

**THE
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

MINUTES OF THE
THIRTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

MEETING AT
WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

MAY 21-28, 1946



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THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Westminster Theological Seminary
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May 21-28, 1946

TUESDAY, MAY 21st

Tuesday Morning

The Moderator of the Twelfth General Assembly, the Rev. Robert S. Marsden, opened the devotional service preceding the Thirteenth General Assembly at 11:00 a. m., May 21, 1946, in the Library Auditorium of Westminster Theological Seminary, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Mr. Marsden preached a sermon on the subject "Christian Humility," based on Philippians 2:5-8, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who . . . humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Following the sermon the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered by Mr. Marsden, assisted by the Rev. Robert L. Vining and the Rev. John Verhage, and by Elders Henry A. Huibregtse, George O. Cotton, Warren Sleighter and William Huber.

Tuesday Afternoon

The Thirteenth General Assembly was called to order at 2:00 p. m. and constituted with prayer by Mr. Marsden.

The roll was called by the Rev. Eugene Bradford, Clerk of the Twelfth General Assembly.

THE ROLL OF THE ASSEMBLY

Presbytery of California

Ministers: William Harlee Bordeaux, Th.D., Robert B. Brown, Henry W. Coray, Robert H. Graham, Bruce F. Hunt, Clifford S. Smith.

Presbytery of the Dakotas

Ministers: Louis Knowles, Walter J. Magee, Melvin B. Nonhof, Russell D. Piper, Delbert E. Schowalter.

Elders: George O. Cotton, William Huber.

Presbytery of New Jersey

Ministers: H. Wilson Albright, Robert L. Atwell, Bruce A. Coie, Edward B. Cooper, Alexander K. Davison, S.T.D., Everett C. DeVelde, Leslie A. Dunn, Donald C. Graham, John F. Gray, Richard W. Gray, Lewis J. Grotenhuis, Edward Heerema, John C. Hills, Jr., Oscar Holkeboer, Walter C. Jent, Edward L. Kellogg, James W. Price.

Elders: J. Enoch Faw, Carlisle Gale (alt.), Robert M. Garrison, Leslie Gibson (alt.), Roy MacGibbon, Matthew McCroddan, I. T. Mullen (alt.), Samuel G. Parker, Samuel Pitt (alt.), Ted Stratton, Sr.

Presbytery of New York and New England

Ministers: Edmund P. Clowney, John J. DeWaard, Burton L. Goddard, Th.D., Raymond M. Meiners, John Murray, Arthur O. Olson, Herman T. Petersen, John C. Rankin, Charles L. Shook, John H. Skilton, Kelly G. Tucker, Robert L. Vining, William Young, Th.D.

Elder: Frank J. Remein.

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON SONG IN WORSHIP
PRESENTED TO THE THIRTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON THE TEACHING OF OUR STANDARDS
RESPECTING THE SONGS THAT MAY BE SUNG IN THE
PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD**

The Committee has labored diligently in carrying out the commission assigned to it. It has prepared a partial report and has gathered extensive materials to aid in the completion of its task.

A. The teaching of the Subordinate Standards respecting the Regulative Principle of Worship.

There is a principle clearly expressed in our subordinate Standards which has frequently been called, the **regulative** principle of worship. There is an appropriateness in the word "regulative", because it is the principle that deals with the question: in what way or ways are we to worship God? What are the elements which constitute the true and acceptable worship of God? How may we know that the way in which we worship God is acceptable to Him?

To be quite concrete and historical, there are at least two well-defined answers to this question in Christian churches. One of these is that of the Romish Church, followed in principle by Lutherans and Episcopalians, namely, that it is proper to worship God in ways not forbidden in the Word. In contrast with this there is another answer, namely, that God may be worshipped only in ways instituted, prescribed or commanded in the Word. The contrast is patent—the one says: what is not forbidden is permitted, the other says: what is not prescribed is forbidden.

It is in relation to this question that the regulative principle is to be understood. It will surely be conceded that it has a right to such a denomination. The following examination of our Standards will show that a regulative principle is clearly enunciated and that it is precisely formulated in answer to the questions stated above.

I. The first statement in our subordinate Standards bearing upon this question is that in the Confession of Faith, Chapter I, Section vi, namely, "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."

