

Those Who Lead Worship

By Terry L. Johnson

Nearly everything I know about worship I learned from Hughes O. Old.¹ I wouldn't want the great doctor to be blamed for any of my historical gaffes, unsupported assumptions, or unwarranted conclusions. Still, insofar as I know anything in the realm of worship, I owe it to Dr. Old: his writings, his lectures, and his reading lists. He was perhaps the world's leading expert in the field of liturgies, probably the greatest scholar of Protestant worship, certainly the foremost expert in history and practice of Reformed worship. He knew more than anyone else, and arguably, more than all of the rest of us combined.

Dr. Old likened the task of the student of Reformed worship to going up into the attic to retrieve treasures that have been neglected, even forgotten, for years. A little dusting, some refurbishing, a touch of paint or varnish, and these treasures are ready to serve the household of faith once more. What have Reformed Protestants had to say about those who lead services of worship? The older standards have been hidden in the attic for too long. It is past time for us to reemphasize the old qualities necessary for leadership in worship. However, doing so will not be easy.

BACKGROUND

We labor today in the era of the "gimmick-driven church." In addition to the eye-popping stunts we discussed in *Worshipping with Calvin*,² mailers cross the desks of ministers on a nearly weekly basis promising slightly more mundane silver bullets which will slay the dragons of non-growth and invigorate a season of super-growth. We can recall the yellow Sunday School bus ministry, "Here's Life America," hand bell choirs, Evangelism Explosion, small group discipleship, telemarketing, the seeker-friendly church, the church for the unchurched, the Toronto Blessing, the Laughing Revival, and the Brownsville Revival, each presented as a

panacea that would cure what ailed the church. Since the advent of the twenty-first century we've seen Promise Keepers, Wild at Heart, WWJD, The Prayer of Jabez, Forty Days of Purpose, the Passion of Christ, the Florida Outpouring, Xtreme Ministries ("where Feet, Fist and Faith Collide"), the "Emergent Church," "Deep Church," "Secret Church," and so on.³ "The One Month to Live Challenge," endorsed by Warren & Hybels, promises to "help your church experience exponential growth" and "double your small groups and Sunday School."⁴ *Synergize 2! Pastors Conference* appeals to those "who wish to double their impact and influence."⁵ Marketing concerns have led to churches branding themselves with increasingly unusual names: Elevation, Envision, Restoration, enCompass, Journey, The River, Tapestry, Celebration, Oasis, Crossings, Crosspointe, Sandals, Harvest, Impact, The Refinery, Mosaic, Relate Church, and Liquid Church, among many others.

There is an almost compulsive desire among our contemporaries to reinvent the church and reconstruct its ministry. The "change" mantra gets politicians elected and books published. "Work on their horror of the Same Old Thing," Screwtape tells his demon-in-training.⁶

THE AUTHOR: Terry L. Johnson is the senior minister of the Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. He is the author and editor of many books including the *Trinity Psalter*, *Leading in Worship*, *The Case for Traditional Protestantism*, and *Reformed Worship*.

1. Some of the following material appears in *Serving with Calvin* (Evangelical Press, 2015).

2. See Terry L. Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin: Recovering the Historic Ministry & Worship of Reformed Protestantism* (Darlington, England: EP Books, 2014), Chapter 9.

3. Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging & Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009); "Secret Church," *Christianity Today*, 54, No. 5 (May 2010), 40.

4. "One Month to Live Challenge" brochure.

5. Synergize 2! Pastors Conference letter of 12/28/09.

6. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982), 116, 118.

Contrast regularly is made between the “traditional” church (usually left undefined: traditional Southern Baptist and tradition Presbyterian are very different creatures; which do they mean?) and the new and improved alternative for new and exceptional times.⁷ Tomorrow another cure-all will be unveiled, another “can’t miss” program that will tip the scales. “Like a gambler looking for a winning ticket, [congregations] search for a program that will ‘turn their church around,’” Harry Reeder, pastor of the Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, observes.⁸

The seeker-churches have become great promoters of new forms of ministry. Their assumption: the old forms don’t work. For Randy Pope, the gifted founding pastor of the Perimeter Presbyterian Church and Perimeter ministries in Atlanta, small groups are the “primary method of making mature and equipped followers of Christ.”⁹ His TEAMS (T_ruth, E_quipping, Accountability, M_ission, S_upplication) are the primary place where nurture, education, and equipping take place, among other things. Rick Warren has a similar small group program at his Saddleback Church. Pope provides a survey of church history which might lead one to conclude that Perimeter Church’s structure of the church gathered (on Sundays) and scattered (in small groups on weekdays) is a breakthrough which restores the ministry pattern of the New Testament church for the first time since the days of the Apostles. Perimeter Church is “suggesting a radical change in the way church is done.”¹⁰ “Radical change” is assumed to be necessary.

In addition to reaching the lost, Pope says that seeker-churches are eager “to answer the question of how to make mature followers of Christ.”¹¹ The church catholic has had some experience in answering this question, but not to the satisfaction of the seeker churches. The

old ways will not work for them. Ministry must be re-invented. Why? Because for them, all previous forms of ministry are inadequate.

However, we would suggest one reason for this perception of the inadequacy of all that precedes them is that so little of consequence occurs in a typical “contemporary” Sunday service. The ordinary means of grace have been watered down to the point of impotence. Necessity has forced them to become experts at mid-week ministry alternatives. Pope’s subtitle is, “An Alternative Approach to Ministry.” Warren’s bookcover comments extol him for “a new paradigm for ministry.” Apparently 2000 years of church history and nearly 500 years of Protestant ministry provide no viable models for the twenty-first century. All previous ministries were in one way or another incomplete, or inadequate, or lacking. The dynamic church of the Patristic era, the missional church of the Middle Ages, the transformational church of the Reformation era, the faithful churches of Protestant orthodoxy (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and the evangelizing churches of the Awakenings (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) provide no pattern for ministry for contemporary churches. The means of making “mature followers of Christ” during each of these historic periods primarily was through the use of the ordinary means of grace in the public assembly of the whole church on the Lord’s Day for morning and evening prayer. The Scripture reading, preaching, psalm-singing, praying, and even the eucharist (yes, even the eucharist, as Jungmann pointed out of the Patristic Church¹² and Schmidt did of the Scottish Presbyterian churches¹³) of the Patristic, Reformation, Puritan and evangelical churches transformed their worlds.

We are not opposed to alternative forms of ministry. Sometimes innovation may be necessary and helpful. However, it is all too typical of Baby Boomers’ imagined self-importance to think that the historic means employed by the church in all its eras of health and growth are no longer workable and new structures must be created. Boomers, Gen-Xers, Millennials and the like are so unique, so distinctive from every previous generation! The post-modern world is so different! The old ways will no longer work. Yet here’s what will: and out rolls the latest, the best, the greatest program, technique, organization, ministry yet devised.

Have the new paradigms worked? We and others are persuaded they have not. “My first Sunday back from some time away, I sat in the worship service and wept,” writes Walt Kallestad, pastor of Phoenix-area megachurch, Community Church of Joy. It was not the emotional impact of the service that moved him. Quite the

7. T. David Gordon complains that “my students routinely assume that I am defending Bill Gaither or Fanny Crosby when I express reluctance about praise choruses” (*Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2010], 42).

8. Harry Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 9.

9. Randy Pope, *The Prevailing Church: An Alternative Approach to Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2005), 113.

10. Pope, 123.

11. Pope, 123.

12. Joseph A.S.J. Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy: To the Time of Gregory the Great*, Liturgical Studies Volume VI (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959); see chapter 1 of *Worshipping with Calvin*.

13. Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); see chapter 6 of *Worshipping with Calvin*.

contrary. Rather, the service “struck me as such a production, so performance driven.” In a word, “it was shallow ... I was mortified at what we’d become.”¹⁴ Kallestad had built a market-driven, seeker-friendly church based on the principles espoused by Bill Hybels and Rick Warren (whom he names) and others. Attendance skyrocketed, he says, but “we became a program-driven church attracting consumers looking for the latest and greatest religious presentations.”¹⁵ “Worship was a show,” he admits, “and we’d produced consumers.”¹⁶ “Why weren’t we producing empowered disciples?” he asks. “What were we missing?”¹⁷ He later answers his own question. “We were entertaining people as a substitute for leading them into the presence of God.”¹⁸

“We made a mistake,” Bill Hybels admits in light of the disappointing levels of commitment indicated by members of the Willow Creek Church, the Vatican City of seeker-sensitive services. Dale Buss, writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, labels this “a megadevelopment in the world of megachurches.” Hybels and his staff have found that significant numbers of their flock “consider themselves ‘stalled’ or ‘dissatisfied’ with the role of the church in their spiritual growth and huge portions of these groups were considering leaving Willow Creek because of it.”¹⁹ David Wells speaks of “the failure of the market-driven, seeker-sensitive churches to produce serious Christian life.” “*Forget rethinking the church,*” he insists.²⁰

The extent to which the problems encountered by the market-driven churches leads to a reevaluation of their revamping of the primary services of “seeker-sensitive” churches remains to be seen.²¹ Some advocates of contemporary worship see the need for worship that is God-centered, gospel-driven, Spirit-dependent, word-filled. However, the forms they presently employ are not conducive of these goals. For example, Bob Kauflin admits to not reading extended texts of Scripture in worship.²² Snippets of verses may be read in the call to worship, or read between stanzas of a song, or projected on a screen, or printed on a bulletin cover.²³ But systematic Bible reading is not envisioned, nor is expository preaching, nor is metrical psalm singing, nor is classic hymnody, nor is a full-diet of prayer.

OUR VISION

We are skeptical of a seeker-driven, market-driven philosophy, not because of a party spirit or overall orneriness, but because we have a different vision of the church, its worship, and its ministry. We may outline that vision as follows.

First, the Sunday services of the church should be,

and indeed are, de facto, the primary place where Christian ministry occurs. “The place of public assembling to worship should be highly prized,” says the Puritan Nathanael Vincent (1638–1697), “for the sake of the work that is performed here.” Here the Triune God is “publicly owned and acknowledged.” The public assembly, he says, citing Psalm 42:2 and 73:17–19, “is, as it were, the suburbs of the city of God in heaven.”²⁴ We concede that it seems otherwise; that the most visible and exciting ministry is occurring “out there” among the para-church groups and in the specialized discipleship groups of the church. We maintain that this perception is wrong, and for two reasons.

1. The church assembles primarily on Sunday. The numbers participating in ministry once one moves outside the public assemblies of the Lord’s Day drop off dramatically. Only a fraction of the Sunday crowd reappears for ministry of any sort at any other time. Sunday is when the overwhelming number of our people are present, and the Sunday services are the only opportunity we have to minister the gospel to the great majority of them.

2. Only at the Lord’s Day assembly of the church are the means of grace fully operative. Nowhere else may the sacraments be administered. It is unlikely that the ministry of preaching of those ordained, commissioned, and “sent” into ministry will occur at alternative gatherings (Rom 10:15). It is doubtful that a full diet of prayer will be experienced, or that there will be a commitment to biblical psalmody and hymnody, or extended Scripture reading outside of the public assembly of the

14. Walt Kallestad, “‘Showtime!’ No More,” in *Leadership Journal*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/fall/13.39.html>, posted November 26, 2008, 1 [accessed March 29, 2017].

15. Kallestad, 2.

16. Kallestad, 2–3.

17. Kallestad, 4–5.

18. Kallestad, 7.

19. Dale Buss, “Less Seeking, More Thrills,” *The Wall Street Journal* (June 27, 2008): W11.

20. David Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 216.

21. This admission in Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson’s *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Association, 2007) has been much commented upon. See Chuck Colson, “Rethinking Church” in Prison Fellowship’s Breakpoint Commentaries.

22. See Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), chapters 8–11, 15. He urges keeping the word central “by treasuring, singing, reading, showing and praying God’s word.”

23. Kauflin, 94–95.

24. Nathanael Vincent, *Attending Upon God Without Distraction* (1695; Grand Rapids, MI: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2010), 20.

church. The means of grace are operative for the whole people of God in the Sunday services in ways they are not at any other time in the life of God's people. These services should be the primary focus of the church's ministering energies.

Second, the public assembly of the church should be characterized by God-centered reverence. We are opposed to turning worship services into entertaining evangelistic meetings. For 2000 years the Lord's Day has been the day of Christian worship. Voices are being raised within the contemporary Christian worship movement against "performancism."²⁵ We are convinced that the character of the Sunday assembly as a service of worship must be maintained. The Sunday services are intended for the worship of God and the edification of the saints. This is why the word of God is read, preached, sung, prayed, and administered (Acts 2:42). These are acts of worship that edify God's people. They also carry the content of the evangel, as we've seen. However, evangelism is a byproduct of worship, not a central or governing principle.

Third, the ministry of the church should target the community as a whole. We are opposed to targeting a selected demographic within a community and tailoring the services of the church to appeal to the cultural preferences of that demographic or sub-culture. A demographically specific strategy implicitly excludes those outside the boundaries of the targeted group, an exclusion that cannot be biblically justified (Gal. 3:28).

Fourth, the congregation that develops as a result of the Christian ministry should be a cross-section of the whole community. We are opposed to the intentional building of homogenous churches, which, it must be admitted, are the inevitable result of a seeker-driven philosophy. We insist that churches were never meant to attract one kind of person or be composed of one kind of person (Gal. 3:28).

Fifth, the regular ministry of the church should focus on "ordinary" and "primary" means of grace. We are opposed to a philosophy that places so much emphasis on external, relatively superficial, and often extrabiblical methodology. Churches are built, we maintain, not by pop format, media, drama, praise bands, "practical" messages, and assorted entertainment-driven gimmicks,

25. James Brown of Falls Church, Anglican, "Are We Headed For a Crash: Reflections on the Current State of Evangelical Worship" (posted May 19, 2014). <https://worthilymagnify.com/2014/05/19/crash/> [accessed March 29, 2017].

26. Vincent, *Attending Upon God*, 21.

27. Anthony D. Baker, Learning to Read the Gospel Again," *Christianity Today*, 55, No. 12 (December 2011).

28. Vincent, *Attending Upon God*, 21.

but by the word, prayer, and sacraments. "Men's inventions in religion, though often followed with great eagerness, are found unprofitable and vain to them who have been zealous for them," warns Nathaniel Vincent. His perspective represents that of the older Reformed tradition: "But the ordinance which the Lord Himself has appointed, He is ready to own and make effectual to them who attend upon Him in the use of them."²⁶ Stanly Hauerwas, a man whom *Time* once called "America's Best Theologian," responded to a question about his view of new church movements, especially emergent church trends, saying, "The future of the church is not found in things like this, the future is doing the same thing Sunday after Sunday."²⁷ If by "the same thing" is meant the regular ministry of the word, prayer, and sacraments, we couldn't agree more.

