Of Prayer Books and Puritans:
Reform, Revival, and Renewal in Protestant Worship

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It's better to confess rather than conceal one's sins, so I will start this essay with a plea for absolution. This overview of Reformed worship from the sixteenth century to the present is guilty of gross oversimplification and generalization. Frankly, it is impossible to cover the breadth of Reformed worship in all its variety (and make a few prescriptive recommendations) in such short compass. The difficulty with any study of Reformed worship is that from the very beginning, the Protestant Reformation contained within itself a wide range of worship theologies and practices. Even among strict Calvinists, on the continent of Europe, in Britain, and then in America, there was a high degree of diversity. My desire in this essay is simply to touch on some of the more interesting highlights, especially as they bear upon current issues in the Reformed church in America.

It is not easy to shape the historical data into an overarching narrative that does justice to the complexity of the shifts and developments that have taken place within the Reformed world over the centuries. However, three basic phases can be discerned: First, the era of the Reformation itself, as the magisterial Reformers sought to realign the church's worship with Scripture, preserving what they could while implementing needed changes. Second, the "hijacking" of the Reformation by a more minimalist and/or Anabaptistic approach to worship, producing American revivalism and a reversion back to some of the worst features of medieval worship (albeit in different packaging). Third, attempts beginning in the mid-nineteenth century to renew and revitalize Reformed worship through a greater appreciation for the breadth and richness of the Bible's liturgical theology and a desire to reconnect with the catholic tradition. That Reformed catholic liturgical renewal movement continues up to the present day, as this volume of essays demonstrates.

The Roots of Reformed Worship

Many of the questions at the heart of the Reformation were explicitly liturgical in character. Martin Luther's driving question was not simply, "*How* can God be gracious to sinners?" but "*Where* can sinners find this gracious God?" The medieval church did more than simply point people back to their works to make satisfaction for sin. It pointed them to relics, acts of penance, icons, prayers to Mary, and other assorted forms of idolatry. These were the *places* the medievals were told to go to have an encounter with God.

The Reformation break-through was more than rediscovering justification by faith alone. The Reformers pointed people to the preaching of the Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper as the *places* where God's grace in Christ may be found. In the medieval church, there was very little preaching or teaching offered to the laity in their own language. Baptism was hardly regarded as a means of grace since it had to be supplemented with

penance to cover post-baptismal sin. And the laity were essentially cut off from the table from the twelfth century on, either by fear of spilling the transubstantiated blood or by the practice of private masses performed by priests alone. The Reformation sought to restore the means of grace to their rightful, biblical position in the liturgy and life of God's people.

The Reformation was an all-out assault on the idolatry of the church's corrupt sacramental system and priesthood, analogous to the Old Testament reforms of Josiah and Hezekiah. The Reformers destroyed relics, smashed icons, and put an end to the cult of the saints. They refocused attention on the biblically prescribed means of grace, emphasizing preaching and reducing the number of sacraments from seven to two (baptism and the Lord's Supper).[1] They replaced penance with absolution, a weekly reminder of the promise of perpetual forgiveness made at baptism.[2] The Reformers also reconfigured the church, emphasizing the priesthood of the baptized and the need for corporate participation in worship. In the late medieval church, most "worshippers" came merely as spectators, to watch the priest perform a "hocus pocus" magic show.[3] People gazed at the sacramental elements in adoration but did not actually eat and drink.[4] Liturgy was not really "liturgy" at all, in the classic sense of "the communal, public work of the people."[5] The Reformers, by contrast, emphasized vigorous congregational singing and corporate prayers. The liturgy was put into the vernacular language of the people so they could follow and participate.

Yet, at the same time, the Reformation proved to be a liturgically conservative movement. The Reformers did not try to reinvent Christian worship. They preserved the aspects of medieval worship that they found to be consistent with the Scriptures. They were not averse to relying on tradition, especially when they could find a consensus in

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[1] This was part and parcel of redefining a sacrament as a divine work of grace on behalf of the covenant people. Thus penance could not be a sacrament because it is a human work. Marriage could not be a sacrament because it does not belong to or mark out the covenant community as such. And so forth.

[2] The standard historical myth says that medieval Christians believed they were saved by baptism, come what may. The Reformers came along and said that the sacraments are not salvific since salvation comes by faith. But this is not accurate on either count. In reality, the magisterial Reformers had a much *stronger* view of baptismal efficacy that the medieval church. In the medieval sacramental system, baptism washed away original sin, but all subsequent sin could only be dealt with through works of penance. Thus, assurance was essentially impossible. The Reformers, especially Martin Luther, Martin Bucer, and John Calvin, strengthened the church's doctrine of baptism on biblical grounds. They argued that baptism offers a full, free, and complete salvation, to be received by faith alone. Thus, there is no need for penance subsequent to baptism. The Reformers told Christians who struggled with feelings of guilt to flee back to promise God granted them in baptism, a promise of perpetual cleansing and forgiveness. For more details, see my essay "Calvin on Baptism, Penance, and Absolution," available at http://www.hornes.org/theologia/category/sacraments.

[3] Quite literally: "hocus pocus" most likely comes from a corruption of the words of institution in Latin.

[4] Communion in one kind was common practice in the medieval period. The laity only partook of the bread, and even that was quite infrequent.

[5] This definition of liturgy, as common and helpful as it is, does not capture the *real genius* of the early Reformers. Indeed, it is only a half-definition. For Luther and Calvin, liturgy was fundamentally "the divine service." That is, it was regarded as God's service to his people his people through Word and sacrament, and only secondarily and responsively the public work of the people towards God in Christ. In other words, their view of what happened in the liturgy was of a piece with their doctrine of *sola gratia.*

early patristic sources. The basic catholic shape of worship, from as far back as we can trace the post-apostolic church, included a ministry of the Word and a ministry of the Table each Lord's Day. The Reformers kept in tact this basic model and removed most of its late medieval corruptions. The Reformers wanted frequent (at least weekly) communion, and desired to have the laity restored to the communion meal.[6] They preached lengthy expositional sermons, like those found in the church fathers, and expected the laity to comprehend them.[7]

Liturgical conservativism is seen in other Protestant developments. While Thomas Cranmer's 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* (*BCP*) was Reformed in content, many of the prayers and the overall structure were derived from the medieval Sarum Rite.[8] Cranmer's liturgical genius was clearly on display in a service that was rich in substance, masterful in language, and streamlined in form. Cranmer also maintained the daily office, though he sought to transfer it from the monastaries (which had been outlawed in England) to the lives of "ordinary" Christians, in the hope that the whole baptized community might function more faithfully as a "royal priesthood." Later editions of the *BCP* moved in an even more decidedly Protestant direction, for better or worse. Cranmer often seemed to have difficulty making up his mind on things like the "real presence" of Christ in the Supper and sometimes the compromised, politically expedient nature of his work became all too clear. But he did provide the church with an exquisite, if not entirely fresh or consistent, body of liturgical texts.[9]

While Puritan dissenters would eventually reject the *BCP* for a complex set of reasons, its early origin means that it belongs to the English speaking Protestant tradition as a whole. According to Julius Melton, nineteenth century Presbyterian liturgist Charles Shields claimed that

> The Book of Common Prayer dated from a time prior to the separation of Presbyterians and Episcopalians into different parties and prior to the expulsion of

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[6] Laymen communed so infrequently in Luther's day that he declared no one should consider himself a Christian unless he partook at least once a year. Calvin earnestly desired to implement weekly communion in Geneva, though a stubborn city council stood in his way.

[7] The preaching schedule in Calvin's Geneva was very incredibly heavy. Not only were there multiple sermons on Sunday, but people were also expected to attend multiple preaching services during the week. The Reformation was a time of intense "Bible study" as the masses began to immerse themselves in the Word.

[8] It would be foolish to deny that Cranmer was a great and original liturgist in his own right. Cranmer was a great synthesizer, drawing "upon an amazing variety of sources – the early fathers, Lutheran church orders, a Spanish cardinal's Breviary, Eastern Orthodox liturgies, old Gallic rites – integrating this material into the Sarum Rite, the Roman rite as it had been adapted to English usage at Salisbury," William Willimon, *Water, Word, Wine, and Bread*, (Valley Forge, PA, Judson Press, 1980), 77. Cranmer was given the opportunity to write a new liturgy because the medieval Mass did not make provision for the people to receive both elements in communion. Cranmer's work gained greater acclaim than any previous liturgy in part due to the printing press, which made the *BCP* more widely available than previous liturgical books.

[9] Cranmer, ever desiring to please his constituency and hold to together a fraying kingdom, put together the 1552 (second edition) *BCP* under less than ideal conditions. This prayer book was decidedly less ceremonial and more penitential than the previous edition – all in a desire to satisfy the more radical Protestants who *still* ended up rejecting it.

> Presbyterians from the Church of England. It was therefore properly as much a Presbyterian as an Episcopalian possession.[10]

Just as there was no rigid distinction between the Lutheran and Reformed early on, so Presbyterians and Anglicans both trace their heritage back to the fount of the English Reformation. Later differentiation and even mutual hostility do not negate the earlier links. Thus, it was not totally unexpected or illegitimate for Presbyterians to eventually "rediscover" the beauty of *BCP* worship in the nineteenth century (as we'll see below).

