

The Liturgical Nature of Ecclesial Ministry

By Glen J. Clary

CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AS LEITOURGIA

The ministry of the church is inherently a theological matter. The church is, as scripture says, “the church of God” and “the church of Christ;” it, therefore, must not be deemed a mere human institution.¹ This precludes sociological and anthropological approaches to defining the nature of the church and its ministry and requires that we begin with what God has done in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The church is not an invention of man but a creation of God. “It does not owe its origin to human initiative, or its continued existence to human faithfulness. *The church is God’s work*. It is a creation of the gospel” (Genderen and Velema, 695).

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1. J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, tr. Gerrit Bilkes and Ed M. van der Maas (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 2008) 694.

2. Cf. Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship Reformed According to Scripture*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) 6.

3. *Leitourgia* (λεϊτουργία) is the term that we have chosen to use for a liturgically oriented theology of ministry. In this article, *leitourgia* is used generically and often synonymously with the words worship, doxology and *latria*. For a similar use of the word *leitourgia*, see Robert K. Martin in his essay, “Christian Ministry as Communion: Contributions of Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue to a Reformed Theology of Ecclesial Ministry,” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35:3–4, Summer-Fall 1998, pp. 405–24. For the etymology and history of *leitourgia*, see Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 2, tr. and ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) 378–84; Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Reformed Liturgy,” in Donald K. McKim, ed., *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992) 271; and Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, tr. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967) 216–17.

4. Cited in Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002) 117.

Likewise, ecclesial ministry is no mere human activity. The ministry of the church, no less than the church itself, is a work of God. Christian ministry is a work of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ to the glory of the Father.² Above all else, ecclesial ministry is *leitourgia*—the worship of God.³ The primary aim of every form of ministry—whether preaching, teaching, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, evangelism, charitable deeds or fellowship—is the glory of God. In other words, worship is a constitutive element of every act of ministry. As Robert Martin observes, “all authentic forms of ministry arise out of the worship of the church and are, therefore, liturgically structured.” Martin adds,

If it is true that worship orients all other ministries as the most fundamental dimension of ecclesial life, then we cannot conceive of the relationship of worship to other ministerial dimensions (*diakonia*, *koinonia*, *didache*, *kerygma*) as if they were categorically equal. Because worship is the foundation of all ministry, worship occupies the fundamental level of ecclesial life in and upon which all ministerial practices become true responses to God. For, in worship ecclesial life is properly oriented to its true theological source by fulfilling its true and ultimate purpose: giving praise and honor to the living Triune God in every aspect of its existence (Martin, 405, 407).

Thus, the doxological nature of ministry is foundational and pervasive. Christian ministry is inherently doxology. Worship is the primary task and chief end of the church. In the words of George Florovsky, “Christianity is a liturgical religion. The Church is first of all a worshipping community. Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second.”⁴ Agreeing with this sentiment, Donald Bloesch writes,

The praise of God has a certain priority over doctrine

and discipline. *Doxa* (worship) is muted unless it is united with dogma and praxis. Dogma and praxis, on the other hand, become lifeless unless they are rooted in *doxa*. Theology is both dogmatic and doxological. Study and prayer belong together (*idem.*).

These statements rightly affirm the priority of worship to other forms of ecclesial ministry. Our concern, however, is not merely with the priority of worship but with its pervasiveness. Our thesis is that *every* biblical form of ecclesial ministry is liturgical in nature. Ecclesial ministry is inherently and pervasively *leitourgia*—the worship of God. Every activity that the church is called to perform serves the glory of God, and this is precisely what constitutes that activity as an act of ministry. We will support this thesis by examining the following three topics: (1) the liturgical nature of the church, (2) the liturgical nature of the office of believer and (3) the liturgical nature of pastoral ministry.

THE LITURGICAL NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The nature of the church is inseparably related to the ministry of the church. What the church *is* should determine what the church *does*. The biblical imperatives regarding the church's ministry are founded on the biblical indicants regarding the church's nature. As Peter says, "you are a spiritual house ... a holy priesthood;" therefore, offer "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Again, "you are a royal priesthood;" therefore, "proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pt 2:5–10).⁵ Thus, to answer the question "what is the nature of ecclesial ministry," we must begin by examining the nature of the church itself. What we hope to demonstrate is that the church is inherently liturgical and, therefore, so is its ministry.

REDEEMED FOR WORSHIP

The story of the Exodus highlights the liturgical nature of the church. The Exodus narrative expressly states that the purpose of Israel's redemption is the worship of God. In the call of Moses, God said, "I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve [worship] God on this mountain" (Ex 3:12). Likewise, God instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve [worship]

me'" (4:22–23). Thus, the chief end of Israel's redemption was the worship of God. The stated purpose of their salvation was to form them into a worshipping assembly. This is affirmed in the song of praise that the Israelites sang in response to their deliverance from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea. Moses and all the people exclaimed,

I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him ... You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode ... You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established (Ex 15:1–17).

Here, the reason for their redemption is stated in terms of bringing them to the holy sanctuary and planting them on Mt. Zion. In other words, God delivered them in order to gather them into his temple for worship. "The purpose of salvation, then, is worship. The Exodus was the means, and gathering in worship was the end."⁶

When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, God commanded them to worship him and prescribed the nature of the worship that they were to offer. The first table of the law requires true worship and forbids false worship. The first commandment calls the church to worship Yahweh and forbids the worship of other gods. The second prescribes the true worship of Yahweh and forbids the false worship of him. The third requires the church to call on the name of the LORD and forbids any profane use of his name. The fourth commands the church to observe the Sabbath by a holy convocation and forbids any profanation of the day that God had consecrated for public worship (cf. Gn 2:1–3; Lv 23:3). Thus, both the stated purpose of the Exodus and the first table of the law emphasize the reason for which God redeemed his people from bondage, namely, to form them into a worshipping assembly.

5. The purpose clauses of the biblical text reveal the reason for which the church was formed. We have rendered them as imperatives to illustrate our point that the imperatives regarding ecclesial ministry are based on the indicants regarding the nature of the church.

6. D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2002) 52.

THE CHURCH AS A SACRED ASSEMBLY

The significance of the assembly of Israel at Mount Sinai for the doctrine of the church can hardly be overstated. It is this redemptive historical event that defines the meaning of the church. Scripture often portrays the church as a sacred assembly. In fact, the word *ecclesia* is “the Greek Old Testament translation of the Hebrew word *qahal*,” meaning assembly or gathering.⁷ In redemptive history, “the great and definitive assembly of Israel was the assembly at Sinai,” marking “the climax of God’s redemption” and constituting “the people as the people of God.”⁸ This event is the prototypical assembly (*qahal*). It serves as the model for the sacred assemblies of Israel throughout the Old Testament and provides the theological meaning of the word Jesus used for the entity he promised to build—the *ecclesia* (cf. Mt 16:18). Edmund Clowney explains,

When Jesus speaks of the ‘church’ ... he uses a term rich with Old Testament meaning. Israel was God’s assembly in the great day when God assembled them before him at Mount Sinai to make his covenant with them. He had brought them on ‘eagles’ wings’ to himself (Ex. 19:4). The exodus redemption culminates at Sinai ‘in the day of the assembly’ (Dt. 4:10, LXX; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16). Israel was an assembly because they gathered before God, appearing in his presence (Dt. 4:10). The later assemblies of Israel recalled that great assembly. God’s trumpet blast that summoned the Sinai assembly echoed again later when the priests blew two silver trumpets to summon Israel to the door of God’s house (Nu. 10:1–10). God assembled his people before him to renew his covenant (e.g. Jos. 24:1, 25). Three times a year Israel assembled for the feasts of the sacred calendar (Lv. 23). The prophets described the future blessing of God’s presence when they announced a great festival assembly that would include the Gentiles (Is. 2:2–4; 56:6–8; Joel 2:15–17; cf. Ps. 87). (Clowney, *Church*, 30).

