

Chapter Eight

IN LIGHT OF THE COVENANT

All that has preceded has been helpful in determining that the regulative principle of worship, as formulated by the Puritans and as adopted by the divines at the Westminster Assembly, is unworkable. More importantly, it is simply not the teaching of Scripture. Does this mean, then, that worship is a matter of complete freedom, subject to individual tastes or corporate denominational dictates? Or is it possible to integrate an expanded view of *adiaphora* (circumstances) into the overall context of Reformed worship? The important fact is that although the Puritan regulative principle of worship has been found wanting, this does not mean that the Scriptures fail to give guidance in regards to worship. In fact, the Puritan emphasis that worship should be regulated by the Word of God was on the right track. The Bible *does* provide parameters for acceptable worship. It does give guidelines for regulating the public, corporate worship of the church, and it does provide parameters for using properly those matters deemed indifferent.

The immediate problem is one of terminology. Having granted that the Bible does regulate worship, what name should be given to the biblical principles that regulate worship? The historic term, the "regulative principle," presents itself as an obvious possibility. This term has the advantage of accurately describing itself, for after all, we are seeking to determine biblical principles for *regulating worship*. The problem with using this term is that it already has a well-defined meaning in the history of the church and in the theology of worship. It is identified, specifically, with the Puritan understanding of the regulation of worship. Furthermore, there are many problems related to worship in the Presbyterian churches today that may be directly attributed to the equivocation and ambiguity that already surrounds the term,

"regulative principle of worship." To attempt now to redefine it would simply confound the issue further.

Another possibility would be to call this the "biblical principle of worship." This has an advantage in that its name indicates its agreement with and dependence upon the Scriptures. Nevertheless, it has a drawback as well, for the term "biblical" is often used today in contexts where obscurantism reigns. Thus to define something as "biblical" often does more to obfuscate an issue than it does to clarify it. A further drawback is the unfortunate fact that in the history of the church, "biblical" worship has been the rallying cry of certain Anabaptist groups who are clearly in disagreement with the Reformed faith and the principles that will be argued below.

Perhaps, in light of the discussions above, a better term to give to our suggested approach to worship is the "covenantal principle of worship." The advantages of this are obvious. First, the name places itself squarely within the context of Reformed consideration, since by definition Reformed theology is very much concerned with covenants and covenantal relations. The covenant formula, "I will be your God, and you will be my people," sets forth both promise and obligation in terms of covenant relationship. Second, this term clearly implies responsibility and certainly provides no room for any notion of simple, mechanical conformity. Indeed, the obligation of the covenant requires faithful, responsible, and intentional obedience to covenant precepts and principles. Third, it is clearly distinguishable from other approaches to worship and avoids the danger of confusion. Thus, the "covenantal principle of worship" will be the name given to the regulation of worship advocated in the following pages.

Now that the name, the covenantal principle of worship, has been given to our suggested approach to worship, we face the task of giving substance to this definition. That is, having acknowledged the Puritan regulative principle of worship to be flawed, we must now offer something in its place. In offering the covenantal principle of worship, it will be necessary to outline the parameters

of its operation. These parameters are intended to be biblical in their basis, and faithful to the Reformed tradition, particularly as expressed in the thought of John Calvin.

First, and most obviously, the covenantal principle of worship includes all those elements of worship that are clearly commanded in Scripture. At this point, the covenantal principle of worship is identical with the Puritan regulative principle of worship. This would include the positive commands, such as praying, celebrating the sacraments, preaching, singing of Psalms, etc. Even as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (I, vi) speaks of those things "expressly set down in scripture," even so the covenantal principle of worship agrees with this assertion.

Second, and also in accordance with the Puritan regulative principle, the covenantal principle of worship includes all those things as well that "by good or necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture" (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, I, vi). Thus, whatever is required by Scripture, or is a necessary, logical corollary of the teaching of Scripture, is affirmed as a part of covenantal worship and must be observed by the church. J.J. von Allmen, in a rather lengthy summary, has provided a synopsis of those elements that are necessary for worship to fulfill the most basic of biblical requirements.

The NT marks the limits within which, with more or less felicity and obedience, Christian worship can truly be carried out as Christian worship. These limits are as follows: first, the assembly must take place in the name of Jesus Christ, to celebrate His victory and invoke His presence. The intention of the celebrant must be to celebrate the Christian cult. Secondly, this cult must enable the faithful to persevere in the teaching of the apostles; next it must enable them, at the breaking of the bread, to communicate with the body of Christ; fourthly, it must gather up the prayers of the Church and offer them to God; finally, it should be an assembly of men and women who are not just juxtaposed as at the cinema, but committed to a way of life in common. These last four characteristics make possible the first.¹

Third, and most significant for our discussion, the covenantal principle of worship includes the freedom to worship in any manner

warranted by the Scriptures. That is, the covenantal principle of worship says that whatever is *consistent* with the Scriptures is acceptable in worship. Here is where the major difference with the Puritan formula appears. For the Puritan, all worship was either commanded or unlawful. If commanded, it was either directly commanded (or, logically necessary; thus essential), or indirectly commanded, by general principle and Christian prudence (and therefore, circumstantial).

For the Puritan, the circumstantial *alone* may be viewed as *adiaphora*; but, the circumstantial was so unduly restricted as to rule out, in effect, the concept of indifferent things. Here, in the covenantal principle of worship, there are still *two categories*: commanded, by direct precept or example (and therefore necessary), and indirectly commanded, or governed by general principle and Christian prudence (and therefore, circumstantial *and indifferent*). But, the covenant principle of worship insists that the second category must be given its due to include the broad range of *adiaphora*, things neither commanded, nor forbidden, but governed by the light of covenant faithfulness.

