

# The Neo-Presbyterian Challenge to Confessional Presbyterian Orthodoxy:

## A Biblical Analysis of John Frame's *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*

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### Introduction

John Frame (a Presbyterian Church in America ordained minister, “worship leader,” and professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida) has written a book that both defends and sets forth the worship paradigm of most modern “conservative” Presbyterianism. (By conservative Presbyterianism we refer to those Presbyterian bodies that strictly adhere to biblical inerrancy, the virgin birth, literal miracles, vicarious atonement, a literal resurrection, the five points of Calvinism and so on.) 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. Frame is either guilty of serious self-deception, or he is incredibly dishonest. In this brief analysis of Frame’s book we will consider: (a) Frame’s book as a justification of the status quo (i.e., neo-Presbyterian worship), (b) Frame’s misrepresentation of the position regarding worship of the early Presbyterians and Westminster Standards, (c) Frame’s redefinition of the regulative principle, (d) Frame’s bizarre, arbitrary and unorthodox exegetical methodology that he uses to justify many human innovations in worship, and (e) Frame’s case for modern “celebrative” worship.

### Defending the Status Quo

One of the purposes of Frame’s book is to justify the type of worship practiced by his and many other churches. He writes, “Part of my motivation was a concern to preserve for my local congregation and others like it the freedom to worship God in its accustomed style—one that is nontraditional, but in my judgment, fully spiritual.”<sup>1</sup> Frame throughout the book refers to traditional vs. non-traditional worship. Although he never defines traditional worship, it is clear that he is not in favor of it. He says, “Historically oriented books typically try to make us feel guilty if we do not follow traditional patterns. Theological traditionalists also typically want to minimize freedom and flexibility. Even those who offer suggestions for ‘meaningful worship’ are often very restrictive, for they tend to be very negative toward churches that don’t follow

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<sup>1</sup> John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996), p. xii.

their suggestions.”<sup>2</sup> This statement which occurs in the preface of the book is a classic case of what debaters call “poisoning the well.” According to Frame, there is traditional worship which he implies is founded upon human tradition and there is his type of worship which is truly free of human traditions and is biblical. We will see, however, that Frame proposes all sorts of things in worship that have no warrant from God’s word. If by traditional, Frame was condemning uninspired hymns, musical instruments (e.g., the piano and organ) and extra biblical holy days (e.g., Christmas and Easter), then he would be on the right track.<sup>3</sup> However, one will note as he reads Frame’s book that his problem with the typical old-fashioned corrupt “Presbyterian” worship is that it does not have enough human innovations. He is really in favor of more, not less, human autonomy.

As this study progresses we will see that there are two basic schools of thought regarding worship in “conservative” Presbyterian circles. There are strict, consistent regulativists who follow the original intent of the Westminster Standards. Such people worship exactly as Presbyterians did for over two hundred years (i.e., *a cappella* exclusive psalmody without extra-biblical holy days). There are others (the vast majority) who have found ways to circumvent the regulative principle and bring in various human innovations. Frame, as part of the latter group, is simply being more consistent. That is primarily the reason that Frame’s Arminian-Charismatic style of worship is being adopted throughout “conservative” Presbyterian denominations that have already abandoned biblical worship. Frame’s main disagreement with old-fashioned corrupt “Presbyterian” worship (e.g., *Trinity Hymnal* and a piano) is really one primarily of style or taste. (Although there are also still some major philosophical differences regarding the role of the mind in worship and mysticism.) Frame’s disagreement with the Westminster Standards and strict regulativists is fundamental and foundational. Thus, most of his book is directed against the Westminster Standards and the worship that it produced (exclusive *a cappella* psalmody without extra-biblical holy days, etc.).

In a sense, Frame has done the church of Christ a great service by putting in written form for all to read and analyze a defense of neo-presbyterian worship. What is neo-presbyterian worship? It is Arminian-Charismatic style worship conducted by Presbyterians who pretend to hold to the Westminster Standards (in the sphere of worship). One can understand where Frame is coming from, from the following statement: “In a way, the volume seeks to summarize the thinking underlying the worship of the ‘New Life’ Presbyterian churches: New Life Presbyterian Church in Escondido, California, where I worship, our ‘mother church’ of the same name in

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>3</sup> In order to keep this review reasonably short this author will not refute Frame’s arguments against the historic Reformed positions on exclusive psalmody, musical instruments in worship and the celebration of extra-biblical holy days (e.g., Christmas and Easter). This author has already refuted Frame’s arguments (which are typical of the modern Presbyterian status quo) in other works: *The Regulative Principle of Worship and Christmas*; *Musical Instruments in the Public Worship of God*; *A Brief Examination of Exclusive Psalmody*; and *Sola Scriptura and the Regulative Principle of Worship*. All these books are available free at <http://www.reformed.com>. Other recommended works are: John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Havertown, PA: New Covenant Publication Society, 1983 [1888]); Kevin Reed, *Christmas: An Historical Survey Regarding Its Origins and Opposition to It* (Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1983); *Biblical Worship* (Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage, 1995). Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion: The Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant Publications, 1977). G. I. Williamson, *On the Observance of Sacred Days* (Havertown, PA: New Covenant Publication Society, n.d.); *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of God; Commanded or Not Commanded?* D. W. Collins, *Musical Instruments in Divine Worship Condemned by the Word of God* (Pittsburgh: Stevenson and Foster, 1881), p. 38.

Glenside, Pennsylvania, and others.”<sup>4</sup> The “mother church” to which Frame refers was founded in the 1970s by Orthodox Presbyterian pastor Jack Miller. The “mother church” in Glenside adopted the worship practices of Arminian-Charismatic churches and discovered that the new worship practices were fun, attracted young people and led to church growth. It is important to note that the new “non-traditional” worship adopted by the original New Life Church in Glenside which is now practiced in a majority of the Presbyterian Church in American congregations and in many Orthodox Presbyterian churches did not come into being from a careful exegesis of Scripture by Reformed pastors and theologians. It was simply borrowed lock, stock and barrel from Arminian-Charismatics who couldn’t care less if there was such a thing as the regulative principle. Frame, a “worship leader” in such a church, attempts in his book to harmonize such worship with the Reformed faith twenty years after such worship was adopted. He has taken upon himself the task of harmonizing a non-Reformed, Arminian-Charismatic worship paradigm with the strict regulative paradigm of the Westminster Standards. In a moment we will see that this involves redefining the Reformed concept of “divine warrant” so broadly that almost anything is permitted in worship. Frame has the job of fitting a very large square peg (Arminian-Charismatic worship) into a very small round hole (the Reformed-confessional doctrine of worship). Therefore, he spends a great deal of time with a hammer and chisel making the small round hole very large and square. One must give Frame credit for the skill with which he so smoothly, cunningly and craftily completely redefines the regulative principle, all the while claiming total allegiance to the Westminster Standards.

Another stated purpose of Frame’s book is to soothe the guilty consciences of Reformed pastors who know enough theology and church history to recognize to a certain extent that they have departed from Reformed, confessional worship. He writes,

Presbyterian worship—based on the biblical “regulative principle,” which I describe in these pages—was in its early days very restrictive, austere, and “minimalist.” It excluded organs, choirs, hymn texts other than the Psalms, symbolism in the worship area, and religious holidays except for the Sabbath. Presbyterians in the “Covenanter” tradition, such as those in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America and a few other denominations, still worship in this way, but they are in that respect a small minority of conservative Presbyterians today. Nevertheless, the Puritan theology of worship that produced this minimalism is still taught in theologically conservative Presbyterian churches and seminaries as the authentic Presbyterian and Reformed view of worship. This is partly because that theology is reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, to which these churches subscribe. But the Westminster standards actually contain very little of the Puritan theology of worship. The Puritan and Scottish divines who wrote the Westminster standards were wise not to include in them all their ideas of worship. The principles responsible for liturgical minimalism come from Puritan and other Reformed texts that go above and beyond the confessional documents. Yet these extraconfessional texts themselves have considerable informal authority in conservative Presbyterian churches.

The result has been that although few conservative Presbyterian churches actually worship in the Puritan way, the Puritan theology of worship remains the standard orthodoxy among them. This discrepancy sometimes leads to guilty consciences. I have talked to pastors, for instance, who are unwilling to go back to exclusive use of the Psalms in congregational singing, yet feel awkward about singing hymns. They almost seem to think that they *ought* to worship as the

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<sup>4</sup> *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*, p. xvi. This author attended the ‘mother church’ in the late 1970’s and met and talked with Dr. Miller, who was a very sincere, pious and godly man (he passed on to glory in 1995). In the area of worship, however, his efforts have done much to corrupt the church of Christ.

Puritans did, even though they have no intention of doing so. They worry that this wavering amounts to an inconsistency in their commitment to the Reformed faith and to Presbyterian orthodoxy.

I believe that Presbyterians need to do some rethinking in this area. In my view, the Westminster Confession is entirely right in its regulative principle—that true worship is limited to what God commands. But the methods used by the Puritans to discover and apply those commands need a theological overhaul. Much of what they said cannot be justified by Scripture. The result of our rethinking, I hope, will be a somewhat revised paradigm for Presbyterian worship; one thoroughly Reformed in its assumptions, affirming the regulative principle and the statements of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, but allowing much greater flexibility than the Puritans did in applying God’s commands for worship. *Such a revised paradigm will relieve the guilty feelings mentioned earlier, not because it allows us to ignore God’s commandments, but because it helps us to understand more accurately what our Lord expects of us.*<sup>5</sup>

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 in the quote above that there is a “discrepancy” between what modern Presbyterians profess and what they actually practice. This discrepancy causes some Presbyterian ministers to feel guilty. Therefore (according to Frame), what these ministers need is a new “revised paradigm” that allows “much greater flexibility” (which amounts to “much greater human autonomy”), so that ministries can worship in the corrupt backslidden fashion they are accustomed to without “guilty feelings.” In order to soothe guilty consciences Frame wages guerilla warfare upon Reformed worship. He attacks the regulative principle by completely redefining it and gutting it. He then attacks the standard, historic, biblical positions held by Presbyterians until the declension began (e.g., exclusive Psalmody, the non-use of instruments in public worship, the non-celebration of pagan, papal holy days, etc.).

The secondary purpose of Frame’s book is to justify to his already backslidden (*Trinity Hymnal*, piano and organ) audience the superiority of Arminian-Charismatic contemporary worship. We will see that what most modern Presbyterians need is not an apologetic for declension but rather a call to sincere repentance. There must be a return to the biblical attainments of our covenanted Presbyterian forefathers.

## Rewriting History

Before we turn our attention to Frame’s treatment of the regulative principle we first must consider the misrepresentation of church history that is given to make it appear that his position is not contrary to the Westminster Standards. He writes, “[T]he Westminster Standards actually contain very little of the Puritan theology of worship. The Puritan and Scottish divines who wrote the Westminster Standards were wise not to include in them all of their ideas on worship. The principles responsible for liturgical minimalism come from Puritan and other Reformed texts *that go above and beyond the confessional documents*. Yet these extra-confessional texts themselves have considerable informal authority in conservative Presbyterian churches.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xii-xii, emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

The purpose of this statement is to make a distinction between the teaching of the Westminster Standards and “extra-confessional texts” (i.e., books, tracts, pamphlets, and sermons) by Puritans and other Reformed persons “that go above and beyond the confessional documents.” According to Frame it is not the confession that produced “liturgical minimalism”<sup>7</sup> but rather Puritan extremists who went too far. Why does Frame separate the teachings of the Westminster Standards from the writings on worship of those Puritans and Presbyterians who wrote the Westminster Standards? The simple reason that Frame and other advocates of neo-presbyterian worship repeatedly misrepresent the teaching of the Westminster Standards is that they do not want to admit that their position is anti-confessional. Advocates of neo-presbyterian worship (e.g., uninspired hymns, musical instruments in worship and extra-biblical holy days [e.g., Christmas and Easter]) either ignore or misrepresent church history.

In order to prove that the distinction that Frame makes between the Westminster Standards and the Puritan and other Reformed texts that supposedly go beyond the Confession and produce “liturgical minimalism” is false, and that Frame’s attack on this supposed minimalistic worship is anti-confessional, we will briefly consider three positions that Frame opposes yet were advocated by the Westminster Assembly: exclusive psalmody, the non-use of musical instruments in worship and the rejection of extra-biblical holy days.

In the Confession of Faith (chapter 21, section 5) we read regarding religious worship: “The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the word, in obedience unto God, with understanding faith, and reverence; singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God.”<sup>8</sup> According to the Confession what are Christians to sing during the ordinary religious worship of God? They are to

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<sup>7</sup> Frame has borrowed the term “minimalist” from James Jordan’s *Liturgical Nestorianism* (Niceville, FL: Transfiguration Press, 1994). In his book Jordan accuses strict regulativists of being like Nestorians who denigrated human nature by “saying that God and man were not joined.” Aside from the fact that it was the Monophysites who denied and thus denigrated the true humanity of Christ by manner of a fusion of the two natures, Jordan’s argument has nothing to do with the debate over the regulative principle. It sounds creative and intellectual and that is enough for many of Jordan’s followers. That Frame would approvingly reference Jordan’s book is not surprising. Jordan has misrepresented and mocked the regulative principle for years. He also is well known for “interpretive maximalism.” Through his creative LSD hermeneutics he discovers hidden obscure meanings in a text. Both men, however, attack the regulative principle for different reasons. Frame wants charismatic style worship while Jordan prefers a more high church liturgical style worship. Note the following quotes from his *Sociology of the Church* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1986): “Biblical teaching as a whole is quite favorable to Christmas as an annual ecclesiastical festival.... As I study Scripture, I find that Lutheran and Anglican churches are more biblical in their worship [than Baptist and Reformed], despite some problems” (p. 210). “What I am saying is that the custom [of crossing oneself] is not unscriptural, and that the conservative church at large should give it some thought” (p. 212). “This [the Scripture reading and sermon] is all designed to lead us to the second act of sacrifice: the Offertory. The Offertory is not a ‘collection,’ but the act of self-immolation.... Thus, the offering plates are brought down front to the minister, who holds them up before God (‘heave offering’) and gives them to Him” (p. 27). “The whole-personal priesthood of all believers means not only congregational participation (which requires prayer books), but also holistic ‘doing.’ It means singing, falling down, kneeling, dancing, clapping, processions, and so forth” (p. 32). “By requiring knowledge before communion, the church cut its children off from the Table....If we are to have reformation, we must reject this residuum of Gnosticism and return to an understanding that the act of the eucharist precedes the interpretation of it” (p. 38). Jordan, just as Frame, argues from “large, over-arching principles of worship” (p. 209) and thus often engages in speculative, creative application. If one disagrees with Jordan’s “high church” views he is arbitrarily labeled (with absolutely no proof whatsoever) as Neo-platonic, Nestorian, Gnostic, Nominalistic, Stoic, etc.

