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# THE BLUE BANNER

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## The Westminster Confession of Faith and Logic

by W. Gary Crampton, Th.D

In the Westminster Confession of Faith (1:6) we read:

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.

B. B. Warfield, commenting on this section of the Confession, writes:

It must be observed, however, that the teachings and prescriptions of Scripture are not confined by the Confession to what is 'expressly set down in Scripture.' Men are required to believe and obey not only what is 'expressly set down in Scripture.' but also what 'by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.' This is the strenuous and universal contention of the Reformed theology against the Socinians and Arminians, who desired to confine the authority of Scripture to its literal assertions; and it involves a characteristic honoring of reason as the instrument for the ascertainment of truth. We must depend upon our human faculties to ascertain what Scripture says; we cannot suddenly abnegate them and refuse their guidance in determining what Scripture means. This is not, of course, to make reason the ground of the authority of inferred doctrines and duties. Reason is the instrument of discovery of all doctrines and duties, whether 'expressly set down in Scripture' or 'by good and necessary consequence deduced from Scripture': but their authority, when once discovered, is derived from God, who reveals them and prescribes them in Scripture, either by literal assertion or by necessary implication.

It is the Reformed contention, reflected here by the Confession, that the sense of Scripture is Scripture, and that men are bound by its whole sense in all its implications. The re-emergence in recent controversies of

the plea that the authority of Scripture is to be confined to its expressed declarations, and that human logic is not to be trusted in divine things, is, therefore, a direct denial of a fundamental position of Reformed theology, explicitly affirmed in the Confession, as well as an abnegation of fundamental reason, which would not only render thinking in a system impossible, but would logically involve the denial of the authority of all doctrine of the Trinity, and would logically involve the denial of all doctrine whatsoever, since no single doctrine of whatever simplicity can be ascertained from Scripture except by the process of the understanding. It is, therefore, an unimportant incident that the recent plea against the use of human logic in determining doctrine has been most sharply put forward in order to justify the rejection of a doctrine which is explicitly taught, and that repeatedly of a doctrine which is explicitly, in the very letter of Scripture; if the plea is valid at all, it destroys at once our confidence in all doctrines, no one of which is ascertained or formulated without the aid of human logic.<sup>1</sup>

What Warfield is asserting (and agreeing with) is that the Westminster divines had a high view of logic. Logic, human logic, says the Confession (and Warfield as well), is a necessary tool to be used in the study and exposition of the Word of God. In fact, so important was the proper use of logic to the divines, that they required gospel ministers to be trained in this area prior to ordination. In the section entitled "The Form of Church Government," we read that a part of the ordination examination tested "whether he [the ordinand] hath skill in logick and philosophy."

Warfield is not the only one who has understood the importance of logic. Another twentieth century theologian, James O. Buswell, says: "When we accept

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Edmonton, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991), 226, 227.

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the laws of logic, we are not accepting laws external to God to which he must be subject, but we are accepting laws of truth which are derived from God's holy character." And centuries earlier Augustine wrote: "The science of reasoning is of very great service in searching into and unraveling all sorts of questions that come up in Scripture....The validity of logical sequences is not a thing devised by men, but it is observed and noted by them that they may be able to learn and teach it; for it exists eternally in the reason of things, and has its origin with God."<sup>2</sup>

What Buswell and Augustine are saying is that logic is eternal; it is not created; it "has its origin with God." Or as the twentieth century theologian and philosopher Gordon Clark has written: "Logic is fixed, universal, necessary, and irreplaceable...[because] God is a rational being, the architecture of whose mind is logic."<sup>3</sup>

### Some Aberrant Views of Logic

As important as the proper use of logic is for an understanding of God and His Word, there are a number of modern day theologians and philosophers who deprecate logic. They teach that there is no point of contact between divine logic and human logic. Here we have what Ronald Nash calls "the religious revolt against logic."<sup>4</sup> And the revolt is not only from the neo-orthodox camp. One would expect men such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Thomas Torrance to take such an irrational position. After all, neo-orthodoxy is known as the "theology of paradox," in which faith must "curb" logic. But this pervasive spirit of misology has infected even those who make no claim to neo-orthodoxy.

