THE LITURGICAL SHAPE OF REFORMED WORSHIP[1]

Paul Wells

If our knee-jerk reaction to liturgy is that it is irrelevant and that many other aspects of worship are more engaging, it might just be that the *Zeitgeist* is subtly oppressing us.[2] As Terry Johnson comments, from the turn of the last century until the 1960s, evangelicals lost touch with the older Protestant tradition, which reaches back to the ancient church via the Reformers, and in so doing, lost the church's own liturgical culture.[3] Since then, the assault of popular culture, plus the rise of market-oriented seeker churches lead by Rev. Dr Feelgoods, have turned worship inside out. Our predecessors would have great difficulty recognising many churches today as the assembly of God's people for *holy worship*, a term that is dead in the water of postmodernism.

Liturgy is generally taken to mean a prescribed form of worship, as in Chrysostom's liturgy or the *Book of Common Prayer* or, in a more specific sense, the formularies used in the celebration of the Roman Eucharist. Originally from the Greek *leitourgia*, used of public or state duties and services, it was applied in the Septuagint to the temple service in Jerusalem. John Owen argued that these ceremonies are carnal shadows of the things to come, replaced in the New Testament by the liberty of the Spirit in the new covenant dispensation of grace.[4] This association of liturgy with what is Jewish allowed Owen to say that liturgy is a temporary arrangement awaiting the good things to come. Although it was consequently done away with by the apostles, the Papacy returned to 'Judaism' with its unbiblical ceremonies and traditions. This line of argument does not bode well for any liturgy in a nonconformist context. Can there be any liturgy, a precise *duty* rendered to God in worship, is the question for many Reformed people, rather than the shape of the liturgy.

Discussions about the shape of public worship, or liturgy, polarise rather predictably in different contexts into a face-off between the advo-

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1 A French version of this text, 'La forme liturgique du culte réformée', was published in *La Revue reformée*, 68 (2017:5): 61-86.

2 It is worth noting that of the four Constitutions adopted by the Second Vatican Council, the third was devoted entirely to the subject of liturgy, S*acrosanctum Concilium*.

3 Terry L. Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin* (Darlington, Evangelical Press, 2014), p. 244.

4 John Owen, *Works*, 16, 'Discourse on Liturgies', ch. 1.

cates of structure (the institution) who wish to maintain form in line with tradition (as gatemen), and the defenders of liberty (the event), for whom (as adventurers) spontaneity is of the essence. Moreover, to say that 'evangelicals are not interested in the technicalities of liturgical worship' is an understatement.[5] The word liturgy makes most evangelicals shudder, a tribute to the influence of Owen who maintained that 'all liturgies, as such, are false worship […] used to defeat Christ's promise of gifts and God's Spirit.'[6] Liturgy suggests deadness and smacks of dreaded Anglicanism.

However, to pretend that 'our church has no liturgy' hides the fact that there is an implicit one, made up of 'slots', often the remit of solo performers. This form of liturgy, that Gerald Bray calls 'the hymn-sandwich pattern'[7], has recently mutated into the 'worship-message sandwich'. The outcome is predictably amorphous, laced with songs of doubtful pedigree, when it is not rescued by star music leaders who run the show. In a sense we cannot escape liturgy in one form or another. However, we may legitimately wonder if contemporary worship has anything to do with what divine worship should be. Having cleared the house of liturgy, many worse demons have returned to take up residence, and the last state may well be worse than the first.

Behind the generality of these remarks lie serious issues, not least whether the God we claim to worship approves of what we do in his name and if, when worship is driven by feel-good motives, blissful ignorance might not be a mask for a subtle kind of blasphemy.[8] So liturgy becomes a real pastoral dilemma, often a case of walking the tightrope between what ought to be practiced biblically, and what the punters want, sometimes because of their young people.

In the context of the Reformed tradition, questions about liturgy are traditionally of another nature than these present concerns and often centre around the relation of the Scripture principle to *adiaphora*. On the one hand, taking the high ground, are those who brandish the regulative principle with the assurance of Goliath, and on the other, the libertarians who are at ease with liturgical flexibility. Ultimately we find ourselves back to debates about how the Scripture principle works.[9] Are forms of

5 James I. Packer, *Among God's Giants* (Eastbourne, Kingsway, 1991), p. 324.

6 Ibid, p. 328, no reference given.

7 Gerald Bray, *God is Love. A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2012), p. 710.

8 Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin*, pp. 75ff.

9 Daniel R. Hyde comments on the widespread inflation of the regulative principle – 'It is becoming more and more a commonplace within conservative, traditional Reformed circles to attribute the phrase "regulative principle

ceremony and liturgy that are not explicitly authorised by Scripture legitimate, when they are not forbidden by it? How does our answer affect the shape of Reformed liturgy? Such questions appeared early on in the Reformation. If Scripture is the final authority, in what sense is it alone? So Luther promoted music in the churches because he saw no scriptural rule against it, whereas Zwingli removed the organ from the church in Zurich, because he found no biblical justification for musical instruments in Christian worship.[10] Later even flowers would be banned in some places of worship for the same reason! Today those who wish to introduce drama and dance in worship claim, if they claim anything, that there is nothing in Scripture to forbid it.

