

Introduction: *The Centrality of Worship in Christian Spirituality*

We should “step back” for a moment and think about what we are doing when we “worship” something, even how “strange” it is that we would do it. What does it say about our spirituality that we “worship?” In so many words, our confession introduces it this way:

The light of nature sheweth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might.

What are some of the ways that we discern the centrality of worship in Scripture?

1. *Worship is central to the church by definition of “church.”*

Our English word "church" is a translation of the Greek word "ecclesia" meaning "assembly" in the New Testament. Our identity as "church" is that of one holy catholic and apostolic *assembly* that is organically united with the saints and angels in the glorious festal gathering in heaven according to Hebrews 12:22-29.¹ Therefore, the church is exhorted to *assemble* together in Heb.10:19-25 which is no doubt a reference to our participation together in worship on earth as we await the great day of our joining with the heavenly courts anticipated in Hebrews 12. The consummation of church history is told with the jolting visions of heavenly liturgy in John's apocalyptic epistle. We are met there with visions of the glorified Christ in the company of worshippers. These liturgical visions are central to John's exhortation to the church in her mission to persevere in being a witness to the nations for the glory of God as revealed in Christ.

2. *Worship is central to our identity as “creature.”*

We are never so right with ourselves than when we worship! Our worship defines us as those made in the image of God responding to God, our infinite, immutable and glorious Creator. As part of God's creation, we are told how we, like the heavens, “declare the glory of God.” (Ps.19:1) Our worship is "awe-full" and when we catch even a glimpse of the power of God in creation—like Elijah who was filled with awe at the awesome power of God in a hurricane. There is no more natural and true response to God than the responses to worship. *Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created...* (Ps.148:5) Lester Ruth observed, "if God is one of the reasons we offer worship, we can also point to ourselves. Worship is the ultimate original human vocation. People are not first of all *homo sapiens*, "knowing creatures," but we were created by God to be worshipping creatures. What distinguishes humanity in relationship to God is humanity's ability to worship." Again from the book of Revelation we discover that "worship fulfills our eternal destiny. It anticipates the quality of eternal life."² Even the language we evoke when speaking of worship makes the case for our vocation of worship. The word "liturgy" is derived from the Greek words "laos" and "ergon" or "the work of the people." It is our calling then to worship God.

3. *Worship is central to our identity as purposed in our salvation.*

In God's redemption, we are shown the mighty acts of God to save his chosen people from their enemies—and most ultimately the last and final enemy of death itself. (1Cor.15) We respond in worship. Moses prostrated himself to the God full of grace and truth as exposed in Exodus 34:6. Christ meant his accomplishments for the salvation of the elect to "glorify thy name" according to John. (Jn.12:28) The exalted Christ is worshipped as the "lamb who was slain" for the sins of the elect in Revelation. And the assembly of worshippers sing forth, *worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!* And we are told that *every creature which is in heaven and earth and under the earth...* said, *Blessing and honor and glory and power to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever!* (Rev. 5:12-13) This is to worship the God of salvation!

As summarized by Lester Ruth, we are therefore called to worship because, "God is worthy of our worship and praise. It is meet and right to give God thanks and praise. It is suitable and appropriate. It is right because of the nature of God."³ As someone else has observed, "God's worthiness ensures that God-centered worship could never be in vain."⁴ It is the defining mark of our spirituality to be God centered versus “us” centered, and worship is the expression of this! (Remember WCF 3:1-2 and especially the conclusion: *to Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service or obedience he is pleased to require of them.*)

¹ Edmund Clowney, *The Church*, p. 118

² Lester Ruth, Lecture 1

³ Quoted from unpublished Lecture notes, *Foundations of Liturgical Study, Lecture 1 (9/2/99)*

⁴ 1975 Harford Appeal, "We worship God because God is to be worshipped." (J.R. Neuhaus, *Freedom*, p. 122)

4 Fundamental Principles of "Christian" Worship In WCF:

Principle #1: The Regulative Principle (read 21.1b)

A Historical Survey: Ezekiel 20:27-32 compared to Dt.12:1-10, 13

1. Type of literature: Prophetic Court case
"Divine Judgement Oracle"
2. Series of indictments based on the Deuteronomic covenant in contrast to Israel's history
3. **Main indictment: Covenant infidelity**
Purpose of Covenant: 20:14
Israel's unfaithfulness: v. 30 Spiritual Harlotry
4. Covenant Curse for breaking covenant stipulations: 33-39 (From Dt. 28)
5. Specific Problem: *Syncretism in Worship*
Key phrase: "on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree."
(Compare to covenant stipulations in Dt. 12.)

As Calvin put it:

"Worship should be to God alone and without any dependence on human will... all mixtures by which the pure simplicity of lawful worship is corrupted are condemned." We are to follow in all simplicity what he has ordained by his Word, without adding anything to it at all" (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, p. 66).

