


The Essentials of Covenantal Worship

Introduction--Worship as an essential and defining activity



That *Worship*, is an essential, even defining characteristic of the church hardly needs defending. 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 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 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.

And if worship is essential to the church's identity, it is likewise essential to the identity of created humanity. For never are we so right with ourselves than when we are right in our worship! Our worship defines us as those made in the image of God responding to God, our infinite, immutable and glorious Creator. In God's creation, we are told that "the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1) We respond in worship. Our worship is "awe-ful" and reverent 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. Or like Isaiah who caught a glimpse of God's glory in the temple enthroned among the flaming angels and could not help but prostrate himself in humble adoration and awe in God's presence. 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)

Worship is essential to our identity as those saved and forgiven by God's grace. 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!

Clearly then, worship as an essential, even defining, characteristic of the church needs no defending. We are called to worship because, in the words of Lester Ruth, "God is worthy of our worship and praise. It is meet and right to give God thanks and praise. It is

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

suitable and appropriate. It is right because of the nature of God."² "God's worthiness ensures that God-centered worship could never be in vain."³

One thinks here of the Westminster Confession of Faith. After describing God-- one who is *infinite in being and perfection... immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute... most righteous, most loving, gracious, merciful... all-sufficient not standing in need of any creature which he hath made, not deriving any glory from them but only manifesting his won glory in, by, unto and upon them... as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain, etc. etc* -- the confession is compelled to add, *to Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service or obedience he is pleased to require of them.*⁴

Our worship is likewise our highest, most profound calling as both humans and Christians. Lester Ruth observes that "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 anticipate the quality of eternal life."⁵ 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. It is the ultimate purpose for our being saved by God's grace. So for instance, Paul describes the Trinitarian activity of salvation in Ephesians as a doxological event "to the praise of His glorious grace." (Ephesians 1:6, 12 and 14 a related to the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit respectively.)

We may rightly conclude with Aiden Kavenaugh that "the liturgy of the church is nothing other than the church's faith in motion." Or with Alexander Schmemmann that "worship is the public act which sternly actualizes the nature of the church as the body of Christ, an act... which embraces, expresses, inspires and defines the whole church, her whole essential nature, her whole life." In the language of the confession, *Our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!*

It is for this very reason-- that worship IS essential to the identity of the church-- that we need to talk earnestly about it.

II. The Challenges Facing Us In Worship

And yet the moment we set out to talk about worship, we are met with a legion of challenges-- challenges that need to make us more humble, tolerant and civil toward one another as we talk about worship. To acknowledge the challenges will also go a long way toward reforming our worship to the glory of God.

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

³ 1975 Harford Appeal, "We worship God because God is to be worshipped." J.R. Neuhaus, "The activity called worship is not true worship if it can be done legitimately in any other context... Worship, if done in response to anything other than the mystery of God in Christ, is idolatry." (J.R. Neuhaus, *Freedom*, p. 122)

⁴ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter II, Sections 1-2.

⁵ Lester Ruth, Lecture 1

Our first great challenge in discerning true worship is that we are Naturally Challenged. The challenge to reform worship is always primarily the challenge to respond properly to God, "to put our faith in motion." And yet, who can say "I know God" such as to know the proper response to Him? God is mysteriously *other*-- his perfections exhaust our wildest imaginations. To talk about worship is to assume that we can talk about God-- and we can't, not in any pure and comprehensive manner!

"Worship is the "response of the creature to the Eternal"... an acknowledgment of God as transcendent. It is precisely at the point of stressing the presence of God as "eternal" and transcendent that is *above* the world and occupying a space known as holy that Christian worship finds it difficult to convey..." Ralph Martin p.3

It is true that God has graciously "dumbed down" His glory that we might have a glimpse of him, both in creation and redemption. And yet even these "dumbed down" revelations are only imperfectly understood by us. Our response to God should always be after the type that is expressed by the apostle Paul, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways are past finding out! (Rom.11:33) And however else we talk about worship with each other, we should all be somewhat timid about it. Worship is, most essentially, about our response to God, and we are "nature challenged" as created, finite, mortals!

Secondly, we are Morally Challenged. Even as our created "natures" presents us with a challenge, so also we are challenged by our morality as fallen and sinful beings. Romans 1:18ff makes it very clear, that our moral inclination is not to "worship" God, but to avoid worship by creating idols. Why idols? Because idols have the appearance of gods who lord over us such as to satisfy the craving to be religious, and yet in reality we lord over our idols by manipulating them to do for us what we want. Every idol in the Bible is like this. Baal in the Old Testament was the god of fertility, presumably to make the earth fertile. And yet Baal could be manipulated to fertility by the fertility rites of temple prostitution. Idols accomplish the temptation at the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" in that they put humanity in control without the appearance of control. This can be expressed in worship perhaps more so than anything else. Even as we maintain the appearance of responding to God, we are manipulating an idol within our culture in order to gain something we want out of worship. Therefore, in our fallen nature, we must never forget our moral instinct that is not yet fully sanctified this side of heaven. Our instinct is to "worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever." Again, we need great humility as we discuss worship together. It is every person's tendency, if not covertly then overtly, to sabotage true worship!

There is a relationship between our lives and our worship. Our values, our worldviews, our habits, our practices at home-- all play to the quality of our worship. Dawn has said it this way...

Who we are as an individual believer depends greatly upon the character of the community of believers in which you are nurtured. How faithfully does that community incarnate God's presence and pass on the narratives that reveal God when they assemble together? .p106

We are morally challenged!

We are also, and thirdly, culturally challenged. Eg. This is the challenge associated with contextualization. Each one of us are contextualized within a particular culture-- no one culture being unchallenged by its own moral challenges. This third challenge is all the more significant and dynamic once it is remembered that our worship is the attempt to actualize the timeless God-centered convictions of faith into an ever changing, time-bound context of cultures. Our conversation about contextualized worship will necessarily be both strategic and critical such that in the words of Marva Dawn, the church ought to be "up-side-down" in her worship.

Believers in Jesus are called to live *in* the world. We do not escape it to avoid its contamination's and problems, but from the *inside* we seek to understand it so that we can minister to its needs. Simultaneously, we struggle to be not *of* the world; we rejects its values and stay *outside* its temptations and idolatries. To maintain this dialectical tension of being *in* but not *of*, the Church's worship must be upside-down (as from the world's perspective)-- turning the culture's perspective on its head (thinking from God's revelation rather than human knowledge)...

Herein lies the challenge! How to be *in* the world and not *of* the world in our worship. How do we contextualize our worship in order to allow full participation of the priesthood of believers without also falling into idolatrous syncretism in our worship. Another way of stating the challenge is by asking, "how do we avoid both *under*-contextualization and *over*-contextualization in worship?" And notice that the option is NOT contextualization! The option is NOT either to think critically about our cultural context or strategically about our cultural context. Whether we realize it or not, we are contextualizing. The question then is are we contextualizing in a manner that serves the interests of responding to God in worship.

And so, an up-side-down approach to worship will mean that we will want to think about ourselves (as people contextualized in a particular culture) in a critical way lest we import into our worship the hidden idolatries (*over*-contextualization). And yet we will also want to think about our context in a strategic way less we fail to import anything at all of the subversive values of Christ because it is inaccessible. (*under*-contextualization). E.g. When our worship vernacular is so alien to our culture as to obscure the message or violate the expressions of worship as by a priesthood of believers we have *under* contextualized. We have failed to worship *in* the world as within the cultural vernacular. When our worship vernacular is so common to our culture as to naively import with it the idols of our culture, we have *over* contextualized. Worship ought to be strange, but not because of a strange vernacular. Rather worship is strange because of a strange God whose values are strange to the idolatrous values of the world. This third challenge makes us keenly aware that every medium carries a message such s to represent BOTH an opportunity for critical AND strategic planning. This contextualization tension of "in but not of" is further illustrated by Marva Dawn as follows:

... the argument is usually made that we must "meet people where they are" or "Be all things to all people." Indeed, we must intentionally relate to people in accessible ways, but this does not mean that we should dumb everything down to be appealing and then not try to lift worshipers beyond the lowest common denominator.⁶

⁶ Marva Dawn, Reaching Out... p.125

We are therefore "culturally challenged" which represents both a strategic opportunity and an idolatrous opportunity in relation to worship. The reform of worship will necessarily involve an awareness of our own particular cultural vernacular and its hidden messages for good or for ill.

