

THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

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A Church Blazing With Vision

Wayne Rogers

Our Origin

The Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States (RPCUS) was born in 1983 out of a continuing struggle to uphold the all-embracing, inerrant authority of the Bible as the Word of God, to maintain the purity of the church, and to proclaim the truth of the Reformed faith "in all openness unhindered."

We believe that God has called us into existence to glorify him by being faithful to the Word of God, the historical Reformed faith, and the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. We agree with the late R.B. Kuiper who wrote, "*The truth of the matter is that we believe that the Reformed faith is the Christian faith in its most comprehensive and consistent formulation and...is Christianity in its purest and most precise expression.*" By this conviction we do not seek to judge all non-Reformed evangelicals as unbelievers. We simply insist that there is ultimately only one true religion taught in the Bible, and we believe that the most consistent and best expression of that religion is the Reformed faith. We are urgent and insistent about calling Christians and the Church back to the Reformed faith because as B.B. Warfield, a Princeton theologian of the last century, expressed it, "*It may be contended that the future, as the past, of Christianity itself is bound up with the fortunes of the Reformed faith.*"

Our Focus

The focus of our church's life, fellowship, worship, work and mission is GOD IN CHRIST, who is the "Savior of the world" and "the King of kings and Lord of lords." We strive through the grace of the Holy Spirit not to be doctrine or man centered but rather to be Trinity-centered. "Of him, through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever." As Augustine said, "Let God be all in all to thee, for in him is the entirety of all that thou lovest." We are "determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Our Faith

Without hesitation, mental reservation or embarrassment, we cordially hold to the total (original and unrevised) Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, which we believe are the system of truth taught in the Bible. We are called to defend, expound, and apply that system of truth, with all aspects of the worldview derived from it by good and necessary consequence, and with all of its distinctives in this present age of synthesis and apostasy.

We emphasize our sincere commitment to the Westminster Standards not because we place them on par with the Bible or slavishly follow the doctrines of men, but because those standards are truly our confession of faith. We believe them to constitute a true and accurate

statement of the teachings of the Bible. Only the Bible is infallible and unamendable. The Westminster Standards are amendable. They are not inerrant or close-ended. However, we believe that, because these Standards assert the very system of revealed truth of the Bible, we require of all our ministers, elders and deacons strict subscription to the Westminster Standards.

Our Mission

We believe that the mission of the church is the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, Mat. 28:18-20, which involves person-winning (evangelism and discipleship), family-winning (church planting and Christian education), and culture winning, (world-missions, world evangelization, and Christian Reconstruction) - "MAKING THE WORLD'S NATIONS CHRIST'S DISCIPLES."

"Christian Reconstruction" needs explanation. We believe that Christian Reconstruction is faithfulness to the Creation Mandate of Genesis 1:28 and the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. This mandate and commission comprise a unity. They must not be set in opposition to each other. The Great Commission is Christ's restatement of the Creation Mandate with the difference that it takes into account man's need of redemption. Christian Reconstruction, then, is the work of rebuilding and renewing every idea, activity, relationship, motive and institution of human existence and society by the Word and Spirit of God, beginning with the human heart.

To accomplish these ends God has established three institutions: the church, the state, and the family. The church is a ministry of redemption, worship, edification, mercy, and evangelism. While the church may not usurp the duties of the state and family, she must proclaim prophetically to those laboring in these institutions, calling them in the name of God, the Creator, King, Judge, Lawgiver, and Savior (Isa. 33:22), to conform their labors to the requirements of Scripture.

Since Christ has promised a glorious future when all nations will flow into His Kingdom, the growth of the church is normally to be expected. This growth, however, is accomplished not through adopting worldly means but by maintaining her antithesis with the world, closely adhering to the Great Commission, and only through means which are consistent with Holy Scripture. We believe this involves preeminently the faithful preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom and the whole counsel of God.

While the Great Commission in the full sense has been given to the church and to those specifically called and ordained to that task, every Christian is called upon to bear witness to Christ verbally in the context of his daily life and walk before the world as salt and light.

The task of the civil magistrate as a minister of God, Rom. 13:1ff, is maintaining justice, punishing criminals, and defending his citizens. The civil magistrate should not usurp the duties of the church or the family nor infringe upon their liberties or responsibilities given them by God. He should govern as a servant of God and maintain a peaceful environment in which the cultural and evangelical mandate may be carried out (I Tim. 2:2ff).

To the family has been given by God the cultural-redemptive mandate in terms of work, the bearing, rearing, nurture, discipline, and education of children, the right of private ownership of property, the transmission of inheritance, and, along with the church, the caring and providing for the poor, the elderly, the widow and the orphan. The family is the first church and state of the child, rearing them in terms of the law and grace of God. Thus, the Christian's life is not limited to or consumed by the Church, but it is also family and society focused.

Our motivation is Christ's person. Our foundation is Christ's work. Our power is Christ's Spirit. Our pattern is Christ's humanity. Our protection is Christ's Father. Our governing authority is Christ's deity. Our strategy is Christ's Word. Our hope is Christ's victory. Our mandate is Christ's law. Our food is Christ's sacraments. Our aim is Christ's glory. This is Christian Reconstruction.

Our Traits

Our churches can be identified by four leading traits:

1. The faithful and vigorous preaching and teaching of the whole Word of God
2. The faithful administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper
3. The loving and patient practice of preventive, corrective, and restorative discipline.
4. The zealous commitment to Christ's mandate to "MAKE THE WORLD HIS DISCIPLES"

Our Worship and Praise

Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, and as such she must worship Him according to His revealed will. We firmly believe in the Westminster Confession's regulative principle of worship. In worship we may only do what God commands. We believe in the joyful singing of God's praises with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, which are expressions of biblical truth, with all the musical instruments made available to us. We place a high value on the singing of the 150 Psalms and other portions of the Bible in our worship services. Our churches use songbooks like *The Trinity Hymnal*, the Covenanter's *The Book of Psalms*, and the Christian Reformed Church's *The Psalter-Hymnal*. We also use music as a medium for the spread of the gospel and the Reformed faith. We have several talented and professional singers and musicians whose recordings are marketed nationally and internationally.

Our Government

We believe that Christ is the Head of the church and the state, and that He has appointed a government in the hands of church officers, which government and jurisdiction are distinct from civil government. He has called his church to plant, nourish, equip and reproduce Presbyterian churches, i.e., churches shepherded by elders elected by the congregation to represent Christ and to administer His Word. When the elders of a local congregation meet officially, they are called the Session. When elders from each church in a certain locality meet officially to shepherd the churches committed to their charge, they are called a Presbytery. When the elders from all the churches in a denomination meet officially they are called the

General Assembly. This connection between our churches manifests the unity of Christ's Body in the world and our common confession of faith and government.

Our Discipline

Our Book of Church Order is the "Form of Presbyterian Church-Government" adopted by the Westminster Assembly in 1645, with appropriate footnotes adopted by the RPCUS. The Directory for the Public Worship of God also adopted by the Westminster Divines is our approved guide for worship within our churches. Our Form of Discipline consists of a single page, seven paragraph, statement concerning the necessity, basis, nature, and subjects of discipline.

Our Ecumenicity

We believe in the unity and catholicity of Christ's church. Therefore, we seek fellowship with all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and the Bible. We seek fraternal relations with all churches who sincerely hold to the historic Reformed and Presbyterian Confessions and Catechisms, such as the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, Covenanter; the Reformed Church in the United States, Eureka Classis; the Presbyterian Church in America; the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; the Free Presbyterian Church; etc.

We welcome into our membership any church or minister who shares our distinctives and our strict subscription to the Westminster Standards. We welcome into our churches all who can make a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ, with their children, Acts 16:31.

One of our greatest joys is working with churches, groups and individuals who are "on the way" to being Reformed, or who are in transition between synthetic brands of Christianity and the authentic Christianity of the Reformed faith. We recognize that there are churches and groups of families around the nation and world that are leaning for the first time in our direction, that are being attracted by the truth and power of Reformed Christianity. We long to be of assistance to them. Many of our strongest members and churches came out of non-Calvinistic backgrounds.

Our Locations and Ministries:

We presently have churches, mission works, and schools in Georgia, North Carolina, Washington State, Texas, Virginia, Tennessee, and Ecuador.

Our Website: www.rpcus.org

Our ministers have been involved in evangelistic endeavors throughout these United States, and in world missions in El Salvador, Chile, Paraguay, Argentina, South Africa, Germany, the Ukraine, England, and Scotland. William Farr, missionary to Ecuador, is supported by churches in our denomination.

The Counsel of Chalcedon, a monthly publication of the Chalcedon Presbyterian Church, is read by thousands of people around the world.

The New Southern Presbyterian Review, published by the Chalcedon Presbyterian Church, continues the tradition of the the Southern Presbyterian Review published from 1847 through 1885. The original Review was a stalwart promoter and defender of historical Biblical Reformed and Presbyterian Theology. THE NEW SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW is bringing back some of these original articles and keeping the tradition alive by new articles from various authors.

Our particular churches and mission works are involved in a wide range of ministries in their efforts to win the world to Christ (Mark 10:45). Since its establishment, our denomination has reached over 25 million people through its ministries and ministers with the Word of God. At present our influence far exceeds our numbers. We praise God for that, while at the same time working, praying, and planning for extensive and intensive church growth - spiritually, numerically, geographically, and heterogeneously.

Our Members

Our members come from a variety of races and backgrounds, from one end of the economic, academic, and social spectrum to the other. We are a multiplicity of races, woven by the Holy Spirit into one united body in Christ. We praise God for what He is making of us, and we pray that he will enable us "to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Our Future

We believe that God in his Word has promised his Church a glorious future in Jesus Christ (Isa. 2). We look forward to the future, knowing that it, with all its struggles, afflictions and progressive victories, belongs not to the humanists but to the faithful people of God (1 Cor. 3:21,22). We are future- oriented in our present responsibilities. Our vision for life and the future is determined by the promises of God's covenant and Christ's kingdom. We pray that God would use us to bring the covenantal blessings of salvation to all the families of all the nations of the world (Psa. 22:27ff.; Gal. 3:27-29). We believe that the kingdom of Christ and the preaching of the kingdom will leaven the whole loaf of human society as they advance toward complete victory (Mark 4:21-32). We work, pray and hope for the day when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the seas" (Isa. 11:9).

Our Invitation

If you would like to talk to us about uniting as a member, a minister, a church, a denomination, or if you would like to financially contribute to the planting of new churches, or if you have any further questions about who we are and what we stand for, we encourage you call us at 770-205-9390.

THE FORMATION OF THE RPCUS

On February 20, 1983 the Chalcedon Presbyterian Church congregation voted to withdraw from the Presbyterian Church in America, the denomination with which the church had been affiliated since its founding. We would like, here, to present the resolution which the congregation passed on that day in 1983.

A Resolution

1. Whereas Chalcedon Presbyterian Church has been raised up by God to glorify God by being faithful to the Word of God, the Reformed Faith, and the Great Commission;
2. Whereas the system of doctrine of the Westminster Standards is that of Holy Scriptures;
3. Whereas Chalcedon is called of God to defend, expound and apply that system and its worldview in an age when there is much synthesis with other systems and worldviews among liberal and conservative Presbyterian churches;
4. Whereas the officers of Chalcedon have taken vows to uphold those Standards in all their emphases and distinctives;
5. Whereas God's call to Chalcedon is to carry out the Great Commission which includes world evangelization and discipleship, church planting and nurturing, Christian education, and the Christian reconstruction of all areas and institutions of human society;
6. Whereas a growing laxity is apparent in North Georgia Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church in America concerning their commitment to and upholding of the Westminster Standards as the system of doctrine of the Bible;
7. Whereas this laxity is producing an increasing separation of Chalcedon and its strict confessional position from presbytery;
8. Whereas this laxity has allowed North Georgia Presbytery, within recent months, to receive ministers, who, at the time of their reception, would not affirm:
 - a. That theistic evolution is unbiblical;
 - b. That verbal revelation has ceased along with tongue speaking;
 - c. That regeneration necessarily precedes faith;
 - d. That reception of Jesus as Savior and Lord may never be divided into two distinct decisions or acts;
 - e. That Christians may not be divided into two categories – the carnal and the spiritual;
 - f. That the first day of the week from the resurrection of Christ to the end of the world is the Christian Sabbath;

9. Whereas it has become apparent to the officers of Chalcedon that there has developed an impasse between the presbytery and the session creating an immediate crisis of great potential danger for Chalcedon and her officers:

a. Chalcedon's session, in faithfulness to its ordination vows requires all the elders and deacons of Chalcedon to hold to theonomy¹ and postmillennialism², as taught in our Standards (along with the many other historical distinctives of Presbyterianism and Calvinism);

b. The majority interpretation of the Presbyterian Church in America's position on theonomy is that believing theonomy may not be used as a requirement to hold office in the Presbyterian Church in America;

c. The record of North Georgia Presbytery is clearly in opposition to strict adherence to the Confession;

d. The officers of Chalcedon are convinced that compromise on this issue is compromise of the Word of God, the demands of our vows, and the constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America;

e. It is apparent that the investigating committee from the presbytery, although comprised of very Christian men, is not in agreement with our position;

f. Presbytery has been successfully maneuvered into the position with Chalcedon that allows for only one of two alternatives – the present session must be removed from office or Chalcedon must withdraw from North Georgia Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church in America.