The original Scottish Presbyterian *Book of Common Order* (derived from Knox's *Forme of Prayers,* used in exile in Geneva) was also quite moderate in its reforms, especially compared with the more radical minimalism and aesthetic barrenness that came to characterize English and American Puritanism. Indeed Scottish Presbyterians and Scottish Episcopalians had nearly identical services, and many of the liturgical practices critiqued by the English Puritans were the normal practices of their theological cousins in Scotland.[11]

While the early Protestants downsized the church calendar from the bloated version used by the medieval church, they did not do away with it altogether. Instead, they maintained at least the major feast days.[12] They also maintained many of the traditional bodily postures, though there was some variation amongst the Reformers on things like the propriety of kneeling for communion and the elevation of the elements. Martin Bucer approved of the sign of the cross at baptism, as suggested in the *BCP*, provided it was not done out of superstition. Kneeling for confession and/or prayer was also accepted as appropriate.[13]

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[10] Julius Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America: Changing Patterns since 1787* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001 reprint), 85. Melton calls Shields' argument "doubtful," and no question it is overstated. However, if Presbyterians wish to connect their tradition with the wider movement of the Reformation, not to mention the pre-Reformation catholic church, such a link is necessary. The *BCP* must at least be considered a major piece of the English speaking Reformational tradition. Even if Presbyterians desire to link themselves more directly with the continental Reformed tradition than Anglicanism, they should remember that Martin Bucer, a leading continental Reformer who fled to England for refuge in the mid-sixteenth century and a former pastor of Calvin's in Strassbourg, was a close advisor to Cranmer during the period of the *BCP's* production. So Presbyterians cannot really separate out their liturgical history from the continental Reformed or from the Anglicans, even if Presbyterianism eventually developed its own distinctive theology and practice of worship.

[11] Michael A. Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship: Theological Method and Liturgical Catholicity in American Presbyterianism, 1850-2005," unpublished dissertation, St. Louis University, 2007, 19f. This should be taken as proof that Reformed theology did not *necessitate* liturgical minimalism. Rather, the barrenness of Puritan worship was largely a product of reactionary political and cultural factors, as will be noted below.

[12] The principal Christological feasts were observed by most of the early Reformers.

[13] The continental Reformed liturgies included kneeling. For example, according to Joel Garver (http://sacradoctrina.blogspot.com/2004/07/worship-posture-and-practices-in.html), the 1559 French Reformed *Book of Discipline* states:

> We shall reform the great irreverence that is found among various persons who at public and private prayers do not uncover their heads or bow their knees; this is a matter repugnant to piety, gives suspicion of pride, and scandalizes those who fear God. Therefore all pastors shall be advised, along with elders and heads of families, to carefully see to it that during prayer all persons…shall, by these exterior signs, give evidence of the inward humility of their hearts and

Thus, the early Reformers, on the whole, affirmed a liturgical pattern of worship, even though they sought to make major adjustments to the medieval mass. They changed the liturgy substantially in form and content, but never questioned the value of liturgy as such. If anything, they sough to increase the liturgical participation of the people.

The Rise of Revivalism and the Decline of Reformed Worship

Luther and Calvin were still catholic (note the small "c") Christians. They were hoping to wash the face of the church, not create a new church. They were modern men in some respects, but still had one foot firmly planted in the medieval Christendom.[14] They saw their role as bringing reformation to the established catholic church, albeit from outside its institutional structure after Luther was excommunicated from Rome. They defended charges of schism by pointing to the way the established synagogues and temple hierarchy expelled the apostles in analogous fashion. They maintained a high view of the church, ministry, and sacraments.

Whereas Luther and Calvin viewed their reform efforts as a correction and a cleansing of the medieval church, not the formation of new church from scratch, later Protestant developments moved in a more radical direction. Luther and Calvin wanted to keep the tradition of Christendom in tact – including much of its liturgy – but not all Protestants shared that attitude of respect for their medieval heritage.[15] In several important senses, the Anabaptist wing of the Reformation eventually triumphed over Reformed catholicity. In at least in some key respects this was true of the British Puritans and their Baptist heirs.[16] While there is a high degree of theological continuity from Calvin to the Puritans,

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> the homage they yield to God (unless anyone is prevented from doing so by sickness or otherwise).

Kneeling *at communion* was significantly more controversial matter, even within Anglicanism, since it was often associated with adoration of the elements (e.g., the "Black rubric" controversy precipitated by John Knox). On the whole, outside of Anglicanism, the Reformed tradition has made very strong biblical and theological arguments in favor of eating communion in a seated posture.

[14] Church historian Philip Schaff once commented that "the Reformation was the greatest act of the Catholic church." Schaff definitively demonstrates the seeds of the Reformation were planted in the medieval church and proves the catholicity of the Reformers in his work, The Principle of Protestantism (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004 reprint).

[15] This was especially true of Zwingli. Zwingli was the exception to many rules among the early Reformers. He favored infrequent communion, did away with all singing, and sought to eliminate any vestiges of catholic symbolism from the service. In his radical minimalism, he really had more in common with some Anabaptists than with Luther and Calvin, and he anticipated some of the later Puritans.

[16] I am not saying that the Puritans were Anabaptists – not by any stretch. I am saying that certain features of Anabaptist theology (e.g., its rejection of church tradition as a norm of any kind, its individualism, its downplaying of the sacraments as means of grace, its emphasis on immediacy and rejection of outward worship forms, etc.) eventually displaced the distinctives of the early Reformers among the heirs of the Puritan movement, particularly in American revivalism. Of course, other aspects of Anabaptist theology (e.g., pacifism) were never widely embraced. But given that so many of the Puritans ended up becoming Baptist shows that the thesis is not that far fetched. The English Baptists did not arise directly from continental Anabaptism, but areas of overlap are undeniable. Some would argue that the Baptist movement (e.g., John Smyth's group) arose as the logical end point of Puritan separatism. This historical assessment is not unusual. For example, in William Willimon's *Word, Water, Wine and Bread: How Worship Has Changed Over the Years*, 71ff, he groups the Continental Anabaptists together with the British

there is also a fairly high degree of liturgical *dis*continuity,[17] particularly, on issues such as the propriety and value of fixed prayer forms, the frequency of communion (though quite a few Puritans agreed with Calvin's desire for weekly administration), pastoral vestments, the use of a church calendar, ethical regulations for the Lord's Day, the use of various postures in worship, and so forth. Calvin was favorable to the use of a creed and the Lord's Prayer in worship, as well as traditional sung elements like the *Kyrie* and the *Gloria Patri*. These items typically dropped out of Puritan services.

For Calvin, worship practices were governed by biblical exegesis and practical prudence in a given situation. On the one hand, Calvin favored fixed forms, rooted in Scripture and traditional sources:

> As to what concerns a form of prayer and ecclesiastical rites, I highly approve of it that there be a certain form, from which the ministers be not allowed to vary: That first, some provision be made to help the simplicity and unskillfulness of some; secondly, that the consent and harmony of the churches one with another may appear; and lastly, that the capricious giddiness and levity of such as affect innovations may be prevented.[18]

On the other hand, Calvin knew that many of the adjustments he had to make to medieval worship were circumstantial. Calvin stripped the service more bare than he might have otherwise because so many elements of the medieval liturgy had been subjected to abuse:

> Establishing here no perpetual law for ourselves, we should refer the entire use and purpose of observances to the upbuilding of the church. If the church requires it, we may not only without any offense allow something to be changed but permit any observances previously in use among us to be abandoned. This present age offers proof of the fact that it may be a fitting thing to set aside, as may be opportune in the circumstances, certain rites that in other circumstances are not impious or indecorous.[19]

Independents, Separatists, and (later) Puritans into the "free church" tradition since they all sought, with varying degrees of consistency, to do away with fixed forms in worship in favor of following the "leading of the Spirit." See also Willimon's short history of the British Baptists, 86ff.

[17] The degree of development – or decline, depending on one's point of view – from Calvin to the Puritans is a matter of intense debate. On the one hand, the basic shape of Reformed theology remained largely unchanged from Calvin's *Institutes* to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Calvin and Westminster share the same basic monergistic soteriology. On the other hand, we should not overlook some important changes that took place in theological methodology, philosophical presuppositions, and cultural climate. If *lex ornadi, lex credendi* is true – that is, if worship shapes doctrine, and vice versa – then we have to admit that there were at least *some* significant theological differences between Calvin and the Puritans because everyone agrees there were liturgical differences. The Puritans departed from both Calvin's desired liturgical structure (the sacrament administered with the Word on a weekly basis) as well Calvin's explicit liturgical strategy (a book of set prayer forms). See Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship," 216ff.

[18] Quoted in Charles Baird, *The Presbyterian Liturgies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957 reprint), 23. This quotation indicates that Calvin would have approved of some kind of "Presbyterian Prayer Book," and indeed had a hand in producing such a liturgical form in Geneva.

[19] Quoted in Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship," 226-227. In other words, to the extent that Calvin's worship was "minimalistic" it was largely due not to a theological commitment to minimalism, but a

The later Puritans could not have granted this degree of freedom and flexibility. They tended to ground their worship practices in more timeless and abstract principles (the "regulative principle of worship"). As a result, they were much more dogmatic and divisive and significantly less "catholic" in defending their particular type of worship. The Puritans rejected a number of liturgical practices that the early continental Reformers embraced (or at least allowed). Many Puritans were suspicious of liturgical forms, believing they could all too easily quench the Spirit. John Owen wrote, "all liturgies, as such, are…false worship…used to defeat Christ's promise of gifts and God's Spirit."[20] A later Presbyterian said, "Liturgies are felt to be tame things in a revival of religion."[21] Whether knowingly or not, many of the Puritans (and especially their Baptist descendants in America) followed the spiritualism of Ulrich Zwingli rather than robust-but-moderated liturgical sacramentalism of Calvin.[22]

The English Puritans came to reject the liturgical worship of the *BCP* and sought a more radical "purification" of worship from lingering "catholic" elements.[23] They refused to be satisfied with Cranmer's Reformed catholic "via media." The theological rationale given by the Puritans for their more radical purging of the traditional service became known as "the regulative principle of worship." The regulative principle looks for explicit New Testament warrant for worship practices in the form of *direct* commands or examples.[24] While the desire to regulate worship with Scripture is a feature of Protestantism that goes back to the first generation Reformers, the Puritans made a significant hermeneutical shift.[25] The result was a further "stripping of the altars," making worship less outwardly

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reaction to his providential situation. After centuries of abuse, the church needed to "fast" from certain practices which, in different circumstances, would have been permissible.

