

# **IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH**

**A QUEST FOR THE BIBLICAL FORM OF WORSHIP**

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**A Quest For The Biblical Form Of Worship**

**Boon-Sing Poh**



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This book is dedicated to  
Weng-Keong Ho  
a faithful elder of our church,  
and his dear wife Yuet Kuan,  
for their support in the ministry  
over the years.



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# PREFACE

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The substance of this book began as talks given at the Reformed Ministers' Conference held in Kuala Lumpur in 2009. It has evolved into its present form after being taught in our church as well as in the church leaders' seminars in Hong Kong, Myanmar, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. The busyness of ministry has prevented this book from seeing the light of day until now. It is with great thankfulness and a sense of relief that this book is released.

The 'worship war' of recent years has not seen a retreat of Contemporary Worship. Instead, more churches are succumbing to its influence. The focus of the controversy has been on the music primarily, and secondarily on the songs, of Contemporary Worship. At the beginning, Contemporary Worship was seen only among the Charismatic churches. It has now spread to churches that are otherwise non-Charismatic. This is believed to be due to the fact that many churches unwittingly hold to the Normative Principle of Worship, which allows for the adoption of anything not forbidden by Scripture. It seems necessary, therefore, to consider the wider subject of worship instead of focusing on the elements of songs and music in worship.

Believing in divine sovereignty, and the sole authority of Scripture, it is expected that this book will contribute towards strengthening the arms of those who desire to be faithful to God. If some churches that have gone astray in worship are restored to the biblical position, it will be reason for double joy. May all who read this

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book share the writer's desire to honour God alone – "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth (Psalm 115:1)."

Boon-Sing Poh,  
Kuala Lumpur, October 2020.

# One

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## INTRODUCTION

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**W**orship is a key component of the life of the church and of the individual Christian. Lack of clarity on worship will affect both. The differences among Christians on this issue have caused confusion and perplexity in many. The ‘worship war’<sup>1</sup> over this subject that started in 1980’s has not abated. Our purpose here is not to join in the fray of this ‘war’ but to provide positive help on a subject so indispensable to the Christian faith. While the controversy over worship has focused mainly on music, and to a lesser extent on the Regulative Principle of worship, our scope encompasses public worship in church, and extending from there to other areas of the life of the church and the individual Christian. We begin with the Reformation.

### 1.1 A Sketch Of Church History

In Joshua 4:1-7 we read of the children of Israel crossing the river Jordan for the first time after 40 years of wilderness wandering. It was a historic occasion, showing forth God’s faithfulness, power, and mercy. Each of the twelve tribes carried a stone from the riverbed and set them up at Gilgal "for a memorial to the children of Israel forever". We learn from this incident to remember important events in the history of the church. From such events there are lessons to be

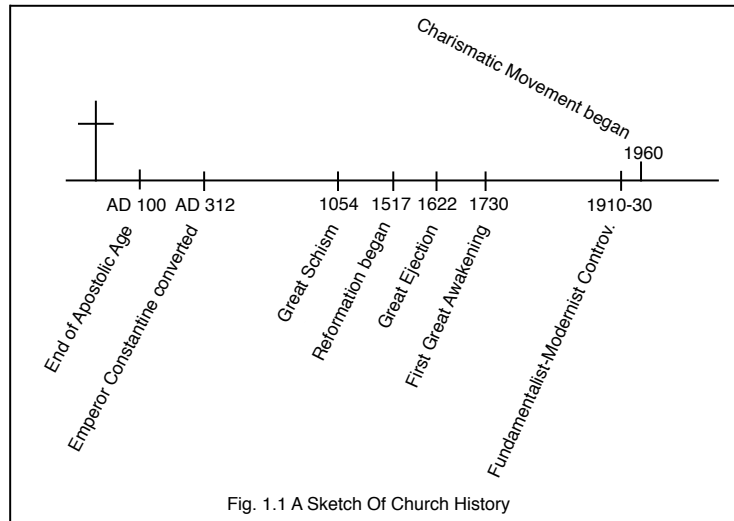
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<sup>1</sup> In this book, the singular ‘war’ is used instead of the plural found in the literature for the reason that, rightly speaking, it is one war consisting of many battles.

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learned, examples to be followed, and mistakes to be avoided. The events of the past help us to understand our present situation and provide guidance to us for the future.



From the sketch of church history above, we note that the two hundred years after the apostles was a period when the church was troubled by persecution from without and heresies from within. Heretical teachings, mainly concerning the doctrine of the Godhead, and especially on the person of Jesus Christ, appeared during this period. There was intermittent persecution of the Christians in the Roman Empire between the Great Fire of Rome (AD 64) and the Edict of Milan (AD 313). Emperor Nero used the fire in Rome as an excuse to persecute the Christians. Emperors Constantine and Licinius jointly issued the decree of Milan to allow for religious tolerance in the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was divided into East and West for political and administrative reasons, leading to rivalry between the Roman Church in the West and the Orthodox Churches in the East. The Great Schism of 1054 occurred in which the Eastern Orthodox Churches excommunicated the Roman Catholic Church, and the latter in turn excommunicated the Eastern churches. The dissenting groups which opposed the sacral churches, viz. the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, were suppressed and

driven underground.

Throughout the Medieval age, covering over a thousand years up to the Reformation, the sacral churches began to go astray in doctrine and in practice. Errors of various kinds crept in, or were deliberately introduced – including the doctrine of salvation by works, the practice of infant sprinkling, a hierarchical form of church government, rituals in worship, etc. Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic monk, was providentially used by God to trigger off the Reformation on 31 October, 1517. John Calvin, a Roman Catholic studying law in France, was converted and avoided potential persecution by fleeing to Switzerland. He systematised the teaching of the Reformation by teaching and writing while based in Geneva. The Reformation spread from Continental Europe to the British Isles. John Knox, who learned Reformed teaching from John Calvin in Geneva, introduced the fire of the Reformation to Scotland. The Church of England broke away from the Roman Catholic Church when King Henry VIII was forbidden by the Pope to divorce his wife and to remarry another woman. The ministers in the Church of England attempted to reform the church from within, until 1662 when some two thousand of them were ejected for refusing to comply to the Book of Common Prayer. The period of the Reformation covers roughly the years 1500 to 1600. This was followed by the Puritan age which covers roughly the years 1600 to 1700.

The First Great Awakening occurred around 1730 when George Whitefield and John Wesley preached in Britain and Jonathan Edwards preached in America. The age of modern missions began when William Carey and others were sent as missionaries to India in 1793. The emphasis on evangelism and missions was accompanied by zeal in social reforms. Modernism began to agitate the churches in the last quarter of the 19th century. C. H. Spurgeon contended against it in the Downgrade Controversy. The Modernists questioned the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible and advocated the use of scientific approaches to determine the authenticity of the text of Scripture. The Old Evangelicals joined forces as Fundamentalists and contended against the Modernists in the years 1910-1930. Through a series of books called 'The Fundamentals' which were disseminated widely, the advance of Modernism was checked. Sadly, the 'Fundamentalists' split into three groups after 1930 – the Fundamentalists (the term now taking on a narrower meaning), the Neo-Evangelicals, and the Reformed. A fourth group arose, viz. the Pen-

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tecostals, which claimed the restoration of the extraordinary officers of the church and the sign gifts associated with them. A Realignment took place from the 1930's which continues to this day, in which individuals crossed over from one group to another as their persuasions changed.

Starting around 1960, Pentecostal teaching and practice began to influence other denominations, developing into the Charismatic movement. At the same time, a revived interest in Reformed theology took place. In the area of worship, the Charismatic movement emphasises freedom from tradition and the adoption of a progressive approach to suit the times. The Reformed movement emphasises faithfulness to Scripture and the value of the Confessions of Faith that arose from the Reformation. The two styles of worship stand in stark contrast to one another, and have been called by the names of Contemporary Worship and Traditional Worship. Underlying the styles of worship are the principles of worship which may be called the Progressive Principle and the Regulative Principle, respectively. Those who hold, either knowingly or unknowingly, to another principle called the Normative Principle would attempt to remain neutral in this controversy, with some tending more in the direction of Traditional Worship while others tending in the direction of Contemporary Worship.

### 1.2 The Reformation

The Reformation of the sixteenth century formed a watershed in the history of the Christian faith. Post Pentecost, it was the greatest revival wrought by the Spirit of God. It was the mother of all subsequent revivals – leaving beneficial results that continue to be seen today. At the dawn of the Reformation, key individuals preached, translated the Bible to the vernacular languages, and died for the faith. They included John Wycliff (1320-1384), John Huss (1369-1415), and William Tyndale (1494-1536). Martin Luther (1483-1546) was providentially used by God to trigger off the Reformation on 31 October 1517. John Calvin (1509-1564) and other Reformers were used by God to articulate and systematise the theology of the Reformation, and to establish newly founded churches. The Evangelical Anabaptists acted as counterpoise to the Magisterial Reformers, sharpening one another in their attempts to recover biblical truth and



practice (Estep, 1986). Fundamental teachings of the Bible had been suppressed by the human traditions, rituals, and superstition of Medieval Christianity for over a thousand years before the Reformation. The sole authority of Scripture in doctrine and practice was recovered. The burning of incense was discontinued. The Latin chants in church were replaced by psalm-singing in the vernacular languages. Pictures of Mary and the apostles were removed. The preaching of God's word occupied central place in the life of the church.

The second generation of Reformers in the Netherlands, Britain, and America – generally known as the Puritans – refined and applied biblical teaching to worship, church government, and the Christian life. With the recovery of these doctrines, the Reformed churches in continental Europe adopted the Three Forms of Unity – consisting of the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism – to express their faith. Those in Britain opposed the unbiblical practices and human traditions carried over from the Roman Catholic Church into the Anglican Church – such as the wearing of surplices, the sign of the cross during prayer, and kneeling to receive the communion elements. Due to their inability from conscience to submit to these requirements, nearly two thousand ministers were ejected from the Anglican Church in 1662. They joined the Separatists outside the state church, thus strengthening the cause of Non-conformity. This has been called the Great Ejection. The English Civil War began in 1642 and lasted until 1646. In the period of Presbyterian ascendancy, the Westminster Assembly met in 1643 to draw up a confession of faith for England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. The Westminster Confession was completed in 1646, and published in 1647. Appended to it was the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, the Directory for the Public Worship of God, and the Form of Presbyterian Church Government.

The attempt to establish a new national church did not materialise (Heatherington, 1853:135-199). The Church of England did not adopt the Westminster Confession but reverted to its own Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith. The Westminster Confession was adopted by the Scottish Presbyterians, together with the Presbyterian Form of Church Government and the Directory for the Public Worship of God, apart from the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism. In other words, the church government and worship spelled out in the Westminster Confession was elaborated and reinforced with the other two documents, while the doctrine

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of the Confession was reinforced by the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. In 1658, during the period of Independent ascendancy, the Congregationalists (or Independents) adopted the Westminster Confession but left out Chapter 30 on Church Censures and Chapter 31 on Synods and Councils, calling their amended Confession the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order. A chapter was added to the Savoy Declaration, viz. Chapter 20 on the Gospel and Its Influence, while a separate document called the Savoy Platform of Church Polity was appended to define their form of church government. The Particular Baptists adopted the Savoy Declaration of 1658, with minor amendments, which became known as the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. In Chapter 26 of the Baptist Confession, on the Church, was incorporated much of the substance of the Savoy Platform, with amendments made to suit their view of church government – which was basically the same as that of the Congregationalists, infant baptism excepted (Poh, 1995, 2013; Bingham, 2019).

### 1.3 An Unfinished Task

The Reformation made considerable progress in the recovery of doctrine, expressed by the five "sola's" of the Reformation – *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *solus Christus*, and *solus Deo gloria*. The Puritans expounded on these themes and applied them to church and personal life. The emphasis on the sovereignty of God, the centrality of the local church, the primacy of God's word, expository preaching, and personal sanctification became the hallmark of Puritan theology. Indeed, the literature arising from the Puritan age has proved to be a rich resource for the church today – with much awaiting to be explored (Beeke and Pederson, 2006).

The Puritans were divided over church government. A handful of Independents in the Westminster Assembly, known as the Dissenting Brethren, were not in agreement with the Presbyterian form of church government. Although a minority in the Assembly, they shared the same view of church government with a large number of Congregationalists and Particular Baptists who were not represented. Among the Presbyterians, there was disagreement over the nature of the office of ruling elders. This unsettled issue was to surface again in the 19th century affecting both the Presbyterians (Poh, 2017:138-140) and the Baptists (Poh, 2013:256-260). Today, the issue of the

eldership is still unsettled among some Presbyterians and Reformed Baptists.

From this brief account, it can be seen that the Puritan age did not elucidate the form of church government to everyone's satisfaction. In the subsequent generation, it became clear that there were three recognisable forms of church government held by the various groupings of churches, viz. Episcopacy (or Prelacy), Presbyterianism, and Independency (or Congregationalism). This writer has shown that it would have helped everyone in their discussion on church government if four forms of church government had been countenanced from the beginning, viz. Episcopacy (or Prelacy), Presbyterianism, Independency, and Congregationalism (Poh, 1995, 2013). In the Puritan age, Independency was also known as Congregationalism, often mentioned with the added remark or qualification that there were the 'extreme Congregationalists' on the periphery of the Independents. In reality, the 'extreme Congregationalists' were the forebears of those who today hold to democratic Congregationalism, which is quite distinct from Independency.

While there was disagreement over the form of church government, the Puritans were generally agreed on the principles of worship as expressed in the Westminster Confession. The Savoy Declaration and the 1689 Confession accepted every article of the chapter on worship, almost word for word. The Scottish Presbyterians adopted the Directory for the Public Worship of God as well, not so much to supplement what was already spelled out in the Westminster Confession, but to elaborate on how those principles of worship were to be implemented. It had the effect of reinforcing what was already taught in the unamended Westminster Confession. It is to be remembered that the articles on church censures (Chapter 30) and on Synods and Councils (Chapter 31) were left out in the Savoy documents and from the 1689 Baptist Confession. The paedobaptist Independents and the Particular Baptists could not accept these two chapters which spelled out the the Presbyterian form of church government. The Nonconformist Puritans were in agreement on the system of worship of the Westminster Confession, but not on its system of church government. (It is debatable whether the conforming Puritans who remained in the Church of England were truly 'Puritans'.) Following John Calvin, the Puritans held to the Regulative Principle of worship while the Church of England held to the Normative Principle of Martin Luther (Reisinger and Allen, 2001:25-32).

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The Regulative Principle, as commonly understood, may be stated as follows: In the public worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture must be obeyed while whatever is not taught in Scripture must be rejected. The Normative Principle teaches that in the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture must be obeyed while whatever is not forbidden by Scripture is allowable.

The common adherence to the Regulative Principle did not mean that all the churches of the Reformation and the Puritan age were worshipping in an identical way. There were differences between them – in the order of service, whether hymns should be sung with the Psalms, whether musical instruments could accompany the singing, etc. However, their adherence to the Regulative Principle resulted in a style of worship that bore a certain family resemblance quite distinct from those who held to the Normative Principle. Furthermore, it should be noted that various extreme and heretical sects existed during the Reformation and the Puritan age – including a section of the Anabaptists, the Levellers, the Ranters, the Seekers, the Quakers, the Fifth Monarchists, the Seventh-Day Baptists, and the Socinians (Poh, 2013: Chap. 3). Their unorthodox beliefs meant that they worshipped in ways quite contrary to those who held to the Regulative Principle and the Normative Principle.

In Germany, five thousand followers of Thomas Muntzer – who claimed the ability to receive direct revelation from the Holy Spirit in the form of visions, dreams, ecstatic utterances, or inspired exegesis – were annihilated by government forces for rebellion (Estep, 1986:140-146). The Socinians were active in Poland and in Britain. They rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, of the divinity of Christ, and the substitutionary view of the atonement. They held to a rationalistic understanding of the Bible. The Quakers claimed the necessity of the inner light while rejecting the ordinances as dead forms. They opposed the singing of Psalms and hymns in their meetings, believing that it interfered with the receiving of the inner light while waiting in silence. The Ranters denied the authority of churches, of Scripture, and of the moral law. They believed in Pantheism, that God is in every creature, and that a believer is free from all traditional restraints. The Seekers believed that baptism should be carried out in the name of Christ alone, basing their argument on Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5, and Romans 6:3. The Seventh-Day Baptists saw Sunday worship as a great obstacle for the conversion of the Jews. This is a brief and incomplete description of the beliefs of the various deviant

groups, which is sufficient to show that their practice of worship fell into a category of its own, different from those who held to the Regulative Principle, and the Normative Principle, and from the worship of the Orthodox churches.

The Orthodox churches – including the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Eastern Orthodox Churches such as the Egyptian Coptic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Greek Orthodox Church – hold to the view that worship must follow Scripture and the sacred tradition of the church. The sacred tradition consists of the supposed oral teaching of the Lord and His apostles, together with the authoritative teaching of the ‘Magisterium’ of the church, which is made up of the Pope and the bishops. Scripture may be correctly interpreted only according to the sacred tradition of the church. This contrasts with the Protestant view that Scripture alone is the authority in all matters of faith and practice, and it may be understood by the individual Christian with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, guided by teachers of the church. The worship in Orthodox churches includes rites and rituals that were rejected by the churches of the Reformation. The Orthodox (spelled with capital ‘O’) churches were also unorthodox in their doctrine of salvation, in which justification is not clearly distinguished from sanctification. In particular, the soteriology of the Roman Catholic Church amounts to salvation by works instead of "by grace through faith in Christ alone".

As with church government, we may ask, "Is there a *jus divinum* (divinely ordained) form of worship – a system of worship that is revealed in the Scripture?" If the Bible is the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice, if it is sufficient and perspicuous (that is, capable of being clearly understood), there is a divinely ordained form of worship. It cannot be that there is no divinely ordained form of worship when there is a divinely ordained form of church government. The Regulative Principle is the application of the sole authority of Scripture to both worship and church government (1689 Confession:1:6). My thesis is that there is a divinely ordained form of worship taught in the Scripture which all New Testament churches must strive to uncover and adopt. At this point, the question may be raised – How did it come about that the biblical form of worship had not been pursued as was the case with church government? The Puritans, such as John Owen, wrote extensively on the *jus divinum* form of church government, but not on the *jus divinum* form of worship.

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The answer, I believe, is due to several factors. Firstly, the churches of the Reformation had just emerged from over a thousand years of Medieval darkness. The colossal weight of human traditions, rites and rituals, and superstition had just been overcome. The new churches of the Reformation needed time to adjust and orient themselves according to the direction of Scripture. It cannot be expected that the infant churches could get everything right overnight. As it turned out, the Reformation, followed by the Puritan age, had succeeded in recovering much ground. It is conceivable that the attention of the church would have turned to worship, following the pursuit of church government, if the spirit of the Reformation had stayed its course. Worship was debated only in its relation to the state and to liberty of conscience (e.g. Owen, Vol. 13:462-506). The Presbyterians and the Independents settled on the view of worship spelt out in the Westminster Confession, in which the Regulative Principle is described but not defined, and exclusive psalm-singing is upheld. The Particular Baptists included the singing of "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" in the 1689 Confession, while debating on the propriety of singing uninspired hymns. The debate turned into acrimonious controversy in the 1690's, until stopped by the General Assembly of 1692 (Brooks, 2006). Providence, however, steered the churches into another direction – which constitute the second reason why worship was not pursued.

The second reason is that differences within the new churches of the Reformation not only had the effect of "iron sharpening iron" on some areas of truth, but also that of narrowing the vision to see more of the trees rather than the wood. As truth was elucidated in some areas, other areas were overlooked. Personal sanctification was emphasised at the expense of social concern; the sovereignty of God was emphasised at the expense of evangelism and church planting; and the biblical form of church government was debated at the expense of the form of worship. There were notable exceptions, but the general trend was noticeable. It is to be noted that the Independents and the Particular Baptists added a chapter (Chapter 20) on "The Gospel and Its Influence" to their Confessions. It took the revivals of the 18th century to turn the attention of the churches to these neglected areas. Sadly, the pendulum swung too far the other way. The emphasis on social concern resulted in a dilution of the gospel message; co-operation in missions led to a blurring of distinctiveness in doctrine; the pursuit of ecumenical fellowship led to a watering

down of doctrinal precision (Brown, 1986:115-141). Debates over the biblical form of church government ceased as this was contrary to the spirit of the time, thus giving no opportunity for debates over the form of worship to see the light of day.

Thirdly, the deviant groups were largely suppressed by the civil authorities during the Puritan age so that they did not constitute too much of a problem to the other churches. The leaders of the Levellers who criticised the government were put in prison in 1648. When the Fifth Monarchists were suppressed by force in 1661, the government moved against the "anabaptists, quakers and other sectaries", warning them not to leave their homes for "any spiritual exercise, or serving God after their own way" except in the parish church (Underhill, 1846:313). The Puritans, despite the ebb and flow in their fortunes, were within the fold of mainstream orthodoxy. They did not have to be too concerned about the unorthodox groups, debating only the matters that differed among themselves. Worship was not one of these at that time.

Other reasons for the neglect of discussion on the form of worship may be cited or proposed, e.g. political turmoil, persecution of the dissenters, distraction by doctrinal aberrations, exhaustion from inter-denominational and intra-denominational debates, etc. Fast forward down the centuries from the Reformation to the present, we can see that neglect of so crucial a subject has meant that many remained ignorant of the biblical teaching on worship. The tension arising from differences on worship could only be contained or ignored for that long, until the 'worship war' erupted in the 1980's. The expected (or was it unexpected?) eruption had its seed in the 1960's – with the rise of the Charismatic movement on the one hand, and the renewed interest in the Reformed faith on the other. The two opposing systems of theology are bound to clash over worship. Conservative Evangelicals would stand on the side of the Reformed to uphold traditional worship while others are swayed to adopt the worship style of the Charismatics.

#### 1.4 The 'Worship War'

The Charismatic movement is characterised by subjectivism, the practise of the sign gifts, and the adoption of the uninhibited (many would describe it as worldly) worship style which today is gener-

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ally known as Contemporary Worship. The origin of Contemporary Worship has been traced to the 'Jesus people' – hippies who turned to Christ in California, in the 1960's (Blanchard et. al., 1983:12-13; Frame, 1997:5; Masters, 2002:11-12). As the 'Jesus people' faded away in the 1980's, the influence of the Charismatic movement gained momentum, winning over churches of various denominations to the practice of the sign gifts and the adoption of Contemporary Worship. While some Reformed and conservative Evangelicals sounded forth warnings against the Charismatic movement (e.g. Masters, 1982, 1988; MacArthur, 1993), others issued warnings against the rock music, dancing, and entertainment adopted in many Charismatic circles (e.g. Blanchard et. al., 1983). The music of Contemporary Worship soon broaden to include the pop-style, while retaining the use of the electric guitar, the drum-set, and other musical instruments, prompting more debates (e.g. Dawn, 1995).

Contemporary Worship began to include both spontaneous and choreographed dancing. The short choruses sung repetitiously in earlier years began to include longer gospel songs so that today Contemporary Worship can boast in a repertoire of songs which continues to grow in numbers. The Seventh-Day Adventist, Alain Coralie, has written an excellent article analysing the adverse effects of the Contemporary Worship movement on worship (Coralie, 2008). Douglas Bachorik and Ryan Weberg, have written a helpful three-parts article on the 'soft' Contemporary Worship songs of the pop-cum-folk style (Bachorik and Weberg, 2012). The 'worship war' on the front of rock music has not abated, however. John Makujina has taken "Another Look at the Contemporary Christian Music Debate" in his book "Measuring the Music", showing that the music of Contemporary Worship has its origin in the depraved culture of secular rock music, and shares with it similar worldly, anti-Christian, characteristics (Makujina, 2016).

The critics of Contemporary Worship have generally not distinguished the songs from the music. The music is shown to have its origin in, and share the same characteristics as, secular rock and punk music. The songs are frowned upon for their doctrinal shallowness. As better songs are written, and the pop-style of music is adopted, more and more Evangelical churches have succumbed to Contemporary Worship. A strong advocate of Contemporary Worship is John Frame (Frame, 1996, 1997) whose Presbyterian church adopts Contemporary Worship songs – leaving out rock music and



the more obviously banal choruses. Frame professes himself to be an enthusiastic believer in the Westminster standards but puts forward an understanding of the Regulative Principle different from how it is traditionally understood, at the same time defending the 'soft' songs of Contemporary Worship. Not surprisingly, he triggered off a series of 'worship battles' on the front of the Regulative Principle (Smith, 2005). A positive contribution on the Regulative Principle of worship is presented by Ernest Reisinger and Matthew Allen. It is marred by approvingly quoting Frame a number of times, when Frame does not hold to the same view on the Regulative Principle advocated in the book (Reisinger and Allen, 2001).

While it is necessary to expose the errors of Contemporary Worship and warn of the danger of adopting its songs and music indiscriminately, there also is a need to put forward positively the principles that should govern church music. Calvin Johansson puts forward a biblical view of worship music contrasting it with the music of entertainment in Contemporary Worship (Johansson, 1998). The music and lyrics of Contemporary Worship songs are shown to fall short of biblical principles. Paul Jones similarly interacts with Contemporary Worship by positively presenting worship music that is regulated by biblical principles (Jones, 2006). Scott Aniol also presents his take on the biblical principles that should govern the choice and composition of hymns and worship music (Aniol, 2009). In another book, Aniol challenges the idea of cultural neutrality often relied upon by advocates of Contemporary Worship, followed by a presentation of biblical worship in the redemptive plan of God (Aniol, 2015). Marva Dawn discusses the broader issues of worship and culture and proposes criteria for the adoption of elements that nurture worship and the Christian life (Dawn, 1995). A helpful compendium on worship from a Reformed perspective appeared in 2003 (Ryken, Thomas and Duncan III, 2003). Peter Masters's "Worship or Entertainment?" (a revision of the earlier "Worship in the Melting Pot") helpfully focuses on key principles of worship breached by the Contemporary Worship movement while putting forth a biblical order of service (Masters, 2020, 2002). David De Bruyn provides guidelines to construct a biblical order of service (De Bruyn, 2015). Scott Meadows expounds on a number of Bible passages to draw out pastoral lessons on worship (Meadows, 2019). Masters, De Bruyn, and Meadows write as practising pastors rather than armchair theologians.

### 1.5 A Biblical Form Of Worship

Worship, by its very essence, involves two parties – God and His people. God is the **Object** of worship, while His people are the **subjects** who worship Him. As Creator, the right to demand and prescribe worship belongs to Him (Jer. 10:7; Mark 12:33; Rev. 14:7). His will is made known to us in the Scripture. How we understand and apply Scripture to worship leads to the different principles of worship. All true Christians should desire to correctly understand and apply Scripture to personal and church life, including worship. Worship requires a **method** prescribed by God in the Scripture. Worship should accomplish the **result** intended by God for His people. We need, therefore, to determine from Scripture the right view on the Object, the subjects, the method, and the result of worship. The principles governing these four broad areas will, together, give us the biblical form of worship.

How Scripture determines the elements and circumstances of worship has been differently understood among the churches that arose from the Reformation. We have seen that the Reformers and the Puritans were divided between holding to the Regulative Principle and the Normative Principle. How would we call the principle held by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches? They believe that worship should be in accordance to the teaching of Scripture, as interpreted by church tradition. For convenience, and want of a better term, we shall call it the Integrative Principle. We might call it Traditional, or Traditionist, worship, but that would cause confusion in the present climate because many see Contemporary Worship as opposed to the Traditional Worship of other Evangelicals who hold either to the Regulative Principle or the Normative Principle. Labelling the worship style of Orthodox churches as Ritualistic would call forth protestation from them because of the negative connotation of the word. Others have called it the Inventive Principle, which similarly carries a negative connotation (Lindblad, et. al., 2001). It seems best to describe the integration of Scripture with the sacred tradition of the church as the Integrative Principle of worship, although the word has begun to be used, albeit differently, in some circles (e.g. Coralie, 2008; Quicke, 2011; Lewis and Demaresk, 2014).

How should we call the approach of the Contemporary Worship movement to worship? There is the generally held idea that Scrip-

## 1.5. A Biblical Form Of Worship

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ture provides sure teaching on doctrine but it is left to the church to decide how worship is to be conducted. When challenged, the Charismatics would appeal to texts from the Bible that, more often than not, are taken out of context. It takes the likes of John Frame (Frame, 1996, 1997) to provide them with some semblance of a theology of worship, just as it has taken the likes of Wayne Grudem to provide them with a theology of the continuation of the sign gifts (Grudem, 1994).

We have noted that, historically, there were deviant groups like the Ranters and Quakers who held to unorthodox doctrine which affected worship. Largely suppressed by the civil authorities, they did not constitute a threat to the orthodox churches, except for the Socinians and the Seventh-Day Baptists, which won over enough members of other churches to cause them alarm (Poh, 2013:181, 246). How would we label their view of Scripture in respect to worship? There was a general disregard of the authority of Scripture over worship, just as the Charismatic movement of today. They might be considered the forerunners of today's Charismatic movement, so far as worship is concerned. Labelling their view of worship as the Permissive Principle might be regarded as pejorative, although our intention is not so. For want of a better term, we shall call it the Progressive Principle, since there are those in the Contemporary Worship movement who regard themselves as progressive compared to those who practise traditional worship.

Historically speaking, therefore, we may discern four different principles of worship, viz. the Integrative Principle, the Normative Principle, the Regulative Principle, and the Progressive Principle. The Integrative Principle may be defined as follows: "In the worship of God, the sacred tradition of the church integrated with Scripture determine what are allowable." The Normative Principle may be defined as follows: "In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture must be obeyed while whatever is not forbidden by Scripture is allowable." We will discuss the Regulative Principle in Chapters 3 and 4, and provide a better definition for it. For the moment, we will use the following definition: "In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture should be followed while whatever is not taught must be rejected." The Progressive Principle may be defined as follows: "In the worship of God, Scripture provides general guidelines to be followed while allowing for freedom in personal preferences and expressions."

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It remains for us to determine from Scripture which of these is the correct one. It will be shown that the first four of the Ten Commandments constitute the ground principles of worship, from which we learn of the Object, the manner, the attitude, and the day of worship. From the Object of worship, we may quite easily see that worship should be directed to the trinitarian God revealed in Scripture (Exod. 20:3; Eph. 1:3-14). From the manner of worship, seen in the light of the Regulative Principle, we learn of the elements of worship. The Regulative Principle also encompasses the circumstances concerning worship which are covered by the attitude of worship. In practice, this is expressed by the necessity of reverence to God and bearing good witness before man (Exod. 20:7; Lev. 10:3). The New Testament equivalent is the teaching of the Lord on the necessity of worshipping God in spirit and truth (John 4:24). The elements of worship found in the New Testament include the reading of Scripture, the teaching and preaching of God's word, prayer, the singing of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and the offering. Baptism and the Lord's Supper may be included in public worship, or celebrated separately. Included in worship is keeping the Lord's Day (Exod. 20:8).

Apart from the first four of the Ten Commandments which provide the ground principles of worship, it will be shown that the offerings made in public worship of the Old Testament consists of three categories – those that are proclamational, those that are responsive, and those that are offertory in nature. This helps us to categorise the elements of worship of the New Testament. Furthermore, there are the general rules of Scripture that govern *some* circumstances concerning worship that are not addressed directly. Together, these principles should give us the biblical form of worship that marks God's people as separated from the world (2 Cor. 6:17-18; 2 Pet. 3:18), and being prepared for worship and service in heaven (Eph. 5:27; Heb. 11:14, 16; Rev. 14:9-14).

Put together, we have the following elemental principles of worship: (i) Trinitarian Exclusivity; (ii) Scriptural Regulation; (iii) Proclamational Worship (in Scripture Reading, Preaching, and Teaching); (iv) Responsive Worship (in Prayer and Congregational Singing); (v) Offertory Worship (in the Collection and Keeping the Lord's Day); (vi) Decency and Order (in the Worship service); and (vii) Eschatological Separation (of God's people). The elemental principle of "Scriptural Regulation" will be considered under two chapters, viz.

"The Regulative Principle" and "Things Indifferent". A separate chapter is devoted to "Special Seasons of Worship" after considering "Offertory Worship". It is better to call this form of worship "Regulative Worship" instead of "Traditional Worship" since the Regulative Principle plays a significant role in this form, while the latter term might lead to confusion with the form of worship practised by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. The four forms of worship, viz. Integrative Worship, Normative Worship, Regulative Worship, and Progressive Worship will be assessed by these elemental principles of worship along the way, when deemed necessary.

We have no desire to join the 'worship war' for its own sake but to contribute towards a biblical understanding of public worship, which John Owen calls 'instituted worship' (Owen, Vol. 13:467, 468). No department of God's work has been more damaged and misrepresented in recent years than that of worship. Those who have been appointed as watchmen over God's flocks cannot but weep at the current state of affairs. It is hoped that by relying primarily on the authority of Scripture, many readers will be convinced of the biblical form of worship. It is hoped that those who have gone astray will repent and return to the right path. The 1689 Baptist Confession<sup>2</sup> will be quoted when necessary, instead of the equivalent Westminster Confession or the Savoy Declaration, unless the situation demands otherwise.

## 1.6 Summary

1 After the apostolic age, the church began to go astray in doctrine and practice. The sacral churches – comprising the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches – introduced errors of various kinds, including those concerning worship. The dissenting churches were driven underground. The Reformation took place in the 16th century in which new churches were founded while older ones like the Church of England was reformed from within. The period of the Reformation, covering roughly the years 1500 to 1600, was followed by the Puritan age, covering roughly the years 1600 to 1700. After the Puritan age, the church was distracted from the work of reformation by the emphases on evangelism, missions, and social concerns. Following the Fundamentalist-

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<sup>2</sup>The edition published by The Wakeman Trust will be used.

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Modernist Controversy, the Evangelicals divided into three groups – the Fundamentalists, the Neo-Evangelicals, and the Reformed. The Pentecostal denomination arose to form the fourth group. Re-alignment of positions has been taking place from that time to the present. The Charismatic movement arose in the 1960's at the same time that there was a revival of interest in Reformed theology. The Charismatic movement practises Contemporary Worship while the Reformed churches practise Traditional Worship.

- 2 The Reformation of the 16th century in Europe resulted in the recovery of important doctrines and the founding of new churches in which the rituals and traditions of Medieval Christianity were rejected. The next generation of Reformers, generally known as the Puritans, continued with the work of reforming the churches. The Reformed churches in continental Europe adopted the Three Forms of Unity – consisting of the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism – to express their faith. The Puritans in Britain adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith, or versions of it known as the Savoy Declaration of Faith and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. The Church of England reverted to upholding the Book of Common Prayer which includes the Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith.
- 3 The Puritan age did not elucidate the form of church government to everyone's satisfaction. The Puritans were generally agreed over worship as expressed in the Westminster Confession. They disagreed with the Lutheran Church and the Anglican Church on worship. Furthermore, there were deviant groups that held to un-orthodox doctrine and practice, including those of worship. The deviant groups, however, were largely suppressed by the civil authorities of the time. Before the understanding on worship could be refined, the attention of the church was diverted to other issues in the subsequent generation. With the rise of the Charismatic movement in the 1960's, and the recovery of interest in Reformed theology, the 'worship war' erupted from around the 1980's which has continued to today. This is the controversy over the manner of worshipping God, polarising between Contemporary Worship and Traditional Worship.
- 4 Historically speaking, therefore, we may discern four different principles of worship, viz. the Integrative Principle, the Normative

Principle, the Regulative Principle, and the Progressive Principle. Since the Bible is the only authority in all matters of faith and practice, there should be a biblical form of worship, just as there is a biblical form of church government.

- 5 The first four of the Ten Commandments constitute the ground principles of worship, giving us the Object, manner, attitude, and day of worship respectively. The offerings made in public worship of the Old Testament consist of three categories – those that are proclamational, those that are responsive, and those that are offer-tory in nature. This helps us to categorise the elements of worship of the New Testament. Furthermore, there are the general rules of Scripture that govern some circumstances concerning worship. Together, these principles should give us the biblical form of wor-ship that marks God’s people as separated from the world, who are being prepared for worship and service in heaven.
- 6 The biblical form of worship will be studied under seven elemental principles: (1) Trinitarian Exclusivity; (2) Scriptural Regulation; (3) Proclamational Worship (in Scripture Reading, and Teaching and Preaching); (4) Responsive Worship (by Prayer, and Congre-gational Singing of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs); (5) Of-fertory Worship (in the Collection and keeping the Lord’s Day); (6) Decency and Order (in the Order Of Worship); and (7) Escha-tological Separation (marking out God’s covenantal people). To-gether, these constitute the biblical form of worship. It is better to call this "Regulative Worship" rather than "Traditional Worship" to avoid confusion with the worship style of the Orthodox Churches.

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# Two

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## TRINITARIAN EXCLUSIVITY

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**T**he exclusive worship of the trinitarian God is considered here. Worship should be directed to the trinitarian God revealed in the Scripture, and to Him alone. Worship is made possible for fallen man by the atoning sacrifice of the Saviour who has been provided by God Himself. Worship is made effectual by the intercession of the risen Saviour, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in His people and in the church. These are truths fundamental to true worship.

### 2.1 The Trinitarian God

The exclusive worship of the trinitarian God is taught in the 1689 Confession, Chapter 22:2 as follows:

Worship is to be given to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to Him alone;<sup>4</sup> not to angels, saints, or any other creatures.<sup>5</sup> And since the Fall, worship is not to be given without a mediator,<sup>6</sup> nor by any other mediation than that of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Matt. 4:9-10; John 4:23; Matt. 28:19. <sup>5</sup>Rom. 1:25; Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10. <sup>6</sup>John 14:6; <sup>7</sup>1 Tim. 2:5.

Although obvious to the average Christian, we must affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. God has revealed Himself as consisting of three distinct Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each Person is fully divine, yet there are not three Gods but one. This is a

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truth revealed to us in the Scripture which must be accepted with humility, awe, and thankfulness. To do so is not blind faith for, firstly, it is in accordance to logic that the finite human mind is unable to comprehend the mystery of the Godhead. Secondly, our faith is based on what is objectively revealed in the written word of God, and not on some vague, subjective, motion of human feelings or imagination. That the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, transcendent, perfect, holy, and just God should reveal Himself to His creatures is a matter for wonder and thanksgiving.

God reveals a plurality of Persons in the Godhead early in the book of Genesis when He uses the plural pronouns "Us" and "Our" in a number of places. It says in Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..." Despite a plurality of Persons, there is only one God, as verse 27 shows, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Similarly, in verse 29, God uses the singular pronoun, "And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food."

After the flood, when the human race gathered in the plains of Shinar and proudly built a city and a tower whose top was "in the heavens", to make a name for themselves, the LORD said, "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Again, the plural pronoun is used, indicating that there are more than one Persons in the Godhead. The Jews would explain this away by saying that it is only a literary device just like when a human author uses the plural "we" to refer to himself. The Jews do not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity although they worship the God of the Bible. Unlike the Muslims who worship a false god, the Jews have an inadequate understanding of the true God of Scripture.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not only taught in the plurality of Persons in the Godhead but also by explicit revelation of the second Person of the Godhead – the Son of God. In Genesis 18, Abraham met three men to whom he paid homage by bowing to the ground. One of the men promised that Sarah would bear a son, to which Sarah laughed in unbelief. In verse 13, the man is referred to as "the LORD", or Jehovah. In verses 17, 20, and 26 we read that "the LORD said". In verse 33 we are told, "So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned

to his place." In theology, the appearance of God as man is known as a theophany, i.e. the manifestation of God as Man. This was the appearance of the second Person of the Godhead, to foreshadow His future incarnation.

