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## Calvin in the Hands of the Philistines: Or Did Calvin Bowl on the Sabbath.

by Chris Coldwell

*Thus it is that history is falsified and good men slandered  
(David Hay Fleming)*

### PART THREE

[Editor's Note: This is the third part of an article tracing the origins of the legend that John Knox once visited Calvin during a game of bowls on a Lord's day. Part one (see the August 1998 issue) summarized Calvin's opinion of Sabbath recreations, and surveyed the 20th century use of the tale. Part Two (September 1998) surveyed the 19th century literature, concentrating on Charles Disraeli, who first brought the tale into the literature dealing with the Sabbath. The series will be completed (D.V.) in the November issue of *The Blue Banner*. The whole article is available on the Internet at [www.fpcr.org](http://www.fpcr.org) or at the Naphtali Press web site in Adobe pdf format, [www.naphtali.com](http://www.naphtali.com).]

### 3. The 17th Century – Searching for earlier references.

As was said previously, it appears the anecdote dates from an earlier time than it first appears in print in the English literature. The earliest *apparent* reference to the tale may be in the *Notes of Debates and Proceedings of The Assembly of Divines and Other Commissioners at Westminster*, by George Gillespie.<sup>1</sup> Recorded there are Gillespie's notes of "Debates in the Sub-Committee Respecting the Directory" [of Worship]. Halfway under the notes for June 5, 1644, in a discussion of qualifications for admittance to the Lord's Supper, Gillespie writes:

For qualification of those that are to be admitted [to the Lord's Table], because there was nothing positively concerning their conversation, it was added, That they shall be of an approved conversation [i.e. *manner of life*].

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<sup>1</sup> *Works: Presbyterian's Armoury*. "Notes of Debates and Proceedings of The Assembly of Divines and Other Commissioners at Westminster," edited by David Meeks (Edinburgh:Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd: 1846), p. 102.

Mr. Goodwin objected, Moral Christians have all that is here expressed, and that there ought [to be] somewhat more, which may be judged grace in the judgment of charity; and that he thinks the ordinance more profaned heretofore by persons than it hath been by all the superstitious; that a man is to be judged, according to his inward principle professed, rather than by any outward duty, else one should call in question whether Calvin were a godly man, because he played at the bowls on the Lord's day; that the word gives us rules to judge, not only of ourselves, but of others.

He offered this clause, That they be such as profess a work of faith and regeneration.

I said, Many presumptuous sinners will profess this, and many weak believers will not profess it, and that it seems he hath no doubting Christians in his congregation.

Mr. Henderson offered this, That they be such as are conceived, in the judgment of charity, to be walking in the way of Christ.

Then he and Mr. Marshall offered thus, And who give just ground, in the judgment of charity, to conceive that there is wrought in them the work of faith and regeneration.

The particular discussion is not important to the scope of this article (the difference between the Independents and Presbyterians about basing church membership upon regeneration seemingly spilling over into this question on qualifications for coming to the Lord's Table). As for the comment on Calvin, all that really can be said is that Goodwin may be building an argument upon the supposition that the story is true. But did he believe the tale to be true? Did he intend it as a real example or a fictitious one? Is this evidence of a strong oral tradition for the tale at this date? Who can say for sure? Unfortunately, Gillespie doesn't make any comment on the tale, but sticks to briefly recording the main points in discussion. Note the tale does not

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include Knox, so it is not even clear if this is the same story. It may really be the case that Goodwin is making a sarcastic reference to the claims by Laud and others at the time, that they were merely following the alleged general practice of Geneva in allowing recreations on the Lord's day. It is a very interesting coincidence that on June 11th, a few days following this subcommittee meeting, Laud utters just such a justification in the session of his trial that took place on that day.<sup>2</sup>

One may be tempted to posit that this could be the source for the tale. However, these minutes long remained in manuscript, and were not published until 1846, two hundred years after the fact. And this writer has found no reference to Goodwin's comment in what little in print there is of this controversy. As was said earlier, it appears to be the case, that aside from Goodwin's questionable reference, the tale did not enter into print until the 19th century via Disraeli. However, to try and verify this, other literature needs to be surveyed.

### Sabbath Literature and Geography books

Pouring over every 17th century title would be like searching for a needle in a haystack, and would be a questionable use of one's time. However, limiting the search to two types of literature provided the best chance of uncovering any reference, or pertinent material related to this tale. This does not rule out the possibility the tale is repeated in other literature, but silence in these two groupings would be rather significant. The two types of literature are: 1. Books regarding the Sabbath. 2. Geographies of the period that discuss Geneva.

1. The Sabbath controversy exploded into the English literature in the late 16th century with the publication of Nicholas Bownd's works.<sup>3</sup> It is true the

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<sup>2</sup> Laud is following his defender Heylyn (who is examined later in this article), who first uttered this defense in his anti-Sabbath productions of the 1630s. It cannot be ruled out that Goodwin may simply be making the same kind of unjustified extrapolation from the general practice of Geneva that later men have made, perhaps being unfamiliar with Calvin's Sermons on Deuteronomy. However, this seems unlikely, as the appeal to the general practice of Geneva, as well as Calvin's sermons, were well known even before the time of the Westminster Assembly. Heylyn's comments were certainly known, as he appears to have been the main anti-Sabbatarian author to answer once the publishing ban was lifted.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Bownd, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath, plainly layde forth and soundly proved* (1595). Bownd published a second edition, *Sabbatum Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (London, 1606), "now by him a second time perused, and enlarged...".

