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*Front Cover*: Samuel Miller, D.D. (1769-1850), Presbyterian Minister and Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government at Princeton (1813-1849). Graphite and charcoal on Bristol, Copyright © 2003 by Lori Teibel. *Back Cover*: Westminster Abbey, attributed to John Kay. *Britannia Illustrata* (London, 1707).

# Reframing Presbyterian Worship: A Critical Survey of the Worship Views of John M. Frame and R. J. Gore

By Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D. D. and David C. Lachman, Ph.D.

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

One of the key reformational doctrines<sup>1</sup> determinate of the health if not the being of a "Presbyterian" Church is the aptly named Regulative Principle of Worship.<sup>2</sup> This principle which was clearly championed from the beginning of the Scottish Reformation, and central to English Puritanism,<sup>3</sup> was refined and

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1. "I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his word." (John Calvin, "On the Necessity of Reforming the Church," *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, edited by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet. Edited and translated by Henry Beveridge [Edinburgh: 1844; Rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983] 1.128-129). "All wirschipping, honoring, or service inventit by the braine of man in the religioun of God, without his own express commandment, is Idolatrie." (John Knox, "A Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry," *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing [Edinburgh: Printed for the Bannatyne Club, 1854; Rpt NY: AMS Press, 1966] 3.34).

2. While it may have been used earlier, the term Regulative Principle of Worship apparently was coined from or at least popularized by usage in the 1946 report of the OPC, "Report of the Committee on Song in Worship Presented to the Thirteenth General Assembly, on the Teaching of Our Standards Respecting the Songs That May Be Sung in the Public Worship of God," specifically section 'A' by John Murray (*Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Minutes of the General Assembly* [1946] 101-107). Research by Sherman Isbell supports Murray authorship. See Endnote A.

3. The regulative principle of worship was the established doctrine of Scottish Presbyterianism, and of the English Puritans. See Endnote B.

4. *Presbyterianism the Truly Primitive and Apostolical Constitution of the Church of Christ*, "The Worship of the Presbyterian Church" (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1835) 64-65.

5. Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London, 1646) 96.

6. John B. Adger, "A Denial of Divine Right for Organs in Public Worship," *Southern Presbyterian Review*, 20.1 (January 1869) 85.

7. George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies*, ed. Christopher Coldwell (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1993)

classically presented in the Westminster Standards, from whence it has been an integral doctrine of Presbyterianism ever since.

The Westminster Assembly determined: "But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture." (*Confession of Faith*, 21.1). The Princeton professor, Dr. Samuel Miller, gives a succinct statement of the principle when he writes that since the Scriptures are the "only infallible rule of faith and practice, no rite or ceremony ought to have a place in the public worship of God, which is not warranted in Scripture, either by direct precept or example, or by good and sufficient inference."<sup>4</sup> A briefer statement still which sums up the Presbyterian principle of worship, is that in the worship of God, "Not to Command is to Forbid,"<sup>5</sup> or "Whatever is not commanded is forbidden."<sup>6</sup>

As this brief definition can lead to misunderstanding, a necessarily corollary to this principle states that there are some circumstances "concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed." (*Confession of Faith*, 1.6). Defining these "circumstances," is part and parcel with the discussion of what authority the church has in ordering the worship of God. As for the church's power in this regard, George Gillespie gives three conditions:<sup>7</sup>

I direct my course straight to the dissecting of the true limits, within which the church's power of enacting laws about things pertaining to the worship of God

is bounded and confined, and which it may not overleap nor transgress. Three conditions I find necessarily requisite in such a thing as the church has power to prescribe by her laws: 1<sup>st</sup> It must be only a circumstance of divine worship; no substantial part of it; no sacred significant and efficacious ceremony. For the order and decency left to the definition of the church, as concerning the particulars of it, comprehends no more but mere circumstances.... 2<sup>nd</sup> That which the church may lawfully prescribe by her laws and ordinances, as a thing left to her determination, must be one of such things as were not determinable by Scripture because *individua* are *infinita*.... 3<sup>rd</sup> If the church prescribe anything lawfully, so that she prescribe no more than she has power given her to prescribe, her ordinances must be accompanied with some good reason and warrant given for the satisfaction of tender consciences.”

Also, in his letter to “All in the Reformed Churches,” Gillespie defined circumstances this way: “...there is nothing which any way pertains to the worship of God left to the determination of human laws, beside the mere circumstances, which neither have any holiness in them, forasmuch as they have no other use and praise in sacred than they have in civil things, nor yet were particularly determinable in Scripture, because they are infinite.” (*EPC*, xli). James Henley Thornwell gives a more detailed definition:<sup>8</sup>

Circumstances are those concomitants of an action without which it either cannot be done at all, or cannot be done with decency and decorum. Public worship, for example, requires public assemblies, and in public assemblies people must appear in some costume and assume some posture.... Public assemblies, moreover, cannot be held without fixing the time and place of meeting: these are circumstances which the church is at liberty to regulate.... We must distinguish between those circumstances which attend actions as actions—that is, without which the actions cannot be—and those circumstances which, though not essential, are added as appendages. These last do not fall within the jurisdiction of the church. She has no right to appoint them. They are circumstances in the sense that they do not belong to the substance of the act. They are not circumstances in the sense that they so surround it that they cannot be separated from it. A liturgy is a circumstance of this kind.... In public worship, indeed in all commanded external actions, there are two elements—a fixed and a variable. The fixed

element, involving the essence of the thing, is beyond the discretion of the church. The variable, involving only the circumstances of the action, its separable accidents, may be changed, modified or altered, according to the exigencies of the case.

Gillespie’s third condition raises another principle which relates to the church’s power regarding worship, which is the doctrine of Christian Liberty or Liberty of Conscience. The Westminster divines state at Confession of Faith 20.2: “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith or worship.”<sup>9</sup>

The language of the Confession at these several points is reminiscent of both the writings of Gillespie, and of his Westminster colleague, Samuel Rutherford. In one of Rutherford’s works circulating in the Assembly during the early part of the discussion on Christian Liberty, and cited at the same time during debate on the subject of Excommunication, he writes (Rutherford, 109):<sup>10</sup>

281-284. Hereafter *EPC*. “This large volume is the most elaborate defense of the classic Puritan-Scottish Presbyterian view of the regulative principle, recently reprinted. Gillespie was an influential member of the Westminster Assembly.” John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996) 157. Hereafter, *Spirit and Truth*.

8. Cited from John L. Girardeau, D.D. LL.D., “The Discretionary Power of the Church,” *Sermons*, ed. by Rev. George A. Blackburn (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1907. Rpt. in *Life Work and Sermons of John L. Girardeau*, Sprinkle Publications, nd) 400-401. See also, “Church Boards and Presbyterianism,” *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Rpt. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974) 246-247. On the nature of circumstances, see also: *The Works of John Owen*, v. 15, “Discourse Concerning Liturgies,” ed. William H. Goold (Rpt. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966).

9. Regarding the long incorrect text, “contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship,” Dr. S. W. Carruthers notes: This double error is the most important in the whole Confession. It has obscured a distinction of great significance ... The divines’ argument is this: men are free in all things directly contrary to God’s word; but, in addition, if the question is one of faith or worship, they are free in matters not stated in the word. The distinction between matters civil and religious, and the great doctrine concerning things indifferent in the ecclesiastical world, are completely obscured by the change of a single letter and an alteration of punctuation.” S. W. Carruthers, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Being an account of the Preparation and Printing of its Seven Leading Editions, to which is appended a critical text of the Confession with notes thereon* (Manchester: R. Aikman & Son, [1937]) 127-128.

10. See the Minutes of the Assembly, 196-197. Alexander F. Mitchell and John Struthers, eds. *Minutes of the Sessions of the*

In actions or Religious means of Worship, and actions Morall, whatever is beside the Word of God, is against the Word of God; I say in Religious means, for there be means of Worship, or Circumstances Physicall, not Morall, not Religious, as whether the Pulpit be of stone or of timber, the Bell of this or this Mettall, the house of Worship stand thus or thus in Situation.

Our *Formalists* will have it in the power of rulers to Command in the matter of Worship, that which is beside the Word of God, and so is negatively Lawfull, though it be not Positively conform to Gods Word, nor Commanded or warranted by practice; which I grant is a witty way of *Romes* devising, to make entry for Religious humane Ceremonies.

Gillespie wrote the following a decade before the Assembly, which not only contains similar thoughts as the Confessional statements, but relates as well to the common usage, popularized later by men such as James Bannerman and William Cunningham, respecting the power of the civil magistrate *circa sacra* [about religion] as opposed to *in sacris* [in religion] (*EPC*, 288, 314, 316, 318):<sup>11</sup>

The church is forbidden to add anything to the commandments of God which he has given unto us, concerning his worship and service (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6); therefore she may not lawfully prescribe anything in the works of divine worship, if it be not a mere circumstance belonging to that kind of things which were not determinable by Scripture.... These *praecognita* [*things foreseen*] being now made good, come we to speak more particularly of the power of princes to make laws and ordinances about things which concern the worship of God.... But in all the Scripture princes have neither a commendable example, nor any other warrant, for the making of any innovation in religion, or for the prescribing of sacred significant ceremonies of men's devising.... Now as

touching the other sort of things which we consider in the worship of God, namely, things merely circumstantial, and such as have the very same use and respect in civil which they have in sacred actions, we hold that whensoever it happens to be the duty and part of a prince to institute and enjoin any order or policy in these circumstances of God's worship, then he may only enjoin such an order as may stand with the observing and following of the rules of the word, whereunto we are tied in the use and practice of things which are in their general nature indifferent.

These lengthy citations and definitions are given because the regulative principle of worship is often misunderstood or mischaracterized when they are ignored. For instance when the doctrine regarding circumstances is ignored, one may see questions in reaction to the regulative principle such as, "If you believe in this regulative principle then why do you use pews in public worship, since they are not mentioned in Scripture?" As William Cunningham writes, just before alluding to Confession of Faith 1.6, "Those who dislike this principle, from whatever reason, usually try to run us into difficulties by putting a very stringent construction upon it, and thereby giving it an appearance of absurdity..."<sup>12</sup> Also, without any reference to historical theology, or to the theological milieu in which the language of the Westminster Standards were drafted, the meaning of the divines may be recast and the traditional/historical meaning divorced from their foundational statements by some postmodern deconstruction of their words. This leads to statements like, "I hold to the regulative principle of the Westminster Confession of Faith, but not to the Puritan understanding of that principle."

Whether they fully understand them or not, it is true that many do reject Presbyterian views of worship. Dr. Cunningham writes of those "latitudinarians" who simply find such a principle repugnant: "Of the views generally held by the Reformers on the subject of the organization of the Church, there are two which have been always very offensive to men of a loose and latitudinarian tendency—viz. the alleged unlawfulness of introducing into the worship and government of the Church anything which is not positively warranted by Scripture, and the permanent binding obligation of a particular form of Church government..." (*Reformers and the Regulative Principle*, 38). There is also an understandable rejection of Presbyterian principles by those of an Anglican, Lutheran or similar persuasion, who profess faith in a different rule of worship, "that

*Westminster Assembly of Divines*. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874).

11. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh : T&T Clark, 1868. Rpt. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960; and 1974) 154-155. William Cunningham, "Church Power," *Discussions on Church Principles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1863) 230.

12. William Cunningham, "The Reformers and the Regulative Principle," in *The Reformation of the Church: A collection of Reformed and Puritan documents on Church issues* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965; Rpt. 1987) 38-39. This is an extract from Cunningham's *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979 Rpt) 31-46.

the Church might warrantably introduce innovations into its government and worship, which might seem fitted to be useful, provided it could not be shown that there was anything in Scripture which expressly prohibited or discountenanced them....” (*Reformers and the Regulative Principle*, 38). However, unhappily for Presbyterianism, criticism and opposition to her rule of worship has not been limited to those who subscribe to different confessions of faith, and this important doctrine has often come under fire from within her own walls. Such is the case in this day.

In particular, over the last several decades, two Presbyterian office holders have taken up the pen against the regulative principle of worship and their writings have received some currency and prominence amongst those looking for champions to overthrow this old cornerstone of Presbyterian orthodoxy. These are Professor John M. Frame, and Dean R. J. Gore. Though he claims to hold to “the basic idea of the regulative principle,” the former rejects the actual principle by redefining it away from what he believes are “the complicated Puritan amplifications of it,” while the latter challenges it directly and would “like to simply drop the regulative principle from Presbyterian theology.” (*Spirit and Truth*, 157). Since this doctrine is crucial to a healthy Presbyterianism, and as the works of these disputants are actually quite deficient to form any sufficient basis for questioning it, the following article surveys their writings and notes the key problems in their contentions with the regulative principle of worship.

In the first section dealing with the writings of John M. Frame, Dr. Frank J. Smith commences the survey by noting some of the professor’s early comments on worship from some seminary class notes from the 1970s. He then moves on to the professor’s published views on worship, observing some key problems with these, as well as noting and memorializing some of the criticisms made by others at the time of their publication. The second section begins with a rigorous critique of R. J. Gore’s doctoral dissertation, “The Pursuit of Plainness: Rethinking the Regulative Principle of Worship,” written by Dr. David C. Lachman, Dr. Smith’s co-editor of *Worship in the Presence of God*. Dr. Lachman exposes serious deficiencies in this paper, and concludes that it “completely fails to make a credible case against the Regulative Principle of Worship.” The survey concludes with a review of Dean Gore’s published work, *Covenantal Worship*, which, as the author, Dr. Smith, notes, retains many of the faults of the dissertation from which it sprang.

## The Writings of John M. Frame Against The Regulative Principle of Worship

By Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.

History undoubtedly will record that the most influential opponent of Presbyterian worship within conservative Presbyterianism in the twentieth century was John McElphatrick Frame.

Born in 1939 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, John Frame graduated from Princeton University, received his Bachelor of Divinity degree from Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) in 1964, and pursued doctoral studies at Yale University. He never completed the dissertation at Yale, however, as in 1968 he was hired to teach at Westminster Seminary. In 1980, Professor Frame moved to California to help start Westminster’s branch campus in Escondido. After two decades in California, he was called in 2000 to be a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. He was recently awarded the Doctor of Divinity degree by Belhaven College.

Because of his stature as a seminary theology professor, he has been able to develop and inculcate views that are far out of the mainstream of classical Reformed thought. Among the most distinctive of his views is the notion that “theology is application”—that is, even the very formulation of theological rubrics (categories) is somewhat arbitrary, and represents a human endeavor, rather than, ideally, reflecting the mind of God as revealed in Scripture.

Theology, of course, must be applied, or the result is dead orthodoxy. But theology has always been regarded as the queen of the sciences, and, as such, as objective in nature. But the professor’s reframing of the theological enterprise recasts it in a subjectivistic direction.

The implications of such are profound for theology as a whole, and it is evident that his views have profoundly affected the way in which he does theology. Indeed, Dr. Frame has promulgated his peculiar

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beliefs on a wide variety of topics. But in no field of theology has this warping effect been more noticeable than the area of worship. The result is that his views regarding worship are among the most novel within putatively conservative Presbyterian circles.

#### WESTMINSTER SEMINARY: DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE CLASS NOTES

In the 1990s, Professor Frame would publish books and articles on the doctrine of worship (see below). However, at least some of his peculiar views were formulated decades before then, as witnessed in his class lectures at Westminster Seminary.

In his “Doctrine of the Christian Life” course, Mr. Frame dealt with the Ten Commandments. In conjunction with the Second Commandment, he quoted from the Westminster Confession of Faith, 21.1, regarding the regulative principle of worship, and also quoted from 20.2 (liberty of conscience in relation to faith and worship) and 1.6 (“good and necessary consequence” being equally binding as express statements of Scripture; and circumstances regarding worship and church government). Commenting upon the notion of “good and necessary consequence”, he wrote: “Worship is not limited to ‘express’ teachings of Scripture, but is based also on legitimate inferences from Scripture. That is, applications. The Confession makes no sharp distinction between the meaning of Scripture and its application, and no distinction at all between these as to their authority.”<sup>13</sup>

Before proceeding further, we would note that Professor Frame appears to have equivocated regarding his terminology. There is a profound difference between “good and necessary consequence” or “legitimate inferences” on the one hand, and “applications” on the other—particularly the way in which Mr. Frame defines “applications.” We shall see a lot more of this notion of “applications” and the blurring of terminology relative to the regulative principle in his later writings.

Commenting on the notion of circumstances of worship, the professor stated: “Whenever a question arises as to whether or not a practice is justified by the regulative principle, we must ask whether or not that practice is an ‘element’ of worship or a mere ‘circum-

stance.’ Such questions are often difficult to answer. Yet the Confession sees rightly that to apply Scripture to a situation always involves some Christian prudence, some knowledge of the situation, some extra-Scriptural premises. That cannot be avoided in worship or in life in general” (“Christian Life,” 148).