[20] Quoted in J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 248. Of course, Packer points out that other Puritans were more favorable to liturgy. But on the whole, the Puritans moved progressively away from the use of fixed forms in worship.

[21] Quoted in Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship," 104.

[22] Again, Zwingli must be understood as a proto-Puritan, and many of the Puritans were really more Zwinglian than Calvinian. Zwingli anticipated some of the more radical Puritans in his liturgical minimalism. Zwingli rejected all singing and other forms of congregational participation in the service; denied physical elements like water, bread, and wine could serve as vehicles of divine favor; reduced communion to subjective memorial/visual aid for worshippers; advocated no more than quarterly observance of the Supper; removed vestments and other symbols from the place of worship; and so on.

[23] By contrast, Bucer and Calvin, on the whole, approved of Cranmer's work. The *BCP* was more complex and less didactic than Calvin's Genevan liturgy, but Calvin "counseled Knox and other Reformers in England and Scotland to exercise patience and to refrain from disputing about ceremonies because he valued Protestant unity more highly than liturgical purity in matters of secondary importance" (Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship," 14). As already noted, Calvin's close associate Bucer, actually served as an advisor to Cranmer when he was stationed in Britain.

[24] Numerous devastating critiques of the regulative principle (at least in its stricter form) have been offered, e.g., John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996) and James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church* (Tyler, TX; Geneva Ministries), 208ff.

[25] The Puritans called the *BCP* "That imperfect book culled and picked out of that popish dunghill the Masse" (Willimon, *Word, Water, Wine, and Bread*, 84). But the Puritans quite clearly swung to the other extreme. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 247-8, explains the novelty of the "regulative principle":

> The idea that direct biblical warrant, in the form of precept or precedent, is required to sanction every substantive item included in the public worship of God was in fact a Puritan innovation, which crystallized out in the course of the prolonged debates that followed the Elizabethan

glorious and symbolic, less participatory, more focused on the sermon to the exclusion of communion, and significantly simpler in ritual and form. The Puritans eliminated most ceremonial gestures and corporate prayers, reducing the congregation's role to singing a few psalms (which was usually done quite poorly) and saying "Amen" after the pastor's prayers. At the 1661 Savoy Conference, the Presbyterians argued against the Episcopalians that "the minister being appointed for the people in all public services appertaining to God…the people's part in public prayer [is] to be only silence and reverence to attend thereunto and to declare their consent in the close by saying Amen."[26]

The regulative principle was an innovative way of using Scripture to control worship. It provided an illusion of security against Romans and Anglican influence. However, there was more going on than a change in liturgical hermeneutics. The Puritan shift in worship was also driven by political and cultural factors, as matters of liturgy unavoidably became a church/state issue.

Politically, the Puritans resented the imposition of a particular form of worship by the British crown. They lost patience with the established order, as the crown jerked the church around, and sometimes even brought persecution against those who separated themselves from the Church of England. As liturgy became a church/state issue, the Puritans were committed to greater liberty for the church, a desire that would not be fully realized until they ventured to America. The use of coercion and violence gave liturgy a bad taste in Puritan mouths.[27] Of course, it is fully understandable that they would come

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> settlement…[W]hen they repudiated all set prayers, when they rejected kneeling in public worship, the Christian year, weekly Communion, and the practice of confirmation, they were not in fact reverting to Calvin, but departing from him, though, as Horton Davies says, it is doubtful whether they realized this.

Indeed, Horton Davies, in *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Morgan, PA; Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997 reprint), 38, 256, points out that the Puritans unwittingly rejected major aspects of the very tradition they believed they were upholding:

> They probably would have been surprised had they realized the extent of their divergence from the customs of the Reformed churches [on the continent]. They would have been even more amazed to learn that, in certain features of her worship, the Established Church in England approximated more closely to the Reformed tradition than they did themselves…
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> [I]n their fear and detestation of the Roman Church, they did not give sufficient heed to the customs of the primitive Church, or to the conclusions of the Reformed Church on the Continent. In fact, in their eager haste to run away from the corruptions of Rome, they far outdistanced their leader, Calvin…

Of course, ignorance of Calvin's liturgical legacy persists down to the present day.

[26] Quoted in Nick Needham, "Worship Through the Ages," in *Give Praise to God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), edited by Phillip Graham Ryken, Derek W, H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan, 406. Ironically, this was a reversion straight back to the "low mass" tradition of the late medieval church! Worship once again became a spectator sport.

[27] This has been a common observation, e.g., Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship," 147n:

> [Charles] Shields believed that the historical reasons for Presbyterian opposition to the *Book of Common Prayer* had less to do with its inherent biblical and theological defects and more to do with its imposition by state coercion, which forced Presbyterians into a reactionary retreat from liturgical forms that even rejected much of their own heritage.

See also, Needham, "Worship Through the Ages," 406-7:

> If the left-wing independent attitude to worship came to prevail among English Noncomformists, this was probably in large measure a psychological reaction against the vindictive and bloody

to hate the religious ceremonies of their persecutors.[28] The Puritan movement was initially born out of a desire to further reform the *BCP*; it ended with a complete rejection of *BCP* altogether.[29] Political conflict hardened theological lines.

Culturally, the Puritans increasingly opposed anything that smacked of Roman Catholic worship. Indeed, some have wondered if the real regulative principle for the later Puritans was actually "whatever Rome and Canterbury do, do the opposite!" Anti-Roman and anti-Anglican polemics overshadowed most Puritan reflection on liturgical theology and practice. Puritan worship was defined by what it wasn't at least as much as by what it was.[30] Of course, this trend reached its high point in anti-Roman Catholic prejudice in eighteenth and nineteenth century America. [31]

Puritan worship morphed further once it reached the shores of America. The unique sociopolitical situation in colonial America made a (more or less) clean break with church tradition plausible. American churches often had a hard time securing ministerial services, especially as the population expanded westward. Inevitably, this led American Christians to emphasize private and familial piety over corporate, ecclesial piety. Combine those trends with America's innate (and often politically driven) anti-authoritarian, democratic bent, and its emphasis on the individual and autonomy, and you have the recipe in place for a major theological and liturgical shift further away from Calvin and medieval Christendom.

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persecution to which they were subjected by the liturgy-loving Anglicans after 1662. When freedom came in 1689, a new mindset evolved among the heirs of the Puritans, which (unsurprisingly) equated liturgy with the perceived unspirituality of a persecuting Episcopal state-church.

The same stream of thinking found its way into the ranks of the Scottish Covenanters, The pioneers of the movement had argued against Episcopalians for the freedom of extemporary prayer, but soon found they were having to argue against their own radicals for the freedom to use set prayers! During the "killing times" of 1660-1689, the use of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the Doxology (the threefold glory to the Trinity, traditionally sung at the end of every psalm) came to be associated in many Presbyterian minds with the detested Episcopal regime that so brutally persecuted Presbyterians.

[28] Puritan/Anglican hostilities are most famously recalled in Jenny Geddes' stool throwing incident.

[29] Thus, the Westminster Assembly initially set out to revise the Anglican 39 Articles but ended up producing an entirely new confession. However, the Assembly did not produce a Puritan counterpart to the *BCP*. Instead the divines wrote a general "directory" which contained no set liturgical forms, only suggested summaries of prayers and forms to assist ministers in worship preparation.

[30] To cite one example, regarding clerical vestments: "Many ministers [by the late seventeenth century] forsook the nearly universal Presbyterian tradition of wearing cassocks or Genevan gowns when leading corporate worship because they now associated robes with episcopacy" (Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship," 19). These sorts of psychological connections exerted enormous power.

[31] At this juncture, I am summarizing a huge body of complex history and overlooking a good deal of theological argumentation that was offered on varying sides. I do not want to leave the impression that the Puritans were lacking in biblical defense for their worship reforms. The better Puritans (e.g., George Gillespie) wrote extensive biblical defenses of their theology of worship. But theology is never done in a vacuum and in this particular instance there can be virtually no doubt that the Puritans were driven at least in part by a reaction against the church bodies they were separating from.

The complex amalgamation of doctrines, practices, and ethos that came to characterize distinctively American Protestantism are known collectively as "revivalism."[32] Given America's break with the "old world" and the lack of ministerial supply, in the nature of the case, worship became increasingly informal, unstructured, and novel. In short, worship was "Americanized." And that Americanization strongly impacted virtually every "old world" denomination represented in the "new world," as well as leading to the formation of a plethora of new denominations that were distinctively "made in America."

