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## Editor's Notes

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*Leonard W. Pine, editor*

Dear Friends:

Welcome to the first issue of *the WRS Journal*! We trust that you will find the information in its pages helpful and encouraging. We have designed the *Journal* primarily for those in the thick of the Bible Presbyterian ministry: pastors, elders, Bible teachers, and evangelists can take this information and put it to immediate use in their teaching and preaching ministries. Laymen also will find benefit the clearly written articles. Our desire is that anyone who wants to be a more effective servant in the church of Jesus Christ will be able to pick up the *Journal* and acquire tools to facilitate that service.

Published semi-annually, each issue of *the WRS Journal* will focus on one topic. This practice will allow us to explore several different facets of a subject as we take a "big picture" approach to the issues that face the ministers of Christ. We will choose subjects based on their helpfulness to you. Each issue will feature one article from a more academic perspective, while the rest will take on a practical bent. The primary contributors will be members of the seminary faculty, with guest articles from pastors and other church leaders who demonstrate proficiency in the subject matter we cover.

I hope you will enjoy our introductory issue. Please let us know what you think!

In our Lord's name,

*Len Pine*

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### **Worship and Order:**

#### **The Overlooked Priorities of Westminster**

by Christopher K. Lensch

The Westminster Standards are such a universal and thorough statement of the teachings of Scripture that they have well stood the test of time. Even in the face of sweeping twentieth-century change, Presbyterians and Reformed groups faithful to the authority of the Bible still find their clearest direction for life and belief in the work of Westminster.

#### **Historical Background**

Originally, the Westminster Assembly was called to focus on church practice more than on church belief. Church government and God's worship were made the priority due to the current national crisis in England.

In 1640 the Puritans gained control of Parliament. In an effort to stop the Church of England's drift back toward Rome under Archbishop Laud and King Charles I, the Long Parliament

convened in 1643 a group of godly ministers and Parliamentarians to advise Parliament regarding a "further and more perfect reformation" of the government and worship of the Church of England.

Although the doctrinal Confession of Faith and the Catechisms are the most famous documents produced by the Westminster Assembly, they were not the primary mission. Actually, the first two years of deliberation were dedicated to work on proper forms of church government and worship.

The urgency for reforming the government of the Church of England was manifest in the threat of growing persecutions of the Puritans by the bishops. As for the church's worship services, the early Reformation had given the Church of England "The Book of Common Prayer" under the pious young King Edward VI. Although the prayer book was in the common tongue of the people, its numerous prayers and empty ceremonies proved to be burdensome.

There was also a concern that the old liturgy tended to increase

"an idle and unedifying ministry, which contented itself with set forms made to their

hands by others, without putting forth themselves to exercise the gift of prayer, with which our Lord Jesus Christ pleaseth to furnish all his servants whom he calls to that office . . . ." (Preface to Directory of Public Worship).

The Westminster Assembly's initial results, then, were the "Directory of Worship" and the "Form of Church Government." A more thorough document on church polity was completed in 1645, "A Directory for Church-Government, Church-Censures, and Ordination of Ministers." The latter is practically a lost document as it has not been republished in the last 200 years. Still, its imprint can be seen in modern denominational constitutions and books of discipline.

The Long Parliament carried out the recommendations of its advisory commission when, in 1648, presbytery boundaries were set up in Puritan controlled areas. The English Civil War, however, as well as Oliver Cromwell, of Independent Church persuasion, soon dashed the possibility of official Presbyterianism in England. He dissolved the Long Parliament and embryonic English Presbyterianism. The Westminster Assembly came to an end.

The influence of Westminster still casts a long shadow over modern church government and worship. The work of the Assembly not only was preserved but was also practiced by the church in Scotland. From there and from its vestiges in England, Presbyterianism was transplanted to the New World where it became a dynamic in shaping the American experiment.

### Order

The genius of Presbyterian government is the biblical principle of "safety in a multitude of counselors." Westminster removed English Presbyterianism from the tyranny of bishops and the caprices of an Erastian church.

