

know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Gen. 18:19).

At the outset of the Reformation in Scotland, John Knox issued the following charge to the heads of households:

You are ordained of God to rule your own houses in his true fear, and according to his Word. Within your own houses, I say, in some cases, you are bishops and kings; your wife, children, servants, and family are your bishopric and charge; of you it shall be required how carefully and diligently you have always instructed them in God's true knowledge, how that you have studied in them to plant virtue and repress vice.

Of course, there are always those who agree "in principle," but offer lame excuses for their reticence to apply their beliefs to their actions. To such men, the words of Gillespie stand as an appropriate exhortation:

Do not reckon it enough to bear within the enclosure of your secret thoughts a certain dislike of the ceremonies and other abuses now set afoot, except both by profession and action you evidence the same, and show your faith by your fact. We are constrained to say to some among you, with Elijah, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" and call unto you with Moses, "Who is on the Lord's side? Who?" "Be not deceived: God is not mocked." And, "No man can serve two masters. "

Sources:

- 1) The main source is the booklet by Kevin Reed: "The Origin and Customs of Christmas". Published USA, 1983.
- 2) Internet and other sources.
- 3) "The Two Babylons". By Rev Alexander Hislop.
- 4) The chapter: "The Bible's testimony against Christmas" is based on an article by Rev. David Silversides against Christmas & Easter. (By kind permission)

Is Christmas Scriptural?

Different aspects of Christmas discussed:

- Does the weather in Israel support the view that Christ was born in December?
- Can the Bible help us find the date of Christ's birth?
- The pagan origin of Christmas.
- The Bible's testimony against Christmas.
- The views of John Knox.
- George Gillespie and his opposition to the re-introduction to the English-Popish Ceremonies.
- Confessional Presbyterianism.
- The view of James Bannerman in the nineteenth century.
- An historical perspective.
- Concluding summary.
- Final Remarks to Protestants.

The weather in Israel.

Israeli meteorologists have tracked December weather patterns for many years and concluded that the climate in Israel has been essentially constant for at least the last 2,000 years.

The temperature in the area of Bethlehem in December averages around 44 degrees Fahrenheit (7 degrees Celsius) but can drop to well below freezing, especially at night. Describing the weather there, Sara Ruhin, chief of the Israeli weather service, noted in a 1990 press release that the area has three months of frost: December with 29 F. [minus 1.6 C.]; January with 30 F. [minus 1.1 C.] and February with 32 F. [0 C.].

Snow is common for two or three days in Jerusalem and nearby Bethlehem in December and January. These were the winter months of increased precipitation in Christ's time, when the roads became practically unusable and people stayed mostly indoors.

This is important evidence to disprove a December date for Christ's birth. Note that, at the time of Christ's birth, the shepherds tended their flocks in the fields at night. *"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field,"* wrote one Gospel writer, *"keeping watch over their flock by night"* (Luke 2:8). A common practice of shepherds was keeping their flocks in the field from April to October, but in the cold and rainy winter months they took their flocks back home and sheltered them. [Probably would have been no room in the stables then also?!]

The time of the census as in Luke 2:1-7.

The Roman and Judean rulers knew that taking a census in winter would have been impractical and unpopular. Generally a census would take place after the harvest season, around September or October, when it would not seriously affect the economy, the weather was good and the roads were still dry enough to allow easy travel. According to the normal dates for the census, this would probably be the season of Christ's birth.

The year of Christ's birth.

Jesus wasn't born in A.D.. 0 either. In 525 Pope John I commissioned the scholar Dionysius Exiguus to establish a feast calendar for the Church.. Dionysius also estimated the year of Christ's birth based upon the founding of the city of Rome. Unfortunately because of insufficient historical data he arrived at a date at least a few years later than the actual event.

The Gospels record Jesus' birth as occurring during the reign of Herod the Great. Herod's death is recorded by Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities of*

manger. By riding roughshod over the historical details of Christ's birth, these popular presentations impugn the accuracy of the scriptural record. Moreover, during the Christmas season numerous manger scenes and religious images are erected in public places, church buildings and homes. This multiplication of graven images is a blatant violation of the second commandment, which explicitly forbids *making or using* any pictorial representations of God. The second commandment prohibits the making of any images of God, including "pictures of Christ" in the manger.