Of course, *some* traditional Presbyterians wanted to preserve the minimalist forms of worship they had brought with them from Britain. But those arch-conservatives found themselves increasingly isolated as America became more populous. The pressure to make worship an unstructured, spontaneous event, more accommodating of the emerging American way of life, was very strong and touched even the most conservative theologians, pastors, and denominations. To illustrate: In 1788, the colonial Presbyterian General Assembly adopted a new *Directory for Public Worship*. The changes from the original were telling:

> The final version deleted even the suggested summaries of prayer content in the 1644 *Westminster Directory*, and it omitted any reference to the Lord's Prayer…Furthermore, the rubrics were revised to turn imperatives into suggestions. Thus, Julius Melton concludes that "the denomination had produced what could almost be described as a non-directive Directory!"[33]

There was an ever growing tension between those who wanted to hang onto Puritan minimalism and those who wanted to embrace the "new measures" of revivalism. This tension led to controversy, crisis, even denominational splits (e.g., the Old Side/New Side Old Light/New Light divisions in the nineteenth century). It also led to an exodus out of Presbyterianism into denominations that were friendlier to revivalism and able to keep pace with the American move westward (namely, Baptists and Methodists). Peter Cartwight's mid-nineteenth century assessment was apropos: "[I]lliterate Methodist preachers set the world on fire" while other traditional denominational bodies faced a struggle just "lighting their matches."[34]

The first wave of revivalism dominated much of eighteenth century American religious life. Known as "the Great Awakening," it was still robustly Calvinistic in soteriology, but lacked any ecclesiological and sacramental depth. The second wave of revivals in the nineteenth century jettisoned Calvinism in favor of Arminianism, which rapidly lost its stigma. It began to create new religious rites to replace traditional liturgies and sacraments. Charles Finney, the champion of these later revivals, famously referred to "revivals" not as "miracles" but as the "purely philosophical result of the right use of

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[32] "Revivalism" is not to be confused with revival per se. Everyone agrees that revival, understood as a sovereign renewing work of God among his people to mature and expand the church, is a good thing. The Reformation itself can be understood as a kind of revival. "Revivalism," however, tries to package and produce revival through a set of techniques.

[33] Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship," 21.

[34] Quoted in Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 37.

constituted means."[35] His theological outlook was purely American humanism: "Religion is the work of man. It is something for man to do, it consists in obeying God. It is man's duty."[36] After the second "awakening," American worship services would conclude with an altar call (for unbelievers) rather than an altar feast (for believers). Indeed, worship was almost entirely absorbed into evangelism, and the focal point was not on maturing in discipleship by means of word and sacrament but on getting souls saved by means of a violent, soul-shaking "conversion experience."[37]

What were the distinctive features of this Americanized Protestantism, this Protestantism "of the people, by the people, for the people"? It impossible to give a full description, but we can at least catalog some of the features that bore heavily upon the church's worship in style and content. There was a great emphasis on the immediacy of the Spirit's work. No longer did Christians expect and wait for God to work through his ordinary, appointed means of Word and sacrament. Rather, people sought after a direct, inward, privatized (and often ecstatic) experience of the Spirit. The sacraments were largely replaced with revivalistic techniques, like the "anxious bench." No longer was church hierarchy respected and trusted. Instead, there was a shift towards egalitarianism, in which each man functioned more or less as his own "pope." Laymen and even laywomen were given increasingly visible leadership roles in the assembly. Itinerating revivalists undermined the authority of local parish pastors. Anti-intellectualism carried over to the new clergy who, in their attempts to show that they weren't really any different than the people they preached to, downplayed rigorous biblical exposition and application in favor of rousing sermons modeled after political stump speeches. No longer was an academically intense seminary training a pre-requisite for ministerial office. Indeed, most frontier preachers were uneducated, and those who were found their education to be a distinct disadvantage. Biblical interpretation was largely cut loose from any confessional heritage and made a matter of private judgment. Democratization made the audience sovereign over the message preached. Individualism fed into sectarianism and even religious consumerism, as people increasingly looked for a church that met their felt needs. The increasing plurality of church choices meant that ecclesiastical bodies had to compete with one another for members by appealing to a lowest common denominator and styling their services (especially music) after the rising popular culture. Spontaneity and even entertainment replaced structured liturgy. Indeed, some revival services were more like circuses than traditional worship gatherings. The emphasis on spontaneity led to a complete rejection of prayer books and forms, in favor of emotionalism and the desire to have everything done extemporaneously.[38]

There were other factors at work as well. The practice of "communion seasons" in Britain fed into the rise of revivalism. The Scottish Presbyterians had turned their infrequent communion celebrations (two to four times per year) into major, week long festivals.

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[35] Quoted in Willimon, *Word, Water, Wine, and Bread,* 102.
[36] Quoted Peter Leithart, "Revivalism and American Protestantism," in The Reconstruction of the Church, (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1985), edited by James B. Jordan, 60.
[37] See Willimon, *Word, Water, Wine, and Bread*, 101ff for a helpful assessment.
[38] For an excellent of survey of the way American populism pulled classic Protestantism out of shape, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1989).

Those festivals evolved into sacrament-less camp meetings on American soil. Also, liberty of conscience, a doctrine that had been applied corporately to church bodies in the medieval Christendom, was reworked into a safeguard of individual autonomy in the American context.[39] The liberty of conscience dogma was used to bolster the argument against the use set prayer forms. How can the conscience be bound to worship God using the words of another?[40] But the result was more than an increase in extempore prayers. The wild proliferation of divisions and sects was an inevitable corollary of revivalism's cultural ethos. Division, dissent, and disorder trailed the leading revivalists and created fertile ground for hyper-denominationalism.

Not surprisingly, some revivalistic emotionalism and antiauthoritarianism spilled over into raw lawlessness. The "hellfire and brimstone" messages were not enough to scare everyone into repentance. One critic of the revivals said that at the camp meetings "more souls were begotten than saved." The sensual music, the emphasis on following the lead of one's feelings, the intense sentimentalism, the man-centered gospel presentations that omitted any "cost of discipleship," and the lack of pastoral oversight, produced a rather unstable religious mix. Nineteenth century American religious life became a fertile field for proliferating dozens of new denominations and cults. It also created numerous "burned over districts" in those regions where emotionally exploitative revivalists wore out their welcome.

In some ways, revivalism may be seen as an almost necessary end goal of Protestantism's reaction against *poorly performed* and *spiritually dead* liturgical worship. Revivalists mocked the staid formalism of the more historic church bodies. Revivalism was an attempt to reach a largely uneducated and rootless people with the simple gospel message; it was an early experiment in contextualization, you might say. Further, revivalism was a pendulum-swinging reaction against the rising tide of Enlightenment rationalism in the more traditional denominations. Not every feature of revivalism was completely off the mark.[41] One of the defining marks of revivalism was its insistence on heart religion, or "experimental religion," as it was sometimes called. It is certainly right and proper to seek a deep and even emotional experience of God's grace. The Psalter is filled with testimonies of such personal awakenings and Jonathan Edwards' masterful treatment of the religious affections showed that at least some proponents of the revival movement were willing to make careful, biblical distinctions between sound and unsound experiences. We should always be amazed and overjoyed at the utter graciousness of our salvation. The faith has to be *felt*, not just *understood*. Nor is it wrong to pray extemporaneously. Indeed, mature Christians should generally be able pray from their hearts with both fervency and truth. Perhaps the more liturgical traditions had left room for the leading of the Spirit and had not sufficiently trained their people to pray skillfully

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[39] I have explored this aspect of American history in some depth in my three part series, "A Compact Road Map of American History," available at http://www.trinity-pres.net/pastor.php.

[40] Presbyterians are oddly inconsistent here. If liberty of conscience rules out a prayer book, why not a confession of faith, a form of government, and a hymn book as well?

[41] On some of the paradoxes of revivalism, see Peter Leithart "Revivalism and American Protestantism," 47f.

on their own. And it is certainly the case that a lot of liturgical worship in the more traditional, conservative churches at that time had descended into a dead formalism.[42]

But revivalism went to excess. It rejected too many things that had proven to be good and helpful to the life of God's people. It twisted and distorted the biblical gospel to match the tastes of American individualism (and may have been one of the root causes of that individualism). An immediate work of God upon the soul, rather than a work of God through the church community and the means of grace became the new norm.[43] Revivalism trimmed the sails to fit the prevailing winds of emotionalism and anti-authoritarianism. It failed to distinguish authentic experiences of God's grace from their showy counterfeits. Its loss of confidence in the ordinary means of grace and the sovereignty of God in drawing sinners to himself led revivalists to legitimate the manipulative use of music and psychological pressure in preaching. Predictably, many of the "revivals" turned out to be more show than substance once the smoke cleared from the camp meetings and the lasting fruit could be assessed. Many revivalists became quasi-celebrities and religious entrepreneurs, known more for their on-stage theatrics and innovations than godly character or sound doctrine. The lasting legacy of revivalism is largely the current state of American evangelicalism, two thousand miles wide, but only a few inches deep, and susceptible to every passing populist trend. There is no doubting that God has used revivalistic American Protestantism to spread the gospel prolifically. There is also no doubt this particular form of Christianity has failed to produce the kind of maturity God desires from his people.

As a result of revivalism's influence, the vast majority of Presbyterians gradually moved away from traditional Puritan minimalism, just as the Puritans had moved away from classic catholic liturgy. Eventually (by the beginning of the twentieth century) Presbyterians embraced uninspired hymns (as opposed to exclusive psalmody),[44] the use of musical instruments (which had previously been viewed as part of the old covenant ceremonial system),[45] and at least a few basic Christian holidays (e.g., Christmas and Easter) which had been forbidden.[46] But this was not liturgical renewal through the back

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[42] Unfortunately, sometimes the revivalists mistook faithful liturgical worship for dead formalism because they were using novel criteria to evaluate the liveliness of a worship service. But, still, the point stands. Those who worship in liturgical settings must always be aware of the peculiar dangers and temptations that accompany their practice.

[43] Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America*, describes an ecclesiology tailor made for the American frontier:

> Few Americans viewed the church with ease as a centuries-old, divine institution. Their individualism did not allow them to be easily *awed* into submission to its control or even to the control of the God it represented, as their medieval or Scottish ancestors might have been. Americans on the frontier more readily thought of the church as simply an assemblage or religiously inclined neighbors.

[44] The first Presbyterian hymnal in America was published in 1831. Hymnody gradually drove out psalmody so that by the dawn of the twentieth century it is safe to say the exclusive psalmody position had become a very tiny, if stubborn, minority.

[45] In 1888, R. L. Dabney wrote review of John L. Girardeau's attack on the use of musical instruments in congregational worship. Dabney lamented that the traditional Presbyterian position (as espoused by Girardeau) was fast eroding, giving way to "popish" practices.

