

Sola Scriptura and the Regulative Principle, Chapter 4

Protestant Inconsistencies

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While, happily, all Protestants affirm *sola scriptura*, many Protestants teach and practice things which contradict the doctrine that Scripture is the sole standard for faith and life. An implicit denial of *sola scriptura*, whether by teaching or practice, can be found in Lutheran, Episcopal, evangelical and even Reformed churches. A brief examination of some of these inconsistencies will aid our understanding of this crucial teaching.

The doctrine of *sola scriptura* is both affirmed and implicitly denied in the creedal statements of the Church of England (the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion [1563, American version 1801]) and the Lutherans (the Augsburg Confession [1530] and Formula of Concord [1576, 1584]). Article six of the Thirty Nine Articles contains a good statement regarding the Bible. “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”¹

The Lutheran confession also contains a strong affirmation of *sola Scriptura*:

I. We believe, confess, and teach that the only rule and norm, according to which all dogmas and all doctors ought to be esteemed and judged, is no other whatever than the prophetic and apostolic writings both of the Old and the New Testament, as it is written (Psalm cxix. 105): ‘Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.’ And St. Paul saith (Gal. i. 8): ‘Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed....’

In this way a clear distinction is retained between the sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and all other writings; and Holy Scripture alone is acknowledged as the [only] judge, norm, and rule, according to which, as by the [only] touchstone, all doctrines are to be examined and judged, as to whether they be godly or ungodly, true or false.²

1. Episcopalianism

Unfortunately, the Lutheran and Episcopal symbols both contradict *sola scriptura* in their discussions of ecclesiastical ceremonies, church authority and tradition. The Thirty Nine Articles give the church an authority that is clearly incompatible with *sola scriptura*. Article 20—Of the Authority of the Church reads:

The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God’s Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, yet, as

¹ *Creeks of Christendom*, 3:489 (all quotes are from the American revision of 1801).

² *Ibid.* 3:93-94, 96.

it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.³

Article 34—*Of the Traditions of the Church* states,

It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word.

Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the Traditions and Ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly (that others may fear to do the like), as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the Magistrate, and woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren.

Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, Ceremonies or Rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying.⁴

The Thirty Nine Articles give the church a power *independent* of Scripture. Not only can the prelates determine or abolish rites or ceremonies as they please solely on their own authority without scriptural warrant, they also reserve to themselves the power to discipline believers who “openly break the Traditions and Ceremonies of the Church.” Although their creed does say that the church cannot “ordain any thing contrary to God's word written,” it nevertheless give the church hierarchy a power independent of Scripture. Thus while article six affirms *sola scriptura* in theory, articles 20 and 34 deny it in practice. The latter articles not only give the church power to determine or abolish rites or ceremonies as she pleases without any scriptural warrant whatsoever, they also give the church the authority to discipline believers who “openly break the Traditions and Ceremonies of the Church.” Article 20 does say that “it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written.” This statement, however (which follows the Lutheran confessions), would offer little comfort to the Puritans and Covenanters who were disciplined and persecuted for refusing to submit to man-made rites and ceremonies.

The Episcopal position on church authority and human tradition is derived from: (1) a deficient view of the perfection and sufficiency of Scripture; (2) a false understanding of the role of human reason in determining church ordinances; (3) a fallacious concept of the crown rights of the resurrected Christ.

When it comes to the government and worship of the church, Episcopalian theologians and apologists openly admit that Scripture is not a perfect rule for the church but only a partial rule. Anglicans (at least in such areas as worship and government) view the Bible as incomplete, vague and general. The Bible is like a defective map with some large roads noted yet with the details missing. If the map is to be really useful, the prelates must fill in the missing pieces. How are the details to be arrived at? The bishops will use their reason to glean from the traditions of the ancient church and add some lovely traditions of their own. The fact that God has made it abundantly clear that he despises human inventions in ethics or in worship is ignored (cf. Gen.

³ *Ibid.* 3:500.

⁴ *Ibid.* 3:508-509.

4:3-5; Lev. 10:1-2; Dt. 4:2; 12:32; Num. 15:39-40; 2 Sam. 6:3-7; 1 Chr. 15:13-15; 1 Kgs. 12:32-33; Jer. 7:24, 31; Isa. 29:13; Col. 2:20-23).

There is a great contrast between the Anglican and the Reformed understanding of *sola scriptura* and the sufficiency of Scripture. Reformed confessions regard the perfection and sufficiency of the Bible as extending not only to doctrine but also to worship and church government. If the worship and government that God has instituted in his word is sufficient, then obviously it does not need supplementation. Davies writes, “The main principle of the absolute authority of God’s word in the Scriptures for faith, ethics, and worship was expressed by all Puritans. To depart from this is the utmost human impertinence and pretentiousness, for it implies that one knows God’s will better than He does, or that the inherent weakness of original sin does not blind one’s judgment through egocentricity.”⁵

The Episcopal concept of church authority and tradition also derives from a wrong use of human reason. Sixteenth century Anglican apologists, in their attempt to refute the dogmatic biblicism of the Puritans, gave reason a role independent of Scripture in determining the worship and government of the church. The Puritans were not against the use of reason. However, for them reason was always to be submitted to Scripture and reason was to be used to deduce doctrine and practice from the Bible itself. It was not to be used independently of Scripture. The Westminster divines refer to explicit teachings from Scripture and those deduced from Scripture by good and necessary consequence (1.6). Anglican apologists (especially Richard Hooker) used reason to give church authorities autonomy from the strict parameters of the word in order to justify their human traditions. (Most of these traditions were a continuation of medieval Roman Catholic practices.) Regarding Richard Hooker (the greatest of Anglican apologists), Cook writes,

