Soteriological Worship: A Theological and Exegetical Analysis of the Doctrine of Worship within the Reformed Evangelical Tradition

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ABSTRACT

The Christian doctrine of worship has commonly been understood from ecclesiological, anthropological and soteriological perspectives. Within the Reformed evangelical tradition, each of these aspects have variously been given emphasis depending on the hermeneutical approach employed to understand scripture as a whole, or what I refer to as a 'biblical theology.' This thesis argues that a soteriological approach to worship makes the best sense of Christ's abrogation and fulfilment of Old Testament worship, seen particularly in John's Gospel and Hebrews. This is against the view of other writers within the tradition, who variously take a 'covenantal' view (which looks for OT patterns of corporate worship which are then retained by the church), or a Christological approach (which emphasizes all-of-life worship and edification within the gathering). Against both, I question whether there is appropriate exegetical warrant to view 'corporate' and 'all-of-life' worship as the best outcomes of biblical theology—even though these concepts are regualarly promoted within the literature. I argue, alternatively, that a better outcome is a soteriological model of worship which has elements of congruence with Paul's doctrine of union with Christ. This doctrine better understands a life of service as the ongoing response of those who are 'in Christ,' as well as establishing an appropriate context for preaching, prayer, praise and thanksgiving within the gathering.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

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1. Why worship?

Without doubt, worship as a practice and theology is at the heart of every Christian tradition. It describes and encapsulates the human response to the divine. Scripture goes as far to say that humanity is 'hard-wired' to worship, whether that be the worship of God or the things he has created;[1] and the tension this creates arguably weaves its way throughout the biblical narrative and into the life of the church. This thesis will explore how Reformed evangelicals have sought to make sense of worship as it applies its biblical theology to praxis.

1.a Background to this study

In the Reformed evangelical tradition, worship is generally considered to include those acts and attitudes which show appropriate honour and adoration towards God, both individually and corporately. Stemming from the biblical custom of bowing or prostrating oneself before another, biblical theologies of worship have gone on to consider the spiritual and ecclesial aspects of worship, and in particular, the ways in which worship is transformed by the life, death and resurrection of Christ. A tension exists, however, in how such outcomes are reconciled with historical and contemporary liturgical practices of the church. A number of different views exist within broader evangelical thinking, three of which I consider the most prevalent. Marva Dawn summarises a common doxological approach to worship:

> Do we sing to God with all our being? Do our practices of public, corporate worship and private, personal devotions form us to be a people who *live* praise.[2]

[1] E.g., Rom 1:25

[2] Marva J. Dawn, *How Shall We Worship? Biblical Guidelines for the Worship Wars* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003/2015), 28-29.

Worship, in other words, is something believers perform in different ways and contexts, although the substance is fundamentally the same: to stir us to witness, adoration, and fulfilment of God's glory.[3] Harold M. Best presents an alternative view that emphasises worship as an all-of-life activity, even if that encompasses corporate worship. We do not go to church to worship, he argues. But as continuing worshipers, we gather ourselves together to continue our worship, now in the company of brothers and sisters.[4] If Christ is the perfect worshipper, then he models an outpouring of what it means to be created in the image of God. Worship, therefore 'is human outpouring to the outpouring of lordship,'[5] and Christians are once-for-all living sacrifices on the merits of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice.[6] Thirdly, there is the view that elevates gathered (and often experiences as liturgical) worship. As Alan Rathe summarises:

> Liturgy is necessarily participative, focused on God's mighty deeds of salvation, and shaped by dualistic rhythms: Word and sacrament, proclamation and response. Worship brings both God's love and the entire Christian life into tangible, ritual focus.[7]

Questions have been raised, however, that challenge various assumptions behind these broad approaches to worship. For instance, 'Is there biblical warrant for speaking of the church gathering and its liturgy as worship?' and, 'Do Old Testament rituals have any place in shaping the corporate life of the church?' This thesis will consider these sorts of assumptions and challenges to them, specifically within the context of Reformed evangelicalism and its antecedents.

If the first Christians emphasized the corporate and liturgical aspects of worship, it was no doubt influenced by Jewish temple and synagogue practices. For example, as the Lord's Supper became central in Christian liturgy, it contained remnants of sacrificial imagery and language in its performance. The Reformers, however, were critical of the 'ceremonies' of the Roman Catholic church, likening them to the rituals of the Jewish temple, pre-Christ.[8] At the same time, their

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[3] Dawn, xii.
[4] Harold M Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 47.
[5] Best, 24.
[6] Best, 36.
[7] Alan Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship and Participation: Taking a Twenty-First Century Reading* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 109.
[8] While I recognise the challenges around issues of supersessionism within Reformed theology, I will not be considering these within this thesis. See, for example, Gerald R. McDermott, "The Reformed Tradition on Israel Is Diverse," updated January 24, 2018, accessed April 20, 2021, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/reformed-tradition-israel-diverse/ who states that there is not one consistent view throughout the tradition, and that it is possible to hold to non-supersessionist views within a Calvinistic biblical framework.

liturgical reforms neglected to question whether Christian worship as they understood it was actually the product of biblical theology. Rather they saw public worship as a tradition of church history which needed to be 'reformed.'

While the early evangelical movement did little to progress theological thinking around worship, in the last decades of the 20th Century a new conversation was beginning. Howard Marshall questioned the validity of using the terms 'worship' and 'service' to describe the Christian gathering or its constituent parts.

> The question which arises is whether these accepted terms [worship and service] are the best or the most appropriate ones to describe what Christians do, or what they ought to be doing, when they gather together. The character of anything we do is determined to some extent by the name which we give to it, and if the name is misleading the action itself may well not be what it ought to be.[9]

Shortly after, David Peterson wrote the seminal work, *Engaging with God*,[10] a comprehensive biblical theology of worship which placed an emphasis on worship as an *all-of-life* activity rather than the church service. While worship cannot be *contained* to a 'Sunday service,' he claimed, 'corporate worship,' nonetheless retained a central place within a whole life of worship as the place and means of edification.

While Peterson's work has been widely accepted within the Reformed evangelical community to be foundational for its study on biblical worship language, it is not without criticism, particularly in terms of its application to the church. Newer biblical theologies have been produced, such as Daniel Block's *For the Glory of God*;[11] which while appreciative of Peterson's work, is critical of the way in which the riches of Old Testament (OT)[12] worship theology are ignored in favour of the New. He recommends, rather, a covenantal approach to the topic, over Peterson's eschatological one. More in line with Marshall's position, Tony Payne then wrote a series of articles promoting

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[9] I. Howard Marshall, "How Far Did The Early Christians Worship God," *Churchman* 99, no. 3 (1985), 216.
[10] David G. Peterson, *Engaging with God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992).
[11] Daniel Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014).
[12] I will be using the abbreviations OT and NT for the Old and New Testaments, understanding both together as Christian scripture. The Reformed view of the relationship between testaments will become evident in subsequent chapters. I acknowledge, however, the breadth of views on the Christian 'appropriation' of the Hebrew scriptures. For a helpful summary, see R. W. L. Moberly, "The Old Testament in Christianity," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, edited by Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 388–406.

an alternative, non-ecclesial approach to worship.[13] Arguing that worship language has no place in describing that which more rightly belongs to the doctrine of the church, he pointed to the lack of technical worship language used in NT descriptions of the assembled church. This view has most recently been articulated by William Taylor in *Revolutionary Worship*,[14] in which he argues that an unhelpful focus on corporate (over all-of-life) worship has led to a culture of experiential Christianity.

Consistent amongst all those discussing this subject, however, is a commitment to the authority of Scripture and to a biblical-theological hermeneutic that insists on progressive revelation and contextual exegesis. Each would affirm, for instance, that the OT sacrificial system is crucial to informing the NT's treatment of worship and that the believer now worships 'in Christ.' However, for some, to worship 'in Christ' means the rituals of the OT are transposed to the church. For others, the all-of-life service of the believer is effective only when performed 'in Christ.' Best, for example argues that authentic worship is not driven by a liturgy or a call to worship, a style or methodology.

> Redemption does not signal the beginning of worship. Instead, it marks its once-for-all cleansing. It is washed in the blood of the Lamb and turned into a following after of the example of Christ and into continued deliverance from the intrusions of fallen worship.[15]

The thesis I will present agrees that NT worship is performed 'in Christ,' but in a different way. Before considering ecclesial or anthropological outcomes, I will argue that we need to understand how Christ worships on the believer's behalf, a position I will describe as *soteriological worship*.

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[13] Tony Payne, "Why do we worship as we do?" *The Briefing,* no. 299 (2003): 15–20; "Church and worship: Some questions and answers," *The Briefing,* no. 301 (2003): 15–18; "The gathering: thinking afresh about church," *The Briefing*, no. 302 (2003): 13–18.
[14] William Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship* (Leyland: 10Publishing, 2020). Taylor is Rector of St Helen's Bishopsgate in London.
[15] Best, 27.

'Soteriological worship' is worship understood primarily in terms of the actions performed by Christ on behalf of the believer, and as a process and state of restored access to God. It speaks into the spheres of 'all-of-life' service and 'corporate worship' (actions that are those of the believer), when each aspect is controlled by the doctrine of the church's union with Christ, although the spiritual worship of Christ is antecedent to both these concepts. The hermeneutical key to this model is a contextual biblical theology, consistent with the exegetical practices of the Reformed evangelical tradition.

1.b The reason for this study – a new approach to worship

As the various views outlined above have been debated for nearly three decades, what fresh insights might a new study of worship theology bring?

i. Clarity

With the term 'worship' used multifariously within different practical, theological and commercial contexts, what do evangelical Christians actually mean when they use this word? Do those leading a church service use the language of worship in a way their congregations will understand or agree with? Is worship about life or liturgy? Is it, for example, appropriate to describe contemporary Christian singing as 'worship' music? This study aims to bring a level of clarity to how we understand the biblical and contemporary uses of the word, as well as the broader doctrine of worship.

ii. Hermeneutical integrity

Reformed evangelicals care a great deal about 'correct' exegesis of Scripture. Rooted in the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, modern day evangelicals continue the concern that Christian worship accurately reflects biblical principles. With such divergent views on what biblical worship looks like, however, a fresh look at the hermeneutics employed to establish those views seems pertinent.

iii. A new model

While this study cannot hope to create consensus amongst those holding various positions on worship within the tradition, it aims nonetheless to offer a theology of worship that might speak

to a range of liturgical contexts, and which is historically and hermeneutically authentic to Reformed evangelicalism. As I have stated, a soteriological approach to worship is concerned firstly with the work of Christ before the actions of the church. In this sense it mirrors the Reformation (and biblical)[16] principle of salvation by grace, not works.

iv. A worship of grace

Evangelicalism is inherently a religion of grace, a grace which is to be preached and received. In both Calvinist and Arminian expressions, God graciously calls the lost to repentance and faith, and provides the means of reconciliation. My contention is that what is true of the gospel is equally true of worship. J. B. Torrance recognises this when he claims,

> It is supremely in Jesus Christ that we see the double meaning of grace. Grace means that God gives himself to us as God, freely and unconditionally, to be worshipped and adored. But grace also means that God comes to us in Jesus Christ as a man, to do for us and in us what we cannot do. He offers a life of perfect obedience and worship and prayer to the Father, that we might be drawn by the Spirit into communion with the Father, "through Jesus Christ our Lord."[17]

Key to this view is that worship occurs in union with Christ, rather than by the effort of the believer. As such, there should be a freedom from obligation in worship; and rather worship should be the means of Christian refreshment and joy. For many, however, worship is not an enjoyment of grace but an activity to be regulated, or the mark of differentiation between traditions, or in some cases an actual 'work.' A soteriological view of worship, regulated by the church's union with Christ, and performed on the eschatological plane guards against this. As Michael Jensen states,

> The gospel is a call to worship. And yet, it is also a declaration that in Jesus we have one who represents us as worshippers—one who worships on our behalf in the throne room of God.[18]

2. Existing models of worship

Several recent studies have attempted to survey the variety of hermeneutical approaches within evangelical worship. In each, however, worship tends to be considered primarily in its corporate sense, rather than anthropologically or soteriologically. Thus, while helpful in bringing a biblical-theological perspective to the subject, they nonetheless reflect a common liturgical bias. Noting

[16] E.g., Eph 2:8–9
[17] James Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 55.
[18] Michael P. Jensen, *Reformation Anglican Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 41–42.

this bias, a brief summary and comment will nonetheless provide a useful background to this study.

2.a Michael Farley

Farley identifies two distinct hermeneutical approaches broadly employed by evangelicals in their biblical theologies of worship—what he describes as the *Praxis-oriented regulative principle* and the *Theologically oriented regulative principle*.

Praxis-oriented regulative principle

If the 'regulative principle' refers to the hermeneutical principle found in Reformed literature for determining a proper biblical warrant for liturgical practices, then as Farley observes, a 'praxis-oriented regulative principle is a hermeneutical approach to a biblical theology of worship that defines the norm for Christian worship as the apostolic *practice* of corporate worship in the first-century church.'[19] Liturgical practices are biblical, therefore, only if they follow explicit NT commands. Advocates of this view include the English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians, both of whom produced writers who variously rejected, for example, the church's calendar and creeds as incompatible with NT apostolic practice.

Farley identifies John Piper and D. A. Carson as modern proponents of this approach, although perhaps less strict in their application. Piper, he claims, makes the distinction between worship in the OT, which is concerned with ritual and form, and the NT, which is concerned with inward spiritual experience. 'Christians ought to be mostly indifferent to the forms of worship and even attempt to minimize the use of all "outward" forms because there are no explicit examples in the NT of the liturgical forms employed by the apostolic church in her weekly assemblies.'[20] Similarly, Farley notes Carson's assertion that the NT lists of corporate worship practices contain no explicit model or mandate of how to order such elements.

A few comments are pertinent to Farley's analysis. While rightly associating the regulative principle of worship (RPW) with historic Puritan and Presbyterian corporate worship, whether to include Carson and Piper in such a category is, however, debatable. As I will return to consider the historical conception and interpretation of the RPW in later chapters, I might simply say here

[19] Michael Farley, "What is "Biblical" Worship? Biblical Hermeneutics and Evangelical Theologies of Worship," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 3 (2008): 592.
[20] Farley, 595.

that, as expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*,[21] the RPW is so general a notion that it does not specify any hermeneutical or practical principles for its application, including for example, whether 'biblical commands' might be considered as purely NT commands. Such principles are, of course, of interest to this study. As I will observe, Carson's concern is not primarily with praxis as Farley suggests. That is, he does not approach worship with a primarily liturgical lens, but a Christological one. As Farley's definition of worship is restricted purely to the liturgical, his attempt to engage with Carson's argument that true worship transcends liturgy feels unsatisfactory. When Carson claims that established liturgy lacks biblical warrant, it is not because such liturgy is inconsistent with scripture, but that scripture is often inconsistent with our liturgy. Carson would rather place himself outside the regulative and normative camps, observing that in practice their praxis is remarkably similar.

Theologically oriented regulative principle

This hermeneutical approach, claims Farley, adopts, in addition to the particular forms of Puritan liturgical practice, more general theological principles. According to this model, liturgical forms or rituals are biblical insofar as they embody truths taught in the Bible, and not merely because the apostolic church practiced the forms or rituals in question.[22]

> Adherents of a theologically oriented regulative principle… defend the liturgical calendar and common lectionary because the festivals embody central biblical truths by focusing the church's readings, sermons, and prayers on the major Christological events in redemptive history.[23]

Two approaches, he notes, are evident:

1. A Patristic-ecumenical model, which draws its ideals from post-biblical liturgies of the patristic period and from 20th Century ecumenical liturgical movements which look back to practices of the ancient church. Proponents include Simon Chan and Robert Webber. While I note that both Chan and Webber *are* interested in biblical-theological approaches to worship, I will not be

[21] 21.1 The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and doeth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited to his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture. "Westminster Confession of Faith," The Church of Scotland, accessed April 15, 2016, http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about_us/our_faith/westminster_confession_of_faith

[22] Farley, 596.

[23] Farley, 596.

considering their post-canonical approaches to praxis as relevant to this study. Nor do I see them self-identifying particularly as 'conservative' evangelicals.

2. A Biblical-typological model, which draws on the NT *and* OT in developing a biblical theology of worship. 'By reading the OT with a typological lens, [adherents] seek to derive normative principles and patterns of practice from the OT that can shape Christian liturgy when suitably translated into forms appropriate for the new covenant community.'[24] While practitioners may embrace certain post-biblical liturgies, they will at the same time use their biblical theology to give warrant to and critique those liturgies. They acknowledge the discontinuities between OT and NT, but similarly highlight the continuities of basic theological principles and patterns regarding corporate worship. Proponents include Allan P. Ross, Jeffrey Meyers and Peter Leithart, who advocate translating and recontextualizing OT worship rituals to Christian corporate worship. As such, 'a careful typological reading of the OT demonstrates that the Bible does provide instruction about the order of different elements in a worship service.'[25] This typology has a double focus: OT institutions and practices are fulfilled in Christ but are also played out in the practices of the church.

It is this model, the biblical-typological approach, that Farley claims has the greatest merit and potential for developing an evangelical biblical theology of worship.

> The OT especially matters for an evangelical theology of worship because it provides biblical precedent for many ancient liturgical practices that evangelicals have forgotten or rejected. It also offers biblical guidance and wisdom concerning many disputed features of Christian worship. It is the OT that furnishes biblical foundations for a theology of the order of worship… Suggesting that OT worship *only* speaks about Jesus and not about the church is to separate Jesus from the church in a way that opposes the NT pattern of double fulfillment of the OT in both Christ *and* the church.[26]

There is much that is attractive to conservative evangelicals in this approach, particularly in employing a biblical-typological hermeneutical method. My contention with this model, however, and indeed with Farley's representative authors, is that it is liturgically biased. His claim that this biblical-typological hermeneutic, following an apostolic hermeneutical tradition which teaches that OT worship ultimately speaks of Christ and the church,[27] can only be said to be true to the extent that those same apostolic authors affirm the OT patterns. That Christ could equally be

[24] Farley, 602.
[25] Farley, 607.
[26] Farley, 612.
[27] Farley, 612.

understood by the first Christians to be the Davidic messiah, Isaiah's suffering servant, and Moses' prophet, however, shows that NT typological fulfilment cannot be contained in simple like for like similarities, but in profound transformations of those types. As I will contend, it is more plausible that the apostolic hermeneutical tradition views the church, not as a fulfilment of an OT type, but as having always existed by virtue of its union with Christ; it is and always was the body of Christ. The NT, I would suggest, does not draw a straight line from Tabernacle to Temple to Church. If OT ritual is concerned with establishing perpetual patterns of worship, one would expect to see these affirmed in the apostolic writings, which I would argue is noticeably absent.

2.b Alan Rathe

Rathe's analysis is concerned with Evangelical participation within worship.[28] Essentially a literary study, he employs a trifocal lens, looking towards the three horizons of

i. *human action* (actions and rituals, the horizon most readily apparent to gathered worshippers);
ii. *divine-through-human-action* (traditionally understood as communion);
iii. *the life of God* (a liturgical expression of participation in the immanent trinity and the *missio Dei*).

Within the literature he notes five emphases amongst Evangelical writers on worship:

i. An All-of-Life Emphasis
ii. A Sacramental Recovery Emphasis
iii. A Gathered Devotion Emphasis
iv. An Evangelistic Worship Emphasis
v. An Organically Missional Emphasis

For the purpose of our study, it is the authors in his first category (including Peterson, Best, Carson and Keller) that most clearly align with the Reformed evangelical tradition. And as Rathe applies his three horizons to this group, he identifies a view of worship which is no longer tied to a corporate liturgical setting, but with an emphasis on horizontal edification. Within the first horizon, these authors give much attention to interior action, but also to those exterior acts which are intended to serve and edify the community; those moments in gathered worship 'that

[28] Rathe, 65.

highlight the porosity of the boundary between the two poles of its worship: gathered adoration and lived-out action."[29] Within the second, he notes a resistance to sacramental thinking. Rather, for those anchored in the Reformed tradition, the Word is viewed as the primary vehicle for *divine-through-human* action. It is through human participation in the Word (through Scripture-based preaching, Scripture reading, and the rhythm of proclamation and praise), that God's actions are recognized.[30]

It is interesting that while Rathe does note the work of Robert Webber in his Sacramental Recovery group (aligned with the former mentioned Patristic-ecumenical model), he ignores Farley's biblical-typological authors all together. Nonetheless, his study is helpful for considering the *praxis* of corporate worship. What it lacks for our purposes is any clear biblical-theological foundation for that praxis. If he does apply a doctrinal lens, it is a systematic one, and one which tends to emphasize and evaluate the activities of the church's worship in relation to the immanent Trinity. Volf, Gunton and others have cautioned against arguing directly to the Church in this way.[31]

> Insofar as Trinitarian models do in fact speak about the triune God who is to be distinguished from human beings, models of the triune God and of the church must also be distinguished. "Person" and "communion" in ecclesiology cannot be identical with "person" and "communion" in the doctrine of the Trinity; they can only be understood as analogous to them.[32]

Rather, if there is to be an analogy between God and Church, Trinity and community, 'it should be of an indirect kind, in which the Church is seen as called to be a… finite echo or bodying forth of the divine personal dynamics.'[33] Just as the being of God *is* the three persons of the Trinity in relation to each other, so it is with the church.

If Farley's analysis correctly identifies those authors and approaches relevant to our study, his methodology and conclusions, however, tend to show a bias towards worship as a purely liturgical practice, and therefore misses the intention of these authors. Rathe's study, while understandably broader than my own, accurately reflects the assertions of the all-of-life writers but ignores the liturgical advocates all together. His methodological lens has a Trinitarian bias,

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[29] Rathe, 73.
[30] Rathe, 80.
[31] Colin Gunton, "The Church On Earth," in *On Being The Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, eds. Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 68.
[32] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 199.
[33] Gunton, 69.

and while employed for a different purpose, is nonetheless concerned with the actions of God and the worshipper rather than the biblical principles on which those actions are built.

A more suitable methodological lens for this study needs to give greater consideration to biblical-theological hermeneutical concerns, needs to demonstrate application to more than just corporate worship, and needs to be 'Reformed' in substance. For this purpose, I will turn to John Calvin in the next chapter.

3. Assumptions and limitations

3.a The canonicity of Scripture

In line with Reformed and evangelical convictions on the authority and sufficiency of scripture, I will be using the historically accepted canon in any exegetical analysis. To develop a systematic and biblical theology of worship requires approaching the biblical texts in the same manner as the subjects of this study. While I acknowledge there are issues over authorship of critical texts, (in this case the NT books of Colossians and Ephesians), I will again consider the Pauline books as one corpus within their canonical context, in line with historical and contemporary evangelical scholarship.[34] In order to understand worship within a salvation-historical context, the hermeneutical principle of biblical theology requires viewing scripture as a whole, rather than as a collection of individual books, and therefore individual authorship is not a critical concern for this study.

3.b Limited to the Reformed (or Calvinist) evangelical tradition

Evangelicalism, as defined below, is a broad movement with significant theological distinctives within its sub-groups. To satisfactorily investigate the theology and practice of worship across the entire movement would be impossible for a study of this size. While my investigation into worship within the Reformed evangelical tradition will no doubt touch on issues relevant to the

[34] N.T. Wright, for example states: 'Here we encounter an interesting irony. In much Protestant scholarship of the last hundred or more years, Ephesians has regularly been deemed post-Pauline, and Colossians has frequently joined it in that "deutero-Pauline" category… I have long regarded that judgment with suspicion, and the more I have read the other letters the more Ephesians and Colossians seem to me very thoroughly and completely Pauline. The problem is, of course, that within the liberal Protestantism that dominated New Testament scholarship for so many years Ephesians and Colossians were seen as dangerous to the point of unacceptability, not least because of their "high" view of the church. There are, to be sure, questions of literary style. But with the Pauline corpus as small as it is—tiny by comparison, say, with the surviving works of Plato or Philo—it is very difficult to be sure that we can set up appropriate stylistic criteria to judge authenticity.' N.T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009), 43.

broader movement, I will consider other groups only where they have direct impact on the development of worship theology within the Reformed tradition. Methodism and Pentecostalism, for instance, will not be considered other than in their contribution to the Calvinist–Arminian debates. Similarly, Lutheranism is a related but separate theological tradition, only really bearing on our subject though its influence on the normative principle of worship. Regarding Calvinism, I do not intend to engage in detail with otherwise key elements of Reformed theology, but rather to view Calvinism as the theological context for my study into evangelical worship. I will assume, for example, other well-known aspects of Calvinist soteriology (such as God's predestination of the elect) as given. Although on this point I would note that historically both Calvinists and evangelicals have tended to view the 'reprobate' as those in need of conversion and therefore in need of hearing and responding to the gospel.[35]

3.c Gender considerations

Gender in worship has become a growing field of research in recent years, and with no exception within evangelicalism. Theresa Berger suggests that broadly 'theorizing the study of gender in Christian worship appropriately… constitutes a critical need in the field of liturgical studies.' Corporate worship, she argues, is an embodied practice and is therefore never gender-free.[36] Noting the rarity of any critical interrogation of masculinity and liturgy, she none-the-less, suggests there is 'a growing insistence… among some conservative Protestant and evangelical groups that Christian ministry needs to regain a "masculine" feel.'[37] Illustrating this idea, James Fenimore notes a key feature of contemporary evangelical worship—its use of technology—to be one which is male dominated.[38]

On the other hand, Christian Smith points out the indifference within evangelicalism towards gender issues.

> The vast majority of ordinary American evangelicals are not particularly interested in culture warfare; they do not share many of the assumptions and proclivities that make such warring attractive. Nor are more than a few of them, in Frances Fitzgerald's words, a 'disciplined, charging army,' ready and eager to follow their alleged leaders into battle. If

[35] Jon Balserak, *Calvinism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13.
[36] Teresa Berger, "Christian Worship and Gender Practices," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2 Mar. 2015; Accessed 1 Dec. 2020. https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-6.
[37] Teresa Berger, "Christian Worship and Gender Practices."
[38] James Fenimore, "Boys and Their Worship Toys: Christian Worship Technology and Gender Politics," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 1.1 (2012). Fenimore argues that churches should intentionally mitigate gender politics, developing an intentionally gender-inclusive process in order to change media ministry.

> anything, our interviews with ordinary evangelicals reveal not the triumphalism of the Christian Right, but the triumph of ambivalence.[39]

While this subject alone would be worthy of further investigation and analysis, it is, none-the-less, more concerned with the praxis and sociology of corporate worship. Our study, on the other hand, considers worship less in its corporate or liturgical forms, but as a soteriological phenomenon, regardless of one's gender or other defining characteristics of 'the worshipper'. Where I show interest in corporate worship within this thesis, it is because it is derivative of this primary soteriological focus, for hermeneutical, rather than sociological concerns. I sadly must agree with Monique Ingalls, however, that 'though there are prominent exceptions, women are also vastly underrepresented within evangelical university and seminary faculties as well as in public intellectual leadership more generally,'[40] and therefore in this field of scholarship.

4. Working definitions

4.a Reformed (or conservative) evangelicalism

Evangelicalism is a tradition rooted in the protestant revivals of the late 18th Century in Great Britain and the United States, established by figures such as George Whitefield, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards. Bebbington's widely used definition sees evangelical spirituality as having four qualities:

> conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be termed crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.[41]

Others have suggested the addition of *pietism*, as historically evangelicals have been characterized as displaying an indifference to culture, laying instead an emphasis on evangelism and personal discipleship.[42] If that is indeed the case, there is little sense amongst *contemporary* evangelicals that pietism should foster a disengagement with the world. Rather, it is more common for

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[39] Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 194-95.
[40] Monique Marie Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 27.
[41] David Bebbington*, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 2–3.
[42] Brian Harris, "Beyond Bebbington: The Quest for Evangelical Identity in a Postmodern Era," *Churchman*, Vol. 122, no. 3 (2008).

evangelicals to hold to a Christian worldview as a positive basis for cultural engagement,[43] and to regard contextual issues as essential to thinking on church planting, mission and corporate worship.

Within contemporary evangelicalism, various subcultures are evident. Some see a division between confessional and revivalist evangelicals, the former wary of the unguarded experientialism of the latter, with the latter critical of a perceived stifling intellectualism of the former.[44] It is common amongst confessional evangelicals to self-identify as 'that movement of Christian believers who seek a constant convictional continuity with the theological formulas of the Protestant Reformation,'[45] against those who have pursued a more liberal trajectory.

In this study I use the terms *conservative* and *Reformed* evangelical synonymously; and while I won't be using the *confessional evangelical* label, the subjects of this study will be broadly consistent with those who identify as such. By Reformed, I mean those who theologically adhere to Calvinism. I might further define our subjects against 'non-conservative' groups, variously labelled as *open evangelical* and *post-evangelical* and even *charismatic evangelical*, who tend to reflect a more open and inclusive approach to culture and who may be more theologically liberal or experiential in praxis. Of course, any one church may possess characteristics of more than one sub-group described here. As such, I recognise the danger of over-generalising in this regard when speaking of any particular individual or church congregation.

With that note of caution, I might broadly suggest that Reformed evangelicals are represented by those conservative Presbyterians who hold to the *Westminster Confession*, many low-church Anglicans within Great Britain and Australia, as well as numerous independent and Baptist churches who would adhere to the *Second London Baptist Confession*.

4.b Biblical theology

The hermeneutical method employed in this study is that of *biblical theology*. The characteristics of this approach will become more evident in the next chapter as I examine the hermeneutics of

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[43] See, for example: Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1983).
[44] See fuller discussion in Roger Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicalism," in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, eds. Andrew Naselli and Colin Hansen (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2011).
[45] Albert Mohler, "Confessional Evangelicalism," in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, eds. Andrew Naselli and Colin Hansen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 74–75.

John Calvin. In short, the biblical-theological method seeks to read Scripture as a whole, as the unfolding narrative of God's redemption of the world, ultimately through Jesus Christ. This is not to say that there is one single approach to biblical theology to which all agree.[46] D. A. Carson remarks that in using the term within contemporary biblical scholarship, 'everyone does that which is right in his or her own eyes, and calls it biblical theology.'[47] Rosner's definition, however, is helpful:

> Biblical theology may be defined as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.[48]

Biblical theology is, therefore, both exegetical and theological. It involves the inductive study of texts in their historical and literary contexts and it attempts to put canonical texts together according to their own redemptive-historical and literary-narrative ordering.[49] Employed by Calvin, this approach continued to provide a hermeneutical and exegetical framework for subsequent Reformed and contemporary evangelical theologians, giving particular attention to the relationship between the OT and NT, relying on the use of typology against figurative readings of the text. In this way, interpretation of types should not contravene the original meaning, nor should they be open to a reader's interpretive imagination. Rather 'typology emerges from the interpretive logic found in the biblical-theological exegesis modelled by the NT authors.'[50]

4.c The language of worship

In line with this hermeneutical approach, a central tenet of this thesis is that worship should be defined according to its use and development within Scripture. I acknowledge that language

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[46] While the model I am using might be described as a salvation-historical one, various other approaches employed by conservative evangelicals (including covenantal and dispensational models) are explored in: Denny Burk and Brian J. Vickers, *God's Glory Revealed in Christ: Essays on Biblical Theology in Honor of Thomas R. Schreiner* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2019); and Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

[47] D. A. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. Brian S. Rosner, T. D. Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 91.

[48] Brian Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. D. Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 10. Similarly: 'A biblical-theological approach attempts to interpret texts in light of their broader literary context, their broader redemptive-historical epoch of which they are a part, and to interpret earlier texts from earlier epochs, attempting to explain them in the light of progressive revelation to which earlier scriptural authors would not have had access.' G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 104.

[49] Aubrey Sequeira and Samuel C. Emadi, "Biblical-Theological Exegesis and the Nature of Typology," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1 (2017): 13.

[50] Sequeira and Emadi, 18.

changes over time and within different contexts, and as such it is valid to use worship language today differently to that of the biblical authors. Often such changes will reflect theological concerns, and at other times will simply reflect the natural evolution of language. Suffice to say that in this study I will not be considering worship in the contemporary sense of corporate singing or certain styles of popular Christian music. There are no doubt good reasons for why worship is used to describe musical genres, some of which we will touch on. Our starting point for understanding worship, however, is best expressed by David Peterson as *the way humans engage with God*.[51] And while this view is broadly accepted among evangelical scholars and teachers, for clarity I might note three distinct ways worship is currently understood to contribute to that end, although I would suggest that none of these categories are strictly biblical terms in and of themselves.

4.d Corporate/Public worship

Most simply, corporate or public worship refers to that which occurs within the gathered church, or the church service. This might variously include public prayers, singing, preaching, formal and informal liturgical elements and the sacraments.

4.e All-of-life worship (or service)

All-of-life worship (or all-of-life service) is the view that worship cannot be contained to the church service or liturgy, or indeed the physical church building. Rather every sphere of life is viewed as sacred and its deeds considered to be acts of worship. Romans 12:1 is commonly cited to endorse this as a NT proposition. Similar statements in the OT, however, suggest all-of-life-service equally belongs to Israelite faith, expressed, for example, in Deuteronomy 6:5 in the call to 'love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.' Though all-of-life worship is a theological formulation of recent evangelical scholarship, I will note that the concept appears in the work of earlier evangelicals, albeit expressed in other ways. While I will make an exegetical distinction in Chapter 6 between the biblical terms for 'worship' and 'service,' in general they are considered as synonymous terms within this all-of-life context.

4.f Spiritual worship

[51] Peterson, 20.

Spiritual Worship is a phrase employed by various writers in the evangelical tradition from Calvin to the present. It is used variously to refer to the inner worship of the heart and mind (i.e. the worship of the human spirit) to the worship that is inspired and enabled by the Holy Spirit. My thesis will use the term in the manner of the Puritan, John Owen, who speaks of *the worship of Christ as performed on behalf of the believer*. In this sense, Christ's spiritual (or gospel) worship is commended against the physical worship of Israel. My proposed *soteriological worship* model will consider spiritual worship in this way.

5. Chapter summary

This thesis will begin by investigating the historical trajectory of worship theology within the Reformed evangelical tradition; it will analyse key examples of contemporary literature on the biblical theology of worship; it will undertake an exegetical study from which I propose a new model for evangelical worship: *the soteriological model;* and will use this model to engage with examples of current thinking and practice.

PART I – The Pre-Evangelical Witness to Worship

Chapter 2: Pre-Evangelical Worship

This chapter will set out the theological foundations for worship within the Reformed evangelical tradition. In the works of John Calvin, we see a salvation-historical hermeneutical system established and applied to worship. The terms spiritual and public worship are introduced by Calvin to distinguish between inward and outward expressions. Looking to what follows in post-Reformation England I note two distinct trajectories in the development of worship theology: the normative approach as seen in Hooker, and the regulative approach outlined in the *Westminster Confession*, and given fuller consideration by Puritans such as John Owen. Over this period, the emphasis on a tight and biblically controlled approach to worship tends to focus on all-of-life formulations, but including public worship. Owen, however, also introduces the idea that spiritual worship is that performed by Christ for his church.

Chapter 3: Early Evangelical Worship – A Theology Of The Heart

While Owen's approach to spiritual worship seemed of little theological concern to the early evangelicals, so too corporate worship was downplayed for other more pragmatic reasons. While

sitting theologically in the tradition of the Puritans (who had by nature been introspective and concerned with protecting biblical orthodoxy within the church), the zeal of the first evangelicals, rather, was directed towards evangelism. In practice, the cross-denominational character of the movement sees a diminished interest in corporate worship and liturgical structures. The enthusiasm shown towards hymn singing was not so much a reimagining of evangelical liturgy as it was a developing characteristic of evangelical piety; and it is this stress on piety that sees the notion of all-of-life worship established, though not labelled as such.

PART II – Contemporary Evangelical Theologies Of Worship

Chapter 4: Covenantal Worship

While inheriting the pietistic and evangelistic concerns of their forebears, modern evangelicals nonetheless have lacked a distinctly evangelical praxis or hermeneutic of worship. While charismatic evangelicals have followed in the Arminian tradition of Wesleyanism, conservatives rather looked towards the Reformed tradition to make sense of worship. Yet within Reformed scholarship two hermeneutical approaches are evident, both of which are reliant on a biblical-theological approach to scripture. The first approach I suggest is 'covenantal.' Its advocates identify patterns of worship within the OT which, in Christ, are applied to the church. In praxis, covenantalists tend to favour more formal liturgical expressions of corporate worship, with a commitment to the regulative principle. On the whole, I would suggest this to be the exegetically weaker model.

Chapter 5: Christological Worship

Against the covenantal worship hermeneutic, the second approach I would suggest is Christological (and perhaps even eschatological) in essence. While seeing OT ritual as pointing to Christ, greater weight is given, however, to exploring NT formulations of worship, with an emphasis on the all-of-life worship of the believer, with corporate worship focusing on the edification of others. Whilst an exegetically stronger approach, this system falls down when attempting to squeeze corporate worship into its all-of-life model rather than allowing the doctrine of church to provide a more natural exegetical framework.

PART III – A New Model: Soteriological Worship

Chapter 6: Spiritual Worship

If there is a key weakness in the previous models it is in the inability to resolve the nature and essence of NT worship. As such, I undertake a fresh look at the biblical material. Considering the issues raised in earlier chapters, I present an exegetical analysis of the key biblical texts (including John 4, Romans 12, Hebrews 9–12), to argue that NT worship is in fact soteriological in essence. In this and the next chapter I show how Christ is presented by the NT authors to be the 'one true worshipper,' a role he performs on behalf of the believer.

Chapter 7: Corporate Worship

If Christ himself 'fulfils' the biblical expectations of true worship, it raises the question of whether 'corporate worship' can properly be considered as a biblical doctrine. I conclude that there is little exegetical evidence to support such a view. I do note, however, that within Pauline formulations of the church's union with Christ there is a place for the doctrine of worship to speak into the praxis of the church. With this is mind, I propose a new soteriological model for worship:

> The soteriological model proposes that spiritual worship be understood primarily in terms of the actions performed by Christ on behalf of the believer, and understood as a process and state of restored access to God.