Professor Frame summarized as follows (“Christian Life,” 149):

(A) Elements of worship must be prescribed by Scripture. ‘Whatever is not commanded is forbidden.’ In Lutheranism a different principle prevails, ‘Whatsoever is not forbidden is permitted.’ Roman Catholicism is even further from the Reformed principle, claiming the right to command what Scripture neither commands nor forbids. Modernism is even worse, permitting and at times commanding what Scripture forbids.

(B) The regulative principle does not require that everything we do in worship be the response to a specific divine command. Acts performed in response to inferences from Scripture or as circumstances of worship are permitted.

Again, what we see here is a blurring of the categories. What the Westminster Seminary professor giveth in point (A), he taketh away in point (B). If the regulative principle has any meaning—and is meaningfully distinct from, say, a Lutheran formulation—the elements of worship constitute the particular acts of worship; but in this professor’s framework, particular acts may themselves be “circumstances” of worship (and therefore, by definition, not requiring a divine command).

Professor Frame went on to question the wisdom of the Westminster Confession of Faith in drawing a sharp distinction between life in general and worship in particular. After a long discussion, he finally concluded: “There are distinctions . . . between faith-worship and other human activities, but those differences are subtle, not as sharp as they are sometimes made out to be. There is a basic unity of structure among all of life’s activities in their relation to God’s law.” Again, we shall see the consequences of the professor’s thinking along these lines in his later writings on worship, and the results are not subtle.

Mr. Frame also discussed the issues of exclusive psalmody and musical instrumentation. Regarding the content of worship song, he framed the debate this way: “The logical status of song: What is song? Is it an ‘element’ of worship. . .? A ‘circumstance?’ An aspect of

13. John M. Frame, ST 323 Doctrine of the Christian Life, Lecture Outline, Part III, §spring 1979, 148. Hereafter “Christian Life.” In this and in all subsequent citations, emphasis is in the original unless otherwise noted.

some other element?" Having set up the terms of debate according to his preferences, he argued: "We must not simply assume that it is an independent element, as, e.g., John Murray does in his minority report to the OPC General Assembly. Some argument is needed."<sup>14</sup> His position is as follows: "I maintain that song is not an independent 'element' of worship, but a form by which other elements are carried on. It is a form of prayer, praise, teaching (Col. 3:16), etc." He also argued: "If song is really a form of prayer, teaching, etc., then when we apply the regulative principle, we must ask, not what Scripture commands us to sing, but rather what Scripture commands us to pray, teach, etc. But all Christians agree that extra-Scriptural words may be used in prayer, praise, and teaching" ("Christian Life," 155-156).

Here, we can see more clearly the problem in Professor Frame's position. The regulative principle means that the particular elements or parts of worship are prescribed; but in his view, it is merely aspects (prayer, praise, teaching, exhortation, etc.) which are Biblically mandated—aspects which can come to expression in a variety of ways. Accordingly, even the reading of Scripture would not necessarily be a prescribed element of worship, since all Christians agree that extra-Scriptural words may be used in teaching. As a matter of fact, neither the reading of the Word nor the preaching of the Word could be considered to be mandated under Professor Frame's system. If it is true that whatever you may preach you may also sing, then there is nothing to prohibit someone from singing a sermon rather than preaching it.

Further confusion regarding the regulative principle is manifest in Professor Frame's consideration of the question of instrumental music. On the one hand, he appealed to various Scripture passages which mention musical instruments, in an effort to justify using them in public worship today; on the other hand, he wrote that instruments are a "circumstance" which can "provide the important function of coordinating pitch and rhythm in the singing" ("Christian Life," 157). But, a circumstance of worship is something which, by definition, is outside of Scripture; to appeal to Scripture to justify a particular practice and simultaneously to assert that that practice is a matter of circumstance, is contradictory. As will become obvious, the professor's lack of clarity regarding "circumstances" has not improved over the years.

Professor Frame concluded his discussion of musical instrumentation thusly ("Christian Life," 157):

The last point [viz., that instruments have an important role as a "circumstance"], plus the earlier Scriptural references, suggests that instrumental music is basically a form of song, just as song is a form of speech.... Instruments are an extension of the human voice. By them we praise, rejoice, etc. If this analysis is correct, then the use of instruments does not require any independent Scriptural justification. To find out what Scripture allows us to play, we ask what Scripture allows us to sing, and ultimately to speak. From this perspective, the prohibition of instruments begins to look like prohibition of microphones, hearing aids, etc. The idea that we can blow air across our vocal cords, or into electronic devices, but not through a mouthpiece, seems highly arbitrary.

Not only does Professor Frame exhibit confusion regarding the nature of a circumstance, but he also demonstrates that he does not really adhere to the regulative principle. To view the playing of an instrument, or singing and speaking, as being on a continuum (to the extent that no meaningful distinction can be drawn among them), implies that there are no particular "parts" or "elements" of worship, which in turn constitutes a denial of the regulative principle.

#### SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

In a 1992 article in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Professor John Frame posed "questions" regarding the regulative principle of worship;<sup>15</sup> and in so doing, helped to demonstrate his continued misunderstanding of the principle. T. David Gordon, in a response, characterizes this article's general deficiencies:<sup>16</sup>

14. Editor's Note: See *Minority Report of the Committee on Song in the Public Worship of God Submitted to the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1947). The text is in the *Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Minutes of the General Assembly* (1947), 51-56. A corrected version of both the majority and minority reports, including addition of a missing line of text, is available at the OPC website at <http://www.opc.org/GA/song.html>. According to William Young, the co-signer of the minority report, it was entirely written by John Murray.

15. John M. Frame, "Some Questions about the Regulative Principle," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (Fall 1992) 357-366. Hereafter "Some Questions."

16. T. David Gordon, "Some Answers About the Regulative Principle," *WTJ* 55 (Fall 1993) 321-329. Hereafter "Some Answers." The author thanks Dr. Gordon for his permission to quote extensively from his reviews of the writings on worship of both Mr. Frame and Dr. Gore.

Professor John Frame very accurately entitled a recent article, “Some Questions about the Regulative Principle,” since questions, rather than solutions, dominated the article. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Often the road to cogent answers is first charted by raising cogent questions. Unfortunately, neither the questions raised nor the answers proposed were especially precise or cogent. It was never clear to this reader, for instance, *whose* regulative principle Frame was evaluating, or *whose* understanding of the “circumstances” of worship were problematic, or *why* a new category, “mode,”<sup>17</sup> was deemed necessary, since the three existing categories of Reformed worship (elements, circumstances, and forms) would appear adequate to his concerns....

Regarding whose view of the regulative principle of Worship Frame may have been addressing, Dr. Gordon complained:

It is not clear with whom Frame is debating.... The lack of specificity makes it unclear to the reader whether Frame’s difference is with historic, clearly defined understandings of the principle, or with some of the particular individuals he may have met in his lifetime, who may not represent any other individuals than themselves.... Is Frame debating the regulative principle as articulated by the Westminster Assembly, by George Gillespie, by John Owen, by James Bannerman, or by the Southern Presbyterians (Dabney, Girardeau, Thomas E. Peck)? It is not clear that his debate is with any of these, and if it is, he has misunderstood them all.

17. Regarding Gordon’s criticism of his category here, Frame writes: “As for ‘mode’ (p. 326), I do not care much about it. Take everything I said about ‘mode’ and put it under ‘circumstances,’ if that makes it clearer. My new paper does not use the ‘mode’ category. It’s a question of how you cut the pie and, of course, whether you like it *à la mode*.” John M. Frame, “Reply to T. David Gordon,” *WTJ* 56 (Spring 1994) 183. Hereafter “Reply to Gordon.” See the footnote below regarding this “new paper.”

18. Gordon remarks in a footnote: “So Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* 2.349: ‘And so, likewise, there are matters not *in* the public worship of God, but *about* the public worship of God, in regard to which the law of nature comes in. The *ceremonies* and *institutions* of Church worship are properly and distinctively matters *in sacris*; the *circumstances* of Church worship, or those that belong to it in common with the ordinary proceedings or peculiar solemnities of men, are properly and distinctively matters *circa sacra*’ (emphases his).” James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868. Rpt. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960; and 1974).

### *Circumstances in Worship*

Frame begins his article by noting the distinction between the Calvinistic understanding of the regulative principle (“whatever is not commanded is forbidden”), and the Lutheran-Catholic counterpart (“whatever is not forbidden is permitted”). He calls the Reformed principle “RP1” and the Lutheran-Catholic principle “RP2” (“Some Questions,” 357-358). However, it is painfully apparent that he has failed to grasp the distinctiveness of Reformed worship, particularly with regard to the crucial matter of “circumstances” of worship. T. David Gordon explains (“Some Answers,” 323-324):

Frame’s understanding of “circumstances,” and how they are governed, is not (apparently) influenced by the very passage of the *Westminster Confession* he quotes.... Frame indicates an awareness of the category of “circumstances”; however, he does not define them by any common definition, but rather gives examples (“time and place of worship, use of a building, use of pews, etc.”). These are accurate *examples* of circumstances, but the lack of a precise definition leads to an incorrect understanding of how they are determined. A “circumstance” is not determined by “something like RP2.” [“Some Questions,” 359.] It is determined (in the *WCF* 1.6) clearly enough.... In Gillespie, Owen, and Bannerman the distinction is between those things that are *circa sacra* and *in sacris*.<sup>18</sup> There are things which are religious in themselves (prayer, singing praise to God), while there are things surrounding religious events (*circa*) which are not religious themselves (speaking, instructing, singing). These things are to be governed by “the light of nature, and Christian prudence,” not by “something more like RP2.”

Dr. Gordon then comments on Professor Frame’s allegation that the Westminster Assembly’s “recognition of circumstances ‘loosens the apparent force of the original principle somewhat.’” (“Some Questions,” 359; “Some Answers,” 324-325):

It is not evident to this reader, however, how the Assembly’s recognition of circumstances “loosens the apparent force of the original principle somewhat.” It does not loosen, but clarify. Those things which surround a religious service, which have no religious nature in themselves, are not to be excluded on that score. Thus, amplifying the human voice is not a reli-

gious matter; it is a matter of prudence, done in both religious and nonreligious assemblies (as is providing illumination, etc.). The Assembly did not “loosen” the regulative principle by this clarification; to the contrary, it protected against the very kind of over-restrictive proof-texting regarding every detail which Frame himself seems to wish to avoid.

One of Professor Frame’s concerns with the teaching of the Westminster Standards regarding “circumstances,” is that it may be difficult to determine the elemental from the circumstantial parts of worship. T. David Gordon pointedly notes that the regulative principle of worship is not the only doctrine that may have areas of difficulty (“Some Answers,” 325):

The doctrine of the two natures of Christ is not without difficulty, but Professor Frame is not prepared to dispense with the doctrine for that reason. Professor Van Til’s apologetic is, one might say, controversial, but this has not prevented Professor Frame from teaching such apologetics with a view toward settling the controversy. In point of fact, the practical controversy, which has threatened the peace of church life from the sixteenth century to our own, is caused by those who refuse to restrict the public worship of God to biblically revealed elements.

#### *Liberty of Conscience and Church Power*

Referring to the Westminster Confession of Faith’s position on liberty of conscience and worship, Professor Frame states (“Some Questions,” 358): “In effect, the confession tells us to follow something like RP2 in most of life’s decisions, but to follow RP1 in matters of faith and worship.” However, he has been led to “conclude that all human life is under RP1, and RP2 plays no role in biblical ethics.” (“Some Questions,” 362). As he himself puts it, not only is the Confession of Faith in error, but the Confession contradicts itself (“Some Questions,” 363):

So, both in worship and in the rest of life, we should adopt RP1: “Whatever is not commanded is forbidden.” Whenever we are not carrying out (rightly applying) a biblical command, we are committing sin (cf. Rom 14:23).

To say this is to say that the “eloquent semicolon” of WCF 20.2 is misplaced.<sup>19</sup> I say this, not because I believe that the passage is too strict in its view of wor-

ship, but because I believe it not strict enough in its conception of how the commandments bear upon everyday life. Of course, elsewhere in the Westminster standards, particularly WCF 1.6, which we have quoted, there is a very strong view of the sufficiency of Scripture for all of life.

Does 1.6, then, contradict 20.2? I think it does, because the writers of 20.2 did not, evidently, think through the concept of application as I have tried to set it forth above. Paragraph 20.2 tells us that we are free (in everyday life) from commandments of men that run contrary to Scripture, and that in addition we are free (in the areas of faith and worship) from any commandments beside Scripture. But in one sense, we are always free from commandments beside Scripture, not only in ‘faith and worship.’ Scripture alone is our ultimate rule, in all areas of life. Of course, Scripture itself calls us to be subject to lesser authorities (both, incidentally, in worship and elsewhere); but when those lesser authorities command contrary to the will of God, we may and must disobey them. And when they command something ‘beside’ Scripture, then we may not accept that as something ultimately authoritative. If someone claims to give commands equal to Scripture in force and authority, we must deny those claims. We are ‘free’ of them—in worship or life in general.

I can certainly endorse what 20.2 actually says, namely, that we are free from commands contrary to Scripture in any area of life and free from commands beside Scripture in worship. But I would go further than the confession does here in asserting our liberty from extrabiblical revelation (following the lead of the confession’s own teaching at 1.6). So, though rejecting the semicolon and the thought behind it, I do not believe I am contravening the system of doctrine taught in the confession.

For someone who is given over to tri-perspectivalism, Professor Frame’s allegation that the Westminster Confession contradicts itself at chapters 1.6 and 20.2 is perhaps no difficulty. However, for those who hold to basic rules of logic (such as the law of non-contradiction), this allegation would create problems with regard to one’s theological system and doctrinal subscription.

19. Editor’s note: The original punctuation here is indeed a semicolon. See the Editor’s introduction.

The professor speculates “the writers of 20.2 did not, evidently, think through the concept of application as I have tried to set it forth above.” Evidently!?! Or perhaps it is because Frame rejects and/or fails to understand the theological categories of the Assembly, which at least two of their members (Gillespie and Rutherford), were quite articulate in defending (see the editor’s introduction to this article).<sup>20</sup>

In the discussion between the two sparring professors, T. David Gordon comments on Frame’s understanding of WCF 20.2 and his ignoring the whole backdrop of the nature of church power in the historic statement of the regulative principle (“Some Answers,” 323, 327-328):

It appears that Frame is unfamiliar with the relevant writings of the authors mentioned above, for if he were, he could hardly have missed the point so significant to them all: the issue that gave birth to the regulative principle was the nature and limits of church power. The issue was not, for them, “worship” versus “the rest of life,” but “those aspects of life governed by the church officers” versus those aspects of life not governed by the church officers. Bannerman, for instance, says this about WCF 1.6 [Bannerman, 1.337]: “The direct object of the Confession in this passage is no doubt to assert the right and extent of liberty of conscience; but along with that, it very distinctly enunciates the doctrine, that neither in regard to faith nor in regard to worship has the Church any authority beside or beyond what is laid down in the Bible; and that it has no right to decree and enforce new observances or institutions in the department of Scriptural worship, any more than to teach and inculcate new truths in the department of Scriptural faith....”

Frame attempts to establish a hermeneutic free from the (mis)perceived “difficulty” of the regulative principle, whereby he would subject all of life to a common hermeneutic, requiring positive warrant from

God’s Word. Note, however, the equivocation that occurs when he attempts to establish such an alternative. Frame changes the Assembly’s “free from any commandments which are *beside* scripture,” if in faith or worship, into any command which assumes *ultimate authority*; [“Some Questions,” 363] but these are not the same things. The civil magistrate, for instance, would not necessarily assume ultimate authority in requiring a speed limit of fifty-miles mph. Are we free from this command? For the Assembly, the answer is “no,” because while it is “beside” Scripture, in the sense that Scripture does not address the speed-limit question, it is not a matter of faith or worship. But for Frame, it is not clear what his answer would be, and it may demonstrate the impossibility (or meaninglessness) of his RP1 over all of life theory; everything would get swallowed up in giving glory to God, but nothing more specific could be said. The Assembly said nothing about the degree of “ultimacy” given to the law; for them, the only issue was whether it was “beside” the Scripture, regardless of ultimacy, in areas of faith or worship....

