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THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

The substance of an Address given to the Inverness Branch of the Scottish Reformation Society, 14th February 2000 by Rev. Hugh M. Cartwright, Edinburgh

The words of the title are not taken from Scripture but they are a shorthand way of identifying a principle which is Scriptural and has great implications for the whole of Christian life, for the life of the Church as an institution in the world and particularly for its worship. In a similar way we use the word ‘Trinity’ which is not a Biblical word but conveniently identifies the Biblical truth concerning the three Persons of the Godhead which is fundamental to the revelation God has given of Himself.

This paper begins by trying to outline this principle as defined by our Scottish Reformers and others who have shared their position. Then it enquires into the Biblical authority adduced for this principle. In conclusion it briefly indicates the importance of this principle today. In each case little more is done than provide hints.

1. The Regulative Principle as it has been defined by our Scottish Reformers and others who have shared their position

Our starting point is the truth that Christ is the Head of the Church. In relation to the Church as the body of elect, redeemed, regenerate sinners, the Headship of Christ signifies that through His union with them He is the source of all their life and grace and unity. In relation to the Church as a society on earth, the Headship of Christ signifies that He originated it and that He continues to administer its affairs. It has taken its form from Him and continues to depend upon Him for existence and power. Christ gives the Church its constitution, laws, ordinances, officebearers, its independent authority and spiritual power. The Church is accountable to Christ for the exercise of the functions He has given to it. He conducts His Church’s affairs through officebearers whom He has appointed but He has not given over the reins of government to any earthly, human, visible head or body of men. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states this with special reference to the Papacy: “There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus

Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God” [XXV. vi]. The Church must implicitly obey every intimation which her Head gives of His will.

For our knowledge of His will we are dependent on His Word. The Headship of Christ underlines the necessity that the Church should seek to discover His will in His Word and put it into effect. This is true not only with regard to the doctrine which the Church ought to believe and proclaim but also with regard to the way in which Christians ought to live, the way in which the Church ought to be governed and disciplined and the way in which God ought to be worshipped. If our Lord Jesus Christ has provided us in His Word with materials from which we can discover His will with regard to the Church’s government, discipline and worship, as well as doctrine, His will must be done. We might call this the regulative principle in its widest form, the principle of the Protestant Reformation and of all true reformation in the Church: “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20).

This principle motivated our Scottish Reformers. In the Preface to the *Scots Confession* of 1560 they earnestly requested “that if any man will note in our Confession any chapter or sentence contrary to God’s Holy Word, that it would please him of his gentleness and for Christian charity’s sake to inform us of it in writing; and we, upon our honour, do promise him that by God’s grace we shall give him satisfaction *from the mouth of God, that is from Holy Scripture*, or else we shall alter whatever he can prove to be wrong”. In the first chapter of *The First Book of Discipline*, 1560, they wrote: “Seeing that Christ Jesus is He whom God the Father hath commanded only to be heard and followed of His sheep, we judge it necessary that His Gospel be truly and openly preached in every Church and Assembly of this realm, and that all doctrine repugnant to the same, be utterly repressed as damnable to man’s salvation”. Their *Book of Common Order*, 1564 [an enlarged edition of ‘The Form of Prayers and Ministration of the Sacraments &c, used in the English Congregation at Geneva’, adapted to the Scottish situation], contained examples of prayers for ordinary occasions, advice on forms to be employed in administering the sacraments, a metrical version of the Psalms and a translation of Calvin’s Catechism. The

men... precisely what the Reformers and Puritans termed will-worship” [*The Puritan Principle of Worship*, pp. 16, 17].

e) It is, finally, honouring to God in that it bears testimony to the fact that the Church recognises His authority in everything. Why do we do this or that? Because we really want God’s will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

If we are out of line with the rest of ‘Christendom’ let us remember that almost universal departure from what was the general Reformed position on one particular principle does not invalidate the principle nor should it silence criticism of the abandonment of it. Criticism of something defective in the worship of others does not involve denial of the reality of worship defectively offered nor does it imply that the purity of our outward form makes us oblivious to the defectiveness of our own worship in other respects. The aim must be worship that is both in Spirit and in truth. Let us all examine ourselves.