Herman Dooyeweerd, for example, avers that there is a "boundary" which exists between God and the cosmos. The laws of logic, of valid inference, which are applicable under the boundary do not have any application with regard to God. Then there is Donald Bloesch, a well known (so called) evangelical theologian. In his *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation*,<sup>5</sup> Bloesch openly denies that there is any point of contact between God's logic and human logic

(121, 293). The truth of biblical revelation, says the author, can never "be caught through the analytical methods of formal logic" (55). Bloesch frankly acknowledges that "I depart from some of my evangelical colleagues in that I understand the divine content of Scripture not as rationally comprehensible teaching but as the mystery of salvation declared in Jesus Christ" (114). Incredulously, he even goes so far as to say that "revelation cannot be assimilated into a comprehensive, rational system of truth" (289). Apparently Dr. Bloesch is more neo-orthodox than he is willing to admit.

Sadly, the "religious revolt against logic" extends into the camp of genuine orthodoxy as well. Edwin H. Palmer, for one, teaches that the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty and man's responsibility is a logical paradox. It cannot be resolved before the bar of human reason. The Calvinist, says Palmer, "in the face of all logic," believes both sides of the paradox to be true, even though he "realizes that what he advocates is ridiculous."<sup>6</sup>

Then there is Cornelius Van Til. Dr. Van Til is well known for his assertion that the Bible is full of logical paradoxes. John Robbins, in his *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth*,<sup>7</sup> cites numerous examples of Van Til's deprecation of logic. For example, in spite of the fact that the Bible teaches that God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), Dr. Van Til maintains that "all teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory" (25). He frequently speaks of logic (not the misuse of logic, but logic itself) in a disparaging manner. He speaks of "logicism" and "the static categories of logic." And with references to the Confession's statement quoted above, Van Til says: "This statement should not be used as a justification for deductive exegesis" (24, 25). Yet, deductive exegesis is precisely what the Confession is endorsing.

Ronald Nash also sees the problem with Van Til and his deprecation of human logic. Nash writes, "I once asked Van Til if, when some human being knows that 1 plus 1 equals 2, that human being's knowledge is identical with God's knowledge. The question, I thought was innocent enough. Van Til's only answer was to smile, shrug his shoulders, and declare that the question

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in Elihu Carranza, *Logic Workbook for Logic by Gordon H Clark* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1992), 97, 99.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *The Trinity Review* (November/December, 1980), edited by John W. Robbins, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1982), Chapter 9.

<sup>5</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1994).

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<sup>6</sup> Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1972), 85.

<sup>7</sup> John R. Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1986). The quotes used here are taken from Robbins' book, where one may also find the title and page number of Van Til's statements. As best as I can determine, Robbins has accurately quoted Van Til.

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was improper in the sense that it had no answer. It had no answer because any proposed answer would presume what it is impossible for Van Til, namely, that laws like those found in mathematics and logic apply beyond the [Dooyeweerdian] boundary.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, unlike Warfield, Buswell, Augustine, Clark, and the Westminster divines, Van Til, like Herman Dooyeweerd, assumed that the laws of logic are created rather than eternally existing in the mind of God.

### The Biblical View of Logic<sup>9</sup>

The Bible teaches that God is a God of knowledge (1 Samuel 2:3; Romans 16:27). Being eternally omniscient (Psalm 139:1-6), God is not only the source of his own knowledge, he is also the source and determiner of all truth. That which is true is true because God thinks it so. As the Westminster Confession (1:4), says, God “is truth itself.” And since that which is not rational cannot be true (1 Timothy 6:20), it follows that God must be rational; the laws of logic are the way he thinks.

This is, of course, what the Bible teaches. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), he is a rational being, the Lord God of truth (Psalm 31:5). So much does the Bible speak of God as the God of logic, that in John 1:1 Jesus Christ is called the “Logic” of God: “In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God” (the English word “logic” is derived from the Greek word *Logos* used in this verse). John 1:1 emphasized the rationality of God the Son. Logic is as eternal as God himself because “the *Logos* is God.” Hence, God and logic cannot be separated; logic is the characteristic of God’s thinking. In the words of Clark, “God and logic are one and the same first principle, for John wrote that Logic was God.”<sup>10</sup>

This will give us a greater understanding of the relationship of logic and Scripture. Since Logic is God, and since Scripture is a part of “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16), it follows that Scripture must be logical. What is said in Scripture is God’s infallible and inerrant thought. It expresses the mind of God, because God and his Word are one. Hence, as the Confession (1:5) teaches, the Bible is a logically consistent book:

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<sup>8</sup> Nash, *op. cit.*, 100.

<sup>9</sup> Much of this article from this point on will follow Gordon H. Clark’s “God and Logic,” *The Trinity Review* (November/December, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

there is a “consent of all the parts.” This is why Paul could “reason” with persons “from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2).