Moreover, given our tendency to sin and a cultural narcissism that comes with this, we will need to be suspect of a "mine is better" kind of approach to the styles in worship, as if any one culture is necessarily "better" than another. (And yet we wouldn't say that all cultures are equal either) So for instance, as related to "style" in music-- consider the following two illustrations:

"What is a Praise Chorus?" From the perspective of a Traditionalist

An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended the big city church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was. "Well," said the farmer, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns." "Praise choruses," said his wife, "What are those?" "Oh, they're okay. They're sort of like hymns, only different," said the farmer. "Well, what's the difference?" asked his wife. The farmer said, "Well it's like this - If I were to say to you: 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well, that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you: 'Martha Martha, Martha, Oh, Martha, MARTHA, MARTHA, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows, the COWS, COWS, COWS are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, the CORN, CORN, CORN' - Then, if I were to repeat the whole thing two or three times, well that would be a praise chorus."

What is a hymn? As from the perspective of a contemporary styled person.

A young, new Christian went to his local church usually, but one weekend attended a small town church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was. "Well," said the young man, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang hymns instead of regular songs." "Hymns," said his wife, "What are those?" "Oh, they're okay. They're sort of like regular songs, only different," said the young man. "Well, what's the difference?" asked his wife. The young man said, "Well it's like this - If I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well that would be a regular song. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you: Oh Martha, dear Martha, hear thou my cry Incline thine ear to the words of my mouth. Turn thou thy whole wondrous ear by and by To the righteous, inimitable, glorious truth. For the way of the animals who can explain There in their heads is no shadow of sense, Harkenest they in God's sun or his rain Unless from the mild, tempting corn they are fenced. Yea those cows in glad bovine, rebellious delight, Have broke free their shackles, their warm pens eschewed. Then goaded by minions of darkness and night They all my mild Chilliwack sweet corn have chewed. So look to that bright shining day by and by, Where all foul corruptions of earth are reborn. Where no vicious animal makes my soul cry And I no longer see those foul cows in the corn. "Then, if I were to do only verses one, three and four and do a key change on the last verse, well, that would be a hymn."

These illustrations reveal that our perspective IS largely colored by our cultural context. There IS a very real vernacular component to the effect that one style has in relation to another.

Excursus: Marva Dawn on Cultural Idols related to worship:

As we think about modern/western culture, Marva Dawn has noted a few more prominent idols that adversely impact our worship today. As summarized,

1. The TV Idol of High Stimulus, Low Response Entertainment

~~The entertainment mind set is evidence when people attend worship for "what I can get out of it."~~

After noticing how TV represents information "framed" without a context or personal relevance after the Neil Postman kinds of observation, Dawn comments, We were left with a world loaded with "information" that is meaningless because it has not context, can lead to nor response and has not connection to everything else in our arsenal of "facts." P.22

Now it seems indisputable to me that television has habituated its watchers to a low information-action ratio, that people are accustomed to "learning" good ideas (even from sermons) and then doing nothing about them... p.21

The TV "culture" also taps into the modern tendency toward vicariousness-- to live through someone or something else.

Consequently, many people in our society live vicariously. They tune into Walkmans instead of learning to play the piano, escape into pulp literature instead of conversing. They don't experience art or nature, but simply take a photograph and walk on. . .

"Just as shopping malls simulate the great outdoors, replacing sun and trees with fluorescent lights and green plastic "plants" we simulate danger with amusement park rides, friends or enemies with talk-radio hosts, rebellion with torn jeans and black boots, sex with lewd phone conversations, revolution with improved fabric softeners, and freedom with the newest panty liner. We simulate real life by eliminating risk and commitment, and end up mistaking what is real for what is only artificial. We exist, that is, encased in a giant cultural condom. (Joey Earl Horstman, "Channel Too: The Postmodern Yawn," *The Other Side* 29, no.3, (May-June 1993): 3

2. The Idol of Efficiency

Because the Church seeks to minister to people formed by the technological milieu, it easily succumbs to its principal criterion of efficiency. When this technological mind-set invades the Church, it can be extremely destructive of true worship in multiple ways-- especially if we "must" finish the worship service in an hour. P.42

Above all, the technological society's push for efficiency has robbed most congregations of the Sabbath rhythm, the setting apart of one day in every seven for ceasing, resting, embracing and feasting, a whole day set apart from God and for each other, a day of delight and healing. Consequently, Christians mimic the frantic lifestyle of the world around them and have no understanding that God has designed a wonderful rhythm of rest and work, of refreshment and then response. IN that rhythm, we don't have to rush out of the worship service at precisely noon, since there is no work to do on Sunday... p.43

3. The Idol of Consumerism

More and more people come to churches with a shoppers mentality-- people "shop" for church and "shop" for music much the same way they "shop" for a good movie on a Friday Night-- What are the criteria implicit to a "shoppers" mentality-- what fits, what will serve my self interest, etc. etc.

The balance of expenditures shifts from product research to market research... We permit that to happen when we study what the consumers/worship participants fancy more than we study what is right with God! p.24)

4. The Idol of Narcissism -

Perhaps the most dangerous of the subtle influences on contemporary worship practices is the self-centered bent of the world ... the technological society increasingly isolates us from one another, with resulting focus on individual selves and needs, not the good of the community... p.107

About a song where "GOD IS NEVER THE SUBJECT... BUT "I" WHO CELEBRATES, SINGS, ETC. ETC. *Focusing in worship on me and my feelings and my praising will nurture a character that is inward-turned, that things first of self rather than of God. ...p.109*

Martin...

E.g. Church Bulletin: "Join Us For Worship, You Will Feel Better For It!" fails to recognize what worship is essentially all about... their experience whether it is found or not, cannot be the aim of worship; it is at best a by-product, a spin off from the original intent." ... "the Chief aim of worship is God himself. An encounter with him may be painful and entail a call to sacrifice, commitment, self-denial... "Therefore, the call is not so much "smile, God loves you" as "repent, weep... tremble... God's love expressed in Christ's cross, suffering and victory is not cheap idea or weak sentiment. It can only be celebrated with reverence and wonder... "

On the other side...

We cannot only emphasize truth without attendant concern for feelings-- especially if, as a result, that truth is conveyed in stale or stilted ways. Our worship practices must embody the truth in ways that relate to people, that invite them to experience the truth firsthand and not simply as irrelevant tradition...
p. 113

Related then to cultural Narcissism is a "ours is better than theirs"--

This can be applied in many ways, as across various contemporary vernaculars-- but it is also across the ages-- a kind of "ours/new" is better than theirs/old...

When churches take this pole to the extreme--- becoming completely alien to the culture in sticking to traditions or celebrating them in ways irrelevant to normal life-- then Christians separate themselves from the world in a sectarianism, provincialism or estoteric gnosticism that prevents ministry to the culture from which they remove themselves....

At the other pole of this dialectic is the need constantly to revitalize the tradition, to express the heritage of the faith in new worship forms that are accessible to the world around the Church. ... 59

To accent either pole of this dialectic without the other is to lose them both. To utilize only new worship forms without connections to the past heritage is to isolate only a few years out of the 3,500 year history of the Christian tradition. Reformation always returns to and deepens the gifts of the original. On the other hand, without reformation the tradition becomes distorted, stale or dead-- or an idolatry. P.60

Memorized tradition:

Research studies show that the earliest memories are retained longest in people's minds. How important it is, then, to fill children's memories with hymns, songs, prayers, Scripture verses and creeds! ... Let us make sure that what we put into children's memories are things of substance, pieces of the Church's heritage that have stood the test of time and suffering. P.121

AS applied to such things as "style" in worship, Marva Dawn has said it well, When we agree that Gods must be the subject and object of our worship, we discover that the bitter war between "traditional" and "contemporary" styles misses the real issue. Both can easily become idolatrous."⁷

The Fifth challenge is that we are Hermeneutically Challenged. There are significant issues in how we read our Bibles that play out in worship. So for instance, there is the covenantal issue of relating the Old and the New Testaments. There are issues about the nature of Biblical authority in so far as how we understand Biblical silence. Related to this challenge is the simple reality that very little is said in the New Covenant. I.e. Not all forms of worship are present at any given time and place in NT... Much of the descriptive data gives the appearance of being *ad hoc* especially. Examples:

Acts 20:7-12-- presumably the breaking of bread on Sunday as the Lord's Supper, but what of the table fellowship in Acts. 2:46 or the unusual circumstances of eating in Acts.27:35?