In our attempt to outline the shape of Reformed liturgy we will seek to respect the regulative principle, although not in the way advocated by Owen. We propose to consider: firstly, the regulative principle as foundational; secondly, the covenant and the way it might structure a Reformed liturgy; thirdly, elements of the liturgy as divine invitation and human response in worship; and finally, some advantages of liturgy in the context of life as worship.

1 THE DUTY AND MANNER OF WORSHIP

'We worship God because God created us to worship him. Worship is at the center of our existence, at the heart of our reason for being' says Hughes Oliphant Old in his classic work *Worship*.[11] If worship is our duty, the manner of it has not been left free to human invention but is principled by God's revelation in Scripture. We propose to look at three cases within the Reformed tradition dealing with the duty and manner of worship and questions of liturgy, in the light of the so-called regulative or Scripture principle.

The regulative principle was not a Puritan invention; it can be traced back to Calvin, and was adopted by the Reformed Churches in their confessions and catechisms.[12] The Scripture itself is regulative of both church

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of worship" to John Murray'. Hyde documents recent contributions to the debate in '"The Fire That Kindleth All Our Sacrifices to God": Owen and the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer', in The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology, ed., Mark Jones, Kelly M. Kapic (Farnham, Ashgate Publ. 2012), p. 251 n. 10.

10 Mark A. Noll, Turning Points (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1998), p. 193.

11 Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship. Reformed According to Scripture* (revised and expanded edition, Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), ch. 1.

12 William Young, 'The Puritan Regulative Principle of the Church'. Originally published as a series in the *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, vol. 14, no. 2, April-

government and the worship of God, in contrast with the Lutheran and Anglican view that what is not forbidden in the Word of God may be allowed in worship.[13] Ceremonies in worship are thus indifferent (*adiaphora*, things neither commanded nor forbidden by the Scripture). The Reformed view, by contrast, stated that only what is prescribed by the Word of God may be used in worship. It assumed that Scripture is unique and its authority, sufficiency and perspicacity order divine worship. The regulative principle is implied in Calvin's view of true religion as 'faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that embraces willing reverence, and carries with it legitimate worship as prescribed in the law.'[14]

Far from being a restrictive straightjacket, the regulative principle was the foundation for freedom from the traditions of men, from an authoritarian Church, and from the irreligion innate in the human mind that spawns superstitions.[15] It stands for God's rule against bipolar manifestations of antinomianism. The Scripture principle, founded on divine revelation, is really the sole way of protecting human freedom of conscience in worship and elsewhere, against *legalism*, invasive human authorities that add to Scripture, and against *anarchy*, which ignores the objective truth of Scripture and replaces it with the subjectivity of human ideas and desires.[16] Both legalism and anarchy are spin-offs of antinomianism, which is the mainspring heresy, that of rejecting God and his revelation. Both were identified by Calvin and the Puritans as manifestations of 'will-worship', self-made religion, the human mind set against God.[17] If,

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June 1959, vol. 16, no. 1, January-March 1961 and 'The Puritan Principle of Worship', in *Puritan Papers, I: 1956-1959*, ed. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Phillipsburg, P&R Publishing, 2000), pp. 141-153.

13 Sometimes called the normative over against the regulative principle, whereas the Roman principle is called 'the inventive principle'. I don't know who coined these terms.

14 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.ii.2.

15 Ibid, II.viii.17 on the second commandment. In his work on saints and martyrs, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), Robert Bartlett points out that in the context of world religions 'It is only the Protestants of Europe and their overseas descendants who have ever really turned their backs on the saints' (p. 637). This is no doubt a result of the regulative principle in worship.

16 These are external manifestations of B. B. Warfield's rationalism and mysticism and Cornelius Van Til's rationalism and irrationalism as the enemies of Christian theism.

17 William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1997), p. 288, opposes instituted worship and will-worship, devised by men and unlawful. Superstition is an excess of religion by addition. Instituted worship is the means ordained by the will of God to increase natural worship and is wholly

in their time, opposition to the regulative principle came from an authoritarian church in Rome or from the English Act of Uniformity of 1662, today it probably comes more from the authoritarian media-driven culture of subjective individualism. But, as Calvin reminds us, 'we are not to seek from men the doctrine of the true worship of God, for the Lord has faithfully and fully instructed us how he is to be worshiped.'[18]

