

**Mission Anabaino Training #3**  
**The Preliminary Principles of Church Power**

**Introduction:**

**More than a “witness”, it is the vivifying power of Christ present on earth as it is in heaven.**

I. “On earth as it is in heaven” – The church as Epicenter of the Kingdom of God and Calling of Under-shepherds

*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

Matthew 16:19-19

*"The church is a Divine institution, owing its origin not to man, but to Christ, and associated together not in consequence of human arrangement, but by Christ's appointment."*

*James Bannerman, Church of Christ)*

..and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, *the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

Eph 1:19-23

Christ the Lord is always himself present with his church... truly and actually... for the Lord is never absent from his church, but is always personally present, personally doing and performing everything in all things... ruling, leading and feeding it himself. But he effects and carries out this his rule and the feeding of his lambs in such a way as to remain always in his heavenly nature, that is, in his divine and intangible state, because he has left this world. Therefore it has pleased him to exercise his rule, protection and care of us who are still in this world with and through the ministry of his word which he does outwardly and tangibly through his ministers and shepherds.

Martin Bucer, *The True Pastoral Care and the Correct Shepherd-Service...*

The Purpose Church Authority: WCF 30

1. The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.

2. To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed; by virtue whereof, they have power, respectively,

- *to retain, and remit sins;*
- *to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word, and censures;*
- *and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel; and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.*

3. Church censures are necessary,

- *for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren,*
- *“for deterring of others from the like offenses,*
- *for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump,*
- *for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel,*
- *and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.*

e.g. Thomas Torrance contends that “the Christian Church is what it is because of its indissoluble union with Christ through the Spirit, for in him is concentrated the Church and its ministry... there is only one ministry, that of Christ in his Body.”<sup>1</sup> The sum implications of this is profound, as John Calvin stated it:

“Beyond the pale of the Church, no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for ... the paternal favor of God and the special evidence of spiritual life are confined to his peculiar people, and hence the abandonment of the Church is always fatal.”

They therefore are insane who, neglecting this means, hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics, who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit; and the proud who content themselves with the private reading of the Scripture, and imagine they do not need the ministry of the church.<sup>2</sup>

...the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

1 Tim. 3:15

#### THE QUESTION:

*If the church really is more than a witness but Christ's mediated power—as to preserve both Christ's exclusive Lordship and Freedom of Conscience—how then ought that power to be regulated... e.g. the Nature, extent and limits of Church power, apart from which all sorts of abuses and heresies ensue!!*

#### I. The Nature of Church Power Explored: James Bannerman—*Church of God*

- *Small Group Discussion (c.f. Handout-CL)*
- Summary Conclusions from Bannerman (excerpts)

##### Two Extremes

##### I. Hyper Power Position:

"Church power is undefined and mysterious thing, having no very well marked limits at all,-- a magic charm, a supernatural virtue, within it administers ordinances, or dispenses sacramental grace, or exercises priestly offices to the members,--an absolute and irresponsible spiritual authority, not to be profanely scanned or impiously restricted..."(Bannerman, p. 235)

##### 2. Hypo Power-Position:

"Deny to that (Church) power its proper place and standing as a Divine ordinance,-- in whose eyes it ceases to be a power of God at all, and its exercise is no longer stamped with a Divine warrant, or accompanied with a Divine and special blessing; a nullity when it administers laws in the Christian society, carrying with it no binding obligation except from the consent of the members; and an empty and unblessed form, divorced from any Divine or gracious influence when it dispenses sacraments and ordinances in the Church... reducing it to the level of a mere human appointment, binding no Divine obligation on the conscience, and communicating no Divine blessing to the soul."(Bannerman, p. 235-36)

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Torrance, "Justification: Its Radical Nature and Place in Reformed Doctrine and Life," Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 151. Quoted in Purves, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.4. Again, Calvin would no doubt qualified—not necessarily and not necessarily immediately per the mediated nature of this salvific transaction.

- According to this theory, there can be no such thing as real authority in government since the Church itself is a matter of private and human arrangement or institution and power is the mere delegation by members and the extent is determined and limited by what they thus consent to give or withhold.
- There can be no such thing as any real gracious power in sacraments since over and above their meaning and influence as signs there can be no Divine grace or blessing in them.  
"Under such a system there would be laws without authority, ordinances without grace and discipline without judgment." (p.239)

#### The Gospel Limits and Extent of Church Power: (How Regulated?)

- Limit of Church Power (Regulated)
  1. *"The judicial power of the Church is limited by a regard to the authority of Christ as the source of it." All authority is under and derived from the authority of Christ as the "Chief Shepherd."(2 Peter 5)*
  2. *"The judicial power of the Church in the way of discipline is limited by the Word of God as the rule of its exercise.. Beyond that rule, the Church has no right of discipline, and no authority to enforce it." (BCO, 27-5)*
  3. *"The power of the Church in the way of discipline is limited by the nature of it, as exclusively a spiritual power. (Can only affect our relationship to church, not temporal affairs like taking away property or civil affairs like taking away voting privilege.)*
  4. *"The power of the Church in the way of discipline is limited by a regard to the liberties and edification of its members."*
    - It is always considered remedial rather than punitive as dealing with those in the church of Christ.
    - Respects the freedom of conscience in those areas where Scripture is either silent or permissive. Rom.14:13-17

#### BCO 27-4:

The power which Christ has given the Church is for building up, and not for destruction. It is to be exercised as under a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath. As in the preaching of the Word the wicked are doctrinally separated from the good, so by discipline the Church authoritatively separates between the holy and the profane. In this it acts the part of a tender mother, correcting her children for their good, that every one of them may be presented faultless in the day of the Lord Jesus. Discipline is systematic training under the authority of God's Scripture. No communing or non-communing member of the Church should be allowed to stray for the Scripture's discipline. Therefore, teaching elders must: a) instruct the officers in discipline, b) instruct the Congregation in discipline, c) jointly practice it in the context of the congregation and church courts.

(note, will return to multi-faced aspects of discipline later in training)

- Extent of Church Power:  
Like the state, the Church is an ordinance of God; and like the state, it is vested by God with a certain measure of authority of its own kind, which entitles it to claim and receive a certain measure of obedience from its members. The Church, for example, has power in matters of faith, not indeed arbitrarily to dictate a new truth or new doctrine of its own, but to declare the doctrine and truth of Christ; and in doing so, to determine and decide for its own purposes

upon the faith and profession of its members. Such decisions in regard to controversies of faith, and such declarations of the truth of Christ, if consonant with the Word of God, are to be received and submitted to by its members, not only or merely because they are consonant with His Word, but because of the authority by which they are made being an ordinance of God for that end. (Bannerman p.)

"It is necessary to mark the *extent* of Church power, as contra distinguished from a mere voluntary and human arrangement, and as connected with both Divine authority and a Divine blessing."(p. 236)

- "Power of Authority vs. Advice"
- Power of real efficacious blessing of presence vs. rational only

#### WCF 31.3

"In other words, there is a certain obligation which Church power carries with it, because its acts and decisions are agreeable to the Word of God; there is a second and additional obligation which Church power carries with it, because it is itself an ordinance of God, appointed expressly for such ends." (p. 237) \*(c.f. WCF 27:1,3)

#### Biblical Support for Christ Mediated Power through Church Government:

- Names themselves of parties ruling in the Church.
  - 1) Instructions given to rulers . 1 Tim.5:20; 2 Tim.4:2; Tit.1:9,13; 2:15
  - 2) Exhortations to members of Church regarding submission to authority. Heb. 13:17; 1 Cor.16:16;
  - 3) Descriptions of the power (ezousia) to be administered by rulers and so to be obeyed by members. 1 Cor. 5:3-5

#### The End and Design of Church Power:

##### A. As Regard to the World:

*"The aim of Church Power, and the end to be accomplished by it, are not direct, but indirect... it is limited to certain ends to be accomplished in regard to the Christian society; and does not, except as a secondary object, contemplate results to be attained beyond the limits of the society." (p.250)*

##### 1 Cor. 5:11-13

"There is a general principle here laid down by the apostle in regard to Church power, drawing a line of marked distinction between those within the Church and the world without... In regard to those without the Church, or the world at large, Church power was not intended to take effect." (p.251)

##### B. As Regard to the Church:

*"The power of the Church has for its aim and end directly the general benefit and spiritual good of the Church as a body.... such power is instituted for the interests and spiritual edification of the whole Church and not for the advantage of the few who administer it... the spiritual edification of the whole body of believers is the one end and aim of Church power." (p. 252, 254) 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 2:24-26*

#### Book of Church Order Preface, Section 2

- 1) God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from any doctrines or commandments of men (a) which are in any respect contrary to the Word of God, or (b) which, in regard to matters of faith and worship, are not governed by the Word of God. Therefore, the rights of private judgment in all matters that

respect religion are universal and inalienable. No religious constitution should be supported by the civil power further than may be necessary for protection and security equal and common to all others.

7) All church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or by representation, is only ministerial and declarative since the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may make laws to bind the conscience. All church courts may err through human frailty, yet it rests upon them to uphold the laws of Scripture though this obligation be lodged with fallible men.

8) Since ecclesiastical discipline must be purely moral or spiritual in its object, and not attended with any civil effects, it can derive no force whatever, but from its own justice, the approbation of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church.

### Church Power in BCO Chapter 3.

**3-1.** The power which Christ has committed to His Church vests in the whole body, the rulers and those ruled, constituting it a spiritual commonwealth. This power, as exercised by the people, extends to the choice of those officers whom He has appointed in His Church.

**3-2.** Ecclesiastical power, which is wholly spiritual, is twofold. The officers exercise it sometimes severally, as in preaching the Gospel, administering the Sacraments, reproofing the erring, visiting the sick, and comforting the afflicted, which is the power of order; and they exercise it sometimes jointly in Church courts, after the form of judgment, which is the power of jurisdiction.

**3-3.** The sole functions of the Church, as a kingdom and government distinct from the civil commonwealth, are to proclaim, to administer, and to enforce the law of Christ revealed in the Scriptures.

**3-4.** The power of the Church is exclusively spiritual; that of the State includes the exercise of force. The constitution of the Church derives from divine revelation; the constitution of the State must be determined by human reason and the course of providential events. The Church has no right to construct or modify a government for the State, and the State has no right to frame a creed or polity for the Church. They are as planets moving in concentric orbits: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).

**3-5.** The Church, with its ordinances, officers and courts, is the agency which Christ has ordained for the edification and government of His people, for the propagation of the faith, and for the evangelization of the world

## **II. Edmund Clowney—"Distinctive Emphasis In Church Polity" with Redemptive Historical and Confessional Support**

- Note Carefully Clowney's Two Distinctive Emphasis"
  - Correspond to two Distinctive Redemptive Historical Trajectories and Corresponding Confessional Principles
- *Note especially: BCO*

### **A. Principle One: "Regulative Principle"**

(Wherein the "confessional principle wherein the prescribed elements of our faith and practice are regulated by scripture ("Divine Law")

#### Clowney—"The Regulative Principle" (p. 100ff)

- P. 102, par.1: Principle to Preserve Exclusive Kingship of Christ over church acting corporately(jointly) and individually (severally)
  - Jointly—Nothing to compel, nothing to repel save Christ—
  - Both Prescriptive and Prohibitive by positive institution

- Principle to Preserve Gospel Charity and “Liberty of Conscience”
- Matters of Faith, Worship and Government (p. 100-101, 102)
  - What is and isn’t included here?
  - P. 101—distinguished from “common to human actions and societies” (WCF 1.6)
  - P. 101- Distinguished as Global facing principle—“Elemental” things concerning Christian faith and practice such as to be universally applied/practices by all Christians/churches
    - Key words —“or beside” scripture...
- P. 104, 2<sup>nd</sup> par. Bottom: Spiritual, Ministerial and Declarative only—not temporal, punitive and legislative

PCA *Confession of Faith*. Chapter 1:6a, 20:1-2

1) Argument from Christ’s Exclusive Lordship:

Often described as the “regulative principle in ecclesiology, it has throughout the history of the church been the consensus across most self-consciously confessional traditions including the Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 1 section 6a:

1.6.a: 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.