In the defense of Anglicanism, published in eight books between 1594 and 1600, Hooker identifies the real issue in the Anglican and Puritan controversy as the nature of the church. He seeks to repudiate Cartwright’s position that the Scripture provides a prototype for the government of the church for all time. Endeavoring to shift the argument away from Scripture, Hooker contends for a principle of natural reason as having equal validity with that of divine revelation. He embarks on an essentially non-Reformed approach to truth, teaching that some spiritual laws are known by reason quite apart from Scripture. Here we have the Catholic mind at work, drawing its strength from Aquinas, operating quite comfortably within the English Church from which it has never been banished; creating, in fact, the characteristic Anglican mentality which has controlled the practice of the Church of England ever since.... There is nothing of *sola scriptura* in Hooker’s contention that to appeal to the New Testament for the polity of the church is to say, in effect, that ‘God in delivering Scripture to his Church should clearly have abrogated amongst them the law of nature; which is an infallible knowledge imprinted in the minds of all the children of men’ [*Ecclesiastical Polity*, Bk. II, Ch. 8, 6]. Reason is given a validity equal to that of Scripture ‘inasmuch as law doth stand upon reason, to alleage reason serveth as well as to cite Scripture; that whatsoever is reasonable the same is lawful whatsoever is author of it.’⁶

⁵ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England from Cranmer to Baxter and Fox, 1534-1690* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996 [1970]), 1:258.

⁶ Paul E. G. Cook, “The Church” in *Puritan and Anglican Thinking* (Northamptonshire, England: The Westminster Conference, 1977), 26.

Closely related to the Anglicans' improper use of human reason is their defective understanding of original sin. Davies writes, "Anglicans found man to be deficient in spiritual capacity; his other powers were weakened, but not desperately wounded and in need of redemptive blood transfusions, as the Puritans claimed. Man's reason was, for the Anglicans, unimpaired; it had a natural capacity to distinguish between good and evil in a moral order. Cranmer assumed, for example, that men could choose the good without the help of sanctifying grace. Jewel affirmed that 'Natural reason holden within her bonds is not the enemy, but the daughter of God's truth.' Donne held that reason must be employed when the meaning of Scripture is unclear, but, 'Though our supreme court...for the last appeal be Faith, yet Reason is her delegate.'"⁷ As a consequence of such a defective view regarding the effects of the fall, Anglicans did not understand the danger of allowing sinful, fallen men the right to determine rites and ceremonies of the church. The Puritans recognized that the corruption of the human heart rendered man unable to determine *acceptable* forms of worshiping a thrice holy God. Even the regenerated mind cannot be trusted to autonomously determine worship ordinances, for it is still struggling with the remaining effects of the fall. The only safe thing to do under such circumstances is to study what God says and follow it. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Pr. 3:5). Bushell writes,

The regulative principle may therefore be seen, in a particular sense, as a natural inference from the doctrine of total depravity. The two are tied together, for example, in Exodus 20:25: 'And if you make an altar of stone for me, you shall not build it of cuts stones, for if you wield your tool upon it, you will profane it.' Any work of man's own hands, that he presumes to offer to God in worship, is defiled by sin and for that reason wholly unacceptable.⁸

The church fathers and theologians of the medieval era, who added many human traditions to the worship of God, no doubt thought they were inventing things that would benefit and edify the church. The result, however, was the Romish whore, the church of the Antichrist. It is for this reason that the Scriptures repeatedly warn the covenant people not to add or detract from the laws, statutes and ordinances that Jehovah has prescribed. "When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Dt. 12:29-32).

⁷ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 1:54.

⁸ Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion: A Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody*, 120. William Young writes, "The total corruption and deceitfulness of the human heart disqualifies man from judging what is to be admitted into the worship of God. It may be that before the fall, our first parents had written on their hearts the law of worship and by looking within the depth of their own beings, could read off the commandments of God. Yet even then, they were not without direct external communication of the will of Him who walked and talked with them in the garden. "Since the fall, however, though the human conscience still witnesses in all men that worship is due to the supreme Being, no information can be gained from the heart of man as to how God is to be worshiped" (Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, eds., *Worship in the Presence of God* [Greenville, S.C.: Greenville Seminary Press, 1992], 81).

The Anglican concept of church authority and tradition is an implicit rejection of the crown rights of Jesus Christ. Episcopalian theologians are not obedient to the great commission in which Jesus commanded the church to teach the nations “to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:20). Their version of the great commission should read, “teach the nations to observe all things that I have commanded you and all things that the bishops decide are unto edification.” When prelates or anyone else places human laws, religious ordinances, ceremonies or rites alongside of God’s revealed will, then such men are giving themselves an authority that belongs solely to God. Only God has the authority to declare an act moral or immoral. Yet men and women have been disciplined and persecuted simply for refusing to submit to humanly-devised rites and ceremonies. Every use of human tradition in the worship of Jehovah is implicitly Romanist and tyrannical. Although evangelical congregations and backslidden Reformed churches may not use the rack, the boot, imprisonment, confiscation or banishment to punish modern Puritans, they do use many subtle and not-so-subtle forms of coercion, discipline and disapproval. Regardless of many churches’ disapprobation of biblical worship, we must never place our faith in the autonomous religious ordinances of finite sinful men.⁹ It is wicked and foolish to look to human traditions in worship as if they were a part of God’s word. Biblical faith must be directed solely to Christ and His word, “for all our obedience in the worship of God is the obedience of faith. And if the Scripture be the rule of faith, our faith is not, in any of its concerns, to be extended beyond it, no more than the thing regulated is to be beyond the rule.”¹⁰

Jesus Christ is the only king and sole lawgiver to the church. Whenever men add human laws, ordinances, rites or ceremonies to what Christ has authorized in his word, they deny believers the liberty they have in Christ. Owen writes,

That abridgement of the liberty of the disciples of Christ, by impositions on them of things which he hath not appointed, nor made necessary by circumstances antecedent unto such impositions, are plain usurpations upon the consciences of the disciples of Christ, destructive of the liberty which he hath purchased for them, and which, if it be their duty to walk according to gospel rule, is sinful to submit unto.¹¹

Ironically (today), opponents of *sola scriptura* as applied to worship (i.e., the regulative principle of worship) have attempted to turn the tables against modern Puritans by arguing that the regulativists are the ones who deny believers liberty by not allowing non-regulativists the opportunity to introduce human innovations into the worship of God. The problem with such an argument is that liberty as defined by Scripture never means liberty from God’s law or liberty to devise one’s own worship ordinances or ceremonies apart from God’s word. Biblical liberty refers to: (1) our freedom from obedience to the law as a means of justification before God (e.g.,

⁹ John Knox writes, “It is not enough that man invent ceremony, and then give it a signification, according to his pleasure.... But if that anything proceed from faith, it must have the word of God for the assurance; for ye are not ignorant, ‘That faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.’ Now, if ye will prove that your ceremonies proceed from faith, and do please God, ye must prove God in expressed words has commanded them: Or else shall ye never prove, that they proceed from faith, nor yet that they please God; but that they are sin, and do displease him, according to the words of the apostle, ‘Whatsoever is not of faith is sin’” (William Croft Dickenson, ed., *John Knox’s History of the Reformation in Scotland* [New York: Philosophical Library, 1950], 1:87).