With respect to this statement it should be noted that it is one of two acknowledgments made with reference to the doctrine that, "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men." We are now interested simply in the import of the above acknowledgment with respect to worship as it bears upon the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture just quoted. The teaching of this section as applied to worship would run as follows: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary" for the worship of God "is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture" except that "there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, . . . 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." We may now proceed to analyze this statement.

1. The exception stated applies only to circumstances of worship. It cannot apply to any substantial part or element of the worship. It cannot apply to anything that enters into the worship itself but only to certain conditions under which the worship is given or conducted.

2. The exception stated applies only to some circumstances. The effect of this restriction is to allow that there may be circumstances of worship that are

either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.

3. The exception stated applies only to some circumstances common to human actions and societies. They are therefore circumstances that are not peculiar to worship. Such are, for example, the circumstances of time and place. They may also include order and length of service, for since human societies are mentioned it is natural for us to think of the meetings of such societies in this connection. The obvious meaning of this section of the Confession is that all that does not fall into the category of "some circumstances, . . . common to human actions and societies" must conform to what is "expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture," in other words, the authority of Scripture is necessary for the whole content of worship—that for which we have Scripture authority is that which is expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from it and vice versa.

II. The next statement in our subordinate Standards bearing upon the question is that in the Confession, Chapter XX, Section ii: "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith or worship." This does not, of course, expressly state the principle regulative of worship, but it does teach something closely companionate with it. In matters of worship, as well as of faith, the conscience is free not only from what is contrary to the Word but also from what is beside it. That is to say, in the matter of worship the conscience is not bound by anything unless it is taught or enjoined in the Word, either by express statement or by good and necessary consequence. What is outwith the deliverances of the Word has no authority for the conscience. The law for the conscience in worship is that which is authorized by Scripture.

This section does not reflect on the question whether the Christian is free to worship God in ways not taught in Scripture or not authorized by Scripture. It would have been outside the purpose and scope of this section to introduce this question. However, it must be noted carefully that this section does not say or imply that the Christian is free to worship in ways that are beside the teaching of Scripture. What the section says is that the conscience is free from all that is beside the Word in matters of worship; it does not say that the conscience is free to use what is beside the Word.

This section, however, does say emphatically that to include in worship anything that is beside the Word, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience. For the section proceeds: "So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience." The only worship that can be rendered out of conscience, then, is the worship authorized by Scripture, that is to say, worship not beside the Word but worship authorized in the Word.

It should be observed, furthermore, that, in matters that are beside the Word, worship and faith are put on the same level. It is pertinent to ask if, in the teaching of the Confession, we are conceded the liberty of incorporating into our faith anything that is beside the Word? It would appear that we are not. If so, are we not justified in presuming, to say the least, that the Confession meant the same principle to apply to worship, even in the terms of this section?

III. In Chapter XXI, Section i, of the Confession the principle regulative of worship is expressly and unequivocally formulated. It says: "But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture."

The following points may be made regarding this section.

1. It enunciates a principle that applies to all worship of God, a principle

regulative of all worship. This principle is that God may be worshipped only in a way or in ways prescribed, instituted, or revealed in the Word.

2. That the regulative principle of worship enunciated in the Confession is that God may be worshipped only in a way prescribed in His Word is quite obvious from the following considerations:

(a) The Confessions says, "the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself." If "instituted," it must be positively ordained and not left to human invention or imagination.

(b) The acceptable way is "limited by His own revealed will." True worship, therefore, is exercised within the limits of what God has revealed to be acceptable. Obviously, if we worship God in a manner or way which Scripture does not determine our worship cannot be within these limits, and is therefore, in terms of the Confession, unacceptable.

(c) The Confession is negative and exclusive as well as positive—God "may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture." This defines the extent of the limitation mentioned in the preceding clause, or it may be regarded as a consequence flowing from the said limitation. It is so limited that the succeeding are excluded.

A word must be said about the construction of this latter part of the section. At the end we have the alternatives "under any visible representation" and "any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture." The immediately preceding part of the sentence, namely, "may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan," applies to both. So the construction is to the effect that God "may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture." By the former negation human imagination or device and Satanic suggestions are to be given no quarter in exercising their ingenuity in the direction of visualizing the worship of God. The Confession apparently felt the need of making special mention of this corruption. By the latter negation there is the most unequivocal statement that every way not prescribed in the holy Scripture is excluded, and this means that any particular element of worship that is not able to plead divine prescription in the Scripture is forbidden. To state it more positively, God may be worshipped only in the manner prescribed in the holy Scripture.