*Book of Church Order, Preface, Sections 1: The King and Head of the Church.*

*Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government rests... having all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth by the Father... and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Ephesians 1:20-23); He, being ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, received gifts for His Church, and gave all offices necessary for the edification of His Church and the perfecting of His saints (Ephesians 4:10-13).*

*It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men; thus mediately exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, unto the edification and establishment of His Kingdom.*

*Christ, as King, has given to His Church officers, oracles and ordinances; and especially has He ordained therein His system of doctrine, government, discipline and worship, all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom; and to which things He commands that nothing be added, and that from them naught be taken away.*

*Since the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, He is present with the Church by His Word and Spirit, and the benefits of all His offices are effectually applied by the Holy Ghost.*

2) Argument From Charity: (c.f. c.f. **Addendum 2: The Regulative Principle Argument From Charity**, by T. David Gordon (1995 PREMISE))

The regulative principle is important both for the sake of preserving the exclusivity of Christ’s authority over the church and for the sake of Christian charity in so far as preserving Christian liberty of conscience. For instance, the regulative principle as articulated in WCF chapter 1 section 6 is

specifically applied to the freedom of Christian conscience in chapter 20, “On Christian Liberty,” section 2 as follows:

20.1: The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind...

20.2: 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. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

### 3) Regulative Principle of Church Power Through The Redemptive Historical Trajectory of “Covenant”

The scripture defines the INSTITUTIONAL church as BOTH Christ’s salvific presence “mediated, “fleshed out” and “templed” among us (c.f. John 1:14, Eph.2:18ff or *participatione divina* ecclesiology) AND as Christ’s covenantal institution explicitly and positively organized by “divine law” (Mt 16:18ff, Eph. 1:22, 2:20 or *jure divino* ecclesiology). Together, this two-fold trajectory of God’s saving activity can be discerned throughout the whole of redemptive history. It has been described by Jonathan Edwards as the saving activity of God in both heat and light. Likewise, Meredith Kline described it as God’s “power (of presence) and paradigm” (of law).

Covenantal Trajectory: Christ the Covenant Head

*The word became flesh and temped among us” (John 1:14)  
and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church,  
which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. (Eph. 1:22-23)*

Can you imagine a scenario wherein the temple was not carefully designed and regulated as to preserve the light and efficacy of God’s mediated presence in the world as witness to his exclusive Lordship as distinguished from the doctrines and commandments of humanity? Even a cursory survey of Israel’s history is a survey of judgment against Israel, not so much for worshiping other gods, but worshiping Yahweh in a manner like the nations worshipped their gods. At the heart of many prophetic “judgment oracles” are the examples wherein Israel didn’t carefully regulate the temple presence under the strict standard of doing and teaching nothing contrary to or *even beside* the instructions of God (Compare for instance Exodus 3 and Dt. 12:7 with Hos.4:15, Ezekiel 20:27-32). Creativity, at least on the elemental level relative to the extent and limits of the temples activity was *not* a virtue! This then brings us to the second trajectory of ecclesiology in redemptive history—the church by divine institution and the so-called regulative principle.

The church as covenant institution:

Most today have lost any real conviction that the actions and mission of the institutionalized church is presented and regulated in the apostolic tradition. In fact, most argue today that the problem with the church is that it is too “organized.” I would beg to differ, and even suggest that the real problem is the church not organized enough—that is to say not carefully regulated in so far as the extent and limits of church power and authority are concerned. How can a house succeed if it is divided among itself. And how can the house be unified unless it limit itself to those things wherein all members can participant in by command of Christ? As will be discerned, this is not to be confused with the extent and limits applied to Christians acting individually in the world. And yet we are here speaking of o the

covenantal nature of salvation as specially applied to the temple-church or ecclesiology by *positive divine institution*.

Biblically, we can say that there was never a time in all of Redemption history when salvation was transacted apart from a covenant transaction such as to satisfy God's Divine Law. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "covenant" (berith) is used at least 289 times. It is explicitly used to summarize the whole of the Genesis history in Exodus 2:24 and the Old Covenant "Bible" itself was called the "book of the covenant" in Exodus 24:7. And to our point, it would be hard to miss that the temple, acting corporately, was not carefully designed and regulated by the covenant as defined by its distinctively prophetic and priestly role (c.f. Leviticus)

In the New Covenant, the covenant figures prominently even as to introduce Christ as saying: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." (Matthew 5:17-18) Christ is later described as the "mediator of the new covenant" (Heb 9:15, 12:15) even by his own atoning "blood of the new covenant" that is then specifically related to the meaning and practice of the Eucharistic meal in the new covenant church (Luke 22:20, 1Cor.11:25).

AS again directly related to the temple-church by positive institution of Christ, we discern this explicitly in Matthew 16:18-19 as further explained by Paul wherein Christ is described as covenant "head over all things regarding the church" in Eph 1:22. Paul further elaborates that the institutional elements themselves are carefully regulated upon the "foundation of the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone" in Eph 2:20. And by implication, the very efficacy of Christ, in the mediatorial sense, is tied to the church BEING nothing more, nothing less save Christ as informed by Christ her exclusive head and king! This is see the church by positive institution such as to be carefully regulated by what can be derived by good and necessary inference from the apostolic foundation with Christ as the cornerstone.

Because the church acting jointly is carefully designed and organized by "positive institution" of Christ upon the foundation of the apostles, it is significant that Christians are morally obligated to support its work and worship. Both for the sake of preserving exclusive crown rights of Christ as head over all things unto the church and to protect the liberty of conscience of those morally obligated to support her, the extent and limits of church power acting jointly must be carefully limited in its power as neither contrary to or beside what can be deduced by good and necessary inference from scripture as her only rule of faith and practice.

**B. Principle Two: "Organic/Vernacular Principle" (or "Vernacular Principle as directed by Scripture and applied to "Forms")—c.f. Clowney: (p.105ff)**

a) PCA Confession of Faith. PCA Confession of Faith Chapter 1:6b

*Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.*

b) Directory Principle of Church Power Through The Redemptive Historical Trajectory of "Temple"

*The word became flesh and temped among us" (John 1:14)  
and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church,  
which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. (Eph. 1:22-23)*



The church as divine presence: How would it change the discussion about Church power if the socially organized visible church were the very real temple-presence (on earth) of God? What are the tragic conditions wherein the scene of God leaving his temple in Ezekiel 10:18-22 is invoked? (the covenant /word dynamic) What are the tragic conditions wherein the temple-church is not “among them” in their socio-cultural nearness? (The temple/flesh) dynamic?

There was never a time in all of redemptive history when salvation was not transacted apart from divine presence as mediated in/with/through the temple-church. In the Old Covenant for instance, Salvation History in the Old Testament was accomplished with such words as dwelling place and tabernacle, even as covenants were initiated and sealed through rites whereby God manifested his saving, albeit mediated, *presence* to his people. (Cf. Gen. 15; 26:24; Exod. 29:42; Deut. 12:5; Lev. 22:3; Ps.76.2; Num. 35:34). The description, *God in the midst of us* (Ps 49), was the single most coveted reality, even as “excommunication” was the most feared curse (Gen.3)

Likewise under the New Covenant, the gospel is not a transition from temple presence to “no temple presence,” but rather to temple presence fulfilled and then mediated by Christ during his ascension ministry. For instance, Paul described salvation with the promise “I will dwell with them” (2 Cor. 6:16) just as under the Old Covenant. And lest this “dwelling” be confused with a private experience, Paul, in 1Cor 3, dares to assert “Do you not know that you (plural) are God’s temple and that Gods Spirit dwells in you (plural)? Therefore, throughout the New Covenant, words like “temple” and “tabernacle” and “dwelling place” describe God’s saving presence as pertaining to the “household of God” or “the church of the living God” no less than it did under the Old Covenant context (c.f. Eph. 2:18-22, Rev. 21:3).

As specifically applied to the first things of ecclesiology, the visibly organized church (Eph. 2:21) as built upon the foundation of the apostles (Eph.2:20) becomes the “dwelling place of God by the Holy Spirit” (Eph.2:22). By a transaction of participation in holy communion in/with/by this church, it is said that we become “partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). The salvific presence must necessarily be qualified as “not necessarily, and not necessarily immediately,” which is to affirm the church fallible this side of heaven and subject to the sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8). And yet, the scripture speaks of this church with such transactional power as to “bind and loose on earth what is bound and loosed in heaven (Mt 16). Or as Christ’s commission to the church in John 20:21ff

*Just as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”*

In the words of Cyprian, the church can be compared to a mothers’ womb wherein we are “conceived, nourished and by her spirit animated.<sup>i</sup> Or as Augustine once explained from Ephesians 1:22, “to the flesh of Christ is joined the church, and there is made total Christ, head and body.”<sup>ii</sup> And again, as Calvin described about the church in agreement with Cyprian and Augustine, “no extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ.”<sup>iii</sup>

Single Covenant Head, multi- (socio-cultural) forms of flesh:

*The one church whose epicenter is in heaven under a common covenant with Christ as the Head is “multi-Form” (embodied) congregations by necessity of “presence” in the flesh of the people.*

- *The Forms themselves are directed by scripture but common to human societies. (c.f. WCF 1.6)*
- *The covenantal terms or “elements” of the church are regulated by scripture and unique to the church built upon the apostolic foundation with Christ as the cornerstone. (BCA Preface, WCF 1.6)*

c) Clowney “Organic Principle” p. 105ff

*The organic concept of the church that appears in the New Testament... presents a more theological, Christ-centered, spiritual view of the church as defined not by one earthly hierarchical center nor by many*

*earthly congregational centers, but by a heavenly center that requires multiform earthly manifestations. Earthly assemblies do not define but manifest the nature and the center of the church.*<sup>3</sup>

- Key paragraph, p. 108, par. 1...
  - “Multi-Form”-- No earthly epic-center to church—e.g. (Rome/Latin, Constantinople/Greek, Canterbury/English, Scottish, Geneva, etc.)
- Local-Facing- p. 106
- Significance in terms of spirituality and practice—no “prescribed” forms” (socio-cultural “circumstances common to human societies”) p. 107
- Principle Preserves Contextualization as more than a mere “pragmatic mission strategy” but as a very “elemental” aspect of the “total” temple presence of God as to mystically unite with the socio-cultural “flesh” of the body of Christ on earth. What are some examples where “forms” are confused with “Elements”

### III. Four Important Distinctions

#### A. Distinguishing Between the Church Acting Jointly Distinguished From the Church Acting Severally

The second of the ecclesial first things pertinent to the discussion of Christ’s engagement of culture is the way the church is manifest in the world. Throughout the biblical record, one can discern between the Christian citizen of the organized church in her exclusively spiritual mission acting jointly on behalf of Christ and the Christian citizen of the civil state in her church acting severally through her members and their related subsidiary and para-church organizations wherein they function as Christian informed citizens of the civil state.

The distinction can be discerned in the apostle Paul when he distinguished between the things that are “lawful” (as per spiritual jurisdiction—applicable to his authority acting jointly) and the “things that are helpful” (as per spiritual influence—applicable to his authority to counsel severally (c.f 1 Cor.6:12, 1 Cor 10:23). Likewise, such distinctions could lead him to say things like “I give this charge (not I, but the Lord)” in 1 Cor 7:10 when acting jointly and then again in 1 Cor.7:12 “to the rest I say (I, not the Lord)” when acting severally.