The accessory abuses of Christmas are so commonly known, they need only be mentioned. The season is characterized by crass commercialism in the media; the stimulation of mass covetousness, especially among children; and general debauchery, as exhibited in many annual Christmas parties. We are to be separate from World (1 John 2:15-17). "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Ex. 23:2).

Final Remarks to Protestants.

A few final words remain for those who claim to be Protestants, and especially Presbyterians. The Protestant Reformers summoned us back to the scriptural law of worship which allows us to admit only those institutions in worship that possess express scriptural warrant. To take a stand in support of Christmas is a repudiation of this legacy of the Reformation. It is a retreat from a hard-won point of orthodoxy.

A consistent application of Reformed and Presbyterian principles of worship requires the repudiation of Christmas. Answer 109 of the Westminster Larger Catechism forbids "any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself." The issue is not a matter of indifference. Since Christmas was not instituted by God, it should not be approved or tolerated in the official practices of the Church. Ministers and church officers are not being true to their ordination vows, if they encourage or tolerate Christmas observance in their congregations.

Moreover, the obligation to protect our families from corrupt worship resides with all heads of households. We must strive to follow the example of Abraham, who received a commendation from the Lord: "I

Christmas observance undermines the sanctity of the Lord's day. The yearning for festivals and celebrations among God's people is understandable. Indeed, God instituted the Lord's Day (and the Lord's Supper) to fulfil a need which men have in this vital area. One reason why people are so enamoured with the festivity of holidays is that the Lord's day is often perceived only in terms of what activities are prohibited on that day. If the Lord's Day is celebrated properly, with great joy, much of the desire for these other days will dissipate. We should be overjoyed with the grand truths of redemption on the day of Christ's resurrection: "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24). It is no mere accident of history that holidays and the Lord's Day are so often linked together in discussions of this sort. Where one is prominent, the other fades in significance. May the Lord's Day be restored to its rightful place in worship.

The institution of Christmas assumes an erroneous view of Church power. God has set apart the Lord's Day as the time for regular worship and corporate remembrance of him. Men do not have the right (or authority) to sanctify other days for stated religious observances. Christmas-keepers are thereby granting to the Church a co-equal authority with the scriptures, since they acknowledge an ecclesiastical power to institute new ordinances of worship.

Further, Christmas constitutes a false sacrament. The Old Testament ceremonies and festivals were designed to typify Christ; they were visible representations to foreshadow the Messiah who was to come, and to confirm the promises of God. Now that Christ has come, the old festivities are not to be observed. Instead, Christ has given to the Church the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The sacraments serve as a visible word to confirm the spiritual realities of our redemption. To celebrate Christmas in a similar manner as a visible reminder and seal of the Incarnation is to allow the holiday to usurp a role which rightly belongs to the sacraments.

Christmas is a source of great misinformation and accessory abuses. Every year, Christmas is the occasion of serious distortions of the facts of the Incarnation. Popular presentations frequently twist the historical facts, as demonstrated by numerous portrayals of the wise men and the

the Jews, Josephus, Book 17, Chpt. 8) and occurred in the spring of 4 B.C.. (*New Testament History*, F.F. Bruce, Anchor Books, p. 23). Therefore, Christ's birth had to take place at least four years before the traditional date!

Can the Bible help us find the date of Christ's birth?

Actually from the Bible, we can at least determine the probable season and year of His birth. The most convincing proof of when Jesus was born comes in understanding the evidence that is presented in the book of Luke concerning the birth of John the Baptist.

Luke 1:5-17 says:

5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth.

6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years.

8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

12 And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Zechariah was of the division of Abijah (Luke 1:5,8). Back in King David's day, the priests had been separated into 24 turns or divisions. These turns began in the first month of the Jewish calendar (1 Chronicles 27:2), March or April of our modern calendar. According to Talmudic and Qumran sources, the turns rotated every week until they reached the end of the sixth month, when the cycle was repeated again until the end of the year. This would mean that Zechariah's division served at the temple twice a year.

