

A Warning Against the False and Dangerous Views of James Jordan Concerning Worship

A Book Review of Kevin Reed's *Canterbury Tales* by Reg Barrow

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The nearer a false worship approaches to a true one, the more dangerous it is. Israel came nearer to the true worship of God than the heathens: now the prophet saith not, Though the heathens be idolators, yet let not Judah be so too; but, "Though Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend." There was more danger that Judah should be drawn aside by Israel, than that they should be drawn aside by any of the heathen. And so there is more danger that we, at this day, should be drawn aside by those that join with us in many things that are right, than by papists, who are hateful to us, and whose ways we see to be abominable. There is not so much danger, especially for those that profess godliness, of being drawn aside by those who grossly violate the laws of God, as by brethren that join with us in many things that are right, and come very near to the true worship of God... We must not approach places calculated to draw us into sin, especially to false worship... It is dangerous to indulge curiosity in visiting places of idolatry... ("Comments on Hosea 4:15 by Jeremiah Burroughs [1599-1646]" cited in *The Original Covenant and Contending Witness* magazine [vol. 1, #19, Sept. 10/93, pp.416-417]).

Reed's book *The Canterbury Tales: An Extended Review and Commentary Based upon the Geneva Papers*, interacts with James Jordan's Geneva Papers on worship. It is an excellent expose demonstrating how Jordan's views on worship are seriously flawed and how his writings "often show more charity toward Papists, than toward the Reformed faith" (p. 28, *Canterbury Tales*).

Reed wades through the many contradictions found in Jordan's writings to show that his corruption of the Reformed faith is most evident in three major areas: 1. the repudiation of the Reformed regulative principle of worship; 2. the attempt to introduce superstitions and unwarranted practices into the church; and 3. the rejection of confessional Presbyterianism (p. 3, *Canterbury Tales*). Elaborating, Reed notes that "the primary indication of the Tyler (this was first written in 1984) corruption of worship is seen "in their repudiation of the Reformed regulative principle of worship. This repudiation is manifest in four ways: by false portrayals of the regulative principle (compare Jordan's *Sociology of the Church*, ch. 10, with William Cunningham's *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, [Banner of Truth, pp. 27-46] or Carlos Eire's *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* [Cambridge University Press, pp. 195-275 - RB]); by a failure to make proper distinctions within the regulative principle; by a faulty pairing of Reformed and Anabaptist notions; and by a failure to deal exegetically with the scriptural position of the reformers (and the Reformed confessions) on the topic of worship... Moreover, Mr. Jordan does not stop with the repudiation of the Reformed regulative principle. He goes on with a program to reintroduce within the church many superstitions and unwarranted practices" (pp. 4, 24, *Canterbury Tales*). The escalation in apostasy, from sinful theory to wicked practice, noted in the last sentence, is not surprising; for as history (inspired and uninspired) teaches, when you reject Scriptural institutions of worship, you must, of necessity, replace them with some form of man-made, idolatrous, ceremony or rite. The rejection of the Reformation regulative principle of worship by Jordan and those who (like the Tylerites) follow his lead, always leaves one dusting off the ancient monuments to Antichrist and singing the songs of false prophets from the past!

For example, witness Jordan's denunciation of "traditional Puritanism and Presbyterianism:"

Thus, for traditional Puritanism and Presbyterianism, the fact that the New Testament books nowhere explicitly command the use of musical instruments in worship, proves (for them) that it is forbidden to use musical instruments in worship. This in spite of the overwhelming Biblical evidence in both the Old (ceremonial law - RB) and New Testaments (find one verse! - RB) that God wants musical instruments used in His worship (p. 209, *Sociology*).