IV. The Larger Catechism, Questions 108 and 109, and the Shorter Catechism, Questions 50 and 51, clearly enunciate the same principle as we have already found in the Confession. It is stated both positively and negatively in both Catechisms. We shall see that it is most important to note the principle of exclusion as well as that of inclusion.

In Question 108 the Larger Catechism says: "The duties required in the second commandments are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word" and the Shorter Catechism, Question 50, says: "The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word." It might be argued that this positive statement, though it makes mandatory the worship of God instituted in His Word, yet does not rigidly exclude the propriety of worshipping God in ways not instituted in the Word. It is here that the effect of the principle of exclusion, formulated in Question 109 and 51 of the respective Catechisms, becomes apparent. The Larger Catechism, Question 109, reads: "The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counselling, commanding, using, or any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself," and the Shorter Catechism, Question 51: "The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word."

Any further observation seems unnecessary other than to say that the worship authorized and enjoined is that instituted or appointed in the Word and that any religious worship or any way of worshipping God not appointed in the Word would be characterized in the language of Question 108 of the Larger Catechism as "false worship" and therefore to be disapproved, detested and opposed, and according to each one's place and calling, removed.

V. It remains to deal with "The Directory for the Public Worship of God," adopted by the Sixth General Assembly of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

There is an obvious distinction between the Confession, Larger and Shorter Catechisms on the one hand, and the Standards of Government, Discipline and Worship, on the other. The former are accorded a higher place in the constitution than the latter, inasmuch as the former are expressly mentioned in the formulae of subscription, whereas the latter are not thus mentioned, even though the approval of the government and discipline of the Church is required in some of the formulae.

It should be observed that the "Directory" is "The Directory for the Public Worship of God" and is more limited in its scope than the statements from the Confession and Catechisms dealt with already.

The relevant sections of the "Directory" may, however, be discussed briefly.

In Chapter II, Section 1, the "Directory" says: "Since the holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source." In the succeeding sections some of these principles are formulated. The principle regulative of worship, found in the Confession and Catechisms, is not formulated, and there is no unequivocal statement affirming or denying it.

There are some remarks, however, that may be made.

1. Chapter II, Section 1, quoted above, says, "the principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source." Since the principle regulative of worship applies to public worship and since such a principle is enunciated in the Confession and Catechisms, this must be one of the principles the "Directory" says must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source. This means that, according to the "Directory," the regulative principle must be that taught in the Word of God. What this teaching is the "Directory" itself does not say.

2. In Chapter II, Section 7, the Directory says, "The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given his church a large measure of liberty in this matter. It may not be forgotten, however, that there is true liberty only where the rules of God's Word are observed and the Spirit of the Lord is, that all things must be done decently and in order, and that God's people should serve him with reverence and in the beauty of holiness." It is possible that the phrase, "a large measure of liberty" might be appealed to as expressing a different principle from that already dealt with as taught in the Confession and Catechisms. Furthermore, it is possible that it may have been intended in this way by the framers of the "Directory." With respect to any such contention or intention two things must be said.

(a) The phrase "a large measure of liberty" refers to "forms for public worship." It is entirely reasonable to assume that "forms" refer to something different from that which comes within the scope of the regulative principle enunciated in the Confession and Catechisms. Surely this section should be interpreted as referring to the kind of fixed liturgical forms to which the framers of the Westminster Standards were consistently opposed. It can at least be said that the regulative principle of the Confession and Catechisms is not in the least inconsistent with such denial of fixed forms as is expressed in this section.

(b) The large measure of liberty must be exercised, according to this section, within "the rules of God's Word." It is not, therefore, unrestricted liberty, and so, if the regulative principle be a principle of God's Word, the liberty must be exercised within, and compatibly with, that principle or rule.

(c) Even supposing that the phrase, "a large measure of liberty" was intended to express a different principle from that enunciated in the Confession and Catechisms, the occurrence of this phrase could not have the effect of abrogating the plain and unequivocal statements of the other Standards.