We find in 1 Chronicles 24:10 that Abijah was the eighth division of the priesthood. Thus, Zechariah's service would be in the tenth week of the Jewish year. Why the tenth week? Because all divisions served during primary feast weeks of the Jewish year. So all of the divisions of the priesthood would serve during *Passover* and the *Days of Unleavened Bread* (the third week of the year). Likewise, all of the divisions of the priesthood would serve during the *Feast of Weeks* or Pentecost (the ninth week). Thus, the eighth course of the priesthood would end up serving on the tenth week of the year.

Now we must make an assumption here. Remember we said that Zechariah's division served at the temple twice a year. The Bible does not specify which of the two shifts of service it was. Regardless, nine months after one of the two dates John the Baptist was born. This would place his birth in March or September.

We will assume that Luke is recording Zechariah's first shift of service for the year. We will find that assumption tends to prove true as we discover the dates of John the Baptist's and Jesus' birth. Therefore, the date of Zechariah's service would be the Jewish date of Sivan 12-18 (See the Companion Bible, Appendix 179, Section III). Going back to Luke 1:23-25:

23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,

25 Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among men.

After his service in the temple, Zechariah went home to his wife. Due to the laws of separation (Leviticus 12:5; 15:19,25), two additional weeks have to be

of the Reformation in Scotland all these festivals were cast out of the Church as things that were not only unnecessary but unscriptural.

Concluding Summery.

Based upon the foregoing presentation, several conclusions may be drawn. These conclusions uniformly support a complete repudiation of Christmas by those who wish to uphold a biblical view of worship.

The scriptures, both by precept and example, forbid the use of any form of worship which is not ordained by God. Since Christmas has no biblical warrant, it should be rejected. The reader who doubts this conclusion, should take a thoughtful look at scriptural passages which demonstrate the unlawfulness of adding to the worship of God through the innovations of man. (See Deut. 4:2; 12:29-32; Lev. 10:1-2; 1 Sam. 13:9-13; Col. 2:16.)

Christmas has brought an infusion of paganism into the Church. This kind of admixture was prohibited among God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. The people of God must purge such corruptions from their midst. "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?... Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2Cor. 6:16-17).

Christmas remains a monument of the superstition of the Church of Rome. The Pope struts around the altar during the Papal Mass on Christmas Eve, chants the prescribed words, and holds up the elements so they may be adored by a fawning multitude. This is not a light matter. It is aggravated by a modern softness toward Popery. Instead of looking for an Antichrist of the dispensational model, Protestants had better re-awaken to the dangers of the Pope, who is "that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God. "" All remnants of Papal superstition must be eradicated from the Church, including favourable references to the word Christmas. The term *Christmas* itself lends credibility to Popery (via the Popish Mass), and God demands that his people purge even their language from the terminology of corrupt worship (see Deut. 12:3; Ex. 23:13).

An Historical Perspective.

In 1583 the Presbyterian Church suppressed the observation of Christmas in Scotland because there are neither biblical references to Christmas celebrations nor any biblical commandments to celebrate the birthday of Christ. The Church of Scotland continued to discourage the celebration of Christmas, which remained a normal working day in Scotland until 1958.

We have seen that Presbyterian opposition to Christmas is consistent, historical, and based upon solid scriptural considerations. Yet, Presbyterians were not the only persons who maintained a strong stand against Christmas and kindred corruptions of worship; there were other Christians who held similar convictions. For example, the famous Baptist preacher Charles H. Spurgeon opened a sermon on 24 December 1871 with the following words:

“We have no superstitious regard for times and seasons. Certainly we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called Christmas: first, because we do not believe in the mass at all, but abhor it, whether it be said or sung in Latin or in English; and, secondly, because we find no scriptural warrant whatever for observing any day as the birthday of the Saviour; and, consequently, its observance is a superstition, because not of divine authority”.

