

NICOTINE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Dedicated to Reformed Faith and Practice

Vol. I No. 4

October 1997

The Regulative Principle of Worship: The Argument from Charity

As the subtitle indicates, the purpose of this brief essay to offer a different argument for the regulative principle than is customarily offered. In doing this, there is no intention at all to suggest that the arguments normally advanced are incomplete or incorrect. To the contrary, totally apart from the considerations introduced here, the argument for the regulative principle contained in the Westminster Standards and reflected by the adherents of those standards in Scotland, England, and America, is sufficient to warrant its observation by the church. That argument maintains that God has, in Scripture, revealed his zeal to

direct his own worship. That argument is a mandate "from above," if you will, demonstrating that the true and living God himself, the object of worship, has revealed that he will be worshiped only in a manner consistent with his express command.

THAT ARGUMENT IS A SOUND one, and adequate to render us morally culpable if we fail to observe the principle. What I intend is not a refinement or correction of that argument in any way. Rather, I intend to offer a complementary argument for the same position, namely, that the elements of the public worship of the saints gathered on the Lord's Day must be received by divine command. The position argued will be the same, but the argument will go in a different, not a better, direction. What follows is an argument "from below." The traditional defense is an argument from above, which intends to demonstrate the compatibility of the regulative with our *love for God*. The following argument is an argument from below, which intends to demonstrate the compatibility of the regulative principle with our *love for our sisters and brothers in Christ*. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the regulative principle of worship is the *only* principle which protects, honors, and advances the demands of charity as they are expressed in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8.

The Demands of Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8

I will not repeat here the exegetical arguments which have been advanced in the history of the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8 or Romans 14, but will, rather, refer the reader to the discussion of these texts by John Murray, "The Weak and the Strong," found in the fourth volume of his collected writings, and also in the twelfth volume of the *Westminster Theological Journal* (1950). I concur with Murray's understanding of these texts, and with the conclusion that

charity requires us not to do anything which *induces another believer to act contrary to conscience*. That is, these two passages do not teach that we must *agree* with the scruples of another's conscience, nor even that we must *act* consistently with the scruples of another's conscience. Rather, the texts teach that we must not say or do anything we know will induce others to act inconsistently with conscience.

THE "WOUNDING" WHICH THESE passages talk about is that which occurs when an individual does something contrary to what he or she believes is right. Even if the scruples are improper scruples, we must still never encourage the violation of scruples held as a matter of conscience. Paul, in fact, refers to the believers in question as "weak" believers, because their understanding of the faith is such that they hold by conscience beliefs not required by revelation. He nevertheless argues that charity requires us not to offend the conscience of such sisters and brothers.

Implicit in Paul's argument is the duty of the church to *instruct the weak*, so that the weak will overcome their weakness. That is, Paul does not consider these scruples to be appropriate, but inappropriate or "weak." In Paul's vocabulary, this term is normally employed to refer to that which is unredeemed, or characteristic of the unredeemed state. For example, he can refer to the "weak and beggarly elemental spirits" (Gal 4:9) as those associated with the time "when you did not know God." In his discussion of the grandeur of divine love, he describes it as that which God lavished upon us "while we were still weak" (Rom. 5:6), and follows this with parallel ideas, "while we were yet sinners," and "while we were enemies." (Rom. 5:8, 10). And when Paul uses the term regarding believers, it is always in a circumstance when he is discussing the yet-incomplete nature of redemption, as we await the return of Christ in the midst

CONTENTS

The Regulative Principle of Worship: The Argument from Charity	1
Prostitution: A Modest But Entirely Reformed Proposal	4
From and To Our Readers	5
39 Alexander Hall	6
Second-Hand Smoke	8

The *Nicotine Theological Journal* will likely be published four times a year. It is sponsored by the Old Life Theological Society, an association dedicated to recovering the riches of confessional Presbyterianism.

Co-Editors: John R. Muether and D. G. Hart.

Subscriptions: \$7 per year. Individual issues are \$2. Orders should be sent to 622 Orchid Lane, Altamonte Springs, FL, 32714.

Correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to 32 Benezet Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19118, or to the address above. Submissions should not exceed 2,000 words.

of a yet-cursed world. This is how he employs the term, for example, in Romans 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness," following a lengthy discussion (8:18-25) of "the sufferings of this present time" in contrast with "the glory that is to be revealed to us." Therefore, Paul does not consider the scruples of the "weak" to be scruples which are to be considered *acceptable* in and by the church, because they are scruples associated with a lack of familiarity with redemption. A person who is "weak" is a person who, in some particular way, is needful of a fuller enjoyment of the privileges, benefits, or duties of the redeemed state.

Wounding the Conscience and the Regulative Principle of Worship

The demands of charity regarding religious scruples require two things: that we not in any way encourage an

individual to act contrary to conscience; and that we instruct those who are "weak," so that their conscience would be in greater conformity to the privileges and duties of being redeemed. These demands must be related to the question of public worship.

First, it is unavoidably the case that *the liturgy of public worship binds the conscience*. That is, people may be free to follow the scruples of their own consciences when engaged in private worship, but when engaged in corporate worship, people either follow and observe a common liturgy (for the day and particular circumstance; we are not discussing a liturgy in a formal or binding sense upon all congregations), or chaos will result. That is, if the congregation is invited to sing hymn 205, and one individual's conscience inspires him to sing 206, bedlam results. If the worship is to be corporate, as opposed to private, it must be unified. Thus, if the liturgy demands something, the individual believer has only one of two options: participate or do not participate. If one cannot participate, on grounds of conscience, one cannot participate in the corporate worship of God. Thus, the framers of the liturgy must recognize that what they *include* in the liturgy may *exclude* individuals from corporate participation. What complicates the matter more, is that corporate worship is *itself* required of believers. Thus, the individual believer, whose conscience forbids participation in a particular aspect of the liturgy, is placed in a catch-22 situation wherein *refusal* to participate violates the divine mandate to participate in corporate worship, and *willingness* to participate in the particular matter violates the conscience.

TO ILLUSTRATE THIS, LET US suppose an admittedly ridiculous hypothetical situation, wherein *not a single element* of a particular service of worship is required by Scripture. Let us suppose, for instance, that the bulletin of a particular service includes three items: dancing a jig, shaking hands with a neighbor, and eating grape jelly. The pious believer, having come to church that Sunday out of obedience to God's command that his people worship him in

public assembly, attends the assembly, but cannot participate, because conscience forbids the individual to dance, shake hands, and eat grape jelly as elements of corporate worship. In such a circumstance, the church's liturgy *forces* the individual to wound the conscience, and only permits the individual to select *in what manner* to wound the conscience; by disobedience to the command to worship publicly, or by disobedience to the commands as to the elements of public worship. If the framers of the liturgy *know* that there is an individual who believes that dancing a jig is a violation of what one may do in public worship, they knowingly cause such an individual to wound the conscience, thus violating the demands of charity as expressed in 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14.

In a less extreme case, let us suppose a better liturgy, in which there are prayers, the Word read and preached, and the jig. In this case, the individual participates in the prayers and the ministry of the Word, but is excluded, by conscience, from participating in the jig. This seems like an acceptable situation, because the individual obeys the command to assemble for corporate worship, and actually participates in at least portions of that worship. However, the problem even here is that the principle of corporate worship itself is offended, if different members of the congregation are opting in and out of the worship service as it proceeds. We cannot increase and enhance the amount of corporate participation in worship if we include elements which we know exclude individuals from participation.

The goal of the framers of liturgies for public worship, therefore, is *not to include elements which exclude individuals* from participation. However, it may be argued, are the framers of public liturgies responsible to be sensitive to an infinite variety of scruples? If there is an individual who has a scruple about prayer, do we omit prayer from the service? Would we exclude the ministration of the Word or the Sacrament, in order to satisfy a scruple? If we were to do so, we would satisfy one divine command (to not

wound a conscience) at the expense of another (to pray in public assemblies), which requires those elements as regular elements of worship. That is, if the *only* guideline in preparation of liturgies were the known scruples of the congregation, we would have only a negative guide, and one which, hypothetically, would require that we do nothing.

It is, therefore, hypothetically possible that there will be occasions when the Church *will* knowingly wound a conscience, out of obedience to the express requirement of Scripture that certain elements are required in public worship. Hypothetically, if not actually, we would have to determine which is the higher principle: obedience to the express revelation of God regarding public worship, or obedience to the revelation of God regarding wounding a conscience. The issue for the framers of public liturgies then is twofold: first, what elements are we so sure we are mandated to do (higher principle) that we will do them even if it means violating a conscience (lower principle); and second, what will we do with those whose consciences are violated in the process?