In other words, the concept of *adiaphora* expands our understanding of circumstances while leaving the concept of elements intact.² Without the concept of *adiaphora*, the Presbyterian churches have found themselves engaged in endless disputes about words. By refusing to acknowledge the breadth of circumstances, Presbyterians have continued to fight over definitions, arguing about such issues as whether the use of musical instruments is an element or a circumstance, or whether it is appropriate to have an Easter or Christmas service. Indeed, these things are *circumstances* of worship. For example, an Easter Service is nothing more than the worship of God's people, on Easter Sunday, with the usual elements of worship contextualized or conditioned by the circumstances of that particular Sunday.

This same thinking applies to the issue of ceremonies in the church. There is nothing in the Scriptures that tells us how to admit new members into the church. In many evangelical Presbyterian

churches, this is done through instruction by the pastor and/or elders, an interview with the session for a profession of faith, and public recognition in the corporate worship service of the church. Is it not obvious that confirmation may accomplish exactly the same goal? Often, confirmation involves instruction by the pastor and/or elders, an interview with the session for a profession of faith, and a public prayer, often accompanied by the laying on of hands. Calvin thought this practice to be most consistent with Scripture, and so it seems to me.

As has been established in chapter four, expanding the concept of circumstances to include *adiaphora*, in addition to those matters deemed essential, is consistent with John Calvin's view of worship. Also, as established by the biblical and theological principles discussed in chapters five and six, such an approach to worship is in accord with the principles of covenant relationship. Further, as von Allmen explains, there is an abundance of opportunity for fleshing out specifics within the general limits established in Scripture. "To be Christian, worship must proceed within these limits, and whatever can be legitimately placed within them, whatever is not contradicted by them . . . can claim the right of being a *Christian* liturgical expression."³ However, the biblical and theological principles that have been discussed also make it clear that *not everything* is an acceptable circumstance or a matter of indifference in worship. Therefore, some effort must be made to clarify further the boundaries, the parameters that circumscribe what may be freely used to constitute acceptable worship.

Before enumerating the various parameters for the covenantal principle of worship, certain preliminary remarks are necessary. First, although this work seeks to redirect the focus of worship, it does not answer every question that might arise. That is, further reflection and additional insights into historical, biblical, and theological data will lead to refining and expanding the parameters given here. While there are many reasons to believe that the direction described here is sound, all human efforts at theologizing are ultimately tentative. Thus, these proposals should be viewed as

heuristic and not definitive. Second, not everyone will agree on how to apply the various parameters described. While the parameters themselves may be clear, it is inevitable that there will be some disagreement on the appropriate application of these guidelines to individual situations. This should not be a cause for despair, but an occasion for further dialogue.

Third, situations may arise in which there is disagreement over which guideline takes precedence over another. For example, one who comes from a traditional Reformed perspective will be more likely to give greater weight to simplicity, while someone from a Pentecostal background might prefer to emphasize liberty.⁴ The following parameters are not listed in any particular order of importance, nor should they all be perceived to be equally important. Therefore, some guidelines are less forgiving when violated than others. With these warnings before us, we now move to consider the individual parameters that together constitute the covenantal principle of public, corporate worship in the church.

Worship That is Simple

The first guideline of the covenantal principle of worship is simplicity. This is one of the obvious implications of Jesus' words in John 4:23-24, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." The term simplicity faces the immediate danger of being misunderstood because of its peculiar use by the Puritans. However, simplicity is not used here as a synonym for spirituality, as opposed to materiality. Neither should it be interpreted to mean that worship should only appeal to the mind (*Gk nous*), be funneled only through the mind, or prohibit the use of the body, in movement, in touch, in smell, or in taste. Rather, simplicity as used here has a much richer significance.

First, worship that is acceptable today is worship that is done in a New Covenant context. While this does not exclude the Old Testament as normative in matters of worship, it does mean that certain particulars of the Old Testament are no longer applicable. Even as the unfolding of revelation and the progress of redemptive history have moved onward, there have been two closely linked phenomena that have occurred.⁵ On the one hand, revelation has increased in an ongoing organic unfolding so that we possess greater knowledge and insight today than the Old Covenant people of God did. On the other hand, with the coming of Christ, this fullness of revelation has fulfilled the typological aspects of the Old Covenant, so that the pageantry of Old Testament worship is now passé. Thus, New Testament worship, relative to Old Testament worship, is simple.

Second, to explain this principle another way, New Testament worship is preeminently Spiritual worship, i.e., worship in and of the Spirit. As has been noted, to speak of worship as Spiritual is not to oppose "spirituality" to "materiality." Rather, it is an affirmation that we worship in the Spirit, for the people of God today are already partakers of the coming age. As Vos has explained this concept, "the Spirit is viewed as pertaining specifically to the future life, nay as constituting the substantial make-up of this life, and the present possession of the Spirit by the believer is regarded in the light of an anticipation. The Spirit's proper sphere is according to this the world to come; from there He projects Himself into the present, and becomes a prophecy of Himself in His eschatological operation."⁶ Thus, New Covenant worship is preeminently worship in the Spirit, under the guidance of the Spirit, by the power of the Spirit.⁷

Third, simple worship is that which has direction and inner coherence. It is worship that "is in the first instance the opposite not of complexity but rather of diffuseness."⁸ Again, this does not mean a bare-bones minimalism either in rite or ceremony. Rather, this "condition of true worship is a respect for the structure controlling the relations between the various parts of the

cult, in an arrangement which shows that the cult progresses toward its culminating point, and that, having reached it, it is strengthened by it for the purpose of afterwards witnessing in the world."⁹

There is little likelihood that a consensus will be achieved on the exact limits of simplicity. Societies where non-verbal means of communication have been highly developed will appreciate a greater role for sign and symbol. Cultures where artistic achievement has developed significantly will have an aesthetic emphasis that differs significantly from those where such development has been hindered. Church communities where an openness to Pneumatic phenomena has been the tradition will be more open to whole-person worship than those whose tradition lies more along the lines of didactic, teaching-oriented worship. These variables will affect the "circumstances" of worship. Nevertheless, every ecclesial community must take simplicity seriously, even if there is not complete agreement on its significance and application.