Works referred to in this paper

The Westminster Confession of Faith, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, and *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* are currently available in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Free Presbyterian Publications)

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The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1562; in *The Creeds of Christendom*, Philip Schaff, Volume III, Sixth Edition, Baker Book House, 1985)

William Balfour, *The Psalms versus Hymns in the Service of the Sanctuary* (Pamphlet, 1881)

James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, Volume I (1869; The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960)

of the church of Christ, - a principle ‘majestic in its own simplicity’. We apply this principle to the mass of paltry stuff that has been devised for the purpose of improving and adorning the church, and thereby we sweep it all away”.

b) It has significant work to do in the promotion of unity. This is seen with regard to the worship of God, that most important function of the Church. The Psalms belong to the universal Church. Hymns are sectarian and divisive. As Cunningham says again of the principle in general, “If all the Protestant churches had cordially adopted and faithfully followed this simple but comprehensive and commanding principle, this would certainly have prevented a fearful amount of mischief, and would, in all probability, have effected a vast amount of good. There is good ground to believe that, in that case, the Protestant churches would have been all along far more cordially united together and more active and successful in opposing their great common enemies, Popery and Infidelity, and in advancing the cause of their common Lord and Master”.

c) It has also significant work to do in securing the liberty of the people of God from the impositions of men, whether in church government or worship. Calvin [*Institutes*, IV. 8. 1] says: “If we concede unreservedly to men all the power which they think proper to assume, it is easy to see how soon it will degenerate into a tyranny which is altogether alien from the Church of Christ”.

d) It has a significant work to do in preserving the Church from unhealthy subjectivism in doctrine and experience and in the exercise of church authority. There are objective Biblical standards to which appeal may and must be made in all these areas. Pastor David Fountain, who has defended Isaac Watt’s pioneering work in introducing hymns, notes that things have gone to what he calls another extreme: “We are going back to the Middle Ages when every device imaginable was used to popularise Christianity, and the effect then was to alter the message and lose its power”. William Young makes the following points: “The regulative principle when applied provides objectivity in worship... conformity to the law of God as opposed to ... subjectivism in worship... worship arising not from the revealed will of the Lord but from the desires, inclinations, imaginations and decisions of

Preface describes it as “a form and order of a reformed church, *limited within the compass of God’s Word, which our Saviour hath left unto us only sufficient to govern all our actions by*; so that whatsoever is added to this Word by man’s device, seem it never so good, holy or beautiful, yet before our God, who is jealous and cannot admit any companion or counsellor, it is evil, wicked and abominable”. In *The Second Book of Discipline*, 1572, it is maintained that Church authority “flows immediately from God and the Mediator Christ Jesus, and is spiritual, not having a temporal head in earth but only Christ, the only spiritual king and governor of His kirk” [1.10]. Note the conclusion drawn from this: “Therefore this power and policy of the kirk should *lean upon the word of God immediately* as the only ground thereof, and should be taken from the pure fountains of the Scriptures, hearing the voice of Christ, the only spiritual king, and being ruled by His laws” [1.11].

This principle is expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Some relevant passages may be noted. “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed” [I. vi]. “The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but *the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture*” [I. x]. “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also” [XX. ii]. “The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is *institut-*

ed by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy scripture” [XXI. i]. The “decrees and determinations” of synods and councils are to be received “with reverence and submission” “if consonant with the word” [XXXI. iii].