[46] In the Puritan New England, the churches were always locked on December 25 to remind the people that the Roman Catholic holiday of Christ*mass* was not to be celebrated by conscientious Protestants.

door. Some of the developments unwittingly brought Presbyterians back into contact with classical "catholic" worship, even if in spite of themselves. But these changes took place without a well thought-out theological rationale. Presbyterians abandoned their traditional regulative principle, but did not replace it with a coherent liturgical theology grounded in Scripture and tradition. The result is that American Presbyterians changed, but they didn't know exactly *why*. They still opposed prayer books and liturgical forms, but they didn't really know the reason other than anti-Roman (and perhaps anti-Anglican) prejudices. Some these shifts had surface level resemblance to the liturgical tradition Presbyterians had previously rejected, but it was a resemblance based on pragmatism and personal preferences, not sustained theological reflection. The distinctives of classic Presbyterianism had been dissolved in the solvent of American revivalism. There were very few Presbyterians who preserved the "Old School" form of minimalist worship, and even fewer Reformed Christians who preserved the more liturgical worship of the Continental Reformation. The end result is that the Presbyterian and Reformed world is completely lacking in any kind of liturgical identity. The heirs of Calvin are defined almost exclusively by ideology.

Current trends in Presbyterian and Reformed worship reflect wider movements in evangelicalism. Worship has changed more in the last one hundred and fifty years than in the previous fifteen hundred years. In the twenty-first century, more and more Reformed churches are moving towards "contemporary" services, featuring modern praise choruses, informal times of sharing, and emphasis on cultural adaptation and "relevance." The contemporary manifestation of the revivalistic impulse is the "seeker sensitive" service, which measures the success of a service not by its fidelity to a biblical pattern of liturgy but by its evangelistic effectiveness. Like the revivals of the last two centuries, this hardly counts as a worship service. It is primarily an evangelistic event. It is characterized by concert music played by a band and not really designed for congregational participation. It excludes communion because communion is not for outsiders and might make them feel uncomfortable. Biblical doctrine is minimized, so the messages typically focus on how Christianity can help people live better lives. The message is often presented through technological means (e.g., on large TV screens) rather than in a personalized, face-to-face way.[47]

In many ways, we've come full circle, back to where we were before the Reformation. The present day evangelical church (including most Presbyterian/Reformed churches) has lost the Word and (especially) the sacraments as objective means of grace. Thus, assurance depends more upon "morbid introspection" (as it has been called) than outward-looking faith focused on Christ. Once again, worship is largely a spectator event, in which the people gather to watch the religious professionals put on a performance. Entertainment has replaced enchantment, but the net result is the same. Communion is infrequent, and preaching has been reduced to either self-help messages that tend to throw people back on their own works or antinomian messages about a gospel that makes no demands. The psalter has been taken from the people –mainly because they don't want

[47] There is nothing wrong with the use of technology of course. But thus far there has been little theological reflection in Presbyterian circles on how to use technology in a way that does not create and "entertainment ethos" or depersonalize the worship service. The danger of Gnosticism is very real.

it and their leaders are too democratic to insist on it anyway. Like the medieval church, the evangelicals have created new "sacraments" (e.g., altar calls) to replace God's ordained means of grace.[48] To be sure, there are also numerous differences compared to the pre-Reformation situation (e.g., there are no vestments for ministers in contemporary evangelical church; the sermon has a place of prominence over the table; etc.). But it is safe to say that American evangelical and Reformed churches have largely failed to preserve (much less develop!) their heritage in the area of worship. Worship in the Reformed church needs reformation.

Attempts at Renewal

What Americans mean by "old time religion" is really not "old time" at all. It's really a nineteenth century innovation. Revivalism has rightly been identified as the one distinctively American contribution to liturgical history. As we have seen, that contribution does not exactly speak well of the maturity level of American evangelicalism. Perhaps the oddest feature of the "camp meeting" revival movement is the way it became the new pattern for Sunday worship in American churches. The conversion-centered worship of revivalism has now given way to "seeker-friendly" services in contemporary evangelical circles, but the overarching approach is still revivalistic.

However, along the way, there *have been* several attempts to reconnect with the "old time" religion of the Reformers and the historic catholic church. These liturgical renewal efforts appear novel to us, but only because American Christianity is so un-traditional. The real novelties are found in mainstream American evangelicalism.

Here, we will briefly sketch out some of these periods of liturgical renewal and recovery that have taken place since the Reformation. None of them to this point have proved to be entirely successful, but the persistent push to renew the church's way of worship is an encouraging sign. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, a number of prominent Reformed theologians saw a need to curb revivalistic excesses, stand against the democratization of evangelical Christianity in America, and reconnect worship with the magisterial Reformers and the best of the pre-Reformation tradition.

A baby step towards liturgical renewal in America was taken when a small book was published anonymously in 1855 under the title *Eutaxia, or the Presbyterian Liturgies.* It was eventually revealed that the compiler of this liturgical collection was Charles Baird, a young Presbyterian minister from New York who had voyaged to Europe, where he discovered a Reformed world quite different from what he had seen in his native country. Having experienced worship according to Geneva's 1541 "Form of Church Prayers,"

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[48] This is to be expected. Man is symbolic creature and cannot live without symbolism. If he will not have God's symbols, he will have to create his own. In some cases, the replacement of sacraments with "new measures" was very explicit. For example, "Finney likened this new measure to baptism in the early church, as a 'public manifestation of their determination to be Christians'" (Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America*, 48). Aside from the fact that Finney gets the meaning of baptism in the early church basically wrong (it was viewed more as a divine gift than obligatory testimony), the fact that he would so casually more or less replace a rite ordained by Christ with one of his own invention is quite remarkable.

Baird realized that the American church lacked a fullness and beauty in her worship. Baird's goal was to call American Presbyterians back to their classic, liturgical roots, essentially advocating a Presbyterian prayer book constructed out of the forms handed down by Calvin, Knox, Bucer, and others. Princeton theologian Charles Hodge advocated following up on Baird's proposed reforms, even suggesting that an optional liturgical prayer book would be "a very great blessing."[49]

There were several attempts to carry out this plan over the next century. For example, Baird published his own *A Book of Public Prayer* in 1857. About that same time, Charles Shields put together a Presbyterian-ized version of the *BCP*, following a model that was originally published in 1661. Shields not only argued that liturgical worship is compatible with Reformed theology and has a strong precedent within the Reformed tradition. He also demonstrated the practical and pastoral advantages of a liturgical model of worship. The northern Presbyterians (PCUSA) published a denominational service book for voluntary use, *The Book of Common Worship* (*BCW*), in 1906, with several subsequent editions (most recently, 1993). The original committee, appointed in 1896, included Princetonian B. B. Warfield. This liturgical resource borrowed elements from the *BCP* and progressively from other traditions as it went through new editions. The *BCW* advocated the use of prayer forms and collects, the creed, multiple OT and NT readings, the observation of major feast days, and situated communion in a traditional context, complete with *Sursum Corda* and the *Sanctus*. Weekly communion was not instituted as the norm until the 1993 edition, but the Lord's Supper certainly took on greater liturgical prominence even in the earlier editions.

The most impressive attempt at liturgical renewal came from the so-called Mercersberg circle of theologians. In 1849 the German Reformed Church appointed a committee, including *uber*-scholars Nevin and Schaff from Mercersberg Seminary, to draft a new liturgy. While the project was never a success in the sense of gaining widespread acceptance, and while the influence of the tiny German Reformed Church was severely limited anyway, the project indicated that interest in patristic and early Reformational patterns of worship was not totally dead in America. Nevin and Schaff did end up exerting quite a bit of influence outside of their narrow German Reformed circles through their writings because their scholarship was so impressive. But there was no denomination as such that carried on their cause.

The Mercersberg movement was intensely Christ-centered: "The distinguishing character of the Mercersburg Theology, in one word, is its Christological interest, its way of looking at all things through the Person of the crucified and risen Savior."[50] Every doctrine, including liturgical theology, was to have a christological focus since Christ – that is, God's union with humanity in the man Jesus – is the central fact of cosmic history. We share in the very life of God by means of our mystical union with Christ. This union is mediated to us through the church and her liturgy. Indeed, Mercersberg

[49] Quoted in Farley, "Reforming reformed Worship," 24.
[50] John Williamson Nevin, "Letter to Dr. Henry Harbaugh," in *Catholic and Reformed: Selected Theological Writings of John Williamson Nevin*, edited by Charles Yrigoyen Jr. and George H. Bricker. (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick Press, 1978), 410.

theology came to fullest practical expression in its newly devised liturgy. Because the church is Christ's body, that body must not be rent asunder. Unity with the catholic church in space and time was considered paramount. Nevin and Schaff despised the sectarian cast of American Christianity and desired to reunify the church around a common form of worship which was genuinely Christ-centered, historic, and based on the objective means of grace.

What were the principle features of the Mercersburg liturgical vision? The Mercersberg liturgy was an "altar liturgy" rather than a "pulpit liturgy." While there was ample space made for the preaching of the word, the liturgy as a whole flowed into the celebration of Christ's "mystical presence" in communion.

> The last ground of all true Christian worship is the mystical presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist; all the parts of public worship are inwardly bound together by their having a common relation to the idea of a Christian altar.[51]

The Mercersberg theologians emphasized liturgy as the "divine service," that is, as fundamentally and foundationally God's service to his people in Christ. Worship is the work of the covenant community only in response to God's prior initiative. Liturgy is not merely about stirring up pious feelings or expressing devotion to God. Something *happens* in the liturgy, something objective and gracious, because Christ is present in the liturgy to make his people sharers in all his benefits.