Worship That is Orderly

Orderliness is not only commanded as a criterion for acceptable New Testament worship (I Corinthians 14:40) but it is also one of the most basic themes in God's dealings with mankind. First, order is a necessary characteristic of acceptable worship because God himself is a God of order. The world which God created was a perfect creation, with balanced eco-systems providing for every possible need of human existence. As Schaeffer has stated it,

The universe has order. It is not chaos. One is able to proceed from the particulars of being to some understanding of its unity. One is able to move ever deeper into the universe and not come upon a precipice of incoherence. We find this emphasized in Genesis 1, which points out that God made all these things to produce after their own kind. Here is order. And so it is with the God of Scripture. He is not the philosophic other, nor the impersonal everything, nor that which is chaotic or random. He is a God who is (and I use this word carefully and worshipfully) a *reasonable* God.¹⁰

Second, order is associated with man by virtue of creation and participation in God's dominion over the world.¹¹ Thus, the general task of cultivation, and the more specific task of cult, both are to be characterized by obedience to God's law-word. Originally Adam was placed in the garden to maintain the order that was already established. Now, on account of the fall, redeemed man is called to restore order in a world where the chaos of lawlessness threatens to overwhelm the remnants of order. In other words, the cultural mandate is binding and has tremendous implications for the type of worship acceptable to God. Order is not optional; it is inherent in creation itself.¹²

Third, true orderliness is not necessarily inimical to freedom.¹³ Rather, in worship, freedom is the expression of creativity, the harnessing of aesthetic impulses and the deliberate ordering of religious expression within the boundaries of that which is consistent with decent, orderly action. Morey, commenting on Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church, observes: "Paul does not refer the Corinthians to a prescribed order of service revealed from God. He points them instead to a mature and responsible exercise of their priestly freedom in the non-essential aspects of worship."¹⁴

Orderliness, then, is concomitant with freedom, not inimical to it. Indeed the demands of orderliness point us toward a goal. Worship that is orderly is worship that is directed, coherent, and thoughtful. Such worship is anything but uniform, for diversity is grounded in the concept of order. As Poythress says, "From creation onward, God intended that the human race should develop with a diversity of individuals. Even apart from the Fall, different people would have had different gifts and different experiences, so that one person's insights into the truth would complement those of another."¹⁵ Thus, from creation, God has provided for creativity, individuality, and spontaneity within the bounds of created order. Worship that is orderly may exist in styles as diverse as charismatic worship, or high-church liturgy. What is essential is that orderliness be uniformly pursued, even

as its practice remains diversely applied.

Worship That is Free

Essential to any genuine worship is the concept of liberty, or freedom. This concept may be defined in individual or ecclesial terms. First, we will consider the liberty of the *individual*. For the individual, the concept of liberty frees the believer from any coercive act on the part of the church. In other words, there must be freedom from the *imposition* of any act of worship that is not divinely commanded. Essentially, we are arguing here for liberty of conscience.

Historically, this has been a sore point for many believers of tender conscience. If the Puritans were wrong to restrict the use of *adiaphora* and narrow the range of circumstances (and they were) then, likewise, the Anglicans were guilty of imposing forms of worship that violated the consciences of many godly people. The question as to whether the conscience is properly informed is, in this context, irrelevant. What is absolutely important is that the conscience of every believer be respected and no one be forced to engage in an act of worship that, for conscience' sake, is deemed unacceptable. Paul has argued in Romans 14:23 that "whatever is not of faith is sin."¹⁶ For any believer to be coerced into doing something with an evil conscience is tantamount to being forced to sin. Thus, the authority of the church is limited. Although a particular circumstance of worship is within the bounds of the covenantal principle of worship, if it is not specifically commanded or necessarily deduced from specific commands, it must not be imposed and made mandatory, although it may be observed voluntarily.

With regards to *ecclesial* freedom, the fact is that each congregation, within the bounds of the covenantal principle of worship, has the right to determine its own particular style or emphasis in worship. Thus, a "New Life" model congregation, which focuses on spontaneity and sharing, may indeed tailor its worship service, within the bounds of covenantal regulation, to support a free style of worship. Likewise, a "high church" model congregation

has freedom to structure its liturgy according to historic forms, responses, and litanies, as long as it is faithful to all the other guidelines of the covenantal principle. As Hageman explains, "the basic principle of Reformed worship . . . asserts that there is not and cannot be one liturgy for the Reformed church, valid at all times and in all places."¹⁷

Of course, this freedom also brings with it a weighty responsibility. To say that all worship styles are legitimate does not mean that every style of worship is equally worthy in every regard. For example, free worship may very well have certain advantages in terms of fellowship and mutual concern. However, it is also the case that free worship often suffers from a lack of historicity or catholicity. From another perspective, worship that may be more successful in integrating historic or catholic rites and ceremonies may need to consider ways to achieve openness and mutual encouragement more completely.¹⁸ Thus, while it is possible to validate many worship styles, the freedom to use those styles does not absolve their proponents from the obligation to learn from others whose worship is valid as well. A spirit of openness and a willingness to be self-critical will enable adherents of all legitimate worship styles to identify their strong points and to reconsider their weak ones.