The regulative principle, however, 'is by no means always easy to apply'[19] as developments in subsequent Reformed theology, including the work of the Westminster Assembly, amply illustrates. In this context, it has been current to drive a wedge between Calvin and the Calvinists,[20] and the contrast in the realm of the shape of liturgy is unavoidable. In Calvin's *Forme des prières et chants ecclésiastiques, avec la manière d'administrer les sacrements et consacrer le marriage, selon la coutume de l'Eglise ancienne*, 1542,[21] the reference to the ancient church reveals Calvin's hand. In Calvin's form of liturgy, congregational responses play a part, some set texts are present, for example the confession of sin, and also set prayers including the Lord's Prayer. Calvin also respected the Apostles' Creed, criticised in no uncertain terms by some Puritans. Even kneeling is not rejected. One doubts that Calvin, if he had reacted in detail, would have considered the *Book of Common Prayer* an 'unperfected booke, culled and picked out of that popishe dunghill the Masse book, full of abominations.'[22] In his liturgy he was influenced by Bucer and Zwingli, but also by Farel, who published the first French Reformed liturgy at Neuchâtel in 1533, and introduced it in Geneva in 1537. In the regular Sunday service it included a general prayer, the Decalogue, confession of sins, repetition of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, a final exhortation and the benediction. None of this Calvin took to be in con-

set forth in the second commandment. Cf. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869), I, 324, 327.

18 Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.x.8.

19 John R. de Witt, 'The Form of Church Government' in *To Enjoy and Glorify God: A Commemoration of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. John L. Carson and David W. Hall (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), p. 166.

20 Hyde, art. cit, p. 251, n. 11-13.

21 Calvin, *Opera*, VI, 161–210.

22 Hyde, art. cit, p. 255. Calvin said with moderation that the second Edwardian Prayer Book of 1552 contained *multas tolerabiles ineptias*, Packer, *Among God's Giants*, p. 326. Calvin would also have looked askance at the criticism of the Creed made by one of the Puritan Independents as being 'old patchery and evil stuff'. James H. Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1965), p. 105.

tradiction with right worship of God or the Scripture principle, even if it might be thought, in terms of later debate, that Calvin was straying away from the regulative toward the normative principle.[23]

With John Owen things developed in another direction and the feel is different in his numerous writings against liturgy.[24] One has the impression that Owen's objections to liturgy do not initially formally relate to a regulative principle, but accrue primarily from material considerations, and particularly his doctrine of the Holy Spirit: 'The question is whether Christ or Antichrist? whether the worship of God or idols? whether the effusion and waiting for the effusion of the Spirit of God in his worship, or all manner of superstitious impositions?'[25] Owen thought that liturgies were Satan's best arm for neutralising the gifts and graces of God, communion with the Spirit and Christ's leading in worship, for to be affected by the Spirit is to be led by Christ. Liturgies foster neglect of the Spirit's gifts and reliance upon 'an operose form of service to be read by the minister; which to do is neither a peculiar gift of the Holy Ghost to any, nor of the minister at all.'[26] Owen's approach is nuanced and shows a certain tolerance, particularly in the practice of prayer, contrasted with John Bunyan's, for example; what is unacceptable is not reading prayers or composing them beforehand but the imposition of an invariable set form which must be used *ne varietur*.[27] In common with Calvin, simplicity and spirituality in worship are opposed to the 'rabble' of Roman ceremonies.

Finally, a further case can be added to make a triptych. In the 19th century, the Scottish theologian James Bannerman, writing on public

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23 As some criticisms of John Frame's writings on worship (*Worship in Spirit and in Truth* and *Contemporary Worship Music*, (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 2012)) have recently claimed. See *The Regulative Principle of Worship*. A Report adopted by the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, March 8, 2001.

24 Cf. Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition*, ch. V, on Puritanism and the anti-liturgical movement.

25 Owen, *Works*, IX, 402, quoted by Hyde, art. cit, p. 252, n. 21. In a more detailed discussion Owen's remarks on liturgy would have to be set in the context of his theology of the trinitarian appropriations. Worship with the triune God is through the media of the persons: the Father, sin and confession; the Son, pardon and union; the Spirit, communion.

26 Hyde, art. cit, p. 258.

27 Iain H. Murray, 'On the Directory for Public Worship', pp. 185-89, in *To Enjoy and Glorify God*, indicates that the concern of the Westminster divines is not set prayers or extemporaneous prayers but praying in a way which is biblical, studied and edifying. Cf. also Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition*, pp. 98-105.

worship, stated that the duty of worship is enjoined by Scripture. The duty is natural, as all are called to worship God, but the public order of worship is specially instituted in Scripture as is the manner of worship.[28] If the way to God is closed for sinful man, the conditions and manner of entrance into his presence must be dictated by God himself, and indicated in what is expressly ordained by Scripture, which limits the power of the church over the conscience.[29] Christ indicated doctrines and institutions to shape human worship, and additions are not legitimate. So the church has a ministerial and not a magisterial or inventive function. 'The proper idea of public worship is the positive institution prescribed for the approach of sinners in their Church state to, and their fellowship with, God.'[30] However, Bannerman continued by adding a distinction between questions concerning worship which are *in sacris* and those that are *circa sacra*. The first concerns ceremonies and institutions *in* the worship of God in which the church has no power, but is called to administer and apply what is dictated by Christ in Scripture, under his authority. The second relates to matters *about* worship; in this respect, the church acts at particular times and in different situations in such a way that everything is done decently and in order, according to the rule of 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40. The light of nature and reason, human laws and customs, are hereby respected. Also things that are not 'expressly set down in Scripture' may be done 'by good and necessary consequence (and) may be deduced from Scripture.'[31] The church has no power in the first area, but it has discretionary powers in the second.

