Ibid., p. 62.

contrasts with the belief of many today who see admission to the sacrament as something to be taken lightly.

Other changes were made in the 17th century Scottish Communion. The Protesters, which included the Covenanters, lengthened the table address, began mass communions, added ancillary services, and revived the sacramental fast, which was moved from the preceding Sabbath to a weekday.⁶³ We would note that none of these changes affected the parts of the worship service.

In order to gain insight into how participants viewed and practiced the sacrament, we will describe Covenanter Communion services held in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

We are fortunate to have a description of a Covenanter field service in the time of persecution. The Earl of Mume was in the area, with a contingent of British troops, heard about the Communion service and swore he would make his troops' horses trample the elements of the Lord's Supper. As a result scouts were sent out and guards were posted nearby, but close enough to hear the sermon. The out-of-door service had tables set up by the waterside. Only those who had received tokens on Saturday were permitted to partake on the Sabbath morn. John Blackader, a participant, said that all the forms were gone through in spite of the danger. Our quotation begins with the communion service.

Mr. Welsh preached the action sermon,⁶⁴ and served the first two tables: the other four ministers, Mr. Blackader, Mr. Dickson,

⁶³Ibid., pp. 125-31.

⁶⁴The "action" sermon is one preached at communion with Christ's death as subject.

Mr. Riddel, and Mr. Rae, exhorted the rest in turn: the table services were closed by Mr. Welsh with solemn thanksgiving. The Communion was peaceably concluded; all the people heartily offering up their gratitude, and singing with a joyful noise to the Rock of their salvation. It was pleasant as the night fell to hear their melody swelling in full unison along the hills, the whole congregation joining with one accord and praising God with the voice of a psalm. There were two long tables and one short across the head, with seats on each side. About a hundred sat at every table: there were 16 tables served so that about 3200 communicated that day. The afternoon sermon was preached by Mr. Dickson: and the season of solemn services was brought to a close with a sermon on Monday afternoon from Mr. Blackader.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, our source does not tell us the fate of the British troops. It appears they did not disturb the worshippers.

Since chapter II of this thesis contains a communion service held by the Rev. John Cuthberson in the 18th century, we will not repeat it, but proceed to one from the 19th century.

The Newark congregation had its first communion in 1874. It began with preparation services.

On Thursday-fast day-Rev. J. C. K. Milligan explained the Psalm and preached from Joshua iii.5. "Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." In the afternoon, Rev. J. H. Boggs preached from Luke xxii.15. "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." At the close of the sermon, Rev. J. C. K. Milligan explained the terms of communion, and with the session distributed tokens. In the evening, the congregation met together again for prayer. The next preparatory service was held on Saturday afternoon. Sermon by J. H. Boggs from 1 Cor. x.4. "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." Sabbath morning dawned fair, and the day was very pleasant. The hall was comfortably filled. Every member of the congregation was present. Rev. J. C. K. Milligan preached the action sermon from Rev. vii.17. "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe all tears from their eyes." After the usual exercises, the congregation were all seated at one table, and the elements representing Christ's dying love were dispensed. There was joy in this feast as they remembered that for the first time as a congregation they were showing forth the Redeemer's death. As a

⁶⁵M'Crie, Public Worship, pp. 239-40.

band of covenanted witnesses they rejoiced in the privilege of giving this public testimony to the royal claims of Prince Messiah for the first time in this great city. There were comforting evidences of the Master's gracious presence. It was good to be there. The evening service was conducted by Rev. J. H. Boggs, who preached from 2 Cor. v.7. "We walk by faith, and not by sight." The same minister led in the thanksgiving services on Monday evening, sermon from Psalm xl.4. "Thou has given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth."⁶⁶

