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The Mercersburg Society has been formed to uphold the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, Evangelical, Reformed, Catholic, Apostolic, organic, developmental and connectional. It affirms the ecumenical Creeds as witnesses to its faith and the Eucharist as the liturgical act from which all other acts of worship and service emanate.

The Society pursues contemporary theology in the Church and the world within the context of Mercersburg Theology. In effecting its purpose the Society provides opportunities for fellowship and study for persons interested in Mercersburg Theology, sponsors and annual convocation, engages in the publication of articles and books, stimulates research and correspondence among scholars on topics of theology, liturgy, the Sacraments and ecumenism.
The **New Mercersburg Review** is designed to publish the proceedings of the annual convocation as well as other articles on the subjects pertinent

From the Editor

F. Chris Anderson

The Fall 2008 issue is dedicated to liturgics.

The 2008 Mercersburg Society Convocation at Princeton Seminary was a great success. This issue of the NMR contains two of the three main presentations. The third essay, "The Germ, Genesis and Contemporary Impact of Mercersburg Philosophy," by Linden DeBie will be featured in the Spring 2009 issue. Yet we would be remise not to tell you to look out for Linden's recent book, *Speculative Theology and Common Sense Religion* which has been published on Wipf & Stock.

The two essays that are featured in this issue both deal with liturgics. Michael A. Farley's essay is "The Use of Scripture in the Liturgical Theology of John Nevin: A Review and Critique." Dr. Farley is adjunct assistant professor at St. Louis University, St. Louis MO. His Ph.D. dissertation is titled: *Reforming Reformed Worship: Liturgical catholicity in American Presbyterianism, 1850-2007.*

Christopher Dorn received his Ph.D in religious studies from Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 2006. The history, theology, and practices of worship in the Reformed churches have been the principal areas of his scholarly investigation. He has served as consultant to the Commission on Christian Worship in the Reformed Church in America. He is the author of *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America: Tradition in Transformation* published by Peter Lang.

Michael Farley and Christopher Dorn are two young scholars whose work should encourage us. They make it clear that Mercersburg Theology continues to grow and is presently impacting a new generation of theologians and pastors from many denominations. I would love to have had the opportunity to have them as my seminary professors.

Lyn Reith Barrett's Letter to the Editor shows us that we are touching on issues that are important to the church in the 21st century. The Rev. Mr. Joseph Alden Bassett is the Minister Emeritus, of The First Church in Chestnut Hill, MA. He gives us a communion meditation and I give a very positive review of *Christ, Creeds and Life: Conversations about the Center of Our Faith.*

The Spring 2009 issue will not only contain Linden DeBie's essay on Mercersburg philosophy it will also give us Deborah Rahn Clemons' essay from the 2006 Convocation we enjoyed at St. Luke's UCC, Trapppe, PA and Trinity Reformed, Collegeville, PA. It summarizes what happened with the Peace Commission of 1857-1890. These two articles are worth the wait.

Letter to the Editor.

(The following letter was written in response to a Spring 2008, # 38, article entitled "The 'Open Table' in Mercersburg Perspective: A Debate Between Friends" by Gabriel Fackre & Joseph Heddon.)

To the Editor, New Mercersburg Review:

Gabe Fackre describes Joseph Heddon as a "fine pastoral theologian" in his response to Heddon's response to Fackre apology for "fencing the table" in the Spring 2008 New Mercersburg Review. I am grateful for both contributions and take note of Fackre's description because the pastoral theologian is the one for whom the "theological rubber meets the road," so to speak. The pastoral theologian takes the lofty interpretations of brilliant and holy minds, puts them into practice, feeds the hungry around the table, watches the Word take root and spring to life, and witnesses the new creation form miracles in people's lives. The pastoral theologian, perhaps, tests the theses of the scholars, puts doctrine through the refiner's fire, and leaves us with the precious metal of God's grace.

As a young person, I did not need John W. Nevin or Philip Schaff or Gabe Fackre to "fence the table" for me. It had already been fenced by my parents who taught me that people who believe in God are either "stupid or weak." Their bigoted and exclusionary perspective left me excluded from the very grace of God that I so desperately needed. Thank God that I was not turned away the first time I sat on my knees and received the Eucharist, unbaptized and totally "unprepared" for what I was receiving, yet deeply aware that I was in the presence of the holy. To imagine that God cannot or does not use the presence of the risen Christ in his meal for justification as well as for sanctification is to imagine that God is limited by our own parochial views, grounded in prayerful study and discernment though they may be.

As in Nevin's time, the battle lines today may be drawn between a "nurture" model of discipleship that focuses on right preparation among those who are already confessed Christians and an "evangelism" model that acknowledges the spiritual movement of the risen Christ in and among the lost, gathering them up, and calling them home. As Joseph Heddon so articulately says, "the Risen Christ is freed from all bonds both literal and figurative. Fencing the table – whether to include only the baptized, only the confirmed, even only the Christian believers – is a disavowal that the table is the Lord's table and it is the freed, Risen Lord, not the church, who issues the invitation. To state the matter using more precise theological vocabulary, we may indeed say that because of the Freedom of the Risen Christ, the Sacrament of the Eucharist can be the cause of conversion for an unbeliever."

I recognize that for Fackre and many of my colleagues, my testimony and tentative conclusions are "awash in individualism and the authority of human experience." I plead guilty to that to the extent that I, too, am a pastoral theologian who puts doctrine to the test where the rubber meets the road. Having been formed by Mercersburg theology, I do not take the issues lightly and struggle continually with the theological considerations posed in Fackre's article and Heddon's review. Yet I must admit that the narrow view of fencing the table smells a bit too much like the exclusionary views of my parents, only at the other end of the spectrum. Surely God is greater than that. Surely the power of the risen Christ who meets us in the Eucharist is not constrained by the limits of our understanding. Surely God's grace is evident in the world outside of the church, drawing people into the body of Christ, by Word and by Table.

Rev. Lyn Reith Barrett
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The Use of Scripture in the Liturgical Theology of John Nevin: A Review and Critique

Michael A. Farley
Mercersburg Convocation, Princeton Theological Seminary
June 3, 2008

The following essay analyzes the use of Scripture in the liturgical theology of John Nevin, and its purpose is not merely descriptive but also prescriptive. In the first part of the paper, I will begin with a description of the way that John Nevin established a biblical foundation for his liturgical theology and ideals. The second part of the article offers a critique of Nevin's biblical theology of worship. My critique will focus not so much on what Nevin *did* say, but rather on what he *didn't* say and why he didn't say it. Nevin unfortunately left large tracts of the biblical landscape untouched in developing his biblical theology of worship. I will attempt to show that a whole Bible theology of worship not only strengthens the case for the Mercersburg liturgical ideals but also raises questions about the ongoing reformation of liturgical practice.

I. The Use of Scripture in the Liturgical Theology of John Nevin

Howard Hageman maintained that John Nevin was unique because he played the key role in formulating "for the first time in the Reformed churches what could be called a theology of the liturgy."[1] In my own research, I have maintained that Nevin's contribution to liturgical theology is important not only for its theological content but also for its theological method.

In order to understand the historical significance of Nevin's achievements in liturgical theology, we must view his work against the background of Reformed liturgical method in his time. In Nevin's era, the dominant Reformed traditions in America—the Congregationalist and Presbyterian traditions that Nevin called "Puritan"—shared a set of common ideas about the theological criteria for defining the fundamentals of Reformed worship:

1. From its early English and Scottish roots in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through its development in nineteenth-century America, liturgical theology in this Anglo-American Reformed tradition began with an emphasis upon the sovereignty of God. God alone has the authority to prescribe the kind of worship he finds acceptable, and God has provided sufficient guidance for the church's liturgical life in the Bible. As John Knox wrote, with

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[1] Howard G. Hageman, *Pulpit and Table: Some Chapters in the History of Worship in the Reformed Churches* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1962), 92.

forceful clarity: "All worshipping, honoring, or service invented by the brain of man in the religion of God, without his own express commandment, is idolatry."[2]

Reformed Christians in this tradition typically understood the Bible as nothing less than a complete liturgical manual that delineates what the church may and may not do in corporate worship with great specificity. The church must conduct corporate worship according to God's commands in Scripture; thus any practice that lacks biblical warrant, i.e., that deviates from strict adherence to the things God has explicitly instituted in Scripture, either by addition or alteration, is forbidden.

2. Biblical warrant comes in two textual forms: (1) explicit imperatives to engage in a particular practice, e.g., commands to read and preach the word of God, to pray, to celebrate the sacraments, etc., and (2) normative examples of practice, either explicitly stated or inferred. Thus, it is the liturgical *praxis* enjoined by the biblical authors that defines the church's enduring liturgical norm. Any practices not backed by such explicit commands and examples lack sufficient biblical warrant.

3. The praxis that ultimately norms the church's worship is found in the NT alone. While the OT furnishes the principle of regulating worship according to God's explicit commands, it is not an adequate source for normative liturgical examples unless the practices in question are also found in the NT. Therefore, the Anglo-American Reformed traditions that were dominant in Nevin's day began with the assumption of discontinuity between the worship of Israel and the worship of the church of Christ. Typological arguments that interpreted OT practices Christologically and draw applications to Christian liturgy were usually deemed inadequate. The primary reasons to reject such typological hermeneutics were (1) to avoid compromising the newness of the new covenant in Christ and his fulfillment of the old covenant, and (2) to maximize the distinction between Reformed worship and the catholic worship of other western Christian traditions (most especially Catholic and Anglican/Episcopalian traditions), the rejection of which contributed to the formation of a distinctively Reformed liturgical identity. Thus, this American "Puritan" tradition read the NT in a fairly legalistic fashion as a new Christian Torah, which has the same purpose and liturgical specificity as the old law and is as fully sufficient for liturgical instruction as the OT was for Israel.

I call this approach to liturgical theology a *praxis-oriented regulative principle*. The phrase "regulative principle" comes from later Presbyterian literature on worship and refers to a hermeneutical principle for determining proper biblical warrant or support for liturgical practices.[3] It is "praxis-oriented"

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[2] John Knox, "A Vindication of the Doctrine That the Sacrifice of the Mass Is Idolatry," in David Laing, ed., *The Works of John Knox*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1854), 34.

[3] See, e.g., R. J. Gore, Jr., "The Pursuit of Plainness: Rethinking the Puritan Regulative Principle of Worship," (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1988). The revised book form of this work is R. J. Gore, Jr.,

because it defines the norm for Christian worship as the apostolic practice of corporate worship in the first-century church that is explicitly attested in the NT. This methodological principle is a kind of primitivism—an attempt to repristinate the "golden age" of alleged apostolic purity and simplicity—and it is major source of the liturgical minimalism and austerity that Nevin and Schaff opposed.[4]

The German Reformed churches (along with other Continental Reformed traditions) historically applied the Bible less restrictively and had a more moderate liturgical practice situated between the extremes of radical Puritan freedom and austerity and the more conservative Lutheran or Anglican forms and ceremonies.[5] However, the polarizing effects of the liturgical controversy in the German Reformed Church in the United States pushed Nevin's chief opponent, John H. A. Bomberger, toward a view of the Bible's sufficiency for liturgics that seems almost functionally equivalent to the Puritan praxis-oriented regulative principle:

> It may confidently be taken for granted, and as confidently asserted, therefore, that the Scriptures have furnished us with everything essential in regard to the matter [of worship]. Their silence, accordingly, is as significant as their statements and descriptions. It is as positive, also, in its import. More is not said, because there was nothing more needful for the guidance and direction of the Church to be said. The devotional

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Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002).

[4] For example, Samuel Miller, one of Nevin's Presbyterian professors at Princeton Theological Seminary, maintained that Scripture was the "great statute book of his kingdom." Therefore, the Bible was "no rite or ceremony ought to have a place in the public worship of God, which is not warranted in Scripture, *either by direct precept or example, or by good and sufficient inference* [emphasis added] (*The Primitive and Apostolical Order of the Church of Christ Vindicated* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1840], 65, 97). For further elaboration and examples of the praxis-oriented regulative principle in the English, Scottish, and American Presbyterian traditions, see Michael A. Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship: Theological Method and Liturgical Catholicity in American Presbyterianism, 1850–2005" (Ph.D. diss., Saint Louis University, 2007), 65–120.

[5] See John H. A. Bomberger, "The Old Palatinate Liturgy of 1563," *The Mercersburg Review* 2 (1850): 81-96, 265-286; John H. A. Bomberger, "The Old Palatinate Liturgy of 1563," *The Mercersburg Review* 3 (1851): 97-128. Therefore, the James F. White distinguishes the categories of "Puritan" and "Reformed" in his typology of Protestant worship traditions (*Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989], 21-24). See also Hughes O. Old, *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture*, Rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 3; Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (London: Dacre Press, 1948; reprint, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), 25–48.

usages reported are all that were practiced, or regarded as essential and worthy to be reported.[6]

Nevertheless, Bomberger distinguished his position from the stricter Puritans by stressing that specific forms not contained in Scripture may be permissible; however, such extra-biblical forms may not be imposed as the only legitimate manner to conduct corporate worship since this would go beyond the Bible's degree of specificity.[7]

John Nevin was no less determined to demonstrate that his liturgical ideals rested upon a solid biblical foundation. However, he interpreted the Bible in a more holistic manner, focusing most of his attention on the relationship of liturgy and sacrament to the Bible's broader theological narrative:

> The bible is not to be understood, by fragments, and as seen from any and every point of view where the beholder may happen to stand. All turns on the position of the beholder himself, and his power of observing and comprehending the revelation as a whole....He must be consciously within the horizon, and underneath the broad canopy, of the new supernatural creation, he is called to contemplate; and then each part of it must be studied and expounded, in full view of its relations to every other part, and to the glorious structure in which all are comprehended as a whole. This is the true conception of biblical theology. Only under this form, can bible proof, as it is called, in favour of or against any doctrine, be entitled to the least respect.[8]

Contrary to the typical Puritan or Presbyterian method, Nevin maintained that sacramental and liturgical theology cannot be derived from a few biblical commands or examples of practice interpreted and applied in isolation from the whole biblical economy of salvation. Therefore, Nevin did not engage in detailed exegesis of many individual biblical texts that explicitly address sacramental and/or liturgical matters. Instead, he spent the greatest amount of space delineating the central biblical narrative of the "new supernatural creation," and he then unfolded the implications of this new creation for the church's corporate worship.