> [The liturgy] teaches that the value of Christ's sacrifice never dies, but is perennially continued in the power of His life. It teaches that the outward side of the sacrament is mystically bound by the Holy Ghost to its inward invisible side; so that the undying power of Christ's life and sacrifice are there for all who take part in it with faith. It teaches that it is our duty to appropriate this grace and bring it before God ("the memorial of blessed sacrifice of His Son") as the only ground of our trust and confidence in His presence. All this the Liturgy teaches. Who will say that it wrongs, in so doing, the sacramental doctrine of the Reformed Church?[52]

Of course, many argued that the proposed liturgy did violate the Reformed tradition. The problem was that most Reformed Christians in America did not realize how far they had drifted from the liturgical and sacramental views of the magisterial Reformers. Mercersberg's historic scholarship was unparalleled, and Nevin and Schaff have been (for the most part) vindicated against the critics who assailed them at the time.

The Mercersberg project has been called "high church Calvinism," which is a fitting label. Nevin's liturgical program sought to employ the best features of patristic liturgies, as seen through the lens of the sixteenth century Reformation. Nevin wanted to integrate features of worship forms drawn for the first several centuries of church history with

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[51] Quoted in Howard G. Hageman, *Pulpit and Table,* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1962), 95.
[52] Quoted in Hageman, *Pulpit and Table,* 96.

those of the early Reformers (before the influences of Puritan minimalism and revivalism ate away at that liturgical heritage).

Nevin's liturgical synthesis was more devotional than didactic. In that regard, he wanted to demonstrate that one did not have to abandon liturgy in order to have vibrant, enthusiastic, vigorous worship. He desired a prayer book that would not be just for pastors, but that would belong to the people as a whole. At the heart of his liturgical program was the restoration of the catholic and Calvinian pattern of integrating the service of the Word and the service of the table into one another in a beautiful, participatory service.

Theologically, the Mercersberg liturgy centered on the person of Christ. The church was viewed as the primary locus on Christ's presence in the world, and both the vehicle and embodiment of salvation. The place of our ultimate encounter with Christ's presence is the Eucharist: "[the Lord's Supper is] the inmost sanctuary of religion, and the most direct and close approach we are ever called to make into the divine presence."[53]

In terms of the specifics, Nevin's liturgy was not as elaborate as one might have expected, given his stated ambitions. But his proposals included set prayers for the pastor and people, the use of traditional elements such as the creeds and the Lord's Prayer, a moderated lectionary/calendar cycle, and a small measure of ceremony and gesture. For Nevin, the liturgy is an eschatological event, in which this creation is brought into contact with the world to come in Christ Jesus. As the church gathered for worship, creation is brought nearer to its final end goal of union with God through Christ.[54]

The Way Forward

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[53] Quoted, Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship," 173.

[54] See, e.g., Nevin's rationale for a church calendar as described by Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship, 172f:

> The church's liturgy not only expresses the unity of the church in history, but in the observance of the liturgical calendar, it also unites the order of redemption and grace in history with the order of nature…Because human beings are also spiritual beings comprised of an organic union of body and soul, however, they only find their fulfillment in a supernatural end. Nevin found this truth to be embodied in the correspondence of seasonal changes with the progress of salvation history. God established the natural cycles of the seasons to be a symbol of the course of redemptive history in which the supernatural takes up the natural world into itself in a permanent, organic union in the person of Christ…
>
> These typological correlations come to liturgical expression in the celebration of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in the seasons and festivals of the liturgical year. The new life and light of spring, for example, points to the victory over the powers of darkness in the resurrection of Christ at Easter, while the "triumphant progress" of the sun toward its summer solstice and its effects on the earth appropriately symbolizes the ascension of Christ and the effects of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Thus, the liturgical year exhibits the sacramental reality of the whole creation and expresses the cosmic significance of the incarnation. In the person of Christ, the whole created order finds its supernatural goal and fulfillment.

This kind of eschatological Christology is pervasive in Nevin's entire theological project, especially his liturgical and sacramental theology.

Today, it is evident that some Presbyterians have been more influenced by Baptist, revivalistic, and charismatic forms of worship than by their own tradition. It remains to be seen how much of an influence the so-called "emerging church" will exert in Presbyterian circles. Others have moved in a more catholic, ecumenical direction, seeking to interact with and borrow from the best of other "high" traditions. More than ever, Presbyterian and Reformed churches are characterized by liturgical diversity (one is tempted to say "liturgical chaos").

Liturgical renewal movements have been much more common among more ecumenically minded liberal Presbyterians that among the hard core confessional Calvinists in smaller, conservative splinter denominations. But there is a refreshing exception, one that proves that liturgy can be both contemporary and orthodox, both beautiful and faithful. The principal figures in this push for liturgical renewal are James Jordan, Jeffery Meyers, and Peter Leithart. We will call them the "Biblical Horizons" group because Jordan's Biblical Horizons (BH) ministry[55] has been the main force behind these theological developments.

This group of liturgical theologians takes a "whole Bible for the whole people" approach to worship. (Or: "Maximum content with maximum participation," as it has been put.) They read the Bible in a Christocentric/ecclesiocentric fashion. Thus, they use Old Testament models, filtered through the grid of new covenant revelation, to inform and guide worship practices. To put it another way, they are committed to the "regulative principle" and thus seek to ground their entire liturgical program in Scripture.[56] But their exegetical conclusions actually bring them closer to a traditional "high church" liturgy than to Puritan minimalism. Thus, they point to a way through the Anglican/Puritan impasse that has haunted the worship of English speaking Protestants.

The BH theologians appreciate the collective wisdom of church tradition and historic catholic patterns of worship. They are committed to the liturgy as a corporate expression of the gospel. But what sets them apart from earlier Reformed attempts at liturgical renewal (e.g., Mercersberg) is their desire to be *fully biblical*, as opposed to *merely traditional*. These theologians are not trying to repristinate the worship of a past era, as if liturgical worship was akin to those who perform Civil War battle reenactments. Rather, they desire to forge ahead, using the best of the traditional sources, but also examining and reshaping everything in light of a holistic, typological reading of Scripture. To advocate liturgical worship is not to accept any and every ritual or ceremonial expression

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[55] See http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/.

[56] Jordan contrasts the "sect" form of the regulative principle with the "catholic" form. He writes in *Liturgical Nestorianism* (Niceville, FL: Transfiguration Press, 1994), 9:

> The "catholic" form, which commands the adherence of most of the conservative Calvinistic community, states that we are to worship only as the Bible teaches, and that such teaching is found by way of command, principle, example, pattern, and every other mode of communication God has determined to use. The sect form of the Regulative Principle comes to the Bible with the pre-determined notion that God can only direct us only by means of explicit commands, a notion that does not arise from the Bible itself, and a notion that is actually unworkable in practice. The catholic form of the Regulative Principle, to which I adhere, allows God to decide how to communicate His will to us, and thus recognizes much more in the Bible about worship than does the sect form.

that has arisen in church history, or that shows up in churches that claim to be liturgical today. The BH approach insists that we must tap into the traditions of the church, but at the same time we must sift through those traditions with biblical discernment.

The best way to understand what Jordan, Meyers, and Leithart have in view is to take a handful of case studies. Their liturgical views and practices are not necessarily identical in every detail, but they share the same basic approach. Our three case studies on liturgical *ordo,* the use of the psalter, and the centrality of worship to Christian living, community development, and cultural formation will reveal how their liturgical program works "on the ground."

First, consider liturgical flow. Traditional Presbyterian discussions of worship have been dominated with arguments over the discrete elements that make up the worship service (e.g., determining which elements have biblical warrant). But there has been very little concern with the overarching *sequence*, with placing the elements in a proper order. The BH theologians are certainly concerned with lawful elements, but their main concern is to follow the Bible's teaching on the narrative shape of the service. The Levitical sacrifices always come in the same basic sequence. Perhaps the easiest place to see this flow is in Leviticus 9, the first time corporate worship was offered at the newly constructed tabernacle. The basic structure of the service, as interpreted by the BH theologians, is as follows:[57]

- The sin offering[58] (Lev. 9:15) highlights **confession** of sin and absolution. Without an initial confession of sin, we are worshipping God with unclean hands and lips.[59] In confession, we acknowledge our unworthiness and

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[57] Jordan, *Theses on Worship* (Niceville, FL: Transfiguration Press, 1994), 93ff. Jordan has done extensive work on Leviticus and translates the names of the offerings in a different way than most English Bibles. In so doing, he is able to pull the new covenant theological meaning out of each offering more easily.

[58] BH theologians have pointed out the terminology of "offering" in the book of Leviticus is actually misleading in many instances. These sacrifices are not really "offerings" but "nearbringings" (a BH neologism). However, a full discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this essay and for the sake of simplicity, I will use the term "offering." For a brief introduction, see Jeff Meyers' web post on the translation of sacrificial language in Leviticus: http://jeffreyjmeyers.blogspot.com/2007/07/leviticus-i-correcting-terms.html.

[59] For historical background on the placement of confession and absolution, see See K. Deddens, "A Missing Link in Reformed Liturgy," available at http://spindleworks.com/library/deddens/missing.htm. Deddens demonstrates the priority of confession in patristic (e.g., the *Didache,* Chrysostom) and early Reformed liturgies. Martin Bucer's and John Knox's liturgies began with a confession of sin and declaration of absolution. Calvin also opened the worship service with a confession of sin (*Institutes*, 3.4.11):

> Seeing that in every sacred assembly we stand in the view of God and angels, in what way should our service begin but in acknowledging our own unworthiness? But this you will say is done in every prayer; for as often as we pray for pardon, we confess our sins. I admit it. But if you consider how great is our carelessness, or drowsiness, or sloth, you will grant me that it would be a salutary ordinance if the Christian people were exercised in humiliation by some formal method of confession. For though the ceremony which the Lord enjoined on the Israelites belonged to the tutelage of the Law, yet the thing itself belongs in some respect to us also. And, indeed, in all well-ordered churches, in observance of an useful custom, the minister, each Lord's day, frames a formula of confession in his own name and that of the people, in which he makes a common

hear God's forgiveness proclaimed and applied.[60] We no longer kill animals for purification, but we do engage in what those actions meant, as we confess our sin and receive God's promise of forgiveness.