Prof. R. J. George begins his discussion of communion with the preparatory services held before it. Before the preparatory services can be held, a time of year must be picked that fits the people. For example, a farming community would avoid harvest and planting times. Also in advance of the services a minister must be chosen as assistant. A month long series of sermons is to precede the sacrament. The preparation days, while not integral, are important and are to be carefully observed. The goal of preparation is to create a sacramental frame of mind on the part of the congregation. The intensity of preparation increases beginning with the preparation Sabbath, which is the Sabbath before communion. The week following is to be a week of prayer. The fast-day (generally Friday) should have a specific goal, such as urging men to forsake and repent of sin in the severity of love. On the day of immediate preparation (generally Saturday), a sermon similar to the one given on the preparation Sabbath is to be preached. The love of Christ is to be preached from passages like Luke 22:15 and John 21:15. The aim of this service is to explain the Terms of Communion. George suggests an order of explanation as follows: Sing an appropriate Psalm like 48 or 78, discuss the authority for the Terms of Communion (Rev. 11:1 or Isa. 26:1), constitute the session by

⁶⁶"First Communion in Newark," Our Banner 1 (October 15, 1874):385.

prayer and remark briefly on the terms. One or two terms chosen from those under attack are to be selected for emphasis. Prof. George treats us to a sample outline of an address on the terms. By the first term we are Bible Christians, by the second Calvinists, by the third term Presbyterians, by the fourth Covenanters, by the fifth Witnesses, and by the sixth practical Christians. In connection with this last service before the sacrament, communion tokens are to be distributed. While the denomination considers their use as optional, Rev. George recommends them because they are to signify to the communicants the importance of their engagement, and impress the elders with their responsibility to care for their members and preserve the purity of the sacraments.⁶⁷

Let us now see how Rev. George would conduct the sacramental service. We will look first at his instructions and then at an autobiographical account of one of his communion services. The Psalm explanation in the communion service should be brief and fit the occasion. The sermon should be an action sermon preached by the minister, and not the assistant, on topics like the plan of redemption, the suffering of Christ, and so forth. The words of institution (1 Cor. 11:23-27) should be explained. Professor George again offers a sample explanation:

1. The authority of Christ in instituting the supper.
2. The time of institution, the night of betrayal.
3. The symbolic sacramental elements.
4. The six sacramental acts of Jesus concerning the elements

that we repeat.

⁶⁷George, Pastor, pp. 143-49.

5. The design of the Lord's Supper as a memorial.⁶⁸

After the explanation of the words of institution should come the warning and debarring (that is, "fencing"). Reasons for these practices are given. The warning comes from the command of Christ that a man examine himself (1 Cor. 11:28), and His example in Matt. 26:21.

Debarring is often objected to as inappropriate: that it chills the ardor of devotion: that it distracts the minds of the communicants with needless fear, just at the moment when they should repose confidently on Christ. This objection has no weight as against the command and example of our Lord. When Jesus said, "One of you shall betray me," it did disturb their peace of mind. Their hearts were filled with sorrow. They began every one of them to say--"Lord is it I?"

The purpose of the warning is to show the purity of Christ's house, prepare communicants for coming to the table, deter the impenitent, guard the people against danger of unworthy communing and its fearful consequences (1 Cor. 11:27, 29).⁶⁹ Some ways of debarring are suggested. These include the use of the Ten Commandments, a scriptural portion like Psalm 24:3-6 with its tests of character, and classifying sins or sinners. Passages that can be read in debarring include Rom. 1:28-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; and 1 Tim. 1:9-10.⁷⁰

The warning and debarring conclude with the invitation to the worthy to partake. The purpose of the invitation is to increase the confidence and joy of the communicants by the loving invitation of Christ. Passages that can be used for the invitation include Matt. 5:3-9; 1 Cor. 6:11; S. of Sol. 2:10-12; and 5:1.⁷¹

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 150-54.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 154-57.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 157-58.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 158.