Likewise, the distinction can be discerned in comparing Matt. 18:15-16 and the power of the church acting severally through her individual members when seeking to restore a person in fellowship (the power of influence) as compared to the ‘binding and loosing” power of jurisdictional (c.f Mt 16) as then attributed to the church acting jointly in Matt. 18:17-20.

The distinction between the church acting jointly and the church acting severally has been historically recognized throughout church history. For instance, the Scottish Second Book of Discipline (1578) distinguished between *potestas ordinis* and *potestas jurisdictionis*, or the power of order (acting severally) vs. the power of jurisdiction (acting jointly). It further explained that “these two kinds of power have both one authority, one ground, one final cause, but are different in the manner and form of execution.” The one is by “by power of mutual consent” (the church acting severally as not to bind conscience) and the other is by “power ecclesiastical” as pertaining to “jurisdiction” (the church acting jointly as to bind conscience in so far as participating in the visible church of God. The same distinctions can be readily discerning in more recent polities such as the PCA Book of Church Order (c.f. BCO 1:5, 3:2, 8:1).

James Bannerman in his classic Church of God makes this point well:

*Like the state, the Church is an ordinance of God; and is vested by God with a certain measure of authority of its own kind, which entitles it to claim and receive a certain measure of obedience from its members. The Church, for example, has power in matters of faith, not indeed arbitrarily to dictate a new truth or new doctrine of its own, but to declare the doctrine and truth of Christ; and in doing so, to determine and decide for its own purposes upon the faith and profession of its members.*

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<sup>3</sup> Edmund Clowney, *Distinctives of the Presbyterian Polity*

*Such decisions in regard to controversies of faith, and such declarations of the truth of Christ, if consonant with the Word of God, are to be received and submitted to by its members, not only or merely because they are consonant with His Word, but because of the authority by which they are made being an ordinance of God for that end... In other words, there is a certain obligation which Church power carries with it, because its acts and decisions are agreeable to the Word of God; there is a second and additional obligation which Church power carries with it, because it is itself an ordinance of God, appointed expressly for such ends.<sup>4</sup>*

Discussion: How can the church infringe upon the exclusive authority of Christ and Christian Liberty?

e.g. Prohibit as “sin” what is not by good and necessary inference prohibited

Jointly

Severally:

e.g. Prescribed as “necessary” what is not by good and necessary inference prescribed

Jointly:

Severally:

e.g. Notice how does the regulative principle changes as applied jointly vs. severally

Jointly—Cannot prescribe what is contrary to OR beside .... Scripture

Severally—Cannot prohibit what is beside... scripture (only contrary to)

**B. Distinguishing between socio-cultural “Forms” and confessional “elements”**

In the words of St. Augustine, *The Word was made flesh, and dwelled among us; to that flesh is joined the church, and there is made the whole Christ, head and body.*<sup>5</sup> As noted already from Edmund Clowney:

The organic concept of the church that appears in the New Testament... presents a more theological, Christ-centered, spiritual view of the church as defined not by one earthly hierarchical center nor by many earthly congregational centers, but by a heavenly center that requires multiform earthly manifestations. Earthly assemblies do not define but manifest the nature and the center of the church.<sup>6</sup>

What this means is that that ecclesial power will want both to adhere to the “regulative “principle” in relation to a fixed heavenly prototype in faith and worship, while also executing this fixed prototype in the socio-cultural flesh of the local context. This then raised the issue of what has historically been distinguished as “fixed elements” and “socially fluid forms.” The regulative principle will seek to regulate the elements of faith and practice according to the covenantal “law” of God such as to preserve the Christo-centric gospel itself. And yet, the vernacular principle will want to distinguish the prescribed “elements” from the cultural-linguistic forms these elements assume in the living presence of Christ in a local and particular social context. Therefore, while not compromising Christ or the gospel, Paul could say such things as I am “a Greek to the Greek and a Jew to the Jew” (1 Cor.9:20). The mystery in all of this is that we “partake of the divine nature” (2Peter 1:4) as per the sacramental principle.

This “both-and” (elements-fixed/prescribed and forms-directed/not prescribed) stress both the sacred otherness and closeness of God’s presences saving presence . In the mystery of church power (as applied in sacraments), John

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<sup>4</sup> James Bannerman, *The Church of God*, Vol. 1. p. 237)

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Epistle of John* 1.2.

<sup>6</sup> Edmund Clowney, "Distinctive Emphasis in Presbyterian Church Polity," *Pressing Toward The Mark* (1986) n.p.

Calvin as summarized “no extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

Notice then in the Westminster Director the two-fold regulative principle applied to elements, but directory principle applied to forms.

AS per the regulative principle applied to the essential, apostolic, elements of worship:

1. *It (the directory) contained ordinances which were of divine institution (Prescribed elements)*
2. *It promised uniformity by setting forth the principle headings of worship and the sense and scope of the prayers.*

But as to the forms that the elements are to express:

3. *As a directory, it provided ministers "some help and furniture" without depriving them of the gift of prayer. (I.e. spirit filled liturgical leadership)<sup>8</sup>*

This two-fold regulative AND directed principle both preserved the ascension vernacular of “flesh” in worship, even as it preserved the ascension “word” of Christ as Lord in faith and practice. Notice then how all of this tension is expressed even in the Westminster Confession of Faith. As noted already, having made the point that all the “elements” of worship are to be regulated by divine institution in scripture, the assembly then makes this remarkable concession as per the use of “forms” in the Confession of Faith ( 21:1)

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

Here again, by “circumstances” the Assembly was reflecting on “forms,” even as it was careful not to prescribe “forms” for worship lest the common and local vernacular of a particular context be compromised. Given our theology of Christ ascended ministry, it could be argued therefore that to NOT consider the media-message (form-element) relationship in worship is to NOT worship according to the age of the spirit in truth. The beauty of this approach is that while scripture would continue to regulate what we do in worship, Christ’s “flesh” in all its diversity is allowed to mediate the elements in a way that Christ is surely “in the midst of us.” It is not as if the worshiper is able to discern anything concrete concerning an image of Christ in this art. That would be to reduce the image of Christ today in/with/through the vernacular church! The church’s historic concern over icons is STILL well deserved, but not because it is artistic, rather because it may obscure the incarnation of Christ now in the church!

### ***The distinction Illustrated in Corporate Worship:***

#### Principle #1: The Regulative Principle (read 21.1b)

A Historical Survey: Ezekiel 20:27-32 compared to Dt.12:1-10, 13

1. Type of literature: Prophetic Court case  
“Divine Judgement Oracle”

2. Series of indictments based on the Deuteronomic covenant in contrast to Israel's history

#### **3.Main indictment: Covenant infidelity**

Purpose of Covenant: 20:14

Israel's unfaithfulness: v. 30 Spiritual Harlotry

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<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37: 48.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Notice then the "middle ground" between liturgy on the one hand and independence on the other- thus a directory and between Anglican/prelacy and independency... A regulated service albeit with freedom for inspired leadership...

4. Covenant Curse for breaking covenant stipulations: 33-39 (From Dt. 28)

5. Specific Problem: *Syncretism in Worship*

Key phrase: "on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree." (Compare to covenant stipulations in Dt. 12.)

As Calvin put it:

"Worship should be to God alone and without any dependence on human will... all mixtures by which the pure simplicity of lawful worship is corrupted are condemned." We are to follow in all simplicity what he has ordained by his Word, without adding anything to it at all" (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, p. 66).

Notice how this principle is stated by the Confession. Also note other confessional statements to this affect.

**Book of Church Order:**

**Preface:** Christ, as *King*, has given to His Church officers, oracles and ordinances; and especially has He ordained there in His system of doctrine, government, discipline and *worship*, all of which are expressly set down in *Scripture*, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced there from; and to which He commands that nothing be added, and that from them naught be taken away.

**Chapter 47 on *The Principles and Elements of Public Worship***

**47-1:** 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 form no other source.

The Scriptures forbids the worshipping of God by images, or in any other way not appointed in His Word, and requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in His Word.

What are the five elements of worship according to the confession?

Worship, prayer, sacraments, word, and fellowship/collection

What is the apostolic foundation for worship as per the foundation setting role of the apostle as per Mt. 16:17ff and Eph. 2:20? Consider then Acts 2:42 where we see four elements included in corporate worship:

**Acts 2:42**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Therefore, 4 Essential Elements:

Prayers

Spoken and Sung

Sacraments

Baptism-entrance

Lord's Supper- Renewal

Word (Apostolic)

Read and Preached

"Fellowship" (Collection and Mercy)

Principle #2: The Vernacular Principle (read 21.3, esp. 3.b)

In so far as it is a work of the people in response to the work of God, there is a "vernacular" component to true, dialogical, nature of worship. Therefore,

**Acts 1:19**

This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

**Acts 2:6**

And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

**Acts 2:8**

And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

**1Cor. 14:5**

I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive **edification**.

This all begs for a discussion about how to both "direct" and "vernaculate" (if I could make up a word here) at the same time. Our discussion would need to talk about the inter-relationship of message and medium. We would need to remember that no culture is "a-moral" such that each culture contains its hidden idols. And we would need to always remember what will be discussed next as the third theological aspect of covenant worship which is the dual ends of worship for both doxology and edification. That is to say, we will want our words, lyrics, and styles to BOTH glorify God and edify the elect.

Using the language of BCO

*Therefore, we are to determine what is "to the glory of God" and "recognizing that Christ is the Mediator by whom alone they can come unto God, when they honor Christ as the head of the church, who rules over public worship and when their worship is an expression of **their** faith in Christ and their love for Him. (BCO 47:5)*

*Again, "the forms for public worship have value only when they serve to express the **inner** reverence of the worshipper and his sincere devotion to the true and living God. And only those whose hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit are capable of such reverence and devotion." (BCO 47:5)*

**Thus, if the regulative principle preserves the doxology of worship, the vernacular principle preserves the edification in worship.**

As directed to both the believing and unbelieving elect, the worship will be edifying, even as it is first and foremost doxological.

**1Cor. 14:12** Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the **edification** of the church that you seek to excel.

**1Cor. 14:26** How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for **edification**.

**And by "edification" it is not just meant "for believers" but "for the elect" (an important distinction... why?)**

Edification Principle Clarified:

NOT: As an appeal to the sympathies of the flesh...

RATHER: As an appeal to the sympathies of effectual calling in election

I.e. A message and vernacular that appeals to the sympathies expected of those being called by God vs. those sympathies of the "flesh" as related to the "natural man", albeit in a vernacular that is sensitive to both the "Unbelieving/seeker/unchurched" and "Believer/church" alike.

**NOTE: Forms As DIRECTED (not prescribed)--a Presbyterian Distinctive**

Our *confession* DOES acknowledge that our response to God will necessarily include such things as are beyond the teachings of scripture and ordered by what amounts to "common sense" – and by "common" we mean "common to human societies" or what best expresses the intent of a confessional element in faith and/or worship according to the cultural context of a local congregation!