<sup>8</sup> *The Confession of Faith, The Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, etc. (Glasgow, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1985 [1976]), p. 93.

sing Psalms. The question that is often raised concerning this section of the Confession is: Does the term “psalm” refer to the book of Psalms, religious songs in general including man-made hymns, or to all inspired Scripture songs? Advocates of neo-presbyterian worship like to point out the fact that the word psalm is not capitalized as if this proves the word is used in some vague generic sense. The problem with this argument is the simple fact that the authors the Westminster Standards only capitalized the word Psalms when it was used as a *title* of the whole book. Note the following quote from The Directory for the Publick Worship of God:

We commend also the more frequent reading of such Scripture as he that readeth shall think best for edification of his hearers, as the book of Psalms, and such like. When the minister who readeth shall judge it necessary to expound any part of what is read, let it not be done until the whole chapter or psalm be ended.... After reading of the word, (and singing of the psalm,) the minister who is to preach....

It is the duty of Christians to praise God publickly, by singing psalms together in the congregation, and also privately in the family.

In singing of psalms, the voice is to be tunably and gravely ordered; but the chief care must be to sing with understanding, and with grace in the heart, making melody unto the Lord. That the whole congregation may join herein, every one that can read is to have a psalm book; and all others, not disabled by age or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read. But for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him or the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof.<sup>9</sup>

The quote above proves that the word psalm or psalms refers not to worship songs in general whether inspired or uninspired but to the book of Psalms in particular.

Further examination of the Minutes of the Westminster Assembly proves that the only song book approved by the assembly for public worship was Mr. Rouse’s version of the book of Psalms:

Mr. Reynolds made a report of an answer to the Lords about Mr. Barton’s Psalms. It was read and debated....This answer to the House of Commons.

*Ordered*—That whereas the Hon<sup>ble</sup> House of Commons hath, by an order bearing the date of the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1643, recommended the Psalms set out by Mr. Rouse to the consideration of the Assembly of Divines, the Assembly hath caused them to be carefully perused, and as they are now altered and amended, do approve of them, and humbly conceive that it may be useful and profitable to the Church that they be permitted to be publicly sung.<sup>(1)</sup>

*Ordered*—The Committee that perused the Psalms shall carry this up to the Hon<sup>ble</sup> House of Commons.

Dr. Temple, Dr. Smith, Dr. Wincop, to carry up the answer to the House of Lords.<sup>10</sup>

A footnote tells us the response of the House of Lords: “<sup>(1)</sup>The House in consequence resolved ‘that this Book of Psalms set forth by Mr. Rouse, and perused by the Assembly of Divines, be forthwith printed.’—*Journals of House of Commons*, vol. iv. p. 342.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 376, 393.

<sup>10</sup> Edited by Alex F. Mitchell and John Struthers, *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines While Engaged in Preparing Their Directory for Church Government, Confession of Faith, and Catechisms (November 1644 to March 1649), From Transcripts of the Originals Procured by a Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991 [1874]), p. 163.

The only debates that occurred in the Westminster Assembly regarding the singing of praise were over whether or not other translations of the book of Psalms should be sung in the churches. The assembly only authorized the Rouse version because “it is so exactly framed according to the original text” and for the sake of uniformity and edification:

The Committee made report of an answer to the House of Lords about Mr. Barton’s Psalms. It was read; and upon debate it was.

*Resolved* upon the Q., To be transcribed and sent to the Lords as the answer of this Assembly to their order. Mr. Carter, jun., enters his dissent to this vote of sending up this answer to the Lords.<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> This answer is not inserted in the Minutes, but it has been preserved in the Journals of the House of Lords, and is as follows:—

TO THE RIGHT THE HOUSE OF LORDS ASSEMBLED IN PARLIAMENT.

The Assembly of Divines received April 9<sup>th</sup> from this Honourable House an Order, bearing date March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1646, to certify this Honourable House why the translation of Psalms by Mr. Barton may not be used and sung in the churches, by such as shall desire it, as well as any other translation; do humbly return this answer: That whereas on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1645, in obedience to an order of this Honourable House concerning the said Mr. Barton’s Psalms, we have already commended to this Honourable House one translation of the Psalms in verse, made by Mr. Rouse, and perused and amended by the same learned gentlemen, and the Committee of the Assembly, as conceiving it would be very useful for the edification of the Church in regard it is so exactly framed according to the original text: and whereas there are several other translations of the Psalms already extant: We humbly conceive that if liberty should be given to people to sing in churches, every one that translation they desire, by that means several translations might come to be used, yea, in one and the same congregation at the same time, which would be a great disruption and hindrance to edification.—*Journals of House of Lords*, vol. viii. pp. 283, 284.<sup>12</sup>

The last debate, regarding whether or not Mr. Barton’s translation of the Psalms (or any other version other than the Rouse version) would be used, occurred on Wednesday morning, April 22, 1646.<sup>13</sup> As noted in the quote above it was resolved that only Mr. Rouse’s version would be permitted in the churches. Only six months later on Friday morning, October 30, 1646, chapter 21—“of Religious Worship” was voted on and agreed to by the assembly.<sup>14</sup> The idea (that is rather common today) that the word “psalms” in the chapter regarding religious worship includes uninspired hymns is clearly false. Did the Puritan and Presbyterians go beyond the Standards (as Frame asserts) in their insistence upon exclusive Psalmody? No. Absolutely not! If neo-Presbyterians want to include hymns and campfire ditties in their worship services, their backslidden General Assemblies certainly allow it. They, however, should be open and honest and admit that they are anti-confessional on this matter.

Robert Shaw in his *Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (1845) teaches that the “singing of psalms” in the *Confession of Faith* means exactly that it says:

3. Singing of psalms. This was enjoined, under the Old Testament, as a part of the ordinary worship of God, and it is distinguished from ceremonial worship.— Ps. lxi.30, 31. It is not

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

abrogate under the New Testament, but rather confirmed.—Eph. v. 19; Col. iii. 16. It is sanctioned by the example of Christ and his apostles.—Matt. xxvi. 30; Acts xvi. 25. The Psalms of David were especially intended by God for the use of the Church in the exercise of public praise, under the former dispensation; and they are equally adapted to the use of the Church under the present dispensation. Although the apostles insist much upon the abolition of ritual institutions, they give no intimations that the Psalms of David are unsuitable for gospel-worship; and had it been intended that they should be set aside in New Testament times, there is reason to think that another psalmody would have been provided in their room. In the Book of Psalms there are various passages which seem to indicate that they were intended by the Spirit for the use of the Church in all ages. “I will extol thee, my God, O King,” says David, “and I will bless thy name for ever and ever.”—Ps. cxiv. 1.<sup>15</sup>

Not only is the teaching of the Confession of Faith and Directory of Public Worship clear on this issue, it is a fact of history that Presbyterians in Scotland, Ireland and North America were exclusive Psalm singers until the latter part of the eighteenth century. What is of particular interest regarding the abandonment of exclusive psalmody by the large Presbyterian bodies in the eighteenth century is that exclusive psalmody was not abandoned as a result of careful study and refutation by pastors, scholars and theologians.

The departure of various Presbyterian denominations from exclusive psalmody (i.e., biblical worship) occurred primarily for three reasons: (1) Various Presbyterian churches lost the biblical understanding of the regulative principle of worship and thus only applied it to the public worship service. “Private” gatherings, family and private worship were considered areas of life outside the strict parameter of divine warrant. Virtually all the innovations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came into the churches through practices that were *arbitrarily* placed outside of the “*Sola Scriptura*” (e.g., family worship, Sunday School, revival meetings, etc.). (2) Many Presbyterians were influenced by the pietistic, sentimental revivalism that swept through the colonies in the eighteenth century. During this time a number of families and pastors began using Isaac Watts’ *Psalms of David Imitated* (1719) instead of the carefully translated 1650 psalter employed by Presbyterians of the day. Watts’ version of the Psalms was a radical departure from exclusive psalmody which went far beyond even a paraphrase of the Psalms. Watts’ version of the Psalms in many instances amounted to uninspired hymns loosely based on the Psalms. One must never forget that Isaac Watts, in the preface to his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), openly admitted that he regarded the Psalms of David as defective, “opposite to the Gospel” and liable to cause believers to “speak a falsehood unto God.” Watts’ version of the Psalms became accepted by many families and various ministers and was a stepping stone to the blatant uninspired hymnody of Watts’ hymnbook. (3) The innovations of the eighteenth century

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, ed. [1845], pp. 224-225. Orthodox Presbyterian pastor G. I. Williamson concurs: “Another element of true worship is ‘the singing of psalms with grace in the heart.’ It will be observed that the Confession does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the use of modern hymns in the worship of God, but rather only the psalms of the Old Testament. It is not generally realized today that Presbyterian and Reformed churches originally used only the inspired psalms, hymns, and songs of the Biblical Psalter in divine worship, but such is the case. The Westminster Assembly not only expressed the conviction that only the psalms should be sung in divine worship, but implemented it by preparing a metrical version of the Psalter for use in the Churches. This is not the place to attempt a consideration of this question. But we must record our conviction that the Confession is correct at this point. It is correct, we believe, because it has never been proved that God has commanded his Church to sing the uninspired compositions of men rather than or along with the inspired songs, hymns, and psalms of the Psalter in divine worship.” (*The Confession of Faith For Study Classes* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964], p. 167).



would not have taken root if the presbyteries in the colonies had done their job and disciplined ministers who had corrupted the worship of God and departed from Scripture and the Westminster Standards. There was an unwillingness to make purity of worship an issue of discipline. There were various battles over the Watts' version from 1752 through the 1780's. The outcome, however, was always the same. The presbytery or synod involved refused to take decisive action, thereby allowing the Watts imitations to continue. As a result, those unwilling to pollute themselves separated to smaller, more biblical Presbyterian bodies. The declension was codified in 1788 when a new directory for worship was adopted which changed the statement of the 1644 directory—"singing of Psalms" to "by singing Psalms and hymns."

Michael Bushell warns us to learn from the sins and mistakes of the P.C.U.S.A. He writes,

Under the pietistic and humanistic influences attending and following the Great Awakening, the American Presbyterian Church eventually came to the conclusion that the peace of the church was best to be served by allowing considerable diversity in the worship practices of the churches under its care. The worship practice of the Presbyterian church was, in effect, cut loose from the bonds of Scripture and allowed to run its own course. It was this situation as much as anything else that led eventually to the Presbyterian church's defection to Modernism. If a church will not keep its worship pure and biblical, if it will not jealously guard its own practice when its people come before God in self-conscious praise and adoration, then it is not to be expected that it will long maintain its doctrinal purity. It is no small wonder that men have so little respect intellectually for the Scriptures when daily they ignore their clear commands concerning how their Author is to be worshiped. The worship of the Presbyterian church in this country is dictated now largely by the demands of convenience, not the demands of Scripture, and there is no basic difference between liberal and evangelical churches on this score, not at least as regards outward form. To our brethren in the various Reformed communions who would disagree with this, we would ask this simple question: "If the regulative principle were not taught in the Scriptures, what difference would it make in your worship?" The answer in most cases would have to be, "very little." We would also ask our brethren whether they have sought self-consciously to apply the regulative principle to their worship practice. We have a suspicion that most of the people in our Reformed churches have never even heard of the regulative principle, much less sought to apply it. Our Reformed churches have inherited a pattern of thinking which will countenance virtually any practice in worship as long as it does not offend the wrong people. These are harsh words, but we are fully convinced that they are accurate.<sup>16</sup>

Another supposed "minimalistic" practice that Frame implies goes beyond the Westminster Standards was the non-use of musical instruments in worship. Was the non-use of musical instruments in worship only the opinion of some Puritans who went beyond the consensus of the Westminster Assembly? No. Absolutely not! A letter from the Scottish ministers and elders who were delegates to the Westminster Assembly to the General Assembly of Scotland (1644) proves the opposite. It reads: "[W]e cannot but admire the good hand of GOD

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion: A Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant Publications, 1993 [1977]), pp. 210-211. For a more thorough discussion of the abandonment of exclusive psalmody by the P.C.U.S.A., see Bushell, pages 198-212. The abandonment of exclusive psalmody by other Presbyterian denominations and Dutch Reformed churches is discussed in pages 212 to 220. For further reading on the P.C.U.S.A. and Watts' Psalms see Charles Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1851), part 2, pp. 244-306.

in the great things done here already, particularly; That the Covenant (the Foundation of the whole Work) is taken; Prelacie and the whole train thereof, extirpated; The Service-Book in many places forsaken, plain and powerful preaching set up; Many Colleges in Cambridge provided with such Ministers, as are most zealous of the best Reformation; Altars removed; The Communion in some places given at the Table setting; The great Organs and *Pauls* and of *Peters* in *Westminster* taken down; Images and many other monuments of Idolatry defaced and abolished.”<sup>17</sup> The General Assembly of Scotland responded to the letter from the commissioners by writing an official letter to the Church of England. It reads: “We were greatly refreshed to hear by Letters from our Commissioners there with you...of the great good things the Lord hath wrought among you and for you...many corruptions, as Altars, Images, and other Monuments of Idolatry and Superstition removed...the great Organs at *Pauls* and *Peters* taken down.”<sup>18</sup> The non-use of musical instruments in worship was the norm of Puritans and Presbyterians and was the main position of the Westminster divines. The non-musical instrument position among Presbyterians began to be abandoned in the 1880's.