Further, logic is embedded in Scripture. The very first verse of the Bible, “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” necessitates the validity of the most fundamental law of logic: the law of contradiction (A is not non-A). Genesis 1:1 teaches that God is the Creator of all things. Too, it says that he created “in the beginning.” It does not teach, therefore, that God is not the Creator of all things, nor does it maintain that God created all things 100 or 1000 years after the beginning. This verse assumes that the words God: created, beginning, and so forth, all have definite meanings. It also assumes that they do not mean certain things. For speech to be intelligible, words must have univocal meanings. What makes the words meaningful and revelation and communication possible is that each word conforms to the law of contradiction.

This most fundamental of laws of logic cannot be proved. For any attempt to prove the law of contradiction would presuppose the truth of the law and therefore beg the question. Simply put, it is not possible to reason without using the law of contradiction. In this sense, the laws of logic are axiomatic. But they are only axiomatic because they are fixed or embedded in the Word of God.

Also fixed in Scripture are the two other principle laws of logic: the law of identity (A is A) and the law of the excluded middle (A is either B or non-B). The former is taught in Exodus 3:14, in the name of God itself: “I AM WHO I AM.” And the latter is found, for example, in the words of Christ: “He who is not with Me is against Me” (Luke 11:23).

Logic, then, is embedded in Scripture. This is why Scripture, rather than the law of contradiction, is selected as the axiomatic starting point of Christian epistemology. Similarly, God is not made the axiom, because all of our knowledge of God comes from Scripture. “God” as an axiom, without Scripture, is merely a name. Scripture, as the axiom, defines God. This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith begins with the doctrine of Scripture in Chapter 1. Chapters 2-5, on the doctrine of God, follow.

As we are taught in the Bible, man is the image and glory of God (Genesis 1:27; 1 Corinthians 11:7). God “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). Adam became a type of soul that is superior to that of nonrational animals (2 Peter

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2:12; Jude 10). Man, as God's image bearer, is a rational being (Colossians 3:10). Again, this is why the apostle Paul could spend time "reasoning" with his auditors "from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2).

Moreover, because Christ is the *Logos* who "gives [epistemological] light to every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9), we are to understand that there is a point at which man's logic meets God's logic. In fact, John 1:9 denies that logic is arbitrary (as per Friedrich Nietzsche, John Dewey, and Jean-Paul Sartre); it also denies polylogism, i.e., that there may be many kinds of logic (as per multi-culturalism). According to John, there is only one kind of logic: God's logic. And the *Logos* gives to every image bearer of God the ability to think logically.

Man, then, has the capacity to think logically, to communicate with God, and to have God communicate with him. God created Adam with a mind structured in a manner similar to his own. In the Scripture, God has given man an intelligible message, "words of truth and reason" (Acts 26:25). God has also given man language that enables him to rationally converse with his Creator (Exodus 4:11). Such thought and conversation would not be possible without the laws of logic. Logic is indispensable to all (God-given) human thought and speech. This being the case, we must insist that there is no "mere human logic" as contrasted with a divine logic. Such fallacious thinking does disservice to the *Logos* of God himself.

One might argue here that the fall of man rendered logic defective. But this not the case. The noetic effects of sin indeed hinder man's ability to reason correctly (Romans 1:21), but this in no way implies that the laws of logic themselves are impinged. Clark writes:

"Logic, the law of contradiction, is not affected by sin. Even if everyone constantly violated the laws of logic, they would not be less true than if everyone constantly observed them. Or, to use another example, no matter how many errors in subtraction can be found on the stubs of our check-books, mathematics itself is unaffected."<sup>11</sup>

As we have seen, the laws of logic are eternally fixed in the mind of God, and they cannot be affected; they are eternally valid.

## Conclusion

John Robbins has correctly said that "there is no greater threat facing the Christian church at the end of the twentieth century than the irrationalism that now controls our entire culture...Hedonism and secular humanism are not to be feared nearly so much as the belief that logic, 'mere human logic,' is an untrustworthy tool for understanding the Bible."<sup>12</sup>

To avoid this irrationalism, which in effect denies that man is the image and glory of God, we must return to the *Logos* theology of the Westminster divines. We must insist that logic and truth are the same for man as they are for God. This is not to say that man knows as much truth as God knows. God is omniscient; he is truth itself, and that which is true is true simply because he thinks it to be so. This, of course, is not the case with man. Whereas truth to God is intuitive, man learns truth discursively. But it is the same truth. This is of necessity the case, because God knows all truth, and unless man knows that which God knows, his ideas cannot be true. It is essential, then, to maintain that there is a coincidence between the logic and truth of God and the logic and truth of man. God thinks logically and he calls on man to do the same.