I go on to suggest six principles of soteriological worship that can be applied (and bring clarity) to current theological discussions and practical expressions of worship within the Reformed evangelical context.

Chapter 8: Engaging the Soteriological Model with Reformed Evangelical Corporate Worship

Using the six principles of soteriological worship established in Chapter 7, I critically evaluate three church contexts within the Reformed evangelical tradition; each with a distinct expression of the doctrine and praxis of worship. Using the published work of their pastors, I seek to understand the relationship between theology and praxis within the Sunday gatherings. Using the soteriological model, I evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these relationships, biblically and historically.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Against potential criticisms of the soteriological model (particularly where the model critiques existing notions of corporate worship, all-of-life piety, expressions of affection towards God and hermeneutical issues), I restate the model's key premises against those criticisms. More importantly, however, I affirm the positive outcomes of a soteriological model of worship for contemporary ecclesiology. Understanding worship as the means of engaging with God in Christ provides the believer with a freedom from the uncertainty inherent in human initiated worship, individually or corporately. The spiritual worship of Christ is foremost a display of God's grace, performed on behalf of the believer, establishing and empowering the church, and guiding its relationships and practices towards one another and the world.

PART I

The Pre and Early Evangelical Witness to Worship

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS: REFORMED WORSHIP

1. Introduction

As with all theology, the doctrine of worship is dynamic—rooted in biblical conviction and conceptualised throughout centuries of thinking and praxis. However, for many Christians attending their local church service each week, little thought will be given to why the liturgy is the way it is. Of course, in the modern world, one has more choice than ever in being a 'worship consumer,' with the opportunity to experience corporate worship in whatever way is most personally engaging.[1] To that end, Elizabeth Welch argues that today

> Worship is not necessarily seen as an encounter with the living, transforming God who changes people's lives… Worship becomes privatised and is an activity that a person can undertake on his or her own. As faith in God diminishes, so the desire to worship diminishes.[2]

Modern corporate worship is not, of course, without context. And in approaching a study of this nature, one must decide at what point to begin considering historical and theological antecedents. While we can assume that contemporary views on worship held by evangelicals will to some extents have roots in the 'awakenings' of the late 18th Century, at the same time most would

[1] See Bryan D. Spinks, *The Worship Mall: Contemporary Responses to Contemporary Culture* (London: SPCK, 2010), xxiii; where he notes the similarities between modern and post-modern retail consumerism and contemporary corporate worship. While consumerism promises desire and satisfaction, faith, he argues, offers satisfaction through desire for the Other.

[2] Elizabeth A. Welch, *Holy Spirit and Worship: Transformation and Truth in the Theologies of John Owen and John Zizioulas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 3.

acknowledge that evangelicalism itself was the product of a number of historical and theological influences. With my particular focus on worship within Reformed (or conservative) evangelicalism, it would seem appropriate therefore to begin this study with the worship theology of the Reformers and in particular, John Calvin. In this chapter I will look at Calvin's approach to Scripture and how this influenced his views on worship, corporate or otherwise. The benefit here, however, is not just one of historical interest. Calvin's hermeneutical system established a method which continues to be held by modern Reformed evangelicals. This approach, I would suggest, is a biblical-theological one, where scripture is viewed as one unfolding narrative, and where literary context, direct or more broadly, functions as the exegetical key. Therefore, in considering the scope of opinion around evangelical worship theology it seems apposite to use Calvin's biblical-theological model as a tool for critical analysis. Furthermore, Calvin sets up much of the language used in subsequent conversations. The distinction between 'spiritual' and 'public' worship, for instance, is critical not just for his own context, but for each subsequent era.

Calvin, however, is not the only pre-evangelical voice we need to hear. The influence of Calvinism on the ecclesiology of the English Elizabethan period and subsequent centuries contributed to a hermeneutical tension which played out significantly in the area of public worship, between those who argued for a strictly biblical approach and those taking a more liberal and encompassing view. I will note briefly, therefore, the distinction between 'normative' and 'regulative' principles of worship, the latter held to by the English Puritans. As will become evident in the following chapter, Puritan theology[3] was arguably the dominant doctrinal influence on the early evangelical movement and some consideration is therefore critical to this study.

2. John Calvin[4]

2.a Calvin's approach to Scripture

Why create a methodology based on the theology of John Calvin? Without doubt, there are few examples of evangelical piety which are not influenced in some way, small or large, by Calvin's thought. If, for example, evangelicalism is considered to be inherently bibliocentric and christocentric,[5] then Calvin is amongst those who lead this tradition in emphasizing the primacy

[3] See Horton Davies, *The worship of the English Puritans* (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1944/1997).
[4] As various scholars use the names John or Jean Calvin interchangeably, I will retain the form as used by each.
[5] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 2–3.

of Christ and the Scriptures as fundamental to Christian thinking and practice. McGrath rightly observes that while there may be no obvious organizing principle in Calvin's theology, it is yet thoroughly Christocentric, not merely in that it centres upon God's revelation in Jesus Christ, but also that this revelation discloses a paradigm which governs other key areas of Christian thought.[6] Likewise, Torrance stresses the bibliocentricity of Calvin's theology whereby the means of revelation is not in the way in which we imagine or conceive of him on our own, but that we know him in spirit and truth as he reveals himself to us in his Word.[7] As such, one cannot interpret the means God has provided as the medium of that revelation except in the light of its actual content. 'Interpretation and understanding go hand in hand together.'[8] Both these aspects support the key assumptions of modern evangelical biblical-theological methods: that scripture interprets scripture, and that Christ himself holds the hope of expectation and fulfilment within the biblical narrative.

But does Calvin consciously demonstrate a biblical-theological approach? I would argue that we can see this operating empirically in the external ordering of his theological thought, particularly within the *Institutes of Christian Religion*.[9]

In many ways, the *Institutes* were a perpetual work in progress, being expanded, revised and reorganized throughout Calvin's life. The final edition, however, presents a theological structure in which scripture is interpreted in both systematic and salvation-historical terms. Book I deals with the doctrine of God and revelation, and especially the ideas of creation and providence. Book II explores the foundations of the doctrine of redemption, including human sin, and the person and work of the redeemer Jesus Christ. Book III concerns the application of redemption (faith, regeneration, justification and predestination). Book IV discusses the life of the church, emphasizing its ministry and sacraments. McGrath tentatively suggests that this order demonstrates a Trinitarian structure: I – Father, II – Son, III – Holy Spirit, IV – The Church, although he admits that he is perhaps superimposing this model onto Calvin.[10] More likely, Calvin is reflecting Augustine's schema of 'Creation – Fall – Redemption – Consummation.'

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[6] Alister E. McGrath, *A life of John Calvin: A study in the shaping of western culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 149.
[7] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), 66.
[8] Torrance, 61.
[9] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PN: The Westminster Press, 1960/1986).
[10] McGrath, 151.

Conceived primarily to describe systematically the moral state of man in relation to law and grace, Augustine at the same time views the four states historically in relation to the salvation narrative.

> The first of these four states is before the law, the second under the law, the third under grace and the fourth in full and perfect peace. And this is how the life of God's people progressed through time… His people existed first before the law was given, then under the law that was given through Moses, then under grace that was revealed by the first coming of the mediator. However, grace was not lacking even earlier to those whom it was right that it should be conferred, although it was veiled and hidden as God's dispositions for that period required. Except through the faith of Christ, not one of the just ones of old could find salvation…[11]

Calvin substantially follows this framework within his hermeneutical method: a biblical theology which expresses narrative continuity in terms of God's 'covenant of grace' in Christ and discontinuity through two administrations.[12] The source of that covenant, and therefore the hope of the whole of scripture, is Christ.[13] So, for example, the church is not purely a NT activity. The covenant of redemption gathers God's people across salvation history, albeit in infant form before the advent of Christ.

> The same church existed among them, but as yet in its childhood. Therefore, keeping them under this tutelage, the Lord gave, not spiritual promises unadorned and open, but ones foreshadowed, in a measure, by earthly promises.[14]

Yet at the same time Calvin argues for discontinuity through the use of figures and types; figures, 'that, in the absence of the reality,… showed but an image and shadow in place of the substance; the New Testament reveals the very substance of truth as present.'[15] The difference between type and reality he will often describe in terms of law and gospel, or literal and spiritual.[16] He thus recognizes the differences between the OT and NT, while emphasizing that their unity is fundamental to his Christological biblical-theological approach.

Characteristic of this hermeneutical method is the avoidance of allegorical interpretation, and a 'determination to be faithful to the grammatical sense…, to bring out the genuine, straightforward meaning of what was written from its own context in text and history.'[17]

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[11] Augustine of Hippo, *The Augustine Confession: The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Charity*, Ch. 118, trans. Bruce Harbert (New York, NY: New City Press, 1999), 140.
[12] Calvin, *Inst.* II.x.1–2, 429–430.
[13] Calvin, *Inst.* II.x.23, 448–449.
[14] Calvin, *Inst.* II.xi.2, 451.
[15] Calvin, *Inst.* II.xi.4, 453–454.
[16] Calvin, *Inst.* II.xi.7, 456.
[17] Torrance, 72.

Allegory, Calvin considered an arbitrary metaphor, constructed from the words of a text but without regard for the context or narrative. Typology, on the other hand, is generally constructed or inferred with deliberate attention paid to the larger historical narrative.[18] I will note shortly how this method informs Calvin's views on worship.[19]

In summary, Calvin's biblical-theological model stresses:

a. The principal that scripture must interpret scripture, a hermeneutic that advocates 'context' as key to both the plain reading of the text and the narrative use of figures, types and fulfilment;
b. The centrality of Christ in Scripture;
c. A salvation historical framework of Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation;
d. The continuity across testaments expressed in terms of the 'covenant of grace;'
e. The distinction between testaments in two administrations of that covenant.

2.b. Calvin's biblical theology of worship

Calvin views OT ceremonial worship as a type and example of the discontinuity between the literal and spiritual.

> For because the Old bore the image of things absent, it had to die and vanish with time. The gospel, because it reveals the very substance, stands fast forever [2 Corinthians 3:10–11]… Now the ceremonies, because by their own weakness they were abrogated at Christ's advent, had the cause of their weakness within themselves.[20]

While the actual substance of worship never changes, in Christ true worship transcends ceremony.

> Thus, God's constancy shines forth in the fact that he taught the same doctrine to all ages, and has continued to require the same worship of his name that he enjoined from the beginning. In the fact that he has changed the outward form and manner, he does not show himself subject to change. Rather, he has accommodated himself to men's capacity, which is varied and changeable.[21]

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[18] John L. Thompson, "Calvin as Biblical Interpreter," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K, McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67–68.
[19] While Calvin and others would strongly argue for pursuing the most straightforward and literal meaning of the biblical text, we should note that typology itself might also be considered a form of allegory, in that it seeks a different meaning to that of the literal. The way this is resolved is with the principle of allowing Scripture to control itself, the clearest examples being when the NT uses typology to explain the work of Christ. When allegory is employed without such a control it quickly becomes moralistic.
[20] Calvin, *Inst.* II.xi.8, 457.
[21] Calvin, *Inst.* II.xi.13, 463.

The context here is Calvin's criticism of the ceremonies of the Catholic church. As human institutions, they are, he considers, unable to affect the true worship they are intended to do:

> First, do not the authors themselves define, in clear terms, that the veriest worship of God is, so to speak, contained in these very constitutions? To what end do they direct their ceremonies, except that God may be worshiped through them?[22]

Where then is true worship found? For Calvin, the answer is 'in Christ.'[23] It is not surprising, therefore, to find that his treatment of worship is not principally found in Book IV of the *Institutes*, but rather Book III. Why this is significant is because he seemingly ties true worship to the doctrines of redemption and justification, rather than to the visible actions of the church, such as the sacraments.

Worship, therefore, is soteriological in essence. In Chapter 6, we will return to look at this idea further in connection with Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ (UWC). While few scholars note any direct relationship between this doctrine and worship, recent studies within Reformed scholarship do present different approaches to UWC which in turn inform views on worship. As such, Julie Canlis notes that there are two distinct approaches to Calvin's schema of *unio cum Christo*: those for whom justification is primary to the event of union (both logically and chronologically), and those who see justification as just one aspect of union with Christ.[24] Both views, she notes, 'are united around a singular concern: a desire that believers be free, with unscrupled consciences, and full of assurance.' Yet with the stakes so very high for both camps, the irony, she suggests, is that for those who take union with Christ seriously, then might not unity with one another be pursued over doctrinal correctness?[25] William B. Evans notes three positions in the literature which emphasize one of three key elements: union with Christ, the forensic dimension of justification, and the transformatory aspect of sanctification.[26] Although like Canlis, he suggests the major point of contention in these discussions lies in the relationship of biblical-theological categories (E.g., union with Christ, resurrection, justification, etc.) to dogmatic-theological categories (E.g., *ordo salutis*, covenant of works, covenant of redemption,

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[22] Calvin. *Inst.* IV.x.9, 1187.
[23] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms,* trans. J. Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), IX:11, 122.
[24] Julie Canlis, "Beyond Tearing One Another to Pieces." *Journal of Reformed Theology* 8 (2014): 80.
[25] Canlis, 81.
[26] William B. Evans, 'Déjà Vu All Over Again? The Contemporary Reformed Soteriological Controversy in Historical Perspective,' *Westminster Theological Journal* 72 (2010): 138.

immediate imputation, etc.).[27] Related to this, he suggests, is the rise in 'confessionalism' in some groups.

> Are Reformed churches defined primarily, as some today seem to argue, by adherence to confessional documents? If so, is the role of Scripture, practically speaking, simply to provide prooftexts for the confessional tradition?[28]

In my review of the contemporary literature in Chapters 4 and 5 I will note a similar distinction of views, with those taking a Covenantal approach to worship (a more confessional position) against a Christological approach (using biblical-theological categories).

While this study has the most sympathy with the biblical-theological method (for reasons outlined in both this and the introductory chapter), I will endeavour, however, to follow Constantine Campbell's approach of allowing theology and exegesis to exist in harmony with one another. In *Paul and Union with Christ*,[29] he stresses that it is not so much whether union displaces other themes such as justification, but how union relates to these themes that that might be spoken of in relative isolation. These themes we will return to in Chapter 6.

If then for Calvin worship is fundamentally soteriological in essence, there are nonetheless external acts of worship 'in Christ', those being the activities of prayer and praise.

> The sacrifice of praise is preferred to all external ceremonies, as if the whole of religion consisted in it alone.[30]

> By the word prayer the prophet expresses the whole worship of God.[31]

> Prayer and praise… hold the first place in true and legitimate worship.[32]

Might not prayer and praise, however, be considered ceremonies of the church? Calvin aims to show that there is a fundamental distinction between spiritual and public worship or the 'exercises of religion.' Spiritual worship does not involve acts of liturgy, which he sees as invented

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[27] Evans, 148.
[28] Evans, 148.
[29] Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).
[30] Calvin, *Psalms*, XXVI:7, 445.
[31] John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. 3, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), Mt. XXI:13, 14.
[32] John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Prophet Jeremiah and The Lamentations,* Vol. 1, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), Jer. VII:21–24, 396.

by men. Nor is it a purer form of liturgy with which to replace literal ceremonies of the OT.[33] True worship is that ordained by God's Word.

> As the Lord wishes to be the only lawgiver for governing souls, the rule for worshipping him must not be sought from any other source than from his own word, and that we ought to abide by the only and pure worship which is there enjoined.[34]

Here (in the context of rendering earthly things to Caesar and spiritual things to God), Calvin is clearly not thinking of spiritual worship as a corporate exercise, but a worshipful engagement with the world flowing from the righteous attitude of the heart.[35]

The nature of spiritual worship he describes most clearly in references to John 4 and Romans 12. On John 4:23 he states,

> The Worship of God is said to consist in the Spirit, because it is nothing else than that inward faith of the heart which produces prayer, and, next, purity of conscience, and self-denial, that we may be dedicated to obedience to God as holy sacrifice.[36]

Spiritual worship was, of course, also at the heart of OT ceremonies. Yet for the Christian to worship in spirit and truth is

> to remove the coverings of the ancient ceremonies and retain simply what is spiritual in the worship of God. For the truth of the worship of God rests in the Spirit, and ceremonies are so to say adventitious.[37]

The obedience required of spiritual worship is best expressed in Romans 12:1, where

> the duty of believers is 'to present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him,' and in this consists the lawful worship of him. From this is derived the basis of the exhortation that 'they be not conformed to the fashion of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of their minds, so that they may prove what is the will of God.'[38]

Spiritual worship comprises therefore both faith and obedience. Public worship, however, is distinct from this sacrifice of obedience, and rather involves the articulation of faith in Christ.

> For God wishes first of all for inward worship, and afterwards for outward profession. The principal altar for the worship of God ought to be situated in our minds, for God is worshipped spiritually by faith, prayer and other acts of piety.[39]

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[33] Calvin, *Inst*. IV.x.8, 1186–1187.
[34] Calvin, *Matthew,* XXII:21, 45.
[35] John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to The Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. J. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 3:3, 88.
[36] John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St John 1–10*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, eds. D.W. Torrance & T.F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), John IV:23, 99.
[37] Calvin, *John* IV:23, 101.
[38] Calvin, *Inst*. III.vii.1, 689.
[39] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel,* trans. T. Myers (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), III:2–7, 211.

As we saw, acts of public worship would similarly, and primarily, involve prayer and praise. With the shadow of the 'temple' passed, public prayer is a practice endorsed by Christ and Paul, and therefore transcends the OT/NT divide on ceremony.[40] Calvin also connects singing with public worship, noting both its affective qualities and its role in edification.[41] But while singing has a special place in the praise of God, it is in public prayer that the tongue is most gainfully employed.

Importantly, these public acts of praise, prayer and singing are not prescribed in any formal order for the NT church. Neither are they salvific, but exist in order that the body is edified and encouraged.[42] The notable exception to Calvin's flexibility in public worship is, however, the banishment of musical instruments. Arguably an inconsistent position, he suggests that 'musical instruments were among the legal ceremonies which Christ at his coming abolished;'[43] tenuously linking this claim with Paul's strictures about speaking in tongues. In the *Institutes*, however, it becomes apparent that this anxiety is not so much a biblical injunction, but an ethical one, that 'our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words.'[44]

If then Public Worship consists of prayer and praise, what of the sacraments? For Calvin, the OT sacraments (its acts of ritual worship) are not types of the NT sacraments. Rather they look forward to the covenant of redemption in Christ; but are only shadows, and are therefore inappropriate for now.[45] God has left the church ceremonies (and here he appeals to Augustine) in the NT sacraments. Yet these themselves are not acts of worship. Rather, the NT sacraments are instruments of God's grace for the elect.[46] And their OT types are found in salvific events such as the Passover. Furthermore, their efficacy depends not on the actions of the worshipper, but on the work of the Holy Spirit.

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[40] Calvin, *Inst.* III.xx.29, 892–893.
[41] 'For in the first passage [1 Cor. 14:15] he teaches that we should sing with voice and heart; in the second [Col. 3:16] he commends spiritual songs, by which the godly may mutually edify one another.' Calvin, *Inst.* III.xx.32, 895.
[42] Calvin, *Inst.* IV.x.30, 1208.
[43] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, trans. C.W. Bingham (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), Ex. XV:20, 263.
[44] Calvin, *Inst.* III.xx.32, 895.
[45] Calvin, *Inst.* IV.xiv.20, 1296–1297.
[46] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans,* trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), IV:11, 164.

> The sacraments properly fulfil their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in.[47]

Significantly, the sacraments are an extension of the ministry of the Word, as a visible sign of that Word.[48] They speak neither of the church's essence, or the essence of its worship, but are an outward 'mark' of the visible church.

> Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.[49]

In summarizing Calvin's views on worship, several key points can be made. OT ceremonies (which were ordained by God, but readily open to abuse) are abrogated by Christ. Spiritual worship, rather, is the worship of the new covenant (even though it also existed prior to Christ) and is an inward faith of the heart. Calvin does retain a role for public worship, which is a matter of church order and edification as much as it is a matter of ceremony, but it is not a means of salvation. True spiritual worship belongs to the church (invisible) which has existed across all time: the elect in Christ. The sacraments of the church are not a replacement for the OT ceremonies, even if they are prefigured in OT types. They are, rather, a mark of the church, a sign or visible 'word'.

While I am not advocating Calvin's hermeneutic and model of worship to be the only or 'purest' evangelical biblical theology of worship, it does, however, create a helpful framework by which to evaluate subsequent thinking and practice within this tradition. As such it pushes us to ask the following questions:

a. How does the centrality of *sola scriptura* define and inform worship? For Calvin, the rule for worshipping God must not be sought from any source other than from his own word; bearing in mind that this principle itself will be subject to one's own hermeneutical method.
b. In what way is scripture allowed to interpret scripture when it comes to worship? Specifically, how relevant is 'context' to either the plain reading of a text or within the broader scriptural narrative (the salvation historical framework of Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation)? Calvin, for example, saw that OT ceremonies were

[47] Calvin, *Inst.* IV.xvii.40, 1417–148.
[48] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses*, trans. J. King (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), XVII:9, 451.
[49] Calvin, *Inst.* IV.i.9, 1023.

symbols which, under the covenant of the law, were a confirmation of their later fulfilment in the covenant of the gospel in Christ.

c. In what sense does the unity and distinction between testaments affect an understanding of worship? Calvin's conception of figures, types and fulfilment understood OT ceremonies as shadows and signs pointing to Christ but also abrogated by him, and therefore not typological of Christian corporate worship. Yet alongside the 'covenant of grace' is his notion of spiritual worship, which under the new covenant is to be given articulation in public worship. The distinction between spiritual and public worship is therefore not an historical one.
d. How is a biblical theology of worship applied practically to the church? Calvin suggests that as public worship is not necessary for salvation, and because of the NT's emphasis on edification, there should be a level of flexibility and contextualization in the church's public worship of prayer and praise.
e. What is the place of experience in public worship? Calvin, by example, encouraged the 'singing of the Word,' but was nervous of the potential for distraction by musical accompaniment or words not derived from scripture itself.

3. Richard Hooker

The English Reformers took a similar position to Calvin in repudiating the catholic mass and the theology of worship which it implied; worship being not what people offered to God, so much as a means of preaching the gospel itself.[50] A significant early figure was Richard Hooker (a major influence within 16th Century and later Anglicanism). A. S. McGrade summarises Hooker's approach to public worship.

> It is "commerce" with God in the cultivation of "godliness," crowned with participation in the grace of Christ through the sacraments of the church. Nothing we do on earth is better than this,… but it is not easy for us. Accordingly, a main function of effective worship is coping with human cognitive and emotional "imbecility," our difficulty in focusing on God. We need help from a setting worthy of the worship of God, the best possible language, broad congregational participation, uplifting music, and zeal and good character in our ministers.[51]

[50] Michael P. Jensen, *Reformation Anglican Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 12.
[51] A. S. McGrade, "Hooker on Public Worship: An Offering to the Wider Reformation," in Littlejohn W. Bradford and Scott N. Kindred-Barnes, *Richard Hooker and Reformed Orthodoxy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 90-91.

Stated in this way, Hooker might be seen to sit comfortably within the tradition of Reformed Orthodoxy.[52]

One way of understanding Hooker's theological method is to see him taking a synthetic approach to various polemical dichotomies, 'integrating them into a new synthesis at the centre of which stood a distinctive and novel vision of what English protestant religion was or… ought to be.'[53]Allchin, for example, contends that,

> Hooker is a man who constantly seeks to hold together things which are easily set in opposition to one another, and which were in fact frequently contrasted with one another in the bitter controversies of the Reformation and the Counter-reformation; nature and grace, faith and reason, word and sacrament, scripture and tradition.[54]

As such, Spinks summarises that Hooker 'combined bold Reformation thought and medieval theology in a highly individualistic manner.'[55]

Others, (although not necessarily opposed to this view), understand Hooker to represent a *via media* way of doing theology, standing between Puritanism and Catholicism, and thus having a profound influence on what would later become known as 'Anglicanism.' The phrase, *via media*, was used significantly within the 19th Century Oxford Movement, particularly by John Henry Newman in his promotion of Tractarianism, and has arguably remained the 'orthodox' view amongst scholars since then. This distinctive form of Christian faith and practice, as Lee W. Gibbs suggests, emerged within the structures of the sixteenth-century Elizabethan Settlement, which Hooker self-consciously and effectively gave classic expression to.[56] This position, however, has been questioned by a number of scholars who suggest that this view is fundamentally the creation of the Oxford Movement. The *via media* thesis, they argue, inadequately explains Hooker's relationship to the Reformed tradition largely because it is anachronistic and owes its origins to the theology of John Henry Newman rather than Hooker

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[52] Spinks concurs that 'even if his starting point with Divine Reason and Law, and his reticence regarding precision on predestination were not so typically Reformed, his sacramental theology, like his teaching on justification, places him firmly within the Reformed tradition. Bryan D. Spinks, *Two Faces of Elizabethan Anglican Theology: Sacraments and Salvation in the Thought of William Perkins and Richard Hooker* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 158.

[53] Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought From Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Routledge, 2020), 146.

[54] A. M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1988), 7.

[55]Spinks, 107.

[56] Lee W. Gibbs, "Richard Hooker's Via Media Doctrine of Scripture and Tradition." *Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 95, No. 2 (2002): 228

himself.[57] This revisionist position suggests that it is more appropriate to view Hooker within the Magisterial Reformed tradition rather than against it. Fekso in particular considers that Hooker's doctrine of union and communion sits very much within mainstream Reformation thinking, firstly because his views on justification and the sacraments are certainly not Catholic, and secondly because these views are endorsed by later Puritan voices such as John Owen.[58] Kirby further challenges the *via media* thesis by demonstrating that Hooker's understanding of the law reflects Thomas Aquinas's Neo-platonic twofold movement of procession and return to its original eternal source.[59] As such, law was a means by which one could participate or have union with the divine, a doctrine whose characteristics were shared by other Reformed theologians.

While this debate may not at first appear to directly relate to Hooker's doctrine of worship, his understanding of union with Christ *does* inform various aspects of his thinking on public worship. As my own thesis will consider this doctrine as essential to an evangelical theology of worship, albeit with fundamentally different outcomes, some consideration of Hooker's thinking will therefore be helpful to this study. As to whether Hooker represents a *via media*, the conclusions of research by Hooker revisionists appear to show the greatest merit. Furthermore, for the purposes of this thesis it makes sense to view Hooker broadly within the Reformed tradition, although acknowledging that as the tradition developed, particularly under Puritan influence, his views became less than mainstream.

Within his own context, however, Hooker nonetheless presents a hermeneutical method that might be considered something of a paradox within Reformed thinking. On the one hand, he affirmed the formula of *sola scriptura*, yet on the other made substantial claims for the role of reason and tradition.

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[57] J. V. Fesko, "Richard Hooker and John Owen on Union with Christ," in Littlejohn W. Bradford and Scott N. Kindred-Barnes, *Richard Hooker and Reformed Orthodoxy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 255. See also, W. J. Torrance Kirby, *Richard Hooker Reformer and Platonist* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 11-12; and John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England 1646-1689* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 394.
[58] Fesko, 256.
[59] Kirby, 3-4.

> What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience are due; the next whereunto, is what any man can necessarily conclude by force of Reason; after this, the voice of the church succeedeth.[60]

As such it might be more accurate to describe his hermeneutic as *prima scriptura*, as he clearly argues *against* a self-authenticating view of scripture. 'It is not the word of God which doth or possibly can assure us that we do well to think it his word.'[61] Rather, church tradition contributes to the interpretation of scripture. For 'scripture could not teach us the things that are of God, unless we did credit men who have taught us that the words of Scripture do signify these things.'[62] But reason, alongside scripture, allows us to interpret natural law for Christian obedience:

> concerning the inhabilitie of reason to search out and to judge of things divine, if they be such as those properties of God and those duties of men towards him, which may be conceived by attentive consideration of heaven and earth, we know that of meere naturall men the Apostle testifieth how they knewe both God, and the lawe of God.[63]

Counter to Calvin's unifying principle of the covenant of grace, Hooker shows little interest in a progressive, narrative approach to biblical theology.[64] Whereas Calvin focused on context with exegetical precision, Hooker sought not 'to enlarge the necessarie use of the word of God; which desire hath begotten an error,'[65] and was inclined rather towards pretext to describe positive aspects of God's character. And where Calvin set out to minimize the role of the church as it related to biblical authority,[66] Hooker emphasized a picture of God intimately connected with the church. In these ways, his view of scripture reflects far more of a medieval, allegorical approach than that of Calvin's contextual tradition.

3.a. Hooker's biblical theology of worship

While Calvin and Hooker might have agreed in certain areas, in other ways they differed significantly.[67] For Hooker, no religion was entirely false, and disputes about doctrine and

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[60] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, eds. G Edelen and W. Speed Hill (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 5,8,2.
[61] Hooker, 2,4,2.
[62] Hooker, 2,7,3.
[63] Hooker, 3,8,6.
[64] Little, if any, scholarship is evident which explores this aspect of Hooker's hermeneutics.
[65] Hooker, 1:145.7–8
[66] 'The testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted.' Calvin, *Inst.* I.vii.4, 72.
[67] Spinks suggests that 'when Hooker quotes Calvin, it is only when Calvin supports his own argument *against* his opponents.' Spinks, 104.

worship were never a matter of final truth and total error.[68] For Calvin, there is a clear difference between truth and idolatry. Like Calvin, however, Hooker's theology of worship is governed by various dualities.[69] So on one level, Hooker agrees with Calvin on the value of public worship in promoting church order and edification.[70] But more significantly, where Calvin saw public worship as a means by which the believer could express the more significant spiritual worship of the heart, Hooker's thinking on external forms of worship demanded that 'signs are to resemble things signified; outward acts to testify to inward dispositions of the heart: human sensible means to show forth hidden divine glory things visible to correspond to things invisible,'[71] a view which has been described as Hooker's fundamental hermeneutical premise.[72]

Rather than liturgy simply being an expression of inward faith, Hooker sees it as especially valuable in its own right, partly because it is a means of edification.[73] Edification, to the conformist establishment, was seen as an instrument of social order.[74] In other words, edification had little positive meaning beyond that of 'order and comeliness,' used to promote civil order and uniformity.[75] That is not to suggest that there were not strongly held theological assumptions behind this view. Whitgift, for example, opposed any hint of Catholic liturgical theology, insisting instead that the word alone, and not outward ceremony, can draw the soul closer to God.[76] Yet while ceremonies were seen to aid this, they were none the less largely incidental and interchangeable. And while order and uniformity and obedience were good things in themselves, 'the ordinary Christian should simply do what he or she was told.'[77]

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[68] McGrade, 92.
[69] See W. B. Littlejohn, "The Edification of the Church: Richard Hooker's theology of worship and the protestant inward/outward disjunction," *Perichoresis* 12, no. 1 (2014): 3–18. He argues that the sixteenth and seventeenth century English protestants inherited a disjunction between the inward and the outward which framed a whole range of dualities, including that of public worship, and the question of whether public worship should be directed by Scripture or by the authority of the magistrate.
[70] Edification in public worship was, in fact, an already established principle within the *Book of Common Prayer*. Article 34 states: 'Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain change and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying.' Charles Hardwick, *A History of the Articles of Religion* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1859), 319.
[71] Hooker, V.6.1: 2:32.24
[72] W. J. Torrance Kirby, "Of musique with psalms: the hermeneutics of Richard Hooker's defence of the 'sensible excellencie' of public worship," *Lutheran and Anglican: Essays in honour of Egil Grislis*, ed. John Stafford (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009), 132.
[73] Littlejohn, 4.
[74] John Whitgift, for example, wrote that, 'Such lawes and orders as keep godly peace and unity in the church do edify; but the laws for apparel keep godly peace and unity in the church; ergo they edify.' *An Answere to a certen libell intitutled, An Admonition to Parliament* (London: Henrie Bynneman, 1573), II:61
[75] Littlejohn, 5.
[76] Lake, 39–40, 46–47, 123–125.
[77] Lake, 164.

Hooker's response to this state of affairs was not to abandon conformity. Nor was it to accept the cold and static piety that it engendered. Equally he was not prepared to give ground to the demands of the Puritans. His approach, rather, was to rehabilitate the concept of edification by proposing that ceremonies do hold concrete spiritual benefits for the believer, and that while ceremonies should be framed in accord with Scripture, reason and nature also play a role.[78] So rather than driving a wedge between the internal and external, Hooker sought to use edification as a link between outward ceremonies and inner grace.

> The end which is aimed at in setting down the outward forme of all religious actions is the edification of the Church. Now men are edified, when either their understanding is taught somewhat whereof in such actions it behoveth all men to consider, or when their harts are moved with any affection suteable therunto, when their minds are in any sorte stirred up unto that reverence, devotion, attention and due regard, which in those cases semeth requisite.[79]

In other words, ceremonies edify the church when both the heart and mind are affected to induce reverence and devotion in the believer.

Hooker's worship duality is perhaps most clearly seen regarding the sacraments. These are not, he claims, simply visible signs of invisible things. Rather, 'sacraments are those which are signes and tokens of some generall promised grace, which allwaies really descendeth from God unto the soul that duly receiveth them.'[80] Spinks summarizes Hooker's view that the sacraments 'are a means of participation in the divine, or union, and as such can be described as "morall instrumentes" that must be performed as the Author of grace requires.[81] While the ceremony itself does not impart God's grace, it nonetheless becomes a necessary condition for the believer to receive that grace. So, while it cannot be separated, the public worship of the church cannot be confused with religion of the heart, having a spiritual efficacy in its own right.

What, then, is the biblical warrant for this principle? Against a contextual approach, Hooker tends to use scripture as a pretext from which to appeal to the role of reason, nature and tradition.[82] Music, for example, is first understood for its role within the natural created order, as

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[78] Littlejohn, 9.
[79] Hooker, 273.30–274.8.
[80] Hooker, 276.14–16.
[81] Spinks, 109.
[82] Hooker's reliance on human reason includes the musical theories of the Pythagorean and Platonic traditions. Kirby, 129.

> a thinge which delighteth all ages and beseemeth all states; a thinge as seasonable in griefe as in joy; as decent beinge added unto actions of greatest waight and solemnitie, as beinge used when men most sequester them selves from action.[83]

And while it has a place in secular life purely as an ornament, it also has a role in moral formation both in society and in the church.

> The verie harmonie of sounds beinge framed in due sorte and carryed from the eare to the spirituall faculties of our soules is by a native puissance and efficacie greatlie availeable to bringe to a perfect temper whatsoever is there troubled.'[84]

The contribution of scripture to this description of music is then largely moralistic, with Hooker citing David as

> the author of adding unto poetrie melodic in publick prayer, melodic both vocall and instrumentall for the raysinge up of mens hartes and the sweetninge of theire affections towardes god… [T]he Church of Christ doth likewise at this present daie reteine it as an ornament to Gods service, and an helpe to our own devotion.[85]

Puritan objections to the liturgical and musical practices of the Elizabethan Church of England had ranged from the abrogation of instrumental music in worship, to the more moderate view that elaborate church music did not serve to edify.[86] Hooker, rather, contended that harmony provides a mirror, a 'sensible meane… carried from the Ear to the Spiritual faculties of our Souls,'[87] by which the soul may contemplate not only itself (*musica humana*) but also the beauty and order of creation (*musica mundana*).[88]

Reason, then, allows one to view the church and its worship as reflecting the greater glory of God's cosmic order, an aesthetic correspondence between the visible beauty of the church on earth and the invisible glory of the church triumphant in heaven.[89] As such he states that

> the publique duties of religion [are] best ordered, when the militant Church doth resemble by sensible means, as it maie in such cases, that hidden dignitie and glorie wherewith the church triumphant in heaven is bewtified.'[90]

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[83] Hooker, 151.10–14.
[84] Hooker, V.38.1; 2:151.4–12.
[85] Hooker, V.38.2; 2:152.12–21.
[86] For further treatment of this debate see: Gretchen L. Finney, "'Organical Musick' and Ecstasy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 8, no. 3 (1947): 273–92.
[87] Hooker, V.38.1; 2:151.6–7)
[88] Kirby, 130.
[89] Kirby, 136.
[90] Hooker, V.6.2; 2:33.3–6. And similarly, 'The howse of prayer is a court bewtifed with the presence of the cælestial powers, that there we stand, we pray, we sound forth hymnes unto God, havinge his Angels intermingled as our associates.' V.25.2; 2:114.13–21

With these and similar examples,[91] Hooker presents a view of the church in which her sacraments, ceremonies and music 'are all modelled on an exemplar of a cosmic order epitomised by the hierarchy of the angels.'[92] Public worship as such is governed by ecclesial and cosmic concerns, directed towards edification rather than salvation.[93] Scripture is a static (rather than dynamic) tool for deciphering God's natural order for the church. In this way, Hooker's hermeneutic of worship is broadly allegorical, using scripture (alongside nature and reason) to morally exhort public worship as aid in the devotion of the believer. More precisely, one might call this an anagogical reading of scripture, the literal sign pointing to the heavenly; the worship of the church militant reflecting the glory of the church triumphant. And in this sense, Hooker's picture of worship might be seen to reflect the hermeneutical tradition of the medieval exegetes more than that of Reformed Orthodoxy.

4. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Directory for Public Worship*

If Hooker's attitude to public worship could be considered 'normative' (allowing for anything that is not expressly prohibited by scripture), then the Puritan approach was to draw from Calvin's strictly bibliocentric position. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* was created in 1646 as a Reformed confession for the Church of England commissioned by the Puritan influenced Long Parliament of 1643, and is in many ways the premier systematic exposition of Reformed Orthodoxy or scholastic Calvinism.[94] While the accompanying *Directory for Public Worship* was commissioned as an alternative to *The Book Of Common Prayer*, these are not easily compared. The former is more of a handbook for pastoral practice than it is a collection of set liturgies, and in practice was never widely adopted in England, although it did find continued use in the Scottish

[91] For example, the 'holy garments' of the clergy are said to resemble 'the glorie of the Sainetes in heaven, together with the bewtie wherein Angels have appeared unto men.' Hooker, V.29.5; 2:127.12 14.
[92] Kirby, 136.
[93] Spinks notes that when considering soteriology and its implications for the sacraments, for Hooker, 'the Fall did not entirely obliterate that [divine] image, and humans still retain free will, and a reason which should incline to the good. Spinks, 113.
[94] Mark W. Karlberg, *Engaging Westminster Calvinism: The Composition of Redemption's Song* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 13. Whether or not this expression of Calvinism reflects Calvin's own thinking has been a subject of recent debate. A helpful summary of the issues are found in Richard A. Muller. *Was Calvin a Calvinist? Or, Did Calvin (or Anyone Else in the Early Modern Era) Plant the "TULIP"?* 2009 Fall Lecture at the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, October 15, 2009, accessed May 17, 2021.
http://www.calvin.edu/meeter/Was%20Calvin%20a%20Calvinist-12-26-09.pdf. Muller argues that 'the later Reformed tradition drew on and appealed to Calvin as one founding teacher among others, recognizing his abilities as a second-generation codifier of the Reformed faith, his limitations as a technical thinker, and his inability to address all of the issues that faced them in altered contexts and other times.' 17.

church.[95] What the *Directory* showed, however, is that while the Puritans demanded strict, biblically regulated forms of public worship, in practice they were looking for an alternative to the formal ceremonies of Anglicanism, preferring far simpler and extemporaneous expressions of liturgy.

The *Confession* approaches worship from the starting point that God deserves the service of all-of-life, and that the acceptable way of offering such worship is instituted by God himself.[96] This particularly applies to 'religious' worship.[97]

> XXI II. Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to Him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creature: and since the fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone.

Notably, this worship is mediated by Christ; and prayer, both of thanksgiving and of supplication, is the primary feature of religious worship, as is the reading and preaching of God's word.[98] In effect, this creates a 'triple lock' on worship: for it to be true, worship must be instituted by God, mediated by Christ, and affected in the heart. So, for example, the *Confession* calls for the 'singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ'. This approach, governed by explicit commands of scripture later came to be known as the regulative principle of worship.[99]

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[95] There *are* examples of Puritan attempts at creating formal liturgies, such as Richard Baxter's *Reformed Liturgy* (or *Savoy Liturgy*) where he attempts to find a middle way between Anglican and hard-line Presbyterian approaches to public worship. In the end, it satisfied neither and was quickly dismissed. See Glen J. Segger, *Richard Baxter's Reformed Liturgy: A Puritan Alternative to the Book of Common Prayer* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014).

[96] *Westminster Confession* XXI I. The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.

[97] This implies that the authors see a distinction between 'religious' worship and spiritual worship, though there is nothing explicitly stated about the nature of this relationship in the *Confession*.

[98] *Westminster Confession* XII, V. The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith and reverence; singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in a holy and religious manner.

[99] While the Puritan concept of biblically regulated worship may be found within much Reformation and Post-Reformation literature, the phrase 'regulative principle' does not itself appear until the early 20th Century, for example, in Francis Petticrew, "The Scriptural Principle Regulative of the Worship of God," in *Psalm-Singers' Conference* (Belfast: Fountain Printing Works, 1903), 73. It is not until the 1940's that it gains wider currency, particularly by John Murray: 'In contrast with this [the principle followed by Lutherans and Episcopalians] there is another answer, namely, that God may be worshipped only in ways instituted, prescribed or commanded in the Word. The contrast is patent—the one says: what is not forbidden is permitted, the other says: what is not prescribed is forbidden.' *Report of the Committee on Song in Worship*, presented to the 13th (1946) and 14th (1947)

In a clear reference to John Chapter 4, the confession states:

> VI. Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now under the Gospel either tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed: but God is to be worshipped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself; so, more solemnly, in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or wilfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by His Word or providence, calls thereunto.

To worship in spirit and truth is to therefore reject acts of worship in specific places or at specific times, and is rather an action of the human spirit, requiring the mediation of Christ for its efficacy. Worship is thus viewed as an all-of-life activity, though the public assembly is given a special position within such a framework.

In establishing biblical validity for its rubrics, the *Confession* provides proof texts for each. At the same time, however, there is little sense of an overarching biblical or systematic theological framework. Singing, for example, is established from Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19 and James 5:13, without explanation of how singing itself is to be understood as worship, or how it is indeed mediated by Christ. This is not to say that the *Confession* ignores hermeneutical concerns. 1.5 insists that 'our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof [of Scripture], is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.' And in 1.9, the 'full sense of any Scripture… is not manifold, but one.' The logic of the *Confession* might be considered thus: the Bible is the word of God, not as the human writings mentioned in 1.3. It is authoritative because it comes from God, 'the author thereof,' 'who is truth itself' (1.4), an authorship which is evident throughout Scriptures, one key feature being 'the consent of all the parts' of Scripture or the harmony of Scripture (1.5).[100] And in considering the hermeneutical tensions of old and new covenants, the *Confession* makes some acknowledgement. In 19.3–5 it explains how the moral law is different to that of the ceremonial and judicial laws, yet at the same time asserts that there is a harmony between testaments. 7.6 reflects Calvin in that 'there are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but

General Assemblies of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Accessed February 19, 2021. https://opc.org/GA/song.html.

[100] Richard Pratt, "Westminster and Contemporary Reformed Hermeneutics." *Reformed Perspectives Magazine* 8, no. 45 (November 5 to November 11, 2006), accessed September 25, 2021, https://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric_pratt/ric_pratt.ennsonpratt.html.

one and the same, under various dispensations.' The covenant of grace, is therefore, the theological construct that brings harmony to the Bible's most radical diversities.[101]

As the *Westminster Confession* is in its nature a *summary* statement of Puritan theology, it understandably lacks a comprehensively articulated hermeneutical method. Where this creates a problem, however, is in its influence on later Puritan and evangelical approaches to worship, (although perhaps less so amongst Anglicans), whereby it merely provides principles for worship rather than a thorough model. It thus becomes open to a wide spectrum of interpretation continuing to the modern era. Foremost of those who would immediately go on to apply its principles within an expansive treatment of worship, however, was John Owen.

5. John Owen

Owen was politically and spiritually a Puritan, concerned with issues of personal godliness, evangelism and church reform;[102] although again, arguably fits within a broader, albeit more defined, theological tradition of Reformed Orthodoxy.[103] While some claim there is no 'centre' to his theology[104] or that he was 'not so much an innovator as a brilliant synthesizer,'[105] others have suggested that 'the intellectual content of Owen's thought defies simplistic reduction to one or two key themes.'[106] Gribben, for example, contends that 'Owen's work represents the best of the intellectual and spiritual achievements of that generation of English Protestants who could no longer tolerate the ambiguity and frustration of their parents' relationship to the established church,'[107] although ultimately his significance might be in his later influence upon evangelicalism, both in its early and modern contexts with his emphasis on subjectivist piety.

Polemically, Owen targets Catholicism, Arminianism and Socinianism. And against these perceived heresies, he was forced to engage with careful exegesis of Scripture, as the latter two equally claimed scripture as the authoritative basis for their theology.[108] At issue was not the

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101 Pratt, 'Westminster and Contemporary Reformed Hermeneutics.'
102 J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 28.
103 Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2007), 6.
104 Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 270.
105 Robert Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity in Its Catholic Context," in Kapic Kelly M. and Mark Jones, *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology* (Farnham, Surrey: Routledge, 2016), 190.
106 Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 45.
107 Gribben, 272.
108 Trueman, *John Owen*, 10.

authority of scripture, but its interpretation. Where his opponents would present a series of proof texts to make their case, Owen was more concerned to understand various texts within both the 'analogy of faith' and logic of the specific biblical author.[109]

This perspective is evident in his thinking on the worship of the church. Two works in particular stand out; one, *The Duties of Pastors and People Distinguished*,[110] showing something of his biblical-theological approach, and the other, *Brief Instruction in the Worship of God and Discipline of the Churches of the New Testament*,[111] his exegetical method. It is in the former that Owen gives an overview of the theme of worship between Adam and Christ, articulating a hermeneutic of both continuity and discontinuity.

Mankind, he argues, has an obligation to worship and instruct others in the knowledge of God.[112] Though no offices of worship existed before the law (as God 'would never allow that in any regard the will of the creature should be the measure of his honour and worship,'[113]) this obligation to share the knowledge of worship of God, or 'natural worship', is one that continues throughout history to the Christian believer. For

> a superinstitution of a new ordinance doth not overthrow any thing that went before in the same kind, universally moral or extraordinary, nor at all change it, unless by express exception; as, by the introduction of the ceremonial law, the offering of sacrifices, which before was common to all, was restrained to the posterity of Levi. Look, then, what performances in the service of God that primitive household of faith was in the general directed unto by the law of nature, the same, regulated by gospel light (not particularly excepted), ought the generality of Christians to perform; which what they were may be collected from what was fore-spoken.[114]

This idea of a superinstitution becomes critical in establishing what the worship of the church will look like. While natural or moral worship is required by God of all mankind, outward

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[109] Henry M. Knapp, "John Owen's Interpretation of Hebrews 6:4–6: Eternal Perseverance of the Saints in Puritan Exegesis," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 34, no. 1 (2003): 29–52, 46.
[110] John Owen, "The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished," in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* Vol. 13 (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1862).
[111] John Owen, "A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God and Discipline of the Churches of the New Testament," in *The Works of John Owen*, D.D. (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1862).
[112] 'I find, then, that before the giving of the law the chief men among the servants of the true God did, every one in their own families, with their neighbors adjoining of the same persuasion, perform those things which they knew to be required, by the law of nature, tradition, or special revelation (the unwritten word of those times), in the service of God; instructing their children and servants in the knowledge of their creed concerning the nature and goodness of God, the fall and sin of man, the use of sacrifices, and the promised seed (the sum of their religion); and, moreover, performing, things appertaining unto God.' Owen, *The Duties of Pastors*, Ch. 1.
[113] Owen, "The Duties of Pastors," Ch. 1.
[114] Owen, "The Duties of Pastors," Ch. 1.

worship is that specifically instituted by God for the church and may alter in expression throughout salvation history.[115] For example, with the establishment of the Mosaic law, sacrifices become the prerogative of the priesthood.

> Concerning the Jews after the giving of Moses' law: The people of God were then gathered in one, and a standard was set up for all his to repair unto, and the church of God became like a city upon a hill, conspicuous to all, and a certain rule set down for everyone to observe that would approach unto him. As, then, before the law, we sought for the manner of God's worship from the practice of men, so now, since the change of the external administration of the covenant, from the prescription of God.[116]

Instituted by God, ceremonial worship was both temporary and typological,[117] yet having ongoing moral implications.[118] The priesthood, for example, Owen viewed as a type of both Christ and the church.[119] But while a priestly sacrifice should be viewed as pointing towards Christ's atonement (and therefore having no salvific purpose in itself), it nonetheless sets up a moral duty for Christians to offer God the sacrifices of lips (eucharistical) and lives (good works), and even self-denial and martyrdom.

> The unspeakable blessings which the priesthood of Christ hath obtained for us are a strong obligation for the duty of praise and thanksgiving; of which that in some measure we may discharge ourselves, he hath furnished us with sacrifices of that kind to be offered unto God.[120]

Under the regulation of scripture, the offering of praise and thanksgiving is not determined by the prerogative of the worshipper, but performed in accordance with the means and words God has provided for them. In short, Owen sets up a hermeneutic for worship whereby the

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115 'By sundry degrees he built up that fabric of his outward worship, which was suited, in his infinite wisdom, unto his own glory and the edification of his church, until the exhibition of the promised seed, or the coming of Christ in the flesh, and the accomplishment of the work of his mediation, Heb. i. 1, 2: for unto that season were those ordinances to serve, and no longer, chap. ix. 10–12, and then were they removed by the same authority whereby they were instituted and appointed, Col. ii. 14, 18–20.' Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 10.

116 Owen, "The Duties of Pastors," Ch. 2.

117 [Of the Jews] The worship of God among them was either moral or ceremonial and typical. The performances belonging unto the latter, with all things thereunto conducing, were appropriated, to them whom God had peculiarly set apart for that purpose. Owen, "The Duties of Pastors," Ch. 2.

118 Owen continues: 'That the paternal teaching and instruction of families in things which appertain to God being a duty of the law of nature, remained in its full vigor, and was not at all impaired by the institution of a new order of teachers for assemblies beyond domestical, then established. Neither, without doubt, ought it to cease amongst Christians, there being no other reason why now it should but that which then was not effectual.' Owen, "The Duties of Pastors," Ch. 2.

119 The unction, then, of the Holy Spirit implies a participation of all those endowments which were typified by the anointing with oil in the Old Testament, and invests us with the privileges, in a spiritual acceptation, of all the sorts of mean which then were so anointed,… so that by being made Christians,… we are ingrafted into Christ, and do attain to a kind of holy and intimate communion with him in all his glorious offices; and in that regard are called priests. The sacrifices we are enjoined to offer give ground to this appellation. Owen, 'The Duties of Pastors,' Ch. 3.1.

120Owen, "The Duties of Pastors," Ch. 3.1.

ceremonies of Israel are both typological of Christ's sacrifice yet at the same time morally binding for Christian service. As I will show in subsequent chapters, this typological dualism continues as a key concern for modern covenantal and Christological theologians.[121] Owen, however, goes on to explain this dual typology in terms of the outward worship instituted by God, and the spiritual worship performed by Christ.

5.a. The Spiritual Worship of Christ

Recent scholarship has suggested that Owen speaks uniquely into Puritan theology in terms of his contributions to Trinitarian theology. Truman, for example, notes that contributions of the Reformed Orthodox to Trinitarian theology were 'not marked so much by innovative critique of the dominant tradition but rather defines that tradition in the face of radical attacks by those who rejected the creeds and who saw patristic theology as reflecting declension from, and perversion of, the pristine gospel of the New Testament.'[122] This was particularly pertinent in terms of Socinianism, where the Reformation scripture principle had the potential not just to critique traditional teachings of the church, but overthrow them all together.

> What is clear… in Owen's discussion of God as Trinity is the complexity of the task at hand: Owen is keen to defend the traditional orthodoxy of Trinitarian faith, yet he does not do so in any simplistic or off-hand manner. Careful logical distinctions and discussion combine with soteriological, exegetical, and linguistic concerns to elaborate a defence of the Trinity at a point in time when the doctrine is coming under fire on each of these fronts.[123]

Welch similarly agrees that Owen 'desired to reclaim the centrality of the Trinity in the midst of the voices which were arguing against this centrality, leading to a stronger focus on the significance of the Holy Spirit in local church worship and life.'[124] Although in the area of worship, she suggests that Owen places a particular emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit, citing Owen's statement that 'in our worship of and obedience to God, in our own consolation, sanctification and ministerial employment, the Spirit is the principle, the life, soul, the all of the whole.'[125] Welch's position is worth some consideration before we return to look more

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[121] This theme is explored more fully in Chapters 4 and 5.
[122] Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic Renaissance Man* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2007), 47.
[123] Trueman, 56.
[124] Elizabeth A. Welch, *Holy Spirit and Worship: Transformation and Truth in the Theologies of John Owen and John Zizioulas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 14.
[125] Owen, *Works*, 2:254.

specifically at Owen. She proposes a 'quadrilateral' approach to the Holy Spirit and Worship[126], which considers:

1. the way in which God, though the Holy Spirit, draws people into relationship with God and with other people;
2. the way in which the Holy Spirit can be encountered as the immediate presence of God in worship
3. the way in which the Holy Spirit opens up truth as relational,
4. the transformative nature of the Holy Spirit, for the person, the world, and creation, as particularly experienced in worship

The ultimate purpose of this model is to allow one to approach liturgical theology with appropriate emphasis given to both the theology *and* practise of worship, without an undue emphasis on either. As an example, Lathrop speaks of an approach to worship which sees its theology emerge from its practices. Liturgical theology, he contends, 'inquires into the meaning of the liturgy by asking how the Christian meeting, in all its signs and words, says something authentic and reliable about God, and so says something true about ourselves and about our world as they are understood before God.'[127] Against this, Welch argues that,

> Over the centuries liturgical theology has begun with a focus on the gathered worshipping congregation and the practices that have constituted worship for that congregation as the starting point for the development of theology, in contrast to approaches to theology that have as their starting point the encounter with God in reason, experience, traction, and/or scripture in order to draw out the theology that undergirds worship.[128]

In other words, it is possible to hold both approaches together in terms of the way God is known.[129] Applying the quadrilateral model to Owen then, Welch observes a movement in his writings between doctrine, faith, and life, which hold together the knowledge of God within the framework of being in relationship with God in worship.[130] This, she suggests, is significant within the theological context of the 17th century.

> For puritans, emphasising the authority of the Holy Spirit, both reduced the authority of the establishment, politically and religiously, and increased the sense of the local nature of authority in each person and in each place.[131]

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126 Welch, 16.
127 Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 3.
128 Welch, 85.
129 Welch, 86.
130 Welch, 19.
131 Welch, 16-17.

Vickers similarly notes a changing approach to the Trinity in the 17th century 'as a shift from *invocation*, or prayer, to intellectual *assent*, or from *doxological* to epistemological activity,' suggesting that Protestants began to give too much weight to the epistemic nature of scripture.[132]

> Late seventeenth-century Protestant theologians understood the theological task as having primarily to do with demonstrating the clarity and intelligibility of Christian beliefs. On this understanding, theology was first and foremost a matter of logical consistency or rationality and only secondarily, if at all, a matter of the re-formation of the human soul through the incorporation into the praying and worshipping community of the faithful. To put it another way, second-order theological reflection lost its moorings in the first-order liturgical tasks of baptism, prayer and worship. The aim of theology was not so much to assist humans to come to know and love God as it was to identify and assent to clear and intelligible propositions about God.[133]

As such there was a growing disconnection between the Holy Spirit and worship. 'Whereas knowing, trusting and loving God had long been regarded as dependent on the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, human beings could now obtain saving knowledge simply by doing their epistemic best.'[134] Similarly, Lim notes that a growing emphasis on rationality and scripture resulted in a demise of mystery;[135] and both he and Welch therefore point to Owen as countering these prevailing trends. Owen's emphasis on a more mystical, apophatic approach to theology arises out of his particular views about the Holy Spirit and worship, drawing attention to the connection between the two.[136]

I would suggest that while helpful in understanding Owen's trinitarian framework, Welch's view does not necessarily reflect the wider scope of Owen's theology of worship, which as we will observe has equally Christological and therefore soteriological tones. Spiritual worship for Owen does not begin with the Holy Spirit, but with Christ. But neither, however, does it start with liturgy. Ryan McGraw draws attention to the way Owen returns to the theme of public worship throughout his writings.

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[132] Jason E. Vickers, *Invocation and Assent: The Making and Remaking of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 1.
[133] Vickers, xviii.
[134] Vickers, xv.
[135] Paul Chang-Ha Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.
[136] Lim, 14.

> Owen tended to include treatments of public worship wherever they fit logically into his writings. This highlights his continued preoccupation with this subject along with his stress on communion with God as triune.[137]

It was this theological approach to worship that insisted that worship was not only a matter of human devising but in response to the threefold nature of the Trinity. It was his pastoral approach to worship that saw worship as preparing people for the work and place of encounter with the Holy Spirit.[138] Welch, in fact, criticizes Owen for this bias against liturgy, suggesting that it reflects his strong anti-Roman Catholic views coloured by the recent period of the Reformation. Owen's lack of specificity in outlining the nature and content of services, she argues, led to a weakness in the content and framework of worship.[139]

> The argument against the regularity of a set liturgy can take away from the value of a regularly repeated framework in deepening the faith. Owen's critique of "man-made" liturgies, while serving to point to human dependence on God, can neglect the role of human activity in shaping spoken or written words.[140]

Such claims, again seem to miss the point of Owen's theological project, or at least mistakenly view his thoughts through too modernist a lens. Yes, Owen's thoughts operated within a trinitarian framework, but consistent with other Puritan thinking, his theology was foremost Reformed and exegetical in substance, even if he displayed a greater pastoral emphasis than others of the time. If modern approaches to worship aim to give emphasis to the Spirit and liturgy in worship, Owen pursued a far more orthodox understanding of trinitarian procession. Where this is seen most clearly is in two sermons titled, *The nature and beauty of gospel worship.*[141] Here, Owen makes a cogent argument for Spiritual or Gospel Worship as the means of the believer's access to God through and by Christ, before exploring how this is reflected in public worship. McGraw again rightly notes the Trinitarian shape of these sermons. As communion with God in three persons is the ultimate aim of the gospel, so, he argues, the communion of the saints with the Triune God, in glory, is both the goal and the pattern of their communion with him on earth.[142] Suzanne McDonald agrees, that in Owen there is a 'soteriological trajectory and

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[137] Ryan M. McGraw. *A Heavenly Directory: Trinitarian Piety, Public Worship and a Reassessment of John Owen's Theology* (Bristol, CT: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2014), 118.
[138] Welch, 92.
[139] Welch, 95.
[140] Welch, 95.
[141] John Owen, *A Treatise on the nature and beauty of Gospel Worship, etc.,* 1721 (United Kingdom: n.p., 1812). Welch suggests we note with caution the amount of weight given to these sermons as they were published sixty years after his death, based on notes taken at the time of preaching. Welch, 91.
[142] McGraw, 53.

transformational continuum between beholding the glory of God by faith now and beholding it by sight in eternity.'[143] As man was made in the image of God, he was created in order to know and to worship God. For Owen, therefore, 'the unity and diversity within the Godhead was the foundation of his piety and, consequently, of his theology of worship.'[144] However, the contention that Owen's approach to public worship is established primarily from an exploration of the specific nature of communion with the Trinity[145] arguably misses the greater soteriological emphases of these sermons.

McGraw considers that of all the Reformed orthodox, only Owen notes the importance of the Trinity as a fundamental article of religion, with few others dealing with the Trinity in terms of personal piety.[146] Exploring the specific nature of communion with each divine person, within these sermons Owen therefore establishes the heart of his views on public worship.[147] Great value, McGraw suggests, is given to the corporate communion of the saints with God, arguing that it is significant that public worship, as both 'the highest expression of communion with God and of the communion of the saints'[148] is the presupposition behind his exegesis. In this light, Ephesian 2:18 is 'a heavenly directory' for public worship, with Owen contending that believers must worship through the Son's mediation, relying on the strength of the Spirit, calling on God the Father.[149]

McGraw is correct in the observation that Owen engages specifically with the nature and practice of public worship directed by the Spirit within the second sermon. However, this too quickly dismisses its contingency on the spiritual worship of Christ in sermon one, which stands alone in its sufficiency and beauty. It ignores Owen's own logic, reading the later discussion on public worship into the former, where in fact something more profound is occurring.

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[143] Suzanne McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ: John Owen and the 'Reforming' of the Beatific Vision," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2015), 143.
[144] McGraw, 55.
[145] McGraw, 59.
[146] McGraw, 58.
[147] McGraw, 59.
[148] McGraw, 70.
[149] McGraw, 70-71.

Owen's primary text, as stated, is Ephesians 2:18,[150] from which he asserts that in bearing the curse of the law, Christ simultaneously abolishes the worship practices of the Jews, thereby removing the barrier separating Gentiles from God's people, and thus God's favour. 'Upon this reconciliation ensueth a twofold advantage or privilege; —an access into the favour of God, who before was at enmity with them; and a new and more glorious way of approaching unto God in his worship, than that about which they were before at difference among themselves.[151] Following Paul's metaphoric use of household and temple language to describe the church in verses 19 and 20–22, Owen shows spiritual worship to be of a soteriological essence, albeit with ecclesiological ramifications. Both images

> relate to the solemn worship of God under the gospel. The first asserts them [the Gentiles] to be now members of the church; —the latter, that by and among them God was worshipped with that divine service which came in the room of that which was appointed in the temple, now by Christ removed and taken away.[152]

OT worship ceremonies are, therefore, not typological of church liturgy, but the work of Christ. Owen summarises this point by saying, 'that it is an eminent effect and fruit of our reconciliation unto God and among ourselves, by the blood of Christ, that believers enjoy the privileges of the excellent, glorious, spiritual worship of God in Christ, revealed and required in the gospel.'[153] Gospel worship is granted to the believer as a fruit of Christ's death, rather than an action they should and could perform themselves. As such, Gospel worship is beautiful, glorious, and excellent, and 'the enjoyment of it is an eminent privilege.'[154] And two of these privileges stand out. The first, which Owen argues typologically, is access to the heavenly tabernacle. Affirming that worship is a fruit of Christ's atoning work he looks to Hebrews 9 and 10, noting that Christ's death removes the earthly tabernacle and the worship that accompanied it. At the heart of this abrogation is the issue of access to God. Where admission to the most holy place in the tabernacle/temple was not possible, and worshippers were kept at a distance 'making their application unto God by outward, carnal Ordinances,' with the tabernacle removed, the 'privilege of entering into the holiest, which is a true expressing of all gospel worship, could no otherwise be obtained for, nor granted unto believers, but by the blood of Christ.'[155] That transformation

[150] 'For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.'
[151] Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 54.
[152] Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 55.
[153] Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 55.
[154] Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 55.
[155] Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 55.

from physical to spiritual worship he affirms by citing 1 Peter 2:4–5, where the privilege granted to gospel worshippers is to offer spiritual sacrifices, made acceptable to God in Christ.

> To fit them for, and enable them hereunto, they are "made a spiritual house, a holy priesthood;" —they are both the temple wherein God dwells by his Spirit, and they are the priests that offer acceptable sacrifices unto him. By what means, then, do they attain this honour? By their "coming unto Christ."[156]

If the first privilege of Christ's worship is in obtaining access to God, then the second is the enjoyment of participation in God. By virtue of their union with Christ, Christians are able to participate in the glory of the Trinity. 'There is no act, part, or duty of gospel worship, wherein the worshippers have not this distinct communion with each person in the blessed Trinity.'[157] Rather it is Christ's initiative to take the worshipper by the hand, and lead them into the presence of God, 'there presenting them (as we shall see), saying, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me," Heb. ii. 13.'[158]

As their priest, 'Christ presents both the persons and the duties of believers before the Lord in their public worship.'[159] Of course, this relationship to the Godhead occurs through Christ as the foundation for the fellowship; and in fact, worship is impossible without him. However, a proper relationship to God through Christ means that genuine worshippers neither need nor demand elaborate ceremonies and external beauty.[160]

At the same time, the work of the Spirit is critical, enabling his people to worship in three ways: providing light from Scripture, creating grace in the heart to effect saving fellowship with God, and enabling his people to worship publicly in a way that glorifies God.[161]

> As 'no man can say that Jesus is lord, but by the Spirit,' —so no man can know the way of God's house and worship but by the Spirit; and we see by experience, that those that despise his assistance, rather trust to themselves and to other men for the worship of God than to the word.[162]

Owen's creation of a dualism between Spiritual and Public worship begins with his thinking on the *place* of worship. In spiritual terms, it is performed in heaven, 'the place of God's glorious

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156 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 56.
157 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 58.
158 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 58.
159 McGraw, 75.
160 McGraw, 74.
161 McGraw, 76.
162 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 71.

presence, where he is attended with all his holy angels, is the place of the worship.'[163] Yet at the same time,

> The saints are the temple of God, in which God manifests his presence. Grace in the hearts of believers is the stage where public worship occurs. This is a "living stone" in God's temple with which all "dead stones:" of external human invention hold no comparison.[164]

And as such, worship occurs *within* the assembly of the saints. 'As God's temple such assemblies are the seat and place of public, solemn, gospel worship,'[165] within which he provides spiritual gifts for its performance.

> He enables men to pray, so as that the souls of the saints may be drawn forth thereby unto communion with God, according unto all their wants and desires; —he enables them to preach or speak as the "oracles of God," so as that the saints may receive instruction suitable to their condition, as to all the ends of the good word of God, whose dispensation is committed unto them; —he enables men to administer the seals of the covenant so, that the faith of the saints may be excited and stirred up to act and exert itself in a way suitable to the nature of each ordinance. And all those gifts are bestowed on men on purpose for the good and edification of others.[166]

Such outward signs, he states, are not to stop the believer from entering heaven, but to help them.[167] Does the worshipper, for instance, require vestments and ornaments in their admission into God's presence? 'No; but faith, and sanctification, and holiness, are the three great qualifications of these worshippers.'[168] Similarly, he acknowledges the need for physical spaces for the earthly assembly of the church, though there is nothing special about such buildings.[169]

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163 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 78.

164 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 78.

165 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 75. Owen continues to argue that, as such, appropriate leadership of public worship is necessary. 'In the New Testament, the solemn worship of God is to be performed in the assemblies of his saints and people. Now, where the same worship is to be performed by many, the very law of nature and reason requireth that some one or more, according as there is necessity, should go before the rest of the assembly in the worship which they have to perform, and be as the hand, or mouth, or eyes to the whole body or assembly. And so, also, hath our Lord ordained, —namely, that in all the public and solemn worship of gospel assemblies, there should be some appointed to go before them in the performance of the duties of the worship that he requireth of them.' Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 74.

166 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 76.

167 And where they are enjoined the use of any outward signs, as in the sacraments, it is not, as it were, to stop them there from entering into heaven, but to help them forward in their entrance; as all know who are acquainted with their true nature and use. I do not say that any of the worship of old was limited in the sensible pledge and tokens of God's presence; but only that the spirit of the worshippers was kept in subjection, so as to approach unto God only as he exhibited himself to their faith in those signs, and not immediately, as we do under the gospel. Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 59.

168 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 64.

169 He [Christ] ministers not in a tabernacle, such as was that of Moses, and Solomon's temple, but in heaven itself, the place of the glorious presence and immediate manifestation of God's glory; —which he calls "the tabernacle which the Lord pitched;" that is, which he appointed for the place of worship to his saints under the ministry of Christ, their high priest. And though other places are necessary here on earth for their assemblies, as they are men

Rather, 'Christ, according to his promise, is in the midst of them as their high priest, and they have in their worship all the order, glory, and beauty… that in any place under heaven they can enjoy and be made partakers of.[170] What prayers the church then offers in weakness are made beautiful in Christ before God. 'They little know what beauty and glory those very duties which they perform and are troubled at are clothed withal: and for the beauty and glory of gospel worship, in comparison of all the self-invented rites of men.[171]

5.b. God instituted worship for the Christian

As I have shown, Owen's biblical theology sees OT ceremony as typological, pointing to Christ's saving work (his gospel or spiritual worship), and at the same time creates a moral imperative for outward worship which is not typological. But as Owen's view was that every aspect of worship be governed by the primacy of scripture,[172] then such outward worship must still therefore be regulated by God's word. The ways and means of worshipping God, he argues, are made known 'in and by the written word only, which contains a full and perfect revelation of the will of God as to his whole worship and all the concernments of it.'[173] In *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, Owen, as such, offers his clearest exposition of what God instituted worship (for believers) entails, and following the *Westminster Confession* states that worship should be 'in and by the ways of his own appointment.'[174] What is perhaps surprising, then, is that the character of outward worship instituted by God is not to do with ceremony or liturgy, but of all-of-life service.

> All our faith, all our obedience in this life, whatever may be obtained or attained unto therein, it all belongs unto our walking with God in the covenant of grace, wherein God

clothed with flesh and infirmities, yet there is none pitched, appointed, or consecrated for the holy and solemn acceptance of their service, but heaven itself; where the High Priest is always ready to administer it before God. And as to the assemblies here below, all places are now alike. And what can be more glorious than this, —namely, that the whole spiritual worship of the gospel, performed here on earth by the saints, is administered in heaven by such a holy Priest, who is at the right hand of the throne of the majesty of God! and yet under his conduct we have by faith an entrance into the presence of God. Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 66.

170 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 68.

171 Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 69.

172 Packer has argued that 'the idea that direct biblical warrant…is required to sanction every substantive item included in the public worship of God was a Puritan innovation.' Beeke and Jones rightfully question this assumption. While Owen stood in harmony with the other Puritans, there is, they suggest, unanimity between Calvin, the Reformers and Owen and the Puritans on this subject. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 653–679, 665.

173 Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 6. See also, 'Our belief of the Scriptures to be the word of God, or a divine revelation, and our understanding of the mind and will of God as revealed in them, are the two springs of all our interest in Christian religion.' John Owen, "The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurance Therein…," in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* Vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1862), 4:121.

174 Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 14. The 'principal ends of all instituted worship', in respect of believers, being 'the increase of the grace of God in them, their edification in their most holy faith, and the testification of the good-will of God unto them. Eph. iv. 11–16.'

> dwells with men, and they are his people, and God himself is with them to be their God. Other ways of communion with him, of obedience unto him, of enjoyment of him, on this side heaven and glory, he hath not appointed nor revealed.[175]

And what enables such worship is the church's union with Christ. God dwells, or is present with his people spiritually, rather than in a specific temporal location such as the temple.

He begins this argument with the nature of God, which requires all mankind to glorify him, 'that is to believe in him, love him, trust him, call on him; which are all therefore cursed that do not.'[176] As such, 'natural worship' is again sounding soteriological tones, and follows a biblical-theological trajectory towards the gospel worship of Christ discussed earlier. At the same time, Christian worship is practiced. It is because it is in the nature of man to depend upon and obey God, that worship 'concerneth those outward ways and means whereby God hath appointed that faith, and love, and fear of him to be exercised and expressed unto his glory.'[177]

> Neither do we only express and profess our inward moral-natural worship of God hereby, by which means it becomes the principal way and instrument of faith and trust exerting themselves in our obedience, but also it is a most effectual help and assistance unto the principle of that natural worship, strengthening the habit of it, and exciting it unto all suitable actings, unto its increase and growth. [178]

Outward worship, Owen contends, is required in the first commandment, namely, that the inward be exercised and expressed.[179] There are similarities here to Calvin, where public worship was to reflect something of the believer's inner or spiritual worship. For Owen, spiritual worship is the task of Christ; therefore the role of outward worship is to express the Christian's 'natural' worship. 'Which [then] are the principal institutions of the gospel to be observed in the worship of God,' he asks?

> The calling, gathering, and settling of churches, with their officers, as the seat and subject of all other solemn instituted worship; prayer, with thanksgiving; singing of psalms; preaching the word; administration of the sacraments of baptism and the supper of the Lord; discipline and rule of the church collected and settled; most of which have also sundry particular duties relating unto them, and subservient unto their due observation.[180]

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[175] Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 14.
[176] Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 4.
[177] Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 4.
[178] Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 4.
[179] Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 5.
[180] Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 27–28.

Preaching of the word and celebration of the sacraments had been for Calvin 'marks' by which a true church might be recognized, and not prescribed public worship as such. These are now more clearly identified by Owen as institutions within a broader picture of biblical worship, especially because they are appointed by Christ.

> God hath frequently promised his special presence in and with his instituted ordinances of old, both unto the things themselves and the places wherein they were according to his appointment to be celebrated, those places being also his special institution.

In the light of John 4, however, he states that we are commanded in all places equally to make our prayers and supplications, and where his presence is promised within those things appointed for his service.[181] For the church, there are no religious places as such, but that where the church gathers, and in its ordained acts of worship, God will thereby dwell. As such, 'God hath given special promises, or promises of his special grace, unto them that attend upon him in his worship in a due manner.'[182]

Arguably, Owen presents one of the most developed formulations of Reformed worship theology. Deriving much from Calvin's OT typology of ceremony which pointed towards Christ; he yet presents a somewhat more sophisticated understanding of worship proceeding from the nature of God: the institution of outward worship that moves soteriologically towards the atoning work of Christ, and ecclesiologically towards an all-of-life service, with God being present with his people in each of these institutions. My own soteriological model of worship (articulated in Chapters 6 and 7) will reflect Owen's position in many ways, as worship as completed and perfected by Christ for the church.

> Under the New Testament, the worship that is appointed in the gospel is founded in and built upon what is already past and accomplished, —namely, the death and life of Jesus Christ, with the sacrifice and atonement for sin made thereby, 1 Cor. xi. 23–26; which can never be again performed; neither is there anything else to the same purpose either needful or possible, Heb. x. 26. So that there is not any ground left for any new institution of worship, or any alteration in those that are already instituted.[183]

6. Conclusion

The antecedents of evangelical worship theology, in both normative and regulative formulations, understood Christian worship to be, in Calvin's words, an inward faith of the heart. As simple as

[181] Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 17.
[182] Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 12.
[183] Owen, "A Brief Instruction," 8–9.

that sounds, various dualities weave around and through this doctrine. Hermeneutically this is evident in the consonance and dissonance between the old and new covenants and the use of typology, where the literal worship of the OT points to the spiritual worship of the New. Calvin, for instance, saw spiritual worship as evidence of continuity as he considered it to exist pre-Christ within the covenant of grace.

A second duality is in the relationship between spiritual and public worship. Both Calvin and Hooker, for example, see public worship as some sort of outward form of the spiritual. Whereas Calvin was seemingly less prescriptive of the church's performance of public worship, Hooker on the other hand was far more theologically invested in the idea of edification; itself a means of grace to the believer. In practice, the normative approach of Anglicanism inspired more formal liturgical expressions of public worship, whereas the scripturally regulated Puritan approach encouraged more extemporaneous gatherings.[184]

While Calvin may have hinted at such an idea, John Owen stands out in his view that spiritual worship is fundamentally soteriological in essence, in that the believer approaches God through the worship of Christ alone. This soteriological view of worship is one that we will return to explore further in Chapters 6 and 7. While such a view is not inconsistent with Calvin's view of OT worship being typological of Christ, he never expressed his position on spiritual worship in these terms.