Thus, “the *ecclesia* of God is that assembly before the Lord of which Sinai was the great pattern” (Clowney, “Toward a Biblical Doctrine,” 34). Furthermore, the congregation at Sinai was a worshipping assembly. Having gathered the Israelites at the foot of the mountain, the LORD called them to worship:

Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and

7. Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995) 30.

8. Edmund P. Clowney, “Toward a Biblical Doctrine of the Church” in *Westminster Theological Journal* 31 no 1 N 1968, pp. 22–81.

Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him (Ex 24:1–2).

In the service of worship that followed, various acts of ministry were performed. Sacrifices were offered to the Lord (v. 5); the holy scriptures were read (v. 7). The people were sprinkled with blood (v. 8), and those who ascended the mountain ate a sacred meal in the presence of God (v. 11)—all of which highlight the liturgical nature of this prototypical assembly.

Referring to the assembly at Mt. Sinai, the author of Hebrews compares and contrasts the new covenant *ecclesia* and the old covenant *qahal*.

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched, and a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them ... But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly [ἐκκλησία] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks better things than the blood of Abel ... Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace by which we may worship [λατρεύω] God acceptably with reverence and awe ... (Heb 12:18–29).

Clearly, the image of the sacred assembly in the heavenly sanctuary highlights the liturgical nature of the church and its ministry (cf. Clowney, “Toward a Biblical Doctrine,” 34). The *ecclesia* exists for *latria*. Having assembled on God’s holy mountain, the church is called to worship with reverence and awe. The church is a heavenly assembly gathered before the exalted Christ. When the saints assemble for worship on earth, they enter the heavenly sanctuary where Christ serves as our high priest.

Since we have boldness to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ... not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together (Heb 10:19–25).

The tabernacle was designed to be an earthly replica of God’s heavenly sanctuary, a copy and shadow of the true tabernacle built by God (Heb 8:1–5). Christ

is the λειτουργός (minister) of the heavenly sanctuary in which he carries out a λειτουργία (ministry), which is superior to the ministry of the old covenant priests (Heb 8:2, 6). Through Christ, we may boldly draw near to God in worship, for we have been definitively cleansed from sin and defilement once and for all by the blood of Jesus (Heb 10:10). When we gather for worship in the name of Christ, we join the heavenly chorus of perfected saints who worship the triune God without ceasing.

Thus, the local church participates in and is a visible expression of this heavenly assembly. It is the ectype of the heavenly archetype. In worship, we join the heavenly gathering around the risen Christ, and by his Spirit, we are united to him and have communion with him through his public ordinances. Worship is a foretaste of the eschaton. When Moses and the elders of Israel ascended the mountain, it was as if they had entered the very throne room of God. "They saw the God of Israel, and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness ... they beheld God, and ate and drank" (Ex 24:10–11). In their worship at Sinai, they tasted the heavenly gift and experienced the powers of the age to come. If that was true of worship in the old covenant, how much more is it true of worship in the new!

The relationship between the local church and the heavenly assembly is an important key to understanding the nature and purpose of the church. Commenting on this relationship, Peter O'Brien says,

To speak of 'church' as a gathering taking place in heaven where believers are already assembled around Christ is a metaphorical way of saying that they now enjoy fellowship with him. It is a figurative manner of speaking about Christians being personally related to Christ as they are related to one another. However, the dimension of the local congregation is also in view. The New Testament does not discuss the relationship between the local church and this heavenly gathering. Although the link is nowhere specifically spelled out, it seems that local congregations, as well as house-groups that meet in particular homes, are concrete, visible expressions of that new relationship which believers have with the Lord Jesus. Local gatherings, whether in a congregation or a house-church, are earthly manifestations of that heavenly gathering around the risen Christ.⁹

It is the reality of this heavenly assembly and of our union and communion with Christ by his Spirit that gives significance to the earthly gathering of even two

or three in Christ's name (cf. Mt 18:20; Clowney, "Toward a Biblical Doctrine," 34). It is for this reason that even the smallest assembly of saints may be called a church. In the words of Miroslav Volf, "Where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, not only is Christ present among them, but a Christian church is there as well." The church exists wherever Christ is in the midst of his people (Volf, 136).

It is important to note here that the activity of gathering the church is not a mere human activity but a divine activity. As the Heidelberg Catechism states, it is the Son of God who "gathers, defends and preserves" his church (Lord's Day 21). Thus, rather than saying that "Christ is where the church is," it is more accurate to say that "The church is where Christ is" (Genderen and Velema, 688). Furthermore, since Christ gathers his church through the preaching of the gospel, we may also say that wherever the true gospel is preached, Christ is present, gathering his church. This sentiment is expressed in the Didache: "My child, night and day, remember the one who preaches the word of God to you, and honor him as the Lord, for wherever the Lord's nature is preached, there the Lord is" (4:1). By contrast, we may also say that "where the gospel is not present, there is no church either" (idem).

As a sacred assembly gathered around the exalted Christ, the church is an eschatological entity. Eschatology precedes ecclesiology and determines the nature and ministry of the church. There is an organic relationship between the church in the present age and the church in the age to come. Clearly, the ministry of the church in the age to come is a ministry of worship. Virtually, every biblical description of the church in its consummative state depicts the church at worship. Thus, if *leitourgia* is the primary activity of the church in its consummative state, then it should be the primary activity of the church in its present state. The character of the heavenly, eschatological assembly provides the definitive answer to the question of the nature of ecclesial ministry. Above all else, ecclesial ministry is *leitourgia*. To make any other aspect of ecclesial life the central focus or the foundation of ecclesial ministry would be to sever the organic unity between the church militant and the church triumphant, the saints on earth and the saints in heaven. Hence, the biblical image of the church as a sacred assembly underscores the liturgical nature of the church and its ministry, but there is another image

9. Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999) 147. Cf. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).

of the church that does the same thing and that is the focus of our next section.

THE CHURCH AS THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD

When the sacred assembly at Mount Sinai came to an end and the Israelites started their journey toward the Promised Land, God's presence went with them. They were instructed to build the tabernacle as a dwelling place for God, so that he might dwell in their midst. God's presence with his people is what distinguished them from the other nations, as Moses indicated in his prayer:

If your presence will not go with us, do not bring us up from here, for how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth (Ex 33:15–16; cf. 19:6; 1 Pt 2:9–10).