For Nevin, the center of the biblical narrative of creation and redemption is the incarnation of Christ. The union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ was the root of an entirely new supernatural order of existence and the

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[6] John H. A. Bomberger, "Primitive Christian Worship," *The Reformed Church Monthly* 2 (1869): 449.

[7] Bomberger, "Primitive," 294. For a systematic exposition of Bomberger's liturgical ideals and liturgical-theological method, see Michael A. Farley, "'A Debt of Fealty to the Past': The Reformed Liturgical Theology of John H. A. Bomberger," *Calvin Theological Journal* 39 (2004): 332–56.

[8] John W. Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (1846; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 231.

beginning of an historical process that will one day redeem the whole creation as it enters into that healing and glorifying union with Christ.

In Nevin's theology, Christology always leads quickly to ecclesiology because the church is the ongoing, objective mediator of Christ's theanthropic life in history. Because the church is the very body of Christ, she is the realization and embodiment of the life of the resurrected Christ himself. This organic, mystical union of head and body is a personal, pneumatological reality. As Nathan Mitchell explains, "Nevin regarded the presence of the Spirit as an immanent, interior principle of the church. In virtue of the incarnation the Spirit has become immanent within the process of history itself."[9]

Nevin's incarnational idealism not only explains the nature of the church itself as the historical, objective bearer of Christ's theanthropic life but also the necessity of liturgical ritual and form to embody that life in the world. According to Nevin, "just as the church's historical visibility is demanded by the 'idea' of the incarnation, so the church's worship must also be expressed in external forms."[10] The liturgy is thus the "externalization of the divine economy, which grows out of the general life of the Church."[11]

To summarize Nevin's biblical-theological framework for worship in language later popularized by twentieth-century Catholic theologians, Jesus is the sacrament of God's life in the world, the church is the sacrament of the life of Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and the eucharistic liturgy is the sacrament of the life of the church that expresses and realizes her mystical union with Christ.[12] Although Nevin didn't use precisely this terminology, it does capture the central axis of his theology of worship. His case for the Mercersburg liturgical agenda rests primarily upon the connections he establishes between liturgy/sacrament, church, and incarnation.

Not only Nevin's general concern for liturgy but also his particular liturgical ideals expressed in *the Order of Worship* follow quite logically and naturally from his theological framework. Liturgical forms are necessary because they are the clearest and most concrete means in and through which the mystical presence of Christ is realized in the life of the church. The organic and catholic unity of the church entails a preference for corporate ritual and liturgical forms that invite and facilitate the active participation of all members of the church. Since the purpose of liturgy is a sacramental encounter and union with the life of

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[9] Nathan D. Mitchell, "Church, Eucharist, and Liturgical Reform at Mercersburg: 1843–1857," (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1978) 451–52.

[10] Mitchell, "Church, Eucharist, and Liturgical Reform," 417.

[11] William DiPuccio, "Nevin's Idealistic Philosophy," in *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth-Century America: Essays on the Thought of John Williamson Nevin*, eds. Sam Hamstra, Jr. and Arie J. Griffioen (Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995), 57.

[12] Cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

Christ, the central ritual of Christian liturgy must be the Eucharist because of the tangible and richly multi-faceted manner by which it actualizes mystical union of Christ and his church. The annual cycle of liturgical festivals and seasons highlights the fulfillment and redemption of the cycles of nature in the history of redemption and the renewal of the whole cosmos in Christ.[13]

In contrast to the praxis-oriented regulative principle employed by his Puritan and Presbyterian ancestors and contemporaries, John Nevin articulated a more theologically oriented regulative principle. He developed a biblical case for his liturgical program not by searching for specific commands and examples of worship practices in the NT but rather by demonstrating how the Mercersburg liturgies embodied more general theological themes and principles in Scripture. This broadened the concept of biblical warrant by broadening the locus of liturgical norms in Scripture and altering the criteria used to evaluate the conformity of liturgical practices to those norms. On Nevin's approach, liturgical forms or practices are biblical insofar as they ritually embody truths taught in the Bible, and not merely because the apostolic church actually practiced the forms or rituals in question.

This shift in theological method has important implications for understanding and appropriating later church tradition because it creates hermeneutical space to accommodate and affirm liturgical development in history. On the basis of their theologically oriented regulative principle, Nevin and Schaff could employ liturgical structures that emerged in the fourth and fifth centuries because their goal was no longer to reproduce first-century apostolic liturgical practice but rather to embody apostolic doctrine in ritual form in the fullest possible way. Nevin's achievement has had lasting significance by setting a precedent followed to the present day in the ecumenical liturgical movements of the past century.[14]

II. The Rest of the Story: More Biblical Foundations for Mercersburg Liturgy

While Nevin's methodological breakthrough was important, it was also incomplete. My primary critique of his use of Scripture in developing his theology of worship is (ironically) that it is not sufficiently organic. Nevin helpfully highlighted the mystical union that obtains in the present between Christ and his body, the church, in the eucharistic liturgy. He also rightly

[13] For a fuller exposition of the theology framework of Nevin's liturgical theology as well as its specific liturgical implications, see Michael A. Farley, "The Liturgical Theology of John Williamson Nevin," *Studia Liturgica* 33 (2003): 204–22.

[14] In my doctoral dissertation, I have traced the way that different American Presbyterian liturgical reformers have followed and developed Nevin's theologically oriented regulative principle in defending movements toward a more catholic and ecumenical liturgical practice. See Farley, "Reforming Reformed Worship," 182–335.

stressed the organic development and continuity of church history from the early church to the present, a continuity that the liturgy expresses and maintains when it assumes a properly catholic shape. However, Nevin devoted relatively little attention to the organic development of liturgical practice within the narrative of creation and redemptive history in Scripture itself. A more organic biblical theology of liturgy would have systematically developed the connections between the worship of the OT era in the past, Christian worship in the present era after Jesus' ascension, and the worship of the future glimpsed in Revelation and elsewhere in Scripture.

Nevin did occasionally mention OT liturgical rites and structures in explaining the meaning of the Lord's Supper.[15] These references are tantalizing, but unfortunately brief and undeveloped.

Like many Reformed theologians, he took the Passover to be the most important OT type foreshadowing the Lord's Supper.[16] Nevin found three primary points of analogy with sacrifice of Christ in which Christians have communion via the Eucharist: the offering of an unblemished victim, its vicarious death and display of blood, and the eating of the sacrifice by the worshipper. He especially emphasized the necessity of eating because it teaches that worshippers receive the benefits of sacrifice only through "an actual participation of the sacrifice itself, in communion with the altar."[17]

In other places, he referred briefly and more generally to the Jewish altar and sacrificial cult as a divine pedagogy for understanding the Lord's Supper. For Nevin, the sacrifices offered at the altar of the tabernacle and temple were the "symbol and type" of the "Christian altar" from which the "Christian shekinah" now radiates.[18]

> We feel at once what the liturgical means, in this view, in the priestly services of the Jewish temple, where the transaction of the altar served to mediate objectively…between the Hearer of prayer and his worshipping people. In the same way…the true Christian *leitourgia*—the substance of which that older service was only the symbol and type—must ever circle, as a system of offices, round the Christian altar, as something always mystically present in the Christian church.[19]

The phrase "altar liturgy" became Nevin's shorthand description of his liturgical ideal vis-à-vis the "pulpit liturgy" of the Puritan tradition that exalted preaching at the expense of the Eucharist.

In spite of these positive analogies and references to OT liturgical structures and concepts, Nevin primarily used the OT as a foil for his explanation

[15] The largest cluster of texts related to the OT in Nevin's liturgical and sacramental works is in *Mystical Presence*, 183-85, 191, 194-96, 200, 209.

[16] Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 235–238.

[17] Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 235.

[18] John W. Nevin, *The Liturgical Question* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1862), 29.

[19] Nevin, *The Liturgical Question*, 28.

of the fullness of redemption in Christ. According to Nevin, the Jewish sacrifices did not mediate mystical union with God in the way that the Lord's Supper does for Christians. He consistently maintained that OT structures and rites were merely prophetic promises of grace to come in the future rather than true means of grace for those who those who participated in them. The whole relation of God to Israel had an "unreal, unsubstantial character" and "constituted at best but an approximation to this grace [of the gospel] rather than the actual presence of it in any sense itself."[20]

When Nevin characterized the OT rites as types of the gospel, he meant that they were merely images that did not convey the salvation they portrayed in tangible form. The Passover was

> an unreal adumbration of the grace that is exhibited to us in the Lord's Supper. It was a picture or sign only of what it was intended to represent; not a sacrament at all indeed in the full New Testament sense, but a sacrament in prefiguration and type.[21]

It was only a "pledge and seal of blessings to come" and only "signified prophetically" the "actual grace" and "real and actually present salvation" received in the Lord's Supper.[22] Therefore, it only served to "illustrate" the "true force of the higher institution" of the Lord's Supper to which it pointed.[23] Likewise, all the other sacrifices and institutions in Israel had a "shadowy, simply prophetic nature." Therefore, "its sacraments were types only, not counterparts of the sacraments of the New Testament. Its salvation was only in the form of promise, more than present fact."[24] Only when the divine nature became permanently united with humanity in the incarnation did the church's sacraments become invested with the abiding efficacy and power of the Holy Spirit.

Nevin repeatedly contrasted worship in the OT and NT with an inner/outer distinction. In the OT, "God drew continually more and more near to men," but "only in an outward way." While God did dwell among his people in the tabernacle, he still remained "beyond them, and out of them, between the cherubim and behind the veil." Therefore, the revelation of God in tabernacle and temple worship and also in prophecy was always "a revelation of God *to* man, and not a revelation of God *in* man."[25] While there were true theophanies through which God appeared to Israel, the "revelation of the supernatural under the Old Testament…was always in an outward and comparatively unreal way. It never came to a true inward union, between the human and the divine. The

[20] Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 196.
[21] Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 236.
[22] Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 237–38.
[23] In the same context, Nevin distinguishes the terms "picture" and "sign" from a rite that is a "seal," i.e., a means of grace that conveys the salvation it signifies (*Mystical Presence*, 233).
[24] Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 196.
[25] Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 191.

supernatural appeared above nature and beyond nature only."[26] Prior to the incarnation, the Holy Spirit's ministry was only temporary and fleeting, an influence exerted only "on the soul of the person to whom it was extended."[27] Nevin's denial of any real sacramental efficacy to the rites and ceremonies of OT worship would seem to explain why he did not devote more attention to the subject in his writings.

I believe that his characterization of OT worship is incomplete and distorted because he failed to discern and explain the profound continuities of spiritual life and communion with God between worship of believers in the OT and NT. He was right to hold that that OT ceremonies were types or shadows that derived their meaning and efficacy from their proleptic relation to Christ's person and work. Jesus is indeed the reality and telos in whom the whole creation and the whole history of redemption find their ultimate fulfillment. However, this does not entail the inference that people in the OT had no sacramental encounter and inward communion with the Spirit of God.

First, Nevin's depiction of the Spirit's work in the OT as a merely "outward" revelation and influence fails to do justice to OT spirituality. The OT bears witness to the abiding presence of God with his people and their communion with him.[28] Furthermore, this communion with God has all the characteristics that the NT explicitly attributes to the work of God's Spirit in salvation. For example, OT believers receive forgiveness of sins from God (Exod. 34:6-7; Lev. 4–6; Ps. 25, 32, 103:8–12; 130) and live by faith (e.g., Abraham, David; cf. Heb. 11) as friends of God who enjoy close fellowship with him. When David pleads "Cast me not away from your presence and take not your holy spirit from me," he demonstrates a keen awareness that his life with God is only possible because God dwells with him personally.[29] In light of the universal effects of sin, how could OT saints respond to God with true faith and holy lives unless they had experienced an "inward" work of God?

Nor was this kind of relationship with God intended only for a handful of people. The Psalms are hymns written to express and form the faith of the whole people of God, and they portray a deep, profound spirituality as the norm for the whole people, not just a few key leaders. The intimate knowledge of God and trust in God evidenced in the psalter is the kind of faith that could only result from a life lived with God and by the power of God. Indeed, why would the NT continue to enjoin the praying and singing of the psalms (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19) and record the words of the psalms on the lips of Jesus and the apostles unless they embody the very epitome of a Spirit-filled life? The very basis of the vehement prophetic denunciation of Israel's unfaithfulness was the expectation that Israel's covenantal relationship with God ought to have produced a quality of

[26] Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 194.
[27] Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 184.
[28] On the subject of the Holy Spirit's role in the lives of individuals in the OT, see Gary Fredericks, *Trinity Journal NS* 9 (1988): 81–104.
[29] All translated quotes from the Bible come from the NRSV.

spiritual life such that the character and behavior of Israel reflected the character of God. Furthermore, while many were unfaithful in Israel, there was always a sizable remnant of the nation that did not forsake his ways and lived truly holy lives.[30]

Second, Nevin fails to observe the sacramental principle embodied in the specific OT liturgical forms themselves. These structures of worship were not merely promises of future blessing and thus "unreal;" rather, they were means of a true sacramental encounter with the living God. Real sacramental worship pervades the OT narrative of creation and redemption from beginning to end. In the garden in Eden, human fellowship with God involves food, specifically a Tree of Life that symbolizes and reveals that all of life comes from God. As the Orthodox liturgical theologian Alexander Schmemann observes,

> In the Bible the food that man eats, the world of which he must partake in order to live, is given to him by God, and it is given as communion with God. The world as man's food is not something "material" and limited to material functions, thus different from, and opposed to, the specifically "spiritual" functions by which man is related to God. All that exists is God's gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man's life communion with God. It is divine love made food, made life for man.[31]

Schmemann's point suggests that Nevin's tendency to speak of the incarnation as the initial entrance of actual, real, supernatural grace into the world assumes an unwarranted (and very modern) nature/grace dichotomy. Such a dichotomy conceives of the world as a realm of pure nature that is not itself always already graced as a sacrament of God's presence and communion with humanity. Nevin correctly exalts the incarnation and resurrection as the telos of creation itself without which the history of creation and redemption remains imperfect and incomplete. Jesus is the final and ultimate revelation of God and the one in whom God has come near to us in an unsurpassably close union. However, Nevin was wrong to exalt the incarnation by downplaying the unfolding drama of grace and salvation that came prior to the incarnation and, in some mysterious manner, was a foretaste of it. The story of God's grace begins at creation, not at the incarnation.