We are told of Moses's experience in Exodus 3:2, "And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush." In verses 5 and 6, we are told, "Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.' The passage makes sense only if we understand "the Angel of the LORD" to be the Son of God.

The Son of God appeared to Joshua as "Commander of the army of the LORD" (Josh. 5:14-15). He appeared to Gideon as "the Angel of the LORD" (Judg. 6:11-12, 21-24). The Angel of the LORD also appeared to Manoah and his wife, to announce that they would be given a son, who would be called Samson (Judg. 13).

Just as there is explicit revelation of the second Person of the Godhead, there is also explicit revelation of the third Person – the Holy Spirit. The Bible begins with the account of creation, saying in Genesis 1:1-2, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." This must be compared with John 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." The two passages together show that all three Persons of the Trinity were involved in creation. The Father willed the creation of all things out of nothing, the Son carried out the will of the Father to create, and He created all things by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God is referred to in a number of places in the Old Testament. Bezalel the son of Uri was filled with the Spirit of God to have wisdom and understanding as a craftsman to build the tabernacle (Exod. 31:1-5; 36:1). The elders of Israel were given the Spirit of the Lord to prophesy (Num. 11:25). The Spirit of God enabled the false prophet Balaam to prophesy and to bless Israel (Num. 24:2). The Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel, son of the younger brother of Caleb, upon Gideon, upon Jephthah, and upon Samson to

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empower them to judge over Israel (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19; 15:14). The Spirit of God is referred to in the book of Job as the agent of creation and the giver of life (Job 26:13; 33:4; 34:14). David prayed that God might not take away His Spirit from him but uphold him instead, when he sinned (Psalm 51:11, 12). God is immanent (present everywhere) by His Spirit (Psalm 139:7).

God who revealed Himself in the Old Testament is clearly trinitarian. With the increasing light of the New Testament, the doctrine of the Trinity becomes clearer and complete. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 shows that all authority has been given to the Son, in heaven and on earth, by the Father. With that authority, the Son of God sends forth His disciples to make disciples of all the nations, and to baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The Lord promises to be with His people to the end of the age, which presence is by His Spirit, for He is Himself in heaven (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; John 14:16-18). Suffice for us to quote John 14:16-18 to prove this point: "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." The churches of the New Testament worshipped the trinitarian God, as indicated in various passages, including 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 1:3-14; and 1 John 5:6-7.

The God who commands His people to worship Him, and Him alone, is trinitarian in essence – "You shall have no other gods before Me (Exod. 20:3)." The Mosaic law may be divided into three categories – the ceremonial law which has been fulfilled with the coming of Christ (Col. 2:14-17; Eph. 2:14-16), the civil law of the nation of Israel which no longer applies to us except for its underlying principles of mercy and justice (1 Cor. 9:8-10), and the moral law which continues to bind God's people to obedience (Matt. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:31). There are those who deny the abiding relevance of the moral law to Christians, exposing themselves to the charge of antinomianism – at least on the theoretical level. Theoretical antinomianism will eventually lead to practical antinomianism, for without an objective measure of morality, relativism will reign. The claim that we live in an age of grace, that we are ruled by the law of love, and that the Spirit in us will enable us to live holy lives will prove to be a mere illusion (Rom. 2:1-4). The view that the moral law still applies to

God's people today – expressed in the 1689 Confession, Chapter 19 – is not only correct but also sound.

The moral law is summarised in the Ten Commandments that was given by God to the nation of Israel. Being a summary, each law must be understood and applied as widely as possible. This principle was well-understood by the Puritans, who expounded the Ten Commandments accordingly (e.g. Watson, 1692). Furthermore, the Ten Commandments is a unity. There are those who wrongly claim that the Fourth Commandment, requiring us to keep the Sabbath day, has been abrogated. This will be considered in greater detail in a later chapter. The abiding relevance of the Ten Commandments means that we have to heed the First Commandment to worship God, and Him alone. The God who gave this command is the trinitarian God of the Bible. Worship must be directed to the trinitarian God of Scripture.

If this is deemed insufficient to prove the point, since there are those who question the abiding relevance of the law, we may refer to the trinitarian passages of the New Testament. We have seen that the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 involves serving the trinitarian God. In Romans 12:1 we find these words, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." The context (vv. 2-8) shows that this is about our service to God in everyday life. The word for "service" (Greek, 'latreia') means to make a priestly offering. Based on this verse, there are those who emphasise that "all of life is worship" thereby diluting the distinctive concept of the weekly public, or corporate, worship of God by His people. This will be discussed farther, below. For the moment, we wish to make the point that if our life is an offering of sorts to God, as taught in Romans 12:1, and the God we serve is trinitarian, as shown in Matthew 28:18-20, then the worship we engage in on a weekly basis is directed to the trinitarian God.

A third, and final, passage is sufficient to prove this point. In Chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Revelation, we are given a glimpse of the worship that is taking place in heaven, in parallel with life on earth. No doubt, this worship will continue on once all the elect are gathered together and the new heavens and the new earth are created (2 Pet. 3:13). Only, it will be more glorious – what with all the elect gathered in, the universe being made new, and the eternal plan of God for the redemption of His people being fulfilled. While

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noting that the book of Revelation is a book of prophecy in which are many things couched in symbolism, it is nevertheless part of God's revelation to us. It is, therefore, capable of being understood – at least in the main thrust of its content. Believing that Scripture has been given to us progressively and cumulatively, the last book of the Bible speaks with a certain finality to us. Just as it has much to say about the form of church government (Poh, 2013:59-63), so also it has much to say about the form of worship. The vision given to the apostle John, in Revelation Chapters 4 and 5, shows that all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are present on the throne, surrounded by the various orders of creatures in worship (Rev. 4:2, 5; 5:6-7 cf. 3:21).

We conclude that worship must be directed to the trinitarian God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

### 2.2 Effectual worship

How may fallen man worship the trinitarian God acceptably? From early, God revealed that fallen man may draw near to Him only by an atoning sacrifice. This was announced in the 'proto-evangel' of Genesis 3:15, and followed by the first physical death – that of an animal, to provide the skin to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21). A system of worship, in which animals were slaughtered and offered up to God to atone for sin, was introduced. This is seen in the offering of Abel which was accepted by God, while that of Cain was rejected (Gen. 4:4-5). Cain's offering was not of the prescribed animals but of his agricultural produce. Abel's offering was "the firstborn of his flock and of their fat" (Gen. 4:4), which conformed to the requirements of worship (cf. Num. 18:17; Lev. 3:16; Heb. 11:4; 12:24).

Noah's first action when he came out of the ark, after the flood, was to erect an altar upon which he offered the burnt offering. We are told in Genesis 8:20, "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it." The burnt offering speaks of the need for a suitable substitute to redeem the sinner who otherwise is under God's wrath. By the payment of the ransom, the sinner is reconciled with God. Without reconciliation with God, the sinner will not be able to worship God acceptably.



Abraham's faith was tested when God commanded him to offer up his son, Isaac. On the way to the place of sacrifice, Isaac asked his father, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham's answer was prophetic in more than one sense, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering (Gen. 22: 7, 8)." God provided a ram, caught in the thicket by the horns, for the burnt offering. Instead of Isaac being sacrificed, the ram provided by God was the substitute. God was going to provide a Saviour as a burnt offering for His people in due time. The Son of God would come, to take upon Himself perfect human nature, by being born of the virgin Mary. We are told in Galatians 3:16, 'Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.'

Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). His death on the cross was the ransom paid for the sins of His people (Matt. 20:28; Heb. 9:28). His blood shed on the cross of Calvary cleanses His people of all their sins (1 John 1:7). The Spirit of God dwells in the hearts of those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, sealing them as the children of God (Gal. 3:2; Eph. 4:30; Rom. 8:9, 11). The Spirit in the believer enables him to worship God acceptably. 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together (Rom. 8:14-17).'

Worship that is directed to the trinitarian God is accepted on the basis of the finished work of Christ. Put another way, only true believers can offer up acceptable worship. The case of Cornelius is like that of the Old Testament believers. He is described as "a devout man and one who feared God with his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always (Acts 10:2)." In other words, he was a proselyte to Judaism. The angel of God said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God (Acts 10:4)." Upon hearing the gospel preached by Peter, Cornelius and his household believed and were baptised. In 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 we are told, "But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he

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is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you." In any congregation, there will be believing and unbelieving visitors. When they understand the word of God preached, there is the likelihood that they will be convicted and they will worship God. The unbelieving visitor would have become a believer. The Holy Spirit works when the word of God is heard.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down upon the gathered disciples of Christ. That was the promise given by the Lord to His disciples (Acts 1:8; John 20:22). Without the Holy Spirit dwelling in believers, and without His presence in the midst of Christ's gathered people, service to God would be rendered ineffectual. The risen Christ is interceding for His people in heaven, as their High Priest (John 16:23-24; Heb. 9:11-12). He is present in His people, and in the midst of His gathered people, by His Spirit. We are told in John 14:17 and 20, "...the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you... At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." The Holy Spirit is received when one repents and believes in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:2; Rom. 8:9).

The truth that only believers can worship God acceptably is stated as follows in the 1689 Confession, Chapter 16, on Good Works:

Good works are only those which God has commanded in His holy Word.<sup>1</sup> Works which do not have the warrant of Scripture, and are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretence of good intentions are not good works.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mic. 6:8; Heb. 13:21. <sup>2</sup>Matt. 15:9; Isa. 29:13.

That good works include worship is clear from the Bible references supplied. Matthew 15:9 is a quote from Isaiah 29:13, and applied to the scribes and Pharisees, "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." That the enabling by the Holy Spirit is necessary to do good works, which includes worship, is made clear in the third paragraph of Chapter 16 of the Confession:

Their ability to do these good works does not in any way come from themselves, but comes wholly from the Spirit

of Christ.<sup>10</sup> To enable them to do good works, alongside the graces which they have already received, it is necessary for there to be a further real influence of the same Holy Spirit to cause them to will and to do of His good pleasure.<sup>11</sup> But believers are not, on these grounds, to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty unless given a special motion by the Spirit, but they must be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>John 15:4-5. <sup>11</sup>2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 2:13. <sup>12</sup>Phil. 2:12; Heb. 6:11-12; Isa. 64:7.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, who died and rose from the dead for our salvation, we are enabled by His Spirit to offer up worship that is acceptable to the triune God.

## 2.3 Exclusive Worship

The trinitarian God of the Bible demands worship from His creatures. What is worship? Worship is the expression – in thought, word, and action – of reverence, adoration, and submission to the trinitarian God who is holy, perfect, and merciful by His creatures who have been redeemed by the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Worship may be private or public. Our concern here is with public worship. Worship is described primarily by the Hebrew word ‘shawkhaw’ in the Old Testament and the Greek ‘proskuneo’, both of which literally means "to prostrate", i.e. to bow down to the ground in homage. We have briefly considered Romans 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." This shows that all of life is to be lived as an offering, i.e. as an act of worship, to God. This does not detract from the necessity of public, i.e. corporate, worship. This is clear from: (i) the examples of God's people gathering in worship in both the Old and the New Testaments; (ii) passages urging public gathering in worship (Heb. 10:24-25; Matt. 18:19-20; 1 Cor. 14:26; 16:2); and (iii) the example of God's people worshipping in heaven (Rev. 4, 5, 7; 14:1-5; 19:1-8). Romans 12:1 is directed to the local church. The singular "sacrifice" is used while the plural "your bodies" refer to the members of the

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church. This shows that the local church should be united not only in public worship, but also in bearing good witness to the world.

In heaven, there is the ongoing life of service to God just as there is corporate worship. Service in heaven will no longer be for the purpose of bearing good witness to unbelievers, who would not be there, but to glorify God. This is suggested by the words of Revelation 9:16-17, "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." The verse before this says, "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them." The temple should be understood as heaven, as shown by Revelation 21:22, "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." Further indication that there is work to do, other than engaging in corporate worship, is found in Revelation 22:1-5,

"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever."

Back to worship on earth, we have seen that this is made effectual by the atoning sacrifice of the Saviour appointed by God. In the Old Testament, this was typified by the system of animal sacrifices taught to Adam and handed down his descendants. After the Flood, Noah's descendants continued worshipping God in the prescribed manner, while many of them quickly slid into idolatry. This was typified by the Amorites (or Canaanites), whose iniquity was "not yet complete" in the days of Abraham (Gen. 15:16). The time came when it was necessary for God to call Abraham away from his compromised peo-

ple in Mesopotamia. Abraham sent his servant to seek a wife for his son, Isaac, from among his relatives in Mesopotamia instead of from among the grossly idolatrous Canaanites (Gen. 24:1-4). It is clear, however, that syncretism in worship had crept into the lives of Abraham's relatives. When Jacob brought his family to depart from his uncle Laban, they were pursued until caught up by him. Laban accused Jacob of stealing his gods, the household idols (Gen. 31:30, 34).

By the time of Moses, God warned His covenant people in no uncertain terms of the danger of idolatry. We read in Exodus 34:12-16,

"Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods."

The history of Israel in the period of judges (Judg. 17:5; 21:25), down to the period of the kings in both Ephraim and Judah, is marked by rebellion against God and unfaithfulness to His word.

The First Commandment must be understood in the light of the history of the fallen human race, stretching to the history of the children of Israel. The Commandment is couched negatively – "You shall have no other gods before Me (Exod. 20:3)." God commands His people to worship Him exclusively. Stated positively, God's people are to worship Him because: (i) He is the Creator of mankind; (ii) He has redeemed His chosen people; and (iii) He has revealed Himself as the Sovereign of the universe and of His redeemed people. These call for an attitude of adoration, gratitude, and reverence which will be developed further in a later chapter (under Eschatological Separation).

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### 2.4 Implications

The first implication to be drawn from our study of the Object of worship must be that the public worship of the church should reflect the trinitarian nature of God. We are taught by our Lord that prayer should be directed to the Father, in the name of His Son, and by the power of His Spirit (Matt. 6:9-13; John 15:16; 16:23-24; John 14:16-17, 26). The hymns we sing should be directed to all three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

The second implication is that the primary purpose of worship should not be diluted by the incidental benefits of worship, viz. the edification of God's people and the salvation of souls. Another way of saying it is that in worship, the vertical perspective of relationship with God takes precedence over the horizontal relationship with men. Our primary concern should be to worship God in the way He has prescribed for us, and not on how to edify men or to draw in unbelievers. When our priority is right, the one will follow the other.

The third implication is that the exclusive worship of God should cause us to examine whether idolatry has been introduced intentionally or unwittingly. The Lord, whose name is Jealous, has 'zero toleration' of idolatry. The clearer light of the New Testament shows that 'heart religion' is more important than mere external actions. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams (1 Sam. 15:22)." We want to keep in mind Matthew 15:8, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." Adultery and murder are not only committed by action but also in the heart (Matt. 5:22, 28). Idolatry is committed not only when we literally bow down to man-made objects but also when we are covetous, i.e. when anything is greater to us than God in our hearts (Col. 3:5).

There were deviant groups in the time of the Reformation and the Puritan age who worshipped God in a disorderly fashion. The Ranters believed that God is in every person and that a believer is free from all traditional restraints. The Socinians rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. Our concern, however, is with worship in our time, and with those groups that are Christian. The Unitarians and the Jehovah's Witnesses do not fall into the scope of our purview. In particular, we wish to consider how the principle of the exclusive worship of the triune God has been upheld in the four forms of worship that are discernible today.

Integrative worship as practised by the Orthodox churches includes prayer to Mary, to martyrs, and to saints, i.e. those 'canonised' by the church. It is believed that there are different degrees of worship – direct, indirect, and supereminent ('hyperdulia'). The Catholic Encyclopedia (CE) says,

"In accordance with these principles it will readily be understood that a certain worship may be offered even to inanimate objects, such as the relics of a martyr, the Cross of Christ, the Crown of Thorns, or even the statue or picture of a saint. There is here no confusion or danger of idolatry, for this worship is subordinate or dependent. The relic of the saint is venerated because of the link which unites it with the person who is adored or venerated; while the statue or picture is regarded as having a conventional relation to a person who has a right to our homage – as being a symbol which reminds us of that person."

From our understanding of the teaching of Scripture, this is nothing but idolatry. It is no different from the gold calf made by Aaron and worshipped by the children of Israel in the time of Moses (Exod. 32:4). It is no different from the gold calves made by Jeroboam the son of Nebat for the northern nation of Ephraim (1 Kings 12:28). In both cases, bowing to the gold calves was regarded as the worship of Jehovah, "the god(s) that brought you out of the land of Egypt". Integrative Worship does not uphold the exclusive worship of the trinitarian God.

In Progressive Worship, there is the adoption of worldly rock and pop music, the use of the pop-band, rhythmic hand-clapping and hand-swaying, and often with dancing as well. Many churches in the Missional Church movement and the New Calvinist movement adopt Progressive Worship to attract people and to keep up with the times. There is the belief in being 'seeker-sensitive' and in being 'incarnational', which basically means pandering to the desires of the world in order to win some. (We hasten to say that not all who hold to the seeker-sensitive and incarnational approach of outreach belong to this category. Those who practise Progressive Worship in their churches are meant.) This is based on the wrong understanding of 1 Corinthians 10:32-33, "Give no offense, either to the Jews

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or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved." There is the failure to see that the apostle Paul was not advocating the adoption of worldly cultural elements, but rather that he was withholding personal rights which might be culturally offensive. He was not adjusting the gospel message nor introducing extra-biblical means to make the preaching of the gospel more attractive to the hearers. Furthermore, he was addressing his approach to outreach, not the worship meeting of the church.

Progressive Worship fails the test of the exclusive worship of the trinitarian God on so many counts. The trinitarian God is worshipped, yes, but worldly elements are introduced with a vengeance that smacks of idolatry. Its concern to please visitors contradicts the purpose of God's people gathering in worship. The focus is on entertaining one another rather than worshipping God. God's name is being used in vain. The aim and approach of proponents of Progressive Worship are too well documented to need repetition here. (See, for example, Makujina, 2016.)

The principle of the exclusive worship of the trinitarian God is upheld in Normative Worship and in Regulative Worship. In both, there is serious cognisance that worship is made effectual by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and by the empowering of the Holy Spirit. By its definition, the Normative Principle allows for alien elements that are not forbidden by Scripture to be adopted. For that reason, many churches that hold to the Normative Principle have adopted elements from Progressive Worship.

### 2.5 Summary

- 1 God who commands His creatures to worship Him in Exodus 20:3 has revealed Himself in the Old Testament as consisting of three Persons. The New Testament shows that the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in such passages as Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 1:3-14; and 1 John 5:6-7; and Revelation 4, 5.
- 2 From early, God revealed that worship by fallen man is made effectual only by the atoning sacrifice of the burnt offering, which pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". Through faith in Jesus Christ,



who died and rose from the dead for our salvation, we are enabled by His Spirit to offer up worship that is acceptable to the triune God.

- 3 Worship is the acknowledgement – in thought, word and action – that God is our Creator who is holy, perfect, and majestic in His character and actions, who has shown His love to His undeserving creatures. Romans 12:1 shows that the whole of life is to be an act of worship to God. However, this does not detract from the necessity of the church gathering in public worship of the trinitarian God, and Him alone.
- 4 There are implications to the truth that the trinitarian God alone must be worshipped based on the finished work of Christ. Firstly, the public worship by the church should reflect the trinitarian nature of God. Secondly, the primary purpose of worship should not be diluted by the incidental benefits of worship, viz. the edification of God’s people and the salvation of souls. Thirdly, the exclusive worship of God should cause us to examine whether idolatry has been introduced intentionally or unwittingly. Integrative Worship and Progressive Worship fail this test. Normative Worship opens itself to the possibility of accepting elements from other forms of worship.

## 2.6 References

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# Three

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## THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

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**A**s Creator, God has the right to demand worship from His creatures. He has the right to prescribe the worship He desires from His creatures. God makes His will known to us in the Scripture. We are not to add or take away from His word (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19). Christians of all shades claim to base their doctrine and practice on Scripture, but they differ on how Scripture is to be understood and applied. In so far as worship is concerned, it is important to determine which principle of Scripture is correct.

### 3.1 Four Principles

Historically, four views on how Scripture governs worship are discernible. Churches in the post-apostolic age may be seen as consisting of two streams – the Establishment (or Sacral) churches and the Dissenting (or Free) churches (Poh, Keys, 1995). The Establishment churches were supported by the state while the Dissenting churches were not. The Establishment churches developed along geographical boundaries, each local church having a district of jurisdiction known today as a ‘parish’. In the first three centuries, i.e. between AD 100 and AD 400, these churches were generally known as the Catholic Church while the various dissenting groups were known by their names, e.g. the Montanists, the Novatians, and the Donatists. Some of the dissenting groups held to unorthodox doctrines, mostly in connection with the person of Christ. Others were quite orthodox, upholding the baptism of believers, while opposing infant bap-

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tism and the perceived laxity in the Catholic Church. The dissenting groups had the common desire of worshipping God according to the simplicity of Scripture instead of adding on the traditions of man.

#### 3.1.1 The Integrative Principle

After Constantine became the Roman emperor in AD 312, an edict was passed to protect the Christians from persecution. As the church in Rome rose to prominence, a sense of uneasiness and rivalry developed between the Catholic churches that was not unconnected with the constant rivalry between the Eastern and the Western Roman Empire. The Roman Catholic Church became dominant in the West while the Eastern Orthodox Churches stood in rivalry with it. The Great Schism occurred in AD 1054, when the Eastern Orthodox Churches excommunicated the Roman Catholic Church while the Roman Catholic Church responded by excommunicating the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Due to their common roots, the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches today uphold basically the same view of Scripture which is integrated with the 'sacred tradition' handed down the centuries. This sacred tradition, supposedly of the oral teaching of the Lord and the apostles, is constantly being added to by various papal decrees, and is considered necessary for the correct understanding of Scripture. Elements from the Old Testament system of worship – including the priesthood, vestments, ornate places of worship, bowing and prostration in prayer, and the burning of incense – are included in worship.

The Catholic view of Scripture and its relation to church tradition is stated as follows in the Catholic Encyclopedia:

The Council [of Trent], as is evident, held that there are Divine traditions not contained in Holy Scripture, revelations made to the Apostles either orally by Jesus Christ or by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and transmitted by the Apostles to the Church.

Holy Scripture is therefore not the only theological source of the Revelation made by God to His Church. Side by side with Scripture there is tradition, side by side with the written revelation there is the oral revelation.

On the relationship between the Magisterium (i.e. Church Council) and Scripture, the Catholic Encyclopedia says:

It was above all for the Church to circulate the Divine Book by minting its doctrine, adapting and explaining it, by offering it and drawing from it nourishment wherewith to nourish souls, briefly by supplementing the book, making use of it, and assisting others to make use of it. This is the debt of Scripture to the living magisterium.

As regards Biblical interpretation properly so called the Church is infallible in the sense that, whether by authentic decision of pope or council, or by its current teaching that a given passage of Scripture has a certain meaning, this meaning must be regarded as the true sense of the passage in question. It claims this power of infallible interpretation only in matters of faith and morals...

We have called this approach to the understanding and application of Scripture to worship the Integrative Principle. The sacred tradition of the church is integrated with Scripture to constitute the authority in matters of faith and morals. Put simply, the Integrative Principle may be stated as, "In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture and the tradition of the church is permissible."

#### 3.1.2 The Normative Principle

The name commonly used for Martin Luther's view of how Scripture should be applied to church government and worship is 'the Normative Principle'. The name given is quite unfortunate in that it may cause confusion with the terms "the norm of Scripture" and "what is normative according to Scripture", used by those who hold to the Regulative Principle, which will be discussed next. Peter Masters has shown that there are norms set in Scripture that are not culturally conditioned and must, therefore, be followed by Christians today (Masters, 1995). The present writer has suggested elsewhere that it might have been better to call the Normative Principle 'the Permissive Principle' instead, no negative connotation implied (Poh, Multifaceted Jewel, 1997). Names aside, Martin Luther's view is captured in this exchange with one Carlstadt (quoted in Reisinger and Allen, 2001:28). "Where has Christ commanded us to elevate the host and exhibit it to the people?" Carlstadt had demanded. "And where has Christ forbidden it?" was Luther's reply.

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The Lutheran and Anglican churches historically have followed Luther in holding to the Normative Principle. This principle is reflected in Article 20 of the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles:

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

Put simply, the Normative Principle may be stated as, "In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture must be obeyed while whatever is not forbidden by Scripture is permissible."

#### 3.1.3 The Regulative Principle

In contrast to the view of Martin Luther, John Calvin held to a view that has been called the Regulative Principle. This was upheld by the majority of the Puritans, and stated in Chapter 22:1 of the 1689 Confession as follows:

But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God has been instituted by Himself,<sup>2</sup> and therefore our method of worship is limited by His own revealed will. He may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan. He may not be worshipped by way of visible representations, or by any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Deut. 12:32. <sup>3</sup>Exod. 20:4-6.

Stated simply, the Regulative Principle as commonly understood is that "In the worship of God, whatever is commanded in Scripture must be obeyed, while whatever is not commanded must be rejected."

From early in the Reformation, there had been differences over "things indifferent" (Greek 'adiaphora') in the worship of God, extending over to doctrinal statements and the Christian life. It is a concept that had its origin in Greek philosophy. In theology, it refers to such indifferent things as food and drink in Romans 14. Controversy over "things indifferent" occurred among the Lutherans in Ger-

many over the retention of the Roman Catholic rites of extreme unction and confirmation, and whether the word "alone" should be used in the doctrine of justification by faith (EB). In Britain, there was the Vestment Controversy in the Anglican Church (Murray, 1965, 1987). By the time of the Westminster Assembly, the 'adiaphora' issue, also referred to as 'Adiaphorism', was settled by the statement in Chapter 1:6 of the Westminster Confession, which appears in the 1689 Confession as:

There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and church government which are 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.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>1 Cor. 11:13-14; 1 Cor. 14:26, 40.

This did not mean there was no more disagreement among those who upheld the Regulative Principle. Indeed, it remains an issue up to today mainly because Adiaphorism is dissociated from the Regulative Principle and confounded with the Liberty of Conscience. Correctly understood, it will go a long way in helping those who uphold the Regulative Principle just as it had helped others in the past.

#### 3.1.4 The Progressive Principle

Not much need be said about the Progressive Principle except to note that it arises from a low view of Scripture, a lack of reverence for God, and an unwarranted focus on personal gratification. The value of Scripture is limited to matters of doctrine in the church, and to morality and ethics in the Christian life. There is the generally accepted ideas that Scripture must be supplemented by common sense and pragmatism, that many of the practices of the church in the New Testament are culturally conditioned, and that we must adopt the findings of science, sociology, and business management into church life. The over-riding concern in worship is that the church must adjust to suit the needs of the time. The biblical principles that matter are "to please all men in all things, that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:31)", that each has something to contribute "for edification" (1 Cor. 14:26), and that culture is inherently neutral and should be

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"redeemed" to serve God (Rom. 8:19-20; 1 Cor. 10:25-26). The traditional style of worship is regarded as stifling and sombre, while worship with rock, pop, and rap music is progressive.

The Progressive Principle may be stated simply as, "In the worship of God, Scripture provides general guidelines to be followed while allowing for freedom in personal preferences and expressions."

#### 3.2 Sola Scriptura

A fundamental truth recovered in the Reformation of the sixteenth century is the principle of 'sola scriptura', which basically states that Scripture is the only authority in all matters of faith and practice. This was upheld by all the Reformers and Puritans, regardless of whether they held to the Normative Principle or the Regulative Principle. The doctrine of 'sola scriptura' includes the ideas that the written revelation of God is complete, sufficient for all our needs, perspicuous (i.e. capable of being understood), and final (i.e. the last court of appeal in any controversy) (Poh, Cessationism, 1997, 2020).

A key passage that teaches 'sola scriptura' is 2 Timothy 3:16-17,

All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The "Scripture" refers to both the Old Testament and the New Testament that was in the process of being written at that time. The apostles were conscious that they stood in the line of those being used by God to bring revelation to completion. They were aware of teaching revealed truth (1 Thess. 2:13; Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:3), and writing scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16; Eph. 2:20). John, as the last surviving apostle, was conscious that he was writing the last portion of Scripture. His words in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible must, therefore, be understood as referring to the whole of Scripture and not just to the book of Revelation. It says in Revelation 22:18-19,

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if



anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

This is a declaration of the completion, sufficiency, and perspicuity of Scripture. Nothing is to be added to, or taken away from, the complete and sufficient word of God. The word "hears" means "to understand and obey". This complements 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which teaches that all Scripture is useful for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. To be noted is the fact that the four areas mentioned – viz. doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction – actually encompasses "all matters of faith and practice". We cannot think of any aspect of the Christian life that does not fall under one or more of these areas. The effect upon the man of God is that he is "thoroughly equipped" (Greek, 'artios' and 'exartizo'), or complete and furnished. In other words, he will be lacking nothing while having everything needful. In such a state, he is ready for "every good work", and not merely "some good work".

The sole authority of Scripture "in all matters of faith and practice" applies to all of life. We have seen that Romans 12:1 teaches that all of the Christian's life is to be an offering to God, i.e. an act of worship. If the authority of Scripture extends over all of life, surely that would include church government and worship. The question might be asked, why should church government and worship be singled out for special attention by the Reformers and the Puritans? There were at least two reasons. Firstly, the most obvious areas of reform needed in the church during the Reformation were church government and worship. Doctrine affects practice. The Roman Catholic Church held to extra-biblical beliefs which manifested practically in the government and worship of the church. Secondly, the Reformers and the Puritans, being trained theologians, could see immediately that Christ's headship over the church involves His offices as prophet, priest, and king. Prophethood concerns doctrine, priesthood concerns worship, and kingship involves government. The Reformers had recovered important doctrines, summarised in the five "sola's" of the Reformation. Christ's prophethood in the church was being affirmed. It was obvious that His priesthood and kingship must be asserted as well.

The three offices of Christ constituted a prominent teaching of

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the Reformers and the Puritans. John Calvin expounded on the three offices of Christ in Book II, Chapter 15, of his *magnum opus*, "The Institutes of the Christian Religion" (Calvin, 1536). The Westminster Confession mentions the three offices of Christ under Chapter 8:1, on Christ the Mediator. The 1689 Confession added paragraphs 9 and 10 to the chapter on Christ as Mediator, expanding on the teaching on the three offices of Christ. This additional material was taken from the earlier (1646) Confession of Faith of the Particular Baptists, which are not found in the Westminster Confession or the Savoy Declaration. The Particular Baptists saw the importance of this doctrine and pursued its application to church government and worship to good effect. In church government, they kept to the Independency taught in the Savoy Platform, minus infant baptism and limiting the officers of the church to elders and deacons. Unlike the Savoy Platform which treats the pastor and teacher as additional officers of the church, the 1689 Confession sees the pastor as the official teacher of the church, who occupies the office of elder together with other ruling elders (Poh, Keys, 1995, 2017). As for worship, the Particular Baptists upheld the Regulative Principle, in common with those who upheld the Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration, until they were mired in controversy over hymn-singing in the seventeenth century.

To be noted at this point is the fact that both the proponents of the Normative Principle and the Regulative Principle held firmly to the principle of 'sola scriptura'. They believed that Scripture is the only authority "in all matters of faith and practice". It was differences in the application of 'sola scriptura' to church government and worship – and particularly the latter – that led to the formulation of the two principles that were later labelled as the Normative Principle and the Regulative Principle. Our next step is to show that the Regulative Principle, instead of the Normative Principle, is more consistent with 'sola scriptura'.

#### 3.3 Scriptural Support For The RP

In Genesis 4:1-7, God accepted the offering of Abel and rejected that of Cain. Abel's offering consisted of "the firstborn of his flock and of their fat" (v. 4), while Cain's offering consisted of "the fruit of the ground" (v. 3). Since Abel was a keeper of sheep while Cain was

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a tiller of the ground (v. 2), it might appear that their respective offering was reasonable and that God was acting unreasonably and arbitrarily by accepting one and rejecting the other. However, comparing with what is known in Genesis 3:21 where God made tunics of skin to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve, and with Genesis 8:20 where Noah offered a burnt offering of animals to God, we must conclude that God had given clear instructions as to how He should be worshipped. Worship must be based on the substitutionary death of the Saviour God would provide in due time, pictured by the animals offered up. Cain could easily have traded his agricultural produce for the animals required in worship with Abel. Worship must be carried out in the way prescribed by God. We read in Hebrews 11:4, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks." In Hebrews 12:22, 24, we are told, "But you have come... ..to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." Abel's sacrifice was a foreshadowing of Christ's perfect sacrifice of Himself for His people.

In Leviticus 10:1-3, we have two of the four sons of Aaron struck dead by God for offering "profane fire before the LORD", which is explained as that "which He had not commanded them" (v. 1). We are told in the verse following, "So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." This shocking incident occurred immediately after Moses and Aaron came out of the tabernacle of meeting, when the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the LORD, i.e. from the direction of the tabernacle, and consumed the burnt offering in the sight of all present. In the excitement of the occasion, and desiring to attract attention to themselves, the two sons of Aaron had offered up incense that was not commanded by God. It is possible that they had been drunk, for the admonition against drinking was given after that (vv. 8-11),

Then the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying: "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the

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children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by the hand of Moses."

These two incidents in the Old Testament are sufficient to establish the principle that in the worship of God, all that He commands must be obeyed and all that is not taught must be rejected. To strengthen the case, we may mention the incident of the children of Israel worshipping the golden calf while Moses was on Mount Sinai communing with God. We are told that the children of Israel "rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (Exod. 32:6). The making of the golden calf to worship was a direct contradiction of the second of the Ten Commandments which had been delivered to them orally earlier (Exod. 20). Apart from making offerings to the calf, the people were enjoying themselves – eating and drinking, and rising up to play. God's words to Moses included these, "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them (v. 8)." Five hundred years later, Jeroboam the son of Nebat was to commit the same sin. He made two golden calves, presented them to the northern nation of Israel as the gods which "brought you up from the land of Egypt! (1 Kings 12:28)".

In the New Testament, we have the teaching of Matthew 28:20, "...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..." The things commanded by Christ would include worship. The Pharisees and scribes were condemned by the Lord in the words of Matthew 15:9, "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." In Colossians 2:22-23, we are taught to reject "the commandments and doctrines of men", for these things "have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion..." The word for "self-imposed religion" is literally "will-worship", i.e. worshipping according to self-will. We are not to worship God as we like, adding or taking away from God's word, and thereby incurring God's wrath (Rev. 22:18-19).

From these considerations, we would conclude that the Regulative Principle is more consistent with the teaching of Scripture compared to the Normative Principle. The Normative Principle not only requires the keeping of what is taught in Scripture but also allows for the introduction of elements not forbidden by Scripture. The allowance of things not forbidden by Scripture opens up the possibility of introducing many things, e.g. the burning of candles, hand-

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clapping and hand-waving, using the drum-set, wearing vestment or a robe during preaching, etc. When challenged by those who hold to the Regulative Principle, those who hold to the Normative Principle would raise issues that are connected with the circumstances concerning worship such as the time and duration of worship, the number of hymns, etc., not explicitly taught in Scripture. It is here that the Regulative Principle stipulates the use of common sense (1 Cor. 11:13-14) and the general rules of Scripture (1 Cor. 14:26, 40) to govern the circumstances concerning worship. The Normative Principle allows for the introduction of alien elements into worship, while confusing these elements with matters truly 'indifferent' in worship. (We will have more to say of 'things indifferent' in the next chapter.)

Although the general rules are not specified in the 1689 Confession, Chapter 1:6, the Bible references given, together with the writings of the Puritans involved in the Westminster Assembly, give clear indications what are meant. Furthermore, some general rules of Scripture are given in Chapter 22:5 of the 1689 Confession, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Today, the advocates of the Regulative Principle would regard the general rules as including doing all things: (i) to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31); (ii) decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40); (iii) to edify the church (1 Cor. 14:26; 2 Cor. 10:8; Eph. 4:29); (iv) not to stumble weaker brethren (Matt. 18:6; Rom. 14:13; 15:1-2); (v) not to dishonour God before the world (Lev. 10:3; Rom. 12:17; 14:16; 2 Cor. 8:21; 1 Pet. 2:12); (vi) according to the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor. 1:12; 11:3); and (vii) to promote godliness, not against the truth but for the truth (2 Cor. 13:8). The principles of edification, not stumbling weaker brethren, and promoting godliness are often treated as one, while the principles of glorifying God and not dishonouring God are also treated as one, so that the list is reduced to doing all things: (i) to the glory of God; (ii) decently and in order; (iii) for edification; and (iv) in simplicity. We will show in the next chapter that all these general rules fall under two specific principles related to the attitude of worship – one found in the Old Testament, viz. Leviticus 10:3, and the other in the New Testament, viz. John 4:24.

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#### 3.4 Adiaphorism

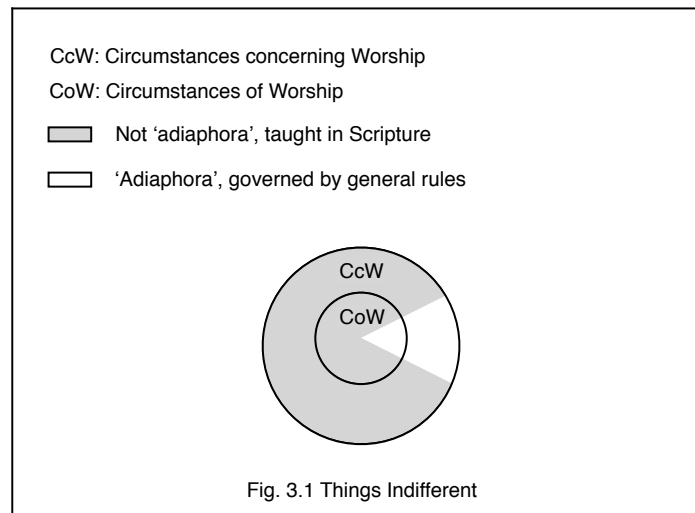
At the risk of labouring the point, we quote again the relevant statement on the ‘adiaphora’ (i.e. things indifferent) in the 1689 Confession, Chapter 1:6,

There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and church government which are 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.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>1 Cor. 11:13-14; 1 Cor. 14:26, 40.

The words used must be carefully noted. It says "**some** circumstances **concerning** worship" and not "**the** circumstances **of** worship". The ‘adiaphora’ is handled narrowly in one sense, and extensively in another sense. It is handled narrowly in that it does not include circumstances that are addressed by Scripture which are to be followed. It is handled extensively in that it includes more than the execution of the various ‘elements of worship’ but also matters related to worship. The elements are mentioned in Chapter 22 of the 1689 Confession as consisting of prayer, Scripture reading, preaching and teaching, the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and keeping the Lord’s Day. The Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration leave out the singing of hymns and spiritual songs. Most churches today would include the collection of the offering as an element of worship since it is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:2, and extensive teaching is given on this in passages such as Mark 12:40-42; 2 Cor. 8, 9. The ‘things indifferent’ (‘adiaphora’) of worship pertains to the circumstances affecting worship and is not limited to manner of executing ‘the elements of worship’. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper might legitimately be included as elements of worship, or they might be conducted separately as worship services other than the public worship held on the Lord’s Day. This point has not been made clear in the literature to date. Instead, the ‘sacraments’ are always mentioned as elements of worship, as well as marks of a true church. The differences aside, the circumstances **concerning** worship should be distinguished from the circumstances **of** worship.