In short, the pre-evangelicals established a robust view of worship that had both inner and outward dimensions, based on a hermeneutic that saw OT ceremonies abrogated and transformed by Christ. The different emphases expressed, however, the hermeneutical nuances of each and whether Scripture should be read as proof text, pretext or in context. This is the broad shape of worship inherited by the first evangelicals. What the evangelicals would then add to this doctrine was an engagement of the heart.

[184] By way of illustration, the history of church music sees two similar paths develop in the post-Elizabethan era: the high church tradition of the choral foundation and anthem singing (associated with the normative principle) and low church congregational Psalm singing (associated with the regulative principle). While the first evangelicals may not have held as strongly to regulative forms of corporate worship as the Puritans, it was nonetheless this tradition that developed into the popular movement of hymn writing and singing.

CHAPTER 3
THE EVANGELICALS: WORSHIP THEOLOGY OF THE HEART

1. Introduction

Where the Reformed tradition had developed a theology of worship that was exegetically articulate and pragmatically and theologically coherent, the early evangelical movement seemingly showed little new interest in the doctrine. This is surprising for a few reasons: firstly, considering the theological influence of Puritanism and its regulative principle, and secondly because of the almost universal interest in hymn singing amongst its leaders and adherents. Scholarship is mixed on the theological antecedents of the movement. Mark Noll has argued that the key influences on the rise of evangelicalism in the 18th Century were Puritanism (with its Calvinist theology), European pietism (stressing holy living and using the language of the heart), and high church Anglicanism (in its ability to organise societies/groups alongside mainstream religion).[1] Balmer suggests more of a Presbyterian than Anglican influence, however. 'Evangelicalism picked up the peculiar characteristics from each strain—warm-hearted spirituality from the Pietists (for instance), doctrinal precisionism from the Presbyterians, and individualistic introspection from the Puritans.'[2] David Bebbington, who set the course for much of the modern scholarship on Evangelicalism,[3] has more recently conceded the Puritan's strong doctrine of assurance is more evident in the language of early Evangelicals than his earlier work suggested.[4] But where he resists giving more emphasis is to the perceived role of the Holy Spirit in the movement. Hindmarsh,

[1] Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2004), 111.
[2] Randall Balmer, *The Encyclopaedia of Evangelicalism*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2002), vii–viii.
[3] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989).
[4] David Bebbington, *The Evangelical Quadrilateral* (Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2021), 13.

however, argues that an early perception of the Holy Spirit as stoking the fire of Evangelical devotion and spirituality is critical to understanding its initial fervour.[5] Since Hooker, Anglicanism, he suggests, sought a union of doctrine, discipline, and devotion.

> But now the call to earnestness was renewed, heightened, and addressed to all. And it was linked with a promise as preachers held out the prospect of an immediate experience of God's forgiveness and the felt presence of the Holy Spirit.[6]

'Experience,' rather than worship, was of great interest to both Calvinist and Arminian evangelicals. While the former held to the Puritan tradition of precise biblical interpretation, the latter argued that Christian experience should be considered when interpreting scripture. Yet both groups were somewhat heart driven.[7] And while soteriological concerns were paramount, evidenced in the evangelistic zeal of its key leaders and in the texts of evangelical hymnody, in giving emphasis to the place of Christian experience, spiritual worship had become somewhat detached from the saving work of Christ.

If Evangelicalism's Calvinistic legacy positively informed a doctrine of worship which placed an emphasis on a 'word' controlled soteriology, in practice the evangelicals had little appetite for liturgical traditions or commitment to denominational structures. Their interest in soteriology, rather, was expressed in fervent evangelism, and corporate worship became less of a concern than the pietistic life. As a result, *spiritual* worship, rather than following Owen's Christological formulation, would develop into a theology of the heart. Of course, Puritan approaches to worship had already moved away from the liturgical formulations of Anglicanism. It is understandable, therefore, that the evangelicals, with little regard for denominational traditions, would appear to show further disinterest. 'What evangelicals did stress theologically—and so came to argue about as well—was the possibility of living a genuinely holy life and, supremely, the realities of divine grace in personal experience.'[8] And while the language of public and spiritual worship continues to be used in this period, worship on the whole becomes associated

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[5] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism: True Religion in a Modern World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 8.
[6] Hindmarsh, 8.
[7] Noll contends that evangelicalism 'grew out of earlier forms of heart-felt British Protestantism and was stimulated by contact with heart-felt continental pietism. It was grounded religiously in the innovative preaching of justifying faith… It offered a compelling picture of direct fellowship with God for believers as individuals and in groups… It featured a form of conversion as much focused on personal experience, as much convinced of the plasticity of human nature and as much preoccupied with claims of certainty as any manifestation of the Enlightenment.' Noll, 144.
[8] Noll, 254.

with the pietistic life of the believer, expressed in public prayer and praise, private devotion, and the godly life. In other words, worship becomes a theology of the heart.

1.a. Hymn Writing

Much has been written about the early evangelical hymn writers, either as sympathetic (or sometimes critical[9]) biographies, or from a historical/musicological perspective. If we take Charles Wesley as an example, Gant's history of English hymn singing views the composer as rejecting the musical styles and equipment of Anglicanism, and who considered polyphony and the 'fuging' style as unsuitable for massed congregational singing.[10] Erik Routley, however, sees Wesley's greatest achievement as delivering the country form the tyranny of the metrical psalm!

> Watts taught his congregations to sing about Christ; the Wesley's taught the whole country to do so… Hymnody is church music for the ordinary man, not to listen to, but to perform; and it seems to have been a principle of the early evangelicals that psalmody, admirable though its tune so often were, underrated the ordinary man's appreciation of music and capacities for performance.[11]

If we take a more theological (rather than musicological) approach to hymn writing, however, then we note that some scholars do not view the evangelical hymnwriters as particularly serious theologians and therefore consider extensive theological investigation beyond the hymns themselves as unwarranted. Langford, for instance, views Charles Wesley in no way a 'creative theologian.' He 'is important not because he added new thoughts or insights to theological discourse, but because he creatively provided for the Methodist revival a theological character suited to its self-understanding… that is, he kept theology immediately and ineluctibly related to the worship and service of God.'[12] Rattenbury is prepared to use the term 'theologian' more broadly, however, viewing Charles as one who created, crafted, and communicated theological doctrine in a more popular medium than a formal theologian would. In this sense he is an 'experimental theologian' communicating theology in the context and medium of Christian experience.[13] Similarly Teresa Berger argues that Welsey *was* in fact a creative theologian, whose hymns are in fact theological statements using first-order doxological language. Theological statements addressed *to* God in hymns of praise, she argues, are as effective and significant as

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[9] See for example, J. R. Watson. *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 282, who suggests that poet William Cowper collapsed under the pressure of Calvinist evangelicalism.
[10] Andrew Gant, *O Sing Unto the Lord: A History of English Church Music* (London: Profile Books, 2015), 265-266.
[11] Erik Routley and Lionel Dakers, *A Short History of English Church Music*, Rev. ed. (London: Mowbray, 1997), 44.
[12] Thomas Langford, "Charles Wesley as Theologian," in S. T. Kimbrough ed., *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian* (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood Books, 1991), 104.
[13] J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: Epworth Press, 1941), 85.

intellectual statements made *about* God. Wesley's hymns, of course, do both.[14] These arguments represent in many ways the general approach to the hymns of this period. I will contend, in line with Berger, that the hymn writing of the early evangelicals was in fact an example of practical theology, encouraging and supporting an emphasis on pietism (in which experience is a key factor), the evangelical's worship of all-of-life.

2. Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

While most would consider Isaac Watts as primarily a hymn writer, less consideration has been given to his thinking on the theology of worship. While generally thought of, in tradition and doctrine, as a Puritan, Watts' friendship and support of the early evangelicals, and his direct influence on the culture of congregational singing within evangelicalism, makes a brief look at his thinking on worship useful to this study. Watts, it has been argued, modified his received Puritan heritage in the areas of reason and passion, which in turn shaped his position on the revival of religion,[15] of which public worship was central.

2.a. Worship is an act of the believer

In a sermon on covetousness, Watts remarks, 'Now the Lord is God alone, and he will not give his glory unto another; he will not suffer inward spiritual worship to be paid to gold and silver.'[16] This rare use of the term 'spiritual worship' by Watts is significant. No doubt echoing the first commandment (Ex 20:3), he affirms the right worship that God expects of his people. That God is protective of his glory suggests that worship involves due reverence, (following perhaps Owen). That it is 'inward' reflects Calvin's notion of spiritual worship as involving faith, prayer and piety, rather than ceremony.[17] The domain of spiritual worship (and not simply its motivation) is the human heart, not external to it. And while spiritual worship does play a role in public worship (as I shall note), the location of spiritual worship is within, and in that sense the obligation for worship is retained with the believer, even in the light of Christ's sacrifice.

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[14] Teresa Berger, *Theology in Hymns? A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and Theology According to a Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780)* (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood Books, 1995), 15-31.
[15] Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts. Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 3
[16] Isaac Watts, "Sermon I. Isaiah ivii 17.18," in *The Sermons and Practical Works of Isaac Watts* Vol. 3 (England: Albion Press, 1805), 606.
[17] Similarly, Watts speaks of prayer as a duty of worship: 'The inward and spiritual performance of this worship is taught in many excellent discourses, but a regular scheme of prayer as a Christian exercise or a holy skill, has been much neglected.' Isaac Watts, *A Guide To Prayer* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), I.

2.b. Worship is contextual

Watts, however, does not operate outside a biblical-theological framework, and if anything, this is most evident in his views on public worship. In his reworking of the Psalter as hymn texts, Watts decidedly wants to understand the OT in the light of the new, with a clear intention to reinterpret the Psalms Christologically.

> To accommodate the Book of Psalms to Christian Worship: And in order to this 'tis necessary to divest David and Asaph, &c. of every other Character but that of a Psalmist and a Saint, and to make them always speak the common Sense and Language of a Christian.[18]

As David would have found the words of Moses insufficient for articulating his own experience of faith, why should the Christian, he argues, be limited to singing the Psalms purely in their original form?

> Where the Original runs in the Form of Prophecy concerning Christ and his Salvation, I have given an historical Turn to the Sense: There is no necessity that we should always sing in the obscure and doubtfull Style of Prediction, when the Things foretold are brought into open Light by a full Accomplishment.[19]

In fact, Watts recognises that the corporate worship of Israel is full of the language of types and figures and needs re-expression in the light of the new covenant.

> For why should I now address God my Saviour in a Song with burnt sacrifices of Fatlings and with the Incense of Rams? Why should I pray to be sprinkled with Hyssop, or recur to the Blood of Bullocks and Goats? Why should I bind my Sacrifice with Cords to the Horns of an Altar, or sing the Praises of God to high sounding Cymbals, when the Gospel has shewn me a nobler Atonement for Sin, and appointed a purer and more spiritual Worship?[20]

Is Watts here following John Owen in claiming that true spiritual worship is achieved through the atonement, (i.e., a soteriological position)? More likely he is suggesting that Christian corporate worship is *more* spiritual than the literal worship of Israel, whose songs and prayers were accompanied with animal sacrifices; whereas the songs and prayers of the Christian are accompanied by Christ's perfect sacrifice. Christ does not take on the worship of the Christian, so much that he creates the context for the Christian to offer worship, which therefore becomes spiritual.

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[18] Isaac Watts, Preface to "The Psalms of David: imitated in the language of the New Testament, and apply'd to the Christian state and worship" (1719), in *The Works of Isaac Watts* Vol. IV (London: 1753).
[19] Watts, *Psalms of David*, xvi.
[20] Watts, *Psalms of David*, xviii.

2.c. Worship is eschatological

If the Christian's worship is spiritual (against the literal worship of the OT), then the primary example of right worship is found looking forwards, rather than backwards.

> That heaven is a place or state of worship, is certain, and beyond all controversy; for this is a very frequent description of it in the word of God. And as the great God has been pleased to appoint different forms of worship to be practised by his saints; so it is possible he may appoint peculiar forms of sacred magnificence to attend his own worship in the state of glory.[21]

Watts views the heavenly gathering as the place of perfect worship, where both prostration and praise are modelled. But he also imagines there to be other expressions of worship, unknown to humanity, because human sin prevents the believer performing it.

> The various parts of divine worship that are practised on earth, at least such as are included in natural religion, shall doubtless be performed in heaven too; and what other unknown worship of positive and celestial appointment shall belong to the heavenly state, is as much above our present conjecture, as the forms of it are.[22]

As such, it is through earthly worship that we are drawn towards heaven. When singing God's praise,

> the Gospel brings us nearer to the heavenly State than all the former Dispensations of God amongst Men: And in these very last Days of the Gospel we are brought almost within sight of the Kingdom of our Lord; yet we are very much unacquainted with the Songs of the New Jerusalem, and unpractised in the Work of Praise.[23]

Yet there is another aspect to Watts' worship eschatology which sees earthly worship as genuine only when performed through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Speaking of his new hymn compositions, he expects that they will be sung under the 'influence and conduct' of the Holy Spirit, 'all conversing with God the Father by the new and living Way of Access to the Throne, even the Person and the Mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ.'[24] While worship is a creaturely action, rather than that of Christ, Watts nonetheless expects that it is performed 'in Christ' to be effective. So, while his theology of worship has praxis at its heart (i.e., in the singing of hymns), it

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[21] Watts, *Sermons and Practical Works,* 406. He continues: 'Bowing the knee, and prostration of the body, are forms and postures of humility practised by earthly worshippers. Angels cover their faces and their feet with their wings, and cry, *holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts!*... But what unknown authority of Christ, for the unbodied or the bodied saints in heaven to adorn their sacred offices, is above our reach to describe or to imagine.'

[22] Isaac Watts, "Discourse II – The Happiness of Separate Spirits. &c.," in *The Works of the Rev. Isaac Watts D.D. in Nine Volumes* Vol. 2 (London: 1753), 399. Similarly, he states that 'As our love of God is imperfect here, so is all our devotion and worship. While we are in this world, sin mingles with all our religious duties: We come before God with our prayers and our songs, but our thoughts wander from him in the midst of worship, and we are gone on a sudden to the ends of the earth,' 380.

[23] Issac Watts, Preface to *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (London: J. Humphreys, for John Lawrence, 1707), i.

[24] Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, iii.

is equally eschatological (i.e., mediated by Christ in heaven), and expressed, for example, in his hymn based on Revelation 4–5:

> Come, let us join our cheerful songs
> with angels round the throne;
> ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
> but all their joys are one.
>
> 'Worthy the Lamb that died,' they cry,
> 'to be exalted thus';
> 'Worthy the Lamb,' our lips reply,
> 'for he was slain for us.'
>
> Jesus is worthy to receive
> honour and power divine;
> and blessings, more than we can give,
> be, Lord, for ever thine.
>
> Let all that dwell above the sky,
> and air, and earth, and seas,
> conspire to lift thy glories high,
> and speak thine endless praise.
>
> The whole creation joins in one
> to bless the sacred name
> of him that sits upon the throne,
> and to adore the Lamb.[25]

2.d. Worship excites the passions/affections

> *What think ye of all the gaudy trappings and golden finery that is mingled with the* Christian *worship by the imaginations of men in the church of* Rome? … *The reformers of our worship in the* church of England *were much of this mind, for they boldly pass this censure on many of the* Popish *ceremonies, that they* entered into the church by undiscreet devotion and zeal without knowledge: They blinded the people, and obscured the glory of God, and are worthy to be cut away and clean rejected: *That they did* more confound and darken, than declare and set forth Christ's benefits unto us*, and reduced us again to a* ceremonial law, like that of Moses*, and to* the bondage of figures and shadows: *This is their sentence and judgment concerning many of the* Romish *rites, in the* preface *to the book of* common prayer.[26]

Watts' critique of the corporate worship of Catholicism, and indeed Anglicanism, acknowledges both its devotion and zeal. And yet it fails, he suggests, because it lacks knowledge through its suppression of the benefits of the gospel. In it, there is a disjunction between knowledge and

[25] Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, I.62.
[26] Isaac Watts, "The Diamond painted," in *The Improvement of the Mind By Isaac Watts, D.D. Also His Posthumous Works* (London: William Baynes, 1819), 367–368.

passion; rather it is in the affections, guided by knowledge of the gospel, that God's love reigns. A such,

> The eye will often look up to God in a way of faith and humble dependence; the ear will be attentive to his holy word; the hand will be lifted up to heaven in daily requests; the knee will be bended in humble worship; all the outward powers will be busy in doing the will of God and promoting his glory.[27]

Again, singing is the prime example of Watts' expectation of God to engage the human affections.

> Let us remember, that the very power of singing was given to human nature chiefly for this purpose, that our own warmest affections of soul might break out into natural or divine melody, and that the tongue of the worshipper might express his own heart.[28]

In each case, however, Godly affections (which are similar in many ways to Watts' descriptions of spiritual worship) motivates Christian obedience and outward acts by which God is glorified. And it is this appreciation of the affections that would drive the evangelicals' religion of the heart.[29]

3. George Whitefield (1717–1770)

The first great evangelical leader, George Whitefield, aimed to win people for Christ through preaching the word to the head and to the heart. Hindmarsh sees four chief factors that shaped Whitefields' evangelical spirituality: 'the discipline of Oxford Methodism, the spiritual boldness of Pietism, the practical biblical emphasis of Puritan-Nonconformist divinity, and, over and above these, the day-by-day experience of the felt presence of God that followed his conversion.'[30] As a Calvinist his experience of grace was founded in the doctrines of election, predestination and the perseverance of the saints. As a pietist he believed the lives of true Christians were transformed by the Holy Spirit. Though ordained as an Anglican clergyman, his commitment to the liturgical practices of the Church of England were therefore immaterial. While formal doctrine was mostly irrelevant, the lived experience of God's grace in Christ was

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[27] Isaac Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God and Its Influence on All the Passions* (London: 1734), 643.
[28] Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David* (London: 1744), xiv.
[29] Beynon makes the case that while Watts takes a similar position to Jonathan Edwards on the affections, he did so some two decades before the latter. If Edwards' aim was to distinguish between true and false affections exhibited in the heat of the Awakenings, Watts' concern, rather, was to 'warm up' the cool religion of his day. Graham Beynon, "The Helpfulness of the Lesser Known Work: Isaac Watts on the Passions," *Themelios* 42, no. 3 (December 2017), 479–493.
[30] Hindmarsh, 15.

paramount.[31] Like Watts, Whitefield understood that capturing the heart was central to bringing souls to Christ.

> That we might deal with you as rational creatures, we have endeavoured calmly, and in the fear of God, to address ourselves to your understandings; but the hardest work is yet ahead, namely, to affect and warm your hearts. This I take to be the very life of preaching… Without proper mixture of these, however a preacher may acquire the character, in the letter-learned and polite world, of being a calm and cool reasoner; yet he never will be looked upon by those whose senses are exercised to discern spiritual things, as a truly evangelical and Christian orator.[32]

Though he displays a zeal for the salvation of souls and the renewal of the inner self, Whitefield's sermons say little about worship, in either a soteriological, spiritual, or liturgical sense. He does, however, address issues of soteriology using different language—within Paul's doctrine of union with Christ, by which he stresses the benefits of salvation obtained by Christ's sacrifice and the spiritual benefits of inner renewal.

> It remains therefore, that this expression, "if any man be in Christ," must be understood in a SECOND and closer signification, to be in him so as to partake of the benefits of his sufferings. To be in him not only by an outward profession, but by an inward change and purity of heart, and cohabitation of his Holy Spirit. To be in him, so as to be mystically united to him by a true and lively faith, and thereby to receive spiritual virtue from him, as the members of the natural body do from the head, or the branches from the vine.[33]

Yet, in a single reference to spiritual worship in a sermon titled 'Temples of The Living God,' Whitefield does imply that worship has a soteriological foundation, when passively received by the believer.

> Such, and such only, who thus worship God in the temple of their hearts, can truly be said to be made priests unto God, or be stiled a royal priesthood; such, and such only, can truly be stiled, "the temple of the living God," because such only pray to him, as one expresses it, in the temple of their hearts, and consequently worship him in spirit and in truth.[34]

This is by no means a robust exegetical foundation for a soteriological spiritual worship. On the one hand, the agency of heart worship appears to rest with the believer. Yet at the same time, Christ is the means of such worship, as the one who establishes both royal priesthood and temple through his work of salvation. So, while the doctrine of worship is not generally of great interest

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[31] Noll, 81.
[32] George Whitefield, in Lee Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield,* Vol. 1 (Watford: Church Society, 2010), 2:421.
[33] Whitefield, "On Regeneration," in *Sermons of George Whitefield* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 261.
[34] Whitefield, "Christians, Temples of the Living God," in *Sermons of George Whitefield* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 272.

to Whitefield, the salvation of souls is; and in this respect, his brief descriptions of spiritual worship are consistent with NT soteriology.

3.a. Corporate praise

Whitefield famously claimed,

> I am no great Friend to long Sermons, long Prayers, or long Hymns. —They generally weary instead of edifying, and therefore I think should be avoided by those who preside in nay public Worshipping Assembly.[35]

While not intended as a censure of public worship, Whitefield's statement does, however, reflect a pragmatic theology. The church service is primarily for edification, a principle which should guide liturgical practise. As such, Whitefield affirms the place of corporate praise within the church and sees a special place for singing in expressing such praise.

> Altho' all the Acts and Exercises of Devotion are sweet and delightful, yet we never resemble the Blessed Worshippers above more than when we are joining together in public Devotions, and, with Hearts and Lips unfeigned, singing Praises to him sitteth upon the Throne for ever. —Consequently, Hymns composed for such a Purpose ought to abound much in Thanksgiving, and to be of such a Nature, that all who attend may join in them without being obliged to sing Lies, or not sing at all…[36]

Like Watts, Whitefield sees public worship as eschatologically inspired and focused, stressing that the church joins with the heavenly choir in singing Christ's praise. As the compiler of *A Collection of Hymns for Social Worship*, this theme is regularly stressed, with a number of hymns advancing this eschatological theme.[37] Yet is it his inclusion of William Hammond's hymn, *LORD, we come before thee now*, (by which he introduces his section on Public Worship), that Whitefield most succinctly expresses what is expected to occur when the church gathers:

> Send some Message from thy Word,
> That may Joy and Peace afford;
> Let thy Spirit now impart
> Full Salvation to each Heart.

4. John Wesley (1703–1791)

The equally prominent British evangelical, John Wesley is similarly noteworthy for this study. Theologically an Arminian (against the Calvinism of Whitefield, Edwards, and Newton), he nonetheless had a profound influence in shaping the spirituality of the movement as a whole.

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[35] George Whitefield, "Preface" to *A Collection of Hymns for Social Worship* (London: William Strahan, 1758), 2.
[36] Whitefield, *A Collection of Hymns for Social Worship*, 2.
[37] Hymns on this theme include: Watts: *Come, let us join our cheerful Songs, With Angels round the Throne*; and C. Wesley: *Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim.*

Furthermore, elements of Wesley's doctrine of Perfectionism might be considered similar to more recent evangelical notions of all-of-life worship. Thirdly, he and his brother Charles contributed significantly to the development of evangelical expressions of faith, particularly through the writing of hymns and, as a consequence, corporate worship.

4.a. Wesley's theology of worship

If there is any sense of a soteriological approach to worship amongst the early evangelicals (whereby Christ imputes the benefits of his worship to the believer), then Wesley clearly moves in the opposite direction! In 1755 James Hervey published *Theron and Aspasio* to defend the Calvinist view of imputation.[38] In response, Wesley retorted 'that strong notions of imputation turned Calvinists into passive antinomians who neglected the disciplines of active Christian life.'[39] As with Watts and Whitefield, Wesley does not articulate a theology of worship in any comprehensive or systematic way. Yet he nonetheless stresses the necessity of good works in the Christian life in the same way modern evangelicals might describe all-of-life worship. It is of interest, then, that in explaining the meaning of 'worshipping in spirit and in truth', Wesley uses the language of union; although not union with Christ, but with God as spirit.

> You cannot find your long-sought happiness in all the pleasures of the world. Are they not "deceitful upon the weights?" Are they not lighter than vanity itself? How long will ye "feed upon that which is not bread?" —which may amuse, but cannot satisfy? You cannot find it in the religion of the world; either in opinions or a mere round of outward duties. Vain labour! Is not God a spirit, and therefore to be "worshipped in spirit and in truth?" In this alone can you find the happiness you seek; in the union of your spirit with the Father of spirits; in the knowledge and love of Him who is the fountain of happiness, sufficient for all the souls he has made.[40]

While seemingly a subtle change in emphasis, Wesley's union language has profound implications on how worship might be understood, not as something achieved by Christ, but as that which is performed by the Christian in order to attain spiritual unity with God; in effect a form of evangelical mysticism.[41]

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[38] 'God first "reckoned" all sinners as spiritually dead in Adam and then "reckoned" the elect as spiritually alive in Christ,' in Noll, 257.
[39] Noll, 257.
[40] John Wesley, "Spiritual Worship," Sermon 77, in *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons III, 71–114* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).
[41] It has been well documented that Wesley showed a particular fascination towards mystical writers, particularly before his conversion, and although becoming critical thereafter, nonetheless retained elements of mystical thinking within his own theology. See, for example, Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013).

If soteriology is at the heart of the Arminian–Calvinism debate, then this is equally evident in the Wesleyan approach to worship. At the Wesleyan annual conference in 1770 it was stated,

> We have received it as a maxim, that "a man is to do nothing in order to receive justification." Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favour with God should "cease from evil, and learn to do well"… [Salvation is] not by the *merit* of works, but by works as a *condition.*[42]

Works (in demonstrating faith) are a condition for salvation, and for Wesley, the acts of worship should be considered in the same way. That is, the evidence of spiritual worship is a necessary condition for the believer's union *with the God as spirit*. In his explanatory notes on John 4, he writes:

> 21. *The hour cometh when ye*—Both Samaritans and Jews, *shall worship neither in this mountain, nor at Jerusalem*—As preferable to any other place. True worship shall be no longer confined to any one place or nation.
> 23. *The true worshippers shall worship the Father*—Not here or there only, but at all times and in all places.
> 24. *God is a Spirit*—Not only remote from the body, and all the properties of it, but likewise full of all spiritual perfections, power, wisdom, love, holiness. And our worship should be suitable to his nature. We should worship him with the truly spiritual worship of faith, love, and holiness, animating all our tempers, thoughts, words, and actions.[43]

By avoiding what it means to worship in 'truth,' he allows for the possibility of the believer emulating God's spiritual nature and character. Spiritual worship for Wesley, therefore, has at its essence an obligation of human agency. This is further evidenced in his notes on Romans 12:1.

> 1. *a sacrifice*—Dead to sin, and *living*—By that life, which is mentioned chap. i, 17, chap vi, 4, &c. *Holy*—Such as the law requires, chap. vii, 12. Acceptable, chap. Viii, 8, *which is your reasonable service*—The worship of the heathens was utterly unreasonable, chap. 1, 18, &c; so was the glorying of the Jews, chap. Ii, 3, &c. But a Christian acts in all things by the highest reason, from the mercy of God inferring his own duty.[44]

What makes Christian service *reasonable* is not that it is performed as the right response to God's grace, but that the logic of the gospel requires holy and acceptable works as a condition for faith. The works of the pagan and Jew are 'unreasonable,' not because they are works, but because they lack Christ. The believer, however, reasoning from the gospel, is able to discern how to live the holy life and is bound by duty to God to live as such.

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[42] Wesleyan Conference minutes, quoted in Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 68.
[43] John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1754), 222–223.
[44] Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 356.

4.b. Perfectionism

For Wesley, then, the Christian life was to be marked by the pursuit of holiness. True worship of God meant imitating his perfect qualities.[45] As I suggested, this perfectionism[46] has similarities to the all-of-life worship advocated by more recent evangelicals. Wesley wrote: 'Christians are called to love God with all their heart, and to serve him with all their strength; which is precisely what I apprehend to be meant by the scriptural term perfection.'[47] While the contemporary view sees the service of the Christian performed as a response to their salvation, for Wesley, perfectionism seems more akin to the notion of achieving union with Christ, albeit as a human achieved goal, rather than by soteriological imputation. That is not to say that God is not ultimately responsible for the gift of holiness, as Wesley describes the heart overflowing with love, (the mark of having achieved perfection), as affected by God in the believer.

If perfectionism is Wesley's de facto doctrine of all-of-life-worship, then the Calvinist–Arminian debates are clearly at play here. His emphasis on free will, a characteristic of his Arminianism, naturally inclines toward a works-based worship than a soteriological one.[48] This was not, however, an absolute perfection, although Wesley did believe that there could be freedom from sin in the life of the believer. The mature Christian might achieve what he termed entire sanctification, a state granted by God that removed original sin.[49] It is not so simple, therefore, to say that perfectionism was attained through the works of the believer, as it was a gift of God by faith. Yet neither is it a soteriological condition achieved once for all by Christ, as Wesley calls

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[45] 'By Methodists I mean a people who profess to pursue (in whatsoever measure they have attained) holiness of heart and life, inward and outward conformity in all things to the revealed will of God; who place religion in an uniform resemblance of the great Object of it; in a steady imitation of him they worship in all his imitable perfections; more particularly in justice, mercy, and truth, or universal love filling the heart and governing the life.' John Wesley, *Advice to the People Called Methodists* (England: 1745), 3.

[46] 'By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions, the whole heart by the whole life. "John Wesley's Letter to Charles, January 27, 1767," in *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989), 391.

[47] John Wesley, "On Christian Perfection: To the Rev. Mr. Dod*"* (1756), in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, Vol. 11 (1872) (London: Forgotten Books, 2017), 449.

[48] In a letter to Wesley, Whitefield wrote: 'Though I hold no particular election, yet I offer Jesus freely to every individual soul. You may carry sanctifications to what degrees you will, only I cannot agree with you that the in-being of sin is to be destroyed in the life.' George Whitefield, "Whitefield to Wesley, 10 October 1741," in Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists*, Vol. 1 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1870), 349.

[49] 'It is thus that we wait for entire sanctification; for a full salvation from all our sins, —from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief; or, as the Apostle expresses it, "go unto perfection." But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love "rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks."' John Wesley, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: A Sermon on Ephesians ii. 8* (England: 1765), 9.

the mature Christian to look expectantly for God to do this 'great work' either instantaneously or gradually in their life.

4.c Hymn writing

Hymn singing, as we noted, was a significant feature of evangelical piety. John's brother Charles is known to be one of the most prolific Christian hymn composers, and not just amongst evangelicals. Yet in this ministry, John and Charles were very much partners in the writing and publishing of hymnals. As hymn singing was not yet widely accepted in Church of England services, it is likely that the hymns were written to supplement official Anglican corporate worship.[50]

And while it is not clear whether the function of singing hymns was itself worship, there is nonetheless a thematic emphasis in the hymns which broadly aligns with what we might now recognise as both soteriological and all-of-life worship categories. Those hymns most often reprinted focus on the redemption of sinners with an encouragement to live the life of faith, by which they were joined to Christ eternally.[51] As such, a number of key words are evident in nearly all of Charles' hymns: 'grace,' 'praise,' 'love,' and 'blood,' and with good reason, that 'with them Wesley can "tell" (or have us sing) his whole theology of redemption.'[52]

In the preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), the brothers argue for the edification of the church, which is the manner by which God 'perfects' the saints.

> According to St. Paul, "all" who will ever "come, in the unity of the faith, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," must together "grow up into him, from whom the whole body fitly join'd together and compacted" (or strengthen'd) "by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love." Ephesians iv. 15, 16.'[53]

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[50] Hymn singing was not officially prohibited in Anglican churches. Following Thomas Cotterill's 1819 publication of *Selection of Psalms and Hymns for Public and Private Use* and subsequent legal action by his parishioners against it, it was found by the court that hymns had always had the same status as metrical psalms, able to be sung before and after the liturgy. This decision ultimately led to a flood of new hymnbooks being complied and published across liturgical traditions. Andrew Gant, *O Sing Unto the Lord: A History of English Church Music* (London: Profile Books, 2015), 267.

[51] Noll, 265.

[52] John R. Tyson, 'The Theology of Charles Wesley's Hymns,' *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44.2 (Fall 2009), 65.

[53] John Wesley and Charles Wesley, Preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (Bristol: 1739), vii.

Edification in this sense, and in contrast to the individualist introspection of the early Christian mystics, is by implication, true worship.

> If thou wilt be perfect, say they, trouble not thyself about outward works. It is better to work virtues in the will. He hath attain'd the true resignation who hath estranged himself from all outward works, that God may work inwardly in him, without any turning to outward things. These are the true worshippers, who worship God in spirit and in truth.[54]

In contrast, 'the gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness.'[55] It must be inferred then that in the singing of hymns, by virtue of its corporate nature and the teaching of 'correct' doctrine, the Christian is engaging in the outworking of their faith and thereby the pursuit of Christian perfection. Hymn singing was the means of encouraging a spirit of devotion amongst the churches. 'When Poetry thus keeps its place, as the handmaid of Piety, it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away.'[56]

I noted earlier that despite some holding to Charles' hymns as being theologically unsophisticated, it may be more appropriate to consider them primarily in practical theological terms, as vehicles to teach *about* God as much as they enabled the praise *of* God. John Tyson rightly states, that

> Charles Wesley was interested in "practical and experimental divinity" is to say that he was concerned for Christian theology as it was lived and experienced. Today we would call him a theologian of *praxis*, but these hymns are loaded with theology. They speak very concretely *about God*, even as they speak *to God*; they are without question *theology in hymns*.[57]

He goes on to observe a number of hermeneutical principles employed by Charles. Beginning from specific passage of Scripture or biblical scene, he would then weave a theological tapestry from other 'biblical words, phrases, and allusions—drawn from all over the Scriptures—to interpret the passage or theme under consideration.'[58] In other words, he was following the Reformed principle of allowing Scripture to interpret scripture. Tyson observes that alongside this systematic approach, Wesley equally had biblical-theological hermeneutics at play.

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[54] Wesley and Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, viii.
[55] 'In what other publication of the kind have you so distinct and full an account of scriptural Christianity? such a declaration of the heights and depths of religion, speculative and practical? so strong cautions against the most plausible errors; particularly those that are now most prevalent I and so clear directions for making your calling and election sure; for perfecting holiness in the fear of God?' John Wesley, Preface to *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People Called Methodists.* (London: John Haddon, 1875), ii.
[56] Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns*, iii.
[57] Tyson, 60.
[58] Tyson, 63.

> Charles often used typology to find a New Testament reality lurking behind an Old Testament text. For example, Samson with his arms outstretched on the columns of the pagan temple reminded him of "our Samson from the skies." Isaac, carrying the wood of his own sacrifice reminded him of Jesus Christ. And Joshua (whose name, like "Jesus," means "God saves") reminded Charles of the true Captain of our salvation who fulfilled the mission begun by Joshua and Moses.[59]

In nearly every case, Wesley is emphasizing soteriological benefits to the believer, whether that be freedom from sin and guilt, 'full salvation,' or the resulting life transformed by grace. J. R. Watson gives the example of the hymn, *Wrestling Jacob*, in which Wesley employs a 'complex typology of Old and New Testament references, and combines a deep spiritual insight with a physical awareness of the most powerful kind.'[60] As in many of his hymns, such allusions are employed to move the singer from an awareness of sin to the contemplation of divine love.

Of course, one might still question whether Charles was truly displaying theological acumen with his hermeneutic or whether he was simply a masterful lyricist, adept at using biblical images for poetic effect. By the standards of Calvin, for instance, his typology is flawed, particularly when using biblical imagery as an allegory for the human condition. The idea of 'my chains falling off,' for instance, may be biblical in origin,[61] but in context is not a metaphor from being released from sin. Wesley's hymns evoke a doxological theology, and I would therefore suggest he is stronger as a systematic (rather than biblical) theologian. 'Praise' is at the centre of his hymn writing, which encompasses both prayers and praises to God. Tyson argues,

> This dimension of the hymns of Charles Wesley gives his theology the form of doxology; they are not only theological statements *about* God, they are experientially-based affirmations made *to* God. It is this latter aspect that gives his hymns so much transformative potential.[62]

And if a fully developed theology of worship is not evident in writings of John or Charles, it is nonetheless possible to see that within Christian praise is found a deeper sense of right worship of God. In the hymn, *Father of all*, based on the Lord's Prayer, the majesty of God leads to true worship, from which then flows confession and praise.

> In heaven thou reign'st enthroned in light,
> Nature's expanse beneath thee spread;
> Earth, air, and sea, before thy sight,
> And hell's deep gloom, are open laid.
> Wisdom, and might, and love are thine;

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[59] Tyson, 72.
[60] J. R. Watson. *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 264.
[61] Acts 12:7
[62] Tyson, 70.

Prostrate before thy face we fall,
Confess thine attributes divine,
And hail the sovereign Lord of all.

5. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

Against the Arminian theology of Charles Wesley and evangelistic pragmatism of George Whitefield, American pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards was a Calvinist in both theology and praxis. And unlike the peripatetic ministries of Wesley and Whitefield, Edwards was first-of-all a church pastor. While following the legacy of the Puritan tradition of regulated public worship, he nonetheless shared the pietistic convictions of the British evangelicals, and famously affirmed the place of genuine religious affections in corporate worship. Edwards seemingly presents a more coherent and systematic view of worship, 'thoroughly consistent with and likely the pinnacle of the Puritan understanding of public and private worship, while at the same time… [anticipating] the sea change in worship that would follow.'[63] For, not unlike Calvin, Edwards viewed worship in its public, private, inner and outward dimensions, endeavouring 'by God's help, to exhibit and set forth the greatness, gloriousness, and transcendent excellency of that God who made us, and whom we worship and adore.'[64]

5.a Edwards' Hermeneutic

Edward's approach to worship (more so than with his British counterparts) rests to some extent on a hermeneutic which seeks to keep a wider biblical-theological framework in mind.