If the whole world is sacramental in a very broad sense, the sacraments of Israel's worship bring this sacramentality into special focus and enable a restoration of the communion with God for which we were made as God's image bearers. For example, the ministry of the Aaronic priesthood was a ministry of word and sacrament exercised through persons, and thus it was a type of Christ's own priestly ministry (Heb. 5–10). *Contra* Nevin, the ministry of the Aaronic

[30] E.g., when Elijah despairs that he is the only faithful Israelite left, God assures him that there were no less than 7000 who remained faithful to the covenant and had not bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:10,14,18).

[31] Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 14.

priesthood was no mere "outward" revelation but rather a revelation of God *in* man and *through* man. Moreover, the fact that the whole nation of Israel was a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6) suggests that God was at work in and through the whole nation to convey the blessings of life in covenant with God to the rest of the world.

The sacrifices of the OT liturgical economy were also more than mere prophetic promises of salvific blessings to come at some point in the future. They were also means of participating in real union with the Spirit of God. This becomes abundantly clear when we attend closely to the theological symbolism embedded in the descriptions of different kinds of sacrifices in the Levitical sacrificial system (something Nevin failed to do).

The very Hebrew term used to describe the sacrifices, *qorban*, means "that which is brought near" (e.g., Lev. 1:2; 2:1; 3:1–2; 4:23; 5:11; 7:38). The related Hebrew verb often translated "to sacrifice" or "to offer" (*qrb*) means "to cause to draw near." Thus, as Reformed liturgical scholar Jeffrey Meyers observes, "The worshiper who offers a sacrificial animal draws near to God....God has graciously provided man with a way of entering into His special presence in His Son by His Spirit, and that way is the way of sacrifice."[32] Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart also argues that the term *qorban*

> points to an understanding of sacrifice as not, obviously, a simple propitiation of the Divine or an attempt to importune God under the shelter of an ingratiating tribute, but as a miraculous reconciliation between God, who is the wellspring of all life, and his people, who are dead in sin. Sacrifice, in this sense, means a marvelous reparation of a shattered covenant, and an act wherein is accomplished, again and again, that divine indwelling, within the body of his people, that is God's purpose in shaping for himself a people to bear his glory. If it is indeed always the will of God to "tabernacle" upon the earth, indeed ultimately to make the whole earth his temple, then the atonement sacrifice is that moment when God restores to himself the body he has chosen to dwell within and so also makes of himself an abode for his creatures. When the blood of the people, so to speak, which is its life, now forfeited through sin, is brought into the ambit of the *Shekinah*, before the mercy seat, an exchange occurs in which the life's blood of those who were perishing is made pure again, infused with the life that flows from God, and the nuptial bond of the mutual indwelling—God in his creatures and they in him—is repaired.[33]

[32] Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, Ida.: Canon Press, 2003), 76.

[33] D. Bentley Hart, " 'Thine Own of Thine Own': Eucharistic Sacrifice in Orthodox Tradition," in *Rediscovering the Eucharist: Ecumenical Conversations*, ed. Roch A. Kereszty (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 143. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:1–4, in which Paul states that Israel was baptized in the wilderness

By largely neglecting the OT, Nevin not only misses the spirituality and sacramentality of OT worship, but also a liturgical sequence found in the sacrificial economy. In the OT, God also spelled out the particular way he drew his people near by establishing a specific order of worship with a consistent sequence of different kinds of sacrifices. When Israel gathered for worship at the tabernacle or temple, the sequence of the sacrificial liturgy was always the following:[34]

1. Purification offering
2. Ascension offering
3. Tribute offering
4. Peace offering

Examples of the full sequence occur in Leviticus 8–9; 1 Chronicles 15–16; 28-29; and 2 Chronicles 5–7.

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through the Red Sea, ate spiritual food, and drank spiritual drink from the rock, which was *Christ*" (emphasis added).

[34] Biblical scholar A. F. Rainey notes that when different sacrifices were offered together in the same worship event, they always occurred in the same sequence: sin/purification offering, ascension offering, and peace offering. See A. F. Rainey, "The Order of Sacrifices in the Old Testament Ritual Texts," *Biblica* 51 (1970): 485–98. Other contemporary OT scholars who recognize this liturgical sequence and its relevance for Christian worship include Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 66; Gordon J. Wenham, "The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, eds. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 82–84; R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 106-7; Philip P. Jenson, "The Levitical Sacrificial System," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, eds. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 25–40; W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1997), 110–3. See also the fine summary in the *NIV Study Bible* notes: "When more than one kind of offering was presented (as in Num. 6:16,17), the procedure was usually as follows: (1) sin offering or guilt offering, (2) burnt offering, (3) fellowship offering and grain offering (along with a drink offering). This sequence furnishes part of the spiritual significance of the sacrificial system. First, sin had to be dealt with (sin offering or guilt offering). Second, the worshiper committed himself completely to God (burnt offering and grain offering). Third, fellowship or communion between the Lord, the priest and the worshiper (fellowship offering) was established. To state it another way, there were sacrifices of expiation (sin offerings and guilt offerings), consecration (burnt offerings and grain offerings) and communion (fellowship offerings - these included vow offerings, thank offerings and freewill offerings)." See the chart entitled "Old Testament Sacrifices," *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 150.

While each sacrifice began with the death of an animal, the subsequent actions with the animals differed in order to accomplish the various effects described by their distinctive names (see Lev. 1–7 for details about each sacrifice). In the purification offering, the display of blood on the altar was the most prominent feature of the ritual. This was to signify the forgiveness and purification of the worshiper by the death of the animal. The ascension offering[35] symbolized

(1) complete (re)commitment to God by cutting up and burning the entire animal, and

(2) complete transformation and ascent to the heavenly presence of God as the animal turned into smoke that ascended to heaven and became a pleasing aroma to God (Lev. 1). The ascension offering was followed immediately by a tribute offering consisting of bread and incense placed on top of the burning animal. These symbols represent the self-offering of the worshipper through the tangible gifts of the fruit of his labor and prayer (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8, 8:3–4). The conclusion to this liturgy of sacrifices was the peace offering, which was a meal shared by God (represented by the priest) and the worshippers. The choice meat of this sacrifice was eaten as a joyful celebration of peace and friendship with God at his altar-table.[36]

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[35] Although this sacrifice is commonly translated "(whole) burnt offering," the Hebrew word, *'olah*, means "that which ascends." The verb from the same root means "to ascend." This name is not only more linguistically accurate but also more theologically preferable because the description of the *'olah* in Leviticus highlights the animal's transformation into smoke that ascends to become a pleasing aroma to God (e.g., Lev. 1:9, 13, 17). This passage through fire and transformation into smoke also correlates with the fire and smoke that signify God's presence in the Most Holy Place at the "summit" of the symbolic Mt. Sinai (which in turn symbolizes the real fire and smoke in which God appeared at the summit of the real Mt. Sinai). Therefore, the *'olah* symbolizes the worshiper's ascent and incorporation into the cloud of God's heavenly presence. Rendering *'olah as* "ascension offering" also maintains consistency with the translated names of the other sacrifices, which are related to their theological meaning and not the merely the condition of the animal. See Meyers, *The Lord's Service*, 79–80, 357; James B. Jordan, "The Whole Burnt Sacrifice," *Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper, No. 11* (Niceville, Fla.: Biblical Horizons, 1991).

[36] Peter J. Leithart, "Sacrifice and Worship," [cited 2 February 2008]. Online: http://www.leithart.com/archives/000960.php; Meyers, *The Lord's Service*, 80–81. See also Gordon J. Wenham, "The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice," 82–84; Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 1991), 41–49.

This sequence of sacrifices mirrors the sequence of events by which God made his covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai.[37] At Sinai, Israel purified herself in preparation to meet God. Moses then ascended to the top of the mountain to receive the word of God, and he returned to read it to the people. Israel responded by offering themselves to God with a solemn oath of faith, loyalty, and commitment to God and the obligations of the covenant. The covenant relationship was then sealed with a special meal eaten by Moses, Aaron and his sons, and some elders of Israel in the special presence of God on the mountain. This order of events at Sinai parallels the sequence of sacrifices in the tabernacle/temple liturgy and also clarifies the function of those sacrifices as a means of renewing and strengthening the covenant relationship:

1. Cleansing/Purification (Exod. 19:9–15): Purification offering
2. Ascension & consecration via God's word (Exod. 19:16–24:6): Ascension offering
3. Oath of commitment in response to God's word (Exod. 24:7–8): Tribute offering
4. Meal with God in His presence (Exod. 24:9–11): Peace offering

The implication of this parallel between the covenant at Sinai and the sacrificial liturgy of the tabernacle and temple is that corporate worship is an act of covenant renewal. To gather for worship at the tabernacle is to return to the same God who revealed himself at Sinai at to renew the covenant relationship initiated there.[38]

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[37] John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 122-123; Cf. Allen Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 170–171; Hughes O. Old, *Themes and Variations for a Christian Doxology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 111–112.

[38] Biblical scholars have frequently discovered many typological parallels between the structure and function of the tabernacle (and, later, the temple) and the structure and function of Mt. Sinai as the locus of Yahweh's special presence and glory when he established his covenant with Israel as recounted in Exodus 19–24. Meyers quotes Jacob Milgrom, who maintains that "the equivalence of the Tabernacle to Sinai is an essential, indeed, indispensable, axiom....The Tabernacle, in effect, becomes a portable Mt. Sinai, an assurance of the permanent presence of the deity in Israel's midst" (*Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991], 574). See Meyers, *The Lord's Service*, 79–80; Peter Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon, 2000), 83–84; Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 234–35; Philip P. Jenson, "The Levitical Sacrificial System," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 31; John Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, vol. 1, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003), 392. In Robert Longacre's detailed discourse

At the tabernacle, this basic four-fold core of the liturgy began with a call to worship and finished with a blessing or benediction (see e.g., Lev. 9). Thus, the full sequence of sacrifices presented in the OT follows this order:

1. Call to worship: God summons his people to corporate worship.
2. Purification: God cleanses his people and forgives their sins.
3. Consecration/Ascension: God enables his people to "ascend" into his special presence to participate in the worship of heaven. God consecrates the worshipers, setting them apart to a renewed commitment to him and the mission of his kingdom.
4. Offering: Worshipers respond with renewed love and loyalty to God and his kingdom with material gifts and prayer.
5. Communion: God serves the worshipers a sacred meal at his table and eats with them to celebrate peace and friendship with them.
6. Blessing: God sends his people out to serve him with his blessing.

This full liturgical sequence appears in Leviticus 8-9 and 2 Chron. 29.[39] Thus, the Bible does present a basic liturgy or order of corporate worship. This consistent ritual sequence is the way of grace by which God renewed and maintained his covenant relationship with Israel and drew them into his special presence.

This liturgical sequence has ongoing relevance for Christian worship because it is (as Nevin emphasized) a foreshadowing of the person and work of Jesus and the church's eucharistic communion with him. Jesus' own life aligns with the liturgy of different sacrifices (purification, ascension, and peace offerings) in Leviticus 9 and elsewhere. In Romans 8:3, Paul identifies Jesus' death as a sin/purification offering, and the NT repeatedly connects the display of his blood with the forgiveness and cleansing of his people.[40] After his bloody

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analysis of the instructions for the building of the tabernacle in Exod. 25:1–30:10, he identifies Exod. 29:38–46 as the literary peak of this unit. These verses connect a description of the daily sacrifices offered at the tabernacle's altar with the purpose and function of the tabernacle characterized using a common covenant formula in Exod. 29:25–26: "I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God." ("Building for the Worship of God," in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature*, ed. Walter R. Bodine [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995], 21–49).

[39] Cf. also 1 Chr 15-16, in which a purifying consecration of the priests and Levites (15:14) precedes the offering of ascension/burnt offerings, peace offerings (16:1), and a concluding blessing (16:3); 1 Chr 29, in which David's prayer of confession and humility before God (29:14-15) precedes ascension/burst offerings and a concluding feast before God (29:21-22); 2 Chr 5-7, in which a prayer of confession of sin and pleas for forgiveness (6:21, 26-39) precedes the sequence of ascension/burnst offering and peace offerings (7:7).

[40] On Jesus' death as sin/purification offering in Rom 8:3, see Peter J. Leithart, "Hermeneutics of Worship," [cited 2 February 2008]. Online:

death, Jesus rose from the dead with a transformed and glorified body and ascended to heaven where he was received in glad triumph to take his place at the right hand of God the Father. This is the same pattern of transformation and ascent embodied in the ascension offering. Finally, just as the ascension offering leads to the celebratory meal of the peace offering, so also the ascended Christ will return to celebrate the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19), an event already anticipated in the present in the Lord's Supper. Thus, the sacrificial liturgy in the OT was a prophetic type of the realization of the new covenant in the life of Jesus.

Furthermore, the coming of Christ does not mean that sacrificial worship has ceased in the church. Rather, as a priesthood the church offers herself to God in Christ as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1). Not only is Christian service to God described as an offering of sacrifices (Phil. 2:17, 4:18), but also concrete acts of worship in the liturgical assembly are acts of sacrifice. Indeed, all the major elements of corporate worship (the word of God, responses of prayer and offering of gifts, and sacramental meals) receive a sacrificial description and interpretation in the NT.