Notice how this principle is stated by the Confession. Also note other confessional statements to this affect.

Book of Church Order:

Preface: Christ, *as King*, has given to His Church officers, oracles and ordinances; and especially has He ordained there in His system of doctrine, government, discipline and *worship*, all of which *are expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced there from; and to which He commands that nothing be added, and that from them naught be taken away.*

Chapter 47 on *The Principles and Elements of Public Worship*

47-1: Since the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, and form no other source.

The Scriptures forbids the worshipping of God by images, *or in any other way not appointed in His Word*, and requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in His Word.

What are the five elements of worship according to the confession?

Worship, prayer, sacraments, word, and fellowship/collection

What is the apostolic foundation for worship as per the foundation setting role of the apostle as per Mt.16:17ff and Eph. 2:20? Consider then Acts 2:42 where we see four elements included in corporate worship:

Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Therefore, 4 Essential Elements:

- Prayers
 - Spoken and Sung
- Sacraments
 - Baptism-entrance
 - Lord's Supper- Renewal
- Word (Apostolic)
 - Read and Preached
- "Fellowship" (Collection and Mercy)

Principle #2: The Christ Centered (or Gospel driven) Principle (read 21.2)

The Covenantal Pattern in Worship— Dialogical Movements after the patterned Gospel logic.

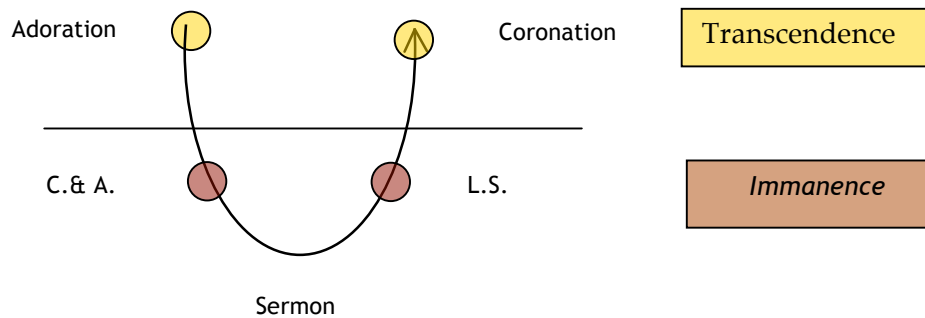
1.) God declares, "I am your God, you are my people" as then covenantally fulfilled in Christ.

2.) The people respond by rendering praise and thanksgiving to God, and by renewing vows of exclusive faith and commitment to God through Christ.

3.) Christ is present in, with and through covenantal worship to bring about his life-giving and salvific purpose to the praise of his glorious grace.

How then is the presence mediated, except by the Christo-centric logic of the gospel as entered into by worship?

- ◆ The Covenantal Movements In worship: From an emphasis on transcendence to imminence to transcendence again...



- ◆ The fourfold pattern after a "Gospel Logic:"

1. Movement of Praise and Adoration: "praise is the gateway to God's presence" (Hughes Old)
We enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Psm.100:4

- ✓ Call to Worship
- ✓ Doxology
- ✓ Hymns/Songs of Praise
- ✓ Prayer of Praise and Invocation

2. Movement of Confession and Absolution: "true knowledge of God leads to a true knowledge of ourselves." (Terry Johnson)

-- A familiar pattern in OT:

Moses (after seeing even the backside of God's glory) "made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship (Ex.34:8)

Isaiah (seeing a vision of God's glory in the temple) cried out "woe is me, for I am ruined, I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips." (Is.6:5)

-- A familiar pattern in the NT:

Peter (after he sees God's glory in Jesus following a miracle) calls out "depart from me for I am a sinful man." (Luke 5:8)

John (seeing a vision of God on the throne) described how "when I saw Him, I fell at his feet as a dead man." (Rev.1:17)

As a consequence, we must infer that man is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty."

John Calvin, *Institutes...*

- ✓ Reading of the Law of God
- ✓ Confession of Sin
- ✓ Assurance and Absolution
- ✓ Entrance Sacrament of Baptism
- ✓ Pastoral Prayers
- ✓ Hymns/Songs of Thanksgiving

3. Movement Within the Mediated Presence of God in *Word* and *Sacrament*: "the means of grace"

It is not merely a re-enactment or remembrance of God's work for our salvation. It is God present as mediated through his word and sacrament so as to transact his covenant to those who are being saved.

Word:

You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever."

1 Peter 1:23-25

But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved... So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ."

Romans 10: 8,17

Sacrament:

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it.