Frame’s divorcing of this doctrine from its matrix in the doctrine of the nature and extent of church power leads to the not surprising conclusion of affirming RP1 “while denying that this principle for worship is any different from the principle by which God governs other areas of human life.” [“Some Questions,” 366]. One can only imagine the consequences of this: the church can require of anybody anything not prohibited in Scripture, a position with which the Anglicans would have been most happy and the Westminster Assembly most hapless. That question so crucial to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the limits of church power as regards liberty of conscience) would completely evaporate. If any individual could argue that some act in some way brought glory to God, then, by Frame’s reasoning, the church could require this to be done as an act of corporate worship. Yet, it takes only a few steps of argument *ad absurdum* to demonstrate the fallacy. Presumably, for instance, the man who is “fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom 14:5) is free to observe a day as religiously distinct. Yet, for Paul (but not for Frame) this individual is not free to do *anything* (put it in a bulletin) which might induce another to observe such a day contrary to his own conscience. As another (admittedly absurd) example, giving my children a bath before bedtime is a matter which I believe gives glory to God (and a much-deserved rest to their mother!). It promotes their health,

20. Editor’s note: The Assembly assigned the topic of “Christian Liberty” to the first committee on November 18, 1645, and the subject received about thirty days of debate within the full Assembly, including thirteen days over the first quarter of 1645/46 and twelve days in October. Debate was concluded and the chapter approved on October 30, 1646. See: B. B. Warfield, “The Westminster Assembly and its Work,” *Works* vol. 6 (Rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981) 112. The first committee contained around thirty-five divines, counting the Scottish Commissioners, and as initially set up included such men as Palmer, Bridge, Goodwin, Ley, Gouge, Sedgwick, Nye, Tuckney, and Dr. Burges. Many of these members wrote extensively and were noted theologians. *Minutes*, lxxxv.

it calms them down for bedtime, and is “good, clean fun.” However, as an officer in the church, I cannot bring a bathtub into our service of worship, place the girls in it, and give them a bath “to the glory of God,” *requiring others* to observe the rite. In fact, Frame’s own example makes a pretty good *ad absurdum* argument. He says: “Buying cabbages, like all human actions, is a matter of concern to God,” and he goes on to indicate that cabbage-buying is an activity addressed by the Word of God, citing 1 Cor 10:31. [“Some Questions,” 362]. Since that is so, and since he wishes to have no different hermeneutic governing the worship of God than that which governs other aspects of life, would Professor Frame suggest that cabbage-buying is a lawful element of Christian worship? Can it possibly be that a professor of Christian theology finds biblical mandate for cabbage-buying as an act of Christian worship, but does not find biblical mandate for preaching in Christian worship? [“Some Questions,” 366 n10].

#### *The Regulative Principle versus All of Life*

Professor Frame claims to “reaffirm the regulative principle in the form RP1, while denying that this principle for worship is any different from the principle by which God governs other areas of human life.” (“Some Questions,” 366). He states that his perspective “serves as a warning against applying RP1 in a wooden manner, such as by demanding specific proof texts to justify worship practices. That sort of wooden approach does have some precedent in Scripture; it is not wrong to find something like this approach in connection with the tabernacle/temple/sacrificial worship. But it is not a rule for worship in general any more than for the rest of life.” (“Some Questions,” 366)

But although he professes not to have betrayed the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Standards, that is precisely what he has done. Without a sharp distinction between life in general and worship in particular, there is no regulative principle as historically understood and maintained by the Puritan forefathers. T. David Gordon rightly concludes (“Some Answers,” 329):

That there may be many questions properly raised about the *contemporary* misunderstanding of the regulative principle does not imply that the *traditional* understanding (Frame’s stated concern) needs adjustment. If there is to be intelligent, ultimately fruitful discussion of the Reformed understanding of

worship, such discussion must have sufficient respect for the Reformed tradition to engage the significant, published expressions of that tradition. If Frame had engaged such literature, he could hardly have failed to put the question differently than he did. The regulative principle of worship does not address worship as distinguished from the rest of life. It addresses what an individual may do, obliging no one else, as distinguished from what the church officers may require of the assembled saints. It is not clear in his article that Frame has familiarized himself with “traditional ways of understanding the principle.” Therefore his comments do not contribute significantly to a discussion of the Reformed *tradition’s* understanding of worship.

#### *Professor Frame’s Reply to Professor Gordon*

John Frame replied briefly to T. David Gordon’s Answers to his Questions (“Reply to T. David Gordon”). In this reply he first defers, in response to the question of cogency, to an unpublished paper “on the regulative principle which is longer, and I think more cogent, than ‘Some Questions.’ It poses some additional questions and provides, I think, a few answers as well.” He invited *WTJ* readers to write and obtain a copy. This was a paper the professor submitted to the PCA’s Mission to North America, entitled “The Lordship of Christ and the Regulative Principle of Worship,” which, along with another paper, he would later expand into the book *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, to be noticed next in this survey (*Spirit and Truth*, xvi-xvii).<sup>21</sup>

#### *Whose Regulative Principle?*

In response to Dr. Gordon’s question as to which and to whose view of the regulative principle he was responding, Professor Frame replied that he was responding to then current discussions of the topic but would not name names, and left it to the reader to determine with whom he was dealing (“Reply to Gordon,” 181-182).

Gordon first asks me to identify my opponents more precisely. I respectfully decline. I will say in general that my article was directed toward current discussions within the churches rather than toward the

21. John Frame, “The Lordship of Christ and the Regulative Principle of Worship,” written for the Worship Task Force of the Committee on Mission to North America, PCA. Unpublished.

deliberations and writings of the Westminster Divines themselves. Gordon knows whom I am talking about, for he identified one of the individuals in private correspondence, and he admits in his article that I am “not entirely tilting at windmills” (p. 329). I suspect, therefore, that readers interested in these matters can also identify my targets. Beyond that, I will not “name names.” There is too much of that in the Christian community. If the shoe fits, anyone may wear it. If it fits nobody, then feel free to discard my article.

If I were writing a historical paper or a critique of the specific views of an individual, I would have supplied names and quotes. But in “Some Questions,” my purpose was rather to raise questions and tentatively to put forth a thesis. Academic niceties aside, I did not feel that for this purpose it was necessary for me to interact with anybody. As to whether I have been attacking straw men, I will leave it to the reader to decide.

Gordon says that this matter must be discussed “only within a history-of-doctrine framework” (p. 329). I disagree. I invite him and others to do historical studies, which doubtless will have their value. But mere historical studies do not tell us where the truth lies. For the Reformed scholar, the truth is to be found only through study of Scripture. That point is an application of the very regulative principle we are discussing. In fact, I think that recent theology in orthodox Reformed circles has been *too* “historical” in its approach, to the point where the regulative principle has been lost sight of....

I will then set aside Gordon’s comments to the effect that the Divines themselves were not subject to my criticisms. I did not intend my paper to be a critique of the Divines. Evidently Gordon thinks that any reference to “traditional views” must be a reference to the Divines (p. 329). I do not use the phrase that way. In my vocabulary, the “Reformed tradition” is the whole history of Reformed thinking on the subject, from the sixteenth century to the present. It includes both the seminal views of the Divines and the (to my mind debatable) views of current Reformed churchmen. For the record, let me say that I am not “unfamiliar” (p. 323) with the writings of the Westminster Divines.

Regardless of whether “Some Questions” is less cogent than it could have been, what should be obvious is that Professor Frame’s failure to clearly define his terms (e.g., “traditional view”) and to identify what ‘contem-

porary’ view he was engaging, simply leaves matters in a state of confusion. Which is it? Is the professor rejecting some modern misunderstanding of the principle, as he sees it? Or is he in reality actually rejecting the ‘seminal’ view of the Westminster Assembly itself? Frame would later write, “... I believe that the basic idea of the regulative principle, apart from the complicated Puritan amplifications of it, is scriptural” (*Spirit and Truth*, 157). But the Westminster Assembly was a gathering of Puritan theologians! Apparently, not only does the professor wish to let others do historical studies, he will *ignore* the historical-theological context of the Assembly’s determinations as well.

In addition, Mr. Frame declares that he was not responding or interacting with the views of the Westminster divines, nor criticizing them. But what are the allegations that the Westminster Confession of Faith is contradictory, and that the Westminster Assembly did not ‘think through the concept of application like I have done,’ if not criticism? The professor’s response that he was not unfamiliar “with the writings of the Westminster Divines,” would appear to be a tacit admission that he was indeed unfamiliar with the writings on the subject by Owen, Bannerman, Dabney, Girardeau, and Peck (“Some Answers,” 323; “Reply to Gordon,” 183).

The balance of Professor Frame’s reply is devoted to Professor Gordon’s point regarding the centrality of church power to the issue of the regulative principle and to the doctrine of liberty of conscience. He writes:

Well, I did not use the quoted phrase, but it should not be too difficult for readers of my article to see the implications of my position for liberty of conscience. Since I believe that all of life is under the regulative principle, I believe that liberty of conscience also exists equally within all aspects of human life. In all of life, we follow *sola Scriptura* and therefore recognize no human authority on the same level as Scripture. All of life is therefore governed by divine commands, though the specific applications are to be made by “the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed” (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 1.6). Thus the distinction between “elements” and “circumstances” is the same in other areas of life as it is in worship. Indeed, I believe that 1.6 of the *Confession* itself applies this principle to all of life.

Of course this view does not imply that there are no

differences among spheres as to God's specific directives. Government and church are both under the same regulative principle, but there are differences in what God has commanded for each. God has, for example, given to government the power of the sword, which he has not given to the church. Indeed, nothing in my argument would rule out the possibility of specific divine directives concerning worship, as distinguished from other human activities. Therefore I am not forced to say, as Gordon thinks, that the church could require us to bathe children at a worship service (p. 328).

### WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

Four years after the article in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Professor Frame encapsulated his ideas in a book entitled, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship*. Several reviews appeared at the time which noted the many problems in the author's handling of the regulative principle.

#### *General Problems in Frame's Work*

Rev. Brian Schwertley, a prolific author on matters regarding Presbyterian worship, commends and then condemns Frame's book thus:<sup>22</sup>

John Frame ... has written a book that both defends and sets forth the worship paradigm of most [of] modern "conservative" Presbyterianism. Before analyzing many of the fundamental assertions of Frame's book, this author would like to commend Frame for a number of things. First, the book, *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*, is well written and organized. Second, Frame has tackled a subject that is very important and hardly addressed in this century. Third, Frame is strongly committed to biblical inerrancy and the absolute authority of the Bible. Although Frame's book has some commendable aspects, it must be condemned over-all as a serious departure from the standard, historical understanding of Reformed worship. What is particularly disturbing regarding Frame's book is that he abandons the Westminster Standards, yet presents himself as a champion of the regulative principle.

Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. assesses the general problems in this way:<sup>23</sup>

There are numerous methodological problems with this book. Prof. Frame tells us that he will give an exegetical reinterpretation of the regulative principle. He leaves for another time a discussion of earlier exegesis of the principle. But when one departs so radically from accepted exegesis he needs to interact with that exegesis. Furthermore, the great majority of the few historical references Mr. Frame makes are not accurate. For example, he asserts that the Puritan approach to worship was minimalistic and went far beyond the statement of the doctrine in the Westminster standards. He says, "very little of the Puritan theology of worship" is found in the Westminster standards (xii). An assertion does not make something true. If Prof. Frame is going to make such a suggestion, he needs to validate. Chapters 1, 20, 21 of the Confession; L.C. Q. 107-110, 154-196; and S.C. Q. 49-52, 89-107 are a very thorough statement of the Puritan and Reformed theology of worship and the Directory of Worship only applies the principles found in the standards. Most modern proponents of the principle are content to limit themselves to its expressions in the standards. Furthermore, Mr. Frame tends to isolate the Puritans as if they were more narrow in their understanding of the regulative principle than Calvin or the Dutch reformed. This is a false dichotomy (e.g., Heidelberg Catechism 96, "What does God require in the second commandment? We are not to make an image of God in any way, nor to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in His word"; cf. Belgic Confession, Article 32; and Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*).

On the other hand, Mr. Frame's exegetical basis for his views is at best scanty. This problem is most telling in his failure to discuss the relation of the regulative principle to the Second Commandment, which is the basis on which all Reformed exegetes from Calvin through the Puritans developed the principle. Likewise, he fails

22. Brian Schwertley, "The Neo-Presbyterian Challenge to Confessional Presbyterian Orthodoxy: A Biblical Analysis of John Frame's *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*." <http://www.reformed.com/pub/frame.htm>. We note here, that since Professor Frame's book factors greatly in the ongoing discussion of worship within Presbyterianism, the lack of a subject/author index is regrettable.

23. Dr. Joseph Pipa, Review: "Worship in Spirit and Truth," *Presbyterian & Reformed News* v. 2, #4 [Fall 1996] 10-11. Used with permission of Presbyterian International News Service. At the time of his review, Dr. Pipa was a colleague of Professor Frame at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. He is now president at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, where he is also professor of historical and systematic theology.

to discuss the relation of key NT passages such as John 4:20-24 and Col. 2:23.

### *Frame's Statement of The Regulative Principle*

Professor Frame begins his book by asking the question, "What is worship?", and the answer given is: "Worship is *the work of acknowledging the greatness of our covenant Lord*" (*Spirit and Truth*, 1). The professor writes that "true worship is saturated with reminders of God's covenant lordship. We worship to honor his mighty acts, to hear his authoritative word, and to fellowship with him personally as the one who has made us his people. When we are distracted from our covenant Lord and preoccupied with our own comforts and pleasures, something has gone seriously wrong. As my former pastor, Dick Kaufmann, says, when we leave worship, we should first ask, not 'What did I get out of it?' But 'How did I do in my work of honoring the Lord?'" (*Spirit and Truth*, 5).

After treating worship in Old and New Testaments, Professor Frame turns to "The Rules for Worship," and a discussion of the regulative principle of worship. The professor notes that, in contrast to Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans, "Presbyterian and Reformed churches ... have employed a stronger principle: whatever Scripture does not command is forbidden. Here, Scripture has more than veto power; its function is essentially positive. On this view, Scripture must positively require a practice, if that practice is to be suitable for the worship of God" (*Spirit and Truth*, 38).

After quoting from the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 21.1, Mr. Frame writes: "The operative word is 'prescribed.' Eventually this restriction of worship to what God prescribes became known as the 'regulative principle' of Reformed and Presbyterian worship" (*Spirit and Truth*, 39).

### *Definitional Changes*

However, having enunciated the Confessional principle, Professor Frame promptly, and subtly, begins to render it meaningless. He does so, as we have seen before, by making the "regulative principle" apply to all of life ("worship in the broad sense", to use his nomenclature); and by carving out the novel category of "application" which allows for human innovation.

24. Kevin Reed, "Presbyterian Worship: Old and New: A Review and Commentary upon *Worship in Spirit and Truth*." <http://www.all-of-grace.org/pub/others/regulativeprinciple.html>.

### *Under the Circumstances*

In presenting his category of "application," the professor again tangles with the concept of "circumstances of worship," in order to reject the term in favor of his new concept, and does not display any apparent benefit from his exchange with T. David Gordon, or from the number of works listed in his bibliography. He writes (*Spirit and Truth*, 40-41):

What are these 'circumstances'? The confession does not define the term, except to say that they are 'common to human actions and societies.' Some of the Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians, trying to further explain this idea, taught that circumstances were secular matters, of no actual religious significance. But surely, in God's world, nothing is purely secular; nothing is entirely devoid of religious significance. That follows from the fact that in one sense worship is all of life. The time and place of a meeting, for instance, are not religiously neutral. Decisions about such matters must be made to the glory of God. The elders of a church would not be exercising godly rule if they tried to force all the members to worship at 3:00 AM! ... Although it is 'common to human actions and societies' to make decisions about meeting times and places, the decision nevertheless has religious significance in the context of the church. The divines understood this, and so they insisted that all these decisions be made 'according to the general rules of the Word.'

In response to this we first refer the reader back to the definitions and citations presented in the editor's introduction to this article. The publisher and writer Kevin Reed, in his review of Frame's book, provides a succinct rebuttal to Frame's comments on "circumstances of worship":<sup>24</sup>

He then moves to a section of applications, asking, "Is there, then, no role for human thought, planning, or decisions, in the worship of God?" (p. 40). He provides a negative assessment of some (unnamed) Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians who supposedly drew a sharp distinction between secular and sacred matters. Yet, the Puritans or Scots did not claim that decisions on circumstances were purely secular; rather, circumstances may be considered indifferent matters considered abstractly, but they obtain a sacred significance when implemented in some way for the service of God.

Mr. Frame continued on the subject of circumstances of worship (*Spirit and Truth*, 41-43):

I agree with the confession that there is room for human judgment in matters that are “common to human actions and societies.” But I do not believe that that is the only legitimate sphere of human judgment. In my view, the term best suited to describe the sphere of human judgment is not *circumstance*, but *application*. Typically, Scripture tells us what we should do in general and then leaves us to determine the specific by our own sanctified wisdom, according to the general rules of the Word. Determining the specifics is what I call “application.”

Unlike the term *circumstance*, the term *application* naturally covers both types of examples I have mentioned. Applications include such matters as the time and place of worship: Scripture tells us to meet, but not when and where—so we must use our own judgment. Similarly, Scripture tells us to pray, but does not dictate to us all the specific words we should use—so we need to decide. As you can see, the sphere of application includes some matters that are “common to human actions and societies” and some matters that are not....