Compare this with the standard Reformed response, pointing out how the introduction of Old Testament ceremonial law into New Testament worship is not only idolatrous,

but a denial of the work of Christ (the ceremonial law being abrogated). John Girardeau sets forth the views of John Calvin:

"To sing the praises of God upon the harp and psaltery," says Calvin, "unquestionably formed a part of the training of the law and of the service of God under that dispensation of shadows and figures; but they are not now to be used in public thanksgiving (on Ps. 71:22)." He says again: "With respect to the tabret, harp, and psaltery, we have formerly observed, and will find it necessary afterwards to repeat the same remark, that the Levites, under the law, were justified in making use of instrumental music in the worship of God; it having been his will to train his people, while they were yet tender and like children, by such rudiments until the coming of Christ. But now, when the clear light of the gospel has dissipated the shadows of the law and taught us that God is to be served in a simpler form, it would be to act a foolish and mistaken part to imitate that which the prophet enjoined only upon those of his own time (on Ps. 81:2)." He further observes: "We are to remember that the worship of God was never understood to consist in such outward services, which were only necessary to help forward a people as yet weak and rude in knowledge in the spiritual worship of God. A difference is to be observed in this respect between his people under the Old and under the New Testament; for now that Christ has appeared, and the church has reached full age, it were only to bury the light of the gospel should we introduce the shadows of a departed dispensation. From this it appears that the Papists, as I shall have occasion to show elsewhere, in employing instrumental music cannot be said so much to imitate the practice of God's ancient people as to ape it in a senseless and absurd manner, exhibiting a silly delight in that worship of the Old Testament which was figurative and terminated with the gospel (on Ps. 92:1)" (*Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, pp. 63, 64).

It should also be noted, because of the almost complete loss of a Reformed hermeneutic (regarding worship) in our day, that running to Revelation for support of the use of musical instruments in public worship is an idea long ago rejected by consistent Reformed exegetes. David Steele's testimony, in his comments on Revelation 14:2-3, gives one of the reasons why,

"Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King... Let the high praise of

God be in their mouth" (Ps. 149:2, 6). Unterrified by the roaring of the beasts of prey, these followers of the Lamb lift their voices in unison; and whether on mountains or in valleys, in dens or in caves of the earth, their songs of praise ascend to the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. The symphony is heightened by the "voice of harpers, harping on their harps." And if any person be so ignorant as to ground an argument on these words, for the use of instruments in the worship of God, consistency will require him to take his position on the literal Mount Zion with a literal lamb! (*Notes on the Apocalypse* [Covenanted Reformed Presbyterian Publishing, 1870, forthcoming], pp. 196-197).

The rejection of Reformation worship and the road to Rome is often paved with incremental deviations from truth, following down the broad path of worship accepted by earlier deformations of biblically regulated worship. This is also illustrated by Reed when he writes, "It is also quite telling that Mr. Jordan acknowledges his affinity with Lutheran and Anglican forms of worship, in preference to others (*Geneva Papers*, #25). Lutheran/Anglican worship is built on an entirely different presupposition than Reformed worship. The Lutheran/Anglican position holds that we may worship God by various means, as long as what we are doing is not explicitly forbidden in scripture" (p. 25, *Canterbury Tales*). This exact Lutheran deviation is also adopted by Jordan in his book *The Sociology of the Church*. After paying lip service to the regulative principle (p. 208), he then argues for the introduction into worship of some of the ensigns of Antichrist on the basis of what the Bible "does not forbid" (p. 217, *Sociology*, emphasis added). Moreover, he again completely forgets his earlier pretended adherence to the regulative principle when he states that "there is no Biblical principle against" (p. 217, *Sociology*, emphasis added) whatever idolatrous innovation with which he would tyrannize the church. This is pure equivocation; the regulative principle calls for God's institution (of elements) of worship, Jordan calls for the exact opposite when he asks where the Bible forbids his innovations. "In other words," Reed continues (exposing Jordan's explicit rejection of the regulative principle and adoption of Lutheran/Anglican notions), "they don't have to produce scriptural warrant for their practices (as in Reformed worship); rather the opponents of the practice must prove that it is wrong. The implication is that God has not left us a specific pattern for worship; he has left the church great freedom to establish rites and ceremonies for worship" (p. 25, *Canterbury Tales*). Moreover, Jordan is not shy about the fact that he likes to wallow in the mud outside of the harlot daughters of Antichrist's latrine, writing, "(a)s I study Scripture, I find that Lutheran and Anglican churches are more Biblical in their worship, despite some problems" (p. 210, *Sociology*). In this vein, William Cunningham long ago (1862) noted the propensity of the carnal nature, when