First, the NT repeatedly images the ministry of the word with a sword (e.g., Eph. 6:17, Rev. 1:16, 2:12) that splits the "joints and marrow" of believers' hearts as they submit to its active and searching scrutiny (Heb. 4:12) just as sacrificial animals underwent a similar cutting of a knife. Second, acts of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving are called sacrifices (Rev. 8:3-5; Heb. 13:14–15, 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Third, material gifts given for the service of God are described as sacrifices acceptable and pleasing to God (Phil. 4:18, Heb. 13:16). Finally, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is portrayed as a sacrificial act (specifically, as the new covenant form of Passover and of the peace offerings in general, of which Passover was one particular type). The symbolism of body and blood offered, separated, blood poured out, and body eaten clearly recapitulates the procedures employed in animal sacrifices (Lev. 1–7). And just as the OT liturgy of sacrifices culminated in a sacred meal at God's table, the Lord's Supper functions in the same way. The apostle Paul draws a direct parallel between the Lord's Supper and the peace offerings that Israel ate at God's altar (1 Cor. 10:16–18).[41]

Thus, the OT consistently and pervasively shows how God lived with and in his people and renewed his union with them by sacramental means in the

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http://www.leithart.com/archives/000947.php; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 220–25. This link is also found in Heb. 9:11–29, which presents Jesus as the high priest entering the Most Holy Place in heaven displaying his own purifying blood just as the Aaronic high priest did with the blood from sin/purification offerings on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16).

[41] For more evidence that the Lord's Supper is the NT fulfillment of the peace offering, see the article by C. John Collins, "The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice: How Patristic Authors Can Help Us Read the Bible," *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 1–23.

sacrificial system. Indeed, this liturgical system provides the very concepts and language that the NT uses to explain both the redeeming work of Christ and the worship of the church in union with him. While Nevin was surely right to emphasize the great advance in redemptive history in the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, the contrast between worship in the OT and NT is not a contrast of utter discontinuity—of divine absence vs. divine presence—but rather the contrast of earlier and later parts of a story in which there is much continuity. The sacramental quality of the liturgy in both OT and NT does indeed arise from its relationship to the person and work of Christ; however, the fulfillment of OT worship in Christ is a narrative in which the glory and presence of God made fully known in Christ at the story's end was already known prior to the end in partial but increasingly greater degrees. Consequently, the Mercersburg liturgical vision arises not merely from the incarnation but rather from the consistent pattern of God establishing and renewing his covenant union with his people in word and sacrament from creation to Israel to Jesus and the church.

As Nevin realized, the OT is Christian Scripture that speaks of Christ and the church in typological fashion. Therefore, it provides a substantial foundation for Mercersburg liturgical theology and practice. Indeed, many aspects of the Mercersburg liturgical and theological system are already anticipated in the OT sacrifices, and they contain a wealth of theological meaning that can ground the particular emphases and strengths of the Mercersburg liturgical tradition on a broad biblical basis. Furthermore, a typological reading of OT worship and its application to Christian worship strengthens the biblical case for Mercersburg principles because it does not simply reason by a more abstract deduction from general biblical themes but rather reasons by analogy from concrete practices of worship found consistently throughout the course of redemptive history. Such attention to OT practices also yields rich theological materials that are not repeated in the NT but that remain very instructive patterns for Christian worship.

For example, the OT liturgical traditions consistently demonstrate the intrinsic unity and complementary of the ministry of word and sacrament. They also furnish a biblical framework for the order of worship. The revised liturgy found in the 1866 *Order of Worship* follows the general liturgical sequence found in catholic Christian tradition, including many Reformed liturgies. Confession and absolution lead to the ministry of the word, which calls us to renewed love and commitment to God. The church responds in offering and prayer, and the liturgy culminates in a communion meal at God's table. A study of the OT reveals that the roots of this liturgical order are found not in fourth-century liturgies or in Justin Martyr but rather in the sacrificial liturgy introduced in the Pentateuch. Finally, OT liturgical symbolism reveals that worship occurs in a heavenly context where heaven and earth meet and the people of God ascend to enjoy God's heavenly presence and power. A theology of Christian liturgy inspired by Mercersburg ought to begin with the OT in order to demonstrate that the church's liturgical experience of the mystical presence is the culmination of

biblical patterns, practices, and purposes for worship grounded in the entire biblical history of creation and redemption.

III. Challenges for the Future of Mercersburg Liturgical Theology and Practice

A more organic and holistic biblical theology of liturgy provides both challenges and resources for the future development of the Mercersburg tradition of liturgical theology and practice. First, I want to highlight some implications for the rhetorical presentation of the Mercersburg theology of worship.

Nevin's organic view of church history, his high esteem for the ancient church in particular, and the robust catholicity of his ecclesiology are not the default for many American Christians. Many American Christians continue to live in ecclesial circles dominated by the same sort of ahistorical, uncatholic modes of thought and practice that Nevin collectively labeled "Puritan." In the ears of these American Christians, Nevin's "high church" Calvinism sounds just as foreign in our own day as it did in his own.

How will we present the Mercersburg liturgical and sacramental agenda persuasively in our contemporary cultural and ecclesial contexts? In particular, how will we present the rich Mercersburg eucharistic vision to Christians who do not share its developed convictions about tradition, history, ecumenism, and ecclesiology and have not been involved in (or even aware of) the ecumenical and liturgical movements of the past century? The liturgical historian James F. White raised this question in a pointed way thirty years ago when he observed that over 50 million American Christians have no contact whatsoever with the "liturgical establishment," which consists of the scholars, denominational liturgical commissions, and ecumenical liturgical organizations populated almost exclusively by Catholics and mainline Protestants:

> So those outside the liturgical establishment are legion. The important thing for us to remember is that they have a thriving worship life without us. Indeed, this is the portion of American Christianity that is growing fastest....Those churches are full and they never bother to ask us for advice. One is often prompted to wonder: "Who needs us?"[42]

This "liturgical establishment" includes contemporary advocates of Mercersburg ideals (which have become rather mainstream within the ecumenical liturgical movement), so his question continues to be relevant for this society.

There is an unprecedented interest in worship in the various evangelical (mostly independent, Baptist, Pentecostal, and some more conservative Reformed) churches, particularly among groups of younger Christians. For example, I am a member of the steering committee for a new study group devoted to worship within the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). Although ETS has study groups for almost every conceivable sub-discipline within theology, at long last (in the fiftieth year of the ETS's organizational life), a group formed last year

[42] James F. White, "Outside the Liturgical Establishment Or Who Needs Us?" *Worship* 52 (1978): 295.

to promote evangelical scholarship on worship.[43] The response to the initial session was exceeded all expectations, and the coming year promises even greater interest. A glance at Worship Leader magazine[44] and publications and blogs associated with the "emerging church" movement[45] also reveal a widespread interest as well as a growing hunger for reflection and resources on the meaning and practice of worship. The Mercersburg tradition has solid theological resources to guide this new interest and enthusiasm. But how will they hear and connect with the Mercersburg agenda?

I believe that a winsome rhetorical approach that leads with and emphasizes a holistic biblical theology of worship can provide a bridge for communication and persuasion in a way that Nevin's own polemical and historical approach did not. As in Nevin's day, it seems to me that many American Christians are less likely to be interested and persuaded by appeals to ancient church tradition and the importance of preserving the catholic and ecumenical unity of Christian worship throughout time. However, many are more inclined (at least initially) to listen to the Bible, which they instinctively revere although often read and apply rather selectively.

If we would communicate and persuade Christians in this American context that the Mercersburg liturgical agenda is worthy of serious consideration, we must take great pains to demonstrate in rigorous detail that it is eminently biblical. Any presentation of liturgical and sacramental theology inspired by the Mercersburg theology needs to draw upon the full scope of Scripture. A more holistic biblical theology of liturgy can demonstrate that Nevin's central liturgical and sacramental framework emerges not simply from his own construal of a few NT passages but rather from accounts of the practice of worship and covenant renewal in Scripture from beginning to end.

A broader and more organic biblical theology of worship will not only ground the Mercersburg liturgical agenda more deeply but also stretch it and supplement it in areas it leaves largely unaddressed. John Nevin rightly sought to correct the imbalanced Protestant tradition he inherited by placing the biblical doctrines of Jesus' incarnation, resurrection, ascension, and mystical presence in the church at the center of Christian theology, and he helped produce liturgical texts that profoundly articulated the wonder of the church's organic, living union with our resurrected Lord. However, he gave much less attention to the manner and environment of worship that most appropriately embody and respond to the presence of Christ and his kingdom that his texts describe so eloquently. By attending to the liturgical instructions and depictions of worship in the OT and in Revelation's visions of heaven and the eschaton, we can build upon Nevin's

[43] This effort complemented and gained momentum from an unprecedented gathering hosted by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in September, 2007 of evangelical scholars who teach about worship in colleges and seminaries.

[44] http://www.worshipleader.com

[45] E.g., http://www.emergentvillage.com

foundation and develop the Mercersburg liturgical theology in areas its founders did not explore in great depth.

The role of art and other kinds of visual symbolism in the church is one such area. In the OT, God established an environment for Israel's corporate worship in the tabernacle and temple that was filled with symbols communicating its theological meaning and purpose in a visual medium. The size, location, and expensive materials of the central sanctuary signified the glory, majesty, and beauty of the God who dwelled there in Israel's midst. In addition, the visual symbols embedded in art and architecture highlighted the theological significance of the liturgical actions that occurred there. These symbols—the ark of the covenant, the table, the tree-like lampstand, the altar, images of angels and garden flora sewn and carved throughout the structure—indicated that assembling at the sanctuary was an entrance into God's special presence at God's house, a return to the fellowship of the garden of Eden, a return to a symbolic Mt. Sinai, and the place where the life of heaven meets earth.[46]

This provides a biblical basis for a Christian theology of liturgical art and should be instructive for the kind of environment that we create for Christian liturgy. The NT repeatedly identifies the church as the new temple (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21–22; 1 Pet. 2:5) and dwelling place of God where we "ascend" into the heavenly tabernacle (Heb. 8–10) of the true Mt. Zion and heavenly Jerusalem to encounter the mystical presence of Christ in worship together with the whole company of heaven and the whole church on earth (Heb. 12:18–29). Since the glory of the new covenant and new creation is so much greater than the old (as Nevin rightly stressed), then we ought to devote serious attention and resources to creating a glorious environment that intentionally and accurately communicates the meaning of the liturgical events that take place in the church. This begins with the central symbols—pulpit and table—prominently placed at the center of the assembly and glorified with symbol and color that express the sacred actions they represent and facilitate. The vestments of the minister are also an important symbol, reminding us that Jesus is the one who leads our worship before the Father. God vested his ministers in the OT with linen robes and other colorful garments for beauty and for glory (Exod. 28:2, 40). Therefore, it seems most fitting to vest Christian ministers in white albs and colorful stoles that symbolize heavenly glory because they speak and act as ordained representatives of Jesus himself. Walls adorned with artistic renderings of angels, departed saints, and scenes from biblical history can communicate that the liturgy expresses the church's ongoing participation in the history of God's covenant and kingdom and joins the church in the present with the whole company of heaven and the whole church on earth, both past and present.

[46] For further discussion and biblical evidence for these four symbolisms in the structures of the tabernacle and temple, see Poythress, *Shadow of Christ*, 9–40; Leithart, *House for My Name*, 82–86; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 574; Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 234–35.

A second area for increased biblical reflection and development in the Mercersburg liturgical tradition would be the general emotional tone or atmosphere of worship. Nevin's liturgical theology clearly aims to foster a greater sense of the wonder, the gravity, and the sacredness of the eucharistic liturgy. The only fitting manner in which to celebrate communion with Christ by the Spirit is profound reverence and awe (Heb. 12:28).

Yet, what kind of atmosphere or tone best embodies genuine reverence and awe? Reformed churches too often associate reverent awe exclusively with a somber mood, quiet contemplation, and emotional and bodily reserve. D. G. Hart (author of an excellent biography of John Nevin)[47] only explicitly articulates and advocates what has often been the implicit assumption and practice of many Reformed churches when he argues that Christians should "come to worship with the same attitude and demeanor they take to a funeral service for a professing Christian"![48] I am not aware that John Nevin spoke to this issue; however, there are hints in the rubrics of the 1857 Provisional Liturgy and the 1866 *Order of Worship* that the compilers contemplated a rather solemn observance of holy communion.[49]

Despite this pervasive Reformed instinct, there is astonishingly little biblical support for equating reverence with quiet meditation and emotional moderation. When God reveals himself to his people in Scripture to speak to them, the event is almost never a quiet affair; rather, it is often accompanied by the loud, thunderous sounds of the voice of Yahweh, overwhelming displays of convulsing natural phenomena and divine glory. When God appears in theophanies at Mt. Sinai to Moses (Exod. 19–24) and later to Elijah (1 Kings 19:8–18), he speaks in a loud voice from the midst of thunder, lightning, earthquakes, wind, fire, and (at Sinai) the sound of a loud trumpet.[50] An

[47] D. G. Hart, *John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2005).

[48] D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2002), 127.

[49] The Provisional Liturgy suggests that "full silence may be better than any words" during the communion of the faithful (Jack M. Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology: The Liturgical Lessons of Mercersburg* [Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1976], 453). While the *Order of Worship* deletes that rubric, it does exhort the minister to open the rite of communion by reading an appropriate text from Scripture "slowly and solemnly" (James H. Nichols, ed. *The Mercersburg Theology* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1966], 274).