Prof. George gave several suggestions for the remainder of the communion service. The people are to be instructed how they are to go and sit at the communion table in front of the church. Psalm 24:3-10 should be sung while the minister takes his place at the table and the elders uncover the elements. Lift and exhibit the elements with explanation. Consecrate them by prayer (he suggests one), and give the elements using the words of institution. Remain silent while passing the elements. As subsequent tables are served a few remarks, or table addresses, can be given, limiting their content to the King alone. After the communicants have been served, and if the service has been a brief one, a brief address can be given on topics like the experience of communion, keeping vows, and words to children or unconverted. The service should be concluded with a prayer of thanksgiving and the signing of Psalm 72:16-19.⁷²

On Monday comes the service after communion. Rev. George believed they should be kept, even though other denominations were dropping them. They serve as thanksgiving services, means of deepening the impression of communion and so conserving their fruits, and a time for reaching the lost. Appropriate themes are denominational distinctive principles, the binding obligations of covenants, holy living and practical godliness. Services can be concluded by reading passages such as Deut. 6:4-6; Rom. 12:9-21; Eph. 6:1-19; or Col. 3:12-25.⁷³

As can be seen from above, the Lord's Supper was and indeed still is the great celebration of the Covenanter Church year. It was a time of celebration, of prayer and fasting, of emphasis on the means of grace,

⁷²Ibid., pp. 158-60. ⁷³Ibid., pp. 160-61.

of thanksgiving and revival. It is no accident that the celebrations are spoken of with great emotion by members.

We are fortunate to have an account of Communion at R. J. George's congregation in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, by Clarence Edward Macartney who became an outstanding pastor and moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly.

The great occasion in our church life was the semi-annual celebration of the Lord's Supper. For this commemoration a visiting minister always came to assist the pastor. The solemnities began with a fast day on the Friday before the Communion Sabbath. Then on Saturday afternoon came the Preparatory Service, after which we marched forward to receive the "Tokens" which admitted us to the Lord's Table on the Sabbath. The Tokens were not metal, as in the old Scottish days, but a card on which were printed the words of our Lord, "This do in remembrance of Me." Then on Sabbath morning came the great celebration. First the "Action" Sermon, designed to warm our hearts with repentance, faith, and love as we came to the Table. Then the "Fencing" of the Tables; that is, stating the qualifications for a worthy partaking of the Communion and giving warning to the impenitent and those living in sin or "secretly trusting in their own merits," lest so coming, they should "eat and drink damnation to themselves."

After this a psalm was started, and about the time the second or third verse was reached, the families began to file out of their pews and take up the solemn march down the aisles to the tables. The long Communion Table extended across the front of the church between the pulpit and the front pews. At one end of the Table there stood hunch-backed Elder Paisley, soberly clad in broadcloth, to whom we handed our Tokens. There were generally four tables; that is, four sittings at the Communion Table. Our family, as a rule joined the procession to the third Table. The Psalm most frequently sung by the congregation as they went swaying down the aisles was the 45th:

"Behold the daughter of the King
All Glorious waits within;
And with embroideries of gold,
Her garments wrought have been.

"She shall be brought before the King
In robes with needle wrought;
Her fellow-virgins following
Shall unto thee be brought."

I have officiated at the great Communion Service which opens the annual General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. I have been stirred by the sacramental occasions in the three churches where I have served as minister. I have witnessed the gorgeous and pompous celebration of the mass in St. Suplice in Paris, and the grand celebration in St. Isaac's Cathedral of the Orthodox Church, in what was then St. Petersburg; but never have I seen any communion Service which so moved me as those commemorations in the Covenanter Church of my boyhood. The Covenanters had bled, suffered, and died to get free of the rites and liturgy of the English Church. Their communion celebration had no bell, no incense, no gown, and no organ; nothing of that nature; yet, in very truth, as I have just described it, it was poetic, symbolic and ritualistic in the highest degree. The particular communion phrase which still lingers sweetly in my memory and one which I use whenever I administer the Communion myself, was that from the Song of Solomon, "Eat O beloved." Yes, those stern old Covenanters had in them, unconsciously, all the poetry and mysticism of true religion.⁷⁴