¹⁰ John Owen, “The Word of God the Sole Rule of Worship” in *Works* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1967), 13:473.

¹¹ John Owen, “A Discourse Concerning Liturgies” in *Works* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1965 [1850-53]), 15:55.

Rom. 3:28); (2) our deliverance from the power of sin in us (e.g., Rom. 6:6 ff.); (3) the abrogation of the ceremonial law and thus our freedom from it; (4) our freedom in areas that are truly *adiaphora*, that is, things indifferent (e.g., Rom. 14:20). Christian liberty never means that we are permitted to add to God's moral precepts or that we can add to the worship that God has prescribed. Such a notion assumes that the most important and reverent activity that Christians engage in (the worship of God) is somehow within the sphere of *adiaphora*. That idea is plainly unbiblical and absurd.

True freedom comes from a proper understanding of the Reformed doctrine of *sola scriptura* and the correlative doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Of the Puritans Rawlinson writes,

Moreover, they believed with Calvin that if God had shown how he was to be worshiped by the clear light of His Word, it was sheer presumption, bordering on blasphemy, for men to add to what God had revealed. In 1605 William Bradshaw declared that Puritans 'hold and maintain that the word of God contained in the writings of the Prophets and Apostles, is of absolute perfection, given by Christ the Head of the Church, to be unto the same, the sole Canon and rule of all matters of Religion, and the worship and service of God whatsoever. And that whatsoever done in the same service and worship cannot be justified by the said word, is unlawful.' Such Bible passages as 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; Matthew 15:9, 13 and Revelation 22:19 were used to justify this position, whilst from such passages as Acts 2:41-42; 1 Timothy 2:1ff.; Ephesians 5:19; Romans 10:14-15; 2 Timothy 1:13 and Matthew 18:15-18, it was argued that there were six ordinances of Gospel worship—Prayer, Praise, Preaching, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Catechising, and Discipline.¹²

Because consistently Reformed churches do not allow human traditions in worship, they never discipline people for adhering only to the worship prescribed in Scripture. It is only in churches that add human traditions that believers are ostracized and persecuted, and ministers are fired for holding to pure gospel worship. How can modern Puritans be accused of denying anyone's liberty when all they are guilty of is following the laws and ordinances of Scripture without human admixture? "[T]he value of providing a biblical warrant for all the ordinances of Puritan worship was that this gave these ordinances an August authority for those who used them, as the Puritans did, in the obedience of faith."¹³ Those who add human inventions to the worship of God can never adequately deal with the issue of authority for their human innovations. There is no divine authority undergirding their practices, and there is no divine authority behind the coercion that is involved in their implementation and continuance. John Owen writes,

The principle that the church hath power to institute any thing or ceremony belonging to the worship of God, either to a matter or manner, beyond the observance of such circumstances as necessarily attend such ordinances as Christ Himself hath instituted, lies at the bottom of all the horrible superstition and idolatry, of all the confusion, blood, persecution, and wars, that have for long a season spread themselves over the face of the Christian world.¹⁴

¹² Leslie A. Rawlinson, "Worship in Liturgy and Form" in *Anglican and Puritan Thinking* (Cambridge, England: Westminster Conference, 1977), 74.

¹³ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 1:71.

¹⁴ John Owen, quoted in William Cunningham, "The Reformers and the Regulative Principle" in *The Reformation of the Church* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965), 40-41.

Those who do not consider divine warrant an important issue for the government and worship of the church should remember that over 18,000 men, women and children who were dedicated Scottish Presbyterians (Covenanters) were murdered simply for refusing to submit to the human ordinances of Prelacy.

A consideration of non-authorized man-made worship reveals not only that such worship is by nature without divine authority and therefore tyrannical but also anthropocentric. What is the purpose of all the pomp, pageantry and spectacle of Anglican worship? Why the dramatic cathedrals? Why the stained glass, special holy days, special gestures and special priestly dress? The reason is *not* that God has commanded such things and thus takes delight in them. God is by no means impressed with fancy cathedrals, bells, smells and silly vestments. The whole purpose of the various man-made adornments (aside from high church sacerdotalism) is to have some psychological effect upon man. The popish paraphernalia and medieval trappings retained in Anglican churches were considered aids or helps to devotion. They were intended to strike awe, reverence and inspiration among the worshipers. The cathedral with its pomp and ceremony served a similar function to the LSD, reefer and light show that a hippie would experience during a rock concert. They set the mood and manipulate the heart. At bottom all such human devices invented for human enjoyment and psychological effect reveal a serious lack of faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to accompany pure gospel worship. The pomp and pageantry of Anglican worship is an implicit denial that the worship authorized and designed by Jesus Christ is adequate unto the end for which it was intended. George Gillespie warns that human ceremonies obscure true religion. He writes,