Worship That Glorifies and Edifies

There are two closely related lines of movement in worship, the vertical and the horizontal. Since we are to glorify God in everything we do (I Corinthians 10:31) how much more should we glorify him in our worship! Furthermore, we should worship in such a way as to edify our fellow believers.¹⁹ Each of these requires worshipers to go beyond themselves, focusing not on the benefits they are to receive, but on the benefits they are to give. First and foremost, worship must glorify God. To do this, there must be an awareness that the One being worshiped is "the almighty and ever-living God who is transcendent, the God who pervades the limitless universe. It is intensely sobering to realize that we worship the

God who is 'wholly other,' the Almighty Creator, the Holy One, the King and Ruler of all."²⁰ Of course, this is not intended to deny God's immanence, for we would be unable to worship Him who was only "beyond." Rather, this is simply a reminder that in worship we are continually to focus on who God is and what he has done for us. God created his people to bring him glory, and this should be the believer's highest goal.²¹

Significantly, we serve a God who delights in blessing us. There is every reason to expect that even as the believer is called by God to glorify his majesty, there are resultant personal benefits that return to God's faithful people. These reflexive benefits should not be the primary motivation in worship, but they should be anticipated in faith as the Divine-human dialogue transpires through the service of worship.²²

The second line of movement, essential but subordinate to the first, is the edification of fellow believers. "If worship had only a vertical dimension and we witnessed only to God, then our pilgrimage would end here. But worship has a horizontal dimension: we witness to one another in the church and to a lost world outside the church. It is not enough that *I* am transformed by worship; I must also help to transform *others*, and I should allow others to be used by God to transform me."²³ Now, it is most important to remember that "edification does not mean 'good feelings'."²⁴ Thus it is very easy for a church to embrace particular acts, rites, ceremonies, or practices for reasons that are not legitimate. Therefore, a distinction must be made between edification and entertainment, or edification and enjoyment.

While it is true that legitimate worship may be enjoyable, it must not be *only* enjoyable. All true worship must tend toward the upbuilding of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 14:26b). As Allen and Borrer have explained it, true worship ought to be multi-faceted, so that "when we worship, we edify; when we edify, we evangelize; when we evangelize, we worship."²⁵ It is not enough that one "enjoy" worship. True worship will build up the body of believers and there is every reason to expect that such worship will

have the reflex action of increasing joy and bringing satisfaction to the worshiper.

Worship That is Catholic

Another guideline that should inform Reformed worship is the biblical concept of catholicity. Not only is catholicity embedded in the church's collective consciousness due to centuries of development, but it is also a concept that is found in the pages of the New Testament. The impetus for catholicity is found in Jesus' parting words to the church. He gives the Great Commission to his followers to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19,20). Later, by way of application, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to conform their worship practices to the pattern that is found "in all the congregations of the saints" (I Corinthians 14:33).²⁶

While there is some confusion regarding the exact practices that Paul wishes to bring into conformity, the desire for catholicity itself is certain.²⁷ "This particular appeal . . . is an indication to the Corinthians that their view of tongues and spirituality that has allowed this disorderly conduct is out of keeping with what God is doing elsewhere through the gospel. They are marching to their own drum; Paul is urging them not only to conform to the character of God, but also to get in step with the rest of his church." As Charles Hodge comments, the problem with the church at Corinth was that they were acting "contrary to established usage."²⁸ In this passage Paul gives concrete meaning to his teaching in I Corinthians 12 that the body of Christ is one, and whatever affects one member has effect upon all other members.

This emphasis on catholicity requires a certain attitude of openness on the part of those who are Reformed. As Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. has stated this, "What Reformed believers have in common with 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord' (Rom. 10:13) is more basic than the differences, because above all they all share in Christ, and Christ is not divided (I Cor. 1:13)."²⁹ Not only is openness required, but a certain amount of humility is necessary as well. Reformed believers "will not allow their confidence to lead

them to suppose that they have cornered all truth or to obscure that they, too, only 'see in a mirror dimly' (I Cor. 13:12). They will not at all be surprised, but grateful and delighted, to learn from and be edified by those in other traditions. At stake here is the capacity of the Reformed tradition to *grow*, so that in our day, 'the Reformed church is always reforming' is something more than an empty slogan."³⁰ Thus, there must be a willingness to learn from others, a willingness to be taught by the entire breadth of the Christian tradition.

Such an openness to other traditions will not be achieved easily. Nevertheless, the fact remains that even those whose traditions are most at variance with the Reformed probably have in some sense reproduced an aspect of the truth that the Reformed churches would be wise to consider. As Vern Poythress reminds us, "By looking for the 'grain of truth' even in some bad idea, we can sometimes find a starting point for a new perspective or a piece of truth that we ourselves had overlooked."³¹ By way of illustration, the more free-flowing, Pentecostal churches must entertain the fact that there is something valuable in Episcopalian, "high church" worship. *Mutatis mutandis*, the "high church" advocates must recognize that there is some value in the free-flowing style of worship preferred by their Pentecostal brothers and sisters.

More basically, Protestants in general should be able to learn from the traditions of the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Churches. After all, does not the sacramental focus of the Roman Catholic Church have something to say to Presbyterians whose worship, sadly enough, all too frequently has been de-sacramentalized? And does not the Orthodox tradition of mystery have something to contribute to the churches of the Reformation and their tendency towards intellectualized, overly didactic worship? Worship that is catholic requires the willingness to hear the truth that is contained in other traditions, even when that truth has been obscured by non-biblical accretions.