While there is a plurality in representative leadership on the local, regional, and national levels, Presbyterian government also observes a division of labors. This is especially seen in our congregational government where the pastor, elders, and deacons cooperate in the ministry, yet within the areas of their defined duties.

Plurality in leadership avoids the concentration of authority in one or two hands where it can be abused. Representative rule means leaders arise from within the flock, so that they understand the

needs of the flock and are held accountable. Specialization and division of labors also decentralize authority while enabling servants to focus fully on their area of responsibility. Significantly, some of these same biblical principles articulated by the Westminster Assembly are found in the American system of government.

### Worship

On the title page of the "Directory for the Public Worship of God" is the hallmark theme verse of Presbyterianism: "Let all things be done decently, and in order," followed by the admonition to "Let all things be done unto edifying" (I Cor. 14:40, 26).

This document puts the proper emphasis on spiritual worship over man-made ceremonies. The Directory addresses the proper spirit of worshipers, and it accentuates the simplicity of the public reading of Scripture, prayer, expounding the Scriptures, followed by more prayer.

The Assembly did not produce a statement on personal piety or family devotions (there is an allusion in WCF XXI:6). Its commission was to reform the *public* worship of the Church of England. The urgency to address family worship may have appeared slight since the practice was common in Puritan circles. However, in 1648 before the end of the Westminster Assembly in London, the Scottish General Assembly produced four pages of "Directions for Family Worship."

The Scottish Presbyterian desire to produce the "Directions for Family Worship" shows an appreciation for God's covenant. It is to and through the family that God extends His promises. The importance of training the next generation in piety was such that household heads were held accountable for carrying on regular family worship, and ministers and elders were charged with inquiring about their faithfulness in family worship. Delinquent and stubborn fathers were barred from the Lord's table.

Modern evangelicalism places proper importance upon the Christians' personal devotions, but evangelicalism diminishes God's dealing with families. We Presbyterians need to return to our roots to balance today's individualism with a renewed focus on families worshipping together in church and especially at home.

### Conclusion

"Decently and in order." "In spirit and in truth." These were watch words of the Presbyterians who met at the Westminster Assembly 350 years ago. These biblical ideals have served our church well and will keep us close to the God of the Scriptures.



**Biblical and Confessional Worship**

by Eric Frank

Among the many articles written in the Westminster Confession of Faith is a segment devoted to worship in the Church. The twenty-first chapter lays down guidelines for religious worship and Christian Sabbath day observance. These paragraphs contain many sound propositions that stimulate a solid and spiritual worship, both in the assembly of saints and in private devotions. The forethought given by the Westminster divines is quite evident. Their chief concern was that the worship of God should remain biblical and pure, and that the man-made superstitions that permeated Roman Catholicism be rejected conclusively.

However, this section of the confession has not been received without its share of disputations. Controversies have swirled around the ramifications of the Sabbath commandment propounded in paragraphs 7 and 8, and the small phrase in paragraph 5 ("singing of psalms with grace in the heart"), which some take to mean exclusive psalm singing (WCoF 21.5,7,8).

This article will not delve into the reasons why Christians should observe the Sunday Sabbath day, but it will examine the idea of exclusive psalmody and worship in the Church overall. Should the book of Psalms be the Church's only hymnal? Is it wrong, or even sinful to use another portion of the Bible in worship, or are most of our churches in error because we sing such non-canonical hymns as "A Mighty Fortress" or "The Church's One Foundation?" In answer to these questions I believe that to use the whole Bible, and even many non-canonical hymns, is both biblical and in agreement with the Confession of Faith. Our churches are not in error by incorporating these things into worship.

Before defending the above proposition, we must acknowledge that the book of Psalms has been

the inspired hymnal of the Church for 3,000 years. The liturgies of ancient Israel, the Apostolic Church, and the visible Church down through the centuries, have all used the Psalter. By no means should the modern Church ever feel that an improvement over the Psalms could be possible. On the other hand, many other books of the Bible contain songs and hymns that were sung by the ancient Church. These inspired verses need to be used as readily as the Psalter in our worship services.