But among such things as have been the accursed means of the church's desolation, which peradventure might seem to some of you to have least harm or evil in them, are the ceremonies of kneeling in the act of receiving the Lord's supper, cross in baptism, bishoping, holidays, etc. which are pressed under the name of things indifferent; yet if you survey the sundry inconveniences and grievous consequences of the same, you will think far otherwise. The vain shows and shadows of these ceremonies have hid and obscured the substance of religion; the true life of godliness is smothered down and suppressed by the burden of these human inventions; for their sakes, many, who are both faithful servants to Christ and loyal subjects to the king, are evil-spoken of, mocked, reproached, menaced, molested; for their sakes Christian brethren are offended, and the weak are greatly scandalized; for their sakes the most powerful and painful ministers in the land are either thrust out, or threatened to be thrust out from their callings; for their sakes the best qualified and most hopeful expectants are debarred from entering into the ministry; for their sakes the seminaries of learning are so corrupted that few or no good plants can come forth from thence; for their sakes many are admitted into the sacred ministry, who are either popish and Arminianized, who minister to the flock poison instead of food; or silly ignorants, who can dispense no wholesome food to the hungry.¹⁵

For the opponents of the regulative principle of worship who accuse Puritan worship of being guilty of a "nominalistic minimalism" or a "color-blind iconclasm" we ask the following questions: What human improvements can be made to the singing of God's inspired Psalms? What (in the words of John Bunyan) ear-gate, mouth-gate and eye gate human additions are

¹⁵ George Gillespie, *A Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded on the Church of Scotland* (Dallas, TX: Naphtali, 1993 [1637]), xxx.

needed to supplement hearing God's word read and preached and looking and feasting upon the flesh and blood of the Son of God? What are fancy buildings, silly popish dress, ceremonies and Romish pomp compared to the ordinances given to us by our most blessed Lord and Savior? Is placing our faith in the infallible words of Christ not enough? Must we also place our faith in the words and inventions of men?¹⁶

2. Lutheranism

The Lutheran churches have also departed from *sola scriptura* in their understanding and regulation of public worship. The Augsburg Confession (A.D. 1530) reads,

And unto the true unity of the Church, it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by men should be alike every where, as St. Paul saith: 'There is one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all' (Art. 7, Of the Church).¹⁷

Concerning Ecclesiastical rites [made by men], they teach that those rites are to be observed which may be observed without sin, and are profitable for tranquility and good order in the Church; such as are set holidays, feasts, and such like. Yet concerning such things, men are to be admonished that consciences are not to be burdened as if such service were necessary to salvation. They are also to be admonished that human traditions, instituted to propitiate God, to merit grace, and make satisfaction for sins, are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. Wherefore vows and traditions concerning foods and days, and such like, instituted to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel (Art. 15, Of Ecclesiastical Rites).¹⁸

¹⁶ One of the most common misconceptions regarding the regulative principle of worship is that it was developed haphazardly as an overreaction to the abuses of Romanism. It is even argued by some that it was only good for that early period of the Reformation when many people were coming out of the papal church; however, now that Protestantism is settled and established it is too extreme and is no longer necessary. There are a number of reasons why the scenario noted above should be regarded as pure fiction. First, the idea that Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, Farel, Bucer and the early English Puritans were all pragmatists who were willing to twist Scripture for a good end is ludicrous. These were men who would rather be tortured and killed than compromise the truth of Scripture. For example, John Calvin spent his whole life preaching, writing commentaries and refining his *Institutes*. The regulative principle is clearly taught in his writings from beginning to end (see Appendix A). It is obvious to any student of history that he did not adopt his position on worship in a sloppy or haphazard manner. Third, the Lutherans also came out of Romanism yet rejected the regulative principle. If pragmatism was involved in adhering to the regulative principle, it was not exhibited by the Reformed churches or theologians. Humanly speaking, the Reformed churches would have been physically much safer from the assaults of Rome and her minions if they would have compromised their understanding of worship and joined the Lutherans. Fourth, the theologians of the Second Reformation period in both England (e.g., John Owen) and Scotland (e.g., George Gillespie, Samuel Rutherford, James Durham), who studied the issue of worship in more detail than even Calvin or Knox, came to identical conclusions on the matter of worship. If anything, the men of the Second Reformation were even more consistent and stricter than some of the earlier theologians. Fifth, the undergirding principles that produced full-blown Romanism are still with us and pose a threat to Protestants. Although the physical danger is no longer with us in many countries, the spiritual danger of Popish doctrine is as great as ever.

¹⁷ *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 3:16.

The Formula of Concord (1576 [1584]), Article 10, *Of Ecclesiastical Ceremonies*, reads,

(Which are commonly called *adiaphora*, or things indifferent.) There has also arisen among the divines of the Augsburg Confession a controversy touching ecclesiastical ceremonies or rites, which are neither enjoined nor forbidden in the Word of God, but have been introduced into the Church merely for the sake of order and seemliness. (Sound doctrine and confession touching this Article.) I. For the better taking away this controversy we believe, teach, and confess, with unanimous consent, that ceremonies or ecclesiastical rites (such as in the Word of God are neither commanded nor forbidden, but have only been instituted for the sake of order and seemliness) are of themselves neither divine worship, nor even any part of divine worship. For it is written (Matt. xv. 9): ‘In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.’ II. We believe, teach, and confess that it is permitted to the Church of God any where on earth, and at whatever time, agreeably to occasion, to change such ceremonies, in such manner as is judged most useful to the Church of God and most suited to her edification.... V. We believe, teach, and confess that one Church ought not to condemn another because it observes more or less of external ceremonies, which the Lord has not instituted, provided only there be consent between them in doctrine and all the articles thereof, and in the true use of the sacraments.¹⁹

We repudiate and condemn the following false dogmas as repugnant to the Word of God: I. That human traditions and constitutions in things ecclesiastical are of themselves to be accounted as divine worship, or at least as a part of divine worship. II. When ceremonies and constitutions of this kind are by a sort of coercion obtruded upon the Church as necessary, and that contrary to the Christian liberty which the Church of Christ has in external matters of this sort.²⁰

The confessional Lutheran position on worship is basically one in which men can add to the worship of God as they please, as long as the human additions are not considered a part of worship. The church is permitted to add rites and ceremonies as long as they are not condemned by the word and are deemed profitable. The human traditions that are added, however, are “neither divine worship, nor even a part of divine worship.” According to Lutheran theologians the man-made rites and ceremonies are merely external matters and are not actually worship; therefore, they can be different in different places; they can be added to or detracted from at will; and they cannot be imposed upon the laity as compulsory.