So for instance, after affirming the above "regulating" principle in Chapter 1.6, our confession also affirms a vernacular sensitive principle as follows within the same chapter and section:

WCF 1:6 Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: *and that there are some circumstances concerning **the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.***

How then are these things to be ordered? Three traditional options:

- Hierarchically driven *Formalism*:  
Prescribing the form of a particular cultural context (Latin and "Roman" mannerisms in a non-Roman place—this includes style of leadership, clothing, instrumentation, etc. etc) This is to make an "element" out of what isn't an element (by good and necessary inference from scripture)
- Congregational Form/lessism:  
Leaving it to the discretion of an individual liturgist without an intentional "directory" from scripture- this is to see worship as unregulated...
- Presbyterially Directed Forms:  
*our standards will clarify that... "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..." (BCO 47:6)*

E.g. Worship is then to be directed with a view toward 1) an order/content/style that is "according to the general rules of the Word" and 2) a content and style that is sensitive to the needs and "vernacular" of a specific congregation. Therefore, a self-consciously "directed" worship as determined by the general rules/values of scripture and circumstances common to the vernacular of a given society.

*Thompson:*

*When their chairman... laid the first draft of the work before the full Assembly (May 1644) he reported that "many serious and sad debates" had taken place over the crucial issue of form and freedom.<sup>9</sup> To satisfy the desires and scruples of all the parties the subcommittee had found it expedient to produce a directory, as opposed to a liturgy, which outlined the main headings of worship and described the substance of each element in such a way that "by altering here and there a word, a man may mould it into a prayer." Where disagreement could not be overcome, the committee made compensation by allowing variety in practice or by using rubrics of lesser compulsion.*

Completed in 1744, entitled *A Directory for the Public Worship of God...*

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<sup>9</sup> OF which we do well to avoid by remaining true to that which the Westminster decided for us ... rather than re-living them all over. Thus the value of denominationalism—there ARE other church options for those who are not comfortable with the Scoto-Presbyterian tradition.

Discussion:

What is the principle that would distinguish between “forms” and “elements” of Christian faith and practice

What are some ways that the church has typically failed to distinguish between “forms” an “elements”

Corporate Worship?

Practice/Spirituality?

**C. Distinguishing Spiritual power (ecclesial) from Temporal Power (civil)**

*"History establishes no truth more clearly than this, that when the Church has engaged in any manner in political difficulties, its best interests, its influence for good, and its religious character have suffered. Individual members of the Church have their responsibilities as citizens and as politicians and their duties are of a totally different sort from those of the Church collectively. Their religion should, indeed make them better citizens; but their citizenship in this world is one thing, and their citizenship of the great Church is another thing. The Church, as such, has absolutely no concern with those works in which it is the highest worldly duty of the man to engage. The church owes no allegiance to any earthly power; it owes no fealty to any monarch or government. For there is no divided loyalty in the church, and no part of the Church, in Jerusalem or Antioch, in England or America, on earth or in heaven, that owes any allegiance which all the other parts do not equally owe. The mistake of confounding the duty of the individual citizen and church-member, with the duties of the church, has led to the most fatal errors.*

Stuart Robinson, May 22, 1862

1. The Church Acting Jointly: Directed and Prescribed— Focus on Reconciliation and a kingdom “not of this world” (Spiritual Mission) Church power “prescribes” (nothing contrary to or beside)

Commenting upon the distinction of church and state in the Old Testament account, Meredith Kline has distinguished the “prophetic cult” or “redemptive city” whose function is purely “priestly and prophetic.” This redemptive community is positioned in, but not of, the “Remedial City” and described as “bestial but legitimate” and therefore “legitimate but not sanctified.” It should be noted that for Kline, the term “city” is *not* synonymous with any social phenomena such as “urban” vs. suburban or rural, but is rather a term for kingdom “polity” or “social organization” as by “divine ordinance.” City as such is more akin to how Augustine used the term “city of God” distinguished from the “city of man” as corresponding to two jurisdictions-- “church and state” albeit defined both jointly (organized) and severally (individually). But again to the point, we see therefore how the remedial is distinguished from the redemptive in so far as the extent and limits of power and jurisdiction are concerned.<sup>10</sup>

In the New Covenant notwithstanding, the argument most often begins with the teaching and example of Christ. One readily things of two passages:

*Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” John 18:36*

*Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Mt. 22:19-22*

In both of the above teachings, the Example of Christ is evident. For the great question of His day was the same question of our day – it was the question of loyalty to a particular geo-political-economic vision for cultural transformation as to play out in this or that branch of partisan politics. This was the issue with which they tried to entangle Him. And what he

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<sup>10</sup> M. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, Two Age Press, 2000, pp. 161ff.)



modeled was both an individual Christian's duty of obedience to the civil authorities (c.f. Rom 13) albeit refusing to decide the question acting as head of the church.

19<sup>th</sup> century Stuart Robinson described them this way:

"As Christian citizens, church members are to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" and as members of Christ's Kingdom, they are to "render unto God the things that are God's." Christ was a citizen, and, as such, conducted Himself as one obedient to the laws of the land. But as the Head of His own Church, and as the example of His own people, He utterly refused to do anything nor to be any thing, as a decider of matters, either legal or political. Nor did He ever teach any thing, nor did He allow His disciples to do or teach any thing looking in that direction."

As pertaining then to the church acting jointly, it is therefore significant that in "great commissions" given to the apostles as the founders of the church, it was an exclusively spiritual mission as related to the single command to make disciples in Matt. 28:19-20. And this was to be accomplished explicitly as to express Christ's prophetic, priestly and kingly offices as by the *word* ("teach them), sacraments (baptize them) and ecclesial shepherding or government ("to obey"). This it seems, until other mandates are added, is the exclusive business of the church in so far as Christ is her exclusive Lord. By positive institution, to do or teach as the rule of faith and practice for the church anything "contrary to or even beside" this commission is to exceed the limits and extent of church authority acting on behalf of Christ.

Likewise, one can invoke the teaching and ministry of the apostles to discover the same exclusively "spiritual" mission. For as expected, through the course Acts and in so far as the teachings of the epistles are concerned, we see perfect conformity to Christ's teaching and example with respect to apostolic foundation for ministry as an infallible commentary to the meaning of Christ's teaching and example. And notwithstanding the serious cultural and political issues that confronted individual Christians as citizens of Rome in their day, there is an amazing silence with respect to engaging these issues, except in so far as to teach the rule of faith and practice as pertaining to divine law.

So for instance, Paul does not hesitate to define the equal status of women and servants with respect to a God who is no respecter of persons, even if this teaching stood apposed to the social customs of his day. And yet he resisted cultural engagement in so far as diverting his focus from preaching the gospel and his efforts in ecclesial formation as a kingdom not of this world. Again, is instructive that the summation of the apostles ministry is often spelled out in terms of church formation and growth, but never once in cultural transformation per se. (again c.f. below-- apostolic instructions to Christians acting severally for this). Quite the contrary, the apostles are shown to resist any attempt at coopting the first things of ecclesial mission in so far as to become participants in cultural transformation and partisan politics- this for the sake of a gospel centered mission!

Thus the apostolic commission as related to the extent of church power was to the spiritual (vs. temporal) campaign of reconciliation with God and the formation of a new kingdom not of this world wherein all human relations are defined as well by reconciliation one to another across all socio-cultural boundaries that otherwise divide the kingdoms of this world...

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience...From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Cor 5:11, 16-19

Regarding the so called “spirituality” doctrine of the church, it could be shown that a non-pacifist, albeit “sectarian” doctrine of the church (by this I mean sectarian in relation to state) has its reformed roots in Augustine, Calvin, Scottish Reformation, 18<sup>th</sup> century Virginia Presbyterians, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Border State Presbyterians, the German Barmen Movement, and even reformed aspects of the post-liberal movement today. Picking up with the Reformation especially:

17<sup>th</sup> century John Calvin:

IT should be noted that John Calvin in his Christian Institutes affirms the “spirituality” position as well in so far as the church and state acting jointly is concerned. He notes for instance how the state is concerned with "merely civil or external justice" while the church "rules over the soul or the inner man, and concerns itself with eternal life." He further describes it as "Jewish vanity" not to recognize that "the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things far removed from one another" (IV.xx.1). While this section in book four looks like a negative statement of the spirituality doctrine, Calvin appears to articulate it positively in book two when he describes Christ's kingship as being strictly "spiritual in nature" (II.xv.3). He adds that Christ's kingdom is "not earthly or carnal and hence subject to corruption, but spiritual" and because of that "lifts us up even to eternal life"(II.xv.4).

17<sup>th</sup> century Scottish Second Book of Discipline stated it this way:

*This power and policy ecclesiastical is different and distinct in its own nature from that power and policy which is called the civil power and appertains to the civil government of the commonwealth; albeit they are both of God, and tend to one end, if they are rightly used: to wit, to advance the glory of God, and to have godly and good subjects. (c.f. Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 31, Book of Church Order Preface II.1, 7, chapters 3:2,3,4).*

One of the important documents that informed the Second Book of Discipline was George Gillespie's famous *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions* presented before the Westminster General Assembly of 1647. In it, George Gillespie states in his *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions* of 1647:

The political or civil power is grounded upon the law of nature itself, and for that cause it is common to infidels with Christians; the power ecclesiastical dependeth immediately upon the positive law of Christ alone; the civil power belongeth to the universal dominion of God the Creator over all nations; but the power ecclesiastical unto the special and economical kingdom of Christ the Mediator, which he exerciseth in the church alone, and which is not of this world.

19<sup>th</sup> century James Bannerman: He nicely summarizes the relation of the church acting jointly to the state acting jointly as follows;

*Like the state, the Church is an ordinance of God; and like the state, it is vested by God with a certain measure of authority of its own kind, which entitles it to claim and receive a certain measure of obedience from its members.*

*The Church, for example, has power in matters of faith, not indeed arbitrarily to dictate a new truth or new doctrine of its own, but to declare the doctrine and truth of Christ; and in doing so, to determine and decide for its own purposes upon the faith and profession of its members. Such decisions in regard to controversies of faith, and such declarations of the truth of Christ, if consonant with the Word of God, are to be received and submitted to by its members, not only or merely because they are consonant with His Word, but because of the authority by which they are made being an ordinance of God for that end...*

*In other words, there is a certain obligation which Church power carries with it, because its acts and decisions are agreeable to the Word of God; there is a second and additional obligation which Church power carries with it, because it is itself an ordinance of God, appointed expressly for such ends." (p. 237) James Bannerman c.f. WCF 31.3*

Mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century Thomas Peck:

Thomas Peck provides a good summary of the relation of “church” to “state” from his *Notes on Ecclesiology*:

**1. In relation to God:** *the state is an ordinance of God considered as the creator, and, therefore, the moral governor of mankind, while the church is an ordinance of God considered as the saviour and restorer of mankind. The state is ordained for man as man; the church for man as a sinner in a condition of inchoate restoration and salvation. The state is for the whole race of man; the church consists of that portion of the race which is really, or by credible profession, the mediatorial body of Christ. (275)*

**2. In relation to constitution:** *The next point of difference between church and state is in the rules by which they are to be respectively regulated in the exercise of their functions. The rule of the church is the word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This is the statute book of the visible kingdom of Christ. The rule for the state is the “light of nature,” or the human reason.*

**3. In relation to power:** *The power of the church is, strictly and only, “ministerial and declarative”; the power of the state is magisterial and imperative. The church has no power to make laws, but only to declare the law of God. All her acts of government are acts of obedience to her Head and King. The state has the power to make laws as well as to declare them; has a legislative as well as a judicial power.*

**4. In relation to Form:** *Hence, the form of government for the church, the regulative and the constitutive principles of her organization, are not matters to be determined by human reason, but to be derived from the Bible as the constitution and statute-book: while, in the state, these are matters to be settled by the history and condition of political communities. The life of the state is natural, and it is left to assume an organization for itself. The life of the church is supernatural, and God prescribes an organization for it. (281)*

**5. In relation to sanctions:** *church and the state differ in their sanctions, as well as in their authority and their rule. The sanction of ecclesiastical government is moral, appealing to the faith and the conscience, a parental discipline, designed for the good of the offender. Its symbol is the “keys.” The sanction of civil government is force, appealing to the bodily sensibilities of the subject or the citizen; a penal administration, designed to vindicate the majesty of justice and the supremacy of law, with a very incidental, if any, reference to the good of the transgressor. Its symbol is the “sword.” (287)*

In short, the two jurisdictions were assigned by God to two different purposes-- the one “spiritual, not having a temporal head on earth” as pertaining to the household of God, and the other “civil” having a temporal head on earth as pertaining to the commonwealth for all people of all faiths and none. It has been said how the two spheres of powers are as two planets orbiting the same sun. Again, the distinction in “powers,” is historically distinguished throughout church history as representative of the apostolic foundation.