Continued Resistance and Decline.

Even with the avalanche of liberalism and evangelical ecumenicity, Christmas has not gone unchallenged in twentieth century Presbyterianism. In 1962, the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland issued a "Statement of Differences Between the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Other Presbyterian Churches." One point of difference concerns the observance of holidays, which are tolerated in the theologically liberal Church of Scotland.

The Free Presbyterian Church rejects the modern custom becoming so prevalent in the Church of Scotland, of observing Christmas and Easter. It regards the observance of these days as symptomatic of the trend in the Church of Scotland towards closer relations with Episcopacy. At the time

counted. So we will make a second assumption, that Elizabeth conceived a child two weeks after Zechariah's return.

Allowing for this and going forward a normal pregnancy places the birth of John the Baptist at the time of the *Passover (Nisan 15)*! The Jews always looked for Elijah to return on the day of *Passover*. Even in modern times there is an empty chair and a table setting for Elijah whenever *Passover* is celebrated. Little children also go to the door of the home and open it in anticipation of Elijah's coming. The Old Testament prophets had said that God would send Elijah before the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6). According to these calculations John the Baptist was born at *Passover*. Remember the angel's words to Zechariah? The angel said that John the Baptist was to come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). Elijah came at *Passover*!

Continuing in Luke 1:26-36:

26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women.

29 And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

Luke tells us that Elizabeth was six months pregnant when the angel Gabriel visited Mary. The beginning of Elizabeth's sixth month would have been the celebration of the Jewish feast of *Hanukkah*, which occurs in December of our modern calendar. *Hanukkah* (*Chanukkah*) is known as the "Feast of the Dedication" (John 10:22) because it is connected with the dedication of the second Jewish temple and the rededication of the temple after the Maccabean revolt. Mary was being dedicated for a purpose of enormous magnitude: God's presence in an earthly temple, i.e. a human body (John 2:18-21).

If Mary did conceive on *Hanukkah*, John the Baptist would have been born three months later at *Passover*. And assuming a normal pregnancy of 285 days, Jesus would have been born on the 15th day of the Jewish month of *Tishri* (September 29 by modern reckoning). This is significant because it is the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). It is a high day, a special Sabbath, a time of great rejoicing.

The Feast of Tabernacles and Jesus.

As you have seen, the birth of our Lord can be reasonably shown to have occurred in the autumn of the year on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles is a joyful feast. Jewish believers would build a tabernacle or booth known as a "*sukkah*" out of green tree branches. They would eat their meals and sleep in this *sukkah* for eight days.

The Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) is called "the season of our joy" and "the feast of the nations." With this in mind, in Luke 2:10 it is written, "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings [*basar* in Hebrew; otherwise known as the gospel] of great joy [*Sukkot* is called the 'season of our joy'], which shall be to all people [*Sukkot* is called 'the feast of the nations']." So, we can see from this that the terminology the angel used to announce the birth of *Yeshua* (Jesus) were themes and messages associated with the Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles).

When was Jesus born? Nothing is absolutely certain, because we are dealing with implications and assumptions, but from Scriptures and history, September or October could have been the time.

The Origin of Christmas.

The ignoble nature of the origins and customs of Christmas can be found in many standard reference sources; therefore, we will only mention a few highly significant facts pertaining to the origins behind Christmas.

Rev Alexander Hislop wrote,

is found in the Appendix, "Touching Days and Places for Public Worship." It says: There is no day commanded in scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called *Holy-days*, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be continued.

Founded upon scriptural principles, this position against holidays is the official teaching of the standards. It should be acknowledged by those who adhere to the Westminster formulations as their doctrinal standards, since it is rooted in the Larger Catechism, as well as the Directory for Worship. This position was reflected in the practice of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and America up through the nineteenth century.

The view of James Bannerman.