"Puritan" view had earlier proponents,<sup>4</sup> but Bownd's book proved to be the landmark work, and most historians pinpoint the beginning of the "Sabbath controversies" in England with him. A minute and exhaustive review of the Puritan Sabbath literature would expand the length and work required for this article beyond reason. As it is, none of the major early works in favor of the Sabbath mention the bowling anecdote.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, it is not mentioned in any of the Sabbatarian books following the lifting of the press ban that began with the reissue of the *Books of Sports*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> With a few exceptions such as Hooper, writings on the fourth commandment prior to 1583 were generally ambiguous, looking at them from a strictly Puritan perspective. Gilfillan traces the English literature back to expressions that in seed form at least, forecast what was to develop into the Puritan view in the later part of the 16th century. *The Sabbath Viewed in the Light of Reason, Revelation, and History, with Sketches of its Literature* (New York: American Tract Society & New York Sabbath Committee, c. 1862). The Sketches were reprinted in *Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature*, volume 5 (Naphthali Press, 1992), pp. 209 ff. Anti-Sabbath and Sabbath writers seem to both agree that Gervase Babington (1551-1610) is the first clearly unambiguous writer to express what became the "Puritan" view. *An Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (1583). However, remarking on this earlier ambiguity, Dennison, echoing Gilfillan, writes "Yet, I ask, how did it happen that in 1583, Gervase Babington penned a statement on the fourth commandment which could have passed for a summary of Nicolas Bownd. In my opinion, the answer is contained in the underground development of Puritanism via prophesyings, lecturings and the universities. One must not neglect to weigh the almost certain effect of the biblical discussions in these Puritan gatherings – gatherings which undoubtedly touched on the Sabbath discussion... Consider the fact that the following men, all of whom later expressed sentiments of a Puritan nature upon the fourth commandment, at one time attended Cambridge University – the 'nursery' of Puritanism: John Knewstubb, Edward Dering, William Perkins, Richard Stubbes, Gervase Babington, William Fulke, Andrew Willet." *Market Day of the Soul*, p. 15-16.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolas Bownd, *ibid.* George Estey, *Certain and learned Expositions upon divers parts of Scripture* (London, 1603), which includes the earlier, *A Most Sweet and comfortable exposition upon the ten commandments* (London, 1602). John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *An Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (1603, 19th edition, 1635). William Greenham, *Treatise of the Sabbath*, in *Works* (London, 1604); George Widley, *Doctrine of the Sabbath, handled in Four Severall Bookes or Treatises* (London, 1604); John Sprint, *Propositions tending to prove the necessary Use of the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's Day* (London, 1607); Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis* (1608). Lewes Bayly, *The Practice of Piety*, third edition (1613). Lewes Thomas, *A Short Treatise upon the Commandments, in seven sermons or exercises of seven sabbaths* (London, 1615). Edward Elton, *An exposition of the ten commandments of God* (London, 1623), an update of *A plain and easy exposition of six of the commandments* (1619).

<sup>6</sup> Hamon L'Estrange, *God's Sabbath before, under the law and under the Gospel* (Cambridge, 1641). George Hakewill, *A short but cleare discourse of the institution, dignity, and end of the Lords-day* (London, 1641). Richard Bernard, *A threefold treatise of the Sabbath* (London, 1641). William Twisse, *The Morality of the Fourth Commandment* (1641). William Gouge, *The sabbaths sanctification* (London, 1641). John Ley, *Sunday a Sabbath* (London, 1641). George Abbot, *Vindiciae sabbathi, or, An answer to two treatises of Master Broads* (London, 1641). John Lawson, *For the Sabbath* (London, 1644). Daniel Cawdrey, Herbert Palmer, *Sabbatum Redivivum: or the Christian Sabbath Vindicated in a full discourse concerning the Sabbath*,

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However, lest a Sabbatarian book was missed here or there, it is not as critical to search every one of these, as the likelihood of the tale being mentioned is greater in the anti-Sabbath literature. Of particular interest among the anti-Sabbatarian works are those published between 1633 and 1640, as they ostensibly are a defense of the *Second Book of Sports*. Significantly, none of the anti-Sabbatarian books printed between 1605 and 1667, mention the tale, including this important group.<sup>7</sup>

Generally the focus of the Sabbath controversy in the latter half of the 17th century shifted away from the strictness of observance, to the day of observance. With the Saturday Sabbath writers coming more into prominence, the likelihood of the tale receiving notice diminishes.<sup>8</sup>

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*and the Lord's Day*. Four Parts (1645, 1652, 1652, 1652). John White, *A way to the tree of life ... A digression, the morality and perpetuity of the Fourth Commandment* (London, 1647). Giles Collier, *Vindiciae thesium de Sabbato, or, A vindication of certain passages in a sermon ... unjustly subjected by Edward Fisher* (London, 1653). William Prynne, *The works of William Prynne... a polemical desertation, of the incoation and determination of the Lord's day Sabbath* (London, 1655). Thomas Shepard, *Theses Sabbaticae, or, The doctrine of the Sabbath* (London, 1655). Thomas Chafie, *The seventh-day Sabbath* (London, 1657). James Ussher, *The judgment of the late Archbishop of Armagh ... Of the Sabbath, and observation of the Lords day* (London, 1658). John Wells, *The practical Sabbatarian* (London, 1668). Richard Baxter, *The divine appointment of the Lords day* (London, 1671). John Owen, *Exercitations concerning the name, original, nature, use, and continuance of a day of sacred rest* (London 2nd edition, 1671). This is part of Owens commentary on Hebrews. Thomas Young, *Dies dominica. The Lords-day ...* (London, 1672). A Latin version was published anonymously in 1639. Nathanael Homes, *An essay concerning the Sabbath* (London, 1673). John Wallis, *A defense of the Christian Sabbath*, part one (Oxford, 1692). Benjamin Keach, *The Jewish Sabbath abrogated, or, The Saturday Sabbatarians confuted* (London, 1700).