As mentioned above, the proponents of exclusive psalmody base their argument on the small phrase in chapter 21 "...singing of Psalms with grace in the heart (paragraph 5)." The problem with this approach is that they are using a sound, but uninspired confession as their proof-text. The Westminster Confession of Faith was never intended to be the criterion for worship, theology, or practice. The Westminster divines gave the Standards to the Church as a framework, and to point the way back to the only criterion for worship, the Holy Scriptures. The very first entry in the chapter under discussion states,

"But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of man, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures (WCoF 21.1)."

The Shorter Catechism is also in agreement with this proposition,

**Q:** "What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?"

**A:** The word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him (Sh. Cat. #2).

These two excerpts from the Confession show where the Westminster divines wanted their emphasis to be. The articles produced at Westminster Abbey were never to usurp authority over the Bible. They were to point the way back to the Sacred text for further study.

The proposition from WCoF 21.5 is taken from scripture, but the whole verse is not given. Both Ephesians and Colossians give the full blown

picture of what the Apostle Paul intended to say, "But be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord...(Eph. 5:19)." In this verse, as well as the similar text in Colossians 3:16, Paul does not give the New Testament order of worship *per se*, but rather manifests to the Church what it really means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The five participles in the Ephesians text--speaking, singing, making melody, giving thanks, and submitting (in verses 19-21)--are all used with an adverbial idea in mind, modifying the commandment, "But be filled with the Spirit." In Colossians participles are also used to show how the Word of Christ is to dwell in us richly.

Although the worship service of the Early Church is not the main thrust of these two passages, Paul evidently envisioned these actions taking place when the churches assembled together, whether it was in an informal gathering or on the Lord's Day. If this is true, what does the Apostle mean by psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs? Those who hold to exclusive psalm singing believe that these three types of songs refer exclusively to the Psalter. They arrive at this conclusion because the three Greek words that are used in Ephesians and Colossians are found in the Greek translation of the Book of Psalms. This, however, is a weak argument; one can find the same words in the Greek translation of Isaiah.<sup>1</sup>

Without belaboring the definitions of these words too much, there is a distinction in meaning among the three. The word *psalmos* (psalms) refers to songs being sung with musical accompaniment, and probably denotes the psalms in the Old Testament. *Humnoi* (hymns) were songs of praise to deities or public heroes, while Christian *humnoi* exalted the living Christ. *Odai pneumatikai* (spiritual songs) could be either spontaneous singing in the Spirit, or songs of a spiritual nature contrasted with their secular counterparts. It is obvious as one studies the New Testament that saints in the Church wrote and sang spiritual songs to praise their Savior. The Greek meanings behind these English words seem to indicate that the early Church used more

than the Book of Psalms when it met together in worship.

Probably the most compelling argument against the early Church's exclusive use of the Psalter is the many psalms and hymns that appear in other books of the Bible, including the New Testament. There are songs in Exodus, 1 Samuel, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Lamentations, Habakkuk, and Revelation, to name just a few. At the beginning of Luke's gospel are three early Christian hymns: *the Magnificat* (Mary's song - Lk 1:46-56), *Benedictus* (Zechariah's song - Lk 1:67-80), and *Nunc Dimittis* (Simeon's song - Lk 2:29-32). These were probably used in worship to celebrate the birth of Christ. It seemed important to the Holy Spirit and to the Evangelist that the Church should recognize these hymns and sing them in worship services.

Even in the fifth chapter of Ephesians the Apostle Paul quotes what seems to be part of an early Christian hymn, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light (Eph. 5:14b)." Paul was probably quoting a spiritual song or hymn known to the Church in Ephesus. It is interesting to notice how Paul placed this portion of song in the same chapter that supposedly refers to exclusive psalmody.