The circumstances concerning worship pertains to more than the mode of worship, i.e. the execution of the elements of worship. It includes the meeting place, the lighting, the clothes worn by the people, the type of seats used, the seating arrangement, etc. The ‘adiaphora’, therefore extends from the circumstances involved in execution of the elements of worship to other circumstances that concern worship. We may represent the ‘adiaphora’ of the Regulative Principle by Fig. 3.1.



The circumstances involved in the execution of the elements of worship constitute the Circumstances *of* Worship (CoW) – e.g. the time of worship, the order of worship, and manner of making the collection, etc. The Circumstances *concerning* Worship (CcW) includes the Circumstances *of* Worship as well as things "which are common to human actions and societies" such as the place of meeting, the type of seats used, the lighting, the clothes we wear, etc. All these have to be regulated by common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture.

We consider first the circumstances connected with the execution of the elements of worship. Taking an offering is an element of worship, while the manner of collection is not specified in Scripture. One church might pass around a bag during the worship service, while

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another church might leave a box at the entrance for voluntary contribution. During the worship service, the offering is brought before God in thanksgiving. Congregational singing is an element of worship. One church might sing four hymns while another might sing five. Scripture reading is an element of worship. One church might have two readings, one of which is the passage to be preached on, while another church might dispense with the reading that is not going to be preached on. Teaching is an element of worship. One church might just have the preaching of the passage of Scripture read, which constitute all the teaching there is, although it may be argued that a measure of teaching is involved in the congregational singing as well (cf. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Another church might include the recitation of the Apostles' Creed to teach doctrine during the worship service.

We have seen that the Roman Catholic Church imposed the Latin chant, the burning of incense, penance (i.e. confession of sins before a priest), and transubstantiation (i.e. the belief in the transformation of the elements of the mass into real flesh and blood in the human body), and many things besides, as elements of worship. The Church of England required kneeling to receive the elements at the Lord's Supper, making the sign of the cross during prayer, and the wearing of vestment by the minister, which were opposed by the Puritans, resulting in their ejection from the church in 1662. Those who uphold Progressive Worship would see no difficulty in using the drum-set, rock and pop music, hand-clapping, the waving of hands, and dancing. All these are introduced as elements, or circumstances, of worship excluded by the Regulative Principle. Furthermore, unlike the lighting, the seats, and the clothes worn, these are unnecessary to the circumstances concerning worship "which are common to human actions and societies".

We consider next the circumstances concerning worship other than those connected with the execution of the elements of worship. Some churches choose to use pews, while other churches use chairs. Some churches choose to have the women sit on one side of the meeting place while the men sit on the other side. Most churches do not mind where anyone chooses to sit. Some churches require the women to have head covering, based on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Other churches see the head covering as a reference to the hair (vv. 6, 14, 15). Furthermore, the principle taught in the passage is that women must be seen to be submitted to the men in so far as the ex-



ercise of authority in the church is concerned. Surely, that is seen by the women not holding office in the church (1 Tim. 3:1-13) and not teaching in the public worship (1 Cor. 14:34-35). All these are to be governed by common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture. How the individuals dress is a matter of Christian freedom, but the general rules require that we glorify God and do not cause others to stumble. To dress shabbily, scantily, or with excessive adornment is, therefore, out of place. In fact, a case can be made out that we are to dress in our "Sunday best" because we are having an audience with the Sovereign of all creation. Many people today have lost this sense of reverence for God and the reality of spiritual communion with God during worship. It is commonly claimed that dress is a matter of personal taste. Others wrongly claim that we must live the 'incarnational' lifestyle to "please all men in all things... ..that they may be saved." Appeal is also wrongly made to the liberty of conscience.

What is the liberty of conscience? Chapter 21 of the 1689 Confession deals with Christian Liberty and the Liberty of Conscience. Through faith in Christ, the Christian is set free from sin and its consequences and has free excess to God, to serve Him without slavish fear. As for the liberty of conscience, paragraph 2 states that:

God alone is the Lord of the conscience,<sup>12</sup> and has left it free from all doctrines and commandments of men which are in any respect contrary to His Word, or not contained in it.<sup>13</sup> Thus to believe such doctrines or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience.<sup>14</sup> The requiring of an implicit faith, an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>James 4:12; Rom. 14:4. <sup>13</sup>Acts 4:19; 5:29; 1 Cor. 7:23; Matt. 15:9. <sup>14</sup>Col. 2:20-23. <sup>15</sup>1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 1:24.

The understanding of the liberty of conscience sets us free from the doctrines and commandments of men "which are in any respect contrary to His Word, or not contained in it." We must not allow ourselves to be forced into believing the doctrine of transubstantiation of the Roman Catholic Church, or into accepting the wearing of the vestment for ministers and the sign of the cross in prayer of the Anglican Church. Similarly, we must not allow the civil authorities

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to stop us from preaching the gospel to all the nations or to gather for worship. The liberty of conscience, however, does not give us the freedom to do as we like in the worship of God. The Regulative Principle determines the elements of worship and the circumstances concerning worship, which we must follow.

We have noted that the reformation of worship was altogether silenced by other concerns after the Puritan age. Debates on worship picked up in the 1960's, escalating into the 'worship war' that continues to the present. This writer contends that the proponents of the Regulative Principle have not espoused the principle well and, along the way, have shot their own foot. There are three ways how this has happened. Firstly, a misleading definition of the Regulative Principle has been given. The commonly understood definition of the Regulative Principle is, "In the worship of God, whatever is commanded in Scripture must be obeyed, while whatever is not commanded is to be rejected" (e.g. Reisinger and Allen, 2001:77, 78). The use of the word "commanded" needs careful explanation for it might be misunderstood as referring only to the explicit commands of Scripture, i.e. instructions given in the imperative tense only. The 1689 Confession, Chapter 22:1 states that "our method of worship is limited by His own revealed will". The revealed will of God in Scripture includes explicit commands, precepts, principles, and examples. John Owen says (Owen, Vol. 13:462):

...a principle which is termed the "foundation of all Puritanism" ...is, "That nothing ought to be established in the worship of God but what is authorized by some precept or example in the word of God, which is the complete and adequate rule of worship."

**Commands** are instructions given in the imperative tense, e.g. "You shall have no other gods before Me (Exod. 20:3)", and "Love one another (John 13:34)". **Precepts** are general rules drawn from passages of Scripture, e.g. the necessity of living in righteousness instead of in sin (Rom. 6:15-23), and to expect persecution for our faith (Matt. 10:24-42; 2 Tim. 3:12). **Principles** are fundamental truths of a system of belief or behaviour, e.g. the primacy of the word of God in the life of the church, the centrality and uniqueness of the local church in God's purposes, and the necessity of humility shown in service. The **examples** set by the Lord, the apostles, and

the early church are binding upon us unless those examples are obviously unique to their offices or their times. They are 'norms' set for us to follow and to strive after and, therefore, 'normative' for us (Poh, Keys, 1995, 2007:158). The word 'normative' as used here must not be confused with the Normative Principle. John Owen states that an apostolic example "hath the force of a divine institution" (Owen, Vol. 16:197). He also states that "extraordinary cases are accompanied with a warranty in themselves for extraordinary actings and duties" (Owen, Vol. 16:54).

All these fall under the realm of hermeneutics which we are unable to delve into here. Suffice to say that any passage of Scripture must be understood plainly, in context, and by comparing with other related passages (Poh, Cessationism, 1997, 2020). Furthermore, these basic rules of interpretation must be regulated by the overall covenantal view of salvation in Christ, and the progressive nature of revelation. Instead of using the word "commanded" in the definition of the Regulative Principle, a better word would be "taught", so that the Regulative Principle reads, "In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture must be obeyed, while whatever is not taught in Scripture must be rejected."

Secondly, the proponents of the Regulative Principle have not helped themselves when they give a truncated definition of the principle, in which the qualifying statement on Adiaphorism is not included. This has led to some advocates of the Regulative Principle applying it rigidly in worship on the one hand, and the critics of the Regulative Principle rejecting it as impractical on the other. In contrast, the Reformers and the Puritans always included a statement of Adiaphorism in their statement on the Regulative Principle. We say "statement" because, to my knowledge, none of them had given a formal definition of the Regulative Principle. An example of a statement, or description, of the Regulative Principle is that of John Hooper (c. 1495-1555) (Murray, 1987):

Nothing should be used in the Church which has not either the express Word of God to support it, or otherwise is a thing indifferent in itself, which brings no profit when done or used, but no harm when not done or omitted.

Another example is the statement given by John a' Lasco (1499-1560):

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It is my belief that among all things in the Church of Christ, some ought to be preserved perpetually, some are indifferent, but others are not on any account to be tolerated. Those that ought to be permanent in the Church are the pure teaching of the prophets and apostles, which ought to be set forth diligently through God's ministers to the flock of Christ, as the food of the soul. Additional to this are the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper administered according to the apostolic rite described in three apostolic gospels; to these ecclesiastical discipline is most fittingly joined. But whatever things are done for the useful and convenient administration of the Word and sacraments are indifferent; so long as they have their source in the Scriptures let there be no prohibition, let their usefulness to the Church be clear, and let there be no tyranny which strangles men's consciences. Of this kind are the questions of gathering at this or that hour of the day in church, using this and that sort of speech in administration of the sacraments, and celebrating the Lord's Supper once or more often in the year.

Further confirmation of this understanding of the definition of the Regulative Principle and Adiaphorism is found in "The Directory for the Publick (sic) Worship of God" drawn up by the Westminster Assembly and adopted by the Presbyterians in Scotland. The purpose of the document is expressed as follows (Westminster Confession, 1990):

Wherein our care hath been to hold forth *such things as are of divine institution in every ordinances; and other things we have endeavoured to set forth according to the rules of Christian prudence, agreeable to the general rules of the word of God*; our meaning therein being only, that the general heads, the sense and scope of the prayers, and other parts of publick worship, being known to all, there may be a consent of all the churches in those things that contain the substance of the service and worship of God... (Emphasis added.)

Another example from John Owen should suffice (Owen, Vol. 13:464):

- 1 That whatever the Scripture hath indeed prescribed and appointed to be done and observed in the worship of God and the government of the church, that is indeed to be done and observed...
- 2 That nothing in conjunction with, nothing as an addition or supplement unto, what is so appointed ought to be admitted, if it be contrary either to the general rules or particular preceptive instructions of the Scripture...
- 3 That nothing ought to be joined with or added unto what in the Scripture is prescribed and appointed in these things without cogent reason, making such conjunction or addition necessary...
- 4 That if any thing or things in this kind shall be found necessary to be added and prescribed, then that and those alone be so which are most consonant unto the general rules of the Scripture given us for our guidance in the worship of God...

These statements of the Regulative Principle include the qualifying statement on the 'adiaphora'. An attempt at a more complete definition of the Regulative Principle would be, "In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture must be obeyed, while whatever is not taught in Scripture must be rejected, except for some circumstances concerning worship which must be ordered according to common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture." Not all circumstances of worship fall under the 'adiaphora'. Only *some* circumstances that are not addressed in the Scripture fall under the 'adiaphora'.

The third way in which proponents of the Regulative Principle have sabotaged their own interest is by confusing the circumstances *concerning* worship with the circumstances *of* worship, thereby confounding the handling of things that are 'adiaphora' with the application of the Liberty of Conscience. It is argued that in the mode of worship, i.e. in the execution of the elements of worship, the general rules of Scripture apply, while in other matters such as the type of seats used and the clothes we wear, the liberty of conscience applies. This was not the case with the Reformers and the Puritans. During the Vestment Controversy in England, the vestment worn by the

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minister was regarded as the introduction of an alien element into worship which must be totally rejected. It was not an 'adiaphora', to be governed by the general principles of Scripture. It was argued that the Aaronic priesthood has been abolished by the priesthood of Christ (Heb. 7, 8, 10). The attempt to introduce the vestment was seen as an attempt to re-establish what had been annulled by Christ which, based on Paul's teaching in Galatians 2, was a transgression of the will of God. We have noted above that the circumstances **concerning** worship includes the manner (or 'mode') of worship, together with "the circumstances which are common to human actions and societies", both of which are to be governed by common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture.

#### 3.5 Summary

- 1 Four principles governing worship has come down to us historically. The Integrative Principle, held by the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches states that "In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture and the tradition of the church is permissible." The Normative Principle held by Lutheran churches and the Church of England states that "In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture is to be obeyed while whatever is not forbidden by Scripture is permissible." The Regulative Principle held by the continental Reformed churches and the Puritans of Britain is commonly understood as, "In the worship of God, whatever is commanded in Scripture must be obeyed, while whatever is not commanded in Scripture must be rejected." The Progressive Principle was held by various dissenting groups down the centuries and may be stated as "In the worship of God, Scripture provides general guidelines to be followed while allowing for freedom in personal preferences and expressions."
- 2 The Reformation of the 16th century recovered the doctrine of 'sola scriptura' which states that Scripture is the only authority in all matters of faith and practice. The application of this doctrine to worship and church government by the Reformers and the Puritans led to the formulation of the Normative Principle and the Regulative Principle.
- 3 The Regulative Principle may be shown to be more consistent with

the teaching of Scripture compared to the other principles of worship advocated by others. The incident of Abel's offering being accepted by God instead of that of Cain in Genesis 4:1-7, the incident of Aaron's two sons being struck dead for offering "profane fire" in Leviticus 10:1-3, and the incident of Aaron and the children of Israel worshipping the golden calf in Exodus 32 support the Regulative Principle. In the New Testament, passages such as Matthew 15:9; 28:18-20; Colossians 2:22-23, and Revelation 22:18-19 would lend support to the Regulative Principle.

- 4 The definition of the Regulative Principle adopted by many today is deficient compared to how it was traditionally understood. Advocates of the Regulative Principle have not helped their own cause by: (i) giving the wrong impression that only the explicit **commands** of Scripture are to be followed instead of the **teaching** of Scripture; (ii) giving a truncated definition of the Regulative Principle in which the qualifying statement on 'things indifferent' is omitted; (iii) confusing **some** circumstances **concerning** worship with **the** circumstances **of** worship, the former of which is limited in extent but extensive in scope, while the latter concerns only the execution of the elements of worship. A more complete definition is, "In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture must be obeyed, while whatever is not taught in Scripture must be rejected, except for some circumstances concerning worship which must be ordered according to common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture."

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## Four

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# THINGS INDIFFERENT

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**T**he ‘adiaphora’, or ‘things indifferent’, in connection with the Regulative Principle of worship needs closer study. It is often treated as an incidental matter and omitted in the definition of the Regulative Principle. Adiaphorism, strictly speaking, applies to the circumstances **concerning** worship, and not just with the circumstances **of** worship. The latter refers to the manner of executing the elements of worship while the former extends the circumstances of the latter to include other matters that are connected to worship. Furthermore, Adiaphorism is limited to some circumstances not addressed directly by Scripture which are to be ordered by the general rules of Scripture. What is the nature of Adiaphorism? Are there specific teaching on this subject in Scripture? How will this impact on worship? These are questions we seek to answer.

### 4.1 The Nature Of Adiaphorism

Adiaphorism is the handling of things that are ‘indifferent’ in worship. The word ‘indifferent’ itself is misleading. It may wrongly be taken to mean we can do as we like with them when, in reality, there is a certain degree of freedom given for them within the bounds of common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture. These ‘things indifferent’ are **some** circumstances **concerning** worship, and not **the** circumstances **of** worship. The circumstances that are addressed by Scripture are not to be considered ‘things indifferent’. Instead, the teaching of Scripture on these circumstances

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are to be obeyed. Furthermore, the circumstances that fall under the category of 'things indifferent' cover not just the execution of the elements of worship but other matters related to worship.

Concerning the 'things indifferent', the 1689 Confession says that the general rules of Scripture "are always to be observed". What are these general rules? The Bible references given include 1 Corinthians 11:13-14 and 14:26, 40 which give us an idea of the category of rules meant. The first reference concerns common sense and Christian prudence – "Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?" The second reference concerns edification – "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." The third reference concerns decency and order – "Let all things be done decently and in order." We have listed a number of the general rules (in Chapter 3) which are, to do all things: (i) to the glory of God; (ii) decently and in order; (iii) for edification; and (iv) in simplicity. We have suggested that these are summarised under two rules concerning worship, viz. Leviticus 10:3 and John 4:24. The fact that these rules are explicitly stated as rules of worship places an obligation on us to take note of them. They may be seen as the outworking of the Second and Third Commandments which are the root sources of the Regulative Principle.

Traditionally, the first four commandments of the Moral Law are classified as the First Table of the Law, which concerns our relationship with God. The next six commandments, considered as the Second Table of the Law, concern our relationship with one another. Although not possible to prove, it is generally assumed that the Ten Commandments were distributed in this manner on the two tables of stone given by God to Moses, for the nation of Israel. The first four commandments are:

- 1 "You shall have no other gods before Me (Exod. 20:3)."
- 2 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them (Exod. 20:4-5)."
- 3 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the

Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain (Exod. 20:7)."

- 4 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates (Exod. 20:8-10)."

The First Commandment concerns the *Object* of worship which we have expounded under the principle of "Trinitarian Exclusivity" (Chapter 2). The Second Commandment concerns the *manner* of worshipping God which we have expounded in the chapter on "The Regulative Principle" (Chapter 3). The authority of Scripture has to be applied to worship in: (i) the execution of the elements of worship (the 'mode' of worship); (ii) the regulation of the circumstances involved in the execution of the elements of worship; and (iii) the circumstances involved in the act of worship. The Regulative Principle, therefore, encompasses the Second and the Third Commandments. The Third Commandment concerns the *attitude* of worship. The specific teaching on worship found in Leviticus 10:3 and John 4:24 are re-affirmations of the Second and Third Commandments. In other words, they are reaffirmations of the Regulative Principle. The Fourth Commandment concerns the *day* of worship, which will be treated in greater detail in a separate chapter. Here, our focus is on the Third Commandment which will be considered in relation to the Second Commandment.

The Third Commandment is couched negatively, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." To "take the name of the Lord" is to be identified with the Lord by faith, very much like a woman taking on the family name of the husband once she is married – a practice seen in many cultures (cf. Isa. 4:1). Those who profess to worship the true God should not dishonour Him by careless or irreverent use of anything related to Him. Examples would include: (i) making loose exclamations like, "My God!" or "Jesus!" (ii) cracking jokes relating to the Bible; (iii) being lax or inattentive in church meetings; (iv) setting a bad example at the place of work as a Christian (Poh, 2013:78). Our interest here lies in the implications of this commandment to public worship.

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We have established the point that Adiaphorism should be considered as part-and-parcel of the Regulative Principle. The Regulative Principle covers not only the Second Commandment which prohibits the introduction of alien elements of worship but also the Third Commandment which requires the correct attitude to worship. This is seen in the case of Aaron's sons being struck dead by the LORD because they introduced something not commanded. We are told in Leviticus 10:1, "Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them." The burning of incense was regarded as "profane fire" because the Lord had not commanded *them*, i.e. Nadab and Abihu. Their *action* was wrong on two counts: firstly, the burning of incense was not commanded by God for that particular worship service; and secondly, the two men were never assigned by God to burn incense. In other words, two alien elements were being introduced into worship. Only Aaron, the High Priest, had been assigned to burn incense on the altar of incense twice each day – once in the morning and once in the evening (Exodus 30:7, 8). Aaron was also assigned to burn incense before the Lord on the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:12-13). Aaron's sons were also wrong in their *attitude* of worship. We are told in Leviticus 10:3,

And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace.

The mode of worship and the attitude of worship are inseparable, just as the Second Commandment and the Third Commandment are inseparable. Both concern the worship of the triune God. Any definition of the Regulative Principle should include a statement of how the elements of worship are to be handled – in practice and in spirit. The attitude of reverence to God, required by the Third Commandment, is of the essence of Adiaphorism. It should be demonstrated in the desire to honour God personally and before men. The Third Commandment, and its equivalent statement in Leviticus 10:3, encompasses the general principles in the New Testament that have bearing on Adiaphorism: (i) doing all things to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31); (ii) doing all things decently and in order

(1 Cor. 14:40); (iii) seeking to edify the church (1 Cor. 14:26; 2 Cor. 10:8; Eph. 4:29); (iv) not stumbling weaker brethren (Matt. 18:6; Rom. 14:13); (v) not dishonouring God before the world (Rom. 12:17; 14:16; 2 Cor. 8:21; 1 Pet. 2:12); and (vi) promoting godliness (2 Cor. 13:8). In short, all the general rules that govern the 'adiaphora' are included except for "doing all things according to the simplicity that is in Christ". For this last general rule, we have to come to the New Testament teaching given in John 4:24.

## 4.2 In Spirit And Truth

John 4:24 says, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." These words of the Lord must be understood in the light of the context. Verses 21-23 say,

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."

The expression "the hour is coming" shows that the age of the New Covenant was going to begin officially soon. The Lord would lay down His life on the cross for His people and rise from the dead. The Holy Spirit would be poured out on the church on the day of Pentecost, which has been taken to be the official birthday of the New Testament church. The temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed in AD 70 while the gospel spread to all the nations. With the completion of Scripture when the book of Revelation was written, the transition period from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant would be over. Worship would no longer be dependent on the location – "neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem". The animal sacrifices of the temple would be replaced by the worship of the Father through faith in Jesus Christ – for "salvation is of the Jews". Jesus Christ is the Saviour promised in the Old Testament Scripture, who is descended from David, who is the Seed of Abraham (Poh, 2020:21-63). These facts have direct bearing on worshipping God "in spirit and truth".

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### 4.2.1 Worshipping in spirit

To worship God in spirit is to worship Him sincerely out of faith in Christ. An unconverted person cannot worship God acceptably, for Christ has said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." It means also worshipping Him by the help of the Holy Spirit who indwells the true believer (Gal. 3:2; Rom. 8:9). Worship should not be hypocritical and ritualistic like that of the Pharisees and scribes. In Mark 7:5, the Pharisees and scribes asked the Lord, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" The Lord's reply to them was, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" The worship of the disciples of Christ is different from that of the Pharisees and the scribes on at least two counts. Firstly, the Christians worship sincerely, having experienced forgiveness of sin and acceptance by God through faith in Christ. This was not the experience of the Pharisees and scribes, for their heart was far from God. Their act of worship was hypocritical. Secondly, the Christians are helped by the Holy Spirit in them. We are told in Romans 8:15, "...you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." In Romans 8:26-27, we are told,

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will* of God.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Christ is present with His people by His Spirit (John 14:16-18; Matt. 18:19-20; 28:20). The worship of Christians is accepted by the Father who is Spirit because of the intercession of Christ. After the death and resurrection of Christ, He has ascended to heaven to act as High Priest for His people. Based on Christ's finished work on the cross, and His present intercession for His people in heaven, we are able to draw near to God in worship. Worship in spirit is made possible because of the help of the Holy Spirit in His people, who applies the saving

benefits of Christ to them. These truths are made clear in Hebrews 10:19-25,

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

### 4.2.2 Worshipping in truth

To worship God in truth is to worship Him with understanding and obedience to the teaching of Scripture. The Samaritans regarded only the five books of Moses as Scripture, while the Jews held also to the Psalms and the Prophets. The Samaritans worshipped on Mt. Gerizim while the Jews worshipped on Mt. Zion. The Lord pointed out to the Samaritan woman that "the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship..." Two points must be noted. Firstly, the Lord was saying that the understanding of the truth is important to worship. Understanding the truth implies obedience to the truth, for what is the point of understanding the truth if there is no obedience to it? Secondly, the Lord was referring to the abolition of the animal sacrifices and rituals of the Old Covenant – "neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem". The types and symbols of the Old Covenant would be fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Christ, according to the prophecies of "the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms" (Luke 24:25-27, 44-48).

The New Covenant has rendered the Old Covenant obsolete (Heb. 8:6, 13). New wine must be put into new wineskins (Matt. 9:17). The Old Testament rituals and ceremonies have been replaced by

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worship "in spirit and truth". New Testament worship partakes of "the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). Furthermore, the word "and" is significant and should not be overlooked. It is a conjunction connecting two adverbial nouns. We are required to worship in spirit **and** truth. In worship, sincerity **and** understanding are united. In worship, the Holy Spirit **and** the word of God are united. The New Covenant concerns the people of God and their worship. The sincerity that arises from faith in Christ is married to the understanding of truth. This is seen in 1 Corinthians 14:15 as well, which says,

What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

In Hebrews 8:10-11, we are told,

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

God has internalised His laws in His people such that there is a willingness to obey Him. The formula of the Covenant of Grace, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" points us to 2 Corinthians 6:16 where it is used also. It shows that God's people are to be distinct and separated from the world. They are in the world but not of the world. Nowhere is this more obvious than when God's people are gathered in worship. The verses that follow (vv. 17-18) say,

Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."



### 4.2.3 A separated people

While there is a sense in which individual believers live out their everyday life as an offering to God, the corporate aspect of their life of worship must not be overlooked. We have considered briefly Romans 12:1 in a previous chapter (Chapter 2). Here is the place to expand on the topic and see its relevance to public worship. Romans 12:1-2 say,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The plural "your bodies" and the singular "a living sacrifice" show that the corporate aspect of the Christian life is in view. This passage is a reference to the local church gathered together, although it has ramifications for the individual believers living out their everyday lives. The subsequent verses expand on this thought, showing that the gifts of the individuals are to be used for the benefit of the whole church – "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another (vv. 4-5)."<sup>1</sup> The chief purpose why the members gather together would be to worship God. The reasonable "service" (Gk. 'latreia', meaning "priestly service"), therefore, includes public worship and all other services rendered God. It follows that verse 2, which qualifies verse 1, applies as much to public worship as it does to the individual's life. Public worship requires that we be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Public worship must mark us out as a people separated unto God. This point will be discussed further in a later chapter.

We pause to summarise what has been considered up to this point. Only true disciples of Christ are able to worship God "in

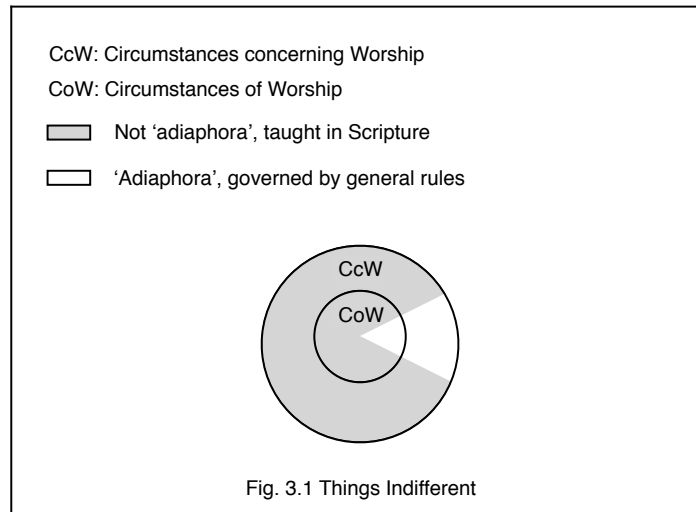
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<sup>1</sup>The "therefore" of Romans 12:1 does not relate to the immediate preceding verses, for Paul is here beginning a new section on practical Christian living. Instead, it relates to all that has been taught from the beginning of the book, which expounds on the doctrine of "justification by faith".

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spirit and truth". This involves sincerity of heart arising from faith in Christ which is married to understanding of the truth regarding worship. When there is sincerity of heart and understanding of the truth, there will be obedience to the truth in worship, showing most clearly that we are a people separated unto God. We have seen that Leviticus 10:3 requires us to worship God with reverence, shown by a desire to honour Him personally and in witness to others. It turns out that worshipping God "in spirit and truth" as taught in John 4:24 is a re-statement of the teaching of Leviticus, but with extension to the fulfilment of the Old Covenant mode of worship in the death of Christ! We now worship God "according to the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). To worship God "in spirit and truth", therefore, is another way of stating the Regulative Principle of worship, in which the elements and circumstances concerning worship are determined by Scripture while some circumstances concerning worship are determined by common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture.



We reproduce Fig. 3.1, representing the 'adiaphora' of the Regulative Principle of worship. The Second Commandment gives rise to that part of the Regulative Principle which determines the elements and circumstances of worship. The Third Commandment gives rise

to the 'adiaphora' of the Regulative Principle which governs *some* circumstances *concerning* worship, including *some* circumstances *of* worship.

## 4.3 Implications On Worship

### 4.3.1 The elements of worship

The 1689 Confession, Chapter 22:1, describes the Regulative Principle as follows,

...The acceptable way of worshipping the true God has been instituted by Himself,<sup>2</sup> and therefore **our method of worship is limited by His own revealed will**. He may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan. **He may not be worshipped** by way of visible representations, or **by any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures**.<sup>3</sup> (Emphasis added.)

<sup>1</sup>Jer. 10:7; Mark 12:33. <sup>2</sup>Deut. 12:32. <sup>3</sup>Exod. 20:4-6.

We say that the Confession "describes" the Regulative Principle because it is not a formal definition of the principle. The parts emphasised give only a partial description of the Regulative Principle, with no mention of how the elements of worship are to be exercised. Before considering the latter, let us determine what constitute the elements of worship. Paragraph 3 of the same chapter of the 1689 Confession states that "Prayer, with thanksgiving, is one part of natural worship, and this God requires of all men." Paragraph 5 says,

The reading of the Scriptures,<sup>16</sup> preaching and hearing the Word of God,<sup>17</sup> teaching and admonishing of one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord;<sup>18</sup> as well as the administration of baptism<sup>19</sup> and the Lord's Supper,<sup>20</sup> are all parts of the worship of God.

<sup>16</sup>1 Tim. 4:13. <sup>17</sup>2 Tim. 4:2; Luke 8:18. <sup>18</sup>Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19. <sup>19</sup>Matt. 28:19-20. <sup>20</sup>1 Cor. 11:26.

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We have suggested that baptism and the Lord's Supper are not essential elements of a normal worship service which may be included, or celebrated separately as "special occasions". If treated as essential elements, candidates will have to be found for baptism in every service. Furthermore, baptism and the Lord's Supper are special ordinances (or 'sacraments') of a true church. Together with the preaching of the gospel and the exercise of church discipline, they are the essential marks of a true church (Poh, 1995, 2017:35-42). The statement on "teaching and admonishing... and singing" is taken directly from Colossians 3:16. We have also suggested that the "teaching and admonishing" that arise from singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs are secondary benefits since the primary purpose of singing is the worship of God. Teaching, however, is clearly an element of worship as 1 Timothy 4:13 includes "reading, exhortation, and doctrine" – the "doctrine" (Greek, 'didaskalo') literally means teaching, i.e. systematic instruction from the word of God. The keeping of the Lord's Day is stated as "a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding upon all men" in paragraph 7 of the same chapter of the 1689 Confession. It will be shown in a later chapter that keeping the Lord's Day and making the collection should rightly be regarded as elements of worship. Put together, the elements of worship are as follows: Scripture reading, prayer, preaching, teaching, singing, the collection, the Lord's Day – with baptism and the Lord's Supper added if necessary, or conducted separately.

##### 4.3.2 Circumstances concerning worship

How are these elements of worship to be conducted? The 1689 Confession, Chapter 22, paragraph 3 continues with these words,

These are to be performed in obedience to Him, with understanding, faith and godly fear. Also to be used in a holy and reverent manner on special occasions are times of solemn humiliation, fastings,<sup>21</sup> and thanksgivings.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Esther 4:16; Joel 2:12. <sup>22</sup>Exod. 15:1-19; Psalm 107.

Apart from baptism and the Lord's Supper, other special occasions of worship would include thanksgiving for the safe delivery of a baby, a particular anniversary of the founding of the church, the sending forth of missionaries, a wedding, etc. Our interest here is

with the normal elements of worship and how they are to be conducted. These are to be performed "in obedience to God, with understanding", which corresponds to the "in truth" of John 4:24. These are to be performed in "faith and godly fear" which corresponds to the "in spirit" of John 4:24. These elements are also to be used "in a holy and reverent manner", which corresponds with the necessity of glorifying God personally and before others, as taught in Leviticus 10:3. John 4:24 and Leviticus 10:3 are the positive outworking of the Second and Third Commandments which require that we worship God in the way prescribed in the New Testament, including the mode and the circumstances of worship. Worship that is according to the Regulative Principle would mark us out as a people separated unto God. Put another way, God's people should not be worldly – in public worship and in other areas of life.

A few observations are in order. Firstly, in the same chapter of the Confession of Faith, under "Worship", is found the *manner* of worshipping God which is by executing the elements of worship, as well as the *attitude* of worship which is how these elements are to be executed. In other words, the Regulative Principle is conceived as including the 'adiaphora'. Secondly, "the general rules of the Word" which govern "some circumstances of the worship of God" – mentioned in 1689 Confession, Chapter 1:6 – are explicitly listed here. Thirdly, these "general rules of the Word" are shown to fall under the two principles of worship, viz. Leviticus 10:3 and John 4:24, which are the practical outworking of the Second and Third Commandments. It follows from these observations that each of the elements of worship, and the whole worship service, must be carried out by asking the questions:

- i Is it glorifying to God?
- ii Is it edifying to others?
- iii Is it showing forth sincerity of faith in Christ?
- iv Is it showing forth understanding of, and conformity to, the truth of Scripture?

If there is a "No" answer to any of these four questions, we may be certain that we are not keeping the Regulative Principle and, therefore, breaking either one, or both, of the Second and Third Commandments.

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The first three of these questions are largely subjective in nature, such that there is the possibility of those who fail the tests claiming otherwise, and charging others for being judgemental of them. We may plead with them to examine themselves (cf. 2 Cor. 13:5-6) and warn them that "the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him (2 Chron. 16:9)." Beyond that, we can do no more. These are tests that one should apply to oneself. We do believe in, and uphold, the liberty of conscience!

The fourth question concerns the objective test of Scripture. The objective test of Scripture gives us the opportunity to show what it teaches concerning each element of worship and how it is to be conducted. This we will do in the subsequent chapters. Seen this way, the application of the Regulative Principle of worship is actually the application of 'sola scriptura' to worship applied seamlessly from determining the elements of worship and the many circumstances of worship that are taught in Scripture (by commands, precepts, principles, and examples) to some circumstances concerning worship that are governed by the general rules of Scripture (applied according to common sense and Christian prudence). Scripture is sufficient to guide us in worship, just as it is sufficient to guide us in other areas of church and Christian life! Scripture is truly the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice!

##### 4.3.3 Various forms of worship

At this juncture, it is possible to make a general assessment of how the various forms of worship measure up to the Regulative Principle which, as noted repeatedly, includes the application of the general rules of Scripture to some circumstances concerning worship, i.e. to the 'things indifferent'. The collection of the offering and the keeping of the Lord's Day have never been matters of contention between the different forms of worship, although individual churches might have different understanding of these. In Integrative Worship (see Catholic Encyclopedia), the reading of Scripture is done by a priest who wears the vestment – the priesthood and the vestment being two alien elements which are excluded by the Regulative Principle. Prayer is made by the priest who wears the vestment and makes the sign of the cross, uses the rosary, and burns incense – an additional three alien elements which breach the Regulative Principle.

The prayer is not extemporaneous but read out. It will be seen in the chapter on Scripture Reading and Prayer (Chapter 5, Proclamational Worship) that the Lord's Prayer is meant to teach the content of prayer, and no more. Instead, all the examples of actual prayer in the Bible are extemporary (not written out in advance). Prayer is also made to Mary, the apostles, and the saints, i.e. departed prominent members of the church who have been canonised by the church, which contradicts the First Commandment. Instead of preaching from the portion of Scripture read, there is the reading of the homily, i.e. a prepared written/printed message. While the homily may pass off as teaching, there is an absence of preaching in the biblical sense. Instead of congregational singing of the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in a known language, there is the Latin chant by the choir. There is a breach of the Regulative Principle on two counts – firstly, in the choir singing instead of the congregation, and secondly in the absence of understanding of what is being sung because it is in Latin.

In Normative Worship, as practised by the Anglican, the Episcopalian, and the Lutheran churches, the reading of Scripture is by a priest who wears the vestment – two alien items excluded by the Regulative Principle. Prayer is read out, and often accompanied by the alternate, read-out, response of the congregation. The priesthood, the vestment, and the sign of the cross are retained. A choir sings, occasionally joined in by the congregation. Evangelical churches that uphold the Normative Principle have Scripture reading without the embellishment of the priesthood and the vestment. Preaching is often followed by the altar call – a practice that breaches the Regulative Principle. There is no command, precept, principle, nor example in the Scripture for the altar call. It is an innovation, supposedly to help the hearers commit themselves to Christ, but producing many questionable professions of faith instead. Prayer is extemporary, without the sign of the cross. Quite many Evangelical churches practise simultaneous congregational prayer during the worship service, which contradicts the teaching of 1 Corinthians 14:15-16, 27, 31. Quite many churches also adopt Contemporary Worship which includes the drum-set and the singing of Contemporary Worship songs and choruses, which blur the distinction between God's separated people and the people of the world. It is debatable whether these Evangelical churches fare better in faithfulness to Scripture than the other churches that uphold Normative Worship.

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In Progressive Worship, the singing and the music overshadow the Scripture reading and the preaching – breaching the primacy of the word of God in worship. The hand-clapping, hand-raising, and body-swaying during the singing of songs to rock and pop-music smack too much of the world – breaching the principle of the necessity of glorifying God personally and before men. The emphasis on being seeker-sensitive and incarnational – i.e. reaching out to people where they are, on their terms, and adopting their culture to convey the gospel – is based on a wrong understanding of 1 Corinthians 10:32-33, "Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved." In this passage, Paul is withholding his legitimate rights, rather than adopting questionable approaches. To refrain from giving offense is different from adopting worldly ways or compromising on the principles of worship. The focus on entertaining everyone in Contemporary Worship music is a serious departure from the objective of worship, which is to pay homage to the almighty and holy God.

Progressive Worship also appeals wrongly to 1 Corinthians 14:26, from which is claimed that everyone may have something to contribute, "for edification". A careful study of the passage will reveal that Paul is "putting the brakes on" instead of "stepping on the accelerator" in so far as the exercise of spiritual gifts is concerned (Poh, 2020). There is a failure on the part of Progressive Worship to understand the verse in context. Many things done in Progressive Worship are contradictory to what is taught in Scripture – e.g. simultaneous congregational prayer (cf. 1 Cor. 14:14-17), the predominance of women in leadership and teaching roles (cf. 1 Cor. 14:34-35), tongue-speaking and healing (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13), spontaneous or choreographed dancing (cf. Col. 2:23), etc. The house-churches in China, and similar churches in other parts of the world, have been heavily influenced by the Pentecostal movement. Progressive Worship is practised in which the singing and simultaneous congregational prayer overshadow the Scripture reading and the preaching. The teaching is generally shallow while there is much emotional prayer and personal testimonies. Instead of being heavy on entertainment as is the case with their Western counterparts, they are heavy on mysticism – i.e. the attempt to attain close communion with God through contemplation and self-surrender rather than



through the understanding of truth.