[50] J. Lust makes a strong case for translating *qol demamah* in 1 Kings 19:12 as "thunderous voice" rather than the more traditional "still, small voice" ("A Gentle Breeze or a Roaring, Thunderous Sound?" *Vetus Testamentum* 25 [1975]: 110–15). See also, Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 27, 247–49.

important liturgical connection to the Sinai theophanies emerges in texts that describe the visible descent of God's glory into the tabernacle and temple. When God inaugurates the corporate worship of Israel in these sanctuaries, a similar kind of theophany occurs with a great cloud, fire, and manifestation of divine glory (Exod. 40; 1 Kings 8/2 Chron. 5–7). The pattern continues in the NT when Christ inaugurates the current era of redemptive history in the church by pouring out his Spirit at Pentecost in an event characterized by a great wind, fire, and loud proclamation of the word of God (Acts 2). Likewise, the voice of Jesus that John hears in his theophanic vision is a "loud voice like a trumpet" (Rev. 1:10).[51]

While these theophanies do not recur on a regularly basis in the normal, weekly worship of God's people, they are ritually re-created and re-presented in and by the liturgical assembly itself. The same God who was so tangibly and powerfully manifest in those past events continues to be mystically present in the church's worship not only through the rite of holy communion itself but also through the loud, vigorous singing of God's word in praise. According to King David, God is enthroned and dwells upon the praises of his people (Ps. 22:3). When David returned the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:5–16; 1 Chron. 15:16–28; 16:4–42), when God descended in glory into Solomon's temple (2 Chron. 5:11–14), and when Hezekiah renewed Israel's temple worship (2 Chron. 29:20–36), the people celebrated the presence of God in their midst with loud, joyful praise that commemorated and renewed the Sinai covenant in sacrifice and song. Not only the clouds of smoke from sacrifices ascending to heaven but also the loud trumpets (cf. Exod. 19:16, 19), strings, cymbals (of the loud, clashing variety; cf. Ps. 150) and the great voice from choirs leading the assembly in song would have produced a majestic, energetic, and powerful sound that imitated in musical idiom the great and glorious manner by which God had so often made himself known.[52]

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[51] Other descriptions of Yahweh's voice and appearances emphasize these same kinds of loud noises and arresting, dramatic phenomena, e.g., Exod. 15; Judg. 5:4–5; Job 38–41; Pss. 18; 29; 68; 77; 89; 135; 144; Isa. 6; 30; 63; Jer. 30; Ezek. 1–3; Dan. 10:1–9; Joel 2; Hab. 3; Mal. 3. For further discussion of the theophanic elements in these texts, see Niehaus, *God at Sinai*.

[52] In other words, this type of music in corporate worship is a kind of memorial before God that calls him to remember his covenant. Certain events, signs or symbols in the OT function as "memorials" for the purpose of calling to remembrance the covenant relationship between God and his people (see e.g., Gen. 9:8, 11–17; Exod. 3:15; 28:12, 29; 30:16). These memorials also includes both sacrifices (e.g., Exod. 12:14, 20:24; Lev. 2:2, 6:15. 24:7) as well as the music that accompanies sacrificial offerings (cf. Ps. 38:1, 70:1). In Numbers 10:9–10, God commands the blowing of trumpets during the offering of ascension offerings and peace offerings is a "reminder" (Heb., *zikkaron*; LXX, *anamnesis*) of the people before God. In 1 Chronicles 16:4, David appoints the Levitical musicians to sing and play harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets in order to "invoke" Yahweh, which is the same verb for remembering used in Numbers

Although worship surely encompasses and evokes the full range of human emotions, the dominant tone of corporate worship in the Bible is joy, not solemn sobriety, because the people of God gather for a feast and not a fast. The key metaphor is table, not tomb.[53] In Scripture, this joy in worship is expressed and inculcated in specific practices in speech, song, food, and physical posture. In Deuteronomy 14:25–26, God commands his people to feast with joy in his presence:

> You shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the Lord your God chooses and spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household.

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10 and literally reads "to cause to remember" (Heb., *hazkir*).[52] The Greek term *anamnesis* is the word for "memorial" found in the eucharistic institution narratives in Luke 22 and 1 Cor. 11, which suggests that liturgical music plays an important function in making the liturgy a truly sacramental commemoration and renewal of God's covenant with his people. (The Hebrew root most often used to describe these memorials is *zkr*. The LXX usually translates the nouns derived from *zkr* with either the Greek words *mnemosunon* or *anamnesis* [Lev. 24:7, Num. 10:10, Ps. 38:1 (ET), Ps. 70:1 (ET)]. Their appearance in very similar contexts (sacrifices and other events in which God remember his people) suggests that there is a strong degree of overlap between the semantic ranges of these Greek words.)

The biblical authors also apply other sacrificial terminology to the song and instruments employed in corporate worship. Both the sacrificial ministry of the Aaronic priesthood and the musical ministry of the Levites are described as a sacred "ministry" (*sharat*; Deut. 10:8; 1 Chron. 15:2; 16:4, 37) using sacred instruments for their work (*keli*; cf. 1 Chron. 28:13-14 with 1 Chron. 15:16 and 16:5). Both priests and Leviticial musicians "stand" (*'mad*) and offer service (*'abodah*) before God (which is technical terminology for priestly service, e.g., Num. 16:9; Deut. 10:8, 17:12, 18:5; cf. 1 Chron. 6:31–33; 15:16). Thus, liturgical music has become part of the way that God's people participate sacramentally in the sacrificial order that restores and celebrates the renewal of God's covenant with the church. Although the offering of animals has ceased, John Nevin correctly observed that sacrifice continues to be an important category for describing the meaning and efficacy of Christian liturgy in the NT. The acts of Christian worship (including the communion and the ministry of the word and prayer, spoken and sung, in the eucharistic liturgy) enable the church to participate in the saving effects of Jesus' perfect sacrifice and become a central sacramental realization of that participation in time and space.

[53] This does not invalidate Nevin's insistence on the term "altar" rather than "table," because altars in the Bible *are* tables where the people of God eat with God and sacramentally receive his mystical presence.

When Solomon dedicated the temple, the liturgy of sacrifices occurred in the context of a seven day feast. The massive numbers of peace offerings would have supplied more than enough sacred barbecue for everyone, and the people went home "joyful and glad of heart" (1 Kings 8:62–66). In Isaiah 25:6–10, the eschatological vision of shalom in the new creation is a feast with rich food and wine at the mountain of God, and, naturally, the text associates this scene with a response of great joy: "let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

The Bible often associates joyful liturgical music and prayer with vigor, both in physical gesture/posture and volume. In the OT, the psalms repeatedly speak of shouting to the Lord, clapping, calling, raising hands, bowing down prostrate, and crying out to him with loud voices whether in praise or in lament. Likewise, in the NT depiction of heavenly worship and the eschatological wedding feast of the Lamb, great multitudes cry out their acclamations in a loud voice that sounds like the "roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder" (Rev. 19:1–9; cf. 5:12; 11:15; 12:10). Those who surround God's throne repeatedly fall down prostrate before him in joy and awe (Rev. 4:9–10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). As John Nevin teaches us, this is the heavenly worship in which we participate when we "ascend" in the Spirit in the eucharistic liturgy. Since the Eucharist is a foretaste and foreshadowing of this eschatological wedding supper of the Lamb, should not the church response to Christ's mystical presence at in the liturgy look and sound something like this? Should we not kneel and even prostrate ourselves before our King, and should not the walls of our churches reverberate with loud voices and thunderous praise?

Thus, both the OT and the eschatological vision of the NT reveal that a sacramental encounter with the presence of God in corporate worship ought to be a loud and emotionally intense occasion. Whether the people of God express shrieking sorrow and or great gladness, the appropriate tone or ethos of worship is always a kind of holy intensity before God. And while this must include lament and confession, the predominant tone or ethos of the church's encounter with God is one of exuberant, joyful praise. These biblical details about the manner of liturgical expression provide instruction about the kinds of music and song that embody the sacramental meaning of the liturgical assembly and the eucharistic liturgy most fittingly.

In reflecting on these biblical texts, Reformed theologian James Jordan offers a helpful corrective to historic Reformed piety and draws important conclusions about the ways of the Spirit of God:

> Much of the Reformed tradition has been very suspicious of the power of music to overwhelm people and change them. We tend to want to change people by talking to them and giving them things to read, but not by overwhelming them with music….God has created music and singing for certain purposes, and the Spirit brings those purposes to pass. What we want is music and singing that overwhelms and changes people the right way. Some quiet music does this; but most of the examples given us for public praise are vigorous. God has given musical worship to effect change, to take dull people and catch them up in praise until they are full of rejoicing. Music *always* has effects. Hence, our goal is to use music in such a way as to cause the right effects, not the wrong ones….True worship starts with the Son and the Spirit, who are worshipping the Father with full praise. The Spirit comes to wrap us up into this worship. The Bible teaches that He does so with music and singing. We are to allow ourselves to be caught up in such praise, and then our dull hearts will begin to change again and we shall feel like praising the Father.[54]

In the Christian church today, this kind of lively, expressive praise is most commonly found in Pentecostal and charismatic churches. I firmly believe that this kind of ethos has been one important factor that has attracted over 500 million Christians worldwide into Pentecostal and charismatic churches and movements over the past century. Pentecostal and charismatic singing, preaching, and prayer radiates the church's exuberant joy in the resurrected Christ. The Pentecostal ethos truly *celebrates* the victory of Christ's ascension and kingship and the powerful, living presence of King Jesus in the midst of his holy temple, the church, by the Holy Spirit. While Reformed people talk and write about the mystical presence, our charismatic brethren have actually sought to encounter Christ wholeheartedly and they respond as if they actually enjoy it! I would certainly not endorse every feature of charismatic worship songs and practices. They do need the catholic liturgical structure and theological substance that Mercersburg tradition can supply. However, I believe they have generally recaptured the spirit (or, better, have been captured by the Spirit) of the mystical presence better than the Reformed churches because they respond to the presence of Christ with a whole-bodied, enthusiastic vigor that is, according to the Bible, a more faithful and fitting response to the presence of God in our midst.

As I see it, one of the greatest challenges for the Mercersburg liturgical tradition in the twenty first century is to integrate Mercersburg liturgical form and substance with a charismatic energy and vigor in music and bodily gesture. In my own experience in both liturgical scholarship and liturgical leadership and

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[54] James B. Jordan, "Spiritual Worship," *Rite Reasons*, no. 83 (March 2003), 3. Jordan also rightly acknowledges that not all liturgical music should be loud and vigorous. Confession of sin, psalms and prayers of lament before God, preparation to receive the Word of God in Scripture, and even the communion rite itself (which celebrates peace with God and the rest of God's shalom as we recline at table with our Lord) are moments in which quieter music is often more appropriate. However, many other moments in the liturgy rightly demand the loud, aggressive praise described in the biblical texts above: our entrance into the assembly, our response to God's call to worship, thankful praise for forgiveness of sins, our response of renewed dedication and self-offering after the sermon, and our marching out with a renewed commission to serve the mission of God's kingdom in the world. Thus, the liturgy ought to be framed and chiefly characterized by energetic joy even though it is punctuated by quieter and more solemn moments.

consultation within the church, I have found that many people reject a structured, formal liturgy because they have never experienced liturgical worship led and performed in a confident, enthusiastic, and joyful manner. In too many Protestant churches (and Catholic churches, for that matter), liturgical renewal has produced liturgical texts full of rich, powerful biblical truth that are sung, prayed, accompanied, and enacted in ways that are emotionally tepid, aesthetically bland, and, in a word, boring. Far too often the most glorious liturgical texts are led by ministers who monotonously read words from the page, accompanied by only a single kind instrument (usually organ or piano) in ponderous and plodding fashion, and mumbled tentatively and hesitantly by the congregation. That is the kiss of death to liturgical renewal! Such dreadful enactment of and participation in the liturgy is an inherently contradictory speech-act because the manner of worship is so radically at odds with the content and significance of the words and actions themselves.

On the other hand, the best way to commend the theological substance and form of the Mercersburg liturgical tradition to others is the experience of the liturgy enacted in an exuberant fashion. Liturgical worship is a practice and a skill, and therefore it must be learned by experience. It is best caught by participation rather than merely taught by books and lectures. Where can we go to learn how to do this? Although substantive liturgical form and enthusiastic expression are too often disjoined in American church traditions, our African brothers and sisters seem to synthesize catholic form and charismatic freedom in combinations rarely found in American church history and culture. Perhaps African churches will lead us in envisioning new ways to infuse the biblical structure and content of catholic tradition with a biblical vitality of response to the presence and ministry of Christ in our midst. May the Lord preserve all that is good and right in the Mercersburg tradition by raising up ministers and congregations who will embody the s/Spirit of the mystical presence in a bold, joyful, vigorous, and lively liturgical life.

Acquiring Liturgical Literacy: The Ongoing Challenge in the Reformed Church in America

June 3, 2008 @ Princeton Seminary

Christopher Dorn

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) claims the distinction of having the oldest continuing non-Anglican Protestant ministry in the United States in America. The church established itself in the new world soon after the first Dutch immigrants came to New Amsterdam (Manhattan Island) in 1628. Almost four hundred years later, the RCA still maintains a Dutch Reformed presence here in North America, still struggling to define its own place in an American Protestant landscape that has become increasingly pluralized.

In the face of this struggle, the RCA has felt the need in recent years to re-examine the subject of worship. Why worship? In the act of worship the church expresses what it is.[55] Reformed worship then is the expression of a Reformed church. For this reason, members concerned about the ecclesial identity of the RCA in the present context have recognized the need to address the current state of worship in their congregations. How far does this worship express and simultaneously shape the distinctive identity of a church that traces its heritage from the Palatinate Reformation, which in turn is indebted to the reforms of John Calvin? In asking this question one already commits oneself to the path of historical research.

In this connection, the RCA Commission on History published last year a volume on the history of worship in the RCA, *Liturgy among the Thorns*.[56] The object of the collection of essays is to help the church understand its liturgical heritage. "This is what we have done and this is why." But the point is not to satisfy an antiquarian interest; it is to address the present--"How *does* worship in your congregation relate to what is presented here?" –as well as the future—"How *might* worship in your congregation continue in a tradition that is authentically Reformed?

I was privileged to be among those chosen to contribute papers in direct response to issues that Howard Hageman, an important figure himself in the liturgical history of the RCA, raised in a series of lectures delivered at Western

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[55] Cf. James Empereur, who understands liturgy as the "symbolic articulation of the spirituality of the community," by which the "self-image" of that community becomes transparent to itself. *Worship: Exploring the Sacred* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1987), 62.

[56] *Liturgy among the Thorns: Essays on Worship in the Reformed Church in America*, James Hart Brumm, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

Theological Seminary in 1966.[57] Those issues concern the liturgy of the Lord's Day (including the Lord's Supper), baptism, church architecture, and congregational song. Hageman perhaps did more than anyone to educate his church about its liturgy. The RCA is indeed indebted to him. But in the spirit of Hageman I want to extend this project of liturgical education into the future. I want to ask how the RCA can move forward.