SINCE WE DO NOT WISH TO violate any requirement of Scripture, we would never wound an individual's conscience *if it is avoidable* without being expressly disobedient to Christ, the Church's head. If the jig wounds a conscience, and we consider therefore removing the jig, we must ask ourselves: does removing the jig constitute disobedience to Christ? If Christ positively *requires* the jig (higher principle), then we *must* jig, even if it wounds someone's conscience (lower principle). But if, in our search of the Bible, we find that Christ in fact nowhere *requires* the jig (higher principle silent), *charity* demands (lower principle *not* silent) that we not require it of the individual whose conscience is wounded by it. Thus, if there are any elements of our liturgical service which are *known* to wound the conscience of any individual (lower principle), we *may not* include those elements unless there is express divine mandate (higher principle).

Of course, this charitable concern for

conscience would mean in practice, that if there is any individual in the congregation who holds to the regulative principle, then *charity* requires the observation of the regulative principle in that church. That is, even if the regulative principle were not adopted on the grounds of *principle* (all of the other arguments to which I referred in my opening paragraph), it would be adopted in *that* congregation on the grounds of *charity*.

IN A HYPOTHETICAL SITUATION where there were an individual who objected to prayer, the Church would pray nevertheless, out of obedience to the express requirement of Scripture. However, it would know that this practice was offending the (extremely weak) conscience of a particular member. What would charity require in this instance? Charity would require a vigorous attempt, through instruction, prayer, and personal visitation, to bring this individual's conscience into conformity with the teachings of Scripture. How could we knowingly permit a person to remain weak, and not perceive that as being uncharitable?

Therefore, those who do not believe in the regulative principle of worship, who know there are members of their congregation who *do* believe it, are bound by the demands of charity to attempt to demonstrate why the regulative principle violates the teachings of the Bible. Anything less is to leave the individuals who believe in the regulative principle in their state of alleged weakness. Only after they have convinced all known holders of the regulative principle of its alleged non-biblical character may they re-introduce other elements into their public liturgies. Charity permits no other course.

Concluding Observations

The regulative principle and the principle of charity are, in fact, not competing principles, and God has not put us in a catch-22 moral bind. In fact, this moral bind is produced by those who do not, on the grounds of principle, adopt

the regulative principle. Their failure to adopt this principle puts them in a moral bind even with regard to the moral principle of charity, with its attendant demands regarding the wounding of consciences. Failure to observe the demands of God's revelation in one area make it difficult to obey the demands of his revelation in another.

IT IS HOPED, THEREFORE, THAT readers, if not currently convinced of the regulative principle, would be led by this discussion to reconsider its merits. It is equally hoped that readers will at least, for the sake of the demands of charity, not disenfranchise from corporate worship those who *do* believe in the regulative principle by including in corporate worship things which are not expressly commanded by God.

Prayers (spoken or sung), the Word read and preached, the Sacraments, and collections for the saints, are elements indisputably and universally recognized as appropriate elements of corporate worship. Introducing other elements, thereby requiring their observation by those present, introduces the offense of wounding the consciences of those who do not recognize their propriety. For the sake of charity, if not that of principled commitment to the regulative principle of worship, church officers church officers should not introduce such offenses.

T. David Gordon

_____SC88

Prostitution: A Modest But Entirely Reformed Proposal

In all of the discussion in Reformed circles about the role of women in modern society, one topic has been sadly neglected. This topic relates to a profession occupied by women for centuries, but for which their contribution has never been recognized or appreciated, especially by Reformed people. Indeed this profession has usually been vilified even though the women practicing it, themselves had often been victims of the worst sort of brutalization. I speak of the profession of prostitution.

The church for centuries, in an oppressive and patriarchal manner (I may be guilty of redundancy here), has censured prostitution. But have we ever carefully examined this traditional stance of the church? In this modern time may not the spirit lead us into some new examination of the Scriptures and some new understanding of this complex issue? Have we taken seriously the testimony of women that they feel called to and fulfilled by this work? For many the money is good. Just as we have learned that making money on the Sabbath is good in the modern world, so in the matter of prostitution we may need to rethink.

Three Pillars

Let me suggest that the case for prostitution rests on three pillars. The first pillar is the key text of Scripture: "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). The second is the clear parallel between slavery and prostitution. The third is understanding properly those texts that seem to condemn prostitution.