In everyday life, I am never free from God’s commands. When I am obeying the Lord, everything I do is done in obedience to divine commands. Some commands, of course, are more general; others are more specific. “Do it all for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31) is general; “do this in remembrance of me: (1 Cor. 11:24), referring to the Lord’s Supper, is relatively specific. By the process of application, I make the general commands specific and the specific commands more so.

Thus understood, the regulative principle for worship is no different from the principles by which God regulates all of our life. That is to be expected, because, as we have seen, worship is in an important sense, all of life. In both cases, “whatever is not commanded is forbidden”—everything we do must be done in obedience to God’s commands. In both cases, application determines the specifics in accordance with the general principles of the word....

I am aware that traditional Presbyterian statements of the regulative principle typically draw a much sharper distinction than I have drawn between worship services and the rest of life. The Westminster Confession,

for example, states that in all of life we are free from any ‘doctrines and commandments of men’ that are ‘contrary to’ God’s word, but that in ‘matters of faith or worship,’ we are also free from doctrines and commandments that are ‘beside’ the word (20.2).

My own formulation does not contradict the confession, but goes beyond it. In my view, we are free from anything ‘beside’ the word, not only in ‘matters of faith, or worship,’ but in all other areas of life as well. In all areas of life, we are subject to biblical commands. Scripture alone is ‘given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life,’ as the confession indicates (1.2). Human wisdom may never presume to *add* to its commands. The only job of human wisdom is to *apply* those commands to specific situations.”

Dr. Pipa writes on these new unconfessional views:

In defending his new definition he confuses both circumstances and forms of worship with elements. The Westminster Confession does not define circumstances as applications of “elements,” but as things that help perform the elements of worship. “Forms” are the precise content of an element—for example, which song to be sung or whether to use common prayer in addition to free prayer. Dr. T. David Gordon has helpfully written of the contrast: “Similarly, if we agree that prayers are to be offered (as elements), it is a ‘circumstantial’ consideration as to how many prayers we will have, and a ‘formal’ consideration as to which particular prayers to include (for instance, whether to pray ‘The Lord’s Prayer,’ or not is a ‘formal’ consideration).”

Further, Frame fails to distinguish between the broad and narrow sense of worship in his application of the principle. “Thus understood, the regulative principle for worship is no different from the principles by which God regulates all of our life” (42). He concludes, since in broad worship Scripture allows us to apply the specific commands to our circumstances, then we may do the same in narrow worship. As he freely admits, this goes beyond the distinction made in WCF 20:2 (“God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship”). He claims not to contradict the Confession but to go beyond. But the Confession defines the regulative principle purely in matters of corporate worship and government and not

broad worship. His new interpretation clearly contradicts the standards.

We agree with Dr. Pipa, as we have indicated previously on this score, that by going beyond the Confession of Faith, Professor Frame has indeed modified the meaning of the regulative principle. Clearly, the Confessional Standards, with regard to both the doctrines of worship and liberty of conscience, *do* make a sharp delineation between life in general and worship in particular. The regulative principle means that the actual elements or practices of worship, not bare principles of worship, are prescribed. But if the application of Christian liberty in matters of worship and doctrine is equated with the application of Christian liberty to life in general, then there is no basis for specific “elements” of worship (since, in life in general, the application of Biblical principles will lead to varying expressions of obedience).

Professor Frame concludes the chapter on “The Rules for Worship” by stating that: (*Spirit and Truth*, 45-46).

... the regulative principle limits what we may do in worship, but it also allows different sorts of applications, and therefore a significant area of liberty. Different churches legitimately apply God’s commands in different ways. God commands us to sing; some churches may apply that command by singing three hymns in their services, others four. Some may sing primarily traditional hymns, others contemporary songs. God commands us to pray. Some churches may have one prayer, led by the minister, or many, led by members of the congregation. As we shall see more clearly in subsequent chapters, there is quite a large role in worship for human judgment, for human creativity, operating within the limits of God’s word.

Certainly, the regulative principle should not be used, as some have used it, to enforce traditionalism in worship. Both in Scripture and in church history, the regulative principle has been a powerful weapon *against* the imposition of human traditions in the worship of God. Consider again the protests of Isaiah (Isa. 29:13) and Jesus (Matt. 15:8-9) against those who placed human traditions on the same level as Scripture. Also consider again the protests of the Puritans against those who claimed the right to impose ceremonies without scriptural warrant.

Certainly, the regulative principle is a charter of free-

dom, not a burdensome bondage. The regulative principle sets us free from human traditions, to worship God his way. It limits our choices in the way a fish is limited to its watery habitat. When we break out of those limits, we discover death awaiting us, not freedom. To deny the regulative principle is to rebel against our loving Creator and then, paradoxically, to find ourselves in miserable bondage to human dogmatism.

In the remainder of this book, therefore, I will not urge anyone to conform to the Puritan style of worship or to any other style. In that respect, this book will be rather unusual, compared to most other worship books! Rather, I shall present the regulative principle as one that sets us free, within limits, to worship God in the language of our own time, to seek those applications of God’s commandments which most edify worshipers in our contemporary cultures. We must be both more conservative and more liberal than most students of Christian worship: conservative in holding exclusively to God’s commands in Scripture as our rule of worship, and liberal in defending the liberty of those who apply those commandments in legitimate, though nontraditional, ways.

In his review, Dr. Pipa comments on Frame’s inconsistent terminology:

Moreover, when he applies the new principle, he says that the regulative principle may not be used “to enforce traditionalism in worship” (45). Again Mr. Frame fails to define his terms. He uses the term “traditionalism” here as worship that is invented by men, while throughout the book he uses the term for the approach that carefully applies the regulative principle to all the elements of worship. Thus, he gives the impression that those whom he opposes are worshipping by man-made traditions.

#### *Frame’s Rejection of Elements of Worship*

Having repudiated the foundation of the regulative principle, Professor Frame, in his chapter “What to Do in Worship,” proceeds to gut the principle in its entirety. With regard to the Puritan (and Westminster Confessional) notion of “parts” or “elements” of worship, he writes that “there are serious problems with this approach. The most serious problem is that there is no scriptural warrant for it! Scripture nowhere divides worship up into a series of independent

‘elements,’ each requiring independent scriptural justification. Scripture nowhere tells us that the regulative principle demands that particular level of specificity, rather than some other” (*Spirit and Truth*, 53).

The professor contends that the New Testament (*Spirit and Truth*, 54):

... gives us no systematic or exhaustive list of the events that were authorized for such services [of public worship]. Certainly it gives us no list of elements in the technical sense of Puritan theology—actions requiring specific scriptural authorization, as opposed to circumstances or applications that do not.

Another problem with the concept of elements of worship is that the things we do in worship are not always clearly distinguishable from one another. Singing and teaching, for example, are not distinct from one another. When we sing hymns with biblical content, we teach one another (Col. 3:16). And many hymns are also prayers and creeds. Prayers with biblical content contain teaching. The entire service is prayer, since it is uttered in the present of God, to his praise. Perhaps it would be better to speak of “aspects” of worship, rather than “elements” or “parts.”

However, if there are no particular “elements” of worship, but merely “aspects” which may be expressed in a variety of ways, then what, pray tell, is left of the regulative principle? How does Mr. Frame’s position differ substantially from the Lutheran or Anglican view?

Further confirming the confusion exhibited, Professor Frame claims that the “New Testament does not give us an exhaustive list of what was and was not done at early Christian meetings. However, as in the case of the Old Testament synagogue, we may, by appeal to broad theological principles, gain assurance as to what God wants us to do when we gather in his name” (*Spirit and Truth*, 55).

Regarding the cursory way in which Frame handles the concept of elements of worship, Dr. Pipa writes:

But the Westminster Confession of Faith is quite clear on elements (21:3-5). Bannerman says: “The scriptures are the only rule for worship, as truly as they are the only rule for the Church in any other department of her duties. And the Scriptures are sufficient for that purpose; for they contain a directory for worship, either expressly inculcated, or justly to be inferred from its statements sufficient for the guidance of the Church

in every necessary part of worship” (*The Church of Christ*, I, 368).

Not only does Frame differ from the standards, but he also neglects to interact with the exegetical principles that Calvin and the Puritans used to determine the elements—principles that are summarized in the Westminster Confession I, 6: “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture.” Bannerman offers three guidelines for determining elements: explicit commands (Eph. 5:19; 2 Tim. 4:2); NT examples (Acts 2:42); and general principles (theological inference) drawn from scripture (use of benediction or placing Baptism in corporate worship) (I, 368).

In rejecting “elements” of worship, Kevin Reed makes clear that Mr. Frame has rejected portions of WCF 21 as well as the earlier Reformation creeds:

It is important to realize that, in rejecting the idea of elements (or parts) of worship, Frame has undermined sections 3-6 of chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession. The Confession specifically uses the term “part” or “parts” three times within these sections, in its description of worship. Therefore, to reject the concept of parts to worship, is to reject the teaching of the Confession.

Moreover, as we have seen, the concept of *parts* of worship is much older than the Puritans. It is interwoven within numerous Reformed creeds and advocated by writers from the outset of the Reformation. Thus, Mr. Frame has not only dismissed the Puritans, and the Confession; in his self-proclaimed wisdom, he has also cast off the teachings of the Reformers.

#### *Mr. Frame’s “Things to do in Worship”*

Professor Frame proceeds to develop a “list of things to do in worship.” His list includes Greetings and Benedictions, Reading of Scripture, Preaching and Teaching, Charismatic Prophecy and Speaking in Tongues,<sup>25</sup> Prayer, Song, Vows, Confession of Faith, Sacraments, Church Discipline, Collections/Offerings,

25. Professor Frame does note that Charismatic Prophecy and Speaking in Tongues, although part of New Testament worship, “were special gifts of God for the founding of the church and should not be expected in our time.”

and Expressions of Fellowship (*Spirit and Truth*, 55-60). However, these categories do not fit with standard definitions.

For example, not only does he equate “preaching” and “teaching,” but he further confuses matters when he attempts to justify “drama” as a form of “preaching” (*Spirit and Truth*, 93):

When God gives us a general command (in this case the command to preach the word), and is silent on some aspect of its specific application, we may properly make those applications ourselves, within the general rules of Scripture. The questions before us, then, are whether drama is legitimately a form of preaching or teaching, and whether there are any scriptural teachings that would rule it out as a means of communicating the word. I would answer yes to the first question, and no to the second....

God often teaches his people through drama. The book of Job, the Old Testament sacrifices and feasts, and the New Testament sacraments are reenactments of God’s great works of redemption. As we have seen, the traditional liturgy has continued this process of reenactment for many centuries, so drama in worship is nothing new.

If we grant that the word can be preached or taught by more than one speaker, that teaching can take place through dialogue, and that teaching inevitably has dramatic elements, then we cannot object to drama as a form of teaching.

Dr. Pipa observes the following regarding Professor Frame’s views of Preaching and Drama in worship services:

I also disagree with blurring the distinction between corporate worship and other occasions on which teaching or fellowship occur. Moreover, he fails to see the unique role of preaching (*kerusso*) as verbal, public proclamation by one commissioned to that task by Christ and thus defines all kinds of instruction and verbal communication as preaching. More seriously, he includes drama as a kind of preaching. In doing so, he blurs distinctions and equivocates. He fails to note the difference between the dramatic element in speaking, and drama. He confuses illustrations or Jesus quoting people in a parable with drama. He fails to distinguish between prophetic revelatory actions and drama.

Regarding Vows, the professor claims that they not only are involved in the sacraments, becoming church members, ordination, and marriage, but that they are involved “indeed, more broadly, [in] the consecration of our lives to God’s purposes. All public worship includes the congregation’s vow to serve Christ as Lord” (*Spirit and Truth*, 57). But, if vowing includes everything in life, then how is it a distinct act of worship?

We could note other ambiguities and outright errors in Professor Frame’s “list.” However, we will at this point simply concentrate on the final item, viz., “Expressions of Fellowship.” Here, he sets forth his belief that “worship has both vertical and horizontal aspects—that in worship we should be concerned above all for God’s glory, but also for our fellow worshipers as our brothers and sisters in Christ.” In his opinion, fellowship meals, holy kisses, and announcements can be appropriate for worship. Beyond that, he writes: “It is not wrong in worship to honor human beings, as long as that honor does not compromise the supreme honor due to the Lord. Nor is it wrong for the congregation to express that honor with a song, applause, hand holding, or hugs” (*Spirit and Truth*, 59-60).

At this point, one hardly knows what to say. It is, to say the least, breathtaking to think that a Reformed theologian would suggest that, in worship, honor ought to be offered to mere mortals. However, we are certain that the Lord of the universe has some definite—and very condemnatory—thoughts about the offering of praise to men during a time that is to be reserved for the worship of God.

Professor Frame’s peculiar perspective also has led him to countenance female leadership in worship, and, apparently, leaves the door wide open for the religious observance of Christmas and other holy days (*Spirit and Truth*, 64-66; 75 n4). He also contends that liturgical dancing is kosher: “God is pleased when we dance before him in worship, but he does not expect us to do it every time we meet in his name.... [I]t is not a ‘necessary element’ of worship, but something that provides enrichment of worship from time to time.” Encouraging the clapping of hands and lifting up of hands in public worship, Professor Frame claims that these also constitute “‘music of the body.’ God wants body as well as spirit to be engaged in his worship.” He writes (*Spirit and Truth*, 131-132):

If people want to stand up and move rhythmically to the songs of praise, they should be encouraged to do so. Dance in worship is first of all the simple, natural, physical dimension of the reverent joy we share

in Christ. Most of us, even those who are not very demonstrative in our worship, find it natural to sway, however slightly, to the rhythm of the songs we sing. That movement itself is a simple form of dance. If that is justifiable, who is to draw the line to show precisely how much movement is permitted? And if such simple movements are justifiable, why not greater movement, especially in light of the biblical references to dance?

Dr. Pipa, commenting on this commendation of dance in worship, concludes:

One other serious problem is his defense of liturgical dance. He admits that God does not prescribe dance. He dismisses the application of the regulative principle as a means of preserving the status quo and concludes that even though God does not prescribe dance, he “is pleased when we dance before him in worship” (131). In reaching this conclusion he violates his own principle expressed in chapter three that since all Old Testament worship is fulfilled in Christ, it is very difficult to derive principles of worship in the New Testament.

With respect to his advocacy of drama and dance one begins to see the true nature of Prof. Frame’s regulative principle. He is not refining the position that the Westminster standards teach as the scriptural position, but rather is moving toward the Lutheran view.

Luther taught that one may do whatever is not forbidden in Scripture. Calvin insisted that we may do in worship only what the Bible commands by explicit word or good and necessary consequence. Mr. Frame’s redefinition: “Typically, Scripture tells us what we should do in general and then leaves us to determine the specifics by our own sanctified wisdom, according to the general rules of the Word” (41). As he discusses the “elements” of worship he says, “Where specifics are lacking [he never shows which specifics are lacking—JP], we must apply the generalities by means of our sanctified wisdom, within the general principles of the word” (54, 55). In discussing drama, he says “I do believe that Scripture gives us the freedom to use drama;...” (94). With respect to dance he says, “It is true, of course, that God does not prescribe dance specifically for the regular worship of the synagogue, tabernacle, or temple” (131).

Herein lies the book’s most serious problem. Mr.

Frame departs from the Reformed exegetical understanding of the regulative principle. Of course this does not make his position wrong. Its rightness or wrongness must be determined by Scripture. But is it appropriate for Mr. Frame to offer this book as a clarification of the Confession’s position (xiii)? It would be much more helpful to admit that this book is a reformulation of the principles of reformed worship and to discuss it on that basis. Of course, then Mr. Frame will have to put his exegesis on the table. I am saddened that he published this as a study book for the church at large. The discussion would have been more helpful if he had written the technical book first and interacted exegetically with his critics.

#### CONCLUSIONS ON FRAME’S VIEWS OF WORSHIP

What are we to make of Professor Frame’s views? Despite his protestations to the contrary, his position denies the regulative principle of worship, even while he professes allegiance to it. Moreover, his views have led him to all kinds of unorthodox conclusions, including the endorsement of liturgical dance and drama, and the honoring of men during worship.

Is this merely an academic or scholarly debate, wherein Mr. Frame is simply hypothesizing from the ivory tower of the seminary? Not according to the professor, who is concerned with the clear discrepancies between the current practices of the church and the rule of her worship as it has been historically understood. We agree, and this raises the real context in which this discussion should have been handled, that of confessional Presbyterianism. Pastor Schwertley rather bluntly brings this to the foreground:

Frame’s book should be seen for what it is. It is first and foremost a defense of the departure and declension in most Presbyterian denominations in the area of worship that has occurred over the past two hundred years. Frame openly admits ... that there is a “discrepancy” between what modern Presbyterians profess and what they actually practice. This discrepancy causes some Presbyterian ministers to feel guilty.