Once again, those who dogmatically hold to this position, not only take the phrase in the Westminster Confession, "singing of psalms with grace in the heart," out of context, but they try to squeeze their proposition into the context of Holy Scripture. Not only does the Bible as a whole reject this methodology, but the context in Ephesians will not allow it either. It is against all rules of exegesis and interpretation to trim down the biblical text so that it will agree with what we believe. True exegesis allows the sacred page to speak for itself, to which the Westminster divines bear adequate witness, "But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will (WCoF 21.1)." The Bible is the final authority on worship, faith, and practice.

Clearly the Early Church incorporated much more than the book of Psalms into worship. A study of all the psalms and hymns in the Bible would fill many volumes. It must have been a joy to be part of worship in the Apostolic Church. Thanks be to God that He has given us a book of such diversity that every portion of it may be used for teaching, admonishing, and singing of praises.

<sup>1</sup> See Rev. Ed Crawford's paper on, "The Music of the Church" -(pg.4 para. 2.)

Those who hold to exclusive psalm singing may concede to the proposition delineated above. With all the biblical evidence, and even the support of the Confession, it is easy to see that the Early Church used more than the book of Psalms in worship. But what about non-canonical hymns? How can we reckon their usage in worship? Is there biblical or even confessional warrant for incorporating this type of music in our Lord's Day services? Once again, it is the thesis of this article that our churches are not erring, either from the Word of God or the Confession of Faith, when we sing hymns that are not part of the canon of Scripture. At this statement many would disagree, claiming that it is contrary to the Westminster Standards. They would cite the proposition in chapter 21,

"But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginings and devices of men... (WCoF 21.1)."

This passage in the Standards at first seems to indicate that the Confession is not in favor of anything introduced into worship unless it is specifically commanded in the Bible. However, in determining what the Confession of Faith really teaches in this area, it is important to review another chapter of the same document. In chapter 1 we find propositions concerning the Holy Scriptures, in which paragraph 4 sheds additional light on the subject at hand,

"The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture... and there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed (WCoF 1.4)."

This lengthy quotation exhibits some important truths found in Scripture. First of all, every doctrine we hold is not expressly set down in the Word, and yet may be deduced from the overall context of the Bible. A perfect example of this is the practice of the Christian Church to meet on Sunday instead of Saturday. Those in Reformed circles call Sunday "the Christian Sabbath," and yet nowhere in the Bible does it say that God changed the Sabbath day from Saturday to Sunday. Most base this position on various passages in the New Testament that indicate that the Early Church, after some time, began to meet exclusively on the first day of the week.

The paragraph quoted above reveals another important truth. Certain circumstances in worship can be ordered by the general rules of the Word. As far as worship is concerned, there seem to be five general rules to follow: 1] The worship must not be contrary to the Word of God (Deut. 12:32), 2] everything must be done for God's glory and honor (Col. 3:17), 3] worship must be in Spirit and in Truth (Jn. 4:24-25), 4] it must be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:12), and 5] it must bring edification to the Church (1 Cor. 14:12). Under these general rules, non-canonical hymns can find a biblical foundation.

There are many examples found in scripture where people added to the worship of God, and yet remained within the general rules listed above. No one commanded the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh to erect a duplicate tabernacle by the Jordan river, and yet zealous Phinehas and the rest of Israel did not condemn their reasoning. In fact the Bible says that the nine-and-a-half tribes were pleased (Jos. 22).

The innovations made by King David are also very significant: he established the Levitical courses, he changed the age limit that was prescribed in the Law of Moses for the Levites from 30 to 20 years old because he needed more workers, he brought musical instruments into the Old Testament Church (something he was not commanded to do), he organized the Levitical choirs and produced much of the liturgical worship of ancient Israel (in fact many of the Psalms were to be sung by different choirs using different instruments and hymn tunes - 1 Chron. 23-26). David's son Solomon erected the temple according to the command of God, but the design was not given to him as it was to Moses. Solomon was the architect of the first temple, not

God; and yet after Solomon's prayer the *Shekinah* glory filled the man-made shrine (2 Chron. 2-7).

Did God institute or command the synagogue system? No! It was established out of necessity in Babylon, because the people needed to worship God and yet were nowhere near the forsaken temple in Jerusalem. This is an interesting point, because the synagogue service that began in the Babylonian captivity was used by Jesus and the Apostles as they preached the Gospel. The Early Church also followed it as the model.