When the tabernacle (or temple) is used as a metaphor for the New Testament church, the emphasis is often on God's abiding presence. "Do you not know" asks Paul, "that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you" (1 Cor 3:16). Elsewhere, Paul says of the church, "In him [Christ], the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph 2:21–22). Again, he writes, "For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'" (2 Cor 6:16). This, no doubt, is part of the redemptive historical significance of the day of Pentecost. When Christ baptized the church with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the church became the temple of the Holy Spirit and, thus, the dwelling place of God. The gift of the Spirit is definitive and permanent. Since that day,

10. Exod. 29:38–39; Luke 1:10; 24:52; Acts 3:1. Even when the Israelites were separated from the temple, they participated in the daily services by facing the temple and stretching out their hands in prayer (see 1 Kings 8:30–53; Daniel 6:10).

11. Lev. 10:11; Deut. 33:10; 2 Chron. 15:3; Ezra 7:6–12; Neh. 8:1–9:3; Jer. 7:1–15; Mal. 2:7; Mark 14:49; Luke 19:47; Acts 5:21, 42. On the teaching ministry of priests and scribes, see Craig Evans et al., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 1086–89; Christine Schams, *Jewish Scribes in the Second Temple Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); David Orton, *The Understanding Scribe* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); George Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) 37–47.

12. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007) 2:53.

the Spirit has inhabited the church. Therefore, as Irenaeus said, "Where the church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and all grace" (Genderen and Velema, 686).

Furthermore, the temple metaphor highlights the liturgical nature of ecclesial ministry. This, no doubt, is due to the role of the temple as a place of worship. God's house was to be a house of prayer for all the nations (1 Kgs 8:30–53; Is 56:7; Mk 11:17). Sacrifices and prayers were offered every morning and evening at the temple, and the people, as well as the priests, participated in the daily hours of prayers.¹⁰ Likewise, the ministry of the Word was a regular feature of temple worship. The prophets and scribes had an ongoing ministry of preaching and teaching in the temple courts.¹¹ Finally, the annual, liturgical festivals of Israel were celebrated at the temple (Exod. 23:14–17; 34:18–23; Deut. 16:1–16). Hence, the ministry that was carried out in God's dwelling place was a ministry of *leitourgia*. Indeed, the ministry of the temple was exclusively liturgical. Thus, when the New Testament refers to the church as the temple of God, it not only emphasizes the truth that God dwells in our midst; it also emphasizes the liturgical nature and purpose of the church. The church is a house of worship. "The primary purpose of the church's existence is the glorification of God."¹² In the words of Peter,

You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people ... (1 Pet. 2:5–10).

The church is a spiritual house, a dwelling place for God; it exists to proclaim the excellencies of God, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. When the church remains true to her calling, every form of ministry that she engages in has a liturgical nature—"spiritual sacrifice"—and a doxological aim—"to proclaim the excellencies of God." Worship is the aim of all ministry and the fount from which all ministry flows (cf. Martin, 410).

LITURGICAL NATURE OF THE OFFICE OF BELIEVER

Having examined the nature of the church, we will now examine the nature of the office of those who belong to the church, namely, the office of believer. As we have

noted, the nature of the church is inherently and pervasively liturgical. In like manner, the office of believer is an office of worship. Every member of the church holds, in virtue of his membership, the office of believer, and therefore, he is called to a ministry of praise and prayer. In baptism, we are all consecrated to the priestly service of *leitourgia*. There is no ontological distinction between clergy and laity, for the priesthood is held in common by all believers.

Looking once again at the prototypical assembly of Israel at Mount Sinai, we discover the significance of the biblical concept of the covenant for the doctrine of the church. It was in the service of worship at the holy mountain that the people of Israel became the people of God. By means of a covenant-making ceremony, God became their God, and they became his people (Exod. 24:1–11). After writing down all the words of the Lord, Moses read the book of the covenant in the hearing of the people (vv. 4, 7).¹³ Then, the Israelites responded to the Word by making a solemn vow; “All that the LORD has spoken, we will do, and we will be obedient” (v. 7). The covenant between God and Israel was then sealed with two visible signs: the sprinkling of blood and the sharing of a meal in the presence of God (vv. 8–11). As Moses threw the blood on the people, he exclaimed, “Behold, the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words” (v. 8).¹⁴ Thus, the sacred assembly at the holy mountain was a covenant ceremony, in which those who were assembled became the people of God. As noted above, it is this redemptive historical event that provides the theological meaning of the word *ecclesia*; “the assembly is the covenant people of God gathered before him.”¹⁵ This covenantal perspective emphasizes the divine initiative in the creation of the church.

In the Old Testament Israel is called the people of God, because he chose to be the God of this people. In addition to election, we must also think of the covenant and of God’s redeeming acts. The LORD bore Israel “on eagles’ wings” and made it his “peculiar treasure” (Ex. 19:4–5). He promised this people his salvation and placed them in his service. He says: “I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Lev. 26:12). “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). In the Old Testament the *qahal* is . . . the church of the covenant being united in their worship of the Lord and having been gathered together to worship the Lord” (Genderen and Velema, 696).

Central to this covenant relationship is God’s promise,

“I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Exod. 6:7; Jer. 31:33; Ezra 37:27; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10; Rev. 21:3). This promise is often linked to the concept of God dwelling among his people, as in Leviticus 26:11–12: “I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.” Likewise, we read in the Apocalypse, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev. 21:3). The point is that the church is God’s dwelling place precisely because he has established his covenant with them. We see this connection, for example, in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. The Gentiles, says Paul, are now included in God’s covenant and are, therefore,

...no longer strangers and aliens, but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph. 2:19–22).

To Paul, the church is the people of God “to whom the promises of the Old Testament as well as the warnings addressed to Israel apply” (2 Cor. 6:16–18; 1 Cor. 10:1–11; Genderen and Velema, 682). “Believers from the Gentile world belong to the New Testament people of God (Rom. 3:29; 9:24–26; Gal. 3:28–29; Eph. 2:11–22);” in Christ, there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles (idem.).

It is not an incidental characteristic of the church as the people of God that it is not impeded by borders dictated by nationality, race, or culture. This is essential for the church. Neither is time a dividing factor. The people of God on earth constitute a unity with all those who in the past were his people and in the future will be his people, for the Lord’s work of gathering the church is ongoing. We call this the catholicity of the church (ibid., 697).

13. “The book of the covenant” probably included the Decalogue and its exposition (Ex 20:1–23:33); see Victor Hamilton, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) 438–43.

14. On the significance of “the blood of the covenant” (cf. Zec. 9:11; Matt. 26:28; Heb. 10:29; 12:24; 13:20), see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 60–107.

15. John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) 2.321.

Thus, the church consists of the covenant people of God throughout all ages of redemptive history. The covenants that God made with Abraham (Gen. 12–17), Moses (Exod. 19–24), David (2 Sam. 7) and the new covenant in Christ (Matt. 26:26–28, 1 Cor. 11:23–26, Heb. 10:29–30) are all different administrations of the one covenant of grace. The saints in the New Testament belong to the same community as the saints of the Old Testament, for there is only one church of God.