This principle controls the Westminster Assembly’s *Directory for the Public Worship of God*. The *Directory* begins with the comment: “in the beginning of the blessed Reformation, our wise and pious ancestors took care to set forth an order for the redress of many things which they then, by the word, discovered to be vain, erroneous, superstitious and idolatrous, in the public worship of God”. It was obviously considered that “further reformation” along these lines was required and the authors go on to say: “We have, after earnest and frequent calling upon the name of God, and after much consultation, *not with flesh and blood, but with His holy word*, resolved to lay aside the former Liturgy, with the many rites and ceremonies formerly used in the worship of God; and have agreed upon this following Directory for all parts of public worship, at ordinary and extraordinary times. Wherein our care has been to hold forth *such things as are of divine institution* in every ordinance; 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”.

As one of the Puritans, Jeremiah Burroughs, [1599-1646], puts it in his *Gospel Worship* [sermons on Leviticus 10:3, in the context where Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord: “Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified”]: “in God’s worship, there must be nothing tendered up to God but what He has commanded. Whatsoever we meddle with in the worship of God must be what we have a warrant for out of the Word of God.... all things in God’s worship must have a warrant out of God’s Word. It must be commanded, it’s not enough that it is not forbidden.... Such things as seem to be very small and little to us, yet God stands much upon them in the matter of worship, for there is nothing wherein the prerogative of God more appears than in worship”.

at liberty; for I seek thy precepts” (Psalm 119:45). “But what is the Christian liberty of the New Testament dispensation? Most certainly it is not a liberty to form our doctrinal belief, or rules of life, or religious observances, irrespective of the Word and authority of Christ” [*The True Psalmody*]. We are delivered from bondage to Satan, sin, self and other men, that we might serve God. This is very important in praise for this is the part of the service in which each worshipper has to join audibly and in the use of a prescribed form. To put it no higher, he should not have to join in the use of something concerning whose correctness and orthodoxy he may have reason to doubt. God’s provision of His own word for use in praise secures freedom of conscience to all God’s people whereas the introduction of other materials of praise into congregational worship restricts their liberty. James Bannerman puts this well: “Conscience has no right, and can possess no liberties, in opposition to the ordinances of Him who is the Lord of the conscience. But the rights of conscience furnish a plea that may lawfully be urged in opposition to ordinances and ceremonies imposed by mere human authority and enforced by ecclesiastical power” [*The Church of Christ*, Vol. I, p. 370].

If it is a Biblical principle that the church has no right to introduce into worship anything that lacks the warrant of God’s word, that the warrant of God’s Word is given for the singing of Spirit-inspired psalms, hymns and songs, and that there is no warrant for the introduction of uninspired hymns into God’s worship, then all these and any other objections fall. The regulative principle means that if there is teaching on the content of sung praise in the Bible it must be regarded as sufficient for the guidance of the Church.

From the attempt to explain what the regulative principle is and what Scriptural basis is claimed for it its practical significance has been obvious. But we conclude with a few undeveloped hints as to its significance.

3. The importance of this principle today

a) It has significant work to do in promoting reformation and bringing the Church back to its apostolic origins as these are found in the Scriptures which are our norm. In Cunningham’s words [*The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, pp. 36, 37]: “We find plainly enough indicated in Scripture a great comprehensive principle, suited to the dignity and importance of the great subject to which it relates, the right administration

you have this done, certainly, in a way in the hymns which you have not in the Psalms. But if what is sought is that the soul, in the faith of those truths, should ascend in praise to God, then I maintain that you are shut up to this in the Psalms in a way which you are not and cannot be in the hymns. In order to sing the Psalms intelligently and with edification you are shut up to those truths in their reality - to the personal Christ and Spirit and to the experience of sonship which is the fruit of this gracious work in a way which does not necessarily attend the singing of hymns where these truths, it may be, are expressed in so many words. Many are too apt to imagine that they have got the thing when they sing the hymn in which it is named. It is no valid objection to the Psalms, in my opinion, that these truths are not brought before us in the same way as in hymns. The question is, Are they there? If we are sure of that, as we certainly are, then it must be our own fault if we do not find them. We must have failed to get into the spirit of the Psalm; and if so, the remedy is not to be found in providing a hymn or hymns in which mention is made of these truths in so many words, but rather in seeking the Spirit of adoption without whom the most evangelical hymns ever written will not enable us to praise God aright, and with whom the Psalms will furnish the richest and most inexhaustible material for praising God, even the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.... Even when you have got the very words in the hymns you must go far deeper down to get the thing; and the danger is that you should content yourselves with the words without the thing. In the Psalms, I may say, it is not till we have got hold of the thing that we really understand the words, whereas in the hymns you may have the words and never get hold of the thing”.