10. Whereas presbytery may, at a called meeting, suspend the session's authority to administer discipline along with its previous actions for the duration of the investigation;

11. Whereas, should Chalcedon remain in North Georgia Presbytery, it is certain that:

a. Presbytery would disallow our requirements for church office;

b. Chalcedon's session would respectfully refuse to comply with the decision;

c. Presbytery would be forced to discipline the session for insubordination, possibly dissolving the session and appointing a commission to rule Chalcedon until the situation is brought to a solution that is satisfactory to presbytery;

12. Whereas, our continual membership in the Presbyterian Church in America would mean continual complaints against Chalcedon because of her stand and actions;

13. Whereas, continual involvement in these complaints and appeals would be a constant drain on our precious time and limited energies;

14. Whereas, membership in North Georgia Presbytery will subject our congregation to continual harassment eventually demoralizing our people;

15. Whereas, the days in which we live are of such critical nature that distraction from our great commission to such lower priorities would be poor stewardship of our time and resources;

16. Whereas, suspension, discipline, or presbytery resolution against us would, potentially make the session unable to:

- a. Shepherd and lead its flock;
- b. Practice discipline;
- c. Preserve purity of doctrine and life in officers;
- d. Maintain the distinctives of Chalcedon.
- e. Carry out the Great Commission in its entirety;
- f. Place ministerial students trained by Chalcedon in pulpits in the Presbyterian Church in America.

17. Whereas, it is the responsibility of the session to protect the congregation from false doctrine and unnecessary disturbance;

18. Whereas, it is the responsibility of the congregation to protect her officers from unnecessary hardship or unjust treatment, such as disciplinary action because of faithfulness to ordination vows;

19. Whereas, if Chalcedon were to withdraw from the Presbyterian Church in America (with all her properties), she would establish an embryonic denomination that would be an authentic alternative to those Presbyterian bodies dominated and hampered by synthetic Calvinism; that would be thoroughly reformed, a haven for all those ministers and churches who have yearned in their hearts for such an opportunity;

20. Whereas, there is a critical need in America for a thoroughly reformed denomination possessed with the Biblical vision of a world converted to Jesus Christ through the faithfulness of His church to His word, by His Spirit to His glory;

Resolution: Therefore, by the grace of God, with grief for our brothers whom we leave and with joy because of the door God has opened for us – be it resolved that:

1. Chalcedon Presbyterian Church withdraw from North Georgia Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church in America effective this date.

2. Chalcedon Presbyterian Church continues to recognize as valid the ordination of her minister, elders and deacons.

3. A new embryonic presbytery be established for the glory of God, called Covenant Presbytery, a seminal Presbyterian denomination, which presbytery would have as its constitution the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, requiring strict subscription to them by all church officers.³

4. We invite all churches and ministers who share our vision to join with us in this great undertaking to the glory of God “in all openness, unhindered.”

Endnotes:

1. For the Westminster Standards on theonomy, the application of the Old Testament case laws see:

- a. Chapter XIX, paragraph IV.
- b. Chapter XXIII, paragraph III, and Scriptural footnotes(in the original).
- c. Chapter XXIV, paragraph IV, and Scriptural footnotes.
- d. Scriptural footnotes to questions 99-148 in the Larger Catechism.

2. For the Westminster Standards on postmillennialism see:

- a. Question 191 in the Larger Catechism and Scriptural footnotes.
- b. Question 45 in the Larger Catechism and Scriptural footnotes.
- c. Question 26 in the Shorter Catechism and Scriptural footnotes.
- d. Chapter VIII, paragraph VIII and Scriptural footnotes.

3. The Westminster Confession of Faith is interpreted according to the intention of its original authors and as interpreted by Covenant Presbytery.

RPCUS DISTINCTIVES AND THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

REV. JOHN M. OTIS

Introduction

The governing constitution of the RPCUS (Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States) is the original Westminster Confession of Faith with its accompanying Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Presbyterian Church Government, and the Directory For Public Worship of God. Outside of its general commitment to the doctrines of the Reformed Faith found in the Westminster Standards, the RPCUS is known for its adherence to four specific areas in addition to all other Reformed doctrines in the Standards. The purpose of this article is to outline these distinctives, giving documentation from the Standards for their insistence. There are those in the Reformed community who already have a perception of the RPCUS' distinctives, and others are unaware of them. This paper will clarify those distinctives.

What are the particular distinctives characterizing this denomination? First, we affirm a presuppositional approach to apologetics. We also acknowledge ourselves to be a theonomic denomination. Third, we believe in a postmillennial eschatology. Fourth, the RPCUS advocates that all areas of ecclesiastical authority be exercised by biblically qualified males. Specifically, the RPCUS only allows male heads of households to participate in congregational voting.

The question that has been raised by some Reformed brethren is: To what extent does the RPCUS demand subscription of its officers to these distinctives? The answer is: The RPCUS requires all of its teaching and ruling elders along with its deacons to subscribe to these distinctives. These distinctives are not the only emphases of the denomination, for they are only part of that total Reformed system of doctrine set forth by the Standards. Allegiance to these four distinctives does not mean that the RPCUS is obsessed with only these four areas. The denomination is committed to all of the Reformed doctrines set forth by each chapter of the Confession. Moreover, the RPCUS insists that these four distinctives are inseparable from the entire system of doctrine delineated by the Standards. The denomination would not see contrary views as acceptable exceptions to the Standards.

The reason why we are drawing attention to these four distinctives is because other Presbyterian denominations permit divergent views in these areas. For example, some Presbyterian denominations practice eschatological liberty. They permit their officers to hold to historic premillennial and amillennial schemes. In rare instances, dispensational premillennialists have been accepted into various presbyteries. The RPCUS does not practice eschatological liberty. We do not believe that the Standards are eschatologically vague. We believe that eschatology plays a key role in the overall system of doctrine taught in our Standards and in the Word of God. For one's future view powerfully impacts one's present actions.

Before we discuss these four distinctives, we need to define "strict subscription" to the Westminster Standards. Strict subscription does not mean that we view the Westminster

Standards to be on par with Scripture. The Scripture alone is preeminently authoritative. The Westminster Confession of Faith is careful to make this point in chapter 1 section X which reads, “The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture.”

The RPCUS believes that the ordination vow taken by all of its officers is itself a strict subscription to the Westminster Standards. The vow reads, “Do you sincerely receive and fully adopt the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures...?” Strict subscription does mean that one adopts all the doctrines set forth in every chapter of the Confession. Someone might ask, “How far does the RPCUS take its demand for subscription?” The answer is : It goes as far as every chapter of the Confession and every question of the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

Strict subscription does not mean that one must adopt every wording of the Standards as the best explanation of the system of doctrine. Of course, we must be careful with any modification of words seeing that words are the vehicles that convey thought. Moreover, we must be careful not to twist the meaning of words in order to create a different sense than originally intended. This type of perversion was done by the 1972 PCUS General Assembly pertaining to the meaning of the phrase, “containing the system of doctrine.” The General Assembly said with reference to the Standards, “On the other hand, since they are said to contain the system rather than to be equated with it, allowance is made for the possibility that they may incorporate elements which neither belong to it nor are essential to it” (quoted in Morton Smith, *How Is The Gold Become Dim*, p. 224). The 1972 PCUS General Assembly further stated, “none of us will traduce or use any opprobrious terms of those that differ from us in these extra-essential and not necessary points of doctrines” (Ibid.). Even though this wording is in the 1729 Adopting Act, the meaning of the words “extra-essential” and “not necessary points of doctrine” came to be so broadly interpreted that it would embrace non-Reformed doctrine and heresy. It became the agenda of the PCUS to act as if it was committed to the Westminster standards, but functionally it abandoned its foundational tenets. By its own admission, the PCUS in its later days confessed to being a loose subscriptionist denomination.

The doctrines and wording of the Westminster Standards are clear. The RPCUS expects all of its officers to give allegiance to every doctrine of every chapter of the Confession. This doctrinal allegiance applies only to elders and deacons -- not to church members. All that is required to become a member in any church of the RPCUS is to give a credible profession of faith to the church session. In essence, there is nothing extraordinary about the RPCUS' expectations. We simply believe in subscription to our Constitution. There are undoubtedly some of our Reformed brethren who think we are too narrow because we are presuppositional, theonomic, postmillennial, and limit congregational voting to male heads of households. The RPCUS insists that these particular distinctives are not extraneous doctrines to the Standards; rather, they are the doctrines of the Standards.

A Commitment To Presuppositional Apologetics

The RPCUS advocates a presuppositional approach to apologetics in the Van Tilian tradition. The heart of presuppositional apologetics is its insistence that the debate between Christianity and all competing systems of philosophy occurs at the worldview level. Individuals always define and interpret the facts according to their governing presuppositions, i.e., their worldview. Accordingly, it is pointless to argue endlessly with the unbelievers about “the facts.” Rather, we must challenge the foolishness of the unbeliever’s philosophy of fact, his worldview. Accordingly, apologetics will always involve a debate about ultimate starting points or presuppositions. These presuppositions constitute the highest authority to which one can appeal. One’s ultimate starting point is the foundation that one assumes to be true, an assumption that is often made without critical analysis or independent verification. It is one’s foundational axiom.

The Christian’s ultimate starting point is self-attesting Scriptures. The Scriptures are our foundational axiom. God’s word must be the ultimate starting point instead of subjective human experience or the independent facts of the universe. “A presuppositional method of apologetics assumes the truth of Scripture in order to argue for the truth of Scripture. Such is unavoidable when ultimate truths are being debated” (Greg Bahnsen, *A Biblical Introduction To Apologetics*, Classroom syllabus 1976, p. 34).

One of the central issues in apologetics is the issue of certainty. Why do we believe Christianity to be the only true religion? On what basis do we believe Christianity to be true? First, Christianity can never be reduced to a probability statement. Christianity is not probably true; it is an absolute certainty. The Bible does not ask men to first establish the Bible’s reliability and then put their trust in it. The Bible makes absolute demands upon man. The Bible testifies to its own authority. Our certainty rests upon the Scripture’s self-attestation to its authority and truthfulness. The Bible is not open for independent verification. Van Til saw that it was sinful for man to call into question the Bible’s veracity. Man must bow in humility to the Bible’s authority and repent of his own autonomous thoughts.

Among some Reformed brethren, there are two other apologetic methodologies. Some are Christian rationalists, being followers of Gordon H. Clark, and others are evidentialists. For Clark, the ultimate test for truth is coherence, and undergirding this is the supremacy of the law on non-contradiction. A person chooses a self-consistent system over against a self-contradictory one (Gordon Clark, *A Christian View of Man and Things*, p.34). Clark maintained that systematic consistency is a test for revelations from God. Clark said, “If Bible doctrines are self-consistent, they have met the only legitimate test of reason. This test of logic is precisely the requirement that a set of propositions be meaningful, whether spoken by God or man” (quoted in Gilbert Weaver, *The Concept of Truth In the Apologetic Systems of Gordon Hadden Clark and Cornelius Van Til*, p.77).

Clark put great emphasis upon the use of reason, for Clark said, “The intelligibility of the Scripture presupposes logic. Therefore, anyone who is in the business of selecting first principles would seem to do better by choosing the law of non-contradiction as the axiom rather than Scripture. Scripture without logic would have no meaning” (Ronald Nash, ed. *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, p.64).

Regarding the issue of certainty, Clark made the following comments: “Logical consistency therefore is evidence of inspiration; but it is not demonstration. Strong accidents do happen to occur, and no proof is forthcoming that the Bible is not such an accident” (quoted in Howard F. Vos, ed. *How May I Know My Bible is Inspired, Can I trust My Bible*, p. 24).

Regarding the use of Scripture in apologetics, Clark said, “the first reason for believing the Bible is inspired is that the Bible claims to be inspired ... It is circular. We believe the Bible to be inspired because it makes the claim, and we believe the claim because it is inspired and therefore true. This does not seem to be the right way to argue” (Ibid. p. 10). Essentially, Clark believed that the apologist’s task, in part, was to reduce anti-Christian systems to absurdity. Clark maintained that Christian propositions are consistent with each other and thereby show the validity of the axiom that Christianity is truth. Hence, logical consistency is Christianity’s test for truth. We will reserve analysis of Clark’s methodology until we have listed another major approach to apologetics.