This covenantal doctrine of the church informs our understanding of the church's worship. Indeed, worship is covenantal communion with God. In worship, God meets with his people and renews and nurtures his covenant bond with them. As the Directory for Public Worship (DPW) states,

Through his public ordinances, the covenant God actively works to engage his people in communion with himself. In public worship, God communes with his people, and they with him, in a manner which expresses the close relationships of the Father and his redeemed children, of the Son and his beloved bride, and of the Holy Spirit and the living temple in which he dwells.¹⁶

This distinguishes the service of worship from an evangelistic meeting, the primary aim of which is to convert the lost. A worship service, however, is for those who already belong to God; it is for those who are already his people. While non-Christians may attend a worship service, they may not truly participate in any act of worship. No one can call on the name of the Lord except by the Holy Spirit; it is the Spirit who cries out in our hearts, "Abba, Father" (1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 4:6). Worship is for those who have been regenerated by the Spirit. At the same time, the unbeliever should be invited to the service to hear the gospel preached, for God makes the preaching of the Word an effectual means of converting the lost. The worship service, however, should not be confused with an evangelistic meeting, which is a common error in the church growth movement. Indeed, this movement often narrowly defines ecclesial ministry as evangelism even to the exclusion of all other forms of

ministry. For example, Steven Furtick, pastor of Elevation Church (Charlotte, NC), recently stated that the sole mission of the church is to seek and to save that which was lost and that Elevation Church does not exist for those who already know Christ.¹⁷ Thus, ecclesial ministry is exclusively evangelism.

For church-growth proponents, the primary purpose of the church is to attract newcomers. Typically, this is done by "target audience profiles" of a specific age range and socio-economic profile. The task of the church is to make itself attractive to a specific demographic segment. In many congregations, this thinking has prompted the introduction of contemporary worship with dance, skits, and messages that avoid "Christianese" or evangelical jargon that bewilders, scares, or bores the unchurched.¹⁸

In such congregations, "worship" is nothing more than a form of entertainment for the purpose of attracting large crowds—all in the name of evangelism and church growth. The sole purpose of worship, however, is the glory of God, and any act of worship that is a means of accomplishing some other end is not worship at all. Serving God's glory cannot be a means of achieving some higher end; it is the highest end.¹⁹

Worship is not an evangelistic meeting. It is a covenant ceremony. In worship, the covenant relationship between God and his people is renewed and nurtured. God and his people commune with each other through his public ordinances: Word, sacraments, prayer and praise. God speaks to his people, and they respond to him. When Moses had finished reading the words of the LORD to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, they responded, "All that *the LORD has spoken* we will do, and we will be obedient" (Exod. 24:7, emphasis added). God spoke to them in the reading of scripture, and they spoke to God in their vow of obedience. There is a dialogue between God and his people in the elements of worship. God calls us to worship; we respond with a hymn praise. God speaks to us through his law and exposes our sins; we respond with a prayer of confession and supplication. God assures us that our sins are forgiven; we respond with a psalm of thanksgiving. God nourishes us through the preaching of the gospel; we respond with prayers of intercession. Every member of the covenant participates in the covenant ceremony. Worship is not the work of a privileged class (whether it be the clergy of the High Church tradition or the praise band of the contemporary worship movement) while the rest of the congregation watches on the sidelines. Rather, worship

16. DPW I.B.1.b. Unless otherwise noted, DPW references the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's Directory for the Public Worship of God.

17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wILPzCyWYk>

18. Hart and Muether, 42. See, for example, Bill Hybels, *Rediscovering Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997); Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995); George Barna, *Marketing the Church* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1990).

19. Cf. John Piper, *Brothers We are Not Professionals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002) 240–41.

is a communal event in which all of God's people actively participate.

Identifying the church as the people of God indicates that all who are included in the covenant are made, through the rite of baptism, members of the church—at least in terms of its visible aspect. Reformed theology makes a distinction between the visible church and the invisible church, not that there are two churches but one church with two aspects.²⁰ A. A. Hodge observes,

There cannot be two churches, one that is visible and another that is invisible. There is but one Church, and that Church is visible or invisible just according to the eye that is looking, just according to the point of view taken ... Now, the distinction I make is, the Church as God sees it, and the Church as man sees it (*idem.*).

The invisible church consists of all the elect. From this perspective, the church is invisible to us, since the elect are known only to God.²¹ The visible church, however, consists of all who profess the true religion, together with their children (WCF 25.2). From this perspective, the church is a mixture of both elect and non-elect people. Robert Shaw explains,

This visible Church comprehends hypocrites and formal professors, as well as those that are effectually called and regenerated. On this account the Church is compared to a *floor*, in which there is not only wheat but also chaff (Matthew 3:12); to a *field*, where tares as well as good seed are sown (Matthew 13:24, 25); to a *net*, which gathers bad fish together with the good (verse 47); to a *great house*, in which are vessels of every kind, some to honour and some to dishonor (2 Timothy 2:20).²²

Defining the church as God's covenant people allows for a clear distinction between the visible and invisible aspects of the church. Some ecclesiologies hardly recognize this distinction. The institutional model of the church, for example, defines the church exclusively "in terms of its visible structures, especially the rights and powers of its officers."²³ In the words of Cardinal Bellarmine, the church is as visible as the kingdom of France or the republic of Venice.²⁴ It is, therefore, virtually identified with its governing body or hierarchy, while the laity are reduced to a condition of passivity, as if they were a mere appendage to the church (Dulles, 37, 43). This tends to create a sharp distinction between the clergy and laity, with the clergy being regarded as a ruling elite, who rule by divine right as do kings and nobility in the secular state (*ibid.*, 162–63).

The doctrine of the church as God's covenant people, however, hardly allows for an "ontological difference between the clergy and laity because all the baptized make up the people of God."²⁵ George Papademetriou explains,

The Church ... is the community of the people of God. It is not divided into "clergy" and "laity." All are members of the Body of Christ. Saint John Chrysostom clearly points out that it is inappropriate to distinguish between "sheep" and "shepherds." Under Christ, "we are all sheep." Both the shepherds and the shepherded are shepherded under the One, Heavenly Shepherd ... The concept of "clergy" as distinct from "laity" ... is nonexistent in the New Testament ... All who are baptized in Christ are "God's people" – the Body of Christ – the Church. All who are committed to the "one faith" are the *pleroma* of the Body of Christ.²⁶

Likewise, if the church is viewed as a sacred assembly and as God's holy temple and if ministry is thus conceived of as *leitourgia*, then the priesthood of all believers becomes a formative motif. This also prevents a sharp distinction between clergy and laity. According to Saint Basil, all the saints are called to be priests and *leitourgoi* (ministers) of God.²⁷ "Laity and clergy are all of the royal priesthood" (Papademetriou, 116). Papademetriou observes,

20. A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976) 174–76.

21. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith (hereafter, WCF) 25:1.

22. Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Christian Heritage, 2008) 315.

23. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, (NY: Doubleday, 1987) 35.

24. Robert Bellarmine was an important leader in the Counter-Reformation during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Bellarmine writes, "Ecclesia enim est coetus hominum ita visibilis, et palpabilis, ut est coetus populi Romani, vel Regnum Galliae, aut Respublica Venetorum." Roberto Francesco Romolo Bellarmino, *De Controversiis Christianae fidei adversus haereticos*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Justinus Fèvre (Paris: Vives, 1870), tome II, "Controversiarum de Conciliis," Liber III, "Qui est de Ecclesia Militante Toto Orbe Terrarum Difusa," cap. II, "de definitione Ecclesiae," 318. Cf. Genderen and Velema, 686; Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 37.