Allow me then to propose "path" as the guiding metaphor for my remarks. First, I traverse the path that the RCA has already gone as it has sought to educate and express itself liturgically. On this path we will encounter bends and forks, rocky ground and smooth. Second, I attempt to mark out a path that the RCA can and should follow into the future. This will mean promoting awareness in the church today of the need for liturgical literacy.

Sixteenth Century: Liturgy in the Age of Reformation

Good liturgy is indispensable to the life of the church. When worship is not celebrated according to a liturgy that expresses the meaning and aim of Christian worship, then the community is in danger of losing its Christian specificity, among other things. It risks becoming a community in which it is no longer apparent to itself that it assembles in the Holy Spirit to worship God through Jesus Christ.

Historically, this concern for Christian specificity is what motivated the sixteenth century Reformers to modify and then to abandon the Roman Canon, the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church of their age. Theobald Schwarz was the first to introduce a Protestant Canon, retaining the form while introducing new content informed by Reformation insights into the gospel of God's free grace in Jesus Christ.[58] Martin Luther too at first retained the Canon, excising only those formulae that contained sacrificial ideas he regarded as inconsistent with God's self-revelation in Christ. Later Luther abandoned the Canon entirely.[59] The Reformed camp followed suit. Their worship derived in most cases from a vernacular paraliturgical service popular in the territories of southwest Germany and the Swiss city-states. This service, called the prone, included, among other things, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Decalogue. The service was didactic in intent, serving as a vehicle to teach the people the sum of Christian truth, about which they could learn little through an official Mass said in a language largely unintelligible to them.

This concern for Christian specificity is even more transparent on those Sundays when this service of prayer and instruction was continued in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Calvin and his fellow Reformers created forms for the Supper that spelled out very precisely the intention, use and goal of

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[57] For a complete text of these lectures, see Gregg A. Mast, *In Remembrance and Hope: The Ministry and Vision of Howard G. Hageman* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 93-169.

[58] For a brief overview of Schwarz' rite, see Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (New York: World Publishing, 1961), 159-60.

[59] *Ibid.*, 95-137.

Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper. The intelligibility of the sacrament was absolutely essential to them. The action must be explained in the form because a celebration of the sacrament devoid of a conscious understanding of it renders the sacrament of no value for those participating in it. In their own way, the Reformers were interested in promoting "full, active, and conscious participation in the liturgy." This interest helps explain the Reformers' insistence on (1) the vernacular in worship; (2) the strict adherence to and careful exposition of the dominical mandate (1 Corinthians 11:23-29) as the basis and warrant for the action; and (3) a service of preparation within a week before the celebration, a service in which those intending to participate were to ratify their baptismal vows (by reaffirming their faith in the terms of a Reformed Catechism) and to renounce sin, so as to avoid profanation of the body and blood and the holy community.

The RCA inherited the shape of these two services through the liturgical prayers and forms for the sacraments authorized by the Church Order of the Palatinate in 1563.[60] Petrus Dathenus, pastor of a small congregation of Dutch refugees in that southwest German territory, translated them into Dutch for use among his people. When the Dutch Reformed church incorporated itself later in the Netherlands, it introduced very few changes to the liturgical material it had received from Dathenus. At the provincial synod of Holland and Zeeland at Dordrecht (Dort) in 1574, church leaders passed resolutions to adopt the prayers and forms for the sacraments that Dathenus compiled for his own congregation. The synod, however, did require that the votum ("Our help is in the name of the Lord…") open the the Lord's Day service, and the Aaronic benediction ("The Lord bless you and keep you…") conclude it. The only modification to the form for the Supper was the required use of the words of distribution based on Martin Micron's London rite (1554): "Take, drink all of it, remember and believe that the precious blood of Jesus Christ has been poured out for the forgiveness of all our sins."[61] In 1619 the national synod of Dort officially adopted the forms for the sacraments provided by Datheen and instructed that they be added to the public documents of the church. By this synodical resolution, these liturgical texts were now officially constituted as the *Netherlands Liturgy* and accorded the same authority as that of the doctrinal standards of the church, which now consisted in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the canons promulgated at the Synod of Dort. It is noteworthy, however, that the new Church Order of Dort did not contain the forms for the prayers before and after the sermon for ordinary Lord's Day worship, nor did it instruct them to be read. Their continued use

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[60] For this account of the early history of the fledgling Reformed Church in the Netherlands and in America, I am relying on my essay, "Liturgy for the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper: Critical Turning Points," in *Liturgy among the Thorns*, 9-22. The reader is invited to consult the sources cited in that essay.

[61] For text and introduction, see Willem Frederik Dankbaar (ed.), *Marten Micron, De christlicke Ordinancien der Nederlantscher Ghemeinten te London (1554)*, Kerkhistorische Studein behorende bij het Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeshiedenis, Deel VII, 's-Gravenhage 1956.

depended on the customs of the congregations and the free enterprise of Dutch printers.

The *Netherlands Liturgy* and the doctrinal standards accompanied the colonists who settled on New Amsterdam (Manhattan Island) shortly after the Synod of Dort concluded its sessions. When the Dutch Reformed Church in the American colonies established independence from the mother church one-hundred sixty years later, it appointed a committee to translate and revise the entire Church Order of Dort, as well as the doctrinal standards and liturgy. In 1793, these documents were published together as the new church's official *Constitution*, consisting in the threefold "Doctrine, Liturgy, and Government."

Note the inclusion of the liturgy in the constitution of what was later named the RCA. RCA leaders have passionately protested that the RCA is a liturgical church, to be distinguished from other Reformed denominations that rely on worship directories.[62] For a confessional church, prescribed forms are necessary because they ensure the coherence of the theology of the standards with that expressed in worship. The law of belief establishes the law of prayer (*lex credendi, lex orandi*). Liturgical scholars are more used to the reversal of subject and predicate here: the way the church prays is the way the church believes (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). But it is hard to doubt the historical record in the Reformed churches in this regard. The forms are subordinate to the didactic purposes for which the Reformers drew them up. Critical voices as early as the nineteenth century will call attention to their orientation through the frequent use of the pejorative term didacticism.

But the RCA upheld the ideals of the Reformers for the most part, at least at the beginning. Throughout the colonial period worship in most congegrations would have conformed to the Palatinate pattern. On those infrequent Sundays when the Lord's Supper was celebrated, they would have heard the form for the Supper as it had come down to the Dutch churches from the Palatinate, since throughout the period the mother church mandated that pastors read without change the forms for the sacraments. Insofar as the sacraments were intended to seal the promises of the faith to the believer, the forms had to be read in their entirety as a safeguard against doctrinal error.

There were exceptions. Dutch pietist preachers, including the illustrious Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, militated against prescribed forms of prayer in worship. They were convinced that these dampened fervor in the expression of public devotion. The pastors who favored experientialism in worship, however, did not persuade the young colonial church to relinquish its commitment to the

[62] Leaders of the RCA could no longer make this argument after 1986, when their denomination approved a directory for worship. For a critical response to this decision, see Richard H. Otterness, "The Directory of Worship, 1986 in Reformed Tradition and Contemporary Society" (Ph.D diss., Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1987).

Netherlands Liturgy, which remained the norm for worship throughout the period.[63]

Nineteenth Century: Liturgy in an Age of Transition

This was about to change in the nineteenth century. There are several factors that converged to destabilize the Palatinate pattern of worship in the life of the RCA. Let me identify three. The profusion of Protestant groups competing for space on the American frontier is a major one. By the mid-century a committee appointed to report on the state of the church complained of the "unseemly diversity" that prevailed in worship practices of the congregations. The desire to conform to the habits of the other denominations was singled out as a suspected cause.[64] The second is the emergence of the Mercersburg theology in the fledgling German Reformed Church in the United States. The theological and liturgical ferment this movement spread had momentous consequences for the conception of liturgy and worship in both churches. Their direct impact, however, would be felt by the RCA only in the twentieth century. The third is the liturgical incompetency of denominational leaders. The closing years of the nineteenth century were a liturgically uncreative period in the RCA. Fortunately, through the visionary leadership of Howard Hageman and others the RCA would emerge from the aftermath of those years into the liturgical renaissance of the twentieth century. But let me first say more about these points each in turn.

The Search for Liturgical Identity in the RCA

In response to the perceived neglect of the traditional liturgical forms in the congregations, the synod appointed a committee in 1853 to examine the question of the liturgy and to propose needed revisions to the forms.[65] The changes the committee introduced were extensive and later incorporated in a new provisional liturgy approved by the synod in 1857. But the synod in a special session later determined its earlier action to be unconstitutional and resolved that the classes vote on the new liturgy in 1858. The majority of them, however, failed to vote, and so the synod aborted the whole project.

The labors of the past five years had not gone to waste, however. The synod did not recall the published copies, and they circulated within the denomination, serving as a means to educate the congregations about Christian worship. The ninety-six page provisional liturgy contained forms for a wide range of services and dedications, in addition to the traditional Palatinate forms for the sacraments. The Nicene and Athanasian creeds were printed, and a lectionary for morning and evening services for each Lord's Day was appended.

But the most outstanding feature of this liturgy was a complete order of worship for the Lord's Day, appearing for the first time in the history of the RCA.

[63] "The Liturgy for the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper in *Liturgy among the Thorns*, 20-21.

[64] Cited in Hageman's lectures in Mast, *In Remembrance and Hope*, 122.

[65] For this account of the liturgical history of the RCA in the nineteenth century, once again I rely on my essay "The Liturgy for the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper" in *Liturgy among the Thorns*, 23-25.

The order began with an invocation and a salutation, after which came the reading of the Law. Then a reading from the Old and one from the New Testament followed, providing the theme for the sermon. The prayer of intercessions was inserted between the lessons and the sermon. After the sermon came a second prayer, and the service concluded with a benediction. Rubrics indicating places for hymns are curiously absent. Presumably, the committee allowed local custom to dictate their place in the order.

Even if elegant, the order departed from the Reformed pattern of worship. First, in the Palatinate order the prayer before the sermon consists of a confession of sins and a petition for the saving apprehension of the Word. Reformed liturgical scholars have called this an epiclesis over the word, a hallmark of Reformed worship. Only after the sermon is the longer prayer of intercessions offered. Second, the invocation for God's presence is incongruent with the firm confidence in the always already present God expressed in the votum, another hallmark of Reformed worship. Finally, in the Reformed churches two scripture lessons were occasionally used, but almost always from the gospels and the epistles. Hageman has pointed out that the practice of selecting one from each of the two testaments was borrowed from the Anglican services of morning and evening prayer. In this connection, Hageman has chronicled the relations between these two churches in what he calls the Gothic period of the nineteenth century. The susceptibility of the Dutch Reformed to the Anglican influence during this period is one of those ironies of history. Recall that the very reason it initiated liturgical reform was to address the problem of conformity to the habits of other denominations.

Liturgy and the Mercersburg Theology

The Dutch were not the only Reformed Christians in America concerned about worship. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Palatinate immigrants became numerous enough to establish their own church, incorporated under the name the German Reformed Church in the United States. The Dutch and the new German church shared a common confessional and liturgical heritage. For this reason, they sought to cooperate closely with each other. By 1842, the two communions entertained a merger, and organized a joint convention at which to discuss how to bring this to pass.

The plans for this merger failed to materialize, however, largely due to a development in the German church called the Mercersburg theology. In the course of the next several years the two most outstanding proponents of this theology, John Nevin and Philip Schaff, presented a vision of an historical, visible, and catholic church centered around the altar, with a high doctrine of the Eucharist and the sacramental mediation of grace. Unfortunately, the Dutch denounced this theology for its "Romanizing tendencies" and eventually severed relations with the German church.[66] Later it hailed it as a "proto-ecumenical" movement, drawing inspiration from Mercersburg for the liturgical reforms it implemented later in the ecumenical age of the twentieth century.

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[66] *Ibid.*, 25-26.

The story of Mercersburg has been rehearsed many times. Here I want only to point out that the ecclesiological ideals of Nevin and Schaff dictated a total break from the Palatinate pattern of worship, in form if not in spirit, as they strenuously argued. Of course those who know the story will recall that the conflict and controversy in that denomination raged over the precise place of the traditional Reformed pattern of worship. For his part, Nevin judged the Reformation orders of worship as deficient. He was right in pointing out that they were not liturgies in the strict sense. He was right for two reasons. First, they were meant to be read only by the minister from the pulpit. Liturgy as work of the people is excluded. Second, the form for the celebration of the Supper was relegated to an occasional service; it was not regarded as integral to a complete service of pulpit and table. With sure instinct Nevin determined that the structure of worship that the Reformation handed on to the Reformed churches could not accommodate the liturgical worship he envisaged. Recourse had to be made to the patristic era, from which came eucharistic liturgies in which word and sacrament are organically related. The genius of Nevin was to claim that his own rehabilitation of John Calvin's doctrine of the *unio mystica*, according to which union of the faithful with the risen and glorified Christ is mediated by the symbols of the bread and wine in the power of the Holy Spirit, necessitated the adoption of such a eucharistic liturgy. With historical hindsight, we can say that insofar as Calvin's eucharistic doctrine was heavily indebted to the church fathers, especially Cyril of Alexandria, Nevin was right here where Cavin was wrong, or at least ignorant. In this connection, we have learned from Gregory Dix's magisterial history of the shape of the liturgy that the century of Mercersburg had access to liturgical sources that seem to have been unavailable to the Reformers.[67] For this reason, the title of Hughes Oliphant Old's important *Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* is somewhat misleading.[68] There is simply very little evidence to suggest that the views of the early Reformers on the structure of worship were informed by anything other than the Roman Canon and the paraliturgical services I described earlier. Despite his assertions to the contrary, Calvin's form of prayers were decidedly not after the pattern of the early church, as he mistakenly claims in the title of his Genevan liturgy.[69] Nevin was harsh in his criticism here. The Reformers dismissed liturgical issues as *adiaphora*, an unconscionable position to Mercersburg. More seriously, Nevin suspected their position to be the outcome of the failure to reconcile the imperatives of evangelical freedom with worship regularized by a liturgy.[70]

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[67] Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: A & C Black, 1945).

[68] (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1975).