Gordon Clark says it this way:

Christianity claims that God is the God of truth; that he is wisdom; that his Son is his *Logos*, the logic, the Word of God. Man was created a reasonable being so that he could understand God's message to him...Christianity is a rational religion. It has an intellectually apprehensible content. Its revelation can be understood.<sup>13</sup>

What must be done? As Robbins states, we need to "embrace with passion the Scriptural ideals of clarity in both thought and speech; let us recognize, with Christ and the Westminster Assembly, the indispensability of logic...and let us defend the consistency and intelligibility of the Bible. Then, and only then, will Christianity have a bright and glorious future in America and throughout the earth."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1952, 1980), 299.

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<sup>12</sup> Robbins, *op. cit.*, 39.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968), edited by Ronald H. Nash, 137.

<sup>14</sup> Robbins, *op. cit.*, 40.

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# The Use of the Communion Table in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

by James Begg

## Part Three

(Continued from the December 1998 issue).

### Section Three

**A view of the corrupt Innovations, respecting the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and the Communion Table, in the past ages of the Christian Church.**

The new mode of dispensing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, lately introduced [ed. circa 1828] into some of the Established Churches of Scotland, namely, the distribution of the elements to the communicants sitting in pews, instead of sitting about, or at, the Communion Table, is a corrupt innovation of the worship of God. It is a departure from the pattern exhibited by Christ at the institution of that ordinance, and observed by the inspired Apostles, and followed by their successors in the earliest ages of the Christian Church. This innovation ought therefore to be checked without delay. If it is not corrected, it is highly probable that it will spread, and bring other corruptions in its train. There are no bounds to corrupt innovations. The history of the Church furnishes an abundant and melancholy proof of this, and has laid up a rich store of experience from which we ought to profit.

Corruptions began early to be introduced, and progressively to spread, respecting the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the Communion Table. A few of these corrupt innovations may be traced, as a warning to us, in these giddy and unstable times.

The practice of giving this sacrament to young children; of sending the consecrated elements to the sick and infirm, in their private houses; as well as the practice of standing or kneeling at the table, and each communicant receiving the elements from the officiating minister; were all of them corrupt practices very early introduced into the Christian Church, and were also attended, and followed, by other corruptions.

In that part of the church where the table stood, it was sometimes a practice to have it surrounded with rails of wood, to render it inaccessible to the people. Sometimes the Communion Table was surrounded with

a veil or hanging and, in after times, the image of our Savior, or some saint, was painted on these veils. Epiphanius, who flourished in the fourth century, about the year 368, tore a veil from a church in Palestine, because it had such images painted on it, contrary, as the history states, to the rules of the Christian Church.

The altar place was thus kept inaccessible to all but the clergy, in time of divine service; and the laity and women were, in the progress of time, not allowed to communicate there. The Council of Laodicea, in the year 361, particularly forbids women to approach the altar; and, by another canon, allows none but the clergy to communicate there. So strictly was this canon observed by St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, who flourished about the year 374, that he would not permit the Emperor Theodosius to communicate there, but obliged him to retire to the exterior court of the people, when he had made his oblation at the altar. Agreeably to this, the Council of Trullo, in the year 692, decreed, "That no layman should come within the altar part, except the Emperor, when he made his oblation to the Creator."

This corrupt innovation, however, met with considerable resistance in some parts of the Christian Church, particularly in France. In the sixth century, the Christian people were there still allowed to communicate at the *communion table* or *altar*; and the second Council of Tours, in the year 567, orders the holy of holies (so the altar part of the church was then denominated) to be open, both for men and women to communicate in at the time of the oblation. The fourth canon is in these terms: *Ad orandum et communicandum laicis et foeminis, sicut mos est, pateant sancta sanctorum.*

As the superstitions of Popery advanced in the Christian Church, the corruptions about the *altar* or *Lord's table* were also greatly multiplied. It is difficult, perhaps not possible, to determine the precise time when every new corrupt innovation was introduced. They were generally introduced silently, by some persons of influence, and practiced by them as improvements, and thus they gradually spread, and at last obtained general consent and legal sanction. Thus, while men slept, the enemy sowed tares, which took root, and sprang up, and extended their corrupt and pernicious effects. A short

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reference to facts may be useful, and should render us watchful against every corrupt innovation on our established form of worship.

In some places, after pictures and images were allowed in churches, the Holy Ghost was represented by a dove, hovering over the *altar* or *communion table*. An accusation was brought against Severus, Bishop of Antioch, in the council of Constantinople, in the year 565, for appropriating to his own use, the silver and golden doves that hung over the baptistery and the *altar*.