> Ministers are not to make those things that seem right to their own reason a rule in their interpreting a revelation, but the revelation is to be the rule of its own interpretation; i.e., the way that they must interpret Scripture is not to compare the dictates of the Spirit of God in his revelation with what their own reason says, and then to force such an interpretation as shall be agreeable to those dictates, but they must interpret the dictates of the Spirit of God by comparing them with other dictates of Scripture.[65]

This approach to the Bible was broadly consistent with that of Calvinism and Puritanism. Edwards, however, did show some differences in this regard, finding types not only in the Bible,

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[63] Ted Rivera, *Jonathan Edwards on Worship: Public and Private Devotion to God.* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 6.
[64] Comment on Psalm 86:6. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1834/2005), 10:416.
[65] Jonathan Edwards in Kenneth J. Minkema and Richard A. Bailey, "Reason, Revelation and Preaching: An Unpublished Ordination Sermon by Jonathan Edwards," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (1999), 27.

but both inside and outside the Scriptures.[66] 'Influenced by the newer scientific epistemology, nature became a particularly rich source of types.'[67]

But if the literal meaning of Scripture was insufficient on its own, then a second step beyond the mastery of the literal sense of the text was required.

> When you read observe what you read. Observe how things come in. Take notice of the drift of the discourse, and compare one Scripture with another… And use means to find out the meaning of the Scripture… procure, and diligently use other books which may help you to grow in this knowledge.[68]

'That something extra Edwards called spiritual understanding or knowledge,'[69] an understanding only available to those who are Spirit filled and thereby able to discern the true meaning of the word of God.[70] 'In the sense that it is the interaction of Word and Spirit that produces spiritual understanding, Edwards remained thoroughly Protestant,'[71] calling for diligent contextual exegesis rather than a license to interpret the text through human feeling or intuition. Against the enthusiasts of the religious awakenings who were offering visions and revelations as authentication of religious experience, Edwards wrote:

> It seems to me that God would have our whole dependence be upon the Scriptures because the greater our dependence is on the Word of God, the more direct and immediate is our dependence on God himself.[72]

It is clear, however, that Edwards was by no means against genuine 'religious affections.' It was God's revelation, in the context of the sermon, by which the heart was affected in terms of repentance, conversion and piety. In this sense Edwards' hermeneutic sought to bring together

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[66] Lennox rightly notes that, 'typology, like allegory, finds the significance of an event beyond the bounds of the event itself. The two differ, however in that typology considers both the event (type) and its fulfilment (archetype) as fully historical. The typological interpretation of the Puritans was clearly based on the practice of the Reformers for whom typology was as important as allegory has been in the Middle Ages.' Stephen J. Lennox, *The Populist Hermeneutic in American Biblical Studies* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 29.

[67] Lennox suggests that as a result, Edwards' typology was even more subjective than it had been in the hands of the Puritans.' Lennox, 29–30.

[68] Jonathan Edwards, 'Importance and Advantage of a thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth,' in *The Works of President Edwards* (London: Wiley & Putnam, 1844), IV:14.

[69] Stephen J. Stein, "The Quest for the Spiritual Sense: The Biblical Hermeneutics of Jonathan Edwards," *The Harvard Theological Review* 70, no. 1/2 (1977): 108.

[70] Edwards, *WJE* II, 280–281.

[71] Stein notes that Edwards also 'used the concept of "spiritual sense" in a second way, to denote that fuller understanding of the Bible which is one of the results of the sense of the heart implanted by God.' That is, Edwards employed the same terms—spiritual sense and spiritual understanding—to refer to both the process and the product of God's grace.' Stein, 109.

[72] Edwards, 'Miscellanies'*, WJE*, 535.

traditional Reformed theology and evangelical experience, but also the literary critical aspects of Enlightenment philosophy.[73]

To understand how Edwards' hermeneutic influences his view of worship requires viewing it on two axes—one external and pragmatic (which he calls public and private worship) and the other, theological (which he describes as inner and outer worship).

5.b Public and private worship

For Edwards, the external dimension of worship included both public and private elements: 'such as outward prayer, singing psalms, going to the public assemblies of God's people, attending the sacraments, keeping days of fasting or thanksgiving, reading and hearing the word of God, attending private religious meetings, speaking respectfully of God, talking much of God and Christ.'[74] In this sense, public and private worship are in no way opposing ideas, but the pragmatic actions of the life of piety, and therefore are neither soteriological or pneumatological in purpose or effect. The goal of public and private worship, rather, is edification. It was the means by which the believer pursued the spiritual disciplines; for the benefit of the believer rather than the adoration of God. While outwardly similar to Wesley's perfectionism, Edward's spiritual disciplines were a means to godliness, rather than the ends. And as the corporate spiritual disciplines (Scripture reading, prayer, singing) were about edification over adoration, Edwards saw little problem with pushing away from the strict Puritan tradition of regulated worship. Instead of singing only Psalms, Edwards wrote,

> It has been our manner in this congregation, for more than two years past, in the summer time, when we sing three times upon the Sabbath, to sing an hymn, or part of a hymn of Dr. Watt's. that last time, viz.: at the conclusion of the afternoon exercise. I introduced it principally because I saw in the people a very general inclination to it.'[75]

In short, if hymn singing, as a popular expression of faith, was beneficial to the edification of the church, then there was no reason not to encourage it.

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[73] Crisp argues, 'Although he followed the Puritan model of elucidating text, doctrine, and application, Edwards's understanding of the role of the sermon in conversion, his religious psychology, and his insistence upon laying bare the idea (in the Lockean sense of that term) before the minds of his hearers, meant that getting clear the doctrinal content of his sermons was of particular importance to him. Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 145.

[74] Edwards, *WJE*, 22:117.

[75] Edwards, *WJE*, 16:144.

Critical to both public and private worship, was the practice of self-examination, which was 'a nearly constant point of application in his preaching, a practice to be meticulously and regularly undertaken in personal devotion.'[76] 'In this way the nature of true heart worship becomes more evident: all of Edwards's emphasis on the affections, on true and false religion, or inward and external religion, devolved on the matter of a heart sincerely inflamed by love for God.'[77]

5.c Inner and outward worship

Edward's second axis of worship, however, centred around theological, rather than pragmatic concerns. This involved an inner dimension of love, fear and reverence to be expressed outwardly in works of piety (which also included external public worship). While Edwards tends not to use spiritual and all-of-life worship categories, his description of inner and outer worship are nonetheless remarkably similar to these. This for Edwards is true worship of God, far more than just the external practices of public worship. In his most direct sermon on the subject: 'Mercy and Not Sacrifice' (Mt 12:7), he argues that mercy towards one's fellow man (outward worship) should be given priority over the requirements of external (or public) worship.

> Two kinds of duties [are] compared, mercy and sacrifice, the one a moral duty towards men, viz. that of mercy… The other duty is a duty of external religion towards God, viz. offering sacrifice… We may observe to which of these the preference is given, viz., to mercy, which is a moral duty of religion towards men. This God prefers before sacrifice, that is, an external duty of religion towards God.[78]

Similarly,

> moral duties towards men are a more important and essential part of religion than external acts of worship of God.[79]

This pietistic concern might suggest that Edwards was diverging from the Westminster emphasis on man's chief end being to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. However, Edwards goes on to explain that 'if he is temperate and charitable with conscience towards God, and the man performs these duties as subject to him, then they are performed as duties of religion;'[80] that is, pietism is the true expression of glorifying God.

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[76] Rivera, 16.
[77] Rivera, 16. Furthermore, in the plethora of articles, book and dissertations on Edwards, there has been virtually nothing written about Edward's views on worship. Rivera postures this may be the result of a gap between academic (and thereby arm's length engagement) and so-called devotional writings, despite worship being a readily discerned theme in his sermons and writings. Rivera, 18–19.
[78] Edwards, *WJE*, 22:114.
[79] Edwards, *WJE*, 22:115.
[80] Edwards, *WJE*, 22:117.

At the same time, the *inward* acts of worship are 'the inwards acting of love to God, and inward fear and reverence towards God, acts of inward trust in God and submission to him.'[81]

> The internal acts of worship, or the worship of the heart in inward acts of love and fear of God and trust in God, are the most essential and important of all the duties of religion whatsoever. Christ teaches us this; he tells us that the first and great command of the Law is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, (Matt. 22:37–38). This is the very essence of true religion, the most fundamental part, the source.[82]

Internal worship is, thus, Edward's 'spiritual worship', though again not in any soteriological sense. Rather it reflects the evangelical emphasis on inner devotion. While I noted that Edwards *does* have a place for external worship, particularly in terms of practicing the spiritual disciplines, it is in this sermon that he applies his biblical theology to this distinction. External worship is reminiscent of the rituals of the OT. Rather, in the New, 'men are called upon to worship God in the Spirit.'[83] 'Jesus Christ, for example, 'did abundantly more insist on such duties than on the duties of external worship.'[84] And similarly, the apostle Paul 'insists ten times so much on moral duties towards men as the external acts of worship."[85]

External worship is therefore of 'no use but only as a sign of something else, viz. a sign of internal worship."[86] Inner (i.e., spiritual) worship is not so much about approaching God with reverence or adoration, but evidenced in acts of piety towards others.[87] Just as genuine religious affections are evidenced in the actions of a godly life, for Edwards, spiritual worship is evidenced in piety.

6. John Newton (1725-1807)

Newton was infamously the captain of transatlantic slave ships before his conversion to evangelical Christianity and ordination as an Anglican minister. Like Edwards, he was a parish

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[81] Edwards, *WJE*, 22:117.
[82] Edwards, *WJE*, 22:119.
[83] Edwards, *WJE*, 22:119.
[84] Edwards, *WJE*, 22:119.
[85] Edwards, *WJE*, 22:119. Furthermore, 'Hypocrites and self-righteous persons do much more commonly abound in the outward acts of worship of God than they do in the duties of righteousness and mercy towards their neighbors.' *WJE*, 22:123.
[86] Edwards, *WJE,* 22:126.
[87] He continues, 'The best evidences to others are not persons' abounding in outward acts of worship, in reading, hearing, or in shows of respect to God, to, or being exceeding strict and exact in these things, but their abounding in a Christian behaviour, in deeds or righteousness, meekness, forbearance, peaceableness, love and mercy amongst men. These are the greatest evidences that men can have of other's eminency in religion, that is much to be preferred to man's being much in the religion of the tongue, as in external acts of worship.' Edwards, *WJE*, 22:132.

vicar before he was an evangelist, although ultimately had a great deal of influence within social, political, and clerical circles. He did, however, share a similar interest and passion with the Wesleys in the writing of hymns; with his first concern in hymn writing being the edification of the ordinary or 'plain' people of his parish. The *Olney Hymns*, written with poet William Cowper, became one of the most influential evangelical hymnbooks of the era; and although Newton stated a desire that his hymns be sung by true Christians of all denominations, he none the less was upfront and unashamed of his Calvinist convictions.[88] Some see Newton more specifically attempting to find a middle way between Arminianism and high Calvinism.

> Predestination functioned more to enshrine the experience of grace, to account for the discovery that God had done something for him which he could not do for himself. Strict in orthodoxy, weighted towards experience, Newton's Calvinism was above all evangelistic.[89]

Reinke agrees that Newton's theology begins with the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ, but that results in a radical regeneration.

> Awakened to Christ by the new birth, and united to Christ by faith, the Christian passes through various stages of maturity in this life as he/she beholds and delights in Christ's glory in Scripture. All along the pilgrimage of the Christian life—though the darkest personal trials, and despite indwelling sin and various character flaws—Christ's glory is beheld and treasured, resulting in tastes of eternal joy, in growing security, and in progressive victory over the self, the world, and the devil—a victory manifested in self-emptying and other-loving obedience, and ultimately in a life aimed to please God alone.[90]

In short, understanding God's grace is critical for making sense of the rest of the Christian life with its external trials and the guilt of personal sin. 'If justification can be explained only by the sovereign grace of God, then sanctification can only be rooted in the same cause.'[91] It is this view of the redeemed life, shaped by God's grace, that allows Newton to speak into the all-of-life service of Christ, both in sermon and in song. At the same time, his Calvinist convictions meant he was able to articulate a soteriological picture of worship than begins with Christ rather than with the believer.

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[88] John Newton and William Cowper, *Olney Hymns* (1779) (United Kingdom: Gospel Standard Trust Publications, 2009), 4.
[89] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 157.
[90] Tony Reinke, *Newton on the Christian Life: To Live Is Christ* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2015), 14.
[91] Reinke, 24.

6.a. Newton's Hymns and Hermeneutics

An initial reading of the Preface to the *Olney Hymns* might suggest that Newton had a far more sober view of hymn singing than the others we have discussed. Saying nothing of vertical praise or adoration of God, nor the affections stirred by singing, he states that this collection was created for the simple purpose of 'promoting the faith and comfort of sincere Christians.' Edification (rather than praise) seems to be the priority. In fact, he displays far more emotive language to describe his friendship with co-writer William Cowper as intimate and endeared, and the grief and disappointment he felt at the poet's 'indisposition.' What becomes evident, however, is that central to Newton's hymn writing is 'experience,' and particularly his own. J. R. Watson suggests that Newton's own experience of God's providence made him powerfully conscious of the need to proclaim it.

> He is the sailor who has survived the voyage, who smiles at the storm… and who celebrates the 'amazing grace' which has saved him; he knows the sweetness of Jesus' name to those who believe and looks forward to the glories of Zion. It is no accident, perhaps, that his best-known hymns are related to these stages of the Christian life—salvation by faith, belief in Christ as Saviour, and hope of Heaven.[92]

However, for Newton, human experience could not itself be relied upon. Rather,

> as the workings of the heart of man, and Spirit of God, are in general the same, in all who are the subjects of grace, I hope most of these hymns, being the fruit and expression of my own experience, will coincide with the views of real Christians of all denominations.[93]

In other words, the redeemed heart and mind will be in tune with the work and purposes of Holy Spirit, meaning the experiences of a true Christian will always be marked by grace. He stresses, for example, that the 'doctrines of grace are essential to [his own] peace.' Such peace, he contends, is 'friendly to holiness, and to have a direct influence in producing and maintaining a gospel conversation, and therefore I must not be ashamed of them.'[94] Though he does not use the language of the affections as such, he nonetheless describes a piety similar to that of Jonathan Edwards. The Spirit of God effects grace in the heart of the believer, transforming both behaviour and experience. Hindmarsh rightly sees this to be consistent with Newton's private devotional exercises, which 'aimed to recreate the emotional landscape of conversion as a way of

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[92] Watson, 288.
[93] John Newton and William Cowper, *Olney Hymns* (1779) (United Kingdom: Gospel Standard Trust Publications) 2009, 4.
[94] John Newton and William Cowper, 4.

keeping gratitude to God at a high pitch, since gratitude was, from the human point of view, the inward motor of growth in Christian virtue.'[95]

If Newton's hymns are rich in the experience of faith, they are nonetheless written to serve the message being sung. Hindmarsh suggests that perhaps it was the temperaments of Newton and Cowper that 'lent to their verse a plaintive or resigned tone much more often than for the Wesleys.' Either way, they 'assume a more reticent spiritual posture and have less immediate expectations that sin will be purged by divine grace in the life of the believer.'[96] I would suggest, that while this may be true, that more fundamental is Newton's Calvinist and Puritan heritage. Firstly, he overtly states that he is following the model of the 'the late Dr Watts' who restrained himself poetically and accommodated himself to the capabilities of common readers. But equally, Newton recognizes the uniqueness of congregational singing both musically and theologically.

> There is a style and manner suited to the composition of hymns, which may be more successfully, or at least more easily attained by a versifier, than by a poet. They should be *Hymns,* not *Odes*, if designed for public worship, and for the use of plain people. Perspicuity, simplicity and ease, should be chiefly attended to; and the imagery and colouring of poetry, if admitted at all, should be indulged very sparingly and with great judgement.[97]

Musically, hymns for public worship should consider what is most helpful for corporate singing, requiring musical and poetic simplicity and care. This was not simplicity for the sake of simplicity, however, but driven by theological concerns. If an ode is an expression of faith that is overly poetic, individualistic, and 'vertical' in nature, it is therefore unsuitable for congregational singing. But of greater concern is that music and poetry should serve the gospel itself, rather than distract from it. In notes taken at a meeting of the Eclectic Society Newton comments that music that 'occupies the mind' detracts from the simplicity of the gospel. Ceremonial worship he likens to a 'dead carcass,' whereas the gospel has 'the living power of religion.'

> Scientific music not subservient but hurtful, and therefore not expedient. It too much occupies the mind in performance or in hearing. The effects mechanical. Tends to give a ceremonial Judaizing cast to worship, and to hurt the simplicity of the Gospel. It substitutes a dead carcass for the living power of religion. In private, it is ensnaring without great care, and may insensibly steal away the heart and consume much precious time.[98]

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[95] Hindmarsh, 271.
[96] Hindmarsh, 275.
[97] John Newton and William Cowper, 3.
[98] John Newton, 'How far Music may be subservient to true devotion,' *Minutes of the Eclectic Society*, 9 June 1788, accessed 28 November 2022,

Of course, very few today would suggest that Newton wrote boring or unengaging hymns! *Amazing Grace*, for example, is considered today by many to be the world's most popular hymn. This hymn is, at the same time, an excellent illustration of Newton's biblical-theological hermeneutic, just as much as it is a metaphor for his own conversion. Within the *Olney* Hymns it is titled as *Faith's Review and Expectation 1 Chron. 17: 16-17*. These reference verses are not concerned with personal conversion but rather the prophet Nathan's declaration about God's establishment of an eternal kingdom through one of David's descendants. Hindmarsh comments,

> One of the high points in biblical theology and the weight of accumulated Christian covenantal and typological interpretation meant that Newton would certainly have seen in the text the anticipation of Christ as that greater son of David, the one presented as the fulfilment of the divine promise to David in the genealogies of the Gospels. The typology had only to be extended to see in God's grace to David as an anticipation of God's grace to Newton in his experience, as much as to the poor of Olney in theirs.[99]

Amazing Grace is, thus, 'perceptive biblical theology, embraced by one man deeply moved by his own redemption, articulated for corporate worship.'[100]

6.b. Newton's Soteriology

If Newton's hymns demonstrate something of a Reformed biblical-theological hermeneutic, it is in a sermon on Micah 6:6-8 that he uniquely presents a picture of worship that captures both its soteriological and all-of-life aspects;[101] although it is surprising that he ignores possible implications for public worship when he has such a keen interest in the renewed life of grace. The weight he gives to the question of spiritual worship, however, is evident in his introductory statement that 'there is no question that can arise in the mind of man, that is of so high importance as this in my text.'[102]

Worship, he suggests, is fundamentally soteriological; although he begins by questioning if the Christian's acceptable service (presumably alluding to Rom 12:1) is in fact acceptable.

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https://www.johnnewton.org/Groups/254708/The_John_Newton/new_menus/Journals/Eclectic_Society/1787_1789/1787_1789.aspx.

[99] Hindmarsh, 278.

[100] Reinke, 23.

[101] Sermon XVII – Micah vi. 6,7,8 in John Newton, *The Works of the Rev. John Newton* (New York: Robert Carter, 1844).

[102] Newton, Micah vi., 469.

> You are now come before God to worship; ask yourselves, wherewith? On what do you ground your hope, that you offer him acceptable service? You must shortly appear before him in judgement. Are you prepared to meet him?[103]

Micah 6, he contends, points to three facets of true worship: our obligation to show God homage, the sense of God's majesty, and the recognition of our sinful nature. Those whose minds are awakened by the Spirit, he argues, possess:

1. A sense of duty; that you are under an obligation to come and bow before the High God. You are sensible that you ought now, and find that you cannot, live without paying him homage and worship, but that he has a right to your service, and expects it.[104]
2. A sense of the majesty and glory of God…[105] They consider him as the High God; they know that he humbles himself to behold even the worship of heaven, and are therefore struck with this though, Wherewith can I, a poor worm, who am but dust and ashes, come before this High God?[106]
3. A sense of guilt… If I had offended a man like myself, I might think of making some amends; but my sins are against God. His justice, wisdom,[107] holiness, and truth,[108] have all demands upon me.[109]

Newton paints a broad picture of what it looks like for man to worship God. Rather than using the Micah passage as a proof text, he rather synthesizes a biblical theology of worship, weaving together various OT threads to demonstrate that God is the one true object of worship, while humanity is incapable of offering such worship. His solution is soteriological and Christological.

> All other sacrifices and saviours are insufficient; but Jesus, by the once offering up of himself hath made a full, perfect, and everlasting atonement, and now he reigns in our nature, possessed all the fullness of grace, exercising the power of God in the salvation of men.[110]

While in many ways a classic evangelical statement of the gospel, it is at the same time somewhat unique in that is it used to address how one is able to fulfil the obligation to offer God true worship. Jesus has achieved and secured salvation and requires no help from the one saved for its effectiveness. It is imputed to those seek access to God in the name of Jesus.

> When you come to God in this way, what does he requires of you? Is it to make your own peace? He would as soon require you to make a new heaven and a new earth… But

[103] Newton, Micah vi., 469.
[104] Exodus 20:3-5
[105] 1 Chronicles 29:11
[106] Job 42
[107] Proverbs 1:3
[108] Deuteronomy 32:4
[109] Newton, Micah vi., 469.
[110] Newton, 470-471.

> this he requires of you, "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God;" and the methods of his grace will enable you to do so.[111]

An immediate question is why Newton would set out to articulate a biblical theology of worship where Whitefield and Wesley do not. An obvious difference of course is that Newton's immediate concerns were pastoral, within the context of his parish ministry. But equally, Newton approached pastoral ministry, including his hymn writing, theologically. Reformed soteriology informed his preaching and lyrics, but was clothed in experience, and particularly the experience of God's grace. Some suggest that he was restrained by his Calvinism, and that 'his habit of mind was one of signification rather than of symbol… the material and the spiritual remained largely isomorphic categories, and the imagination was more often the source of distracting fancies than it was an organ or perception and creativity.'[112] Others see that Newton was able to transcend his circumstances and the limitations of his evangelical origins and the traditional formulas of evangelical doctrine.[113] I would suggest that the most appropriate way to summarise Newton's theology of God's sovereignty, salvation and regeneration is with the one word: grace. As Reinke concludes, 'The life and ministry of Newton can all fit under the banner of grace—God's abundant, all-sufficient, infinite, sovereign, unceasing and amazing grace.'[114]

7. Conclusion

Early evangelicalism has been shown by Bebbington[115] and others to hold to the core convictions of being Christ centred, Bible centred, and focused on evangelism, personal devotion and pietism.[116] I would add that they were equally driven by concerns of the heart. And while each of those I have looked at have approached the subject of worship in a different manner (in both spiritual and corporate aspects), at the same time, heart engagement with God and heart inspired service are central to all. The heart is where spiritual worship occurs; affected by God to produce works of prayer, praise and piety. At one extreme, Watts hoped that true worship would help ignite the affections to counter an otherwise dry faith. On the other, Edwards argued that affections without works were baseless. Again, Wesley saw the perfected heart as one that perfectly overflowed with love. Each demonstrate that evangelical piety was establishing itself as

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111 Newton, 471.
112 Hindmarsh, 288.
113 Watson, 299.
114 Reinke, 21.
115 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern* Britain, 2–3.
116 Brian Harris, "Beyond Bebbington: The Quest for Evangelical Identity in a Postmodern Era," *Churchman* 122, no. 3 (2008).

a religion of the inner self, and therefore less concerned with outward ceremonies or liturgy. But neither was there any thought that Christ, in abrogating the ceremonies of the old covenant, had become the perfect worshipper of the new; although in this regard Newton was somewhat unique. Worship for most seemingly remained (or became more so) the obligation of the Christian.

As such, I would suggest that practical theology was more important to the early evangelicals than biblical theology—which when applied to worship saw various formulations of an all-of-life position taking precedence over earlier Puritan soteriology. If spiritual worship was the obeisance of the heart, then pietism was its external (all-of-life) equivalent, and is given far more weight by the evangelicals than any engagement with formal public worship. This may be partly because denominational traditions were of secondary concern. Yet the one activity that *was* taken seriously, as an act of both piety and public worship, was hymn singing. The prolific amount of hymn writing of the period is the clearest example of such practical theology. It flourished not from any theological conviction around corporate worship, but because of its ability to engage the masses on the one hand, and as an aid to personal devotion and edification on the other. Hymn singing was the means by which the Puritan commitment to the word of God was maintained—but spoken to the heart. In hymn singing, 'experience' becomes the new evangelical hermeneutical lens, mirroring perhaps the secular philosophical transition from Enlightenment thinking to Romanticism. This was not without issue, with Edwards in particular needing to address the rampant 'enthusiasm' of the revivals with his discourse on the religious affections.[117] His solution, however, was interestingly not to measure the validity of affections against the Word of God, so much as against the evidence of a godly life.

In short, as a word-driven, heart engaged theology, evangelicalism saw the conversion of souls as the primary concern over any re-formulation of doctrines of church and worship. As such, the theology of worship was rarely addressed in the sermons and writings of the first evangelicals. If there is a drift away from soteriological concerns in worship, it is likely to be a 'sin of omission' rather than for any theological concern, except to say that exegesis appeared to be giving ground to experience. The encouragement towards living the pietistic life, though not obviously driven

[117] Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise on Religious Affections,* ed. W. Ellerby (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982).

by biblical-theological concerns, did however create a legacy that would become central in the all-of-life worship models of contemporary evangelicalism.

PART II

Contemporary Evangelical Theologies of Worship

CHAPTER 4
COVENANTAL WORSHIP

1. Introduction

A. W. Tozer's 1965 book on worship exemplified a view that was to become widespread within 20th Century evangelicalism.[1] Against what he described as the neo-rationalist evangelicals of his time, Tozer sought to bring together the heart-worship of early evangelicalism with the Reformed principle of worshipping God in the way in which he decreed. As such, worship should be both 'felt in the heart' *and* express that feeling in an appropriate manner; the substance of worship being the 'humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder.'[2]

While there is an element of the mystical in his position, which might easily lead to a reductionist or internal approach to worship, Tozer does in fact argue that worshipping in Spirit and truth refers to the Holy Spirit and the Gospel. One cannot worship without being regenerate, and neither can one worship without hearing what God has to say to us. His is, in effect, a renewed argument for all-of-life worship.

> The purpose of God in sending His Son to die and rise and live and be at the right hand of God the Father was that He might restore to us the missing jewel, the jewel of worship; that we might come back and learn to do again that which we were created to do in the first place—worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, to spend our time in awesome wonder and adoration of God, feeling and expressing it, and letting it get into our labors and doing nothing except as an act of worship to Almighty God through His Son Jesus Christ.[3]

Tozer's concerns were ostensibly pastoral before they were theological and were directed against

[1] Tozer was an influential American evangelical pastor and writer in the first half of the 20th Century, although notably more of an Arminian than Calvinist.
[2] A. W. Tozer, *Worship: The Missing Jewel* (Camp Hill, PN: Christian Publications, 1992), 2.
[3] Tozer, 4.

a seemingly dry rationalism within evangelical life, more than towards any perceived deficiency in corporate worship; though others have since applied his views in this direction. The church, he believed, was lacking worship, and what was needed was

> an attitude, a state of mind, a sustained act, subject to degrees of perfection and intensity. As soon as He sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts we say "Abba" and we're worshiping.[4]

This view sets the context for the study we are about to undertake. Tozer re-presents a notion of all-of-life worship which nearly all modern evangelical scholars will affirm to some degree, making the heart central in the believer's participation in worship, yet with soteriological undertones. While approaches and emphases will vary, these elements can be found weaving their way through the meta-narrative of modern worship theology.

The material I will now specifically consider, however, has been chosen because its authors either identify as Reformed or conservative evangelical, or because their work is widely held to be significant by these authors. While many a theologian and church leader have written something of their views on worship, within these next two chapters I will consider those who are approaching the doctrine with a deliberately biblical-theological hermeneutic. I will also, for the sake of comparison, consider where possible how each understands:

a. key texts (such as John 4:22–24, Romans 12:1 and Hebrews 9);

b. the Lord's Supper; and

c. the semantic use of the key NT worship words: *proskyneō, latreuo/latreia* and *leitourgos*.

A synthetic categorization of approaches will be inevitable in a study of this kind. Block rightly notes that even among those who agree that Scripture alone should be the ultimate authority, there is nonetheless division over what Scriptures are determinative for Christian worship.[5] I would add that part of this division stems from differences in hermeneutical method. As such, and with the risk of over-generalizing, I will consider these authors within two groups: those who take an OT covenantal approach to worship, and those who hold to a NT-shaped Christological view, to be considered in the following chapter.[6] There will, of course, be areas of agreement

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[4] Tozer, 9.

[5] Daniel Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 4.

[6] I noted in Chapter 1 that Michael Farley ('What is 'Biblical' Worship? Biblical Hermeneutics and Evangelical Theologies of Worship,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 51.3 (2008), 591–613) suggests a possible third group, which he describes as holding to a Patristic-ecumenical model, which draws its ideals from post-biblical liturgies of the patristic period and from 20th Century ecumenical liturgical movements. Proponents include Simon

across both camps, although I hope to make clear some fundamental differences in biblical-theological method and resulting implications for praxis.

This chapter considers what I call a covenantal approach to worship. An in-depth analysis of covenantal theology is beyond the scope of this thesis. One cannot ignore, however, that covenantal approaches to biblical theology are evident in the work of nearly all Reformed theologians. Ligon Duncan summarizes covenant theology as

> a framework for biblical interpretation, informed by exegetical, biblical, and systematic theology, that recognizes that the redemptive history revealed in Scripture is explicitly articulated through a succession of covenants (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and New), thus providing an organizing principle for biblical theology. Covenant theology also posits theological covenants (the Covenants of Redemption, Works, and Grace) and appreciates how the scriptural teaching about covenants entails and relates to a number of vitally important biblical themes and issues, including the purpose of God in history, the nature of the people of God, the federal headships of Adam and Christ, the person and work of Christ, the continuities and discontinuities in the progress of redemptive history, the relation of the Old and New Testaments, law and gospel, the assurance of salvation, the nature and significance of the sacraments (or ordinances), and what it means to walk with God in this life.[7]

It is important to note, however, that covenantal theology is biblically *implicit*. That is, while covenant itself is a commonly used biblical word, there are no obvious proof texts that establish it as an overarching hermeneutic tool. Rather, it is a systematic theological system developed to establish a particular approach to biblical theology. Calvin, for example, spoke of a single covenant of grace, whereas later students of Calvin formulated additional covenants of works and redemption. The *Westminster Confession* finally gave creedal status to the covenant of works and grace. The simple principal is, however, that there are patterns in scripture, normally established in the OT, that help make sense of the story of salvation and the way the church should then respond. Such patterns, we shall see, are also not restricted to the broad covenants noted above. Jonathan Gibson, for example, sees a covenantal pattern for worship established in creation when he states that 'for Adam and all his descendants, a liturgy was fixed, stitched into the very order and fabric of human life on earth: call—response—meal.'[8] This pattern reveals a

> Call to worship (through God's Word)

Chan and Robert Webber. While both Chan and Webber *are* interested in biblical-theological approaches to worship, I will not be considering these here as they are post-canonical and therefore not within the bounds of this study.

[7] Ligon Duncan, *Covenant Theology*, accessed December 1, 2022, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/covenant-theology/

[8] Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngey. *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 4.

> Response (by faith and obedience, love and devotion)
> Fellowship meal (union and communion with God)

As I suggested, taking an implicit approach has certain dangers. Again, Duncan cautions:

> When reading the Bible, we must let the explicit passages of Scripture clarify the implicit ones. A doctrine that we infer from a text cannot be true if it contradicts the explicit teaching of another text.[9]

And while this approach is a valid application of allowing scripture to interpret scripture, it nonetheless requires careful and appropriate reading of context. Each of the authors I consider below take this approach to some extent, applying their own unique covenantal systems to establish their biblical theologies of worship.

2. Peter Leithart

If it is a fundamental truth of scripture that we become like whatever or whomever we worship, then it is also true that we are *how* we worship.[10] Such is Peter Leithart's aim in addressing what evangelicals *do* in worship rather than be defined by what they *do not* allow. Claiming to follow the tradition of the Reformers, that our worship be both 'pure' in its conformity to scripture and arising from a genuine devotion to the Lord, his thesis contends that worship be defined as an act, not an attitude. A simple appeal to the vocabulary of worship in the Bible emphasizes this, 'for the biblical words are all active, with literal meanings like "bow down" and "serve.""[11]

Leithart claims to be countering the 'non-conformist evangelical' approach which thinks that New Testament spiritual worship means mental worship, worship that takes place, primarily at least, in our hearts and minds.'[12] John Piper, for example, asks what it would mean

> that we are to be spirit-worshipers, worshiping from the spirit, and truth, driven by truth? I think the point is that when we worship—right worship, good worship, pleasing worship—depends on a right mental grasp of the way God really is, truth.[13]

Scripture, Leithart suggests, presents a different picture.

> Spiritual worship is worship through the Holy Spirit poured out upon us and, when the Spirit comes, he makes an enormous racket: a rushing mighty wind, flames of fire,

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[9] Ligon Duncan, *Explicit vs. Explicit*. March 18, 2004, accessed December 2, 2022, https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/explicit-vs-implicit.
[10] Peter Leithart, "Transforming Worship," *Foundations* 38, (Spring 1997): 27.
[11] Leithart, 28.
[12] Leithart, 28.
[13] John Piper, *What Is Worship?* April 29, 2016, accessed March 10, 2020, https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-worship.

> tongues loosed in praise and edification (Acts 2). On this point at least, the Toronto Blessing is closer to Scripture than the Quakers.[14]

Reforming evangelical worship, therefore, demands an end to clericalization of worship and a new emphasis on congregational participation. While he affirms in a broad sense that all of Christian life is worship, at the same time he wants to emphasize that worship on 'the Lord's Day' is a specific kind of act, an act of the church by which God renews his covenant with her.[15] It is this covenantal theme which undergirds Leithart's approach.

> The church is the people of God, bound to him by the bond of friendship and love which the Bible calls covenant. But the church is a covenant people full of sinners… and so, once a week in a public, formal, visible way, God gathers us to renew covenant with us.[16]

These covenant renewal 'actions' will be recognized in many church traditions: the call to worship, confession, assurance, the Word, offerings, praise, the Supper (as the seal of the covenant), and the dismissal. As such, Leithart openly aligns with the regulative principle of worship (RPW), which for him boils down to the principle that worship must be biblical.[17]

He does, however, acknowledge that determining what scripture teaches on worship raises a host of challenging hermeneutical questions, and centrally, the relationship between old and new covenants. The question is posed to whether or not we can draw guidelines for our performance of new covenant worship from OT liturgical instructions; and if so, how? Leithart dismisses the view that says the OT sacrificial laws have no longer any implications for the practices of the church. His answer is twofold:

> First, we can emphatically agree that the entire OT is fulfilled in Jesus, and this is the fundamental point of the entire OT. The entire OT is typological. But the Jesus that is revealed in the NT is the head of a body. To use Augustine's terminology, the OT is typological of the *totus Christus*, not merely the Head (Jesus) but the body (the church).[18]

As an example, he cites Paul's argument in Galatians 4 that Abraham's seed does not simply equal Isaac, but also Jesus, and also the church. He extrapolates to the Lord's Supper and Baptism in a similar way.

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[14] Leithart, 28–29.
[15] Leithart, 31.
[16] Leithart, 31.
[17] 'We are called to worship God in a way that is pleasing to Him, and we know what is pleasing to Him in worship from studying His revelation in Scripture. Formulated in this way, the RPW is a fundamental principle of worship.' Peter Leithart, 'Hermeneutics of Worship,' November 6, 2004, accessed February 15, 2021, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/leithart/2004/11/hermeneutics-of-worship/.
[18] Leithart, 'Hermeneutics of Worship.'

The Supper, for instance, is most clearly a fulfillment of Passover. And while of course, Jesus' death also fulfills the death of the Passover Lamb (Jn 1:29), Leithart sees no conflict here, and introduces a dual typology to explain this. Both affirmations, he suggests, are found in 1 Corinthians 5:7 where Paul says that 'Christ our Passover has been sacrificed,' and where he immediately exhorts the Corinthians to 'keep the feast.' Again, in Romans 8:1–3 Jesus' death is described as a sin offering, whereas Hebrews 13:10ff makes as Eucharistic application of the rules of the sin offering. 'There is both a theological typology, fulfilled in Jesus, and a liturgical typology, where the OT pattern is reversed and fulfilled in the practice of the NT church.'[19]

We might make a few remarks about Leithart's model. Firstly, he arguably does not pursue the most straightforward reading of the NT texts. His dual typology, for example, fails simply at the level of not recognizing the use of metaphor in Paul's writing. Neither 1 Corinthians 5 nor Hebrews 13 can, in context, be considered to be Eucharistic in intent. If anything, they exemplify the nature of transformation under the new covenant.

Secondly, he gives little scriptural evidence for the way OT types inform the actions of the church, his 'liturgical typology.' We would expect a NT antitype (for example, the sacrifice of praise in Christ in Heb 13) to restate a continuing or transformed practice from the OT.

Thirdly, Leithart advocates a 'worship experience' for the church which somehow reflects the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2. Regardless of whether one has a preference for an expressive or charismatic church service, the context would suggest that the events of Pentecost are not considered by the writer of Acts to be normative for the church, as evidenced in the less dramatic conversion experiences later in the book.

Lastly, Leithart's contention that worship is an act, rather than attitude, feels unsatisfactory when based solely on the notion of biblical worship words being active verbs. A more robust biblical-theological approach might consider with more nuance both the OT context and development of worship language through the reinterpreting lens of the new covenant. Despite these shortcomings, Leithart is clearly aware of the key issues in contemporary scholarship on worship

[19] Leithart, 'Hermeneutics of Worship.'

and is rightly concerned with the pastoral implications of different hermeneutical approaches.

3. Jeffrey J. Meyers

A fuller exposition of the covenantal view of worship is found in the thinking of Jeffrey J. Meyers,[20] where it is again apparent that Christian worship is very much focused on the Sunday assembly.