Scene in 1 Cor.14:26 suggests a structureless gathering (yet condemned it would seem by Paul) and leadership in Pauline congregations is in evidence (Phil.1:1, 1 Th.5:12, 1Cor.16:15-16)

The descriptions of worship in Revelations 4--5 seem to reflect the context of John's day in so far as instruments are concerned. And yet, musical instruments referred to in OT and in Rev. are not mention in NT epistles...(Col.3:16-- "in the heart") Yet, in that we do accept the NT as normative-- "we look for the principles insofar as we can ascertain and pinpoint them" (p.191) The fact is, there are many hermeneutic issues that must be resolved *before* we can talk about worship.

⁷ Marva Dawn, Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down, p.93

Our sixth challenge is that we are worship-war challenged. We even have a name for it-- "worship wars." In such a context, the issues are often falsely polarized into opposing and irreconcilable categories. Simple-mindedness prevails for its political expediency. So for instance, some of the notable false dichotomies have been:

1. Aesthetics vs. Worship

As if to be in contrast to obedience vs. an outward show 1Sam.15:22... or in contrast to not be served by "houses made with hands..." (Acts.7:48-50, 17:24-25) I.e. a service pleasing to creator as antithetical to service pleasing to creature... Thus, the need for a better way of determining "aesthetics" than merely, is it NOT pleasing to us... better "medium-message" way of doing it...

2. Uplifting vs. Worship

It is NOT a blasphemous question (contra TD), "what did you get out of the worship today...? It is blasphemous if this question is asked in isolation from "what did God get out of the worship today? Or "what ought we to get out of worship? Moreover, it would be blasphemous question if it assumed only an uplifting experience to be a positive experience-- i.e. it might be conviction of sin, terror, etc. etc.

3. Seeker Sensitive vs. Believer Worship

It would be wrong to appeal to "non-believing" sympathies, but it would not be wrong to appeal to "elect sympathies" as in a manner that is genuinely considerate of elect/unbelievers being present. The elect consist of both believing and unbelieving (at a given moment at least) people.

Another effect of worship wars in the local congregation has been to avoid the topic of worship all together such that we lack a coherent theology of worship.

"... the failure to construct a systematic theology of worship... every person is left apparently to his or her own best ideas and emotions, resulting in a veritable kaleidoscope of patterns and forms of worship throughout Christendom.

Martin (p.2)

Therefore, fearful of being "tagged" into one or another opposing camp, good pastors have said relatively nothing. This is no doubt one of the reasons why we lack a developed theology of worship in that the people most qualified to talk about it are most scarred out of their wits to even bring the subject up. Perhaps we intuitively know that worship is at the very heart and soul of our beings as made in God's image and as a people redeemed "in order to worship" God-- we then feel so strongly about worship that the conversation is muted! We start screaming before the discussion is allowed room to develop! As a pastor-- we avoid the conversation fearing that our congregations will not be mature enough keep the first things in view-- love, Christ-centeredness, Justificaion by faith, etc. etc. -- and why shouldn't we fear this-- since we are no less tolerant in our ministerial associations either!


The challenge to reform worship is therefore a challenge to experience Christian unity. As noted by Scot Sherman, "denominational unity grows out of the gospel itself and deepens as we celebrate the gospel in worship."⁸ And yet John Witvliet has observed that "with the possible exception of the first centuries after Christ, never before has the church been reforming its liturgy *in so many directions at once.*" Within my own denomination (PCA), it is

⁸ Scot Sherman, "Worship and Gospel Unity" (an unpublished paper given at Metropolitan New York Presbyterian)

disconcerting at best that there is so little agreement, not about the importance of worship, but of what makes for "good" worship. For on any given Sunday, a worshipper attending the PCA church will experience vastly varying things in a PCA worship service. Sherman has suggested that American Presbyterians in general and PCA Presbyterians in particular have adopted a "don't ask, don't tell" liturgical strategy, and the Reformation heritage was largely laid aside for the anti-liturgical movements of later generations." AS this impacts our Christian unity, he further elaborates,

When the PCA was formed in 1973, we began with daunting challenges to church unity-theological, ecclesiastical and liturgical. We were brought together by what we were clearly against (liberalism) and generally for (Old School Calvinism broadly conceived, and the Great Commission). We rightly rejected the Arminian amendments to the Confession of Faith, but we also embraced the "wisdom" of returning to the 1788 solution of the non-binding Directory as our only worship resource. The result has been perpetual squabbling between those who reflect one or more of the dominant Evangelical liturgical subcultures (e.g. Baptist, Charismatic, Church Growth) who mostly want to be left alone, and those who seek to gain hegemony over the denomination for one of the narrower streams of the Presbyterian past (e.g. Puritanism). Let's face it, General Assembly often looks like a array of sorcerer's apprentice brooms dancing around (figuratively of course) trying to sweep one another clean, or out of the door.

The challenge to reform worship is no less the challenge to find Christian unity after the high and priestly prayer of Christ whose unity with the Father is to be shared in by the church. (Jn.17) Again in Sherman's words, "and when we worship we not only reflect the unity of God, we actually participate in His unity (Jn.15:9-10) Against worship wars, we must strive for worship unity!



III. What is worship?

Worship as most essentially *a faithful human response to Divine revelation set into a dialogical pattern for the glory of God resulting in the continuing salvation of God's people.*

Expanded Definition of Worship

Worship is the obedient gathering of God's people in response to God's Glory in covenant renewal. As such it is a dialogue whereby 1.) God declares, "I am your God, you are my people." 2.) The people respond by rendering praise and thanksgiving to God, and by renewing vows of exclusive commitment to God. 3.) God is present through it all to bring his salvation benediction to those being saved to the praise of God's glorious grace! Therefore, the focus of worship is always upon the acts and attributes of God who alone establishes and secures this covenant. In the New Covenant, the greatest revelation of God's acts and attributes are in Jesus Christ; New Covenant worship therefore chiefly proclaims the incarnation, crucifixion, and exaltation of Christ.

As summarized by Ralph Martin "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.⁹ He further specifies,

⁹ Ralph Martin, *The Worship of God*, (1982) p. 10 Also not the language of "approach to us"-- a mediated presence which as will be shown below is the essential characteristic of covenant renewal theology applied to worship)

We acknowledge this initiative by ascribing to him praise and by publishing his mighty acts in creation, calling and redemption... all worship of God finds its origin in the objective "moment" when God acts and comes to our world in free love.¹⁰

Too often, it seems to me, we rush into our conversations about worship relative to its particulars without first observing THE universal and more general meta-element (or principled impulse descriptive of worship) that makes worship what it is! And yet the *meta-element of worship* itself will in large measure direct our subsequent discussions about the particulars and their corresponding expressions in a given context. The simplicity of this "meta-element" will remind us that we are possibly responding to many things other than to God(see *challenges*). It will also embrace the many and multi-faceted aspects of "responding" that are prescribed in scripture and contextualized in a wholistic way as relative to our full humanness. But before we go there, first let's notice how this is in fact expressed in a confessional context as within our own tradition in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

Again, our tendency at this point would be to turn to *WCF* 21 and its chapter on worship first. But if we were to stand back and observe the "meta-narrative" of the *Confession* itself, we discover our "meta-element" in that over and over again the language of worship is employed as human responses to the various descriptions of what God has revealed about himself and salvation. So for instance, "glory" is used 25 times, worship 22 times and expressions like "to the praise of his glorious grace" (3.5) and "to the praise of his glorious justice" (3.7), are used in the *Confession* as descriptive of a faithful response to God's initiative in salvation. As noted already, the *Confession* cannot describe what God's has revealed about himself-- that God is "infinite and eternal in his being and perfection--" without concluding, "to him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship... He is pleased to require of them." (2.2) The *telos* of both scriptural revelation and general revelation in Chapter one is likewise climaxed in so far as it is related to faithful worship (1.6).