The Lutheran understanding of worship was developed early in the Reformation and was directed primarily against Rome. For Luther and Melancthon the main problem with papal rites and ceremonies was that they were compulsory and considered necessary for salvation. Luther writes,

On this same weak basis, the Romanists have attributed to the sacrament of ordination a certain fictitious “character,” which is said to be indelibly impressed upon an ordinand. I would ask whence do such ideas arise, and on whose authority and for what reason have they become established? Not that we are unwilling for the Romanists to be free to invent, to say, or to assert, whatever they like; but we also insist on our own freedom, lest they arrogate to themselves the right of making articles of the faith out of their own ideas, as they have hitherto presumed to do. It is sufficient that, for the sake of

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 3:160-163.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 3:163-164.

concord, we should accommodate ourselves to their ceremonies and idiosyncrasies; but we refuse to be compelled to accept them as necessary for salvation, which they are not. Let them do away with the element of compulsion in their arbitrary demands, and we will yield free obedience to their wishes in order that we may live in peace towards each other. For it is mean, iniquitous, and servile for a Christian man, with his freedom, to be subjected to any regulations except the heavenly and divine.²¹

In his *Apology* Melancthon writes, “For Scripture calls traditions doctrines of demons, when it is taught that religious rites are serviceable to merit the remission of sins and grace (218, 4). If the adversaries defend these human services as meriting justification, grace and the remission of sins, they absolutely establish the kingdom of Antichrist (220, 18). Daniel (11, 38) indicates that new human services will be the very form and constitution of Antichrist (221, 19).”²²

The major differences between Reformed and Lutheran worship are the result of the different theological viewpoints of Luther and Calvin. One could add that with regard to church practice Luther was very conservative. For Luther the major doctrine to which practically every other teaching must be considered in order to be understood was justification by faith. It was the chief doctrine by which the church stood or fell. Therefore, when Luther turned to the reformation of the medieval style worship that he was accustomed to he used a scalpel and not an axe. Although Luther was a champion of *sola scriptura*, he never made the connection between Scripture alone and the need of divine warrant for worship ordinances, as did Calvin. When Luther looked at worship practice his major concern was, Is this practice motivated by a belief in justification by works? Does this ritual or practice detract in any way from the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ? With these criteria Luther eliminated many abuses (e.g., the Roman Catholic Mass, pilgrimages, the saints as mediators, the sacerdotal priesthood, etc.). Luther also held that any worship practice that contradicted the clear teaching of Scripture must be avoided. Therefore, the church service should be intelligible to the people. It should be conducted in their own language. Communion should be served in both kinds—the bread and the wine. Preaching should be emphasized so the flock will receive instruction and edification rather than a vain mumbling in Latin. Another important issue with Luther was the matter of Christian liberty. Human traditions in worship were *adiaphora* and should not be forced upon the people. Such coercion smacked of Romanism and merit-mongering.

Luther had a favorable view of church traditions. Human traditions in church should be respected and considered valuable as long as they do not contradict Scripture. This view of tradition is observed in Luther’s doctrine of the “orders.” Davies writes,

The implications of this doctrine were that God has so ordered the world that man must not live as a mere individual isolated from society, but as a being sharing certain communal relationships. Such communities ordained by God are the Church and the State. Since they depend for their continuance on the divine sanction, men ought to respect them. Therefore, except when they definitely contradict the revealed will of God, they are to be obeyed. Such a doctrine puts a heavy premium upon tradition and as such it may be regarded as the religious basis of Luther’s conservatism. It also helps to explain why the bishops have such an important part to play in deciding what particular liturgical

²¹ Martin Luther, “The Pagan Servitude of the Church” in John Dillenber, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writing Edited with an Introduction* (New York: Anchor, 1961), 343-344.

²² Philip Melancthon as quoted in J. L. Neve, *Introduction to the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church* (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1926), 260-261.

reforms are desirable. Theoretically Luther left the choice of accepting or rejecting his liturgical reforms to the Christians of the local churches, but in practice the decision was left to the discretion of the bishop.²³

The Lutheran confessions faithfully reflect Luther's teaching regarding human ceremonies. Church traditions (i.e., humanly devised rites and ceremonies not prescribed in Scripture) are permissible if: (1) they are not Romanizing (that is, no human merit is connected to the ceremonies), (2) the ceremonies do not violate the teaching of Scripture, (3) they are not over-multiplied to the point where believers think less highly of real biblical commandments (e.g., the Lord's supper), (4) they are not compulsory (that is, they are not to be conformed under pressure). In other words, they are not to be considered *necessary* acts of worship. (A necessary act of worship is that which is commanded by Scripture [e.g., the sacraments].)

Lutherans teach that the church is permitted to add rites and ceremonies only within the sphere of *adiaphora* (Gk. for "things indifferent"). Allbeck writes,

The Formula of Concord first marks out the boundaries of genuine *adiaphora*. True *adiaphora* are never contrary to God's Word, never unionizing, never Romanizing, never useless foolish spectacles, never essentially constitute the worship of God. Concerning their status, it is said that *adiaphora* may be changed by the church in the interest of good order, discipline, and edification. But there is always the necessity of clear doctrinal confession by word and deed. *Adiaphora* are matters of freedom. Compulsory *adiaphora* involve a contradiction of terms. When they cease to be free they must be resisted.²⁴

The Lutheran understanding of *sola scriptura* does not permit the church to add its own doctrines to the teachings of Scripture, nor does it allow the church to add to "essential" or "commanded" worship (i.e., the sacraments). It does, however, give the church a very large role in determining rites and ceremonies simply by declaring the human additions to be within the realm of *adiaphora*. In theory the Lutheran statements regarding worship are superior to the Episcopalian teachings. At least the Lutherans do not regard their human additions as an actual part of worship. They also claim that the human rites and ceremonies are not compulsory like the worship ordinances commanded in Scripture. In practice, however, the Lutheran churches are no better than their Episcopal counterparts. Both deny the sufficiency of Scripture in the realm of worship. Both are guilty of allowing human corruptions to displace pure gospel worship. They both deny that the worship of God in the new covenant era is fixed or limited by the canon of Scripture. As a consequence both leave the parameters of acceptable worship in a state of flux. The boundaries of worship are always changing because they are determined not by Scripture alone but also by human tradition, and there are an infinite number of worship options available to man that do not violate the Lutheran principle of allowing anything not expressly forbidden.