<sup>7</sup> Robertus Loeus, *Effigiatio Veri Sabbathisimi* (1605). Thomas Rogers, "Preface" to *Catholic Doctrine of the Church* (1607, 1625). The Declaration for Sports on the Lord's Day (1618). Thomas Broad, *Three Questions on the Fourth Commandment* (1621). John Prideaux, *The doctrine of the Sabbath: Delivered in the act at Oxon, anno, 1622. Now translated into English for the benefit of the common people* [by Peter Heylyn] (London, 1622). Edward Brerewood, *A learned treatise of the Sabbath ... written to Mr. Nicholas Byfield .. with Mr. Byfields answere and Mr. Brerewoods reply*. (Oxford, 1630). Edward Brerewood, *Treatise on the Sabbath* (1632). Second Declaration of Sports (1633). Peter Heylyn, *History of the Sabbath* (1635). Francis White, *Treatise of the Sabbath* (1635). John Pocklington, *Sunday no Sabbath* (1635). Robert Sanderson, *A Sovereign Antidote Against Sabbatharian Errors* (1636). David Primerose, *A Treatise of the Sabbath and the Lord's Day* (1636). Christopher Dow, *A Discourse of the Sabbath and the Lord's Day* (1636). Gilbert Ironside, *Seven Questions of the Sabbath* (1637). Peter Heylyn, *Brief and Moderate Answer ... of Henry Burton* (1637). Edward Fisher, *A Christian caveat to the old and new sabbatarians* (London, 1652). Thomas Grantham, *The seventh day Sabbath ceased as ceremonial* (London, 1667).

<sup>8</sup> For a general survey of the Sabbath and anti-Sabbath literature of the 17th century, see the books by Cox and Gilfillan previously mentioned. Also see Dennison's *Market Day of the Soul*. Dennison remarks (p. 119) "From mid-century, the Puritan treatises are, in the

## Peter Heylyn and the Practice of Geneva

2. While the bowling tale is not mentioned in any of the works surveyed, one author defended Sabbath recreations by appealing to the general practice of Geneva. Peter Heylyn, a defender of the Book of Sports, does this in his preface to Prideaux's *The Doctrine of the Sabbath*, and in his own work, *History of the Sabbath*. He also repeats it in his two geography books, and in his *History of the Presbyterians*.<sup>9</sup> In the preface to Prideaux he says:

Even in Geneva itself, according as it is related in the enlargement of Boterus by Robert Johnson, All honest exercises, shooting in pieces, long bows, crossbows, etc. are used on the Sabbath day and that both in the morning before and after sermon: neither do ministers find fault therewith, so that they hinder not from hearing of the word at the time appointed.<sup>10</sup>

The source of Heylyn's comment about crossbows and shooting on the Lord's day is from a geography of the late 16th century by Giovanni Botero (translated by Robert Johnson, who added material, including that covering Geneva). The comment by Johnson is:<sup>11</sup>

The town is very well peopled, especially with women; insomuch as they commonly say, that there are three women for one man, yielding this for a reason, that the wars have consumed their men, they reckon some 16,000 of all sorts....

All honest exercises, as shooting pieces, crossbows, longbows, etc. are used on the Sabbath day, and that in the morning both before and after the sermon, neither do the ministers find any fault therewith, so that they hinder not from hearing the word at the appointed time.

Other geographies of the time do not mention this, but do point out, as does Johnson, the constant danger Geneva faced from her enemies.<sup>12</sup> Geneva survived

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main, directed to their antagonists on the right, i.e. the Seventh-day Sabbatarians.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Aerius redivivus, or, The History of the Presbyterians...* (Oxford, 1670).

<sup>10</sup> John Prideaux, *The doctrine of the Sabbath: Delivered in the act at Oxon, anno, 1622. Now translated into English for the benefit of the common people* [by Peter Heylyn] (London, 1622). Translator's preface, page 10-11 (unnumbered).

<sup>11</sup> *An historicall description of the most famous kingdomes and common-weales in the worlde. : Relating their scituations, manners, customes, civill government, and other memorable matters. / Translated into English and enlarged, with addition of the relation of the states of Saxony, Geneva, Hungary and Spaine; in no language euer before imprinted* (London, 1601; 2nd. Edition, 1603). Translated by Robert Johnson from Giovanni Botero's *Le relationi universali* (first published in Rome, 1591), pp. 88-89.