A third practice which Frame would consider “minimalistic” and extreme is the non-celebration of holy days (e.g., Christmas and Easter) other than Sunday, the Christian Sabbath. Is this position something that goes beyond the Westminster Assembly? No. The assembly has made itself very clear on this matter. The Westminster Assembly's *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* (1645) says, “There is no day commanded in the Scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called *Holy-days*, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued.”<sup>19</sup>

Frame apparently wants us to believe that there is the Westminster Standards with which he is in agreement and there are Puritan and other Reformed texts that go beyond the Confession that need to be corrected. Given the fact that the Assembly endorsed exclusive psalmody, the abolishment of musical instruments in worship and holy days, we ask Frame to show us what are the “minimalist” views that go beyond the Confession that he is referring to? There were Puritans who argued that churches should stop saying the creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Confession, and the doxology. There also was disagreement over issues such as conventicles. However, division did not occur over these side issues. If these are the issues that Frame is referring to, one cannot tell by reading his book. The issues that do bother Frame, that he spends time refuting, were all matters which were endorsed by the Westminster Assembly. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that Frame's book at many points is an attack on the Westminster Standards in particular and Reformed worship in general.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> John Maitland, Alexander Henderson, Samuel Rutherford, Robert Baillie and George Gillespie (the Scottish delegates to the Westminster Assembly), 1644.

<sup>18</sup> The General Assemblies [*sic*] Answer to the Right Reverend the Assembly of the Divines in the Kirk of England (1644). Samuel Gibson writes, “But it hath been often said, *Take away the Common Prayer Book, take away our Religion*. Nay, our Religion is in the Bible, there is our God, and our Christ, and our Faith, and our Creed in all points. The whole Bible was Paul's belief; there are the Psalms of David, and his Prayers, and the Lord's Prayer, and other prayers, by which we may learn to pray. We have still the Lord's Songs, the Songs of Zion, sung by many with grace in their hearts, *making melody to the Lord*, though without organs. There we have all the commandments.”—*Samuel Gibson* (minister, Church of England; Westminster divine), *The Ruin of the Authors and Fomentors of Civil Wars* (1645).

<sup>19</sup> *The Confession of Faith, The Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, etc., p. 394.

<sup>20</sup> What is particularly bizarre regarding Frame's book is that in the paragraph immediately prior to the one in which he falsely claims that minimalistic worship was not a product of the Westminster Standards, but came from other Puritan and Reformed works that go *beyond* the Standards. He wrote: “Presbyterian worship—based on the biblical ‘regulative principle,’ which I describe in these pages—was in its early days very restrictive, austere, and

## Frame's Redefinition of the Regulative Principle

### *Introduction*

In this section we will prove that Frame completely redefines the regulative principle of worship. It is very important that Reformed believers who adhere to the Reformed symbols understand that Frame's concept of divine warrant has virtually nothing to do with the Westminster Standards. In fact, what Frame offers as an exposition of the regulative principle is totally unique. This author (who has studied this issue extensively) is unaware of any Reformed theologians, expositors or authors who have advocated views on the regulative principle or divine warrant that are even remotely similar to Frame's view. (The closest view perhaps is Steve Schissel's "informed principle of worship" which is founded on an open rejection of the regulative principle.<sup>21</sup>) Frame should have followed his own advice on how to write a theological paper. He writes, "At the very least, it will involve exegetical research and intelligent interaction with biblical texts. Otherwise, the theological work can hardly make any claim to scripturality; and if it is not scriptural, it is simply worthless."<sup>22</sup> We will see that Frame's use of the biblical texts for divine warrant of such things as drama is not intelligent, not scriptural and completely worthless. Frame continues, "Additionally, there should usually be some interaction with other orthodox theologians to guard against individualistic aberration."<sup>23</sup> Frame's understanding of the regulative principle is clearly an individualistic aberration. This reviewer challenges Frame and the seminary professors who endorsed his anti-confessional book to produce one Reformed author who agrees with Frame's concept of divine warrant.

Frame lays the foundation of his own unique version of the regulative principle in chapters 4 and 5. In chapter 4 ("rules for worship") Frame discusses the regulative principle. In chapter 5 ("What to Do in Worship") he deals with the elements of worship. What Frame does in these chapters is very deceptive. First he gives a fairly standard orthodox definition of the regulative principle. (In this section, however, he does ignore how Puritans and Presbyterians defined methods of divine warrant.) After he identifies himself as a confessional Presbyterian who adheres to the regulative principle he then proceeds to systematically redefine and destroy the historic confessional understanding of the regulative principle. A careful reading of Frame's book reveals that Frame believes the historic confessional understanding of the regulative principle is unbiblical and unworkable. Because Frame believes that the historic confessional understanding of the regulative principle is unbiblical and unworkable, he sets it aside and then proceeds to give us his own unique version of it.

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'minimalist.' It excluded organs, choirs, hymn texts other than the Psalms, symbolism in the worship area, and religious holidays except for the Sabbath" (p. xii). The regulative principle, that Frame says in its early days was very restrictive, austere, and minimalist that produced the Presbyterian and Reformed worship that Frame describes, is set forth in the strictest manner in the Standards (cf. *WCF* 1:6-7; 20:2; 21:1-5; *LC* 108, 109, 110; *SC* 50, 51, 52). Frame's version of history makes no sense whatsoever. The Puritans and Presbyterians taught and practiced a strict regulativist type of worship, yet supposedly in their Standards they espoused something different. Such a version of events is totally absurd.

<sup>21</sup> See Brian M. Schwertley's *A Brief Critique of Steven Schissel's Article against the Regulative Principle of Worship*.

<sup>22</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), p. 371.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

How does Frame replace the confessional regulative principle with his own unique version of it? There are a number of things that must be examined in our analysis of Frame's redefinition. First, Frame takes the position that the Bible does not offer specifics regarding worship but only generalities. This type of argument was common among Anglican theologians (e.g., Hooker) as they attempted to refute the Puritans. According to Frame, the specifics are left to man's discretion. Second, Frame gives a false portrayal of the Puritan-Presbyterian position regarding informal vs. formal meetings. He also makes no distinction between public, family and private worship; and, ignores the distinction between extra-ordinary events and set times of worship. Frame wants to be able to mine the Scriptures for divine warrant in places that clearly have nothing to do with a public worship service. Third, Frame rejects the confessional view regarding the circumstances of worship in favor of what he calls "applications." This departure from the Confession allows Frame to move away from specific warrant to warrant that is dependent on general rules or principles. Frame takes the rules that the Westminster divines applied *only* to circumstances or incidentals of worship and uses them as divine warrant for worship ordinances. Fourth, Frame rejects the Westminster Confession of Faith's view regarding the elements of worship. Frame replaces the confessional view of separate elements that are each dependent on specific divine warrant in favor of a few general categories that men can apply as they see fit. As we consider Frame's redefinition of the regulative principle we must not lose sight of the fact that Frame's book is a defense of neo-Presbyterian (i.e., Arminian-Charismatic style) worship. Frame's clever redefinitions are directed at one goal. That goal is the removal of the strict, "minimalistic," confessional concept of divine warrant in favor of a very broad, general, loose concept of divine warrant.

#### *Frame's Lip Service to the Westminster Standards*

If one reads Frame's endorsement of the Westminster Standards and his initial definition of the regulative principle in isolation from the rest of his book, one would get the impression that Frame was a confessional, or orthodox, Presbyterian. Frame writes, "My own theological commitment is Presbyterian; I subscribe enthusiastically to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and I trust that that commitment will be quite evident in this book."<sup>24</sup>

Note that Frame defends the Reformed understanding of worship against non-Reformed views. He writes, "Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans have taken the position that we may do anything in worship except what Scripture forbids. Here Scripture regulates worship in a negative way—by exercising veto power. Presbyterian and Reformed churches, however, have employed a stronger principle: whatever Scripture does not command is forbidden. Here Scripture has more 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."<sup>25</sup> Frame then quotes the classic regulativist statement from the Westminster Confession of Faith (21:1) and says, "The operative word is 'prescribed.' Eventually this restriction of worship to what God prescribes became known as the 'regulative principle.'"<sup>26</sup> Frame continues, "Can any of us trust ourselves to determine apart from Scripture, what God does and does not like in worship? Our finitude and sin disqualify us from making such judgments.... Scripture itself condemns worship

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<sup>24</sup> John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*, p. xiv-xv.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

that is based only on human ideas.... Scripture, God's word, is sufficient for our worship, as for all life."<sup>27</sup> Frame refers to a number of standard regulative passages such as Leviticus 10:1-2, Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:8-9, Mark 7:6-7 and Colossians 2:23.<sup>28</sup>

### *Frame Reveals His True Colors*

After reading Frame's statements regarding his commitment to the Westminster Standards and the regulative principle one would naturally think that Frame was a champion of the regulative principle and the Reformed worship of Calvin, Knox, the Puritans and early Presbyterians. The truth of the matter, however, is that Frame's concept of the regulative principle and divine warrant as delineated in the rest of his book is an explicit rejection of the Westminster Standards and Reformed confessional worship.

One can begin to see Frame's real opinion of the regulative principle when he writes, "Unlike some Presbyterian writers, I believe that I understand, and understand sympathetically, why some sincere Christians prefer not to worship in the Presbyterian way. I recognize that there are real problems in the traditional Presbyterian view that need to be addressed from the Scriptures, and I intend to deal with these problems seriously."<sup>29</sup> Did we not just read about Frame's strong commitment to the Westminster Standards and the regulative principle of worship? If Frame adheres to the Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as he claims, then would he not believe that the Presbyterian way is the biblical way? Is he not admitting here that he believes there are problems with the Westminster Standards that need to be addressed by the Scriptures? In other words, the Westminster Standards are unscriptural and need to be altered in order to meet biblical teaching. Is it possible that Frame is not referring to the Standards themselves but to the corruption of the Presbyterian worship that has occurred since the second half of the eighteenth century? No. Since Frame spends a good deal of time

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Frame, p. 39. Although Frame gives us a list of traditional regulative principle proof texts, note that he does not really believe that these passages actually prove the regulative principle. He tells us that he relies on more general principles; however, he does not tell us where or how these principles are derived from the Bible. He writes, "Some readers will note that although I earlier cited a list of passages such as Lev. 10:1-3 to show God's displeasure with illegitimate worship, I have not used this list to prove the regulative principle, but have instead relied on more general considerations. It does not seem to me that that list of passages proves the precise point that 'whatever is not commanded is forbidden.' The practices condemned in those passages are not merely not commanded; they are explicitly forbidden. For example, what Nadab and Abihu did in Lev. 10:1 was not only 'unauthorized,' the text informs us, but also 'contrary to [God's] command.' The fire should have been taken from God's altar (Num. 16:46), not from a private source (compare Ex. 35:3)" [p. 47, endnote 2]. Frame's analysis of the Nadab and Abihu incident is erroneous. The reason that the fire of Nadab and Abihu is called "strange" (KJV), "profane" (NKJV) or "unauthorized" (NIV) is not because it is expressly forbidden, but because as the text explicitly says, it was never commanded. The passages that Frame offers to disprove the traditional regulativist understanding of the passage do not prove his point at all. The Numbers 16:46 passage simply says that fire is to be taken from the altar and put on a censer. Neither in this or any other passage are people expressly told not to use fire from any other source. The point of the regulative principle is that when God says take fire from the altar men must follow God's direction without adding their own human rules or traditions. The passage that Frame offers as proof (Ex. 35:3) that fire from another source is expressly forbidden teaches that the people are not to kindle a fire in their dwellings on the Sabbath. It has nothing to do with the Leviticus 10:1 passage. That Frame would list a series of passages in a section on the regulative principle that he really doesn't believe teaches the regulative principle is strange. However, since he heartily endorses the Westminster Standards' teaching on worship and then explicitly rejects it later in the same book, we should not be surprised by such contradictions.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

defending the declension that has occurred, one can only come to the conclusion that Frame believes there are “real problems” with the Westminster Standards.

Frame also admits that his concept of the regulative principle leaves plenty of room for human autonomy. He writes, “The first key to meaningful worship is to do as God commands. Beyond that, of course, there is the question of how best to carry out those commands in our own time and place. This is the question of the ‘language’ in which we should express our worship to God and in which we should seek to edify one another. But we must know what limits God has placed upon us before we can determine the areas in which we are free to seek more meaningful forms. One of my main concerns in this book is to define both the areas in which we are bound by God’s norms and the areas in which we are set free (by those same norms!) to develop creative *applications* of those norms.”<sup>30</sup> The key to understanding Frame’s redefinition of the historic understanding of the regulative principle is the phrase “creative applications.” (His unique view regarding “creative applications” will be dealt with below.)