What about the Jewish feasts celebrated by Jesus? In John's Gospel the Evangelist mentions that Jesus was walking in the temple during the time of the feast of dedication (Hanukkah - Jn. 10). Judas Maccabaeus started this commemoration of God's faithfulness to his people and our Lord Jesus himself celebrated it. Christ also partook of the Passover meal with his disciples. Luke's Gospel presents in detail Jesus' use of the ancient Seder liturgy, something that was developed over time, and was not prescribed in the Law of Moses.

There are other examples that could be used. Those we have looked at, however, are sufficient to show that many things were practiced that were not commanded in Scripture *per se*, but still followed the scriptural criteria listed above. In just the same way the use of hymns is not contrary to the Word of God or the Confession of Faith. As long as the hymns selected follow the general rules listed in the Bible, they will be for the glory of God and the edification of the Church.

One final note on the use of uninspired hymns in worship is needed. What are these hymns really? Are they Scripture? No! They are prayers and testimonials that have been given by God's people down through the centuries. They demonstrate that the same song of salvation that was given to David (Ps. 40), was also given to them, and has now been given to us. If we can't sing these musical prayers in our worship services because they are uninspired, we better not pray out loud from our hearts during worship, either.

Many other examples could be used to prove that this type of worship valid, spiritual, and confessional. These things, however should be sufficient to stimulate in us mature thought, charitable conversation, and a true and spiritual worship.



**William Guthrie:  
A Brief Biography**  
by John T. Dyck

When the Lord raises up a number of faithful ministers of the gospel at once, as He did in Scotland with the Covenanters in the seventeenth century, not all of them are given due recognition and many are forgotten over time. One such man is William Guthrie, born in 1620 at Pitforthly, Scotland. Mr. Guthrie was the minister of the church in Fenwick, Scotland, and a pastor who dearly loved his flock and the Lord that had bought them. He was a man of tender heart and earnest love for the Truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Though little has been written of him, what we do know of him warms our souls.

William Guthrie studied at St. Andrews University under his cousin, James Guthrie, and later prepared for the ministry under Samuel Rutherford. He is generally considered to be the earliest fruit of Rutherford's labors. He was licensed to preach in August 1642, and ordained in the newly erected parish of Fenwick on November 7, 1644. Being the first pastor there he found a great ignorance of the things of the Lord amongst the people and a general neglect of religion. Though this was very discouraging, his zeal for the glory of his Master and his great love for the souls of men were blessed of God and accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of many souls.

His special love for the souls of men could be seen in the extraordinary lengths to which he went in getting men to come to hear the preaching of the Word. On at least one occasion he went into a house in which he knew the occupants did not attend the worship services. In the course of conversation with them, he would ask them what they thought of their minister. When he was told that they didn't really know much about him because they never went to church, he invited them to come, sometimes even bribing them with money, or arranging to meet them there. When they arrived they were surprised to find that it was the minister himself who had visited and invited them! We are also told of a man who neglected the public worship of the Lord's people so that he could go hunting. When asked what he would make by going hunting for the day, he replied that he would get half-a-crown. Upon hearing this, Guthrie promised that if he came to church that

week he would give him that same amount. The man came, and never failed to attend services after that, eventually becoming a member of the Session.

This wonderful Presbyterian pastor was highly esteemed in the eyes, not only of the people of Fenwick, but in all of Scotland. He received numerous calls to minister in various churches throughout that nation, most of them much larger than the one in Fenwick. But he preferred to remain where the Lord had first led him and where His people loved him. In the light of his great popularity there is very little that remains of his sermons or writings. Many sermons were printed and circulated in his name which either he did not write, or were poor and inaccurate notes taken from one of his sermons. A few of his actual sermons were published, mostly after his death.