- The ascension offering[61] (Lev. 9:16) corresponds to our entrance into God's heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb. 10:19ff)[62] and our **consecration** to his service. This ascent is marked by the *susrum corda* ("Lift your hearts up to the Lord").[63] The ascension offering consists in a burst of sung praise, since we have received cleansing and access to God's throne room. We enter God's courts with thanksgiving and joy. This offering also includes the reading and preaching of the Word, as we are consecrated to God's service by his truth (Jn. 17:17). We no longer have priests who cut animals

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confession of iniquity, and supplicates pardon from the Lord. In short, by this key a door of prayer is opened privately for each, and publicly for all.

Unfortunately, the *BCP* leaves confession of sin immediately before communion and includes prayers that focus more on our worthiness than God's victory in Christ. This has the effect of making communion more penitential than celebratory. The emphasis becomes "tomb" more than "table," "funeral" more than "feast." This is a problem that has afflicted much of Western Christian worship for centuries. It's been rightly said that many of the Reformers eliminated the sacrament of penance only to turn communion into a new form of penance! BH liturgical scholarship provides solid biblical grounding for putting confession and absolution at the beginning of the service.

[60] Calvin believed regular confession was necessary (*Institutes,* 3.14.10; 4.1):

> Therefore God does not, as many stupidly believe, once for all reckon to us as righteousness that forgiveness of sins concerning which we have spoken in order that, having obtained pardon for our past life, we may afterward seek righteousness in the law; this would only lead us into a false hope, to laugh at us, and mock us. For since no perfection can come to us as long as we are clothed in the flesh, and the law moreover announces death and judgment to all who do not maintain perfect righteousness in works, it will always have grounds for accusing and condemning us unless, on the contrary, God's mercy counters it, and by continual forgiveness of sins repeatedly acquits us…

Calvin took a very strong view of pastoral absolution, as his comments on John 20:23 reveal:

> When Christ enjoins the Apostles to forgive sins, he does not convey to them what is peculiar to himself. It belongs to him to forgive sins. This honor, so far as it belongs peculiarly to himself, he does not surrender to the Apostles, but enjoins them, in his Name, to declare the forgiveness of sins, that through their agency he may reconcile men to God. In short, properly speaking, it is he alone who forgives sins through his apostles and ministers

[61] Many translations refer to this as the "whole burnt offering," but the better commentaries acknowledge that the word describing the offering means "to go up."

[62] This is what makes new covenant worship a special event: It is our corporate entrance into the heavenly sanctuary in the Spirit by faith. Jordan explains in *Theses on Worship*, 23:

> Calvin argued the Church ascends into heaven (not locally, but in the Spirit) during sacramental worship. "Lift up your hearts," is the command the minister gives to the congregation, to which we reply "We lift them up to the Lord," and Calvin stated that this ritual affirms the Church's ascent in the Spirit.

[63] Thus, this is one place where Jordan, Meyers, and Leithart break with the traditional liturgies. Historically, the *sursum corda* has been placed somewhere between the sermon and the supper, as part of the preface to communion. But that sends the wrong message – as if only the meal took place in the heavenlies, and not the preaching of the word. In reality, both word and table are "heavenly" events. For example, Moses feasted with the seventy elders on the mount (Ex. 24), but he also received the law on the mount (Ex. 19). Jesus' upper room time with the disciples included both word and meal (Jn. 13-17). And so on. Thus, the *sursum corda* needs to be placed right after confession of sin and absolution. The BH liturgy puts an end to the "divided service."

apart, but we do have pastors who cut us apart with the sword of the Word in order to make our lives acceptable to God (Heb. 4:12).

- The tribute offering (Lev. 9:17) follows, represented by the **collection** of tithes and offerings. Like the old covenant "heave offerings," the collection should offered to God with raised hands, then received back for use in his name. We offer *ourselves* to God through Christ in the ascension offering; we offer our *works* to God through Christ in the tribute offering. In the old covenant, the tribute offering consisted of bread (symbolizing man's labors, transforming the creation), and never stood alone in the Levitical system. It always followed the sin and ascension offerings, and was placed on top of them on the altar. This is because our works are not acceptable to God apart from the blood sacrifice of Christ. But in Christ, God accepts us *and our labors*.
- The peace offering (Lev. 9:18-21) is the climax of the covenant renewal liturgy. This offering is the **communion** meal we eat in God's presence. All old covenant feasts and festivals (e.g., Passover) were variations of the peace offering. The Lord's Supper, of course, is our peace offering in the new covenant, as God shares his table with us. It is fitting that we approach the table with prayers of intercession (the old covenant "incense offering") and prayers of thanksgiving (note that Jesus offered two prayers of thanks at the Last Supper, one over each element, in sequence).

We can round off this overall structure by pointing out that the sacrificial service begins with a call to worship (Lev. 9:1-5) as the people are summoned into God's presence, and ends with a benediction, as the people are commissioned (Lev. 9:22-23). Note that this whole pattern tells a story – the sequence is simply a liturgical embodiment of the gospel narrative, moving from sin, to cleansing, to transformation, to glorification. The entire package of liturgical offerings is not primarily our work for God; it is God's gift to his people (Lev. 17:11).

This liturgical pattern makes clear the basic purpose of the gathered service: it is not primarily evangelism, nor teaching, nor expressions of personal devotion, but covenant renewal, as we feed upon the risen Christ and receive his gifts in the Word and at the table. In the liturgy, the Christ who gave himself once and for all on the cross gives himself to us in a fresh way. In the liturgy, we respond offering ourselves to the Father in union with Son and through the Spirit.

Unlike most of the Puritans, the BH theologians do not look for a liturgical "bare minimum," focused on explicit commands. Rather, they look also for broader liturgical patterns and principles within Scripture. BH hermeneutics "translates" the old covenant offerings into new covenant forms. The New Testament may not provide very much explicit instruction in liturgical matters, but this is because so much is assumed. The patterns of approach to God, the protocols of receiving God's gifts and offering him praise, had already been firmly established in the previous old covenant revelation. We must avoid a kind of "liturgical dispensationalism" that cuts us off from the Old Testament.

We are fully warranted in using this pattern in the new covenant. While Jesus abolished *animal* sacrifice, he did not abrogate *the way* of sacrifice as such (e.g., Rom. 12:1-2, Heb. 13:15, etc.). New covenant worship is still described in sacrificial categories and the church is described as the true temple. In Christ, our worship service represents the fulfillment and transformation of old covenant liturgical types and shadows. In Christ, the law (or Torah) in its entirety has been transformed. So-called ceremonial laws still function in teaching us about worship even they are no longer applicable in their original form. Indeed, BH theologians have been known to speak of the "liturgical equity" of the ceremonial law in a way somewhat analogous to the Westminster Confession's insistence on the abiding validity of the "judicial equity" (WCF) of Torah's civil legislation.[64]

It is intriguing to note that the Biblical Horizons' liturgical *ordo* is essentially identical to that of the historic catholic and Reformed church, albeit with a few significant adjustments. Whether or not that pattern historically arose from exegeting texts like Leviticus 9 and making christological, new covenant applications is hard to say. But at the very least, the BH group has provided solid biblical grounding for what the church has more or less always done instinctively.

Second, the BH group advocates heavy saturation with the psalter. While rejecting exclusive psalmody (the Puritan position), Jordan argues for that psalmody should dominate the musical culture of the church. "The Psalter should be woven into the warp and woof of worship."[65] "It is *obvious* that God intends this book to [be] the core of our worship song."[66] After all, since God wrote the psalms, we know that he likes them. If we desire to please God in worship, we will sing his Word back to him.

But unlike the Puritans, who typically rewrote the psalms to fit metrical harmonies, Jordan advocates chanting the psalms in accurate translations.

> Metrical psalms are no substitute for chanted psalms, psalms sung straight from the text. Text psalms preserve the poetic parallelism of Scripture, and thus accentuate the dialogical and antiphonal theology of the psalter. Moreover, metrical psalms must of necessity be "dynamically equivalent," rephrasing ideas, omitting certain words, emphasizing others, substituting other names for God in order to make the rhyme come out, etc. Metrical psalms are *one application* of the psalter, but they are not a substitute for the psalter.
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> Bad money drives out good, and in the history of the Reformed churches, metrical psalms drove out pure psalmody. Then psalm paraphrases (Isaac watts) drove out metrical psalms. Then hymns drove out psalm paraphrases. Then gospel refrain songs drove out hymns. Now we see praise choruses drive out gospel refrain songs. What's next?[67]

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[64] See, e.g., Peter Leithart, *From Silence to Song* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 101ff. As Leithart has demonstrated elsewhere, if Presbyterians are willing to initiate infants into the church on the basis of typological arguments from the "ceremonies" of the old covenant (e.g., circumcision), then why aren't they willing to base liturgical practices on the ceremonial system as a whole? If typology can ground paedobaptism, why not liturgical order?

[65] Jordan, *Theses on Worship*, 84.

[66] Jordan, *Liturgical Nestorianism* (Niceville, FL: Transfiguration Press), 75.

[67] Jordan, *Theses on Worship*, 85.

Jordan holds out the psalter as the church's standard for musical excellence. The psalter includes all kinds of things we would never have the guts to write or sing ourselves. We need to be a people who are soaked in the language and imagery and poetic forms of God's inspired hymnal.