The position against ecclesiastical holidays continued to be upheld in Scotland in the nineteenth century. Writing in his book, *The Church of Christ*, James Bannerman treats ecclesiastical holidays. He cites scriptural testimony, and refers to the Appendix of the Directory for Worship. He reveals nothing really startling, but his writing on the subject is forceful:

Though there were no other service rendered on the Sabbath, and though our lips were silent and our tongues expressed no articulate praise, the single act of keeping the first day of the week holy would be an act of religious homage to the authority, and of solemn adoration to the person, of Christ. The observance of that day of rest, as part of the ordinary worship of the Church, is an act of adoration to Christ, as much as a hymn in His praise would be an expression of adoration to Christ. And who does not see, that upon the same principle the observance of holidays appointed by the Church, as ordinary and stated parts of Divine worship, is an expression of religious homage to man, who is the author of the appointment, an unlawful acknowledgment of human or ecclesiastical authority in an act of worship. In keeping, after a religious sort, a day that has no authority but man's, we are paying homage to that authority; we are bowing down, in the very act of our observance of the day as part of worship, not to Christ, who has not appointed it, but to the Church, which has. We are keeping the season holy, not to God, but to man.

sacraments in private places, etc. are the wares of Rome, the baggage of Babylon, the trinkets of the whore, the badges of Popery, the ensigns of Christ's enemies, and the very trophies of Antichrist: we cannot conform, communicate, and symbolize with the idolatrous Papists, in the use of the same, without making ourselves idolaters by participation.

Gillespie also observes how ecclesiastical holidays undermine the true distinction of the Lord's Day. "Upon holy days they enjoin a cessation from work, and a dedicating of the day to Divine worship, even as upon the Lord's Day." In fact, "let it be observed, whether or not they keep the festival days more carefully, and urge the keeping of them more earnestly, than the Lord's own day." "...And whereas they can digest the common profanation of the Lord's Day, and not challenge it, they cannot away with the not observing of their festivities."

As an additional practical criticism, Gillespie gives a special word on the revelry associated with Christmas: "The keeping of some festival days is set up instead of the thankful commemoration of God's inestimable benefits: howbeit the festivity of Christmas has hitherto served more to Bacchanalian lasciviousness than to the remembrance of the birth of Christ."

With this cursory survey of Gillespie's monumental work, the reader is invited to consider the issues raised by Gillespie's criticisms. The essential issues have changed very little over the past 350 years.

Confessional Presbyterianism.

When the Westminster Standards were drawn up in the seventeenth century, the true worship of God took a central position in the doctrines contained therein. True worship is directed to God alone, and only in ways he has prescribed. Matters of worship to be observed the proper means or elements of worship are only those which God has ordained.

Treating the second commandment, the Larger Catechism demonstrates the unlawfulness of adding to the worship of God. The scriptures forbid "any religious worship not instituted by God himself" and "corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever" (Larger Catechism no. 109; cf. Confession, chapter 21).

This scriptural teaching is applied in the assembly's Directory for the Public Worship of God. A section particularly pertinent to the discussion on Christmas

Nimrod who with his wife Seramis, was the great fount of Babylonian idolatry. Seramis secured the deification of Nimrod. He was allegedly reincarnated as her son. Among the various names of this god in the different mythologies, he had "the name Zoroastes, "the seed of the Woman". Many ancient mythologies picture him as slaying a serpent. Thus were the statements of scripture perverted and imitated by Satanic deception. And thus was born the worship of the mother goddess and her son.



From Babylon



From India

The date December 25, coincided also with the birth of Attis, a Phrygian cult of the sun-god, introduced into Rome under the Empire. The popular feasts attached to the births of other sun-gods such as Mithras, were also invariably celebrated at the time of the winter solstice. The transition from festivals commemorating the birth of a sun god to a celebration ostensibly for the Son of God occurred sometime in the fourth century. Unable to eradicate the heathen celebration of Saturnalia, the Church of Rome, sometime before 336 A.D., designated a Feast of the Nativity to be observed. (See Alexander Hislop: "The Two Babylons")

Records covering the first three centuries of New Testament church history mention an increasing significance given to the period from Passover to Pentecost; yet, evidence is lacking to prove any celebration regarding the Saviour's birth. In the middle of the third century, Origin gives a list of fasts and festivals which were observed in his time, and no mention is made of Christmas. The lack of such testimony supports the conclusion that no celebration was then observed. Although there was no Christmas observance at this time, there were various pagan celebrations held in conjunction with the winter solstice.