Summary:

"The power of the Church has for its aim and end directly the general benefit and spiritual good of the Church as a body.... such power is instituted for the interests and spiritual edification of the whole Church and not for the advantage of the few who administer it... the spiritual edification of the whole body of believers is the one end and aim of Church power." (James Bannerman p. 252, 254) 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 2:24-2

2) The Church Acting Severally: Church In the World for the World—temporal mission—Church power “directs” not “prescribes” (nothing contrary to, but “beside”? Yes, as directed, but not prescribed)

*“As much as possible, Christians should live, serve, and be deeply involved in the lives of our largest cities. They need to be involved in the life of the whole city, not just their own particular enclave. If you*

*can live and serve in the city, you should.”*

We ought to heartily agree with Keller's above exhortation in so far as

1) we define “city” as pertaining to human civilization of all peoples of all faiths and none

AND

2) in so far as we are speaking of the church acting severally!

That is, it must be stated at the outset that there IS A Biblical mandate for cultural engagement. Speaking of the Old Covenant context for cultural engagement, Meredith Kline summarizes the “priestly mission of sanctifying culture” this way:

Like the Sethite covenant community, the church too operates in temple building only at the reality level of the people-temple (cf. Eph 2:21,22; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:5)... the priestly mission of sanctifying culture as it comes to expression in the building of the holy people-house of God ...but what would it entail with respect to the common city of man?

Positively, it must be recognized that the whole life of God's people is covered by the liturgical model of their priestly identity. All that they do is done as a service rendered unto God. All their cultural activity in the sphere of the city of man they are to dedicate to the glory of God. This sanctification of culture is subjective; it transpires within the spirit of the saints. Negatively, it must be insisted that this subjective sanctification of culture does not result in a change from common to holy status in culture objectively considered. The common city of man does not in any fashion or to any degree become the holy kingdom of God through the participation of the culture-sanctifying saints in its development. Viewed in terms of its products, effects, institutional context, *etc.*, the cultural activity of God's people is common grace activity. Their city of man activity is not “kingdom (of God)” activity. Though it is an expression of the reign of God in their lives, it is not a building of the kingdom of God as institution or realm. For the common city of man is not the holy kingdom realm, nor does it ever become the holy city of God, whether gradually or suddenly. Rather, it must be removed in judgment to make way for the heavenly city as a new creation.

*AS it pertains then to the extent of church power—the Christian is “directed” by scripture as to do nothing contrary to scripture, but the Christian is not directed in so far as doing/believing things “beside scripture.” This is because of the “Common grace” and “general revelation” of God that the Christian is engaging in so far as common grace for the common good is concerned.*

That is, herein, we see that the holy temple building for redemptive purposes is then to express itself through individual members via the priestly service of common grace activities that are for the common good.

This is as well inferred by Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan in response to the scribal question “who is my neighbor?” The question was clearly related to the great command of Leviticus 19:18, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself?” In so far as the parable serves to define “neighbor” to include those of other races, classes and even faiths, this encourages Christian to engage culture and to do justice and mercy with/for those outside of the church! Likewise, in Galatians 6:10, even as Paul establishes the a priority that Christians do justice and mercy for those who are “*especially the household of faith,*” he likewise exhorts Christians to “do *“good to all.”*

The language of “resident-aliens” is often invoked as related to a Christian individual duty to the “city.” We think of the precedent setting circumstances of Israel living in Exile wherein they are commanded in Jeremiah 29:7 to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” As commented by Tim Keller,

God commands the Jewish exiles not to attack, despise, or flee the city — but to seek its peace, to love the city as they grow in numbers. God is still primarily concerned with his plan of salvation. He must establish his people; the gospel must be proclaimed; human beings must be reconciled to him. Yet he assures his people that serving the good of this pagan city

is part of this very plan: "If it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer 29: 7). Loving and serving the city not only shows love and compassion; doing so also strengthens the hands of the people of God, who bear the message of the gospel to the world."

Likewise, 1 Peter also envisions Christians living in the present world as resident aliens in so far as their true homeland is heaven. And again, the exhortation is:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Pet.2:11-12)

As again properly commented upon by Tim Keller, "It is no wonder that Christians seeking to obey Christ and Paul have over the centuries worked to abolish slavery, repeal child labor laws, and open voting rights to all citizens, as well as to begin thousands of programs and ministries that help the poor and needy."

And so Christian's ought to be concerned and involved with social justice and mercy on behalf of the church acting severally-- both as individuals and by means of the various subsidiary types of organizations that can be formed seeking the common good. To be sure, it would NOT be the thesis here that *"we should instead simply work at 'being and building up the church' and avoid any efforts to change or renew culture."*<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to note that while respecting and even enjoining respect for and submission to all lawful civil authorities in Rom 13, 1 Peter 2:13-17, etc, that we often receive such apostolic instructions as to live as "exiles" (1 Peter 1:1, 17) and "sojourners" (1:11) as per the manner in which the Old Covenant church did in relation to a foreign culture and spirituality in the time of their exile (Heb.11:13). The concern was that the church not be assimilated into the cultures of the world, even if they must live in the world without losing their Christian identity and witness. And key to this commissioning according to Peter was that they must view themselves as those being "built up as a spiritual house (elsewhere ecclesial language) as to be a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5).

He later further explains that as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (2:9) qua being the church, that as they engage the culture, they should "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation (vs. 2:12).

Peter's instructions corresponds perfectly with Paul's in Eph 2:11ff and then Eph 5. On the one hand, he gives rather elaborate instructions about the Christian duty to the apostolically organized church as to preserve its fundamental integrity as a separate and holy "city" or polity. They are to become:

fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

And again, like in 1 Peter, this citizenship is defined in priestly and prophetic terms as related to their being a holy temple presence of God, corporately, in the midst of an otherwise unholy, non-priestly/prophetic world. The polity itself is not of this world in so far as it is a polity of word, sacrament as executed under the authority of a separate constitution (The Scriptures according to Apostolic Foundation) and government (Government according to "elders" 1Tim 3). Paul's subsequent instructions seems to focus upon ecclesial formation and ecclesial ethics, albeit all together postured toward culture in a counter-cultural manner (do not partner with them"), yet for the sake of witnessing light to them amidst the prevailing culture of darkness (Eph. 5:7-14). The relation to culture is shown to be indirect, as by Christians acting severally vs. Christian acting jointly as the temple-church

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<sup>11</sup> Keller, The Bible on Church and Culture (April 2008).

apostolically organized.

As Christian related to culture, Peter therefore expects there to be a tension in so far as the Christian will need to proactively serve culture in love relation to Christ and culture. The tension is shown to result in a both a that will result in a posture of both offensive and defensive tactics. On the offence, Christian are called to engage the world with their good deeds of love and God-informed ethical values, even as their deeds will often be misunderstood and even apposed in so far as the values are an offense to the values of another kingdom worldview. Peter therefore says that we should be willing to engage the world both by word and by deed with the hope that is within us, even as our deeds will back up our words in a way that will shame those who the hope that is in us (2:8) . And yet while there as a “not of this world” sectarian positioned community, this would enable them to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” to the world (1 Peter 2:9).

Discussion:

How can the church violate the “spirituality” principle acting jointly? What can it proscribe that isn’t, by good and necessary inference in scripture, proscribed?

How can the church violate the “spiritual” principle acting severally? What can it “prohibit” that isn’t, by good and necessary inference, prohibited

**D. Distinguishing Weak/Strong From Sin/Righteousness** (c/ John Murray, Weak and the Strong”

c.f. T. David Gordon on Murray: (Addendum 2)

The Demands of Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8

- Charity requires us not to do anything which *induce another believer to act contrary to conscience*.
  - That is, these two passages do not teach that we must *agree* with the scruples of another's conscience, nor even that we must *act* consistently with the scruples of another's conscience. Rather, the texts teach that we must not say or do anything which we know will *induce another to act inconsistently with conscience*.
- The "wounding" which these passages talk about is the wounding of the conscience which occurs when an individual does something contrary to what he or she believes is right.
  - Even if the scruples are improper scruples, that is, not mandated by revelation, we must still never encourage the violation of scruples held as a matter of conscience. Paul, in fact, refers to the believers in question as "weak" believers, because their understanding of the faith is such that they hold by conscience beliefs not required by revelation. He nevertheless argues that charity requires us not to offend the conscience of such sisters and brothers.
- Paul does not consider the scruples of the "weak" to be scruples which are to be considered *acceptable* in and by the church, because they are scruples associated with a lack of familiarity with redemption. A person who is "weak" is a person who, in some particular way, is needful of a fuller enjoyment of the privileges, benefits, or duties of the redeemed state.

Note also:

James Bannerman has observed how "man has been made free as to his conscience from the doctrine and commandments of his fellow men, in order that he may be free to serve God."(p. *The Church of God*, p. 160) Thus, and for the sake of Christian Liberty of Conscience, the church must limit its use of power in so far as those charged to support the work and worship of the church must not then be put into a situation wherein to support the work and worship of the church puts them into a conflict with church actions that cannot pass the test of nothing contrary to or beside' as determined by "good and necessary inference commanded in scripture if for the sake of Christian charity along per Paul's point in Romans 14.

There are two different ways freedom of conscience works out relative to a Christian's moral obligations:

- 1) A person ought not be obligated to participate in or support the church beyond that which Christ has instituted by good and necessary inference from Scripture (positive institution by divine law). Thus, church acting jointly must regulate itself to do nothing save what is "by good and necessary inference" (elements) albeit in the socio-cultural flesh of the people (vernacular forms)
- 2) A person individually ought not be prevented from participating in or supporting other causes/activities unless contrary to the scripture only. (e.g. non –elemental)

That is to say, if the church acting jointly is "regulated" by positive command of scripture, church acting severally is only directed by scripture, but can rely upon general revelation and the so called "laws of nature" as well.

However, since the church acting severally through her individual members acting individually and/or various subsidiary and para-church organizations acting outside of the formal jurisdiction of the organized church has not been designed by positive institution in scripture, the regulative principle is only to do nothing contrary to scripture. Otherwise, as directed by scripture, the individual or subsidiary organizations is free to do whatever is deemed good and noble for those of all faiths and none—of "common good."

Discussion:

How has the church often confuse "weak" from "wicked"? Examples?

## V. CHURCH POWER RELATED TO THE QUESTION OF CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION:

### I. Historical Context of Subscription in American Presbyterianism:

The **Adopting Act of 1729** is an act of the [Synod of Philadelphia](#), an early [Presbyterian](#) body in [Colonial America](#), requiring ministers to agree with the "essential & necessary Articles" of the [Westminster Standards](#). The Act was a compromise between [Scots-Irish](#) ministers, who preferred strict subscription to [confessional](#) standards in order to maintain [orthodoxy](#), and the [New Englanders](#), who preferred less hierarchical [church government](#) and believed the individual conscience could not be bound by others but only by the [Bible](#). The Adopting Act was unanimously approved on September 19th, 1729.