THE FIRST PILLAR IS CRUCIAL. I Corinthians 10:31 shows that Paul has completely broken with old forms of ethical thinking and made ethics radically teleological. Actions must be judged solely by whether the intention is to glorify God or not. Paul says that what appears to be an act of idolatry -eating meat offered to idols- is not idolatry if the intention is to glorify God. This radical reorientation of ethics has been largely missed by the church through the centuries, but it is time to allow this seminal verse to have its full weight in

our thinking. *It is not actions but intentions that determine whether something is right or wrong.* Our children have been trying to help us see this point for a long time with their oft repeated observation, "I didn't mean it."

Once this text really grips us, we cannot help but see its application to prostitution. It is not the action, but the intention that is crucial in evaluating any human activity. If one feels called to glorify God in the calling of prostitution, then it surely is the Bible-approved thing to do.

The Bible itself gives clear application of this great principle in the case of Rahab. Rahab the prostitute is a model of faith, courage, and devotion. Scripture nowhere condemns her for being a prostitute or says that she ceased to be a prostitute. Obviously she continued to be a faithful prostitute.

THE SECOND PILLAR IN THE defense of prostitution is the obvious parallel to slavery. Prostitutes, like slaves, have often been treated like chattel. They have been abused, victimized and oppressed. They have been controlled by heartless pimps as slaves were by cruel masters.

Historically the church has sought to remedy prostitution by urging prostitutes to stop being prostitutes. But isn't that like suggesting to slaves that the problem with slavery was the work rather than the bondage? Prostitutes do not need to stop working; they need to be liberated. They need to have their work honored and properly compensated. They need freedom to practice their profession when, where and how they choose. That kind of liberation was the solution to slavery and is clearly the only responsible solution to the enslavement of prostitutes.

The *third pillar* relates to biblical texts that seem to oppose prostitution. Indeed some may feel at the outset that the biblical position is so obvious that no further examination is necessary. But the history of the church teaches us that there are always alternative perspectives and interpretations of every text in the Bible. We must not feel bound to any traditional

interpretation- which is, after all, just the work of men- but must be open to new ideas and the leading of the spirit. (See Jeremiah 42 and 43.)

Two kinds of texts have been used to oppose prostitution. *First* are the OT's warnings about harlotry. While these texts are numerous, they are not meant to be universal in their application. In OT times prostitutes were associated with pagan temples and pagan worship. The harlotry condemned in the OT is the harlotry that links sex to idolatry and false religion. Modern prostitution has nothing to do with idolatry and so is not condemned in these texts.

The *second* set of texts that seems to condemn prostitution are those related to the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." Some of you will think that this text is crystal clear. But think again. Adultery is a violation of the spiritual-physical union of a marriage. But prostitution has nothing to do with spiritual unions. It is a purely physical relationship, and so it cannot effect the personal union of marriage. Moreover many social scientists believe that prostitution has beneficial social consequences. Therefore we should recognize that prostitution is not condemned by the seventh commandment.

Now some may think that there is a still clearer biblical condemnation of prostitution. Paul did say, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!" (I Corinthians 6:15). But let us not approach this text as if we were fundamentalists. We must recognize that Paul has not given full play to his basic teleological ethics in this text. (Perhaps he even intended that I Cor 10:31 be a correction of his statement here in I Cor 6:15.) Paul seems confused about the relation of the physical with the spiritual in this one place- a confusion which he avoids in the main thrust of his writing. He probably wrote this way to encourage us to use our ingenuity to figure out his real, full meaning. In any case it is clear that Paul cannot mean what he says.

THE CONCLUSION WE MUST reach is that prostitution is not condemned in the Bible. If it is not condemned, then it must be legitimate. Indeed the general thrust of the Bible not only permits it, but rather tends to encourage it- if done to the glory of God. We may well be disobedient to God if we oppose prostitution.

My modest proposal will not, I expect, gain immediate, universal support. Such proposals seldom do. Jonathan Swift experienced that with his original "Modest Proposal" when he suggested during a famine in Ireland that parents should eat their children. Yet the reasonableness and practicality of this proposal have stood the test of time. There can be no doubt that fewer adults would have died if they had eaten their children.