## 4.4 Summary

- 1 Adiaphorism is the handling of things that are indifferent in worship. It is an inseparable part of the Regulative Principle. The first part of the Regulative Principle arises from the Second Commandment, by which only what is taught in Scripture is admissible in worship. The second part of the Regulative Principle arises from the Third Commandment, by which some circumstances concerning worship are regulated in accordance to a reverential attitude to God.
- 2 The reverential attitude demanded by the Third Commandment is shown in practice by the two principles of honouring God personally and before men (Lev. 10:3), and a sincerity in worship that is accompanied by conformity to God's word (John 4:24). Public worship shows most clearly that God's people are distinct and separated from the world.
- 3 The Regulative Principle identifies for us seven elements of worship, viz. prayer, Scripture reading, preaching, teaching, singing, the offering, and the Lord's Day. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the special ordinances of the church which may be included in the normal public worship, or they may be conducted separately as special occasions of worship.
- 4 The Regulative Principle also shows how worship is to be conducted. In practice, four test questions may be applied, viz. (i) Is it glorifying to God? (ii) Is it edifying to others? (iii) Is it showing forth sincerity of faith in Christ? (iv) Is it showing forth understanding of, and conformity to, the truth of Scripture? Of these, the first three are largely subjective and to be self-applied, while the last is the objective test of Scripture. The application of the Regulative Principle to worship, in reality, is the application of 'sola scriptura' to worship in a seamless manner – from the determination of the elements of worship and the many circumstances concerning worship taught in Scripture, to some circumstances concerning worship that are regulated by the general rules of Scripture.

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5 Integrative Worship, Normative Worship, and Progressive Worship fail the test of Scripture on many counts. The Regulative Principle alone helps us to worship God correctly.

#### 4.5 References

- 1 Catholic Encyclopedia: <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15710a.htm> (Last accessed, August 2020.)
- 2 Poh, Boon-Sing. 2013. A Basic Catechism of the Christian Faith. Good News Enterprise. 165pp.
- 3 Poh, B. S. 1995, 2017. The Keys of the Kingdom. Good News Enterprise. 427pp.
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# Five

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## PROCLAMATIONAL WORSHIP

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**T**he Second Commandment says, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image – any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them (Exod. 20:4-5)." While the First Commandment concerns the Object of true worship, the Second Commandment is concerned with the manner of worshipping God. The manner, or mode, of worshipping God in the Old Testament has been replaced by the manner of worship prescribed in the New Testament. The principles underlying worship remains the same, however.

### 5.1 Abiding Principles

From the time of Adam to Moses, God had instituted the burnt offering as the way to worship Him. This consisted of the slaughtering and burning up of ceremonially clean animals on an altar (cf. Gen. 8:20). From Moses onwards, an elaborate system of worship was instituted in which offerings of various kinds were made – the burnt offering, the sin (or trespass) offering, the grain (and/or drink) offering, and the peace offering (Leviticus 1-5). While there are differences among Bible scholars as to the significance in the details, there is general agreement on the main significance of each sacrifice. All these offerings point to various aspects of the work of Christ (Bonar,

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1846, 1983). Of these offerings, some are proclamational, followed by those that are responsive, while others are offertory, in nature.

The burnt offering was a proclamation by God that He must be approached acceptably by way of an atoning sacrifice, which in due time was fulfilled in the death of Christ for His people (Lev. 1:4). The message proclaimed is that the sin of the people must be atoned for, and reconciliation with God must be effected, before there can be fellowship between the two parties. In other words, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission (Heb. 9:22)" was being declared each time the burnt offering was made. The sin and trespass offerings were a similar proclamation from God, but made to those already reconciled with God. Presumptuous sins, i.e. sin committed deliberately, would require the death penalty in the Old Covenant (Num. 15:30-31). Inadvertent sins, however, must be atoned for by the sin and trespass offerings to maintain communion with God (Lev. 4:1-3; 5:1-6, 17-19).

To these proclamational rituals was added the reading of the Law (Exod. 24:7; Neh. 8:3, 8, 13; 9:3). God's people had to respond to the hearing of the Law. In Exodus 24:7, during the service for reaffirming the covenant with God, the people said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." In Nehemiah 8:6, we are told that 'all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.' In Nehemiah 9:3, we are told that "they confessed and worshipped the LORD their God."

Public worship also involved the grain and drink offerings which were responsive acts of adoration and praise to God upon reconciliation with Him. That these offerings were an expression of adoration to God, in response to reconciliation effected by the burnt offering, is clear from the fact that they are mentioned together in Numbers 15:1-21 – "to make a sweet aroma to the LORD" (vv. 3, 7, 10, 13). The grain offering had to be offered without leaven if baked, and with "the salt of the covenant of your God" if it was grain (Lev. 2:11-16). The drink offering consisted of half a hin (six to eight pints) of wine sprinkled on the fire of sacrifice (Num. 15:10).

Then, there was also the peace offering (Lev. 3:1-8) which consisted of either the produce of the flock (Lev. 7:28-36) or the produce of the ground (Lev. 23:9-11). This was offered in thanksgiving to God for His blessing. Portions of the peace offering were given as wave or heave offerings to Aaron and his sons, i.e. the priests

who served in the tabernacle or temple. The message conveyed by these offerings was that the people willingly and gratefully submitted themselves to God and brought Him gifts in acknowledgement that all that they had had come by His grace upon them. In other words, these were offertory offerings, i.e. gifts offered voluntarily.

The concept of the progressive nature of revelation should be understood. Elsewhere, this has been discussed in relation to church government (Poh, 1995, 2017:59-63). The same thing applies to worship. When we arrive at the New Testament, all three types of offerings – the proclamational, the responsive, and the offertory – of the Old Testament find fulfilment in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 7-10). In the New Testament, instead of worshipping by rituals, God's people are to worship "in spirit and truth (John 4:24)". The elements of worship in the New Testament correspond to the three categories in the Old Testament because the same God is worshipped, in fulfilment of His eternal Covenant of Redemption. At the same time, there is progression from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The proclamational elements are Scripture reading as well as teaching and preaching. The responsive elements are prayer and congregational singing, while the offertory elements are the collection and keeping the Lord's Day.

Public worship is the gathering of God's redeemed people in audience with God, just as the subjects of a kingdom gather at fixed times in audience with the human king. In such an audience, three categories of activities take place – the king addresses the subjects, the subjects respond to the king by words, and they bring tributes before the king. The elements of New Testament worship may be similarly classified under these three categories (cf. Lev. 7:12; Heb. 13:15-16; Rev. 5:8; 8:4). God addresses His people in the reading of Scripture, and in teaching and preaching from His word. The people respond by words to God in prayer and in congregational singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. The people also present their offering of the collection and the keeping of the Lord's Day. It will be shown that keeping the Sabbath is an offering to God in acknowledgement of His blessing.

The propriety of seeing worship as an audience between king and subjects may be established by: (i) God's people being ruled by human kings in the Old Testament which foreshadowed the rule of Christ as King of His people (Matt. 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:26-28; Phil. 2:9-11); (ii) the New Testament portrayal of Christ as King of

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a spiritual kingdom (Matt. 21:4-11; 27:11; Rev. 19:16); (iii) the worship in heaven which is portrayed as all the angels and the redeemed creatures arranged in concentric circles and paying homage to the trinitarian God who is at the centre where the throne is located (Rev. 4-7; 14:1-13; 19:1-10). In the remaining part of this chapter, we focus only on the proclamational aspect of worship, which includes the reading of Scripture, and the teaching and preaching of God's word.

### 5.2 Scripture Reading

Moses wrote down and read to the children of Israel not only the Ten Commandments but also "the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments" which, together, constituted the Book of the Law (Deut. 4:44-46; 30:10). In the days of Nehemiah, Ezra was assigned to read the Law before the assembly of people followed by the scribes who gave teaching from portions of the Law (Neh. 8:2-3, 8). From the account, it would seem clear that there were two readings – the longer reading by Ezra, followed by portions of the Law which the scribes read and expounded.

The public reading of the Old Testament Scriptures was part of synagogue worship (Luke 4:16-20; Acts 13:27; 15:21; 2 Cor. 3:14-15). In the New Testament churches, the Old Testament Scriptures continued to be read, together with the apostolic writings which were being circulated (1 Tim. 4:13; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul says, "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." The public reading of Scriptures is meant because it is mentioned together with exhortation and doctrine, which are public activities. The word "exhortation" (Greek, 'parakaleo') refers to public proclamation involving warning, encouragement, and comforting. The word "doctrine" (Greek, 'didaskalo') means teaching, i.e. systematic instruction from the word of God. The context also shows that these are public activities, for it says in verse 16, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself **and those who hear you.**" (Emphasis added.) Furthermore, the wider context shows that this was among the instructions given to Timothy, to set the church in Ephesus in order. It says in Chapter 3, verse 14, "These things *I write* to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I

am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Churches are divided over whether there should be one or two readings of Scripture. From the example seen in Nehemiah 8, there should be two readings. It might be argued, however, that the nation of Israel, when gathered together, would have been considerably larger than most local churches today – even if infants, their mothers, and the old and infirm were not included among "the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding" (Neh. 8:2). The size of a congregation, however, is no bar to the number of readings of Scripture. Those churches that keep to one reading will also preach from the passage read. This is the practice of all churches that believe in the primacy of God's word and, therefore, the primacy of preaching. There are churches that read a portion of Scripture without expounding from the passage read, but engage instead in story-telling or giving a discourse minimally related to the passage. They fail in executing the next elements of worship, which are teaching and preaching.

Why do churches that expound on God's word also have another reading of Scripture, before the one preached on? Apart from the example set in Nehemiah 8, there seem to be the advantage of exposing the congregation to a wider scope of God's word. People are generally exposed to more information from the world rather than to God's word. Exposing them to an additional reading of God's word would be like pouring water to parched ground. It will be welcomed, and it will do the people good. Another reason is that there are preachers who tend to preach from a single verse, or part of a verse, of Scripture each time. The majority of the Puritans seemed to have favoured that style of preaching. In our time, the famous preacher in London, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, adopted the same style of preaching. He was reputed to have taken fourteen years to preach through the book of Romans. While he was able to hold the interest of the people by his powerful preaching, such an approach would deprive the congregation from hearing a vast portion of God's word for years. There was advantage, therefore, for another reading of Scripture during the worship service. A church that adopts another reading of Scripture should have it before the one preached on, in order not to detract from the impact of the preaching. The example of Nehemiah 8 also shows that the additional reading was before the

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ones preached from.

On the other hand, it may be argued that 1 Timothy 4:13 does not indicate another compulsory reading apart from the passage preached on. If the example of Nehemiah 8 is insisted on, in which there was a reading apart from the passages preached on, then it can be equally insisted that there should be more than one readings with more than one messages, and by more than one preachers, as shown in Nehemiah 8:7-8. This would lead us into ridiculous conclusions, contradicting 1 Corinthians 14:27-31 – where a maximum of three persons may speak, while two is preferable, and one is ideal. What needs to be noted is the abiding principle which, in this case, is the primacy of God's word demonstrated by Scripture reading and its exposition. In the smaller congregation of a local church, in contrast to the gathering of the children of Israel, only one preacher is needed to preach a substantial message. The children of Israel met together in Jerusalem only three times in a year, while the local church meets twice on the Lord's Day, every week. The situation in the local church would be closer to that in the synagogue, in which the passage of Scripture read was expounded on (cf. Luke 4:16-27). Furthermore, most preachers prefer preaching from a passage of Scripture instead of from a single verse or part of a verse. The likelihood of congregational ignorance of the wider scope of God's word would be minimised. In fact, an additional reading during the service might detract from the one preached on. It is better to read or recite a psalm instead, as this would constitute a devotional exercise like singing. This does not rule out the exceptional occasions when the reading of another portion of Scripture is more appropriate than a psalm.

The principle of doing all things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40), governing 'things indifferent', requires that the worship service be led by the minister of the word. There are churches that have various people doing different things during the worship service. While there is no hard-and-fast rule that says only the minister of the word should do everything in the meeting, such churches should ensure that the person reading the Scripture has the ability to read well. Clarity of speech, sharpness in enunciation, and good cadence in articulation are needed to read well – without going into the excess of theatrics. The lamb offered up to God in the Old Testament had to be without blemish (Exod. 12:5). Although the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament have found their fulfilment in Christ,



the principle that we are to offer the best holds. Attention should be given to the reading of Scripture, preferably to be done by the minister himself. By means of Scripture reading, God speaks to His people.

### 5.3 Preaching And Teaching

Scripture reading carries in itself the power of God to address sinners and saints alike. Augustine of Hippo was supposed to have been converted through reading Scripture, upon hearing some children saying in Latin, 'tolle lege, tolle lege' ("pick up and read") (Blackburn, 2001:86). There was an occasion when C. H. Spurgeon, in order to test the acoustic of the Crystal Palace in London, cried in a loud voice, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." A workman in the building was convicted of his sins by those words, went home, and struggled for a time until he was finally converted (Spurgeon, Vol. 1:534). Arthur Pink (Murray, 2004) was convicted of his sins and converted after his father uttered the words of Proverbs 14:12 (also Prov. 16:25) to him when he came home late one night after attending a theosophy meeting, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Everyday, countless number of Christians read the Bible to feed their souls and to seek guidance from God because it is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4)."

That said, it is the will of God that Scripture should be preached in order that hearers might be saved. "Faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17)." "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor. 1:22-25)." God uses the human preacher as the instrument to convey His word to hearers, while the Holy Spirit uses the word heard to minister life to those who are elect (1 Pet. 1:22; John 3:5-8). The first purpose of preaching is to win souls, regardless of whether the preaching is done during public worship, from house to house, or to individuals.

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The second purpose of preaching is to build up the faith of believers. The public ministry of the word is to edify the church, which is made up of believers in Jesus Christ, although there are always non-believers present – whether the children of believers or visitors (1 Cor. 14:23, 24; 2 Cor. 13:5-6). Edification applies only to believers who already have spiritual life. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 includes incorporating the new disciples into the membership of the church by baptism, followed by teaching them to observe all the Lord's commands. We are told in Ephesians 4:11-16 that the ministry of the word is to equip the saints "for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (v. 12)." Although the ministry of God's word includes the elements of warning believers of wrong teaching and restoring those who are sinning, its primary purpose is the edification of the church (2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; 13:10).

The third purpose of preaching is to confirm unbelievers in their sin. We are told in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16, "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?" Preaching has the effects of saving the elect and condemning the reprobate. Those who have sinned against light will be judged more severely than those who have not heard the gospel (Luke 12:48). The condemnation of the reprobate on the day of judgement will manifest the glory of God's justice. This is stated in the 1689 Confession, Chapter 32:2, as follows:

The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect, and also His justice, in the eternal damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient.<sup>4</sup> Then shall the righteous go into everlasting life and receive that fulness of joy and glory with everlasting reward in the presence of the Lord. But the wicked, who know not God and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast aside into everlasting torments,<sup>5</sup> and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Rom. 9:22-23. <sup>5</sup>Matt. 25:21 & 24; 2 Tim. 4:8. <sup>6</sup>Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:48; 2 Thess. 1:7-10.

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Preaching the word, therefore, includes the three purposes of winning souls to Christ, building up the faith of those who are believers, and the condemnation of those who are unbelieving. This is best done by having a service dedicated to teaching believers and another dedicated to winning souls in the two main services on the Lord's Day. Both are services of worship attended by members of the church. There is no rule to prevent an element of evangelism, or that of teaching, in the message of either service but having separate dedicated services makes for clarity and effectiveness of purpose. If, say, the morning service is fixed for teaching while the evening service is for winning souls, the members of the church will be able to invite non-believing friends to the evening service to hear the gospel.

Is there a difference between preaching and teaching the word of God? A case may be made that these are distinct, although related, activities. The word 'preaching' is derived from the Greek word 'kerusso' which means to proclaim, to herald, or to announce with authority. The word 'teaching' is derived from the Greek word 'didasko' which means to teach, to instruct, to impart knowledge. The Lord engaged in these distinct activities as is clear from such passages as Matthew 11:1, "...He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities." The word 'teaching' is also used as a general term to cover all activities of imparting knowledge such as by preaching, admonition, exhortation, persuasion, etc. (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:11; 6:3; 1 Cor. 12:28, 29; James 3:1).

When taken in the general sense, teaching allows for different modes of imparting knowledge. The singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs – although itself a distinct element of worship – includes the secondary benefit of allowing the church members to teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16). Teaching may take the form of reading one or two questions from the Catechism, with the answers. Or, it may take the form of reciting the Apostles' Creed. We have noted that 1 Timothy 4:13 says, "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." When teaching in the general sense is taken together with the explicit command to give attention to "doctrine", a strong case is made for providing a slot of time during public worship to impart teaching by using the Catechism and/or to recite the Apostles' Creed. Indeed, it may be argued that just as Scripture reading and preaching (or exhortation) are elements of worship, so also doctrine (i.e. teaching) is an element of worship. To omit doctrine would be a breach of the Regulative Principle. To

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give a substantial message as "teaching" would be to compete with the "preaching" and breach the principle of "the primacy of preaching".

To teach or preach God's word in a public meeting is to wield spiritual authority. Together with the government of the church, they constitute the two "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). God does not permit women to have authority over men. The qualifications for elders of the church, as found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, are intended for men only. 1 Timothy 2:12 specifically says, "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." The same teaching is given in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. This is based on God's will from creation (1 Tim. 2:13-15 cf. Matt. 19:4). It is, therefore, not a matter of the culture of the time. Women are not forbidden to be involved in gospel ministry by accompanying their husbands, and even to witness to unconverted men (Rom. 16:1, 3, 6, 7, 12; 1 Cor. 9:5; Phil. 4:3). They may also teach the children and other women, whether at home or in the church (2 Tim. 1:5 cf. 3:15; Tit. 2:3-5). In 1 Timothy 4:13, we find reading, exhortation, and doctrine mentioned together. If women are not to teach and preach in a public meeting of the church, they are not to read the word of God as well. All this sounds negative, until we realise that our God is wise and loving, and He has given different roles to men and women so that they complement one another. This teaching is ignored by many churches today.

### 5.4 The Primacy Of Preaching

More needs to be said about the primacy of preaching as upheld by the Reformers and the Puritans (Estep, 1986:155-157; 244-246; Park, 2005). The primacy of God's word in the life of the church, and the life of the believer, leads to the primacy of preaching (Deut. 6:4-9; Psalm 119:105; 138:2; Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 1:17; etc.). The chief way God's people benefit from His word is by hearing it preached by the God-appointed preachers (Matt. 9:38; 28:18-20; Rom. 10:14-15, 17; 1 Cor. 4:1; 12:29; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). Many churches seem ignorant of the rich resources on homiletics that have come down to us since William Perkins (1558-1602) produced his "Prophetica: The Arte of Prophecyng, 1607". To the

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Puritans, preaching is the ordinary and external means use by God to save sinners and to build up the faith of the elect. The Holy Spirit works powerfully and effectually as God's word is delivered in the plain style so as to be understood by all hearers. The plain style includes the three aspects of Explanation, Doctrine, and Use to expound God's word. The mind, the affection, and the will of the hearers are addressed. Preachers work hard, and in dependence of the Holy Spirit, to prepare the message, while the hearers are taught to be attentive and reverential as they hear the message. The message includes the Law and the Gospel, is Christ-centred, and is delivered "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor. 2:4)". The minister of the gospel is one called by God, the call consisting of the internal and the external aspects. The internal call consists of an inner compulsion to serve God as a preacher and the possession of the requisite qualifications specified by passages such as 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The external call consists of the confirmation of the church of his possession of a godly character and the gifts of handling God's word and God's people.

Insufficient attention is given to the differences between preaching and teaching in many churches today such that the two words are treated as interchangeable. In preaching, the will of God arising from the passage of Scripture preached is being authoritatively proclaimed. The message should be an exposition – and opening up – of the passage of Scripture. It should not be an imposition of the preacher's ideas upon the passage. Or, in the language of hermeneutics, it should be an 'exegesis' (i.e. drawing out) of the passage, and not an 'eisegesis' of (i.e. reading into) the passage. The message would consist of making the sense of the passage clear, drawing out the doctrine, and applying the doctrine to the hearers. It should be delivered with "light accompanied by heat" – the light is a reference to the doctrinal content while the heat is a reference to the passion involved in the delivery. The 'light' has the priority over the 'heat'. There should be substantial, but not an overloading of, 'light' so that the message constitute a satisfying spiritual meal. There should be sufficient, but no overloading of, 'heat' to make the hearers realise that the preacher believes in what he is delivering. The aim is to inform the mind of the hearers of truth, to convince and convict them in their hearts, and to move them to act upon what they have heard.

On the part of the hearers, reverence for God would be seen in a reverence for His word as well as a reverence for His servant who

## 5. PROCLAMATIONAL WORSHIP

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is delivering the word. The hearers will be attentive to the preaching, in order to "test all things" in order to "hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). In other words, the hearers will not be critical of the preacher, attempting to find fault with his preaching. Instead, like the Bereans, they will receive the word with all readiness, and search the Scripture to confirm what they are hearing (Acts 17:11). They will have a high regard for the servants of God, but avoid idolising them (Heb. 13:7, 17 cf. Acts 14:13-18). The hearers are not mere spectators but are very much involved in the act of hearing what God is saying through the preacher. Indeed, the hearing of the word preached may be regarded as the highest act of worship. In the dynamic, spiritual, interaction between the preacher and the hearers, the Holy Spirit is applying the word of God effectually to the hearers – unto the salvation of the elect, the edification of the redeemed, and the conviction of the reprobate (1 Cor. 14:23-24; 2 Cor. 2:15-17; 10:8; 13:10).

The Puritan tradition of preaching is not found in the Integrative Worship of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches in which rituals and ceremonies are the focus. There was a time when the Roman Catholic would say, "I am going to church for the mass", while the Protestant would say, "I am going to church to hear the preaching of God's word." Sadly, while the Catholics would still say the same thing, the Protestants have largely forgotten their heritage of the primacy of preaching, as taught in Scripture. This is true among churches that uphold Progressive Worship as well as many that hold to Normative Worship.

Due to the influence of the Charismatic movement, Progressive Worship focuses more on the "edification" of those present by the enjoyment of singing and music. It does not have a high view of preaching. Indeed, in such churches, the time for hearing the message is regarded as a mere appendix to the worship, which consists in the singing, the music, and some prayers. Listening to the message is considered a passive activity in which the congregation are mere spectators, in contrast to music in which everyone participates. Preaching of the Puritan tradition is foreign to such churches. With no intention of being judgemental, it has to be honestly said that the 'preaching' in such churches falls far short of the "light and heat" (Davies, 1948, 1997:202), or the "logic on fire" (Lloyd-Jones, 1985:97), of Puritan preaching.

In Normative Worship, as practised in the Anglican Church and

the Lutheran churches, the Lord's Table and the reading of Scripture take centre stage while the reading of the homily, i.e. a prepared message, replaces actual preaching. The vestment of the minister is also retained which would be excluded under the Regulative Principle. Most Evangelical churches would uphold the Normative Principle, knowingly or unknowingly, while rejecting vestments and the central place of the Lord's Table. Instead, the altar call is introduced as an appendix to the preaching. In such churches, there are some individuals who are preaching reasonably well but with no appreciation of preaching of the Puritan kind in which preachers of the like of George Whitefield, C. H. Spurgeon, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones are held up as models.

Thankfully, the Reformed tradition that upholds Regulative Worship continues to attach great importance to experiential preaching that is Christ-centred, God-honouring, and in dependence of the Holy Spirit – preaching that is consistent with the example set by the Lord and the apostles (Luke 4:32; John 7:46; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13). Sadly, among those who profess adherence to Regulative Worship are some who unwittingly undermine the primacy of preaching by denying the doctrine of the call to the ministry. There are also churches that are theoretically orthodox but lack spiritual life, in which the preaching appears more like academic lectures than preaching of the biblical kind.

## 5.5 Summary

1 The Second Commandment concerns the manner of worshipping God. Although the manner of worship in the Old Testament has been replaced by that in the New testament, the principles of worship remain the same. Old Testament worship consisted of rituals that were proclamational, responsive, and offertory in nature. In the New Testament, God's people are to worship "in spirit and truth". The rituals have been replaced by the elements of worship prescribed in the New Testament, which are proclamational, responsive, and offertory in nature. The proclamational elements are Scripture reading as well as teaching and preaching. The responsive elements are prayer and congregational singing, while the offertory elements are the collection and keeping the Lord's Day.

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- 2 Today, churches are divided over whether there should be one or two readings of Scripture. 1 Timothy 4:13 does not indicate another compulsory reading apart from the passage preached on. In fact, an additional reading during the public worship might detract from the one preached on. It is better to read or recite a psalm instead, as this would constitute devotional exercise like singing. By means of Scripture reading, God speaks to His people.
- 3 There is a difference between peaching and teaching, although there is considerable overlap between the two activities. Preaching has the purposes of winning souls to Christ, building up the faith of believers, and confirming unbelievers in their sin. Teaching involves the impartation of doctrine. The teaching of doctrine is an element of worship. Apart from preaching from a passage of Scripture, there is place for the reading of one or two questions of the Catechism with the answers, and/or the recitation of the Apostles' Creed, as an element of worship. God has ordained that men, not women, do the Scripture reading, teaching, and preaching in the public worship.
- 4 The primacy of God's word in the life of the church, and the life of the believer, leads to the primacy of preaching. The chief way God's people benefit from His word is by hearing it preached by the God-appointed preachers. On the part of the hearers, the reverence for God should be seen in a reverence for His word as well as a reverence for His servant who is delivering the word. The hearing of God's word preached may be regarded as the highest act of worship. In preaching, the Holy Spirit is applying the word of God effectually to the hearers.
- 5 Integrative Worship focuses on rituals and ceremonies, and not on preaching. Progressive Worship does not have a high view of preaching. Instead, preaching is regarded as a passive activity in which the congregation are spectators. In Normative Worship, the reading of Scripture and the Lord's Table take centre stage while the reading of the homily, i.e. a prepared message, replaces actual preaching. Most Evangelical churches, whether knowingly or unknowingly, uphold the Normative Principle while rejecting vestments and the central place of the Lord's Table. Instead, the altar call is introduced as an appendix to the preaching. In Regulative Worship, great importance is attached to experiential preaching



that is Christ-centred, God-honouring, and in dependence of the Holy Spirit. Sadly, some are unwittingly undermining the primacy of preaching by denying the doctrine of the call to the ministry of the word. There are also churches that are theoretically orthodox but have poor preaching that resembles academic lectures.

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# Six

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## RESPONSIVE WORSHIP

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**T**he responsive elements of worship are prayer and the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Through prayer and singing, we respond to God who speaks to us by the proclamational elements of Scripture reading, preaching, and teaching during public worship. The two responsive elements have been most perverted in many churches today. The ‘worship war’ of recent years have focussed largely on singing while overlooking the abuse of prayer.

### 6.1 Prayer

The biblical teaching on prayer is summarised in two paragraphs of the 1689 Confession, Chapter 22: 3, 4,

Prayer, with thanksgiving, is one part of natural worship, and this God requires of all men.<sup>8</sup> But to be accepted it must be made in the name of the Son,<sup>9</sup> by the help of the Spirit,<sup>10</sup> and according to His will.<sup>11</sup> It must be made with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and corporate prayer must be made in a known language.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Psalm 95:1-7; 65:2. <sup>9</sup>John 14:13-14. <sup>10</sup>Rom. 8:26. <sup>11</sup>1 John 5:14. <sup>12</sup>1 Cor. 14:16-17.

Prayer is to be made for lawful things, and for all kinds of people who are alive now or who shall live in the

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future,<sup>13</sup> but not for the dead,<sup>14</sup> nor for those who are known to have sinned the "sin leading to death".<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>1 Tim. 2:1-2; 2 Sam. 7:29. <sup>14</sup>2 Sam. 12:21-23. <sup>15</sup>1 John 5:16.

Prayer may be carried out individually (Mark 1:35; 6:46) or corporately (Acts 1:14; 4:31; 12:12). Believers are encouraged to read the Bible and to pray privately on a daily basis (Matt. 6:5-7). The Lord's Prayer of Matthew 6:9-13 shows that, as a general rule, prayer should be directed to the Father. Prayer is also to be made in the name of the Son (John 16:23-24), which is made effectual by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in God's children (John 14:16-18; Rom. 8:26-27). The church should have a weekly meeting for corporate prayer, which is different from the prayers made in the worship service. A weekly corporate prayer meeting held, say, on a Monday night, or on a Saturday morning, or on Sunday morning before the public worship, is to be part of the church's life (Acts 1:14; 4:24, 31; 12:12).

In such a prayer meeting, someone (usually the pastor) would lead by calling for a hymn to be sung, followed by the reading of a portion of Scripture. The prayer items are announced, with other prayer requests taken from those present. The person chairing the meeting starts off praying, followed by one or two other men in turns. The ladies and other men present may then take their turns to pray. Each person prays for two or three of the items announced, ending the prayer with "In the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ", or some other similar words, to which everyone present responds by saying "Amen", meaning "May that be so". The formula "In the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ" is uttered in accordance with the teaching of the Lord (John 14:13-14; 16:23-24, 26). It means "Based on the authority and merits of the Lord Jesus Christ", for He has died to redeem His people and is interceding for them in heaven (Heb. 4:14-16). From the practical point of view, it marks the end of one's prayer, giving the opportunity for the people to agree by saying the "Amen" (1 Cor. 14:16), and for another person to start praying. Occasionally, there might be more than one person starting to pray at the same time, in which case the oldest person should be allowed to pray while the others keep silent until that prayer is finished. There is no need for embarrassment over

such "clashes". Indeed, the clashes are a good sign that the people are eager to pray.

Throughout the time of prayer, everyone's eyes are closed to help in focusing on the occasion while the heads are bowed in reverence to God. Closed eyes and bowed heads are the minimum of postures showing reverence to God, which is not only found in the Bible but also universally recognised. The word used in the Bible for bowing down the head is 'kawdad' (Gen. 24:26, 48; Exod. 4:31; 12:27; etc.) which is different from 'shawkhaw', to prostrate oneself. In the Old Testament, more than one postures may be adopted on the same occasion. In Genesis 43:28, the sons of Jacob bowed their heads and prostrated themselves to Joseph, their brother, who was prime minister in Egypt. In Nehemiah 8:6, three postures were adopted: 'And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.' The progression of God's revelation in the Bible shows that in the New Testament, worship is to be "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24) and according to "the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). There might be occasions when it is right to kneel down in prayer (cf. Acts 20:36), but keeping the heads bowed and the eyes closed are sufficient to indicate reverence to God according to these New Testament principles. If kneeling in prayer is insisted upon, quite many in almost every church who have knee problems will be excluded from the prayer. We know, however, that the physical posture is not of the essence of prayer. There are occasions when one has to pray with eyes open, as when taking a walk in the park, while driving, and in an emergency.

The lifting up of holy hands in prayer mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:8 must be correctly understood. The verse says, "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;..." The phrase "everywhere", or "in every place" (Greek 'panti totou') alerts us to Paul's purpose, which is to lay down a general principle which applies in all the churches. The same phrase is used in 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 2:14; and 1 Thessalonians 1:8 in the same sense. We must, therefore, not wrongly conclude that there were a number of men together with the pastor who prayed in public worship. Timothy was the one who led in public worship. He was the one who preached. 1 Timothy 4:16 says, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will

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save both yourself *and those who hear you.*" (Emphasis added.) He was also the one who led the congregation in prayer.

Furthermore, the expression "lifting up holy hands" is not meant to be literal. Instead, it is a metaphor based on Psalm 134:2 which says, "Lift up your hands *in* the sanctuary, and bless the LORD." Old Testament worship was expressed by external actions such as bowing and prostrating and, in this case, lifting up the hands meaning "calling out to God, praising Him". Paul adds to this thought the necessity of holiness, which is his emphasis. In other words, he is saying, "let the men pray in holiness, without discontent or distrust in God". The subsequent verses say, "...in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." In the same way, the women are to show forth their godliness by dressing modestly and adorning themselves with good works. The comparison is between the holiness of the men and the godliness of the women. James 5:16 tells us that "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Holiness, godliness, and righteousness are related terms. "Looking up", a godly person has a living relationship with God. "Looking in", he is holy in his person. "Looking out", he acts righteously, i.e. in obedience to God's word.

The practice of everyone praying at the same time is contrary to the clear teaching of 1 Corinthians 14:16, 26-33 which require each person praying in turns so that everyone present may hear and understand what is prayed for. Simultaneous prayer was associated with the Pentecostal movement of the 1930's, which morphed into the Charismatic movement of the 1960's, and is practised in many churches today. Since no one will understand what each person is praying for in the babel of noises, how are they going to say "Amen" in agreement? Furthermore, the language used in corporate prayer must be understood by the people present, and with each praying in turns. Praying in a language not understood by the majority of people present is quite out of place, much less the so-called 'speaking in tongues' of the Charismatic movement which are not known languages but gibberish (Poh, 1997, 2020).

## 6.2 Public Prayer

The general rules of prayer apply to prayer during public worship but more needs to be said about the latter, which is our prime concern here. The example set in the Bible is that public worship should be led by one who is in charge. King Solomon led in the public worship at the dedication of the newly completed temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:1, 12, 22, 54, 62). As the one who led the service of worship, he also led the people in prayer. In Nehemiah 8, we see Ezra leading the service of worship (v. 2) as well as the prayer (v. 6). In the New Testament, Timothy was left by Paul in Ephesus to set the church in order. We have seen that he was told to "give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13). He was told further, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you (v. 16)." In 2 Timothy 2:15 we have, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." In 2 Timothy 4:2 we have, "Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." Clearly, Timothy was the one who led the worship services including, as we have seen in 1 Timothy 2:8, the prayers – "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands..." Similarly, Titus was the one who led the worship in the church in Crete, which would have included the prayers (Tit. 1:5; 2:1, 15; 3:1).

All the examples of prayer in the Bible show that it is to be extemporary, which is different from reading out a written or printed prayer. There may be special occasions when a written prayer is read, or the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13) is recited by the congregation. Such occasions would be rare. The pastor who normally leads the worship service should cultivate the ability to pray extemporaneously, from the heart. As in private prayer, public prayer does not require any special posture of the body, apart from closing the eyes to cut out distraction, and bowing the head in reverence to God. Raising the hands in prayer, and in singing, by the congregation is out of place. The only possible occasion for the raising of hands during worship is by the preacher when he pronounces the closing blessing. This is based on the example of the Lord in Luke 24:50, "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them."

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In public worship, there are two main prayers – the one at the beginning, often called the Opening, or Pastoral, Prayer, and the one at the end of the service which is simply called the Closing Prayer. Generally, the Opening Prayer would be longer – taking up to five minutes. The Closing Prayer would take up to one or two minutes, in which God is thanked for the word heard, and expression of consecration is made, possibly ending with the benediction of 1 Corinthians 13:14 or some similar words. Each prayer would end with the expression, "In the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ", or some similar expressions in which the name of the Lord is invoked. The Opening Prayer, being the pastoral prayer, would lead the congregation in the praise of God, in acknowledgement of our sins and unworthiness, and in thanksgiving to God for what Christ has accomplished for His people and His present intercession for them in heaven. This is followed by petitions – praying for the government, for any issue that may be affecting the nation, for the work of missions, for the sick and the infirm, for faith, and for forgiveness of sins. The Lord's Prayer of Matthew 6:9-13 is our example, and no more than that. The Lord intended it to be an example only, as is clear from His words in Matthew 6:9, "***In this manner***, therefore, pray.." (Emphasis added.) A supplementary guide to prayer is 1 Timothy 2:1-7. From these two passages, we may create a graphic representation of a Prayer Model to guide us, as in Fig. 6.1.

In the Opening/Pastoral Prayer, we begin with the outermost circle: praising and thanking God for who He is and His goodness to His creatures. In the next circle: thanking God for sending His Son to save undeserving creatures by His atoning death and resurrection, and for His kingdom to extend. In the third circle: praying for the civil authorities, for peace, for gospel freedom. In the fourth circle: praying for the concerns of the church, including for individuals to be saved, for faith to be strengthened, for the sick and infirm to be given health, patience, and the joy of salvation. This is the reverse of the Prayer Model for personal daily prayer, where it is more helpful to begin with the inner circle, moving to the outmost circle – committing self to God, followed by the family, the church, and the wider work of God. The Closing Prayer is shorter and needs no model to help. The tone and the matter of prayer would be influenced by, and a response to, the preached message.

Most preachers find it helpful to have a short prayer after the Scripture reading, to commit the preaching that follows to God. The



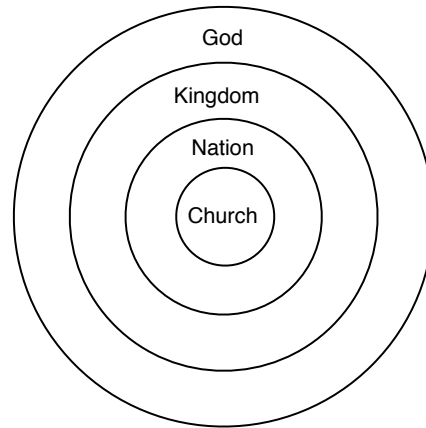


Fig. 6.1 Prayer Model

help of the Spirit will be invoked, and the listeners prayed for. It would seem best for the preacher not to pray for himself for that would tend to draw the attention of the hearers to himself instead of focusing on what God has to say to them. The committal of the preacher to God would have been done in the vestry, in the prayer together with the office-bearers, before the service began. Furthermore, using biblical expressions and Bible verses in the prayers help the congregation to identify themselves with the teaching and sentiments of those Bible words.

### 6.3 Congregational Singing

In the New Testament, a number of passages address singing in worship either directly or indirectly. Together, they show that congregational singing is expected from the New Testament church. Apart from Matthew 26:30 which shows that at least one hymn was sung during the institution of the Lord's Supper, there is the indirect passage of 1 Corinthians 14:15, 26 and the direct, parallel, passages of Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16. We say "parallel" because both Ephesians and Colossians were part of the four 'prison epistles' (together with Philipians and Philemon) written by the apostle Paul

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in AD 61, when he was imprisoned in Rome. In addition to these are the passages in the book of Revelation, viz. Revelation 5:9; 14:3; and 15:3. The indirect passage of 1 Corinthians 14:15, 26 says,

What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

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.

Ephesians 5:18-19 says,

...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,...

Colossians 3:16 which says,

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

We have discussed 1 Corinthians 14:15 in connection with the Regulative Principle (Chapter 3). In singing, the spirit and the understanding are united together. Verse 26 has been discussed in Chapter 4, on Things Indifferent. This verse has been wrongly understood by advocates of Progressive Worship who downplay the primacy of the word of God in favour of edification by other means. The verse mentions only "a psalm", omitting mention of "a hymn" and "a spiritual song". This does not constitute a problem as the list of things mentioned is not meant to be exhaustive. Prayer and Scripture reading are not mentioned, for example. The emphasis made in the verse, taken in context, is that all things must be done for edification **by the understanding of the content conveyed**.

It is to be noted that there are some disagreements on the exact translations of Ephesians 5:18-20 and Colossians 3:16 (Lenski, 1998; Hendriksen, Colossians 1962). For our purpose, we shall use

the New King James Version, which is close to the King James Version. The latter, published in 1611, was used by the Puritans in the 17th century when there was much discussion on congregational singing. While the Presbyterians and the Independents settled on the singing of metrical psalms, as expressed in the Westminster Confession of 1647 and the Savoy Declaration of 1658, the Particular Baptists added the singing of hymns and spiritual songs as taught in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 in their Confession of 1677 (endorsed in 1689). The Particular Baptists came into existence from their Independent background in the 1630's (Poh, 2000). By 1650, congregational singing among them was in evidence (Young, 1959:19-24).