Upon turning to the *Confession's* chapter on worship itself, we again discover the "meta-element of worship," not stated directly, but clearly represented in the "logic" of the confession itself. So for instance, we observe the dialogical dynamic in the divine initiation/human response pattern with respect to natural revelation as follows:

The light of nature showeth 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... (21.1)

In that the "meta-element of worship" is a faithful human response to divine initiation, and especially as revealed in God's salvation through Christ, the *Confession* again recognizes the nature of faithful worship in so far as it is a proper response to God only as mediated by Christ in special revelation.

Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creature: and, since the fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone. (21.2)

¹⁰ Martin, p.11

And finally, the "meta-element of worship" will show itself in so far as "good" worship is "good" relative to it's being *appropriate* to God according to our *Confession*. Notice carefully that I used the language of "appropriate." E.g. I will suggest that this has the effect of both regulating worship and expanding worship to include things which we often don't readily associate with worship. As it will be shown, the "meta-element of worship" both regulates and expands worship in that anything deemed "appropriate" to a faithful response to God makes for "good" worship. An *appropriate* range of response to God might include such things as both terror and comfort, joy and sadness, humility and confidence. Driven by a faithful response to the initiation of God, our worship is shown to have both a vertical and horizontal element to it in so far as it is done to God as related though to what God would have us to do "to and with" one another in response to Him.

Thus the language of worship shows up in our confession as related to our communion with God and our communion with one another (26.2, 29.1).¹¹ This will correspond to both a doxological and communal elements as then related to both "reverence" and "edification" respectively (see below). What all this suggests about a principled sort of impulse to worship is that it ought to be most essentially *a faithful human response to Divine revelation set into a dialogical pattern* as understood from Scripture. What we still lack however, is how this fundamental "impulse" as descriptive of a "meta-element of worship" is in fact theologically developed in the Bible. What exactly is a "Biblical theology" of worship in concordance with the meta-element of worship? This will be perhaps our most important task if we are going to be theologically driven in worship!

The Basics in Covenantal Worship

1. Covenantal worship is the transaction of God's saving presence "in the midst" of his people.

This "presence" dynamic may be demonstrated as from the moment that humanity was excommunicated from the "presence of God" (Gen.3:8) to the ultimate climax of restoration into the full and immediate presence of God as recorded in Revelations 21. . In Revelation 21:3-4 we are told about the consummate manifestation of redemption in terms that describe a presence of God. We read that "the tabernacle of God is with the people" and that "He will dwell with them" such that the benefits of salvation are brought by God to the people in an *immediate* and dynamic way. This is the way our scripture describes the climax of redemption and the ultimate *omega* of redemptive history--by a description of the consummation of *presence!* But what is even more noteworthy is that this description is clearly worded in order to reflect the pre-consummated description of God's presence in previous and provisional administrations as through covenant worship!

The specific language of Revelation 21 refers back to Leviticus 26:9ff where there was the anticipated restoration of God's people as foreshadowed in the Old Covenant mediation of God's presence through the temple context of worship. Under the Mosaic covenant, God promised to "set my tabernacle among" them. This of course was accomplished by the temple administration of prophetic, priestly and kingly kinds of ministries that were instituted during the Mosaic context. In the Mosaic context of covenant worship, there was the prophetic dynamic/means of "word", the priestly dynamic/means of "sacraments and prayers (often

¹¹ 26.2 Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

sung)" and the kingly dynamics of "vows" as related both to God and one another." God certainly dwelt among them such that the tabernacle of meeting described in Exodus 29:42 was later described as the "dwelling place" of God in Deuteronomy 12:5.¹²

Under the New Covenant, this conception of "tabernacle" is mediated through different corporate structures related to the activity of the Holy Spirit for the church and yet we still see the three dynamics/means played out in worship as by the ministry of word, sacraments and oaths as related to the administration of worship that was established by Christ upon the foundation that was laid by the apostles. Paul teaches that "we are the temple of God" and immediately applies the promises and exhortations once given to the Old Covenant church to the New Covenant church (2 Cor. 6:16-18, see then Exek. 37:26, Is. 52:11, 2 Sam. 7:14.). Paul's teaching for us under the New Covenant was no different than the prophetic teaching under the Old Covenant, that salvation is described with the promise "I will dwell with them" (2 Cor. 6:16). This "dwelling" after the fall and before heaven always included some mediated structure whereby God, in a provisional way, was present to effect his saving activity. And according to Revelation 21, we are to see all this earlier history as climaxed in heavenly liturgy as in the immediate presence of Christ at his return!

Therefore, as from a theology of covenant, we still want to discern in our theology of covenant worship three "means/dynamics whereby God mediates his benevolent presence to a chosen people. We will return to these three "dynamics" as under the New Covenant administration of "new" covenant worship later.¹³ But by way of a very brief summary here:

Prophetic-- Call to Worship, Sermon, Absolution of Sin, Benedictions

Priestly-- Prayers (both sung and unsung-- Invocation, Praise, Confession, Intercession, Thanksgiving), Sacraments (Covenant Initiation sacrament of Baptism, Covenant Renewal Sacrament of Lord's Supper)

Kingly-- "one-anothering rites" (membership vows, collection, oversight)

Note for instance: Acts 2:42 comprehensively summarizes the gatherings of the assembly of Christ under apostolic oversight. Acts 20:7 less comprehensively mentions the "first day" gathering of the saints "to break bread." These assemblies were characterized by apostolic teaching, the collections for the poor, the Lord's supper (and baptism where appropriate, Acts 2:41), and prayer (Acts 2:42).

The special significance as related to this first theological element of covenant worship is this-- IN that these "means" are prescribed by God for the sake of transacting God's benevolence to a chosen people, they are necessary in order to have "good" worship. Without them, we could say as our confession does about the church in general, there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. As will be shown, this at least sets the stage for such conversations as weekly communion, etc.

Moreover, this first theological element begs for the use of the three types of means in a covenant specific manner. In that we are no longer under the Old Covenant, we are no longer required to offer sacrifices of animals through a mediatorial priest. E.g. There ought to be something distinctively "new covenant" about our ministry of word, sacraments and discipline such as to transact the mediated presence of God under the current administration. This ought not to be taken to mean that there covenant worship in the Old Covenant is irrelevant for those living in the New Covenant. This is clearly not the case in that much of the "patterns" and "principles" that are assumed in the New Covenant were established in the

¹² See also Ex. 40:34, Ps. 76:2.

¹³ For a more detailed description of a "presence theology" of redemptive history, see Chapter 2-3 in *The Church Question...* by Preston Graham, (1998)

Old Covenant. So for instance the pattern of "covenant renewal" rites established in the Old Covenant is clearly maintained in the New Testament. (Passover meals-- Lord's supper meal) So to the pattern of covenant initiation into the corporate covenant community is likewise a pattern that is clearly assumed in the New covenant (Circumcision-- Baptism) Moreover, even as God is being worshipped under a different covenant administration, He is the same God then as now such that many of the "kinds of things" God is pleased with then would correspond to the kinds of things God would be pleased with now. So for instance, he was pleased then with "reverence" as now.

Perhaps too, this is the kind of argument that would apply to the appropriate use of instruments in worship assuming that in the manner of using instruments would not undermine or contradict some other New Covenant distinctive (such as for instance the unique "priesthood of believers" doctrine of the new covenant in distinction from the old). And yet, in so far as God is to be praised, and since this praise may be appropriately accompanied by the use of instruments both in the Old Testament and in heaven, then there is perhaps shown a continuity as based upon the fact that God is the same then and now, etc.