<sup>12</sup> George Abbot, *A brief description of the whole world* (London, 1642). Samuel Clarke, *A geographical description of all the countries in the known world* (London, 1671). Pierre Duval, *Geographia universalis, The present*

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some serious attacks, the most famous of which occurred in 1602. An attack that began on Saturday night and Sunday morning was successfully turned back, and the captured enemy were executed that Sunday afternoon. Geneva still celebrates this victory, the Escalade, as a major holiday. Duval in his geography remarks that “Geneva is the best fortified city of all [those in the area], keeping a very exact guard for the preservation of their liberty and that of religion which is reformed.”<sup>13</sup> Clarke relates that the citizens of Geneva successfully repulsed an attack by quickly getting to their arms, and remarks, and “this hot Camiscado hath made them of Geneva stay better upon their guard ever since.”<sup>14</sup>

As indicated above, Peter Heylyn also authored two geographies, where he again repeated the claim by Johnson.<sup>15</sup> He writes: “They allow in this city all manner of honest recreations upon Sundays.”<sup>16</sup> “In respect hereof though the ministers are very strict in forbidding dancing, and have writ many tracts against it; yet to give some content to the common people (who have not leisure to attend it at other times) they allow all manlike exercises on the Lord’s day, as shooting in pieces, long bows, crossbows, and the like, and that too in the morning both before and after sermon; so it be no impediment to them from coming to the church at the times appointed.”<sup>17</sup>

Much like Disraeli, Heylyn wears his bias openly, and the characterization in his geography of the discipline and practice of Geneva is outrageous. **18** The

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*state of the whole world* (London, 1685). George Meriton, *A geographical description of the world* (London, 1679). Meriton seems to have relied on Johnson, but does not make mention of the Lord’s day practices in Geneva.

<sup>13</sup> Duval, *ibid*, p. 273.

<sup>14</sup> Clarke, *ibid*, p. 210

<sup>15</sup> *Microcosmus. Cosmographie in four books* (London, 1657). *Microcosmos, a little description of the great world* (Oxford, 1631).

<sup>16</sup> Heylyn, *A little description of the great world*, p. 134.

<sup>17</sup> Heylyn, *Cosmographie in four bookes*, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> “And so we have the true beginning of the Genevian discipline, begotten in Rebellion, born in sedition, and nursed up by faction.... Being born into the world by the means aforesaid, some other helps it had to make it acceptable and approved of in other churches. As first, the great content it gave to the *common people*, to see themselves intrusted with the weightiest matters in religion, and thereby an *equality* with, if not (by reason of their number, being two for one) a *superiority* above their ministers. Next, the *great reputation* which Calvin for his diligence in writing and preaching had attained unto, made all his *dictates* as authentic amongst some divines, as ever the Pope’s *ipsi dedit* in the church of Rome. Whereby it came to pass, in a little time that only those churches which embraced the doctrines and discipline authorized by Calvin were called the Reformed churches.”

Archbishop of Armaugh, James Ussher no less, had this heavy criticism of his geography:<sup>19</sup>

... but that either that the Articles of Ireland were ever called in, or any articles or canons at all were ever here confirmed by Act of Parliament may well be reckoned among Dr. Hylin’s fancies which show what little credit he deserves in his Geography, when he brings us news of the remote parts of the world, that tells us so many untruths of things so lately, and so publicly acted in his neighbor nation.

Much later, Andrew Le Mercier, pastor of the French church in Boston in his account of Geneva, writes regarding Heylyn:<sup>20</sup>

I do not wonder at all that popish writers, when they treat of Geneva, are very partial and invent a multitude of falsehoods and absurdities; because they hate its religion ... On the other hand I cannot but wonder that some Protestant English writers have writ with so much passion, ignorance and partiality against the church and the place, when in their geographie books they have mentioned it, as when a certain author, dead long ago, saith, that the people expelled the Bishop: and gives to understand, that they are hypocrites, when he says that their discipline is the fruit of faction ...

Le Mercier wrote in 1732, and according to his preface, relied on Spon’s geography.<sup>21</sup> But he had also been to Geneva earlier in his life. He does not mention the bowling anecdote, but affirms: “I have been more particular in this description because I think that it is a shame not to know the whole of a small thing; and that it may please some persons who can never find such circumstances in other books. I must add, that the peasants are trained upon the Sabbath day, which I leave the Reader to judge whether it be a laudable practice.”<sup>22</sup>

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*Cosmographie*, p. 139. After complaining that what Calvin recommended for polity, Beza made necessary upon all churches, he writes: “By means whereof their followers in most of the Reformed churches drove on so furiously, that rather than their discipline should not be admitted, and the Episcopal Government destroyed in all the churches of Christ, they were resolved to depose kings, ruin kingdoms, and to subvert the fundamental constitutions of all civil states.” *Ibid*, p. 140.

<sup>19</sup> James Ussher, *The judgment of the late Archbishop of Armaugh* (London, 1658).

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Le Mercier, *The church history of Geneva, in five books. As also a political and geographical account of that republic* (Boston, 1732). Geographical Account, p. iv.

<sup>21</sup> Jacob Spon, *The history of the city and state of Geneva* (London, 1687). As far as a quick perusal allowed, Spon does not mention the training practices of Geneva. This would seem to be a personal account by Le Mercier.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

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## Heylyn Answered

Heylyn drew the attention of many of the Puritan authors who chose to write on the Sabbath after the freedom of the press was restored. In answer to his appeal to the practice of Geneva for Lord's day recreation, it was objected that it was very unseemly to plead the example of Geneva when they themselves saw the evil of such, since at the Synod of Dort such recreations were condemned.<sup>23</sup> Twisse believed Heylyn drew an unwarranted implication from the list of activities reported by Johnson,<sup>24</sup> and thought the activities mentioned were no more than might be pleaded as necessary for the defense of a city that was in constant peril.<sup>25</sup> The report that Twisse had was that only the youth practiced shooting in the evening, and no more.