My conclusion that prostitution is not only legitimate, but that it is one more profession to be redeemed by earnest Christians, may seem radical at first glance. But, thoughtful reader, I want to assure you that this conclusion has been reached following the hermeneutical principles laid down by Louis Berkhof. Indeed, this conclusion was in many ways anticipated by the great Reformer Martin Luther. He once said, "All callings are honorable with the possible exceptions of burglary and prostitution." This great student of the Scriptures was already beginning to see the radical implications of teaching that every profession is a calling.

SO WHEN YOUR DAUGHTER comes to you with tears in her eyes and asks, "Mom and Dad, why can't I be a prostitute?", don't be harsh, judgmental or old-fashioned. Don't undermine her self-esteem. Don't stand against the work of the Spirit to break down oppression and to redeem another area of life. Encourage her to use all her gifts. Encourage her to pursue her calling.

Thanks to the new hermeneutic, whoring has become honorable in the church.

I. M. Free

SC88

From and To Our Readers

To the Editor:

I hope that one need not partake of tobacco and fermented drink (even if moderately) in order to engage in the kind of conversation that is a foretaste of heavenly fellowship and may sustain us on our pilgrimage "this side of glory" (*NTJ* 1:1). Some of us with a God-given philosophical bent and critical nature need only the lively companions with whom to banter rather than the accompanying stimulants to profitably dialogue and wax theological.

Though you are wise to differentiate the conversation from the tastes that may accompany it, I fear the latter's emphasis in your publication risks equating the two. While there is precedent for conceiving of heavenly glories by analogy from earthly delights (the love between a husband and wife as reflecting that of Christ for his church, for example), as well as a precedent for heart consumption with good conversation (see, for instance, the Platonic dialogues, particularly *The Symposium*), surely one would want to avoid trivializing the characteristics of the Kingdom with preferences of mere food, Fuentes, or drink.

WHILE YOU DISABUSE YOUR readers of the notion that the *NTJ* is a hobby magazine, and differentiate the Reformed piety it advocates from evangelicalism, by wrapping Presbyterian distinctives in tobacco you seem to be in some ways little different from evangelicals who wrap themselves in the American flag and eat apple pie. In doing so you impose on theological convictions certain cultural expressions that do not necessarily follow from them, and are not necessarily shared by others, even if the religious tenets are. This identification runs the risk of trivializing these convictions with trappings -- not of evangelicalism -- but trappings nonetheless.

For instance, why the tobacco leaf? Why not the tea leaf? There are those who find pipes and cigars more expressive of perceived "masculine" tastes, even as they find the "ubiquitous cigarette" of even Scotch unsuitable as marks of how they order their daily lives, let alone (dare I even say) their "piety." However, these same individuals might very well find the pleasures of afternoon tea extremely enjoyable. So why not, instead of the *Nicotine Theological Journal*, have the *Camamille* or *Darjeeling Theological Times*?

"Too feminine! Too flowery!" you may cry. But this is precisely my point. While keeping in mind the light-hearted nature of the *NTJ*, we may yet observe that you have merely traded consumption of one product for another, albeit a more restricted, refined and high-brow one. You may argue on the other hand that this is precisely *your* point. But while you have rightly called into question the unthinking concession to mass and pop culture that characterizes much of current evangelicalism, you have simply perpetuated purchase in another market by a different kind of consumer. While Christians should think more critically and carefully about how they live and what they buy in this world, the products you push and tastes you advocate seem almost too exclusive.

IT SEEMS THAT THE BEST POINT your publication could make is that Christians should thoughtfully and carefully order their lives while not dictating the products with which to order them. While I may not partake in the pleasures of single malt whisky, my piety and "world-and-life view" should not necessarily be considered inferior. Despite the *NTJ's* hope to avoid arrogance and narrow-mindedness, I must state in conclusion that I, for one, do not live "any dumber" for doing so.

Sincerely,
Sam Brooks

P.S. Please find my subscription check enclosed.

The editors respond: We welcome Mr.

Brooks' letter as another opportunity to clarify our editorial purpose. We remind our readers that tobacco is suggestive and not prescriptive, and we repeat for those who missed it: membership in OLTS is not limited to smokers and drinkers. We affirm the doctrine of Christian liberty; many of our Old School friends do not smoke, and that for a variety of reasons. (Some have suggested that they enjoy more fully the fragrance of smoke when they are abstaining while in the company of smokers, and we have politely refrained from calling them parasites.)