There are a number of reasons why the Lutheran understanding of worship must be rejected as unscriptural and irrational. First, the idea that external rites or ceremonies are *adiaphora* is unbiblical. Every act in the moral and religious sphere is always either good or bad. The only activities that may be considered *adiaphora* are matters that are truly circumstantial or incidental to the ceremonies such as setting up chairs, turning on lights, etc. Activities that are circumstantial do not need to be proven by Scripture. However, they do need to be conducted according to the general rules of the word. Williamson writes,

²³ Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997 [1948]), 17.

²⁴ Willard Dow Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg, 1952), 283.

One must be careful to distinguish between the circumstances of worship and the worship itself. For example the Scripture does not prescribe the hour of the day at which public worship of the congregation is to be held. Neither has the Lord prescribed the shape, style, or size of the place of worship. In the nature of the case, such circumstances will vary from country to country, season to season, and place to place. There is a general rule, however, which requires that congregations assemble somewhere on the Lord's Day. The general rule controls the particular situation according to the circumstances. But when the congregation has assembled at the agreed place the worship must be then only that which God has commanded.²⁵

The style of church architecture, lighting, heating, seating arrangements and length of service are circumstantial to the worship of God. However, sprinkling holy water, making the sign of the cross, disallowing meat on Fridays, using salt and cream during infant baptism, confirmation, Christmas and Easter celebration, special ceremonial priestly garments and kneeling at the Lord's supper are not circumstantial to worship but additions to the worship itself.

Man-made innovations in worship are strictly forbidden by Scripture. The Bible teaches that men are not to add or detract from God's moral precepts (cf. Dt. 4:2; Josh. 1:7-8; Pr. 30:5-6) and men are not to add or detract from the worship that God has instituted in His word (cf. Dt. 12:32; Lev. 10:1-2; 2 Sam. 6:3-7; Jer. 7:31; 19:5). The Lutheran idea that man-made rites or ceremonies are not worship is unbiblical and totally arbitrary. We know that God considers human rites or ceremonies to be unauthorized, unacceptable and sinful additions to worship. Jehovah killed Nadab and Abihu for conducting a humanly-devised ceremony (the burning of strange fire, Lev. 10:1, 2). Although Lutheran theologians do not regard humanly-devised acts of worship as real worship, God refers to all such human inventions as "will worship" (Col. 2:20-23). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for the humanly-devised rite of religious hand washing (Mt. 15:1-3). The Jews received this rebuke from our Lord not because there is anything intrinsically immoral regarding hand washings but because the church does not have the authority to add her own religious ceremonies to what God has authorized in His word. Some have argued that Jesus was only condemning bad or unedifying human traditions being added to what God has commanded. The problem with this argument is that religious hand washings from a strictly ethical standpoint harm no one. Jesus picked the most innocent, innocuous religious human tradition possible to make the point crystal clear that no human additions are acceptable to God no matter how small or "innocent."

Second, the Lutheran assertion that man-made rites and ceremonies are not obligatory or compulsory is not the actual practice of the Lutherans or anyone else. Why? Because when human ceremonies are introduced into the public worship of God they are *always* practiced under some form of human compulsion. The moment that human traditions are introduced into the church service people are forced either to depart from that church to avoid the human additions or to commit sin by participating in unauthorized ceremonies. Whenever a church adds man-made ceremonies to the worship of God there is always ecclesiastical and social pressure to submit to the man-made ordinances. Church members are expected and urged to follow the church calendar, go to the Christmas and Easter service, sing uninspired hymns, listen to the musical groups, watch the children's choir, participate in the altar call, etc. Even in many "Reformed" churches there is pressure or coercion applied to people so that they will conform to

²⁵ G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 164.

the various corruptions that have accumulated over the years. People have even been disciplined for refusing to participate in silly and Romish human inventions (e.g., uninspired hymns, holy days, children's church, etc.).²⁶

The Lutheran concept of non-compulsory human traditions may sound good as a theory, but in practice it corrupts the church and destroys Christian liberty. The Bible teaches that God alone speaking in His infallible word has an absolute, unqualified authority over men's consciences. Thus, the Westminster Confession of Faith asserts: "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has 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. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also" (20.2). Believers in Christ are free not only from doctrines and commandments which are contrary to God's word, such as confession to a priest, the Mass, celebrating holy days besides the Lord's day, etc., they also are free from doctrines and commandments which are additions to the Bible, that is, they may not explicitly contradict Scripture but are not taught in Scripture; they are derived from human authority. "Any doctrine or commandment contrary to or besides His will in matters religious the Christian not only may but must disobey. Liberty of conscience means the liberty of the individual to obey God rather than man."²⁷

Although Lutherans insist (as noted above) that their human additions are not compulsory (in order to avoid the appearance of being Romanistic) they indeed are compulsory. Even the great Martin Luther was inconsistent. Davies writes,

Similarly, in liturgical matters, it may fairly be claimed that his doctrine of the Word of God was not logically developed. In extenuation it should be remembered, however, that he was the first of the Reformers and that by the time of Calvin the situation was more stable and men had more time for reflection on the issues. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that in Luther's later years the Reformer displayed a growing conservatism. He desired more uniformity both in the use of ecclesiastical vestments and of liturgical forms. What had previously been optional, became obligatory.²⁸

Are we supposed to believe that a Lutheran minister and his congregation would be left unmolested by church authorities if they decided to discard the church calendar, extra-biblical holy days, hymnals, organs, crosses and all other human innovations that lack divine warrant? Sadly, Lutheran congregants, like their Anglican counterparts, are expected to submit to the ceremonies and commandments of men with an implicit faith and blind obedience. Remember, "Whatsoever is not done in faith, nor accompanied with a personal persuasion of the obligation

²⁶ Gordon Clark writes, "The twentieth century church in America seems to have fallen into a curious self-contradiction. The lust for power and control over men and organizations has produced an almost papal claim to authority on the part of bureaucratic ecclesiastical officials. When the majority speaks (and the officials manipulate the majority) it is the voice of God" (*What Do Presbyterians Believe?* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965), 191). Sadly, many elders in "Reformed" denominations see their job as one of maintaining the status quo or current backslidden state of their church's spiritual condition. Unfortunately this often means an unquestioning acceptance of all sorts of unbiblical human traditions. If often also means treating Christians concerned with reformation as kooks, as people who need to be kept quiet in order to maintain the defections of past generations.