One other aspect of catholicity needs to be elucidated. Thus far catholicity has been used in the sense of breadth. However,

there is a linear or longitudinal sense of catholicity that reminds us that the church today is connected to the church of the apostles, the fathers, the martyrs, and the Reformers of over two thousand years of history. Von Allmen observes, "In its worship the Church bears witness that it unites the centuries, refusing to allow what is past to fall into oblivion, or what is promised to fade into illusion."³² Thus, the church must seek to retain that which is valuable, transforming its practice where necessary, but always with the sense of historical continuity. True catholicity, then, would find legitimate points of contact in worship, not only in the breadth of tradition present today, but in the riches of the liturgical tradition of the church.³³

Indeed, there is much to be gained from the catholic tradition of the church, and much that is valuable to be gleaned from the practices of the entire church.³⁴ As Hageman has stated it, "whatever in the ecumenical church is consonant with their Biblical and Reformed loyalties, is there for the Reformed churches to enjoy."³⁵ Worship that is truly catholic will seek to employ "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable" (Philippians 4:8) regardless of its source, to the upbuilding of God's people and the greater glory of God.

Worship That is Culturally Sensitive

One of the paramount concerns in liturgical circles today is cultural sensitivity. Indeed, we are all more aware of the role that culture plays in our outlook on life.³⁶ In the past this was not the case. Instead, Reformed theologians were often guilty of absolutizing principles of worship that had been determined in the reactionary setting of Reformation/Post-Reformation European polemics. Too often plainness and simple uniformity were understood to be normative.³⁷ Here cultural factors displaced the true center of Reformed liturgy, and, in the passing of time became identified with truly Reformed worship.

It is imperative to separate the center or "genius" of Reformed liturgy from any particular cultural manifestation. "The controlling idea in Reformed worship is that God acts in worship and that we are not to hold God's actions at arm's length but to appropriate them into our innermost being. Worship is a meeting between God and his people, a meeting in which both parties act- God as the initiator and we as the responders."³⁸

It is at this point that the possibility of cultural diversity plays an important part. The two sides of worship may be viewed as (1) God's initiative of grace, as proclaimed by the minister of the Word, elders, or lay persons on God's behalf to the congregation, and (2) the response of the people to that initiative, as led by the worship leader or leaders. Significantly, the forms that such Christian proclamation and response take do not participate in some supra-temporal norm. Rather, "each worshipping community must seek to tell and act out the story and then respond to it in a way that is appropriate to its own culture. The context for worship must be in keeping with the cultural context. We need to know what is essential to worship and then we need to prayerfully contextualize it."³⁹ Simply put, the church must ever be alert to the danger of confusing timeless truth with its temporal manifestation.

After all, change in worship has been part of God's ongoing plan of redemption. Even Scripture itself is filled with changes in worship from the patriarchal stage to the Mosaic, from the Mosaic to the Davidic, and from the Davidic to the New Covenant.⁴⁰ The biblical imperative for the church in relation to culture, then, is adaptation and transformation, redeeming that which is "noble and wholesome."⁴¹ As long as the church is in the world, this will be a necessary part of her responsibility. "As a pilgrim people we ought to take more seriously the realization that our present forms or patterns are not the ultimate forms. From time to time we must fold up our tents and move on-- but only when we are convinced that our move is obedient to the Word of God."⁴²

The church, then, must be able to relate the truths of Scripture, particularly the positive commands regarding worship

(together with the covenant principles that govern *adiaphora*) to the context in which an indigenous culture exists. As one writer has stated it, "When worship practice is consistent with life, worship will be relevant."⁴³ The genius of Reformed liturgy is revealed every time cultural adaptation of the liturgy is achieved.

Worship That is Balanced

For want of a better description, this particular guideline may be referred to as balance. While all of the Christian life should be balanced, we must make two specific points regarding balance in reference to worship. That is, there should be balance (1) between Word and symbol, and (2) between Word and Sacrament. That is, because of the nature of humanity, symbolism plays an important role along with didactic or simply verbal elements in worship. Furthermore, while sacraments are more than symbols, they may be viewed as the most focused point of symbolism in worship.

The fact is that all of humanity experiences the import of symbolism, much of which is related to the human body and its orientation in the world.

Throughout the human race, the top and bottom, the right and left, the inside and outside of the body, and facing water, earth, wind, or fire are 'figures' that enable man to speak- think- make the transexperimental world: life-death, heaven-hell, power-weakness, etc. The liturgy likewise is entirely structured by these bodily-cosmic figures: descent into-coming up from the waters of baptism; eating-and-drinking-together in the eucharistic meal; listening to-response to the Word; calling together-coming together-dispersal of assemblies, etc. We can never completely free ourselves of these figures. They affect every human being and are in a sense universal.⁴⁴

Significantly, God has made use of such natural symbols in the church, and the church would be foolish to deny the power and influence such symbols contain.

Indeed, many of the problems that have occurred in theological anthropology have arisen because of the same impulses that would deny the value and role of symbol. Humans, according to the Scripture, are a unity, not a composite. Moreover, humans are a

diversity as well, having "several dimensions or spheres of life" so that we may relate to the material world and to the spiritual world.⁴⁵ Thus, attempts to reduce humanity to only materialist aspects, or to "free" humans by identifying them with the spirit that is imprisoned in their bodies, are all notions that are pagan in orientation and not Christian. Neither a reductionist approach to humanity, nor a composite approach satisfies the biblical data.