Frame believes that the regulative principle does not lead God’s people to any particular “style of worship.” He writes, “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.”<sup>31</sup> According to Frame the Bible does not offer any blueprints in the sphere of worship. It rather is vague and general and thus leaves the details to man (i.e., human autonomy).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>32</sup> Frame has also adopted unbiblical views regarding women in public worship. He has imbibed the teachings of James Hurley on this issue which were set forth to circumvent the clear teaching of Scripture and accommodate the infiltration of feminism in the church. Frame writes, “In general, I agree with James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), and others, who argue that the only biblical limitation on women’s role is that women may not be elders. Hurley argues that the prohibition on women speaking in 1 Cor. 14:34-35 is not for the duration of the meeting, but for the authoritative ‘weighing of the prophets’ described in vv. 29-33, and that the teaching prohibited in 1 Tim. 2:12 is the authoritative teaching of the office of elder. However we may interpret these difficult passages, it is plain that under some circumstances women did legitimately speak in worship (1 Cor. 11:5) and that women were not entirely excluded from teaching (Acts 18:26; Titus 2:4) (p. 75, endnote 6).” There are a number of reasons why the teaching of Frame and Hurley must be rejected. First, nowhere in the Bible do we find a distinction between authoritative *versus* non-authoritative teaching in public worship. This kind of arbitrary, non-textually based distinction would have made the medieval scholastics proud. Second, Hurley ignores the fact that although women were not permitted to ask questions, speak or teach in the Jewish synagogues in the Old Covenant and apostolic era, men—the heads of households—were permitted to ask questions and make comments regarding the Scripture reading and exposition. Women had to ask their husbands at home. Why ignore the historical context (and cultural milieu) and read our modern feminist culture back into the text? The answer is simple. Hurley’s arguments are more a justification of existing practice (i.e., the current declension) than objective exegesis. Third, at no point in the passage (1 Cor. 14:34-35) or the context are we told that women keeping silent applies only to the evaluation of prophets. Hurley’s conclusion is speculation—a speculation not made by virtually any commentator, theologian or preacher until the rise and popularity of feminism in the 1970’s. Fourth, Hurley’s speculative conclusion contradicts the explicit teaching of 1 Tim. 2:12 where there is no possibility that Paul is only speaking about the evaluation of the prophets. Fifth, the reasons that are given in Scripture for women not speaking, teaching or asking questions in church (e.g., 1. God’s ordained order of authority [1 Cor. 11:3]; 2. Adam was created

According to the *Westminster Standards* and Puritan thought, the regulative principle gives men freedom from human traditions and innovations in worship. Frame defines the regulative principle in a manner that gives freedom to innovate as long as some general guidelines are followed and the innovations are called “creative application.” He writes, “In my view, once we understand what Scripture actually commands for worship, we will see that it actually leaves quite a number of things to our discretion and therefore allows considerable flexibility. I believe that most books on worship, Presbyterian and otherwise, underestimate the amount of freedom that Scripture permits in worship.... This book, however, will stress that Scripture leaves many questions open—questions that different churches in different situations can legitimately answer differently.”<sup>33</sup> If the regulative principle restricts men to only those practices that are dependent upon divine warrant or scriptural proof, how can one argue that this principle gives men great freedom? If by freedom Frame means freedom from doctrine, commandments and innovations of man or a certain freedom in areas that are circumstantial to worship (e.g., seating arrangement, lighting, type of pulpit, etc.), then we would agree. But, Frame’s definition of freedom goes way beyond the Westminster Standards. He defines freedom as “creative application” of general principles that can lead to completely different types of worship. Note the phrases such as: “our discretion,” “considerable flexibility,” “creative application,” “many questions open,” “we are free to seek more meaningful forms,” etc. Frame wants worship that is based on human autonomy and that is full of innovations, but which in a very loose, convoluted manner is somehow connected with the general teachings of Scripture.

### *Frame’s “No Specifics” Regulative Principle*

Frame’s unique definition of the regulative principle is in part founded upon his understanding of synagogue and (apostolic) Christian meetings. He writes, “Jesus attended the synagogue regularly and taught there (Luke 4:15-16), so there can be no question as to God’s approval of the institution. It is interesting, however, to note that the synagogue and the temple

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first [1 Tim. 2:14]; 3. The woman [Eve] originated from the man [Adam] [Gen. 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 11:8]; 4. The woman-wife was created as a help-meet to the man-Adam [Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:9]; 5. Eve was deceived and fell into transgression [1 Tim. 2:14]; 6. The covenant headship of the husband [1 Cor. 14:34-35]) obviously apply to all forms of teaching or speaking in public worship. They cannot arbitrarily be applied to only one type of speaking or teaching. This point is strongly supported by Paul’s statements regarding women being submissive and asking their own husbands at home. Paul is setting forth and supporting the biblical teaching regarding covenant headship. Hurley artificially applies these broad overarching principles to a tiny sliver of public worship (the evaluation of prophets) that no longer even applies to the modern church, for prophecy has ceased. Sixth, the alleged major difficulty of reconciling 1 Cor. 11:5 (where women are said to pray and prophecy) with 1 Cor. 14:34-35 (where women are forbidden to speak in church and are commanded to keep silent) has been resolved in ways that do not violate the analogy of Scripture and are much more exegetically responsible than Hurley’s speculation. Three possible interpretations are: 1. When Paul refers to women praying and prophesying in 1 Cor. 11:5, the term prophesying refers to women singing the Psalms which are prophetic Scripture. 2. Paul’s discussion of women praying and prophesying in public worship is merely hypothetical, for he later forbids the practice altogether in 1 Cor. 14:34-35 (cf. Calvin’s commentary on the passage). 3. Paul under inspiration regards women setting forth direct revelation from God to be an exception to regular speaking (e.g., making comments or asking questions) or teaching (i.e., the uninspired exposition of Scripture). In other words, since prophecy is God Himself speaking without human exposition, a woman prophesying is not herself exercising authority over a man. The passages that Frame uses (Ac. 18:26; Ti. 2:4) for women teaching have nothing to do with public worship. The first passage refers to Priscilla and her husband’s private instructions of Apollos. The second passage refers to older women who in their inter-personal relationships with younger women are to teach them how to be good wives and homemakers.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

were very different in their scriptural warrant: God regulated the sacrificial worship of the tabernacle and the temple in detail, charging the people to do everything strictly according to the revealed pattern. He hardly said anything to Israel, however, about the synagogue (or, for that matter, about the ministries of teaching and prayer carried out on the temple grounds), leaving the arranging of its services largely to the discretion of the people. Of course, they knew in *general* what God wanted: he wanted his word to be taught and prayer to be offered. *But God left the specifics open-ended.*<sup>34</sup> Frame argues that divine warrant is applicable only in a “general” manner. The specifics are “open-ended.” That is, the specifics are determined by man.

Frame asserts that the Christian meeting was like the synagogue in that scriptural warrant does not descend to the level of specific parts of worship. Therefore, various actions that are part of new covenant religious worship do not require “specific scriptural authorization.” He writes, “Unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to prove that anything is divinely required *specifically* for official services.”<sup>35</sup> He adds, “The New Testament tells us a little more about the Christian meeting (which was more like the synagogue than like the sacrificial worship of the temple), but it gives us no systematic or exhaustive list of the events that were authorized for such services. 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.”

After arguing that the regulative principle does not apply to specifics (which Frame knows is a non-confessional understanding of the regulative principle), he sets forth his own unique version of divine warrant. He writes, “Where specifics are lacking, we must apply the *generalities* by means of our sanctified wisdom, within *general* principles of the word.... 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.”<sup>36</sup> In the area of worship Frame believes that the Bible is not specific. It is 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 useful (or workable), men must use their “sanctified wisdom” to fill in the specifics, details or missing pieces. Frame has adopted a position that is closer to Episcopalianism than the strict regulativist position of the Westminster Standards. Although Frame does not say that men are permitted to make things up as long as their innovations are not contrary to Scripture, he does allow men a great area of autonomy as long as practice is loosely based on “the general principles of the word.”

There are a number of ideas in Frame’s statements that need further comment. First, Frame has adopted the anti-regulativist interpretation of the Jewish synagogue. He assumes that since there is not a set of inscripturated divine imperatives regarding the synagogue meetings, therefore what occurred in the synagogues was left “to the discretion of the people.” Before Frame even begins his chapter on the regulative principle (i.e., “The Rules for Worship”) he argues that the regulative principle as historically defined at the most only applied to “the sacrificial worship of the tabernacle and the temple.”<sup>37</sup> Frame believes that the Westminster Standard’s teaching that *specific* warrant is required for every worship ordinance or element is

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2., emphasis added.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44, emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55, emphasis added.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.



wrong and unbiblical. If Frame's understanding is correct, then there is no regulative principle. All of Frame's talk regarding his strong commitment to the Westminster Standards is a sham. Frame's analysis of the Jewish synagogues does raise a few important questions. Does the fact that there is not a set of explicit commands in Scripture which regulate the synagogues prove that the Puritan-Presbyterian concept of divine warrant (that applies to specific parts or elements of worship) is unscriptural? Did the Westminster divines and our Puritan and Presbyterian forefathers make a serious blunder when they adopted the strict regulativist position and incorporated it into their confessions and catechisms? Is Frame a hero for boldly standing up and declaring "the emperor has no clothes"? The answer to all these questions is an emphatic "no"! One can assume (as do Frame and many others) that synagogues were not under the regulative principle (as historically defined) and that the Jews were making up the specifics of worship as they went along. The only problem with such an assumption, however, is that it contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture.

There are many passages in the Bible which unequivocally condemn adding to God's law-word (e.g., Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5). Man is not permitted autonomously to determine his own ethics, theology or worship. There are also passages where both Christ (e.g., Mt. 15:2-9; Mk. 7:1-13) and Paul (e.g., Col. 2:20-23) condemn human traditions in worship. The Bible does not merely condemn additions or innovations in a general manner but deals with specific additions (e.g., offering the fruit of the ground instead of blood [Gen. 4:3-5]; strange fire [Lev. 10:1-2]; ritual hand washings [Mt. 15:2-9]; ascetic eating practices [Col. 2:21]. Note also that the regulative principle (as biblically defined, i.e., the Puritan version) is not restricted to the tabernacle or temple but is applied to individuals at home and church. Given the fact that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture and the clearer portions of Scripture should be used to interpret the less clear, does it make sense (hermeneutically) to assume that the synagogue meetings were not regulated by divine revelation of some sort? Taking the Scriptures as a whole, the Puritans believed that it would be contradictory for Christ and Paul to condemn specific religious additions in the home and church yet countenance additions in the synagogue. An aspect of "good and necessary consequence" (*WCF* 1:6, i.e., logical inference from Scripture) is what Puritans referred to as approved historical example. When one observes in Scripture that Abel (Gen. 4:4) and Noah (Gen. 8:20-21) offered acceptable sacrifices to Jehovah without any prior *inscripturated* divine imperatives, or that the universal practice of the New Covenant church was not seventh but first day public worship apart from any *inscripturated* instructions to change the day, then one may logically infer that such practices were based on some form of divine revelation that was not inscripturated.

The Puritan understanding of approved historical example is supported by Hebrews 11:4 which says, "by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Biblical faith presupposes divine revelation. Throughout Hebrews 11 true faith is spoken of as a belief in God's word that results in obedience to God's revealed will. Any idea that Abel's offering was based on reason alone, or that God's acceptance of blood sacrifice was arbitrary or based on the subjective state of Abel's heart alone, must be rejected as unscriptural. Given the analogy of Scripture, the necessity of faith in acts of religious worship and the acceptance of certain practices by God in Scripture that appear without detailed instructions, the idea that the synagogue meetings were not regulated but were determined by "the discretion of the people" is unwarranted. To assume (as Frame does) that the Jews of the synagogue were making it up as they went along ("winging it") is to assume something that contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture.

Second, Frame argues that like the Jewish synagogues, the Christian meetings were basically unregulated as to specifics (e.g., “The New Testament...gives us no systematic or exhaustive list of the events that were authorized for such services”<sup>38</sup>). Although it is true that in no place in the New Testament do we find a systematic list of what is to occur in public worship, that does not mean that the New Testament has nothing to say in the matter or that the various elements of worship cannot be determined from a study of Scripture. Whether or not the New Testament gives us a systematic list of worship ordinances for New Covenant services is irrelevant. Many important doctrines and issues are set forth in Scripture in a very non-systematic manner. Frame is attempting to convince the readers of his book that a regulative principle that deals with specifics must be rejected. Once he has deconstructed the historic, traditional understanding of the regulative principle, then he will put in its place the general or “virtually anything goes” version. However, since the Bible clearly teaches that everything man does in worship (even to the specifics) must have divine warrant, we must not be deceived by Frame’s subterfuge. What about Frame’s claim that the New Testament does not give us an “exhaustive list of the events that were authorized for such services”? The New Testament does not need to give us an exhaustive list because if a practice is not found in the New Testament (or taught or inferred from the Old Testament) then it is already forbidden. The idea that there is not an “exhaustive list” presupposes a prelatical concept of worship and is an implicit denial of the sufficiency of Scripture in the sphere of worship.

Third, Frame teaches that divine warrant is not specific but general. He argues that since the Bible does not contain specifics regarding synagogue or New Testament Christian meetings, men are to seek divine warrant in “broad theological generalities.” Men are to use their sanctified wisdom to “apply the generalities.” People must follow the “general principles of the word.” When Frame speaks of divine warrant in terms of “broad theological principles,” “generalities” and “general principles of the word,” he has rejected the Westminster Standards on this issue and has completely redefined the regulative principle. There is a great difference between specific warrant from Scripture for a particular practice and basing a practice on a “generality” or “broad theological principle.” Using Frame’s definition of the regulative principle one can have an infinite variety of worship options as long as a particular practice is loosely connected with a “generality” or “broad theological principle.” The strict, narrow version of the regulative principle advocated by the Reformed confessions produced a general uniformity of worship for many generations. Frame’s view leads to chaos and a multiformity of worship practices precisely because it leaves man a large area of autonomy. Frame of course does not call it autonomy. He uses phrases such as “creative application” and “considerable flexibility.”