Sixth, the regular ministry of the church should be simple, one which depends on the Holy Spirit, not human ingenuity. We are opposed to a philosophy which diminishes the Lordship of Christ and sovereignty of God in the building of the church. "I will build My church," Jesus says (Matt. 16:18). "God causes the growth," says the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 3:6-8).

While we do not denigrate the numerical success that the seeker churches have seen, and the lost souls that they have won, we do wonder what might have been if extremely talented and energetic ministers like Warren, Hybels, and Pope, and perceptive observers like Barna, had poured their lives into historic patterns of Protestant ministry. We suspect they would have dynamic ministries every bit as large and influential as they have today and perhaps even more so, given the greater attention to the ministry of the word read, preached, sung, prayed, and administered that this would have involved.

Reformed worship and ministry has the potential to restore sanity and fruitfulness to the church life of evangelical Christianity. It is true that God can work whenever and where He wishes, even with or without means. It is true that God has used the above named programs and movements to bring the lost to Christ and sanctify saints. We wouldn't deny this for a moment. It is also true that we are wise to invest our energies in the expectation that He will work *in those places where He has promised and through those means that He has ordained*. Reformed ministry and worship places confidence in the word, sacraments, and prayer as promised means of grace. They are the "golden pipes," says Nathanael Vincent from Zechariah 4:12, "that convey the grace of the Spirit into the hearts of men."²⁸ This confidence results in a congregational life that is simplified. The frenetic multiplication of programs gives

way to the ordinary services of the church in a ministry that takes Reformed ministry and worship seriously.

Moreover, Reformed ministry and worship has the potential to unite the whole people of God in a common worship. It centers on God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It honors the word and Spirit. It respects catholicity and tradition. It claims its own ecclesiastical culture around which the diversity of worldly cultures are encouraged to gather. It makes the communion of the saints, past, present, and future, possible.

Let us now return to our theme. Lost in the fixation upon matters of form (contemporary, user-friendly, culturally familiar) and image (up-to-date, hip, cool, casual, mellow) is the character and qualifications of those who lead worship services. Does it matter who stands up front? Does character matter? Does knowledge matter? Does piety matter? If they do, how are they being assessed? What steps are being taken to ensure that Christ is being well represented by those who in His name stand before the people of God?

Proper biblical worship is weighty. It is substantial and spiritual. It cannot properly be led casually, thoughtlessly, spontaneously, or mechanically. Effective leadership cannot be reduced to technique, or structure, or even content. If today's church is to "worship in spirit and truth" and "with reverence and awe," then the theological, ethical, devotional, and practical qualifications of those who lead the church's public services must be given priority attention (John 4:24; Heb. 12:28). We recommend the following, that spiritual services might have spiritual men to lead them.

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

First, those who lead the church in its worship should be ordained. Why ordained? Because ordination is a process whereby, over time, the theological and moral qualifications of church leaders are assessed and finally approved. "Not a novice," the Apostle Paul insists (KJV). "Not a new convert" (NASV), lest he fall prey to the temptations of the immature and uninstructed (1 Tim. 3:6). Ministry is to be entrusted to those known to be "faithful men" (2 Tim. 2:2).

"Anabaptist thinking has invaded *our* churches," lamented the great Dutch theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper, a hundred years ago. "In almost all Reformed and Presbyterian churches," he said, an understanding of office and ordination "is disappearing."²⁹ We confess to being uncomfortable with the growing practice of turning over the leadership of worship to "worship teams" made up of (often very young) unordained musicians and others. A few years ago the

General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America featured a worship service in which a praise team comprised of teenagers and twenty-somethings led the service. The irony of an assembly hall full of highly qualified and thoroughly vetted ministers and elders being led by unordained, underqualified, youthful novices was rich, and disorienting. What are ministers if they are not worship leaders? D. A. Carson has urged that we "abolish forever the notion of a 'worship leader,'" because the title implies that preaching, reading, and applying God's word are not worship.³⁰ Can our discomfort with unordained leadership be justified as anything other than unwarranted clericalism? We think so. Limiting worship leadership to ordained ministers can be justified in precisely the same way in which regular preaching and the administration of the sacraments in traditional Protestant churches are restricted to those who had been examined both in theology and character and approved for licensure or ordination by the responsible authorities.

Focus for a moment on the administration of the sacraments. Who may administer the sacraments in historic Protestant churches? The consistent practice both among the continental Reformed and the Anglo-American Reformed tradition has been to limit their administration to the ordained clergy in the context of the gathered church under the authority of the church session (board of elders). *Not even lay elders may administer the sacraments.* The reason is simple: the warnings against abuse of the Lord's Table are so strong in Scripture (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:23–34), and the errors surrounding the sacraments that have plagued the church throughout its history are so serious that this safeguard is necessary. Wisdom requires that only those theologically educated, examined, and approved at the highest level should administer them. Even though lay elders are examined theologically and for their character and spiritual maturity, they may not administer the sacraments because they have not been educated or examined at a level sufficient to ensure their competence to do so. They lack the benefit of three years of seminary education. They have not served in a ministerial internship. They have not submitted to oral and written examinations in Bible, theology, church government, and Christian experience. They have not been prepared sufficiently to explain the subtleties of the church's sacramental theology (e.g., the meaning and mode of baptism, the meaning of

29. Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship*, ed. Harry Boonstra (1911; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 120.

30. Tony Payne, interview with D. A. Carson, *The Briefing*, Issue #232 (Matthias Media, 2000); cited in Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 53.

Jesus' eucharistic words, the nature of Christ's presence in the eucharist, etc.) or to fence the table. Sacramentalism lurks at one extreme, memorialism at another, and desecration of the table through unworthy partaking is an ever present danger. Hence the church historically has placed this limit on their administration. Only the ordained clergy (that is, those observed, educated, tested, and approved) may do so.

What about preaching? The practice in the Reformed churches has been (whatever others have thought) to apply the stringent requirements of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 by limiting regular preaching to those who are theologically trained and examined, whose character has been observed and known to be of superior quality, and finally who have been approved by the assembly of ministers and elders. Through the safeguard of licensure and ordination the church has protected itself from the theological errors and ethical lapses of the inexperienced and immature (1 Tim. 3:6). The high privilege of regular public proclamation ought to be entrusted

only to those who have been observed, educated, examined, and approved at the highest levels.

If it is wise to limit the administration of the sacraments and preaching to ordained clergy, then who ought to do the public praying? Likewise, who ought to be selecting the hymns? It is only because we no longer are as careful as we once were to pray and sing biblical language and sound theology that we have forgotten of the need of rigorous theological qualifications for those who lead in worship through prayer and song as well as those who preach. So much error was spread in the early church through the hymns of heretics that the liturgy was purged of virtually all non-scriptural language around the fifth century. Hymns were not readmitted to the regular worship of the church until the twelfth century.³¹ We mention this, we repeat again, not to advocate exclusive psalm singing (though we do venerate the tradition), but to illustrate the point: leadership in worship ought to be left in the hands of those with thorough theological training and carefully assessed character. In other words, in the hands of the ordained clergy.