This distinction, Bannerman admits, implies the difficulty of drawing

> the line between matters of decency and order, which it is competent to the Church to regulate in the circumstances of its worship, and matters of express appointment and command in the ceremonies of its worship, which it is not competent for the Church to regulate and interfere with.[32]

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28 Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, I, 340-43.

29 Cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XX.ii.

30 Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, I, 348.

31 *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.vi.

32 Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, I, 354, refers to three marks that distinguish between *in sacris* and *circa sacra*, described by George Gillespie in his *Dispute against the English-Popish Ceremonies Obtruded upon the Church of Scotland* (1637). Ceremonies and circumstances are distinguished: i) circumstances are not of the essence of worship; ii) circumstances are not directly determinable by Scripture; iii) the church regulates circumstances but not the parts of worship. No doubt more considerations could be added.

This would seem to imply that in questions concerning the shape of the liturgy there is room, in a Reformed perspective, to take into account all that relates to the human situation, the needs of particular historical circumstance and culture, without endangering conformity to the regulative principle.[33] It also implies that there is formally a place in the liturgy for human response in confession, prayer and praise, as long as worship *circa sacra* does not contradict or add to the truth revealed in Scripture, and the principles ordained for proper worship. In the light of these factors, it appears possible to say that Calvin's form of worship with a responsive liturgy respects the regulative principle just as much as Owen's, in spite of appearances to the contrary. In both cases the regulative principle would be broken only if the Scripture principle were contravened in the manner or content of worship.

This brings us to a further issue that should engage us regarding Reformed worship, namely that worship involves two actors, God and man, invitation and response, which is also the formal structure of the covenants in the history of salvation. This raises further questions as to outcomes when the regulative principle is applied in such a way as to eliminate the response and participation of the congregation in worship though liturgical acts. Does it not establish a new kind of teaching priesthood as the only actor in worship, resulting in what Nicholas Wolterstorff called 'the tragedy of liturgy in Protestantism'?[34]

2 REFORMED WORSHIP AS COVENANTAL WORSHIP

'What takes place on Sunday in church buildings is not the rental of a building to this or that preacher to do there as he sees fit, but it is very definitely a gathering of the congregation in its lawful assembly.'[35] That assembly is summoned by the Lord and it is therefore 'the assembling of ourselves' (Heb. 10:25) to meet with our God for worship, as a reconciled congregation.[36] As Saviour the Lord calls to worship, and when his people draw near to meet with him, the world is left behind. 'All sin, all activity in a sinful world, all consequences of earlier sins, all the impact on our hearts of a God-denying demon world – all this *separates* us from God and leaves an empty space between God and our soul', but

[33] I am not claiming that Bannerman himself would have seen it this way.

[34] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1983), ch. 12. Cf. Abraham Kuyper's comments on church becoming a lecture hall rather than the assembly of believers, *Our Worship* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 15, 189.

[35] Kuyper, *Our Worship*, pp. 6, 8.

[36] Ibid, pp. 9-10, 13, 16.

this fades in the overwhelming presence of the One who calls. Worship is therefore 'a coming together with the congregation of Christ, in order to meet together, the Eternal Being', and not something for the purpose of propaganda, evangelism or entertainment.[37] The calling of God and his presence shapes the service of worship, the liturgy of the assembly. As Abraham Kuyper said, 'all liturgy is predicated on the foundational notion that the church has authority over the minister and not the minister over the church regarding the manner in which our holy worship shall be practiced in the gathering of believers.'[38] How then are the call and the presence of God regulative of covenantal worship?

The biblical covenants are shaped in terms of union and communion based on divine call, God's invitation, stipulations and promises, and human response (restipulation) in the covenant: firm pledges and promises on God's part and serious obligations on ours.[39] 'The various biblical covenants relate to God's initiated self-obligation (grace) as a necessary first movement, and to an obligation which God imposes on human beings for conduct and action that will bring blessing to them.'[40] This structure has profound implications for worship, as it does for all of human life, but particularly for worship, as it is there we meet God, our Creator and Saviour, in a foundational way.

Divine worship in a Christian perspective is a joyful, new covenant, public meeting with the risen Lord. It is *the Lord* himself who calls us into his presence and whose blessing we receive at the end; what takes place between these two moments is worship as a covenantal activity. The form it takes is liturgy that expresses the basic structures, the order and the nature of the binding relationship between God and his people. In a Reformed context, the form of public worship repeats the story of redemption, its messianic foundation, and reflects the order of salvation.[41] It causes us to look heavenward, *sursum corda*, because our altar is not on earth, but in heaven, where the Great High Priest represents and receives us.