The idea that the obligation to praise God for Christ is one that cannot be fulfilled without adding the hymns of men to the psalms of inspiration used by our Lord and His apostles and the early Church as full of Christ, ignores the unity of Old Testament and New Testament dispensations, suggests a low view of the Psalms and casts reflection upon the goodness and wisdom of God.

Others object to exclusive psalmody on the ground that it restricts the liberty of New Testament Christians. But surely liberty and law are not exclusive. The Bible is “the perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1: 25). “I will walk

After the Revolution the Church of Scotland General Assembly’s 1707 *Act against Innovations in the Worship of God* reaffirmed this principle and opposed Episcopal innovations on the ground that they are “dangerous to this Church and manifestly contrary to our known Principle (which is, that nothing is to be admitted in the worship of God, but what is prescribed in the Holy Scriptures)”.

The supremacy and decisive authority of the inscripturated Word of God in the life of the Church is a basic principle of other Reformed Confessions. For example, the Belgic Confession of 1561 [adopted by the Synod of Dort in 1619, and authoritative in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands] asserts that “the marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, *if all things are managed according to the pure word of God*, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church” [Article XXIX].

William Cunningham [in his *Historical Theology*, Volume I, pp. 65, 66] concludes from the doctrine of the sufficiency and perfection of God’s written Word that “*anything which is imposed upon the church as binding by God’s authority...must be traced to something contained in, or fairly deducible from, Scripture. Unless Scripture proof be adduced, we are entitled at once to set aside all claim alleged upon our submission.* If God really fitted and intended the written word to be the only rule of faith and practice, and has made this known unto us, He has thereby not only authorised but required us to reject or disregard anything obtruded upon the church as binding that cannot be traced to that source”. In other words, he says, “ nothing ought to be admitted into the ordinary government and worship of the Christian Church which has not the sanction or warrant of scriptural authority, or apostolic practice at least, if not precept” [p. 68]. Cunningham asserts that “when this general truth is denied there is no limitation that can be put to the introduction of the inventions of men into the government and worship of Christ’s house” [p. 72].

A different principle is found, for example, in the *Thirty-nine Articles* of the Church of England. This accounts to a large extent for what the Puritans considered to be the 'half-reformed' state of the Anglican Church. Article 20 claims that "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 *anything that is contrary to God's Word written...*". In spite of the earlier contentions of men such as John Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester, and Johannes a Lasco, a Polish minister to foreign refugees in London during Edward's reign, the view prevailed in the Church of England which also prevailed in the Lutheran section of the Reformation. According to it, what is not forbidden is allowed whereas our principle asserts that what is not commanded is forbidden. Cunningham [*The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, pp 31, 32] remarks that "the Calvinistic section of the Reformers... were of opinion that there are sufficiently plain indications in Scripture itself that it was Christ's mind and will that nothing should be introduced into the government and worship of the church unless a positive warrant for it could be found in Scripture. This principle was adopted and acted upon by the English Puritans and the Scottish Presbyterians; and we are persuaded that it is the only true and safe principle applicable to this matter". As Hooper and a Lasco explained, and as the Westminster Confession of Faith asserts, there are matters with regard to the implementation of Biblical commands 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" - practical steps have to be taken to ensure that "all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14: 40). But for anything essential to Church government, worship and discipline - anything on which the Word speaks - we must take our directions from the Word. So much for human attempts to describe this principle.