#### § Act Preliminary to the Adopting Act.

"The committee brought in an overture upon the affair of the Confession, which, after long debating upon it, was agreed upon, *in hæc verba*:-

"Although the synod do not claim or pretend to any authority of imposing our faith upon other men's consciences, but do profess our just dissatisfaction with and abhorrence of such impositions, and do utterly disclaim all legislative power and authority of such impositions, and do utterly disclaim all legislative power and authority in the Church, being willing to receive one another, as Christ has received us to the glory of God, and admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances all such as we have grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the kingdom of heaven; yet we are undoubtedly obliged to take care that the faith once delivered to the saints be kept pure and uncorrupt among us, and so hand down to our posterity.

And do therefore agree, that all the Ministers of this Synod, or that shall hereafter be admitted into this Synod, shall declare their agreement in and approbation of the Confession of Faith with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine; and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of our faith.

And we do also agree, that all the Presbyteries within our bounds shall always take care not to admit any candidate of the ministry into the exercise of the sacred function, but what declares his agreement in opinion

with all the essential and necessary articles of said Confession, either by subscribing the said Confession of Faith and Catechisms, or by a verbal declaration of their assent thereto, as such Minister or candidate for the Ministry shall think best. And in case any Minister of this Synod, or any candidate for the ministry, shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the time of his making said declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds and to ministerial communion if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government. But if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge such Ministers or candidates erroneous in essential and necessary articles of faith, the Synod or Presbytery shall declare them incapable of Communion with them.

And the Synod do solemnly agree, that none of us will traduce or use any opprobrious terms of those that differ from us in these extra-essential and not necessary points of doctrine, but treat them with the same friendship, kindness and brotherly love, as if they had not differed from us in such Sentiments."--*Minutes*, 1729, p. 94.

### **§ The Adopting Act.**

[The foregoing paper was adopted in the morning. In the afternoon took place "The Adopting Act."]

"All the Ministers of this Synod now present, except one,\* that declared himself not prepared, viz., Masters Jedediah Andrews, Thomas Craighead, John Thomson, James Anderson, John Pierson, Samuel Gelston, Joseph Houston, Gilbert Tennent, Adam Boyd, Jonathan Dickinson, John Bradner, Alexander Hutchinson, Thomas Evans, Hugh Stevenson, William Tennent, Hugh Conn, George Gillespie, and John Willson, after proposing all the scruples that any of them had to make against any articles and expressions in the Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, have unanimously agreed in the solution of those scruples, and in declaring the said Confession and Catechisms to be the confession of their faith, excepting only some clauses in the twentieth and twenty-third chapters, concerning which clauses the Synod do unanimously declare, that they do not received those articles in any such sense as to suppose the civil magistrate hath a controlling power over Synods with respect to the exercise of their ministerial authority; or power to persecute any for their religion, or in any sense contrary to the Protestant succession to the throne of Great Britain.

"The Synod observing that unanimity, peace, and unity, which appeared in all their consultations and determinations relating to the affair of the Confession, did unanimously agree in giving thanks to God in solemn prayer and praises."--*Ibid*.

### **§ Passages of the Confession excepted to in the Adopting Act.**

[The following are the passages explained in the above act. Chap. 20, sec. 4, of certain offenders it is said] "they may be proceeded against by the censures of the Church, and by the power of the civil magistrate."

Chap. 23, sec. 3. "The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the Church; that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. for the better effecting whereof he hath power to call Synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God."

### **§ The Directory recommended.**

"A motion being made to know the Synod's judgment about the Directory, they gave their sense of the matter in the following words, viz. The Synod do unanimously acknowledge and declare, that they judge the Directory for worship, discipline, and government of the Church, commonly annexed to the Westminster Confession, to be agreeable in substance to the word of God, and founded thereupon; and therefore do earnestly recommend the same to all their members, to be by them observed as near as circumstances will allow, and Christian prudence direct."--*Minutes*, 1729, p. 95.



## 19<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterian Samuel Miller:

Let the candidate for admission unfold to the Presbytery before which he presents himself, all his doubts and scruples, with perfect frankness; opening his whole heart, as if on oath; and neither softening nor concealing anything. Let him cause them distinctly to understand, that if he subscribe the Confession of Faith, he must be understood to do it in consistency with the exceptions and explanations which he specifies. If the Presbytery, after this fair understanding, should be of the opinion, that the excepted points *were of little or no importance, and interfered with no article of faith*, and should be willing to receive his subscription in the usual way, he may proceed.

## B. The Present Context:

**June 12, 2003**

CHARLOTTE – The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America voted Wednesday to approve an amendment to its Book of Church Order defining the nature of adherence to its doctrinal standards by ministers and elders.

At its 2002 General Assembly, the PCA approved an amendment to the Book of Church Order that its framers believed would define the nature of subscription clearer. Defining subscription or theological adherence by ministers and elders to the Confession and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in America has been a matter of great debate for most of its history. Forty-five presbyteries approved the amendment, while 19 did not approve it, giving it the necessary two-thirds vote needed for passage. To complete the ratification process, the amendment also had to be approved by this meeting of the General Assembly.

The effect of the amendment will require ministers to state any differences with the PCA's confessional standards, to have the presbytery (regional court) determine whether the differences are allowable exceptions and to have the differences recorded in writing.

While only a majority vote was necessary for ratification, the amendment received a 66 percent vote of the commissioners with a vote of 821 to 545.

## The Motion that Passed:

### Amend BCO 21-4 to Specify Good Faith Subscription

**Whereas** the purity and unity of our church require her to establish that her officers sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Standards as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, and for those officers to declare if at any time they find themselves out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system (*BCO 21-5; WCF XXXI.2*);

**And, whereas** the purity and unity of the church also require that her leaders understand both the restrictions and allowances of her Standards that are derived from Scripture but, unlike it, are not the only infallible rule of faith and practice (*WCF I.8, 10; XX.2; XXXI.3; WLC # 3; BCO Preface II. 7*);

**And, whereas** there is a longstanding tradition within American Presbyterianism, including the PCA, that officers may in good faith take exception to certain particulars of the Westminster Standards, if such particular exceptions are not inimical (i.e. hostile or injurious) to the more comprehensive system of doctrine;

**And, whereas** the PCA's original Good-faith subscription position has served the church well, but recently been challenged by some who desire either a more Broad- or Strict-subscription position;

**And, whereas** the church must guard against a broad, "substance-of-doctrine" subscription approach, which has no definitive meaning and leaves to the candidate himself rather than to the wisdom of the presbytery to determine what areas of his disagreement with particular statements of the Constitution are inimical to the system of doctrine and what are allowable differences with the Westminster Standards;

**And, whereas** the assertion that the PCA was consciously founded as a Strict-subscriptionist Church in 1973 cannot be sustained (*Minutes of the Twenty-First General Assembly*, cf. pp. 89 and 149 with pp. 146 and 166-168); And, whereas the General Assembly of the PCA did not declare itself to be a Strict-subscriptionist Church in the joining and receiving process with the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod in 1982;

**And, whereas** attempts to change the PCA into a Broad- or Strict-subscriptionist Church are a departure from the original position of the PCA, and such attempts may bring discord and possibly division within the Church;

**And, whereas** the inclusion of a Good-faith subscription statement in our *Book of Church Order* is needed to state explicitly what has been the understanding and practice of the majority of the PCA from its beginning; **Therefore**, to clarify and support the original ordination standards of the PCA, \_\_\_\_\_Presbytery overtures the General Assembly to amend the *Book of Church Order* by inserting the paragraphs in bold below as new paragraphs of BCO 21-4 between the following sentences, as indicated:

"Whenever a Presbytery shall omit any of these parts, it shall always make a record of the reasons for such omissions and of the trial parts omitted.

[Insert new paragraphs (in bold below) here]

**While our Constitution does not require the candidate's affirmation of every statement and/or proposition of doctrine in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms, it is the right and responsibility of the Presbytery to determine if the candidate is out of accord with any of the fundamentals of these doctrinal standards and, as a consequence, may not be able in good faith sincerely to receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures (cf. BCO 21-5, Q. 2; 24-5, Q.2). Therefore, in examining a candidate for ordination the Presbytery shall inquire not only into the candidate's knowledge and views in the areas specified above, but also shall require the candidate to state the specific instances in which he may differ with the *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* in any of their statements and/or propositions. The court may grant an exception to any difference of doctrine only if in the court's judgment the candidate's declared difference is not out of accord with a fundamental of our system of doctrine because the difference is neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion**

"The Presbytery being fully satisfied of his qualifications for the sacred office...."

### III. A Compromise Between Two Positions:

1. Strict subscription means that no exceptions to the standards are allowed. Any exception renders the holder of said exception ineligible for ordination. On the positive side of strict subscription is the idea that everyone needs to be able to trust the other pastors that they believe and hold the same confession. On the negative side, the temptation is for the candidate to be less than perfectly honest.
2. Good faith subscription allows certain exceptions if they are not ruled by the Presbytery to be out of accord with the fundamentals of the system of doctrine. Good faith subscription means that a candidate declares every difference he has, and the Presbytery rules on each difference as to its nature. And then it is assumed that the candidate agrees with everything else. That is what is assumed in good faith. In the PCA, there are three possibilities for ruling on a difference:
  - i. it is a verbal or semantic difference only, and does not indicate a theological deviation from the standards;
  - ii. an exception (genuine theological difference) that does not strike at the vitals of religion;
  - iii. a difference that does strike at the vitals of religion (if it is ruled in this third category, the candidate may not be ordained).

T. David Gordon Describes the Issue and differences this way: (c.f. Addendum

The Westminster Confession of Faith says: The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. (1:10) Similarly, Westminster Confession of Faith 31:3 says: All synods or councils, since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both. The church, then, has a responsibility to confess the faith in a manner which recognizes her own fallibility in so confessing. It was the recognition of this twofold responsibility which caused the Protestant churches to permit candidates to record exceptions and/or scruples with the confessional standards.

Thus, an individual who takes exception to something which the church has declared need not, simply for this reason, be removed from the church or from the teaching office. If no exceptions or scruples are permitted, then, effectively, the church's declarations have indeed become a rule of faith, or practice, rather than a help in both. The church must determine how significant the exception is. Does the exception sufficiently undercut the church's responsibility to confess the truth such that the candidate in question cannot be granted the court's endorsement?

At the same time, if the court determines that the candidate is acceptable, this does not mean that the candidate's exception is now part of the church's teaching, as some erroneously think.

Two views are common in the more conservative reformed bodies today, and they may be accurately represented by illustration: [c.f. PCA "Good Faith Subscription" adopted after this article)

1. The first view distinguishes three categories of beliefs which the church recognizes.
  - a. There are those beliefs which the church endorses and propagates;
  - b. there are those beliefs which the church does not propagate, but which she tolerates;
  - c. and there are those beliefs which she has declared intolerable.
2. The second view distinguishes only two categories of beliefs:
  - a. those which the church propagates
  - b. and those which she declares intolerable.

For the second view, when the church approves a candidate's exceptions, those exceptions become, in some sense, part of the church's approved view. For the first view, those approved do not become part of the church's view; yet they are considered less harmful than heresy, and are tolerated in the sense that they are not, in and of themselves, ground for removal from the church or from the teaching office.

The picture could even be cut a little finer, because the church could assign to that second category two sub- categories: Beliefs which are tolerated and which can be taught; and beliefs which are tolerated but cannot be taught. In such a scenario, the church could permit an individual who professes a given belief to remain in the church, and to remain an officer in the church, but could require the officer not to teach the views in question.