There is, however, one book that this eminent servant of the Lord did write. It has been published under the title *A Christian's Great Interest*, and is still in print. The English divine John Owen said that "...for divines, that author I take to have been one of the greatest divines that ever wrote; it is my *Vademecum*, and I carry it, and the Sedan New Testament, still about with me. I have written several folios, but there is more divinity in it than in them all." This is a very high commendation from a great scholar whose own words have followed him to bless the saints through a number of centuries.

This wonderful little book is divided into two parts. The first gives various tests whereby someone may know he is a Christian; the second shows plainly the way of salvation. It was mightily blessed of the Lord firstly in Scotland during a time when many churches lost their pastors, and then throughout the world in various translations. It continues to be a source of comfort and encouragement to the Lord's people today, and ought to be a part of every Christian's library.

In order to deal with his tendencies toward melancholy as well as the feeble state of his body, William Guthrie loved to engage in sports, such as curling and fishing to give him physical exercise, although he never allowed these activities to keep him from pursuing his primary desire to see the salvation of men's souls. On one occasion we are told that Guthrie took the time to visit an older man in Haddington who had many wonderful things to relate about the providence of God in his life. As he had carefully listened to this man's stories for some time, his face suddenly brightened upon

remembering a delightful trout stream he had passed on his way to town. Suddenly, he asked the man if he had a fishing rod he might borrow. The man was pleased to think that his old fishing rod would be glorified by such a minister as Guthrie using it, but his wife was shocked at this sudden change in Guthrie from things spiritual to things earthly that she expressed her displeasure without hesitation. Dr. Whyte points out that "...neither John Owen nor Thomas Chalmers knew how much they owed to the fishing rods and curling stones, the fowling pieces and the violins that crowded the corners of the manse of Fenwick."

Though surrounded by others who were martyred for their faithfulness to Christ, yet Guthrie died of a complication of physical disorders on October 10, 1665, leaving a widow and two daughters. In his lifetime he had been imprisoned, but never suffered physical torture. He was scorned and mocked, but endured all for the sake of the gospel.

William Guthrie was a man who was truly raised up of God to stand uncompromisingly for the truth of God's Word and the liberty to preach it in his native land. He was a man who loved his God and those souls entrusted to his care by the Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep. May the Lord raise up a hundred more such men here in North America to perceive the sins of the day and address them boldly from the Word of God.



### Teaching Through the Westminster Confession by John Battle

I am writing this article primarily with ministers in mind. If you are not a minister, I trust that it will be a blessing to you as well, as many elders and other church leaders also may have the privilege of teaching through our Confession.

It was in our youth group in the Bible Presbyterian Church in San Bernardino, California, that I first learned about the doctrines of grace, and loved the beauty and simplicity of these truths. Jerry Galloway, who was then a student at Highland College, started it all when he brought a message to our youth group on the limited atonement, based on Romans 9. Yet when I went to Highland myself as a student several years later, my understanding was quite limited and confused.

Mrs. George Pribyl, whose husband was a Bible Presbyterian elder and the business manager of the college, was in charge of the college office. Since I had a work scholarship, I spend many hours in that office with Mrs. Pribyl. We had several theological discussions. I liked the idea of "free-will," but she would simply smile and say, "Just wait . . . you'll see."

The theology teacher at Highland was the Rev. David Brown (who later was murdered while carrying out his pastoral duties). Professor Brown taught a three-semester series in theology. His main textbook, besides the Bible, was A. A. Hodge's commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith. For three semesters we memorized the Shorter Catechism, and we memorized the whole outlines of A. A. Hodge's book! The Lord used that "old fashioned" teaching technique in a profound way. Needless to say, Mrs. Pribyl was right. Everything fell into place.

This intense and prolonged exposure to our Reformed doctrines has been the background of my studies and orientation ever since. Throughout all my years of seminary study at Faith and postgraduate studies at Grace Theological Seminary (strongly dispensational), this doctrinal foundation has been a great blessing to me. Now, when I attend theological society meetings and hear and interact with theologians from other traditions, I appreciate more than ever the solid core of belief spelled out in our Confession. To foray out into the theological world on one's own, without the benefit of a well-thought-out theological tradition, exposes one to tremendous risks. Many prominent Bible teachers have fallen into grievous errors, which an elementary understanding of the church's historical standards would have warned them of.