2. The Biblical authority which has been adduced for this Principle

A recent writer [Kenneth Dix, *The Praises of God in Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, p. 25] has said that the Regulative Principle "is open to criticism: (i) for being in itself an addition to Scripture; (ii) for going beyond the liberty which the New Testament allows and (iii) as being almost impossible to apply with complete consistency. Paul's directive at the end of 1 Corinthians 14 is, 'Let all things be done decently and in order'. He does not suggest the existence of any further principle". If the first

expressions to any particular party or opinion: that in words prepared for public worship and for the lips of multitudes there might not be a syllable offensive to sincere Christians whose judgments may differ in the lesser matters of religion.... where the flights of his faith and love are sublime I have often sunk the expressions within the reach of an ordinary Christian.... Where the original runs in the form of prophecy concerning Christ and His salvation I have given an historical turn to the sense; there is no necessity that we should always sing in the obscure and doubtful style of prediction when the things foretold are brought into open light by a full accomplishment... Where the Psalmist describes religion by the fear of God I have often joined faith and love to it. Where he speaks of the pardon of sin through the mercies of God I have added the merits of a Saviour. Where he talks of sacrificing goats or bullocks I rather choose to mention the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God.... And I am fully satisfied that more honour is done to our blessed Saviour by speaking His Name, His graces and actions, in His own language, according to the brighter discoveries He has now made than by going back again to the Jewish forms of worship and the language of types and figures". Something more than Isaac Watts' persuasion is needed to justify such bold treatment of a divinely inspired Book.

William Balfour's comment is worth noting: "It is urged against the exclusive use of the Psalms and in favour of hymns that it is desirable to have material for public praise in which the name and work of Christ and the Holy Spirit and the Christian privilege of sonship are brought more prominently and distinctly forward than, it is alleged, they are or could be in the Psalms, written as they were so long before the coming of Christ and the sending of the Spirit.... It is enough to reply to such men, the want is not in the Psalms but in themselves. If Christ and His Spirit dwelt richly in their own hearts they could not fail to find them in those Psalms which the Spirit of Christ indited and in which Christ, if we may say so, found Himself, when He expounded to His disciples the things concerning Himself in the Psalms. But there are those who allow that the name and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the sonship of believers are found in the Psalms; only they do not come so much to the surface, so to speak, as they do in what they term good Gospel hymns. Well, we allow there is a difference, and a very great difference, but it is altogether in favour of the Psalms. Of course it all depends upon what men are seeking after. If it is to have allusion made to those glorious truths always in so many words in the praise of the sanctuary

Those who recognise the regulative principle and yet claim Scriptural authority for singing uninspired hymns base much of their case upon Ephesians 5: 18-20 and Colossians 3: 16. We cannot just assume that “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” are to be understood according to the modern usage of these words. These terms must be understood according to their Biblical usage. It has to be said that the Greek words *psalmois*, *humnois*, *odais* translate the Hebrew words *mizmorim*, *tehillim*, *shirim* and that these are the terms used in the Book of Psalms and of the various contents of the Book of Psalms. Indeed, *tehillim* is the term used to describe the Book itself, the Book of Hymns. There is no doubt regarding the place given in Old and New Testaments to the divinely inspired Psalms and there is no one who can prove that the passages in Ephesians and Colossians refer to materials of praise outwith the Book of Psalms, and certainly not to material not inspired by the Spirit. A rather novel approach to these passages and the meaning of spiritual is adopted by a recent writer: “The limitation Paul lays down is not Psalms only but *spiritual* only. The singing of Christians is to be unreservedly *spiritual* and always in direct contrast to the bawdy songs of the world” [Kenneth Dix, p. 22]. “We have no evidence either from the Old Testament or from the New that the expansion of revelation received expression in the devotional exercises of the church through the singing of uninspired songs of praise” [J. Murray and W. Young, *The Scriptural Warrant*, p. 16].