25. John N. Karmiris, *The Status and Ministry of the Laity in the Orthodox Church*, tr. Evie Zachariades-Holmberg (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994) 8. Cf. Thomas Hopko, "What is a Priest? An Orthodox Statement," in *To be a Priest: Prospective on Vocation and Ordination*, ed. Robert E. Terrwilliger and Urban T. Holmes, III, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975) 25.

26. George C. Papademetriou, "Leadership in the Parish: A Theology of Ministry," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 48:1–4 2003, 114–15.

27. Saint Basil, "Homily on the Beatitudes," in *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866) 31.1264.

Each baptized Christian participates in the royal priesthood of Christ. St. John Chrysostom, in addressing the lay people, states: “You are yourselves made priests in Baptism ... priests in that you offer yourselves to God” ... The faithful who are baptized are incorporated into the Body of Christ and share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. All the people of God share in the leadership of the Church for the expansion of the Body of Christ and the greater glory of God (*ibid.*, 117).

Thus, the priesthood is held in common by all the saints and is not to be identified with the clergy alone. This doctrine helps the church to avoid the danger of clericalism without diminishing the importance of ordained ministry. If all participate in the priesthood, then the role of the minister is not to worship before or on behalf of the people but, rather, to lead all the saints in worship. Both he who leads and those who are led offer a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. The clergy-laity distinction has too often reduced the laity to the role of mere spectators of liturgical rites, especially in communities characterized by ceremonialism or sacerdotalism.

The priesthood, however, belongs to all who are baptized. The sacrament of baptism is a rite of cleansing and consecration. Baptism is a sign that we have been cleansed from all sin and defilement by the blood of Christ (Acts 2:38; 22:16). It is a sign that our ritual uncleanness has been removed and that we are now fit to enter God’s holy presence (Heb. 10:19–22). In Ezekiel, it is the sign of the new covenant appended to the promise of purification.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ez 36:25–27).

The Old Testament rites of purification and consecration

28. This is not to confuse worship in the “broad” sense with worship in the “narrow” sense. Not every act that a believer performs is an act of worship *per se*, though every one of his actions should serve the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Our focus in this article is on ecclesial ministry and not on the personal life of individual members of the church. In other words, we are concerned with the ministry of the church as the church and with the communal ministry of the saints as part of that ecclesial ministry. Cf. Terry L. Johnson, *Reformed Worship* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2000) 5–6.

were types of Christian baptism (cf. Ps. 51:1–7; Jn 3:23–26; Heb. 10:19–22). The significance of baptism is that we are both cleansed from defilement and consecrated to a priestly ministry. As the sprinkling of the blood at Mount Sinai separated Israel from the world, marking them as God’s holy people, so too the sprinkling with water identifies us as the people of the new covenant. It identifies us as the disciples of Christ (Matt. 28:19–20). Baptism in the name of the triune God is a seal of the new covenant signifying that he is our God, and we are his people. Every member of the covenant is consecrated to the priestly service of praise and prayer. Each one fills the office of believer and is set apart to worship and serve the living and true God. This is the primary calling of every believer.

When the ministry of all the saints is understood as *leitourgia*, no one is a mere spectator, but all are worshipers and enjoy communion with God by his Spirit and with one another as members of the mystical Body of Christ. Moreover, every form of ministry—and not only the liturgy in the narrow sense of the word—has a liturgical nature and doxological aim. Thus, any believer performing an act of ministry is offering a spiritual sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ. Whether he is giving thanks to God’s name or is performing an act of kindness or generosity, he is offering up a spiritual sacrifice that is well pleasing to God through Christ. As the author of Hebrews states, “Through him, therefore, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. And do not neglect doing good and fellowship [*koinonia*], for *with such sacrifices*, God is pleased” (Heb. 13:15–16, emphasis added).²⁸

THE LITURGICAL NATURE OF PASTORAL MINISTRY

Having examined the priestly ministry of the saints, we turn our attention now to the work of the pastor. What we hope to demonstrate is that the ministry of the pastor is a ministry of *leitourgia*. Worship is a constitutive element of every act of pastoral ministry. The minister’s calling is to lead the congregation in worship—not only to conduct public worship on the Lord’s Day but to remind the church that it is a house of worship and to call the church to this service. The role of the pastor is to keep the faithful focused on this calling and to exhort them to fulfil this ministry.

The necessity of pastoral ministry has been challenged in recent years by the so-called mystical communion ecclesiology, which overemphasizes the invisible aspect of the church (see Dulles, 39–54). According to

Emil Brunner, the church is not an institution but a brotherhood (*Bruderschaft*), a pure communion of persons (*Personengemeinschaft*; Dulles, 48). This model does not focus on the visible structure of the church and its governing body (as does the institutional model) but on “the mystical and invisible communion that binds together all those who are enlivened by the grace of Christ” (*ibid.*, 51). The Body of Christ is “not essentially visible, since it includes angels and separated souls. Still less is it societal, since it includes all men who are animated by the Spirit of God” (*idem.*).

Rather than prioritizing *leitourgia*, the mystical communion model defines ministry primarily as *koinonia*—fellowship or communion. It is not *koinonia*, however, but *leitourgia* that is the constitutive element of all forms of ministry. This is true even when *koinonia* is defined as communion with God. Communion with God serves a doxological aim and purpose. God created us for communion with him *for his own glory* (cf. Eph. 1:3–14). Thus, *leitourgia* is the more foundational element. At the same time, however, the worship of the church takes place in community. Worship is never a solo affair.²⁹ No saint worships alone, for worship takes place in the heavenly sanctuary with innumerable angels in festal gathering and with the saints who have joined the *ecclesia triumphans*. The *communio sanctorum* precludes the possibility of *leitourgia* apart from *koinonia*.

Furthermore, the concept of ministry as *koinonia* with its emphasis on the immediate relationship of all believers to God by his Spirit may undermine the importance of the preaching and teaching of scripture as well as the importance of the sacraments. The ministry of Word and sacraments is a ministry of *leitourgia*. The liturgical nature of the sacraments is scarcely disputed, but the liturgical nature of preaching is hardly recognized in many ecclesial traditions. The Reformers, however, viewed preaching as an act of worship, just as much as the celebration of the sacraments and as the service of prayer.³⁰ Furthermore, preaching is an act of worship—not on the part of the minister alone—but on the part of all the saints who hear the Word preached. Hughes Oliphant Old explains,

[It] is not only the preaching of the Word, but the receiving of the preached Word, which is worship. The whole congregation worships God by receiving his Word with humility and obedience. The ministry of the Word is not a solo sport, like a game of solitaire or playing tennis against the garage door. Preaching both honors God and builds up the Church. It is, as prayer, and in fact as

all worship, the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ to the glory of the Father (*idem.*).

Thus, preaching is *leitourgia*; it serves the glory of God. The preacher of the gospel is a λειτουργός (minister) carrying out a priestly service before God.³¹ This is how Paul describes his ministry when he says that God gave him the grace

to be a minister [λειτουργός] of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God [ἱεουργοῦντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ], so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:15–16).