Benjamin Keach introduced the singing of hymns other than the metrical psalms in the Particular Baptist church at Horseleydown, London, where he was the pastor. This led to controversy, first within his own church, then spreading to both the Particular Baptists and the General Baptists, in the 1690's. Keach's opponent, Isaac Marlow, argued that the Ephesians and Colossians passages do not teach vocal singing but rather an inward action of the heart, and a mindset to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Brooks, 2006: Chap. 3). He further argued against the view that singing in praise of the Creator is a moral duty of all creatures. We mention these only for the purpose of providing awareness that hymn-singing had been controverted over in the past. Our aim is to establish from these same passages a number of issues regarding singing in worship.

#### 6.3.1 Should there be a choir?

Singing during public worship in the Old Testament involved the choir leading the people, accompanied by stated instruments. The choir was made up of priests and Levites. This was so in the temple (2 Chron. 23:18) as well as on special occasions such as when David brought the ark back to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 13:8), and when Nehemiah dedicated the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:27). During the institution of the Lord's Supper, the Lord and the apostles sang a hymn together at the end (Matt. 26:30), intimating that the local churches to be founded later should have congregational singing. There is no mention of a choir in the New Testament, making its existence hard to be justified based on the Regulative Principle. Not only is it not an element of worship, it is also not a thing 'indifferent', be-

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longing to the category of "some circumstances... common to human actions and societies". It is not an indispensable part of congregational singing. This does not preclude the possibility of a church having a choir in which members who enjoy singing come together in fellowship, and having the choir sing on special occasions such as the Children's Sunday School Open Day, a wedding, etc. Instead of the choir, the whole congregation is expected to sing, as indicated by all the New Testament passages on this subject. The well-known New Testament commentator, Lenski, translates Ephesians 5:19 as "singing and playing with your heart to the Lord." He comments as follows (Lenski, 1966):

Singing is done by means of the voice; playing by means of an instrument. ψαλλο means to let a string twang and thus to play a lyre or a harp, and then to play any instrument as an accompaniment to the voice. Thus the two are here combined: "singing and playing." "Making melody" (our versions) will do if it is applied to instruments. But the view of some commentators that the dative indicates place: "*in* your heart," and that this is *silent* singing in the heart, is untenable.

This view of not having a choir in the normal public worship will not go down well with churches that have a tradition of having a choir and a trained musician who leads it. However, consistency in the application of the Regulative Principle and faithfulness to the teaching of Scripture requires that the choir be excluded from public worship. The reasons may be listed down as follows:

- i The New Testament does not mention nor allude to the necessity of a choir, whether as an element of worship or as a circumstance concerning worship;
- ii Congregational singing, without the aid of a choir, was intimated during the institution of the Lord's Supper;
- iii The doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers" (1 Pet. 2:9-10) requires that the congregation be regarded as equivalent of the choir of the Old Testament which was made up of priests and Levites;

- iv The teaching on singing in the New Testament is addressed to the local church, implying that the whole congregation sings;
- v The singing in heaven is congregational (Rev. 5:9; 14:3; 15:3; 19:6). The local church is a microcosm of the universal church, which is being prepared for glory (Eph. 1:9-10; 5:27; 1 Cor. 15:28). Worship in the local church should reflect what worship is like in heaven.

#### 6.3.2 What are hymns?

Today, we use the word 'hymns' as a general term to refer to the songs that are suitable for singing in worship. Not all songs are hymns, and not all hymns are of the same quality. What are the "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16? Shouldn't we sing only the psalms found in the book of Psalms?

We reject the rigid – and in our opinion, wrong – application of the Regulative Principle, which requires that only the psalms in the book of Psalms be sung by Christians today. According to this view, the expression "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" is a reference to the psalms in the book of Psalms, in the same way that "the commandments, the statutes, and the judgements" (Deut. 5:31; 7:11) is a reference to the law of God. It is further argued that the psalms are also referred to as songs (titles of Ps. 65; 122; etc.), and that the "hymn" sung by the Lord after instituting the Lord's Supper was one of the psalms.

Over and against that view, we believe that the "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" are distinct categories of songs, as indicated by the "and" between the categories. Spiritual songs were composed throughout the history of God's people in praise of God. Moses composed a song when the Israelites crossed over the Red Sea (Exod. 15:1). He composed another song near the end of his life (Deut. 31:22, 30; 32:44). Another of his songs is incorporated in the book of Psalms (Ps. 90). Deborah wrote a song (Judg. 4:4; 5:1). King Solomon composed one thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32), at least some of which were incorporated in the book of Psalms (Ps. 72; 127). The prophet Habakkuk wrote a song, which seemed to have been sung in worship (Hab. 3:1, 19). Spiritual songs were composed for worship in keeping with the revelation of God's word, which occurred progressively.

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With this tradition of writing songs of worship, it is quite certain that the Jews during the inter-testamental period composed songs which later became known as 'hymns', while the early Christians composed songs known simply as 'spiritual songs'. Before the coming of our Lord on earth, the Greek-speaking Jews were already using the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament). The hymns and spiritual songs would most likely have been sung in Greek instead of Hebrew. The expression, "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs", in the New Testament thus makes perfect sense. Lenski says this of "hymns" (Lenski, 1966):

The word "hymns" originally had a strong pagan flavor, for it was used to designate the songs of praise that were addressed to heathen divinities or to deified men. Paul uses this word twice, the verb appears in Matt. 26:30 and in Acts 16:25. A hymn in the Christian sense of the term is thus an uninspired poetical composition in praise of God or Christ that is intended to be sung.

Next, it is to be noted that the heavenly host sing "a new song" in praise of the Lord who has redeemed His people and is now seated on the throne (Rev. 5:31; 14:3). If we are going to sing a new song in heaven, surely it is right for us to sing new songs on earth, apart from the psalms and other hymns composed through the centuries. The "hymn" sung at the close of the institution of the Lord's Supper was either a psalm in Greek, or a spiritual song composed during the inter-testamental period in Greek. The Hallel (praise psalms), consisting of Psalms 113-118, were sung at Passover which argues for the former, while the institution of the Lord's Supper as a new sign of the New Covenant argues for the possibility of the latter.

If we sing only the psalms, we are unnecessarily restricting ourselves to a limited portion of God's revelation. The book of Psalms cannot be regarded as a summary of the whole Bible in the same way that the Ten Commandments are a summary of the whole of God's moral law. New revelations were given after the writing of the book of Psalms – revelations on the Holy Spirit, the atonement, the church, the preaching of the gospel, the judgement, etc. (Eph. 3:9-10; Col. 1:26-27; Heb. 1:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

Similarly, the spiritual songs would have been songs composed by the early church in Greek to sing the truths revealed in the Old Testament as well as by the Lord and the apostles. It is estimated that

Matthew's Gospel was already in circulation as early as AD 50. The apostle Paul wrote the prison epistles around AD 61. The writings of the apostles were in circulation among the churches (Col. 4:16; 2 Pet. 3:15). Snippets of the "spiritual songs" of the early church are found scattered in the New Testament, e.g. 1 Timothy 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:11-13. They are in poetic form, characterised by uniformity, rhythm, and parallelism. Not all songs were suited to worship. They had to be "spiritual" songs, i.e. songs suited for worship, in form and content. We quote Lenski again (Lenski, 1966):

The Greek word "ode" is wider in meaning and refers to any song or poem, religious or secular; hence it is placed last and needs the adjective "spiritual odes or songs," to distinguish them from secular songs.

#### 6.3.3 What constitute a good hymn?

The "hymns" we compose and sing today must fulfil the criterion of suitability in form and content for worship. We consider first the content.

By comparing the two parallel passages of Ephesians 5:18-20 and Colossians 3:16, we conclude that to be filled with the Spirit is equivalent to letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly. The word of God may not be separated from the Holy Spirit who inspired its writing. Although the singing is directed to God in worship, it has the secondary benefit of "teaching and admonishing one another". John Calvin (Calvin: Institutes Vol. II:Chap. 20:181) says:

This employment of the tongue is chiefly in the public services which are performed in the meeting of the saints. In this way the God whom we serve in one spirit and one faith, we glorify together as it were with one voice and one mouth; and that openly, so that each may in turn receive the confession of his brother's faith, and be invited and incited to imitate it.

For that to happen, the "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" must be rich in the doctrine of Scripture. Shallow doctrine and infantile teaching should not characterise the hymns that are sung in public worship. Hymns should be written by Christians of mature experience. John Newton was an experienced pastor who wrote many

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beautiful hymns, in co-operation with his church member, William Cowper, who also wrote high quality hymns. Isaac Watts was an accomplished pastor and educationist who produced excellent hymns. Other names may be mentioned, including Charles Wesley, Frances Ridley Havergal, Anne Steele, Joseph Hart, Augustus Toplady, etc. who produced superb hymns that have moulded the faith of many through the centuries. Most of these hymns were matched to existing tunes, or to tunes specially produced for them. This is quite unlike what is happening today, in which song writers of shallow Christian experience produce poor quality lyrics for the tunes which they produce, some of which might be good ones.

A good hymn should also have good form. The general characteristics of the psalms set the example for us. They are Hebrew poems containing rich doctrine applied to various aspects of life. They are God-centred, with flow in thought, and sung to appropriate tunes. A number of tunes are named in the titles of the psalms – ‘Jeduthun’ (Ps. 39, 62, 77); ‘The Lilies’ (Ps. 45, 69, 80); ‘Do Not Destroy’ (Ps. 57, 58, 59, 75). In the New Testament, the tunes are not mentioned. Instead, the psalms are often quoted, showing that the primary value of the psalms to us today is in their doctrinal content. The discovery in recent years of the musical notations in the Psalms of the Masoretic Text by Suzanne Haik-Vantoura is of great interest (Haik-Vantoura, 1991). This does not necessitate us using the tunes nor using Hebrew poetry for the lyrics. Instead, the underlying principle is that the songs sung in worship should be in the form of poems of the language used, sung to appropriate tunes that express the sentiments of the words well.

Poetry in different languages would take on different characteristics. Hebrew poetry consists of parallelism in which sentences of similar phrases or clauses are used to convey sentiments consisting of iambic (dee-dum) or anapestic (dee-dee-dum) rhythm (Wikipedia, Biblical poetry). Western poems are written in iambic pentameter. English hymns follow this pattern, i.e. in iambic meters, and often with rhyming. We take John Newton’s Amazing Grace as an example. This is in Common Meter, in which the number of syllables in each line corresponds to the 8-6-8-6 iambic rhythm. The first verse reads,

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me;



I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.

As we read the lines aloud, we will notice the unstressed syllable followed by the stressed syllable of the iambic rhythm. The lines end with rhyme in the alternate lines:

dee-dum, dee-dum, dee-dum, dee-**dum**  
dee-dum, dee-dum, dee-**dum**;  
dee-dum, dee-dum, dee-dum, dee-**dum**  
dee-dum, dee-dum, dee-**dum**;

Of course, poems are not rigid in form. The rhyme may be in two successive lines instead of in alternate lines. A predominantly iambic rhythm may be broken by a trochaic rhythm (dum-dee). There may be a line that is not perfect metre, i.e. having more, or less, syllables. When variations occur, there might, or might not, be difficulty matching with a tune.

We desire to offer the best to God, just as the sacrificial lamb of the Old Testament had to be without blemish. Although the sacrificial lamb has been fulfilled by the coming of the Saviour, the principle of offering our best stands (cf. 1 Sam. 2:30; 2 Chron. 31:20-21; Phil. 1:20). Furthermore, the psalms set the example of what the songs of worship should be like. A good prose writer will have a good command of the language used. A good prose writer may not be a good poet. A good hymn requires good poetry, good theology, and mature Christian experience. Shallow, wrong, and ambiguous theology will make bad hymns. Who is sufficient for such a task as writing good hymns?

#### 6.3.4 What sort of tunes may we use?

Not all tunes are suitable for worship. The tune should not be overly sentimental, nor should it be too fast-paced so as to incite towards dancing. The tune should express the mood, or sentiment, of the words well. It should be subservient to the words, help in the singing, and not distracting the mind from the words. Most of the metrical hymns handed down to us are sung to tunes specially composed for singing in worship. These tunes, which are of universal appeal, have come largely from western cultures. They have been used in churches of other cultures to sing the translated hymns. Some tunes

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have been borrowed from folk songs. For example, the hymn, "What Child is this, who, laid to rest", is sung to an old English melody (of before 1642) called "Greensleeves". In our churches, we have used the tune, "Jerusalem", to sing a version of Psalm 46 (Poh, 2010). We have also used the tune, "Thaxted", to sing a new hymn, "The Song of songs to worship" (Poh, 2014).

The necessity of a correct match between the hymn and the tune may be illustrated by two well-known hymns, "Facing a task unfinished" and "Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!" – both of which are in the 7-6-7-6-D (double) metre. The tune normally used for the former is "Aurelia", while that used for the latter is "Morning Light". Putting the first stanzas side-by-side we have Fig. 6.2.

Facing a task unfinished, That drives us to our knees, A need that, undiminished, Rebukes our slothful ease. We, who rejoice to know You, Renew before Your throne The solemn pledge we owe You To go and make You known.	Stand up! Stand up for Jesus! You soldiers of the cross; Lift high His royal banner, It must not suffer loss: From vict'ry unto vict'ry His army shall He lead, Till every foe is vanquished And Christ is Lord indeed.
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Fig. 6.2 Matching Tunes To Hymns

The two hymns are singable to the two tunes as they are of the same metre. However, the tune "Morning Light" is more lively than "Aurelia", making it unsuitable to the penitential sentiment of the hymn "Facing a task unfinished". Similarly, "Aurelia" would be unsuitable to the mood of "Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!" This is not a mere matter of association with long use but a matter of compatibility between hymn and tune.

As the church extends in the world, hymns are being composed in other cultures which would in due time be translated into English.

An example is, "O thou my soul, forget no more", written by the Indian Christian, Krishna Pal (1764-1822) who was converted under the ministry of William Carey, which has been translated into English by Joshua Marshman. This hymn may be sung to tunes in the Long Metre (8-8-8-8 syllables). It is conceivable that tunes from other cultures, not just lyrics, in due time will be used in the English-speaking world. We are aware that some tunes can be appreciated only by people who are immersed in the particular culture from which they arise, and are therefore of limited appeal. In the Chinese culture, for example, there are a number of distinct categories of folk tunes, including the *huangmei diao* (which originated from the province of Guangxi), the *geju* (or Chinese opera music), the *shange* (or mountain songs), and the *minyao* (or folk songs). While the first of these has been used by Chinese Christians in Taiwan, it is doubtful that it will be appreciated by other cultures. The last of these, however, has the potential of being appreciated universally.

When the three ingredients of good theology, good poetry, and good tune are found together, we have a sure winner! Seldom do we find such a combination in all hymns, much less in today's worship songs. The hymn "Amazing grace! how sweet the sound" may be regarded as one such. Another is Augustus Toplady's "A debtor to mercy alone", sung to the tune "Trewen". Seldom do hymns soar to the soul-stirring height of experiential theology as this one. We quote all three stanzas of this hymn:

A debtor to mercy alone,  
Of covenant mercy I sing;  
Nor fear, with Your righteousness on,  
My person and off'ring to bring;  
The terrors of law and of God  
With me can have nothing to do;  
My Saviour's obedience and blood  
Hide all my transgressions from view.

The work which His goodness began,  
The arm of His strength will complete:  
His promise is Yes and Amen,  
And never was forfeited yet;  
Things future, nor things that are now,  
Nor all things below or above,

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Can make Him His purpose forgo,  
Or sever my soul from His love.

My name from the palms of His hands  
Eternity will not erase;  
Impressed on His heart it remains,  
In marks of indelible grace;  
Yes, I to the end shall endure,  
As sure as the earnest is giv'n;  
More happy, but not more secure,  
The glorified spirits in heav'n.

### 6.3.5 How should music be used?

We have noted that the expression "singing and making melody" in Ephesians 5:19 is translated as "singing and playing" by Lenski who adds, "Singing is done by means of the voice; playing by means of an instrument." The Greek word ('psallo') for "making melody" or "playing" means to let a string twang and thus to play a lyre or a harp. By extension, other instruments may be included but of the types that make melody. The translation of the word 'psallo' as "making melody" has been done with good reason. The lyre which was a smaller, hand-held, version of the harp was supposed to have been played by David. Both the lyre and the harp are instruments played by plucking the strings to produce melody. The chords are always played 'arpeggio', i.e. with its notes sounded in succession, rather than simultaneously. In these respects they differ from the modern guitar which is normally played by strumming the notes of a chord simultaneously. Although the guitar and the lyre are stringed instruments, the normal way each is played differs. The lyre is better suited to accompany congregational singing compared to the guitar. Having said that, strumming the chords or plucking the notes with the guitar may be preferred to purely percussion instruments such as the drum, for the combination of chords come close to the melody, although it is still not the melody. The guitar is only a stand-in instrument in the absence of an appropriate one.

This will be understood better by considering what constitutes a tune. The tune that is sung to a hymn consists of three basic components, viz. the melody, the rhythm, and the beat. The melody consists of single notes arranged together to form a sequence unique to

that particular tune. The rhythm is the duration each note is played. The rhythm is built upon the beat, which is the steady pulse over which the notes are played. The melody might be played to a different rhythm and yet be recognised for what it is. When the notes are compressed evenly, the piece of melody is played at a fast tempo. When expanded evenly, the melody is played at a slow tempo. One might deliberately compress different parts of the melody unevenly which will produce an irregular tempo, but the melody is still recognisable for what it is.

Music is meant to aid the singing and not to overwhelm it. A single instrument should be used instead of many. An orchestra may have many instruments playing in harmony. We are not to have a choir, much less an orchestra, during public worship. The musical instrument chosen should be capable of playing the melody to guide the people in the singing, rather than giving the beats which tend to induce movements to the body. On this count, percussion instruments such as the drum, the pop-band and the tambourine would not be suitable for use in public worship. The flute and the trumpet, on the other hand, might qualify. However, playing the flute or the trumpet means that the player would not be able to join the congregation in singing since his mouth is occupied. The piano or the organ are therefore better choices. The piano is a string instrument, although struck to produce the sound, while the organ is a wind instrument – both of which produce melody. An electronic keyboard is also a possible choice, but care must be taken not to allow the beat-function to be turned on. In other cultures, a suitable instrument that produces melody may be chosen. In the Chinese culture, the *guzheng*, the *yangqin*, and the *erhu* are possible choices.

It might be argued that a variety of instruments were used in the worship in the Old testament, including the trumpet and the cymbals. Peter Masters has pointed out that not all the musical instruments known to the nation of Israel were allowed to be used in the tabernacle and the temple (Masters, 2020:45-47). The instruments, appointed by divine inspiration, were cymbals, string instruments, and harps (1 Chron. 15:16, 28; 16:5, 6, 42; 25:1, 6; 2 Chron. 29:25-29). The trumpet was used in a limited way, viz. to call the people to solemn assemblies and to accompany the burnt offering. Allowing for the progression from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, the underlying principle of limitation to the music remains while the emphasis on congregational singing is instituted. The worship in

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heaven involves only the use of harps (Rev. 5:8; 14:3), which reinforces all we have learnt – emphasis on congregational singing, the accompaniment of melody rather than beats, and limitation to the number of instruments used.

Another argument for the principle of restraint and limitation on music in public worship is in the construction of the words of Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16 which we reproduce below:

Ephesians 5:18-20 says,

...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,...

Colossians 3:16 which says,

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

The conjunction "and" (Greek 'kai') in the expression "in psalms **and** hymns **and** spiritual songs" show that three items are of equal importance. This is similar to "in spirit **and** truth" in John 4:24. Its next use in the expression "singing **and** making melody" would appear to be explanatory and elaborative. It answers the question, "How should we sing?" The answer is, "By making melody in your heart to the Lord." In other words, we are not only to sing with our mouth, but our hearts must be sincere in what we are singing. This is borne out by comparing with Colossians 3:16 which says, "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord". The use of "and" is similar to Ephesians 4:11, "And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors **and** teachers..." The word "teachers" is not a reference to a different category of officers but explanatory of "pastors" since there is no "some" before "teachers".

We conclude that while music may be used in accompaniment of singing, the latter has the priority. Traditionally, the piano or the organ has been chosen, for good reasons, to aid worship. Whatever instrument is chosen, it should produce melody, and not the beats, of the tune. It is better to sing 'acapella', i.e. without instrumental accompaniment than to overuse music in public worship.

### 6.3.6 Should we use Contemporary Worship Songs?

Contemporary Worship has had input from two movements – the Charismatic movement and the Missional Church movement. Since its rise in the 1960's the worship style of the Charismatic movement has diffused into churches of various theological persuasions. The Missional Church movement has emphasised the seeker-sensitive approach as well as the incarnational approach to win souls to Christ. Public worship is geared towards reaching out to souls more than towards paying homage to God – a reversal of the biblical purposes of worship. The attempt to be culturally relevant results in the replacement of the traditional organ or piano with the drum-set. The visual and the physical takes precedent over the mental and the spiritual. Hymns are projected on screen instead of sung from hymn books. The hands are free from encumbrance to clap, to be raised, and to wave to the beats of the music. Songs of minimal doctrinal content are sung, often repetitiously. The teaching of God's word is not given a prominent place. Marva Dawn has called this "a dumbing down" while attempting to reach out (Dawn, 1995).

We have noted that in the 'worship war' of recent years, the critics of Contemporary Worship have focussed more on the music than on the songs. A convincing case has been made by various authors that the rock, rap, and pop music of the Contemporary Worship movement has its root in, and shares the same characteristics of, the decadent and sensual culture of the world (e.g. Blanchard et al. 1983; Aniol, 2009; Makujina, 2016). While it may be argued that the songs and the music belong together, a change seems to be taking place in the quality of the songs produced. In earlier years, the songs were doctrinally shallow and short, and meant to be sung repetitiously. With time, some better songs have been produced by the Contemporary Worship movement. However, there is still a lack of quality in the content and the form. The songs are mostly in the style of non-metrical pop songs sung to some catchy tunes. John Frame, who favours Contemporary Worship songs, has managed to cull some 150 to sing in his church. He protests strongly against the criticism levelled at Contemporary Worship songs (Frame, 1997). Favouring rapprochement, he overlooks the inevitable association of such songs with the origin, ethos, and character of the Contemporary Worship movement. There might come a time when some of the songs are adopted into the worship of mainstream evangelical-

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ism that do not practise Contemporary Worship. That time seems far off. It is extremely unwise, and contrary to the teaching of Scripture, to associate the worship of God with a decadent culture that is given over to entertainment and sensuality. "Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4)."

Our aim is not to be drawn into the 'worship war' but to elucidate the biblical teaching on worship. In doing this, we cannot help but point out that our understanding of the Regulative Principle differ from that of Frame and others who have adopted Contemporary Worship. We would reject Contemporary Worship for the following reasons:

- i Its association with the entertainment and sensuality of the world;
- ii Its use of more than one instruments including percussion ones;
- iii Its focus on loudness and beats which encourage bodily movements;
- iv Its use of poor quality songs;
- v Its deliberate under-emphasis of the preaching and understanding of God's word; and
- vi Its man-centredness, when true worship should be God-centred.

### 6.4 Summary

- 1 Through prayer and singing, we respond to God who speaks to us by the proclamational elements of Scripture reading, preaching, and teaching during public worship. In the Old Testament, various postures were adopted in prayer. In the New Testament, bowing the head with eyes closed are sufficient to show our reverence for God. The practice of simultaneous prayer contradicts the teaching of Scripture on many counts, what more the so-called tongue-speaking of the Charismatic movement.
- 2 The example set in the Bible is that public worship should be led by one who is in charge. There are two main prayers in a public worship – the Opening or Pastoral prayer, and the Closing Prayer. Many preachers have a short prayer before the preaching of God's



word. The Lord's Prayer of Matthew 6:9-13 is only an example for prayer, not intended for recital. Together with 1 Timothy 2:1-7, a model of prayer is to focus on God, His kingdom, the nation, and the church, in that order. Each prayer ends with the formula, "In the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ", or some other similar words showing dependence on Christ.

- 3 Congregational singing is expected of the New Testament church, without the need of a choir. Instead of the exclusive singing of psalms, the New Testament teaches the singing of hymns of human composition as well. The psalms set the example of what constitute good hymns. They are poems, containing rich doctrine, applied to various aspects of life. They are God-centred, with flow in thought, and sung to appropriate tunes. A good hymn will have good form and good content. The tune must be appropriate for worship and suited to the mood or sentiment expressed by the hymn.
- 4 The Bible teaches the principle of limitation to the number of instruments used in accompaniment to singing. Not more than one instrument should be used, which produces melody instead of beats. The piano or the organ are suitable, and so is the electronic keyboard except that the beat-function should be turned off. The flute, the trumpet, and the guitar are not so suitable. Percussion instruments such as the drum, the cymbals and the tambourine are not suitable for public worship.
- 5 The music and songs of the Contemporary Worship movement fail to meet the biblical criteria of public worship taught in the Bible.

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# Seven

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## OFFERTORY WORSHIP

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**I**n public worship, God addresses His people by the proclamational elements of Scripture reading, preaching, and teaching while the people respond by words of prayer and singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. The people also respond by actions of bringing the collection and keeping the Lord's Day.

### 7.1 Categories Of Worship Elements

We have compared public worship to a king holding an audience with his subjects. The king addresses the subjects while the subjects respond by words and also present offerings or tributes. In Chapter 5, on Responsive Worship, we have compared the Old Testament offerings to the New Testament elements of worship. The Old Covenant has given way to the New Covenant. The modes of worship are different but there is a continuity of the principles involved since we are worshipping the same God who has one eternal purpose of saving for Himself a people for His own glory. The three broad categories of proclamation, response, and offertory may be subdivided as shown in the table of Fig. 7.1.

In the Old Testament, the burnt offering was the earliest offering instituted by God (Gen. 4:4; 8:20-21). It was needed "to make atonement", i.e. effect reconciliation with God (Lev. 1:4). It foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who "has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma (Eph. 5:2)". In the law given to the children of Israel, the

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OT Offerings	NT Elements	Categories
Burnt offering	Scripture reading Preaching Teaching	Proclamation: Gospel-centric
Sin offering Trespass offering	Scripture reading Preaching Teaching	Proclamation: Edification
Drink offering Grain offering	Prayer Singing	Response: Adoration
Peace Offering Wave & heave offerings	Collection Keeping the Lord's Day	Offertory: Thanksgiving

**Fig. 7.1 Elements of Worship Compared**

burnt offering was offered first, followed by the other sacrifices. The burnt offering was a "sweet aroma" to God (Lev. 1:9), making it possible for the other offerings to be a "sweet aroma" as well (Lev. 3:5; Num. 15:3, 7, 10, 13). This shows that our offering is made acceptable to God only by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. There must be reconciliation with God before there is fellowship with Him. Prayer and singing are our response to God by words. The collection and keeping the Lord's Day are our response to God by actions that take on the nature of paying tributes to God.

In the New Testament, God continues to require His people to draw near to Him in worship (Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 16:2; Heb. 10:24-25). From eternity past, the triune God has placed His love upon the elect in the eternal covenant, which is the Covenant of Redemption (Eph. 1:3-14). Gospel-centric proclamation reminds God's people of His love in their salvation, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It also addresses non-believers present, to draw them to faith in Christ (1 Cor. 14:23, 24; 2 Cor. 13:5-6). While on earth, they are called into the kingdom of God by the gospel through the effectual work of the Holy Spirit. Once saved, they are built up in the faith and transformed in their inner man, to be conformed more and more to the image of the Saviour by the hearing of the word (Matt. 28:20; Rom.

8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). The ministry of the word is for edification (Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Cor. 10:8). This is to prepare the church for worship and service in heaven (Eph. 5:27; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Rev. 21:1-4, 22-27; 22:1-5).

In response to God who addresses them in the proclamational elements of Scripture reading, preaching, and teaching, the people pray and sing in adoration. The people should also bring their collection to God – first, to acknowledge that all they have earned has come from God, and second, in order that gospel ministry might be sustained. In some communities, the produce of the farm are still brought as offerings. However, in most situations, monetary offering is more practical. The setting aside of a day in the week conveys the same idea of "giving back to God".

## 7.2 The Collection

### 7.2.1 The method

While on earth, the Lord Jesus Christ worshipped in the synagogues and the temple in Jerusalem. He paid the annual temple tax which was for the upkeep of the temple (Matt. 17:24-27). He taught His disciples on tithing in the incident of the poor widow who gave her two mites (Mark 12:41-44). William Hendriksen tells us that the "treasury" was in the Women's Court of the temple, against the wall of which stood thirteen trumpet-shaped chests for gifts and dues (Hendriksen, 1975:450). In the Old Testament, collection was made by using a chest with a hole bored in the lid (2 Kings 12:9). The collection was not made by passing around collection bags, as is done in most churches today. This is not to say that it is wrong to do so. The method of making the collection belongs to the circumstances of worship which must be determined by common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture. It will be up to the individual church to decide what works best for the situation. However, it must not be assumed that passing around the collection bags is the only possible way. Givings must be voluntary and private by nature. No one should be forced to give or to make a show of giving. A better way might be to place an offering box at the entrance of the worship hall in the generally smaller churches today, so that people can give voluntarily as they come in or go out. Common sense will require that the box be locked and attached so as not to be stolen

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while everyone is focussed on worship. The box may be carried to the front of the congregation during the service to be consecrated to God in prayer. Passing around a bag tends to make visitors feel obliged to give.

Extensive teaching on givings is found in the Bible. The children of Israel gave the tithe which was a tenth of their produce to support the Levites who served God (Num. 18:21-32). In addition there was an annual tithe (Deut. 14:22) followed by a tithe every three years (Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12). Some have argued that the tithes in the Old Testament were equivalent to our income tax and therefore have no relevance to the church. However, it is to be noted that Israel was the covenant people of God which foreshadowed the local churches of the New Covenant. The tithes of the Old Testament was mainly to support the Levites but also the strangers, the fatherless, and the widows (Deut. 26:12). The New Testament church has to support the pastors and missionaries in ministry (1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:14), the needy widows (1 Tim. 5:16), and to meet urgent needs (Tit. 3:14; Acts 20:35). While the New Testament does not specify any fixed amount to give, principles are given to guide us in giving. The principles are: "each according to his ability (Acts 11:29)", "as he may prosper (1 Cor. 16:2)", "according to what one has (2 Cor. 8:12)", and "that there may be equality (2 Cor. 8:14)". The Old Testament amount of ten percent of one's income has been taken as a general guide by most Christians today.

### 7.2.2 Its purposes

More important than the amount given is the attitude of giving. It will be unbecoming for one to quibble over whether it should be ten percent of one's gross or net income. Givings must be made generously (2 Cor. 8:2; Mark 12:43-44), cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7), regularly (1 Cor. 16:1-2), and privately (Matt. 6:1-4; 2 Cor. 9:7). Apart from supporting those in full-time ministry, the needy widows, and meeting urgent needs, there are other needs such as the upkeep of the meeting place, expenses involved in holding the annual church camp and conference, and expenses involved in outreach and missions. The Lord engaged in a threefold ministry of teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing the sick (Matt. 4:23; 9:35). In other words, there was teaching to build up the faith of believers, preaching to win souls, and good works done



to meet needs (Poh, 2020: 257-261). This also was the ministry of the apostle Paul (Acts 20:20-21, 27, 35) who says, in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ." The church should be rich in good works (Tit. 3:8, 14) – doing good to all, "especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10)." The good works need not be paraded before others, as we are told "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (Matt. 6:4)". Instead, the church should be "the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15)" – the pillar to hold high the gospel, and the foundation upon which the faith of believers are built up. In that way, the church will be "a city that is set on a hill" which "cannot be hidden" (Matt. 6:14). It is when the light of the gospel shines before men that they may see our good works in the right perspective and glorify our Father in heaven.

The idea of "giving back to God" is a concept taught in the Bible. In the law of Moses, the first-born of man and beast was claimed by God (Exod. 13:2), and so also the first fruits of the land (Exod. 22:29). The first-born of man was redeemed by the Levites who served the Lord full-time (Num. 3:44-51). The offering of the first fruits to God was an acknowledgement that the land and all its fruits were a gift of God. Moses announced to the children of Israel, "Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, *also* the earth with all that *is* in it (Deut. 10:14)." Psalm 115:16 says, "The heaven, *even* the heavens, *are* the Lord's; but the earth He has given to the children of men." When God granted a son to Hannah, followed by other children, Samuel was "lent to the LORD" at the house of God in Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:28). Proverbs 19:17 says, "He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD", meaning that he brings his offering to help the poor. Givings, therefore, is an acknowledgement that all that we have, and all that we earn, come from God. Life has come from God, and so have health, ability to earn, and opportunity to earn.

It is well-known that there is symbolism in numbers in the Bible. The best known is perhaps the number 'seven' which represents the perfection of God. The number 'six' stands for man, who was created on the sixth day. Man is given the mandate, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Gen. 1:28)." God made everything in six days, "and indeed it was very good (Gen. 1:31)". On the seventh day God rested from all His work. The number 'seven' represents God's perfection.

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The seven golden lampstands in the book of Revelation represent the seven churches of Asia which, in turn, represent all the churches of the Lord throughout the gospel age (Rev. 1:12, 20). Man is the highest of God's creation, and try as he might, he never reaches God's perfection. Both the supremacy of man over other creatures and his failure to attain the perfection of God are represented in the number '666' in Revelation 13:18. The number 'two' represents companionship, for God said of Adam, "*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him* (Gen. 2:18)." The creatures entered Noah's ark "two by two" (Gen. 7:9). The disciples were sent out "two by two" by the Lord (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). The number 'four' represents the whole world, which is described as "the four winds of heaven (Dan. 11:4; Zech. 2:6)", "the four corners of the earth (Rev. 7:1)", and "the four winds of the earth (Rev. 7:1)". The number 'ten' represents completeness, and is used often as a round figure of any event, e.g. Genesis 31:7, 41; Numbers 14:22; Job 19:3. Care must be taken not to assume literal numbers as symbolic or representative. The context often helps us to determine which is meant.

Giving a tenth to acknowledge that the complete amount has come from God is a concept found early in the Bible, long before it became institutionalised in the nation of Israel. When Abraham gave Melchizedek, "the priest of God Most High", a tithe of all that he had gained from battle – he was acknowledging that God had given him the victory (Gen. 14:18-20). Jacob made a vow to God when he was fleeing from Esau that if God protected and provided for him until his safe return, he would tithe to God, saying, "...of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You (Gen. 28:22)." The concept of giving back to God a portion, in acknowledgement that the whole has come from God, is clear.

The purposes of making the collection may be summarised as: firstly, to support the ministry of the word, secondly, to help those in need, and thirdly, to express our gratitude to God for all that we have and have earned. Today, the term "to tithe" is used in reference to the regular givings made to God for the support of gospel ministries, regardless of the proportion of one's earning that is given. It is like using the word "hymns" to represent all suitable songs sung in worship. The word "offerings" is used in reference to designated gifts. It is not uncommon, therefore, to see collection boxes in churches marked "Tithes and offerings". On a practical note, it is good to have good accounting practice by having the collection counted with the

help of a witness each time, and all properly recorded. The pastor should never be involved in counting or keeping the collection, to avoid suspicion and slander from people of ill-will (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:18-22).

## 7.3 The Lord's Day

Nigel Lee has convincingly and exhaustively made the case that there is a deep theological significance to the pattern of work and rest that God has set for the human race (Lee, 1966). In his book, he handles two questions: "Is the Sabbath of perpetual obligation?" and "Was the change of the Sabbath day from Saturday to Sunday scriptural or not?" To both questions he answers in the affirmative. These are exactly the questions still raised and denied today, much to the detriment and loss of the church. We have to put forth the case for the perpetuity of the Sabbath, and for its change from Saturday to Sunday. We have also to give the theological reasons for the institution of the Sabbath, and handle the practical issues arising from keeping the day.

### 7.3.1 Its purposes

Like the burnt offering and the tithe, the keeping of the Sabbath day is of ancient institution. We are told in Genesis 2:1-3,

"Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."

God has entered His rest from the work of creation, but not from His work of sustaining creation. He sets the pattern of work and rest for His people, to proclaim the truth that there is an eternal Sabbath that His chosen people must look forward to. Theologically speaking, God is still at rest from the work of creation. Upon the return of Christ to judge the world, the present universe will be melted down and remade (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Theologically speaking,

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that would be the eighth day following the "seventh day rest" after creation recorded in the book of Genesis, when God engages in the work of re-creation. This is not to say that the seven days of creation were not literal days. Rather, a theological principle is being established for man to imitate God. After all, in the "seventh day rest" of God, the cycle of six-days-labour-seventh-day-rest has been observed by man from the days of Adam! The children of Israel had been keeping the Sabbath even before the Ten Commandments were given (Exod. 16:22-30). This is a staggering thought. Are you part of that long line of God's people who keep the Sabbath? The "eighth day" of God will correspond with the first day of the new age that stretches to eternity, when God's elect would have been gathered to worship and serve Him in the new heavens, on the "new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13)".

That new age is entered, in principle, when the elect is called out of the world by the gospel, to faith in Jesus Christ. This is taught in Hebrews 4:1-5, where God's people in the New Covenant are compared with the children of Israel who died in the wilderness:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said:

*"So I swore in My wrath,  
"They shall not enter My rest,"*

although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh *day* in this way: *"And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"*; and again in this *place*: *"They shall not enter My rest."*

The gospel is proclaimed to all the nations to call out the elect so that they enter into the "rest" that is in Christ. This is taught in the verses following, viz. Hebrews 4:6-10,

Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because

of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said:

*"Today, if you will hear His voice,  
Do not harden your hearts."*

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.

A number of important points must be noted from this passage. Firstly, it is expected of those who have found "rest" in Christ – i.e. those who have come to faith in Christ – to keep the pattern of six days labour and seventh day rest. Verse 10 says, "For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His." God intends for His people to commune with Him on the day of rest. This is the primary purpose of the Sabbath day.

Secondly, this pattern of work and rest is to be kept as a testimony to the people of the world that we are His covenantal people who are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the call of the gospel to them – "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

Thirdly, it should be noted that the word for "rest" (Greek 'sabbatismos') in verse 9 means "Sabbath rest", while a different word is used in the other verses (Greek 'katapausis'). Verse 9 says, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." God's people are heading for their Sabbath rest in eternity. Meanwhile, they have work to do for God which includes keeping the pattern of six days labour and one day rest, just as God worked for six days and is now in His Sabbath rest. Keeping the Sabbath rest therefore serves another purpose of reminding God's people of the hope they have through faith in Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, we know that God's ways are perfect, including giving us seven days in the week. The number 'seven' is a reminder of God's perfection, and that the week of seven days is of divine origin. It is like the seven basic notes of the musical octave – Do, Re Mi, Fa, So La, Ti – followed by a new octave. It is called an "octave" (an eighth) only because the eighth note up the scale is double the frequency of

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the one with the same pitch class. This phenomenon has been called "the basic miracle of music". Similarly, in the wisdom of God, the number of days per week has been seven from creation. Failure to keep the weekly cycle of work and rest deprives us of operating at the optimum, to God's glory. In real life, man operates best when this weekly cycle of work and rest is kept. Man is not like machines, which can function effectively without rest until the parts wear out. Rather, the cells in his body need recuperation on a regular basis to function at optimal level.