Some object to exclusive psalmody on the ground that it keeps New Testament Christians under the Old Covenant and prevents them from singing about an accomplished salvation. Isaac Watts, one of the pioneers of hymn singing in England, was one of these. In his Preface to his *Psalms and Hymns* he explains his “own design, which is to accommodate the book of Psalms to Christian Worship and in order to this, it is necessary to divest David and Asaph of every other character but that of a psalmist and a saint and to make them always speak the common sense and language of a Christian. Attempting to work with this view, I have entirely omitted several whole Psalms, and large pieces of many others; and have chosen out of all of them such parts only as might easily and naturally be accommodated to the various occasions of the Christian life or at least might afford us some beautiful allusion to Christian affairs.... nor have I confined my

criticism is false then the other criticisms fall to the ground. If it is Biblical it is consistent with Christian liberty and most practical.

Roman Catholicism and other bodies exalt tradition to a level with Scripture and place the Church above both. Cults and others profess to be guided by the Spirit apart from the Word. The Reformers maintained that for our knowledge of the Lord’s will we are dependent upon His Word. On matters concerning which He has spoken we are to join no other authority with His. Is there Biblical basis for asserting that the Lord has provided us in His Word with materials from which we can discover His will with regard to the Church’s government, discipline and worship as well as doctrine? Are there doctrines, particular precepts, authoritative examples and general controlling principles in Scripture with regard to the government, discipline and worship of the Church? If there is a Biblical basis for asserting that our Lord Jesus Christ has provided us with such materials then His revealed will must govern our practice in these areas.

Cunningham [*The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, pp 33, 34] claims that “the truth of this principle, as a general rule for the guidance of the church, is plainly enough involved in what Scripture teaches concerning its own sufficiency and perfection as a rule of faith and practice, concerning God’s exclusive right to determine in what way He ought to be worshipped, concerning Christ’s exclusive right to settle the constitution, laws and arrangements of His kingdom, concerning the unlawfulness of will worship, and concerning the utter unfitness of men for the function which they have so often and so boldly usurped in this matter. The fair application of these various scriptural views taken in combination, along with the utter want of any evidence on the other side, seems to us quite sufficient to shut out the lawfulness of introducing the inventions of men into the government and worship of the Christian church”.

We feel justified in assuming that the Lord would not leave His church without guidance as to how the affairs of His house are to be conducted between His two appearances in this world. Paul explained his reason for writing to Timothy: “that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Timothy 3: 15). We may test the validity of this assumption by asking two questions, and indicating the lines along which

they may be answered. We can scarcely consider the principle without touching on its application in the areas of Church government and discipline and worship.

(1) When we turn to the Bible can we find materials which provide us with an understanding of how the Lord wishes His Church to be governed and disciplined?

Order and office characterised the Old Testament Church. God has ordained that there should be officebearers and order in His Church in New Testament times also. "And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Cor. 12. 28). "And He gave some, apostles, and some, prophets, and some evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4: 11, 12). Some offices and gifts were temporary, but even the terms of the commission given to the Apostles suggest that while the specific office of Apostle would obviously cease there would be men who would continue the work of preaching and baptising and teaching and ruling until the end of the world. The Apostles provided for the election and ordination of men who would secure the continuation of Gospel ordinances and church government. "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2.2). "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee... able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1. 5, 9). Provision was made for the appointment of deacons. The duties and qualifications of pastors and teachers, of elders and deacons, are specified. Names are applied to men performing certain functions in the church which show that they had an office and were not simply exercising gifts: "labourers" (Matt. 9.38); "ministers" (1 Cor. 3.5); "ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4.1); "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5.20); "elders" (Tit. 1.5); "a bishop... the steward of God" (Tit. 1.7). Epistles addressed to churches recognise the presence in them of "the bishops and deacons" (Philippians 1.1). "The elders which are among you I also exhort, who are also an elder" (1 Peter 5.1). The responsibilities