Paul preaches the gospel to the Gentiles, so that they might be sanctified by the Spirit and presented to God as a sacrifice. In this sense, preaching the gospel is a priestly service.³² Hughes Oliphant Old explains,

The preaching and the hearing of the Word of God is in the last analysis worship, worship in its most profound sense. Preaching is not an auxiliary activity to worship, nor is it some kind of preparation for worship which one hopes will follow . . . The proclaiming of the word of God, simply in itself, is high service to God. The solemn reading and preaching of scripture in the midst of the congregation is a cultic act . . . in continuity with the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Even more, it fulfills these ancient cultic acts.³³

Stressing the immediate relationship of every believer to God—as in the mystical communion model—does not necessarily undercut the necessity of the public ministry of the Word. Reformed theology recognizes the direct access that every believer has to the Father; as Paul says, through Christ “we have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18). However, Reformed theology

29. Note that even when a believer is praying alone, Christ instructs him to pray in the plural, “Our Father” (Mt 6:6–9).

30. See Hughes Oliphant Old, “Preaching as Worship in the Pulpit of John Calvin,” in *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary*, ed. David Hall (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Co., 2010) 95–117.

31. Cf. Didache 15:1, “appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord . . . for to you, they themselves also minister [*leitourgeo*] the ministry [*leitourgia*] of the prophets and teachers.”

32. “The offering of the Gentiles” could be subjective or objective. The NIV takes the latter view and translates the phrase, “so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

33. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998) 189.

also emphasizes the vital role of the means of grace as instruments through which communion with God is produced.³⁴ The preaching of the gospel is not merely an invitation to fellowship with Christ; it is a vehicle by which Christ is communicated to us or, to put it another way, “the effective means by which communion with Christ is brought about.”³⁵ In the words of Calvin, God has “ordained his Word as the instrument by which Jesus Christ, with all his graces, is dispensed to us.”³⁶ One cannot enjoy communion with God without faith in Christ, and that faith comes through the ministry of preaching (cf. Rom. 10:17).

Thus, the Word and the sacraments, as appendages to the Word, are divinely appointed instruments through which union and communion with God are engendered and nourished. If *koinonia* is of the essence of the church, then so are these means through which that *koinonia* is produced.³⁷ Thus, Word and sacraments belong to the very definition of the church. The Reformed tradition agrees with this; the church, says Luther, is “the gathering of all believers, in which the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered in accord with the gospel.”³⁸ Likewise, Calvin defines the visible church as

the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ, who by baptism are initiated into the faith; by partaking of the Lord’s Supper profess unity in true doctrine and charity, agree in holding the word of the Lord, and observe the ministry which Christ has appointed for the preaching of it.³⁹

34. See Glen J. Clary, “John Calvin: Servant of the Word,” *Ordained Servant* 18 (2009).

35. B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: the Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 76.

36. John Calvin, “Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” in *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 2.166.

37. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* (Intervarsity Press, 2002) 39.

38. *Ibid.*, 40. Cf. Augsburg Confession, Article 7.

39. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845) 4.1.7. On Calvin’s ecclesiology, see B. C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

40. Hughes Oliphant Old, *Themes and Variations for a Christian Doxology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992) 111–2. On the covenant ceremony in Exodus 24, see Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2004) 497–511; Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 21–4; and Tse-Gun Song, *Sinai Covenant and Moab Covenant: An Exegetical Study of the Covenants in Exodus 19:1–24:11 and Deuteronomy 4:45–28:69* (Cheltenham and Gloucester: College of Higher Education, 1992) 109–87.

This definition is in keeping with our doctrine of the church as God’s covenant people because the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments are inherently covenantal activities.

This may be demonstrated by the covenant-making ceremony that took place in the prototypical assembly at Mount Sinai, which highlights the covenantal nature of the ministry of Word and sacraments. The reading of scripture was a covenantal activity because it was a declaration of the covenant promises; Moses read the book of the covenant in the hearing of the people (Exod. 24:7). The two ceremonies that were appended to the declaration of the covenant (the sprinkling of blood and the sharing of a meal in the presence of God) were for the purpose of sealing the covenant. As Moses sprinkled the blood on the people, he said, “Behold, the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words” (v. 8). This signified “the covenantal union that brought God and his people together in a common life.”⁴⁰ Finally, the covenant was sealed with a sacred meal; Moses led the elders of Israel up on the mountain, and “they beheld God, and ate and drank” (v. 11). “The meaning of this is clear: in the sharing of the meal one enters into table fellowship with God . . . this is fellowship or, even better, communion at its most intimate” (Old, *Themes and Variations*, 111–2). In like manner, the Lord’s Supper is a covenant meal by which the members of the new covenant enjoy communion with God and with one another. Thus, in the ceremony by which the people of Israel became God’s people, the ministry of Word and sacraments played a central role. Likewise, in the new covenant, the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments are essential to the creation of the church. The promises of the covenant are proclaimed in the gospel and then sealed to those who receive the sacraments, thus, forming the visible church.

This covenantal understanding of Word and sacraments underscores the inseparable relationship between them. The sacraments do not have an independent status but are appended to the Word for the purpose of confirming it (see Clary, 87). Apart from the Word, the sacraments have no meaning and convey no benefit. They are signs and seals of the covenant promises declared in the gospel. The Word is primary; the sacraments are added to it. This priority of the Word, however, does not mean that the sacraments are peripheral or nonessential. Christ has ordained both and has joined them together, not to be separated. Such a separation is an error common to both the sacramental ecclesiology of Vatican II and the kerygmatic ecclesiology of

many free church communities. Kerygmatic ecclesiology rightly affirms that preaching the gospel is the primary task of the church and that the sacraments are secondary (Dulles, 76, 83). A minister is not a sacerdotal mediator magically opening sacramental valves of grace (as in the sacramental model), but, above all else, he is a herald of the gospel. His primary calling is the public reading and preaching of scripture (cf. 1 Tim. 4:13–16). Thus, a minister is, first of all, a minister of the Word. He must give himself entirely to the reading and exposition of the scriptures, which are able to thoroughly equip him for every good work (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17). To fulfill his ministry, he must “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:1–5).

To this ministry of preaching is added the ministry of the sacraments. Having set forth the promises of the new covenant in the proclamation of the gospel, the minister then leads the congregation in the celebration of the sacraments in order to seal the covenant between God and his people. The ministry of the sacraments is often a deficient ministry in word-centered communities. In Karl Barth’s theology of ministry, for example, the sacraments are listed as a subcategory of the ministry of fellowship, which itself is the last in a list of twelve forms of ministry.⁴¹ Any taxonomy of ministry that separates the sacraments from the Word and gives them a status that is independent of the Word will inevitably lead to a wrong view of the sacraments. It could lead to a superstitious view of the sacraments in which they function as magical rites that contain and convey saving grace that is unique to the sacraments. Or it could lead to a low view of the sacraments in which they only have value insofar as they support some other ecclesial ministry. In Barth’s taxonomy, for example, the sacraments only seem to have value insofar as they stimulate fellowship. If, however, we understand the preaching of the gospel as a proclamation of the covenant and if the sacraments are covenantal rites appended to the gospel as signs and seals of that covenant, then the sacraments cannot be severed from the Word. A covenantal understanding of church and ministry should help to maintain the priority of the Word as well as the vitality of the sacraments.