We see now that failure to keep the Sabbath by Christians would deprive them of at least these four great purposes – to commune with God, to bear witness to the world, to be reminded of their eternal destiny, and to operate at the optimum to God's glory.

### 7.3.2 Keeping the Lord's Day

The next point to establish is that the seventh day Sabbath has been replaced by the first day of the week in the New Testament. It is also known as the Lord's Day for it commemorates the resurrection of the Lord (Rev. 1:10). The Fourth Commandment is not broken thereby, for we are still keeping the pattern of six days labour and the seventh day rest. The Bible teaches that the Sabbath of the Christians has been moved from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week. In Matthew 28:1, we are told, "Now after the Sabbath, as the first *day* of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb." The expression "the first of the week" ('day' has been added by the translators) in Greek ('mian sabbaton') is literally "the first of the Sabbaths". There are actually two Sabbaths mentioned in the same verse. The first mention is a reference to the seventh day Sabbath of the Jews. The second mention is a reference to the Christian Sabbath. Both mentions of the word are in the plural in Greek, to indicate that these are recurring days. The Jews celebrate the Sabbath every seventh day of the week while the Christians celebrate the Sabbath every first day of the week, hence "the first of the Sabbaths". All the occurrences of the expression "the first (day) of the week" is from the same Greek expression. It was on the first day of the week that the Lord rose from the dead.

In Acts 20:7, we are told, "Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."

It is clear that the church was meeting for worship for there was the breaking of bread which was the Lord's Supper (cf. Acts 2:42) and there was also the preaching of God's word. In passing, it should be noted that it was an evening service, for Paul preached until midnight. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, we are told, "On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come." It would not make sense for the church to meet on the first day of the week merely to make the collection. The church was already meeting on the first day of the week for worship, during which Paul asked for the contribution to the poor in Judea to be made. The first day of the week was the Christian Sabbath.

The early church fathers may be quoted to show that this practice was carried through to the post-apostolic period. Here, we shall quote only from Tertullian (c. 155 - c. 240). In a treatise on prayer, Tertullian declares, "we, according to the instruction which we have received, should on the day of the Lord's resurrection, and on that day alone, also refrain from all anxiety, putting aside our worldly business in order to give no place to the devil." Furthermore, Tertullian is supposed to have said, "the seventh day sabbath is gone to its grave with the signs and shadows of the Old Testament", whereas "every eighth day is the Christian's festival", and "we make Sunday a day of festivity" (Lee, 1966: 244-245).

In the history of the church, there have been those who deny the abiding relevance of the Ten Commandments, and especially the Fourth Commandment. The denial of the abiding relevance of the moral law has been called Antinomianism ('nomos' means 'law'). This is not to imply that all Antinomians live a life of licentiousness. There are theoretical Antinomians, and there are practical Antinomians. Our concern here is with the arguments of the Antinomians. Today, Antinomianism appears in the guise of 'New Covenant Theology'. It is claimed that the Ten Commandments belong to the Jews in the Old Testament time and have been abrogated by the coming of Christ. It is claimed also that we live in the age of grace in which the new command of love, for God and for one another, holds. Then, it is claimed that the Lord abrogated the Sabbath in Matthew 12:1-14, and the parallel passages in the other Gospels. Another argument is that the Fourth Commandment is not quoted in the New Testament and therefore not of abiding relevance.

In refutation of these arguments, we must note that there is a

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continuity as well as a discontinuity between the two Testaments. The progressive and cumulative nature of revelation must be appreciated, in which more light is shed with increasing revelation but without abrogating the earlier revelation, until the Scripture was complete. The Old Covenant rites and rituals have been fulfilled by the coming of Christ while the underlying principles of worship continue to be applicable in the New Covenant. This we have explained along the way in the previous chapters. The law of God in the Old Testament consists of three categories, viz. the ceremonial, the civil, and the moral. The first two categories have been abrogated by the coming of Christ, while the moral law continues to be of relevance to God's people. This is basic theology that, sadly, many Christians are ignorant of today. It is covered in Chapter 19 of the 1689 Confession. It will require gargantuan effort on the part of the opponents to attempt to overturn this well established teaching and, we believe, they will not succeed.

To rely on an argument of silence of the Scripture is fraught with dangers, as is seen in the Normative Principle of worship. In the Normative Principle, it is argued that whatever is not forbidden in Scripture is permissible. The Fourth Commandment need not have to be quoted in the New Testament to establish its continuing relevance. Whether a commandment is of abiding relevance is not established by whether it is quoted. This is a strange, and new, rule of hermeneutics that is being introduced. The Scripture teaches by many means – by commands, precepts, principles, and examples – as we have shown in the earlier chapters. We have shown above that the Hebrews 4:1-10 passage teaches the abiding relevance of keeping the Sabbath. The Lord says, in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

It is disingenuous to argue from Matthew 12:1-14 for the abolition of the Sabbath. The Lord was only establishing the circumstances under which the Sabbath need not be kept in the normal way. The norm is to stop work and entertainment that are normally done on the other days of the week, e.g. washing clothes, collecting firewood, collecting drinking water, etc. In today's world, the work and entertainment would include washing the car, going to the market or shopping mall, doing office work, eating out in restaurants, watching video shows, travelling, etc. Such works and recreation are unnecessary on the Sabbath. Instead, God's people are to do works



of piety, e.g. engaging in public worship, doing outreach, visiting the sick and the lonely, etc. This is what is meant when the Lord says, in Matthew 12:5, "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" In Matthew 12:1-4, the Lord is establishing the point that apart from works of piety, there are the works of necessity. The disciples were hungry and plucked heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath, just as David and his men ate the showbread which was normally not lawful to eat except by the priests. In our time, we would drive over to the shopping mall to get some bread and foodstuff if some guests suddenly turn up from a distant city. In Matthew 12:9-14, the Lord is establishing another exception to the normal way of keeping the Sabbath which is the work of mercy. The sheep that falls into the pit on the Sabbath must be rescued. In our days, stopping to help the injured in a road accident on the Sabbath is permissible, right, and good.

In summary, works of piety, necessity, and mercy should be done on the Sabbath, while works normally done on other days of the week should stop. A Christian would not want a job that requires him to work regularly on the Lord's Day. Doctors and nurses, however, are doing works of mercy when their rota falls on the Lord's Day. The police and firemen are doing works of necessity when their rota falls on the Lord's Day. Cooking and washing the dishes after meal on the Lord's Day are works of necessity, although we would avoid going to lengths to cook elaborate meals on that day.

It should be noted that the Fourth Commandment requires the keeping of the *day* of the Sabbath holy, and not merely carrying out some holy activities. In the Old Testament, all holy days, including the weekly Sabbath, began with the morning sacrifice and ended with the evening sacrifice (Num. 28:1-8). The New Testament equivalent would be to begin the Lord's Day with worship and to end it with worship. There is much to be done to serve God between the two main services. Bigger churches might have other services in between the two main ones. There will be those who fetch the Sunday School children to church, while others teach the children. There will be teams of people going out to preach the gospel to various outreach groups. Others would be involved in preparing lunch or dinner if these have been organised in the church. We would wish that such services for the Lord could be done more on the other days of the week but only a minimal can be accomplished in most situa-

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tions. The Lord's Day allows God's people to devote themselves to such services.

By having two main services of worship on the Lord's Day means that one service can be devoted to preaching to build up the faith of believers, while the other service can be devoted to preaching to win souls to Christ. Since these are primarily worship services, the members of the church would attend both. By having a dedicated gospel service every week means that members will be able to invite non-believing friends and relatives to that service.

By keeping the day holy, we do not mean that the first day of the week assumes some quality that makes it different from others. That would be no different from the superstitious belief of the Judaizers of Paul's time, who multiplied man-made rules to observe the Sabbath day – "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle" (Col. 3:16-23). Instead of such legalism, we must see the Lord's Day as setting us free from man-made regulations to willingly engage in worship and service to God. John Calvin summarises the purposes of keeping the Lord's Day under three points: "first, that during our whole lives we may aim at a constant rest from our own works, in order that the Lord may work in us by His Spirit; secondly, that every individual, as he has opportunity, may diligently exercise himself in private, in pious meditation on the works of God, and, at the same time, that all may observe the legitimate order appointed by the Church, for the hearing of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and public prayer; and, thirdly, that we may avoid oppressing those who are subject to us." While warning against legalism, he said (Calvin, Vol. I:343-344), "We must be careful, however, to observe the general doctrine – viz. in order that religion may neither be lost nor languish among us, we must diligently attend on our religious assemblies, and duly avail ourselves of those external aids which tend to promote the worship of God."

It was the practice of missionaries of an earlier generation to teach their new converts to keep the Lord's Day. God blessed the missionaries and the converts as they sought to honour Him (e.g. Taylor, 1965: 212-215). Today, many churches have only one worship service. The duty to keep the Lord's Day is no more taught. Ignorance on this teaching prevails. Instead, there are those who oppose the teaching on the Christian Sabbath. Ostensibly intending to avoid legalism, they have swung to the other extreme of failing to keep the Christian Sabbath. One extreme, however, does not justify

another. The biblical position does not lie in either extreme. Instead, it is stated clearly in Chapter 22, paragraphs 7 and 8, of the 1689 Confession:

As it is the law of nature that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, should be set apart for the worship of God, so He has given in His Word a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding upon all men, in all ages to this effect. He has particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy for Him.<sup>28</sup> From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ this was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ it was changed to the first day of the week and called the Lord's Day.<sup>29</sup> This is to be continued until the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week having been abolished.

<sup>28</sup>Exod. 20:8. <sup>29</sup>1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10.

The Sabbath is kept holy to the Lord by those who, after the necessary preparation of their hearts and prior arranging of their common affairs, observe all day a holy rest from their worldly employment and recreations,<sup>30</sup> and give themselves over to the public and private acts of worship for the whole time, and to carrying out duties of necessity and mercy.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Isa. 58:13; Neh. 13:15-22. <sup>31</sup>Matt. 12:1-13.

There are situations where the Christian Sabbath cannot be kept on the first day of the week. Some states in Malaysia do not keep Sunday as a public holiday, making it difficult for churches to keep the day as the Christian Sabbath. In Nepal also, Sunday is not a public holiday. In such situations, the churches keep Saturday as the Christian Sabbath, with the hope that the first day of the week may be kept as the Christian Sabbath in the future. In Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, churches meet on a Friday. The manner of keeping the day holy unto the Lord remains the same although the day kept is not the first day of the week.

## 7. OFFERTORY WORSHIP

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### 7.4 Summary

- 1 The Old Testament offerings prepared the way for the New Testament elements of worship. The proclamational elements of Scripture reading, preaching, and teaching are gospel-centric as well as for edification. The responsive elements by words include prayer and singing, in adoration of God. The offertory elements include bringing the collection and keeping the Lord's Day.
- 2 In the Bible, the collection is made by people placing their offering into a box. The principles are: "each according to his ability", "as he may prosper", "according to what one has", and "that there may be equality". The Old Testament amount of ten percent of one's income has been taken as a general guide by most Christians today.
- 3 The attitude of giving is important. Givings must be made generously, cheerfully, regularly, and privately. Givings is an acknowledgement that all that we have, and all that we earn, come from God. The purposes of making the collection may be summarised as: to support the ministry of the word, to help those in need, and to express our gratitude to God for all that we have and have earned.
- 4 The Sabbath rest after six days of work was instituted by God from the foundation of the world. It was kept by the children of Israel even before the the Ten Commandments were given. Keeping the Sabbath serves four great purposes for God's people – to commune with God, to bear witness to the world, to be reminded of their eternal destiny, and to operate at the optimum to God's glory.
- 5 The Sabbath of the Christians has been moved from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week. It is called the Lord's Day to commemorate the resurrection of the Lord. The Bible gives clear teaching on the abiding relevance of the Christian Sabbath, although this has been denied by the Antinomians. Matthew 12:1-14 teaches that works of piety, necessity, and mercy should be done on the Sabbath, while works and recreation normally done on other days of the week should stop.
- 6 The Fourth Commandment requires the keeping of the *day* of the Sabbath holy, and not merely carrying out some holy activities.

The Lord's Day should begin with worship and end with worship. By having two main services of worship on the Lord's Day means that one service can be devoted to preaching to build up the faith of believers, while the other service can be devoted to preaching to win souls to Christ. Much can be done to serve God between the two main services. We must avoid legalism, but willingly and correctly keep the Lord's Day. In situations where churches have to keep Saturday or Friday as the Christian Sabbath, the manner of keeping it holy remains the same.

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# Eight

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## SPECIAL OCCASIONS

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**A**part from public worship on the Lord's Day, there are special occasions of worship. We would include baptism and the Lord's Supper under such special occasions. Other occasions would include marriage, thanksgiving for the birth of a child, a particular anniversary of the church, etc.

### 8.1 Baptism And The Lord's Supper

#### 8.1.1 Special ordinances

The 1689 Confession, Chapter 22:5, clearly states that "The reading of the Scriptures, preaching and hearing the Word of God, the teaching and admonishing of one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts; as well as the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, are all parts of the worship of God." Prayer is stated in the earlier two paragraphs. The inclusion of baptism and the Lord's Supper as elements of worship would require that these be included in every worship service, or in the case of baptism, whenever candidates are available. By taking the bold step of excluding these two special ordinances from elements that constitute normal public worship, convincing justification must be given.

Firstly, it must be noted that we do not hold the 1689 Confession as our authority in matters of faith and practice. It was never the intention of the framers of the Confession for it to be treated as such. The framers of the Confession held to the principle of 'sola scriptura'.

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The Confession is a useful, convenient, and concise document of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible which define the distinctiveness of the church that uses it. Whatever authority the Confession has over the church is due to the truth of Scripture expressed in it. A Creed or a Statement of Faith of, say, 15 points of doctrine, would be sufficient to identify the church as a true and Evangelical church but insufficient to distinguish it from other churches which might hold to doctrines it disagrees with. A Confession of Faith helps prospective members to know what the church stands for before they commit themselves to it. It helps the church to exclude teaching that it disagrees with. It helps the church to determine to what degree of fellowship it may have with other churches, and vice versa. Disagreement with any point of the Confession is therefore no sin, as long as we can give biblical justification for our position.

Secondly, if both special ordinances are the normal elements of worship, we should be able to incorporate them into any normal public worship. In fact, we would be obliged to incorporate them into every worship service. Baptism, however, is dependent on whether there are candidates available, while not every church agrees to the necessity of having the Lord's Supper every week, and in both the main services of the Lord's Day. While it is a sad fact that many churches today do not have two public worship services on the Lord's Day, we do not know of any church that has two services celebrating the Lord's Supper in both.

Thirdly, the institution of baptism as a church ordinance is found in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, and the parallel passages. Baptism is not given in the context of the public worship of the church. Similarly, the institution of the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:20-30, and the parallel passages, is not in the context of the public worship of the church. Rather, it is given as a separate, stand-alone, service. The instruction given on the Lord's Supper by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 is also in the context of a service separate from the public worship. Both special ordinances may be incorporated into the normal public worship, but they may also be celebrated as special occasions of worship, as they often are.

The fourth reason why baptism and the Lord's Supper should not be listed together with the normal elements of worship is that these are meant only for believers. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are special ordinances, called the 'sacraments' by many churches. The 1689 Confession refers to baptism and the Lord's Supper as 'ordinances',



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whereas the Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration refer to them as 'sacraments'. The uniqueness of baptism and the Lord's Supper is recognised in the 1689 Confession which devotes three separate chapters to these special ordinances. It is stated in Chapter 28:1, "Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, to be continued in His Church to the end of the world." Paragraph 2 of the same chapter says, "These holy appointments are to be administered only by those who are qualified and called to administer them, according to the commission of Christ." The references given for this second paragraph are Matthew 28:19 and 1 Corinthians 4:1 which refer to ministers of the gospel. Chapter 30 of the Confession, on The Lord's Supper, Paragraph 3 says, "The Lord Jesus has, in this ordinance, appointed His ministers to pray and bless the elements of bread and wine (so setting them apart from a common to a holy use) and to take and break the bread, then to take the cup, and to give both to the communicants, also communicating themselves."

We do not regard feet-washing as a 'sacrament' or special ordinance like baptism and the Lord's Supper. The 1689 Confession does not list it as a special ordinance or an element of worship. The incident of the Lord washing the feet of the disciples in John 13:1-20 is culturally conditioned. The people of that time, in that place, wore sandals on dusty roads which required the servants to wash their feet before entering the houses. The Lord was setting "an example" of humility in service (John 13:15). The lesson abides, but not the mode used to teach the lesson.

### 8.1.2 For believers only

In Chapter 5 of this book, on Responsive Worship, we saw that public worship should be led by one person, normally the pastor. Here, in the 1689 Confession, we see the affirmation of this truth. It is possible for the pastor to delegate the actual execution of baptism and the Lord's Supper to another person (cf. John 4:1-2) – e.g. an elder of the church or a visiting pastor – but the responsibility for the whole service lies with the pastor of the church. We note, in passing, that the 1689 Confession teaches a view of eldership similar to that of the paedobaptist Independents of the 17th century, in which all pastors are elders, while not all elders are pastors (1 Tim. 5:17; Eph. 4:11). The pastor, who is a minister of the gospel, is the one referred to as

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"qualified and called to administer them (i.e. the two ordinances)." Over and above the qualifications needed of an elder (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), he has a calling from God to handle His word full-time (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 4:1). This is contrary to the view of those who hold to the Absolute Equality (or Parity) view of the eldership, in which all elders are pastors. The similarity of view between the Particular Baptists, who issued the 1689 Confession, and the Independents is not surprising since the former were offshoots of the latter, due to their differences on baptism (Bingham, 2019; Poh, 2013).

Unlike other ordinances such as prayer and the hearing of God's word, baptism and the Lord's Supper are meant for believers only. Chapter 29, Paragraph 2 of the 1689 Confession, on Baptism, says, "Those who actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subjects for this ordinance." Chapter 30, Paragraph 8 of the Confession, on the Lord's Supper, says, "All ignorant and ungodly persons who are unfit to enjoy communion with Christ are equally unworthy of the Lord's Table, and therefore cannot, without great sin against Him, take a share in these holy mysteries or be admitted to the Supper, while they remain in that condition. Indeed, those who receive (the elements) unworthily, are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, eating and drinking judgement to themselves." These two ordinances are unlike the other elements of worship which form "natural worship" to which unbelievers are encouraged to join in, with the hope that they might come to faith in Jesus Christ.

The 1689 Confession, Chapter 22 on Worship and the Sabbath Day, Paragraph 3 says, "Prayer, with thanksgiving, is one part of natural worship, and this God requires of all men. But to be accepted it must be made in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, and according to His will." If prayer with thanksgiving is one part of natural worship, what are the other parts? Paragraph 5 says, "The reading of the Scriptures, preaching and hearing the Word of God, the teaching and admonishing of one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord; as well as the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, are all parts of the worship of God." Since only believers are allowed to be baptised and to take part in the Lord's Supper, these ordinances should rightly be taken out of the list of the other elements of worship which constitute "natural worship", i.e. worship expected from all men.

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Paragraph 7 of the Confession also regards the keeping of the Lord's Day part of "natural worship", saying, "As it is the law of nature that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, should be set apart for the worship of God, so He has given in His Word a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding upon all men, in all ages to this effect. He has particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy for Him."

Most churches today have the Lord's Supper as a separate service held immediately before or after the morning worship service. The church at Troas appeared to have had it in the evening service, in which Paul spoke until midnight (Acts 20:7). Baptism may be incorporated into one of the two worship services on the Lord's Day, or it can be held separately, especially if it is held away from the normal place of meeting, such as at the sea. The inclusion of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the list of the normal elements of worship is therefore an inconsistency in Chapter 22:5 of the 1689 Confession (as well as in the Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration).

In practice, the church will need to determine whether the baptismal candidate shows a credible profession of faith. Under normal circumstances, the candidate would have attended the church on a weekly basis for at least six months to allow the members to know him sufficiently well. When a request for baptism is made, two elders of the church will need to interview him/her. A written testimony submitted before the interview would be helpful. It is not necessary for the candidate, especially if he is a new believer, to know all the doctrines of the Confession of Faith, nor to be able to articulate basic doctrines well. The elders' aim in the interview is to determine if there is genuine repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. There should be signs of spiritual life in the person such as a teachable spirit, a desire for God's word, and holy aspirations.

Normally, the order is for the person to be baptised before he partakes of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42). The Church Secretary who gives the invitation to the Lord's Supper during the public worship should use some words as, "Baptised believers who are in fellowship with God's people are welcome to take part in the Lord's Supper immediately after the worship service." The pastor who conducts the Lord's Supper should begin the special service by using some words as, "The Lord's Supper is opened to baptised believers who are not under discipline in any church. If you are not sure whether or not to take part, it is best to abstain. You may come

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to any of the elders after the service to discuss the matter to see if you are able to partake together in the future."

### 8.1.3 The modes

Our differences with the paedobaptists on baptism have been covered elsewhere and will not be repeated here (Poh, 2017: Chap. 11; Poh, 2020: MJ). The paedobaptists often appeal to their view of Covenant Theology to support infant baptism by sprinkling. The Particular Baptists, and their spiritual descendants today (viz. the Reformed Baptists) hold to a more consistent Covenant Theology which does not require the inclusion of the children of believers in the Covenant of Grace, at the same time not excluding them from its beneficial influence (Denault, 2017; Blackburn et. al., 2012; Poh, 2020:WMT: 21-63).

In relation to the Regulative Principle of worship, the questions have been raised: "What sort of water should be used in baptism?" "What sort of bread and content of the cup should be used in the Lord's Supper?" and "Should only one loaf and one cup be used in the Lord's Supper instead of having them divided beforehand?" These questions belong to the circumstances of worship which should be guided by common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture. Our answer to the first question is that water is water – whether still, running, muddy, or salty. The Lord was baptised by John the Baptist in the river Jordan which had running, fresh, water. On the day of Pentecost, the apostles baptised about 3,000 people, most likely in the large pools in the temple complex. Moreover, there were many Roman baths scattered throughout Jerusalem which could have been used (Hulse, 1982).

More important than the physical elements used in the two ordinances are the meaning and purpose of each of the ordinances. The 1689 Confession gives the meaning of baptism in Chapter 29:1 as follows:

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be to the person who is baptised  
– a sign of his fellowship with Christ in His death and resurrection;  
– of his being engrafted into Christ;<sup>1</sup>  
– of remission of sins;<sup>2</sup> and

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– of that person's giving up of himself to God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27. <sup>2</sup>Mark 1:4; Acts 22:16. <sup>3</sup> Rom. 6:4.

The subjects of baptism are given in Paragraph 2 of the Confession, as quoted above in relation to baptism and the Lord's Supper being treated as special occasions of worship. On the manner of baptising, Paragraph 3 of the Confession says:

The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, in which the person is to be baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 8:38.

On the mode of baptism, Paragraph 4 of the Confession says:

Immersion – the dipping of the person in water – is necessary for the due administration of this ordinance.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Matt. 3:16; John 3:23.

The purpose of baptism is not mentioned in the 1689 Confession, which is incorporation of the person baptised into the membership of the local church (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:41). The exceptional situation of the Ethiopian eunuch being baptised while not becoming a member of a local church, in Acts 8:26-40, should not be used to negate the necessity of becoming a member of a local church. The existing membership would have agreed to accept the person into membership upon his/her baptism. Some churches require the baptised person to separately apply for membership with the church. All churches that hold consistently to the 1689 Confession would require baptism prior to acceptance of the person into membership.

The purpose of the Lord's Supper is given in Chapter 30, Paragraph 1, of the 1689 Confession as follows:

The Supper of the Lord Jesus was instituted by Him the same night on which He was betrayed to be observed in His churches until the end of the world for the perpetual remembrance, and showing forth of the sacrifice of Himself in His death.<sup>1</sup> It was also instituted by Christ to confirm believers in all the benefits of His death;

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- for their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him;
- for their further engagement in and commitment to all the duties which they owe to Him;
- and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him and with their fellow believers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>1 Cor. 11:23-26. <sup>2</sup>1 Cor. 10:16-21.

The meaning of the Lord's Supper is given in Paragraph 2 as follows:

In this ordinance Christ is not offered up to His Father, nor is there any real sacrifice made at all for remission of sin (of the living or the dead). There is only a memorial of that one offering up of Christ by Himself upon the cross once for all,<sup>3</sup> the memorial being accompanied by a spiritual oblation of all possible praise to God for Calvary.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Heb. 9:25-28. <sup>4</sup>1 Cor. 11:24; Matt. 26:26-27.

The word "oblation" means "offering". The Lord's Supper, therefore, only symbolically shows forth Christ's death for sin and our participation in His death and resurrection. This is followed by condemnation of the Roman Catholic sacrifice of the mass. Paragraph 6 further denounces the Roman Catholic idea of transubstantiation, which maintains that a change occurs in the substance of the bread and the wine into the flesh and blood of Christ. Paragraph 7 rejects the Lutheran idea of consubstantiation which maintains that the body and blood of Christ is present together with the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

On the mode of the Lord's Supper, Paragraph 3 of Chapter 30 says,

The Lord Jesus has, in this ordinance, appointed His ministers to pray and bless the elements of bread and wine (so setting them apart from a common to a holy use) and to take and break the bread, then to take the cup, and to give both to the communicants, also communicating themselves.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>1 Cor. 11:23-26, etc.

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We have noted that the minister of the word has the responsibility over the conduct of the Lord's Supper. The physical elements are bread and wine. As with baptism, in which the water used is any type of water, so here bread is any type of bread – whether leavened or unleavened, and whether flat or a loaf. There are those who argue that, at the institution of the Lord's Supper, the bread used in the Passover feast was unleavened bread. We would regard that as incidental, belonging to the category of 'things indifferent' because the leaven in the Old Testament represented sin which has been removed by Christ's death on the cross. In partaking the Lord's Supper, the believer resolves to live a holy life. It says, in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." The loaf, however, should be one piece to represent the one body of Christ, as taught in 1 Corinthians 10:17, "For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread." The minister breaks the bread once or twice, and passes it around for the individuals each to pinch a piece off for himself.

There is no necessity to use one cup to pass around which would take too long, especially in a larger congregation. Furthermore, there is concern about hygiene, even if a piece of sanitised cloth is passed along with the cup to wipe the rim each time the cup is sipped. In the institution of the Lord's Supper as recorded in Luke 22:19-20, the large cup that was passed around was divided among the disciples (cf. v. 17) – i.e. poured into their individual smaller cups. Most churches today find it more practical to use small communion cups, filled ready before the service. In addition, the liquid used need not be fermented wine. In the institution of the Lord's Supper, the expressions used are "the cup" and "the fruit of the vine", and never the word "wine" even though it is found in many places in the Bible. This shows that unfermented grape juice and, indeed, any fruit juice may be used. The word "wine" in the Bible could mean grape juice of different degrees of fermentation. Unfermented grape juice is preferred because of its dark colour which resembles blood. Its use also prevents the abuse of wine and removes a possible cause of stumbling to teetotallers (i.e. those who abstain from intoxicating drink).

While baptism requires candidates to be available, how frequently should the Lord's Supper be celebrated? Some Reformed and Presbyterian churches celebrate the Lord's Supper rather infrequently –

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once in six months or once a year while others celebrate it every week. The frequency of having the Lord's Supper has been debated since the Reformation. John Calvin favoured having it once a week, saying (Calvin, Institutes, Vol. II: 600), "All this mass of ceremonies being abandoned, the sacrament might be celebrated in the most becoming manner, if it were dispensed to the Church very frequently, at least once a-week." The Puritans were divided over the frequency of this ordinance such that it is not mentioned in the Westminster Confession, the Savoy Declaration, or the 1689 Confession. From the meaning and purpose of the ordinance we may determine how frequently it should be celebrated.

(i) The Passover feast, which foreshadowed the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 5:7), was celebrated only once in a year. From this, it would seem that we are not to have the Lord's Supper so regularly that its special significance is lost. The words, "This do, as often as you drink it (1 Cor. 11:25)", also indicate that it is not intended to be celebrated too often.

(ii) On the other hand, we are told to do it in remembrance of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:24). Surely, we would like to remember the Lord often. Furthermore, this is a means of grace. It is to be done for the good of our souls.

We conclude that it must be done frequently enough, but not so frequently as to lose its special significance. To have it once a week is to have it too frequently. To have it once in three months would be too infrequent since a church member who is providentially hindered from partaking in one would have to wait another three months for the next one. Having it once a fortnight would seem to be ideal, while having it once a month is also a possibility.

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the local church which may meet anywhere other than the usual place of meeting. It is possible, therefore, for the church to hold the Lord's Supper in, say, the home of a sick member who has been unable to attend church for a prolonged period. It is not right, however, to have the Lord's Supper between the bride and the groom during a wedding which would pervert the ordinance from its intended purpose.



## 8.2 Other Occasions

### 8.2.1 Corporate Prayer

In Chapter 6, on Responsive Worship, the mechanics of corporate prayer have been discussed. Here, we consider the weekly prayer meeting of the church as a special occasion of worship. The early church had corporate prayer separate from the public worship. We are told in Acts 1:12-14,

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

The disciples of Christ appeared to be gathered in prayer when the Holy Spirit came upon them, for we read in Acts 2:1, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." We are told in Acts 2:42, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." When Peter and John were tried by the Sanhedrin, and then released, "they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them (Acts 4:23)." "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness (verse 31)." When Peter was delivered from prison by an angel, "he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying (Acts 12:12)."

Corporate prayer was also practised by God's people in the Old Testament. When Nehemiah planned to see the king over the situation in Jerusalem, he prayed, "O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your *servants* who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man (Neh. 1:11)." (Emphasis added.) Apart from praying alone, Ne-

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hemiah seemed to have gathered often to pray with other companions, as indicated by the plural "servants". When Esther was challenged by Mordecai to seek reprieve from the king for the Jews, she responded by saying (Esther 4:15-16), "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" It is to be noted that fasting is carried out in conjunction with prayer, while prayer may be carried out without fasting. Our church holds a Prayer-and-Fasting Week every year in the first week of December in which there is daily fasting from 10.00pm to 4.00pm the following day, during which only water is sipped. The day would end with the church gathered together in prayer, in the evening. On the last day of the week, there is a fellowship meal together after a time of sharing and prayer.

### 8.2.2 Weddings

A wedding of a believing couple calls for worship in thanksgiving to God and in committal of their life together to Him. The elements of normal worship should be included – viz. prayer, singing of hymns, reading of Scripture, and preaching – with the focus on the vows made by the couple to be bound together in the sight of God and the witnesses present. Since it is an act of worship, no alien elements are to be introduced, e.g. having the Lord's Supper between the bride and groom, the burning of candles with all the superfluous explanation of what that means, customary practices such as the Chinese tea ceremony in which the parents are served tea, the presentation of songs, etc. Let all the customary practices, presentation of songs, etc. be done before or after the worship service, and outside the sanctuary, and ensure that even in these practices there are no unbiblical elements such as kneeling down to, or worshipping, the parents or the ancestors.

### 8.2.3 Thanksgiving services

The birth of a child to a family calls for thanksgiving. This normally takes place a month after birth, or when the child is three months old. The parents and the newborn, including other children, may come forward in the midst of the worship service, normally before

the reading and preaching of the word of God, for the pastor to carry the child to pray. The family then return to be seated while the service proceeds as usual. Instead of incorporating the thanksgiving into the public worship, it may be conducted separately, say, in the home.

In some agrarian communities, a thanksgiving service is held after harvest. This would be a communal affair in which the church gathers for a special thanksgiving service. The 25th anniversary, 40th anniversary, and 50th anniversary of a church call for thanksgiving. The graduation (or commencement) ceremony of a seminary or theological college should rightly be a time of worship. The same may be said of occasions such as a ministers' conference, a church camp, the consecration of missionaries, etc.

Some of these events may be incorporated into the public worship without too much disruption to the main purpose of the occasion, which is to worship God, e.g. the birth of a child, and the consecration of missionaries. Other events are, by their nature, separate services, e.g. the corporate prayer meeting of the church, a wedding, the graduation exercise of a seminary, and a ministers' conference. Since these are special worship services, the number of hymns might be less than in the public worship, and the Bible passage and the message would be adapted to the occasion. The hymns might even be dispensed with on some occasions, as well as the preaching, leaving only the reading of God's word and prayer. These would not constitute a full worship service but it is still worship in which reverence for God must be observed.

### 8.2.4 Funerals

It falls upon the church to conduct the funeral of a deceased church member or an adherent, often upon request by the family members. The undertakers would normally handle the practical arrangements such as securing a casket, preparing the body, and arranging for the burial. Local and customary practices will affect the circumstances of the meetings. Here, we give the general guidelines and some observations. There are three services required: the wake service, the funeral service, and the committal service. Colourful clothing, skimpy clothing, and over-adornment will be out of place for such occasions in most cultures. The pastor or elder who conducts the meetings should wear plain-coloured shirt (preferably white), black

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trousers, and a black tie.

There is often only one wake service on the night before the funeral service. Having more than one wake services might be too taxing on friends and relatives who attend.

- 1 In the Chinese culture, the immediate family would normally be seated to one side of the hall, near the casket. Well-wishers who just arrive would stand in front of the casket for a moment of silence, and possibly bow slightly as a show of respect, before turning to the family to bow slightly to them. The family would bow in acknowledgement. Kneeling before the casket is out of place for Christians (Poh, 2020, Chinese Culture).
- 2 Two hymns are sufficient, to begin and end the service. Both the opening and closing prayers would be short and adapted to the occasion. Some close family members and friends might come forward to give the eulogies. Some suitable passages to preach from are: John 4:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Psalm 23; John 11:21-27. These passages are suitable for the funeral service as well. The preacher (and translator, if any) must avoid using uncouth terms and inappropriate words. For example, one should say "the deceased" instead of "the dead person", "the casket" instead of "the coffin", "his remains" instead of "his dead body", etc.
- 3 In the Chinese culture (and some other eastern cultures), the conclusion of the service is followed by the visitors filing round the casket to pay their last respect to the deceased, while consoling the family.

The funeral service is similar to the wake service. After the visitors have filed round the casket, some of them might go away. The pastor gathers the family around the casket to have a last glimpse of the deceased, and pray for the family members before the undertakers seal the casket. The 1689 Confession, Chapter 22, paragraph 4, says, "Prayer is to be made for lawful things, and for all kinds of people who are alive now or shall live in the future, but not for the dead (2 Sam. 12:21-23)..." In Indonesia, cologne is sprinkled on the body of the deceased before the casket is sealed. In the Chinese culture, those present form a cortege (procession) behind the casket to walk for a short distance before driving together to the cemetery for the burial.

The committal service is short, with possibly one hymn followed by a short message. Suitable passages to speak from include John 11:25-26; Job 1:21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 15:51-52. After committing the remains of the deceased to God in prayer, the undertakers lower the casket into the pit. In the Chinese culture, one or two representatives of the family would view the placement of the casket and request for adjustment to its alignment if necessary. The undertakers then pass a flower to each person present to be dropped onto the casket before it is buried. A temporary cross is often placed at the site of the burial until a more permanent tombstone is erected.

There are families that choose cremation instead of burial for the deceased. In some places such as Hong Kong and Singapore, where burial ground is scarce and extremely expensive, cremation is encouraged and even required by law. Barring such situations, Christians should prefer burial to cremation because of the examples set in the Bible, including the burial of the Lord, of Sarah, of Abraham, of David, etc. (Matt. 27:59-60; Gen. 23:19; 25:8-10; Acts 2:29).

Reverence for God, the comfort of hearing the Scripture, and committal to God in prayer constitute the bare essentials of a worship service.

### 8.3 Summary

1 Baptism and the Lord's Supper should rightly be excluded from the list of the normal elements of worship in the 1689 Confession of Faith and be treated as special occasions of worship instead. This suggestion should not alarm anyone as: (i) the Confession of Faith was never intended to be our authority but only as an aid in church life; (ii) it is impractical to include baptism and the Lord's Supper in every public worship as baptism requires suitable candidates and the Lord's Supper, being a special ordinance, is never celebrated in every public worship; (iii) both the special ordinances were instituted by the Lord, not in the context of public worship, but as separate services; (iv) both special ordinances are meant only for believers while the normal elements of worship are meant for non-believers as well. We do not regard feet-washing as a 'sacrament' or special ordinance like baptism and the Lord's Supper.

2 The Lord's Supper may be celebrated before or after one of the

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main worship services on the Lord's Day. Baptism may be incorporated into one of the main services, or celebrated separately if it is held away from the normal place of meeting, for example, at the sea. Candidates for baptism should be interviewed by two elders of the church to determine whether there is a credible profession of faith. Normally, a person should be baptised before he partakes of the Lord's Supper. The church should announce that the Lord's Supper is opened to baptised believers who are not under discipline in any church.

- 3 The physical elements used in baptism and the Lord's Supper belong to the category of 'things indifferent'. Water is water of any kind – still or running, fresh or salty. Similarly, bread is bread of any kind – flat or a loaf, leavened or unleavened. Leaven in the Old Testament signified sin, which has been taken away from us by Christ.
- 4 Baptism has the meaning of: (i) fellowship with Christ in His death and resurrection; (ii) being engrafted into Christ; (iii) remission of sins; and (iv) desire to live and walk in newness of life. Baptism has the purpose of incorporating the person into membership of the local church.
- 5 The Lord's Supper only symbolically shows forth Christ's death for sin and our participation in His death and resurrection. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is for the communicants to remember the Lord's death, to resolve to live a holy life, and to express fellowship with one another through faith in Christ. The use of one loaf is spiritually significant, while it is not necessary to use only one cup. Using grape juice is better than using wine since only "the cup" and "the fruit of the vine" are mentioned in the Bible during the institution of the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, this will prevent the abuse of wine and avoid causing teetotallers to stumble.
- 6 Other occasions of worship include the corporate prayer meeting of the church, a wedding, a funeral, the end of the harvesting season, the special anniversary of the church, thanksgiving for the birth of a child, the graduation ceremony of a seminary or theological college, a ministers' conference, a church camp, thanksgiving at the end of the church prayer and fasting week, etc. Some of these events might be incorporated into the public worship in

church, while others would be separate services. These may be full services including all the normal elements of worship, or the elements of worship may be trimmed down. Reverence for God must be observed in all such worship.

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# Nine

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## DECENCY AND ORDER

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**P**ublic worship consists of the elements of worship strung together in a certain way to constitute an Order Of Worship. The general rule we should follow is, "Let all things be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40)", to accomplish the purpose of worshipping God "in spirit and truth (John 4:24)". To do things "decently" is to do things in a way that is honourable and appropriate to the occasion. To do things "in order" is to arrange the items in turns with the view of accomplishing the purpose well. An unplanned, free-for-all, disorderly meeting like what was seen in the Corinthian church is contrary to the character of the God we worship, "For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (1 Cor. 14:33)." What biblical principles and general rules are there to guide us in the construction of an Order Of Worship?