Twisse's report brings out the partisan nature in the accounts regarding the practice of Geneva. A difficulty for the prelates, who depended upon Heylyn's account

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<sup>23</sup> Dort had taken some steps to correct abuses. "The delegates from Zealand raised the question by asking advice on the theology of the Sabbath. As a result of this request, the Synod issued what are sometimes known as the six points of Dort. These six points were issued by Dort as a provisional statement, but they remain the foundational position of Dutch Calvinism." "Basically Dort taught that Sunday has replaced Saturday as the day 'solemnly hallowed by Christians,' and that Sunday 'must be so consecrated to worship that on that day we rest from all servile works, except those which charity and present necessity require; and also from all such recreations as interfere with worship.'" W. Robert Godfrey, "No Time for Nostalgia," *The Outlook*, July/Aug. 1990. Cawdrey wrote: "And now for the Calvinian Churches, we think it very unreasonable that their practice should be produced against us, which cannot but be condemned by them that bring it. For first, whereas they have no public service in the afternoon in some places (which is false of Geneva, as we are credible informed) but leave it at large to labor or pleasure, we ask, do they do well in so doing? Did not themselves see the error, when at the last Synod at Dort, they set up Catechism, Lectures in the afternoon; and resolved to implore the civil magistrate, that they would restrain all servile work, games, drinking matches, and other profanations of the Sabbath?" *Sabbatum Redivivum*, part 3, p. 652-653.

<sup>24</sup> "And as for the exercises here mentioned, I find them to fall wondrously short, of that which the author avouches, as namely, that they esteem the Sabbath to lie open to *all honest exercises and lawful recreations*; for I make no question but in this Prefacer's opinion there are far more exercises and lawful recreations than that of shooting which alone is here mentioned..." Twisse, *Morality of the Fourth Commandment*, p. 147.

<sup>25</sup> "Neither do I find that the exercises here mentioned are so much accommodated to the refreshing of the mind and quickening of the spirit; as to make their bodies active and expedite in some functions which may be for the service of the commonwealth. And lately upon inquiry hereabout I have received information, that at Geneva, after evening prayer, only the youth do practice shooting in guns to make them more ready, and expert for the defense of the city, which is never out of danger." Ibid.

from Johnson, is that it is obvious that Geneva's practice did not remain static. The practice of the city apparently changed greatly between the time of Johnson's report, through the early 17th century via Dort, to the time of Twisse around 1640.

In addition to these faults found in Heylyn, the Puritans also appealed to Calvin's views in response to the alleged practice of Geneva. Twisse found it difficult to believe Heylyn's report, writing:

And I have cause to come but slowly to the believing hereof, because it is Calvin's doctrine concerning the Sabbath, that albeit under the gospel we are not bound to so rigorous a rest as the Jews were, yet that still we are obliged to abstain from all other works, as they are *Avocamenta à sacris studiis & meditationibus*, Avocations from holy studies and meditations; and their ministers, I should think do not well if they fail to mind them hereof, unless both they and the people are fallen from Calvin's doctrine in this point, in which case I see no just cause why any should choke us therewith, but give us as much liberty to dissent from him in the doctrine of the Sabbath, as they of Geneva take unto themselves.<sup>26</sup>

George Hakewill<sup>27</sup> explicitly brings Calvin's Deuteronomy sermons into the argument against recreations on the Lord's day:

Some reformed Churches in other parts may perchance give way to the use of them on the Lord's day, which in them is somewhat the more excusable, because they have none other holy days, though for my own part I think it better if they had, yet that the very same Pastors of those churches who admitted or

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<sup>26</sup> Twisse, Ibid, 147-148.

<sup>27</sup> Hakewill is a more moderate Puritan when it comes to holy days. But he argues very strongly against labor and recreation on the Lord's day. "... That unlawful recreations may not be used on that day, no Christian, I think, will deny, since they may not be used on any days; so as all the doubt is touching lawful recreations, whereof some also there are, which I think no man will affirm to be lawfully used on the Lord's day, as hawking, hunting, and the like, which are not unlawful in themselves, but unlawful on that day because it is the Lord's day. And so other recreations; if bodily labor, which on other days is not only lawful, but necessary, be forbidden because it is the Lord's day, methinks by the same reason, even lawful recreations should be forbidden on the same day, as tending no less to the violating of that day than bodily labor. If on that day I may not sow or not reap, nor carry my corn, no, not in the most uncertain and catching weather, though it carries a fair show of keeping those precious fruits of the earth from spoiling which God of his goodness has sent me, shall I presume to use those recreations on that day, which commonly end in the abuse of those good blessings? Manlike exercises are, doubtless, very requisite, but considering the number of other holy days in our church (under favor spoken) I see no necessity of putting them in practice on the Lord's day, nor of ranking the Lord's day, with other holy days." George Hakewill, *A short but cleave discourse of the institution, dignity, and end of the Lords-day* (London, 1641), p. 28-29.