To the ministry of Word and sacraments, we must also add the ministry of prayer. As Paul indicates in his instructions to Timothy, it is the minister’s responsibility to lead the congregation in prayer.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all people,

for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:1–4).

This text alludes to the universal mission of the church, to make disciples of all nations by means of the gospel. The minister is called to lead the church in carrying out this mission. The spread of the gospel to the nations is *leitourgia* just as much as the Sunday liturgy of Word, sacraments and prayer. The sacramental model of the church often misses this point. The very act of leading others to Christ is itself an act of worship and not merely a prelude to worship. The preaching of the gospel is itself an invitation to Christ’s Table. This is a common motif in the parables of Jesus. The gospel is an invitation to “the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind” to come to the banquet of Christ; “go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:12–24). The minister carries out a liturgical function when he is preaching the gospel—whether addressing the church or the world. To the lost, he says, “repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). To the saints, he says, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker” (Ps. 95:6). The role of the minister is to lead God’s people in worship, not only to conduct public worship on the Lord’s Day but to continually remind the saints of their chief end (to glorify God and enjoy him forever) and to call them to this ministry.

All ministry can be evaluated by essentially liturgical criteria: How well does the act of ministry enable people to be with God? ... Almost all of what a pastor does, even the seemingly little things, especially the little things, can be opportunities to orient us toward God. Visiting the sick can be much more than empathetic sharing (after all, anybody can do that, even people who don’t believe in God) if seen as an occasion for orienting someone to God. Pastors would do well to examine their schedules and ruthlessly delete any activity unable to be an opportunity to help us do that which we do in worship. The need of the church for leaders who can help us focus on our unique vocation as the church is simply too important to allow it to be crowded out by secular busyness ... In worship, in preaching, in serving the Lord’s Supper, in baptizing, the pastor receives the

41. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1962) 865–901.

model whereby all other pastoral acts are to be judged, the pattern into which all other ministerial duties are to be fit, namely, orienting God's people to God. When that happens, the pastor may expect to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."⁴²

Thus, the minister's role is to remind the church of what the church is; it is the church of God and the church of Christ. What God has done in Christ defines the nature of the church and its ministry. Christ himself, the true Minister and Executor of all ministry, defines the ministry of the church (cf. Barth, 831). The minister's task is to call the church to be the church, to call God's people to worship and serve their God.

RECOVERING GENUINE ECCLESIAL MINISTRY

The modern church is "divided between competing notions of the purpose of the church" (Hart and Muether, 39). These notions arise from various ideas regarding the nature of the church and of its ministry. Ecclesiology and ministry are entwined and inseparable. Our doctrine of the church founds our doctrine of ministry. Hence, if we have a deficient or defective ecclesiology, then our understanding of ecclesial ministry will be impaired. To recover a truly biblical ecclesial ministry, we must first recapture the biblical doctrine of the church as the covenant people of God. This doctrine rules out many of the unbiblical notions of ecclesial ministry that are common today.

In the first place, as we noted above, a covenantal understanding of worship could have averted the error of the church growth movement of transforming the worship service into an evangelistic meeting. A worship service is a meeting between God and his covenant people to renew and nurture the bond between them. Secondly, a covenantal understanding of the sacraments could have forestalled the rise of ceremonialism. If the sacraments are covenant signs and seals, then they can have no role in worship that is independent of the preached Word. Furthermore, the covenantal nature of the sacraments is hardly recognized by modern evangelicals. They are not regarded as confirmatory signs appended to the Word but are seen merely as devotional tools that mark special occasions. This is why many evangelical churches only

have Communion on Easter or Christmas. It is a special occasion, a spiritual hallmark moment. The purpose of the sacrament is merely to add an extra measure of solemnity to the special occasion in order to heighten one's sense of the sacred. For many evangelicals, the sacraments are only important because they add just the right touch of sentimentality to what would otherwise be a jaded service.

The point here is that without a mature and biblically accurate doctrine of the church, we are bound to end up with an erroneous conception of ecclesial ministry. Too often, the church has squandered its time and energy by attempting to be something it was never intended to be or to achieve something it was never expected to achieve. The Social Gospel movement of the early twentieth century, for example, redefined ecclesial ministry in terms of social justice. The aim of ministry was merely to make the world a better place to live. However, the church is no mere tool for social transformation or moral renewal. It is a house of worship, the dwelling place of God, the heavenly assembly gathered before the exalted Christ. It is an eschatological entity that worships God without ceasing, and this eschatological orientation calls us to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." It urges us to set our "minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:1–2).

In more recent years, the social transformation approach to ministry has experienced something of a renaissance in the Reformed church, particularly, in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). The vision statement of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York is just one example.

As a church of Jesus Christ, Redeemer exists to help build a great city for all people through a movement of the gospel that brings personal conversion, community formation, social justice, and cultural renewal to New York City and, through it, the world.⁴³

Is the mission of the church to help build a great city on earth? Is the aim of ecclesial ministry community formation, social justice and cultural renewal? Clearly, Redeemer has lost sight of the eschaton. Remove the words "gospel" and "personal conversion," and this mission statement could have been adopted by virtually any philanthropic organization. Serving God's glory has been exchanged for serving one's fellow man. Humanitarianism has supplanted *leitourgia* (which is entirely

42. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony – A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something is Wrong* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989) 138–39.

43. http://www.redeemer.com/learn/about_us

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the work was so well received that the Puritan view coalesced around Bownd's presentation of the proper understanding and observance of the Christian Sabbath or Lord's Day. This view was later encapsulated and codified in the Westminster Standards (Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 21, ¶VII, VII; Larger Catechism, 115–121; Shorter Catechism, 57–62; Directory for the Public Worship of God, "Of the Sanctification of the Lord's Day").

However, Bownd's teaching brought him into conflict with a neighbor minister, Thomas Rogers, which resulted in what historians note as the first controversy over Sabbatarianism in English literature. There has been some controversy about this controversy, and a newly noticed manuscript letter, which Coldwell transcribes, provides some additional understanding. Historians have wondered why Rogers, a careerist conformist looking to gain preferment in pursuing Bownd, waited until 1599 to publicly preach against his Sabbath doctrine. This manuscript makes clear Rogers did not wait and had been hounding Bownd for answers to his charges of error for a number of years, which finally caused the Puritan to complain to their bishop. The result was this scolding letter from Rogers dated April 29, 1598, which shores up the sparse information known about the controversy and provides new insights into the two men's conflict and Bownd's 1606 enlarged edition of his book.

"Anti-Sabbatarian Scold" reviews the development of the Puritan nonconformist movement under Elizabeth I and gives biographical details on the lives and published works of Bownd and Rogers, the background to the latter's disputes and contentious nature, and his attempt and apparent success in having Bownd's work suppressed by civil and ecclesiastical authorities. What is clear is that the first Sabbatarian controversy in English literature was not reflective of some general anti-Sabbatarian reaction, but was instead a single opportunistic pursuit of Nicholas Bownd's work by Thomas Rogers. What also becomes clear in a first time study of the transcription compared with a collation of the two editions of Bownd's book is that the additions to his 1606 text were made in large part in answer to Rogers' charges both in his 1599 sermon and in his scolding letter of 1598.