Another way of explaining this would be to note that humans are rational beings, but they are *more* than rational beings. Humans consist of intellect, but they are more than intellect, for they have will and emotions as well. Humans are creatures of the senses as well as of the mind. Now no one is perfectly balanced, and some will inevitably give a greater role to the emotions, while others may limit their affections by giving reign to the intellect.⁴⁶ Regardless of the particular orientation of an individual, the fact remains that the believer operates on all levels, seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, thinking, rejoicing, sorrowing. Thus, a balanced service of worship will speak to the mind, but it will also speak to the heart, to the emotions, to the will.⁴⁷

Truth, then, can be communicated in worship not only through verbal explanations, but also through movement, posture, music, drama, art, and the wise use of sacred space and sacred time.⁴⁸ While there should be no compulsion in the matter, many in the church have experienced humility and submission through the act of kneeling in prayer. Others have rejoiced and exulted in the Lord by lifting up their hands to heaven, acting out what is transpiring at a deeper level. The bright, flowing banners used in some churches emphasize important aspects of God's redemption, or highlight special seasons in the Christian Year.

The message conveyed by the positioning of the pulpit, table, and font often tell as much about a church's worship as the sermon, or bulletin. Webber has commented on the importance of the symbolic, particularly the return of aesthetics to worship. "The historic argument for the use of the arts in worship is grounded in the incarnation. The claim is that God, by becoming a person, sanctified

physical and material reality as a vehicle for spiritual presence. He comes to us through flesh and blood. Why, then, shouldn't we accept appropriate art forms as visible means through which a spiritual reality becomes present or through which we offer praise?"⁴⁹

All Reformed believers will agree on the importance of word in worship. After all, the centrality of *The Word* is the great legacy of all Protestants.⁵⁰ However, not all will agree on where to place the fulcrum to balance word and symbol. Such disagreement is to be expected and not to be regretted. As each congregation adapts itself to the guidelines of Scripture, with sensitivity to the predominant modes of thinking, learning, and communicating present in the congregation, there will be differences of emphasis. The key, however, lies in the effort to achieve balance, for it is there that the churches must be in agreement. Failure to strive for balance in worship will ultimately cause the church's service of worship to fall short of the biblical ideal.⁵¹

If it is necessary to balance word and symbol, it is critical to balance Word and Sacrament. If there is anything that modern liturgical scholarship agrees on, it is that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated every Lord's Day as the church gathers to worship the risen Lord. We have seen Calvin's emphasis that true worship is worship involving both the Word and the Table. As von Allmen notes, the most basic reason that weekly communion is essential is that "Christ instituted it and commanded the Church to celebrate it."⁵² Indeed, there is evidence that the New Testament church did just that.⁵³ The implications of apostolic practice, as well as the liturgical history of the church, indicate that weekly communion should be the norm and not the exception.

Theologically, there are some tremendous implications involved in the regular, weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. First, it is a sign of judgment, in that it discriminates those who have been admitted into the family from those who are yet without. Indeed, all who are admitted have undergone the waters of judgment in baptism and have been delivered.⁵⁴ Thus, there is an eschatological focus

in that every time the communion is observed there is an anticipation of the final judgment, when the people of God will be eternally separated from the unfaithful. Second, the Lord's Supper is an act of covenant bonding, with the sacramental tearing of the body and shedding of the blood of Jesus that enables the church to participate in his resurrection life.⁵⁵ Thus, we are reminded weekly that we already are participants in the life that is to come.

Third, the reenactment of the Last Supper is a "remembrance," by which the people of God participate sacramentally in the act of redemption on the cross, even as the Passover memorial united the Jews with the redemption of the Exodus.⁵⁶ Through this action, the people of God have confirmed every Lord's Day the promise of forgiveness of sins. By reenacting these tremendous concepts every Lord's Day, the service of Word and Table provides a completely adequate response to God's initiatives. Moreover, the Lord's Supper is a response that satisfies non-rational human needs in worship even as it addresses the senses and the heart.

Must a church adopt weekly communion to be a Christian church? Of course, the legacy of the Reformation and historic Presbyterian practice tell us that this is not so. The better question would be, do churches that practice infrequent communion miss out on benefits, personal and corporate, by failing to balance properly the emphasis on Word and Sacrament? For this there can be only one answer.

A radical change in Presbyterian thinking will not come easily, nor will it come quickly. However, if the Presbyterian churches are to be truly Reformed, they must not be satisfied with inherited practices that do not adequately represent the intentions of Scripture. Instead, they must make those first steps towards restoring the Lord's Supper to its rightful place as the "normal" worship of the church.

Worship That is Christ-centered

The last, but arguably the most important, guideline is that worship must be Christ-centered. This should not be understood as somehow inimical to Trinitarian worship.⁵⁷ On the contrary, all

true worship is Trinitarian in that it is for the glory of the Father, through the mediation of the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Further, it would be a serious Christological error to understand a Christocentric focus as somehow detracting from Trinitarian worship.⁵⁸ Instead, the Christocentric focus we are speaking of here carries with it several positive ideas that must inform the worship of the church.