B. The Teaching of our Subordinate Standards Respecting the Songs that may be Sung in the Public Worship of God.

So far as we have been able to find, the only place where there is express reference in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms to the materials of song to be used in the worship of God is in Chapter XXI, Section V of the Confession. This chapter deals with "Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day." Its teaching is not limited to public worship, though it includes public worship. As found already in the other study, this chapter enunciates in Section I the regulative principle of all worship. In Section II as well as in the first part of Section I some other principles of worship are formulated. In Sections III, IV and V the parts of worship are enumerated. It is in connection with these that "singing of psalms with grace in the heart" is stated to be one part of "the ordinary religious worship of God." It is coordinated with "prayer, with thanksgiving," "the reading of the Scriptures with godly fear," "the sound preaching and consonable hearing of the Word," and "the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ." The ordinary religious worship of God is distinguished from the worship rendered upon "special occasions" such as "religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings."

So far as the Confession is concerned, then, singing is one part of the ordinary religious worship of God. By obvious implication it is part of the ordinary public worship of God. The material to be used in such singing is "psalms." In other words, in that part of worship that consists in singing, it is the "singing of psalms" that defines that in which it consists, not simply singing, not simply singing of God's praises, and not simply singing with grace in the heart, but "singing of psalms." The song-part of worship is the "singing of psalms." Hence the Confession does not provide for the use of any materials of song other than "psalms" in the worship of God.

The proof texts given in the Westminster Confession are Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; James 5:13. The proof texts given in the Confession of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. are these three with Acts 16:25 added.

"The Directory for the Public Worship of God" of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church deals with this question in Chapter III which bears the heading, "Of the Usual Parts of Public Worship." Section 6 deals with "congregational singing." It is implied that it is a part of public worship, coordinate with the other parts mentioned in other sections. In this section there occurs the following: "Since the metrical versions of the Psalms are based upon the Word of God, they ought to be used frequently in public worship. Great care must be taken that all the materials of song are in perfect accord with the teaching of holy Scripture."

There can be no doubt but "the Psalms" mentioned in "the Directory" are the book of Psalms. With respect to such it is said that the metrical versions, being based upon the Word of God, should be used frequently in public worship. The context makes it plain that what is meant is that they are to be used frequently as the materials of congregational singing. A few observations regarding this statement of the Directory are in order.

(1) The metrical versions are not called the Word of God. Rather are they said to be based upon it.

(2) These metrical versions, "the Directory" says, ought to be used "frequently." It does not say expressly that the "congregational singing" consists in the singing of these metrical versions of the Psalms. The omission of any such identification, together with the use of the word, "frequently," might be said to concede the propriety, so far as the Directory is concerned, of singing materials other than the metrical versions of the Psalms. This interpretation could plead support from the sentence that follows, namely, "Great care must

be taken that all the materials of song are in perfect accord with the teaching of holy Scripture." It could be argued that the phrase "all the materials of song" makes allowance for materials other than the metrical versions of the Psalms and that the latter are only part of the materials of song. Further support for this interpretation might be drawn from the phrase, "in perfect accord with the teaching of holy Scripture." It would hardly seem necessary to issue this warning with respect to the metrical versions of the Psalms since these Psalms are the Word of God and the metrical versions are directly based upon it.

(3) It should be noted, however, that this section of the Directory does not expressly endorse the use in congregational singing of any other materials than what is called "the metrical versions of the Psalms" but would seem to allow for them.

(4) In Chapter IV, C., Section 3 "the Directory for the Public Worship of God" says, "A psalm or hymn should then be sung, and the congregation dismissed with the following or some other benediction." This has to do with the conclusion of the communion service.

Since in the language of Scripture the words "psalm" and "hymn" may be used synonymously it cannot be affirmed dogmatically that this statement endorses the use of sacred songs other than psalms in the public worship of God.

However, even though in the language of Scripture the word "hymn" may be used with reference to a psalm, yet in this statement the word "hymn" probably has to be taken as referring to a sacred song that is not a psalm. Here therefore the Directory may provide for the singing of sacred songs other than psalms in the public worship of God. In this place the provision is restricted to the conclusion of the communion service. But since the conclusion of the communion service is as integral a part of the public worship of God as any other part, it can be said that, on this interpretation, "the Directory" does here in principle make provision for, and states the propriety of, the singing of materials other than psalms in the public worship of God.