been so used by the Church under the New Testament dispensation. It is thus allowed that it does afford suitable material for praise under the New Testament, and that it was designed to do so..... a Psalter which would give adequate expression to the public praise of His Church throughout all ages - a Psalter which would, in fact, be adapted to the clearer light of the new as well as to the light of the old dispensation?.... There is not one word of Christ or His apostles can be produced to show that they considered the Psalms deficient in any way as material for praise for the New Testament Church..... and if the memorial of the great sacrifice which Christ was to offer of Himself for sin, which may be said to usher in the Gospel dispensation, was suitably closed by singing from the Book of Psalms, it seems to me to declare, if the action of Christ is to have any significance for us, that the Psalms are not only not to be superseded, but that they do not require to be, and are not to be, supplemented under the New Testament dispensation". There is no evidence in the New Testament or in early church history that there was any deviation from the custom of praising God in the psalms He had provided. Reference is often made to a letter from Pliny to the Emperor Trajan in AD112 which spoke of Christians singing praise to Christ. As *The True Psalmody* [Belfast 1867, Third Edition] puts it, "Are not the words of a pagan pro-consul rather a slender foundation on which to build so large an edifice of hymn-singing?". There is no evidence of uninspired hymns in worship until near the end of the fourth century other than those allegedly introduced by heretics to propagate their views.

In the New Testament we are exhorted to sing psalms. The 'hymning' of Matt 26:30 took place in connection with Old Testament Passover and New Testament Lord's Supper and was undoubtedly from Psalms 113-118. Paul is literally saying in 1 Cor 14: 15, "I will sing [praise, psalm] with the spirit", just as he says in verse 26, 'every one of you hath a psalm'. 'Is any merry? let him sing psalms' (Jas. 5:13). "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; 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; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5: 18-20). "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" (Colossians 3: 16).

John Murray [*Collected Writings*, Vol. I, p. 168] draws attention to “some texts in the New Testament” which he says “bear directly on this question: Mark 7:7,8: ‘Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups; and many other such like things ye do’; Jn. 4:24: ‘God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth’; Col. 2: 20-23: ‘... which things indeed have a show of wisdom in will worship....’; 1 Peter 2:5: ‘Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ’”. He asks: “Where does the Holy Spirit give us direction respecting that which He approves and leads us to render? The answer is: only in the Scripture as the Word which He has inspired. This simply means that for all the modes and elements of worship there must be authorisation from the Word of God....”.

These New Testament references indicate that the principle still prevails that how we worship God should be determined by His will not ours. There is nothing unspiritual or legalistic in suggesting that the manner in which worship should be conducted in an age characterised by the coming of the Saviour and the outpouring of the Spirit should be regulated by the revealed will of God. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14: 15) is a principle which prevails in every other area of life. Surely it is operative when a sinner seeks to draw near to God in worship.

When it comes to the matter of praise the general principles brought out in the Scriptures referred to must be viewed in the light of facts such as these: sung praise is a prescribed part of the worship of God; the only Scripturally authorised hymn book is the Book of Psalms; this Book was not supplanted or supplemented in New Testament times by divine appointment or inspiration of another. Listen to William Balfour: “If it had been needful to provide further material for public praise there is no reason to believe that Christ would not have provided it either through His apostles or by specially qualifying some men for the work.... He would not have left it, certainly, to this nineteenth century to do.... It is only He who is ‘fearful in praises’ who can tell us how He should be praised in the Assembly of His saints..... As a matter of fact, God has provided... a book of praise which has been furnished for the express purpose of being used in the worship of the sanctuary.... It was... used by Christ and His apostles, and it has on this account

of congregations towards their officebearers are spelled out. “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things” (Gal. 6.6). “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5.17). “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Heb. 13. 17). These officebearers were to be elected by the church and were to be set apart for their work by those in office before them.