### 9.1 Relevance Of Revelation

The relevance of the book of Revelation to the church has been grossly underestimated. It is assumed to be a difficult book to understand. The existence of various interpretations of the book has prevented many from drawing practical lessons from the book. In reality, the differences revolve around the return of the Lord in relation to "the thousand years" of Chapter 20 of the book. If the recognised principles of hermeneutics are faithfully and consistently applied, the book should be capable of being understood, at least in the main outline – yielding important lessons for us. Some impor-

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tant hermeneutical principles include:

- i Recognising that this is a book of prophecy, in which visions and symbolism predominate;
- ii The words must be taken plainly, which need not mean literally all the time;
- iii The words must be taken in context;
- iv A passage must be compared with analogous passages;
- v The clear must interpret the unclear, and not vice versa;
- vi The grammar and the historical circumstances should be taken into account.
- vii The conclusion must be consistent with the analogy of faith, i.e. the overall biblical teaching.

The book of Revelation consists of seven distinct parts, each with its distinct message (Hendriksen, 1980:28):

- 1 Christ and the seven golden lampstands (chaps. 1-3): Local churches must remain faithful to the end.
- 2 The scroll of seven seals (Chaps. 4-7): Tribulations in the world cannot nullify the victory of the church in Jesus Christ.
- 3 The seven trumpets of warning (Chaps. 8-11): God's warning of judgement in the gospel will culminate in the final judgement.
- 4 The woman and the male Child persecuted by the dragon and his helpers (Chaps. 12-14): The church will be preserved despite severe persecution.
- 5 The seven bowls of wrath (Chaps. 15-16): The impenitent will have to face with God's wrath, now and in the final judgement.
- 6 The fall of the great harlot and the two beasts (Chaps. 17-19): The world of enmity against the church will be completely overthrown.
- 7 The judgement of Satan followed by the new heaven and the new earth (Chaps. 20-22): Satan will receive his eternal doom while the church will enter her eternal felicity.

Of particular interest to us is Chapters 4-7 in which the tribulations faced by the church on earth are mirrored by the spiritual realities portrayed by worship in heaven. In other words, the worship in heaven is the spiritual explanation of what is being accomplished by the church on earth. The ideal worship in heaven alludes to the worship being offered up by the church on earth. The underlying principles of worship are the same on earth as in heaven. The method and attitude of worship on earth should, therefore, conform to the principles of worship observed in heaven. The part ends with the sealing of the 144,000 of "the children of Israel" who actually represent all the children of God in both the Old and New Testaments. The twelve tribes of Revelation 7 do not correspond exactly to the twelve tribes of Old Testament Israel for it begins with Judah from which the Saviour would come (Gen. 49:10-12), and not with Reuben, the firstborn. Furthermore, the tribe of Ephraim is not mentioned while Manasseh is mentioned. Joseph, the father of Ephraim and Manasseh is included while the tribe of Dan is missed out. Believing in the verbal inspiration of Scripture, we take this as indicating a new list consisting of all God's elect from the old and new dispensations who are redeemed by the Saviour, who comes from the line of Judah. Each tribe has exactly 12,000 who are sealed, showing that the list is symbolic of the perfect number of God's elect – 3 is the number for God, 4 is the number for the whole world, 10 is the number for completeness, so that  $3 \times 4 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 = 12,000$ . The total of 144,000 sealed with the Father's name are referred to again in Chapter 14 which will be considered in the next chapter of this book.

For our purpose here, we make some general observations from Revelation 4 and 5:

- a Worship in heaven is pictured as a throne, surrounded by all the creatures who are arranged in concentric circles, paying homage to the Father and the Son, who are with the Holy Spirit, at the centre – "the seven Spirits of God" (Rev. 4:5; 5:6), the "seven" representing perfection. This confirms our understanding that worship is directed to the trinitarian God, and should be carried out with reverence much like having an audience with the supreme King.
- b The Lamb who had been slain is alone able to unseal the scroll in the Father's right hand, showing that His atoning death is the pivotal event in God's eternal plan of redeeming for Himself a people.

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This shows that worship is made acceptable to God only through the atoning work of Christ.

- c The atoning death of the Lamb constitutes the substance of "a new song" sung by all the creatures in heaven (Rev. 5 cf. 15:3-4). The expression "a new song" is not a reference to one particular song but to "a new theme" in all the songs sung in heaven (Rev. 5:9 cf. 14:3). This shows that we are to sing not just the psalms but also other hymns rich in redemptive revelation.
- d The singing in heaven is accompanied by the harp, an instrument that produces melody (Rev. 5:8 cf. 14:2; 15:2). The four cherubim and the twenty-four elders (Rev. 5:8), and all the redeemed (Rev. 15:2) – indeed, all the other angels – are equipped with harps by God. This shows that we should not have an orchestra consisting of many instruments, nor a choir that sings while others listen. While allowance must be made for symbolism, we may quite safely conclude that only one type of instrument is to be used in the worship on earth which produces melody to accompany the congregational singing, and not one that produces beats and rhythms.
- e The 'hymn sandwich' order of service is used, in which other acts of worship are carried out between the singing (Rev. 4:8, 11; 5:9, 12, 13).

Of the five observations, the last has not been discussed. In the worship in heaven, we have the four living creatures singing (Rev. 4:8), the twenty-four elders singing (Rev. 4:11), both the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders singing (Rev. 5:9), and all the creatures singing (Rev. 5:12). Other items are sandwiched in between the singing. The worship draws to a close with all the creatures singing (Rev. 5:13). This gives rise to the so-called 'hymn sandwich' system of worship. It has the advantage of maximising congregational involvement in the whole service in the right way, as indicated by the various groups in heaven being involved in the worship.

This writer has visited and preached in a few old Puritan churches in England in each of which was an elevated pulpit, an open Bible, and a hymn board. The elevated pulpit with the open Bible were intended to show that the preaching of God's word has the primacy

in worship. The hymn boards showed the hymn numbers in the hymnal intended to be sung in each service. A quick check on the computer will show that the hymn boards originated in the 16th century, i.e. from the period of the Reformation, stretching into the Puritan age and beyond. Why should the hymns be indicated instead of the two Scripture passages that were read during worship? (We have noted that the Puritans had two readings of Scripture in each service while the present writer is arguing that there is no absolute necessity for two readings.) Why were the other items of worship not listed on the hymn boards? The answer appears to lie in the fact that the Reformers and Puritans were men of the Book who knew the Scripture well. They had discovered many things from the Scripture and recovered many precious truths. However, they had not the time to expound on everything, much less those lesser matters such as why the hymns were listed instead of other items in the Order Of Worship. My contention is that they had understood that the worship in heaven, as taught in the book of Revelation, sets the pattern for our worship on earth. They had noticed that the order of worship in heaven is the 'hymn sandwich' system.

Today, things are different in many churches that practise Contemporary Worship. There is continuous singing of gospel songs and choruses to stir up the emotion. The music from the electric guitars and pop-band stir up the feelings even more. In such churches, singing and music constitute 'worship', after which comes 'the word of God'. The way it is put, Scripture reading and preaching are not part of worship. We have noted that such churches hardly know what is true preaching of the Puritan tradition. Before 'the word of God' in their meetings, a traditional hymn is sung, which is tacit admission that the songs and choruses sung earlier do not set the mood that is compatible to hearing God's word.

## 9.2 Other Principles

### 9.2.1 Trinitarian worship

We worship the trinitarian God. We have seen, in Chapter 6 (Responsive Worship), that generally speaking, prayer should be directed to God the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. We have seen also, in Chapter 2, that worship is directed exclusively to the trinitarian God. The choice of hymns in public

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worship should be guided by this principle of Trinitarian Exclusivity. The first hymn should be directed to God the Father, or to the Trinity. The second hymn should be directed to the Son, or to the church which is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:6-10). The third hymn should be directed to the Holy Spirit, or should concern the word of God, for the Spirit and the word cannot be separated, just as Christ and the church cannot be separated (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). Another hymn should be our response to the preached word – a response of repentance and faith, of consecration to God, of trust in God, or of thanksgiving – depending on the message that has been preached.

### 9.2.2 The primacy of preaching

The primacy of preaching in worship arises from the primacy of the word in the life of the Christian and the church. A high view of preaching requires that the congregation appeals to God to reveal His will in the preaching of His word, by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. This is done by congregational singing and by prayer led by the preacher. It follows that the preaching should be after the third hymn which concerns the Holy Spirit and/or the word of God. The preacher prays a short prayer of committal of the preaching and hearing to God – calling upon Him to bless all present, to protect the hearers from distraction, and to work a deep work in the hearts of the hearers. As noted under Chapter 6 (Responsive Worship), it would be preferable that the preacher does not pray for himself in the pulpit but for the hearers or for the congregation as a whole, which includes himself. This is in order not to draw unnecessary attention to himself instead of focusing on the word of God. The committal of the preacher to God would have been done in the vestry together with the office-bearers, before the service began.

### 9.2.3 Intentional progression

The principle of the primacy of preaching means that preaching is the climax of the worship service. Doing all things decently and in order requires that there be a progression towards the climax, followed by a quick but unhurried retreat to allow the message to ring in the ears and warm the hearts, without unnecessary interruption. Therefore, there should be a closing hymn in response to the mes-

sage preached, followed by the closing prayer. Any additional hymn would be superfluous. All the items slotted between the four hymns should show intentional progression in the whole service.

The practice in some churches of having the church secretary make the announcement immediately after the worship service would disrupt the effect of the preached message upon the congregation. Where then should the announcement fit in, if not at the end of the service? Quite many churches have the announcement in the midst of the service, before the preaching of God's word. This avoids disrupting the beneficial effects of preaching upon the hearers. Its presence in the service may be justified by the fact that it is a circumstance concerning worship, i.e. an 'adiaphora'. Another way of handling the announcement is to have it just before the service begins. That way, it is kept out of the service, since it is not an element of worship, yet achieves its intended purpose. However, wouldn't that deprive the late-comers from hearing the announcement? The perpetual late-comers will have to change their habit and learn to arrive early. If there are important matters relevant to some late-comers, the deacons can take note and inform them after the service. Quite many churches have a weekly bulletin on which are the news items. Another way is for the announced items to be communicated by social media to the relevant individuals. In our church, we have a Whatsapp group for members of the church and another for friends of the church, i.e. regulars who are not formal members.

### 9.2.4 Led service

Intentional progression in the meeting is best achieved by the pastor leading the whole service. He knows what he will be preaching on. He may choose the hymns to suit his message, and the appropriate hymn in response to it. It would be disastrous to choose a closing hymn on the theme of missions when the message calls for sinners to repent of their sins! We have seen that Scripture teaches led worship. In the tabernacle, Aaron presided over the services as High Priest. In the dedication of the temple, Solomon led the service. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete to set the churches in order, with clear indications that they were the ones who presided in meetings.

A worldly egalitarianism has crept into many churches today, in which as many people as possible are given the opportunity to con-

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tribute some items during worship. We have noted that this is based on a wrong understanding of 1 Corinthians 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." The pastors of such churches fear being labelled as men who practise the 'one-man-show'. God's word, however, teaches us that "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe (Prov. 29:25)." In the Order Of Worship which we are proposing, the pastor is not alone speaking throughout the meeting. The church secretary (normally one of the elders) makes the announcement. The collection is brought forward during the service by one of the deacons who prays in thanksgiving and committal of the offering to God. The lunch and dinner that we have together in church after the services are presided over by one of the elders. If there is a birthday celebrated during mealtime (never during the worship service), the presiding elder handles that as well.

### 9.3 A Structure Of Worship

The forgoing principles lead us to a structure or framework of a viable service. The four hymns of the service form the base of the structure, while the primacy of preaching provides the apex of the structure. There are three possible configurations to the basic structure, as shown in Fig. 9.1.

Proceeding from left to right, the black dots on the baseline represent the hymns that are sung in order. The black dot at the top represents the climax of the service, which is the preaching. In Configuration A, the preaching occurs too early into the service. The hymns, and other items in between the hymns, which follow the preaching would disrupt its beneficial effects. Configuration B is better than Configuration A, in that the preaching is not placed too early in the service, but in the middle of the service. Based on the consideration that preaching constitutes the climax of worship, the beneficial effects of which should not be disrupted, Configuration C is the best. The three hymns before the preaching, and the other items of worship, build up expectation to the preaching. The closing hymn is the response to the preaching.

Choosing Configuration C, we may now fit in the other items of worship. We may place the Opening Prayer before or after the first



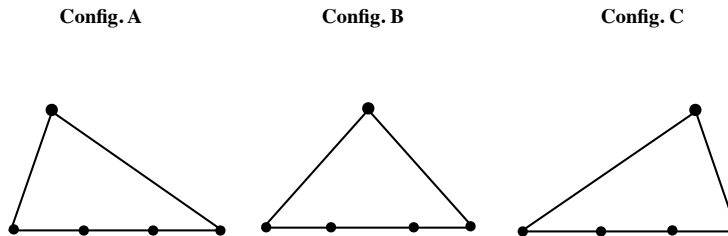


Fig. 9.1 Hymn Sandwich Configurations

hymn. There are advantages in placing it after the first hymn because the stragglers to the meeting may come in to find seats while the first hymn is sung, instead of being held up in the vestibule by the Opening Prayer if it is before the first hymn. Most Christians would not want to move about when the pastor is leading the congregation in addressing God during the Opening Prayer. The Closing Prayer is after the closing hymn since it ends the whole worship. It is superfluous to have a short closing prayer immediately after the preaching, although it is not wrong to do so.

The Scripture Reading might be fitted in before or after the third hymn. It would be better to have it before the third hymn so that the preacher does not have to speak continuously in one stretch – from reading the Scripture, to a short prayer, to preaching the message – especially if the Scripture Reading happens to be longer than usual. Furthermore, singing the third hymn after the Scripture Reading allows the passage read to percolate in the mind of the hearers before the message is delivered.

While not having a second reading of Scripture apart from the passage to be preached on, the recitation of a psalm by the congregation earlier in the service is an aid to worship. It has the advantage that it constitutes Scripture Reading and will please those who are

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used to having a second reading of Scripture. At the same time, those who believe in exclusive psalm-singing would realise that we value the Psalms in worship by reading a psalm aloud together each week, apart from singing some of them in the repertoire of hymns in our hymnal. The psalm may be read out by the preacher instead of being recited in unison by the congregation.

Another element of worship is Teaching which is accomplished in the Preaching, since there is considerable overlap between teaching and preaching. It is also partially fulfilled in the Singing since through the doctrine found in the "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" there is a degree of "teaching and admonishing one another" (Col. 3:16). In our church, we desire to fulfil more definitely the element of Teaching by including a slot in which either the Apostles' Creed is recited by the congregation before the Scripture Reading, or one or two questions and answers from the Catechism are read out by the pastor. Some churches have a short message, consisting of a "running commentary", on the first Scripture reading. This is not advisable as it has the tendency to detract from the preaching.

We slot in the presentation of the Offering, or Collection, after the second hymn. Some churches begin the worship with a Call To Worship and end the service with a benediction and/or the singing of the doxology. There are no compelling reasons to add these as elements of worship. The 1689 Confession does not include these among the elements of worship. The inclusion of the Call To Worship may be justified under Scripture Reading, while the singing of the doxology may be justified under Singing. These items, however, seem to be remnants of the traditions of the sacral churches. Examples of Scripture used in the Call To Worship are: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation (Exod. 34:6-7)"; and "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, *ble*ss His holy name! (Psalm 103:1). The doxology used in many churches is taken from the closing stanza of two hymns written by the Anglican bishop, Thomas Ken (1637-1711) for use at Winchester College:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

## 9.4 An Order Of Worship

We are ready now to provide a complete Order Of Worship, listing the main elements of worship in bold and the controverted or optional items in normal print.

Welcome and Announcement  
**First Hymn (to the Father or the Trinity)**  
**Opening Prayer**  
Psalm Recitation  
**Second Hymn (to the Son or on the church)**  
**Presentation of Collection**  
Reading of the Catechism or Recitation of the Apostles'  
Creed  
**Scripture Reading**  
**Third Hymn (to the Holy Spirit or on the Word)**  
Short Prayer  
**Preaching**  
**Fourth Hymn (response to the preaching)**  
**Closing Prayer**

We have noted that some churches add the Call To Worship at the beginning, and the singing of the doxology at the end, of the Order Of Worship. Many churches have only one worship service on the Lord's Day. Our church has two services on the Lord's Day – the message of the morning service being focused on building up the faith of believers while that of the evening service is focused on winning souls to Christ. In the evening message, we dispense with the Psalm Recitation and the Catechism or the Apostles' Creed. In the Old Testament, Scripture reading and preaching were done with the congregation and the preacher standing (Neh. 8:4, 5; 1 Kings 8:55). In the synagogue at Nazareth, the Lord stood up to read the Scripture and sat down to teach (Luke 4:16, 20ff.). In the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, Paul stood up to preach (Acts 13:16). At a prayer meeting in Philippi, Paul sat down to teach (Acts 16:13). From such variations in practice, we may conclude that the posture adopted in worship is not important, although the church should set a common

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practice for all. We have noted that worship in the New Testament emphasises more on the internal attitude rather than the physical posture of the body. In most churches today, the preacher preaches standing, and the congregation stand to sing as well. Standing allows the preacher more freedom to emphasise his message with bodily gestures, and it allows the congregation to sing more comfortably, with chest and abdomen expanded.

If there is a thanksgiving for the birth of a baby, it may replace the slot for the Psalm Recitation. Instead of reciting a psalm, a passage relevant to the occasion may be read, followed by a short exhortation by the pastor who then takes the baby and pray. Relevant passages to read would include Psalms 127; 128; Deut. 6:1-9; Mark 10:13-16; 2 Tim. 1:3-7 and 3:14-15. When there is a baptism, it may be slotted in immediately after the preaching of God's word. This will not disrupt the effect of preaching but reinforce it instead, as baptism is always a powerful testimony to unbelievers and a stirring reminder to believers of God's grace. The pastor who baptises the candidate would retreat to change his clothes while an elder calls for the closing hymn and ends the service with prayer.

If the message is forty-five minutes to an hour long, a normal service would finish in one-and-a-half hours. The worship structure of Configuration C which we have chosen is only a rough guide. The service will need to be smooth, and not abrupt. It gently leads to the climax of hearing the message preached and ends quickly with the last hymn, followed by the closing prayer. If we consider the anticipation of the people, or the relative degree of importance of the elements of worship, as measurable 'spiritual energy', we may represent the worship service in the form of a graph, as shown in Fig. 9.2.

This is a suggested Order Of Worship that takes into consideration the various principles adduced from Scripture. It bears the family characteristics of Regulative Worship, including God-centredness, the simplicity that is in Christ, the elements of worship revealed in Scripture, and recognition of the primacy of preaching. (Cf. Masters, 2020: 53-61; De Bruyn, 2015). As noted repeatedly, not all churches practising Regulative Worship are identical in the way worship is conducted. At the same time, there will be no unexpected elements of worship that are introduced or shocking variations in attitude and behaviour that characterise the freedom of expressions, personal preferences, and worldly influence seen in Progressive Wor-

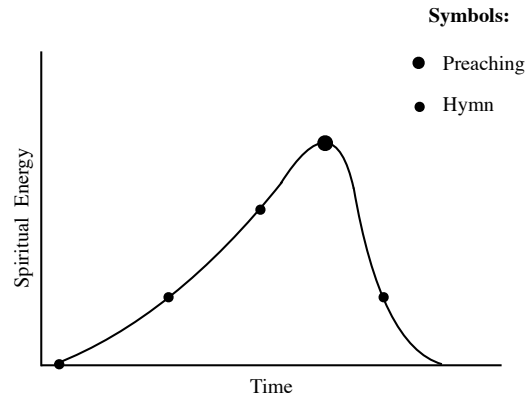


Fig. 9.2 Intentional Progression In Worship

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In Integrative Worship, there are generally two parts – the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In each part, a portion of Scripture is read, followed by singing, listening to the homily (a read message), and ending with responsive prayer. The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with a collection, the priest goes through the ceremony of lifting up the bread and the cup as offerings to God, the washing of his hands, singing, the ringing of bells, the burning of incense, and the passing of the elements to the communicants which are received kneeling down. The communicants take the elements, believing in transubstantiation, and return to their seats for quiet prayer, after which the priest dismisses them with the pronouncement of blessing. The Order of Worship is supposed to have evolved in the church through the centuries (Catholic Encyclopedia: Liturgy). The rituals of lifting up the elements to God, the washing of hands of the priest, kneeling and the sign of the cross in prayer, the ringing of bells, the burning of incense, and the belief in transubstantiation are all reminiscent of the Old Testament sacrifices mixed with superstition, and lacks the simplicity that is in Christ. From around the 1950's, Roman Catholics began to adopt the Four-hymn Sandwich system of the Protestants into the Mass "to promote congregational

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participation" (Sullivan, HP Review).

Normative Worship generally follows the Order of Worship seen in Regulative Worship, except that there is a tendency to include unscriptural elements such as a choir, solo presentation of songs, the altar call, and the like. As noted already, many such churches have adopted elements from Progressive Worship such as using the drum-set, hand-clapping and hand raising during singing, etc.

### 9.5 Summary

- 1 The general rule of "doing all things decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40) applies to the Order Of Worship. The elements of worship must be arranged according to known biblical principles to achieve the intended purpose of worshipping God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). To do things "decently" is to do things in a way that is honourable and appropriate to the occasion. To do things "in order" is to arrange the items in turns with the view of accomplishing the purpose well.
- 2 The book of Revelation is relevant to worship because it is the final instalment of God's progressive revelation of Scripture. Chapters 4 to 7 of the book reveals to us that worship in heaven consists of the 'hymn sandwich' format in which other items of worship are slotted between the singing of hymns. The Reformers and the Puritans seemed to have grasped this point, since the hymn board, which indicated the hymns to be sung during worship, was introduced in those days.
- 3 In the Hymn Sandwich system, the various items of worship are slotted between the hymns. The hymns include those sung to God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and in response to the preaching – in that order. The preaching of the word of God constitutes the climax of worship. Other principles to guide us in designing an Order Of Worship are: trinitarian worship, the primacy of preaching, intentional progression, and led service. The items of worship are arranged to build up expectation to hear the preaching, after which the service is drawn to close quickly but without hurry.
- 4 A possible Order Of Worship consists of the following: (i) Welcome and Announcement; (ii) First Hymn; (iii) Opening Prayer;

(iv) Psalm Recitation; (v) Second Hymn; (vi) Presentation of Collection; (vii) Teaching (Catechism or Apostles' Creed); (viii) Scripture Reading; (ix) Third Hymn; (x) Short Prayer; (xi) Preaching; (xii) Fourth Hymn; (xiii) Closing Prayer. Although not wrong to do so, there is no compelling reasons to have the Call To Worship at the beginning, and to sing the doxology at the end, of the service. If there is a thanksgiving for the birth of a baby, it may replace the slot meant for the Psalm Recitation. If there is a baptism, it may be slotted immediately after the preaching.

- 5 The suggested Order Of Worship takes into consideration the various principles adduced from Scripture. It bears the family characteristics of Regulative Worship, including God-centredness, the simplicity that is in Christ, the elements of worship revealed in Scripture, and recognition of the primacy of preaching. Other forms of worship would include unscriptural innovations, the worst being Integrative Worship on the one hand, that includes rituals and superstitious practices, and Progressive Worship on the other hand which has innovations based on freedom of expression, personal preferences, and worldly influence.

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# Ten

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## ESCHATOLOGICAL SEPARATION

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**E**schatology is the study of "the last things", i.e. those things related to the end of the world when Christ returns to judge the living and the resurrected dead, and to make all things new. God's elect have been chosen from eternity past, are called out from the world of sin into the kingdom of God in history, and are prepared on earth for everlasting life in heaven. We will consider the elect as a separated people, a worshipping people, and a hopeful (i.e. eschatologically oriented) people.

### 10.1 A Separated People

We have learned important lessons on worship from Revelation 4 and 5. There are important lessons on worship found in Revelation 14 as well. Before coming to that chapter, it is helpful to see the parallel passage in Revelation 7. The chapter before that shows the seals of persecution being opened one by one. The opening of the first seal reveals Christ on a white horse going forth "conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:2). This represents the preaching of the gospel to win souls. The white horse is followed by the red horse of persecution and warfare, the black horse of poverty and injustice, and the pale horse of sickness and death. The proclamation of the gospel to win souls to Christ is always followed by persecution, oppression, and death to the believers. The fifth seal reveals the souls of martyrs

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who are safe in heaven (Rev. 6:9-11). The sixth seal reveals that judgement day has arrived (Rev. 6:12-17).

Chapter 7:1-8 reveals the vision of four angels holding back "the four winds of the earth". Another angel comes from God, saying to the four angels, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." This angel who speaks then uses the seal he is carrying to seal God's people on the foreheads – 144,000 of them, 12,000 from each tribe of the children of Israel. As we have noted, these represent the entire Church Militant, the believers in the Old Testament age as well as those in the New Testament age while they are on earth. Of course, they do not exist together on earth at the same time. Rather, all the elect are considered from the perspective of their life on earth in any period of history. They are the Church Militant that have many battles to fight before being translated into heaven as the individuals die in the faith. The seal on their foreheads shows their authenticity, security, and ownership by God. They are preserved from harm when the four angels of judgement let loose God's wrath on earth to destroy the reprobate, i.e. those by-passed in God's plan of salvation.

The vision switches to the scene in heaven after judgement in Revelation 7:9. All God's elect are safe in heaven. Not all the elect are gathered together yet, since many of them are still on earth. They are the elect in heaven at any moment in history. They are the Church Triumphant. They are portrayed as "standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands" singing praises to God and to the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-10). The other creatures around the throne fall down and sing praises to God. It is explained to the apostle John that those arrayed in white robes "are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The "great tribulation" is a reference to the accumulation of all the trials and persecutions face by all the believers through the ages, including the tribulation near to Christ's return to judge the world in which the believers will suffer severely (Matt. 24:27-31 cf. Rev. 6:12-17).

We are told in verse 15, "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them." This does not mean that life in heaven consists in endless public worship. The "temple" is not a literal building but corresponds to the presence of God in the midst

of His redeemed people, just as the completely gathered church, described as "the New Jerusalem", has no literal temple – Revelation 21:22, "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." The last verses of Revelation 7 describe the felicity of life in heaven, including the statement that "the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters." This shows that there will be work and service to God, apart from engaging in public worship, in heaven.

We have established the point that Revelation 7:1-8, concerning the 144,000 of all the tribes of the children of Israel who were sealed, describes the Church Militant, i.e. believers who are still on earth, while Revelation 7:9-17 describes the Church Triumphant, i.e. the redeemed of the Lord gathered together in heaven. As believers pass on from earth, they end up safely in heaven. This will continue until the Lord returns to judge the world, to make all things new, to bring His redeemed people to dwell with Him on the new earth in the new heaven, while the unbelievers are consigned to eternal hell, together with the devil and the wicked angels who follow him. Life in heaven after the judgement is described in Chapters 21 and 22 of the book of Revelation. In the chapters before these, the scenes of heaven correspond to the scenes of earth during the gospel age, i.e. in the period between the first and the second comings of Christ.

We now consider Revelation 14. The exact number of God's elect who are sealed on their forehead with the Father's name (Rev. 14:1) stand in contrast to those marked (not "sealed") on their right hands or on their foreheads with the name of the beast, or the number of his name (Rev. 13:16-17). These who worship the beast and his image are destined to face the wrath of God at the return of the Lord, and will be tormented in hell forever (Rev. 14:9-11). The beast is introduced in Revelation 13:1-10 as rising out of the sea – representing antichristian nations and governments (cf. Rev. 17:15; Isa. 17:12). He is aided by the beast that rises from the earth (Rev. 13:11-18) – representing antichristian teaching (cf. James 3:15; Phil. 3:19). Revelation 17 reveals the beast carrying another helper, a woman called Babylon who together kill many believers – the woman representing worldly seduction (Rev. 17:4). Two groups of people, and only two, are found on the earth – those sealed with the Father's name, and those marked with the name or number of the beast. The beast, in reality, is the agent of Satan, for it has seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 13:1) just as the fiery red dragon of Revelation 12:3, who is

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identified as Satan (Rev. 12:9), has seven heads and ten horns. The difference is that Satan has seven diadems on his head while the beast has seven diadems on his horns. The beast serves the dragon.

We come to the point we want to make. In Revelation 18, the fall of Babylon is described. "Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her (v. 8)." Throughout history, Babylon – worldly allurements – has ensnared so many souls. We are told in verse 3, "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury." Then a voice from heaven says (v. 4), "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues." These words sound too familiar. We are directed to 2 Corinthians 6:17-18,

Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

The apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 52:11 and applies it to God's covenantal people in the New Testament age. When believers are saved they are to disengage themselves from sinful habits, false teaching, and worldliness. James 4:4 tells us, "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." The redeemed of the Lord are a separated people. The 144,000 who are sealed in Revelation 14 are the people of God who are gathered out of the world. They show themselves to be a separated people by their way of life and their worship of God.

### 10.2 A Worshipping People

We establish next the truth that God's people who are separate from the world are to be a worshipping people. We consider Revelation 14:1-5, which says,

Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thou-

sand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from *among* men, *being* firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

It is possible to see the 144,000 who have been sealed as being in heaven, i.e. they are now the Church Triumphant. However, another possibility is to look upon this as the Church Militant, consistent with what we find in Chapter 7. We will then have a consistent understanding that life in heaven *after* the judgement is described in Chapters 21 and 22, while the other chapters describe life on earth as well as life in heaven *before* the judgement. The Church Militant is said to be standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion in the sense that while on earth, they are already in the kingdom of God. They are secure and as good as being in heaven already. This truth is expressed powerfully in a stanza of Augustus Toplady's hymn, "A Debtor to Mercy Alone",

My name from the palms of His hands  
Eternity will not erase;  
Impressed on His heart it remains,  
In marks of indelible grace;  
Yes, I to the end shall endure,  
As sure as the earnest is given;  
More happy, but not more secure,  
The glorified spirits in heaven.

When we arrive in heaven we will be more happy, but not more secure, than the glorified spirits for the reason that we are already perfectly secure on earth. The Lord is present in the midst of His

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church on earth by His Spirit (John 14:16-18; Matt. 28:20). We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). While on earth, we are as good as being in heaven when we come to Christ by faith. This truth is taught in Hebrews 12:22-24,

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

This gives a different perspective to the vision of Revelation 14 (compared to Hendriksen, 1980:185). The 144,000 who have been sealed are the Church Militant joining the Church Triumphant in singing the "new song before the throne"! The 144,000 are redeemed from the earth, setting them apart from the worldly people who are unable to learn the new song, i.e. they cannot sing of Christ and redemption by His blood. The natural man is unable to appreciate spiritual things because "they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14)." Only the redeemed are able to worship "in spirit and truth (John 4:24)". They are characterised by righteous living, faithfulness to the Lamb, separation from the world, and worshipping God in purity – as seen in verses 4-5,

These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from *among* men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

God calls out a people from the world in order to worship and serve Him. This is shown in Revelation 14:6-7 which says:

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him

who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."

In order to call upon the world to "fear God and give glory to Him" and to "worship Him", the 144,000 who are sealed should themselves be doing so. A separated people is a worshipping people.

### 10.3 A Hopeful People

The Church Militant must preach "the everlasting gospel" to the world which includes calling upon the people of the world to worship God the Creator in view of the coming judgement. The "everlasting gospel" is the message of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" who redeem His people by His substitutionary death (1 Cor. 2:2; Luke 24:46-47). When sinners are saved, they join the Church Militant to worship God who is the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Judge. This theme of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Judge is found in the First Table of the law. We recall these commandments which were considered in Chapter 4 (Things Indifferent):

- 1 "You shall have no other gods before Me (Exod. 20:3)."
- 2 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them (Exod. 20:4-5)."
- 3 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain (Exod. 20:7)."
- 4 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates (Exod. 20:8-10)."

These commandments concern the worship of God. The Fourth Commandment is undergirded by the truth that God is the Creator:

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"For *in* six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Exod. 20:11)." The Ten Commandments are prefaced by the truth that God is the Redeemer: "I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Exod. 20:2)." The Second Commandment is undergirded by the truth that God is the Judge: "For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (Exod. 20:5-6)."

God as Creator requires us to worship Him with reverence. God as Redeemer requires us to worship Him with joy. God as Judge requires us to worship Him with gratitude. Often, worship is portrayed as a celebration, which is associated with joy. Reverence and gratitude are overlooked. To a certain extent, worship is a celebration. In the Old Testament, all festivals except for the day of atonement were times of celebration and rejoicing (Hos. 2:11 cf. Lev. 16:29-31). The rejoicing is not to be confused with the jollity of the world, as happened when the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf: "Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play (Exod. 32:6)." Reverence is required of us by the Third Commandment, which is expressed practically in the words of Leviticus 10:3, "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified." Gratitude is also required of us because we have been spared the condemnation of judgement day. In the New Testament, worshipping with reverence, joy, and gratitude is expressed as "God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24)."

If God is Creator, Redeemer, and Judge at one and the same time, the three qualities of reverence, joy, and gratitude can coexist in His people as well without contradiction. This must be reflected in the hymns chosen for worship. It must be reflected in the preacher and his preaching. It must be reflected in the behaviour and clothing of the worshippers. In contrast to an earlier generation who would wear their "Sunday best" to church, there are church leaders today who would mount the pulpit dressed in casual, and even outrageous, clothing – and in so doing, they are making a statement. While our dressing is very much a matter of taste and governed by the Liberty



of Conscience, self-regulation according to "common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture" is required. The advocates of Contemporary (Progressive) Worship do not see any obligation to keep to such self-regulation in their dress and behaviour. While there are differing degrees to this cavalier attitude, the underlying attitude is noticeable. They would dress up appropriately to attend an interview for a job, but they see no necessity to dress properly to meet the "King of kings and the Lord of lords" on the Lord's Day. They do not see that they are going against Leviticus 10:3 and John 4:24.

We will not linger over the controversial Chapter 20 of the book of Revelation. This writer does not hold to the view that the 1,000 years in that chapter is literal, and that the distinct sections – viz. vv. 1-3, vv. 4-6, vv. 7-10, and vv. 11-15 – are events that follow one another chronologically. Instead, the 1,000 years are a round figure referring to the gospel age, i.e. the period between the first and second comings of Christ, and the different sections of the chapter are different perspectives of the same period. The first section (vv. 1-3) reveals Satan's power curtailed by the coming of Christ while the gospel is preached to all the nations by the Church Militant. The second section (vv. 4-6) reveals the Church Triumphant in heaven during the gospel age – the translation of their souls to heaven is "the first resurrection". The third section (vv. 7-10) reveals that Satan will do his worst in the short period before the coming of Christ to judge the world. God will intervene on behalf of His people and cast the enemies, together with the devil who instigated them, into hell. This corresponds to the teaching of the Lord in Mark 13:5-23. The last section (vv. 11-15) reveals the day of judgement at the end of the gospel age.

We move on to Chapters 21 and 22 of the book of Revelation. After the judgement, all God's people will be gathered together on the new earth, which will be in the new heaven (Rev. 21:1-8). The structure and substance of the New Jerusalem – which represents the complete number of God's elect gathered together – reveal its perfection and glory (Rev. 21:9-27). Revelation 22:1-15 reveals the blessedness of life on the new earth, in the new heaven. This is followed by the closing admonition and exhortation to the whole book (vv. 16-21). Eternal life is represented by the living water flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. There is a park in the city itself, crisscrossed by streets as the river meanders through

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it. In the middle of each street, and along the banks of the river are trees described collectively as "the tree of life" (v. 2). It seems that there are twelve types of trees, each bearing its fruits every month – the twelve representing all types of trees, whose fruits abundantly supply the needs of the redeemed people. Even the leaves of the tree are useful, "for the healing of the nations". "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him (v. 3)." Service refers to work, just as the end of verse 5 indicates work to be done for God, "And they shall reign forever and ever."

There will be public worship as well, as indicated by verse 4, "They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads." Just as described in Chapters 4 and 5 of the book, all the creatures will be gathered regularly around the throne of God and of the Lamb, to worship the triune God. It cannot be that there is public worship in heaven before the day of judgement which then stops after the judgement. No! Public worship will continue to all eternity, and so will life lived out in worship, on the new earth in which righteousness dwells. Our worship and service to God on earth should be carried out in anticipation of life in heaven.

### 10.4 Some Conclusions

Is the worship in heaven portrayed as the creatures prancing about in dance, raising their hands, waving and clapping to loud music, with pop-bands and electric guitars producing ear-splitting and heart-pounding contemporary music? Or is it portrayed as an august orchestra producing majestic, soul-swaying, music? Or is there a choir made up of a portion of the redeemed, singing to all the other creatures in heaven? The answer to each question is obvious. The humble saint will have to look down with sadness and anguish. The worship in many churches today does not reflect the qualities and characteristics of worship in heaven.

What we see of worship in heaven is that all the saints are dressed in white (Rev. 3:5; 7:14), and when all the redeemed are gathered together, they are "arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Rev. 19:8)". While we must take full cognisance of the spiritual significance of the white dress, we must not miss the fact that appropriate dressing is involved when

having an audience with the King, or at the wedding of the Lamb. Those who lead public worship must be appropriately dressed, as also must all who worship God. We would not impose a dress code on all who attend the worship service. We will welcome a tramp or a punk who decides to drop in to the church. The children of the King, however, should know better on how they are to be dressed. While rejecting the vestment for the minister and over-adornment in the congregation, we do not have to swing to the opposite extreme of being casual in our dressing. A reverential decorum is expected of us. But it is starkly absent in many churches today. The words of Malachi are applicable: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? Says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise My name (Mal. 1:6)." In the New Testament, reverence for God is emphasised in Hebrews 12:28-29, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." Reverence must be sensed. It must also be seen.

Then, we must note that all the creatures in heaven (Rev. 5:8; 14:2), including all the saints (Rev. 15:2), are equipped with harps of God with which they sing "the song of Moses, the servant of God, and they sing the song of the Lamb (Rev. 15:3-4)." The two songs have redemption as the theme. Although the angels are not redeemed by the Lamb, since they are not fallen in Adam, they join in the singing of the "new song", i.e. songs having the theme of redemption accomplished (Rev. 5:11-13 cf. 9-10). This shows that the end, or goal, of God's plan of salvation is the manifestation of His glory in the salvation of the elect. This is also the *end* of missions. The *objective* of missions is the planting and establishment of local churches, in preparation for life in heaven (Poh, 2020:292). Since a significant part of life in heaven consists in public worship, it is imperative that local churches be primed to worship God in heaven. Public worship on earth must, therefore, conform to the qualities and characteristics of worship in heaven. This includes congregational singing of "a new song", i.e. songs that are rich on the theme of redemption, accompanied by instrumental melody – all carried out consistently with "the simplicity that is in Christ". Reverence for God coexists with joy and gratitude in the church that is redeemed by Christ and spared the condemnation of judgement day.

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The chief way by which God's people are noticed to be a separated people (2 Cor. 6:17-18), and a people who belong to Christ and are loved by the Father (John 17:23), is by their regular gathering together in worship. Not only must we worship "in spirit and truth", we must never forget the "witness quality" involved in public worship (Lev. 10:3). We must dissociate ourselves from the rituals and human traditions of Integrative Worship. We must also dissociate ourselves from the worldliness of Progressive Worship. We do not want to open ourselves to absorbing unscriptural elements into worship as in Normative Worship. We are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" who declare plainly that we seek a homeland (Heb. 11:13-14). We will keep Regulative Worship, and continue to be a separated people, a worshipping people, and a hopeful people.