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connived at the use of such manlike exercises, as severely cried down effeminate sports on that day, let one speak for all: "If we employ the Sunday," says Calvin, "to make good cheer, to sport ourselves, to go to games and pastimes, shall God in this be honored, is it not a mockery? Is this an unhallowing of his Name?" [In Deut. 5, Sermon 34].<sup>28</sup>

### Richard Baxter

Of all the Puritan authors answering Heylyn, Richard Baxter appears to assume the most fault to Calvin for supposedly allowing others to do more on the Lord's day than he should have. However, he provides no references to any statements by Calvin to substantiate this,<sup>29</sup> and more to the point, there seems an implicit denial that Calvin himself had a more lax observance of the Lord's day:

Obj: But by all this you seem to cast a great reproach on Calvin, Beza, and most of the great divines of the foreign churches, who have not been so strict for the observation of the Lord's day.

Answ. Let these things be observed by the impartial reader. 1. It cannot be proved to be most of them, that were so faulty herein as the objection intimates. Many of them have written much for the holy spending of the day. 2. It must be noted, that it is a superstitious ceremonious sabbatizing which many of them write against, who seem to the unobservant to mean more. 3. And you must remember that they come newly out of Popery, and had seen the Lord's day and a superabundance of other human holy days imposed on the church to be ceremoniously observed, and they did not all of them so clearly as they ought discern the difference between the Lord's day and those holy days or church festivals; and so did too promiscuously conjoin them in their reproofs of the burdens imposed on the church. And it being the Papists' ceremoniousness and their multitude of festivals that stood all together in their eye, it tempted them to too undistinguishing and inaccurate a reformation. 4. And for Calvin you must know that he spent every day so like to a Lord's day, in hard study, and Prayer, and numerous writings, and public preachings, or lecturings and disputings, either every day of the week, or very near it, scarce allowing himself time for his one only spare meal a day, that he might the easilier be tempted to make less difference in his judgment between the Lord's day and other days, than he should have done, and to plead for more recreation on that day for others, than he took any day himself.

Lacking any firm evidence to the contrary, it appears Baxter was being more apologetic for Calvin

than was called for, and perhaps not opposing Heylyn as firmly as he should have on this point. It may be Baxter was extrapolating from Calvin's behavior in general.<sup>30</sup> Or this simply may be another point at which Baxter used poorer judgment than he ought to have in this work.<sup>31</sup>

### The Practice of Bowling

But what about bowling? Two incidents explicitly tie the recreation of lawn bowling to the practice of Geneva; one from the 17th century and one from the late 16th century. Two famous prelates offered this excuse when they were charged with immorality for playing at bowls on the Lord's day: 'It was a common practice in Geneva.'

### John Laud

The subject of bowls on the Lord's day and of Calvin's view of Sabbath recreations came up during the trial of John Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury. In the session of his trial that took place on June 11, 1644, Laud defends himself, and claims to have had a strict observance of the Lord's day, though he also defended the recreations as authorized by the *Second Book of Sports* from the practice of Geneva. <sup>32</sup> The Commons replied that his practice was not very strict, that the Book

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<sup>30</sup> Doumerguer, vol. 3, pp. 539-540. "During his stay in Strasbourg, at the time of a sort of students' revolt, without wishing to sacrifice the rights of discipline, he says, 'Truly, I see, one must have some indulgence for human folly, and must not push rigor (rigidity) to the point of no longer allowing them here and there the right to make some mistakes.' Will we say, he spoke thus in 1539? Here then in 1546. It has to do with theater and representations which some pastors violently oppose. Spirits are very over excited. Calvin, personally, would be for tolerance (see below). But he does not separate from his colleagues, and asks that there be not an approbation of pastors. Nevertheless, he is not opposed to the Council using leniency: 'for, he says, one cannot refuse all diversions to the people.'" Translated from the French by Michael Dolberry.

<sup>31</sup> Gilfillan, p. 145. "If in the few pages, where he [Baxter] argues against the formal obligation on Christians of the law of Eden and Sinai, he becomes weak as other men, and exposes himself to defeat, as well as impairs the authority and practical rule of the institution..."

<sup>32</sup> Henry Wharton, *The history of the troubles and tryal of the Most Reverend Father in God and blessed martyr, William Laud* (London, 1695-1700), p. 343-344. "And for the day, I ever labored it might be kept holy, but yet free from a superstitious holiness. But first, there is no proof offered for this, Secondly, 'tis impossible: for till the afternoon service and sermon were done; no recreation is allowed by that book; nor than to any but such as have been at both. Therefore it could not be done to take it away. Thirdly, the book names none but lawful recreations. Therefore if unlawful be used, the book gives them no warrant. And that some are lawful after the public service of God is ended appears by the practice of Geneva, where after evening prayer, the elder men bowl, and the younger train."