What is true of preaching and the sacraments ought also be recognized of the other elements of worship and of the service as a whole.³² The extended and difficult ordination process is an important though imperfect mechanism for weeding out candidates for worship leadership who would otherwise prove theologically and morally unstable. The church is wise to retain it. Worship is ministry, and ministers ought to lead it. Even if one rejects our argument for ordained public leadership, the implications of the qualifications for ministry found in Acts 6:1–5, 1 Timothy 3, and Titus 1 would require at least that all who take a public role in the public services of the church, from gathering the collection to ushering to leading the singing to reading Scripture, be subject to some form of careful examination in Christian experience, character, knowledge, and ethics. No one should be given a public role in the ministry of the church who is not known to be qualified doctrinally and morally to do so. The more public the responsibilities, the more thorough should be the examination. The danger of dishonor being brought to the name of Christ through the moral lapses of the immature or the theological errors of the unstructured must be minimized. Careful examination of public servants will not eliminate the occasions of public reproach for the church, but it may reduce the frequency of those occasions.

Consistent with this, *ordained ministers ought to plan Reformed worship services*. Scottish theologian W. G. Blaikie, writing in the 1890s of tendencies that, if anything, have become more pronounced today, explained

31. See Mary Berry, "Hymns," in (ed.), *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy & Worship*, ed. J. G. Davies (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 262; *The Study of Liturgy*, ed. Cheslyn Jones et. al (Oxford UP, 1992), 509. See *Worshipping with Calvin*, Chapter 5 "Sing the Word."

32. The Reformed tradition has consistently insisted upon ministerial leadership in worship. The current position of the Christian Reformed Church is "the minister of the Word serving as pastor of a congregation shall preach the Word, administer the sacraments, conduct public worship services ..." (Church Order, Article 12). The Orthodox Presbyterian Church's *Form of Government* states, "It is [the minister's] task to conduct the public worship of God," and identifies specifically prayer, reading and preaching the Scriptures, the administration of the sacraments, and the blessing (chapter VIII). The current "Directory for Worship" of the Presbyterian Church in America requires that the public reading of Scripture, public prayer, preaching and the administration of the sacraments all be conducted by the minister. This was true of the Westminster Assembly's original Directory as well, and reflects the historic Reformed understanding. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1985) requires that neither sacrament "be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word, lawfully ordained" (XXVII.4). Dr. Robert Godfrey reminds us that this conviction "is implied in the Belgic confession." He writes, "Article 30 reads, 'we believe that this true church ought to be governed according to the spiritual order that our Lord has taught us in his Word. There should be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and administer the Sacraments.' It is also implicit in Article 16 of the Dort Church Order (1619), 'The office of the Minister is to continue in prayer and in the Ministry of the Word, to dispense the Sacraments, to watch over his fellow-brethren, Elders and Deacons, as well as the Congregation ...' There is no provision in either of these documents for anyone other than the minister to lead in worship" [W. Robert Godfrey, "Leading in Worship" (unpublished paper, n.d.); see also Charles G. Dennison, "Worship and Office," in *Order in the Offices*, ed. Mark R. Brown (Classic Presbyterian Government Resources: Duncansville, PA 1993), 157–79].

that “the devotional part of the service is often conducted with little care and preparation.” He asks, “is it conscientious, is it respectful to God, is it fair to the congregation, for the man who is to be their mouth-piece at the throne of grace, to rush into so solemn and momentous a service with hardly a thought of it beforehand?”³³ Leading requires planning. Ministers ought to plan the order of service. They ought to decide which items to include and which to exclude. They ought to determine the Scripture readings and sermon texts. They ought to determine the placement of the six prayers (invocation, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, illumination, benediction), and how to distribute them (singularly or in combination). They ought to explain the transitions between the items in the service. They ought to decide which psalms and hymns to sing.

Some ministers make the mistake of turning over this responsibility to the music director or musician.³⁴ We question why this should be thought necessary or desirable. Is the musician better trained theologically to do so? Does he have greater knowledge of the content of the sermon and what would better tie in with it? Is he more aware of the needs of the congregation? We trust that the answer to these questions would be no. The only reasonable justification might be the obvious one, that the musician knows the hymnal better than the minister. This points out a larger problem. We have noted that many of the ministers serving Reformed churches today are men who were converted in high school or college through campus ministries.³⁵ Their formative spiritual experiences occurred in the context of parachurch organizations. Many of these men went directly from college to seminary, and from there into the churches. Consequently they bring with them a vast ignorance of the church, its life, and its devotional forms.

We can think of a fine minister for whom the above description fits, who had never attended Sunday night services; and when he became a solo pastor, had no interest in having a Sunday night service. He had no background and consequently no understanding of the ways in which Sunday night services function in the life of a congregation. The same is true for the order of service and hymnody. Many are pastoring churches who have never participated in a traditional Protestant service. Their experience of public devotional gatherings is limited to youth functions and college fellowships. Many are ignorant of the rich treasury of hymns that is the heritage of the church. I console myself in thinking that worship services sometimes look as they do because those leading them just don’t know any better.

Consequently, we urge Reformed ministers to be

students of the hymnal and psalter. W.G.T. Shedd (1820–1894), one of the outstanding American Reformed theologians of the nineteenth century whose *Dogmatic Theology* remains in print today, in his *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (1867), devoted considerable space to hymn-selection. He urged the minister to study the hymnody of the church, and specifically the hymnbook of the church to which he ministers so that he will “obtain that taste and feeling for sacred lyric poetry which will guide him, as by a sure instinct, to the choice of the best and most appropriate hymns.”³⁶ When I first began to lead worship services I asked a pianist in the church to play for me every single selection in the hymnal. I rated the words and tunes of the hymns on a scale of one to ten, recorded my ratings, and then created a list of the several hundred earning a score seven or greater. On a similar list I continue to record the dates when hymns are used, color-coding the year for easy reference. The result has been not only a vast expansion of my knowledge of available and useful hymns, but a much broader exposure to outstanding hymnody for the congregation I serve. Both the new and the old *Trinity Hymnal* are goldmines of devotional material. Study them. Covenant Seminary’s Robert G. Rayburn (1915–1990), in his very useful study, *O Come, Let Us Worship*, estimates that the average congregation uses about thirty or thirty-five songs or hymns in a year.³⁷ Our congregation uses over 200 different hymns and psalms each year. This wider exposure enriches the worship of the church as well as the personal devotional life of the members of the congregation.

The minister himself also ought to control the worship service. He ought to control the service for all the reasons stated above. Given all the variables in the typical worship service and the constraints of time, he should be in a position to make instant adjustments, cutting and deleting, that will keep the service on schedule. How often do sermons get crowded out because the various “worship leaders” are pursuing their own agendas without an eye to the whole? The minister must keep the reins on the entire service.

33. William G. Blaikie, *For the Work of the Ministry: A Manual of Homiletical and Pastoral Theology* (1896; Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), 166–167.

34. “The choice of hymns will, of course, be absolutely in your own hands,” R. W. Dale, *Nine Lectures on Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), 277.

35. See *Worshipping with Calvin*, Chapter 1.

36. W.G.T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (1867; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 270.

37. Robert Rayburn, *O Come Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 226.

Pastoral concern drives our insistence on ordained leadership in the church's public services. All of the foregoing decisions about content and order of the church's public services directly impact the spiritual welfare of the church's members. The reading, preaching, praying, singing, and administering is all for the edification of the congregation. All of the safeguards implicit in ordination protect the congregation from the likelihood of doctrinal or moral scandal, or even the loss incurred, the opportunities missed, the time squandered because of unprepared and incompetent leadership. Noel Due, in concluding his "Genesis to Revelation" survey of the biblical theology of worship, makes this same point. He argues that "the leading of worship in the public assembly must be seen as a facet of the pastoral care of the congregation . . . For this reason," he continues, "the whole idea of a 'worship leader' who is a non-elder of the congregation (or at least directly accountable to the eldership) must be held up to question."³⁸ Pastors must lead in order to ensure that Christ's sheep are being fed the proper content and that the elements are being administered in their proper proportions.