So what apparently is needed, according to Frame, is simply a revamped and more flexible rule of worship. After all it is much easier to read a new definition back into the Westminster Standards, rather than making “an honest disavowal (with appropriate

changes).” Thus practices can be maintained or introduced, “with little regard to what those statements really mean...” (Schwertley).

One would think that a conservative Presbyterian would wish to avoid behaving like a theological liberal, but what is rejecting the regulative principle by redefinition but doing just that? A liberal would be perfectly content to say, “I hold to the confessional doctrine of the virgin birth, but I reject the Puritan conception of it.” If Presbyterian conservatives continue to behave like liberals regarding their ordination vows in the area of worship, there is every possibility that such behavior will soon erode other doctrines—maybe even such a central doctrine as that of justification by faith alone.

In addition to the question of confessional integrity, the result of Professor Frame’s view is little different than that of R. J. Gore, who rejects the regulative principle of worship outright. Whom do we find writing the introduction to Gore’s recent book (to be noticed in the following half of this survey), but John Frame himself. In this preface, the professor candidly makes the following statements bringing their views to one: a rejection of the regulative principle of worship:

When I heard, in the early 1990s, that R. J. Gore had written a dissertation at Westminster Theological Seminary opposing the regulative principle of worship, I had to see it for myself. To criticize the Puritan view of worship in that citadel of Presbyterian orthodoxy seemed a bold move, even perhaps a bit foolhardy. But Gore satisfied his examiners at Westminster, and he impressed me with the high quality of his research and thinking.

Research and thinking are not always balanced in our circles. I tend to regard the proponents of the Puritan regulative principle as stronger in the former than in the latter area. My own writings on worship have sometimes been criticized as having the reverse imbalance, and I won’t contest that. But Gore has done a marvelous job, not only of mastering the historical sources, but also of analyzing them carefully and using that analysis to make balanced recommendations for our worship today.

I differ with him on a few points, mostly terminological. He defines “regulative principle” as including all

26. Mr. Frame himself acknowledges the connection between his “perspectivalism” and his views on worship: *Spirit and Truth*, 62 n3; 76 n12.

the elements and distinctions made by the Puritans, and in that sense he rejects the regulative principle. I define it more generally as the principle that worship must be according to Scripture, and in that sense I affirm it. But as I read Gore, there is no substantive disagreement between us. We both want to say that Scripture must direct our worship, but that Scripture must be read according to sound hermeneutics....

If in the second paragraph, by “thinking,” the professor means unfounded speculation, then we certainly agree. Of course that is not what he means. The problem is not that some defenders of the statements of the Westminster Confession are not clear thinkers, nor that there has not been very clear and precise theological thinking on the worship principles of Presbyterianism (witness Bannerman and many others mentioned in this article which the professor dismisses as historical studies), but that Mr. Frame disagrees with these principles and has set his mind to reinterpret them. As for being impressed with Gore’s “research and thinking” in his dissertation, we shall have quite a bit to say in the appropriate place below.

The confusion evident in Mr. Frame regarding worship is emblematic of the deeper problem in his theological system, viz., tri-perspectivalism. His academic work has been predicated upon an advocacy of three “perspectives”—the normative, the situational, and the existential—which are equally ultimate. This means that the normative—presumably, that of Scripture—is simply one perspective that informs us in a given situation. The result, of necessity, is that the entire theological enterprise becomes subject to subjectivism, rather than having a solid, objective, Biblical anchor. It is therefore no wonder that Professor Frame’s views on worship have gone so far astray from the genuine regulative principle of worship.<sup>26</sup>

### The Writings of R. J. Gore Against The Regulative Principle of Worship

R. J. Gore, Jr., represents one of several scholars who desire to move from “simple” and “prescribed” worship, to a type of worship that is ecumenical in scope. Born in Durham, North Carolina, in 1955, Ralph Jackson Gore, Jr., graduated from Bob Jones University (B.A., 1976; M.A., 1979), Faith Theological Seminary (M.A., 1981; M.Div. and S.T.M., 1983),

and Westminster Theological Seminary (Ph.D., 1988). Dr. Gore served pastorates in the Bible Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, and as an U.S. Army chaplain, both at home and overseas. In 1996, he was hired to teach systematic theology at Erskine Theological Seminary, the denominational school of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, located in Due West, South Carolina; and is now the Dean at that institution.

DISSERTATION AT WESTMINSTER  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Dean Gore's 1988 doctoral dissertation, "The Pursuit of Plainness: Rethinking the Regulative Principle of Worship," was a critique of the Puritan understanding of worship. Since his recent book is a "fairly significant revision" of this paper (though a comparison of the dissertation and the book reveals negligible differences in regard to the material considered below), and since the earlier paper received high praise from some quarters, we present this critical evaluation of it before surveying *Covenantal Worship*.

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF R. J. GORE'S  
"PURSUIT OF PLAINNESS"<sup>27</sup>

By David C. Lachman, Ph.D.

We must pass over most of the early portion of "Pursuit of Plainness" for want of space. Suffice it to say, much of Gore's first hundred pages is a pedestrian rendition of the history of the church in the 16th century, neither worth including in a dissertation (beyond perhaps a page or two) nor worthy of a critique, though he does not really appear to be overly familiar with the subject. His section on the frequency of the Lord's Supper largely represents Calvin correctly and the Puritan practice as well, but he seems to have no understanding of the reasons why the Puritans did not implement the goals of the early Reformers, nor of the Westminster Assembly's desire that it be celebrated frequently. His treatment of the Westminster Assembly is poor and demonstrates a basic unfamiliarity with both the period and the divines, as well as their writings.

*Calvin and the Regulative Principle*

This brings us to Gore's handling of Calvin and the regulative principle which deserves some detailed criticism. Without offering any contemporary evidence, Gore assumes that "the Puritans understood themselves to be faithful conveyors of the great reformer's thought..." ("Pursuit," 138) and, in that context, seeks to determine the faithfulness of the Puritan regulative principle to John Calvin's formulation of the doctrine. After some pages of extraneous material, he begins by correctly characterizing Calvin as saying that "we would be unable to worship God purely unless God told us how we should properly worship and serve him;" God, Calvin says, despises our own intention in worship and "considers it detestable." Further, "God is pleased with our obedience to his commands" and again, quoting Calvin: "we are to follow in all simplicity what he has ordained by his Word, without adding anything to it at all." Worship acceptable to God can not be the product of human invention ("Pursuit," 149-150).

When, after another twenty pages, Gore returns to the point at issue, citing the *Institutes* (IV, x, 22), he claims that, when Calvin says that no ceremony is acceptable if it is imposed as if it were a law of God, "This does not mean that the Church is unable to speak to the circumstances of the day. Indeed [Gore says Calvin says] it is permissible to prescribe certain activity as long as three conditions are met: (1) it must be framed according to love (for the sake of the weak) (2) it must not be viewed as an addition to God's law, and (3) it must be intended for a particular need at a particular

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27. R. J. Gore, "The Pursuit of Plainness: Rethinking the Regulative Principle of Worship." Ph.D. Dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1988. Hereafter "Pursuit."

time in the life of the Church” (“Pursuit,” 170-171). But in this section of the *Institutes* Calvin says no such thing. Rather he is saying that out of love no offence should be given to weak brethren, illustrating this by saying that such practices as eating meat on Friday and laboring on ‘holy days,’ indifferent in themselves, should be avoided until the weak grow stronger in the faith. Calvin neither says nor implies that the church has authority to prescribe any activity whatever.

### *Calvin Misrepresented*

Worse, Gore goes on to summarize Calvin’s point by saying: “Where these conditions are met, it is possible to introduce a practice, a rite, or a ceremony, or to abstain from one of these as long as there is no imposition or coercion of the conscience” (“Pursuit,” 171). Calvin not only does not say this in IV, x, 22, but rather just the opposite! He argues that in matters indifferent, “superstition aside”, the strong should not offend the consciences of the weak unnecessarily. But against the Romanists he specifies that this is “no contrived addition to God’s law but a genuine and simple accommodation to the times and customs for which it was intended.” Gore completely misrepresents Calvin in this, inventing out of whole cloth a characterization of Calvin by which he can then assert that the Puritans have departed from Calvin’s teaching on the matter.

Again, Gore asserts that Calvin says in IV, x, 30 that “God has not given an exact, detailed prescription of every aspect of worship” and that the church must therefore “rely on ‘general rules’ or broader precepts from which specific applications must be made” (“Pursuit,” 173). Calvin, however, says exactly the opposite: “...the Lord has in his sacred oracles faithfully embraced and clearly expressed both the whole sum of true righteousness, and all aspects of the worship of his majesty, and whatever was necessary to salvation; therefore, in these the Master alone is to be heard.” What Calvin does say (and what Gore confuses with “aspects of worship”) is that “because he [God] did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended upon the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages), here we must take refuge in those general rules which he has given, that whatever the necessity of the church will require for order and decorum should be tested against these.” The example he gives is that of “kneeling when solemn prayers are being said”; he is not speaking of “aspects” of worship, whether of divine command (prayer) or

of human invention (liturgical dance), but only of the outward details of the aspects. In regard to “aspects”, he clearly asserts that only those of divine command are permissible; those of human invention are offensive to God.

Thus when Gore says that “sensitivity [for Calvin] must be exercised in the development of new practices or the abolition of old practices,” Gore implies Calvin is speaking of aspects of worship when Calvin is only speaking of outward detail. He concludes by claiming that Calvin (in IV, x, 32) gives “three general rules for the observance of ceremonies: (1) the rules and observance should be kept to a minimum, (2) there should be no superstition where ceremonies are observed, and no contention where they are not, and (3) rites and ceremonies should always be contextualized, to the time, place, and needs of the Church.” But he fails to notice that in the preceding section (31) Calvin makes it plain that the ‘ceremonies’ he has in mind are such matters as “a woman [who] needs such haste to help a neighbor that she cannot stop to cover her head” and that “it is better to bury a dead man in due time than, where a shroud is lacking, or where there are no pallbearers to carry him, to wait until the unburied corpse decays.” So when he concludes that “some of the *adiaphora* that Calvin would admit into the Church are not simply circumstances of worship, but at times are indeed substantial parts or elements of worship,” it is based on nothing at all in Calvin; it is entirely Gore’s own opinion foisted on Calvin.

### *The Puritan Regulative Principle*

In his chapter entitled “Critical Analysis of the Puritan Regulative Principle,” Gore acknowledges that “the Puritans considered themselves to be biblical in their theology and in their exegesis,” but asserts that though their “errors were relatively minor” they were handicapped by “certain peculiarities and limitations of the period” and, also, were pressured into “increasingly radical positions” by the Established Church. This, Gore claims, resulted in an extremism which involves an “absence of balance” in respect to the form they gave the *regulative principle* (“Pursuit,” 215-216).

The first section of his ‘Analysis’ begins by asserting that the Puritans had a “tendency towards rationalism,” a position which “argues for the necessary primacy of reason and intellect in the pursuit of truth.” This he attempts to prove by a variety of quotations from modern, secondary literature, most by authors neither sympathetic to or familiar with Puritan thought,

and none to the exact point in question. Having done this, he cites George Gillespie to the effect that “human ceremonies derogate from the true inward and spiritual worship” (“Pursuit,” 219) and John Flavel and John Owen to similar effect (“Pursuit,” 220). How their assertions that the church should confine itself to worship commanded in Scripture demonstrate rationalism, he does not explain.

He concludes by saying that “it is only reasonable to see the Puritans borrowing from these systems [stoic philosophy and neo-Platonism] congenial with their own ascetic leanings.” This he does not bother to demonstrate either from modern studies of Puritan thought or from the Puritans themselves. He does not even stop to consider that neo-Platonism developed as a philosophical movement in the context of Cambridge University in the 1650s and that it is therefore impossible to think it a context for the development of the Puritan regulative principle, which had been fully expounded and stated by the 1640s. He simply makes these unfounded assertions in order to denigrate Puritan thinking (“Pursuit,” 221).

He proceeds to the specifics of his analysis of Puritan Biblical interpretation under the heading: “Errors in Hermeneutics”. He begins by accusing the Puritans of “crass literalism”, quoting J. I. Packer’s listing of “some extreme examples, not representative of Puritans in general.” But Gore, though acknowledging that these examples are not representative, nevertheless uses them as the only basis for his charge of crass literalism (asserting that contra the Puritans “the Bible teaches by implication as well as by direct statement” and that “a preoccupation with a strict, literal basis for worship is not a principle of interpretation consistent with the Bible itself”); he does not bother to refer to any ‘representative Puritans’ to prove his point (“Pursuit,” 222-223).

His further enumeration of errors includes:—1. The possibility of isolating texts in a way that “may fail to synthesize accurately the overall message of the Scriptures” – he gives one example of this, but does not bother to show that the two passages he refers to actually demonstrate his point (“Pursuit,” 223-224).

— 2. The giving of too much weight to “necessary consequences” – he recognizes that “the use of logic and necessary consequence ... is commonly used by all theologians,” but claims that the Puritans read their doctrine into the text; again he does not bother to discuss the two references he makes to the Scottish Presbyterian George Gillespie (“Pursuit,” 224-225).

— 3. The failure “to take into account organic bib-

lical developments” – he faults Puritans for failing to understand the cultural setting of the text and the progressive unfolding of redemption, but with no reference to or consideration of anything they wrote (“Pursuit,” 226).

— 4. A preoccupation with New Testament worship, as opposed to a Biblical basis for worship which includes the Old Testament as well – he faults Owen for placing the OT on a “lower level” than the NT, but does not attempt to correlate his charge that the Puritans failed to understand organic biblical development with his charge that they believed the NT to have superseded the old and, in fact, makes no real attempt to understand the coherence of the Puritan position (“Pursuit,” 227-228).

In concluding this section Gore says “that not all Puritans were guilty of committing all these errors.” But there is no evidence that he has read more than a few pages of those few Puritans he cites and certainly no evidence that he has the familiarity with Puritan literature as a whole which would enable him to draw any conclusions whatever as to the truth of his allegations. A scholarly work on the subject would necessarily illustrate each of the above points with a multiplicity of relevant references to a variety of Puritans, early through late; Gore contents himself with a few references, the relevance of which is not obvious, but which he does not bother to demonstrate.

#### *Worship Practices of the Lord*

His second section, “Dominical Practices and the Regulative Principle”, addresses the question: “... what light do the practices of the Lord shed on the issue of the proper interpretation of the *regulative principle*?” After a quotation from John Murray, asserting that “any tradition which is not based upon and derived from divine prescription is of human origin and sanction and incurs the condemnation so patent in our Lord’s teaching on this subject” of worship, he seeks to find “another interpretation ... of the texts at hand” (“Pursuit,” 231).

#### *The Synagogue*

To do this, he first broaches the question of synagogue worship, accusing the proponents of the *regulative principle* of casually skirting the issue (“Pursuit,” 231-232). Gore asserts that synagogue worship falls “into the category the traditional view would describe as ‘will-worship.’” That “the origin of the synagogue is

that of human contrivance and not of divine command” is the basis of this assertion and he demonstrates that this is the modern consensus opinion. He acknowledges that “Rabbinical tradition locates the [synagogue’s] origin during the time of Moses” and recognizes that James Jordan concurs, finding the origin of the synagogue in Leviticus 23:3. But Gore dismisses this on the basis of what he terms the overwhelming evidence that the synagogue was exilic or post-exilic in origin (“Pursuit,” 233). He then references George Gillespie, saying that he addressed the question, being “familiar with all the previous arguments and writing with the express intent of removing this obstacle to the Puritan view.”<sup>28</sup> But, though

28. What Gore means by “previous arguments” is unclear: he certainly cannot mean the late 20<sup>th</sup> century works he cites and it is unlikely that he has 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century works in mind, as they generally take the position that synagogues were prevalent throughout the land of Israel prior to the exile. See, for example, David Dickson on Psalm 74—could it be that Gore’s failure to reference such works stems from a complete want of familiarity with them?

29. Editor’s note: A case for the early founding of the synagogue as a commanded institution of worship, is presented in: Richard E. Bacon, *A Pattern in the Heavens, Part One: Ecclesiology* (Blue Banner Ebooks, 2001) 83–93. See free ebooks at [www.fpctr.org](http://www.fpctr.org). “So then, in conclusion, we maintain that while it is difficult to trace the synagogue through every book and time of the Mosaic institutions, there is a train that extends from Leviticus through Nehemiah, which is to say from Moses’ generation through the generation in which the Old Testament canon came to a close. There was a *miqra’-qodesh* in the days of Moses, in the days of Elisha, in the days of Ezekiel, and in the days of Christ. That synagogue was an institution of God ...” (*Pattern*, 92–93).