The second Council of Tours, in the year 567, decreed, that the sign of the cross should be laid on the *altar*. and Evagrius, who lived about the year 594, in his history of the Church, speaks of crosses of silver, given by Chosroes to one of the churches of Constantinople, to be fixed upon the *altar*.

Censers and incense were probably introduced about the same time; for the same historian, Evagrius, mentions not only crosses, but also golden censures, as given by Chosroes to the church at Constantinople; so that crosses and censers were probably the productions of the same age, viz. the sixth century.

Images and relics of saints were, in after ages, laid on the *altar*, or communion table. In the Council of Paris, in the year 509, it was decreed, that no *altars* should be consecrated, except those which were made of stone only. After this, they were usually built as fixtures in the altar part of the church; and the relics of some favorite saint were deposited in some part of the erection.

The doctrine of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, began to be taught in the ninth century, by Paschasius Rathbert, Monk of Corbie, who, in the year 818, composed a treatise of the body and blood of Christ. This doctrine of transubstantiation gradually spread, until at last it was decreed in the Council of Lateran, in the year 1215, under Pope Innocent III., in these terms: "That the body and blood of Jesus Christ are truly contained under the species of bread and wine in the sacrament of the *altar*; the bread being transubstantiated into the body, and the wine into the blood."

The adoration of the host was ordained by Honorius III, in the year 1220, who enjoins, "That the priest should often instruct the people; that at the elevation of the host, when mass is celebrated, they should kneel with respect, and that they should do the same when it is carried by the priest to the sick."

Gregory the ninth, who succeeded Honorius, ordained the ringing of the bell on these occasions. In the year 1227, he ordained, "That when the body and blood of Christ should be made, and the host elevated, a bell should be rung, that all who heard it might fall upon their knees, and, with clasped hands, worship the host."

The feast of the sacrament was instituted by Urban IV in the year 1264.

The procession of the holy sacrament was introduced in the fourteenth century. Some ascribe this institution to John XXII; others think that this procession first began at Padus, about the year 1360.

In the fifteenth century, the people were deprived of the use of the cup in the Sacrament, by the Council of Constance, in the year 1415, whose decree on this head cannot be read without horror, by any who regard the authority of Christ. It runs thus: "Although Jesus Christ instituted and administered the venerable Sacrament to his disciples under both kinds of bread and wine; and though in the primitive Church, the faithful received it in both kinds, nevertheless to evite certain dangers and scandals, this custom with good reason was introduced, that the ministers officiating should receive it in both kinds, but the laity under the species of bread alone; wherefore it ought to be accounted an erroneous opinion, that the observation of that custom or law, is sacrilegious, or any thing unlawful; and those who obstinately maintain the contrary, ought to be banished as heretics, and punished severely by the Diocesians, or officials of the places they belong to."

From this historical statement, it appears that one corrupt innovation always prepared the way for another, until superstition and idolatry overspread the whole face of the Christian church. Opposition was sometimes made to these corrupt innovations; but whilst one corruption was opposed, another was introduced. Thus the second Council of Tours, in the year 567, which opposed the exclusion of the laity and women from the Communion Table, ordained that the sign of the cross should be laid on the altar; so stupidly blind and inconsistent are men rendered, under the influence of corruption and superstition. Some of these corruptions were, at the first, and for a long time, but very partially embraced: but the leaven was gradually extending its influence, until it spread over the whole mass. The doctrine of transubstantiation, which was broached in 818, spread but slowly, even those dark ages, and did not receive the full sanction of the corrupt Church of Rome, until the year 1215. The other corrupt innovations above stated, were in like manner only gradually adopted.

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The Reformation by Martin Luther and others, was, under the blessing of God, a happy period for the Christian Church; but even then, several errors and corruptions were introduced, and have since been maintained. One of these respected the *Communion Table*. After the Reformation, a party arose who maintained, "That no Communion Table was necessary, and that the body of the Church, in general, was the altar, or *Communion Table*." In the year 1623, Videllius published at Geneva, Exercises on Ignatius, in which these opinions are stated and defended; and they have since been embraced and followed by some parties of professing Christians in modern times, particularly by the Independents.