PIETY

Second, we must insist upon exemplary *piety* on the part of those who lead worship services. Years ago my brother-in-law, an elder in the Presbyterian Church of America, served on his church's search committee for an assistant minister. After interviewing half a dozen candidates, he made an interesting comment. He noted that all of the candidates were young, sharp, and impressive. He said they all displayed keen wit, winsome personalities, and pastoral competence. However, he went on to observe, none of them seemed to be particularly devout. He didn't perceive much spiritual passion. Or disciplined devotion. Or ethical precision. Or a burden for souls. Or love for Christ. Or a zeal for the glory of God. They were well-educated, well-dressed,

38. Noel Due, *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 234, 235.

39. Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656, repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 61.

40. The vows for ordination for the Presbyterian Church in America include this: "Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, whether personal or relational, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before the flock of which God shall make you overseer?" (*The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*, Office of the Stated Clerk, Sixth Edition, 2005, Sec. 21–5, my emphasis).

41. Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 43–48; 252–253.

thoroughly trained for ministry, and skilled managers and program organizers. They were groomed for success. All the necessary ingredients were present. Yet they lacked spiritual *gravitas*, the seriousness and focus, the intensity and carefulness that comes from knowing the God of the Bible.

Deep piety, we would argue, is a necessary concomitant of supernatural religion. Spiritual worship requires spiritual leadership. The single most important factor in the leading of effective worship services is the spiritual maturity, the intensity, the zeal, and the depth of piety of those leading these services. Put negatively, one cannot effectively lead in prayer publicly if one is not devoted to prayer in the closet ("be much in secret prayer," urges Baxter³⁹); one cannot effectively lead in the study of God's word through its reading and preaching in public if one is not disciplined in the study of God word in private; one cannot effectively lead the people of God into communion with Christ at the Table unless one pursues communion with Him as a habit of life. Exemplary piety is essential.⁴⁰

What David Wells has called the "managerial revolution," coupled with a market-driven philosophy of church growth, has been tragically misleading at this point. The impression has been made that "success" in ministry is almost entirely a matter of external factors. This may not have been said in so many words. Rather, it has been implied by the emphasis that has been placed on everything but piety in discussions of growth. The keys to success, one might have thought, are to be found in discovering one's market niche, creative advertising, establishing a culture (e.g., casual), a format (late-night talk show), a style of music (pop), a type of building (non-churchy), and kind of message (topical sermons addressing felt needs). Success for the church (it has been implied) is to be found in programs and services, promotion and marketing, top-of-the-line sound and light systems, therapeutic or "practical" messages, managerial skill and professional leadership. The godliness of those leading the church is almost entirely overlooked. This is nowhere more obvious than in the aforementioned prevalence of young people, often teenagers, up front, leading worship services with instruments, music, and not infrequently painful transitional comments, who, unlike the ministers of yesteryear, are untested, untrained, and spiritually unqualified for the task. Attempts are being made to correct the problem of immaturity and carnality in "worship leaders," but the predominance of the young and theologically ignorant makes a solution unlikely.⁴¹ Personality, it would seem, has been allowed to trump piety; format, faithfulness;

style, substance; and technique, character. If John Angell James thought in 1847 that “An Earnest Ministry” was “the want of the times,” one can scarcely imagine his response to the state of the public ministry of the church at the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁴²

Previous generations of commentators are unanimous in their insistence that the single most important factor in worship leadership is the piety of the minister. Typical of the older understanding, Irish born and Princeton educated pastor Thomas Murphy (1823–1900), writing in 1877, says, “It should be laid down as our first principle that eminent piety is *the indispensable qualification* for the minister of the gospel.”⁴³ He places piety before talents, learning, study, “favorable circumstances, or skill in working, or power in sermonizing.” Without what he calls “high tone” or “eminent piety” or “elevated spirituality,” then “nothing else will be of much account” in a given ministry.⁴⁴ “It is not possible for us to overestimate,” he claims, “the importance of the deepest piety in those who are called to (the ministry’s) sacred duties.”⁴⁵ He devotes 53 pages to “The Pastor in the Closet,” and 59 pages to “The Pastor in the Study,” before he ever deals with public ministry. For Murphy, the foundation of public ministry is personal piety. “The public prayer of the pastor should be an echo of the deep earnestness which he has learned in the closet.”⁴⁶ Again, “the one who is mighty in private with God will also be mighty in public.”⁴⁷

Similarly, Ebenezer Porter, one-time President of Andover Seminary (at the time a conservative seminary founded as an alternative to the too-liberal Yale), writing in 1834, claims that “the amount of usefulness in the ministry, depends in no small measure on the character of your public prayers.” This is an extraordinary perspective in itself, given the tragic neglect of public prayer in evangelical churches today. One’s “usefulness,” or what we might call one’s “fruitfulness” or “success,” depends, he says, not on one’s skill as preacher or manager or counselor; not on one’s intelligence, attractiveness, or disposition, but “on the character of (one’s) public prayers.” To this he adds, “if you would pray well in public, you must be a devout man.”⁴⁸ For Porter, the foundation of pastoral success is found in devotion to God, and expressed in public prayer.

The Anglican Calvinist Charles Bridges, also writing in 1849, lists “spiritual character” as his first necessary qualification for Christian ministry; that is, that ministers should be “holy—in a peculiar sense men of God—men consecrated to God by a daily surrender of time and talents to his service. . . .”⁴⁹ Bridges spends eighty pages investigating the “causes of the want of

success in the Christian ministry” that arise from the defects in the personal character of ministers.⁵⁰ Devotion to Christ, for Bridges, is central to fruitfulness in ministry.

J. W. Alexander, son of Archibald, Princeton Seminary professor and pastor, wrote in 1864 that “of all people on earth, ministers most need the constant impressions derived from closet piety.”⁵¹ W.G.T. Shedd, writing in 1867, devotes nineteen pages to the “Religious Character and Habits of the Clergyman,” maintaining that “the foundation of influence in parochial life is the clergyman’s character, and the root of clerical character is piety.”⁵² R.L. Dabney, writing in 1870, says the same of preaching: “the prime qualification of the sacred orator is sincere, eminent piety.”⁵³ Phillips Brooks, in his famous Yale lectures in 1877, identified “personal piety” as “that first of all the necessary qualities,” which provide “the true conditions of a minister’s success.” Without this, he says, the preacher’s work is “weary and unsatisfying and unprofitable work.”⁵⁴ Further, “first among the elements of power which make success I must put the supreme importance of character, of personal uprightness and purity impressing themselves upon the men who witness them.”⁵⁵ C.H. Spurgeon, writing in 1881 in a chapter entitled “The Minister’s Self-Watch,” claims, “Holiness in a minister is at once his chief necessity and his goodliest ornament.”⁵⁶ Moreover, “we

42. John Angell James, *An Earnest Ministry: The Want of the Times* (1847, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993).

43. My emphasis.

44. Thomas Murphy, *Pastoral Theology: The Pastor and the Various Duties of His Office* (1877; Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1996), 38.

45. Murphy, 47.

46. Murphy, 214.

47. Murphy, 215.

48. Ebenezer Porter, *Lectures on Homiletics & Preaching, and on Public Prayer; Together with Sermons and Letters* (New York: Flagg, Gould and Newman, 1834), 299, 301.

49. Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry; With an Inquiry into the Cause of Its Inefficiency; With an Especial Reference to the Ministry of the Establishment* (London: Seeley, 1849), 26.

50. Bridges, 103–183.

51. James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching: Being Contributions to Homiletics* (1864; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), III.

52. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*, 282.

53. Robert L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric or Course of Lectures on Preaching* (1870; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 40.

54. Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching Delivered before the Divinity School of Yale College In January and February, 1887* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1907), 37–39.

55. *Ibid.*, 49.

56. C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: A Selection from Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors’ College, Metropolitan Tabernacle* (London: Passmore and Alabaſter, 1881), I, 14.

must cultivate the highest degree of godliness *because our work imperatively requires it*.⁵⁷ Similar concerns can be seen in the other nineteenth-century pastoral theologians such as Lyman Beecher, William M. Taylor, William S. Plumber, John Brown, and William G. Blaikie.⁵⁸ We cite this great cloud of witnesses with a sense of urgency, hoping that our contemporaries will give piety its due consideration.

Among twentieth-century authors, by way of contrast, “piety” is a virtually unknown term, “godliness” an underappreciated necessity of ministry.⁵⁹ There would seem to be some fear in more recent times that too strong a connection between ministerial piety and fruitfulness in ministry might imply human self-sufficiency and a diminished role for the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet the Apostles, fully convinced of the necessity and priority of God’s power in ministry (e.g., John 15:1–5; Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 2:14–3:6; 12:7–10), show no hesitancy in connecting piety and fruitfulness. The Apostle Paul’s long lists of character qualities for church leaders are well known (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1). He urges Timothy, “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness (*eusebeia*); for . . . godliness is profitable for all things” (1 Tim. 4:7, 8). Further,

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you (1 Tim. 4:16).

57. Spurgeon, I, 12.

58. Henry Ward Beecher, *Yale Lectures on Preaching* (New York: Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, 1893), I, 37ff; William M. Taylor, *The Ministry of the Word* (1876; Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2003) 25–78; William S. Plumer, *Hints & Helps in Pastoral Theology* (1874; Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2003), 36–59; Abraham Booth, “Pastoral Cautions,” John Erskine, “The Qualifications Necessary for Teachers of Christianity,” and David Boistwich, “The Character and Duty of a Christian Preacher,” in *The Christian Pastor’s Manual*, ed. John Brown (1826; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1991), 66–104; cf. James M. Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 56–64; Blaikie, *The Work of the Ministry*, 180, 239–252.

59. Even D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), and John R Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), are disappointing in this respect.

60. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 45.

61. David Haslam, “M’Cheyne Quotations,” <http://www.mcheyne.info/quotes.php> [accessed March 29, 2017].

62. Erroll Hulse, “The Preacher and Piety,” in Samuel T. Logan, Jr., *The Preacher & Preaching Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), 62–90.

63. David Eby, *Power Preaching for Church Growth: The Role of Preaching in Growing Churches* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1996), 80.

Timothy’s character and conduct (“yourself”) are placed alongside of his “teaching” as items of parallel importance requiring careful scrutiny. Both are crucial for fruitful ministry. Character and conduct together in Christian leaders “insure salvation,” says the Apostle Paul. When the Apostle speaks of the ministry he conducts, he refers to “how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers” (1 Thess. 2:10, NASB). Apparently this was worth mentioning. Apparently this was a key ingredient in fruitful gospel ministry. Ministers are to live lives that are devout, upright, and blameless. He tells the Corinthians that “in holiness and godly sincerely, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially towards you” (2 Cor. 1:12). Holy, godly, sincere, wise, gracious conduct is crucial in gospel ministry. Similarly, the Apostle Peter directly relates Christian virtues such as “moral excellence” (*aretē*), “godliness” (*eusebeia*), and “love” (*agapē*) to fruitfulness (2 Peter 1:5–7):

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:8).

Usefulness and fruitfulness in Christian service are directly related by the Apostle Peter to the possession and growth of Christian virtues.

The Apostles Peter and Paul were only saying what Jesus said before them: “apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). He is the True Vine, and we are but branches. We have the responsibility to abide in Him if we are to have life and bear fruit (John 15:1–11). Dependent prayer is vital. “How dare we pray in battle if we have never cried to the Lord while buckling on the harness,” Spurgeon complains.⁶⁰ In the end managerial skill, entrepreneurial initiative, and market-awareness are at best icing on a cake that is baked in the prayer closet. At worst, they are a tragic diversion from the ordinary spiritual means that are the true keys to spiritual power and effectiveness. “The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness,” said the saintly Robert Murray M’Cheyne.⁶¹

Thankfully, some voices are still being raised in support of piety over personality. Erroll Hulse contributed “The Preacher and Piety” to *The Preacher & Preaching*.⁶² David Eby affirms in connection with preaching, “Vigorous personal piety is indispensable. No ardent, active spirituality, no potent preaching.”⁶³ J. I. Packer has reminded us the preacher “must speak as one who . . . knows the reality and power of which he speaks.”

The preacher, Packer maintains, “is called to be a living advertisement for the relevance and power of what he proclaims.”⁶⁴ Perhaps the loudest voice has been that of David Wells, who right through his works has warned of the shifting job descriptions of the clergy, from pastor/preachers to manager/marketers.⁶⁵ The church is not selling a product; it is presenting a Person. Consistency between the character of the One presented and the one presenting is indispensable if our message is to be credible. Alec Motyer states simply, “It is not the most able who are blessed in their ministry, but the most holy.”⁶⁶

We must continue to insist that faithful, effective and fruitful *public* worship is *supernatural* worship. It is *spiritual* worship. It is Holy Spirit inspired and animated. Such worship can never be duplicated by gregarious but superficial leaders, however charming they may be. It cannot be simulated through use of energizing music, stimulating visual media and talented but worldly speakers, though it may be counterfeited. We must also understand and be heard saying that traditional Reformed worship is not a formula that, if implemented by the numbers, its dotted and T’s crossed, guarantees success. Pious, devout, virtuous leadership is indispensable if worship is to be faithful, effective, and fruitful.

Well might we ask with the Apostle Paul, “Who is adequate for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16). We will never be up to the task in our own strength, virtue, or piety. “Our adequacy is from God,” the Apostle Paul answers, and we with him (2 Cor. 3:5). High as the standards are, we must reach them *in Christ*, however imperfectly. There is a difference between not fulfilling the New Testament standards and imperfectly fulfilling them.⁶⁷ We must insist that our leaders fulfill the requirements of piety, though they do so imperfectly. Robert Murray M’Cheyne’s dictum will ever remain true: “A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.”⁶⁸

HUMILITY

Third, those who lead worship must be *humble*. Recall John Chrysostom’s (c.347–407) answer when asked what were the three most important Christian virtues. First, he said, was humility. Second, he insisted, was humility. And third, he maintained, was, yes, humility. Every week a crowd gathers to see the minister lead a service and hear what he has to say. This can be heady stuff and the road to ruin for the weak. An exaggerated assessment of one’s importance comes easily to ministers. An inflated sense of one’s wisdom, and with that, one’s indispensability, are occupational hazards. We confess surprise and dismay at the size of even the obtrusiveness of many clergy egos, a vice to which, we report to

our compounded dismay, even the most traditional of Reformed ministers are not exempt. Vanity clearly is a major motivating factor for some church leaders in their drive for “success,” however it may be defined. Making a name for oneself, so fundamental to worldly ambitions, is not absent from the clergy’s private lists of priorities. The need for recognition, for worldly affirmation, for success, perhaps more than any other factors, contribute to the temptation to compromise the gospel and gospel ministry, to water it down or spruce it up.