The 1945 Directory begins its discussion with the theology of and preparation for the sacrament and moves to an advised communion service. The sacrament is a memorial to Christ's atoning death and marks continuance in and loyalty to the visible church. Sacraments are to be observed as often as the session may decide. Every member is to observe the sacrament with careful preparation. The Lord's day before is to be observed as a preparation Sabbath, with other preparatory services to be arranged by the session. The Terms of Communion are to be explained during the communion season. The goal of these services is to present Christ and the redemption. As the Directory says:

All services connected with the Lord's Supper should reverently present the Lord Jesus Christ and his redeeming love. The psalms, the Scripture, and the sermon should center in Christ and his death upon the cross, and in the blessings which flow therefrom. The words of institution (1 Cor. 11:23-27) should be explained, showing the authority of Christ, the purpose of the supper, and the significance of the symbols and of the sacramental acts.

Members should be reminded of the duty of self-examination, and warned

⁷⁴Macartney, Minister, pp. 66-67.

against unworthy partaking. The people are invited to the table during the singing of a Psalm like 24 or 116. The use of tables, as opposed to serving the sacrament in the pews, is strongly recommended as an aid in discipline.⁷⁵

We will quote the next several sections of the Directory in order to give the forms used:

The minister shall take his place beside the table bearing the elements. When all is ready he shall lift the bread and the cup, and exhibit them to the communicants using words such as these: "The Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread and also the cup, a sacramental act significant of his taking a human nature into union with his Divine person. Following his command and example, I take this bread and this cup, and exhibit them to you as the sacramental symbols of the body and blood of the Lord."

Replacing the elements, the minister shall say: "After the Lord Jesus had taken the bread and the cup, He blessed them, a sacramental act which signifies the consecration of his human nature to the work which He came to do. Let us engage in prayer and consecrate the elements."

The form to be used is:

"Bless so much of the elements of bread and wine as shall be used on this occasion, which we hereby set apart from a common to a sacramental use, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church."

The minister shall take the bread and break it, saying:

"After the Lord Jesus had blessed the bread He brake it, a sacramental act significant of his suffering and death upon the cross. Following his example, I break this bread (here the bread is broken) and give it to you his disciples, saying as He said (here the bread is offered) "Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me."

He shall then take the cup, and give it to the communicants, saying: "After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." After a brief pause he shall continue: "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come."

⁷⁵Constitution, pp. 316-17.

The session is to arrange to serve the ministers and elders. A Psalm such as 45 is to be sung going to and from the tables. A brief address after the sacrament may be given by the minister or the assistant. The service is to conclude with prayer of thanksgiving, praise and the benediction. Special sermons may fittingly follow the communion for the purpose of impressions. They should deal with the great issues and objectives of the Church of Christ.⁷⁶

Since the 1945 Directory was written there has been less emphasis on preparatory services and a trend toward more frequent communion. In this century a popular format has been to have the preparation Sabbath followed by two evening preparatory services in the Wednesday to Saturday time period, followed by a Sabbath morning communion, and concluding with evening service used as the former Monday service was.⁷⁷ However, old forms linger on in many congregations. Dr. Bruce Stewart assisted in Lochiel, Canada, in 1948 or 49, which still had a Friday fast day. He made the mistake of picking up a Reader's Digest, whereupon he was informed they did not read secular literature on fast days. In 1954 when he assisted in Quinter, Kansas, they still had eight services.⁷⁸

There have been other changes. As the congregations have moved toward having communion more than twice a year, there have been fewer preparatory services. Covenant Fellowship, Pittsburgh, for example, celebrates the sacrament bi-monthly, using Sabbath morning as a

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 317-19.

⁷⁷"Notes," Covenanter Witness, January 28, 1931, p. 66. This was the earliest example of a Communion service with two days of preparation I found.