2. Covenantal worship is most essentially a community/ecclesial event Covenant worship is corporate worship!

Under the Old Covenant administration, we see clearly that the covenant purpose was directed to the people of Israel as a corporate body-- Israel, as a nation, was called a "priestly kingdom and a holy nation" whereby God's law and grace was revealed to the nations... It is important to observe that it was through the corporate Israel that God revealed himself in a special way under the Old testament... Paul will say in Romans about this Israel-- Romans 9

4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; 5 to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

And yet his point later will be that the true Israel was succeeded by the church!

...For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel... 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.

And so, under the Old Covenant, Israel, acting in her corporate identity, was the means through which the covenant was initially revealed! Israel, as a corporate person, is called even a priestly and holy nation-- Israel as described as consisting of many individuals joined together into a covenant community.

Ex. 19:3 Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: 4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, 6 but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

This mission to be a priestly and holy nation among the nations was seen by the prophets as never being accomplished... such as to look for the formation of yet another in succession to Israel who would accomplish this great commission...

Is. 61:6

but you shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory.

Who is the "you"-- as from the context-- it is clearly the corporate people that are saved by the Messiah!¹⁴ These "ministers" are later described in this passage as the "bridegroom" of the Messiah with language that is later used by the apostles to describe the church both in Eph. and in Rev.

And therefore, in the Old Covenant context-- the covenant was transacted with a corporate person known as Israel, a "priestly kingdom and a holy nation." We see then the prophetic expectation for a "new Israel"-- those whose morning would be turned to gladness as by the Messiah's ministry- -and those who would themselves be "ministers" as a priestly kingdom and holy nation... So would it surprise you that this same language is directly applied to the church in the New Covenant with the purpose of glorifying God to the nations.

1Pet. 2:9

¶ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

While corporate nature of covenant worship is clearly maintained in the New Covenant, it should be noted that the New Covenant administration does show itself in a distinctive manner as related to what Protestants have called the "priesthood of believers." As it will be shown, this also has great relevance to what makes "good" worship under the New Covenant. But for now, we will want to observe how under the Old Testament, the corporate nature of worship was realized through the mediation of "priests" in the temple. Under the

¹⁴ Notice how first Isaiah speaks to of the Messiah:

Is. 61:1

¶ The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion

Now Isaiah directs his attention to those who are comforted by the Messiah (saved) -- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. 4 They shall build up the ancient ruins (the mission of Israel) they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

With respect to the great commission especially:

Is. 61:5

¶ Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines; 6 but you (those corporate people of God who have been "comforted" by "the anointed one") shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory....

9 Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

As Bridegroom:

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

new covenant "priesthood of believers" doctrine, all participants in the covenant have access to God by the mediation of Christ alone, such that we are no longer in need of "priests." But one thing is for sure, covenant worship is necessarily corporate worship. God never envisioned a covenant that is merely and individual thing. God's self-revelatory intentions are in fact shown to be related to his Trinitarian community as revealed in the corporate unity of the covenant community. Thus, as already mentioned, under the New Covenant, our "corporateness" is evidenced by the high and priestly prayer of Christ whose unity with the Father is to be shared in by the church. (Jn.17) Again as Scot Sherman has noted, "and when we worship we not only reflect the unity of God, we actually participate in His unity (Jn.15:9-10)

As this works out especially in New *Covenant* worship, we discern that authenticity in worship is related directly to a covenantal identification with the corporate community as this then was related to admission to the Lord's Table. A person who would partake of Christ's table is exhorted in 1Cor.11: to "examine" him/herself. The question this raises is "after what standard" since all examination requires some sort of criteria by which to judge. Paul's instructions leading up to his exhortation are extremely revealing.

1Cor.10:15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 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? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Paul's theology of the covenant renewal at Christ's table is clearly stated as pertinent to both a person's "vertical" relationship with God AND their "horizontal" relationship with God's covenant people. Paul applies his "vertical" theology by means of exhortations related to the avoidance of idolatry (vs. 7-14). Paul applies his "horizontal" theology by means of exhortations related to the avoidance of divisiveness within the church.

1Cor. 11:17 Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. 19 Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. 20 When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. 21 For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. 22 What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! 1Cor. 11:23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,

Our worship is therefore in some ways related to our "one-anothering" in and around the worship service. This was most especially expressed in the "fellowship" of giving as in 2Cor.8. That this "one-anothering culture" is related to authentic worship is further demonstrated by Christ himself who related a person's relationship to God with their relationship to each other.

Matt. 22:36

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" 37 He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second *is like it*: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (Note: Neighbor in OT context would have been those related to the covenant community)

Our communion with God in Worship IS tied to the communion of the saints one to another. Therefore, in Acts2:40ff, a description of covenantal worship includes a description of a people that "had all things in common." This of course was taught in the OT as well in places like Isaiah 58 where worship and caring for the poor among them was viewed in relation one to the other. E.g. Our "covenant" relationship with God is never merely an individual thing. We are related to God in so far as we participate in the "body of Christ." Any practice that could tend to foster this is a good thing. As noted, our covenant *renewal* requires an "examination" relative to our covenant relationships in the church, which of

course assumes some definable means of covenant *initiation* into the church. And of course, we know that Christ gave the world permission to in fact judge our sincerity by this very thing.

John 13:35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

The corporate nature of worship is further expressed not only through caring for one another, but entering into vows with one another. E.g. An authentic love assumes some context for a covenant relationship as expressed through vows.¹⁵ So then, notice the Biblical teachings about vows and especially in relation to worship:

1. Vows have always been central to both *initiation* and *renewal* within covenant worship as in some public profession of faith. In the OT, we see that covenant renewal worship was often referred to in its relation to initiating vows-- as in the language of "make your vows" and then later "fulfill" or "pay" your vows" for instance.

Pss. 22:25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

Pss. 50:14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.

Pss. 56:12 My vows to you I must perform, O God; I will render thank offerings to you.

Pss. my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

Pss. 61:8 So I will always sing praises to your name, as I pay my vows day after day.

Pss. 65:1 Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed,

Pss. 66:13 I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows,

Pss. 76:11 Make vows to the LORD your God, and perform them; let all who are around him bring gifts to the one who is awesome,

Pss. 116:14 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

Prov. 7:14 "I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows;

Prov. 20:25 It is a snare for one to say rashly, "It is holy," and begin to reflect only after making a vow.

Eccl. 5:4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill what you vow. 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfill it.

In the NT context, there is nothing said that would annul this aspect of authentic covenant renewal, and yet many passages that suggest their continuation. So for instance, Christ doesn't annul vows, but rather affirms them in so far as he seeks to reform them against insincerity.

Matt. 5:33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.'... 37 Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

Likewise, whatever else is required of authentic Christian conversions, there is a public confession as related to it according to Paul:

Rom. 10:9 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

As was shown earlier, the context of the Lord's table as a renewal rite is clearly related to some initiation whereby a person commits his/herself to the body of Christ. To "break ranks" was shown to be in violation of their covenant renewal itself. Again, a renewal

¹⁵ It would exhaust this "abbreviated" rationale at this time, but it would not be hard to demonstrate that throughout redemptive history, individuals were authenticated in so far as they were participants in the covenant community. Thus, to be saved from God's judgment of Egypt is referred to as being "baptized into Moses" (1Cor.10:1). Or to be saved from God's judgment against the enemies of Noah is referred to as a baptism"(1P.3:1). The language of election was almost synonymous to the language of "Israel" in the Old Testament even as "church" is in the New Testament. Etc. etc. Our identity as Christians is never independent of our identity within a corporate context-- even as a large share of Apostolic exhortations are related to our "one anothering" in the body of Christ.

assumes an initiation, presumably some way of publicly affirming ones commitment to Christ and his body! The "confess with your mouth"-- what else could it refer to if not as Paul clarified in 1 Cor. 10 and 11 as referring to both the vertical and horizontal dynamic of Christian discipleship?