²⁷ James Benjamin Green, *Harmony of the Westminster Presbyterian Standards* (Collins World, 1976), 155.

²⁸ Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, 18.

or lawfulness of it in the sight of God, is pronounced to be sin—Rom. xiv. 23.”²⁹ Hodge writes, “[I]t is a great sin, involving at the same time sacrilege, and treason to the human race, for any man or set of men to arrogate the prerogative of God and to attempt to bind the consciences of their fellow men by any obligation not certainly imposed by God and revealed in his Word.”³⁰ Furthermore, when men participate in worship ordinances that originate in the mind of man—that are not based upon Scripture but ecclesiastical authority—they are not doing religious homage to God (who never appointed such rites or ceremonies) but to man. They are in principle bowing down to the autonomous authority of sinful men. Worshiping God without a divine appointment is an implicit acknowledgment of popery and prelacy. “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 Jn. 5:21).

Third, the Lutheran position suffers from an irreconcilable internal contradiction. According to the Lutheran confessions men are permitted to add their own traditions, rites or ceremonies to the worship of God, only if the additions are edifying and are not regarded as compulsory. These qualifications raise an important question. If men have the ability to devise a tradition, rite or ceremony that truly sanctifies believers, should not that ceremony, if it really edified God’s people, be mandatory? The Anglican articles which state that the church can make up rites or ceremonies that she regards as edifying and then impose them on the flock with ecclesiastical discipline if necessary is more logical. If a human tradition, rite or ceremony sanctifies then it should be mandatory. It is important to note, however, that the apostle Paul teaches that human commandments and ordinances do not edify or sanctify the church. He writes, “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—’Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col 2:20-23). Human rites and ceremonies are the commandments of men. They appear to be wise and edifying; however, the truth is that they do not sanctify at all. The Holy Spirit does not use human traditions, rites or ceremonies to edify the church. He uses the word of God. “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). If we want to receive edification, then we must only follow God’s laws, statutes and religious ordinances. Papal, prelatial and/or fundamentalistic legalism does not edify.³¹

Fourth, the Lutheran assertion that man-made rites or ceremonies are not worship is fictitious nonsense. When ecclesiastical authorities devise a religious ceremony and then place it into the public worship service alongside of worship ordinances authorized in Scripture, they are implicitly teaching that the man-made ceremonies are of the same type and carry an equal authority to divinely instituted ordinances. When men intermingle human ceremonies with divine ordinances in the worship service, do they expect the worshipers to distinguish between the two (human and divine) as the service proceeds? Furthermore, if the man-made religious ceremonies are not worship, then what are they? What is their purpose? Why are they conducted during the

²⁹ Robert Shaw, *Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, 206.

³⁰ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 267.

³¹ Gordon Clark writes, “Strange to say, evangelicals, fundamentalists, pietists or other devout people, who would be horrified at the sign of the cross or bowing to images, have invented religious requirements and taboos of their own. There is a Bible school which insists that the girls put their hair up in buns, for a looser hair-do would be ‘worldly’” (*What Do Presbyterians Believe?* 192-193).

worship service? Why are they listed in the church bulletin as part of the public worship of God? Frank Smith writes,

Note carefully that worship is an imposition, since we are required to gather with God's people in order to engage in public worship. Therefore, which is the legalistic position (and the one opposed to Christian liberty)—the one which thinks it does not need biblical warrant to require this or that action to be performed in worship, or the one which makes strict appeal to Scripture and wishes not to impose anything upon God's precious flock unless it is found in His Word? In passing, we would note that the Reformed faith is at once the most strict and narrow, and also the broadest and most universal, because of its unwillingness to impose upon people anything unless it is biblical.³²

The Lutheran idea that their human additions to worship are not really worship shows the deceitfulness of the human heart. Men are so in love with their non-authorized human traditions that they will twist the plain meaning of words and resort to illogical and unsound arguments and exegetical gymnastics to justify their sinful practices. The Lutheran conception is very similar to the absurd Roman Catholic assertion that worship of the saints and the virgin Mary is not really worship. It is alleged that when Romanists bow and worship God, it is a special worship (*latría*). But when they bow down to and worship the saints and blessed virgin, it is *doulia* (or, for Mary, *hyperdoulia*). We must recognize that all such pharisaical-type distinctions are nothing more than clever excuses for departing from the worship that God has prescribed. Against all tyrannical usurpations and encroachments of the church Christ says: "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt. 15:9; cf. Isa. 29:13).

3. Evangelicalism

Evangelicals are also guilty of restricting the application of the Bible's authority. When it comes to worship, evangelicals do not believe that Scripture is sufficient. They would say that nothing sinful ought to be a part of worship. However, they believe that men have the authority to make up any form or content of worship that they think is useful. Unfortunately, the Lutheran or Episcopal understanding of worship has been embraced by the vast majority of professing Christians. This pragmatic understanding of worship has predictably led to liturgical chaos in evangelical churches. Whenever churches abandon *sola scriptura* in the sphere of worship and adopt pragmatism, the result is a worship service that becomes increasingly anthropocentric and pagan.