it is bent on inventing man-made ceremonies and humanly embellished worship:

Of the views generally held by the Reformers on the subject of the organization of the church, there are two which have been always very offensive to men of a loose and latitudinarian tendency, -viz., the alleged unlawfulness of introducing into the worship and government of the church any thing which is not positively warranted by Scripture, and the permanent binding obligation of a particular form of church government ("Leaders of the Reformation" in *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* [Banner of Truth, reprinted 1989], p. 31).

The very problem Cunningham refers to, concerning "loose and latitudinarian" tendencies, is again (in our day) being exhibited by Jordan and exposed and rebuked by Reed (in his *Canterbury Tales*), some 122 years later. Furthermore, should Jordan (and all those who follow him) continue to slide away from the Reformation attainments of Christ's bride (especially the great victories of the second Reformation), continuing down the path he is now on, promoting his revolution against "traditional Puritan and Presbyterian" worship and the reconstruction of the mystery of iniquity, Calvin's stern rebuke (Titus 1:13), found at the end of this quotation by Carlos Eire (*War Against the Idols*, pp. 219-220) will most certainly become applicable,

Calvin maintains that the human heart is also led into the error of idolatry through its love of ceremony and ritual (A good study of Calvin's view of ceremonies is T.W. Street's *John Calvin on Adiaphora* [Ph.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1954], pp. 208-16). Calvin attacks the excessive and improper use of ceremonies by the Catholic church as a denial of spiritual worship. First, because it is an abrogation of God's commands; secondly, because it often entails the improper use of material paraphernalia; and finally because it is often taken to be some sort of automatic communication between God and man. Humanly devised ceremonies are a bold affront to God's power, honor, and freedom. Through them men attempt to worship God as they please and to bind His power to specific situations. Consequently, Calvin deals with ceremonies as dangerous distractions that only serve to confuse man and rob God of His majesty (Grau, *Calvins Stellung*, p. 12; Wencelius, *L'Esthetique*, pp. 221-2). Calvin also carries his analysis of the psychology of idolatry to the social level. "We see," he says, "how by mutual persuasion, men urge one another to defend superstition and the worship of idols." Calvin asserts that the more the truth of God is

manifested, the more obstinately man persists in following his own way against God, as if he intends to wage war against Him (take heed Jim - RB). Calvin is convinced that the perversion of man is such that, since the beginning of the Reformation, there has been an increase in idolatry, not a decrease (*Commentary of Isaiah*, CR 37.37 [CR refers to: *Corpus Reformatorum: Joannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, edited by W. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss, Brunswick, 1863-80]). Calvin attributes this rebellion against God to a form of mass hysteria in which idolaters take comfort from each other's encouragements and from the security that comes from belonging to a large group (Ibid. CR 37.254). Calvin also argues that people remain steeped in idolatry out of habit and a false sense of awe resulting from the antiquity of their beliefs. It is very difficult, he indicates, to believe that anything ancient can be wrong. The older the idolatry, therefore, the harder it is to displace from men's hearts (Sermons on Deuteronomy, CR 28.711). Zwingli has also made a similar reference to this phenomenon in *De vera et falsa religione* (*Latin Works*, 3.337).