In Scandinavia, the great feast of Yule with the use of trees and other various ceremonies, had celebrated the birth of the winter sun-god. In the Latin countries there reigned *Saturnalia*, a cult of the god Saturn. The exchanging of gifts, extravagant merriment, and lighting of candles all have previous counterparts in the Roman *Saturnalia*.

The process of assimilation is characteristic of Roman Catholicism throughout the centuries. Within Roman Catholicism, there is no policy designed to eradicate such heathen practices; rather, the general practice is to foster assimilation by replacing pagan superstitions with similar ecclesiastical institutions. An example of this policy is illustrated by a letter which Pope Gregory wrote to Abbot Mellitus on how to order things in Britain (A.D. 606):

The temples of the idols among the people should on no account be destroyed. The idols themselves are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there. For if these temples are well-built, they must be purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the service of the true God. In this way, we hope that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God. And since they have a custom of sacrificing many oxen to demons, let some other solemnity be substituted in its place, such as a day of Dedication or Festivals of the holy martyrs whose relics are enshrined there.

This is quite a programme! The church is encouraged to give the pagans ecclesiastical relics, rites, ceremonies, and festive celebrations as a substitute for their heathen ones. This policy differs greatly from the conduct of the children of God who cut down sacred groves, destroyed the remnants of idolatry, or burned their heathen books in order to make a clean break with pagan ways (Ex. 34:13; Deut. 12:2-4, 29-32; 2 Kings 18:4; Acts 19:19).

The Christmas holiday incorporates heathen observances on a worldwide scale. Each culture seems to have its own local "contribution" to the celebration of Christmas. The serious question for the Christian is this: Are we not commanded, "Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jer. 10:2)?

Along with Rome's direct infusion of paganism, the papal church has added some novelties of its own. The principal perversion is the celebration of the Mass. Since the middle ages, the concept of transubstantiation has been an integral part of Popish worship. Roman Catholics contend that the communion elements are transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ, in order to offer a re-sacrifice of Christ a sacrifice which is said to possess propitiatory

Gillespie's work contains a four-fold assault upon the ceremonies in general. First he argues against their necessity; second, he dispels notions that they are expedient; third, he demonstrates their unlawfulness; and fourth, he shows they are not indifferent. In each section, he draws applications of general principles to specific ceremonies which he finds objectionable. Specifically, he disputes the propriety of kneeling in the act of receiving the Lord's Supper, the use of the sign of the cross in baptism, confirmation, the surplice, and holidays.

The holidays take a severe beating on a number of counts. Some of his arguments are as follows.

Gillespie cites Knox to demonstrate the regulative principle of worship. Upon this principle, the holidays must be excluded, since they lack any positive warrant in the scriptures.

Gillespie rests his case on the second commandment. "The second commandment is moral and perpetual, and forbids to us as well as to them the additions and inventions of men in the worship of God." Therefore, "sacred significant ceremonies devised by man are to be reckoned among those images forbidden in the second commandment."

Based upon Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16, Gillespie notes the passing away of the biblical ceremonial feasts: "those days having had the honour to be once appointed by God himself, were to be honourably buried..." "If Paul condemned the observing of feasts which God himself instituted, then much more does he condemn the observation of feasts of man's devising."

Gillespie notes the superstitious and corrupt origins of the ceremonies. He provides numerous scripture references to show the duty of God's people to remove all remnants of idolatry from among them (Ex. 34:13; Num. 33:52; Deut. 7:5, 25-26; 12:2-3; Isa. 30:22) Gillespie's opponents claim that it is enough to clear away the "abuses" of the ceremonies, not the rites themselves; but Gillespie answers that, unless these ceremonies can be proven to be of necessary use by God's appointment, they must be purged completely out of existence.