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Baxter, *The divine appointment of the Lord's day* (London, 1671), pp. 127-128.

authorized even unlawful pastimes, and appealed to Calvin against the alleged practice of Geneva.<sup>33</sup> Prynne more fully brings this out both in his report of Laud's defense,<sup>34</sup> and of the Commons reply:

Moreover, some of the recreations mentioned in it [the book of Sports] are not very lawful upon any day, though the Archbishop affirms the contrary; but certainly unlawful on any part of the Lord's day, even after evening Prayer, as fathers, councils, Imperial laws, and both Protestant and Popish writers have resolved.<sup>35</sup> The pretended practice of Geneva which he alleges, is but a hearsay without proof, borrowed from Peter Heylyn's profane History of the (he should have said NO) Sabbath (part 2, c. 6, sect. 6, 8, 9), who yet informs us (sect. 9) that "Dancing hath been condemned by French synods and writers" (as well Protestant as Popish) which yet the Declaration for sports *in terminis* allows of on the Lord's day, contrary to the practice and judgment of Geneva. As for Mr. Calvin himself, though he differs in some particulars touching the morality of the fourth commandment from other of our divines, yet he in express words condemns dancing and pastimes on the Lord's day, not deeming it a Jewish superstition or rigidity to prohibit such sports thereon, especially dancing, as his 71

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (London, 1837), vol. 2, pp. 313-314. "The commons replied, that it was evident, by the archbishop's letter to the bishop of Bath and Wells, that the declaration was printed by his procurement, the warrant for printing it being written all with his own hand, and without date, and therefore might probably be obtained afterward; moreover, some of the recreations mentioned in it are unlawful on the Lord's day, according to the opinion of fathers, councils, and imperial laws; and though Calvin differs from our Protestant writers about the morality of the sabbath, yet he expressly condemns dancing and pastimes on that day. As for his grace's own strict observation of the Lord's day, it is an averment without truth, for he sat constantly at the council-table on that day; and it was his ordinary practice to go to bowls in the summer-time, and use other recreations upon it..."

<sup>34</sup> William Prynne, *Canterburies doom, or, the first part of a compleat history of the commitment, charge, tryall, condemnation, execution of William Laud, late Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1646), p. 504-505. "In Geneva itself (as I have been credibly informed by travelers) they use shooting in pieces, longbows, crossbows, muskets, and throwing of bowls too, on the Lord's day, as well as before as after sermons ended, and allow all honest recreations without reproof of their ministers; yea, Mr. Calvin the great professor there, Inst. 1. 2. c. 8. sect. 34, blames those "who infected the people in former ages with a judaical opinion, that the morality of the fourth commandment, to wit, the keeping of one day in seven did still continue: which what else is it then in dishonor of the Jews to change the day, and to affix as great a sanctity to it, as the Jews ever did. And that those who adhered to their constitution who broached this doctrine, *Crassa carnalique superstitione Judeoster superant*: men may be too strict as well as profane therein. yet I for my part have ever strictly observed the Lord's day in point of practice."

<sup>35</sup> A side note refers to *Sunday a Sabbath* by Ley, and Prynne's own *Histrionastix*.

sermon upon Job proclaims to all the world, and other Geneva ministers since him, have done the like....<sup>36</sup>

Laud added bowling to the list of items Heylyn reported; a report Prynne believed to be hearsay. Which party was the most correct as to the actual practice of Geneva is difficult to say for sure, though the veracity of Heylyn and Laud is more suspect. However, even if Laud's claim were true, it would not say anything directly to Calvin's view, which Prynne clearly adduced in answer to the appeal to Geneva's practice. The most that could be said is that Calvin may have had good reason to exhort to a stricter observance of the day, assuming Geneva's practice had remained the same from Calvin's day to the time of Laud (which seems doubtful).

(To Be Continued)

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 506

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# BIBLICAL DISCIPLINE

by Richard Bacon

The initial statement in *PSI*'s section on biblical church discipline is excellent as far as it goes.<sup>1</sup> It would have been much better, in this writer's opinion, to begin the discussion of biblical discipline with a discussion of the keys of the kingdom. Our church's constitution at *WCF XXX:ii* states:

To these [church] officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins, to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.

We see in this paragraph from the Westminster divines that biblical discipline is committed to church officers acting in concert. The keys involve the acts of shutting and of opening; of retaining and remitting sins. Too often biblical discipline is seen only as the abnormal act of shutting the kingdom to the impenitent. The day by day and week by week work of biblical discipline is primarily that of teaching God's Word. Discipline, and its related discipleship, involves explaining and doing what God commands and abstaining from what he forbids.

From time to time, however, our fallen nature being what it is, biblical discipline must take on a judicial aspect. When a church member refuses after some period of teaching and counseling to heed the Scripture, then process should be brought against him for the glory of God, the purity of the church, and his own reclamation.

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<sup>1</sup> PCA CONSENSUS: *A Proposed Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America (PSI)*, Chapter VI, pp.22-24. Back in 1994, a more broadly evangelical group in the PCA issued this statement as a basis to reconcile differences in the denomination. Several more reformed groups of ministers within the PCA issued largely critical responses to this proposal, for its departures from historic Presbyterianism. The above, which deals with the *PSI*'s statement on discipline, appeared in *Answers to PCA Consensus: An Analysis of A Proposed Statement of Identity For the Presbyterian Church in America* (Blue Banner Books, 1994).

In the formal procedure of discipline, the rules of Scripture and our constitution become exceedingly important. We do not want discipline applied by men who make up rules "as they go along." We want the rights of due process protected at every step of the procedure. In other words, the rules of discipline are in the constitution *primarily* as a safeguard for the accused. It is therefore wise the *PSI* affirms the need for consistent and orderly procedures for formal discipline.<sup>2</sup>

One difficulty that the PCA has faced for the past several years is how properly to adjudicate appeals that reach the highest court of the church. It is undeniable that Presbyterians have historically made use of commissions in an attempt to deal with cases fairly and swiftly. It was hoped that when the Standing Judicial Commission (SJC) system was instituted that some of the many difficulties involved with biblical discipline would be solved.