The discovery and transcription of this letter is a boon to the study of the development of English Sabbatarianism, particularly to the study of Rogers' contention with Bownd, about which questions have been raised by his contemporaries and others down to the present. The letter is presented in transcription with notes keying to passages in Bownd's text (a critical text of both editions).

In addition to this detailed article, Coldwell, who is to publish a critical edition of *True Doctrine of the Sabbath* (D.V.), provides more background and information on the Bownd's work in this issue's *Antiquary* and *In Translatione*.

One other article is "By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them: A Timely Admonition from an Ancient Narrative." Drawing on Machen's classic, *What is Faith?*, Joseph Rolison delves into Genesis 9:18–29 and the account of Noah's post-deluvian sin and the reaction of his sons. Rolison carefully deals with the matters of preaching the gospel to our covenant children and the need for a robust doctrine of progressive sanctification. He also addresses the nature of covenantal blessing and curses—both temporal and eternal—from this most important text. Rolison's exegetical work, reference to the Westminster Confession, and Machen's classic will certainly send every reader back to the Scriptures, the Confession, and to Machen.

While the offerings in book reviews are somewhat fewer than in years past, there are some very important books reviewed here. N.T. Wright is always a good sparring partner, however little confessional folks may agree with him. The Puritan theology by Beeke and Jones is a unique contribution to historical theology. A Baptist theologian writing about the sacraments as means of grace is a notable event. John Frame is a well-known writer in Reformed circles, and readers will want to know how a confessionally Reformed reviewer sees Frame's work. A new work on American Presbyterianism will always be of interest to readers of this journal, and Sinclair Ferguson always has something of value to say. Unfortunately, not all the books this editor wanted to see reviewed could find a reviewer. However, the majority of the important books we wanted to cover are represented, with a few extra. The views in review section (*Sic et Non*) finally brings to a close the discussion on some distinctives of Westminster Seminary California. We hope and pray that these articles will help bring light (and lower the temperature!).

Finally, Todd Ruddell, who has been providing entries for *Psallo* since our first issue, presents a rendering of Psalm 57:1–11 for this tenth issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

THE EDITORS ■

The Liturgical Nature of Ecclesial Ministry. Continued from Page 112.

omitted from Redeemer's mission statement) as the cardinal characteristic of ecclesial ministry.

If we fail to maintain the foundational and pervasive role of *leitourgia*, then we will necessarily end up deviating from the true calling of the church. If *diakonia* becomes the defining mark of ecclesial ministry, then we end up with humanitarianism. This is the error of the Social Gospel movement. If *koinonia* is the predominant element, then mysticism is the result, as we saw earlier in the mystical communion model of the church. If evangelism becomes the central focus of ministry, then we end up with Finneyism. This is the error of the church growth movement. Making evangelism the primary mission

of the church is not the answer to the social transformation approach to ecclesial ministry, though some have made this argument. For example, PCA Pastor Charles Dunahoo writes,

The marks of the true church are not seen in the starting of hospitals, or running shelters for the homeless, or picketing or lobbying for social justice. While those may be things that Christians should do and support, that does not equate with defining the mission of the church. Proclamation, witness, and disciple making best define the church's mission. Those must have priority and if some of the other things suggested above are included in the church's life, referring to the institutional church, they must be justified as supporting its primary mission of disciple-making ... The challenge for church leadership ... is to keep the main thing the church's main thing, and what is that? Making disciples, preaching Christ and him crucified, equipping the saints for their work in ministry both in and out of the church.⁴⁴

Again, *leitourgia* is strangely missing from these remarks as it is in Redeemer's mission statement. Surely, no church in the PCA has eliminated *leitourgia* from its understanding of ministry, yet there are some who centralize or absolutize some other form of ministry (such as mercy ministry or evangelism), and this will ultimately reorient them away from their primary calling.

By exploring the liturgical nature of the church, the liturgical nature of the office of believer and the liturgical nature of pastoral ministry, we have demonstrated that all ecclesial ministry is *leitourgia*. Worship is the foundation of all ministry and the fount from which all ministry flows. We have further demonstrated the inseparable relationship between ecclesiology and ministry. What the church *is* determines what the church *does*. Ecclesiology and ministry are mutually formative. Hence, the ministry of the church must have the same nature and orientation as the church itself. A liturgically oriented theology of ministry is entirely consistent with Reformed ecclesiology. It is a ministry that is in keeping with the true nature of the church as a covenantal and eschatological entity. For a church to be truly Reformed, it needs a theology of ministry that is explicitly and undeniably consistent with Reformed ecclesiology. It must have a ministry that is inherently and pervasively *leitourgia*, for the chief end of the church and of every act of ministry is to glorify God.■

44. <http://www.pcacdm.org/what-is-the-mission-of-the-church-making-sense-of-social-justice-shalom-and-the-great-commission/>

Reviews & Responses. Continued from Page 224.

different episodes (for instance, the revolutionary war) when Presbyterians were following the culture rather than leading. And that may be the besetting sin of mainline Presbyterianism—namely, haunted by the fear of engaging in sectarian or intolerant modes of Christian expression, they suppressed the ideal of faithfulness for the strategy of having a place at American culture's table. Longfield suggests that this strategy was ultimately a failure. However, he also backs away from calling it such. For that reason, his book on Presbyterians and American culture will console mainline Presbyterians about the good old days of cultural prominence and remind confessional Presbyterians of worldliness' dangers.■

Psallo. Continued from Page 225.

to make use of those resources, bending them all in service of David's destruction. David is keenly aware, as he told Jonathan his confidant, that "...truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." (1 Sam. 20:3) He has been hotly pursued by Saul, and certainly this was not his expectation when Samuel poured the anointing oil upon him, by the Word of the Lord, anointing him to be the next king, in the room of Saul. He has dwelt in forests, caves, in the land of the enemies of Israel, and away from the public worship of God, which as the 10th generation from Pharez was a special grief to him (Deut. 23:2; Ruth 4:18–22), which is seen in many of David's Psalms (e.g. Pss. 26:8, 27:4, 63:1–3, 68:24, to reverence but a few). But in the midst of all of this David remains fixed upon God and His promises, steadfast and unmoved. He declares that he will take refuge in God until these afflictions are over. Note that he has an unshakeable hope—that wonderful word "until"! There is an end to affliction, and there is a refuge during affliction. The refuge is established so that we might be able to bear up under the affliction, and the end of the affliction is declared so that we might continue in hope, fixed and steadfast upon the promises and Covenant of God Himself, and in Christ, in whom all the promises of God are yea, and amen (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:20). This is no mental sleight-of-hand, no pretense, and no eastern-mystical paradox that good is really bad, and bad is really good, etc. This is a very human difficulty, and a very human response, from one who has a heart of faith, and looks to Christ for salvation.

As such, it is an example to all sufferers in the Lord. Note David's confidence: God shall send forth his mercy and truth (vv 3; 10). "Mercy and Truth" is a shorthand Old Testament phrase denoting the saints' understanding of the Gospel itself. The mercy is that covenant fidelity, faithfulness of God to all His promises in Christ Jesus. The truth spoken of is the truth of His Word, the proclamations of what God will do for His people in forgiveness, mercy, favor, grace, provision,