E.J. Carnell was an advocate of another major approach to apologetics known as evidentialism. Carnell said that truth is what God says it is. How do we know when God is speaking truth? We must test truth claims to determine their validity. Regarding one’s starting point for apologetics, Carnell has said, “I have always been warmly attracted to the Cartesian starting point, for it has close affinities with my own procedure” (E.J. Carnell, *Christian Commitment*, p. 37). The Cartesian starting point is: I think therefore I am. Carnell continued, “Here is what I defend: I think therefore, I am morally obliged to admit to reality of my own existence” (Ibid).

Regarding the relationship of faith to evidences, Carnell has said, “We have defined generic faith as a resting of the mind in the sufficiency of the evidences, saving Faith is a cordial trust in the person and work of Christ. But saving faith is built on the foundation of generic faith, for we could never yield ourselves to cordial trust unless the whole man rested in the sufficiency of the evidences” (Carnell, *Christian Commitment*, p. 267). For the evidentialist, the truthfulness of the Bible rests upon the weight of evidences. For the Christian apologist, the preponderance of evidence proves Christianity to be true. Evidentialism demands that man, even non-Christian man, be the determining judge of what constitutes a legitimate proof; therefore, man is the ultimate starting point for truth, not the Scripture itself.

Having set forth three major approaches to apologetics, which one does the Westminster Standards advocate? In chapter 1 section IV, the Westminster Confession states, “The authority of the holy scriptures, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, (who is truth itself,) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God.” The Confession goes on to describe the uniqueness of the Scriptures as being spiritual in content, possessing great doctrines, having majestic literary style, setting forth a unity of doctrine spanning all sixty –six books, which were written by different authors over centuries of time. The Confession says that these are “arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God; yet, not withstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts” (Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1 section V).

The Westminster Confession clearly adopts a presuppositional approach to apologetics. The Bible's internal testimony to its inspiration and authority is our starting point. God has sovereignly revealed Himself in its pages, and his Word exercises unquestionable authority over all men. Some might say, "The RPCUS is being rather narrow or nit-picking in what it deems as an acceptable apologetic approach." The issue at stake is no minor one. One of the great doctrines of the Westminster Standards is that of the sovereignty of God. Man exists to bring glory to His sovereign God, and any perspective that detracts from this central point diminishes this doctrinal truth. Man's experiences, his observations, and his reasoning can never be the criteria upon which man stands as judge over God. Any apologetic methodology that begins with man and not with God as He is revealed in Scripture is insulting to the God of Scripture. The God of the Bible cannot come to us in any other way than that which is consistent with Himself. God has revealed Himself as the I AM THAT I AM, one who is self explanatory, one who is accountable to no one but Himself. If God chooses to reveal Himself in Scripture, then the Scripture needs no verification. The Bible's self-attesting authority demands that man submit his whole being (mind, heart, and will) to the word of God. Yes, the Bible is the most rational explanation of the universe, and the evidences or facts of the universe do point to Christianity's truthfulness. However, this alone is not what makes Christianity the only true religion. The Bible is not true because of the facts, but the facts are true because the Bible is true! An overriding doctrine of the Standards is that man, the creature, is the servant of God the creator, not vice versa. The Clarkian and evidentialist approaches to apologetics must be abandoned because they are not faithful to Scripture nor to the Confessional Standards. It is on this basis that the RPCUS insists that its officers adopt a presuppositional approach to apologetics.

The Theonomic Distinctive

A second distinguishing feature of the RPCUS is that it is a theonomic denomination. We are quite aware of the controversy in the Reformed world over this point, and we are grieved that this is even an issue, for we believe that the Scripture and the Confessional Standards are quite clear. Without discussing great detail, the debate has focused upon the continuing validity of the judicial or case laws of the Old Testament for our modern culture. The position of the RPCUS has been that it simply adopts at face value chapters 19 and 23 of the Westminster Confession of Faith pertaining to the law of God and to the civil magistrate. Several key points need to be made. First, the RPCUS adopts chapter 23 in its entirety as originally framed by the Westminster delegates. We reject the revisions to the Confession made by the Adopting Act of 1729. It took exception to section III of chapter 23 of the Westminster Confession pertaining to the duty of the civil magistrate. The Adopting Act viewed this section as extra-essential and not as a necessary point of doctrine. One problem with referring to sections of the Confession as extra-essential and not necessary is: What is the basis for determining what is not essential and necessary? A very dangerous precedent is set, and it paves the way for abandoning the doctrines of the Standards. This is what happened historically in the PCUS in its eventual slide into apostasy.

The RPCUS also sees a great error in what the Synod of New York and Philadelphia did in 1788 in amending chapter 23 of the Confession regarding the duties of the civil magistrate. It deleted portions of section III of chapter 23. The section that it deleted was: "it is his duty, to

take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.” Several Scriptural proof texts are provided by the Westminster delegates to demonstrate the legitimacy of this section. The point is: The civil magistrate, though a separate institution from the church, is still accountable to God to be as Romans 13:4 says, “a minister of God to you for good...” The civil magistrate as God’s minister is commissioned to uphold the law of God as revealed in Scripture. One of the proof texts in the Confession cites King Josiah and his thorough abolishment of pagan worship centers in Israel. This section of the Confession clearly renounces the idea of religious pluralism in a Christian culture. Non-Christian religions are not given equal footing with Christianity. In fact, they are not to be tolerated in the sense that they are not to be allowed by the state to proselytize a community.

A second point emphasized by the RPCUS is that chapter 19 section IV of the Confession is not vague or unclear in its meaning and application. The section reads, “with regard to the nation of Israel, To them also, as a body politick, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.” The controversy over the issue of theonomy revolves around the phrase, “not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.” Many in the Reformed community who oppose theonomy say, “Since the nation of Israel has expired as a political body, the judicial laws of Moses do not apply to us at all.

The theonomic position is that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament are no longer obligatory upon God’s people. They foreshadowed the atoning work of Christ. Now that the reality has come, there is not a need for the types and shadows of the old covenant. The judicial or case laws are still to be enforced, however, for these laws are specific illustrations of how to carry out God’s moral law as summarized in the ten commandments. Greg Bahnsen, the author of *Theonomy In Christian Ethics*, wrote, “The case law illustrates the applications or qualification of the principle laid down in the general commandment” (p. 313). Bahnsen further stated, “The case laws outside of the Decalogue (also called “judicial laws” in Reformed literature) are thus moral in character. Because their details are often communicated in terms of ancient Israel’s culture, these laws are not binding as such on us in today’s culture; rather, we are now required to keep the underlying principle (or “general equity”) of these laws” (Greg Bahnsen, “God’s Law and Gospel Prosperity: A Reply to the Editor of the Presbyterian Journal,” p. 15).

Accordingly, the phrase, “general equity,” in the Westminster Confession indicates that the underlying principle of the case law is what is obligatory upon us today. Bahnsen has said, “Likewise, as an application of the sixth commandment, “Thou shall not kill” the law of God required Israelites to place a fencing around the roofs of their houses. The underlying principle of this law still applies to us today, even though we may not apply it to entertaining on flat roofs since this is not part of our cultural experience; instead we might apply it today by placing a fence around our backyard swimming pools - again, in order to protect human life and thus obey the general precept of God’s law” (Ibid. p.14).

The meaning of “general equity” is not open to a variance of meaning or application. The meaning of words must always be understood in the historical context in which they are found. How did the English Puritans who wrote the Confession understand the meaning of these words? How did the American Puritans understand their meaning and application? We need to let the authors of the Confession speak for themselves, and then the mystery of the debate over theonomy should be over! The theonomic position should not be seen as an ethical innovation. It is a restatement of standard Puritan and Reformed thought.

One of the most important works done in recent time is Martin A. Foulner’s book, *Theonomy and the Westminster Confession*, published in 1997. Foulner has given us a masterful compilation of quotes by the English and American Puritans, which forever settles the issue from an historical and scholarly point of view. The Puritans of the 17th Century were theonomists! Who better to give us an understanding of the meaning of chapter 19 of the Confession than those English Puritans who attended the Westminster Assembly and helped formulate the wording of the Confession? Two notable delegates of the Westminster Assembly were George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford. Regarding the applicability of the Mosaic judicial law, Gillespie said, “I heartily yield that a lawful magistrate, whether Christian or heathen, ought to be a keeper or guardian of both tables; and as God’s viceregent, hath authority to punish heinous sins against either table, by civil or corporal punishments, which proves nothing against a distinct church government for keeping pure the ordinances of Christ” (George Gillespie, *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming; or, the Divine Ordinances of Church Government Vindicated*, 1646 as quoted in Martin Foulner’s *Theonomy and the Westminster Confession*, p. 14).

Samuel Rutherford, another delegate of the Westminster Assembly, used language similar to that of the Confession when he wrote, “It is clear the question must be thus stated, for all the lawes of the old Testament (which we hold in their morall equite to be perpetual) that are touching blasphemies, heresies, solicitation to worship false Gods and the breach of which the Godly Magistrate was to punish, command or forbid onely such things as may be proved by two or three witnesses...” (Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty of Conscience*, p. 47 as quoted in Foulner, p. 16).

In 1649 the Commissioners of the Westminster Assembly wrote *A Solemn Testimony Against Toleration*. In it they said, “For it cannot be shown that any part of that power which magistrates had under the Old Testament is repealed under the new, neither can any convincing reason be brought, why it should be of narrower extent now nor then. Are not blasphemies, heresies and errors dishonourable to God, and destructive unto souls as well now as of old?” (Quoted in Foulner, p. 33).

In his book, *Theonomy and the Westminster Confession*, Foulner quotes from other English Puritans who attended the Westminster Assembly and who believed in carrying out the punishments of the Mosaic judicial laws. These other Puritans were Jeremiah Burroughs, Herbert Palmer, William Reyner, Richard Vines, Thomas Hodges, and Philip Nye.

In keeping with Puritan tradition, the RPCUS affirms that the Westminster Standards are theonomic documents; therefore, nothing short of affirming the general theonomic position is

acceptable for all officers of the RPCUS. In saying this, we need to clarify a very important point. The RPCUS endorses theonomy as it is stated in chapters 19 and 23 of the original Confession. There are some theonomists today who believe the dietary laws of the Old Testament are still operative; however, this is a position not held by many other theonomists. The predominant opinion of these is that the dietary laws fall more under the ceremonial law than they do under the judicial laws. Moreover, there is sometimes difference of opinion among theonomists in how the principles of the case laws should be enforced. For example, are federal regulatory agencies such as the FAA and OSHA legitimate applications of the principles of the case laws of the Old Testament. Some theonomists have said “yes” and others “no.” Herein is a certain latitude of differing thought within the overall theonomic position.

The RPCUS, as a presbyterial examination body, wants to hear from a prospective officer that he endorses the basic theonomic position of the Westminster Confession as stated in chapter 19 section IV. The presbytery often asks further questions of the candidate to determine what he understands to be the meaning of “general equity.” If the candidate says, “I believe the Mosaic civil or judicial laws are still valid in the application of their basic principle,” then this would be considered as an acceptable answer.

The Postmillennial Distinctive

A third distinctive of the RPCUS is that we are a postmillennial denomination. We do not practice eschatological liberty because the Westminster Standards do not allow such liberty. Again, the operating principle of the RPCUS is that we subscribe to all the doctrines of every chapter of the Confession. All forms of premillennialism are unacceptable viewpoints. Dispensational premillennialism is fundamentally out of accord with the Standards by espousing a view that denies covenant theology, which is the clear position of the Standards. Historic premillennialism is out of accord due to the following reasons: 1) It believes that the kingdom of God in its fullest sense will not be present on earth until Christ’s second coming when He establishes an earthly reign of at least a thousand years. 2) It believes that the effects of the gospel will not bring about worldwide conversion and cultural renewal. It believes that the world is steadily getting worse, culminating in a great apostasy, the rise of the antichrist, and the Great Tribulation at the end of the church age. 3) It believes in two bodily resurrections. The first, commonly called the Rapture, occurs at Jesus’ second coming. The second bodily resurrection, commonly known as the Great White Throne Judgment, occurs at the end of the millennial reign of Christ.