And finally, the corporate nature of worship is shown in so far as it is related to the "vocation" of service in the church as called by Paul a "spiritual service of worship" in Romans 12. And note carefully the context in Romans 12. I.e.

- vs. 1: The corporate/spiritual responsibility of every Christian is here being exhorted by Paul.
- vs. 2-- our service is out of a renewed mind-- minds and hearts that are given a new purpose in life, minds that have been in the language of Is (comforted) and now minds that are directly related to the purpose of the Great Commission Covenant community...
- vs. 3-8-- Paul relates then the reasonable service of each Christian to the organic nature of the body of Christ and a priestly community (thus the priesthood of all believers)

The point that Paul is making is that our corporate worship is related to an organic union of gifts and services as related to a vocation of church membership.

Rom. 12:3

¶ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Descriptions of worship in the early church more than illustrate that worship and communion of saints are deeply related one to the other. (Acts 2:40ff)

The point is that worship, in so far as it approximates the idea of corporateness under the New Covenant will seek for corporate participation. This participation will be determined by the nature of the specific means itself. (Such that coporateness in preaching will be understood as "conscientious hearing the word preach" whereas in the case of hymn singing-- if it is shown that singing requires vocalization and not hearing vocalization-- then it could be argues that every person in the congregation ought to "sing" rather than a set apart "priesthood" of ordained singers as in the case of the temple worship of th Old Covenant. But again, we will save some of this for later...

A third significance to the "corporate" nature of covenant renewal is to never forget that while our corporateness has a uniquely contextualized look to it as from a particular context of a particular congregation of a particular denomination-- this corporateness extends to the church of every place and of every time as ultimately in organic union with the heavenly church! We discover a church that is connected, reflecting our organic union with Christ as our heavenly center. As discovered in the New Covenant context itself, we can speak of one church consisting of multiple worship centers in a given city or region. Consequently, to the degree that we can genuinely function as one with respect to our ministry of word, sacrament, and pastoral care is the degree to which we experience an authentically connected church. This has been articulated by Edmund Clowney in the following manner:¹⁶

The scriptural model in view is the "city-church"... these are seen as unified churches under one presbyterial government but including a number of congregations... They are members of the church of the city...

... a different concept of "the church of God which is at Corinth." Corinth is one place of manifestation (of the heavenly church manifest on earth) for God has

¹⁶ Edmund Clowney, "Distinctive Emphasis in Presbyterian Church Polity," *Pressing Toward The Mark* (1986) .

"many people" in that city, but the church is not the church of Stephanas (16:15), or of Paul, Peter, or Apollos (1:12) or of Corinth. It is the church of God; therefore it includes those who are called to be saints and they are addressed with "all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus in every place."

The organic concept of the church that appears in the New Testament... presents a more theological, Christ-centered, spiritual view of the church as defined not by one earthly hierarchical center nor by many earthly congregational centers, but by a heavenly center that requires multiform earthly manifestations. Earthly assemblies do not define but manifest the nature and the center of the church.

As related to "between congregations" our standards of admission to the "sacred rites of covenant renewal" ought to be as wide of standards as the gospel is wide." Our union with one-another is extends to our union with the heavenly church. Moreover, while we would strive for orthodox unity between congregations-- we may also participate in a principled ecumenical unity to the degree that we participate at a level relative to our doctrinal unity.

And finally, this connectionalism ought to mean that while we would in fact strive for orthodox unity, we will want to tolerate and perhaps even celebrate our vernacular diversity. We would want to be careful in our defining "good" worship to unnecessarily exclude the participation of some merely due to vernacular barriers. So, while we may not be able to all participate in a spanish speaking service, we ought not then to label "Spanish" as better/worse worship as related to God, but "better/worse" in relation to a given person. How far then does this vernacular principle go? What about other vernacular issues as related to styles that effect perceptions in very different ways as determined from very different cultural contexts. We ought to see that Christ has incarnated his presence through the medium of a multiple of contexts-- and that perhaps each of these contexts give us a unique vision of Christ-- not because Christ is different in those contexts, but because our fallible interpretations of Christ due to our own social contexts are challenged. In large measure, this "theology of worship" as within a covenant framework will drive us to discover a principled unity within diversity as related to worship. It is hoped that we might better recognize and practice a kind of worship that is distinguishably "reformed" after the regulated "means" prescribed by God to mediate his presence-- and yet that these distinguishable marks could then be practiced in a multiple of vernaculars such as to accomplish the intended ends.

3. Covenantal worship takes seriously both parties, God and humanity. Thus, The *Dual End of Covenant Worship To glorify God and to edify the elect*'

What is *Essential For Good Corporate Worship*?

A. Regulated: The *Regulated* Presence of God as by those elements of worship appointed by Christ, the "cornerstone" and "head" of the church under the New Covenant through the foundation laid by the apostles. (Eph. 2:20-21)

¹⁷ I should say again, that by "elect" this I intentionally don't mean "believer." I will make a case for this later, but my point is simply to say that our worship does acknowledge that some are present, who are elect but have not as yet experienced the effectual application of the covenant to them by the Holy Spirit. A Covenant worship service will then consider the non-believing elect in so far as edification is concerned, which is to appeal to those sympathies that are ultimately given by the Holy Spirit (rather than other worldly sympathies), and yet to do this in a way that is sensitive to the un-believer's limited religious understanding and/or contextual ization, etc.

4. Regulative Principle Illustrated in OT:

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: vs. 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.)

5. The Regulative Principle Illustrated in NT:

a. Human inclination:

Paul's point in Romans 1:19ff is that the human race, in its revolt against God, has "worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator." Further, this is not due to ignorance, but to moral defilement: "Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give him thanks..."

b. From the Principle of Christian Charity: Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8:4-13

The Bible teaches that Christ is the sole Lord of an individual's conscience; that believers owe implicit obedience (obedience that needs no justification in reason or arguments) to Christ alone. God alone may require us to do something simply because He has said so. To induce someone to act contrary to what they believe is right is sinful. Further, God requires us to worship Him only as He has revealed. Therefore, to require a person, in corporate worship, to do something which God has not required, forces the person to sin against his/her conscience, by making them do what they do not believe God has called them to do (John Murray and Edmund Clowney have articulated this view very clearly).

6. The Regulative Principle Historically Illustrated:

John Calvin:

"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).

Thomas E. Peck, *Miscellanies*, vol. 1, pp. 96-97:

"Man, then, is incompetent to devise modes of worship, because he knows not what modes are best adapted to express the truth or the emotions which the truth is suited to produce."

7. The Regulative Principle Confessionally Illustrated:

WCF 1:6

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is *either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added*, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

WCF 21.1

The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and does 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. *But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.*

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.

47-3: The end of public worship is the glory of God. His people should engage in all its several parts with an eye single to his glory...

47-4: Public worship is *Christian* when the worshippers recognize that Christ is the Mediator by whom *alone* they can come unto God, when they honor *Christ as Head of the church, who rules over public worship*, and when their worship is an expression of their faith in Christ and of their love for him.

Question: What is the apostolic foundation for worship: Note Mt.16:17ff, Eph. 2:20

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

T. David Gordon:

Acts.

Luke records for us the practice of the early church, and includes records of the activities of the assembled church. The meetings of this assembled church permit us to see how the apostles, who had been instructed by Jesus, oversaw and regulated the assemblies of the primitive church. Acts 2:42 comprehensively summarizes the gatherings of the assembly of

Christ under apostolic oversight. Acts 20.7 less comprehensively mentions the "first day" gathering of the saints "to break bread." These assemblies were characterized by apostolic teaching, the collections for the poor, the Lord's supper (and baptism where appropriate, Acts 2.41), and prayer (Acts 2.42). These passages in Acts are not to be confused with the various evangelistic assemblies also recorded in Acts, since these would not be regulative for the church's assemblings.

Epistles.