The innovation lately introduced into some of the Established Churches, of making the people communicate in pews, coincides very much with the corrupt practice defended by Videllius, and appears also to be nearly allied to the early corruption sanctioned by the Council of Laodicea, in the year 361, of excluding the laity and women from the altar part of the Church, restricting them to the outer court of the people, and allowing none but the clergy to communicate at the Table. It is really and truly an exclusion from the *Communion Table*. There is neither in scripture precept nor example, the smallest countenance given to the very indecent and corrupt practice, of making the whole communicants turn their backs on one another. If this corruption is passed over in silence, it is impossible to say what may be the next. May not the practice of kneeling be again introduced, and supported by arguments much more powerful than can be adduced for this innovation?

May not wafers be substituted for the bread? Do not wafers resemble bread as much, or more, than pews resemble a table? In short, there can be no bounds set to innovations, if once they are admitted. The history of the past should warn us to be on our guard for the future. Corrupt human nature is the same. There is the same spirit of novelty, the same desire of change, and of being esteemed wiser than our fathers. There is the same giddiness, and restlessness, and ambition, and folly, and pride, and vanity. There is the same feeling of discontent with present usages and established forms, and eagerness for what may be called, by innovators, improvement and reform. There is the same desire to accommodate religious forms to our own convenience, and worldly interest, and ease, and to the ever-varying opinions and taste, and humor, and fashion of the world, which has been the fruitful source of so many errors and corruptions, in every age of the church, and all flowing

from the same *evil heart of unbelief, leading to depart from the living God*. Against all this fascinating influence we should be on our guard, appealing and adhering to the infallible rule of faith and practice. "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

The words of our venerable and worthy reformer, Mr. John Knox, to this purpose, are highly worthy of regard, by all the ministers of the Church of Scotland. When called before the Privy Council of England, on the 14th day of April, 1553, there being then present the Bishops of Canterbury and Ely, and the Earls of Bedford, Northampton, Shrewsbury, and others, and being asked, "If kneeling at the *Lord's Table* was not indifferent?" His reply was, "That Christ's action was most perfect, and that it was most sure to follow his example, and that kneeling was man's addition and invention." When they stated that they were sorry to know him of a contrary mind to the common order; he answered, "That he was sorry that the common order was contrary to Christ's institution." [See Life of Mr. Knox, prefixed to his History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland.]. So may it be said in this case, that the action of Christ is most perfect, and that it is most sure to follow his example, and that the practice of making all the communicants turn their backs on one another, is the invention of men, contrary to the institution of Christ, and, it is to be feared, if not corrected, will bring along with it other corrupt innovations. **To be Continued (D.V.)**

DO YOU LOVE TO SING THE PSALMS BUT SEEM TO SING THE SAME ONES REPEATEDLY WITHOUT LEARNING NEW ONES?  
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# Presbyterians Do Not Observe Holy-days

Samuel Miller, D.D.

[The following is from: Samuel Miller, D.D., *Presbyterianism the truly primitive and Apostolical Constitution of the Church of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1835) 73-78. Miller is discussing "The Worship of the Presbyterian Church." There are minor editing and spelling changes to conform to modern American usage. Miller made some very similar comments regarding Christmas observance ten years earlier in a letter to the editor of *The Commercial Advertiser*, in New York, December 29, 1825 (see *The Blue Banner*, 2.11, November 1993.)]

We believe, and teach, in our public formularies, that there is no day, under the Gospel dispensation, commanded to be kept holy, except the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath.

We believe, indeed, and declare, in the same formula, that it is both scriptural and rational, to observe special days of Fasting and Thanksgiving, as the extraordinary dispensations of Divine Providence may direct. But we are persuaded, that even the keeping of these days, when they are made stated observances, recurring, of course, at particular times, whatever the aspect of Providence may be, is calculated to promote formality and superstition, rather than the edification of the body of Christ.

Our reasons for entertaining this opinion, are the following:

1. We are persuaded that there is no scriptural warrant for such observances, either from precept or example. There is no hint in the New Testament that such days were either observed or recommended by the Apostles, or by any of the churches in their time. The mention of Easter, in Acts 12:4, has no application to this subject. Herod was a Jew, not a Christian; and, of course, had no desire to honor a Christian solemnity. The real meaning of the passage is, - as the slightest inspection of the original will satisfy every intelligent reader; "intending after the Passover to bring him forth to the people."

2. We believe that the Scriptures not only do not warrant the observance of such days, but that they positively discountenance it. Let any one impartially weigh Colossians 2:16 and also, Galatians 4:9-11 and then say whether these passages do not evidently

indicate, that the inspired Apostle disapproved of the observance of such days.

3. The observance of Fasts and Festivals, by divine direction, under the Old Testament economy, makes nothing in favor of such observances under the New Testament dispensation. That economy was no longer binding, or even lawful after the New Testament Church was set up. It were just as reasonable to plead for the present use of the Passover, the incense, and the burnt offerings of the Old economy, which were confessedly done away by the coming of Christ, as to argue in favor of human inventions, bearing some resemblance to them, as binding in the Christian Church.