Mark 14:22-23

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

1 Cor.16-17

- ✓ Reading from Scripture
- ✓ Prayer for Illumination
- ✓ Expository Sermon
- ✓ Renewed Faith in Christ
- ✓ Renewed Trust and Giving of Ourselves to Christ
- ✓ Sacrament of Lord's Supper and Spiritual Confirmation and Sealing into Gods' Salvation

4. Movement of Coronation of God by humanity and benediction for those being saved by God.

- ✓ Hymn of Coronation and Praise
- ✓ Prayer of Coronation, Praise and Thanksgiving
- ✓ Gloria Patri
- ✓ Benediction: The final Word is God's, and it is the promise of blessing, not curse, upon those being saved!

◆ Summary of the Covenantal Pattern:

The two beat rhythm of God's approach to us that meets with and evokes a reacting offering of ourselves to him seems basic to the Christian view of worship.

Ralph Martin

Principle #3: The Vernacular Principle (read 21.3, esp. 3.b)

In so far as it is a work of the people in response to the work of God, there is a "vernacular" component to true, dialogical, nature of worship. Therefore,

Acts 1:19

This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

Acts 2:6

And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

Acts 2:8

And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

1 Cor. 14:5

I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive **edification**.

This all begs for a discussion about how to both "direct" and "vernaculate" (if I could make up a word here) at the same time. Our discussion would need to talk about the inter-relationship of message and medium. We would need to remember that no culture is "a-moral" such that each culture contains its hidden idols. And we would need to always remember what will be discussed next as the third theological aspect of covenant worship which is the dual ends of worship for both doxology and edification. That is to say, we will want our words, lyrics, and styles to BOTH glorify God and edify the elect.

Using the language of BCO

Therefore, we are to determine what is "to the glory of God" and "recognizing that Christ is the Mediator by whom alone they can come unto God, when they honor Christ as the head of the church, who rules over public worship and when their worship is an expression of their faith in Christ and their love for Him. (BCO 47:5)

Again, "the forms for public worship have value only when they serve to express the inner reverence of the worshipper and his sincere devotion to the true and living God. And only those whose hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit are capable of such reverence and devotion." (BCO 47:5)

Thus, if the regulative principle preserves the doxology of worship, the vernacular principle preserves the edification in worship.

As directed to both the believing and unbelieving elect, the worship will be edifying, even as it is first and foremost doxological.

1 Cor. 14:12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the **edification** of the church that you seek to excel.

1 Cor. 14:26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for **edification**.

And by "edification" it is not just meant "for believers" but "for the elect" (an important distinction... why?)

Edification Principle Clarified:

NOT: As an appeal to the sympathies of the flesh...

RATHER: As an appeal to the sympathies of effectual calling in election

I.e. A message and vernacular that appeals to the sympathies expected of those being called by God vs. those sympathies of the "flesh" as related to the "natural man", albeit in a vernacular that is sensitive to both the "Unbelieving/seeker/unchurched" and "Believer/church" alike.

Principle #4: The Directed Principle – a Presbyterian Distinctive

Note: Our *confession* DOES acknowledge that our response to God will necessarily include such things as are beyond the teachings of scripture and ordered by what amounts to "common sense." So for instance, after affirming the above "regulating" principle in Chapter 1.6, our confession also affirms a vernacular sensitive principle as follows within the same chapter and section:

WCF 1:6 Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

How then are these things to be ordered? Three traditional options:

Hierarchically driven *Formalism*:

Congregational *Formlessness*:

Presbyterially Directed Forms:

our standards will clarify that... "the Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given his Church a large measure of liberty in this matter. It may not be forgotten, however, that there is true liberty only where the rules of God's word are observed and the spirit of the Lord is, that all things must be done decently and in order, and that God's people should serve Him with reverence and in the beauty of holiness..." (BCO 47:6)

E.g. Worship is then to be directed with a view toward 1) an order/content/style that is "according to the general rules of the Word" and 2) a content and style that is sensitive to the needs and "vernacular" of a specific congregation. Therefore, a self-consciously "directed" worship as determined by the general rules/values of scripture and circumstances common to the vernacular of a given society.

Thompson:

When their chairman... laid the first draft of the work before the full Assembly (May 1644) he reported that "many serious and sad debates" had taken place over the crucial issue of form and freedom.⁵ To satisfy the desires and scruples of all the parties the subcommittee had found it expedient to produce a directory, as opposed to a liturgy, which outlined the main headings of worship and described the substance of each element in such a way that "by altering here and there a word, a man may mould it into a prayer." Where disagreement could not be overcome, the committee made compensation by allowing variety in practice or by using rubrics of lesser compulsion.

Completed in 1744, entitled *A Directory for the Public Worship of God...*

⁵ OF which we do well to avoid by remaining true to that which the Westminster decided for us ... rather than re-living them all over. Thus the value of denominationalism—there ARE other church options for those who are not comfortable with the Scots-Presbyterian tradition.