So then, why tobacco and why not tea? We deny the charge that we are dictating the tastes whereby Christians should order their lives. For those for whom tea is a delightful foretaste of heaven, we would encourage its moderate enjoyment. We admit that our use is neither frequent nor discriminating. (Coffee is another matter. The debate over its perfect blend has not engaged the editors lest it threaten their already precarious friendship.)

BUT TOBACCO WORKS BETTER than tea because it underscores more forcefully our point that Reformed piety is different from evangelical piety. The artificial morality of the latter has placed smoke and drink beyond the pale. We counter that smoking is, by itself, neither pious nor impious, and we insist that these taboos beg the real questions that must be raised: Which piety? And whose spirituality? Our point is that the ways in which we express Reformed piety may vary, but they are not arbitrary. Alcohol and tobacco are long-established ways in which Reformed Christians have embodied their theological commitments. The same cannot be said, we have argued, for the likes of fast food or light beer.

Finally, we acknowledge with Mr. Brooks that it is a particular temptation for modern American Christians to trivialize and commodify our notions of the good life. We make no particular claim of immunity from that temptation. And so we strive for vigilance, along with our readers, to take heed lest we too fall.

SC88

39 Alexander Hall

Light Up, Don't Spit Up

In our first issue ("Sabbath, Psalms and Single-Malt," Jan. 1997) we opined that the pages of the *NTJ* would be open to arguments for chewing tobacco even though the editors have no real inclination to take up the practice. A recent piece in *First Things* ("Tobacco and the Soul," Apr. 1997) has forced us to reconsider our initial openness.

The author, Michael P. Foley argues that different forms of tobacco consumption correspond to different parts of the soul. Cigarettes appeal to the appetitive side of the soul, "a fact that explains their association with both food and sex." People with strong desires, he writes, demand instant gratification and, therefore, cigarettes. Cigars, however, correspond to the spirited part of the soul, the quest for power and reputation, thus, explaining the popularity of cigars among politicians, business moguls, etc. Pipes relate to the rational part of the soul, hence the common image of wise people smoking pipes, such as the Oxford don or Sherlock Holmes.

BUT WHEN IT COMES TO THE USE of tobacco not involving fire (here Foley notes that fire has historically been emblematic of reason) the associations are not so flattering. Chewing tobacco corresponds to the "nonhuman -- or more accurately, subhuman -- parts of the soul." It is, in Foley's words, "a quintessentially subhuman activity. . . the rumination of bovine men. Or perhaps we should say it is camel-like, for camels not only chew, but spit as well." That is why Foley says we "usually associate [chewing tobacco] with men of limited acumen."

In case you were wondering, the author puts snuff into the same category, though with the difference that it is not quite as disgusting even though more unnatural (because not taken through the mouth.)

This is not to say that Mr. Foley's word is the last on chewing tobacco. But he

articulated concerns that we had even though we couldn't quite put our finger on them when we wrote the first editorial. For that reason, unless the protest is too strong, we will not be considering any submissions on nonflammable consumption of tobacco. We believe the acumen of our readers is much too high to do otherwise.

Would Jesus Read the *NTJ*?

Readers may be tempted to think we go out of our way to find particularly heinous examples of evangelical kitsch (which is another way of saying evangelical piety). But the range of products hawked by evangelical parachurch entrepreneurs is so great we do not have to look hard to find something both tacky and theologically objectionable. Richard John Neuhaus once complained about evangelical publishers putting out a book called *Christian Reasons for Coming Out of the Rain*. His point had the sting of mocking the evangelical desire to give everything religious significance and a proof-text to boot, even the common sense routines of life. But his point also implied that there is a market for this religious paraphernalia which continues to grow and confront us at unexpected times.

A RECENT TRIP TO ALABAMA unearthed a new line of religious merchandise that has captured the teenage market, as reported by the July 5th issue of the *Montgomery* It is a bracelet that has the initials W W J D. Readers who grew up in evangelical homes will no doubt recognize that the mnemonic stands for What Would Jesus Do. Teens who wear the bracelet say it is a constant reminder of the kind of behavior that they as Christians should exhibit. One interviewee specifically mentioned the blessing conveyed by the bracelet in a particularly difficult moment and how the reminder of Jesus helped him do the right thing.