### 10.5 Summary

- 1 Revelation 7 shows the Church Militant consisting of the 144,000 who are sealed on the forehead with the Father's name. It also shows the Church Triumphant singing praises to God and to the Lamb. As believers die, they are translated to join the saints in heaven. Revelation 14 shows the 144,000 who are sealed worshipping God while those marked with the name or number of the beast being tormented by the wrath of God. In Revelation 18:4 we have God's call from heaven for His people to come out of the world, corresponding to the call found in 2 Corinthians 6:17-18. God's people are called out of the world to be separated unto God. This is shown by their way of life and their worship of God.
- 2 Revelation 14 shows the saints of God on earth joining with the saints in heaven in worship. This is consistent with the teaching of Hebrews 12:22-24 that the saints on earth have entered, in principle, the kingdom of God. They preach the gospel to the people of the world, calling upon them to fear God, to give glory to Him, and to worship Him. In order to do so, the saints on earth must themselves be doing the same. A separated people is a worshipping people.
- 3 The "everlasting gospel" preached by the Church Militant reveals God as Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. This theme of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Judge is also found in the revelation of the

Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. These three characteristics of God call for reverence, joy, and gratitude from God's people, which should be seen in public worship. Revelation 21 and 22 show the blessedness of life in heaven, which consists of public worship as well as work done in service to God. Our worship and service to God on earth should be carried out in anticipation of life in heaven.

- 4 We should be saddened and grieved by the fact that the worship in many churches today do not reflect the qualities and characteristics of worship in heaven. Preachers and worshippers should be appropriately dressed during worship. There should be congregational singing of songs that are rich in the theme of redemption, accompanied by instrumental melody, consistent with "the simplicity that is in Christ". Reverence, joy, and gratitude should characterise God's people. The chief way by which God's people are noticed to be a separated people, and a people who belong to Christ and are loved by the Father, is by their regular gathering together in worship. We will keep Regulative Worship, and continue to be a separated people, a worshipping people, and a hopeful people.

## 10.6 References

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# Eleven

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## CONCLUSION

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**I**n this closing chapter, we provide an overview of what have been covered, make some general observations, and end with some practical implications.

### 11.1 An Overview

Historically, four forms of worship have come down to us: Integrative Worship, Normative Worship, Regulative Worship, and Progressive Worship. No formal definitions have been given for the principles governing these forms of worship. As commonly understood, the principles governing these forms of worship may be stated as follows:

- The Integrative Principle: In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture and the tradition of the church is permissible.
- The Normative Principle: In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture must be obeyed, while whatever is not forbidden by Scripture is permissible.
- The Regulative Principle: In the worship of God, whatever is commanded in Scripture must be obeyed, while whatever is not commanded in Scripture must be rejected.
- The Progressive Principle: In the worship of God, Scripture provides general guidelines to be followed

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while allowing for freedom in personal preferences and expressions.

From before the Reformation of the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches have held to the Integrative Principle. Starting from the Reformation, Martin Luther, the Lutheran Churches, and the Church of England have held to the Normative Principle. Today, most Evangelical churches would hold to the Normative Principle either knowingly or unwittingly. Following John Calvin, the Reformed churches and the churches of the Puritan age have held to the Regulative Principle. Today, most Reformed churches – including the Dutch Reformed Churches, the Scottish Presbyterian Churches, and the Reformed Baptist Churches – together with some conservative Evangelical churches, would hold to the Regulative Principle. From the 1960's, churches in the Charismatic movement, or churches that have been influenced by it, adopt Contemporary Worship which upholds the Progressive Principle.

We have shown that the Regulative Principle is rooted in the Reformation principle of 'sola scriptura' and the Ten Commandments. The Normative Principle similarly arose from a belief in 'sola scriptura' and the Ten Commandments. Explicit instances of worship in the Bible, however, confirm the correctness of the Regulative Principle, including – the incident of Abel's offering being accepted by God instead of that of Cain in Genesis 4:1-7, the incident of Aaron's two sons being struck dead for offering "profane fire" in Leviticus 10:1-3, and the incident of Aaron and the children of Israel worshipping the golden calf in Exodus 32. In the New Testament, passages such as Matthew 15:9; 28:18-20; Colossians 2:22-23, and Revelation 22:18-19 would lend support to the Regulative Principle.

The advocates of the Regulative Principle have done themselves a disservice by not articulating the principle well. They have: (i) given the wrong impression that only the explicit *commands* of Scripture are to be followed instead of the *teaching* of Scripture; (ii) given a truncated definition of the Regulative Principle in which the qualifying statement on 'things indifferent' is omitted; (iii) confusing "*some* circumstances *concerning* worship" with "*the* circumstances *of* worship". A more complete definition of the Regulative Principle is, "In the worship of God, whatever is taught in Scripture must be obeyed, while whatever is not taught in Scripture must be rejected, except for some circumstances concerning worship which must be ordered ac-



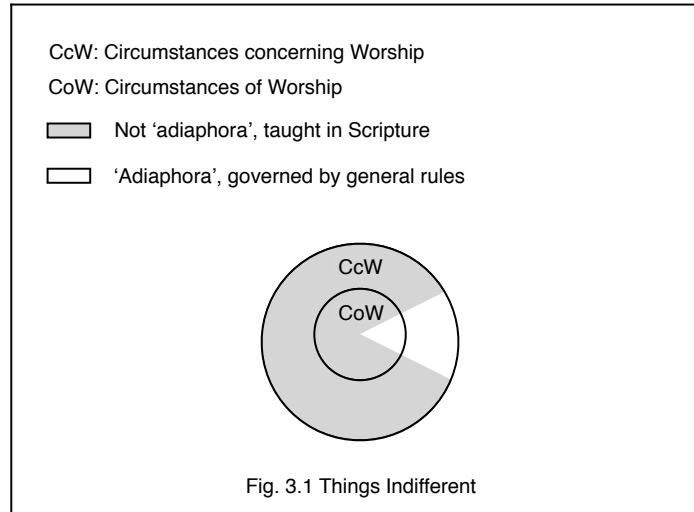
ording to common sense, Christian prudence, and the general rules of Scripture."

The First Table of the Law is directly concerned with worship. The First Commandment concerns the *Object* of worship. The Second Commandment concerns the *manner* of worshipping God. The authority of Scripture has to be applied to worship in: (i) the execution of the elements of worship (the 'mode' of worship); (ii) the regulation of the circumstances involved in the execution of the elements of worship; and (iii) the circumstances involved in the act of worship. The Regulative Principle, therefore, encompasses the Second and the Third Commandments. The Third Commandment concerns the *attitude* of worship. The specific teaching on worship found in Leviticus 10:3 and John 4:24 are re-affirmations of the Second and Third Commandments. In other words, they are reaffirmations of the Regulative Principle. The Fourth Commandment concerns the *day* of worship. The circumstances concerning worship have been called by the misleading term 'adiaphora', meaning 'things indifferent'. It should not be understood wrongly to mean that the circumstances related to worship are of no concern in worship and are left to individual preferences. Rather, it means they are matters not address explicitly in the Scripture. Since "all matters of faith and practice" are to be under the authority of Scripture, the elements of worship must be determined from Scripture and the circumstances concerning worship must be governed by Scripture. In *some* circumstances concerning worship that are not explicitly addressed by Scripture, the general rules of Scripture are to be applied with common sense and Christian prudence. The 'adiaphora' is limited in extent, covering only *some* matters not explicitly addressed by Scripture. It is wider in scope than is commonly understood, covering some circumstances *of* worship as well as some circumstances *related* to worship. The 'adiaphora' in relation to the circumstances concerning worship is represented by Fig. 3.1.

The New Testament reveals seven elements of worship, viz. Scripture Reading, Preaching, Teaching, Prayer, Singing, the Collection, and the observance of the Lord's Day. Baptism and the Lord's Supper constitute the special ordinances of the local church which may be conducted separately as special occasions of worship, or they may be incorporated into the normal public worship on the Lord's Day. The principles underlying worship in the Old Testament are the same as those in the New Testament since the same God is worshipped

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in both dispensations, by the elect who are called out of the world according to His eternal plan of salvation. However, the modes of worship are different because the coming of the Saviour has fulfilled the types and symbols of the Old Covenant. The three categories of worship in the Old Covenant have been replaced by their equivalents in the New Covenant, although the nature of those categories remain the same. They are summarised in Fig. 7.1.

The book of Revelation provides teaching on worship which are often overlooked. It shows that we are to sing a "new song", i.e. songs rich with the theme of redemption in Christ. This shows that hymns may be sung instead of just the psalms. It shows that only one instrument which produces melody is to be used to accompany congregational singing. It shows that the 'hymn sandwich' system is to be followed when designing an Order Of Worship. It shows also that God's children on earth are a separated people, a worshipping people, and a hopeful people, i.e. a people who are eschatologically oriented.

The chief way by which God's people are noticed to be a separated people, and a people who belong to Christ and are loved by the Father, is by their regular gathering together in worship. Not only must we worship "in spirit and truth", we must never forget

OT Offerings	NT Elements	Categories
Burnt offering	Scripture reading Preaching Teaching	Proclamation: Gospel-centric
Sin offering Trespass offering	Scripture reading Preaching Teaching	Proclamation: Edification
Drink offering Grain offering	Prayer Singing	Response: Adoration
Peace Offering Wave & heave offerings	Collection Keeping the Lord's Day	Offertory: Thanksgiving

Fig. 7.1 Elements of Worship Compared

the "witness quality" involved in public worship. We must dissociate ourselves from the rituals and human traditions of Integrative Worship. We must also dissociate ourselves from the worldliness of Progressive Worship. We do not want to open ourselves to absorbing unscriptural elements into worship as in Normative Worship. We will keep Regulative Worship, and continue to be a separated people, a worshipping people, and a hopeful people.

The seven elemental principles that arise from our study constitute the biblical form of worship which we have called Regulative Worship, in contrast to the other forms of worship that have come down to us historically. The elemental principles of Regulative Worship include:

- i **Trinitarian Exclusivity:** The trinitarian God revealed in the Scripture alone is to be worshipped.
- ii **Scriptural Regulation:** The Regulative Principle should govern how worship is to be conducted, including what constitute the elements of worship and the circumstances concerning worship.
- iii **Proclamational Worship:** there should be Scripture reading and preaching from the read passage, and possibly supplementary teaching such as reciting a psalm, reciting the Apostles' Creed,

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and/or the reading of some questions and answers of the Catechism.

- iv **Responsive Worship:** there should be led, extemporary, prayer and congregational singing of hymns modelled after the psalms, with the accompaniment of an instrument that produces melody.
- v **Offertory Worship:** there should be the collection and the keeping of the Lord's Day holy.
- vi **Decency and Order:** there should be an Order of Worship in which the Hymn Sandwich system is followed, with the primacy of preaching recognised.
- vii **Eschatological Separation:** God's people are separated unto Him from the world, worshipping Him in the way prescribed, and preparing for worship and service in heaven.

### 11.2 Some General Observations

#### 11.2.1 Confusing 'Traditional' With 'Integrative'

It has been shown elsewhere that the Evangelical Realignment that began from the 1930's has continued to today (Poh, 2017:139-145). Some churches that are Charismatic have adopted Reformed soteriology and regarded themselves as Reformed when in reality they are still Charismatic – holding to the continuation of the sign gifts of tongue-speaking, healing, and prophecy and practising Contemporary Worship. There are Reformed individuals who have succumbed to the adoption of the sign gifts and/or Contemporary Worship. With the recovery of interest in Reformed theology from the 1960's, in tandem with the spread of the Charismatic movement, Traditional Worship has stood in opposition to Contemporary Worship. One must be careful not to confuse the term Traditional Worship with the rituals and ceremonies of Integrative Worship. Based on the terminology used in this book, Traditional Worship is called Regulative Worship, while Contemporary Worship is one expression of Progressive Worship.

### 11.2.2 More than the 'Five Points'

The focus of the 'worship war' of recent years has been on the music and, to a lesser extent, on the songs used in Contemporary Worship. In this book, we have broadened the discussion to public worship which encompasses much more than the music and the songs. The deficiencies of Contemporary Worship lies not only in the aberrations in music and songs but in the whole gamut of items, behaviour, and principles connected with worship. Indeed, it extends to one's attitude and approach to God and to His word. i.e. to the Christian life. Many young people who are new in the faith – together with many with questionable faith – are caught up with Contemporary Worship. As they grow in experience, there will be those who begin to seek for alternatives in worship. There are those who enthusiastically embraced the "Five Points of Calvinism" but fail to see its incompatibility with Contemporary Worship. A convincing case should be presented to them that the Reformed faith encompasses more than its soteriology. Regulative Worship is very much a part of the Reformed faith.

### 11.2.3 Choosing between NP and RP

Many Evangelicals have approached worship without the awareness of the underlying principles that are at stake. Unwittingly, they have been holding to the Normative Principle – seeking to follow what is biblical while rejecting what is perceived to be mere human tradition, and accepting what is not forbidden in Scripture. They struggle over whether to use the drum-set and the slide-projector, whether to dress well, and whether gospel songs should be used. Since these are not forbidden by Scripture, they have been adopted. When it comes to having lit candles, or pulling the ears while singing, they are stumped. We have seen that, historically, those who hold to the sole authority of Scripture have narrowed down the choice of principles to just the Normative Principle and the Regulative Principle. The Integrative Principle and the Progressive Principle may be dismissed since unscriptural innovations are allowed. In this book we have attempted to show that the Regulative Principle is most consistent with 'sola scriptura'. It must be decisively accepted in favour of the Normative Principle. When applied to public worship, we have Regulative Worship as the biblical form of worship.

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### 11.2.4 Untrained song writers

The production of tunes and hymns for worship is not as straight forward as is thought by many. In the past, the hymns were written by ministers and spiritually mature people to be sung to tunes produced by others who were good in music. For example, the hymn "A debtor to mercy alone" by Augustus Montague Toplady (1740-1778) is often sung to the tune "Trewen" composed by David Emlyn Evans (1843-1913). Sixty-six of Evans compositions won prizes in competitions in Wales, England and America (Cyber Hymnal). Evans was a composer and not a hymn writer, while Toplady was a hymn writer and not a composer. Today, composers attempt to be songwriters, and songwriters attempt to be composers, who vie to produce songs for worship. Toplady and Evans may be in a league of their own, but they remind us that the lamb offered up to God must be without blemish. New believers and theologically untrained musicians should be careful not to foist their compositions upon the churches. When we have a high view of the church, and of worship, we will tread more carefully. We thank God that there are still hymn writers and composers today. May such be used by God more and more!

### 11.2.5 A conservative spirit needed

There is a legitimate place to enjoy songs and music in life but the worship of God is another matter. This writer enjoys listening to Chinese folk songs, reads tonic solfa, and plays the harmonica and the Chinese flute. Apart from a little personal gratification in music and songs, his greater concern is "to achieve transforming the hearts of the masses and singing the praise of the Lord" – in the words of the missionary to China, Timothy Richard (Gong, 2017). This is not a matter to be rushed. The biblical approach to outreach and missions must be sought (Poh, WMT, 2020). The biblical teaching on worship must be grasped. A conservative spirit towards the Scripture must be cultivated (See Appendix.). A conservative spirit must not be equated with a regressive spirit. The progressive spirit that is so much in vogue in academia and politics today need not be seen as incompatible with a conservative spirit towards the Scripture. Open-mindedness and the innovative spirit must be applied in the right place, while reverence and a teachable spirit must hold sway in the worship of God (Heb. 12:28-29). One may favour republicanism

### 11.3. Practical Implications

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to monarchism in politics, but God must be submitted to as Creator and King (1 Sam. 12:12; Jer. 10:7, 10; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 19:16). Worship in heaven is portrayed as having an audience with the King (Rev. 4-7).

#### 11.2.6 Friendly fire

Within the wider Reformed family are big-hearted individuals who show sympathy towards the progressive-minded young people who have embraced Calvinistic soteriology. Commendable as that may be, there is no necessity to be the apologists for their Progressive Worship and their Continuationism (Poh, 1997, 2020). Their foray into these territories constitute friendly fire against other Reformed brethren. It has caused them no small measure of distress. It is possible that at least some of these big-hearted brethren have allowed their scholarship to outstrip their piety. We would humbly appeal to these brethren to consider the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:7-9,

Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete.

### 11.3 Practical Implications

#### 11.3.1 No neutrality

In the matter of worship there is no possibility of remaining neutral. As decisively as we have rejected the Integrative Worship of the sacral churches, so decisively must we reject Progressive Worship. One places oneself in a precarious position by holding to Normative Worship. Regulative Worship must be embraced whole-heartedly because it is the biblical form of worship. This does not mean that we have arrived at perfection. We give due allowance for growth in spiritual understanding, and genuine differences in the application of the Regulative Principle. The Regulative Principle itself allows for differences of expression in worship due to cultural differences, local

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peculiarities, and exceptional circumstances. Such differences, however, will not obscure the family characteristics of Regulative Worship.

### 11.3.2 Semper reformanda

The spirit of 'semper reformanda' – always being reformed – is needed (Poh, 2017). We are reminded of the words of John Robinson (1575-1625) – "the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy word" (Broadbent, 1981: 245). This is not contradictory, but complementary, to a conservative spirit towards the Scripture. In this regard, we plead our disagreement with those who advocate exclusive psalm-singing, and those who advocate singing 'acappella' (without instrumental accompaniment). Our greater foe, however, is Progressive Worship – manifested today as Contemporary Worship. Those gifted with writing hymns and composing worship tunes should be encouraged to produce new works to add to the repertoire of existing hymns. No doubt, such gifted writers and composers would be few and far between but we are content to have a steady stream, rather than a deluge, of new hymns and tunes since we still value what we already have.

### 11.3.3 Prophet, Priest, and King

The Lord Jesus Christ, as Head of the church, occupies the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. Submission to His headship requires submission to His three offices. Prophethood concerns doctrine, priesthood concerns worship, and kingship concerns the government of the church. Not only must we strive to be correct in doctrine and church government, we must strive to be correct in worship as well. Effort must be made to determine the biblical form of worship. Once convinced of which is the biblical form of worship, effort must be made to implement it in the church. The greater responsibility lies with the pastor of a church to guide the eldership, and then the church, towards understanding and implementing the biblical form of worship.

We must draw to a close. As the local churches on earth are brought to greater conformity to the truth, the universal church is being sanctified and cleansed by the Lord "that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any



such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:26-27)." Theologically, God has entered His rest from His work of the first creation. While on earth, we keep the pattern of "six days labour, seventh day rest" to commemorate God's first creation. But there remains "a rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9), when Christ returns to judge the world and to make all things new. In principle, we have already "come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven (Heb. 12:22-23)." Every time God's people gather in public worship, they are joining in worship with the saints and angels in heaven (Rev. 14:1-5). Is the worship in your church in harmony with the worship in heaven?

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## Appendix: CONSERVATIVE OR LIBERAL?

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[Talk given at the Reformed Ministers' Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 3-6 September 2007.]

**A**re you conservative or liberal? When you ask someone this question, the answer you get will depend on whether you are referring to politics or to theology. It is possible for a person to be a liberal in politics and a conservative in theology, and vice versa. The words "liberal" and "conservative" can be applied to education, sociology, the arts and many other areas. Our interest here is in theology. In fact, our interest goes farther than theology, and extends into the whole of the Christian life – covering one's belief, attitude, and choices.

One need not be a liberal, or a conservative, for life. There are those who were conservative, but today are liberal. There are others who were liberal, but today are conservative. I have met people who are thoroughly liberal in theology, with whom I have almost nothing in common. I have met more people who do not hold to liberalism as their belief, but are liberal in attitude (or spirit). In fact, many do not even realise that they have a liberal attitude, thinking that they merely hold to different views on the teachings of the Bible. It is my intention to argue out a case in support of being conservative, in so far as our faith is concerned. I would like to convince you that it is right, and to your best interest, that you are conservative. I would like to show that we should remain conservative all our life.

### Definitions

*What is liberalism?*

We need to define what it means to be liberal and to be conservative. We begin with the meaning of liberalism as a system of belief. This definition is taken from a dictionary of theological terms (Manton, 1990:83).

"Theologically, liberalism means freedom from the necessity of believing the Bible to be God's revelation to mankind. When once people are "free" from this necessity, they are "free" to deny all the central doctrines of the Christian faith – the moral demands of God, the sinful nature of man, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary death of Christ, the resurrection, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers.

Liberalism grew up in Germany in the nineteenth century and spread to England. The theory of evolution helped liberalism because if mankind has evolved physically, they are evolving morally also. All that is needed is to improve their outward circumstances in order to help their moral "climb". In this way the "social gospel" came into being. The first world war (1914-1918) did much to destroy this optimistic view of mankind."

*What does it mean to be liberal in attitude?*

From this meaning of liberalism, we may derive a definition for the liberal attitude. To be liberal in attitude is to have a propensity to reject whatever is established in favour of something new or different, in order to please self or others, instead of pleasing God. A person with a liberal attitude will accept and do what he likes, or is convenient to himself, regardless of what the Bible actually teaches. He will attempt to reinterpret, or ignore, any teaching of the Bible that does not suit him while accepting other teachings as correct.

*What does it mean to be conservative in attitude?*

In contrast, a person who has a conservative spirit wishes to know, and do, what the Bible teaches and is slow to reject what is time-tested and has been blessed by God. He is always concerned to know what is most consistent with the teaching of the Bible and does not want to change things just to please himself or others. He fears offending God and going astray from what is right.

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The same dictionary of theological terms which we have quoted from, earlier, defines a conservative as follows (Manton, 1990:38):

"A person who wishes to conserve (keep, or retain) the belief in the Bible as the revealed Word of God without mistake. This is in contrast to the liberal, who believes that the Bible is only a book produced by human beings and therefore containing mistakes.

The phrase 'conservative evangelical' describes the person who believes in the evangel (the gospel message, the good news of Jesus Christ) and who is determined to preserve that belief."

That is the definition of a person who is *theologically* conservative. Note that, here, we are discussing more than your belief. We are discussing your attitude towards the Bible, towards God, and towards living out the Christian life. It is, therefore, worthwhile to read again the definition of a person who has *a conservative spirit*, given above.

From these definitions, we see that it is possible for a person to hold to doctrines that are basically correct and yet have a liberal attitude. Equally, it is possible for a person to hold to wrong doctrines and yet have a conservative spirit. We would expect that a person with a liberal attitude will go farther and farther astray from the Bible's teaching, with time. We would expect a person who has a conservative attitude to gradually come closer and closer to the correct teachings of the Bible. It is easier to teach a person with a conservative spirit than one with a liberal spirit.

### **Why Many Christians Are Liberal**

As we interact with more Christians from other backgrounds and denominations, we will find that many of them have a liberal attitude towards the Bible. You may wonder why that is so. Such liberal Christians find it unusual that conservative Christians should be so cautious about making changes and accepting new ideas. They take it for granted that it is natural to be "progressive", to learn new things, and to experiment with new ideas. They find it hard to understand why Christians should be so conservative in a modern world. We shall try to explain why so many Christians are liberal, before showing why we ought to be conservative.

*Living in a globalised world*

The first reason why many Christians are liberal is that we live in a globalised world. With improved communication and transportation, there is constant movement of people and ideas around the world. In any one place or country, we can find people of diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. In a pluralistic society, every normal and sane person would want to live in peace with others. That means we must accept one another, and pursue happiness together for our common good. This idea is extended to the church. In the church, too, we should learn to accept one another and tolerate differences of opinion. In our interaction with other churches, we should learn to accept one another and show forth a united front to the world. What matters is that we are all Christians and will be living together in heaven. Why don't we unite together to win souls for Christ, instead of quarrelling over doctrinal differences?

This seems to be the prevailing attitude of Christians at large. Globalisation has had an impact on the way people think.

*Improvement in education*

The second reason why many Christians are liberal is the improvement in education. The literacy level has improved, and more people can read. They are exposed to more ideas from all over the world. Advances have been made in science, engineering and medicine. The computer is widely used and people all over the world are interconnected via the internet and the mobile phone. Since impressive advances have been made, and are seen with the eyes, and enjoyed by almost everyone, it seems natural to trust in the advancement of human knowledge rather than just trusting the Bible. In fact, the Bible should be reinterpreted to suit the times. Take, for example, the theory of evolution. So many scientists and clever people continue to believe in evolution, and they are contributing to the advances we see in science and technology. Shouldn't we reassess our view of Scripture and make some adjustments so as not to contradict evolution?

So pervasive is the acceptance of "evolution" that it is unthinkable to many that anyone should question it, let alone reject it. It requires effort to study the right resources to begin realising that the so-called theory of evolution, in fact, is a questionable model of the origin of life. But it already has had such a widespread influence upon people all over the world, and it certainly weakens trust in the Bible as the

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infallible and inerrant word of God among Christians.

*Advancement in politics*

The third reason why many Christians are liberal is that advancement is seen even in the realm of politics. The European Union was formed after the second world war to unite European countries economically and politically in order to secure lasting peace. It began with six countries in 1950 and gradually expanded until it stands at twenty-seven countries today. The Berlin wall was opened in 1989 and torn down in 1990, when Germany was reunited. In 1991 Communism fell in Soviet Russia and in Eastern Europe. Vietnam was reunited in 1975 and began to open to the world in 1986. In China, Mao Zedong died in 1976. Deng Xiaoping took over the power and opened up China to the world in 1978. In Korea, there is expectation that there will be reunification before too long. The mood of the world seems to be to unite, to work for the common good and prosperity, and to accept democracy as the best form of political governance. In democracy, everyone has a say, and consensus is the rule. Quoting Abraham Lincoln, "Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people." When such a mood, and such an idea of government, are applied to the church there will be ready acceptance of everyone's view, and everyone's right to participate. Church leaders who are conservative will be under pressure to change, or resign, or be removed.

The influence of the general trend of politics in the world upon Christians must not be overlooked. It has had an impact upon many Christians, such that they are more inclined to be liberal in attitude.

*Influence upon the church*

All these changes in the world are dramatic, and almost breathtaking. Christians who are not careful have been influenced in the direction of becoming liberal minded. Are you one of those who have been so influenced? Do you have a liberal attitude to Christian things? Let us see how this manifests itself in some areas of church life.

The first test we will conduct is in the area of worship. Do you agree that there is nothing wrong in worshipping the charismatic way – including using the pop-band, singing modern choruses, having simultaneous prayer, hand-clapping when singing, hand-raising when praying, and even dancing? Do you agree that this is the trend

we must adopt, that all churches are going this direction and we must follow them? Do you agree that we must adopt this style of worship, otherwise we will lose the youths in our churches? If you answer "Yes" to all these questions, you are liberal-minded.

Next, test yourself in the area of church structure. Do you favour the appointment of women elders and women pastors? Do you believe there should be more personal counselling in church rather than powerful doctrinal preaching? Do you approve of introducing cell-groups and other modern church-growth techniques? Do you favour the use of projectors and power-point presentations during worship instead of using the old fashioned hymn books and relying on preaching alone? If your answer is "Yes" to all these questions, you are liberal in spirit.

Then, test yourself in the area of inter-church fellowship. Do you fraternise with Charismatics, Liberals and Roman Catholics? Do you believe that Christians of all shades of opinion should be united and show love to one another? As a church leader, are you afraid of being isolated by other churches and being accused of being narrow-minded and isolationist? Does ecumenism appeal to you? If you answer "Yes" to all these questions, you are liberal-minded.

Finally, test yourself in the area of doctrine. Do you believe that God speaks to us today through the Bible and also through dreams and visions? Do you believe that miracles and healing must follow gospel preaching so that it will be easier for sinners to believe? Do you believe that the Bible's teaching on creation is true but we must make adjustments to our understanding to suit the theory of evolution? Do you believe that the Bible is capable of many interpretations and we must accept the interpretation of others as equally valid? If your answer is "Yes" to all these questions, you are liberal-minded.

You do not have to hold to liberalism as your system of belief to be liberal in attitude. Some pastors outrightly reject liberalism and hold to the evangelical or Reformed doctrines of salvation and the Bible, but they are liberal in attitude so that it shows in their ecumenism and the way they worship. I wish to convince you that it is wrong to be liberal-minded. I wish to convince you that it is right to be conservative. If you are conservative in spirit, you are more likely to become more biblical in your beliefs. Conversely, if you are liberal-minded, you are more likely to lose whatever biblical truths you have now.



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### **Why We Must Be Conservative**

Just as I have put before you three reasons why many Christians tend to be liberal in attitude, I must put forward three reasons why we need to be conservative. I am aware that I am "swimming against the current", fighting against the prevalent attitude in society. I cannot expect much success if it were a mere matter of opinions. However, I am convinced that the truth will prevail, and that God will use whatever truth is presented to bring conviction "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement".

#### *The character of God*

The first point I would present before you is that the character of the God we worship demands that we be conservative. God is almighty, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is holy, just, wise, and true. In Him is no darkness. Much more can be said about the attributes of God. What we must grasp is the majesty of God. "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders (Exod. 15:11)?"

Man may be the highest of all God's creation. Man may be the most intelligent of all God's creatures. But man is only a creature – limited in wisdom, power, and ability. We owe to our Creator everything that we are, and everything that we have. We need to bow in awe before Him, and acknowledge that we are so small in His sight. A humble and submissive spirit before the all-powerful God will knock out of us any pride and reliance on human wisdom. A conservative spirit alone is consistent with our submission to God. A conservative spirit seeks to know God's will in all things. Unlike the liberal spirit, the conservative spirit does not dare to make man the end of all decisions. We dare not insist on pleasing self, nor pleasing other people, for we want to please God alone. This is not to say we deliberately anger other people and show no kindness, courtesy, nor love to them. No, we seek to please God in all things and, in that way, we are enabled to love man correctly.

#### *The nature of the Bible*

The second reason why we must have a conservative spirit is that the nature of the Bible demands it. The Bible is the inspired word of God. It is unlike any other book. It is written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke

*as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20)." The Bible is the complete revelation of God. We do not expect new revelation to be given until Christ comes again. The book of Revelation, which is the last book of the Bible, written by the last surviving apostle, closes with these words: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19)."

The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible. The Holy Spirit gives us the new birth. The same Spirit continues to feed our souls with the word of God by illumining our minds and giving us understanding. 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4)."' The Bible is sufficient for all our needs. We do not have to seek out new revelation. We do not have to rely on human wisdom. We must not do things to please man, but to please God. The only way we can please God is to do what His word requires of us. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17)." A person with a conservative spirit will seek to know, and do, what the word of God says. He will not just please himself, nor others.

#### *Our accountability*

The third reason why we must have a conservative spirit is that we will be held accountable before God. God is sovereign. He is in control of all things. He requires that man lives according to His will. Those who are redeemed by the blood of His Son has every reason to live for Him. The sovereign God holds us accountable for the way we serve Him. There will be a day of judgement, when all will be called to account. God's word is sufficient to guide us. His Spirit is willing to enable us. His grace will be sufficient for us. Therefore, we are to serve Him willingly, and faithfully, to the end of our lives. King David's dying words to Solomon are equally relevant to us: "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If

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you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever (1 Chron. 28:9)."

We do not want to go against God's will. We must, therefore, do what His word requires, and not introduce anything of our own in the worship of God, and in our service to Him. Remember how Uzzah was struck dead for trying to stabilise the ark of God (2 Sam. 6:6-7). In the same way, we deserve to be struck dead for not only failing to believe in the sufficiency of God's word but also for trying to introduce innovations to improve on God's revealed will. Remember how the two sons of Aaron – Nadab and Abihu – were struck dead for offering "profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them (Lev. 10:1)". In the same way, we deserve to be struck dead for worshipping God in ways not instructed by His word. A conservative spirit is called for if we want to serve God faithfully. "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12)." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31)."

We have covered three reasons why we should have a conservative spirit. A conservative spirit is demanded of all Christians, and all servants of God, (i) because of the character of God, (ii) because of the nature of Scripture, and (iii) because of our accountability to Him.

#### **Four Mistakes To Avoid**

##### *Not human traditions*

Let me now make some qualifications so as to prevent misunderstanding in other people, and also to avoid mistakes in ourselves. Firstly, when we advocate having a conservative spirit, over against a liberal spirit, we do not mean defending and retaining human traditions. We emphasise that it is God's word that we follow, not human traditions which have been handed down in the church. The Pharisees were very good at insisting on the tradition of the elders in the name of God when they were actually breaking the commandments of God (Matt. 15:1-9). Churches have many cherished traditions which must be re-examined in the light of Scripture. Having the right conservative spirit requires that we have the courage to remove whatever is unbiblical and do what is biblical.

Sometimes, we may be doing what is commanded by God, but the manner by which we obey Him may be unhelpful or wrong. Take, for example, passing around a bag to make the collection during the

worship service. Making the collection is right, but using a bag that is passed around may not be the best way. It makes visitors and new believers feel obliged to give, causing them unnecessary distress and embarrassment. Some might not come back to church to avoid facing the same situation again. We find in the Bible, in both the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, that offerings were made by the people voluntarily going to a box to place in what they have decided to give (2 Kings 12:9; Mark 12:41-44). I regard this as a small matter. The important thing is that there is an offering made during worship. The way that is done is of small importance. But if a better way, which has biblical precedent, is pointed out to you, wouldn't you consider adopting it? Or would you cling on to what the church has always done? In that case, you have a traditionalist spirit, and not a conservative spirit.

Take another example, which is more serious. Today, in many church circles, the "altar call" is accepted as a legitimate way to evangelise the masses. In fact, it has become an indispensable element of their "revival meetings". Any criticism of the altar call will be frowned upon and even resisted with hostility. Since its introduction by the early Methodists in America over two hundred years ago (Murray, 1994:185-190), the practice is now so entrenched in many churches. I would appeal to you not to defend the altar call simply because it has been widely practised, for so long. It is a practice that arose from Arminianism. Preachers who practise the altar call would appeal for sinners to come forward to the front of the church with the same urgency that they appeal for them to repent and believe. It is inevitable that sinners will associate their action of coming to the front with repentance and faith. It is a fact that many who "walked to the front" do not show signs of true conversion afterwards. The Bible does not link repentance and faith with the action of walking to the front of the church. Repentance and faith occurs in the heart, when the sinner hears the gospel preached. The altar call is a human tradition that is harmful.

*Not uniformity*

The second mistake likely to be made by those who are conservative in spirit is to expect uniformity in doctrine and practice among all believers. This is an impossibility in practice, and it is something that is not taught in Scripture. Instead, Scripture teaches us to expect differences of doctrine and practice among believers. Scripture

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*permits* differences in non-fundamental matters, but it does not *approve* of such differences. Effort must still be made to minimise the differences by coming to the correct teachings of the Bible. These might be obvious to some, but to others they are not. We, therefore, need to explain.

In 1 Corinthians 11:19 we read, "For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you." The context shows that Paul did not approve of the factions among the Corinthian Christians. But he accepted the fact that there were factions among them. He also expected that among those who differed, there were those who were right, and there were those who were wrong.

In Philippians 3:15 we read, "Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you." Paul expected Christians who were spiritually mature to have the same belief and attitude about pressing on in spiritual growth. He also expected that there would be minor differences of view which would be ironed out as everyone progressed.

The differences between Christians should not be such that the fundamentals of the faith are affected. When fundamentals of the faith are affected, we will need to separate from those who are wrong. This is the teaching of such passages as Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-16; 2 John 9-10; Galatians 1:8, 9, and Jude 3. As long as the differences do not affect the fundamentals of the faith, we must live with those differences, and work towards minimising those differences so that we may be "of one accord, of one mind (Phil. 2:2)". This applies to doctrine and to practice. This applies to individual Christians and to churches. We see, therefore, that Christians who have a conservative spirit do not necessarily share the same doctrine and practice. However, it is expected that as they study the Scripture, they will share more and more truths in common as differences are sorted out. They are recognisable as a people who share a conservative spirit, and a conservative theology, different from those who are liberal-minded.

#### *Not harsh dogmatism*

The third possible mistake is to associate the conservative attitude with a harsh dogmatism and a critical spirit. The commandments of God are summarised by our Lord under the two great commands: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your

soul, and with all your mind," and "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). Love for our neighbours, and especially for our brethren in Christ, should characterise every Christian. Showing love might mean having to correct those in error, but there is no need to assume a harsh and judgemental attitude. Many Christians do things that are wrong in our view because they do not know any better. They have not had the opportunity to sit under systematic, expository, preaching. They are ignorant because they have not been exposed to the truth. It is not right to put truth across to them in an unfriendly and critical manner. You might be able to win the argument in your engagement with him, but you would have lost the person.

*Not inefficient and unfruitful service*

The fourth possible mistake is to associate the conservative spirit with inefficient and unfruitful service to the Lord. The desire to retain what is right might be wrongly extended to the retention of what is comfortable and convenient to ourselves. The avoidance of unbiblical novelties and human innovations might be wrongly extended to the avoidance of new opportunities in serving the Lord. Every field of service has its peculiar difficulties and opportunities. The servant of the Lord would want to face the challenges and opportunities with boldness and courage, trusting the sufficiency of the Bible and the enabling of the Spirit. Those who aim to please God alone do not fear criticism from friends or foes. If it is the right thing to do, we will do it, once we have prayerfully weighed the matter and are convinced that it does not violate any biblical principles. The truth should set us free – free from the power of sin, free from the fear of man, free from the shackles of traditions, and free to be guided by the Spirit to do God's will. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith states this: "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from all doctrines and commandments of men which are in any respect contrary to His Word, or not contained in it. Thus to believe such doctrines or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience. The requiring of an implicit faith, and absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also (1689 Confession:21:2)."

When Martin Luther was asked to retract much of what he had taught, he respectfully but boldly said, "Unless I am convinced by proofs from Scriptures or by plain and clear reasons and arguments,

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I can and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

A conservative spirit characterised those who have been most used by God, and who have been most fruitful in missions. We can mention George Whitefield, a mighty preacher greatly used in Britain to win souls for Christ, who travelled to America to preach in days when motorcars and aeroplanes had not been invented. We think of C. H. Spurgeon, "the prince of preachers", who was most enterprising in gospel outreach. We think of William Carey, "the father of modern missions", who went to evangelise India, translated the Bible into over 30 languages, and was instrumental in abolishing the practice of widow-burning. We think of Adoniram Judson, a paedobaptist missionary who was bold enough to re-study the subject of baptism and became a baptist, who pioneered in Burma (now Myanmar), who was bold enough to remarry after the death of his wife, despite the criticism of friends! These were conservative men, whose hearts had been set free by the truth. They may truly be called ministers of the free Spirit!

There is a proper place for Christian flair, and holy courage, as we serve God.

### **Conclusion**

Christians who are conservative in theology are in the minority today. Christians who are conservative both in theology and in spirit are even fewer in numbers. Many conservative Christians feel isolated, pressured, and disdained by the liberal-minded Christian majority. The latter show their liberal attitude by adopting Charismatic doctrine and practice, Arminian theology and methods of evangelism, and possessing an ecumenical spirit and a readiness to adopt questionable methods of worship, church-growth, and evangelism. Those who are conservative should understand why many are liberal-minded, and why it is wrong to follow them. We must stand our ground and continue to be conservative, for we know that we are pleasing God and living for Him, and not for man.

Being conservative or liberal has to do with your belief, your attitude, and your choice. Those who are liberal must reconsider their position. Is your belief right? Is your attitude right? Is your choice to be liberal right? Do you truly revere God? Do you truly love the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you truly want to obey His commands? "The LORD

searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts (1 Chron. 28:10)." "Each of us shall give account of himself to God (Rom. 14:12)."

May God help us to be conservative in spirit and in theology.  
Amen.

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