30. Editor’s note: This is the argument against prescribed worship used by Richard Hooker in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, which Gore notes in his book where he repeats this same argument from the synagogue. R. J. Gore, Jr., *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2002). T. David Gordon commends Dr. Gore for raising the issue, and his answer is that the “synagogue was not worship but study” (T. David Gordon, “Review Article: The Westminster Assembly’s Unworkable and Unscriptural View of Worship,” *WTJ* 65 [2003] 346–347. Hereafter “Review of Gore.”). While he only mentions it in passing, Gillespie on the other hand clearly believed it was an institution for public worship. It may be that this issue is one that holders of the regulative principle may need to treat more thoroughly, particularly since we fear Dr. Gordon’s answer to this objection may raise more problems than it actually solves.

31. The criticism here is that Gore’s critique of Gillespie is based on modern “scholarship” and is correspondingly completely uninformed as to 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century views on the subject. He has taken a brief digression by Gillespie and, without looking at any other Reformed or Puritan work on the subject, has critiqued it as if it were the definitive statement and defense of the position. That he has failed to do any real research is an indication that it is he who is begging the question, not Gillespie. Mr. Gore is supposedly doing a dissertation on the Puritan view of worship, but could not be bothered to look into what the Puritans (a broad sample as opposed to

Gillespie does assert that synagogues were built after the tribes first settled in the land and that this was done by the warrant of the authority of the prophets,<sup>29</sup> Gillespie is not arguing this point here, as Gore implies, but just mentions it in passing, devoting only ten lines of text to it (Gillespie, *English-Popish Ceremonies*, 3.5.10, 253). If Gore had seriously wanted to understand and critique the Puritan position on the subject, he might have bothered at least to look at a few Puritan commentaries on Psalm 74 or at the controversy William Ames had with Bishop Thomas Morton. As he has not done this, his effort here to demonstrate the Puritan *regulative principle* erroneous on the basis of the participation of Jesus in the worship of the synagogue, a worship purely of human institution,<sup>30</sup> is itself a casual skirting of Puritan treatments of the subject and is therefore worthless.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Voluntary Jewish Feasts*

Gore passes on to a discussion of Jesus’s observance of the Voluntary Jewish Feasts, proving to his satisfaction from the witness of a variety of modern commentators that when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of the Dedication (John 10:22) it implies that he was there in order to participate in its observance. He interprets John 5:1 (“After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went out to Jerusalem”) in similar fashion. But he does not bother to consider that the presence of Jesus in Jerusalem at such times might have been timed in order to enable him to speak to the much larger numbers of people then present there. Certainly there is nothing inherent in either passage which implies his participation in either feast. That it is quite possible to interpret these passages as merely alluding to the time of year Jesus was in Jerusalem does not come under Gore’s consideration. This is a serious flaw in that if he had bothered to look into Puritan commentaries on the passages in question he would have found that this is what they argued is the correct interpretation. It is particularly reprehensible that he does not even refer to George Gillespie’s discussion of the subject in his *English Popish Ceremonies* (EPC, 3.6.8–11, 264–270): admittedly this is not an easy work to read, but granted the subject matter of Gore’s dissertation it should not be too much to expect a familiarity with the whole of the work and an interaction with it when it impinges on the points he is trying to make. Generally, a responsible scholarly discussion of the matter would at least take into account Puritan exegesis of the passages in question. Lacking

even the rudiments of this, Gore's treatment of the matter is wholly without merit.<sup>32</sup>

*Gore's Handling of the 'Proof' Texts for  
the Regulative Principle*

His third section examines selective texts "offered by the proponents of the Puritan *regulative principle*." After introducing the adage, "Interpretation is one, application is many," he considers six texts of Scripture, in order "to determine the exact exegetical meaning of ... [each] passage" ("Pursuit," 247). What follows, however, is anything but an attempt to discuss the "exact exegetical meaning" of the passages in question. First, in regard to Exodus 20:4-5, Gore asserts that "the one obvious exegetical fact is that the use of any idol, or image, of Jehovah or any creature for any purpose of worship is forbidden." He adduces no argument that this is the only clear teaching of the text and cites no commentators, ancient or modern, to this effect. Nor does he refer to any Puritan commentary, pro or con (the two Puritan works to which he refers are very brief: the Owen is a little book on worship and the Flavel is an exposition of the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism, though Gore nowhere in his dissertation gives the title of either; he supplies this want in his published book). He simply asserts that this is the only possible meaning of the text and therefore concludes that it is not possible to interpret the text as requiring that "nothing is acceptable in worship which has not been explicitly commanded" ("Pursuit," 248-249).

Second, in his consideration of Exodus 25:40 ("And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain." NASB) he asserts that "the advocates of the Puritan regulative principle of worship" expand "this text ... to cover all of worship." But he does not bother to refer to any Puritans, either as to how they actually exegete the passage or as to how they apply it. Gore has space here for an attempt to show that Calvin "left significant room for matters of indifference," but though this chapter of his dissertation is ostensibly on the Puritans, he exhibits no interest in looking into so much as a single Puritan exposition of the passage ("Pursuit," 250-253).

Third, Gore asserts in regard to Leviticus 10:1-3 (Nadab and Abihu) that this is a passage which "frequently occurs in Puritan citations." He also claims that Puritans "usually" will apply "this passage to prohibit doing anything not specifically commanded." As evidence of this he again adduces (the same) refer-

ences from Owen and Flavel. How he can be sure that they are typical Puritans and that he can so generalize from what he reads in them to Puritanism as a whole is not something he considers. Nor does he consider that there might be arguments in more extensive Puritan works which would justify their so using the passage. Gore finds it easier simply to beg the question by asserting that "what is clearly taught here is that the specific commands of God must not be transgressed," not to condemn as illegitimate every act of worship not specifically commanded (*Pursuit*, 253-256).

Fourth, Gore characterizes Deuteronomy 12:30-32 (concluding with "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do it; you shall not add to nor take away from it." NASB) as a summary of "Israel's covenant obligations to Jehovah." Without any reference to Puritan expositions of the passage, and after acknowledging that S.R. Driver essentially interprets the passage in a way which confirms what Gore characterizes as the Puritan interpretation, he cites more recent commentators, one of whom characterizes the passage as one which deals with a covenant formula and sanctions and with the substance of the law and not the letter. Although he admits that the passage is relevant to the regulation of worship (quoting Ridderbos), Gore (not Ridderbos) concludes from this that voluntary worship, not specifically required by the covenant, is not totally prohibited. This is hardly honest dealing either with the Puritans or with the exegesis of the passage itself ("Pursuit," 256-259).

Fifth, regarding Matthew 15:3-9 ("... in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." NASB), Gore asserts that "the advocates of the Puritan regulative principle interpret this text in the most rigorous sense possible, so that divine commands are absolutely necessary for every essential part of worship." As proof of this he refers to the same pages in Owen, Flavel and Ames he has previously used, though again without bothering to quote their actual words. Thus he is able to decry their strictness without actually interacting with either the Biblical text itself or what any Puritan has to say about it — and in this case, as what these particular Puritans have

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the very few works he did bother himself to consult) actually had to say?

32. We note here that Dean Gore made some significant changes to this section dealing with voluntary Jewish feasts in *Covenantal Worship*, including adding references to Gillespie's arguments, one dealing with John 10:22 and the other with Purim. We refer the reader to the following section in this survey dealing with that work.

to say about this passage is minimal and as he has no other Puritans to hand, Gore is perhaps constrained to pass on rather quickly (“Pursuit,” 259-262).

Sixth, the final passage he mentions is Colossians 2: 23. Gore again uses the NASB, which substitutes “self-made religion” for “will-worship”. This notwithstanding, he acknowledges that it is “fair and accurate” to say that “the passage teaches that any human innovation in worship that is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture, either by forbidding that which is allowed or requiring that which is not commanded, is unacceptable. Further, we are warned against adding to the commands of God as though they were somehow deficient.” But he thinks that this does not require “the narrow prohibitions of the Puritan *regulative principle*” and this, for him, is adequate to dispense with the Puritan use of the passage (“Pursuit,” 262-264).

Gore concludes from all this that since “Jesus participated in worship that was outside the clearly mandated prescriptions of Mosaic worship ... a broader application of the exegetical teachings of the relevant texts and a reformulation of the Puritan *regulative principle* of worship” is demanded. The Puritans’ “virtual denial of *adiaphora* renders necessary a positive warrant, or airtight logic, for every facet of Scripture.” And as Gore thinks this does not do justice to the “total teaching of Scripture”, the Puritan formulation is to be rejected (“Pursuit,” 265).

The whole of this section, crucial to demonstrating the validity of his rejection of Puritan teaching on the regulative principle, is completely inadequate. At a minimum, particularly in a purportedly scholarly work, a representative selection of Puritan authors should be taken under consideration and their collective opinion (if it is found to be essentially uniform) should be carefully stated (or, alternatively, any divergence of opinion should be equally carefully stated) and held up for examination. It is disgraceful that Gore’s acquaintance with the Puritans appears to be limited to a few passages in three authors (William Ames, John Owen and John Flavel: Gore does not even bother to specify to what individual works by Owen and Flavel he refers, simply giving the volume and page number of the collected works),<sup>33</sup> with additional reference to a few passages in the works of one Scottish Presbyterian (George Gillespie). If Gore has any knowledge of any other Puritan authors (or if

he knows it is possible to have access to books printed in the seventeenth century, as opposed to modern reprint editions) it is impossible to discern it from anything he has written in this dissertation which Westminster Theological Seminary accepted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

#### *Adiaphora and the Reformed Confessions*

After a question-begging treatment of the teaching of the New Testament in regard to *adiaphora*, Gore first asserts and then attempts to demonstrate that “the consensus of the Reformation was that such a category was absolutely necessary to understand the role of the Church in worship” (“Pursuit,” 299). He begins by demonstrating the obvious, that the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* teaches that what is not forbidden is permitted as long as the church judges it useful and for edification (“Pursuit,” 300).

But then he proceeds to try to show that the Reformed Confessions took a similar position. He introduces a quotation from the *Belgic Confession* which states: “... we believe, though it is useful and beneficial, that those who are rulers of the Church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the Church; yet they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only master, hath instituted. And, therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever.” This Gore says “makes a clear assertion that care must be observed in the institution of indifferent matters, allowing only those which further the well-being of the Church.” But this is to mistake “certain ordinances” as intending the introduction of “indifferent matters” into worship; rather the intention in this confession is to allow arrangements which make human meetings possible while guarding against the introduction of “all human inventions” into worship. The intention here is, practically speaking, the opposite of what Gore supposes (“Pursuit,” 301-302).

Likewise in referring to the Scots Confession of 1560 he mistakenly claims that “the confession gives witness to the temporal character of the ceremonies and the necessity of changing those ceremonies from time to time, as the church deems it necessary.” This Gore confuses with the substance of worship when what is plainly in view here is only those matters “men have devised”. This is made more clear in the ninth

33. The full titles are given in *Covenantal Worship*, but this simply indicates how substandard the dissertation is, as a scholarly work, that in a book one would add the precise bibliographical detail which was lacking in the dissertation.

head of the First Book of Discipline (“Concerning the Policie of the Kirk”), where it becomes evident that what is in view are such matters as when baptism is to be administered and what days in the week the kirk should assemble (“Pursuit,” 302).

Again, in regard to the Second Helvetic Confession Gore asserts that “there is yet admission of an area of freedom in matters of worship,” but the Confession asserts that “the true unity of the Church” consists “in the true and uniform preaching of the Gospel, and in such rites as the Lord himself has expressly set down.” Gore does not bother to explain how the Confession’s assertion allows his “area of freedom” (“Pursuit,” 303).

In the context of his discussion of *adiaphora*, Gore even claims that “in an indirect fashion” the Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that “there are matters of indifference, matters which on a voluntary basis could be used in the worship of God.” This interpretation of WCF 20.2 (Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience) infers almost exactly the opposite of the meaning of the text (and, also, of what Gore recognizes as the forbidding of such voluntary acts of worship in WCF 21, immediately following). It is an evidence of his basic ignorance of Reformed thinking on the matter that Gore does not recognize that the thrust of the assertion in chapter 20 (“God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith or worship”) is to state in unequivocal terms the individual’s freedom from the imposition of human inventions, whether in respect to doctrine or the worship of the church. That it is an infringement of Christian liberty to impose on the worship of the church a dance troupe or an orchestra is something which does not seem to have occurred to him. But this is the intention of both chapters 20 and 21 of the WCF. Liberty in Christ is not freedom to do as we please, but rather the freedom from sin which enables us to do as God pleases (“Pursuit,” 305).

### Conclusion

It should be said plainly that the caliber of Gore’s scholarship in “Pursuit of Plainness” does not rise above that ordinarily expected in a simple ‘term’ paper; consequently it completely fails to make a credible case against the Regulative Principle of Worship. It is indeed almost incredible that this paper was found acceptable for any degree whatever, and we must agree

with the conclusion of one, familiar with both it and the later book based upon it, that the Westminster Seminary “committee should never have approved the dissertation, because the methodology was so seriously flawed.”<sup>34</sup> But yet more seriously, it should never have been accepted because of the inadequacy of Gore’s research, both in his misrepresentations of Calvin and others and in his almost complete failure so much as to look into what the Puritans actually had to say on the subject.

### R. J. GORE’S COVENANTAL WORSHIP

By Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.

Throughout the 1990s, Professor Gore continued to develop his anti-Confessional ideas,<sup>35</sup> and then summed up his thoughts in 2002 with his book, *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle*.<sup>36</sup>

As already noted, this book is a distillation and reworking of Gore’s doctoral dissertation just surveyed. The problems with the book remain the same as those in the older paper. As T. David Gordon notes in his review of the book, “the majority of the work (and of the dissertation) is devoted to the unproven and unprovable thesis that the Puritans embraced a different principle of worship than did Calvin.” Among the things which Gordon finds commendable about the work, are the clear noting of “both the differences between the worship practices of the English Puritans and those of Calvin, and the historical occasions of these differences...”; placing the discussion of the synagogue front and center; and Gore’s candor in rejecting the regulative principle as stated in the Westminster Standards. We could not agree more that such candor

34. Personal Correspondence, Dr. T. David Gordon, Professor of Religion and Greek, Grove City College, to Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D., February 28, 2005. See also, “Review of Gore,” 346.

35. For example, see his review of Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, eds., *Worship in the Presence of God: A collection of essays on the nature, elements, and historic views and practice of worship*, *WTJ* 56 (1994) 443-47; “Reviewing the Puritan Regulative Principle of Worship,” *Presbyterian* 20.1 (1994) 41-50; and “Reviewing the Regulative Principle. Part II,” *Presbyterian* 21.1 (1995) 29-47. *Presbyterian* is the official scholarly journal of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis.

36. R. J. Gore, Jr., *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2002). Hereafter Gore.

is more refreshing than “the prevaricating dodges one occasionally encounters among less-candid Presbyterians, who have no more regard for the regulative principle than Gore does, but who profess to agree with it” (Review of Gore, 346).

Unhappily, most of the serious defects in Gore’s dissertation are repeated in *Covenantal Worship*, and Professor Gordon, who took up the pen again as noted in favor of the regulative principle in a review of Gore’s book, ably underscores them. “Gore’s discussion omits important Reformed terminology for discussing worship (and re-defines one of the two terms retained), leading to substantial misunderstandings of Calvin’s relation to the Puritans; some of the methodological deficiencies of the dissertation are repeated here in Gore’s comparison between Calvin and the Puritans, notably the omission of Calvin’s own statements about his views on the matter; Gore’s objections to the regulative principle as ‘unworkable’ are both overstated and, in large measure, self-created; and Gore’s description of the Reformed understanding of Liberty of Conscience is almost the mirror opposite of what the Reformed confessions have actually taught” (“Review of Gore,” 346).

#### *Misrepresenting Calvin Revisited*

Professor Gordon makes very clear what has been previously seen in Gore’s dissertation, that the latter seriously mishandles and thus misunderstands Calvin. “The gravest methodological weakness (both in the dissertation and here) is Gore’s inferring Calvin’s principles regarding worship from Calvin’s practice. Such an inference is unwarranted, for many reasons.... But this methodology is all the more problematic when dealing with an individual whose principles are *stated*. In many places, Calvin states what his views of worship are, and those statements, reiterated in so many places, are identical to those of the Puritans who followed him. Gore does not cite Calvin’s sermons on the Second Commandment, his statements in *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, or even his comments from the relevant passages of the *Institutes*, all which would indicate that the church in its public assemblies should only worship God as he has commanded.” Gordon then cites several passages out of Calvin’s writings

37. The author thanks Dr. David C. Lachman for his contribution of this section.

38. Calvin on John 10:22. *A harmonie vpon the three euangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke ... whereunto is also added a commentarie vpon the euangelist S. Iohn.* (Londini: Geo. Bishop, 1584).

before concluding: “The failure to cite such passages as these (which could be multiplied many times) is simply irresponsible” (“Review of Gore,” 351-52).