4. The history of the introduction of stated Fasts and Festivals by the early Christians, speaks much against both their obligation, and their edifying character. Their origin was ignoble. They were chiefly brought in by carnal policy, for the purpose of drawing into the Church Jews and Gentiles, who had both been accustomed to festivals and holy-days. And from the moment of their introduction, they became the signal for strife, or the monuments of worldly expedient, and degrading superstition.

As there were no holy-days, excepting the Lord's day, observed in the Christian Church while the Apostles lived; and no hint given that they thought any other expedient or desirable; so we find no hint of any such observance having been adopted until towards the close of the second century. Then, the celebration of Easter gave rise to a controversy; the Asiatic Christians pleading for its observance at the same time which was prescribed for the Jewish Passover, and contending that they were supported in this by apostolic tradition; while the Western Church contended for its stated celebration on a certain Sunday, and urged, with equal confidence, apostolic tradition in favor of their scheme. Concerning this fierce and unhallowed controversy, Socrates, the ecclesiastical historian, who wrote soon after the time of Eusebius, and begins his history where the latter closes his narrative; speaking on the controversy concerning Easter, expresses himself thus: "Neither the ancients, nor the fathers of later times, I mean such as favored the Jewish custom, had sufficient cause to contend so eagerly about the feast of Easter; for they considered not within

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themselves, that when the Jewish religion was changed into Christianity, the literal observance of the Mosaic law, and the types of things to come, wholly ceased. And this carries with it its own evidence. For no one of Christ's laws permits Christians to observe the rites of the Jews. Nay, the Apostle hath in plain words forbidden it, where he abrogates Circumcision, and exhorts us not to contend about feasts and holy-days. For, writing to the Galatians, he admonishes them not to observe days, and months, and times, and years. And unto the Colossians, he is as plain as may be, declaring, that the observance of such things was but a shadow. Neither the Apostles nor the Evangelists have enjoined on Christians the observance of Easter; but have left the remembrance of it to the free choice and discretion of those who have been benefited by such days. Men keep holy-days, because thereon they enjoy rest from toil and labor. Therefore, it comes to pass, that in every place they do celebrate, of their own accord, the remembrance of the Lord's passion. But neither our Savior nor his Apostles have any where commanded us to observe it." Socrates, Lib. 5, cap. 21.

Here, then, is an eminent Christian writer who flourished early in the fifth century, who had made the history of the Church his particular study; who explicitly declares, that neither Christ nor his Apostles gave any command, or even countenance to the observance of festival days; that it was brought into the Church by custom; and that in different parts of the Church there was diversity of practice in regard to this matter. With respect to Easter, in particular, this diversity was striking. We no sooner hear of its observance at all, than we begin to hear of contest, and interruption of Christian fellowship on account of it; some quoting the authority of some of the Apostles for keeping this festival on one day; and others, with equal confidence, quoting the authority of other Apostles for the selection of a different day: thereby clearly demonstrating, that there was error somewhere, and rendering it highly probable that all parties were wrong, and that no such observances at all, were binding on Christians.

The festival of Easter, no doubt, was introduced in the second century, in place of the Passover, and in accommodation to the same Jewish prejudice which had said, even during the apostolic age, "Except ye be circumcised, after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Hence, it was generally called *pascha*, and *pasch*, in conformity with the name of the Jewish festival, whose place it took. It seems to have received the title of Easter in Great Britain, from the circumstance, that, when Christianity was introduced into that country, a great

Pagan festival, celebrated at the same season of the year, in honor of the Pagan goddess Eostre, yielded its place to the Christian festival, which received, substantially, the name of the Pagan deity. The title of Easter, it is believed, is seldom used but by Britons and their descendants.

Few festivals are celebrated in the Romish Church, and in some Protestant Churches, with more interest and zeal than Christmas. Yet when Origen, about the middle of the third century, professes to give a list of the fasts and festivals which were observed in his day, he makes no mention of Christmas. From this fact, Sir Peter King, in his *Inquiry into the Constitution and worship, &c. of the Primitive Church*, &c. 1 infers, that no such festival was then observed; and adds, "It seems improbable that they should celebrate Christ's nativity, when they disagreed about the month and the day when Christ was born." Every month in the year has been assigned by different portions and writers of the Christian Church as the time of our Lord's nativity; and the final location of this, as well as other holy-days, in the ecclesiastical calendar, was adjusted rather upon astronomical and mathematical principles, than on any solid calculations of history.