> There is no need to bring any other sacrifice, because the one sacrifice of Christ is a *perfect* sacrifice. Not only has sin been completely atoned for, but

37 Ibid, pp. 14, 15.

38 Ibid, p. 6.

39 Deuteronomy 10:12-22. Cf. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, pp. 278-79. The words 'for yourself' in the commandments and in the OT imply the reciprocation of the covenant.

40 William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2013), p. 2.

41 Von Allmen, *Célébrer le salut*, pp. 12-36.

> Christ has also earned total righteousness and holiness. And the only sacrifice that still remains is our own surrender to death by our act of *perfect faith*.[42]

By faith we are joined to the risen Lord whose life of obedience sealed the new covenant for us.

How then can we describe the worship-shaping function of the covenant? Many biblical examples of practice could be used to illustrate the principle, but here we find it useful to follow a suggestion made the Swiss Reformed theologian Jean-Jacques Von Allmen.[43] The covenantal order of salvation can be expressed as being structured in a *sacramental* and a *sacrificial* way, God calling us in Christ to present ourselves as living sacrifices in his service (*logikèn latreían*, Rom. 12:1). In worship we meet the Lord and his gift of salvation and we reply to that call.[44] Those who received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost became a community founded on the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42, 20:7). The Lord regularly calls his people together to renew covenant with him. Worship therefore has a double aspect: it is *sacramental* (God proclaims the divine *mystery* of salvation) and *sacrificial* (our counterpart in *offering* obedient service to the Lord). Von Allmen understands these two terms in the sense proposed by Philip Melanchthon in his *Apology for the Confession of Augsburg*: 'theologians properly distinguish between sacrament and sacrifice […] a sacrament is a ceremony or a work in which *God* accomplishes for us what the promise joined to the ceremony offers […] while a sacrifice, on the contrary, is a ceremony or a work that we render to God to honour him.'[45] To put it another way, the liturgical shape of worship and its content is structured by these two complementary elements, which could be called more simply as the reciprocity of gift and gratitude.

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42 Kuyper, *Our Worship*, p. 22 and on 'The Altar', pp. 20-23.

43 In his books *Une réforme dans l'Eglise* (Grembloux, Duculot, 1971), pp. 13-16 and *Célébrer le salut* (Labor et Fides/Cerf, Genève/Paris, 1984), pp. 46-50.

44 Von Allmen, *Celebrer le salut*, pp. 47-50, talks of the nuptuality of the encounter with Christ that reveals what the church is as bride of Christ.

45 Ibid, pp. 46-47 and *Une réforme*, p. 13, quoting Philip Melanchthon from *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930), p. 354, my translation. The language of sacrament and sacrifice has most often been used in debate about the Eucharist. Cf. Daniel Brevint's *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice* (1673), prepared by John Wesley was highly influential in Methodism: http://anglicanhistory.org/england/brevint/. Accessed 15/08/15.

Von Allmen stated that 'this distinction can be applied also to the church which is at one and the same time sacrament and sacrifice, grace and thanksgiving, the gift of God and human obedience.'[46] From these two aspects of the covenant, the divine act and the human response, an attempt can be made to describe a possible liturgical form of the Christian worship service. The divine action and the human reply are conjoined in such a way that God makes himself known to us and is heard by us, and we confess him to be God and express allegiance to him.

It can hardly escape our attention that the reciprocity of sacrament and sacrifice are present in post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology and language, although not in the way we are using it. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states,

> The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering.[47]

However the problem, as in Edward Schillebeeckx's *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, is that the sacrament swallows up the sacrifice, and the sacrifice itself becomes sacramental. This seems to be a result of Schillebeeckx's theandric interpretation of Chalcedon: 'Christ is God in a human way, and man in a divine way. As a man he acts out his divine life in and according to his human existence. Everything he does as a man is […] a divine act in human form; an interpretation and transposition of a divine activity into a human activity.'[48] So Israel assumes a sacramental role in salvation, Christ becomes the 'primordial' sacrament of God for humanity, since 'Christ himself is the Church, an invisible communion in grace with the living God'[49] and the church consequently becomes the sacrament of the risen Christ, the encounter with God. When sacrament engulfs sacrifice the human response in the offering of worship to God,

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46 Von Allmen, *Une réforme*, p. 13.

47 *Catéchisme de l'Eglise Catholique* (Paris, Mame/Plon, 1992), p. 294, §1368. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, I. 13.

48 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (London, Sheed and Ward, 1963), pp. 13-14; 17ff. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, I. 1, 8.

49 Ibid, pp. 12-13.

loses its full humanity. Hospitality given and received are two distinct realities.