Further, the ceremonies are not simply the monuments of past idolatry. They continue to be used by the Papists in their present corrupt and idolatrous worship. Thus, these rites are the very badges of present idolatry.

Forasmuch then, as kneeling before the consecrated bread, the sign of the cross, surplice, festival days, bishopping, bowing to the altar, administration of the

In which Books of Old and New Testaments we affirm that all things necessary for the instruction of the Kirk, and to make the man of God perfect, are contained and sufficiently expressed.

By contrary Doctrine, we understand whatsoever men, by Laws, Councils, or Constitutions have imposed upon the consciences of men, without the expressed commandment of God's word: such as be vows of chastity, foreswearing of marriage, binding of men and women to several and disguised apparels, to the superstitious observation of fasting days, difference of meat for conscience sake, prayer for the dead; and keeping of holy days of certain Saints commanded by men, such as be all those that the Papists have invented, as the Feasts (as they term them) of Apostles, Martyrs, Virgins, of Christmas, Circumcision, Epiphany, Purification, and other fond feasts of our Lady. Which things, because in God's scriptures they neither have commandment nor assurance, we judge them utterly to be abolished from this Realm; affirming further, that the obstinate maintainers and teachers of such abominations ought not to escape the punishment of the Civil Magistrate.

The position of the Scottish Church was reaffirmed in 1566. Theodore Beza wrote to Knox, requesting Scottish approval for the Second Helvetic Confession (1566). The General Assembly in Scotland replied with a letter of *general* approval. Nevertheless, the Assembly could scarcely refrain from mentioning, with regard to what is written in the 24th chapter of the aforesaid Confession concerning the "festival of our Lord's nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, ascension, and sending the Holy Ghost upon his disciples," that these festivals at the present time obtain no place among us; for we dare not religiously celebrate any other feast-day than what the divine oracles prescribed.

George Gillespie and his opposition to the English-Popish Ceremonies.

Over the next several decades, tensions persisted within the Scottish Church because of the Anglican order imposed upon the Scots. The Church of England was never purged of many liturgical superstitions which were carried over from Roman Catholicism. When the Anglican rituals (including holidays) were obtruded on the Scottish Church, militant opposition arose among the Scots.

George Gillespie (1613-49) wrote a definitive response to the advocates of the Anglican order. Gillespie was a premier theologian, and later served as a Scottish Commissioner to the Westminster Assembly. In 1637, Gillespie's book on the liturgical controversy was published: *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded Upon the Church of Scotland*.

merits. The Mass is a blasphemous assault upon the finality and perfection of Christ's sacrifice on the cross of Calvary (Cf. Heb. 9:12, 24-26; 10:10-14).

The Mass is the pre-eminent feature of Christmas celebration. "In the Roman Catholic Church three masses are usually said to symbolize the birth of Christ eternally in the bosom of the Father, from the womb of Mary and mystically in the soul of the faithful." The concept of the Mass is embedded in the English term *Christmas*, its etymology being traced to the Old English words *Christes maesse*, meaning "the mass or festival of Christ."

Because of its pagan and papal associations, Christmas met strong objections during and after the Protestant Reformation. This opposition was especially forceful among Presbyterians. They did so on the basis of the regulative principle.

The Bible's testimony against Christmas.

Even if Christmas had no pagan associations of the past or with Roman Catholicism we ought to reject it because the Bible does not teach the observance of Christmas. The Scriptures make it clear exactly how we are to worship God, including special days that we should observe, "what thing soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it". (Deut. 12:32 cf Lev. 10:1-3). For other Scriptures maintaining this principle see: Genesis 4:3-5; 2 Samuel 6:3-7 and 1 Chronicles 15:13-15 cp. Numbers 4:6 and 15. The second commandment teaches us that we are only to worship God in the way that He requires. Answer 109 of the Westminster Larger Catechism explains that the commandment forbids "any other wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself." The teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ reinforces this: - "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men" (Mark 7:7-8). The Apostle Paul likewise warns against "will worship" (Col. 2:22-23), worship that originates in the wishes of man wants to do rather than the commandment of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ commands the Church to teach men to observe all things that He had commanded (Matt. 28:20). They had no authority to add or take from what He has commanded.