Now we believe it is all to the good for teenagers to follow the example of Jesus, though we hate the cliché that "what would Jesus do" has become. The problem, however is that, as far as the NT

reveals or OT messianic prophecy suggests, Jesus did not wear bracelets. Instead he followed the God-ordained means of prayer, the sacraments and worship (while ordaining new ones) for nurturing his religious identity and calling. So not only is the W W J D bracelet encouraging teens to depart from the example of Jesus, but such religious merchandise has become a substitute for the God-given ordinances he has promised to use to sustain his people. We suggest that a more theologically accurate bracelet would go like this J W W T -- "Jesus Would'nt Wear This."

In a very important article on the commodification of Christianity (*Modern Theology* Oct. 1993), Philip D. Kenneson writes, "Absent discipleship, which has the potential to mark the church as a peculiar people, Christians find it increasingly difficult to determine how they are different from their pagan friends and neighbors. Lacking any substantive way, it is not surprising that Christians resort to the way American culture regularly creates and maintains distinctions – through consumption. Hence, in American culture 'Christians' are those who consume 'Christian' commodities, thus making it possible for people to discern who they are: they are the ones buying Christian music, jewelry, books, games, bumper stickers, and wall hangings, and the ones going to Christian concerts, workshops, and conferences. By consuming these Christian products, they set themselves apart in one of the few ways they know how to."

Contrary to evangelicalism which encourages its adherents brandish the outward and extraordinary marks of the marketplace, Reformed theology teaches that the marks of the church are preaching, the sacraments and discipline. These same marks identify the individual believer. Unfortunately, they don't seem to be sufficiently effective for evangelicals. We can't help but wonder if part of the problem is that merchants can't commodify the classic marks of the church, though the megachurch folks sure are giving it a try.

ONE LAST CONCERN ABOUT THE W W J D bracelet is that it devalues the accomplishments of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Christ did not come simply

to show us how to be good. He came to deliver his chosen ones out of the estate of sin and misery and bring them into an estate of salvation. And he did that, as the Shorter Catechism teaches, by executing the offices of a prophet, priest and king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation. The problem with the W W J D bracelet, along with all unqualified uses of the phrase, "what would Jesus do," is that such an understanding of Christ misses all that the Shorter Catechism has to say about the work of Christ (questions and answers 20 to 29), thus, giving the impression that being a Christian is simply being good, or as easy as wearing some t-shirt or bumpersticker.

J. Gresham Machen, whom we are wont to quote, identified liberalism as a religion of human goodness and ethical imperatives, as opposed to historic Christianity, a religion of human sin and salvation through sovereign grace. We fear that modern evangelical piety (as displayed in its merchandise), aside from exhibiting bad taste, shows greater affinity to the liberalism that Machen spent most of his life opposing than to the good news he defended.

An Old School Presbyterian Christmas

Suspend your disbelief for a moment, the way you're supposed to do when you go to the movies, and assume that it is appropriate for Presbyterians to observe holidays other than those commanded in Scripture. If an Old School Presbyterian were to observe Christmas, for instance, how might he do it? Well, the answer is that he would follow the biblical pattern set down in Matthew 2, the account of the three wise men. With the holiday season fast approaching and the necessity of making adequate preparations, we offer the following recommendations for observing Jesus' birthday in good conscience:

1) Purchase your gold, frankincense and myrrh early. The frankincense and myrrh may be especially hard to find. Try Crabtree and Evelyn. If that fails pine tar and scented lamp oil may be substituted.

2) Avoid Christmas eve services,

especially those held at 11:00 pm or, even worse, at midnight. You will be involved in a strenuous effort the next day. Obtain as much sleep as possible. 3) You should find some good hiking boots that will keep your feet dry. They should also be light. The L. L. Bean catalog has a good selection. Order by the middle of November to beat the Christmas rush and to have enough time to break them in.

4) Find a good map to see where a due eastward trek will take you. Inspect it for natural hazards such as streams, but also for pesky industrial obstacles, such as railroad tracks or, worse, highways. Any good pilgrimage can be ruined by poor route management.

5) If your trip takes you through a bad section of town, be sure to pack the gold in a money belt or even in one of your socks. You would hate to lose your investment needlessly, especially since you will be returning with it. (You should also probably take only 8 ounces. Remember the old biking adage: take care of the ounces and the pounds will take care of themselves.)

6) Carbobulk. A good ziti with broccoli and sun-dried tomatoes sauteed in garlic and olive oil served with toasted pine nuts and lots of parmesan is simple and quick and should allow you to take in without napping, almost all of the Blue/Grey Bowl Game, a Christmas day classic, before heading out on your journey.