For ministers to serve faithfully and fruitfully, a fundamental death to self must take place (2 Cor. 4:12). Jesus demanded self-denial and cross-bearing (Matt. 16:24,25). The apostles crucified the flesh and its lusts (Gal. 5:24). Jesus commended poverty of spirit and meekness as among the highest of virtues (Matt. 5:3,5). The greatest of all, He said, must be the servant of all (Matt. 20:25–28). No one in recent times made more of the need to die to self than did William Still (1911–1997), more than fifty years the pastor of the Gilcomston South Church of Scotland congregation in Aberdeen. “You will have to die,” he told ministerial students over fifty years ago, “not only to your own sin, but to self in many of its most seemingly innocent and legitimate aspects, for only then can the death and resurrection power of Jesus Christ be communicated to men.”⁶⁹ Failure in ministry comes, he says, from “not living in an instant, tensile experience of the death/ resurrection of Christ, dead to all but the mighty purpose of God.”⁷⁰ “To minister fruitfully,” he says, “you must minister as a dead man ... Every time you essay to minister there must be a new death. ‘Deaths off’: ‘I die daily’: said Paul. This is the glorious agony of the man who is used of God amidst the opposition of the world, the church, and certainly the devil, that he is ever a dying man.”⁷¹ Ministers must die

64. Packer, “Why Preach?” in *Preacher & Preaching*, 16, 17.

65. e.g. David Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 72ff.

66. J. Alec Motyer, *Preaching? Simple Teaching on Simply Preaching* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 131.

67. See more on this theme, Chapter IV, “Preach the Whole Gospel.”

68. Cited in *Preacher & Preaching*, 12, 13, 63. The whole citation is as follows: “In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents which God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.” The original source is Andrew A. Bonar, *Robert Murray M’Cheyne: Memoir and Remains* (London: Banner of Truth, 1966), 281.

69. William Still, *Work of the Pastor* (Aberdeen: Didasko Press, 1976), 21.

70. Still, 58.

71. Still, 78,79.

to ambition, die to success, die to ego, die to recognition, die to power and control. “The Word will never come through a living man,” says Still; “he must be dead.”⁷² Faithfulness and eternal fruitfulness are directly related to humbly surrendering our aims and dreams to the greater cause of the glory of Christ.

WISDOM

Fourth, those who lead worship must be *wise*. Wisdom is a much neglected category of Christian discipleship. Yet the Bible gives it a great deal of emphasis, both directly (in the Old Testament “Wisdom Books” of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and various wisdom psalms) and more generally. Wisdom has much to say about how we order our worship.

Wisdom, according to the Bible, is a *correct understanding of the nature of things* (truth, people, places, events, nature).⁷³ “The wise are realists who adjust to the way things are,” says J. I. Packer.⁷⁴ Wisdom is understanding what to do, given the nature of things in creation, providence, and redemption. Wisdom is the correct application of truth to circumstances. It is gained both through Scripture (e.g., Ps. 19; 119) and through careful observation of the world. For example, Jesus expects that His disciples will have discerned the relative virtues of sand and rock as foundational material for buildings, so as to build on the latter and avoid the former. He expects they will have learned enough about the properties of wine and wineskins so as not to waste new wine in old wineskins (Matt. 7:24–27; 9:16–17). They will have learned these things (and so grasp the point of His teaching) not so much by reading Bible verses, but by observation of the nature of the world around them. This is the wisdom of the book of Proverbs. Wisdom there is not so much “by the book,” but by shrewd observation. “I looked out of my window and saw,” he says (Prov. 7:6). The wise are those who “go to the ant” and observe (Prov. 6:6–11). The wise will know how and when to tend their fig trees and flocks and till their land, not because of the commands of God in Scripture, but because they know how the created order works: they know the will of God as observed in the natural order of things (Prov. 27:18, 23; 28:19). Conversely the unwise

or foolish are those who harm themselves and others by foolishly ignoring what nature reveals. “Does not even nature teach you?” the Apostle Paul asks (1 Cor. 11:14). The unwise exchange the natural (what corresponds to human nature as observed) for the unnatural (what is contrary to human nature as observed) (Rom. 1:26). Wisdom, says D. E. Johnson in his comments on Colossians 2:2–3, is “comprehensive insight into the nature of things, the meaning of life, the way to discern appropriate causes of action in various circumstances.”⁷⁵

Ephesians 5:15ff could serve as a case study in wisdom:

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:15–18).

The Apostle Paul urges that believers “walk not as unwise men but as wise.” Then he identifies specific areas in which we are to do so. The first has to do with the *stewardship of time*. We are to be “making the most of (our) time, because the days are evil.” To obey this command we must understand both the priorities the Bible establishes and the nature of the moment. For example, at any given moment should one’s available time be devoted to work, the family, leisure, or the church? To answer that question requires that we carefully discern an array of variables. If I don’t concentrate on my work might I lose my job? Or, has the family been neglected? Or, is this a time properly devoted to leisure? Or, should gospel work receive priority attention at the moment? There are no formulas, no rule books, no works of casuistry that can answer these questions as they are raised at any given moment. Only wisdom can determine the priority.

Next the Apostle Paul counsels *moderation in the alcohol consumption*. “Do not be drunk with wine,” he says. How do I fulfill that command? I must understand the characteristics of both myself and the alcoholic beverage I am consuming. Again, no book can calculate for me ahead of time the relationship between the beverage, my body weight, my immediate food consumption, and the other factors which may determine whether or not I cross the line that separates sobriety from drunkenness.

The Apostle Paul goes on to address husbands and wives (Eph. 5:21ff.). How is a wife to be “subject” to her husband and yet not be a doormat? How is a husband to lead and not be a tyrant? The answer is, good wifery and good husbandry requires that one be a good student of one’s Bible, one’s circumstances, and one’s *spouse*. One

72. Still, 96.

73. See Terry L. Johnson, *The Case for Traditional Protestantism* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), II, 30–46.

74. J. I. Packer, “Theology and Wisdom,” in *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke*, ed. J. I. Packer & Sven K. Soderlund (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 8.

75. S. W. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 84.

must understand both what the Bible teaches about the mutual obligations of husbands and wives *and* the nature of one's spouse *and* the circumstances of any given occasion. "Live with your wives in an understanding way," the Apostle Peter counsels husbands (1 Peter 3:7). For one to be an understanding husband, one must be a keen student of Scripture and of one's wife, as well as the circumstances of the moment.

Where is the line that separates faith from presumption? Wise stewardship from uncharitable tightfistedness? Modesty from immodesty? Love from undisciplined indulgence? Discipline from oppression? Hard work from idolatry of vocation? Leisure from sloth? All of these determinations lie between the lines of Scripture and can only be determined by wisdom. We can understand why the Apostle Paul's major prayers in the New Testament all concentrate on wisdom. The disciples of Christ need wisdom, knowledge, and enlightenment (Eph. 1:17–21). They need knowledge and discernment if they are to "approve the things that are excellent" (Phil. 1:9–11). They need knowledge, wisdom, and understanding if they are to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work" (Col. 1:9–12).