This scriptural teaching that whatever Scripture does not command is to be excluded from worship is known as the "regulative principle". We exclude uninspired hymns, musical instruments and also holy days appointed by man. It

is of course appropriate to respond to the providence of God with days of thanksgiving or prayer and humiliation as the Westminster Directory For Public Worship explains: “Nevertheless, it is lawful and necessary, upon special emergent occasions, to separate a day or days for public fasting or thanksgiving, as the several eminent and extraordinary dispensations of God’s providence shall administer cause and opportunity to his people” (Westminster Directory For Public Worship), it goes on to say, however, that, “festival days, vulgarly called ‘Holy-days’, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued”.

While events and situations in providence vary across the years and century and across nations, the facts of the redemption that has been accomplished do not. The death and resurrection of Christ are commemorated through the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day. No other days have been appointed and therefore they are not needed. To appoint other days is to reject the wisdom of God, believing that His appointment was insufficient.

King Jeroboam of Israel violated the regulative principle by ordaining a holy day “which he had devised of his own heart” (1 Kings 12:32-33). It was similar to the one that God had ordained and it was in worship of the same God but it was not on the day that God had commanded but on a day of Jeroboam’s devising.

32 And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.
33 So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

Some may appeal to the feast of Purim in the book of Esther. The feast of Purim was not, however, worship as Esther 9:18, 26, and 28 makes clear. It was a day of gladness, but not an institution of worship like Jeroboam’s sacrifices. The Westminster Confession speaks of “solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.” (WCF Chapter 21, Section 5). It uses Esther 9:20-22 as a proof text for “and thanksgivings upon special occasions”, not for the ordinances of worship which it deals with before this.

John Knox and the Scottish Reformation.

From the outset of the Scottish Reformation, the discussion focussed upon the nature of true worship. John Knox repeatedly confronted his papal adversaries by contending that true worship must be instituted by God. True worship is not derived from the innovations of men.

At the heart of Knox's argument is an appeal to Deuteronomy 4 :1-2 and 12:30-32. These portions of scripture teach that it is unlawful to add to, or subtract from, the worship which God has instituted in his Word. Consequently, all religious ceremonies and institutions must have direct scriptural warrant if they are to be admitted as valid expressions of worship. This statement of the regulative principle of worship was a hallmark of the Scottish reformation. Knox made his case for the regulative principle at the beginning of his ministry, before he had studied on the Continent. Knox condemned the false worship of Roman Catholicism. In a public debate against the Papists, Knox declared:

That God's word damns your ceremonies, it is evident; for the plain and straight commandment of God is, "Not that thing which appears good in thy eyes, shalt thou do to the Lord thy God, but what the Lord thy God has commanded thee, that do thou: add nothing to it; diminish nothing from it." Now unless that ye are able to prove that God has commanded your ceremonies, this his former commandment will damn both you and them.

With this understanding of worship, the Scottish Church cast out a multitude of the monuments of idolatry which were part of papal worship; graven images, the Mass, false sacraments, Romish liturgical ceremonies, and Roman bishops were all removed from the Church. Ecclesiastical holidays were also expelled from the Church of Scotland.

In 1560, Knox and several others drew up the First Book of Discipline. In this book, the First Head of Doctrine begins with a general statement on the nature of the gospel.

After the opening statement, an "explication" is given which asserts the sole authority of scripture as it relates to doctrine and worship. Note the firm condemnation of holidays, as incorporated in this remarkable document:

Lest upon this our generality ungodly men take occasion to cavil, this we add for explication. By preaching of the Evangel, we understand not only the Scriptures of the New Testament, but also of the Old; to wit, the Law, Prophets, and Histories, in which Christ Jesus is no less contained in figure, than we have him now expressed in verity. And, therefore, with the Apostle, we affirm that "all Scripture inspired of God is profitable to instruct, to reprove, and to exhort."