First, all true worship centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Christ event, then, is the all-controlling category of Christian worship. Every time the church gathers to worship, "there is a summing up of those events in history that constitute the source of the church's salvation. In worship we rehearse the gospel story. We rehearse, as it were, the Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, and Consummation. Therefore, our worship proclaims Jesus Christ and His saving reality again and again."⁵⁹ Significantly, it is in worship that the church experiences most pointedly the tension between this age and the eschaton. As von Allmen describes it, "the Christian cult, because it is based on the reconciliation of all things in Christ, is the advance-guard of that cosmic quest of which St. Paul speaks, that cosmic longing for a restitution of what God, in His love, had established at the first (Rom. 8:18ff)."⁶⁰

Every gathering of the people of God to recapitulate the Christ event through the Word and the Table is, through the work of the Holy Spirit, a *reenactment*⁶¹ of the work on the cross and an *anticipation* of the Second Advent.⁶² Torrance reminds us that while the cross is a once-for-all event, there is a sacramental "re-living" of salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit through whom we "are so intimately united to Christ, by communion in his body and blood, that we participate in his self-consecration and self offering to the Father."⁶³ Thus, "at every Eucharist, those who participate learn that they are themselves the objects of the redemptive action of the cross."⁶⁴ Likewise, the proclamation of the coming Kingdom, as well as the symbolism of the eschatological banquet in the Lord's Supper, points the church forward to the

greater realization of all the benefits now enjoyed by way of anticipation.

Second, all true worship is mediated through the work of Jesus Christ. This may be viewed from different perspectives. To begin with, Jesus Christ offers worship to the Father on behalf of the church. Thus, all worship is made acceptable to the Father because it is mediated through the Son as High Priest for the people of God. Jesus Christ, who clothed himself with humanity in order that he might offer up himself on behalf of his people, also ever lives to intercede on behalf of the church, sanctifying her worship and offering it to the Father as his own.⁶⁵ From another perspective, mediation involves the union that is sustained between Christ and his people, particularly in regard to worship. Torrance explains this in relation to the Lord's Supper:

The eucharistic sacrifice means that we *through the Spirit* are so intimately united to Christ, by communion in his body and blood, that we participate in his self-consecration and self-offering to the Father and thus appear with him and in him and through him before the Majesty of God in worship, praise and adoration with no other sacrifice than the sacrifice of Christ Jesus our Mediator and High Priest. Conversely, the eucharistic sacrifice is the self-consecration and self-offering of Jesus Christ in our nature ascending to the Father from the Church in which he dwells through the Spirit he has poured out upon it, uniting it to himself as his Body, so that when the Church worships, praises and adores the Father through Christ and celebrates the Eucharist in his name, it is Christ himself who worships, praises and adores the Father in and through his members, taking up, moulding and sanctifying the prayers of his people as they are united to him through communion in his body and blood.⁶⁶

Thus, Jesus Christ not only unites himself with the church in its worship, he is himself the content of the church's worship. If according to his human nature he lifts up the worship of the church unto the Father, even according to his divine nature he is himself the focus of worship.⁶⁷

Third, Jesus Christ is the ultimate parameter of worship. That is, Jesus, through his Spirit, teaches the church and leads the people of God into the fullness of worship. Poythress has commented

on this in regard to a particular aspect of the church's worship, praise in song, that "Christ sings in us to write the law on our hearts (Heb. 8:10). This is part of the *application* of redemption and the application of Scripture."⁶⁸ Now, much could be said about the role of the Spirit in gifting the church with the *charismata* and leading the church in power. Suffice it to say here that the church must ever be open to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, working through men and women gifted by his Spirit, to lead the church into new and greater understanding of his will.

Of course, there are dangers inherent in speaking of being led by Christ's Spirit. The one danger is to fail continually to relate the leading of the Spirit to the teaching of the Word. The other is so to fear the workings of the Spirit as to effectively eliminate his leading.⁶⁹ Both possibilities of error exist, but neither should intimidate the church into ignoring this greatest source of power and direction.

Summary

In agreement with the biblical and historical findings of earlier chapters, we have attempted to establish a firm theological basis for the regulation of Christian worship. Our investigation has shown that worship, far from being esoteric in nature, is at bottom one with faithful service to God. Such service is not regulated by an endless number of rules governing every possible course of action. Rather, God has established his covenant with his people, and grounded their obedience in responsible conformity to his marvelous Word. Wisdom, gained from mature reflection on God, His Word, and the world around us, replaces reliance on an endless, pedantic code of rules and regulations. Furthermore, the church has substantial freedom in many matters neither commanded nor prohibited. These may be used as the church wisely sees fit.

The people of God, however, are not freed from an extensive set of rules in order to act arbitrarily in their worship of the Lord. Rather, they are commanded to image God's own character by applying the parameters of covenantal regulation to their public,

corporate acts of worship. As the Presbyterian churches contextualize the covenant principle of worship, worship styles as diverse as those found in "New Life" churches and "high church" settings will be validated. The covenant principle of worship, applied to varying contexts and needs, will result not in sterile uniformity, but rather in a rich diversity of praise offered up to the glory of God.

¹ J.J. von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 96.

² Frame, in *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 38ff, seeks to substitute "applications" for "circumstances." By changing the terms, he seeks to resolve the same problem I address through the rehabilitation of *adiaphora* and the expansion of circumstances. I have chosen to use the categories "elements" and "circumstances" because they are conventional language for this discussion.

³ Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 96.

⁴ Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 52, notes that everyone labors with preconceptions and biases. This need not be destructive. As he says: "by using a bias self-consciously, we put ourselves in a better position to remember that our discoveries have arisen from one starting point among many."

⁵ Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 11-14.

⁶ Geerhardus Vos, "Paul's Eschatological Concept of the Spirit," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 103.

⁷ Cf. Romans 8:4-9, 14; I Corinthians 12:3, 13; 14:15,16.

⁸ Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 102.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time in The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, 2nd edition. 5 vols. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 40.

¹¹ Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 9.

¹² L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1975), 74.