In the epistles we are given an opportunity to see how the apostles instructed the churches when they were not themselves present to direct them (as opposed to Acts, where the apostles are normally present with the churches we observe). The epistles contain an enormous amount of instruction, but very little instruction related to regulating the activities of the assembly of believers. There is information regarding general behaviour and doctrine, and information regarding how Christians should interact with one another (love, service, etc.), and also some information related to the Church assembled. We would expect that many circumstantial details (where to meet, etc.) would not be regulated by apostolic precept, but we would also expect that many *elemental* matters, entrusted by Christ into apostolic care, would indeed be regulated.

Those matters related to the assembled church, and regulated by the apostles are: prayer (1 Cor. 11.4-16; 1 Tm. 2.1-15 [possibly]); preaching/teaching (1 Cor. 14); the Lord's Supper and its disciplinary integrity (1 Cor. 11.17-34; 1 Cor. 5); the collection (1 Cor. 16.1-2). We observe here the same apostolic oversight as was observed in Acts. Under the leadership of Christ's appointed apostles, the early church in its assembled meetings devotes itself to the regulated observance of the Word of God, the sacraments, prayer (both spoken and sung, 1 Cor. 14.15), and offerings.

Apocalyptic visions of worship in heaven.

Believers, though spatially absent from heaven themselves, already sit in the heavenly places through their federal head and representative, Christ (Eph. 2.6). Further, though spatially absent from heaven, they are nevertheless already considered "citizens" of heaven (Phil. 3.20), and are commanded to think about heavenly things, the things which are "above where Christ is" (Col. 3.1). The blessings of which they are already partakers are "heavenly" blessings (Eph. 1.3), and they are partakers of a "heavenly" calling (Heb. 3.1). They have already come to "Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12.22-24). This reality affords the strongest possible implicit argument for permitting the visions of glorious heavenly worship to be paradigmatic, insofar as possible, for earthly worship.

Of course, the most prominent feature of this heavenly worshipping assembly is its corporate expressions of adoration and devotion. The entire, numberless group praises God together with a single voice, adoring Him and celebrating the Lamb's redemption. This surely functions as a two-fold corrective to the tendency toward worship which is individualistic or which perceives the devotional aspects as "merely" preliminary to the exposition of the Word. While the Word and Sacraments are most necessary now, as are the collections for the relief of the saints in their worldly need, these three dimensions disappear in heaven, and the expressions of thanks and praise, both spoken and sung, go on forever throughout eternity.

Surely that aspect of our earthly worship which we will carry over with us into heavenly worship should be more precious to us than it often is.

Note on the Use of Scripture in Regulating Worship:

The need for a covenantal hermeneutic as distinguished from any given worship from any given covenantal context.. Here is where your biblical theology plays out significantly.

i.e. It would NOT be a necessary corollary between OT temple/synagogue worship and NT worship... (Vos/Klinian vs. say neo-theonomic conceptions of "covenantal worship.")

For example:

Jeffrey Myers, *The Lord's Service*

James Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Theses on Worship*

B. Doxological: Everything directed to the *Glory* of God

1 Tim. 1:17

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and **glory** forever and ever. Amen.

Therefore, Worship done in an attitude and in such a manner as will foster:

1. God Centered Praise
2. God Centered Reverence and Respect
3. God Directed Humility, Confession, Invocation
4. God Centered Thanksgiving and Joy

Note: We ought always to evaluate our experience in worship as compared to those in Scripture who found themselves in the presence of God. I.e. What is Isaiah's "posture" and response to the Presence of God in Isaiah 6. How do we see the glorified church as represented by the 24 elders in heaven responding to the one who is seated on the throne in Rev. 4? What is the basis of their hope as discovered in Rev. 5? Etc.

We may describe doxology in the following dimensions.

1. Invocation Doxology: Calling upon God-- a yearning for God's presence for covenant renewal as expressed in prayer and song. "God's glory is tacitly confessed by our thirst, our unquenchable desire for God, which none other can satisfy." (p.25) (Examples Pss. 22, 42, 43) When people fix their hope on God, then God is glorified. (It is this, less one or another style-- that is the essence of invocational doxology-- and then what style would enable a person in his/her own person to express this?)
2. Kerygmatic Doxology: Proclamation which begins with acclamation-- both of which require vernacular expressions, but so as to represent sincerity one the ones "acclaiming" and to reach the ones to whom it is proclaimed. I.e. Where "praise" became evangelism (p.47) Instruments in the Temple were used to assist in both acclamation and proclamation. "Here is one of the glories of Protestant worship. It is in the context of the kerygmatic doxology that one can best appreciate the origins of instrumental music in Christian worship." (p.57) "Proclamation rejoices in presence."(p.59)

Today when a service of worship begins with Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, one is aroused to hear the proclamation of the gospel. It is the function of preludes to claim our attention for a momentous event. In the same way, it

is the function of a postlude to affirm the surpassing importance of the worship that has just been celebrated. (p.58)

3. Wisdom Doxology: Teaching aspect to make one wise in salvation even as we are ultimately directed to the wisdom of God in Christ. (John 20:31, see p. 67)

4. Prophetic Doxology: The holiness of God is glorified when it is reflected in the holiness of the people.

"Amos was not opposed to services of worship. He was opposed to worship that was insincere, that served the pride of the worshipers, the love for the theatrical and the luxurious, but neglected God's demand for holiness. (p.93)
Notes Amos 5:21-24

5. Sacramental Doxology: Entering into the household of God. A Context for vow making and keeping. Covenant renewal then includes the remembering God's mighty acts of redemption such as to encourage faith and participation in God and His salvation. And covenant doxology requires real presence such as to be in communion with God. I.e. real covenant requires real, two party, participation... For example Olds notes about the high church movement:

"The "High Church" movement wanted to reassert the centrality of the eucharist and deemphasize the preaching of the Word. It was concerned with cultivating the distinction between "clergy" and "laity." While the choir robed to look like medieval monks, was to enrich the service by singing entroits, anthems, and responses, the singing of the congregation was regarded as of minor significance. The liturgical goal of the "High Church" movement was to give a mystical feeling to worship. Beclouding the whole thing in mystery was looked upon very favorably... " (p.132)

Given the "doxological" aspect of covenant worship worship is always God-centered such as to beg for some means of regulation in order to properly preserve the glory of God in worship. E.g. The means/dynamics of worship, in so far as they are prescribed by God are to be regulated by God and for his unique covenant purpose as fulfilled in Christ. God's glory as one of the chief ends of worship is clearly at the heart of faithful worship. To forget this or to not take this seriously is to negate worship in a most fundamental way. And this will always be manifest in obedience.

1 Sam. 15:22 And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. (for context, see 13:8-15, 15:3-22)

C. Edifying: (As directed to both the believing and unbelieving elect)

1Cor. 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.

1Cor. 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**.

Having noted the doxological aspect of worship, such God-centered, descriptions of worship are not to be viewed as irreconcilable with worship that is edifying. We cannot dichotomize our service to man from our service to God. The scripture makes it clear by the decalogue itself as also clarified by Christ-- that to love

God and to love neighbor ARE related in so far as the glory of God is manifest in the dialectal relationship between the two. I.e. See John 15

John 15:8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. **9** As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. **10** If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. **11** I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. **12 ¶** "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **13** No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. **14** You are my friends if you do what I command you. **15** I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. **16** You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. **17** I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Therefore, while our goal is to glorify God in worship, this will never mean that we do not consider the needs of God's people in worship and God's plan of redemptive as communicated to them. And once we concede this, the incarnational/vernacular condescension of God will manifest itself in worship such that the people are served as well, which is to serve God if governed by God's commands. Notice then how John Calvin spoke of this second goal

Calvin: p. 175ff, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, by John Leith)

1. Intelligibility. *Worship must not only correct; it must be understood. Calvin did not deny the emotional element in worship. Worship, like faith, is a total personal act. He noted "a good affection toward God is not a thing dead and brutish but a lively movement proceeding from the Holy Spirit when the heart is rightly touched and the understanding enlightened." The first step toward intelligibility was the Protestant insistence that the worship must be in the language of the people. Yet this was not the beginning. In music care must be taken lest the melody obscure the meaning. ... Sacramental actions must always be in the context of teaching and preaching so that the act or the symbol will be clearly understood.*
2. Edification -- *he claimed that the form of liturgy that he presented to the church was "entirely directed toward edification." "Nothing which does not lend to edification ought to be received into the Church."*
3. Simplicity-- *It must "omit from baptism all theatrical pomp which dazzles the eyes of the simple and deadens their minds."¹⁸*

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.