C. The Teaching of the Word of God Concerning the Regulative Principle of Worship.

The Scriptures are the authoritative and sufficient rule for us in all of faith and practice. In worship we are bound to observe the principles, regulations, and ordinances which they enjoin upon us—and those principles, regulations, and ordinances alone; what they do not prescribe we are not to observe. The second commandment (Ex. 20:4-6; Deut. 5:8-10) emphatically enunciates this principle. This commandment is rightly interpreted in the Larger Catechism, Q. 108, as requiring among other duties "the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath established in his word . . ." It is also rightly held, in the Larger Catechism, Q. 109, to forbid, along with other sins "all devising, counselling, condoning, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself . . . all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretense whatsoever." Of relevance to worship is Moses' commandment: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2; see also Deut. 12:32). Obviously relevant is our Lord's condemnation of the Pharisees (Mark 7:5-8). See also Col. 2:20-23.

God who is a most pure Spirit and absolute Sovereign is the sole object of worship. Nothing that has not come from Him as its source is fit to be returned to Him as its end. Autonomous human reason and will, sense, emotion and imagination are not competent to originate acts or methods of worship. God as the supreme Law-giver claims for Himself the prerogative of appointing the ordinances of His worship. How then can it be anything other than presumption in a subject of this absolute Sovereign to offer as worship anything which He has not prescribed? That God allows worship that He has not prescribed is contrary to the Scripture. The attitude of God to the worshipper is

expressed in such a passage as: "When ye come before me, who hath required this at your hand?" (Is. 1:12), and the religious attitude of the worshipper who is keenly conscious of God's sovereignty is expressed in such a passage as: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God" (Micah 6:6)? The connection between the spirituality and sovereignty of God is also evident in the second commandment. The express prohibition of image-worship in this commandment is seen to rest upon the fact that false worship consists in the invention of modes of worshipping God inconsistent with His spirituality. "Making to oneself" is opposed to the regulative principle as it expresses the divine sovereignty, and likenesses of sensible things are opposed to the pure spirituality of the Deity. Proper regard for God's prerogative of sovereignty in worship is the supreme safeguard against the adulterations of the spirituality of worship; disregard of God's prerogative of sovereignty in worship definitely tends toward the adulteration of the spirituality of worship.

The necessity of observing this principle is accentuated by the fallen state of man. The total corruption and deceitfulness of the unregenerate human heart disqualify men from judging as to what may be admitted into the content of worship. The necessity of external revelation as an unerring and sufficient guide for worship is evident. The repeated admonitions of Scripture in both Testaments (Deut. 4:9,15,23; 12:13,19,30; Num. 15:39,40; I Cor. 11:17,20, 28, 29) show the vanity and folly of looking to the consciousness even of the regenerate man for the rule or source of the content of worship.

Many direct and specific commandments regarding worship are given to us in the Bible. But it is not only by express commands that the Bible gives warrant for certain practices of worship and renders them obligatory. What is to be derived by good and necessary consequence from the express statements of Scripture is to be regarded as taught, sanctioned, or warranted by Scripture. We have, for example, no express command to baptize infants, but we believe that we have divine warrant and authorization for the practice. To refuse to baptize infants is a serious violation of divine ordinance. Authorization may also be given in Scripture by approved example. If God has authorized a certain element of worship by some other method than that of express command, it is still a revelation to us of what is acceptable to Him.

In submitting a partial report, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly call the attention of the presbyteries and sessions to the report, and urge the presbyteries and sessions to give earnest study to it with a view to careful consideration of the report at the Fourteenth General Assembly.

The Committee further recommends that it be continued.

ROBERT S. MARSDEN, Chairman

On motion the first recommendation of the committee was adopted.

On motion the second recommendation of the committee was adopted.

It was moved and carried that the report of the Committee on Overtures and Papers be heard immediately after the report of the Committee on Texts and Proof-Texts.

The report of the Committee on Texts and Proof-texts was presented by Mr. Murray, chairman of the committee. The report is as follows:

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON TEXTS AND PROOF-TEXTS
PRESENTED TO THE THIRTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

The Committee on Texts and Proof-Texts respectfully reports to the Thirteenth General Assembly that it has not been able to do any further work on the revision of proof-texts for the Confession of Faith. The reason for this