¹³ Augustine, for example, speaks of liberty from sin as being able to obey God's commands. Saint Augustine, "The Enchiridion," in *Basic Writings of Augustine*, 2 vols., ed. Whitney J. Oates (1948; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), I:675. Chapter XXX.

¹⁴ Morey, *Worship is All of Life*, 82.

¹⁵ Poythress, *Symphonic Theology*, 53.

¹⁶ Cranfield, *Romans*, II:729, says "*pistis* here denotes one's confidence that one's faith (in the basic NT sense of the word) allows one to do a particular thing."

¹⁷ Hageman, *Pulpit and Table*, 109.

¹⁸ Paul Anderson, "Balancing Form and Freedom," *Leadership* VII:2 (Spring 1986): 24-33, argues for the necessity of balancing form and freedom

within every service of worship. He also provides suggestions for implementing such a practice. See also, Webber, *Worship Is A Verb*, 133-4.

¹⁹ Jordan, *Sociology of the Church*, 25.

²⁰ Webber, *Worship Is A Verb*, 110.

²¹ Rayburn, *O Come Let Us Worship*, 16-7.

²² Martin, *The Worship of God*, 217ff has an excellent discussion of this dialogic movement in worship. Cf. also Rayburn, *O Come Let Us Worship*, 118-29, "Worship as Dialogue."

²³ Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, 108.

²⁴ Jordan, *Sociology of the Church*, 25.

²⁵ Allen and Borrer, *Worship- Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*, 57.

²⁶ Cf. I Corinthians 1:2 and 11:16.

²⁷ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 698. He surveys possible interpretations of verse 33 on pages 696-8.

²⁸ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 305.

²⁹ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "On Being Reformed," *The Bulletin of Westminster Theological Seminary* XXIV:4 (Fall 1985).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Poythress, *Symphonic Theology*, 52.

³² Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 49.

³³ Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Understanding of Liturgy in the Light of Its History," in *The Study of Liturgy*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 495.

³⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), I:115-6 and I:123-7, discusses the closely related issue of "common consent" of the church, *consensus fidelium*. Hodge, although denying the Roman Catholic understanding of the term, admits there is some value in "common consent," providing it is in accordance with Scripture, and not contrary to it.

³⁵ Hageman, *Pulpit and Table*, 128.

³⁶ Chuck Kraft, "World View and Worship," *Worship Times* II:1 (Spring 1987): 2.

³⁷ Eugene and Helen Westra, "Let All the Earth Worship the Lord," *Reformed Worship* III (Spring 1987): 9.

³⁸ Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, "The Genius of Reformed Liturgy," *Reformed Worship* II (Winter 1986/87): 10.

³⁹ Robert Webber, "Worship East and West," *Worship Times* II:1 (Spring 1987): 3.

⁴⁰ James H. Olthuis, "Worship and Witness," in *Will All the King's Men*, ed. James H. Olthuis et al (Toronto: Wedge, 1972), 21.

⁴¹ Anscar J. Chupungco, *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 20.

⁴² Olthuis, "Worship and Witness," 23.

⁴³ Appianda Arthur, "The African Missionary's Legacy: Sharing the Gospel, Taking Away the Culture," *Worship Times* II:1 (Spring 1987): 7.

⁴⁴ Joseph Gelineau, "Tradition-Invention-Culture," in *Liturgy: A Creative Tradition*, eds. Mary Collins and David Power, *Consilium* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 11.

⁴⁵ Jordan, *Sociology of the Church*, 222.

⁴⁶ Mark Brasler, "Sensitive to the Senses," *Leadership* VII:2 (Spring 1986): 21.

⁴⁷ Webber encourages the church to pay more attention to right brain (aesthetic, versus left brain, analytic) activity in worship, *Worship is a Verb*, 21. Such worship would appeal to all sense (one of the great values in weekly communion) including touch, taste, sight, and smell (along with hearing, of course).

⁴⁸ Sacred, not in opposition to profane, but as peculiarly devoted to the public act of worship.

⁴⁹ Webber, *Worship is a Verb*, 23.

⁵⁰ But, James F. White, "Our Apostasy in Worship," *The Christian Century*, September 28, 1977: 842, indicts Protestant churches with failing to give proper place to the Scriptures in corporate worship. His complaint still seems appropriate at the beginning of the 21st century.

⁵¹ Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, 314, says the lack of balance between "body" and "soul" in worship results in "the sickness of passivity in many Protestant congregations today."

⁵² Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 154.

⁵³ Acts 2:46, 20:7; I Corinthians 11:18. See also Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 29; Josef A. Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy*, trans. Francis A. Brunner, vol. 6 in *Liturgical Studies* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 29ff.

⁵⁴ Von Allmen, *Worship*, 64-6; Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 73-83.

⁵⁵ Jordan, *Sociology of the Church*, 244ff.

⁵⁶ Max Thurian, *The One Bread*, trans. Theodore DuBois (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 19.

⁵⁷ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 16-9.

⁵⁸ Martin, *The Worship of God*, 211.

⁵⁹ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 91.

⁶⁰ Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 37.

⁶¹ T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 133-4. Of course, Torrance distances himself from the "representation" of Tridentine Roman Catholic theology, noting that "his Offering is once for all and does not need to be repeated," 133.

⁶² Martin, *The Worship of God*, 211.

⁶³ Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 134.

⁶⁴ Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 34.

⁶⁵ Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 110; von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 23-4.

⁶⁶ Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 134.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 110-1.

⁶⁸ Vern S. Poythress, "Ezra 3, Union with Christ, and Exclusive Psalmody," *Westminster Theological Journal* XXXVII (May 1975): 221.

⁶⁹ See Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 118-22.