#### *Gore’s Mishandling of both John Calvin and George Gillespie*<sup>37</sup>

But Professor Gore mangles not only the meaning of Calvin, but also of George Gillespie. Regarding the appearance of Christ at the Feast in John 10, Gore writes:

Gillespie, recognizing the importance of this event, argues the following points: (1) that there was no legal basis for the Feast of Dedication, (2) that Christ did not approve of the feast, and (3) that his presence was entirely for the benefit of the multitude, not due to any regard he may have had for the festival.

However, George Gillespie is not “recognizing the importance of this event,” but rather is responding to the arguments of the Bishop whose book he is confuting, a work with which R.J. Gore seems to be entirely unacquainted. Gore continues in this vein:

Consider the facts, however. At what other time in the ministry of Jesus did he accommodate himself to the religious errors of the Jews, for whatever reason? The desperation in Gillespie’s efforts to reconcile this event with the Puritan regulative principle of worship should be obvious.

This ignores Gillespie’s argument, which is that the Gospel account does no more than fix the time of year when Jesus was in Jerusalem and in no way implies an approval of the Feast of Dedication or an accommodation to religious error. Gore then misuses Calvin once again for his purposes:

Significantly, the commentators disagree with Gillespie’s speculation. There is virtually unanimity among the commentators that Jesus was there *to worship*. Calvin, for example, notes “Christ appeared *in the temple* at that time, according to custom.”

What Calvin actually says is this: “Christ appeared then according to his custom in the Temple, that his preaching might bring forth greater store of fruit in a great assembly of men.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, on John 5: 1 he says: “Jesus came unto the feast day unto Jerusalem, partly because there was greater opportunitie to

spread abroad doctrine, then, by reason of the course of people: partly because he must be obedient to the law, that he might deliver all men from the bondage of the law..." (Calvin in loc.). Note that in respect to both passages Calvin mentions the great number of people. Gore omits this part of Calvin's sentence, perhaps because he has just denigrated Gillespie for making this very point. Further, Calvin gives no other reason than the great assembly of people for Christ's presence in the temple at the feast of dedication, though he also speaks of the fulfillment of the (Mosaic) law in respect to his appearance in John 5:1. It would seem, therefore, that Calvin is in agreement with Gillespie and not with Gore.

In other words, it is in respect to the feast of dedication that Calvin makes no reference to worship (though he could have readily), but in respect of a feast commanded by Moses he does add the second reason for Jesus' presence. It is plain therefore that Calvin does not say, contra Gore, that Jesus was there to worship at a feast clearly not ordained by God. All he actually says is that Jesus was there in order to preach to a great number in a context where it would have been easy for him, as he did in John 5:1, to say that Jesus was there to observe the feast.

As for his use of commentators in general on this point, other than the reference to Calvin, when Gore speaks of virtual "unanimity among the commentators," he evidently has in view only the modern, mostly liberal, commentators he cites. Again, consulting a variety of 16th and 17th century Reformed commentators, who largely agree with Gillespie, does not seem to have occurred to him as a possibility.

Not done with disparaging Gillespie, Gore also cites him in comments on Purim in an endnote, and writes that the Scottish theologian:

argues against Purim as well. His arguments include: (1) Purim was civil only, and not religious (pp. 121-22);<sup>39</sup> if it were religious, Mordecai would be a prophet, so there would be a special warrant for the observation of Purim (p. 123); (3) it was unlawfully instituted, period (pp. 123-24). As may be noted, these objections include arguments based on silence, historical inaccuracies, and simple begging of the question. Similar arguments from "implication" or "good and necessary consequence" were expressed during the Westminster Assembly, session 649. The resolution states that "the fathers at first had a command from God ... yet nothing is left recorded to show His will and appointment of the things instanced in, but

the example and the practice of the apostles and the churches in their time." Mitchell etc. See also the essay by Jack Delivuk ... "Some Hermeneutical Methods in the Westminster Standards."

Gore does not seem to know how either to quote or to summarize accurately arguments with which he disagrees and apparently has trouble giving cogent reasons why he disagrees. He neither presents Gillespie's arguments nor gives any *reasons* why they are inadequate. Is the reader to take it on faith that Gillespie based his arguments on "silence, historical inaccuracies, and simple begging of the question"?

We observe the following on Gore's summation of Gillespie: (1) Gillespie's lengthiest argument which he begins by arguing from the text of Esther itself is that these days of Purim as first instituted appeared to be "only appointed to be days of civil mirth and gladness, such as are in use with us, when we set out bonfires, and other tokens of civil joy, from some memorable benefit which the kingdom or commonwealth has received." He then spends around 1,200 words answering Bishop Lancelot Andrews' arguments that these days were religious holy days rather than "days of civil joy and solemnity only" (*EPC*, 3.6.8.264). (2) After this Gillespie simply makes the point that whatever the nature of these days were, whether civil or religious days, they had a "more than ordinary warrant for them because Mordecai, by whose advice and direction they were appointed to be kept, was a prophet by the instinct and revelation of the Spirit (Esth. 4:13)."<sup>40</sup> He then cites the Swiss theologian Rudolph Hoßpianin,

39. Editor's note: Dr. Gore's citations from Gillespie are from The Presbyterian's Armoury edition of his *Works* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1846). See *EPC*, 3.6.8.264 in the Naph-tali Press edition.

40. Editor's note: Thomas M'Crie, no friend of "holidays of human appointment," disagrees that Purim was merely civil in nature, saying, "though it should be granted that the description contains nothing but expressions of secular joy, we would scarcely be warranted to maintain that this feast had no religious character. It is of the nature of this Book not to bring forward religion expressly, for reasons that we formerly assigned." On the other hand, M'Crie agrees that Mordecai did not act on his own authority, "There can be no doubt that he was raised up in an extraordinary manner as a saviour to Israel; and in the course of this Lecture we have seen grounds for believing that, in addition to his other honours, he was employed as the penman of this portion of inspired scripture. From all these considerations, it is reasonable to conclude that the feast of Purim was not instituted without divine counsel and approbation. Add to this, that the decree of Esther confirming it, is expressly said, in the close of this chapter, to have been engrossed in this book, by whomsoever it was written." Thomas M'Crie, *Lectures on the Book of Esther* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1838) 280-283.

who wrote: “Perhaps we will not have gone far astray if we say that this was done by Mordecai and Esther from a particular inspiration of the Holy Spirit” (*EPC*, 3.6.10.267).<sup>41</sup> (3) In the citation Gore gives, Gillespie is referring to “the Feast of the dedication of the Altar by Judas Maccabeus” and quotes Cartwright to the effect that “this Feast was unduly instituted.” Gillespie is not there speaking of Purim at all!

#### *Church Power and ‘All of Life as Worship’*

With that brief aside, we return to T. David Gordon’s observations. The professor sums up admirably the whole difficulty with both Gore and Frame regarding the context of discussing ‘worship.’ He writes (“Review of Gore,” 352-353):

The issue that separated the Puritans from the Anglicans was the authority of the church to call saints to certain assemblies, and then to determine what would be done in those assemblies.... I consistently find that those like Gore (and John Frame) who resist the traditional Westminster understanding of regulated worship, discuss “worship” aside from the question of the nature and limits of church-power, whereas those who study the principle within that arena tend to agree with it. Similarly, the same individuals also tend to speak of “all of life as worship,” indicating again an unwillingness to discuss the historic principle within the arena in which it was historically developed. The issues that separated the Anglicans and Puritans had nothing to do with “all of life,” nor anything to do with any aspect of life other than one *particular* aspect of life: the calling of the saints to assemble together to meet and renew covenant with God.

Next in one paragraph Gordon exposes the flaw of the idea that “all of life is worship” (“Review of Gore,” 353):

Such obtuseness regarding the historical setting of the doctrine necessarily will lead to unanswerable theological and practical problems: If all of life is

“worship,” may individuals celebrate the Lord’s Supper privately, in families, without the presence of an ordained minister? If all of life is “worship,” may the sacraments be administered anywhere, any time? If all of life is “worship,” why does Paul give *different* directions for eating in the Christian assembly than he does for eating “at home” (1 Cor 11:20, 33, 34)? If all of life is “worship,” why does Paul require *silence* of the women “in all the churches,” while expressly permitting them to *speak* “at home” (1 Cor 14:33-35)? Does not Paul in these passages expressly distinguish behavior that is permissible “in the church” from behavior that is permissible “at home”? And was not this distinction between how life “in assembly” is governed *differently* than life in other places precisely the point of Calvin and the Puritans?

#### *Christian Liberty and the Reformed Confessions*

Gordon’s review of Gore’s treatment of the subject of Christian Liberty exposes the same fundamental misunderstanding of the Reformed Confessions as noted previously in surveying his dissertation (“Review of Gore,” 354):

It should not be surprising that Gore’s understanding of Christian liberty is almost entirely opposite from what it has historically meant. If one does not distinguish what is permissible in the Christian assemblies on the first day of the week from what is permissible elsewhere, one will not be able to understand the nature and limits of church power, or, consequently, the nature of Christian liberty from the abuse of the same.... Gore understands Calvin and the subsequent Reformed confessions as saying virtually the opposite of what they actually said. Indeed, his misunderstanding is so profoundly total that on first reading I thought the editors had inadvertently omitted (or added) a negative....

What Calvin and the Reformed standards declare that believers are free *from*, Gore declares them to be free *to*. In those places where Calvin and the Reformed creeds declare that we are free “*from* the doctrines or commandments of men,” Gore asserts that we are free *to* obey the doctrines or commandments of men. Gore believes that Christian liberty is the liberty *to do* what is not prohibited; Calvin and the Reformed creeds perceive it as liberty *from* doing what is not commanded. Failing to make the fundamental Pauline distinction between “in assembly” and outside the assembly, Gore

41. Editor’s note: Rudolph Hošpinian (1547-1626), *Festa Christianorum: hoc est, De origine progressu, ceremoniis et riti bus festorum dierum Christianorum* (Zurich, 1587) chp 2. *ad finem*. The translation is given in the Naphtali Press edition of *English Popish Ceremonies*. Hošpinian undertook extensive studies in church history and wrote several books that delved into the origin of the rites and ceremonies of Roman Catholicism. This work dealt with ‘holy days.’ The Zurich preacher also wrote on the rites and ceremonies of the Jews, Turks, Romans, Greeks and Indians.

reads biblical texts as having precisely the *opposite* import that Calvin and the Reformed creeds thought they had.

#### *Gore's Understanding of the Regulative Principle*

As to Gore's persistent claim that the regulative principle is unworkable, Gordon summarizes in reply ("Review of Gore," 355):

...Gore has manifestly misunderstood the doctrine in significant ways. He does not indicate any awareness of its relation to the doctrine of church-power; he does not understand "circumstances" as the Reformed tradition does; and he does not recognize the categories of "form" and "rubric" in his articulation of the Puritan principle. The primary reasons for Gore's finding the doctrine "unworkable" are self-created: he does not yet understand the doctrine as it has been historically articulated. That is, what is "unworkable" for him is not the regulative principle itself, as articulated by Calvin or the Westminster Assembly, but it is his mishandling of that principle that divorces it from the doctrine of the nature and limits of church-power, that confuses "worship as all of life" with "worship" as the first-day gatherings of God's visible covenant people, that redefines what a "circumstance" of worship is, and that fails to appreciate the importance of "forms" and "rubrics" for discussing worship intelligibly.

#### *Motivations and other Problems*

After this summation of the problems in Gore's work what more could be said? However, before closing this survey, we do wish to address some other issues in *Covenantal Worship* and note some apparent motivating factors in Gore's abandonment of Presbyterian principles.

#### *Personal Pilgrimage from Presbyterian Worship*

It is interesting to read from Dr. Gore what the motivating factors were that lead to his rejection of the regulative principle of worship. He begins his treatise by sketching an autobiographical pilgrimage, from a position of enthusiastically adopting the Puritan perspective, to one of questioning it. One key factor in that journey was his increasing inability to understand the difference between using "a visible, physical, and tangible symbol" such as a wooden cross, and the Bible's literary use of that symbol. Another factor was

his having been highly uplifted by means of a highly liturgical worship service at a presbytery meeting, and his not knowing how to reconcile that experience with what he "professed to believe." A third key factor was his becoming a U.S. Army National Guard chaplain in 1986; as a result of his chaplaincy, he found himself having to justify his unwillingness to participate in a generic Protestant service—complete with altar set-up consisting of a brass cross and candlesticks—stipulated by the Army. As he read numerous books which defended the Puritan principle, he found a disturbing pattern. Many of the writings borrowed heavily from other sources favorable to the Puritan regulative principle of worship and provided little interaction with current developments in worship. There was much indicting of 'will-worshippers,' but little effort was made to articulate a positive exposition of the regulative principle in light of cultural challenges. Indeed, a great deal of the literature was little more than sloganeering. Furthermore, the exegesis of the key texts upon which the principle was based often appeared overstated and unconvincing. He then confesses that as he tried to apply the regulative principle, he was led "to conclusions that challenged much of what I had previously believed about Reformed worship" (Gore, 4-7).

Dr. Gore also mentions a final factor in his theological transformation, viz., the sobering fact "that so few Christians embraced the Puritan regulative principle of worship." Of the 2.1 billion Christians in the world, only a tiny percentage would be evangelical Presbyterian (those in the United States representing about 0.019 percent of all Christians worldwide), and "an even smaller subset would profess to follow the Puritan regulative principle of worship." While conceding that "the lack of adherents, in and of itself, does not negate the Puritan regulative principle of worship," he also suggests not only an approach of humility by Presbyterians, but also a willingness to "learn from the church catholic" (Gore, 7).

#### *Enemies of Presbyterianism as Sources*

Given his presuppositions, it is understandable why Dr. Gore opposes this Presbyterian doctrine. One of the ways in which he does so is by trying to drive a wedge between Presbyterian and Puritan worship. He writes: "In true pendulum-like fashion, the corrective efforts of the Westminster Assembly were at times excessive. James F. White observes that 'when the Reformers did rebel against prevailing practice, justifiable anger at contemporary abuses often led to

the elimination of things of genuine value that had become distorted in the course of time.” (Gore, 23-24).

Professor Gore also had previously made reference to James White, “a leading expert on worship,” who “places Puritan worship, a seventeenth-century development and major influence on Presbyterian faith and practice, midway between Reformed and Anabaptist traditions of worship. According to White’s analysis, Presbyterians must trace their liturgical lineage back not only to the practices of Zwingli, Calvin, and Knox, but also to the practices of the English Puritans.”

From the footnotes, one can glean that the resources for this perspective are from liberal sources: John Knox Westminster Press, and *Christian Century* magazine. Moreover, who exactly is this “leading expert on worship”? James F. White is the long-time professor of liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame, and a champion of an ecumenical approach to church life.<sup>42</sup>

It is one thing to utilize scholarly works in order to gain insight into various historical phenomena with regard to the practice of worship. But it is quite another thing altogether to quote favorably from enemies of historic Presbyterianism in order to denigrate the position of one’s spiritual forefathers. This is a pattern which one finds throughout Professor Gore’s work. He quotes favorably from Robert Webber, an erstwhile Reformed Presbyterian<sup>43</sup> who at one time taught at Covenant College but has now joined himself to High Church Anglicanism (the “smells and bells” crowd); and from Thomas Howard, raised as a fundamentalist but one who subsequently converted to Roman Catholicism. Dr. Gore writes: “Howard ... challenged evangelicals to restore the Lord’s Table to a place of importance, as ‘the center of the liturgy.’ Through these writings, Webber and Howard addressed the evangelical community at large with questions—and proposed answers that demand a hearing” (Gore, 14-15).<sup>44</sup>

### *Covenantal Life is Worship*

In a chapter on “Your Reasonable Service,” R. J. Gore

argues that covenantal life is worship. The professor does correctly note that the concessions by Norman Shepherd and John H. White, who profess adherence to the regulative principle of worship but believe that “the regulation of worship is but a specific application of the regulation of life,” work to “undermine the nature of the Puritan regulative principle of worship” (Gore, 112-114). In his eyes, the regulation of worship and of life are essentially the same: “Worship is regulated, even as life is regulated, based on the clear, sufficient teaching of Scripture, which sets boundaries and limits actions, but provided liberty and freedom of response within those parameters. Francis Schaeffer has pointed out that both form and freedom are grounded in creation and both must be asserted—in balance” (Gore, 120). Furthermore, the author’s approach calls for a “covenantal consciousness,” for worship and life, leading to the following conclusion (Gore, 119-124):

Worship was never intended to consist in simple conformity to a comprehensive set of guidelines. Even in the Mosaic economy, filled with ceremonial and typical elements, basic to true worship was the exercise of dominion as faithful obedient creatures. Now, in the cultural diversity of the New Testament church, the occasion for exercising such stewardship has vastly increased.