Meyer's approach is similarly a biblical-theological one, in that he actively engages with both the hermeneutical and semantic questions regarding worship across the narrative arc of Scripture. Informing this is, again, a commitment to a covenantal framework, which becomes the key to identifying a biblical purpose for the praxis of the church gathering.[21] During corporate worship, he claims, God renews his covenant with his people when he gathers them together and serves them, with the eschatological goal of a common meal. 'We come to church on Sunday to eat with Jesus and one another, to feast in His presence.'[22]

While admitting that there is no simple definition of a covenant, he does propose that a covenant is essentially a *formal* personal relationship. In Scripture, it is the *form* or *shape* of God's personal relations with us, evident in the story of how God enters into covenant with man. It is these concrete, historical events and literary documents that therefore become the paradigms (or models) of what the covenant is and ought to be.[23]

As such, in each covenant Meyers identifies a pattern: a. God takes hold, b. God separates and makes something new, c. God speaks, d. God grants ritual signs and seals, e. God arranges for the future. One example is the Abrahamic Covenant:

1. Abram is taken hold of by Yahweh in order to do something new.
2. The Lord separates Abram from his old country and family.
3. God speaks to Abraham, with new, more detailed promises.
4. There is a sign and seal of the covenant in circumcision.
5. God promises an heir to ensure the perpetuation of the covenant.[24]

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[20] Jeffrey J Meyers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003).
[21] Meyers, 33.
[22] Meyers, 33.
[23] Meyers, 39.
[24] Meyers, 47–48.

This pattern, he argues, is continued throughout salvation history until it is seen ultimately in the new covenant in Christ, and then in the worship of the church through the covenantal renewal service. Traditional Christian liturgies, he claims, reflect this shape:

1. Call to worship
2. Confession and Forgiveness
3. Scripture Reading and Sermons
4. The Lord's Supper
5. The Benediction and Commissioning

Within this structure, the ritual of the Lord's Supper is itself identified by Jesus as a covenant renewal rite (Lk 22:10),[25] shaped around the five-point covenantal model. And if Christian worship is covenantal in design, then, Meyers suggests, it is also sacrificial in character. We are priests 'in Christ' and we therefore sacrifice 'in Christ' (Rom 12:1; Heb 13:5).[26] And it is in his explanation of these two concepts that we get a better picture of Meyer's hermeneutical method, one which is consonant in its view of Old and New Testaments and literalistic in exegesis.

Firstly, Meyers claims that in both old and new covenants the details of the sacrificial ritual would always and ultimately make reference to Christ *and* his people. So just as the worship of the people of God is explicitly described as sacrificial (Ps 50:8, 14, 23), so the language of sacrifice is used to describe the liturgical service of Christians (Heb 13:15).[27] Similarly, the way in which God renews his covenant with us is the way of sacrifice. Our reasonable *liturgy*, the apostle Paul says, is to 'offer ourselves as living sacrifices' (Rom 12:1–2). The details of the divine pattern or liturgy for the people of God, however, are found in the order of the sacrificial rituals so carefully described in the OT.[28] I will argue later that a reliance on a liturgical translation of *latreia* is problematic, and that the context of Rom 12 is in no way suggestive of the gathered church, nor requiring explication in OT ritual; its application being to advocate acts of loving service within a range of Christian and secular relationships.

Acts 13:2, however, is Meyer's prime example of the church worshiping on the Lord's Day, although again there is no obvious reference in the text to such a context. Opting to translate *leitourgountōn* as 'liturgy' (rather than the more usual translation of performing service), he

[25] Meyers, 49.
[26] Meyers, 66.
[27] Meyers, 68.
[28] Meyers, 73.

understands this passage to be describing a 'worship service.'[29] His translation of *latreias* as 'ritual service' in Hebrews 9:6 is, however, more accurate. Although I might again suggest that in context, the author of the Hebrews is arguing *against* the continuation of such patterns in the church: 'Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself… [and] he has appeared *once for all* at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (Heb 9:24).

Meyers concludes that 'this mode of "sacrificial living"… ought to characterize our daily lives, to be sure, but on the Lord's Day there is a special sense in which we are gathered together by God as the body of Christ in order to be drawn into God's holy presence as "living sacrifices."'[30] Behind the concept of liturgy is the recognition that God has established a carefully delineated way of approaching him. 'According to the New Testament, the way or order in which God drew the sacrificial animals into His presence in the Old Testament symbolizes God's appointed way of drawing sinful human beings into His Holy, but life-giving presence in His Son.'[31] This, he contends, is what happens every Lord's Day in the worship service. United to Christ (the sacrifice), we are not only brought together by the Spirit, but by the same Spirit we are drawn into the Father's presence in His Son by cleansing, consecration, and communion.[32]

Meyer's covenantal framework certainly rests on a narrative biblical-theological method. Unlike Calvin's model of *progressive* revelation, however, Meyers sees covenantal patterns deeply imbedded throughout Scripture, with the church and its worship reflecting that order. The church, he claims, has further patterned worship in *sacrificial* categories. 'What is sacrificial is covenantal, and vice versa.'[33]

Here, I would suggest, is the key weakness in Meyers' hermeneutic, in that he confuses patterns with types. He suggests that to view OT worship as typological requires NT fulfilment, not just in Christ, but in a new covenant ecclesiology, which I would argue is simply not a self-evident NT

[29] Meyers, 75. In other NT contexts, *leiturgos* specifically describes the priestly or Levitical service (either as type or antitype), against the more general *latreuō*, and never directly in connection with the gathering. This still leaves the question of what was going on in Antioch. It seems as if the prophets and teachers were engaged in some sort of (Christian or perhaps Jewish) prophetic ritual involving prayer and fasting, although it is impossible to say if this is corporate worship in the way Meyers and others would understand it.
[30] Meyers, 75.
[31] Meyers, 76.
[32] Meyers, 77.
[33] Meyers, 53.

principle. Similarly, he is unable to substantiate a continuing pattern of liturgical worship in the NT church. All of which highlights a second weakness of an overly literalistic interpretive method, ignoring both narrative and literary context and the use of metaphor. His interpretation of Romans 12:1, for example, is overly liturgical (and ecclesial for that matter), missing Paul's emphasis on the response to salvation by faith with obedience in service. His exegesis, I would contend, borders on eisegesis. Finally, his appeals to post-canonical liturgical structures are simply not valid within a biblical-theological argument.

4. Allen P. Ross

Ross argues that we should understand liturgy as the locus between the Christian life and worship, and thus the right way to formally respond to God's revelation.

> Christian worship, whether individual or collective, is the *structured and ordered expression of the proper response* of the people of God to the revelation of God in Christ.[34]

In relationship to the whole life of faith, worship is the point at which the Christian life comes to ritual focus. What we do in worship has a bearing on everything else we do in the faith, and how we live out our faith will impact our worship.[35]

Ross takes an inductive approach to Scripture, arguing from descriptions of OT worship to suggest normative practices for the church. In this way, worship is defined as the celebration of being in covenant fellowship with God, by means of the adoration and praise of God's nature and works. This occurs in the memorial reenactment of entering into covenant through ritual acts, all with 'the confident anticipation of the fulfilment of the covenant promises in glory.'[36] Covenant, he explains, is our union with God, a pattern established first at Sinai and then again in Christ that is sealed and secure through his sacrifice. It is this covenant that is at the heart of Christian worship.[37]

Like Meyers, Ross looks for patterns in the biblical narrative. However, instead of observing recurring covenantal sequences, he takes a more linear approach, drawing lines between OT types and their NT antitypes. Unlike the progressive narrative models that we will look at shortly, his

[34] Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 6.
[35] Ross, 6.
[36] Ross, 14.
[37] Ross, 15.

methodology involves reading forward from type to fulfilment, and then reading that meaning back into the type. Three examples of this hermeneutic are as follows.

First is in the way God makes himself present, which is the goal of creation and redemption. 'Communion with the living God is at the heart of all worship; and where God is present with his people is a sanctuary.'[38] This, he claims, is the pattern in the history of worship. When people sin, they forfeit access to the sanctuary, the place God chose to make his presence known, until the sin is dealt with. In God's plan, the sacrificial death of Jesus was 'what the ritual of Israel's worship had been anticipating for ages.'[39]

> And so worship in Christ now celebrates the glory of the new creation as well as the old creation; it glorifies the one who is the Redeemer as well as the Creator; and it finds in the garden sanctuary the pattern for worship and the symbolism for the spiritual life. And in his presence, we find every provision of life and thus every reason to worship him.[40]

The main purpose of the tabernacle, therefore, was that the LORD might dwell among his people (Ex 25:8), thereby giving a reality to the truth of his presence with them.[41] The New Testament writers then saw in the sanctuary a prophetic type of access to God available through Christ Jesus (e.g., Jn 1:14, see also Jn 2:19).[42] Ross claims that the NT fulfillment of these things, however, does not diminish the theological significance of the OT type in its setting; on the contrary, it greatly enhances it by revealing its corresponding reality in the revelation through Jesus the Messiah.[43]

A second example is in the way Ross uses the OT sacrifices to take us to Holy Communion. The 'peace offering', the culmination of the sanctuary ritual, was the great communal meal. It was not a sacrifice offered to make peace with God, he suggests, but one that was made to celebrate being at peace with God. It was a sacrifice offered in communion with God, and in this sense parallels the ritual of Holy Communion in the church as nothing else does; in the Communion Christians eat the food from the Lord's Table because they are in covenant with him.[44]

> True worship is sacrificial—it costs…. And just as every act of worship in ancient Israel required the people to bring sacrifices and gifts to God to express their gratitude and commitment to him, so too must we serve God sacrificially, not to obtain mercy, but to

[38] Ross, 22.
[39] Ross, 38.
[40] Ross, 39.
[41] Ross, 76.
[42] Ross, 76.
[43] Ross, 76.
[44] Ross, 82.

demonstrate our gratitude and devotion to him.[45]

Thirdly, Ross uses the argument of silence. He suggests, for example, that the NT says very little about singing and praise owing to the fact that it did not have to, as it was so much a part of the Israelite's worship of God. The writers simply assume that such praise should continue and will continue in glory.[46] Similarly, the solution to hypocritical, formalistic ritual is not simply to get rid of the forms and the ritual. Rather, the solution lies in spiritual reform: contrition, repentance, confession, spiritual growth, and genuine praise.[47] OT ritual worship controls our understanding of whatever is or isn't present in the NT descriptions.

In short, this linear biblical-theological approach supports Ross' presupposition that there is a fundamental continuity from the ritual worship of Israel to the church. But this does not mean that he bypasses Christ in the process. Ross makes particular use of John 4:21–24 to explain the redeemed nature of the Church's worship. But if the context of this passage appears to concern the place of worship, Ross does not argue that worship be decentralized, nor that the quality of worship be de-ritualized. Rather it is the present Christ who would provide spiritual life to those who believe in him (Jn 4:13–14). 'To worship "in truth" means that one must confess that Jesus is Lord, that he is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and then walk in the truth.'[48] So while acknowledging the soteriological nature of true worship in Christ, his application is nonetheless material rather than spiritual. What he avoids is seeing any transformation in the nature of one's approach to God. Worship itself does not change, just the redeemed state of the worshipper.

If Ross' approach to NT worship is fundamentally descriptive (suggesting that it is thereby normative), then it is equally allegorical. His interpretation of the Emmaus Road story, for example, draws the conclusion that Holy Communion is central and essential to Christian worship.[49] This also says something of Ross' view of experiencing the presence of God. 'The experience of the burning heart when Scripture is opened to us and the awareness of the reality

[45] Ross, 85.
[46] Ross, 111.
[47] Ross, 152.
[48] Ross, 173.
[49] 'The power of the clear exposition of the Word of God and the celebration of the meal at the Lord's Table have formed the heart of Christian worship ever since. Without the effectual exposition of Scripture the meal will not be fully understood; and without the communal meal, the teaching will not be personalized and activated by faith.' Ross, 182.

of his presence in the breaking of the bread are absolutely essential to the vitality of our worship.'[50]

But if there is one central reason for Ross to stress the continuity of NT worship (over transformation), it is related to his eschatology, which becomes evident in his description of worship in the new creation.

> What is 'new' about all this is the reality of the presence of God with his people… The people of God will no longer commune with God by image and symbol but in reality because his habitation will be with them… While this world lasts, the true Jerusalem remains above (Gal. 4:26); and we know its significance from the earthly copy of it, before Christ came, and the spiritual approach to it, because Christ came (Heb 12:22).[51]

Ross advocates that ritualistic worship is necessary because the church's worship is still but a type of a future spiritual worship. We are yet to enter God's presence in his sanctuary. If this is presenting a future-eschatological (or dispensational) framework, then it stands in stark contrast to what we will observe in the inaugurated eschatological approaches of all-of-life worship advocates.

Ross' hermeneutical method is to trace worship through the bible, uncovering patterns in its historical development, in order to identify principles and acts that remain constant for the church today.[52] He rightly notes that the Bible tends to describe, rather than define worship, and accurately uses worship terminology in its context. In adopting a descriptive approach, however, he loses the benefits of a systematic lens. He can describe Isaiah's apocalyptic encounter with God, for example, but wants to argue that this then becomes normative for Christian worship. Identifying and describing in great detail the cultic practices of ancient Israel, he gives little room for NT transformation of those patterns. His use of typology, therefore, lacks Christological control. One might expect the Passover to be understood as the type of the Lord's Supper, and the ritual sacrifices as types of the Atonement. Rather, Ross prefers an abductive extrapolation to the life of the church. To state that Jesus performed much of his ministry within a 'worship context'[53] tells us nothing of worship itself, but then any notion of a NT theology of all-of-life worship barely arises. NT worship therefore becomes confused with ecclesial practices and any

[50] Ross, 182.
[51] Ross, 229.
[52] Ross, 13.
[53] Ross, 167.

expectation of spiritual worship is set aside until the new creation. A further weakness in this method is his reliance on biblical silence; by which that not abrogated in Christ remains. I would argue that such an abrogation is in fact key to making exegetical sense of John 4. Ross seems to miss Jesus' own claim to change the place of Christian worship to himself.

5. Conclusion

Modern covenantal approaches to worship care about OT patterns continuing into the life of the church, albeit through the transforming lens of Christ. The ceremonies of the OT, however, are not abrogated by the New, and rather are seen to help shape models for Christian corporate worship, particularly if understood within a regulative framework. I would suggest this to be the hermeneutically weaker approach, giving less emphasis to context and more reliance on literalistic interpretations of the text. Such methods would therefore seem at odds with Calvin's own hermeneutical approach. When continuity is forced, it tends to result in confused typology and a bias towards allegory. The next chapter, then, looks at those whose view NT worship as far more transformational, with one eye on the cross and the other on the new creation.

CHAPTER 5
CHRISTOLOGICAL WORSHIP

1. Introduction

If Tozer exemplified the modern evangelical notion that worship was an all-of-life activity, with corporate worship often its focal point, then Howard Marshall was among the first to question whether it was appropriate to speak of corporate worship at all. Marshall rightly saw 'worship' and 'service' as distinct biblical ideas but concluded nonetheless that they had become theologically empty terms.[1] In applying their use to the Christian gathering, evangelicals were suggesting that the central thing taking place was *doing* something which is addressed in some way to God.[2] Against this anthropocentric view of worship, he wrote:

> Theologians in the Calvinist and Barthian tradition have rightly noted that the accent in this type of understanding of worship lies on what we do and that we ought to think rather in a christological way: Christ is the one who perfectly represents God to us and who perfectly represents us to God, so that Christian worship is our being taken up and incorporated into that perfect worship which Christ as our high priest offers to the Father.[3]

As such, he was arguing that the use of 'worship' and 'service' to describe what occurs in the Christian gathering was fundamentally distorting the NT picture of worship. This idea I will return to in Chapters 6 and 7; and while the authors I consider in this chapter do not go as far as Marshall in abrogating the concept of corporate worship altogether, they do, nonetheless follow his Christological methodology.

Similarly, in Chapter 8 I will further discuss the ways in which the hermeneutics of worship go on

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[1] 'One may… talk about a 'service of worship' and nobody finds this to be a tautologous expression, presumably because 'service' has come to mean little more than 'a gathering of Christians to perform certain rites.' I. Howard Marshall, "How far did the early Christians worship God," *Churchman*, Issue 99, no. 3 (1985): 216.
[2] Marshall, 216.
[3] Marshall, 217. See also, D. W. Torrance, "The Word of God in Worship," *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 1 (1983): 11-16.

to influencing praxis. Although it is worth noting here that there is there is an evident 'tug-of-war' between two worship paradigms within evangelicalism. Alan Rathe notes how 'one of these paradigms casts worship as a decidedly *all of life* activity, while the other sees worship as quintessentially expressed in explicit, corporate, doxology.'[4] While Rathe's concerns are somewhat different to my own, his two groups bear some resemblance to my covenantal and Christological groups. As I suggested earlier, neither would argue against corporate or all-of-life worship, but rather, the emphasis that should be given to each driven by hermeneutical concerns.

If the covenantal position within conservative evangelicalism sees the OT as determinative for the praxis of corporate worship, then the alternate view seeks to give emphasis to the NT in advocating a non-liturgical approach to the gathering. It is, I would argue, an inherently Christological position, concerned with the eschatological. This hermeneutical approach is summarized aptly by Graeme Goldsworthy:

> If the biblical story is true, Christ is the only saviour for humankind and there is room for no other way to God. If the story is true, Jesus Christ is the interpretative key to every fact in the universe and, of course, the Bible is one such fact. He is thus the hermeneutic principle that applies first to the Bible as the ground for understanding, and also to the whole of reality. Interpreting reality correctly is a by-product of salvation. Thus we must assert that the person and work of Jesus Christ are foundational for evangelical hermeneutics . . . Christ interprets all facts, since all things were created in him, through him and for him (Col. 1:16). As the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), Christ mediates the ultimate truth about God in all things and thus about the meaning of the Bible.[5]

Against the various covenantal positions, then, the Christological approach sees Jesus Christ as the single exegetical key to Scripture, and therefore inherently places an emphasis on understanding the OT through the new, rather than the other way around. And unlike the covenantal systems that lean into sacramentalism, the Christological tends to emphasize edification within the gathering, congruent with the notion of all-of-life worship.

2. David Peterson

Robert E. Webber was one of a number of authors of the 1990's who sought to synthesize various emphases within evangelical worship (covenantal, sacramental, historical, all-of-life).

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[4] Alan Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship, and Participation: Taking a Twenty-First Century Reading* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 67.

[5] Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centred Hermeneutics: Biblical-Theological Foundations and Principles* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2006), 48.

While drawing heavily from the covenantal position outlined in the previous chapter, his broader approach would nonetheless come to represent much of popular mainstream thinking within global evangelicalism around worship.

> Worship in the covenantal relationship is characterized by a willingness to be obedient to the Book of the Covenant and a commitment ratified in a sacrifice. The worship of Israel was to take place at a particular time and a particular place with particular rituals. While Christians have no prescribed time or place, they do have the ritual of the Lord's Supper, the have adapted the first day of the week to celebrate the death and resurrection, and they have established places of worship.[6]

Yet amongst the conservative Reformed, a different approach was evolving that emphasized the worship of the NT over the old—both in theology and praxis.

In 2021, British academic, Gary Williams spoke to a conference of church musicians in London making the assertion that

> There's a widespread view amongst evangelical Christians in the UK and Australia that makes the following three claims…: Old Testament worship was locational—people came together to worship God in a particular place, but by contrast now NT worship… is not locational, but is in fact the whole of life in which we worship God. Secondly, God is so present and near to his people now there is no sense in which we can come into his presence or draw near to him as we gather to worship. And thirdly, God is a speaking God. He speaks alike, when his word is preached or when gathered in a small group bible study, or indeed when I read my bible on my own.[7]

This critique was in response to the biblical theology of worship most clearly articulated by Australian theologian David Peterson. Williams' criticism is that Peterson's views are monomodal—that is, worship occurs in one mode throughout the whole of life. Similarly, it is monomodal because it views God being present in the same way all the time; and it is monomodal in its view of word ministry.

Williams proposed, rather, not a return to Webber's broad approach, but 'an historic, reformed view of Christian worship which is that God is indeed present in particular ways when his people gather to worship him.'[8] While the monomodal view is legitimately targeted at both charismatic experiential worship and Catholic ritualism, all of life, he argues, is *not* worship. It should be, but it's not. Our worship is bimodal, in that we move into and out of the worship of God. Whether or not Williams is fairly summarising the body of early Reformed thought on worship is not the

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[6] Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 28.
[7] Gary Williams, "The presence of God as we gather," Together21 Conference, YouTube, July 8, 2021, 0:00 to 8:00, https://youtu.be/rT6P7RFaWwk.
[8] Williams, "The presence of God as we gather," 02:20 to 02:34.

particular concern of this chapter. Suffice to say that the Reformers and later reformed thinkers were not obviously reacting to 16th and 17th century forms of bimodalism, so much as Catholic ritual and anti-scriptural rationalism. What is interesting about Williams' critique, however, is that it targets what I describe as a Christological view of worship, using an exegetical approach similar to Peterson himself and other conservatives. A closer look at this position is therefore helpful for our study.

A key premise of David Peterson is that worship theology should express the total relationship with the true and living God. The ritual provisions and religious activities in various OT contexts are, he claims, set within the broader framework of teaching about life under the rule of God; Christ's kingdom being the ultimate expression of that rule.[9] Within his biblical-theological structure he emphasizes the historical context of each section of Scripture.[10] How this differs to a covenantal or dispensational approach I will consider shortly. But consistent with the covenantal writers, Peterson equally stresses a unity across testaments, contending that acceptable worship is always a matter of responding to God's initiative in salvation and revelation, and doing so in the way he requires.[11]

Where he differs, however, is to view worship through a Christological lens, through which OT ritual is fulfilled and transformed. As a result, worship becomes a comprehensive category to describe the Christian's total existence; 'coextensive with the faith-response wherever and whenever that response is elicited.'[12]

As we have seen, Peterson's biblical-theological approach is not without criticism, primarily in that he devotes far more space to analyzing the NT material over the Old. Block, for instance, considers that Peterson unhelpfully sets up the OT's focus on place, festivals and rituals as a foil against which to interpret NT worship.[13] This leads, he suggests, to unhelpful generalizations, such as underestimating the liturgical nature of worship in the NT as well as misrepresenting

[9] David G. Peterson, *Engaging with God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 18.
[10] Peterson, 20.
[11] Peterson, 19.
[12] Peterson, 18–19.
[13] Daniel Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 4.

worship as it is actually presented in the OT.

Though his perspective is undoubtedly a NT one, Peterson's semantic study of OT worship words is, nonetheless, the most comprehensive of all our authors. These key words I have already stated. But where the covenantal approach would often limit linguistic usage to the immediate context in order to suggest normative praxis, Peterson's aim is to understand the evolving theological implications connected to their semantic development. Contrasting Leithart's 'worship *acts*,' Peterson's three '*attitudinal*' categories (worship as homage, service, and reverence) form a model whereby OT worship types inform and transform the nature of new covenant worship for the church.

Firstly, while he notes that bending over to the Lord can be indicative of submission to God as a pattern of life, *histahwa/proskynein* worship properly refers either to spontaneous acts of homage or adoration in obedience to his commands. While it would be wrong to conclude that a particular gesture is essential to true worship, the OT, he contends, 'makes it clear that faith, gratitude and obedience are the essential requirements for acceptable worship.'[14]

Worship, expressed by *latreuein,* however, is more adequately rendered 'to serve', and in the LXX it is service exclusively rendered to God or service by means of sacrifice and ritual.[15] Importantly, serving the Lord is a comprehensive term for Israel's relationship with God (Dt 10:12, 20; 11:13.) It implies a total lifestyle of allegiance to God and is the worship of the people as a whole, not the specific work of priests or Levites.[16] It best undergirds the concept of worship as all-of-life.

Priestly service in the LXX, he notes, is rendered by the verb *leitourgein* (Hebrew *seret*). While the covenantal authors made the seemingly obvious connection to the word liturgy, Peterson suggests that liturgy is far too narrow to convey the range of meanings of this word in the Greek Bible.[17] Its use, over 100 times in LXX, in reference to the service of God in the tabernacle or temple by priests and Levites, clearly distinguishes it from the more general *latreuein* used for

[14] Peterson, 63. Contra Block, 12, and T. Fretheim, in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis [NIDOTTE]*, ed. W. A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 2:42-44, who argue that the Hebrew word is a Hishtaphel form of the root *ḥāyâ/ḥawâ,* "to live."
[15] Peterson, 64.
[16] Peterson, 66.
[17] Peterson, 66.

Israel's service as a whole.[18]

Scripture's perspective, he surmises, is that worship involves specific acts of adoration and submission as well as a lifestyle of obedient service. The problem for translation and for theology, however, is that the English word 'worship' is generally used too narrowly.[19] So from one point of view, OT worship can express homage in silence or by simple gesture, but it is fundamentally the attitude of the heart which really matters.[20] From another, however, acceptable worship is service rendered to God; demanding obedience and faithfulness in every sphere of life, with cultic activity viewed as a particular expression of Israel's dependence upon and submission to God. The service of the priests and Levites within the prescribed cult was designed to facilitate the service of all Israel to God. The common factor in each, Peterson asserts, is the assumption that God had acted towards Israel in revelation and redemption, to make it possible for them to engage with him acceptably.[21]

Peterson's primary aim, however, is to consider how the NT writers understood and adapted the OT's worship themes through a Christological lens. He notes that in the gospels, Jesus provides no systematic instruction about such worship, and yet certain sayings and actions reflect his radical perspective. Like Ross, he considers that, in context, the ministry of Jesus *is* intimately connected with the institutions of temple, synagogue and family; but then goes further, to observe that Matthew and John in particular develop a picture of Jesus as the fulfilment of everything that the temple stood for and the focus of worship under the new covenant.'[22] It is not surprising, he suggests, that expressions of the hope for a new temple are at the centre of Jewish thinking about the future. 'With the promise that God would dwell forever in the midst of his people, in a new and unparalleled way, went the belief that the nations would somehow be united in the worship of the one true God.'[23]

When considering John 4, Peterson (unlike the covenantal writers), places this passage, and each of its statements, in a wider literary and theological context. He notes how John moves from the idea of Jesus as the true tabernacle (1:14) and the true temple (2:19) to show that he fulfils the

[18] Peterson, 67.
[19] Peterson, 70.
[20] Peterson, 72–73.
[21] Peterson, 73.
[22] Peterson, 81.
[23] Peterson, 81.

ideal of the holy mountain where God can be encountered (4:20–24).[24] John 4, however, is not just about place. Rather, Jesus' ministry initiates a totally different way of relating to God. This approach is problematic for those such as Block, who would argue that the worship of ancient Israel was equally true and genuine, whereas Peterson appears to claim that OT worshippers were 'unregenerate, lacked new life, and were not confirmed in the truth.'[25] This is perhaps an unfair assessment, with Peterson's stress being on the fulfilment of OT worship, rather than its insufficiencies. The context, he suggests, is that the coming time refers to the hour of his death, resurrection and return to the Father. It is only through these events that the new temple is raised up and the Spirit is given. But even before the cross, the period of true worship is present and operating in advance in the person and ministry of Jesus.[26]

Furthermore, Jesus is not simply contrasting the old external and cultic patterns of worship with a new inward and universal spirituality. Rather, spirit and truth are closely connected in John's portrait of Christ. The Father begets true worshippers through the Spirit, whom Jesus makes available by means of his saving work (see also Rom 8:15–16); and true worshippers will therefore be those who relate to God through Jesus Christ (see also Jn 17:3).[27] Here, Jesus is not the focus or object of worship, but the means by which the Father obtains true worshippers from every nation (see also 12.32). Christ is now the 'place' of eschatological pilgrimage for all the nations, and the Father cannot now be honoured unless Jesus is given all the honour due to him as the Son.

With this in mind, Peterson makes what he sees is the important connection to the church's corporate worship.

> The fundamental teaching of this fascinating passage is lost when we rush too quickly to apply it to our congregational activities… New Covenant worship is essentially the engagement with God that he has made possible through the revelation of himself in Jesus Christ and the life he has made available through the Holy Spirit.[28]

When the gospels indicate that the temple has been replaced by Jesus and that the messianic salvation has been accomplished by his death and resurrection, the implication is that a new covenant has been inaugurated. The Lord's Supper, for example, becomes a concrete external

[24] Peterson, 97.
[25] Block, 5.
[26] Peterson, 98.
[27] Peterson, 99.
[28] Peterson, 100.

action that expresses the reality of life under the new covenant. In Communion, the benefits of Christ's sacrifice would be enjoyed by faith, in the fellowship of the redeemed. It is only in this very modified sense, Peterson argues, that it could be said that Jesus instituted a 'cultic' meal for his disciples. Even so, 'there is nothing in the Last Supper narratives to suggest that such table-fellowship would be tied to sacred times and sacred places or be bound by the ministrations of any priesthood.'[29] This, however, is not to dismiss the value of the Lord's Supper for the Christian gathering, as there are, he says, guidelines in the Last Supper narratives about what should lie at the heart of every Christian gathering.[30]

On the Pauline epistles, Peterson makes the important observation that nowhere does Paul describe congregational meetings as worship. Although worship terminology is certainly found throughout his writings, it occurs, he suggests, in a transformed and renewed sense. 'Paul's use of cultic terminology signals the end of traditional cultic thinking, for there is now nothing holy in the cultic sense except the community of the holy people.'[31]

In the key Romans 12:1 text, the service called for by God is the obedience of faith expressed by those whose minds are being transformed and renewed. It is an obedience that reflects non-conformity to the values, attitudes and behavior of 'this age' (Rom 12:2; see also Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:22–24).[32] Acceptable worship in the following chapters of Romans involves effective ministry to one another within the body of Christ, maintaining love and forgiveness towards those outside the Christian community, expressing right relationships with ruling authorities, living expectantly in the light of Christ's imminent return, and demonstrating love especially towards those with different opinions within the congregation of Christ's people.[33]

However, Peterson stops short of claiming that worship in the Pauline letters is simply synonymous with ethics, the reason being that the terminology of worship is used quite specifically to refer to gospel preaching and the ministries that support gospel work. 'There is a

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[29] Peterson, 126.
[30] Peterson continues: 'With one eye on the past and what Jesus has done for us, we need to express our gratitude to God for his grace towards us and reach out together to experience afresh the forgiveness and restoration he has promised to us. With another eye on the future and what it will mean for us to share with Christ in his coming kingdom, we need to encourage one another in this hope and to learn what it means to live as the redeemed community in the present.' Peterson, 130.
[31] Peterson, 166.
[32] Peterson, 176.
[33] Peterson, 178.

declaratory side to glorifying God and a sacrificial service in the cause of the gospel that needs to be highlighted as a vital part of the Christian's 'understanding worship;'[34] which is consistent with his later application and statements regarding the church gathering. On the one, hand he observes that *proskynein* is never used in connection with the regular gathering of God's people for prayer, praise and encouragement. But at the same time, he suggests that it is logical that such activities *should* be characterized as worship. It is edification, however, that now becomes central in the meeting of God's people.[35]

Of course, while edification as an outcome of corporate worship is not new to this tradition, it does open itself up to criticism. Anglican theologian, Daniel Hardy, while not an evangelical, articulates the view shared by a number within and outside the tradition, that 'the occupational hazard is to treat worship as a routine ritual practice of community-formation unmotivated by—and inert in the presence of—the holiness of God.'[36] In other words, 'horizontal' corporate worship can easily lack transcendence, or a sense of the divine. Rather, Hardy would argue that the reality of the divine is found in the link between worship and participation in the holiness of God.

> If we see worship as the situation in which the relational and directive propriety of the holiness of God is intrinsically present in social enactment, there is a direct connection between the contingent human attempt to "worship" and the inner dynamic of the holiness of God. [37]

The principle of edification, Peterson argues however, is to govern the thinking and behavior of Christians in all circumstances, and as such Paul regularly employs this notion with reference to the activities of Christian assembly. When Christians gather together to minister to one another the truth of God in love, the church is manifested, maintained and advanced in God's way.[38] This is also how, Peterson suggests, we are to understand the Lord's Supper. It

> is clearly meant to focus the eyes of the participants on one another as well as on God. We do not simply meet to have fellowship with God but to minister to one another as we express our common participation in Christ as our Saviour and Lord.[39]

Peterson concludes that in the end, it may be best to speak of congregational worship as a particular expression of the total life-response that is the worship of the new covenant. The

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[34] Peterson, 194.
[35] Peterson, 196.
[36] Daniel W. Hardy, *Finding the Church: The Dynamic Truth of Anglicanism* (London: SCM, 2001), 20.
[37] Hardy, 20.
[38] Peterson, 213–214.
[39] Peterson, 218.

> revolutionary use of the terminology of worship with reference to a Christ-centered, gospel serving, life-orientation is obscured by the common practice of restricting any talk of worship to what is done in church…. If Christians are meant to worship God in every sphere of life, it cannot be worship as such that brings them to church. 'Corporate worship' may express more accurately what is involved, but Paul's emphasis is on coming together to participate in the edification of the church.[40]

Finally, Peterson appeals to the book of Hebrews to make clear that the inauguration of the new covenant by Jesus means the fulfillment and replacement of the whole pattern of approach to God established under the Mosaic covenant. The writer, he contends, proclaims the end of that earthly cult, by expounding Christ's work as the ultimate, heavenly cult.[41] Paradoxically, Christians are liberated from cultic obligations in any earthly sense, to serve God in a new way.

It is in his analysis of the Hebrews material that we most clearly understand Peterson's approach to typology. The writer, he asserts, stresses that the Old Testament cult functioned as an anticipation or 'shadow of the good things to come' (10:1, see also 8:5). The implication of 9:8-9a, however, is that God has only made its anticipatory function clear in New Testament times. The cult enables Israel to draw near to God in a limited sense, but its strengths and weaknesses have really only come to light with its fulfillment in Christ.[42]

In Hebrews, Christ is properly the object of human worship. Yet the use of other worship terminology introduces a further perspective.

> It is 'by the blood of Jesus' that we are to approach God (10:19; see also 7:25) and it is 'through Jesus' that we are to offer the praise and obedience that is pleasing to God (13:15–16). So Christ is more often portrayed as the means of acceptable worship in the book.'[43]

The OT showed that the locus of life and worship was to be the sanctuary. However, under the new covenant, that sanctuary is the Heavenly Jerusalem, and it is through Christ that we may enjoy the fellowship of that joyful assembly in advance.[44]

Peterson's biblical theology promotes an inaugurated eschatology. Worship is radically transformed in Christ, from ritual to all-of-life obedience. What is perhaps unclear, is how he

[40] Peterson, 219.
[41] Peterson, 228.
[42] Peterson, 233.
[43] Peterson, 238.
[44] Peterson, 254.

maintains a place for 'corporate worship' in this schema. Certainly, transformed ritual language is used of the church in general and ethical terms. But it is not clear how Peterson moves to his central claim that the gathering of the church is to be an anticipation of the heavenly or eschatological assembly of God's people. It might be that he is expressing a view similar to Beale, whose biblical theology of the temple leads to the conclusion that the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21:1 is defined by and equated with the paradisal city-temple of 21:2 and 21:9. In this view, the new creation and Jerusalem are none other than God's tabernacle, the true temple of God's special presence.

> The Old Testament tabernacle and temples were symbolically designed to point to the cosmic eschatological reality that God's tabernacling presence, formerly limited to the holy of holies, was to be extended throughout the whole earth.[45]

In the same way, Peterson views the eschatological plane as characterized by worship or divine service in the form of prayer and praise directed to God and in the form of ministry to one another. With this perspective, worship and edification can therefore be different dimensions of the same activities.

3. D. A. Carson

In my first chapter I noted Farley's analysis of evangelical hermeneutical approaches to worship. Ultimately, he considered a biblical-typological model (whose exponents included Ross, Meyer and Leithart) as having the greatest potential for developing an evangelical biblical theology of worship as it derived its theology from the whole bible rather than the NT alone.

> It is the OT that furnishes biblical foundations for a theology of the order of worship, the theological content and musical accompaniment of liturgical song, bodily posture in worship, art, architecture, color, ministerial vestments, and an annual calendar of liturgical festivals.[46]

Farley was reacting against the position of D.A Carson—in what he labels a praxis-oriented regulative principle. Carson, he suggested, writes as if the only biblical texts and practices necessary for constructing a biblical theology of worship are those explicitly mentioned in the NT.[47] This, he argues, is inadequate, as no NT book was written to be a complete manual of liturgics.[48] Carson, he suggests, views the NT in an inappropriately narrow and legalistic way, as if

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[45] G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 25.
[46] Michael Farley, "What is 'Biblical' Worship? Biblical Hermeneutics and Evangelical Theologies of Worship," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 3 (2008): 612.
[47] Farley, 611.
[48] Farley, 610.

the NT is to function as a collective new covenant version of Leviticus and it is therefore wrong to read and apply the NT in this restrictive fashion. 'Liturgical theology ought to be a matter of wisdom that results from reflection upon all that God has revealed in Scripture about corporate worship in light of the person and work of Christ.'[49] I would argue, however, that to consider Carson's view within a rubric of liturgical theology is to miss the point of his position all together—that a *liturgical approach to worship* in in fact far too narrow and restrictive a way to consider the biblical material.

Against Farley, Rathe more accurately recognizes Carson's view of worship (and Peterson's for that matter) as being no longer tied to a corporate liturgical setting, but with an emphasis on horizontal edification. While giving attention to interior action, exterior acts are intended to serve and edify the community; those moments in gathered worship 'that highlight the porosity of the boundary between the two poles of its worship: gathered adoration and lived-out action.'[50] There is with Carson, he notes, a resistance to sacramental thinking, with the Word viewed as the primary vehicle for *divine-through-human* action. It is through the congregation's participation in the Word that God's actions are recognized.[51] Rathe, however, is again less concerned with Carson's biblical principles as he is with considering trinitarian concerns around the actions of God and the worshipper.