In order to reveal how Frame’s concept of divine warrant can prove almost anything one wants, let us examine how Frame himself justifies certain practices in public worship. On page 56 he argues that greetings should be a part of the worship service. How does he prove that greetings are prescribed by God? Frame writes, “They [greetings and benedictions] were clearly part of church life, since they were a regular part of Paul’s letters (see Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Rom. 15:33; 1 Cor. 16:23-24; 2 Cor. 13:14). Since his letters were most likely read in church meetings (Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27; Phm. 2), these greetings and benedictions were also a part of public worship.”<sup>39</sup> Normally if a Reformed person wanted to argue in favor of a special greetings time (i.e., handshake and hug time) during public worship he would look for a specific command or attempt to infer a greeting time from a scriptural historical example. Frame, however simply

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

points out that Paul greeted churches in his epistles and his letters were read in the churches. The fact that all letters contain greetings and that it is doubtful that whole books of the Bible were read at each service is ignored. Following Frame's logic one could argue: Boats are frequently mentioned in Scripture (e.g., 2 Sam. 19:18; Prov. 30:19; Isa. 33:21; Ezek. 27:5; Jon. 1:3-5; Mt. 4:21-22; Mk. 1:19; Lu. 5:3; Jn. 6:22; Ac. 27:16, 30, 32; etc.); since Scripture is read in the church meetings, boats also should be part of public worship.

A better example of Frame's concept of "creative application" is the divine warrant he offers for the use of drama (i.e., skits or plays) in public worship. Frame's argumentation in favor of drama gives us an explicit understanding of his unique definition of divine warrant. He even introduces his argumentation as an example of an application of a general principle. He writes, "Many churches are using drama today in an attempt to communicate the word of God more clearly than could be done through more traditional forms of preaching. Some Presbyterians oppose this, because there is no specific command in Scripture to use drama in this way. But we have seen that specific commands are not always needed. When God gives us a general command (in this case the command to preach the word), and is silent on some aspects 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 the second."<sup>40</sup> Note, once again, that for Frame specific warrant is unnecessary. When Scripture is silent on "application" (i.e., when Scripture is insufficient or incomplete), man is to use his autonomous thought to remove God's silence. In other words man must take what is insufficient and general and make it sufficient and specific.

What does Frame offer as divine warrant for drama in public worship? He argues that "preaching and teaching contain many dramatic elements"<sup>41</sup>; Jesus "taught parables, which often included dialogues between different characters"<sup>42</sup>; Paul's letters "are often dramatic"<sup>43</sup> and "the book of Revelation is a dramatic feast"<sup>44</sup>; "the prophets sometimes performed symbolic actions"<sup>45</sup>; and, "the Old Testament sacrifices and feasts, and the New Testament sacraments are re-enactments of God's great works of redemption."<sup>46</sup>

When we read Frame's application of his own version of the regulative principle we are astonished that this book was endorsed by four seminary professors from two different "conservative, Reformed" seminaries.<sup>47</sup> Why? Because Frame's concept of divine warrant is so general, wide and arbitrary one could prove virtually anything. His concept of "proof" would make any cult leader smile. If one thinks this is exaggeration, let's apply Frame's concept of divine warrant to other practices that some people would find "refreshing" in public worship. In the Bible we often encounter prophets that are depressed. There also are many books in the Bible that contain many sad and depressing elements. Therefore, we are authorized by God to have

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Richard L. Pratt, Jr. and Steve Brown from Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. and D. Clair Davis from Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.

blues bands (with appropriate lyrics of course) as part of public worship. Why not? As Frame asserts, is not singing simply one manner of teaching or preaching?

In the Bible we often read of military battles. The apostle Paul often portrays the Christian life as one of warfare. In the book of Revelation do we not have a great war portrayed between Christ's people and the followers of the beast? Therefore, as a creative application of these general theological principles we can incorporate sword fights into public worship. No one would be hurt of course. They would simply be dramatic reenactments of the Christian life. The children would love it.

The "exegetical" methods that Frame uses to prove or justify certain worship practices are absurd. Frame goes to the Bible and takes things that have nothing to do with public worship and then makes an *arbitrary* application to the human innovation he desires. Does the fact that God required certain prophets to do some unusual and dramatic things tell us anything about how we are to conduct a public worship service? No, of course not! There is no connection whatsoever. Does the fact that preaching in Scripture can be dramatic somehow imply that God has authorized dramatic presentations in public worship? No, not at all! The connection is totally arbitrary. In fact not one person throughout all of church history saw such a connection until Frame made it up. Does the fact that Jesus spoke in parables that had more than one character in them prove that dramatic presentations are biblical? No. Listen carefully. Don't miss this. The characters in Jesus' parables were not characters in a play or even real people. Christ was telling a story in His teaching. To argue that our Lord was authorizing dramatic presentations in public worship is pure fantasy. If Jesus was authorizing drama groups, the Spirit-inspired apostles didn't see it, for dramatic presentations were excluded from apostolic worship. A legitimate application of Jesus' preaching methodology would be the use of illustrations and stories in preaching. Does the fact that Revelation (according to Frame) is a dramatic feast tell us anything about public worship? No. Although the book does contain some worship scenes couched in apocalyptic imagery, there are no commands, historical examples or logical inferences pointing to dramatic presentations in the book at all.

The argumentation that Frame uses to "prove" the worship practices that he desires often reminds this author of the argumentation used by Vern Poythress (a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania) in his book *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*.<sup>48</sup> Given the many striking similarities a quote from Greg L. Bahnsen's analysis of Poythress' work is in order. Bahnsen's analysis fits Frame's argumentation like a glove. When reading Bahnsen's analysis, just substitute Frame's name for Poythress'. Bahnsen writes,

Poythress has a penchant for appealing to vague "motifs" in biblical passages and then telling us (*without* exegetical basis) that they are suggestive of some theological "connection" or "relation" (*without* definition). To deal with broad and ambiguous allusions is not precise enough to demonstrate any specific conclusion; because there are no control principles or predictability in how such vague notions will be taken, the door is left open too wide for the interpreter's subjective creativity. And simply to assert that X is (somehow) "related" or "connected" to Y is trivial—not very informative. (Everything is related in some way to everything else, after all.) These vague connections play a determinative role where Poythress wants to draw significant theological conclusions.... The key to drawing artful "connections" everywhere in the Bible, of course, is to make your categories broad and vague enough to include just about anything.... What is the theologian supposed to do with such discussions?

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<sup>48</sup> Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991.

They aren't arguments, really. They are more like mood enhancers ("take a couple of Valium and enjoy the experience"). Seen in their least harmful light, I suppose such discussions may have homiletical or pedagogical value—as adductive or illustrative aids for conclusions established on more reliable exegetical grounds. They may even subjectively reinforce preconceived theological commitments, but they hardly function as objective proof in a theological argument, one subject to common rules of reasoning, predictable results, and public examination. Poythress is not the only author these days who enjoys this style of writing: stringing together a host of loose "connections" in a stream-of-consciousness style, often with organizing categories broad enough to include almost anything anyway, until one stipulates that he has reached a "conclusion"—one which is usually as vague and ambiguous as it is lacking in textual warrant. I would like to say that Poythress does it "better" than others, but there is really little way to judge (since there are so few objective criteria).<sup>49</sup>

If professing Christians want to use Frame's concept of divine warrant to "prove" various practices in public worship, they are free to do so. However, they should be honest and admit that their version of the regulative principle has nothing to do with the Westminster Standards or Reformed theology on the subject. Frame's arbitrary, loose manner of "proving" various practices from the Scriptures leaves Presbyterian and Reformed churches with no real restraints on worship except the prelatival (i.e., Episcopal-Lutheran) principle that anything goes as long as it is not expressly forbidden in the Bible.

Fourth, Frame rejects the *Westminster Confession's* doctrine regarding the elements or parts of worship. He writes,

In response to this kind of question [i.e., the problem of generality and specificity], the Puritans developed the doctrine of "elements" or "parts" of worship. Worship, they believed, is made up of certain clearly distinguishable elements: prayer, the reading of Scripture, preaching, and so on. The regulative principle, they held, requires us to find biblical warrant for each of these elements. For them, that answered the question about the level of specificity. We need not find a biblical command to pray this or that particular prayer (assuming that the prayers under consideration are all scriptural in their content and appropriate to the occasion), but we do need a biblical warrant to include prayer as an element of worship.

But 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.<sup>50</sup>

Note, that (once again) Frame argues against the Puritans rather than the Westminster Confession. He says that the Puritan position does not have biblical warrant, which is to say it is unbiblical. He ignores the fact that: (a) the authors of the Westminster Standards and the early Presbyterians were Puritans<sup>51</sup> and (b) the Westminster Confession (21:3-5) clearly teaches the

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<sup>49</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 299-300, 302-303.

<sup>50</sup> *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*, p. 52-53.

<sup>51</sup> John Coffey writes, "In describing Scots like Rutherford as Puritan we are following the example of their contemporaries. When James VI revisited Scotland in 1617 he recalled that many English Puritans had yielded under royal pressure, and declared 'Let us take the same course with the Puritans here.' Peter Heylyn too, did not hesitate to speak of 'the Presbyterian or Puritan Faction in Scotland.' Rutherford himself noted that 'we be nicknamed Puritan' and complained that 'a strict and precise walking with God in everything' was scorned as 'Puritan.' The nickname was given throughout the English-speaking world to people who were felt to be excessively

Puritan position that Frame rejects. Given the fact that Frame says that he enthusiastically subscribes to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms on page xiv in his book, one should not be surprised that Frame is unwilling to admit that his enthusiastic subscription was false, that he subscribed with crossed fingers. Frame of course is free to reject the teaching of the Westminster Standards. However, since he does so, he should be honest and consistent and join the Reformed Episcopal Church instead of deceitfully working to undermine an essential aspect of the Reformed faith.

As we consider Frame's attack on the confessional concept of elements or parts of worship, keep in mind that Frame's strategy throughout his analysis of the rules for worship is to make divine warrant broad enough to allow human innovations disguised as creative applications. Therefore, he must eliminate the confessional doctrine of elements of worship, each of which requires specific divine warrant. There are a number of arguments to consider in Frame's rejection of the elements of worship. First, Frame argues that Scripture nowhere teaches "that the regulative principle demands that level of specificity."<sup>52</sup> He adds, "The problem is that Scripture doesn't give us a list of elements required for Christian worship services."<sup>53</sup> Note Frame's disingenuous and inconsistent method of argumentation. When he disagrees with the Puritan confessional view, he demands credible evidence. He wants a command, an explicit statement or even a detailed list. Yet when he sets out to prove his own ideas regarding divine warrant he offers no solid exegetical argumentation, only bizarre loose connections and arbitrary applications. Does the regulative principle descend to the level of the elements of worship? Is it specific? Although there is no detailed list set forth in the New Testament of worship elements, the various elements or parts of religious worship are easily proved from divine imperatives and descriptions of worship services or approved historical examples found in Scripture. As we consider Frame's next objection to the idea of specific elements of worship, the scriptural evidence will prove that Frame is wrong. Furthermore, the biblical passages that teach the regulative principle itself demand specificity. If Old Testament believers used Frame's general flexible version of the regulative principle, it would have been very easy for the Jews to justify religious hand washings, ascetic eating practices (e.g., note the Seventh-day Adventist justifications for various eating practices), strange fire, etc.

Second, Frame wants to mix the various elements of worship into general categories. He writes, "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 (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 presence of God, to his praise. The entire service is teaching, since it is all based on Scripture. Perhaps it would be better to speak of 'aspects' of worship, rather than 'elements' or 'parts.'"<sup>54</sup> Frame adds, "Since we cannot identify elements, we cannot say that song is an element and therefore requires specific divine commands governing its content. Even if we accept the division of worship not elements, it is not plausible to argue that song is an element of worship, independent of all others. As we saw in the preceding chapter, song is not an

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zealous and strict in their religion, people whose intense desire to obey Scripture often brought them into conflict with royal ecclesiastical policy" (*Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* [Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997], p. 18).

<sup>52</sup> *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

independent element, but rather a *way* of doing other things. It is a way of praying, confessing, etc. Therefore, when we apply the regulative principle to matters of song, we should not ask specifically what words Scripture commands us to sing, but rather, what words Scripture commands us to use in teaching, prayer, confession, etc.”<sup>55</sup> For Frame there are not specific elements of worship but only broad categories that have different aspects. Why does Frame attack the confessional doctrine of elements of worship? A major reason is that it enables him to apply biblical rules for one element to another. This is one of the common arguments against exclusive psalmody. If a person can make up their own words for prayer or preaching, then (according to Frame’s concept of aspects) one can make up their own words for singing praise. Although it is true that elements of singing praise, preaching or teaching and prayer can have certain aspects in common (e.g., many psalms contain prayer, prayer can contain praise and sermons can contain praise and supplication, etc.), the idea that these distinct elements can be collapsed into one category (e.g., teaching) or that the specific rules given by Scripture for one element can be applied to the other parts of worship completely breaks down when one examines the specific rules and context that the Bible gives to each separate ordinance. Note the following examples.