5. But the motives and manner of introducing Christmas into the Christian Church, speak more strongly against it. Its real origin was this. Like many other observances, it was borrowed from the heathen. The well known Pagan festival among the Romans, distinguished by the title of Saturnalia, because instituted in honor of their fabled deity, Saturn, was celebrated by them with the greatest splendor, extravagance, and debauchery. It was, during its continuance, a season of freedom and equality; the master ceased to rule, and the slave to obey; the former waiting at his own table, upon the latter, and submitting to the suspension of all order, and the reign of universal frolic. The ceremonial of this festival was opened on the 19th of December, by lighting profusion of waxen candles in the temple of Saturn; and by suspending in their temple, and in all their habitations, boughs of laurel, and various kinds of evergreen. The Christian Church, seeing the unhappy moral influence of this festival; perceiving her own members too often partaking in its licentiousness; and desirous, if possible, of effecting its abolition, appointed a festival, in honor of her Master's birth, nearly about the same time, for the purpose of superseding it. In doing this, the policy was to retain as many of these habits which had prevailed in

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<sup>1</sup> Lord Peter King (1669-1734), *An enquiry into the constitution, discipline, unity and worship of the primitive church, that flourish'd within the first three hundred years after Christ. Faithfully collected out of the extant writings of those ages* (London, 1719).

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the Saturnalia as could in any way be reconciled with the purity of Christianity. They made their new festival, therefore, a season of relaxation and mirth, of cheerful visiting, and mutual presents. They lighted candles in their places of worship and adorned them with a profusion of evergreen boughs. Thus did the Romish Church borrow from the Pagans some of her most prominent observances; and thus have some observances of this origin been adopted and continued by Protestants.

6. It being evident, then, that stated fasts and festivals have no divine warrant, and that their use under the New Testament economy is a mere human invention; we may ask those who are friendly to their observance, what limits ought to be set to their adoption and use in the Christian Church? If it be lawful to introduce five such days for stated observance, why not ten, twenty, or five score? A small number were, at an early period, brought into use by serious men, who thought they were thereby rendering God service, and extending the reign of religion. But one after another was added, as superstition increased, until the calendar became burdened with between two and three hundred fasts and festivals, or saint's days, in each year; thus materially interfering with the claims of secular industry, and loading the worship of God with a mass of superstitious observances, equally unfriendly to the temporal and the eternal interests of men. Let the principle once be admitted, that stated days of religious observance, which God has no where commanded, may properly be introduced into the Christian ritual, and, by parity of reasoning, every one who, from good motives, can effect the introduction of a new religious festival, is at liberty to do so. Upon this principle was built up the enormous mass of superstition which now distinguishes and corrupts the Romish Church.

7. The observance of uncommanded holy-days is ever found to interfere with the due sanctification of the Lord's day. Adding to the appointments of God is superstition. And superstition has ever been found unfriendly to genuine obedience. Its votaries, like the Jews of old, have ever been found more tenacious of their own inventions, of traditionary dreams, than of God's revealed code of duty. Accordingly, there is, perhaps, no fact more universal and unquestionable, than that the zealous observers of stated fasts and festivals are characteristically lax in the observance of that one day which God has eminently set apart for himself, and on the sanctification of which all the vital interests of practical religion are suspended. So it was among the Israelites of old. As early as the fifth century, Augustine

complains that the superstitious observance of uncommanded rites, betrayed many in his time, into a spirit of irreverence and neglect towards those which were divinely appointed. So it is, notoriously, among the Romanists at the present day. And so, without any breach of charity, it may be said to be in every religious community in which zeal for the observance of uncommanded holy-days prevails. It is true, many in those communities tell us, that the observance of holy-days, devoted to particular persons and events in the history of the Church, has a manifest and strong tendency to increase the spirit of piety. But if this be so, we might expect to find much more scriptural piety in the Romish Church than in any other, since holy-days are ten times more numerous in that denomination than in the system of any Protestant Church. But is it so? Let those who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, decide.

If the foregoing allegations be in any measure well founded; if there be no warrant in God's word for any observances of this kind; if, on the contrary, the Scriptures positively discourage them; if the history of their introduction and increase mark an unhallowed origin; if, when we once open the door to such human inventions, no one can say how or when it may be closed; and if the observance of days, not appointed of God, has ever been found to exert an unfriendly influence on the sanctification of that holy-day which God has appointed, surely we need no further proof that it is wise to discard them from our ecclesiastical system.

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