7) Don't be disappointed if you don't find the manger. Remember, mangers in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania don't count.

8) Plan to take December 26th off. If you have a choice, take the day after Christmas as vacation rather than Christmas. You won't be fit for much on the 26th after an all night walk.

9) Don't feel obligated to rent camels. Singing "We Three Kings" is inappropriate even if John Frame thinks it is biblical. Better to chant a messianic psalm.

10) If you do run into a creche don't mistake it for the real thing. You're supposed to be wise.

All Shook Up

Television pastor, Robert Schuller, has not found the skies of United Airlines all

that friendly of late. On June 28 he flew from Los Angeles to New York for Betty Shabazz's memorial service. (Was he a good friend of Malcolm X or just posturing? You make the call.) Schuller's first-class ticket, ironically, was with United Airlines. When Schuller asked the flight attendant to hang up his garment bag the response was basically, "hang it yourself," though the attendant explained it was a violation of company rules. Later the pastor also asked for fruit without cheese but the same attendant, Khaled Elabiad, refused to comply with the minister's request. Then Schuller rose and went to the kitchen to ask another attendant for a serving of grapes sans cheese. Elabiad claims that Schuller, who had been drinking, grabbed him by the shoulders and began to shake him. "I was shaken so hard," the attendant says, "that my head was going back and forth many times, giving me whiplashes and pain." OUCH! Schuller counters that he was only counseling the attendant. "My intent," as he explained to the court after federal prosecutors charged Schuller with misdemeanor assault, "was to get his attention, not to cause physical harm." The good news for Schuller is that the assault charges have been dropped. The bad news is that Elabiad is filing a \$5 million lawsuit. Could this be what happens to clergy who seek relevance?

It is not hard for us to believe that Schuller could be so demanding as to come off as a surly passenger. Anyone who heard his interview with Michael Horton et al a few years back on the "White Horse Inn" know of the preacher's egotistical ways. What is hard to believe is that a 70 year-old man could inflict such bodily harm upon a man at least forty years younger. Can you really see this bastion of positive thinking shaking any individual so hard that his head would bob from side to side like those little baseball player dolls that baby boomers grew up with? But then again, maybe Schuller's service/show is called "Hour of Power" for a reason.

_____SC88

Second-Hand

Smoke

Editorial note. *The following comes from the pen of Michael Kelly, who during his brief tenure as editor of The New Republic questioned the integrity of Bill Clinton about as well as the editor of any liberal weekly, so well, in fact, that his publisher, Martin Peretz, fired him. This excerpt (TNR [July 14 & 21, 1997]) may be of interest to NTJ readers in showing that smoking is intimately connected to civil liberty.*

I NO LONGER SMOKE, EXCEPT for the occasional caged party cigarette, and even then I find I don't enjoy the old delivery systems as I did once. But on the Fourth of July, I am going to say the Pledge of Allegiance and light up a Marlboro, or perhaps an unfiltered Camel. It's my patriotic duty.

It's yours too if you care about living in a nation predicated on the idea that the citizen must be protected from the natural tendency of the state to expand into his or her life. The proposed settlement between Big Tobacco and Big Government epitomizes the new statism. It has been called the nanny state, but that his too kind a term. It is too cold, too cruel, too implacable, too illiberal to be a nanny. It is the Nurse Ratched state. . . .

President Clinton, . . . declared in 1995 that 'the era of big government is over.'

Actually what is over is the old model of big government. . . . The new model is as devoted to spectacular schemes of social engineering as the old one -- and it has added the awful idea that these schemes may be achieved not through legislation and federal funding, but through a creative and brutal system of mandated behaviorism, in which the state uses its immense powers to force targeted citizens and entities to 'voluntarily' accept a violation of their rights and an encroachment upon their liberties -- and to pay for this privilege.

_____SC88

**Renew Your NTJ
Subscription,**

Please

Paul tells us that the Lord loves a cheerful giver. And editors of periodicals lean on staff love cheerful subscribers who renew their subscriptions without being harangued. It would do us a favor if you would send in checks for renewal before the end of 1997. Don't forget that in the true spirit of a Constantinian Christmas the *NTJ* makes a great stocking stuffer. (And that's as close to the fireplace as it should go.)