Where are the tenants of historic premillennialism out of accord with the Westminster Standards? The Confession and Larger Catechism do not differentiate as separate events the second coming of Christ, the last day, and the great day of judgment. All these events are contemporaneous, meaning that these are all facets of one great event. There are not two bodily resurrections but only one, and there is no time separation between these events such as a thousand-year reign of Christ. Chapter 32 sections II and III of the Westminster Confession refer to the last day as the day of resurrection for both the righteous and unrighteous. Chapter 33 speaks of the Day of Judgment where the righteous and the unrighteous will be judged. Chapter 33 section III associates this great Day of Judgment with Christ’s Second Coming. Larger Catechism question # 87 states, “What are we to believe concerning the resurrection? Part of the

answer states, “We are to believe, that at the last day there shall be a general resurrection of the dead,... both of the just and unjust: when they that are then found alive shall in a moment be changed...” The answer to Larger Catechism question # 88 refers to the day of resurrection, the Day of Judgment, and Christ’s Second Coming as one event. Question # 88 states, “What shall immediately follow after the resurrection?” The answer states, “Immediately after the resurrection shall follow the general and final judgment of angels and men; the day and hour whereof no man knoweth, that all may watch and pray, and be ever ready for the coming of the Lord.”

Shorter Catechism question # 28 asks, “Wherein consisteth Christ’s exaltation? The answer states, “Christ’s exaltation consisteth in His rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.” We can see that the Shorter Catechism links Christ’s coming and His judgment of the world with the last day.

Larger Catechism question and answer # 56 links Christ’s coming with the last day, which is also the Day of Judgment. The question states, “How is Christ to be exalted in his coming again to judge the world?” The answer states, “Christ is to be exalted in his coming again to judge the world, in that he, who was unjustly judged and condemned by wicked men, shall come again at the last day in great power, and in the full manifestation of his own glory, and of his Father’s, with all his holy angels, with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, to judge the world in righteousness.” Historic premillennialism has always associated I Thessalonians 4:16 with the Rapture, where Christ descends with a shout, with a voice of an archangel, and with a trumpet. Yet, the Rapture is supposedly separated from the Day of Judgment by at least a thousand years. The Larger Catechism refutes this notion, and it emphatically states that Christ, “shall come again at the last day in great power...” Moreover, the Catechism states that Christ is exalted “in his coming again to judge the world.” Hence, the Second Coming and the great Day of Judgment are one event!

Amillennialists would agree with every correction that we have pointed out with reference to the premillennialists. There are great similarities between amillennialists and postmillennialists, but the basic difference between the two is paramount and is of such magnitude that an amillennialist would not pass a theological exam in the RPCUS. While the amillennialist does believe that Jesus is presently reigning in this age, he is essentially pessimistic in his view of history. He does not believe that the gospel will prosper in bringing about the Christianization of the world. He believes that culture will continue to decline , leading to a great apostasy which culminates in Christ’s Second Coming at the end of this millennial age.

Some might say that the RPCUS’ postmillennial position is too dogmatic and too narrow in denying amillennialists entrance into the denomination. Yet, the distinguishing mark of postmillennial eschatology is central. It believes in the victory of the gospel in space and time during the present millennial age. The Great Commission of Christ in Matthew 28:18-20 will be accomplished in history prior to Christ’s Second Coming. The knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea as promised in Isaiah 11:9 and in Habakkuk 2:14. King Jesus will take possession of His inheritance as was promised Him by the Father in

Psalm 2:7,8. Verse 8 says, “Ask of Me and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession.” From His ascended throne in heaven, King Jesus exercises His kingly reign by subduing His enemies, making them a footstool for His feet just as Hebrews 10:12,13 says, “but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.”

The postmillennialist asks every amillennialist, “How can a sovereign God, who has foreordained the end from the beginning and who has all power, ever lose?” The Great Commission is not the foreordination of defeat but of victory. This optimism is seen in the Larger Catechism question and answer # 54, “How is Christ exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God?” Part of the answer states, “Christ...doth gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies;...” Shorter Catechism question # 26 asks, “How does Christ execute the office of a king?” The answer is: “Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.” One of the proof texts given by the Westminster delegates on this question and answer is Psalm 110 and I Corinthians 15:25. The Corinthian passage says, “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.”

Larger Catechism question # 191 states, “What do we pray for in the second petition?” The answer is: “In the second petition, (which is, Thy kingdom come,) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fulness of the Gentiles brought in, the church furnished with gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption,...”

This portion of the Lord’s prayer is unquestionably postmillennial. A prayer for the kingdom of sin and Satan to be destroyed is a prayer for the victory of the gospel in the millennial age. Since the first promise of the Messiah in Genesis 3:15, there has been enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. We know the seed of the woman (Christ and His seed, i.e., his people) shall have ultimate victory over the seed of the serpent (Satan and His seed, i.e., his followers). We know that the woman’s seed is the church of Christ, all the elect of God, and the serpent’s seed is all the reprobate, the children of the Devil. In Genesis 22:17 we have the promise that Abraham’s seed will possess the gates of their enemies. Galatians 3:29 identifies the church as the seed of Abraham. To possess an enemy’s gate is to conquer one’s enemy. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus promised His church that the gates of Hell would not be able to withstand the assault of the church. From II Corinthians 10:3-5 we learn that the church has divinely empowered spiritual weapons for the destruction of fortresses. The church destroys ungodly speculations and brings all thoughts captive to Christ’s obedience. We know that Jesus’ millennial reign shall be victorious as noted by Psalm 2; Psalm 110; I Corinthians 15:20-28; Hebrews 10:12,13; and Ephesians 1:20-23. Since prayer is a means ordained by God to bring about His sovereign decrees, would God have us pray for something that He does not intend to accomplish? Of course not!

When we are commanded to pray that the gospel be propagated throughout the world, we are praying that the gospel accomplish its intended purpose – that of the Christianization of the

world's nations. This is the promise of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. In verse 18 Jesus said that he possessed all authority in heaven and earth. In light of this fact, Jesus commanded His church to go and make disciples of the world's nations. Since Jesus said that he would be with the church to the end of the world, this means that His sovereign power would always be energizing His church to fulfill her task.

The prayer for the Jews to be called to Christ is a fulfillment of what was promised in Romans 11:26 that all ethnic Israel would be saved, that she, the natural branch, would be grafted back onto the tree. The prayer that the fullness of the Gentiles be brought in is a prayer for the Christianization of the world in accord with Matthew 28:18-20 and what was promised in Psalm 22:27,28 that all the families of the nations will worship God. It is also a prayer for the fulfillment of the promise in Isaiah 2:2-4 that the peoples of the earth will stream to the mountain of the house of the Lord to learn the ways of Jehovah, and the nations will beat their weapons of war into tools of productivity to the glory of God.

The Westminster Standards are postmillennial. What the RPCUS wants to hear from its candidates is that they believe in the success of the gospel during the millennial age before the Second Coming of Christ.

Congregational Voting By Male Heads of Households

The fourth distinguishing characteristic of the RPCUS is that we believe that only male heads of households have a right to vote in a congregational meeting. The RPCUS believes that other Presbyterian and Reformed denominations do not go far enough in limiting the role of women in the church. I Corinthians 14:34,35 states, "Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church." The text is clear that women are prohibited in speaking in church worship services. If they have theological questions they are to look to their own husbands. The governing principle is that they are to be in subjection. To speak in worship is not to be in subjection. The contrast is clear in the passage – "for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves,..." I Timothy 2:11-14 gives a similar admonition – "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression."

Many denominations have correctly understood this passage as a prohibition against women officers (teaching and ruling elders and deacons). However, they have fallen short of its total prohibition. A congregational vote is an exercise of rule in the church. It is an exercise of ecclesiastical power. One of the foremost responsibilities of a congregation meeting is the selection of church officers, from the pastor to ruling elders and to deacons. This selection has tremendous and long term affects in the ministry of any particular church. The selection of officers is probably the most important decision in the life of any church. Since it is not unusual for women to constitute a greater number of communing or voting members in a church, this means that women can out vote the male members and determine who is to be church officers. It

is not uncommon for Presbyterian pulpit committees (a committee selected by the congregation to locate prospective pastors and bring recommendations to the congregation for a vote) to be comprised of at least one woman. This means the woman's vote carries even more power, seeing that the pulpit committee is not that large. The ability to select one man over another as a church officer is an exercise of authority or rule in the church. It is totally out of accord with biblical admonitions that the women are to be submissive to men and remain quiet in church. I Corinthians 11:3 is very forthright in the line of authority – “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.” The principle of submission is magnificently brought out in I Peter 3:5,6 regarding the submission of wives to their husbands – “For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.” Yes, this context along with I Corinthians 11 has primary reference to the relationship of husbands and wives; however, the principle of womanly submission to male headship is not totally restricted to the marriage relationship, for we noted earlier that Paul's prohibition against women having authority over men is also grounded in the principle of submission. Note carefully that Paul prefaces this prohibition by I Timothy 2:11 which says, “Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.” For a woman to possess the power of a congregational vote is totally inconsistent with the cultivation and manifestation of submission to male headship in the life of the church.

The question might be raised by some, “The RPCUS has sought to give a biblical defense of their prohibition against women's suffrage, but where in the Westminster Standards is this position defended?” First, any doctrine that is biblical is also a doctrine that is either explicitly or implicitly set forth in the Standards. As we examine the Westminster Standards, we will find no explicit chapter or catechism question and answer dealing with the issue of women's suffrage in the life of the church, but we should not be misled to think that the issue is not addressed in some form. For example, we do not find any explicit mention in the Westminster Standards prohibiting women from holding church office. Are we to interpret this to mean that the Standards do not have a position regarding this issue? In the historical context, this was not an issue. However, the Westminster Standards are not completely silent regarding the role of women in the church. We can implicitly build a case by looking at the Scriptural proof texts given in the document entitled, *The Form of Presbyterian Church Government.*” In the section of this document dealing with pastors, we find the following comments concerning the public reading of the Scriptures: “That the priests and Levites in the Jewish church were entrusted with the public reading of the word is proved. That the ministers of the gospel have as ample a charge and commission to dispense the word, as well as other ordinances, as the priests and Levites had under the law, proved, Isa. Lxvi. 21. Matt. xxiii. 34 where our Saviour entitleth the officers of the New Testament, whom he will send forth, by the same names of the teachers of the Old.” It is clear from this statement that a parallel is being drawn between the priests and Levites of the Old Testament with ministers of the gospel in the New Testament. Obviously, there are dissimilarities between the two groups, but there are similarities as well. The similarities are addressed in the proof texts. Deuteronomy 31:9-11 and I Timothy 3:2 are cited. In these two proof texts, we find that Moses wrote the law, giving it to the priests, the sons of Levi for them to publicly read to the congregation of Israel. We are told in I Timothy 3:2 that one of the qualifications for an elder is that, if he is married, he is to be the husband of one wife. Hence,

we see that the Westminster Standards do implicitly teach from their proof texts that only males are to hold church office.

In *The Form of Presbyterian Church Government*, we read in the section on ordination the following definition: “Ordination is the solemn setting apart of a person to some publick church office.” The proof text given for this point is Numbers 8:10-22. This portion of Scripture deals with the presentation of the Levites to the Lord for their priestly service. Numbers 8:9,10 reads, “So you shall present the Levites before the tent of meeting. You shall also assemble the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, and present the Levites before the Lord; and the *sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites.*” Only the male representatives were engaged in setting apart other males for religious service. Keil and Delitzsch state in their commentary on Numbers, “Moses was then to cause them to draw near before the tabernacle, *i.e.*, to enter the court, and to gather together the whole congregation of Israel, *viz.*, in the persons of their heads and representatives. After this the Levites were to come before Jehovah, *i.e.*, in front of the altar; and the children of Israel, *i.e.*, the tribe princes in the name of the Israelites, were to lay their hands upon them.....that by this symbolic act they might transfer to the Levites the obligation resting upon the whole nation to serve the Lord in the persons of its first born sons, and might present them to the Lord as representatives of the first born of Israel, to serve Him as living sacrifices” (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 48).

It is vital to note that the phrase “the whole congregation” is expressed in terms of male heads who laid hands on other male representatives for religious service. This principle is carried forward into the New Testament in the ordination of ministers of the gospel. *The Form of Presbyterian Church Government* states, “Every minister of the Word is to be ordained by imposition of hands, and prayer, with fasting, by those preaching presbyters to whom it doth belong.” If church elders, who are to be males, are installing other elders into church office by the laying on of hands, it is totally inconsistent to imagine women have any part in the selection of these elders by a congregational vote. The problem with our churches is that they seem to think that the existence of women’s suffrage in the broader society must or should be exercised in the church. The legitimacy of women’s suffrage in the civil realm is an equally important issue that should be given a biblical critique, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to give such an assessment.

It is interesting to note the impact of this view upon women in the RPCUS. This author has talked with women in our churches about the prohibition of female voting in congregational meetings. They did not view this prohibition as an act of tyranny or as an attempt to control or subjugate the women in the church. Some said that they viewed this prohibition as a blessing in that they felt relieved of the burden of responsibility that more properly belongs to their husbands.