> Just so, if we drift from the psalms – the warchants of the Prince of peace – we shall drift into an easy and lax piety. The inner warfare will be deemphasized, and the warfare for the world will disappear. The focus of the hymns tends to be on matters easier for us to talk about, such as suffering and happiness. How many hymns, etc., do you know of that ask God to judge the enemy? I can think of one, by Luther, and it is psalm-based! In the face of abortion, pornography, rape, drug addiction, and Islam, nothing less than psalms will cut the mustard. The fact of the matter is that the present generation of American Christians will either learn to sing the psalms, or it will die.[68]

Jordan provides five "laws of psalmody" to guide the church's reform of worship music. We need to sing the psalms accurately, completely, comprehensively, with accompaniment, and preponderantly. That is to say: We need to sing the psalms in a precise translation, we need to sing complete psalms, we need to make use of the whole psalter instead of returning exclusively to a few select favorites, we need to make use of a wide range of accompanying instruments, and we need to give the psalms more weight than any other kind of musical praise in worship. Jordan knows that these guidelines will not be easy to implement, but he calls us to die to our own musical preferences.

Finally, the BH group argues that liturgy is central to life of the church, namely, Christian discipleship, community formation, and cultural interaction. Liturgy gives us an identity as God's in-Christ people because in the liturgy God speaks to us personally through his ordained representative and tells us who we are and what he has done for us. Liturgy is the fount of community, as we are congealed into one body through a common sign (baptism), a shared story (the Word preached and the creed recited), and a common table (the Lord's Supper). Shared symbols and songs build cohesion. Making confession together and joining hearts and voices in public prayer knit us into one body. Worship should involve the whole person, meaning that bodily movements and gestures are important. We are not just intellects to be stuffed with doctrine; we need to be holistically reprogrammed to respond to God's Word with our bodies as well as our minds. Thus, postures such as kneeling, standing, and sitting all have their proper place. Following Cornelius Van Til, BH is committed to the equally ultimacy of theology and praxis in liturgy and the rest of life.

Worship should also engage the whole covenant community, from the youngest to the oldest. The pastor should be the leader of the service, as the "head" appointed to represent the bride before the Father, as well as the one given to the church by Christ as his duly authorized representative (Mt. 10:40; Jn. 20:23; Eph. 4:11-12). The egalitarian impulse of the early revivalists had a grain of truth in it – the people should be involved in the worship service. But they should not be involved as "lay leaders" in the service, but as a corporate priesthood, offering sacrifice in unison, as a response to God's initiative

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[68] Jordan, *Theses on Worship*, 88.

through his spokesman. Because so much of a liturgical service is repetitive, it can be memorized, which allows both young children are the elderly to participate.

Further, because the liturgy belongs to the people, it should not be attractive but not elitist. The BH group has a concern for accessibility. But they also have a concern for aesthetics. Liturgy should represent the finest in "high folk" art. Symbolism and beauty matter, and need to be given proper attention. Thus, Jordan and others have devoted a great deal of attention to architecture,[69] pastoral vestments,[70] musical style,[71] the finer points of leading a liturgical service,[72] and other aspects of worship. At the same time, the BH group has made scathing criticisms of many liturgical practices found in Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Anglo-Catholicism.[73]

The BH theologians argue that a biblically shaped, highly participatory liturgy is the best way to create mature disciples of Jesus. But the question remains: *How* does this happen? *Ho*w does the liturgy shape and mold the character of the Christian community? The liturgy provides both the form and the content of Christian discipleship. In the liturgy, we receive God's gifts of glory (absolution), wisdom (instruction from the Word), and life (the communion meal).[74] Liturgy is not only devotion but edification. Liturgy trains in basic Christian virtues such humility (as we kneel to confess sin), stewardship/generosity (as we render tithes and offerings), and love (as we gather around a common table to share a common meal). Further, what God does for us in the liturgy becomes a model for our own lives. Just as God forgives us, so we are bound to forgive others. Just as God instructs us from his Word, so we should have a desire to teach the nations. Just as God feeds us generously from his table, so we should be compelled to show hospitality and mercy in tangible ways to others. There is something of a liturgical "golden rule" here: As God does unto us in the divine service, so we should do unto others in the rest of life.

The BH theologians also emphasize the way in which liturgy spills over to culture as a whole. Liturgy is the center of the Kingdom and the center of the world.[75] Liturgy (or "cult") interacts with culture in several different ways. Liturgy is the church's primary form of holy war against the world, the flesh, and the devil. God changes the world first and foremost in response to the prayers of his people, and the power of corporate prayer has been a constant BH theme. Liturgical activism has to precede and ground all other forms of activism. We are powerless to effect transformation in ourselves, but by virtue of our union with Christ, we share in his reign over all things. The husband (Christ)

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[69] Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church*, 214ff.

[70] In general, the BH liturgists favor white vestments with colored stoles, matching the ancient and biblical models. See Meyers, *The Lord's Service* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 337ff, and Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church*, 259ff.

[71] Jordan "Church Music in Chaos," in *The Reconstruction of the Church*, 241ff.

[72] Jeffrey Meyers' series of blog posts, Why Some Conservative Presbyterians Don't Like Liturgy," http://jeffreyjmeyers.blogspot.com/2007/07/why-some-conservative-presbyterians.html.

[73] See especially Jordan, *The Liturgy Trap* (Niceville, FL: Transfiguration Press, 1994).

[74] Jordan, *Theses on Worship*, 31ff.

[75] Jordan points out that the Garden of Eden was the original sanctuary and the base from which man would go out to transform the creation. He also frequently points out that Israel was called out of Egypt not primarily to form a theocracy or educational institution, but to hold a liturgical festival to the Lord. Before Israel could conquer the promised land (dominion) she had to be trained in worship (service).

listens to his bride (the church). In Christ, we have all become God's counselors, or royal advisors. The power of liturgy is found especially in our access to the "oval office" of the universe, as we gather around the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16).[76]

Moreover, the liturgy is *intrinsically* political and public. We do not need to "add" politics to liturgy to make it relevant. The liturgy is an open challenge to all forms of privatization and secularization that would lock the faith up in the family prayer closet. In the liturgy, we confess public allegiance to "another king – Jesus." In worship, we enter the sanctuary-throne room of the King of the Universe (Heb. 4:16; Rev. 4-5). Baptism enrolls us in his kingdom. Preaching calls upon us to trust and serve him, as the Sovereign Lord gives us our marching orders. In the confession of faith, we swear our loyalty to this Lord and to his empire, the church. At the table, we feast upon his royal provision and recommit ourselves to his service. The liturgy is shot through with politics from beginning to end. Leithart explains:

> Liturgy and politics don't mix. For two things to mix, they have to be separable; liturgy and politics are not. Participation in the Christian liturgy is always a political act. Worship, far from being a retreat from politics, embodies a new kind of politics, a genuinely Christian politics. Liturgy and politics are not like the salt and pepper that can be added to your scrambled egg; they are more like the scramble and the egg…
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> Paul did not require that Christians renounce all rights as citizens-he himself made use of his rights as a Roman to advance the gospel-but the fact that the Corinthians ate at the Lord's table meant they were citizens of the Lord's city to which their citizenship in Corinth had to be subordinate. This was not an apolitical act or a renunciation of politics, but a sign that the Church was a different sort of political order. As such, it was a direct challenge to the claims of the pagan political order.
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> The Eucharist was a sign of the Church's distinctness from the world, a sign that she constituted a new "city" that had invaded the ancient city, a sign that, contrary to Aristotle, the virtuous life was lived in the Church rather than in the Greek polis. By participating in this ritual, Christians were committing themselves to maintaining a critical distance from the political system. They were committing themselves to what Rowan Williams has called the "fundamental Christian vocation of not belonging." And that commitment, enacted liturgically, is emphatically political.[77]

The church is an alternative culture, even a counter-culture. But as she interfaces with her "host" culture she also begins to transform it. The mission of the church is nothing less than the complete transfiguration and maturation of the world. The church's liturgical culture is "high folk" culture, but it inevitably sets new standards for truth, goodness, and beauty in the culture at large. As worship trains worshippers, God's people become more effective agents of kingdom transformation in the world. The trickle down effect of worship on the rest of life is a historical fact of Western civilization.[78] It happened in

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[76] See especially Peter Leithart, *the Kingdom and the Power* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed) and *Against Christianity* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press), 2004.

[77] "Politics at Prayer," First Things June/July 2001 available online at

[78] See, e.g., Jordan, *Theses on Worship*, 88 on music:

Western Christendom in the past, and it will continue to happen again and again in the civilizations of the world, down to the end of history.

Further, through the liturgy God puts his blessing on the artifacts of human culture. Indeed, Leithart has shown (in seminal form) that an entire theology of culture can be derived from reflection of the Eucharistic elements. At the table, we receive bread and wine as gifts of God. But we also offer them back to God as signs of our gratitude. Bread and wine – the products of creation mixed with and transformed by human labor – are absorbed into the kingdom. In the liturgy, we witness a sneak preview of God transfiguring the old fallen creation into his glorious new creation. The bread and wine become the firstfruits of the coming kingdom.[79]

The BH group does not claim to have all the answers to the liturgical questions that plague the contemporary church. Indeed, one of the (somewhat) distinctive features of BH is its belief that God will continue grow and mature the church through history for centuries to come. Thus, liturgical theology and practice will continue to evolve until Christ's final coming. But for those who are interested in connecting their worship with the historic church as well as grounding those liturgical views and practices in the Scriptures themselves, there is no better place to turn in the meantime.

All of Western "classical" music grew out of the Church, out of plain chant psalmody that evolved from the synagogue into Gregorian chant, and out of the music of the liturgy. The psalms produce music. They produce culture. They provide a legacy to our children.

[79] See Peter Leithart, *Blessed Are the Hungry* (Moscow, ID: 2000), 157ff.