References to the power of the keys (Matthew 16 and 18 and John 20) indicate an authoritative exercise of ministry and government and discipline on the part of those appointed to administer the affairs of the Church. They are not only to preach and teach and exhort but rebuke. “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim. 5.20). An example of the exercise of discipline is found in 1 Cor. 5: 3-5, 13: “... to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh.... Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person”. The reality of this power is clear from the exhortations given in Scripture to the members of the Church to be subject to those who rule over them and speak unto them the word of God. This power of government and discipline is spiritual. It is ministerial and is regulated and limited by the Word of God. Its aim is the glory of God in the good of the Church.

There are also indications that a plurality of officebearers are to work together in the government of the Church at a local and wider level. The presbyters as a body ordained men to office by the laying on of hands. The Council at Jerusalem, reported in Acts 15, had to ascertain the will of God for the Church in a practical matter “using the ordinary means of ascertaining the divine will, and enjoying only the ordinary guidance and influences of His Spirit” [Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, Vol I].

If we search the scriptures we find that Christ has given His Church sufficient guidance as to His will for government and discipline. From all the material available it is obvious that general principles and outlines of church government are provided as a divinely ordained model for the church in all ages. Since the Bible presents us with so much information regarding the officers and government and discipline of the Church the Church is not at liberty to devise offices and forms of government or

principles and practices of discipline not in keeping with the principles and precepts and examples set out in the Word.

(2) When we turn to the Bible can we find materials which provide us with an understanding of how the Lord wishes His Church to worship Him?

God in all the glory of His revelation is the Object of worship. That He should be worshipped by the Christian community is not an edict of men but an ordinance of God. The whole of life must be characterised by devotion to God but there is worship which is specific in its form and content and occurs at specific times. The Christian must worship at times on his own and at times in the family and there are summonses addressed to the Church to gather at a specified time and place on a specified day for the specific purpose of engaging in activities which specifically constitute the worship of God. Charnock [*Works*, Vol. 1, p. 298] says that “worship is an act of the understanding, applying itself to the knowledge of the excellency of God, and actual thoughts of His majesty.... It is also an act of the will, whereby the soul adores and reverenceth His majesty, is ravished with His amiableness, embraceth His goodness, enters itself into an intimate communion with this most lovely object, and pitcheth all his affections on Him”. Acceptable worship must be Spiritual worship, “authorised by the Holy Spirit, constrained by the Holy Spirit, offered in the Holy Spirit” [J. Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 1, ‘Worship’, p. 167]. James Begg [in *The use of Organs*] claims that “the worship of God is the most sacred thing with which His creatures have to do. It is more sacred than the government of the Church, more sacred even than Christian doctrine, for these are, in a sense, merely instrumental in bringing us into proper relations to God; and if it is true in anything whatsoever that God’s will must be the only rule, it is especially true of His own worship”.

Does the Bible tell us how we are to worship as well as indicate that we must worship? Or has that been left to the discretion of men? As with church government, information in the Bible on the subject of worship is such that all the Church has to do is put Biblical teaching into effect.

This doctrine is grounded originally in the clear teaching of the Old Testament that God is jealous that His worship should be conducted strictly in

accordance with His revealed will. The Westminster divines drew this conclusion not just from the general indications of God’s will in His Word but from what they saw to be the tenor of the Second Commandment: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or 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: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20: 4-6). “The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in His word” [*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 50]. “The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word” [*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 51]. “The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God’s sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath to his own worship” [*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 52]. The movement from Sinai to Sion, or from Old Testament to New Testament, has not affected this: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12: 28, 29).

Many statements and incidents in the Old Testament illustrate God’s insistence that He be worshipped not only in the spirit of devotion but also in the manner revealed by himself. The principle is carried over into the New Testament as is illustrated in the reiteration of Isaiah 29: 13, 14 in Matthew 15:7, 8, 9: “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophecy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” - or, as it is in Isaiah 29, “their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men”. Calvin infers “that part of the reverence due to Him consists in worshipping Him simply in the way which He commands, without mingling any inventions of our own..... We must be fools in regard to our own wisdom and all the wisdom of men, in order that we may allow Him alone to be wise” [*Institutes*, IV. 10. 23, 24].