The point is: Church sessions, don’t be afraid to enact this policy. If your church is grounded in the Word of God, your women will desire faithful male headship in all areas of life, including local congregational life. Regardless of what you think the response of the women in your church will be, you must act biblically. Be courageous, and the Lord will honor you.

Conclusion

The RPCUS views itself as a denomination in the great tradition of Southern Presbyterianism. We do not believe that we are the only legitimate Presbyterian denomination, but we do believe that God has raised us up to be guardians of a special treasure -- the Westminster Standards. We believe that they set forth the system of doctrine taught by the Bible. We believe that strict subscription to them is expected of a confessional or creedal church. Strict subscription extends to every doctrine in every chapter of the Confession. We are as narrow or restrictive as the wording of the Confession of Faith. We do say to all our Reformed brothers, "Come, join us, and stand with us as together we champion the causes of King Jesus.

WHY THE RPCUS HAS THE ORIGINAL WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH AND CATECHISMS UNREVISED

Rev. Joe Morecraft

Teaching Elder Joe Morecraft made a presentation of the establishment of the constitution of Covenant Presbytery, [now the RPCUS]:...the WCF, Larger and Shorter Catechisms as originally published by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland must be subscribed to by all ordained members. Passed.

Minutes of Covenant Presbytery August 29, 1983

Why did I make that motion? Let me give you four reasons.

First, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland edition of the Westminster Standards is a sturdy, hardback book with readable print. It contains the Westminster Assembly's Scriptural footnotes completely written out, for the Confession, Catechisms and book of church government. It also includes other historical documents that are important for organizing a church and understanding our heritage as Presbyterians, which documents are not included in other editions of the Standards, such as the original Directory of Publick Worship, the Form of Presbyterial Church-Government, .the Solemn League and Covenant, etc.

Second, although our presbytery has no disagreement at all with the revision of chapter 23, paragraph 3, as it appears in the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in America, we believe that the original chapter 23, paragraph 3 spells out more completely, Biblically and with less ambiguity the functions and limits of the civil magistrate with reference to the Law of God and the relation of church and state, by which *as nursing fathers*, the state carries out its God-given duty *to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner, that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger.*- the revised 23:3. In other words, it speaks directly and relevantly to the political issues facing us today, offering specific, Biblical, workable, although politically incorrect, answers to the questions people are asking.

Third, one revision of the Westminster Confession led to another and then to another and another. We want our church in some clear, although small, way to intervene and rescue the Church from the accelerated move away from the historical and Biblical Calvinism and Presbyterianism of the original Westminster Confession. Adopting the original was an attempt on our part to "stop the flow of blood," and thereby, hopefully, by God's grace, to bring the Church back to renewed purity and vitality.

Fourth, tying our little denomination to the original Westminster Confession of Faith was a deliberate effort to root ourselves firmly and self consciously in the English, and more particularly the Scottish, Reformations, (along with the Swiss, German and French, of course), so as to lay down a basis for a strong advance into the future, which we pray will bring us an even greater Reformation of the Church. Hopefully our people would not only love the Westminster Standards, but also come to love the historical context that gave it birth. Hopefully, our youth will find some of their heroes in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.

Why did American Presbyterianism, revise 23:3 in the Westminster Confession of Faith?

The early American Presbyterians, mostly fresh from Northern Ireland and Scotland, and a century or less away from "the killing times," when an Erastian¹ English monarchy tried to subjugate the Churches of Scotland and England, were understandably "gun shy" with reference to some of the language of chapter 23:3 and 31:2 in the Confession. They, along with the English Puritan immigrants, did not ever want the same thing to happen in the colonies, and thus the revision of these chapters. However, I am convinced that their understanding of that chapter was sadly mistaken, that in no way can the original Westminster Confession of Faith be charged and convicted of Erastianism. Not all the Westminster divines, however, after the publication of the Confession, were consistent in their actions with what they wrote in the Confession: their doctrine was better than their practice as is always the case with Calvinists. Two good defenses of chapters 23 and 31 against the charge of Erastianism are: Robert Shaw, *THE REFORMED FAITH*, pp. xx f, and James Bannerman, *THE CHURCH OF CHRIST*, Vol. I, pp. 171 ff. A good history of 18th Century American Presbyterianism is Charles Hodge, *THE CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH*.

The Westminster Confession commits itself unequivocally to the exclusive headship of Jesus Christ over His church. *The Lord Jesus Christ, as King and Head of His Church, bath therein appointed a government, in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.- WCF, 30:1. ...to these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed; by virtue whereof, they have power, respectively, to retain and remit sins; to shut the kingdom against the impenitent, both by the word and censures...- WCF, 30:2. The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven... - WCF, 23:3.* Such clear statements are certain evidence that the Westminster Confession is not Erastian. Robert Shaw makes this point in the introduction of his excellent commentary on the Confession, entitled *THE REFORMED FAITH*, pp. xix-xxi.:

You would think by his remarks that he was addressing the situation today, although he wrote these words in 1845 in Scotland.

Another decided and great merit of the Confession consists in the clear and well-defined statement which it makes of the principles on which alone can securely rest the great idea of the co-ordination, yet mutual support, of the civil and the ecclesiastical jurisdictions. It is but too usual for people to misunderstand those parts of the [original] Confession which treat these jurisdictions-some accusing those passages of containing Erastian concessions, and others charging them with being either lawless or intolerant. The truth is, they favor no extreme.

Proceeding upon the sacred rule, to render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's, they willingly ascribe to the civil magistrate a supreme power in the State-all that belongs to his province, not merely with regard to his due authority over the persons and property of men, but also with regard to what pertains to his own official mode of rendering homage to the King of kings. It is in this latter department of magisterial duty that what is called the power of the civil magistrate, *circa sacra-about religious*² matters, consists. But there his province ends, and he has no power *in sacris-in* religious matters. This is most carefully guarded in the leading proposition of chapter xxx-*The Lord Jesus Christ, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein appointed government in the hands of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.* The leading Erastians of that period, learned and subtle as they were, felt it impossible to evade the force of that proposition, and could but refuse to give to it the sanction of the Legislature. They could not, however, prevail upon the Assembly either to modify or suppress it; and there it remains, and must remain, as the unanswered and unanswerable refutation of the Erastian heresy by the Westminster Assembly of Divines.

What does the original Westminster Confession teach regarding the duty of the state toward the church?

Of the Civil Magistrate, Chapter 23 in the WCF, contains four paragraphs, each explaining one main point of doctrine:

- i. The origin and function of the state;
- ii. The political involvement of Christians;
- iii. The limitations and power of the state; and
- iv. The responsibility of the Christian citizenry.

The original 23:3 reads as follows: *The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God fully settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.* What is the point being made in WCF 23:3³?

First, the authority of the state is about but not in the church. The WCF 23:3 teaches that, whereas the state has no power *within* the Church, God has given it power *relating*

to and *around* the Church as the Church's protective **nursing father and nursing mother**, Isaiah 49:23. The civil magistrate is to protect and promote the welfare of the Church of God. As King David said with reference to his duty as civil magistrate towards the Church: **For the sake of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good**, Psalm 122:9.

The state has no jurisdiction within the organization and policies of the Church, but it does have jurisdiction *around* and *about* the Church. It is to protect the Church and her interests, but *no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof* [the regular government and discipline of the Church appointed by Christ]. The state is to exercise its authority justly and wisely so as *to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance*, revised 23:3. These two areas-about and within the church-are vastly different, and they must not be confused. The state-its office-holders and constitutions-has no jurisdiction, inside the institutional Church, but it does have a God-given responsibility to promote and advance the interests of the Church, and to protect her from those who would do her harm: *God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under Him over the people, for His own glory, and the public good; and, to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, or the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil-doers*, WCF 23:1. In the Confession's Scriptural footnote to this underlined statement it gives Romans 13:1-4, which prescribes the duty of the civil government before God as being **the minister of God to you for good**, vs. 4. The phrase to you refers to the recipients of the epistle to the Romans, which were **the called of Jesus Christ ... all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints, i.e.**, the church. Even the revised chapter 23:3 makes this point when it says: *Yet as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord*

The Confession distinctly and frequently announces the doctrine, that the civil magistrate has a certain power about religion-a certain authority and duty to provide for and promote by competent means the well-being and interests of the Church. - All that is fairly implied in it, (23:3), is the ascription to the state of a certain authority about the Church, for the purpose of promoting its interests not the ascription to it of an authority within the Church, for the purpose of exercising jurisdiction there.- James Bannerman, THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, Vol. I, p. 177.

In other words, the state's authority *with reference to* and *about* the Church involves no usurpation of authority *in* or *over* the Church.

Second, what does the WCF teach regarding the duties of the state about the Church? It sets forth four duties.

(1). The state is to *take order* for those objects at which it aims. This expression is a technical one, common in the theological debates of the Westminster Assembly. It means "to provide for, to attend to, to take care to accomplish," language far from

implying the usurpation of authority over the church by the state. The Scriptural footnotes of the original chapter 23:3 supportive of this duty are Isaiah 49:23, Psalm 122:9, Ezra 7:23-28, Leviticus 24:16, Deuteronomy 13:5,6,12, II Kings 18:4, II Chronicles 34:33, II Chronicles 15:12,13, which footnotes show the theonomic perspective of the Westminster divines. Because of their Biblical hermeneutic, they could, without hesitation or apology, quote Old Testament laws and examples for the state today, believing as they did that the Hebrew Republic was in many ways a model for nations today .⁴ As Greg Bahnsen pointed out: "the Mosaic law is a `model' to be emulated, not a code to be simply quoted or read into modern statute books."- NO OTHER STANDARD, p. 160.

(2). In order to reach its objectives with reference to the Church, the state has the power to *call synods*, *i.e.*, assemblies of church officers. This power does not imply any authority within the Church to decide or rule in spiritual or ecclesiastical things pertaining to the government and inner life and mission of the Church. In the original WCF 31:2, this duty is carefully explained: *magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with about matters of religion...* This is what Parliament did in calling the Westminster Assembly to meet in the 1640's: to consult with Parliament and to give it advice from the Word of God. There is no Erastianism here, for, these councils and synods, such as the Westminster Assembly, were not courts of the church, but consultant committees to the state. After all, although the church and state are separate institutions, the state is as accountable to obey God's Law as is the Church, for both are accountable to *God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world*, 23:1. If critics of the original 31:2 are correct in saying it is illegitimate for the state to *call synods*, then the men who heeded the summons of Parliament to participate in the Westminster Assembly were wrong to do so, for it was a blending of church and state. However, the Scripture footnotes of the original Confession show that the Word of God is on the side of the original: II Chronicles 19:8-11, II Chronicles 29-30 and Matthew 2:4,5.

(3). In order to reach its objectives with reference to the Church, the state has the power to *be present at synods* which it calls. This is a logical deduction from the previously mentioned power. The state has the right to be present at any assembly whatever convened within its dominion. This is true even of synods of the Church, as long as the state does not preside, dictate or interfere with their deliberations. The Scriptural footnotes in the preceding paragraph are also applicable here.

(4). To reach its objectives with reference to the Church, the state has the authority not only to be present at meetings of synods, but also to *provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God*, as revealed in Scripture. As in the case of the phrase, *take order*, this expression is somewhat of a technical one, and is to be understood according to the use of such theological terms at the time of the Westminster Assembly. The term meant "to make it an object of care and attention generally, that what is done be done according to the Word of God. So interpreted, it comes very far short indeed of anything implying Erastian control on the part of the magistrate in seeking his object, or any assertion of a right to review, or reverse, or in

any way overbear, the decisions of Church courts. - These are all the means specified by the WCF as lying open to the civil magistrate to employ in seeking to promote the interests of [the Christian] religion and of the Church of Christ; and it is plain that none of them imply or necessitate on his part the assumption of any proper control or jurisdiction in spiritual matters."- James Bannerman, THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, Vol. 1, pp. 180 ff.

The Responsibility of the World's Nations to bow before the Kingship of Jesus Christ, the Ruler of the Kings of the Earth

According to Psalm 2, which the New Testament refers to Jesus Christ in Acts 4:24-27, 13:33, Hebrews 1:5-5:5 and Revelation 2:27, the nations and political establishments of the world today are in deliberate rebellion against Jehovah and His Christ, making every effort to break free from God's moral order and from the consequences that come from breaking that order. They find the Lord and His Law restrictive and burdensome, keeping them from reaching their humanistic and tyrannical goals for human society. In the meanwhile He who sits enthroned as universal Sovereign laughs at all their efforts to dethrone Him and to escape Him. In fact, He scoffs at them in contempt of their evil. Furthermore, He causes all their efforts to fail by speaking His powerful Word to them, confusing and terrifying them in His fury, Hebrews 4:12-13. They drive themselves to distraction and despair trying to suppress this truth in unrighteousness.