⁷⁸Interview with Bruce Stewart.

preparatory service and the evenings as a communion service. Communion tokens are seldom, if ever used as a discipline technique, but only to gain a roll of communicants. The table is still used in most Reformed Presbyterian churches with some exceptions like Covenant Fellowship and First Beaver Falls where the elements are passed among the pews. We would note that these changes have concerned the adiaphora surrounding the sacrament, and not the parts of worship.

Some things have not changed, however. There is still the strong insistence that men come to the table prepared to commune with their Lord. Unrepentant sinners are not permitted to commune. The sacrament is still the big event of the Covenanter Church year. And, most important, the Lord continues to use the sacrament as a means of grace among His people.

In this chapter we have looked at the practice of Reformed Presbyterian worship. We have seen how a denomination committed and limited to certain parts of worship has taken them from a Scottish Puritan context and adapted them to the American situation. It has been a lesson in how to change, and still stay the same.

CHAPTER VII

A SUMMARY OF REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN WORSHIP

Characteristics of Reformed Presbyterian Worship

In this chapter we will consider the characteristics of Reformed Presbyterian worship, why its parts have changed so little, and what other denominations can learn from it.

Since Reformed Presbyterian worship is little different from the classical worship of Reformed churches, we will therefore use Dr. M. E. Osterhaven's list of the characteristics of Reformed worship as a basis for the characteristics of Reformed Presbyterian worship.

1. Reformed worship attempts to restore worship to the norms of the Scripture and the practice of the apostolic church.¹ This is an application of the Reformed belief that Scripture is the sole authority in the worship and practice of the Christian life.

2. Worship must be according to the Word of God. John Calvin would have only the parts of worship for which he could find a scriptural warrant. He believed that man could not properly worship God because of man's depravity, unless he was guided by the Scriptures.² The Reformed

¹M. Eugene Osterhaven, The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 56. Dr. Osterhaven is professor of systematic theology at Western Theological Seminary.

²Ibid.

Presbyterian Church, by her strong insistence on the Regulative Principle of Worship, shows her adherence to the Reformed tradition.

3. Worship is to have edification as its primary purpose (1 Cor. 14:26). There is to be instruction and understanding in whatever the church does in worship.³ Edification is a strength of Reformed Presbyterian worship due to its emphasis on using and teaching Scripture. There are generally two Bible readings and four Psalms in the morning service. As for teaching on the Scripture, there is the sermon, the Psalm meditation, some introductions to Psalms before they are sung, and introductions to the Scripture passages before they are read, all done by an educated clergy. Edification is not limited to intellectual content, but is designed to make men doers of the Word, and not merely hearers.

One of the questions that puzzled me for a long time is why the Bible teaches that edification is the goal of worship. Two teachings lead me to the answer. First, the Old Testament prophets do not regard worship as very devout. Again and again they condemn worship that is not coupled with righteousness. "To obey is better than sacrifice." (1 Sam. 15:22) Unless worship is part of a life style of obedience it becomes a form of idolatry, because it does not come from an obedient heart. Because edification is the goal of worship, obedience in a man's whole life is the requirement for true worship. There is no worship without edification.

The second teaching is that worship has two meanings. One is corporate worship, the sense which it has been used in this paper. The

³Ibid., p. 57.

other is that all of life is worship. The answer to our problem lies in the relation between these two forms of worship. Corporate worship has several functions such as praise, humiliation, and edification. The goal of worship is edification because of the requirements that make a man open to edification. These include a humble heart listening to the Holy Spirit speak to it, Scripture and orthodox preaching in the worship service, and a willingness to obey God the other six days. In other words, the requirements for edification are identical to the requirements for worship, and edification serves as the basis on which we worship by our deeds the other six days. If the man is not edified on the Sabbath, he has no basis for the service on the other six days.

4. Worship is to be done "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). The quest is for a balance between freedom and order in worship. There is also to be dignity and something of the artistic.⁴ Reformed Presbyterians attempt to have a balance between freedom and order in several ways. The first is to prescribe the parts of worship, but not the order. As we mentioned, the Directory for Worship is advisory rather than required. This means congregations have the option to adapt worship to their local situation. Congregations keep order in their services by having planned orders of worship with written bulletins.