(1) One element is preaching from the Bible (Mt. 26:13; Mk 16:15; Ac. 9:20; 17:10; 20:8; 1 Cor. 14:28; 2 Tim. 4:2). Preaching involves reasoning from the Scriptures (cf. Ac. 17:2-3; 18:4, 19; 24:25) and explaining or expounding God’s word (cf. Mk. 4:34; Lk. 24:27; Ac. 2:14-40; 17:3; 18:36; 28:23). New Covenant teachers did not speak by divine interpretation, but interpreted divinely inspired Scripture. In the same manner the Old Testament levitical teachers explained and interpreted the inscripturated law to the covenant people (cf. Neh. 8:7-8; Lev. 10:8-11; Dt. 17:8-13; 24:8; 31:9-13; 33:8; 2 Chr. 15:3; 17:7-9; 19:8-10; 30:22; 35:3; Ezr. 7:1-11; Ezek. 44:15, 23-24; Hos. 4:6; Mal. 2:1, 5-8). There are specific biblical rules that apply to preaching that distinguish it from other elements such as praise and prayer. While both men and women can pray (Ac. 1:13-14, 1 Cor. 11:5) and sing praise (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 1:5), only men (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-14) who are called by God and set apart to the gospel ministry can preach (Mt. 28:18-20; Ac. 9:15; 13:1-5; Rom. 10:14-15; Eph. 4:11-12; 2 Tim. 4:2, etc.). Therefore, the idea that singing praise is not an element of worship but only one way to teach or a circumstance of teaching is clearly unscriptural. If singing praise was simply one given method of teaching then women would be forbidden to sing praise in church, for they are forbidden to teach in the public assemblies. Furthermore, if singing was a circumstance of worship, then it would be optional and could be excluded from public worship altogether. Does the average “conservative” Presbyterian allow women to preach or teach in the public assembly? No, he does not. But isn’t that because the Bible explicitly forbids women from teaching or even speaking in church? Yes, indeed it is. What this proves is that in practice those who adhere to Frame’s unorthodox theories on worship must follow the distinction between elements of worship in order to conduct a worship service. Frame’s rejection of distinct elements or parts of worship is simply a clever tactic to eliminate the specificity of the regulative principle.

(2) Another part of worship is the singing of Psalms (1 Chr. 16:9; Ps. 95:1-2; 105:2; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Unlike preaching, where the minister uses his own uninspired words to exposit Scripture, singing praise involves only the use of Spirit-inspired songs. In the Bible prophetic inspiration was a requirement for writing worship songs for the church (cf. Ex. 15:20-21; Jg. 5; Isa. 5:1; 26:1ff; 2 Sam 23:1, 2; 1 Chr. 25:5; 2 Chr. 29:30; 35:15; Mt. 22:43-44;

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

Mk. 12:36; Ac. 1:16-17; 2:29-31; 4:24-25). The writing of worship songs in the Old Testament was so intimately connected with prophetic inspiration that 2 Kings 23:2 and 2 Chronicles 34:30 use the term “Levite” and “prophet” interchangeably.

(3) Reading the Bible is also a part of public worship (Mk. 4:16-20; Ac. 1:13; 13:15; 16:13; 1 Cor. 11:20; 1 Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:13). Obviously, Scripture reading requires reading from the Bible alone. Reading from the Apocrypha or Shakespeare or uninspired Christian poetry or theology books cannot be substituted for this element. Scripture reading, like preaching but unlike singing praise, is restricted to ministers of the gospel (Ex. 24:7; Josh 8:34-35; Dt. 31:9-13; Neh. 8:7-8; 13:1; 1 Th. 5:27; Col. 4:16; 1 Tim. 4:3).

(4) Another element of worship is prayer to God (Dt. 22:5; Mt. 6:9; 1 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 Th. 5:17; Phil. 4:6; Heb. 13:18; Jas. 1:5). Unlike the elements of singing praise and reading the Scriptures, the Bible authorizes the use of our own words in prayer, as long as we follow the pattern or model given to us by Christ (cf. Mt. 6:9). God promises His people that the Holy Spirit will assist them when they form their prayers (cf. Zech. 12:10; Rom. 8:26-27).

A brief consideration of the elements of worship (noted above) proves that the rules which apply to one element (e.g., prayer) cannot be applied to another element (e.g., singing praise or reading the Bible) without violating Scripture. Our consideration has also proved that collapsing various elements into broad categories violates God’s word. The only reason people artificially construct such broad categories is to avoid the specific rules that God has instituted for each particular element of worship. Feminists do so to accommodate women reading the Scriptures and preaching in church. Others do so to allow a dramatic presentation to substitute for the sermon. There are also many who do so in order to substitute the uninspired songs of men for the inspired Psalms of God.

Given the abundant scriptural evidence for the Puritan concept of elements or parts of worship, one can understand why the authors of the Westminster Confession of Faith did not just give us broad categories but rather set forth distinct worship elements. The Confession names “prayer with thanksgiving” (21:3), “The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence: singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths and vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgiving upon several occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in a holy and religious manner” (21:5). The work of the Westminster Divines on worship was the culmination of over one hundred years of Reformed exegesis, debate and analysis of the matter. Their statements were simply a refined statement with some added details of the writings of the reformers and Reformed symbols that preceded its authorship. Frame’s arrogant and flippant disregard of the reformers and Reformed confessions with no real evidence is disturbing. That he is a minister in good standing in a denomination which claims adherence to the Westminster Standards and teaches at a Reformed seminary is even more disturbing.

Third, after rejecting the Westminster Standards on elements or parts of worship Frame leaves us with aspects of worship. What exactly is an aspect of worship? Although Frame does not define what he means by aspects, he apparently means “things to do” that are related to his general categories. Since the English dictionary gives as one of its main meanings for aspect as “part” we wonder what exactly is the difference between “element,” “part,” “things to do” and



“aspect.” Perhaps a course in perspectivalism will aid our understanding.<sup>56</sup> “Perhaps with the acumen of the medieval schoolmen, Mr. Frame can explain to us the subtle difference between ‘things, ‘aspects,’ and ‘parts’ in worship.”<sup>57</sup>

### *Frame’s Rejection of the Circumstances of Worship*

Frame rejects the confessional concept of circumstances of worship in favor of what he calls applications. Once again we see Frame setting aside the Westminster Standards and over four hundred years of Reformed thought for his own unique concept of applications. Note that, as before, Frame’s goal is to greatly broaden the concept of divine warrant. After quoting the Confession of Faith (“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” [1, 6]) Frame writes,

Scripture, they believed, was sufficient to tell us the basic things we should do in worship. But it does not give us detailed direction in the area of “circumstances.”

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 A.M.! Decisions about the time and place of worship can greatly affect the quality of edification (1 Cor. 14:26). Although it is “common to human actions and societies” to make decision 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.” But then, how are we to distinguish circumstance from substantive elements of worship?

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<sup>56</sup> Frame offers a few other arguments against the confessional concept of elements or parts of worship. One is what he calls the practical snags argument. He points out that there have been disagreements over the years regarding what are elements and what are not (p. 53). He fails to point out, however, that the disagreements that he refers to are all of recent origin and were primarily dredged up to circumvent exclusive psalmody. Then he brings up the fact that the Puritans disagreed over issues like reading written prayers and reciting the Apostle’s Creed. However, he ignores the fact that these were individual disagreements and that in the sphere of worship the Puritans and Presbyterians were in unanimous agreement regarding the Westminster Standards. Does the fact that professing Christians disagree over the abiding validity of the ten commandments mean that we should jettison the ten commandments and replace them with something different? Of course not! The fact that people disagree over certain issues is irrelevant to whether or not a theological position is correct. This issue must be determined by solid exegetical evidence and not LSD hermeneutics. Frame also raises the issue of a marriage worship service. Since there is no such thing as a marriage worship service in Scripture, Frame’s consideration is not germane to the discussion. If Frame wants us to reject the Westminster Standards and over 400 years of Reformed thought on the subject of worship, he is going to have to offer something more substantial. A good starting point would be some good old-fashioned biblical exegesis. We are still waiting.

<sup>57</sup> Kevin Reed, “Presbyterian Worship: Old and New” in Brian Schwertley, *Musical Instruments in the Public Worship of God* (Southfield, MI: Reformed Witness, 1999), p. 139.

Furthermore, there seem to be some matters in worship that are not “common to human actions and societies,” concerning which we must use our human judgment. For example, Scripture tells us to pray, but it doesn’t tell us what precise words to use in our prayers on every occasion. We must decide what words to use, within the limits of the biblical teachings about prayer. That is a decision of great spiritual importance. It does not seem right to describe this matter as a mere “circumstance.” Prayer is not “common to human actions and societies.” But in prayer we must use our own judgment within biblical guidelines; if we don’t, we will not pray at all.

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 specifics 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 are not.<sup>58</sup>

There are a number of things to note regarding Frame’s discussion of the circumstances of worship. First, Frame’s contention that some (unnamed) Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians regarded circumstances as secular is wrong and misleading. They did not regard the circumstances of worship as secular or religiously neutral. They did, however, regard them as things that were not specifically determinable by Scripture that had a certain commonality with civil or secular affairs. For example, a civil meeting will have a beginning and end, chairs, lighting, a podium, a building and so forth. However, these circumstances of worship are to be designed or conducted “according to the general rules of Scripture.” Frame (once again) asserts a false bifurcation of thought between certain (unnamed) Puritans/Presbyterians and the Westminster divines.

Second, Frame gives us an over-simplification of the concept of circumstances in order to make the confessional understanding look incompetent and unworkable. Frame tells us that since the words we use in prayer are of “great spiritual importance” and prayer is not “common to human actions and societies”; therefore, we need to use a better more workable concept than the term circumstances of worship. Frame’s alternative is “applications.”

Frame’s argument raises a number of questions. Is what believers do when they pray merely a circumstance of worship? Is prayer regulated only by the general rules of Scripture? Although it is true that believers are free to make up their own words in order to meet the various circumstances and contingencies of daily life, prayer itself is specifically regulated by Scripture. Jesus told the disciples to pray in a certain manner (Mt. 6:9). He told them not to “use vain repetitions as the heathen do” (Mt. 6:7). Further, we are told that the Holy Spirit will assist us when we pray (cf. Zech. 12:10; Rom. 8:26-27). Strictly speaking, prayer is not a circumstance of worship. The Westminster divines did not regard the content of prayer in the same manner as the type of seating, lighting, pulpit style, flooring, etc. Therefore, the idea that choosing one’s own

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<sup>58</sup> *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, pp. 40-41.

words for prayer in worship renders the concept of circumstances of worship somehow unworkable is not true.

If one holds to the confessional understanding of the regulative principle, that all the parts or elements of worship require divine warrant, one must explain those things that are necessary to conduct a public meeting that are not specifically addressed in Scripture. Does the Bible tell us what type of building to meet in, or the type of chairs to use, or what the type of pulpit should be used and so forth? Are there not areas related to a public worship service that do not directly affect the content or parts of religious worship? The confessional answer that there are some circumstances relating to worship that are not themselves parts of worship or worship ordinances is unavoidable and obvious. If Frame observes that, in certain areas or applications, the concept of circumstances need clarification, then that is one thing. But why does he insist on tossing it aside for his own concept of applications? The main reason is related to Frame's rejection of the confessional doctrine of elements or parts of religious worship each of which requires divine warrant. Once one rejects the concept of worship elements, one is left only with broad categories. Believers are to determine out of broad categories the various "things to do" in worship. According to Frame the "things to do" can be determined by specific commands or according to "broad theological principles." What this means is that Frame has taken the concept of "the general rules of the word" that the Westminster divines *only* applied to the circumstances of worship and has applied it to worship itself. This incredible broadening of the concept of divine warrant renders the whole section in the Confession dealing with the circumstances of worship superfluous. Since Frame has already taken the Confession's "the general rules of the word" and applied it to worship itself, he must redefine the circumstances into applications. Why? Because the term "applications" is broad enough to cover everything relating to worship, whether worship ordinance or the circumstantial areas. In fact everything in life that we do as Christians is an application of Scripture in some sense. Frame continues on his path of taking well thought-out clear distinctions found in the Westminster Standards and replacing them with very general concepts. Remember, the end game is human autonomy in worship.

### *Frame's Misrepresentation of the Puritan/Presbyterian Position Regarding Formal versus Informal Meetings*

Frame accuses "some theologians" and the Puritans of only applying the regulative principle to "formal" or "official" worship services. He writes,

This position on church power, however, led some theologians to distinguish sharply between worship services that are "formal" or "official" (i.e., sanctioned by the ruling body of the church), and other meetings at which worship takes place, such as family devotions, hymn sings at homes, etc., which are not officially sanctioned. Some have said that the regulative principle properly applied only to the formal or official service, not to other forms of worship. But that distinction is clearly unscriptural. When Scripture forbids us to worship according to our own imaginations, it is not forbidding that only during official services. The God of Scripture would certainly not approve of people who worshiped him in formal services, but worshiped idols in the privacy of their homes!

On the Puritan view, the regulative principle pertains primarily to worship that is officially sanctioned by the church. On this view, in order to show that, say, preaching is appropriate for worship, we must show by biblical commands and examples that God requires preaching in officially sanctioned worship services. It is not enough to show that God is pleased when the word is preached in crowds or informal home meetings. Rather, we must show that preaching is

mandated precisely for the formal or official worship service. Unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to prove that anything is divinely required specifically for official services.<sup>59</sup>

This is a total misrepresentation of the Puritan position. The truth of the matter is that the idea that the regulative principle only applied to public worship was not widely accepted until the late nineteenth century. As worship innovations and declension occurred throughout the nineteenth century and certain practices such as the use of musical instruments in family worship, the celebration of Christmas in the home and various Sunday school programs where women were allowed to speak, ask questions and even teach men became popular, a concerted effort was made to at least keep these innovations out of the “official service.” In fact, today an “ultra-conservative” Presbyterian is often defined as someone who wants to keep the celebration of papal-pagan holy days out of the public worship, yet who thinks celebrating such days in the home and decorating the home with the trinkets of anti-Christ and pagan paraphernalia is perfectly acceptable. The Puritans and Presbyterians never allowed church members to violate the regulative principle in the home. People who celebrated Christmas or Easter were disciplined.