Needless to say, I have been a firm believer in teaching the Confession ever since. It has been my privilege to teach through the Confession in several different churches and classes, in addition to my seminary teaching. A. A. Hodge's commentary is still on my required reading list for theology classes at WRS, and I witness the same theological joy of discovery, the same firmness and confidence arising in our students that I experienced thirty years ago.

In order to help teach the Confession in churches, I have developed types notes which I distribute to the people. These notes have the text of the Confession section, an outlines of the content of

the section, the Scriptural support for the doctrine involved, and a brief discussion. Occasionally the catechisms give added information on the topic, in which case I often include those portions. There are several excellent harmonies of our standards, which make this task quite simple. Some of the Scriptural proofs supplied by the Westminster Assembly seem to some people to be far-fetched or not to the point. A brief discussion of the Scripture proofs is helpful. In addition, frequently there are other texts which might seem more forceful, and these I include in the notes.

Teaching is much easier and more interesting with such a handout, and the people save them. Most of these notes are now on my computer; it is fairly simple to correct them and bring them up to date. Although I've never done this, it would be helpful for someone to prepare a kind of index to our standards that people could use when they come up against common heresies, sects, or moral or ethical questions.

Church people seem to really enjoy classes in our standards. Its topics are always of great importance; our Confession is not out of date! Doctrines that were debated in the seventeenth century are still debated today. Other denominations are always trying to promote their distinctives, and nearly all of these are covered in our Confession. Preachers on TV are constantly bombarding our people with novel ideas (some not so novel!). Current issues in government and society are discussed in the Confession. Controversial subjects involving personal and family life and morality can be discussed in class before the time when they will arrive in the life of the church; members are much more easily taught without the emotionally charged atmosphere of a current situation in the church. Very seldom will your members consider a class boring! I have found that church members who have gone through the Confession in detail are much less likely to leave our churches, but rather become evangelistic when speaking to others.

Personally, I have found teaching through our Confession a blessing to my soul. This will be true for any minister. The Bible is a means of grace, and our Confession is thoroughly biblical. As you work through the various chapters, you will find that, being the teacher, you will receive a greater blessing than the rest of the class. As you meditate on the nature of God, the work of Christ, the way of salvation, your own election, conversion, and

sanctification, and the practical duties God requires, you will be brought into God's presence and will receive rich encouragement to live for Christ. As practical problems arise in your life, in the lives of those around you, or in your church, you will have the tested wisdom of deeply spiritual men come readily to your mind. As younger men prepare for the ministry, you will be able to guide and help them, and to give them a standard by which to grow. Teaching through our Confession will strengthen both yourself and your church.



### The Standards as Homiletic Tools

by Leonard Pine

Confessional churches often take for granted that the person in the pew fully understands and adheres to their creeds and confessions. However, that assumption has cost Presbyterians and other confessional denominations their spiritual lives throughout history. As a typical example, the New Side/Old Side controversy in the Presbyterian Church crippled the spiritual fervor and testimony of the church while laity sat placidly by believing all was well. That controversy is still impacting us today. If we learn to use the Westminster Standards properly, by God's grace we may avoid the error and divisiveness of past generations.

The pulpit ministry should strive to link its doctrine clearly to "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints." A. A. Hodge posits four reasons for the use of creeds and standards: first, "to mark, disseminate, and preserve the attainments made in the knowledge of Christian truth;" second, "to discriminate the truth" from falsehood; third, "to act as the basis for ecclesiastical fellowship;" and fourth, to aid in "popular instruction."<sup>2</sup> Keeping your congregation aware of their moorings can hinder cults and erroneous doctrine from making inroads into a congregation, and benefit you as well. As you prepare, you will stay in a consistently

<sup>22</sup>*The Confession of Faith*, reprint edition, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), pp. 2, 3. Robert L. Dabney also provides an excellent discussion on this point in his pamphlet *The Doctrinal Contents of the Confession*, reprint edition, (Greenville, SC: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1993), pp. 13-22.

orthodox track, preventing yourself from taking off on tangents or buying into error and heresy.