Titus 3:3

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. **4** But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5** he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Worship includes BOTH Covenant *Initiation* and Covenant *Renewal* By Proclaiming the Doctrines of Grace in the Completed and Sufficient Work of Christ

¹⁸ A case could be made here that what Calvin is getting at is a medium fit the message driven "form" as to not obscure the real meaning of the event by aestheticism...

D. Vernacular Sensitive: 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?

1Cor. 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**.

I.e. 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:

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.

This all begs for a discussion about how to both "regulate" 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

Application in New Haven: A Blended Style of Worship fit the "blended" vernacular of a post-modern city as within a given language group.

Examples:

Other nations blended with Euro-centric American

Formal blended with Informal

Contemporary blended with Traditional

Old English blended with modern English

High Liturgical with low liturgical

Reasons:

a. In order to foster greater "tolerance" out of love one for another about those things that are vernacular in nature. (Rom. 14)

b. In order to account for the relatively "blended" vernacular that exist in most post-modern cities today.

c. To foster more genuine "participation" in worship by the widest defined vernacular possible within a given language group.

d. To make the Christ centered doctrines of grace more accessible to more people within covenantal worship.

E. Directed: Directed Worship in order to be done *Decently* and in *Order* after the Logic of Covenant Worship

About worship specifically, Paul teaches:

1Cor. 14:40 Let all things be done **decently** and in **order**.

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.*

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.

Thus a "directed" Style of Worship (Not formalism or formlessness...)

Note: If Anglican church is prone to formalism, so too Puritanism in reaction often was prone to formlessness... The Westminster tradition self-consciously sought to avoid either extreme—thus a directed approach...

Again, Whereas the Episcopalian's "Book" regulate both elements and Forms

The independents deregulate both form and elements more or less...

The Presbyterians regulate elements and "direct" forms

Thus,

Avoids sacerdotalism on the one hand, and spiritualism on the other...

See summary of Westminster on Worship by Leith...

Directed Approach Confessionally Illustrated:

WCF 21

p3 Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men: and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of his Spirit, according to his will, **with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and, if vocal, in a known tongue.**

p5 The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and **conscionable** hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, **with understanding, faith, and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart;** as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.

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)

And so, rather than confusing "forms and circumstances" with a "means of grace" as some will do, 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. I 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)

Our tradition as set up by Westminster (which should not necessarily be equated with Calvin since many traditions were trajectories out from Calvin) was to see forms as good skeletons but not as sufficient for living religion. I.e their "form worship" was driven by the fear that mere "forms" without anointed pastoral ministry led to dead orthodoxy..

A liturgical "form" was good and necessary even for a good body-- but without the flesh and blood of pastoral admonishments, rebuke, correction, training, etc-- these things would grow cold, route and dead...,

Confessionally Illustrated Again:

Larger Catechism # 155

How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

Larger Catechism #157

How is the Word of God to be read?

The holy Scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very Word of God, and that he only can enable us to understand them; with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them; with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of them; with meditation, application, selfdenial, and prayer.

Larger Catechism #159

How is the Word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?

They that are called to labor in the ministry of the Word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.

Larger Catechism #160

What is required of those that hear the Word preached?

It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

Excursus: John Leith-- Summary of Westminster

The Westminster Directory: (p.190ff)

While the Assembly was united in its understanding of Reformed theology, it was divided on the matter of worship between the Scottish Presbyterians, the English Presbyterians and the Independents.

Notice the concern again as stated by Leith quoting the Directory preface.

*" means... to make and increase an idle and unedifying ministry, which contented itself with set forms made to their hands by others, **without putting forth themselves**¹⁹ to exercise the gift of prayer, with which our Lord Jesus Christ pleaseth to furnish all his servants whom he calls to that office.*

1. Concern for converted ministry
2. Concern for a gifted and spirit filled ministry
2. Why? Because it was believed that there is a "joint" AND several aspect to liturgical leadership
3. Ultimate concern was to avoid dead formalism on the one hand and licentious syncretism with the idols of the world on the other...

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.²⁰ 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...*

*The preface commenced with a typical Puritan thesis: the Anglican reformation remains to be finished...The Book of Common Prayer, while commendable in its day, had become a burden upon the conscience of "sundry good Christians" causing ministers to be deprived and laity to be kept from the Lord's Table.²¹ It produced prayer-book idolatry to the depreciation of preaching. **It confirmed the papist in their own superstition, rendered the clergy "idle and unedifying" and brought untold contention upon the church.***

1. It contained ordinances which were of divine institution (Prescribed elements)
2. It promised uniformity by setting forth the principle headings of worship and the sense and scope of the prayers
3. As a directory, it provided ministers "some help and furniture" without depriving them of the **gift of prayer**. (I.e. anointed leadership)²²

Thus for example as related to the Lord's supper:

*First, he (minister) read the words of institution... which he could also **"explain and apply"** if it seemed appropriate...*

¹⁹ The recognition of "several" authority being expressed in worship by the minister

²⁰ 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 Scoto-Presbyterian tradition.

²¹ Thus the call for a "regulative principle" as directed not to forms but to elements, so on the one hand to prescribe what scripture prescribes, nothing more and nothingless... etc.

²² Notice then the "middle ground" between liturgy on the one hand and independence on the other-- thus a directory and between Anglican/prelacy and Independency... A regulated service albeit with freedom for inspired leadership...

The elements, having been "sanctified by the Word and Prayer"... the minister delivered bread and cup to the people who sat "about" the table or "at" it. (thus up-front or in seats-- the Scots preferred the people sitting at the table and handing the elements to one another, the Puritans preferred to receive the elements from the hands of the ministry...)

Leith,

The Assembly replaced the service book that contained the prayers and forms of worship with a directory that served as a guide... yet the Directory suggests an order of worship that is not very different from that of Geneva and the Scottish Book of Common Order.

The Directory presupposed that the minister was a converted man who could and would pray and lead worship out of his Christian experience. For a highly disciplined community and ministry such as practice was very effective. With the waning of discipline a voluntary liturgical order and free prayers became the occasion for much trivia, senseless repetition and personal idiosyncrasy.

Summary:

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)

And, rather than confusing "forms and circumstances" with a "means of grace" 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)

Some particulars that are "Not up for grabs" at CPC:

1. Expository Preaching
2. Weekly Communion
3. Covenantal Pattern of Worship utilizing all Four Elements
4. A clear identification with the One Holy Catholic Church "of our Fathers" through selected hymns, confessions and prayers
5. Music that fits the message (abeit relative to the vernacular interpretation) but is both classical/traditional and contemporary/folk with suitable instrumentation.. (E.g. both classical and "folk" style instrumentations as suited to medium of music)
6. God Centered message targeting elect sympathies (in believer and unbeliever terms)
7. Reverent (which could include a wide range of expressions including "sorrow, joy, thanksgiving, commitment, conviction, affirmation, etc. etc.) as distinguished from entertainment, "casual", passive, knee-stumping emotionalism, etc. etc.
8. Gospel driven service...
9. 1st Day of the Week (Sun-down to Sun-down)
10. Corporate Confession of Sin and Faith
11. Pre-worship "Heart" prep. (either with or without music)

12. Avoid announcements during worship...

13. The role of instrumentation is to "accompany" a given element and/or form of element. I.e. Triumphant "form" of hymn warrants, in so far as possible, a corresponding "triumphant" musical arrangements using instruments well suited to a "triumphant" sound. Or, instrumentation is not used in lieu of congregational participation where warranted by the element/form of worship. (We affirm that both the music "forms" and the instrument "circumstances" contain a "message" that either affirms and promotes a given intended message or distracts from it-- this is what we mean by "accompaniment" as a role relative to any given element and/or form.

14. Seek to avoid the entertainment "impulse" as noted by passivity vs. participation and medium focus vs. message focus.