[69] The full title, translated into English, is *The Form of Church Prayers and Hymns with the Manner of Administering the Sacraments and Consecrating Marriage according to the Custom of the Ancient Church.*

[70] See John W. Nevin, *The Liturgical Question with Reference to the Provisional Liturgy of the German Reformed Church: A Report by the "Liturgical Committee"* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1862). For a summary, see my

The Mercersburg theologians labored tirelessly to give to the congregations in the German Reformed church a liturgy that had enormous potential to enrich their spiritual lives. But with the possible exception of Nevin, they underestimated the lay resistance to their movement. Most of the congregations simply could not adapt to a form of worship in which an encounter between God and his people is mediated by grace-bearing sacraments. They were used to conceiving of this encounter as an experience of the Spirit in relatively free sphere of praying, singing, and hearing the word preached.

In this regard, Schaff at least had the foresight to realize that the congregations had varying degrees of receptivity to the revisions they had in mind. That is why he introduced in the Baltimore proposals four orders of worship for the Lord's Day of decreasing liturgical character. This allowed a measure of flexibility for congregations. On the other hand, Schaff intended the first to be normative; the idea was to habituate the people gradually to the form of worship embodied in the first. The alternative orders would not survive into the authorized version of the liturgy, an Order of Worship (1866).

More pessimistic by nature, Nevin entertained no illusion that the the liturgy would be embraced by the congregations. But he was far from despairing. The provisional liturgy had been published and circulating in the congregations. Even if they were not yet prepared to incorporate a liturgical worship in the strict sense, the provisional liturgy was propagating sound ideas about Christian worship among the people. Uncharacteristically, Nevin adopted an optimistic outlook, at least toward the distant future.

Liturgical Incompetency in the RCA

The controversy over the Mercersburg theology and liturgy, however, continued to plague the denomination until a truce was called in 1884. The labors of the movement would bear fruit in other Reformed denominations, however, which were prompted by its liturgical productions to undertake their own reforms. The RCA can certainly be counted among them. That they did not launch their reforms with the benefit of the same theological and liturgical acuity as their German Reformed co-religionists, however, is an understatement. Elbert S. Porter, the editor of the anti-Mercersburg *Christian Intelligencer* and himself a bitter enemy of the theology, was appointed in 1868 to chair a committee on worship. Fortunately, perhaps, he decided to withdraw himself from the committee in the following year. In 1870 Mancius Smedes Hutton, his replacement, proposed to guide the revision of the liturgy of the RCA on the basis of three principles: (1) greater corporate participation; (2) the self-identity of the RCA as a liturgical church; and (3) the adoption of Calvin's Strasbourg liturgy as a model. To be sure, there is nothing inherently wrong in these principles. But the committee exercised little creativity in implementing them. The order for Lord's Day worship in the revised service book that came out in 1873 reveals a slavish dependence on the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.

Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America: Tradition in Transformation (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 68-71.

Into the form for the Lord's Supper they inserted rubrics indicating that the Apostles' Creed was to be recited by both minister and people and that the Communion Thanksgiving was to be read responsively (Psalm 103). This of course was a gesture toward providing for more corporate participation.

This was not the only consideration that the committee devoted to the Lord's Supper. Curiously, it decided to include in an appendix titled "prayers for special occasions" a complete eucharistic prayer. I have treated this oddity elsewhere, pointing out that a prayer of this type was until then without precedent in the RCA.[71] Historians are not exactly certain whether and how the prayer was used in RCA congregations, since Dathenus' form for the Supper remained binding on congregations. Whatever the case, the prayer was evidently important enough to be retained unaltered when the revised liturgy was re-issued in 1882.

Direction for the liturgical life of the RCA was still lacking at the turn of the twentieth century. Mancius Holmes Hutton, son of Smedes Hutton, was appointed chair of the committee, which the synod constituted to respond to the demands of the congregations for abbreviated forms for the sacraments. The reports and the revised forms that the committee presented to the synod of 1903 reveal a strange attempt to conflate the form for the Supper with the eucharistic prayer. That form was now introduced by an epiclesis and contained a formula for self-oblation before the prayer for worthy reception, introduced by a rubric indicating the latter as an alternate. The committee also truncated the form in other places. Holmes Hutton explained that the proposed revision combined the abbreviated form and the richer parts of the eucharistic prayer that first appeared in the 1873 revision. That he had neither the liturgical sense nor even a basic knowledge of the conventions necessary for a liturgically acceptable eucharistic celebration is obvious. To remove the epiclesis and the self-oblation from the eucharistic prayer, refer to them as the richer parts, and then arbitrarily relocate them in the traditional form is to reduce the celebration to incoherence.

Before that form for the Supper was successfully introduced into the 1906 liturgy, it suffered even further mutilation. Before the epiclesis now appeared the preface and the anamnesis from the eucharistic prayer. This curious amalgam of formulae from the eucharistic prayer and Dathenus' form for the Supper was accepted by the church only after it agreed to publish the latter unmolested as an alternative. The RCA learned from the aftermath of the conflict in the German Reformed church to proceed cautiously. If congregations were unwilling to participate in liturgical reform, they would be free to opt out. The two orders for the sacrament would appear juxtaposed as the abridged and unabridged forms respectively.

Twentieth Century: Liturgy in an Age of Renewal

I have already referred to the twentieth century as a period of liturgical renaissance in the RCA. I have demonstrated elsewhere how the astonishing transformation of its worship life has to be seen against the wider background of

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[71] See my *Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America*, 74-79.

the global changes that impacted churches worldwide.[72] I refer here to the liturgical and ecumenical movements. These created a climate for liturgical research and reform that has never been seen in the history of the Christian churches before or since. Consequently, when the RCA appointed four of its leaders to address the subject of the liturgy in 1950, these men were able to perform their tasks with knowledge of both the history and principles of liturgy and the theologies of Christian worship that simply was not available to their predecessors. In this regard, the RCA owes a debt of gratitude to Howard Hageman, one of the four members of the committee. Hageman was not only an acknowledged authority in the history of Reformed worship, but also an open-minded student of the modern liturgical movement. Under his leadership, the committee after almost two decades of intense study and experimentation succeeded in integrating word and sacrament in Lord's Day worship. It also composed an order for the sacrament that adheres to the structure of the classic eucharistic prayer of the undivided church of the fathers. At the same time it succeeded in impressing a Reformed stamp on this order. In it one will find elements and emphases characteristic of classic Reformed theology and spirituality. In this regard, historians of the RCA are fond of claiming that the ideals of Mercersburg were realized with the committee's presentation of their *Liturgy and Psalms* to the denomination in 1967.[73] That this happened in a church that was once hostile to Mercersburg is another one of those ironies of history.

Twenty-First Century: An Age in Need of Liturgical Literacy

Liturgical history in the RCA does not end with the publication of that *Liturgy and Psalms* in 1968, but few will doubt how hard it is to trace the scarlet thread from the developments that culminated in the monumental achievement of 1968 through what has followed since then. The revisions of 1987 and 2005 have consolidated the gains of their predecessor, but this has not guaranteed fidelity to the liturgical principles embodied in it.[74] This has especially been the case in congregations in the Midwest. In the 80s and 90s many of these congregations were influenced by the "church growth" movement, accompanied by the rise of the "community" church. Pastors and worship leaders in these congregations abandoned "traditional" orders of worship in favor of "contemporary" or "seeker-sensitive" services. This meant that services consisting in praise medleys, dramas, personal testimonies, and emotionally uplifting messages usually inspired by a biblical theme largely replaced those determined by prescribed texts and prayer formulae, traditional hymnody, and expository preaching. The rationale for this change is that the words, symbols, and ritual actions deriving from the classic

[72] *Ibid.*, 83-107.

[73] *The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America together with the Psalter Selected and Arranged for Responsive Reading*, ed. Gerrit T. Vander Lugt (New York: The Board of Education of the Reformed Church in America, 1968). This is known popularly as *Liturgy and Psalms*.

[74] "The Liturgy for the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper," in *Liturgy among the Thorns*, 44.

forms of the Reformers and the liturgies of the broader catholic tradition are no longer relevant or accessible to the contemporary churchgoer. In order to engage persons living in an increasingly secularized and pluralized world, one must adopt forms of communication that appeal more broadly to an unchurched culture.

I am not unsympathetic to this argument, but this is not the place to enter into the debate. Here I wish only to point out that there have been signs of a shift in recent years. More young people are expressing nostalgia for the holy, for mystery, and for a depth dimension in worship that they don't seem to be experiencing in the worship of those congregations. A Presbyterian pastor recently reported encounters with young pastors, less than five years out of seminary, who have grown tired of contemporary worship. These young pastors have begun to search the church's worship heritage. They are asking which books to read, which conferences to attend, and are looking for informed people who can help them.[75] In brief, they are asking about how to acquire liturgical literacy. The publication of *Liturgy and Thorns*, which I mentioned at the beginning, is evidence that we can expect to encounter these young pastors in the RCA also.

If this is indeed a growing trend even in the RCA, and we are convinced that it is a salutary one, how do we encourage it? Let me suggest as a natural starting point for our deliberations the role of the seminary. The RCA seminary I attended did not assign to the history and theology of worship a privileged place in its curriculum; the subject was relegated to a four week module in an introductory course in pastoral theology. But I am not singling out here a problem only in the RCA. When I graduated from seminary, I discovered that this low estimation of the subject was reflected in the curricula of most Reformed seminaries, with a few outstanding exceptions. In this connection, Alan Falconer has observed that the theology of worship, where it is studied at all, is most often subsumed under the more general theme of "theology of sacraments" which in turn is not usually treated with reference to the *ordo* or structure of worship.[76] This reflects the problematic tendency to regard the world of the celebration itself as a secondary concern. Professors have recourse first to theological doctrines, which they elaborate apart from the liturgical celebration, and then apply them to the celebration in order to it illuminate its meaning. I have criticized this methodology elsewhere.[77] But it is still uncritically assumed. To illustrate, three years ago I was invited to interview at the seminary from which I graduated. In the course of the interview a member of the search committee asked me if I was competent to teach a course in sacraments. I responded affirmatively with

[75] Harold M. Daniels, "Association for Reformed & Liturgical Worship: A New Venture in Liturgical Reform and Renewal" in *Call to Worship* 38:4 (2004-2005), 31-32.

[76] "Word, Sacrament, and Communion: New Emphases in Reformed Worship in the Twentieth Century" in *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, 143.

[77] *Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America*, 188-190.

enthusiasm, ready after several years of research to apply in the seminary classroom what I had learned in the graduate seminar. I wasn't hired for the position, but in retrospect it seems increasingly odd that it was in regard to a position in Reformed theology, with special emphasis on Calvin studies, that I was asked whether I could teach a course in sacraments.

This benign neglect of the place of liturgical studies in seminary education has had the unfortunate consequence that many Reformed pastors have not been prepared to reflect critically on liturgical praxis. When I served a year as an assistant pastor in an RCA congregation, I very soon came to the frightening realization that I was inadequate to the task of framing and evaluating an order of worship on the basis of sound liturgical principles. I had only the slightest grasp of the reasons why we did what we were doing in our worship. Later in graduate school, when introduced to the enormous amount of historical and theological scholarship that came out of the liturgical and ecumenical movements, I became convinced that four weeks scarcely affords enough time even to scratch the surface of what pastors and worship leaders should know. In this regard, I will reiterate a question that Princeton University professor Horton Davies posed before the Mercersburg Society in 1985: "If a sermon occupies no more than a third of a service of divine worship, and liturgy takes up the rest of the time, why in theological seminaries is so much more time given to homiletics (not to mention biblical interpretation and systematic theology, all subservient to sermon production) than to liturgies?"[78]

Reformed seminaries need to open up space in their curricula for courses devoted entirely to liturgy and worship. They need to appreciate that those who specialize in liturgical studies are uniquely qualified to teach these courses. Our understanding of how liturgy affects and transforms those who participate in it has been enriched by their contributions. Disciplines including not only psychology and sociology but also linguistics, cultural anthropology, ritual studies, trauma theory, ethnomedicine, and ethnomusicology have been exploited by these scholars in recent years to provide us deeper insight into what takes place when a community assembles for public worship. Reformed seminaries should encourage and support those who are willing and able to explore these disciplines more deeply in order to impart a greater understanding of the vital role that worship practices play in the formation of individual and ecclesial identity. Liturgical scholars have demonstrated that methodological observation on what worshippers intend when they perform the actions in the time and space devoted to worship can make transparent what they believe about God, themselves, and their world. The old prejudice is that Reformed churches are examples of "orthodox" societies rather than "orthopraxic" societies. That is, they place more emphasis on doctrinal beliefs than on the proper performance of rites. Consequently, those who are interested in learning what the Reformed churches believe concerning the meaning of their worship should turn to someone

[78] "The Importance of Liturgical Studies in Theological Education" in *New Mercersburg Review* 1 (Autumn 1985), 48.

thoroughly catechized in the Reformed confessions.[79] This does have some validity, but to insist on a disjunction here is to separate theory from practice.

Perhaps this disjunction helps explain why the RCA has been bedeviled to the present day by the polarization of confessionalists on the one hand and pietists on the other. Sensitive observers will see how this division has been perpetuated and reinforced in the worship life of that church. Might the requirement of advanced courses in liturgy and worship in RCA seminaries sensitize prospective pastors to this division, at the same time preparing them to address it more adequately than has been the case before now? Consider the special role that liturgical scholars can play here. They naturally occupy a mediating position between the academy and the church. On the one hand, they can potentially enrich the academic life of seminarians by teaching them to see the practical relevance of the theology they are learning. On the other hand, they can indirectly strengthen the worship life of the churches by helping turn out liturgically literate worship leaders. These will be leaders who are competent not only in thinking theologically about liturgy, but also in thinking liturgically about theology. RCA seminaries should give more consideration how to promote the latter without neglecting the former. The ultimate goal of course is the formation of healthy congregations characterized by a deeper, more organic integration of confession and celebration. Such congregations will better withstand those polarizing forces that rend asunder what belongs together.