Like any other tool, however, the Standards need to be used properly to receive the most benefit from them. If employed too zealously, they can create the pharisaic problem that Jesus denounced, namely, substituting the traditions of men for the revelation of God.<sup>3</sup> Several cautions, then, are in order as we consider the relationship of the standards to the Scriptures. Paul's second Epistle to Timothy, 3:16, is helpful at this point. It is "all *scripture*" that is profitable and edifying. Men's traditions can be profitable, but they are useful only to the degree that they accurately reflect the teaching of Scripture. Therefore, you should never use the Standards as preaching texts, nor as the sole proof or support for a doctrinal point. To do so would clearly say to a congregation that the Standards are on a par with Holy Writ, in spite of your intentions to the contrary.

Furthermore, while the interpretive tradition found in our Standards is certainly worthy and biblically grounded, it is not inspired, and its authority is granted it by *fiat*. Indeed, as the centuries passed, church traditions have changed on certain points, sometimes by deliberate effort. An example is the *filioque* issue spoken to in chapter 2, section 4 of the Confession of Faith. None of the early creeds of the Church declared the Holy Spirit to be proceeding from both the Father and the Son. However, in the late fifth century, the Bishop of Toledo, Spain, decided to read John 15:26 in that way, despite all preceding arguments against such an interpretation, and he arbitrarily added the phrase "and the Son" to the Nicene Creed. Enough people in the Western Church latched onto the idea so that it managed to stick, despite the protestations of Western popes and Eastern patriarchs alike.<sup>4</sup> Our confession kept that tradition, which by the time of Westminster was accepted so widely in the West that few considered it an issue. The point here is not to argue the controversy all over again, but merely to note that interpretations *are* reflected in the Standards. This fact should cause us to exercise caution when searching those documents for "proof" for our teaching. The Westminster Standards do not determine or prove our theology, just as a dictionary

<sup>3</sup>Matthew 15:3-9; compare also Colossians 2:8.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd edition, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 23-26.

does not determine the meaning of words, but rather records how people commonly use words. The Standards do, however, clearly explicate how those of us who claim them understand and apply theology.

Therefore, to use the Standards properly we must follow the rules for the effective employment of material that supports the points we try to make in our preaching and writing. The purpose of using support material in any speech or document is to clarify, amplify, apply, and/or demonstrate whatever point is at hand. Two words govern the choices we make in this area: *variety* and *balance*. Variety in types and sources of support demonstrates a broad basis of acceptance for the ideas you are trying to convey (the need for this demonstration increases with resistance to the teaching). Support material may take the form of stories (either real or fictitious), examples, comparisons and contrasts, analogies, quotations, statistics, and visual aids, among others. Balance comes in to moderate variety. Choose the best support for the point, and limit how much support you have for each point to what the people need for understanding and conviction. Take care that the support does not overshadow the point and become the message. Choose quality over quantity. Overkill will just make your congregation tired. The more your congregation accepts an idea, the less support you need for it.

Finally, I will mention a few specific thoughts about quotations, since this is the form of support material the Standards will usually take. Use direct quotations if the meaning is clear as written. Paraphrase if necessary (and indicate that you are doing so), but carefully so as not to alter the meaning. Be so familiar with the quotation that you can maintain a semblance of eye contact with your congregation to gauge their attention and understanding. Most importantly, avoid lengthy quotations (more than two or three lines). Summarize longer passages. If you do not, you will lose your congregation: remember, they only have one shot at hearing what you have been studying all week. Also, reading long passages runs the risk of introducing ideas foreign to the point you are trying to make, thereby fragmenting your listener's attention.

Used properly in the pulpit and in other facets of church work, the Westminster Standards can be a great help toward the goal of equipping our

congregations to do the work of the ministry.<sup>5</sup> May God help us to that end.



A word about . . .

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<sup>5</sup>Ephesians 4:11-13