What has the Sovereign of the nations spoken that is so terrifying to the rebels of this world? "I have installed My unique Son, Jesus Christ, as the mediatorial king of the nations. I have given him all the world's nations as His own personal possession. They are not only under My providential government, they are also under His moral government, accountable to Him as nations with all their institutions. Those who refuse to recognize His supremacy over them and bow in submission to Him He will break and shatter as if they were cheap clay pots; but those who take refuge in Him will be blessed." (A paraphrase and interpretation of Psalm 2: From His throne at God's right hand, Christ now calls upon all His servants and subjects in places of political power: "**O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with reverence, And rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, And you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him.**")

This extortion is addressed not merely to the kings and judges of O.T. Israel, but to the kings and judges of the earth, of the Babylonians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Syrians, Americans, Europeans, Russians, Chinese, Sudanese, Iraqis, Peruvians, South Africans, Polynesians, Australians. All the political powers of all of Christ's possessions which include all nations to the end of the earth are accountable to Him as their King, and are called upon by Him to bow in obedience before His royal scepter. It is not simply as individual human beings that these kings and judges are to receive His instruction, worship Him and pay Him homage; rather it is in their official capacity as kings and judges that they are to do these things. In their executive

offices, legislative assemblies, and courtrooms, they are to obey and enforce the laws and crown rights of Christ the King. If they refuse to do so, for whatever reason, they will be considered and treated by Him as rebels doomed for destruction.

First, the political institutions of the world's nations are to **show discernment and take warning** by giving heed to the revealed instruction of their Lord in His written Law by which infallible and absolute standard they can correctly distinguish between right and wrong and effectively administer justice. Without such a standard, justice is a meaningless and arbitrarily defined word used as a hammer by tyrants to keep the people in slavery. Distinguishing between right and wrong is impossible without a revelation from God; and without such a standard people, doing whatever seems right in their own eyes, become ungovernable unless a tyrant imposes order.

Second, these political powers are to **worship the LORD with reverence and rejoice with trembling**. They are called upon to worship and serve the triune God through faith in Jesus Christ, which brings to their land joy, reverence for God, and God's blessings. Furthermore, they are to protect the pure worship of the triune God., forbidding the public worship of all other gods.

Third, they are to do homage to the Son. The political institutions of the world's nations are to confess publicly their allegiance to Jesus Christ as their ultimate Head of State and to His Law as their statute book. They are hereby called upon to confess the supremacy of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and King of kings, to covenant with Him that their nations will always walk before Him in obedience, and that no law shall be enacted in their nations contrary to His revealed will found in Holy Scripture. In other words, political powers are called upon in Psalm 2 to be distinctively, comprehensively, genuinely, legally, permanently and unashamedly Christian, nationally confessing that Jesus is Lord.

Since Jesus Christ has been invested by God with dominion over the nations of the world, and since He actively administers that dominion everyday, it follows naturally and unavoidably that the world's nations have duties which they owe to their King, our Mediator.

First, it is the duty of nations and their political establishments to honor their king as faithful subjects in all their institutions and laws. Whether we are individuals or nations, citizens or elected officials, it remains true that in whatever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God. It is not enough that they promote the general welfare of the citizenry; but as moral subjects of the King of kings, responsible to govern in His name, they are to have as their ultimate and self-conscious objective in the formation of their constitutions, the establishment of their institutions, the shaping of their foreign and domestic policies, the election and appointment of their officials, all their legislation and in every act of administration to honor and glorify Him to whom they owe their being, preservation and powers.

A devoted regard to the prince's honor and a willingness to maintain his dignity against every infringement, enter essentially into the nature of loyalty.- William Symington, MESSIAH THE PRINCE, p. 232.

Because Nebuchadnezzar failed to do this, God inflicted him with the terrifying judgment of being driven from human society and made to live like and live with the beasts of the field for seven seasons. Why did the Lord treat him in this manner? The answer is found in Daniel 4:32-**0 king, this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: that you be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is Ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.** It was for this same reason that God would destroy the Babylonian king, Belshazzar: **you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven ... the God in whose hand are your lifebreath and your ways, you have not glorified,** Daniel 5:23. These verses should make all those who hold public office pause and consider with fear and trembling. Not only do they have the duty to do all to the glory of the triune God; but if they neglect or violate this duty, they expose themselves to the judgment of God. The point is: being a constitutional republic is not sufficient. A nation must be a Christian republic unashamedly honoring Christ the King in all its affairs of state.

Second, it is the duty of nations as the subjects of the Lord Christ to make His civil laws revealed in His Bible as the basis and source of their own laws. They are to have Christ as their only Source of Law, and the Bible as their only source of all their political statutes, because God in Christ is the one Lawgiver, Judge, King and Savior incarnate, Isaiah 33:22. Their standard of legislation and administration may not be human reason, national conscience, public opinion, expert opinion, or political expediency. None of these is, nor all of them together are competent guides in the governing of a nation.

We contend ... that the Bible is to be our rule, not only in matters of a purely religious nature, in matters connected with conscience and the worship of God, but in matters of a civil or political nature. - To require nations, who possess the sacred volume, to confine themselves, in their political affairs, to the dim light of nature, is not more absurd than it would be to require men, when the sun is in the heavens, to shut out its full blaze and go about their ordinary duties by the feeble rays of a taper [candle].

Indeed, if nations are moral subjects, they are bound to regulate their conduct by whatever law their moral Governor has been pleased to give them; and as they are the subjects of the Mediator, they must be under the law of the Mediator as contained in the Scriptures. He has not placed His moral subjects in ignorance of His will, nor left them to search for it amid the obscurities and imperfections of a law which sin has effaced and well nigh obliterated. In the Holy Scriptures of truth, He has given them a fairer and more complete exhibition of the principles of immutable and eternal justice, than that which is to be found in the law of nature. Symington, p. 235

Endnotes

1. Erastianism takes its name from Thomas Erastus, 1524-1583, of Heidelberg, Germany. It emerged in England at the Westminster Assembly, 1643, when a small number of the men present advocated the supremacy of the state over the church. Their position was defeated and refuted by the overwhelming majority of the assembly. Erastianism has been soundly refuted time and again by Presbyterian scholars: (1). James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, Vol. 1, pp. 171ff; (2) William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, Vol. II, pp. 557 ff.; (3) Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith*, pp. xix ff.; (4) George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*; (5). William M. Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, pp. 232 ff.; (6) Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord*; (7) J. R. DeWitt, *Jus Divinum: The Westminster Assembly and the Divine Right of Church Government*; and (8). Samuel Rutherford and others, *The Divine Right of Church-Government*.

2. As this paragraph later shows, by "religious," Shaw had in mind "ecclesiastical and spiritual" issues. Although the institutional, functional and jurisdictional separation of church and state is clearly taught in the WCF, the Confession also presupposes, as several chapters show, that it is impossible to separate religion and politics, and is most undesirable to separate the Bible and politics, God and politics or Christianity and politics, (as even the revised 23:3 shows). WCF 23:1 makes this very point in its first sentence: *God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates TO BE UNDER HIM over the people, FOR HIS GLORY, and the public good.*

3. In understanding 23:3 correctly, it is important to keep these two principles in mind: (1). The language of two or more passages in a document claiming to be accurate, systematic and authoritative statements of Divine-revealed doctrine must be interpreted in a way that makes them consistent with each other and not contradictory to each other. (2). The language of such a document must be understood in the sense commonly given to it in its author's day, without imposing our own meaning upon it.

4. See Samuel Rutherford, *LEX REX*, E. C. Wines, *THE HEBREW REPUBLIC*, and John Shearer, *HEBREW INSTITUTIONS SOCIAL AND CIVIL*, reprinted by Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

The Constitution of the RPCUS consists of the original 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and of the Form of Presbyterian Church Government as amended by the RPCUS, The Directory for Public Worship, and The Form of Church Discipline.

I. The Form of Presbyterian Church Government of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the U.S.

The Form of Presbyterian Church Government of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the U.S. is The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government adopted by the Westminster Assembly as found in the Westminster Confession of Faith published by the Free Presbyterian Publications with the following notes adopted by the RPCUS which are printed in bold type.

ASSEMBLY AT EDINBURGH,

February 10, 1645, Sess 16.

ACT of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY of the Kirk of SCOTLAND, approving the Propositions concerning Kirk-government and Ordination of Ministers

THE PREFACE.

JESUS CHRIST, upon whose shoulders the government is, whose name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace; of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end; who sits upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and justice, from henceforth, even for ever; having all power given unto him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, far above all principalities and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all: he being ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things, received gifts for his church, and gave officers necessary for the edification of his church, and perfecting of his saints.

Of the Church.

THERE is one general church visible, held forth in the New Testament.

The ministry, oracles, and ordinances of the New Testament, are given by Jesus Christ to the general church visible, for the gathering and perfecting of it in this life, until his second coming.

Particular visible churches, members of the general church, are also held forth in the New Testament. Particular churches in the primitive times were made up of visible saints, *viz.* of such as, being of age, professed faith in Christ, and obedience unto Christ, according to the rules of faith and life taught by Christ and his apostles; and of their children.

Vows for Admission of persons to Sealing Ordinances:

- 1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?**
- 2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?**
- 3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?**
- 4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?**
- 5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?**

Vows for Administration of Infant Baptism:

- 1. Do you acknowledge your child's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?**
- 2. Do you claim God's covenant promises in (his) behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for (his) salvation, as you do for your own?**
- 3. Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him), that you will teach (him) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (him) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?**

To the congregation (optional):

Do you as a congregation undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child?

Of the Officers of the Church.

THE officers which Christ hath appointed for the edification of his church, and the perfecting of the saints, are, some extraordinary, as apostles, evangelists, and prophets, which are ceased.

The office of evangelist is ordinary and perpetual, Eph. 4:11, 2 Tim. 4:5. The evangelist is commissioned to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments in foreign countries, frontier settlements, or the destitute parts of the church; and to him may be entrusted the power to organize churches and ordain Ruling Elders and Deacons therein.

Others ordinary and perpetual, as pastors, teachers, and other church-governors, and deacons.

Pastors.

This chapter on Pastors refers to the office and work of Teaching Elders.

THE pastor is an ordinary and perpetual officer in the church, prophesying of the time of the gospel.

First, it belongs to his office,

To pray for and with his flock, as the mouth of the people unto God, Acts vi. 2, 3, 4, and xx. 36, where preaching and prayer are joined as several parts of the same office. The office of the elder (that is, the pastor) is to pray for the sick, even in private, to which a blessing is especially promised; much more therefore ought he to perform this in the publick execution of his office, as a part thereof.

To read the Scriptures publickly; for the proof of which,

1. That the priests and Levites in the Jewish church were trusted with the publick reading of the word is proved.
2. That the ministers of the gospel have as ample a charge and commission to dispense the word, as well as other ordinances, as the priests and Levites had under the law, proved, Isa. lxvi. 21. Matt. xxiii. 34. where our Saviour entitleth the officers of the New Testament, whom he will send forth, by the same names of the teachers of the Old.

Which propositions prove, that therefore (the duty being of a moral nature) it followeth by just consequence, that the publick reading of the scriptures belongeth to the pastor's office.

To feed the flock, by preaching of the word, according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, and comfort.

To catechise, which is a plain laying down the first principles of the oracles of God, or of the doctrine of Christ, and is a part of preaching.

To dispense other divine mysteries.

To administer the sacraments.

To bless the people from God, Numb. vi. 23, 24, 25, 26. Compared with Rev. i.4, 5, (where the same blessings, and persons from whom they come, are expressly mentioned,) Isa. lxvi. 21, where, under the names of Priests and Levites to be continued under the gospel, are meant evangelical pastors, who therefore are by office to bless the people.

To take care of the poor.

And he hath also a ruling power over the flock as a pastor.

Teacher or Doctor.

THE scripture doth hold out the name and title of teacher, as well as of the pastor.

Who is also a minister of the word, as well as the pastor, and hath power of administration of the sacraments.

The Lord having given different gifts, and divers exercises according to these gifts, in the ministry of the word; though these different gifts may meet in, and accordingly be exercised by, one and the same minister; yet, where be several ministers in the same congregation, they may be designed to several employments, according to the different gifts in which each of them doth most excel. And he that doth more excel in exposition of scripture, in teaching sound doctrine, and in convincing gainsayers, than he doth in application, and is accordingly employed therein, may be called a teacher, or doctor, (the places alleged by the notation of the word do prove the proposition.) Nevertheless, where is but one minister in a particular congregation, he is to perform, as far as he is able, the whole work of the ministry.