Sounding a bit like the Luther of the *Table Talk*, though somewhat more restrained, Calvin expands upon this theme by comparing idolaters to latrine cleaners:

"Just as a 'maistre Fifi' mocks those who hold their noses (in his presence), because he has handled filth for so long that he can no longer smell his own foulness; so likewise do idolaters make light of those who are offended by a stench they cannot themselves recognize. Hardened by habit, they sit in their own excrement, and yet believe they are surrounded by roses" (*Excuse*, CR 6.595. ['Maistre Fifi' is a sixteenth-century French slang term for a latrine or sewer cleaner.])

It may also interest some of you that Kevin Reed is presently gathering together a body of Calvin's most important sermons, as referred to in *War Against the Idols*. These sermons, chosen as an example of Calvin's iconoclastic zeal, include some of the great Reformer's most classic statements concerning worship and separation from idolatry. Moreover, most of these sermons have never been translated into English before. When the translation work is done and the book has been prepared for press, these sermons will be released to the public as a hardcover book. At present, though it has not been confirmed, the title for this book will be: *Come Out from Among Them: The Anti-Nicodemite Writings of John Calvin*. But back to the discussion at hand. For a positive

statement of biblically regulated worship, which will clear the air of the stench of Roman Catholic and Lutheran/Anglican idolatry, taken from the greatest family of uninspired documents ever produced by man (and exhibiting the height of the second Reformation faithfulness), please note the finely crafted explanations of the duties required, sins forbidden and reasons annexed to the second commandment, as found in the *Westminster Larger Catechism* (adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland July 2, 1648, as a part of the covenanted uniformity in worship required by this Assembly's [international] covenant with Christ as sworn in the "Solemn League and Covenant", August 17, 1643):

Question 108: What are the duties required in the second commandment?

Answer: The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in his Word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto him: as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.

Question 109: What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; tolerating a false religion; the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature: Whatsoever; all worshiping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them; all superstitious devices, 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 pretense: Whatsoever; simony; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God has appointed.

Question 110: What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it? Answer: The reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it, contained in these

words, For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments; are, besides God's sovereignty over us, and propriety in us, his fervent zeal for his own worship, and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom; accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate him, and threatening to punish them unto divers generations; and esteeming the observers of it such as love him and keep his commandments, and promising mercy to them unto many generations.

If the covenanted Presbyterianism of the Westminster divines is not the antithesis of what James Jordan is putting forth, I could not tell you what is. And it is here again, we find, in light of this information, Reed's *Canterbury Tales* to be most helpful. For at this point Reed exhibits the practical consequences of the rejection of Reformation worship, citing examples of the rotten fruit that inevitably appears when you have a bad theological tree, "Consequently, we now find the Tyler community sporting an entire wardrobe bearing designer labels of Rome and Canterbury. It is fashionable to support ministerial vestments, the litany, the ecclesiastical year (with saints' days), the sign of the cross, and public healing services" (p. 24, *Canterbury Tales*). Since these shenanigans began some time ago, under the guise of a superior understanding of the regulative principle, promoted primarily by Jordan, some have become more bold, honest and logically consistent about their rejection of Reformation worship. Gary North, for instance, recently (Feb./94) called the regulative principle a "Presbyterian folk myth" (*Christian Reconstruction* newsletter, vol. 18, #1). Of course this apostasy does not end with aberrant views of worship, for Reed also notes that "(i)n... *The Geneva Papers* (#28), Mr. Jordan openly states his view that the Westminster Confession is a corpse, a dead symbol with a main value for study, in order to help the church write a new confession... a rather open denial of confessional Presbyterianism" (p. 27, *Canterbury Tales*; on this point also see Wagner's *Paleopresbyterianism Versus Neopresbyterianism*; in it he shows how attacks upon the original *Westminster Confession* are one of the two major marks of the neopresbyterian rejection of classic or historic Presbyterianism). Here, more than just about any other place, Jordan serves as a sober warning from God against those who would remove the old landmarks. Theology is a seamless garment, a systematic whole; start pulling out specific threads and you will end up with a garment full of holes (not a holy garment), and your nakedness will be evident to all when the judgement comes. In fact, when compared to the historical testimony of our Reformation forefathers regarding the regulative principle, Jordan, the new "emperor of innovation" has already shown that he has been

stripped of his Reformation clothes, theologically.