Just as God and man exist for each other in the covenant, so also in worship the sacramental and the sacrificial are made for each other. God's election and call are gifted and sacramental, *for us*, man's reply is sacrificial, *to God* in thanks and obedience. The sacramental is primary because without God's saving act and presence, the sacrificial deflates to man-centred will-worship, a mantra, a cry of distress or a superstitious round of vain offerings. With the sacrament given, the sacrifice becomes praise for the grace received and holy obedience of consecration to serve the Lord. As Von Allmen stated, the kerygma, the Lord's table, and the divine commandments are sacramental; faith, hope and loving obedience are sacrificial responses to grace.

This structure implies that the church is not a free agency to invent a liturgy by stacking up this and that like the ingredients in Gerald Bray's sandwich. The church does not invent, she *replies* to God's call; the church-sacrifice originates in, and is held by the church-sacrament, including in the liturgy.[50] Nor is worship in constant mutation, because the sacramental elements belong to the Lord and remain unreformable, *in sacris*, whereas the sacrificial aspects of worship, *circa sacra*, are reformable in the light of better understanding of the gospel in the human response, contextualisation in differing cultural situations, and are refined in progressing historical expressions. So worship can be different in different localities, but the sacramental aspects of the gospel are the same. We believe no other thing than the witnesses and martyrs of the ancient church, but we express ourselves differently.[51]

These propositions might seem to be advocating a move away from the regulative principle to a kind of normative principle in worship. Nothing of the sort is suggested, but rather the quest for a structure of worship that respects the bipolarity of the covenant and meeting with God. Expression of the sacramental and the sacrificial in worship must both be normed by God's word. Our covenantal response in worship and liturgy must be in harmony with the covenant treaty, Scripture, even when it is a spontaneous response. This might mean, for instance, that if Psalm singing is the ideal response in the realm of music, being given by God him-

50 Von Allmen, *Une réforme*, p. 14.

51 Von Allmen (Ibid, p. 16) cautions about the danger of monophysitism in ecclesiology, where the sacrament devours the sacrifice and reform becomes impossible, and a sort of nestorianism in ecclesiology in which the relation of the sacrificial to the sacramental is cut and the church plays at constant change. If the second is the temptation of liberal churches, the first might be that of evangelical conservative worship stuck in a time warp.

self for that end (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), other responses are not illegitimate when humanly composed hymns are orthodox in expression, and faithful to biblical revelation. If our sung responses are 'Bible-filled' they are legitimate,[52] and it is our responsibility not to sing or pray heresy.

God's people are constantly called, in their worship, to seek an optimal adequation of the sacrificial to the sacramental, so that God be worshipped 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). In the sacramental we express the catholicity of the church, and in the sacrificial the fact that 'the Corinthian church did things differently from the Jerusalem church.'[53] But how, and in what way, can this be applied to the shape of Reformed liturgy?

3 THE SHAPE OF NEW COVENANT LITURGY

Since the time of Enoch people began to call on the name of the Lord, or worship him (Gen. 4:26) and Christians call on God in the name of Jesus, who stands among them (Matt. 18:20; 28:20). This means publicly recognising God's presence and worshipping him because of his grace and through the mediation of Christ. God gives his name and identifies himself as the Lord and we reply to his overtures. Invitation and response are two complementary aspects of worship and express the divine and the human meeting in covenantal fellowship. Unfortunately this bipolarity in worship has generally fallen away even in Reformed and Presbyterian circles today, and in evangelicalism opposition to Anglican liturgy has resulted either in putting worship on the back burner, with an exaggerated concern not to overstep the regulative principle, or in a communal stream of consciousness in worship song.

True, there is no set form or liturgy of public worship in the New Testament.[54] The order of worship itself is sacrificial and can vary according to different times, seasons and cultural situations. However this does not mean that all the elements necessary to reflect theologically on the shape of worship are not present in Scripture. From start to finish worship should be a lively dialogue between God's word and our response. When Calvin elaborated the Geneva liturgy, I believe he tried to do justice to both hearing God and responding to him. Any meeting with God calls for repentance and forgiveness because we are sinners, even if we are God's people. A liturgy worth its salt follows a dynamic movement from God's lordship to recognition of our sin, the provision made for our salvation in

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52 Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin*, pp. 129-48.

53 Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'The Reformed Liturgy' in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. D. K. McKim, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1992), p. 277.

54 Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London, SCM Press, 1953).

Christ, and praise. All this leads to a communal confession of faith that prepares us to receive God's word preached and the Lord's supper, which ought to be an integral part of the liturgy of the church, and not an addition.