In the same chapter, Professor Gore rings the changes on the notion of *adiaphora*, or things indifferent. He attempts to make his case Biblically from four passages: Acts 16 (Timothy’s circumcision); Acts 21 (Paul’s participation in a Jewish purification rite); Romans 14 (“strong” and “weak” Christians); and 1 Corinthians 8 (eating meat sacrificed to idols).

### *The Covenantal Principle of Worship*

At this point we present Dr. Gore’s view in his own words of a “covenantal principle of worship,” the term he has coined to describe his peculiar views (Gore, 138ff). The “most significant” aspect is that (Gore, 140):

the covenantal principle of worship includes the freedom to worship in any manner warranted by the Scriptures. That is, the covenantal principle of worship says that whatever is consistent with the Scriptures is acceptable in worship. Here is where the major difference with the Puritan formula appears. For the Puritan, all worship was either commanded or unlawful.

42. “James F. White ... has devoted his professional life to teaching liturgy and equipping others for this ministry. He has been involved in liturgical reform and is the author of sixteen other books on liturgy” (<http://www.stgabriel.com/pages/LP61564.html>).

43. That is, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES) variety.

44. Buried in an endnote is the fact that Thomas Howard did later convert to Roman Catholicism (Gore, 168, n12).

If commanded, it was either directly commanded (or logically necessary; thus essential) or indirectly commanded, by general principle and Christian prudence (and therefore circumstantial).

For the Puritan, the circumstantial alone may be viewed as *adiaphora*; but the circumstantial was so unduly restricted as to rule out, in effect, the concept of indifferent things. Here, in the covenantal principle of worship, there are still two categories: commanded, by direct precept or example (and therefore necessary), and indirectly commanded, or governed by general principle and Christian prudence (and therefore circumstantial *and indifferent*). But the covenantal principle of worship insists that the second category must be given its due to include the broad range of *adiaphora*, things neither commanded nor forbidden, but governed by the light of covenant faithfulness.

We would congratulate anybody who can make sense of those last two paragraphs. However, Dean Gore tries, in the next paragraph, to help us understand what he was saying (Gore, 141):

In other words, the concept of *adiaphora* expands our understanding of circumstances while leaving the concept of elements intact. Without the concept of *adiaphora*, the Presbyterian churches have found themselves engaged in endless disputes about words. By refusing to acknowledge the breadth of circumstances, Presbyterians have continued to fight over definitions, arguing about such issues as whether the use of musical instruments is an element or a circumstance, or whether it is appropriate to have an Easter or Christmas service. Indeed, these things are circumstances of worship. For example, an Easter service is nothing more than the worship of God's people on Easter Sunday, with the usual elements of worship contextualized or conditioned by the *circumstances* of that particular Sunday.

Here, at last, we can begin to see what may be driving Dr. Gore—it is his desire to employ instrumental music in public worship, and his love for Easter and Christmas. But we can also see manifest the fundamental misunderstandings on his part.

#### *Various Principles Governing Worship*

Dr. Gore goes on to speak of various principles which he believes should govern worship. They are

simplicity, orderliness, freedom, glorification and edification, catholicity, cultural sensitivity, balance, and Christ-centeredness.

Regarding worship that is “simple,” he notes that the progressiveness of redemptive history means that certain typological aspects of the Old Testament have been fulfilled by Christ, “so that the pageantry of Old Testament worship is now passé. Thus, New Testament worship, relative to Old Testament worship, is simple.” Simple worship, he writes, is also worship of the Spirit—that is, not as opposed to materiality, but as energized by the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, “simple worship is that which has direction and inner coherence. It is worship that ‘is in the first instance the opposite not of complexity but rather of diffuseness.’ Again, this does not mean a bare-boned minimalism either in rite or ceremony. Rather, this ‘condition of true worship is a respect for the structure controlling the relations between the various parts of the cult, in an arrangement which shows that the cult progresses toward its culminating point, and that, having reached it, it is strengthened by it for the purpose of afterwards witnessing in the world’” (Gore, 143-144). Dr. Gore goes on to explain (Gore, 144-145):

There is little likelihood that a consensus will be achieved on the exact limits of simplicity. Societies where nonverbal means of communication have been highly developed will appreciate a greater role for sign and symbol. Cultures where artistic achievement has developed significantly will have an aesthetic emphasis that differs significantly from those where such development has been hindered. Church communities where an openness to Pneumatic phenomena has been the tradition will be more open to whole-person worship than will those whose tradition lies more along the lines of didactic, teaching-oriented worship. These variables will affect the circumstances of worship. Nevertheless, every ecclesial community must take simplicity seriously, even if there is not complete agreement on its significance and application.

What this passage seems to imply (and we say “seems,” since it is difficult to fathom precisely the man’s mind), is that there is legitimacy to various expressions of nonverbal, aesthetic, and charismatic worship. Indeed, the wording Dr. Gore has selected seems to imply that Pentecostals, being open to “whole-person worship,” have much to teach those in the Reformed faith, who are interested more with “teaching-oriented worship.”

Regarding worship that is “orderly,” Professor Gore claims that such worship “is anything but uniform, for diversity is grounded in the concept of order.... Thus, from creation, God has provided for creativity, individuality, and spontaneity within the bounds of created order. Worship that is orderly may exist in styles as diverse as charismatic worship or High Church liturgy. What is essential is that orderliness be uniformly pursued, even as its practice remains diversely applied” (Gore, 146).

But, the Westminster Assembly was called in order to effect uniformity in religion, including in worship, among the kingdoms of Great Britain. While it is true that there is diversity on circumstantial matters, that is not the same thing as saying that “diversity is grounded in the very concept of order.”

Regarding worship that is “free,” the professor argues for freedom of individual conscience, and for “ecclesial freedom” as well—that is, for the notion “that each congregation, within the bounds of the covenantal principle of worship, has the right to determine its own particular style or emphasis in worship” (Gore, 146-147).

Regarding worship that “glorifies and edifies,” Dr. Gore says that there are “two closely related lines of movement in worship, the vertical and the horizontal.” He rejects the idea that the legitimate worship must be “only enjoyable,” and maintains that worship must edify others (Gore, 148-50; emphasis in the original).

Regarding worship that is “catholic,” he calls upon Reformed believers to be both “open” to others in the Body of Christ, and humble. He goes beyond urging Pentecostals and High Church Episcopalians learning from each other, and claims that “Protestants in general should be able to learn from the traditions of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. After all, does not the sacramental focus of the Roman Catholic Church have something to say to Presbyterians whose worship, sadly enough, all too frequently has been desacramentalized? And does not the Orthodox tradition of mystery have something to contribute to the churches of the Reformation and their tendency toward intellectualized, overly didactic worship? Worship that is catholic requires the willingness to hear the truth contained in other traditions, even when that truth has been obscured by nonbiblical accretions” (Gore, 151-152).

In answer to the two rhetorical questions in the preceding paragraph, we would most definitely answer, “No!” Our Presbyterian doctrine already includes a proper understanding of the sacraments, and

already properly celebrates the mystery of worship. (Is Dr. Gore simply not aware of the literature in the Reformed heritage?)

More than that, at this point, we see even more clearly where Dr. Gore’s spiritual pilgrimage is taking him. It appears that he is not only embarrassed by the small numbers of conservative Presbyterians, but also by the relative smallness of the Protestant church vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

Regarding worship that is “culturally sensitive,” he writes that “change in worship has been part of God’s ongoing plan of redemption. Even Scripture itself is filled with changes in worship from the patriarchal stage to the Mosaic, from the Mosaic to the Davidic, and from the Davidic to the New Covenant. The biblical imperative for the church in relation to culture, then, is adaptation and transformation, redeeming that which is ‘noble and wholesome.’” He adds: “The genius of Reformed liturgy is revealed every time cultural adaptation of the liturgy is achieved” (Gore, 153-154).

Really? We thought that the genius of Reformed worship is revealed every time the church conforms to the regulative principle of worship. But what is more shocking is the assumption that change in worship within Scripture, gives warrant for extra-Biblical change to the practice of worship. A final observation with regard to this topic has to do with his assertion that the church must redeem in culture “that which is ‘noble and wholesome.’” The reference to “noble and wholesome” comes from a book published by Paulist Press, and written by Anscar Chupungco, a Roman Catholic from the Philippines (Gore, 192, n41).

Regarding worship that is “balanced,” Professor Gore wants to balance Word and symbol and Word and sacraments (Gore, 154ff). He writes (Gore, 156):

Truth, then, can be communicated in worship not only through verbal explanations, but also through movement, posture, music, drama, art, and the wise use of sacred space and sacred time. While there should be no compulsion in the matter, many in the church have experienced humility and submission through the act of kneeling in prayer. Others have rejoiced and exulted in the Lord by lifting up their hands to heaven, acting out what is transpiring at a deeper level. The bright, flowing banners used in some churches emphasize important aspects of God’s redemption, or highlight special seasons in the Christian year.

He also quotes from Robert Webber “on the impor-

tance of the symbolic, particularly the return of aesthetics to worship: ... 'Why, then, shouldn't we accept appropriate art forms as visible means through which a spiritual reality becomes present or through which we offer praise?'" (Gore, 156).

However, the quote from Professor Webber, cited approvingly by R. J. Gore, underscores the problem with their position. In light of clear Scriptural teaching (Exodus 20:4-6; Leviticus 10:1-3; Colossians 2:23; etc.), the question of worship is not, "Why not?"; the question of worship is, "Why?" That is, What positive warrant is there to employ this or that practice in worship? To open up worship practice by means of asking, "Why not?," is to embrace a rationalistic, and skeptical, perspective. The end result of this un-Biblical approach is evident, in that nothing, in principle, could be lawfully excluded from worship—drama, dance, art, or anything else in created reality.

Regarding worship that is "Christ-centered," Professor Gore asserts that "the church must ever be open to the lordship of Jesus Christ, working through men and women gifted by his Spirit, to lead the church into new and greater understanding of his will" (Gore, 161).

While he does not actually state that women are to lead in worship, it is easy to see how someone might infer that he would be open to that suggestion. Indeed, since anything that is not an element of worship automatically falls under the category of *adiaphora*, according to Professor Gore, then why not have women lead in worship?

#### *Conclusions on Gore's Writings on Worship*

We must say that, on one level, it is refreshing that someone who denies the regulative principle of worship would be candid enough to admit it. But since the Rev. Dr. Gore admits that he is out of accord with the Westminster Standards on such a major matter as the doctrine of worship,<sup>45</sup> then why does he continue to enjoy status as a Presbyterian teaching elder? (Would it not be the honorable course of action for him to relinquish his ministerial credentials?) Indeed, why did a purportedly conservative denomination (the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church) employ him as a faculty member at (and now Dean of) their official seminary? The answer, sadly, is because the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America (the denomination to which Professor Frame belongs), and other churches that have such men in office, honor these men who reject the Presbyterian faith with respect to worship.

#### FRAME AND GORE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Over the past several decades, there are numerous factors, from both within and without Presbyterianism, that have worked to reframe Presbyterian worship. Within the putatively Presbyterian churches, foremost among the figures who have done the most damage are John M. Frame and R.J. Gore, Jr.

Each of the men represents a different approach to the rejection of Presbyterian worship. Professor Frame pretends to adhere to the regulative principle of worship, while Dr. Gore is candid enough to admit that he does not. However, the net result is the same: a repudiation of Presbyterian doctrine on this crucial matter, by men who have taken Presbyterian ordination vows and occupy places of influence and authority.

Another commonality between these two teaching elders is their affiliation with Westminster Theological Seminary. The establishment of this Philadelphia institution (in 1929), similarly as the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America later in the century, also manifested a reawakened Calvinism. However, like these two denominations, the seminary, too, was divided theologically: the Scotsman John Murray maintained the views of the Westminster Assembly, while most of his colleagues did not. And, also like these two denominations, the seminary chose not to follow the path of historic Presbyterianism: there eventually arose a new generation that knew not Murray.

The founder of Westminster Seminary, J. Gresham Machen, lamented in a 1923 sermon the lack of honesty among churchmen who say one thing and mean something else. The good professor asserted that he did not know when the revival in religion would come, but he was certain that when it did, it would come only after there was a restoration of basic integrity.

If we agree with Machen's point, then we would have to conclude that R.J. Gore's anti-Presbyterian perspective, which is at least refreshing in its candor, may be a harbinger of better days ahead. But the

45. Not to belabor the point, but, in case there is any question as to Professor Gore's hostility to the Presbyterian position, here is a sampling of his own words: "... the Puritan regulative principle of worship was imbalanced in a number of ways"; "Jesus, in his practice, violated the Puritan formulation of the regulative principle of worship"; "The forced exegesis and arguments from silence demonstrated the inadequacy of the Puritan formula"; "... the regulative principle, as formulated by the Puritans, adopted by the Westminster Assembly, and embraced by the various Presbyterian churches, is flawed and unworkable"; "... the Puritan regulative principle of worship [is] flawed" (Gore, 92, 106, 110, 111, 139).

blessing of God's Holy Spirit will not be apparent until there is repentance by Presbyterian office bearers who take solemn vows with crossed fingers.

#### ENDNOTES.

A. See footnote 2. Sherman Isbell's research supports attribution to John Murray of Section A of the "Report of the Committee on Song in Worship Presented to the Thirteenth General Assembly, on the Teaching of Our Standards Respecting the Songs That May Be Sung in the Public Worship of God," He writes, "The thirteenth General Assembly (1946) was presented with 'a partial report' from the study committee. Murray was responsible for the opening section 'A,' which provides the fundamental statement of the regulative principle. Murray's authorship is evident from the draft text and draft cover letter, both in Murray's handwriting, which are preserved among his papers in the archives of the Montgomery Library at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. In his letter to the committee members, Murray says, "This paper is being sent to you in the hope that study of it beforehand will be of some assistance in furthering and perhaps expediting our work at the next meeting of the Committee on March 10<sup>th</sup>. . . . I thought it necessary to enter into some detail in view of questions raised at our last meeting." This statement of the Reformed regulative principle deserves recognition in the corpus of Murray's writings. William Young observes: 'Section A of the 1946 report is clearly the work of John Murray. . . . Section C is evidently based on parts of my report on the scripture proof of the regulative principle, except for the addition to C in the 1947 report, in which I did not concur.' Thus the bulk of the committee's incomplete report in 1946 was composed by the two men who dissented from the committee's majority report the following year. The 1947 General Assembly received from the committee a majority report and a minority report, each seeking to complete what the "partial report" had begun the year before. The contributions by Murray and William Young to the 1946 report were viewed by the committee as a preamble to the 1947 reports. The majority report of 1947 argued that song need not be restricted to the words of Scripture, and that this position is compatible with the regulative principle set forth in the previous year's "partial report." However, the minority report, signed by the men who provided the committee's defining statement of the regulative principle, concluded that 'there is no warrant in Scripture for the use of uninspired human compositions in the singing of God's praise in public worship.' William

Young has noted that the minority report, though signed by Murray and Young, 'was written entirely by Prof. Murray.'" See Mr. Isbell's introduction to his transcript of this material at <http://members.aol.com/RSICHURCH/song1.html>.

B. See footnote 3. The regulative principle was the doctrine of Scottish Presbyterianism, and English Puritanism. — of the Scottish Church as exhibited in *Pardovan's Collections*: "By the 15<sup>th</sup> act of Assembly 1707, they declare that there are some innovations set up of late by prelatists in their public Assemblies, which are dangerous to this church, and manifestly contrary to the constant practice and known principle thereof, which is, that nothing is to be admitted in the worship of God, but what is prescribed in the Holy Scriptures. . . ." (Walter Steuart of Pardovan, *Collections and Observations Concerning the Worship, Discipline, and Government of the Church of Scotland* [Edinburgh: 1709, cited from Edinburgh: W. Gray and R. Inglis, 1770] 2.1.1). — Of the Puritans as exhibited by among many which could be mentioned — William Ames: "1. Instituted worship is the means ordained by the will of God to exercise and increase natural worship. 2. The means ordained by God are wholly set forth in the second commandment, which forbids all contrary means of worship devised by men under the words, *graven image* and *likeness*. Since these were once the chief inventions of men for corrupting the worship of God, they are rightly used for all devices of man's wit pertaining to worship (by a synecdoche constantly used in the decalogue)." (William Ames, "Instituted Worship," *The Marrow of Theology*, Translated from the third Latin edition, 1629, and edited by John D. Eusden [Pilgrim Press, 1968. Rpt. Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1983] Bk II. Ch. 13, 278). — And William Perkins: "The second point, is the rule of worship, and that is, that nothing may go under the name of the worship of God, which he hath not ordained in his own Word, and commanded to us as his own worship. For we are forbidden under pain of the curse of God, either to add, or to take away anything from the precepts of God in which he prescribes his own worship. . . ." (William Perkins, *Workes* [Cambridge: John Legate, 1608-09] 1.661. Cited from William Young, *The Puritan Principle of Worship Part IV*. <http://members.aol.com/RSIGRACE/puritan4.html>). ■