What has taken place, in the opinion of many, is the abdication of judicial responsibility by our highest court. The General Assembly has become a virtual "rubber stamp" to approve the actions of the SJC. The concept of an appeal being made to the broader church has been lost due to the fact that cases are adjudicated by a panel of three men except in unusual cases. It is difficult for many in the PCA to discern the Acts 15 model in such a structure.

The *PSI* affirms "that the healthy church will prefer, when possible, informal over formal discipline, and encouragement over correction."<sup>3</sup> *PSI* does not clarify what is meant by the term "informal discipline," but formal discipline is intended as that which is "in accord with a judicial court model."<sup>4</sup> For some reason which is not explained, *PSI* asserts that such discipline will cause the church "inevitably [to] become too open to securing

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<sup>2</sup> *PSI*, p.22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.



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organizational orthodoxy and member conformity by coercive means.”<sup>5</sup>

Earlier the *PSI* declared, “the purposes of proper discipline are never vindictive, vengeful, nor punitive.”<sup>6</sup> Further *PSI* affirmed that such discipline expresses the church's compassion and concern. In fact, when administered according to due process and not the caprice of men, church discipline is both loving and merciful.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore unclear whether *PSI* regards biblical discipline as “coercive means” (as it states on page 23) or as “loving and merciful” (as it states on page 22). Further, it is unclear what the document intends to convey by the use of the term “organizational orthodoxy.”

*PSI* maintains on page 23, “A church zealous for purity glorifies God; churches lusting for court cases dishonour God.” It seems that the distinction between zeal for God's honor and “lust for court cases” would be a question of the heart. While this writer agrees wholeheartedly that there is a danger in the hearts of men of succumbing to a litigious spirit, *PSI* does not explain how the zealous will be discerned from the litigious.

The Scriptures cited for delegating discipline to commissions are poorly chosen. It would be far better to claim that such commissions are a circumstance of church government in accordance with *WCF* I:vi than to cite such inapt proofs.

Exodus 18:17-26 shows judgment being taken from the hands of one man (Moses) and being spread among many - as many as one judge for every ten members of Israel. Acts 15:2 demonstrates Paul and Barnabas' resolve to take a practical theological question to a larger group (verse 22 - “then it pleased the apostles with the whole church...”) The passage cited in II Corinthians 1:23 - “was inflicted of many.”

In this writer's opinion much more remains to be said with respect to church discipline in the PCA especially in light of case 93-3, *Chen V. Ascension Presbytery*.<sup>8</sup> In that case the SJC opinion unwarrantedly

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Commissioner's Handbook, Report of the Standing Judicial Commission to the Twenty-second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (Atlanta GA: Office of the Stated Clerk, 1994) pp. 2053-2111. See also forthcoming,

and unconstitutionally extended the provisions of *Book of Church Order* § 25-11 to include private members. Further, it unconstitutionally changed the meaning of *BCO* § 46-5, “but only after the Session has followed scriptural procedures (Matthew 18).”

According to SJC (and by its concurrence, the General Assembly of the PCA), a Session is *not* to follow the scriptural procedures of Matthew 18 which procedures include how to proceed when the offending party is contumacious, “but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matthew 18:17). Not only has SJC (and the 1994 GA) thus changed the meaning of our constitution, it has done so in a way that undermines biblical discipline. The effect of case 93-3 is that a person cannot be disciplined except with his own permission.

Biblical discipline has been understood by Presbyterians since at least 1560 (and many would argue even earlier) to be one of the irreducible marks of a true church.<sup>9</sup> If the PCA chooses to continue on the course begun in *Chen V. Ascension Presbytery* and hinted in *PSI*, it is only a question of time until it is no true church at all, but has its candlestick removed by the Judge of both the church and the nations. Ω

**Answers to PCA Consensus: An Analysis of A Proposed Statement of Identity For the Presbyterian Church in America.** Now out of print, these articles are posted at the FPCR web site ([www.fpcr.org](http://www.fpcr.org)). Or send \$5.00 for a laser print copy (use order form on the back page of this newsletter). Articles by Frank Smith, Richard Bacon, Carl Bogue, E. C. Case, Larry Ball, and Grover Gunn.

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Minutes of the Twenty-second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (Atlanta GA: Office of the Stated Clerk, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> *The Confession of Faith* of 1560, Cap. XVIII - of The Notes By Which The True Kirk is Discerned From The False And Who Shall Be Judge of The Doctrine. “The Notes, therefore, of the true Kirk of God we believe, confess, and avow to be, first, The true preaching of the word of God; into the which God has revealed himself to us, as the writings of the Prophets and Apostles do declare. Secondly, The right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, which must be annexed to the word and promise of God, to seal and confirm the same in our hearts. Last[ly], Ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed, and virtue nourished.” *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, William Croft Dickinson, D. Lit., editor (NY: Philosophical Library, 1950), Vol. 2, Appendix VI, pp.266.

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- ❖ Concerning the constituting of true churches by reformation out of such as have been corrupt, by James Durham.
- ❖ The Eldership of Matthew 18:17 and 1 Corinthians 5:4. The Ministerial Assembly of the Elders Holds the Power to bind and loose. Samuel Rutherford as summarized by Richard Bacon.
- ❖ The Use of the Communion in the Lord's Supper, by James Begg (ongoing).
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