Worship is held in high regard, and the attempt is made to do it well. The most important way in which Reformed Presbyterians witness to the dignity of their worship services is by attending them. A high percentage of the members will attend both on Sabbath morning and evening. I remember when there were big snow falls on Saturday nights in Beaver

⁴Ibid.

Falls. On Sunday morning the radio would list the church cancellations. The Reformed Presbyterian Churches would not cancel, and many of the members would manage to attend.

Artistry will be shown largely by the minister and by the singing. Many ministers create a service that blends well around a certain theme. Some have great literary skills that are used in prayer and preaching. The congregation's main contribution to the artistry is in the area of singing. A number of congregations can carry four-part harmony well, and there is an emphasis on teaching congregations how to sing.

5. Simplicity is also a characteristic of Reformed worship. This contrasts with the Roman mass which is ornate and accompanied by great ceremony. John Calvin, while realizing that worship could have a great appeal to the senses, felt that its main function was to please God.⁵ The function of worship, then, is to please God and not man. So often in discussions on worship I have heard people ask, "Does this worship please me?" instead of, "Does this worship please God?" The reply to this humanistic line of thinking is to ask, "Whom are we worshipping, you or God?"

Reformed Presbyterian sanctuaries reflect the simplicity of their view of worship. They are simple, often having the beauty and dignity of simplicity. There is little in the way of crosses or religious art. The worship services lack the pomp and sensual appeal of many liturgical churches. This is intentional. The appeal of the Reformed church is first to the intellect, second to the conscience, with the emotions and will following. The emotions are to be moved by the message from God, and not

Ibid., pp. 57-58.

by the environment. John White commenting on 2 Cor. 4:2 expressed the function of the preacher, and by implication the worship service as follows:

Truth is for the mind not the emotions. Your first job is to inform the minds of men and women with facts. If you do that the Holy Spirit will awaken their consciences. Only when people's consciences are awakened by the Holy Spirit can their emotions properly be stirred. And even then God will only stir them by awakening them to the true gravity of their condition and the wonder of Christ's love. Such awakening, such stirring is God's part, not yours. Your job is to inform not to dabble with wills and emotions.⁶

Man's deepest and greatest hunger is for God and His Word. Without it he will die (Amos 8:11-13). With it the rest of life will come to its proper focus (Matt. 6:33). It is this supreme need that Reformed worship attempts to meet. The simplicity is designed in part to keep other things from distracting men from their interaction with Word and Sacrament.

6. There are other characteristics of Reformed worship, among them is ecumenicity. By using only practices commanded in the Bible, Reformed Presbyterian congregations worship in a way that allows Christians from other denominations to participate wholeheartedly in all parts of worship.

7. The last characteristic we would mention is that it is Word-centered worship. All parts of worship are either the Word (Psalms and Scripture readings), about the Word (sermons, Psalm meditations and sacraments), or according to the Word (prayer and offering). Indeed, there are frequent allusions to or quotations from Scripture in prayers, and Scripture passages are sometimes quoted with the offering.

⁶John White, The Golden Cow: Materialism in the Twentieth-Century Church (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1979), p. 150.

Why Reformed Presbyterian Worship
Kept Its Form

Historically speaking, the most interesting question is why the Reformed Presbyterian Church has kept her form of worship when most other Presbyterian and Reformed churches have changed it. We need more definition to understand this question. As was mentioned in chapter IV, the parts of worship (offering, prayer, Scripture reading, preaching, and so forth) are commanded in the Bible, but the circumstances (time of day, number of preparatory services before the sacraments, order of worship, and so forth) are adiaphora. The Reformed Presbyterian Church allows the freedom to change the circumstances, but not to change the parts of worship. Other presbyterian churches, such as the United Presbyterian Church, have changed both.