Without pretending to be exhaustive or to move beyond the realm of a possible shape of Reformed liturgy, the following is an attempt to indicate some elements belonging to the sacramental and to the sacrificial aspects of worship:[55]

1) In the *sacramental aspects* of worship we meet God to listen and hear what he has done to enact our salvation. They include the following biblical features which model the liturgy of the assembled congregation and make up its backbone:

- the votum ('Our help is from God...') and the salutation expressing God's gracious welcome into his presence, as he meets with his people – for instance 'Grace and peace from God...' (Not 'Morning all' or greeting those around us). This is an essential, but largely forgotten, part of the liturgy; God initiates worship, calling us into his presence to meet with him; we approach God, recognising that he is our God and we are his people. God's meeting with us is the condition of worship – and this can be expressed by a Psalm (100, 121, 122 etc.), a text like 1 Timothy 1:2 or, for example, one of Christ's 'I am' sayings that invite us to worship;

- the hearing of God's law from the Old or the New Testament (We enter God's presence each week as sinners in need of forgiveness. This is not legalism; it is in line with Calvin's 'third use of the law' in Christian life). The presence of law and grace in promise illustrates in miniature the shape of the *historia salutis*;

- God speaks through Scripture, read from both Testaments;

- the preaching of the word of God (using *lectio continua*), is *his* word to us when Scripture is faithfully proclaimed;

- the 'visible words' of the Lord's supper and baptism;

[55] We leave aside questions such as whether all of the service should be conducted by the minister from the pulpit, and when the congregation might stand, sit or kneel.

- the benediction (the Aaronic blessing, or another) ends worship. It seems important that the minister or teaching elder pronounce the blessing in the name of the Lord to be received by the assembly. (Members of the congregation do not bless each other, as practiced in some congregations). We leave the presence of God renewed and carry *his* blessing with us in our 'profane' activities.

2) The *sacrificial aspects* of worship are woven into the fabric provided by the sacramental aspects of the liturgy, and they include the following biblical elements in response:

- communal confession of sin in response to God's law (using 1 John 1:5-10 for example, another biblical text, or a text such as Calvin's confession);

- prayers for forgiveness, prayer before the sermon, as well as general intercession and praise, plus the Lord's prayer.[56] All prayer is offered with biblical content, as suggested by the Westminster *Directory*. Free prayer depends on the situation of the congregation;

- the singing of Psalms, or parts of Psalms as liturgical responses, and hymns;[57]

- the confession of faith of the church (the Apostles, Nicean and Athanasian creeds, biblical confessions such as Philippians 2, a question and answer from the *Heidelberg Catechism* or an article of a confession of faith etc.).[58]

3) The church elders, acting as God's servants, lead in the first aspects of worship; the congregation replies collectively, as a body, in the second. The order itself may be open to many variations.

The weaving together of these elements in a dynamic, structured and coherent whole in which the covenant partners play out their specific roles one with respect to the other shapes a Reformed liturgy. Calvin and others, including Abraham Kuyper, have tried to capture this living, dia-

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[56] Kuyper, *Our Worship*, p. 35, refers to four elements of prayer: confession, adoration, thanks and supplication.

[57] On the demise of psalmody in Protestantism see Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin*, pp. 128-38.

[58] Are church notices and offerings a part of Christian worship as such? Offerings have greater biblical warrant than notices. Notices can be given before the beginning of worship, and the means for offerings can be provided at the exit rather than taken during the service.

logic and relational aspect of divine worship.[59] Kuyper's ideal shape of liturgy was the following:[60]

> Tolling of the bell – singing of psalm – entry of council and handshake with minister – votum – salutation – singing of psalm – exhortation to confession – public confession of sin (liturgical prayer, kneeling) – absolution – Apostles creed (spoken or sung by people), singing of psalm – Scripture reading – prayer before sermon, concluded with Lord's prayer – sermon – offering and singing of psalm, prayer for the needs of Christendom – singing of psalm – reading of ten commandments – benediction.

Two aspects of this suggested shape of the liturgy are particularly disagreeable to people today, particularly evangelicals. Firstly, Kuyper's idea that liturgy is born of the restriction of the freedom of the minister, and secondly, form is thought to be unspiritual.[61] However, in both cases, the shape of the liturgy restricts arbitrary action which degenerates into absence of form, and therefore of movement. A Reformed liturgy has its instrument in form and the form is filled with meaning, because of the sequence of acts that structure worship. Liturgy is not an addition to what was appointed and commanded by Christ and the apostles, who are said to have known nothing of liturgy.[62] It is a reflection of the divine-human encounter in the judgment of sin and the conferring of grace. When filled with biblical meaning reflecting the *historia salutis*, the structure becomes a suitable vehicle for the Holy Spirit's action, uniting the body of believers in the reality and hope of salvation. This is an appropriate antidote to both superstar performers and to the subjective super-spirituality that is so prevalent in worship today.

4 SOME ADVANTAGES OF LITURGY

A liturgical structure of worship also has some forgotten advantages.[63] Firstly, regularity is important in human life, and Reformed liturgy has the advantage of repetition. Isaiah brings the following exhortation to God's people: 'When you come to appear before me […] wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from before my

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59 Movement and telelogy are generally absent in the average evangelical 'hymn-sandwich' service. Over against formless worship, the *Book of Common Prayer* is not without some formal advantages.