If Peterson's most valuable contribution to the subject of worship is in biblical semantics, then with D. A. Carson, it is in a cognizance of hermeneutics. Not only is a theology of worship made difficult by strongly held and divergent views, he contends, neither is it helped by linguistic pressures, and by the sharp tendencies to produce quite different works, depending in part on whether the theologian is working out of the matrix of systematic theology or of biblical theology.[52] It is the latter, he believes, that best allows us to make sense of the biblical material. Yet, even so, he notes the variety of biblical approaches.[53]

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[49] Farley, 611.
[50] Alan Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship and Participation: Taking a Twenty-First Century Reading* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 73.
[51] Rathe, 80.
[52] D. A. Carson, "Worship Under the Word," in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 18.
[53] 'While some interpreters think of typology as an interpretive method that provides us with nothing more than "spiritual principles" (which presuppose an atemporal relationship), others—myself included—think that several forms of typology embrace a teleological element, a predictive element. In that case, one must ask what those Old Testament patterns of worship are *pointing toward*. This shift in interpretation tilts toward biblical theology.' Carson, 22.

Carson is sympathetic to the exegesis of Peterson, especially in his examination of praise and 'cultic' vocabulary in the New Testament. Where he is less convinced is in Peterson's lack of the 'affective' in the worship of both testaments. Worship, Carson argues,

> is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so… While all true worship is God centered, *Christian* worship is no less Christ-centered… Worship manifests itself both in adoration and in action, both in the individual believer and in *corporate worship*, which is worship offered up in the body of believers.[54]

And it is a narrative biblical-theological approach, he argues, that best supports this thesis. Because of the location of new covenant believers in the stream of redemptive history, the heart of what constitutes true worship changes its form rather radically.[55] There are three broad principles he considers within this approach.

Firstly, however enmeshed in cultus, sacrifice, priestly service, covenantal prescription, and major festivals the worship of Israel had become, worship keeps changing its face across the biblical narrative.[56]

Secondly, Carson maintains that there is no reason to restrict all worship in ancient Israel to the cultus. The Psalms, he notes, create a large scope for individual praise and adoration. And similarly, the Old Testament provides ample evidence of individuals pouring out their prayers before God, quite apart from the religion of the cultus (e.g., Hannah, Daniel, and Job).[57]

But thirdly, and he notes most importantly, is the remarkable shift that occurs with the coming of Christ and the new covenant he introduces. He gives two examples. 1. The Levitical priesthood has been replaced multifariously: a. we are all priests (1 Pet), b. Jesus alone is the high priest (Heb); but c. there is no priestly tribe; 2. Concerning the temple: Jesus' body becomes the temple (Jn 2), or adapting the figure, the church becomes the temple (1 Cor 3), or the individual

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[54] Carson, 26. Furthermore, Carson is critical of the view that the assembly is simply about instruction and mutual edification: 'One must ask if this is a new reductionism. If the New Testament expands the horizons of worship to embrace all of life, does it intend to exclude those times when Christians assemble together?... Do the 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) serve *exclusively* to edify saints mutually?' D. A. Carson, "'Worship the Lord Your God': The Perennial Challenge," in *Worship: Adoration and Action,* ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1993), 16.

[55] Carson, 38.

[56] Carson, 36.

[57] Carson, 36.

becomes the temple (1 Cor 6); but the temple is never a building.[58]

This pattern of type/antitype is so thorough, he asserts, that inevitably the way we think of worship must also change. For example, within Romans 12:1–2 Paul uses the language of the cultus except that his use of terminology transports us away from the cultus. We no longer offer an animal as a sacrifice but our bodies.[59]

We see a similar thing in John 4:24. We do not worship spiritually as opposed to carnally, or truthfully as opposed to falsely. The context focuses Jesus' argument. Firstly, both Samaria's mountains and Jerusalem are abolished as the proper location for the corporate worship of the people of God, even if in the past he chose to disclose himself in such a temple to anticipate what was coming. Secondly, Jesus, as the true vine, manna, Shepherd, temple and Son, indicate that to worship in Spirit and in truth is first and foremost a way of saying that we must worship God *by means of Christ*. In the light of Hebrews 8:13, 'Christian worship is new covenant worship; it is gospel-inspired worship; it is Christ-centered worship; it is cross-focused worship.'[60] The NT message is that we offer up ourselves as living sacrifices.[61]

Carson therefore asserts that on this side of Christ's supreme sacrifice we no longer participate in the forms that pointed toward it. The focus of worship language, priestly language, and sacrificial language has been transmuted into a far more comprehensive arena, one that is far less oriented toward any notion of cultus. However, in order not to exaggerate the differences between worship under the Mosaic covenant and the new, it is essential, Carson states, to recognize that all true worship is God centered.[62] Israel's worship was never simply a matter of conforming to formal requirements. As such, the prophets offer a number of passages that denounce formally 'correct' worship while the worshiper's heart is set on idolatry (e.g., Ez 8).[63] However,

> The transformation of language is inescapable and is tied to the shift from type to antitype, from promise to reality, from shadow to substance. But we must not therefore conclude that, apart from instances of individual worship, in the Old Testament the formal requirements of the cultus exhausted what was meant by public worship.[64]

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[58] Carson, 36.
[59] Carson, 37.
[60] Carson, 37.
[61] Carson, 38.
[62] Block questions Carson's consistency in this regard, suggesting that in his exegesis of verses such as Rom 12:1, he emphasizes the change in the language of worship and the ways in which it departs from the cultus. Block, 4.
[63] Carson, 38.
[64] Carson, 39.

It has always been necessary, Carson notes, to love God wholly; to recognize his holiness, power, glory and goodness; and to adore him for what he is.[65]

The way that wholly loving God works out under the old covenant is in heartfelt obedience to the terms of that covenant. The way wholly loving God works out under the new covenant is the same, 'and here the language of the cultus has been transmuted to all-of-life, with the implication, not so much of a desacralization of space and time and food, as with a sacralization of all space and all time and all food: what God has declared holy let no one declare unholy.'[66]

Like Peterson, Carson makes the claim that the NT forces us to see our worship manifest in both the individual believer and in corporate worship.[67] Although in that context, the church in assembly not only approaches God, it also provides encouragement to its members. Farley and others critically note that Carson is wrong to argue that the NT alone provides the norms for Christian worship, placing an emphasis on an internal spiritual experience over the external, which involves form and ritual.[68] What can be more cultic and formal, Block suggests, than the Lord's Supper or the ritual of baptism?[69] Or as Webber argues,

> Through these sacred actions [the Eucharist and Baptism] God both speaks and acts and brings the power of the saving event to the worshiping community. The worshipers then respond in faith, remembering and celebrating God's saving deeds through these sacred actions. Consequently, the sacred actions become the meeting point for God's saving presence and the worshipers' response of praise and thanksgiving.[70]

Carson acknowledges that an extension of his reasoning might lead some to echo William Law in saying that there is not one command in all the Gospel for public worship. 'We do not come together for worship, these people say; rather we come together for instruction, or we come together for mutual edification.' Carson's reply is this: 'Would it not be better to say that the New Testament emphasis is that the people of God should worship him in their individual lives and in their family lives and then, when they come together, worship him corporately?'[71] Carson's argument here has merit, except for the fact that he does not account for the lack of *proskynein* language in the NT epistles.

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[65] Carson, 40.
[66] Carson, 40.
[67] Carson, 44.
[68] Farley, 595-96. See also, Block, 4.
[69] Block, 4.
[70] Webber, 31.
[71] Carson, 46.

If then the activities of Christians described in the NT may be described as worship, there is a further, narrower sense of the activities within corporate worship. And he points out that most of the activities of the gathered church are related in one way or another to the word. To this end he quotes Robert Doyle,

> To each other we confess and testify to the greatness of God. We do this by the very activity of making God's Word the centre of our activities—by reading it, preaching it, making it the basis of exhortation, and even setting it to music in hymns and praise. The Spirit uses all this, we are assured, to build us up in Christ. Praise is integral to our activities in church, because it is another form of our response of faith. It is part of our whole life of worship, but only one part of it.[72]

Carson recognizes, however, that there is no explicit mandate or model of a particular order or arrangement of these elements. 'The tendency in some traditions to nail everything down in great detail and claim that such stipulations are biblically sanctioned is to "go beyond what is written" (to use the Pauline phrase, 1 Cor 4:6).'[73] This is not to deny, he claims, that experience may teach us better and worse ways of leading corporate worship, or that there may be profound and interlocking theological structures that undergird certain decisions about corporate worship. He does avoid, however, an evaluation of the Hooker (or normative) and regulative principles, suggesting that 'for all their differences, theologically rich and serious services from both camps often have more common *content* than either side usually acknowledge.'[74]

4. Harold Best

Harold Best comes to the doctrine of worship as a practical theologian rather than as a biblical scholar. It is worth considering his thinking on worship, however, for this very reason, as he would argue that a correct theology of worship is a priority before considering how to apply it. His key point is more narrowly focused than that of Peterson and Carson, which is that humans are designed for a 'continuous outpouring' of praise to their creator. Like the other Christological writers, he aims to create a distinction between the theology of worship and the corporate worship of the church's weekly assembly. Reflecting Marshal, Best is clear that in no place do the epistles speak of these gatherings 'specifically as worship times, nor is worship mentioned as the

[72] Robert Doyle, "The One True Worshipper," *The Briefing* (29 April 1999): 8.
[73] Carson, 51.
[74] Carson, 55.

singular, all-encompassing act, much less the reason for the gathering.'[75]

Best openly acknowledged that he is building on the exegetical work of David Peterson, although he stresses the Christocentric nature of worship perhaps even more strongly. His biblical theology is in fact so Christologically centered that his thesis is firmly planted in the NT material before he works backwards to encompass the Old. In short, he describes worship as 'the continuous outpouring of all that I am, all that I do and all that I can ever become in light of a chosen or choosing God;'[76] and from the outset he contends that worship is not an activity of Christians alone, but the entire human race and 'their submission to whatever masters them and their witness as to why they live the way they do.'[77] Worship outside the worship of God through Christ Jesus is therefore idolatrous, and 'likewise, idolatry is the chief enemy of the most fervently worshiping Christians, even to the extent that some of us may end up worshiping worship.'[78]

Central to his thesis of authentic worship, however, is the idea of 'continuousness.'

> Worship does not stop and start, despite our notions to the contrary. Once we place emphasis on specific times, places and methods, we misunderstand worship's biblical meaning. Worship may ebb and flow, may take on various appearances and may be unconscious or conscious, intense and ecstatic or quiet and commonplace, but it is continuous. When we sin, worship does not stop.[79]

Immediately this sets him at odds with those in the covenantal worship group who consider time, space and liturgical concerns as essential to biblical worship. What is at the heart of Christian worship is what he describes as 'continuous outpouring.' 'These two words are the only descriptors I can think of that take in both the work of God and the work of humankind as these together eventually inform a biblically complete concept of worship.'[80] In other words, worship requires both humanity and God—humanity because they are always worshipping something, and God because it is in his nature to outpour himself to the world and his people. From this foundation Best then begins to paint a picture of worship centered around the perfect sacrifice of Christ, although quickly adds that Christ's model of outpouring will shape the worship of those who are in Christ. Paul, for example in 2 Tim 4:6, states that he is being poured out as a libation.

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[75] Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003, 63.
[76] Best, 18.
[77] Best, 18.
[78] Best, 163.
[79] Best, 18-19.
[80] Best, 19.

If Christ's sacrifice is the starting point for worship, Best looks to creation to explain how it is that humanity is wired to worship. In creation, 'God's grace, inexplicable generosity and immeasurable imagination brought him to create a race of beings in his own image, *imago Dei*.'[81] It is because we are made in God's image that we were created 'continuously outpouring,' rather than being something we graduate into being. The incarnation of Christ exemplifies this, as his 'continuous outpouring as perfect man to his heavenly Father and continuous outpouring toward the world as the only Savior… [demonstrate] he is the perfect worshiper, knowing his Father uninterruptedly, submissively and completely.'[82] Jesus came, he argues, not just to remove sin but equally to demonstrate there was no flaws in God's original creating act.

Where Best stands out in his theology of worship is in his biblical-theological framework. The whole of Scripture, he argues, verifies the principle of worship as a continuum, with the words for worship—*proskynein* and *latreuein*—suggesting a close relationship between worship in a given place and time, and worship as an all-pervasive and ongoing condition.[83] As such, he is attempting to synthesize the concepts of worship as homage and worship as service into one idea. He again explains this from the NT, where 'there is no escape from the idea that worship is an undiminished outpouring, even though, curiously enough, the words for "worship" are not used much,' particularly in relation to the church gathering.[84] Here he turns to Romans 12:1, where he notes Paul's ruthlessly detailed inquiry into creation, fall, sin and righteousness. 'Above all these chapters are about continuous outpouring—that of God in the creation, that of humanity in its fallen and inexcusable enthusiasm for evil, that of Christ in his total victory over sin and death, and that of all believers in their pressing on against sin and upward into Christ's stature and fullness.'[85] Romans 12:1, he argues, calls for the same continuity in the life of the believer, constituting their spiritual worship. The believer is a continual living sacrifice just as Christ's sacrifice of himself was once for all. There is 'no other way to describe this continued action but as worship (even if we prefer the word service).'[86]

> Whatever we choose, we are bound up in intertestamental accord in which bowing down, serving and worshipping are identical. We must call this kind of worship spiritual, not only because it is in Christ and of the Spirit, but also because we walk as continual

[81] Best, 22.
[82] Best, 24.
[83] Best, 35.
[84] Best, 35.
[85] Best, 35.
[86] Best, 35.

> worshippers by faith and not by sight.[87]

In the following two chapters I will suggest that 'spiritual worship' is, in fact, not the most accurate way to translate this particular verse. However, Best is aiming to making a theological point here rather than an exegetical one. This is particularly evident as he attempts to synthesize this concept with Jesus' statement John 4 about worshipping in Spirit and truth, which he argues is equally about both salvation (God's action) and authentic worship (our action).

The Samaritan woman in John 4, he proposes, represents the religious world in trying to keep both worship concepts separate. Christ, however, will always unify salvation and authentic worship.[88] The woman sees worship as an occasion, a time, a place, a tradition, whereas Jesus 'subsumed *without condemning*, the entire history of time and place, tradition and protocol, under a singular paradigm: Spirit and truth.[89] This concept, he suggests, not only sets up Romans 12, but equally looks back to creation—where worship is continuous, and time and location are incidental. Salvation and authentic worship mean always being in the Spirit and always being in the truth.[90] In other words, Best is arguing that John 4 removes the distinction between worship as homage and worship as service, and rather advocates that worship is all-of-life.

As to how the believer contributes to this idea of worship, Best turns to Psalm 29:2 with its call to 'worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,' to explore what this looks like. Holiness, he suggests is another biblical word that speaks of our continuous state of redeemed outpourers.

> The Christian life is not sequential, nor is holiness the final piece in a complex redemption puzzle. It is that which is put into operation the moment we turn to Christ… Spiritual worship and the beauty of holiness are as down-to-earth and practical as Christians can get.[91]

'Our worship is acceptable and effective by our being moment-by-moment living sacrifices, doing everything in the Spirit and according to truth, seeking out the beauty of holiness as our only walk, holding fast to God, who alone is our praise and worship.'[92] This picture of worship is, he argues, found throughout Scripture, most pointedly in Deuteronomy 10, although more

[87] Best, 36.
[88] Best, 38.
[89] Best, 38.
[90] Best, 38.
[91] Best, 40.
[92] Best, 41.

commonly in the NT.[93] And this emphasis on NT holiness seems deliberate. Our overemphasis on temporal worship (time, place, music etc.), he suggests, comes from a failure to appreciate the final dimensions of worship that a New Testament theology can bring to us. 'Talking about worship renewal the way we tend to do is almost like talking about Old Testament renewal instead of Old Testament fulfillment.'[94] I would argue then that Best's biblical-theological hermeneutic is best summed up in his statement that 'Christ is established in the Old Testament so efficiently as to make the Incarnation an inevitable reality.'[95] When Jesus stated that Abraham saw this day and was glad (Jn 8:56) it was a verification of the OT in 'establishing the continuity of both Testaments and, even more importantly, the summative force of the New.[96]

This principle, he argues, particularly applies to worship. Concepts of Spirit and truth are hidden or embedded in the OT in time and place such as the tabernacle and temple.

> Time and place are not swept aside but as swept up in Spirit and truth, in continuous worship, in living sacrifice and in the verities of faith, love and hope. If we posit a theology of worship on any other concept, we might be running the risk, however unconsciously…, of legalizing the subject of worship and, by implication, neglecting the finish that New Testament thought puts to the Old.[97]

What makes the authentic worship of the NT significant is that it is tied to our union with Christ. Being in Christ and Christ in us assures us of our hope in glory. And it is through this doctrine of union that Best moves towards thinking about corporate worship. Those who lead worship, for instance, do not do so as individuals, but in a 'partnership between the worship leadership and the people of God, a partnership shared because of the priesthood of all continuous outpourers.'[98] The church is called to communal worship 'by virtue of their very nature—their renewed, common identity in Christ.'[99] Corporate worship, then, is not driven by a liturgy or a call to worship, a change in style or a methodology.

> Redemption does not signal the beginning of worship. Instead, it marks its once-for-all cleansing.[100]

Anything we present to God (in continuous outpouring), he argues, cannot be sufficient to create authentic worship. 'The only solution to fallen worship is Jesus Christ, who takes out twisted

[93] 1 Pet 2:4-5; Heb 12-13; Phi 1:6, 2:12-13; Col 1:9-12; 2 Pet 1:2-7.
[94] Best, 45.
[95] Best, 46.
[96] Best, 46.
[97] Best, 47.
[98] Best, 61-62.
[99] Rathe, 72.
[100] Best, 27.

and inverted worship and sets it right.'[101] In short, Jesus must redeem and perfect our offerings of worship.

> God sees and hears of all our offerings, perfected. God sees and hears as no human being can, all because our offerings have been perfected by the giver. The out-of-tune singing of an ordinary believer, the hymnic chant of the Aborigine…, the open frankness of a primitive art piece, the nearly transcendent "Kyrie" of Bach's B minor mass, the praise choruses of the charismatic, the drum praise of the Cameroonian—everything from the widow's mite to the poured-out ointment of artistic action—are at once humbled and exalted by the strong saving work of Christ. While the believer offers, Christ perfects. It is all of Christ and it is all of faith.[102]

In terms of the content of corporate worship, edification is not as central to Best as it is for Peterson, and to a lesser degree Carson. Edification, rather, sits alongside other aspects of the corporate gathering including fellowship, praise, and instruction.[103] And while he does stress the church's union with Christ, where others have emphasized an outpouring of edification, Best rather sees the 'power and glory' of corporate worship as specifically 'inward.'[104] This does not mean he is looking for experientialism, but rather, 'true experience.' True experience encompasses 'a wealth of actions in which heart and mind [are] filled to the full and integrated accordingly.'[105] Of course, 'if the Holy Spirit chooses to make this outwardly manifest, and should the entire assembly break into unpredicted ecstasy (whether in charged silence or Pentecostal polyphony), so be it.'[106] Similarly Best shows a level of ambivalence towards the Lord's Supper. The concept of constant mutual indwelling sees the Supper diminished in favour of 'the eternally preceding and changeless fact of Christ in us.'[107] The immediacy of Christ in the life of the believer holds greater weight than the mediation of the sacraments. 'Christ is in me even as he is in his church.'[108]

If we can summarize Best's theology of worship, we can say that it:

a. Involves the whole of life;
b. Is established in creation;

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[101] Best, 212.
[102] Harold M. Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1993), 155-6.
[103] Best, 63.
[104] Rathe, 73
[105] Best, 68.
[106] Best, 68.
[107] Best, 56.
[108] Best, 56.

c. Perfected in Christ;
d. Reflects the Trinity;
e. Is experienced in union with Christ, individually and corporately, inward and externally.

What makes his overall argument weaker that Peterson and Carson, is that he arrives at his position through a synthetic systematic approach, rather than by following a more rigorous biblical theology. This is most obvious in the way he establishes his core principles of worship from Romans 12, but then works backwards to the Gospels and the OT to support his thesis. The more plausible hermeneutical method employed by nearly all the others we have considered, is to begin with OT types and let the NT demonstrate how those types are fulfilled on the Bible's own terms. Best's thesis of continuous outpouring may therefore exist as a purely a synthetic doctrine, based on proof texts that might have different exegetical outcomes if considered on their own terms. However, his ideas are broadly consistent those who stress a Christological approach to worship, and whose outcomes for corporate worship that are more horizontal than vertical. Best is clear that we do not go to church to worship, but that as continuing worshippers, we gather ourselves together to continue our worship, now in the company of brothers and sisters.[109] While gathered worship provides no special access to God, it certainly basks in the intimate fellowship with the divine that irradiates the rest of life. [110]

5. Conclusion

I would argue that against the covenantal authors, Peterson and Carson present the stronger biblical-theological arguments, at the very least because they consider the semantic, hermeneutical, typological and contextual issues with more care and consistency. There is less presupposition in their exegesis, with seemingly more openness to letting the force of the biblical narrative direct the outcome. The weight given to the NT passages is therefore justifiable when considering Scripture's literary and broader salvation-historical trajectory. Similarly, the weight given to Christological interpretation and contextual analysis seems more in line with methodology we saw established in Calvin. Best sits in this tradition, although relying heavily on the prior semantic work of Peterson, and employing a less rigorous biblical theology.

Having said that, the weakness of each is apparent when justifying the place, or even existence, of

[109] Best, 47.
[110] Best, 47.

corporate worship. If new covenant Christology transforms OT worship types in the way they suggest, then remarkably little exegetical warrant is given for moving from worship as all-of-life to the narrower concept of corporate worship. Calvin's own nuanced distinction between the 'obedience' of spiritual worship and the exercises of public worship might be used to strengthen such a connection. Rather, these models attempt to synthesize various soteriological elements of NT worship with the believer's all-of-life response of service and the activities of the corporate gathering. In such a framework, to worship 'in Christ' means that our acts of worship become acceptable when they are performed 'in him,' and thus remain to a great extent the obligation of the believer. This differs from the proposition of this thesis (along with Marshall and articulated in the following chapter), that to worship in Christ occurs vicariously, on behalf of the believer. There is, of course, no dispute that the NT presents a rich ecclesiology of the redeemed body of Christ. In many ways, however, these authors continue to import aspects of the covenantal models which assume a continuity between the worship practices of Israel and the service of the church. In this sense, Peterson and Carson in particular are less prepared to let go of old covenant acts of worship than they might first indicate.

PART III

A New Model: Soteriological Worship

CHAPTER 6
SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

1. Introduction

In light of the historical and theological context established in the previous chapters, I propose to take a fresh look at worship within the NT. Agreeing with Marshall's claim that 'Christ is the one who perfectly represents God to us and who perfectly represents us to God, so that Christian worship is our being taken up and incorporated into that perfect worship which Christ as our high priest offers to the Father,'[1] the purpose of this chapter is to give some theological and exegetical substance to that assertion. Following Calvin and others, my hermeneutical approach will be a salvation-historical one. As such I will consider the doctrine of worship within the context of the wider biblical narrative, but specifically noting the way that spiritual worship within the NT is understood as the antitype of OT rituals and attitudes towards God. To this end, I will consider further the nuances of specialized worship language, within its immediate and broader contexts, and its use literally or figuratively, seeking to understand the author's choice of that language. Finally, I will attempt to synthesize a NT perspective on worship using insights gained from this study to go beyond such terms and language. Particular attention will be given to worship within John's Gospel, Hebrews and the Pauline epistles, to lay the groundwork for a model that might redress some of the deficiencies I noted in the previous chapters.

[1] I. Howard Marshall, 'How Far Did The Early Christians Worship God,' *Churchman* 99, no. 3 (1985): 217.

In short, I will propose that the NT views worship as having two primary aspects: the 'spiritual worship' of Christ on behalf of the believer, and the 'service worship' of the believer in response to the former. Understanding how the NT authors use technical worship language in context will frame the discussion of both these ideas. However, in order to present as complete a picture of NT worship as possible I will go on to consider the relationship between worship and the related doctrines of the church and Paul's union with Christ. Such relationships are, of course, assumed naturally by many. Bockmuehl, for example, states that

> Paul locates the personal encounter with Jesus not in individual experience but in the life of his people as his body gathered for worship. Here is where the believers are transformed into his death and resurrection through baptism, here is where in sharing the cup and the bread they share the very body and blood of Jesus, and here their worship is energized and empowered by the experienced presence of the one whom they greet with the acclamations 'Lord Jesus Christ' or 'Our Lord, Come!'[2]

In this view, union with Christ is experienced within the church's *corporate* worship, found within the praise and eschatological longing and the sacraments of the gathered church. I would suggest, however, that this reflects a somewhat eisegetical approach to worship, conditioned by the contemporary English use of the word, and is therefore not in line with the Reformed principle of allowing Scripture to set its own terms for its interpretation. It is not the purpose of this study, however, to redefine the English word 'worship'! At the same time, we do want to be cautioned by Barr's notion of 'illegitimate totality transfer'[3]—the idea that the semantic value of a word as it occurs in one context becomes added to its semantic value in another context, and so on, until the sum of these semantic values is then read into a particular case. Such a caution seems particularly prudent in the case of worship, where the one English word is regularly used to translate a number of different Greek words, and where contemporary church culture invests worship with a range of meanings related to liturgical forms, mystical personal experiences, and even the contemporary Christian music industry.[4]

I accept, therefore, that it is linguistically legitimate for the contemporary church to instil the English word worship with a greater sense of liturgy (including music, etc.) than the biblical

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[2] Markus Bockmuehl, "The Personal Presence of Jesus in the Writings of Paul," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70, no. 1 (2017): 39–60.
[3] James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 218.
[4] See, for example: https://www.worshiptogether.com/; https://www.worshipfuel.com/; https://www.resoundworship.org/; https://worshipcentral.org/. Accessed July 4, 2021.

material might suggest. Words do change their meanings! My earlier historical study has indeed shown how giving weight to certain aspects of worship theology has helped to shape our modern definitions.[5] We need to recognise, however, the problem this can create in shaping a consistent biblical theology. At the same time, we also want to accept (following Barr[6]) that definitions of worship should be able to include more than just the lexical meanings of given words, and that within scripture worship may well be a tapestry of ideas. In which case, there still needs some level of lexical control over what contributes to the tapestry and what does not. My model will therefore follow the broad Reformation principle that scripture should set the agenda for reading scripture.

2. Spiritual worship

2.a *proskyneō* – the heart of worship[7]

The Greek Bible's fundamental word for worship, *proskyneō,* stems from the physical action of bowing before someone (e.g., God, Christ, an idol, or person of authority), although it equally assumes the attitude of honour and respect behind the physical action.[8] In response to God's

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[5] A further danger in basing an argument on semantics alone is to ignore those who would argue that corporate worship *can* be found in the NT even when it is given little or formal technical expression. I would hope that my approach will allow a generous hearing of those arguments.

[6] Barr argues that meaning is not found in the word by itself and that words do not have some hidden metaphysical reality. Rather, words are building blocks of larger concepts, and in order to understand the full scope of the concepts designated by words as linguistic markers, the entire semantic range of the word must be examined. It is therefore much more appropriate to look for theology, not in a word, but in a sentence or combination of words. He also cautions against deriving meaning from a word's origins: 'The main point is that the etymology of a word is not a statement about its meaning but about its history.' For example, 'it is sometimes suggested, that *leiturgia* "means" a work (*ergon*) performed by the people (*laos*) perhaps through a priestly or kingly representative. But at least by the time of Aristotle the word had simply become a generalized one for any kind of "service" or "function."' Barr, 109, 149–151.

[7] The *sebo* group of words similarly reflect a reverence of God or other objects of worship, although specifically in reference to the worship performed by gentiles and unbelievers, for example in Acts 16:14; 17:23; 18:7. As their usage is not modified by Christ in any obvious sense, these words do not directly contribute to my biblical theology of worship, and as such are not being considered in this chapter.

[8] In the Septuagint, *proskyneō* nearly always translates חוה *(hištaḥ^{a}wâ).* David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Leicester: Apollos, 1992), 57. TDNT notes that *proskyneō* is an ancient term for reverent adoration of the gods, which in the case of chthonic deities would mean stooping to kiss the earth. The Greeks abandon the outward gesture but keep the term for the inner attitude. Later the word takes on a much more general sense of expressing love and respect. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: 1985), 948–949. Similarly, in the NIDNTT: 'The basic meaning of *proskyneō*, in the opinion of most scholars, is to kiss. The prefix indicates a connection with cultic practices going back beyond Greek history. On Egyptian reliefs, worshippers are represented with an outstretched hand throwing a kiss to (pros-) the deity. Among the Greeks the verb is a technical term for the adoration of the gods, meaning to fall down, prostrate oneself, or adore on one's knees. Probably it came to have this meaning because in order to kiss the earth (i.e., the earth deity) or the image of a god, one had to cast oneself on the ground. Later *proskyneō* was also used in connection with the deification of rulers and the Roman emperor cult. In addition to the external act of prostrating oneself in worship, *proskyneō* can denote the corresponding inward attitude of

revelation to Moses in Exodus 4:29–31, the Israelites physically bow in worship, as does the whole earth, in a figurative sense, when it is called to worship in Psalm 96:9.

In the NT gospels, *proskyneō* is nearly always directed towards Christ, whether by Gentile or Jew.[9] The wise men, for example, ask, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship [*proskynēsai*] him' (Mt 2:2). Or when Jesus' disciples were confronted with his authority over the wind and waves, they 'worshipped [*prosekynēsan*] him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God"' (Mt 14:33). In showing how worship is directed towards Jesus, the gospel writers seem to be suggesting that what was (in the OT) reverence due to God, is now offered instead to Christ. Alternatively, the writers may be using *proskyneō* purely in a descriptive rather than theological sense within the narrative. Likely, both are true.

There are two significant occasions in the gospels, however, where worship is considered purely theologically, directed towards God the Father (rather than to Christ), and arguably more in line with the antecedent worship of the OT. The first we see at the end of the forty days of temptation in the wilderness where Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and says to him,

> 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship [*proskynēsēs*] me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Be gone, Satan! For it is written,
>
> > "You shall worship [*proskynēseis*][10] the Lord your God and him only shall you serve [*latreuseis*]"' (Mt 4:9–10).

Both the temptation and response cut to the heart of the God-human relationship: the commandments concerning the exclusivity and holiness of God, which were to set the parameters by which Israel should flourish as a nation, are now the rule by which Jesus' life and ministry will be founded. Of note is the relationship between the terms worship and service (*latreuō*), which we will return to shortly.[11]

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reverence and humility.' Hans Schonweiss and Colin Brown in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985).

[9] See: Ray Lozano, *The Proskynesis of Jesus in the New Testament: A Study of the Significance of Jesus as an Object of "Proskyneō" in the New Testament Writings* (London: T&T Clark, 2019).

[10] When Jesus speaks of worship (as opposed to those offering it to him) it is seen to be ultimately directed towards God and not something he demands for himself.

[11] The collocation of *proskyneō* and *latreuō* shows both the distinction and connection of these two concepts.

3. Spiritual worship in John – 'In spirit and in truth'

While the temptation narrative shows continuity with the OT's use of worship language, the other occasion where Jesus speaks of worship, however, shows it profoundly transformed. In John 4, in dialogue with Jesus, the Samaritan woman states, 'Our fathers worshiped [*prosekynēsan*] on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship [*proskynein*]' (Jn 4:20). Jesus' response is that

> true worshipers will worship [*proskynēsousin*] the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship [*proskynountas*] him. God is spirit, and those who worship [*proskynountas*] him must worship [*proskynein*] in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23–24).

It is in this somewhat enigmatic passage that John creates an expectation of a new experience of engaging with God under the new covenant, overturning existing notions of place and ritual in worship.[12] The reader, however, is not presented with a straightforward explanation of what it means to 'worship in spirit and in truth.' However, both the immediate context of John's Gospel and broader biblical narrative assist if we consider the themes of spirit, truth, temple and place.

Elizabeth Welch has argued that at the heart of worship exists an 'inner dynamic of the holiness of God' particularly found in the nature and activity of the Holy Spirit,[13] suggesting that this passage has a Pneumatological emphasis. However, while the Holy Spirit certainly plays a significant role in Christian rebirth in the preceding chapter, is this how John understands spiritual worship here? Reformed theologian Richard Phillips contends, rather, that to worship in spirit means to worship within the human spirit, and to worship in truth requires a right conception of who God is and how he should be worshipped.[14] His is essentially an argument for the Regulative principle of worship, extrapolating from John that Christians should worship in spirit (internally), in truth (through legislated actions) and in Christ (our means of access to God). Christ, he argues, frames this statement about worship, as the question posed about the appropriate place to worship is answered by Jesus himself in the I Am statement in 4:26.[15]

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[12] "'The Father" is a direct object, a dative of personal interest, suggesting personal relationship, that is, the new relationship created in the life of the genuine worshiper.' Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 155.

[13] Elizabeth A. Welch, *Holy Spirit and Worship: Transformation and Truth in the Theologies of John Owen and John Zizioulas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 5.

[14] Richard D. Phillips, *John* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2014), 255.

[15] Phillips, 260.

I would suggest, however, that this interpretation misses the sense of the narrative, reducing worship to a Christian work, thereby missing the eschatological and soteriological expectations set up here by John. If scholars disagree over the interpretation of 'spirit and truth', and particularly over whether 'spirit' refers to the Holy or human Spirit, David F. Ford takes a more Christological view, and argues that to enter more deeply into worship means entering more deeply into who Jesus is, and therefore both spirit and truth are connected as closely as possible to Jesus.[16] When God is then described as spirit, therefore, it is in reference to his life-giving Spirit. Similarly for Köstenberger, 'it is likely that "God is spirit" is not referring to the Holy Spirit, but is identifying God as a spiritual rather than material being [cf. Is 31:3, Ez 11:19–20; 36:26–27].'[17] He does concede, however, that 'spirit and truth' may well refer to the Holy Spirit because of later associations between the Spirit and truth in John's gospel. 'If Jesus' point here is that God is spirit, proper worship of him is also a matter of spirit rather than physical location (Jerusalem vs Gerizim).'[18] Ridderbos also contends that John does not describe worship in any sort of supersensuous way. Rather, 'spirit and truth' should be understood as a hendiadys (as with 'grace and truth in 1:17') referring to 'the fellowship thus established in its life-creating and life-giving power, as leading to the fullness of God's gifts (cf. 1:16) that is no longer mediated by all sorts of provisions and symbolic forms, but by the Spirit of God himself.'[19] Beasley-Murray, however, more directly argues that the verse refers to the Holy Spirit because of the eschatological context established by Jesus. 'Since the kingdom of God is the age of the Spirit's outpouring, true worshippers will worship the Father in virtue of the life, freedom, and power bestowed by the Spirit, and in accordance with the redemptive revelation brought by the Redeemer.'[20] This view certainly has contextual merit. I would want to add, however, that more attention might be given to the narrative flow of the gospel, particularly noting Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus in the previous chapter, where the Holy Spirit is viewed as instrumental in affecting salvation, and that this chapter should therefore be read in the same light.

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[16] David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A theological commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 116.
[17] Köstenberger, 157.
[18] Köstenberger, 157. He goes on to postulate, however, that 'because the terms, "spirit" and "truth" are joined later in the expression "Spirit of truth," referring to the Holy Spirit (see 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; cf. 1 John 4:6; 5:6; see also 2 Thess. 2:13), while true worship is not a matter of geographical location, physical posture, liturgy or external rituals (cf. Matt. 6:5–13); it *is* a matter of the heart and of the Spirit.' Köstenberger, 157.
[19] Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, transl. by John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 163-164.
[20] George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Volume 36: Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 62. Beasley-Murray goes on to say that in the following verse, however, that 'God is spirit' does not refer to his metaphorical being but rather to his work in the world.

If then, as Carson agrees, John is referring here to the Holy Spirit,[21] then this passage is sounding trinitarian notes. The association of 'word' and 'Spirit' is strong in the Old Testament,[22] and as such, this connection may well be in the evangelist's mind, since Jesus, the 'word made flesh' (1:14) and 'the truth' (14:6), is also the one to whom God gives Spirit without limit (3:34).[23] Or as Stibbe concurs, 'true worship is paternal in focus (the Father), personal in origin (the Son), and pneumatic in character (the Spirit).'[24] More specifically, however, John seems to be making a statement about the Holy Spirit's role in the salvation of the believer. If, as Jesus seems to suggest, true worship can only be effected by the work of the Holy Spirit, then we are immediately reminded of the not dissimilar conversation with Nicodemus in the previous chapter, where the Spirit is the agent of bringing about new birth (3:6). The eternal life brought about by that new birth, is of course, conditioned by the work of and belief in the Son, Jesus (3:16–17). As Thompson rightly notes: 'in this Gospel, the Spirit of God has been identified as that life-giving power through which God calls a new people into being; through the Spirit, God's people are "begotten from above."'[25]

To understand what John (and Jesus) means by 'truth,' we again need to look more broadly within the gospel.[26] On a number of occasions Jesus is either identified or self-identifies with 'the truth' (1:14, 17; 14:6). Jesus (as bringer of grace and truth) is significantly connected with the place of his ministry, as the word who became flesh dwelt, or literally 'tabernacled' (*skēnoō*), among us. This identification of Jesus with the tabernacle/temple (also in 2:19), suggests by implication that the place where people would meet with God would be in *him*. Christ, (God's glory which was hidden even from Moses), would, as the new tabernacle, enable access to God for all people, no longer restricted by the physical barriers and priestly roles associated with the temple. When Jesus therefore speaks of a new means of worship, not associated with the physical temple, we can assume that he is speaking in some way of himself.[27] As Thompson argues, 'the

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[21] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 225.
[22] For example, Gen 1:1–3; 2 Sam 23:2; Prov 1:23; Zech 4:6.
[23] Carson, 225.
[24] Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John's Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1994), 64.
[25] Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 105. Similarly, C. K. Barratt suggests that the Father's seeking of new worshippers has 'perhaps as much claim as 20:30f. to be regarded as expressing the purpose of the gospel.' C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An introduction with commentary and notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1978), 238
[26] Of the 29 occurrences of *alētheia* in the gospels, 24 of these occur in John.
[27] 'In John's Gospel, Jesus is the Word (1:14), has received the fullness of the Spirit (3:34), and is himself the truth (14:6); in his final prayer, he affirms the God's Word is truth that sanctifies (17:17). Hence "spirit" and "truth" are part of a conceptual cluster that also includes "word" and "worship."' Kostenberger, 157.

contrast between the "true worship" and worship in a specific temple is neither an argument for the interiorization of worship, as opposed to the practice of various rituals or sacrifice, nor a criticism of the idea of "sacred space" per see.'[28] Rather the context for worship is in the eschatological assertion that the hour is coming and is now here; that is, the hour of Jesus' death and return to the Father.