This fact has become increasingly evident in the last thirty years as churches have adopted the worship paradigm of the church growth experts. These "experts," who look to business, psychology and sociology for wisdom rather than the Bible, argue that the best method for attaining church growth is to make the church user-friendly to unbelievers. This tactic involves a de-emphasis on the preached word and the sacraments in favor of a service that titillates and entertains. The emphasis in most modern evangelical worship services is on entertainment. Such services do not feed the intellect but rather stir the emotions. Modern worship services have little in common with apostolic worship and much in common with Las Vegas, Hollywood and Broadway. In many churches people even applaud after a performance, as if they were at a play or concert.

³² Frank Smith, "The Singing of Praise" in *Worship in the Presence of God*, 223.

As a result the modern evangelical worship service does not glorify God but instead glorifies man. It is basically a show for man, directed to man, with man-pleasing songs and lots of entertainment: comedian pastors, music soloists, rock groups, “gospel” bands, celebrity guest speakers, plays, skits, videos, singers, choirs, liturgical dancing and so on. Pragmatic man-centered worship has even influenced church architecture. The central feature of a Puritan meeting house was the pulpit on which rested a large Bible. The central feature of the modern mega-church is the stage. The men who designed Episcopal and Lutheran worship with all its man-made defects at least attempted to be reverent and majestic. Modern evangelical worship is usually neither; it is crass, tasteless pablum.

When we approach a thrice-holy God who is infinite in perfections, should not our sole concern be to learn what He has prescribed and then focus our attention on what pleases him rather than on what pleases us and makes us feel good? When we consistently adhere to *sola scriptura* and thus depend solely upon God’s infallible and sufficient word to determine what is acceptable worship, we eliminate the possibility of popish, pagan, prelatric, or pragmatic will-worship from being intruded upon the church. Worship is arguably the most important activity engaged in by the church. Therefore, when we seek direction regarding worship, should we not place our trust in God and his infallible word rather than the opinions of sinful man? “We have to do with a God who is very jealous; who will be worshiped as He wills, or not at all. Nor can we complain. If God be such a Being as we are taught in the Holy Scripture, it must be His inalienable right to determine and prescribe how He will be served.”³³ The idea that sinful men can add to, improve upon and make more sufficient the worship that God has authorized in his word is arrogant and foolish. Young writes,

The enlightened understanding is content to learn God’s precepts and the renewed will to walk in them, but the regenerate heart as such cannot desire to make the slightest addition to God’s commandments. Whenever true believers have acted inconsistently in this respect, they have invariably allowed great corruption to be introduced into God’s sanctuary.³⁴

4. Reformed Declension

Many Reformed churches have also abandoned the Bible’s sole authority over worship. Many Reformed and Presbyterian denominations still officially hold to *sola scriptura* in the sphere of worship. The rule of Scripture over worship is called the *regulative principle of worship*. This principle declares that all the parts or elements of worship must have divine warrant, that is, everything that is a part of worship that holds a religious significance (i.e., things or acts that are not circumstantial) must be authorized either by a direct command in Scripture (e.g., “Do this in remembrance of Me,” Lk. 22:19); or by logical inference from Scripture (i.e., there may not be an explicit command but when several passages are compared they teach or infer a scriptural practice [e.g., infant baptism]); or by biblical historical example (e.g., the change from the seventh day to the first day of the week for corporate public worship). Simply put, every worship practice must be proven from Scripture. This principle (if strictly followed)

³³ Samuel H. Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), 240.

³⁴ William Young, “The Second Commandment” in Frank Smith and David C. Lachman, eds., *Worship in the Presence of God*, 81-82.

eliminates all human innovation, pragmatism and pagan syncretism from worship and thus leaves the church in the same state as it was in the days of the apostles.

Unfortunately, most Reformed churches today have departed from the regulative principle and thus allow many practices that have not been prescribed by the Bible (e.g., extra-biblical holy days such as Christmas and Easter, uninspired hymns, choirs, instrumental music, etc.). Many Reformed churches are following in the footsteps of Arminian, revivalistic, charismatic, and the church growth movement style of worship. An excellent example of the current deterioration is the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). The following statistics document their declension. Twenty-five years ago the PCA had approximately 2% exclusive Psalms singing churches; 40% “traditional” (e.g., *Trinity Hymnal* with piano and organ); 50% “traditional” with a few “Scripture songs” and a variety of musical instrumentation; and only 8% had a “traditional/contemporary” mix. Today, approximately 70% of their churches have a “traditional/contemporary” mix. Hurst writes, “If [they] don’t have dance and drama, it’s only because there is no one to lead it; women and young people may lead worship as individuals praying and reading Scripture, applause [is] acceptable for [a] job well done; music may take the form of [a] performance.”³⁵ Less than 1% of PCA churches today adhere to exclusive Psalmody (i.e., biblical worship).

Some conservatives within Reformed denominations have expressed a concern regarding the rapid trend away from “traditional” worship toward “contemporary” or “celebrative” worship in their denominations. These men attempt to stem the tide of new-fangled worship with discussions on how worship must be dignified, majestic and reverent. Their battle cry is “decently and in order.” While we heartily agree with our brothers regarding the need for reverence, decency and orderliness in the public worship of God, we disagree regarding the fundamental problem that is causing such a rapid declension in worship. To cure the disease, one must do more than attempt to alleviate the symptoms; one must go to the root of the problem. As long as Reformed denominations reject or redefine the regulative principle of worship, rendering it virtually useless, all efforts at serious reformation in worship will be defeated. Without a strict interpretation of the regulative principle, the debate over worship shifts from an exegetical discussion of what is warranted by Scripture to primarily a debate over human preferences. The beauty and wisdom of the regulative principle of worship is that it protects the church from our own sinful hearts. Worship that is fixed and founded deep upon the bedrock of Scripture is immune from the wind and waves of human opinion, fashion and fad.

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[HOME PAGE](#)

³⁵ Peter Hurst, “Lesson 4: Congregational Worship” in Byron Snapp, ed., *The Presbyterian Witness* (Hampton, VA: Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church, fall 1997), XI.4, 13. All statistics used in this paragraph are taken from Hurst’s article.