Are there historical reasons for the refusal of Reformed Presbyterians to change her parts of worship? Yes, there is an attachment to the past, particularly to the Scottish persecutions, but this does not seem to greatly affect worship. While it is true that martyrs did sing Psalms as they went to their deaths, this is never mentioned as an authority for modern Covenanters singing them. Also, other practices of the Scottish persecution period, such as the use of communion tokens, have largely been abandoned.

Are there sociological reasons? Yes, the denomination has traditionally been rural which implies a certain conservatism. There were many immigrants, especially in the last century, who were used to Covenanter worship in Ireland and Scotland, who would not want this reminder of home changed. This, however, was also true of the United Presbyterians

who dropped exclusive Psalmody in the 1920's. Small size and close fellowship in the denomination have contributed to conformity in worship. People know what is happening in other congregations, and presbyteries will take action if there are breaches of discipline.

There is good evidence that none of these reasons adequately explains the stability of the Reformed Presbyterian worship. In 1833 the Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod, also known as the "New Lights," split with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Both denominations had congregations located in the same areas, and often in the same towns. They had the same family ties and both benefited from Irish immigrants. The New Lights, however, changed their position on worship. Since the two denominations were so close, historical and sociological reasons clearly fail to explain the stability of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America position on worship. This leaves us only with the theological reasons for the continuing position on worship. This position is supported by Nancy Clark, who, in her thesis on the New Lights, argues that changes in their denominational worship came as a result of a doctrinal decline.⁷

There are five theological reasons why the Covenanter Church has held to her position on worship. First, a balance was kept between the circumstances and parts of worship. Allowing congregations freedom in circumstances and, therefore, blending of parts avoided the error of too rigid a system.

⁷Nancy E. Clark, "A History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church" (M.A. dissertation, Butler University, 1966), pp. 77-79, 83-85.

Second is the scriptural basis for the doctrinal position.

While some will not agree with the doctrinal position on worship defended in this thesis, it must be admitted that there is scriptural evidence for it. Given the Reformed view of the authority of the Bible, it would be difficult to hold a position on worship much different from that of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Third, church members were and are educated in doctrine. This was and is in part due to the early founding of Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary (founded 1810) and Geneva College (founded 1848), but most of the credit should go to the parents. Children were raised singing Psalms and reading the Bible in family devotions. On Sunday afternoons the common practice was to catechize the children using the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The parents were supported by numerous tracts, articles in denominational publications, and educated clergy preaching and teaching on Covenanter distinctive doctrines. Finally there was the environment of their denomination; most members were Covenanters because they really believed what the church taught.

A major reason why Christians go to worship services is to worship God. The Reformed Presbyterian service attempts to meet this desire by its Biblical emphasis. As we saw in chapter VI, the Reformed Presbyterian worship also attempts to meet the desire for worship both objectively and subjectively.

Fifth and most important was and still is the content of Reformed Presbyterian worship. Probably the major reason why Christians go to worship services is to hear and obey the Word of God, and Reformed Presbyterian worship services are filled with the Word. From the call to

worship (a Bible passage) to the apostolic benediction, the service is from the Bible.

What Churches Can Learn from Reformed
Presbyterian Worship

What can the wider Christian Church learn from Reformed Presbyterian worship? The main lesson is the value of a Biblically-centered worship. This is very significant in an era when one hears that some clergy are preaching from Time magazine. Only a Biblically centered worship will meet man's deepest need for the Word of God.

A more specific application of this relates to the singing of Psalms. While at one time many hymnals contained a large selection of Psalms, the number of Psalm selections has decreased dramatically in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the Psalms have not been replaced by better material, but frequently by sentimental lyrics with little theological content. The exclusive Psalmody position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church has motivated many churches to a greater use of the Psalms in worship.⁸

⁸The conclusions in this chapter were discussed with Dr. Bruce C. Stewart, professor of Practical Theology, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

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