A teacher, or doctor, is of most excellent use in schools and universities; as of old in the schools of the prophets, and at Jerusalem, where Gamaliel and others taught as doctors.

Other Church-Governors

Other Church governors refers to Ruling Elders

AS there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church; so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in his church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church. Which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders.

Ruling Elders possess the same authority as Teaching Elders in the courts of the church. Ruling Elders are also shepherds of the church along with the Teaching Elders, I Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28. Ruling Elders are to be elected by male heads of households in each congregation, having been examined by a duly constituted court of the church in accord with the apostolic rule of I Tim. 3 and Titus 1.

A male head is defined as a male who is the head of his family with or without dependents, or by himself (Adopted by the 1990 General Assembly of the RPCUS).

Vows for Ordination and Installation:

- 1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?**
- 2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?**
- 3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the RPCUS in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?**
- 4. Do you accept the office of ruling elder in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the Church of which God has made you an officer?**
- 5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?**
- 6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?**

The ruling elder elect having answered in the affirmative, the minister shall address to the members of the church the following question:

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as a ruling elder, and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?

Deacons.

THE scripture doth hold out deacons as distinct officers in the church.

Deacons are to be elected by the male heads of households of that congregation having been examined and approved by a duly constituted court of the church in accord with the Apostolic rule of I Tim. 3 and Titus 1.

Whose office is perpetual. To whose office it belongs not to preach the word, or administer the sacraments, but to take special care in distributing to the necessities of the poor.

The office of Deacon is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus Christ; it expresses also the communion of the saints, especially in their helping one another in time of need.

Vows for Ordination and Installation:

- 1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?**
- 2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?**
- 3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the RPCUS in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?**
- 4. Do you accept the office of deacon in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the Church of which God has made you an officer?**
- 5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?**
- 6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?**

The deacon elect having answered in the affirmative, the minister shall address to the members of the church the following question:

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as a deacon, and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?

Of Particular Congregations.

IT is lawful and expedient that there be fixed congregations, that is, a certain company of Christians to meet in one assembly ordinarily for publick worship. When believers multiply to such a number, that they cannot conveniently meet in one place, it is lawful and expedient that they should be divided into distinct and fixed congregations, for the better administration of such ordinances as belong unto them, and the discharge of mutual duties.

The ordinary way of dividing Christians into distinct congregations, and most expedient for edification, is by the respective bounds of their dwellings.

First, Because they who dwell together, being bound to all kind of moral duties one to another, have the better opportunity thereby to discharge them; which moral tie is perpetual; for Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.

Secondly, The communion of saints must be so ordered, as may stand with the most convenient use of the ordinances, and discharge of moral duties, without respect of persons.

Thirdly, The pastor and people must so nearly cohabit together, as that they may mutually perform their duties each to other with most conveniency.

In this company some must be set apart to bear office.

Vows For the Organization of a New Church: “Do you, in reliance on God for strength, solemnly promise and covenant that you will walk together as an organized church, on the principles of the faith and order of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the US, and that you will be zealous and faithful in maintaining the purity and peace of the whole body?”

Of the Officers of a particular Congregation.

FOR officers in a single congregation, there ought to be one at the least, both to labour in the word and doctrine, and to rule.

It is also requisite that there should be others to join in government.

And likewise it is requisite that there be others to take special care for the relief of the poor.

The number of each of which is to be proportioned according to the condition of the congregation.

These officers are to meet together at convenient and set times, for the well ordering of the affairs of that congregation, each according to his office.

It is most expedient that, in these meetings, one whose office is to labour in the word and doctrine, do moderate in their proceedings.

Of the Ordinances in a particular Congregation.

THE ordinances in a single congregation are, prayer, thanksgiving, and singing of psalms, the word read, (although there follow no immediate explication of what is read,) the word expounded and applied, catechising, the sacraments administered, collection made for the poor, dismissing the people with a blessing.

(Hymns, spiritual songs, and scriptural songs, in accord with Scripture, should be sung along with the 150 Psalms of the Bible, Eph. 5:19.)

Of Church-Government, and the several sorts of Assemblies for the same.

CHRIST hath instituted a government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church: to that purpose, the apostles did immediately receive the keys from the hand of Jesus Christ, and did use and exercise them in all the churches of the world upon all occasions.

And Christ hath since continually furnished some in his church with gifts of government, and with commission to execute the same, when called thereunto.

It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that the church be governed by several sorts of assemblies, which are congregational, classical, and synodical.

(Congregational assemblies are Sessions; Classical assemblies are Presbyteries; Synodical assemblies are General Assemblies.)

Of the power in common of all these Assemblies.

IT is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that the several assemblies before mentioned have power to convent, and call before them, any person within their several bounds, whom the ecclesiastical business which is before them doth concern.

They have power to hear and determine such causes and differences as do orderly come before them.

It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that all the said assemblies have some power to dispense church-censures.

Of Congregational Assemblies, that is, the Meeting of the ruling Officers of a particular Congregation, for the Government thereof.

THE ruling officers of a particular congregation have power, authoritatively, to call before them any member of the congregation, as they shall see just occasion.

To enquire into the knowledge and spiritual estate of the several members of the congregation.

To admonish and rebuke.

Which three branches are proved by Heb. xiii. 17; 1 Thess. v. 12, 13; Ezek. xxxiv. 4.

Authoritative suspension from the Lord's table, of a person not yet cast out of the church, is agreeable to the scripture:

First, Because the ordinance itself must not be profaned.

Secondly, Because we are charged to withdraw from those that walk disorderly.

Thirdly, Because of the great sin and danger, both to him that comes unworthily, and also to the whole church. And there was power and authority, under the Old Testament, to keep unclean persons from holy things.

The like power and authority, by way of analogy, continues under the New Testament.

The ruling officers of a particular congregation have power authoritatively to suspend from the Lord's table a person not yet cast out of the church:

First, Because those who have authority to judge of, and admit, such as are fit to receive the sacrament, have authority to keep back such as shall be found unworthy.

Secondly, Because it is an ecclesiastical business of ordinary practice belonging to that congregation.

When congregations are divided and fixed, they need all mutual help one from another, both in regard of their intrinsical weaknesses and mutual dependence, as also in regard of enemies from without.

Of Classical Assemblies (Presbytery).

THE scripture doth hold out a presbytery in a church.

A presbytery consisteth of ministers of the word, and such other publick officers as are agreeable to and warranted by the word of God to be church-governors, to join with the ministers in the government of the church.

(Particular churches are represented at Presbytery by one Ruling Elder from each church.)

The scripture doth hold forth, that many particular congregations may be under one presbyterial government.

This proposition is proved by instances:

I. First, Of the church of Jerusalem, which consisted of more congregations than one, and all these congregations were under one presbyterial government.

This appeareth thus:

First, The church of Jerusalem consisted of more congregations than one, as is manifest:

Ist, By the multitude of believers mentioned, in divers [places], both before the dispersion of the believers there, by means of the persecution, and also after the dispersion.

2dly, By the many apostles and other preachers in the church of Jerusalem. And if there were but one congregation there, then each apostle preached but seldom; which will not consist with Acts vi. 2.

3dly, The diversity of languages among the believers, mentioned both in the second and sixth chapters of the Acts, doth argue more congregations than one in that church.

Secondly, All those congregations were under one presbyterial government; because,

Ist, They were one church.

2dly, The elders of the church are mentioned.

3dly, The apostles did the ordinary acts of presbyters, as presbyters in that kirk; which proveth a presbyterial church before the dispersion, Acts vi.

4thly, The several congregations in Jerusalem being one church, the elders of that church are mentioned as meeting together for acts of government; which proves that those several congregations were under one presbyterial government.

And whether these congregations were fixed or not fixed, in regard of officers or members, it is all one as to the truth of the proposition.

Nor doth there appear any material difference betwixt the several congregations in Jerusalem, and the many congregations now in the ordinary condition of the church, as to the point of fixedness required of officers or members.

Thirdly, Therefore the scripture doth hold forth, that many congregations may be under one presbyterial government.

II. *Secondly*, By the instance of the church of Ephesus; for,

First, That there were more congregations than one in the church of Ephesus, appears by Acts xx. 31, where is mention of Paul's continuance at Ephesus in preaching for the space of

three years; and Acts xix. 18,19,20, where the special effect of the word is mentioned; and ver. 10. and 17. of the same chapter, where is a distinction of Jews and Greeks; and 1 Cor. xvi. 8,9, where is a reason of Paul's stay at Ephesus until Pentecost; and ver. 19, where is mention of a particular church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, then at Ephesus, as appears, Acts xviii. 19,24,26. All which laid together, doth prove that the multitude of believers did make more congregations than one in the church of Ephesus.

Secondly, That there were many elders over these many congregations, as one flock, appeareth.

Thirdly, That these many congregations were one church, and that they were under one presbyterial government, appeareth.

Of Synodical Assemblies (General Assembly).

THE scripture doth hold out another sort of assemblies for the government of the church, beside classical and congregational, all which we call *Synodical*.

Pastors and teachers, and other church-governors, (as also other fit persons, when it shall be deemed expedient,) are members of those assemblies which we call *Synodical*, where they have a lawful calling thereunto.

(Particular churches are represented at Presbytery by one Ruling Elder from each church.)

Synodical assemblies may lawfully be of several sorts, as provincial, national, and oecumenical.

It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that there be a subordination of congregational, classical, provincial, and national assemblies, for the government of the church.

Of Ordination of Ministers.

UNDER the head of Ordination of Ministers is to be considered, either the doctrine of ordination, or the power of it.

Touching the Doctrine of Ordination.

NO man ought to take upon him the office of a minister of the word without a lawful calling.

Ordination is always to be continued in the church.

Ordination is the solemn setting apart of a person to some publick church office.

Every minister of the word is to be ordained by imposition of hands, and prayer, with fasting, by those preaching presbyters to whom it doth belong.

(Ruling Elders participate in the act of ordination and the laying on of hands, Acts 13:1-3, 16:4.)

It is agreeable to the word of God, and very expedient, that such as are to be ordained ministers, be designed to some particular church, or other ministerial charge.

(Ministers of the Word are to be elected by male heads of households who are members of the congregation.)

He that is to be ordained minister, must be duly qualified, both for life and ministerial abilities, according to the rules of the apostle.

He is to be examined and approved by those by whom he is to be ordained.

No man is to be ordained a minister for a particular congregation, if they of that congregation can shew just cause of exception against him.

Vows for Ordination and Installation:

- 1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?**
- 2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will on your own initiative, make known to your Presbytery the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?**
- 3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the RPCUS in conformity with the general principles of Biblical polity?**
- 4. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?**
- 5. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?**
- 6. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?**

7. Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, whether personal or relational, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before the flock of which God shall make you overseer?

8. Are you now willing to take the charge of this church, agreeable to your declaration when accepting their call? And do you, relying upon God for strength, promise to discharge to it the duties of a pastor?

Questions to Congregation:

1. Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive _____, whom you have called to be your pastor?

2. Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?

3. Do you promise to encourage him in his labors, and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?

4. Do you engage to continue to him while he is your pastor that competent worldly maintenance which you have promised, and to furnish him with whatever you may see needful for the honor of religion and for his comfort among you?

Touching the Power of Ordination.

ORDINATION is the act of a presbytery.

(All the courts of the church, Sessions, Presbyteries, and General Assemblies are “presbyteries.”)

The power of ordering the whole work of ordination is in the whole presbytery, which, when it is over more congregations than one, whether these congregations be fixed or not fixed, in regard of officers or members, it is indifferent as to the point of ordination.

It is very requisite, that no single congregation, that can conveniently associate, do assume to itself all and sole power in ordination:

1. Because there is no example in scripture that any single congregation, which might conveniently associate, did assume to itself all and sole power in ordination; neither is there any rule which may warrant such a practice.

2. Because there is in scripture example of an ordination in a presbytery over divers congregations; as in the church of Jerusalem, where were many congregations: these many congregations were under one presbytery, and this presbytery did ordain.

The preaching presbyters orderly associated, either in cities or neighbouring villages, are those to whom the imposition of hands doth appertain, for those congregations within their bounds respectively.

(Ruling Elders participate in the act of ordination and the laying on of hands, Acts 13:1-3, 16:4.)

Concerning the Doctrinal Part of Ordination of Ministers.