Indeed, the picture could be qualified even further (though the readers will be spared another graphic), because a given court of the church could also elect to permit a man to teach a given exception, with the proviso that when doing so he would also clearly distinguish that view from the view of the church (This has always been the author's personal practice, even though Presbytery has not required it of him). That is, the court's tolerance of a given exception from the church's confession may be in degrees. It can be tolerated:

- if the one holding the view will not teach it (or will only teach it in discussions among other officers); or

- if the one holding the view will always teach the church's view in apposition to the exceptional view; or
- if it can be tolerated without any qualification.

#### **IV. BCO 21.5**

While our Constitution does not require the candidate's affirmation of every statement and/or proposition of doctrine in our *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms*, it is the right and responsibility of the Presbytery to determine if the candidate is out of accord with any of the fundamentals of these doctrinal standards and, as a consequence, may not be able in good faith sincerely to receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures (cf. BCO 21-5, Q.2; 24-6, Q.2).

Therefore, in examining a candidate for ordination, the Presbytery shall inquire not only into the candidate's knowledge and views in the areas specified above, but also shall require the candidate to state the specific instances in which he may differ with the *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* in any of their statements and/or propositions. The court may grant an exception to any difference of doctrine only if in the court's judgment the candidate's declared difference is not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine because the difference is neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion.

#### **Relevant Questions for TE/RE Ordination Regarding Subscription (c.f. BCO 21, 25)**

- 1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?**
- 2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will on your own initiative, make known to your Presbytery the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?**
- 3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of Biblical polity?**
- 4. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?**

## **II. Addendums:**

### **I. Addendum 1: The Church's Power: Its Relation to Subscription, by T. David Gordon PREMISE / Volume II, Number 1/ January 28, 1995 / Page 9**

This essay attempts to address the question of confessional subscription in light of one other reality: the nature of church power. Thus, the essay is very limited in scope. It does not intend to address the issue of confessional subscription comprehensively. Rather, it merely wishes to consider whether the issue of subscription might not be profitably addressed by considering the implications of the doctrine of the church's power. This essay assumes that the church has both power and responsibility to declare the doctrines and commandments of Christ (Mt. 28). It wishes to examine the issue of confessional subscription in light of three aspects of church power: the spiritual nature of church power, the fallibility of the exercise of church power, and the joint-several nature of church power.

#### **The Church's Power to Enforce: Spiritual, Not Temporal**

In 1 Corinthians 5, the church is commanded to hand the impenitent individual over to Satan, not to the civil authority. Following from this, the majority of the Presbyterian churches have refused to employ the civil authority's power to enforce ecclesiastical laws. The First Preliminary Principle in the PCA Book of Church Order follows that of earlier American Presbyterian churches in saying: No religious constitution should be supported by the civil power further than may be necessary for protection and security equal and common to all others. The Eighth Preliminary Principle states: Since ecclesiastical discipline derives its force only from the power and authority of Christ, the great Head of the Church Universal, it must be purely moral and spiritual in its nature (emphases mine). One implication of this doctrine of the spiritual nature of church power is this:

Persuasion is more consonant with the progress of God's Kingdom than coercion. Thus, if a candidate for the gospel ministry is not able conscientiously to affirm every aspect of the church's doctrine as his own, the court of the church should investigate whether the candidate's scruples are due to ignorance. The candidate may never have been exposed to the best arguments (or any arguments!) for the confessional view, since the confessional documents themselves do not present arguments for the conclusions found therein. Under such a situation, remanding for further study, and providing directions for such study, is a preferable option to merely rejecting the candidate. If the candidate is merely rejected, only two possibilities can occur.

First, the candidate, potentially useful to the church, is discouraged from candidacy and withdraws from pursuit of the ministry. If this takes place, the church has lost a potential laborer, who, had he been persuaded of the church's view, could have been profitable to the church.

Second, the candidate may simply find a Presbytery who will not scrutinize him on this point. In this case, the candidate remains unpersuaded of the church's view, and, therefore, incapable of promoting the church's view.

Thus, if we genuinely believe that the church's power is moral and spiritual, we believe it is important to present the arguments to the conscience as the seat of moral decision. Similarly, if her power is spiritual, then again it is wise to expose the candidate to truth, by which spiritual sanctification takes place. For both reasons, then, it is important for the examining presbytery to recognize that it has three options, not two: It may approve the candidate, disapprove the candidate, or remand the candidate for further study, requiring the candidate to readspecific works and to report on his interaction with the arguments presented therein.

#### **The Church's Power to Declare What is True: Not inerrant**

The Westminster Confession of Faith says: The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. (1:10) Similarly, Westminster Confession of Faith 31:3 says: All synods or councils, since the apostles' times, whether general

or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both. The church, then, has a responsibility to confess the faith in a manner which recognizes her own fallibility in so confessing. It was the recognition of this twofold responsibility which caused the Protestant churches to permit candidates to record exceptions and/or scruples with the confessional standards.

Thus, an individual who takes exception to something which the church has declared need not, simply for this reason, be removed from the church or from the teaching office. If no exceptions or scruples are permitted, then, effectively, the church's declarations have indeed become a rule of faith, or practice, rather than a help in both. The church must determine how significant the exception is. Does the exception sufficiently undercut the church's responsibility to confess the truth such that the candidate in question cannot be granted the court's endorsement?

At the same time, if the court determines that the candidate is acceptable, this does not mean that the candidate's exception is now part of the church's teaching, as some erroneously think. Two views are common in the more conservative reformed bodies today, and they may be accurately represented by illustration: [c.f. PCA "Good Faith Subscription" adopted after this article)

The first view distinguishes three categories of beliefs which the church recognizes. There are those beliefs which the church endorses and propagates; there are those beliefs which the church does not propagate, but which she tolerates; and there are those beliefs which she has declared intolerable. The second view distinguishes only two categories of beliefs: those which the church propagates and those which she declares intolerable. For the second view, when the church approves a candidate's exceptions, those exceptions become, in some sense, part of the church's approved view. For the first view, those approved do not become part of the church's view; yet they are considered less harmful than heresy, and are tolerated in the sense that they are not, in and of themselves, ground for removal from the church or from the teaching office.

The picture could even be cut a little finer, because the church could assign to that second category two sub- categories: Beliefs which are tolerated and which can be taught; and beliefs which are tolerated but cannot be taught. In such a scenario, the church could permit an individual who professes a given belief to remain in the church, and to remain an officer in the church, but could require the officer not to teach the views in question.

Indeed, the picture could be qualified even further (though the readers will be spared another graphic), because a given court of the church could also elect to permit a man to teach a given exception, with the proviso that when doing so he would also clearly distinguish that view from the view of the church (This has always been the author's personal practice, even though Presbytery has not required it of him). That is, the court's tolerance of a given exception from the church's confession may be in degrees. It can be tolerated:

- if the one holding the view will not teach it (or will only teach it in discussions among other officers); or
- if the one holding the view will always teach the church's view in apposition to the exceptional view; or
- if it can be tolerated without any qualification.

## **B. The Distinction Between Joint and Several Powers in the Church**

The confusion which exists regarding the Second View, above, is itself a reflection of the confusion regarding the twofold power of the church. The Scottish Second Book of Discipline in its very first page made a distinction which continues to appear in Presbyterian Books of Order and Government: the distinction between joint power and several power.[1] In the PCA, this distinction is articulated at BCO 3- 2:

Ecclesiastical power, which is wholly spiritual, is twofold. The officers exercise it sometimes severally, as in preaching the Gospel, administering the Sacraments, reprovng the erring, visiting the sick, and comforting the afflicted, which is the power of order; and they exercise it sometimes jointly in Church courts, after the form of judgment, which is the power of jurisdiction (emphases mine).[2]

The officers, in whose hand church power is effectively exercised, sometimes exercise that power severed from one another, acting as individuals; and sometimes they exercise power joined together in church courts, exercising authority over those under their jurisdiction. Thus, an individual minister teaches and preaches both privately and publicly, exercising the keys of the kingdom (calling people to faith and repentance) severally. His words are his.

The officers of the church assembled, however, frame, modify, and approve the church's confession, acting jointly. Acting jointly, the officers may determine that lewd and lascivious dancing is sin; while acting severally, a given minister might very well counsel a member of his flock that his (or her) dancing is indeed lewd and lascivious, and should cease. Such counsel is private counsel; it is church- power severally administered. If the individual does not heed the counsel, and a trial ensues, only at the end of the trial has the church acted jointly to determine the matter.

Those confused about this distinction between several and joint power believe that a minister's teaching and the confession of the church must always be the same. Thus, they either become plenary subscriptionists (requiring subscription to everything said in the church's confessional standards) or they become floating confessionalists (believing that every time a court approves a man with exceptions, this exception now becomes part of the church's confession).[3] Both views are wrong, and both are wrong because they fail to distinguish several and joint power.

Requiring plenary subscription effectively nullifies the church's profession that her standards may be modified. How can such standards be modified, if no one is permitted to office- holding in the church, except those who embrace the standards plenary? On the other hand, permitting a kind of floating confessionalism (the church professes what the confession says, plus everything that her officers may say in opposition to that confession) effectively nullifies the church's confession (because it cannot be found anywhere in writing, consisting as it would of that written document plus every view of every scruple- holding individual).

A better alternative is to recognize the distinction between joint power and several power. The church's confession is jointly determined. The PCA confesses only what she has jointly declared or approved. There may be within her individuals who respectfully disagree with portions of that confession. Disagreements, however, are not part of her confession. What such individuals say severally is not to be equated with or confused with what the church says jointly. Allow me to illustrate the practical consequences of this view by two examples.

As a teacher in a confessional church, I may very well be entitled to take exception to that confession in some areas. I am not entitled to teach those exceptions in any way that might imply that those exceptions were not exceptions. I may be rightly expected to know what the church's confession is, and I may be rightly expected to teach that confession, whenever called upon to explain the church's view. I therefore must, whenever called upon to explain my own personal (several) view, be prepared to make clear that my view on that point is not the church's view. If I do not do so, then I nullify, in practice, the church's several power in declaring the truth. In practice, I create a floating confession. If I do make the distinction clearly and explicitly, then the church's confession has been preserved intact, and my hearers are not deceived into thinking my views enjoy the endorsement of the church.

In a case of discipline, similarly, the distinction of joint and several power is very significant. What am I to do, if a judicial matter comes before me in an area wherein my views differ from the church's views? Acting jointly at that point, I have no liberty to enforce a decision contrary to the will of the church that ordained me. My only options, therefore, are two: I may request to be absented from serving on the case, on the ground that I do not wish to enforce a law I deem erroneous (with full knowledge that the court would have every right, if it so desired, to remove me from my office for failure to fulfil my duties), or I may adjudicate the case consistently with the law of the church. I have always chosen the latter approach. Any individual or lower court brought before a PCA tribunal has every right to expect the matter to be resolved by reference to the PCA's beliefs, not by my beliefs. My duty, in such a circumstance, is to determine whether the individual or court has complied with the standards of the church. If the individual or court has any interest in the perfectly arcane issue of whether they have complied with my standards, they may inquire further.

I believe this distinction satisfies two parties in our church who otherwise appear to be at logger-heads. To those who fear that the secondary standards would become de facto primary standards, the distinction elaborated above assures that this will not happen. Individuals may be permitted to serve as officers without implicitly declaring the church to have been infallible in its confession-making councils. To those who fear that every permitted exception effectively expands the church's confession or even nullifies it, my viewpoint safeguards against this entirely. Not one member of our congregation has ever been confused over what the PCA's position is where I respectfully disagree with it. Nor need anyone who has complied with our constitution ever fear that they will be found guilty in a judicial case because they have not satisfied my opinions. In judicial/joint business, I accept my duty to enforce the law and will of the church, even where I respectfully disagree with it.