Although the Puritans, Presbyterians and Westminster divines strictly applied the regulative principle to all worship whether public, family, or private, that does not mean that each sphere had the exact same rules. For example, in family worship the father is to lead (Dt. 6:7-9) in teaching and Scripture reading. But he is not permitted to dispense or partake of the public ordinances (i.e., baptism and the Lord’s supper) or exercise church discipline. It is very important that when we seek divine warrant for a practice in public worship, we distinguish between commands or historical examples in Scripture that apply to an individual, or family, or public meeting, or even an extra-ordinary event. Why? Because Frame misrepresents the Puritan position not because he wants to abolish innovations in the home but because he wants to be able to mine the Scriptures for divine warrant in passages that clearly have nothing to do with public worship. What is a major justification that Frame offers for drama in public worship? The prophets sometimes did dramatic things. How does Frame justify liturgical dance in public worship? He points to several passages that refer to extra ordinary national and local victory celebrations (i.e., outdoor parades).<sup>60</sup> Frame’s caricature of the Puritan position sets the stage for his redefinition of the regulative principle and his sloppy, no- real-connection proof-texting of various modern innovations.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> See *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, p. 131.

<sup>61</sup> As Frame misrepresents the Puritan’s understanding of the scope of the regulative principle he also misrepresents the Westminster Confession. He writes, “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) (p. 43). In this section on liberty of conscience the phrases “contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship” go together and are connected by the verb “are” to “the doctrine and commandments of men.” The Confession is not making two separate statements—one regarding all of life and another regarding only matters of faith. Anything contrary to or beside God’s Word in all matters of faith or worship does not have God’s authority. Shaw writes, “In this section the doctrine of liberty of conscience is laid down in most explicit terms. The conscience, in all matters of faith and duty, is subject to the authority of God alone, and entirely free from all subjection to the traditions and commandments of men. To believe any doctrine, or obey any commandment, contrary to, the Word of God, out of submission to human authority, is to betray true liberty of conscience” (*Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, p. 205). A. A. Hodge writes, “God has

## Frame's Case for Contemporaneity in Worship

As we consider Frame's book we must never lose sight of the fact that his book is an apologetic for the Charismatic-Arminian style of worship conducted in the "New Life" churches. This type of worship is commonly referred to as "contemporary" or "celebrative" worship. How does Frame justify this new type of worship from Scripture? His argument is founded upon the fact that tongues must be translated into an understandable language. He writes,

On the other hand, Scripture also tells us, and more explicitly and emphatically, that worship should be intelligible. It should be understandable to the worshipers, and even to non-Christian visitors (1 Cor. 14, especially vv. 24-25). And intelligibility requires contemporaneity. When churches use archaic language and follow practices that are little understood today, they compromise that biblical principle.... Another important consideration is that the style chosen must promote the intelligibility of the communication. We have seen that this is the chief emphasis of 1 Corinthians 14, which is the most extended treatment of a Christian worship meeting in the New Testament. Intelligibility of communication is crucial to the Great Commission and to the demand of love, for love seeks to promote, not impede, mutual understanding.

Intelligibility requires us, first, to speak the language of the people, not Latin, as the Reformers emphasized. But communication is more than language in the narrow sense. Content is communicated through body language, style, the choice of popular rather than technical terms, well-known musical styles, etc.<sup>62</sup>

Frame's argument for contemporary worship is another example of what he calls "creative application." A more accurate designation would be "arbitrary application." When the apostle Paul was dealing with a specific problem at Corinth (un-interpreted or non-translated tongues) was he also making a statement regarding musical styles, body language or contemporary song styles? No. Neither Paul or the Corinthians or any commentators past or present (with the exception of Frame) believe or teach that Paul was telling the church to make sure they had proper body language. Frame is (once again) grasping after straws. One could just as well apply Frame's concept of intelligibility to church architecture, Christian clothing, the pastor's car and furniture, etc., for the application is arbitrary. It is not rooted in standard Protestant biblical exegesis.

How did "celebrative" or "contemporary" worship begin? Was there a group of Christians who out of a serious study of Scripture (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:24-25) decided that God required worship to be modernized to better speak to our childish degenerate culture? No. Generally speaking, its rise in popularity is a combination of three historical developments. First, contemporary worship has its roots in Arminian pragmatic revivalism. Arminian revivalists learned that feminine, emotional, tear-jerking songs helped people make a "decision for Christ." They also learned that entertainment, performances, organ interludes and so forth brought more people into the tent. Second, in the late 1960's and early 1970's many pot-heads and hippies

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authoritatively addressed the human conscience only in his law, the only perfect revelation of which in this world is the inspired Scriptures. Hence God himself has set the human conscience free from all obligation to believe or obey any such doctrines or commandments of men as are either contrary to or aside from the teachings of that Word" (*The Confession of Faith*, p. 265).

<sup>62</sup> *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, pp. 67, 83.

became professing Christians. Many of these converted hippies (“the Jesus people”) incorporated the communal, simple, emotional style of singing they were accustomed to into their services. This new style of worship often consisted of one-verse choruses that were sung over and over again until people were worked into an emotional frenzy or meditative type of trance. Sadly, this emotionalism and trance-like state was and still is equated with the special presence of the Holy Spirit or a mystical communion with God. Believers need to understand that this new emotional, non-doctrinal type of worship has its roots not in the Bible but in hedonistic, counter-culture, mystical paganism. Peter Masters writes, “It was a form of worship fashioned and conceived in the womb of the hippie meditational mysticism, in which hippies in their hundreds and thousands would sit on California hillsides with eyes closed, swaying themselves into an ecstatic state of experience. Former hippies carried into their new Christian allegiance the method of seeking the emotional release or sensations to which they were accustomed, and no one showed them a better way.”<sup>63</sup>

Third, there was the rise of the church growth movement which offered a pious sounding but totally pragmatic justification for man-centered, entertainment-oriented worship. The fact that modern “celebrative” music was shallow, worldly and immature was not important because worship must be user-friendly. It must appeal to shallow, worldly and immature seekers. That is, it must be attractive to the flesh. In this paradigm, worship is not primarily considered to be directed to God but to man. Worship is treated as another evangelistic church growth tool. Frame would not put the matter so crassly. But his concept of “intelligibility requires contemporaneity” even to non-Christian visitors says much the same thing. Thus, today churches often have child-like, repetitive songs coupled with rock bands, drama groups, comedian pastors, liturgical dance, videos, movies and so on.

In another book on worship (*Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*), Frame argues in favor of super-simplified (i.e., dumbed down) hymns on the basis of Old Testament saints such as Job, Moses and Isaiah. Job’s lengthy, detailed speeches are compared to traditional worship. When Job was finally confronted with God he spoke only a few simple words. Likewise, when Moses and Isaiah were in God’s presence they were in awe and had very little to say.<sup>64</sup> Peter Masters’ analysis of Frame’s book advocating contemporary worship is right on the mark. He writes, “One of John Frame’s many complaints about traditional worship is that it is far too complex. It has too many words, is too intelligent, and too scholarly. It is not for ordinary people. In supporting this complaint, the author pronounces himself in favor of minimal words. He wants to bypass rationality, and substitute feelings as the leading component in worship. He also insists that there is a physical dimension to worship, dancing and other activities being valid. He wants to get the senses and sensations strumming in order to touch God. The point in raising

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<sup>63</sup> Peter Masters, “Worship in the Melting Pot: Is New Worship Compatible with Traditional Worship?” in *Sword and Trowel* (London, England, 1998), no. 3, p. 13. This author is indebted to Rev. Masters for his many insights into the “new worship.”

<sup>64</sup> When we read passages about a prophet entering into God’s presence and being awe-struck and speaking few words, does this mean that God is telling us by way of “creative application” that He would like worship songs written that consist of one sentence? No, not at all! A legitimate application of such texts would be that we worship an infinitely holy, awesome God. Therefore, when we approach him in worship we need to be very careful to do so according to His rules. Our God is a consuming fire. Also, the worship of such a God (Jehovah) ought to be done in a serious, majestic manner. Churches which practice the new “celebrative” worship with the jokes, skits, entertainment, vain repetition “Romper-Room” choruses, rock bands and camp-fire antics, are neither serious, respectful or majestic. “But, brother, these people are sincere.” Indeed, many are. However, sincerity which is not based on truth is worthless.

his book at this stage is to show how ‘traditionalists’ who adopt new worship eventually capitulate to the sensational-mystical-aesthetic philosophy of worship.”<sup>65</sup>

The origins and arguments in favor of the modern “celebratory” worship raise a few very important questions. Why does modern worship have to cater or lower itself to the immaturity and degeneracy of modern culture? Isn’t such thinking a type of relativism? If rap music becomes the predominate form of musical expression in society, will the advocates of “contemporaneity” use rap music in public worship? (Some churches already use “Christian” rap groups in their worship service entertainment segments.) Also, when Frame and others look to the Scriptures for proof or guidance regarding worship, why point to passages that have nothing to do with singing of praise when God has already told us exactly what He wants? God has written His own hymnal—the book of Psalms—and placed it in the middle of our Bibles, and commanded us to sing it. The only possible reasons that “celebrative” worship advocates ignore the obvious and rely on “creative application” is either a woeful lack of knowledge regarding Scripture or a blatant disregard of Scripture in favor of human autonomy in worship.

The fact that God Himself has written and given the church a hymnbook (the Psalter) tells us a number of things regarding praise, all of which contradict the “celebrative” worship paradigm. First, note that the Psalms are saturated with deep theology and are doctrinally balanced, complex, non-repetitive, and often long.<sup>66</sup> David and the other inspired prophets who wrote the Psalms did not regard heavy doctrine and complexity of meaning as impediments to biblical worship. That is because biblical praise does not attempt to bypass the intellect in favor of an ecstatic experience. Our faith in Jesus Christ is strengthened by learning and understanding biblical doctrine, not by experiencing an emotional phenomenon devoid of cognitive input. There is certainly nothing wrong with experiencing emotions. The Psalms, far better than any uninspired hymnal, reflect the full range of human emotions from the deepest despair to the heights of joy and bliss. However, our emotions are to be founded upon biblical truth. The Holy Spirit uses God’s word to convict and sanctify, not to stir some mystical emotional experience. Remember that the “celebrative” worship paradigm is an outgrowth of the Charismatic movement. Philosophically, it is rooted in an irrational type of Christian existentialism. What Charismatic churches often do is whip the people into an emotional frenzy by means of exciting music, visual-sensual programs, cheerleaders called “worship leaders” (whose primary function is to encourage the people to get more emotional and worked up), highly repetitive worship choruses, etc. Then when the people are having a wonderful experience they are told: “Now don’t you just feel the Spirit’s presence? Do you feel the power? This room is on fire!” These poor deluded souls are taught to equate an “empty-headed”, music-driven emotional experience with God’s presence. This non-rational, sensual, emotional technique of experiencing (what they think) is God’s special presence is mysticism. It is any wonder that many Charismatic churches regard doctrine and solid exegetical preaching as unimportant; that the Charismatic movement is leading many Protestants back to Rome? “Emotion-driven, mystical worship is a delusion,

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<sup>65</sup> Masters, p. 15.

<sup>66</sup> People who argue in favor of repetitive choruses sometimes will point to the Psalms as a justification of short repetitive phrases in worship song. The truth of the matter is that the Psalter is nothing like modern choruses at all. Instead of choruses that are repeated over and over, the Psalms contain what is called a refrain. In Psalm 136 at the end of each verse we find the refrain “For His mercy endures forever.” Unlike modern choruses, the refrain is given at the end of a new and different thought. Every verse of Psalm 136 is different. Thus the mind is focused in thanksgiving upon God’s attributes and redemptive acts instead of the vain repetition of modern choruses where the exact same thing is repeated over and over like a Hindu mantra.

producing intensely emotional and subjective worshipers for whom personal enjoyment is the chief aim.”<sup>67</sup>

Second, the fact that God introduced the Psalms to a primitive, agricultural, mostly illiterate society completely disproves the idea that we need to dumb-down worship by using repetitive choruses, drama and musical performances. If one applied Frame’s “intelligibility” argument to the Israelites, would not their worship have to be even more simple and less complex than that of today’s computer programmers, engineers, pilots, computer scientists and so forth? After all, the vast majority of Israelites were simple peasant farmers and herdsmen. Yet God gave them the complex, highly theological, lengthy, intellectually challenging book of Psalms. God did not expect the Israelites to put their minds on hold while they closed their eyes and repeated the same words over and over and over again like a stoned hippie or Hindu mystic. Biblical worship requires attentiveness of mind. It requires thinking, understanding and focus. Certainly a philosophy of worship that (if *consistently* applied) would require God’s people to set aside the perfect, sufficient, inspired book of Psalms cannot be true.<sup>68</sup>

Third, the “contemporaneity” argument is also disproved by the regulative principle. Did the Jews in the Old covenant era go to the Canaanites, Philistines, Egyptians, or Assyrians in order to make sure that their worship was culturally relevant? Did the New Covenant church seek out “contemporaneity” with Greek or Roman culture? No. They were to do only as God commanded precisely, i.e., to avoid syncretism with the pagan culture. “Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> A common charge against Puritan or truly Reformed worship by high church liturgists and Charismatic style celebratists is that Puritans view worship as a purely mental activity or a purely intellectual exercise. They argue that Puritans neglect the whole man (body and soul) in worship. That what we need is a “ceremonious view” of worship. Then it is often argued that the holistic view entails gestures, dance, ceremony, and ritual, with the Eucharist, not the sermon, being the centerpiece of Christian worship. We are told that there must be act as well as thought. Another charge that is brought in is that Puritan worship is really a result of Greek philosophy and not a careful exegesis of Scripture. Are these charges accurate? No. They consist of a straw man caricature of Reformed worship and blatant misrepresentations. Do Puritans view worship as a purely intellectual, mental affair? No. That accusation simply is not true. For example, the Puritans believe and practice the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper where specific acts and elements are signs and seals of spiritual realities. In the Lord’s supper (for example) all the senses are in operation. There is the hearing of the word, the tasting and touching of the bread and wine. There is the visual-sensual experience of looking at the elements. The issue between strict regulativists and high church liturgists is not purely mental vs. whole man worship. The real issues are: (a) the Puritans want to limit worship to only what is authorized by Scripture while the liturgists want human additions (e.g., pageantry and ritual); and (b) regulativists understand the centrality of the preached word. It is not that Puritans set aside emotion and the “whole man.” Following Paul and others they recognize that proper emotion and visible ordinances must be based on faith and understanding. Otherwise one is left with empty ritualism and mysticism. Paul says that prayer or singing without understanding is useless and does not lead to edification (cf. 1 Cor. 14:12-19). The apostle presupposes that for sanctification to occur there first must be comprehension by the mind.