60 Kuyper, *Our Worship*, p. xl.

61 Ibid, pp. 10-11, 24-27.

62 As in Owen, *Discourse on Liturgies*, pp. 48-58.

63 Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin*, pp. 225-39.

eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good' (Isa. 1:12, 16, 17). These verses summarise the shape of Reformed liturgy: meeting with God strengthens our ties with him and loosens them from the world's shaping to do good. As reconciled people we become a pilgrim church, at home with God, and less at home in the world.[64] As John Bolt comments: 'Christian worship is distinguished from the daily life of service to God by the *liturgy* of God's *called-out and assembled* people in which they practice a storied communion with God that loosens their ties with and involvement in the world's counterstories.'[65] The shape of the liturgy shapes our lives, with the eternal Sabbath as their finality. The very regularity of liturgical worship serves to keep this ultimate reality before us. *This* is the story that shapes our existences and we need to be reminded, forgetful as we are, that *this* is our foundation and we are a pilgrim people with a kingdom task, and no permanence here below.

Secondly, memory is important. Together with biblical texts, the symbols of Reformed worship used in its liturgy are of great value in times of life crisis and distress, because through repetition they are rooted in our memory, if not in our subconscious mind. The Lord's Prayer, the Confession of sin, the Ten Commandments, the words of the votum or the blessing and articles of the catechism, are anchors that remain when all else is slipping away, and they serve to keep our heads above water when we seem to be drowning. Who knows what this mental structuring might save us from at times when human beings are living longer at least in the West? Memorised, these Christian texts and others become second nature.

Finally, liturgy is not just refuelling, but when it is absent, as Nicholas Wolterstorff points out, life as a whole is altered.[66] In the shape of Reformed liturgy as sacramental and sacrificial God is apprehended in a history which is both his and ours, and of which he is the Lord. We remember the past of God's promise, expect the future in hope, and in the present we take heed of God's word in obedience. The liturgy gives teleological structure to our lives past, present and future, because we have received the promise of the Lord in baptism, the hope of salvation at his Table, and day by day we seek to live sacrificially in his service. As a whole, Reformed liturgy has suggestive symbolic value, reminding us of the mainsprings of our life as new creatures in Christ.[67] Sunday worship

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64 Kuyper, *Our Worship*, pp. 14-15.

65 John Bolt, 'All life is worship?' in Kuyper, *Our Worship*, p. 326, italics Bolt's.

66 Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, pp. 149ff.

67 This is the opposite of present phenomenological approaches to worship in which human culture and experience are treated as a large symbolic field

exemplifies the structure of Christian life which is both remembrance and expectation. So all of life is worship, nothing is secular, all is in rhythm with what God has done.[68] In this respect too, the Lord's table is integral to Reformed liturgy. 'Just as the gospel is expressed symbolically in the sacrament, it is expressed structurally in the liturgy.'[69] One and the other present Christ, who is our life.

CONCLUSION: THE LITURGICAL TRAGEDY?

Worship in both Presbyterian and evangelical churches in the western world today invariably neglects congregational response, which may be one of the reasons for the rise of music-dominated services.[70] Psalm singing has well nigh disappeared, including in some orthodox Presbyterian denominations in the United States.[71] Worship services generally neglect responsive Psalm singing, the Lord's Prayer, saying the confession of faith together, the reading of both Testaments and God's law (including the decalogue). The large scale removal of the sacramental elements from worship serves to impoverish our encounters with the living God and ends up in focusing on the ability of the preacher. How many evangelical believers would be hard pushed today to repeat the Creed, the Ten commandments or the Lord's Prayer, to say nothing of the *Te Deum*? This is a sad loss of the faith-markers that bind us to the Lord of the covenant.

How is an order of service created? By organising the sacramental and sacrificial aspects of worship to bring the gospel to the fore. In this respect, as Michael Horton says, the liturgy 'provides ways of preaching the word even before the sermon begins.'[72] All of the elements can be

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mediating mystery and the divine through which 'God continues to impinge on all of life.' This approach proposes a new model for understanding religion in which 'revelation continues to grow and develop under God within the traditions of the community', which are receptive to outside influences in a listening process and an openness of spirit. In fact, it is suggested that there may be better understandings of God from outside the tradition than from within. See, for example, how these statements are developed in David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 270ff.

68 Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, p. 154.

69 Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape our Practice* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2009), p. 84.

70 Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, pp. 158-59 on the dangers of Reformed worship becoming 'didacticism'.

71 Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin*, pp. 218ff.

72 Michael Horton, *A Better Way. Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2002), p. 142.

directly based on Scripture, found in the classic texts of the Church or within the Reformed tradition. Calvin's liturgy, the Westminster divines' *Directory of Public Worship* or even the *Book of Common Prayer* might help us reflect on what is appropriate to the shape of liturgy.

If both these elements of liturgical worship are Bible-centred and Christ-oriented in content, the presence of the Holy Spirit may be invoked with confidence to animate the rest.