1. No man ought to take upon him the office of a minister of the word without a lawful calling.
2. Ordination is always to be continued in the church.
3. Ordination is the solemn setting apart of a person to some publick church office.
4. Every minister of the word is to be ordained by imposition of hands, and prayer, with fasting, by these preaching presbyters to whom it doth belong. **(And Ruling Elders, Acts 13:1-3, 16:4.)**
5. The power of ordering the whole work of ordination is in the whole presbytery, which, when it is over more congregations than one, whether those congregations be fixed or not fixed, in regard of officers or members, it is indifferent as to the point of ordination.
6. It is agreeable to the word, and very expedient, that such as are to be ordained ministers be designed to some particular church, or other ministerial charge.
7. He that is to be ordained minister, must be duly qualified, both for life and ministerial abilities, according to the rules of the apostle.
8. He is to be examined and approved by those by whom he is to be ordained.
9. No man is to be ordained a minister for a particular congregation, if they of that congregation can shew just cause of exception against him.
10. Preaching presbyters orderly associated, either in cities or neighbouring villages, are those to whom the imposition of hands doth appertain, for those congregations within their bounds respectively.
11. In extraordinary cases, something extraordinary may be done, until a settled order may be had, yet keeping as near as possibly may be to the rule.
12. There is at this time (as we humbly conceive) an extraordinary occasion for a way of ordination for the present supply of ministers. **(Not applicable at this time.)**

The Directory for the Ordination of Ministers.

IT being manifest by the word of God, that no man ought to take upon him the office of a minister of the gospel, until he be lawfully called and ordained thereunto; and that the work of ordination is to be performed with all due care, wisdom, gravity, and solemnity, we humbly tender these directions, as requisite to be observed.

1. He that is to be ordained, being either nominated by the people, or otherwise commended to the presbytery, for any place, must address himself to the presbytery, and bring with him a testimonial of his taking the covenant of the three kingdoms; of his diligence and proficiency in his studies; what degrees he hath taken in the university, and what hath been the time of his abode there; and withal of his age, which is to be twenty four years; but especially of his life and conversation.

(The Covenant of the three kingdoms and the age requirement are not applicable.)

2. Which being considered by the presbytery, they are to proceed to enquire touching the grace of God in him, and whether he be of such holiness of life as is requisite in a minister of the gospel; and to examine him touching his learning and sufficiency, and touching the evidences of his calling to the holy ministry; and, in particular, his fair and direct calling to that place.

The Rules for Examination are these:

(1.) That the party examined be dealt withal in a brotherly way, with mildness of spirit, and with special respect to the gravity, modesty, and quality of every one.

(2.) He shall be examined touching his skill in the original tongues, and his trial to be made by reading the Hebrew and Greek Testaments, and rendering some portion of some into Latin; and if he be defective in them, enquiry shall be made more strictly after his other learning, and whether he hath skill in logick and philosophy.

(The trial in Hebrew and Greek may be satisfied by satisfactorily completing courses of study in those areas. There is no Latin requirement.)

(3.) What authors in divinity he hath read, and is best acquainted with; and trial shall be made in his knowledge of the grounds of religion, and of his ability to defend the orthodox doctrine contained in them against all unsound and erroneous opinions, especially these of the present age; of his skill in the sense and meaning of such places of scripture as shall be proposed unto him, in cases of conscience, and in the chronology of the scripture, and the ecclesiastical history.

(4.) If he hath not before preached in publick with approbation of such as are able to judge, he shall, at a competent time assigned him, expound before the presbytery such a place of scripture as shall be given him.

(5.) He shall also, within a competent time, frame a discourse in Latin upon such a common-place or controversy in divinity as shall be assigned to him, and exhibit to the presbytery such theses as express the sum thereof, and maintain a dispute upon them.

(Latin not required.)

(6.) He shall preach before the people, the presbytery, or some of the ministers of the word appointed by them, being present.

(7.) The proportion of his gifts in relation to the place unto which he is called shall be considered.

(8.) Beside the trial of his gifts in preaching, he shall undergo an examination in the premises two several days, and more, if the presbytery shall judge it necessary.

(Two days not required.)

(9.) And as for him that hath formerly been ordained a minister, and is to be removed to another charge, he shall bring a testimonial of his ordination, and of his abilities and conversation, whereupon his fitness for that place shall be tried by his preaching there, and (if it shall be judged necessary) by a further examination of him."

3. In all which he being approved, he is to be sent to the church where he is to serve, there to preach three several days and to converse with the people, that they may have trial of his gifts for their edification, and may have time and occasion to enquire into, and the better to know, his life and conversation.

(Not required.)

4. In the last of these three days appointed for the trial of his gifts in preaching, there shall be sent from the presbytery to the congregation a publick intimation in writing, which shall be publickly read before the people, and after affixed to the church-door, to signify that such a day a competent number of the members of that congregation, nominated by themselves, shall appear before the presbytery, to give their consent and approbation to such a man to be their minister; or otherwise, to put in, with all Christian discretion and meekness, what exceptions they have against him. And if, upon the day appointed, there be no just exception against him, but the people give their consent, then the presbytery shall proceed to ordination.

(Not required.)

5. Upon the day appointed for ordination (**or installation**), which is to be performed in that church where he that is to be ordained is to serve, a solemn fast shall be kept by the congregation, that they may the more earnestly join in prayer for a blessing upon the ordinances of Christ, and the labours of his servant for their good. The presbytery shall come to the place, or at least three or four ministers of the word shall be sent thither from

the presbytery (**Ruling Elders shall also participate in ordination and installation**); of which one appointed by the presbytery shall preach to the people concerning the office and duty of ministers of Christ, and how the people ought to receive them for their work's sake.

6. After the sermon, the minister who hath preached shall, in the face of the congregation, demand of him who is now to be ordained, concerning how faith in Christ Jesus, and his persuasion of the truth of the reformed religion, according to the scriptures; his sincere intentions and ends in desiring to enter into this calling; his diligence in praying, reading, meditation, preaching, ministering the sacraments, discipline, and doing all ministerial duties towards his charge; his zeal and faithfulness in maintaining the truth of the gospel, and unity of the church, against error and schism; his care that himself and his family may be unblameable, and examples to the flock; his willingness and humility, in meekness of spirit, to submit unto the admonitions of his brethren, and discipline of the church; and his resolution to continue in his duty against all trouble and persecution.

(Parts of the ordination and installation service may be assigned to members of the court.)

7. In all which having declared himself, professed his willingness, and promised his endeavours, by the help of God; the minister likewise shall demand of the people concerning their willingness to receive and acknowledge him as the minister of Christ; and to obey and submit unto him, as having rule over them in the Lord; and to maintain, encourage, and assist him in all the parts of his office.

Vows for Installation and Ordination:

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will on your own initiative, make known to your Presbytery the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?

3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the RPCUS in conformity with the general principles of Biblical polity?

4. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?

5. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?

6. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?

7. Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, whether personal or relational, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before the flock of which God shall make you overseer?

8. Are you now willing to take the charge of this church, agreeable to your declaration when accepting their call? And do you, relying upon God for strength, promise to discharge to it the duties of a pastor?

Questions to Congregation:

1. Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive _____, whom you have called to be your pastor?

2. Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?

3. Do you promise to encourage him in his labors, and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?

4. Do you engage to continue to him while he is your pastor that competent worldly maintenance which you have promised, and to furnish him with whatever you may see needful for the honor of religion and for his comfort among you?

8. Which being mutually promised by the people, the presbytery, or the ministers sent from them for ordination (**including Ruling Elders**), shall solemnly set him apart to the office and work of the ministry, by laying their hands on him, which is to be accompanied with a short prayer or blessing, to this effect:

"Thankfully acknowledging the great mercy of God in sending Jesus Christ for the redemption of his people; and for his ascension to the right hand of God the Father, and thence pouring out his Spirit, and giving gifts to men, apostles, evangelists, prophets, pastors, and teachers; for the gathering and building up of his church; and for fitting and inclining this man to this great work: to entreat him to fit him with his Holy Spirit, to give him (who in his name we thus set apart to this holy service) to fulfill the work of his ministry in all things, that he may both save himself, and his people committed to his charge."

9. This or the like form of prayer and blessing being ended, let the minister who preached briefly exhort him to consider of the greatness of his office and work, the danger of negligence both to himself and his people, the blessing which will accompany his

faithfulness in this life, and that to come; and withal exhort the people to carry themselves to him, as to their minister in the Lord, according to their solemn promise made before. And so by prayer commending both him and his flock to the grace of God, after singing of a psalm, let the assembly be dismissed with a blessing.

(Other Ministers of the Word and Elders may be appointed to participate.)

10. If a minister be designed to a congregation, who hath been formerly ordained presbyter according to the form of ordination which hath been in the church of England, which we hold for substance to be valid, and not to be disclaimed by any who have received it; then, there being a cautious proceeding in matters of examination, let him be admitted without any new ordination.

(Shall refer to transfer within the RPCUS)

11. And in case any person already ordained minister in Scotland, or in any other reformed church, be designed to another congregation in England, he is to bring from that church to the presbytery here, within which that congregation is, a sufficient testimonial of his ordination, of his life and conversation while he lived with them, and of the causes of his removal; and to undergo such a trial of his fitness and sufficiency, and to have the same course held with him in other particulars, as is set down in the rule immediately going before, touching examination and admission.

(Shall refer to transfer within the RPCUS)

12. That records be carefully kept in the several presbyteries, of the names of the persons ordained, with their testimonials, the time and place of their ordination, of the presbyters who did impose hands upon them, and of the charge to which they are appointed.

13. That no money or gift, of what kind soever, shall be received from the person to be ordained, or from any on his behalf, for ordination, or ought else belonging to it, by any of the presbytery, or any appertaining to any of them, upon what pretence soever.

Thus far of ordinary Rules, and course of Ordination, in the ordinary way; that which concerns the extraordinary way, requisite to be now practised, followeth.

1. In these present exigencies, while we cannot have any presbyteries formed up to their whole power and work, and that many ministers are to be ordained for the service of the armies and navy, and to many congregations where there is no minister at all; and where (by reason of the publick troubles) the people cannot either themselves enquire and find out one who may be a faithful minister for them, or have any with safety sent unto them, for such a solemn trial as was before mentioned in the ordinary rules; especially, when there can be no presbytery near unto them, to whom they may address themselves, or which may come or send to them a fit man to be ordained in that congregation, and for that people; and yet notwithstanding, it is requisite that ministers be ordained for them by some, who, being set apart themselves for the work of the ministry, have power to join in the setting apart others,

who are found fit and worthy. In those cases, until, by God's blessing, the aforesaid difficulties may be in some good measure removed, let some godly ministers, in or about the city of London, be designed by publick authority, who, being associated, may ordain ministers for the city and the vicinity, keeping as near to the ordinary rules fore-mentioned as possibly they may; and let this association be for no other intent or purpose, but only for the work of ordination.

2. Let the like association be made by the same authority in great towns, and the neighbouring parishes in the several counties, which are at the present quiet and undisturbed, to do the like for the parts adjacent.

3. Let such as are chosen, or appointed for the service of the armies or navy, be ordained, as aforesaid, by the associated ministers of London, or some others in the country.

4. Let them do the like, when any man shall duly and lawfully be recommended to them for the ministry of any congregation, who cannot enjoy liberty to have a trial of his parts and abilities, and desire the help of such ministers so associated, for the better furnishing of them with such a person as by them shall be judged fit for the service of that church and people. [Contents]

II. THE DIRECTORY FOR THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD (THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, FREE PRESBYTERIAN PUBLICATIONS) OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

"The Directory for Public Worship is an approved guide for worship within our churches. "

III. THE FORM OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

"Discipline is the exercise of that authority and the application of that system of laws which the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed in His church as set forth in Matthew 18:15-18.

"The exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. Its ends are the removal of offences; the vindication of the honor of Christ; the promotion of the purity and general edification of the church; and also the benefit of the offender himself.

"An offence is anything in the principles or practice of a church member, which is contrary to the Word of God; or which, if it be not in its own nature sinful, may tempt others to sin, or mar their spiritual edification.

"All baptized persons are members of the church, are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline: and when they have arrived at the years of discretion, they are bound to perform all the duties of Church members.

"Offences are either private or public, to each of which appropriate modes of proceeding belong.

OF PROCESS AGAINST A MINISTER

"As the honor and success of the gospel depend in great measure on the character of its ministers, each presbytery ought, with the greatest care and impartiality, to watch over the personal and professional conduct of all its members.

But as, on the one hand, no minister ought, on account of his office, to be screened from the hand of justice, nor his offences to be slightly censured; so neither ought scandalous charges to be received against him, by any judicatory, on slight grounds. "

"Process against a gospel minister shall always be entered before the presbytery of which he is a member. And the same candor, caution, and general method, substituting only the presbytery for the session, are to be observed in investigating charges against him, as are prescribed in the case of private members. "

APPROVED AND ADOPTED AS AMENDED - FEBRUARY 6, 1991