

## 2<sup>nd</sup>.4. Hart and Muether on the Regulative Principle

*With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the basics of Reformed Worship, 77-87*

The authors are church historians of the OPC

Good worship?

Some say worship is to be meaningful, dynamic, exhilarating...these notions/goals “obscure the biblical standard for worship...that is acceptable to God...whether it conforms to the Bible...” (77); i.e. the RP

16<sup>th</sup> Reformation at its core: abandonment of medieval Catholic abuses (for simple worship)

Basis: 1) Scripture as sufficient (cf. Art 6 of the 39 articles)...for worship, 2) logic of the 10: evil to worship false God...and to worship God in a false way (WLC, 108)

Point vs. non-Reformed: restrict to only what God prescribes and nothing more (otherwise inconsistent with sola Scriptura and the 10). Instead of *the regulative principle* (RP), Lutherans/Anglicans have *the normative principle*: what Scripture does not forbid is permissible; they bar only what is condemned. Thus, since burning incense is not condemned, it is okay.

Reformed: sola Scriptura; for all things: for doctrine, polity, and worship, we must have God’s precept. Of course, this does not mean we have a proof text for every x; hence, the principle of good and necessary consequence. For reformed worship, silence means x is condemned. How do you react to this point: “silence means x is condemned”? [*Basic reaction: this is easier to understand when we keep our focus on worship and the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment where God prescribes how He is to be worshipped and where, in relation to worship, He tells us that He is a jealous God. He is jealous regarding how we worship Him, so, we must have His word on what pleases Him and not our inventions and ideas however well-meant they may be*]

Implications for recent developments in Protestant worship

Dance and drama is without clear warrant so it is wrong. If we have warrant for them, then these are required of all churches. What is the strength of this argument?

There is a yes to our five senses (without candles, ornaments) for worship is concrete (as baptism and communion show) but God’s glory is first in worship; edification second, and worship is not for our pleasure: Calvin: the more something delights, the more it is suspect (Institutes 4.10.11). Can we get into Calvin’s shoes here since it sounds overstated?

Is RP a Puritan Invention?

Critics say it is peculiar to Westminster Standards, but Heidelberg Catechism Q 96 (Netherlands, 1563): from 2<sup>nd</sup>: “that we in no wise make any image of God, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word.”

Belgic Confession (Netherlands, 1618-19 [French translation of original 1561], BC, art. 32): “take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, has instituted...which...bind and compel the conscience.”

Calvin (*The Necessity of Reforming the Church*): “I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word... [they easily think the] opposite...[that whatever has] sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honour of God...but...God...abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal for his worship, if at variance with his command...”

[*So, is it a Puritan invention (pejorative view of Puritan) or Reformed? The RP is definitely deeply entrenched in Reformed theology*]

Objection: narrow

RP is hyperscrupulous and narrow-minded rule that robs Christians of the freedom that God would have them express in worship. Reply: ironically, it is the guarantor of Christian freedom, (Hart. 81). [*How is it the guarantor of liberty? See next page on Christian Liberty; key is that we are slaves when under the commandments of men but free when under the commandments of God*]

Objection: old covenant

But see NT teaching: Mat. 15.9, commandments of men = in vain do they worship me  
Col. 2.22-23 commands of men have appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and will worship—by man's will not God's will.

Great Commission – to observe all that I commanded-to worship as He commands to the exclusion of human invention

God's zeal and jealousy for how He is worshipped is based on His character and transcends OT/NT: WLC, 110 from the 2<sup>nd</sup> we learn: "his fervent zeal for his own worship, and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom"

RP is also based on Total Depravity

Unbelievers worship in ignorance and moral turpitude (weakness, depravity): they turn away from honoring God to worship and serve the creature (Rom. 1).

Remnants of sin remain in believers who need God's guidance for worship (WCF, 16.5 good works of believers are tainted) [there is an idolatrous propensity from the womb]

RP is a guardian of Christian Liberty – Can we get into the reformers shoes on this?

Restraint of sin by regulations of God is not a restriction of liberty but the opposite.

Call to worship in church binds the conscience of worshippers.

This should be by the commands of God not men; if of men then it is enslavement

Example: if lighting an advent wreath goes on in worship and the believer sitting there objects, he must not participate (and thus sin by not worshipping God with the saints as commanded), or participate against his conscience (this is also sin).

RP liberates worshippers from the tyranny of churches that impose on their people elements of public worship that have no biblical warrant, 85

Unbiblical practices usurp the lordship of Christ, 85 (and then controversy and disharmony result).

Elements and Circumstances

There are decisions of pastors on things with no direct warrant from Scripture such as:

Time of services

Length and number of services

AC and voice amplification

How many psalms and hymns

These are based on a distinction between elements and circumstances of worship.

This distinction clarifies RP:

Elements: the "what": fixed and unchanging parts

Circumstances: the "how": conditions most conducive to worship that is orderly (WCF, 1.6): "circumstances concerning the worship of God...common to human actions and societies...to be ordered in the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word" (for example, 8 consecutive hours of public worship would be unreasonable, imprudent and disorderly for Sabbath worship rest)

We should not be wiser than God by will worship (Heidelberg Catechism-HC, 98)

“the RP is nothing more and nothing less than the Reformed tradition’s effort to...worship God in a way pleasing to him on the basis of his revealed will in holy Scripture” (Hart, 87).