We have extended our digression on wisdom because wisdom is vital if Reformed worship is to be properly implemented. Church leaders must correctly discern the variables. It is important to understand that nearly everything that we do in worship, as in life, must be governed by wisdom. God has given us the basic elements of worship. But then wisdom takes over. We are to preach, but which text and how long? We are to sing, but which song? We are to pray, but about what and at what length? Where is the line that separates the reverent from irreverent? The appropriate from the inappropriate? The suitable from the unsuitable? The Bible expects us to discern what is "proper" or "fitting" or "suitable" (*prepo*—1 Cor. 11:13; Titus 2:1; 1 Tim. 2:10; Eph. 5:3) or "respectable" (ESV) (*kosmio*—1 Tim. 2:9) as well as what is "out of place" (NIV) or "not fitting" (NASV) (*aneken*—Eph. 3:4). It expects us to pursue "whatever is honorable is lovely is excellent, and is worthy of praise" (Phil. 4:8), yet it never defines any of these terms or identifies where the line may be found that separates the proper, suitable and fitting, honorable, etc. from the improper, unsuitable, unfitting, and dishonorable, and so on. The questions of what to sing, what to preach, what text to read, what tone to set, and the time to allot to each element are all determined by wisdom. Wisdom, in almost every case, is found by rightly combining the Bible's teaching with the circumstances in which it is applied.

The breadth of wisdom's reach explains why the regulative principle of worship resolves few of the conflicts in the worship wars. "We preach, read Scripture, sing Scripture, pray, and administer the sacraments in our services," says one advocate of the new worship, "so what's the problem?" Nearly everyone across the Reformed spectrum claims allegiance to the regulative principle. The devil, one might say, is in the details. *Nearly every decision in worship* (beyond disputes over the elements) *is made between the lines of Scripture*, where wisdom must lead us to right conclusions.

Every church has its own history, time, place, affiliations, commitments, and mixture of people. Together these constitute a church culture. Typically church cultures change slowly. It would be foolish, if not arrogant, to ignore the culture of a church when attempting to implement even necessary change. When I first came to Independent Presbyterian Church in 1987, I received wise counsel not to change anything for five years, which counsel I followed, mostly. "You need to think of yourself as turning the Queen Mary," I was told. Move slowly. Expository preaching, longer Bible readings, Scripture-enriched prayers, psalm and hymn singing, more frequent observance of the Lord's Supper, and a more reverential tone are all crucial, but they may need to be introduced gradually, with great care, and with pastoral sensitivity. Don't change everything at once. Teach, educate, and inform. Don't overwhelm the congregation with what, for them, is new. Be wise about their capacity for novelty. Don't kill the patient—or, what is more likely, don't drive him off.

Anyone tempted to see this counsel as compromise may wish to consult again the history of Reformed Protestantism. It is true that Zwingli began to preach *lectio continua* in January of 1519, barely a year after the beginning of Luther's reforms. Yet not until the publishing of *De canone missae* (*On the Canon of the Mass*) in August of 1523 did the mass begin to be reformed. Even then, vestments were retained, the use of the *Kyrie eleison*, *Gloria*, collects, *Sursum corda*, and *Sanctus* continued, as did the use of Latin and the essential structure of the liturgy and its ceremonies. Six years into the reform movement, Reformed Protestants were still conducting their services in Latin! It was only because of pressure from underneath, from the discontented masses, that the "cleansing" of the churches was undertaken in the summer of 1524 as paintings and decorations were whitewashed, and relics, statutes, ornaments, and vestments were removed. Zwingli's critique of the mass, his *Commentary on True & False Religion*, was published in March of 1525, following which the mass was abolished

and the reformed liturgy approved in April 1525. However, note that this was seven and one-half years after the posting of the 95 Theses and nearly six and one-half years since the reform of preaching in Zurich. *Progress was slow and pastorally calculated.*

The same caution was shown in the French-speaking world, as William Farel's *La Maniere et fasson*, "the first manual of evangelical worship in the French language," was not published until 1525.⁷⁶ When the pace of reform was accelerated by Calvin and Farel in 1537, they were banished by the Genevan Town Council in 1538. Let the impatient beware. A similar story of slow change may be told in all the cities of the Reformation. Even Luther, who proposed a German Mass in 1519, and who, as we have noted, in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* in 1520 saw the need "to alter the entire external form of the churches and introduce ... a totally different kind of ceremonies," was slow to act.⁷⁷ Alarmed by an iconoclastic riot in Wittenburg in early 1522, his *Formula Missae* was published in December 1523, bringing some reforms. However, like Zwingli's first effort, Latin was retained. His concern, as he stated in his preface, was for those who were weak in faith and the damage that might be done by "the fickle and fastidious spirits who rush in like unclean swine without faith or reason, and who delight only in novelty and tire of it as quickly, when it has worn off."⁷⁸ Prodded further by the introduction of German language liturgies in Strasbourg, Zurich, and Basal, Luther published his *Deutsche Messe* on October 29, 1525, eight years after the 95 Theses, almost to the day. Even then, his reforms were cautious.

Those with an awareness of what is pastorally wise and politically achievable will realize that the reform of worship takes time, that change comes slowly, that customs become entrenched, and that alteration is difficult and costly. Jesus taught his disciples "as they were able to hear it" (Mark 4:5). Implement historic Reformed worship as the people are able to receive it. Be content for services to evolve naturally, organically, and steadily into the priorities of Reformed ministry.

Methodology is not irrelevant. We have outlined

76. Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 186.

77. Martin Luther, "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Three Treatises*, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 152, 153; See *Worshipping with Calvin*, Chapter 3.

78. Cited in Timothy Quill, "Liturgical Worship," in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: Five Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (B&H Academic, 2009), 29; from "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg, 1523," in Luther's Works, vol. 53: *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. by Ulrich S. Leupold [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965], 19; Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 106, 107.

our priorities of what and how, of content and form, in items 1–6 above. Pragmatic considerations alone, however, are inadequate. Focused emphasis once again must be given to the character of those who lead. If today's Christians are to worship biblically, it is vital that the church have ordained pastoral leadership that is devout, humble, and wise. ■

IN BRIEF: Calvin's Preaching

Let us focus in on Calvin as preacher. Again, he is best understood as part of the team. He certainly did not originate the Protestant approach to preaching, but followed the older Reformers in emphasizing expository preaching. He followed them very closely by studying the text of Scripture in the original languages. Capito and Oecolampadius had pioneered the study of biblical Hebrew and had begun to catch sight of the veins of gold to be mined in the Old Testament. Many of the Reformers had brought out glistening nuggets from their study of the Hebrew Scriptures. Luther had produced a marvelous translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Bucer had done a brilliant commentary on the Psalms in which he both held to a grammatical-historical interpretation of the Hebrew text and maintained the legitimacy of the Christian interpretation of the Psalms. Brenz did a remarkable commentary on Ecclesiastes, one of the most difficult books in the Bible. It was Calvin who most consistently and most profoundly worked the whole vein....

The other Reformers had made tremendous progress in setting the Scriptures in their historical context, but Calvin had a mastery of the culture of classical antiquity which was more extensive than that of his older colleagues. He knew the Greek and Roman classics far better than did Luther, Bucer, Brenz, or even Zwingli. He had mastered Renaissance historical criticism, as well as the literary arts of the new learning. He drank in all that Erasmus had to offer on the grammar and rhetoric of antiquity. In fact, he could even show Erasmus a few tricks. Calvin, and much the same can be said of Bullinger, did not have to discover the value of grammatical-historical exegesis before beginning to master it—the older Reformers had done that for him. Essentially Calvin had the same tools for a rereading of the Bible which the older Reformers had; it was just that Calvin's tools were a bit sharper.

Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 4: The Age of the Reformation*, (Eerdmans, 2002), 92–93. ■