What about the common accusation that the Puritans have followed Greek philosophy in their conception of worship? Anyone who is familiar with the writings of John Calvin, John Knox, John Owen, George Gillespie, Samuel Rutherford and others know that such an accusation is totally false. These men derived their philosophy of worship directly from a careful exegesis of Scripture. Note also that the accusers always make their assertions with zero evidence. It is ironic that a strict application of the regulative principle is the only philosophy that disallows the intrusion of human philosophy into the sphere of worship. We ask our brothers who are dissatisfied with the simplicity of pure gospel worship (or what they denigrate as minimalistic worship) to show us based on the real exegesis of Scripture (without creative application and LSD hermeneutics) where Calvin, Knox and the Westminster divines went wrong. We will not be dissuaded by smoke and mirrors.



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. 12:30-32). Although Americans today are not sacrificing their children to Molech, many do serve at the altar of hedonism. Our culture does not look to the prophets of Baal but to sports, Hollywood and Las Vegas. This self-centered, entertainment oriented, hedonistic attitude has thoroughly penetrated many modern Evangelical churches. Modern celebrative music is not a better more biblical way to worship God. It is a syncretistic worship. It is a mixture of the elements of worship with the American hedonistic worldview. Frame's rejection of the Puritan/Presbyterian/confessional understanding of the regulative principle and his alternative of "creative application" has one major objective: the justification of modern syncretistic worship.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

One of the most important debates that is presently occurring between "conservative" Presbyterians is over the issue of the regulative principle and its application to worship. This theological battle is crucial, for its outcome will greatly affect the future course of Presbyterianism. The main battle that is taking place is *not* between status quo traditionalists and charismatic style celebratists but between strict confessionalists (i.e., those who still hold to a strict, consistently applied, historical understanding of the regulative principle) and all those who have rejected or reinterpreted the regulative principle in a non-confessional manner. Frame is without question one of the chief apologists for those who have rejected the confessional position and have charted a new course consistent with what is popular among non-regulativist, Arminian Evangelicals. Although in our day we see a renewed interest in biblical worship (e.g., *a cappella* Psalm singing) it appears that at present the main trend in worship in "conservative" Presbyterian denominations is toward the new "celebrative" worship advocated by Dr. Frame. This trend is to be expected. When denominations depart in practice from the regulative principle with uninspired hymns, musical instruments and extra-biblical holy days, the trend usually is toward consistency. In other words a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

The purpose of the review is to warn everyone who considers himself to be Reformed or Presbyterian that Frame is waging war against biblical worship and the Westminster Standards. Frame is subversive; he is using deception, ambiguity and deceit to persuade others to embrace human autonomy in worship. Note, that Frame's subversion is deliberate and well-planned.

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<sup>69</sup> People who are in favor of "celebrative" worship sometimes portray strict regulativists as theological snobs, unloving or even as influenced by neo-platonism or nominalism. The truth of the matter is that strict regulativists simply want to preserve biblical (i.e., Reformed) worship from worship that is idolatrous, Pelagian and Arminian. When people ignore or set aside what God has commanded in favor of autonomy in worship, they are implicitly saying that God can be approached in worship on man's terms. That man through his own creativity, effort, and mystical experience can lift himself up to God. Such thinking is the essence of paganism and Romanism. The Bible, however, teaches that God alone initiates mediation and sets forth the worship between Himself and His people. Jehovah sets the rules and controls worship. It is the height of arrogance for sinful men to approach God in worship on their own terms. Such men may be friendly and sound very pious, humble and loving. But their doctrine and actions reveal them to be (at least in the area of worship) false teachers and prophets of declension.

Frame is not a novice. He is not a theological amateur who has simply made some mistakes because of immaturity and a lack of knowledge. He has taught theology and apologetics at the seminary level for over 27 years. He knows full well that what he has proposed in his book is a radical departure from the Westminster Standards. Therefore, he is an ordained minister and seminary professor who holds to the Confession of Faith with crossed fingers. Frame and others who have taken ordination vows to uphold the Westminster Standards, yet who now reject the teaching of the Standards have three choices: (1) They can be honest and consistent and resign from their position as pastor, seminary professor or ruling elder and join themselves to a denomination that is Calvinistic in soteriology yet which openly and confessionally rejects Reformed worship (i.e., the regulative principle); (2) they can be dishonest, redefine the regulative principle in an anti-confessional manner and work to subvert a major Presbyterian distinctive and corrupt others; or (3) they can repent, obey their ordination vows and return to the biblical worship of their spiritual forefathers.

Frame's subversion of the *Westminster Standards*, the endorsement of Frame's book by professors from four separate "conservative" Reformed seminaries, and the publication of Frame's book by a purported "Presbyterian and Reformed" publisher reveal two things about the time in which we live. First, we live in a time of great declension. Most of what passes as conservative Presbyterian practice today in the area of worship is really much closer to Arminian Evangelicalism and prelacy than the original intent of the Confession of Faith. Indeed, it is doubtful that someone such as John Knox, George Gillespie or Samuel Rutherford could get a teaching job at any of the "conservative" Presbyterian seminaries today; and, it is virtually certain that not one *major* Presbyterian publisher would publish any of their writings on worship. Why? Because the "conservative" Presbyterian seminaries and major Reformed publishers and most people in Presbyterian denominations do not really believe in confessional worship. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophecy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so" (Jer. 5:30-31).

Second, we live in a time when confessional subscription is very lax; when ministers and elders can repudiate and break their ordination vows with virtually no disciplinary consequences. This situation raises some important questions. (1) If a man openly breaks his ordination vows and publicly teaches an unbiblical doctrine of worship, can the denomination and seminary which refuses to discipline such a man really claim to be Reformed? Are they not by their refusal to enforce their own standards accomplices in that man's deception and corrosive false teaching? Is not their inaction an implicit acceptance of heterodox views? "If Presbyterians took their creed seriously, Mr. Frame would be removed from both the seminary and the pastorate, and not allowed to teach."<sup>70</sup> (2) Further, is not a refusal to bring sanctions against such blatant violations of our standards also an unpastoral refusal to protect church members from false teachers? Is it not an implicit rejection of one of the main purposes of adopting a biblical, carefully-crafted creed? Gary North's analysis of the Presbyterian conflict in the P.C.U.S.A. (c. 1880-1936) applies to our own time of loose subscriptionism and non-disciplined covenant breakers. He writes,

The age-old debate between a strict interpretation of a standard and loose interpretation was a big part of the Presbyterian conflict. To understand what was involved, consider a speed limit sign. It says "35" (either miles per hour or kilometers per hour). What if a man drives 36? Will he be ticketed by a policeman? Probably not. The policeman has limited amounts of time to pursue speeders. He has to chase the speeder, ticket him, and perhaps appear in court to defend

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<sup>70</sup> Kevin Reed, "Presbyterian Worship" in *Musical Instruments in the Public Worship of God*, pp. 143-144.

his actions. In a world of limited resources, a person who speeds by driving 36 in a 35 zone is probably going to get away with it; the safety of the public is dependent on stopping activities of those other, life-threatening speeders. Only if the community is willing to hire many, many policeman and judges can it afford to ticket speeders who drive 36.

Now consider someone who drives 55 in a “25” speed zone for young school-age children. Will a policeman pursue him? Without question. The speeder is putting children at risk. That speeder is a serious lawbreaker. To refuse to pursue him, a policeman would be abandoning the very essence of law enforcement. His own job would probably be at risk for malfeasance. A city that will not bring employment sanctions against a traffic policeman who steadfastly refuses to pursue such speeders is saying, in effect: “Our posted signs mean nothing. Drive as fast as you want, day or night.” In other words, “Young children had better look out for themselves; we will not do it for them.” Strict subscription, like speed limits, is designed to protect the vulnerable person who is under the protection of the law. As surely as a seven-year-old child walking to school is protected by a speed limit sign *and a court system prepared to enforce it*, so is a resident in a country protected by the strict interpretation of a written civil constitution *and a court system prepared to enforce it* and so is a Church member protected by strict subscription to a confession of faith *and a court system prepared to enforce it*.

Two conclusions follow: (1) law without sanctions protects no one; (2) law interpreted by loose construction protects no one predictably. This is true in ecclesiastical matters as it is in highway safety matters. The child is under the protection of the law, the posted limit, the police, and the court, even though he did not publicly swear an oath of allegiance to obey the law. The speed limit sign is for his protection: the person at greatest risk from speeders. When he becomes a driver, he will be expected to obey the law.

In the Bible, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger are identified as the most vulnerable people in the community. The civil law is supposed to protect them. The minor or resident alien today is protected by the national constitution, even though he did not publicly swear an oath of allegiance to it, as the person most at risk of government tyranny. The visitor or the non-voting Church member is protected by the confession of faith, even though he did not publicly swear allegiance to it. It protects his soul from wolves in sheep’s clothing: false shepherds. He will be expected to take public oath to uphold the confession if he ever becomes a church officer.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, what is the point of official adherence to a creed and requiring ordination vows to believe in and uphold the teaching of that creed, when ordained men who have sworn allegiance to that creed can openly deny and subvert some of its most important teachings? “The whole purpose of a creed is to ‘lock-in’ a particular theological viewpoint, to stand against the eroding tides of shifting fashion. Consequently, a creed must be understood in terms of its original intent or else it fails of its purpose....”<sup>72</sup> Men are free to disagree with the original intent of the Westminster Standards. However, if they have sworn allegiance to the Standards they have a moral obligation to make their disagreements known, resign from their position as pastor, elder, teacher or deacon and move on. Likewise, denominations and seminaries who claim allegiance to the Standards yet which teach contrary to the Standards and refuse to discipline men for teaching contrary to the Standards have a moral obligation to (at the minimum) make

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<sup>71</sup> Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), pp. 10-11.

<sup>72</sup> Ken Gentry, Jr., “In the Space of Six Days: On Breaking the Confession with the Rod of Irons” in *Chalcedon Report* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon, April, 2000), p. 17.

changes in the Standards so that they are in accord with what is actually being taught and practiced. Ordained men, seminaries and denominations which pretend to adhere to the Standards when they really do not, are guilty of violating the ninth commandment. They are guilty of false advertising. What is occurring today is fraud on a massive scale. How can declension be stopped when the original intent of the Westminster Standards is ignored or set aside to accommodate heterodox views on worship and creation, women in office, etc.? Gentry writes, “[W]hen we witness the attempt at re-interpreting the clear language before us, deep and serious concerns boil up. Where will this methodology lead? What elements within the Confession are safe from the re-interpretive hermeneutic? And for how long are they safe once this interpretive approach is unleashed?”<sup>73</sup>

Lastly, if crucial sections of the Westminster Standards are ignored or completely redefined in a manner that contradicts the plain historical meaning of the Standards, will this not eventually lead to a shift in authority from the original intent of the Standards to an unwritten, historically relative, arbitrary standard? Yes, it certainly will. Every organization is going to have some sanctions. So it is never a question (in the long run) of sanctions *versus* no sanctions. What happens over a period of time is the anti-confessional non-historical interpretation of the confession becomes the status-quo. Soon, discreet sanctions are used against strict confessionalists (e.g., they are refused pulpits, teaching jobs, committee assignments and are shunned and have evil motives assigned to their theological positions [e.g., so and so only cares about theology not people; or, he is unloving; or, he is divisive; or, he is unconcerned about church growth, etc.]). Next, over a period of time strict confessionalists are even openly admonished and disciplined. Note, when negative sanctions are not imposed upon church officers who have abandoned the Westminster Standards then a time will come when sanctions are “imposed in terms of a standard other than the Westminster Confession of Faith and its two catechisms.”<sup>74</sup> Apart from a strict adherence to the Westminster Standards the institutional question will be: *By What Other Standard?*<sup>75</sup> The time will come when those who adhere to the biblical worship of the confession will be marginalized and then driven out. For those who believe this scenario is far-fetched, keep in mind that this pattern has been repeated throughout church history.

It is our hope and prayer that Frame (along with those who take the name Presbyterian and claim adherence to the Westminster Standards, yet who attack the regulative principle [i.e., Reformed worship] and promote innovations in the worship of God) would cease his attacks upon biblical worship and publicly repent of lying, breaking his vows, taking part in perverted worship, and causing others to corrupt the worship of God.

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Gary North, *Crossed Fingers*, p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*