The assemblies and judicatories of the RCA also have a role to play in fostering liturgical literacy. A recent development in the Presbyterian Church USA can serve as an example of what I have in mind here. In 2002 the Office of Theology and Worship determined that the church needed to clarify the relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper, and made a recommendation to the General Assembly accordingly. The General Assembly concluded that a full and substantive study of the sacraments both within the Reformed tradition and in the ecumenical context was the appropriate response. It appointed a study group, and asked it to report back at the General Assembly in 2006. The outcome was a pastoral letter by the Sacraments Study Group to the congregations of the Presbyterian Church USA.[80] In the introduction of this letter is an invitation to the congregations to practice five disciplines over two years, They are to: (1) set the font in full view of the congregation; (2) open the font and fill it with water on every Lord's Day; (3) set cup and plate on the Lord's Table on every Lord's Day; (4) lead appropriate parts of weekly worship from the font and the from the table; (5) increase the number of Sundays on which the Lord's Supper is celebrated.[81] Concrete suggestions on how to introduce those practices follow, as well as a series of essays designed to stimulate theological reflection on the sacraments and the congregations' practice of them.

[79] *Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America*, 189-190.
[80] *Invitation to Christ Font & Table: A Guide to Sacramental Practices* (Louisville: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 2006).
[81] *Ibid.*, 5.

Might the RCA learn from the Presbyterian church, a close ecumenical partner whose concerns coincide with its own? The General Synod and the Commission on Christian Worship might consider how to develop a similar plan to foster liturgical literacy in the RCA with a view to promoting a more robust liturgical and sacramental life.

The time is certainly opportune. In response to an overture in 2004, the General Synod the following year instructed the Commission on Christian worship to develop guidelines and to introduce new liturgies for the Lord's Supper.[82] This came largely as a result of pressure from congregations whose style of worship, because it is unliturgical, cannot accommodate the current order for the sacrament. The General Synod has imposed on the commission the difficult task of determining the essential elements and expectations of the Lord's Supper on the one hand, and developing briefer, more flexible forms for these congregations on the other. The members of the commission know their denomination's liturgical history well enough to avoid repeating the mistakes of the late nineteenth century. The commission has proceeded cautiously. Capitulating to the demands of congregations for compressed forms out of pragmatic considerations is not an option.

As they continue to discuss issues surrounding the Lord's Supper, the members of the commission will no doubt discover that they cannot avoid raising the most fundamental questions about Christian worship in the process. The path of investigation into the Supper opens out onto a broader plain on which appears the whole of the liturgical heritage. The table is inseparable from the word, from the font, from the way Christians mark time, and from living the liturgy in acts of compassion, justice, and mercy. If the members of the commission follow the path on which they have set to the end, they may attain a vision of worship that is comprehensive in scope. How to communicate this vision to the congregations remains the challenge.

Let me conclude my work here where the proper work should begin. My concern was to bring attention to the need to re-examine the subject of worship in the RCA. Concerned members have realized that the starting point is historical research. In this regard, what I have provided here constitutes a model. But I have also argued that church needs actively to promote this process of re-examination in the present to ensure the health and vitality of its worship life into the future. My hope is that these remarks will contribute to continued discussion about this future.

[82] 2006 Minutes of the General Synod, http://images.rca.org/docs/mgs/2006MGS-Theology.pdf. Accessed: 20 June 2008.

A Communion Sermon

Joseph Alden Bassett…

Exodus 31
I Corinthians 15
Matthew 22

In seventeenth century New England the parable that we just heard from the First Gospel is a primary eucharistic text. Edward Taylor poet and pastor theologian in Westfield used this text in his argument with Jonathan Edwards' grandfather in North Hampton. The text is both harsh and instructive. The parable instructs us that the communion service isn't a casual occasion.

The figure of the banquet is familiar enough when thinking about the communion liturgy. That isn't what gives us pause. Rather it is the ejection of the guest that gets our attention. Being thrown out of a house will do that.

I have a young colleague who had this happen. He was thrown out of a parishioners house on a festive occasion. A single parent the minister had been invited to a party at a grand house. When it was over the host's daughter also a single parent cordially drew near. Their conversation was pleasant enough until the woman realized this man was raising his daughter by himself. This ignited a vociferous tirade against partriarchy. Having witnessed this before a member of the family hustled over, bundled the minister up, opened the door and summarily delivered him onto the outer darkness of the town's loveliest street.

In the parable it wasn't parenting that gave the offense but the guests lack of decorum.

Friend, how comest Thou in hither, not having a wedden garment?

We do not come to communion causally attired or otherwise. Ralph Keifer, a teacher at Notre Dame, used to say, we don't "eat" at communion, we "dine." In the words of the old hymn:

Jesus has the table spread where the saints of God are fed and he says to his people "come and dine."

Put that in the context of a eucharistic liturgy and certain amenities are to be observed. On this point the parable is most emphatic. The man who was thrown out failed to observe the amenities. No wedding garment? Out into the street you go!

Notice the text doesn't say the man didn't have one. It says he didn't wear one. When he accepted the surprise invitation, he probably knew what guests were expected to wear but failed to do so. Confronted by the King it is written he was "speechless." That is a decisive remark.

The guest was without words. Strange as it may seem the same may be said of us. We come to the communion table without words. Not in the sense of "Just as I am without one Plea" but in Nathan Mitchell's sense of without words. When it comes to the communion service, "We lack the competence to perform what is absolutely imperative." This Benedictine who knows Mercersburg well maintains that when it comes to celebrating Holy Communion we really don't know what to say.

Members of the Mercersburg Society recognize that fact. Others do not. One Saturday evening several years ago at a conference dominated by Presbyterians from John Williamson Nevin's seminary a Lord's Day service was announced for the following day. The communion service was to be held right after breakfast. I had seen that done under the ministry of Dr. Wallace Robbins in the same setting, a liturgy at conference tables.

One member of this society asked, "Would there be a eucharistic prayer?"

After an embarrassed silence, the reply was. "Does anyone have one on hand?"

"Yes" a Congregationalist had brought Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship.*

Sunday morning arrived and a breakfast buffet was served. People sat around the tables dishes and rumpled paper napkins before them, awaiting the service. Just at that point he I noticed a disciple of Mercersburg slowly and deliberately clearing away the detritrus of coffee cups and note pads. I thought, "Thank you. You're setting the table that we might dine with Christ." Mercersburg teaches us that Holy Communion is more that a casual event.

For such a service we lack adequate words of gratitude. Reformed Christians take the words of Pastor Gerhardt to heart.

What language shall I borrow
To thank thee dearest friend ?

Left to our own devices, we don't know how to bless God.

I use that word in a very specific sense. To bless is to declare God's promises with authority. On our own we lack that authority. We are as speechless as the guest without the wedding garment.

One of the marks of Mercersburg piety is a verbose Eucharistic Prayer. The crafters of the Mercersburg liturgy remind me of Bezaliel. In the *Torah* it is written that Bezaliel could work in all, manner of materials. What he put together was beautiful.

Not unlike the committee that wove together diverse elements to produce the Mercersburg Communion Prayer. In Appendix V of his book, *Worship and Reformed Theology* on Mercersburg theology Jack Maxwell color codes five sources for this prayer:
green for the original text of the committee; red for the Book of Common Prayer, orange for the Catholic Apostolic Liturgy, gray for the Palatinate liturgy, black for Scripture. As a result one of the question asked Nathan Mitchell when he defended his thesis at Notre Dame in August 1978 was whether the Mercersburg prayer was just a Romantic pastiche.

The full answer to that question came not out of Notre Dame but from the liturgy program at Drew. In her 1995 thesis, *Foundations of German Reformed Worship in the Sixteenth Century Palatinate*, Dr. Deborah Clemens maintained that the Mercersburg Liturgy was not the figment of the Romantic imagination. This liturgy sprang from the Reformed piety of Martin Bucer. [83]

Bezaliel received his wisdom from the Holy Spirit. The invocation of the Holy Spirit is a paramount element in any communion prayer, I am grateful to Nathan Mitchell for accentuating the original *epiclesis* in the Mercersburg liturgy. Robert W. Jenson a theologian who taught at this seminary for two decades [1968-88] has spelled out the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in his *Systematic Theology.*

Citing Jonathan Edwards and John of Damascus, Jenson takes up the melody of ontology with the two categories of Being's fullness - *taxsis* and time. *Taxsis* is the arrangement of elements. *Taxsis* can be a relationship of opposition or a relationship of fulfillment. Proper *taxsis* in the Trinity is the way of orthodoxy.

Times past and relationships of origin articulate the First Person; Time present and relationships of opposition bespeak the Second Person; Time future

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[83] Having heard various eucharistic prayers at Mercersburg Society meetings, in 1999 several of us returned to New England from New Jersey asking could there be an ecumenical Mercersburg eucharistic prayer.

and relationships of fulfillment are the Third person. To worship the Lord is to enjoy all Three in One. So we do this night.

We are here at the Lutheran Seminary about which the Battle of Gettysburg raged. Much that is now these United States originates in that battle. The grandfather and great grandfather of a Lutheran Pastor in Cambridge watched that battle. Young Jacobs was in Seminary and his father as professor at the college. Sometimes they took the college "glass" to watch the battle unfold from the garret of the house on the corner of Middle and Washington Street. At other times they cowered in their cellar. As the artillery rounds were fired "Aunt Mary" would say " Theirs…Ours."

The war didn't bring complete peace. Relations of racial opposition inform our present society now as then James Reeb who was killed in Selma used to bring his college youth group up from Washington to play capture the flag on the battlefield at night. We are constantly being reminded that the battle goes on.

Time future promises relationships of fulfillment. The Holy Spirit gives us our future in God. Nevin made that point in the "Biblical Argument" of the *Mystical Presnce*. There he elaborated on Paul's *midrash*:

> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust,
> So shall we also bear the image of the man of heaven.
>
> I
> Corinthians 15:49

Note the tense "we <u>shall</u> also bear the image of the man of Heaven." The future – the Holy Spirit arranges configurations of fulfillment. That is to say, our resurrection of the body is to be understood in terms of the Holy Spirit as future. In the Holy Spirit we have been given a future.

Looking out the windows of their house one Lutheran family in Gettysburg was struck by how many Confederate soldiers camped outside were reading their New Testaments. Did any of them know of Harbaugh's hymn written in the previous decade:

> Jesus I die to thee,
> Whenever death shall come;
> To die in thee is life to me,
> In my eternal home.

We die at different times and places, Nevertheless, we share the same future in God. That common future is the Third Person.

Glory be to God's Holy arrangement of time:

> As it was in the beginning with relationships of origin,
> As it is at present with relationships of opposition;
> As it ever shall be with relationships of fulfillment.

Being invited to dine at The Lord's Table remember:

> John Williamson Nevin
> Phillip Shaff
> Bernard C. Wolff
> John Henry Agustus Bomberger
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> William Heyser
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> George Welker
> John Rodenmeyer and
> Lewis H. Steiner

have not left us speechless. Because of their communion prayer will not be thrown out into the dark. Thanks be to God.

The Rev. Mr. Joseph Alden Bassett
Minister Emeritus, The First Church in Chestnut Hill

CHRIST, CREEDS AND LIFE:
Conversations About The Center of Our Faith
Anne T. Thayer & Douglas Jacobsen, editors.
(United Church Press, 2007)

A Book Review by F. Chris Anderson

Last September I started an adult Sunday School class that used this book. Days before I began the class I second guessed myself and thought that I had made a terrible mistake. I had assumed that since I was interested in doctrine about the Person and Work of Christ that my adults in Sunday School would be too. A few days before we were to begin I was afraid that I was about to be proved wrong. After the first class I discovered that my fears were totally unfounded. The adults loved the weekly study and eventually were changed by the contents of this book.

The book has been designed to lead such discussions by the Theological Commission of the Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ The introduction states that : "The theme of each chapter is drawn from a phrase that appears in the UCC Statement of Faith." (9) Therefore there are chapters on "Christ as a Person in History: 'The Man of Nazareth'," "Jesus as Fully and Perfectly Human: 'Shared Our Common Lot'", "Christ as Savior, A New Life: 'Crucified Savior, Reconciling the World to Yourself',", "Jesus as Ruler and Giver of the Holy Spirit: 'Our Lord'," , "Looking Ahead: 'Christ Will Come Again'" and "Christ's Life Flows in to the Church: 'You Call, Your Promise.'"

Each of these chapters explores various parts of the Statement of Faith by a brief introductory essay and then questions. After this introduction then the chapter examines what the Bible says, what the creeds say, what our liturgies say and what our hymns say. The chapter then ends with a final brief essay for reflection and more questions for discussion.

The creedal statements that were cited are: The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, The Definition of Chalcedon, Luther's Small Catechism, The Augsburg Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, The Westminster Catechism, and The Evangelical Catechism. The backgrounds of these were briefly explained in chapter 1. The liturgies came from The UCC Book of Worship and the hymns came from the New Century Hymnal.

My class all bought the book and I encouraged them to read the book at home. I am not sure how many did. But every week I would photocopy the particular chapter we were working on into one 8X11 handout sheet. The result was a folded four page handout that looked like a normal church bulletin. This meant that I had to edit out a lot of material since each chapter contains around 12 pages. Each week we read every question, scripture, creed, hymn or final question until we had finished the chapter. I verbally summarized the brief essays.

Sometimes we could finish the chapter in a week but more than not we studied the chapter for two or three weeks. My adults had many, many, questions. I was surprised at the difficulties they had grasping the basic doctrines that are in our Statement of Faith and creedal documents. I had three people who were surprised that Jesus was considered God in the Bible, the creeds, the liturgies and the hymns! Yet they did not fight what they said, they merely were amazed. The class really wrestled with these issues and I am very proud of them.

I whole heartedly recommend this book for every adult Sunday School class in the United Church of Christ. The reason it worked so well for me and my class was that it was field tested by the Theological Commission. This is the work of a group of UCC clergy, professors and lay people, both men and women, from Penn Central Conference. Therefore it does not have the idiosyncratic tendencies of many studies of doctrine that are the product of one person.

Since it has nine chapters it is probably too much to use as a study book during Lent where one is limited by having around seven times to meet. I would also not recommend pushing the content so that one can get one chapter done each week. This is a book that promotes discussion. You might be surprised at where the discussion goes but I found it was always worth going where the class wanted to go. This is a book to enjoy with other believers. This is a book that I hope has many, many printings.

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