II. **Addendum 2:** *The Regulative Principle Argument From Charity*, by T. David Gordon  
(1995 PREMISE)

As the subtitle indicates, it is my purpose in this brief essay to offer a different argument for the regulative principle of worship than is customarily offered. In doing this, there is no intention at all to suggest that the arguments normally advanced are incomplete or incorrect. To the contrary, totally apart from the considerations introduced here, the argument for the regulative principle contained in the Westminster standards and reflected by the adherents of those standards in Scotland, England, and America, is sufficient to warrant its observation by the Church. That argument maintains that God has, in scripture, revealed his zeal to direct his own worship. That argument is a mandate "from above," if you will, demonstrating that the true and living God himself, the object of worship, has revealed that he will be worshipped only in a manner consistent with his express command.

That argument is a sound argument, and an adequate argument to render us morally culpable if we fail to observe the principle. What I intend is not a refinement or correction of that argument in any way. Rather, I intend to offer a complementary argument for the same position, namely, that the elements of the public worship of the saints gathered on the Lord's Day must be received by divine command. The position argued will be the same, but the argument will focus its concern in a different, not a better, direction. What follows is an argument "from below," if you will. The traditional argument is an argument from above, which intends to demonstrate the compatibility of the regulative principle with our *love for God*. The following argument is an argument from below, which intends to demonstrate the compatibility of the regulative principle with our *love for our sisters and brothers in Christ*. The focus of that which follows is to demonstrate that the regulative principle of worship is the *only* principle which protects, honors, and advances the demands of charity as those demands are expressed in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8.

The Demands of Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8

I will not repeat here the exegetical arguments which have been advanced in the history of the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8 or Romans 14, but will, rather, refer the reader to the discussion of these texts by John Murray, "The Weak and the Strong," found in the fourth volume of his collected writings, and also in the twelfth volume of the *Westminster Theological Journal* (1950). I concur with Murray's understanding of these texts, and with the conclusion that charity requires us not to do anything which *induce another believer to act contrary to conscience*. That is, these two passages do not teach that we must *agree* with the scruples of another's conscience, nor even that we must *act* consistently with the scruples of another's conscience. Rather, the texts teach that we must not say or do anything which we know will *induce another to act inconsistently with conscience*.

The "wounding" which these passages talk about is the wounding of the conscience which occurs when an individual does something contrary to what he or she believes is right. Even if the scruples are improper scruples, that is, not mandated by revelation, we must still never encourage the violation of scruples held as a matter of conscience. Paul, in fact, refers to the believers in question as "weak" believers, because their understanding of the faith is such that they hold by conscience beliefs not required by revelation. He nevertheless argues that charity requires us not to offend the conscience of such sisters and brothers.

Implicit in Paul's arguments is the duty of the church *to instruct the weak*, so that the weak will overcome their weakness. That is, Paul does not consider these scruples to be appropriate, but inappropriate or "weak." In Paul's vocabulary, this term is normally employed to refer to that which is unredeemed, or characteristic of the unredeemed state. For example, he can refer to the "weak and beggarly elemental spirits" (Gal. 4.9) as those associated with the



time "when you did not know God." In his discussion of the grandeur of divine love, he describes it as that which God lavished upon us "while we were still weak" (Rom. 5.6), and follows this with parallel expressions, "while we were yet sinners," and "while we were enemies," (Rom. 5.8, 10). And when Paul uses the term regarding believers, it is always in a circumstance when he is discussing the yet-incomplete nature of redemption, as we await the return of Christ in the midst of a yet-cursed world. This is how he employs the term, for example, in Romans 8.26, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness," following a lengthy discussion (8.18-25) of "the sufferings of this present time" in contrast with "the glory that is to be revealed to us." Therefore, Paul does not consider the scruples of the "weak" to be scruples which are to be considered *acceptable* in and by the church, because they are scruples associated with a lack of familiarity with redemption. A person who is "weak" is a person who, in some particular way, is needful of a fuller enjoyment of the privileges, benefits, or duties of the redeemed state.

#### Wounding the Conscience and the Regulative Principle of Worship

The demands of charity regarding religious scruples require two things: That we not in any way encourage an individual to act contrary to conscience; and that we instruct those who are "weak," so that their conscience would be in greater conformity to the privileges and duties of being redeemed. These demands must be related to the question of public worship.

First, it is unavoidably the case that *the liturgy of public worship binds the conscience*. That is, people may be free to follow the scruples of their own consciences when engaged in private worship, but when engaged in corporate worship, people either follow and observe a common liturgy (for the day and particular circumstance; we are not discussing a liturgy in a formal or binding sense upon all congregations), or chaos will result. That is, if the congregation is invited to sing hymn 205, and one individual's conscience inspires him to sing 206, bedlam results. If the worship is to be corporate, as opposed to private, it must be unified. Thus, if the liturgy demands something, the individual believer has only one of two options: participate or do not participate. If one cannot participate, on grounds of conscience, one cannot participate in the corporate worship of God. Thus, the framers of the liturgy must recognize that what they *include* in the liturgy may *exclude* individuals from corporate participation. What complicates the matter more, is that corporate worship is *itself* required of believers. Thus, the individual believer, whose conscience forbids participation in a particular aspect of the liturgy, is placed in a catch-22 situation wherein *refusal* to participate violates the divine mandate to participate in corporate worship, and *willingness* to participate in the particular matter violates the conscience.

To illustrate this, let us suppose an admittedly ridiculous hypothetical situation, wherein *not a single element* of a particular service of worship is required by scripture. Let us suppose, for instance, that the bulletin of a particular service includes three items: dancing a jig, shaking hands with a neighbor, and eating grape jelly. The pious believer, having come to church that Sunday out of obedience to God's command that his people worship him in public assembly, attends the assembly, but cannot participate, because conscience forbids the individual to dance, shake hands, and eat grape jelly as elements of corporate worship. In such a circumstance, the church's liturgy *forces* the individual to wound the conscience, and only permits the individual to select *in what manner* to wound the conscience; by disobedience to the command to worship publicly, or by disobedience to the commands as to the elements of public worship. If the framers of the liturgy *know* that there is an individual who believes that dancing a jig is a violation of what one may do in public worship, they knowingly cause such an individual to wound the conscience, thus violating the demands of charity as expressed in 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14.

In a less extreme example, let us suppose a better liturgy, in which there are prayers, the Word read and preached, and the jig. In this case, the individual participates in the prayers and the ministry of the Word, but is excluded, by conscience, from participating in the jig. This seems like an acceptable situation, because the individual obeys the command to assemble for corporate worship, and actually participates in at least portions of that worship. However, the problem even here is that the principle of corporate worship itself is offended, if different members of the congregation are opting in and out of the worship service as it proceeds. We cannot increase and enhance the amount of corporate participation in worship if we include elements which we know exclude individuals from participation.

One goal of the framers of liturgies for public worship therefore, is *not to include elements which exclude individuals* from participation. However, it may be argued, are the framers of public liturgies responsible to be sensitive to an infinite variety of scruples? If there is an individual who has a scruple about prayer, do we omit

prayer from the service? Would we exclude the ministration of the Word or the Sacrament, in order to satisfy a scruple? If we were to do so, we would satisfy one divine command (to not wound a conscience) at the expense of another (to pray in public assemblies), which requires those elements as regular elements of worship. That is, if the *only* guideline in the preparation of liturgies were the known scruples of the congregation, we would have only a negative guide, and one which, hypothetically, would require that we do nothing.

It is therefore hypothetically possible that there will be occasions when the Church *will* knowingly wound a conscience, out of obedience to the express requirement of scripture that certain elements are required in public worship. Hypothetically, if not actually, we would have to determine which is the higher principle: obedience to the express revelation of God regarding public worship, or obedience to the revelation of God regarding wounding a conscience. The issue for the framers of public liturgies then is twofold: First, what elements are we so sure we are mandated to do (higher principle) that we will do them even if it means violating a conscience (lower principle); and Second, what will we do with those whose consciences are violated in the process?

#### First issue

Since we do not wish to violate any requirement of scripture, we would never wound an individual's conscience *if it is avoidable* without being expressly disobedient to Christ, the Church's head. If the jig wounds a conscience, and we consider therefore removing the jig, we must ask ourselves: does removing the jig constitute disobedience to Christ? If Christ positively *requires* the jig (higher principle), then we *must* jig, even if it wounds someone's conscience (lower principle). But if, in our search of the Bible, we find that Christ in fact nowhere *requires* the jig (higher principle silent), *charity* demands (lower principle *not* silent) that we not require it of the individual whose conscience is wounded by it. Thus, if there are any elements of our liturgical service which are *known* to wound the conscience of any individual (lower principle), we *may not* include those elements unless there is express divine mandate (higher principle).

Of course, this charitable concern for conscience would mean in practice, that if there is any individual in the congregation who holds to the regulative principle, then *charity* requires the observation of the regulative principle in that church. That is, even if the regulative principle were not adopted on the grounds of *principle* (all of the other arguments to which I referred in my opening paragraph), it would be adopted in *that* congregation on the grounds of *charity*.

#### Second issue

In the hypothetical situation where there were an individual who objected to prayer, the Church would pray nevertheless, out of obedience to the express requirement of scripture. However, it would know that this practice was offending the (extremely weak) conscience of a particular member. What would charity require in this instance? Charity would require a vigorous attempt, through instruction, prayer, and personal visitation, to bring this individual's conscience into conformity with the teachings of scripture. How could we knowingly permit a person to remain weak, and not perceive that as being uncharitable?

Therefore, those who do not believe in the regulative principle of worship, who know there are members of their congregation who *do* believe it, are bound by the demands of charity to attempt to demonstrate why the regulative principle violates the teachings of the Bible. Anything less is to leave the individuals who believe in the regulative principle in their state of alleged weakness. Only after they have convinced all known holders of the regulative principle of its alleged non-biblical character may they re-introduce into their public liturgies other elements. Charity permits no other course.

#### Concluding observations

The author is convinced that the regulative principle and the principle of charity are, in fact, not competing principles, and that God has not put us in a catch-22 moral bind. He believes that this moral bind is produced by those who do not, on the grounds of principle, adopt the regulative principle. Their failure to adopt this principle puts them in a moral bind even with regard to the moral principle of charity, with its attendant demands regarding the wounding of consciences. Failure to observe the demands of God's revelation in one area make it difficult to obey the demands of his revelation in another.

It is hoped, therefore, that the reader, if not currently convinced of the regulative principle, would be led by this discussion to reconsider its merits. It is equally hoped that the reader will at least, for the sake of the demands of charity, not disenfranchise from corporate worship those who *do* believe in the regulative principle by including in corporate worship things which are not expressly commanded by God.

Prayers (spoken or sung), the Word read and preached, the Sacraments, and collections for the saints, are elements indisputably and universally recognized as appropriate elements of corporate worship. Introducing other elements, thereby requiring their observation by those present, introduces the offense of wounding the consciences of those who do not recognize their propriety. For the sake of charity, if not that of principled commitment to the regulative principle of worship, the author appeals to officers in the church not to introduce such offenses.

<sup>1</sup> Cyprian, *Treatise 1, On the Unity of the Church*. (A.D 250)

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Epistle of John* 1.2.

<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37: 48.

## BCO Study Guide: Preface

1. Who is the King and Head of the Church?
2. How does He function as such?
3. Where did the Church receive its system of government?
4. Who rules the conscience?
5. What responsibility is incumbent upon the local church with respect to church membership?
6. What documents make up the constitution of the PCA?
7. What are the three parts of the BCO?

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<sup>i</sup> Cyprian, *Treatise 1, On the Unity of the Church*. (A.D 250)

<sup>ii</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Epistle of John* 1.2.

<sup>iii</sup> John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37: 48.