Reed also notes that despite biblical rebuke, Jordan continues to spread his anti-Reformation views, writing, "Mr. Jordan is no longer associated with the congregation (at Tyler - RB) but has continued to spread his aberrant opinions among Presbyterian churches" (p. 29, *Canterbury Tales*). Scripture tells us plainly, and without equivocation, how to treat those who profess Christianity, but deny apostolic doctrine (and are obstinate in their error): "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). Furthermore, we are told "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge" (Prov. 19:27). Because Jordan has had some influence among the more ignorant and anti-historic segments of the Reformed community, and because he continues to spread his poison concerning worship, we would all do well to heed the Scriptural warning. Furthermore, if we really desire Reformation in our day, the word's of John Knox to the English nation, in 1559, calling for national repentance over the recent apostasy during Mary's reign, will be as valuable as any that we will hear today:

For the first point, touching reformation of religion, you must at once so purge and expel all dregs of Papistry, superstition and idolatry: that you; O England! must judge and hold execrable and accursed whatsoever God has not sanctified unto you by his word, or by the action of our master Christ Jesus. The glistening beauty of vain ceremonies, the heaping of things pertaining nothing to edification (by whomsoever they were invented, justified, or maintained), ought at once to be removed, and so trodden under the obedience of God's word, that continually this sentence of your God be present in your heart and mouth: "Not that which appeareth good in thy eyes shalt thou do to the Lord thy God, but what the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, that shalt thou do: add nothing to it; diminish nothing from it... O dissembling hypocrites! plain messengers of Satan, now I do write, which sometime I have said to your faces, that whatsoever God (in matters of religion) has not sanctified by his expressed word, the same, I say, before his Majesty remains execrable, polluted, and defiled. And so, in few words, this is the first point which your true conversion requires; to wit; that only his word reform his religion... The other part, touching the instruction of the people, stands much in the faithful diligence of those to whom the charge of preaching shall be committed. But when I remember that horrible confusion which before was maintained, even by those which would be esteemed chief pillars of religion, I do more fear to be plain in this matter than in all that which before I have spoken. For it may be, that in

speaking the simple truth, I may displease those whom willingly I would offend for no earthly profit. Nevertheless, seeing the cause is not mine, but pertains to Christ Jesus, and to the feeding of that flock which so earnestly and tenderly he did commend Peter (and to all his faithful pastors to the world's end), whatsoever man shall judge, I dare not cease, in God's name to require of you a severe reformation of those things which were before utterly disordered. And first, in the name of the Lord Jesus, I require of you, that no dumb dog, no poisoned and pestilent Papist, none who before has persecuted God's children, or obstinately maintained idolatry, be placed above the people of God, to infect and poison (for other profit they shall do more) the souls of those whom Christ Jesus has redeemed with his precious blood. ("A Brief Exhortation to England..." in *Selected Writings of John Knox* Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995], pp. 594-598).

Reed's book, the *Canterbury Tales*, is in keeping with Knox's biblical admonition to flee idolatry (all worship not instituted by God) and all false teachers. In fact, these very truths are what make this book such a valuable testimony against the present error.

In conclusion, Reed's *Canterbury Tales* is a great introduction to historic Reformed worship, using Jordan as an example of what misguided zeal (and the darkness of dilettantism) can produce in this area. Reed writes clearly and has a very good grasp of the Scriptural and historical data concerning worship issues. He also includes an excellent bibliography which clearly demonstrates the point at issue: showing that Jordan has jettisoned the historic Reformed view of biblically regulated worship (as have most modern Reformed churches and Christian Reconstructionists) - all his (and their) protests to the contrary notwithstanding.

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