However, OT images of Spirit, truth and temple are not the only ones in play here. Central to this narrative is the image of living water. Commentators speculate that the woman's presence at the well at this time of day suggests she has been ostracized by her community. Carson, for example, suggests that

> John may intend a contrast between the woman of this narrative and Nicodemus of chapter 3. He was learned, powerful, respected, orthodox, theologically trained; she was unschooled, without influence, despised, capable only of folk religion. He was a man, a Jew, a ruler; she was a woman, a Samaritan, a moral outcast. And both needed Jesus.'[29]

If this is the case, then Thompson rightly notes that while Jesus calls attention to her problematic situation, he does not condemn her—as subsequent commentators have readily done.[30]

Yet Jesus' engagement with her is not so much on moral grounds, as soteriological. As the dialogue climaxes with Jesus' claims about a new, true worship, it would suggest that the presenting issue is the antithesis of worship: idolatry. If Jesus' primary concerns here were simply with ethics, (in regard to the woman's inappropriate relationships or sexual immorality), we might expect him to offer a solution that involved readmittance to her community or redeeming her views of love and intimacy. This position is poignantly argued by Dorothy Lee.

> The new "sacred site" is the Johannine Jesus, who gives the priceless gift of the Spirit to those who thirst for life, women as well as man, a gift that issues in divine worship in the eschatological now of the incarnation. Water has thus become a full symbol by the end of the narrative. It signifies both the Spirit and the word/revelation/wisdom which Jesus embodies in his own person and gives to those who are thirsty. What the woman seeks and finds is the water of wisdom flowing from the well of the Spirit, implanted in the heart by Jesus. No barrier of race or gender can stand in the way of such a gift.[31]

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[28] Thompson does go on to suggest, however, that while Jesus speaks of an alternative worship, this does not mean that sacred spaces and holy places are thereby outdated or irrelevant. 'As the locus or "place" of God's presence, Jesus reidentifies the "place" of worship' as a space where revelation occurs. Thompson, 104.
[29] Carson, 216.
[30] Thompson, 103.
[31] Dorothy Lee, *Flesh and glory: Symbolism, gender and theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossword Publishing Company, 2002), 76-77.

Lee is correct in understanding Jesus' identification of himself as the place and means of worship. However, the offer of the water of eternal life suggests that the woman's felt needs were less important to Jesus than her spiritual ones.[32] Her problem is ultimately not a lack of human intimacy, but her need for salvation.

And as such, the image of living water brings to mind a number of OT references. As the woman draws attention to the fact that the well had been established by Jacob, and by implication a source of life for Israel/Samaria *materially* ever since, the reader familiar with the OT might readily think of Isaiah 12:3 (drawing water from the well of salvation), Isaiah 55:1–3 ('Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters… that your soul may live,') or Jeremiah 2:13 with its image of the cracked cistern—again a symbol of Israel's idolatry.[33] Even on the purely literal level, thirst, Köstenberger suggests, is among the most intense and imperative human cravings and is therefore commonly used in scripture as a metaphor for spiritual desire.[34] The problem of the Samaritan woman's (and by implication Israel/Samaria's) idolatry, therefore, could not be solved by physical worship, just as the water from Jacob's well could not satisfy a continuing thirst. To participate in spiritual worship required her first finding salvation, in the water springing up to eternal life.

Jesus' claim about true worship, therefore, is a radical one within the context of the formal worship of the Jews. *He* is to be the place and the means of OT engagement with God. *He* himself is to replace the physical temple (2:19). And to participate in spiritual worship means first finding salvation in *him*. By implication, to approach God no longer requires participation in the rituals of temple worship and its liturgy, but will be imputed to those who participate in union with Christ. In John's gospel, 'in which Jesus appears as the *true* vine, the *true* manna, the *true* Shepherd, the *true* temple, the *true* Son—to worship God "in spirit and in *truth*" is first and foremost a way of saying that we must worship God *by means of Christ*.'[35] To consider exactly what this looks like I will return to shortly.

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[32] Note again the similarities with the preceding encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3. Though he is Jewish, male and 'respectable,' his issues are equally identified by Jesus as spiritual ones.

[33] Carson notes, 'The metaphor speaks of God and his grace, knowledge of God, life, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit; in Isaiah 1:16–18; Ezekiel 36:25–27 water promises cleansing… In John's Gospel there are passages where Jesus *is* the living water as he *is* the bread of heaven (6:35), and other passages where he *gives* the living water to believers. In this chapter, the water is the satisfying eternal life mediated by the Spirit that only Jesus, the Messiah and Saviour of the world, can provide.' Carson, 219.

[34] Köstenberger, 151. See also: Ps 42:2, 63:1; 143:6; Is 55:1; Mt 5:6.

[35] D.A. Carson, '"Worship Under the Word," in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 37. Carson is likely not thinking of worship here in a soteriological sense, but more that one approaches God through our acts of worship *in Christ*.

How does John, however, suggest that Christ will bring about this new state of worship? Carson notes the eschatological conditions of the dawning hour, where 'the words *a time is coming* might better be rendered "the hour is coming," since "hour" (*hōra*) when unqualified always points in John's Gospel to the hour of Jesus' cross, resurrection and exaltation.'[36] It is the death and resurrection of Christ which bring about the conditions for the gift of the Holy Spirit to be given (7:38–39; 16:7), and that salvation-historical turning point is possible only because of who Jesus is. 'Precisely for that reason, the hour is not only "coming" but "has now come."'[37]

In summary, the narrative of John 4 presents the reader with the proposition of a new form of spiritual worship, which on one hand stands in contrast to the temporal and physical worship of the Jewish temple, and in another, is a fulfilment of the human need for spiritual satisfaction (which might otherwise be expressed through various forms of idolatry); both of which are brought about and obtained through the coming salvation 'in Christ' and made effectual to the believer by the Holy Spirit.

4. Spiritual worship in Acts, the Epistles

If John's transformation of worship is as profound as I have just stated, it is surprising then how infrequently *proskyneō* appears in Acts and the Epistles. When it does, it is used in a mostly descriptive, rather than spiritual sense, (which is consistent with its earlier use in the synoptic Gospels). In Acts, when Cornelius meets Peter, he falls at his feet to worship [*proskyneō*] him, provoking Peter's response of 'Stand up; I too am a man' (Ac 10:25–26). Similarly, when Paul makes his defence to Felix he states that, 'it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship [*prosekynēsen*] in Jerusalem, and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city' (Ac 24:11–12). Of course, as in English, we have no problem using one word to express a range of meanings.[38] It may well be

[36] Carson, *John*, 223. Kostenberger agrees that this is an eschatological marker, yet suggests that 'the reference seems more in line with a variety of general predictions pertaining to the end times inaugurated or realised by Jesus' coming.' Köstenberger, 155.
[37] Carson, *John*, 224.
[38] For example, 'Man, so long as he remains free, has no more constant and agonizing anxiety than find as quickly as possible someone to worship.' Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David Magarshack (London: Penguin, 1958), 297; 'I worship scones and danishes. If I never had another meal, I wouldn't care as long as I could eat pastries and jelly doughnuts.' Gene Symons, "Gene Simmons," Nov 1, 2005, updated Nov 28, 2016, accessed June 7, 2021, https://www.rachaelraymag.com/real-life/gene-simmons; 'Too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption.' Jimmy Carter, "Energy and the National Goals – A Crisis of Confidence," July 15, 1979, accessed June 7, 2021, https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jimmycartercrisisofconfidence.htm.

that because of Luke's historical interest in the spread of the gospel and growth of the early church he naturally used *proskyneō* in a descriptive rather than theological sense. And if so, there is no real problem in Luke recounting the ways in which early Christians continued to engage with elements of Jewish religious ritual, even if they were aware of Jesus's abrogation of such worship (in John 4). Equally, Paul's motivation to worship in Acts 24 may have been a deliberate case of 'being all things to all men' in order to establish his devout Jewish credentials to the censorious Ananias. The context does not make either option clear.

There is one occasion in Acts, however, where Luke moves beyond the descriptive and describes spiritual worship within a broader biblical-theological structure. In Stephen's speech to the council in Acts 7, he speaks to the accusation of teaching against the Mosaic law and the temple. In short, he argues that just as Moses (as a type of Christ) was rejected, so have the Jews rejected Jesus the antitype. Directly linked to this rejection is the issue of worship.

> But God turned away and gave them over to worship [*latruein*] the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:
>
> 'Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices,
> during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?
> You took up the tent of Moloch
> and the star of your god Rephan,
> the images that you made to worship [*proskynein*];
> and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon' (Luke 7:42–43).[39]

Again we see 'heart' worship in collocation with ritual service, although in this case opposed to one another. That is, Israel has shown service to Yahweh in their acts of ritual sacrifice, while at the same time offering false worship to idols. Luke sees, therefore, a direct correlation between the rejection of God's servant, either as Moses or Christ, and false worship. The speech finishes with Stephen's quotation of Isaiah 66:1 which states that God does not dwell in houses made of stone but that heaven is his throne. While at first this statement might seem contradictory to the Johanine claim of Christ's identification with the temple, Luke in fact employs a similar eschatological movement towards a change in place of worship, where engagement with God occurs within the heavenly realms. It is not insignificant that in the following verses (before Stephen is killed) that he 'gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the

[39] It is unclear what prophetic text Luke is referencing in verse 43.

right hand of God' (Acts 7:55). Following the pattern of Moses' and Christ's rejection, Stephen himself views and enters God's presence in heaven.

In the Pauline epistles, *proskyneō* is used but once, in the description of the unbeliever entering the Corinthian assembly where the 'clear' words of prophecy are being spoken. 'He is convicted[40] by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship [*proskynēsei*] God and declare that God is really among you' (1 Cor 14:24–25). It might again be the case that Paul is using worship in a purely descriptive sense. The singular use of the word and the apparent context of a conversion experience might, however, suggest that there is a greater significance on this occasion than simply describing the unbeliever's physical action of prostration. In coming to faith, the use of worship in this context may in fact sit in line theologically with the soteriological sense of *proskyneō* anticipated in John 4, but now acted out in real time. As Fee suggests,

> The final result of such exposure before God is conversion, which is what Paul thoroughly intends. The language is thoroughly steeped in the OT… [as] biblical language for obeisance and worship.' [41]

Of course, as a single proof text, it is difficult to build a strong case either way.

5. Spiritual worship in Revelation

Worship is a key theme in the narrative of Revelation—with its descriptions of the obeisance and praise of the saints in the heavenly throne room set in contrast to the worship of the Beast and its servants. Within the hymns in particular, scholars tend to note one or more of three emphases: theo-political themes (involving Christ's opposition to the kingdom of Satan/Rome), soteriology, and a model for the worship of the church.

Schedtler, for instance, see echoes of the OT in Christ establishing a priestly kingdom and a new theo-political order.

> The notion that the saints constitute a "kingdom" and "priests" conjures God's revelation to Moses in the desert that the children of Israel will receive the privilege of becoming a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6). In the construction here, however, which mirrors the

[40] Fee notes that 'lying behind the word "convicted" is the OT view that one is exposed before the living God through the prophetic word; inherent in such "exposure" is the call to repentance, the summons to have one's exposed sins forgiven by a merciful God.' Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987/2014), 686.
[41] Fee, 687.

> claim in Rev 1:5, the elect appear to receive two distinct privileges, designated both a "kingdom" and "priests to God."[42]

This worship will take place not in the current order of things, but after all things have been made new. At the same time, the hymns extolling the sovereignty of God and the Lamb signal a rejection of the sovereignty of the Roman emperor.

> By affirming that God is the true heavenly sovereign on account of the fact that God created the world and all that is in it, and that the power of God has been transferred to the exalted Jesus, thereby establishing him as a co-ruler with God on the heavenly throne, the hymn effectively challenges any claim of the sovereignty of the emperor. The very fact that this hymn is sung by a chorus that includes every imaginable creature, intensifies the claim. Creation itself testifies to the claims of the sovereignty of God and the Lamb, thereby trumping the claims of any others who might argue otherwise.[43]

Grabiner similarly see the hymns as emphasising a theo-political theme, but on a greater cosmic scale, viewed from creation to exodus, and from the cross to the defeat of Satan.

> That 'every created thing'… in heaven, on and under the earth, and on the sea joins in the hymn reflects the idea of creation mentioned in the elders' hymn…. [which] focuses the attention of the reader on the fact that God is the Creator of all. Now the entire creation participates in the adoration. The hymnic cycle moves from the ultimate past, identified by the creation language, to the future and God's 'ultimate victory'. The hymn posits a time when rebellion and injustice will no longer exist and the war begun in heaven will the finished, or at the least, there will be a universal recognition of God and Christ's just authority.[44]

Again, he notes the reference to the Exodus account of the redemptive deliverance of God's people through the slain Passover Lamb in order to form the people of God into a kingdom of priests.[45] The central issue of this part of Revelation, he insists, focuses the reader on the key theme of the whole book: Who is worthy to receive worship? The choice is ultimately between the worship of God and the Lamb, or Satan and his intermediaries.[46]

Others take a more immanent approach to the hymns, picking up soteriological themes with ongoing application to the worship of the church. Fanning, for example, notes the significance of the living creatures and elders falling down before the throne.

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[42] Justin Jeffcoat Schedtler, *A Heavenly Chorus: The Dramatic Function of Revelation's Hymns* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 48.
[43] Schedtler, 52.
[44] Steven Charles Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns: Commentary on the Cosmic Conflict* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016), 105.
[45] Grabiner, 109.
[46] Grabiner, 110.

> When John tries on two occasions to honor an angelic messenger in the way… the angel rebukes him and insists, 'Worship God alone!' But Jesus Christ receives such honor here, as well as in 1:17 (John falling before the exalted Christ) and 5:14 (worship to God and the Lamb).'[47]

When God is proclaimed 'worthy' of worship, it is because he is the creator and sustainer of all things. It reflects his inherent being as God Almighty, and so both his nature and his concordant actions are seen together.[48] When the status of 'worthy' is then acknowledged for the Lamb, such worthiness is seen in his unparalleled accomplishment of world-wide redemption. 'No self-sacrifice at the purely human level can redeem a world in sin; no merely human agent can accomplish such a feat.'[49] Thus, a paradox results.

> John's vision gives us a remarkable mixture of majesty and meekness, celebration and suffering, worship and woe, divine glory and abject humiliation. Just when we think heaven's Christology is all as we expected, John upsets our categories.[50]

The response to this picture of judgment and redemption, Fanning argues, is that heartfelt worship should be evoked from every part of creation.[51]

Ian Paul similarly picks up on this call for the church to worship:

> All of creation is caught up, not in obeisance to the emperor, but in the worship of the God and Father of Jesus, and of the lamb, and any who are not taken up with it are, in fact, in the minority. It is an extraordinary cultural and spiritual counter-claim to the majority perception of reality. And in its emotive extravagance, this vision of worship is not offered as a rational fact but as a compelling call for all readers to join in themselves.[52]

Likewise, Gordon Fee contends that these passages are aimed especially at the readers in the seven churches, 'with the reception and reading of this letter, to join now in the worship that here is seen as belonging eternally to their own future existence "in heaven."'[53] It would completely miss John's points, he argues, if the readers were not moved to do the same and burst forth with their own "Amen!"[54]

Making an even more direct link between the worship of heaven and the worship of the church, Richard Phillips notes the necessary connection between soteriology and worship in Revelation.

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[47] Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 221.
[48] Fanning, 225.
[49] Fanning, 225.
[50] Fanning, 232.
[51] Fanning, 233.
[52] Ian Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 2018), 138.
[53] Gordon D. Fee. *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 89
[54] Fee, 89

It is significant, he insists, that the adoration of the church in heaven centres on the redemptive sacrifice of Christ's cross.[55] 'If the death of Christ to ransom us from sin is at the center of heaven's worship, it must be at the center of the church's witness on earth.[56] He goes on to argue that the elders' song is teaching a salvation theology of restoration, and that if the church neglects to proclaim the redemption of the cross then its worship is deviating from that in heaven.[57]

> What a picture this presents of the church's worship! As the twenty-four elders prostrated themselves before Christ, we, too, must worship with "reverence and awe" (Heb. 12:28).[58]

Certainly there is almost universal thinking that the worship observed in Revelation should be reflected in some way within corporate worship of the church. This is less so with those at the theo-political end of the spectrum, where wider eschatological themes are evidenced. Rather, those who take a more immanent and soteriological perspective are far more likely to advocate that the worship of heaven should be a template for the church's own worship. I would suggest that a soteriological emphasis is indeed the right way to approach Revelation's hymns. Whether they act as a template for the corporate worship of the church is less certain.

Again, *proskyneō* is used in the classic sense of describing the physical demonstration of honour, either to God or to his enemies. One the one hand, those in rebellion to God 'worshiped [*prosekynēsan*] the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"" (Rv 13:4). On the other, the apostle

> saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshipped [*prosekynēsan*] the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Rv 20:4).

While subtle, there is nonetheless a distinction in the nature of worshipping God and worshipping his enemies. The worship of the beast is an *active* decision of humanity. Those who resist worshiping the beast, however, are *passively* granted the position of reigning with Christ. In other words, the Christian's identity as a worshipper of God is imputed, not achieved. Further evidence for such imputation is found in Revelation 5, where 'the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, [and] the

[55] Phillips, Richard D., *Revelation* (Phillipsburg NJ: P & R Publishing, 2017), 198.
[56] Phillips, 199.
[57] Philips, 199, 201.
[58] Phillips, 202.

twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship [*proskynēsousin*] him who lives forever and ever' (Rv 4:9–10. See also 5:14). Rather than being a description of 'corporate worship,' the worship of the elders is somewhat involuntary, occuring on a continuous cycle. We might suppose, therefore, that the purpose of Revelation 4–5 is not to describe the actual heavenly 'liturgy,' nor to be a template for earthly corporate worship. If we accept, rather, that the author is using apocalyptic imagery to describe heaven in a way that is pertinent to the context of the reader,[59] then the purpose here is to encourage the confidence and perseverance that their union with Christ secures. The description of perpetual worship in Revelation emphasizes again its soteriological rather than liturgical nature. In other words, in Christ, the believer is imputed a permanent state of acceptable engagement with God; achieved by the active work of Christ and passively received by the believer in faith.

6. Spiritual worship in Hebrews – Christ the one true worshipper

If my reading of John 4 is correct—in that genuine engagement with God (once achieved through the temple and its rituals) is now achieved fully in Christ, then the clearest articulation of this idea in the NT is found in the book of Hebrews. While not using *proskyneō* language, the writer rather uses the imagery of tabernacle, priest and sacrifice to portray Christ as the 'perfect' worshipper; and in fact, more readily uses *latreuō*. I will return to examine the Pauline use of *latreuō* shortly, although I should note here that while this word is regularly translated as 'worship,' semantically it more accurately reflects acts of religious or ritual service, consistent with those found in the OT.[60] But where in the Pauline epistles, such service is required of the believer in response to salvation, in Hebrews this service is first performed by Christ; not to commend its continued practice, but viewed rather in an eschatologically perfected sense. In fact, the author makes a clear distinction between the ritual service of Israel and that of Christ. 'Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship [*latreias*] and an earthly[61] place of holiness' (Heb 9:1).[62] These are but types of Christ's new ritual service. The tension created by the way into the most

[59] Likely written to encourage perseverance, if not in a context of persecution, then worldly influence. See Paul W. Barnett, *Apocalypse Now and Then: Reading Revelation Today* (Sydney: Aquila Press, 2004).

[60] *TDNT*, 503–504.

[61] 'The worldliness or even earthlings of the temple and its ritual is part of its weakness and limitation, and it stands in contrast with the heavenly and spiritual quality of Christ's sacrifice.' Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia, PN: Fortress, 1989), 232.

[62] Lane notes that the repetition of 'the catchword "*prote*"(denoting the "the first covenant") as the point of transition for explicating one aspect of the Sinaitic covenant, namely, its cultic regulations.' William L. Lane. *Hebrews 9–13* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), 217. Lane (and others, e.g., Bruce, 198) draw attention to the fact that the writer is referring to the tabernacle of the Israelites in the wilderness, rather than the temple, because of its association with the establishment of the old covenant at Sinai. Lane, 218.

holy place being barred (in the present age) is subsequently resolved through a typological process in which the Holy Spirit is given an active role in 9:8. This appeal to the Holy Spirit claims 'a special insight which was not previously available to readers of the OT but which has clarified the meaning and purpose of the cultic provisions for Israel in the light of the fulfilment in Christ.'[63] Under the old covenant there was no decisive revelation. What the Spirit reveals, however, is a *lack* of access to the true presence of God.[64]

> According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience[65] of the worshiper [*ton latreuōnta*], but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation (Heb 9:9–10).[66]

The use of the verb 'perfect' [*teleioun*] is significant in this context, as it makes the perfecting of believers (in respect to their relationship with God) the primary focus of this argument,[67] and is further emphasized by the parallel idea in 9:14, whereby the conscience must be cleansed in order that one may serve God effectively.[68] Lane summarises:

> The entire cultic ministry of the tabernacle was only a temporary provision in the outworking of God's redemptive purpose for his people, having validity 'until the time of correction.' With the inception of the new age, the cultic regulations of the old covenant are no longer in force, and the earthly tabernacle with its cultic provisions has lost its significance and status.[69]

As such, Hebrews 9 seeks to answer the question posed in John 4: how would Jesus, in the coming hour, enable worship in spirit and truth without the material elements of temple, sacrifice and priests? Hebrews answers:

> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent[70] (not made with hands,[71] that is, not of this

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[63] Lane, 223. Similarly, 'In the figurative language of the writer, the front compartment of the tabernacle was symbolic of the present age, which through the intrusion of the "time of correction" (v 10), has been superseded.' Lane, 224.
[64] Harold W. Attridge, T*he Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia, PN: Fortress Press, 1989), 240.
[65] 'For Hebrews the perfection of conscience, which involves primarily its "cleansing" from the burden of guilt, is the way in which Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant written on the heart is fulfilled.' Attridge, 242.
[66] 'The one who is not perfected by the old sacrifices is not simply the priest, but the worshiper (*ton latreuōnta*), anyone who "approaches" God.' Attridge, 242.
[67] David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection. An Examination of The Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 175.
[68] Lane, 224.
[69] Lane, 225.
[70] Concerning the significance of the image of the tabernacle and various allegorical interpretations, see Attridge, 246. He concludes that this verse develops the imagery of previous verses and that the tent is the heavenly or spiritual archetype of the earthly tabernacle.
[71] Bruce notes that 'the idea of a sanctuary not made with hands goes back to the earliest forms of Christian teaching, Jesus himself speaking of the time when the Jerusalem temple would be replaced by a temple "made without hands."

> creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood,[72] thus securing an eternal redemption (Heb 9:11–12).

In other words, Jesus' death fulfilled what John 4 anticipated, a perfect redemption achieved in his sacrificial death, and at the same time qualifying him to act as an intercessor for those he saved. O'Brien notes that the three uses of the title *Christ* in 11–28 'reflect a three-step progression in relation to our Lord's appearance: (1) *in the past* he appeared to obtain eternal redemption (11–12); (2) he *now* appears in God's presence to intercede for us (v. 24); and (3) *in the future* he will appear to bring salvation (28).'[73] This comprehensive act of worship, is thus synonymous with the salvation of the believer, rooted in the one-time only historical events of the cross and resurrection, but made continually effective to the believer in Christ's role as high priest.

The writer goes on, however, to show that the consequence of Christ's worship is to enable believers to become true worshippers.

> How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience[74] from dead works to serve[75] [*latreuein*] the living God (Heb 9:14).

Three important ideas flow out of this verse: Firstly, Christ's perfect sacrifice brings about redemption, replacing the need for believers to fulfil the works of the Mosaic law. This work, therefore, is fundamentally salvific. Secondly, the agency of the Holy Spirit is essential. Whether referencing Isaiah's servant,[76] or because Jesus' role as high priest requires a spiritual anointing,[77]

(Mark 14:58; cf. John 2:19–22). When Stephen maintained that "the Most High God does not dwell in houses made with hands," he confirmed this by quoting Isa. 66.' F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 212.

[72] Attridge rightly rejects the notion that Christ actually brought his blood into heaven. 'That "blood" is being used in a metaphorical way is clear, but the precise metaphorical significance is not immediately apparent and debates about the relationship between heavenly and earthly, between the exaltation and the cross, in Hebrews often play off one or another blood metaphor.' Attridge, 248.

[73] P. T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,1999), 317.

[74] Lane notes that "'conscience" is the human organ of the religious life embracing the whole person in relationship to God. It is the point at which a person confronts God's holiness. The ability of the defiled conscience to disqualify someone from serving God has been superseded by the power of the blood of Christ to cleanse the conscience from defilement. The purpose of the purgation is that the community may be renewed in the worship of God.' Lane, 240–241.

[75] 'The construction *eis to latreuein* (so that we may worship/serve the living God') indicates purpose, and stands in contrast to the inability of the old order, which could not perfect the conscience of the worshipper (*ton latreuonta*).' O'Brien, 326.

[76] 'A reference to the Spirit is appropriate in a section under the influence of Isaiah, where the Servant of the Lord is qualified for his task by the Spirit of God.' Lane, 240; see also Bruce, 215–16, 233.

[77] 'It seems better, then, to conclude that the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus as high priest [rather than king] for every aspect of his ministry, including his sacrificial death.' O'Brien, 324.

we again note the parallel with John 3 and 4 where the Spirit is the means of making salvation effective to the recipient. Thirdly, the result of Spirit empowered salvation in Christ is that it enables true service of God. It is no longer Christ who singularly offers his service, but 'his people, by virtue of the same blood, also enter it as perfected worshippers (10:19).'[78] Participation in Christ's act of service is the means by which the believer can now serve, even if the nature of this service is yet to be articulated.

Hebrews 9, however, may still leave us with questions. Was Christ's mediatorial work 'once for all' or does it have ongoing consequences? Was the atonement a singular 'worship' moment or does it have ongoing efficacy—enabling an ongoing state of spiritual worship? In chapter 10:14 the writer states, that 'by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.' Commentators tend to take one of two positions on the meaning of this verse. For some, it is argued that while Christ's sacrifice was a once for all action that perfects the believer, there are nonetheless ongoing implications for the present day sanctification of believers. Because Christ has continuous and uninterrupted access to the Father, then because of his one sacrifice, Christians share the same permanent access to the Father.[79] Sanctification has taken place, although the appropriation of the enduring effects of Christs' act continue in the present. [80] As such, Attridge argues that

> The description of the recipients of the perfection as 'those who are being sanctified'… reinforces the connection between perfection and sanctity that was established in the previous pericope. Yet the present tense used here nuances the relationship suggesting that the appropriation of the enduring effects of Christ's acts is an ongoing present reality… The creative tension between what Christ is understood to have done and what remains for his followers to do begins to emerge with particular clarity.[81]

A greater consensus, however, disagrees, emphasizing that Christ's work of sacrifice is done. 'Its absolute perfection means that it is a *single sacrifice for sins* and that its effectiveness is for all time, and thus that it can never be added to or repeated.'[82] O'Brien argues that 'the perfect form of the verb focuses on the prominence of Christ's action, while the temporal expression "for all time" further emphasizes the permanent effect for believers.'[83]

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[78] Bruce, 213.
[79] Ellingsworth, 511.
[80] Ellingsworth, 511.
[81] Attridge, 280-281.
[82] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), 401.
[83] O'Brien, 357.

> The notion of 'being sanctified, made holy' in Hebrews has to do with a definitive consecration to God through the effective cleansing from sin that qualifies them for fellowship with God. It is better, therefore, to regard the participle as 'timeless,' and thus a general designation of believers as 'sanctified.'[84]

Bruce agrees, but understands these verses to describe the ongoing life of worship that those who are perfected are called to. If in verse 10 'the emphasis lay on the unrepeatable nature of the death of Christ as the sacrifice by which his people have been set apart for the worship and service of God; here their character as the people thus set apart is simply indicated in timeless terms.'[85] Lane similarly approaches this issue with a worship lens, locating 'the decisive purging of believers in the past with respect to its accomplishment and in the present with respect to its enjoyment.'[86] His emphasis, however, is on Jesus' role as the perfector of worship.

> The sacrificial phase of Christ's ministry has been completed (10:11-14). Jesus' saving action was performed in history, but it possesses a validity that transcends history. The fact that he is firmly enthroned in the presence of God provides the assurance that he is able to exercise the ministry of the new covenant on behalf of all those who approach God through him.[87]

I would agree that this view most appropriately encapsulates the eschatological theme of these chapters, and therefore the soteriological worship of Jesus, which is why the writer goes on to state:

> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,[88] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water[89] (Heb 10:19–22).

Here, the writer emphasizes the eschatological sense of the now and not yet in Christ's sacrifice.[90] On the one hand, Jesus' death was complete and perfect in itself. On the other, it enables a

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[84] O'Brien, 357.
[85] Bruce, 247.
[86] Lane, 267.
[87] Lane, 267.
[88] Scholars note that it is difficult to determine what 'his flesh' modifies. Most understand it as explanatory of the 'the curtain,' and as such is incidental to my argument. 'The "veil," an element derived from the symbolism of the heavenly tabernacle, suggests the point through which one gains access to the divine presence, the realm of truth and "perfection."' Attridge, 287.
[89] The view of the majority of scholars is that this is an allusion to Christian baptism, e.g., Bruce, Dunn, Peterson, Attridge, Ellingworth, Leithart. A minority view regards the two clauses as parallel, making a connection between Christ's work as the fulfilment of Ezekiel 36:25–26, e.g., Calvin, O'Brien. Schreiner (319) appeals to the latter, though does not exclude the former.
[90] 'The freedom of access is a present reality (*exontes*); yet the readers still need to be exhorted (v. 35) to hold on to the privileges which Christ has obtained for them (cf. the tension between the present and future in 7:25).' Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 517.

continuous approach to the holy presence of God marked by an increasingly profound experience of the mystery of fellowship with him.[91] The writer's argument presupposes that there can be no true worship of God apart from the sufficient sacrifice of Christ which has replaced all other sacrifices.[92] The consequences of this access for the service of the believer we see played out in chapter 13. However, before addressing the service of the individual, the writer speaks of the church—the context within which their service will find expression.

> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:22–24).

Again, we note the eschatological lens by which the church is viewed and understood,[93] consistent with the previous images of the heavenly tabernacle where Christ's worship is performed. Similarly, the language of 'approaching God' reinforces the notion of acceptable worship as presupposing the believer's salvation.[94] Yet now, the picture is decidedly corporate. 'The new covenant encounter with God signifies access to God in the presence of those who gather for the festive acclamation of his "worthship"… [and] expressed in terms of the vision of vv 22–24, the Christian's experience with God now is the pledge of his ultimate transfer to the actual presence of God in the heavenly city.'[95] So just as Revelation paints an eschatological picture of worship occurring within the family of the church, so too does Hebrews. Christ's singular work of sacrifice was not so much to save individuals, but to gather a church into God's presence, worshipping God perfectly in union with him, and at the same time equipping them to serve one another and the world within their ordinary lives. This notion, I will return to shortly. But first, I will consider how Paul views these same ideas.

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[91] The picture of Christ as ongoing intercessory priest is first introduced in Chapter 7. 'But he [Christ] holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Heb 7:24–25).'

[92] Lane, 310.

[93] O'Brien notes that the gathering is both heavenly and eschatological. 'Christians in their conversion have already, in a sense, come to God and reached Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. At the same time, the city to come is still the goal of their pilgrimage (13:14; 4:1–11). Hebrews reflects the "already/not yet" tension found elsewhere in the New Testament. Here in 12:22–24 the "already" pole of that tension is accented.' O'Brien, 491.

[94] "'You have come" may denote their conversion to Christianity; the Greek verb is that from which "proselyte" is derived, and while it is such a common verb that normally no such implication could be read into it, the particular form uses in this particular context carries with it overtones of conversion… So, by virtue of accepting the gospel, the readers of this epistle had come to that spiritual realm, some of whose realities are detailed in the following clauses.' Bruce, 355.

[95] Lane, 490.

7. Spiritual worship in Paul – Union with Christ

If John and Hebrews are so significant for redefining worship in Christological and soteriological terms, why does the theological notion of worshipping in spirit and truth fail to gain any obvious traction in the Pauline epistles? We might immediately think of Romans 12:1 and its picture of offering one's body as a living sacrifice as an act of 'spiritual worship.' This translation, however, does not make the best contextual and semantic sense of this text, and cannot be equated with the spiritual worship of John 4 and its soteriological connotations. This example notwithstanding, does Paul speak of spiritual worship?

Just as Hebrews described the spiritual worship of Christ and its imputation to the believer without specifically requiring *proskyneō* language, I would argue that something similar occurs within the Pauline epistles, where there is nonetheless an observable contribution to the biblical theology of worship without necessarily relying on technical language of worship.[96] While Paul does not speak specifically of spiritual worship, his language of *union with Christ* [UWC] incorporates a number of the key themes I have noted concerning spiritual worship in John's Gospel and Hebrews, where the worship of the believer occurs *in Christ*, by the Spirit, and within the eschatological realm of the now and not yet. The book of Ephesians begins in just such a way: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* with every *spiritual blessing*[97] in the *heavenly places*'(Eph 1:3).[98]

It is beyond the scope of this study to adequately review the breadth of scholarship on this topic, and I should note that any doctrine of UWC will necessarily be broader in scope than the notion of spiritual worship I am seeking to identify in Paul. Yet it can be observed, even with Calvin, that there is a congruity between these two ideas. In preaching on Ephesians 4:22 he states,

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[96] As I have stated, the single example of *proskyneō* in Paul's letters is found in 1 Corinthians 14:24–25. Although the context is the gathered church, the worship is performed by the *unbeliever*, who on hearing the 'clear' proclamation of the word falls down in repentance. As such, the worship appears to be soteriological in essence, and consistent with John 4.

[97] 'The adjective [spiritual] does not primarily point to a contrast with what is material (e.g., Deut. 28:1–14), secular or worldly. Nor do Paul's words suggest simply the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:3–11. The nature of these gracious gifts is made plain in the following words of the eulogy (vv. 4–14), and include election to holiness, adoption as God's sons and daughters, redemptions and forgiveness, a knowledge of God's gracious plan to sum up all things in Christ, the gift of the Spirit, and the hope of glory.' P. T. O'Brien, 95.

[98] '*In the heavenly realms* is not describing some celestial topography, for the sense conveyed by the local imagery is metaphorical rather than literal. *In the heavenly realms* is bound up with the divine saving events and is to be understood within a Pauline eschatological perspective… The blessing of salvation which believers have received from God links them with the *heavenly realms*.' O'Brien, 97.

> We should be satisfied with the benefits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that when we are grafted into his body and made one with him by belief of the gospel, then we may assure ourselves that he is the fountain which never dries up, nor can ever become exhausted, and that in him we have all variety of good things, and all perfection.[99]

Calvin's 'oft-repeated emphasis on Christ as the inexhaustible fountain of all good things,[100] from whom—by means of our union with him—we draw our life, our righteousness, and our sanctification'[101] is no doubt making reference to the life giving water of John 4.

7.a Current approaches to *union with Christ* theology in Reformed Scholarship

A number of Reformed scholars who are concerned with the issue of whether Calvin himself should be considered a Calvinist, and as such his UWC theology is regularly at the heart of the debate. Partee argues, for example, that Calvin cannot be a Calvinist because union with Christ is at the heart of his theology, and not theirs.[102] Evans goes on to suggest that the Reformed Orthodox distorted Calvin's UWC model of redemption with the imposition of the foreign category of the *ordo salutis*.[103] Fesko notes, however, that while Calvin might have been 'indifferent regarding the respective order of benefits—justification need not precede sanctification because both were given to the believer in their union with Christ.'[104] This might be, Fahim suggests, because Calvin saw the ultimate aim of our UWC being not the redemption of the sinner, but the glory of God.

> Calvin saw that 'unmerited love of God' for the sinners is the first cause for salvation. But as for the final cause, Calvin saw that 'the apostle testifies that it consists both in the proof of divine justice and in the praise of God's goodness.'[105]

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[99] John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. A. Golding (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 355.
[100] Similarly, 'For we know that there are (so to speak) two fountain-heads of mankind, that is to say, Adam and our Lord Jesus Christ. Now with regard to our first birth we all come out of the fountain of Adam and are corrupted with sinfulness, so that there is nothing but perverseness and cursedness in our souls. it is necessary for us then to be renewed in Jesus Christ, and to be made new creatures.' Calvin, *Sermons*, 426.
[101] Lee Gatiss, "The Inexhaustible Fountain of All Good Things: Union with Christ in Calvin on Ephesians." *Themelios* 34, no. 2 (2009): 194.
[102] Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville, KT: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 27.
[103] William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 43–83.
[104] J. V. Fesko, "John Owen on Union with Christ and Justification," *Themelios* 37.1 (2012): 8.
[105] Sherif A. Fahim, *Justification, Sanctification and Union with Christ: Fresh Insights from Calvin Westminster and Walter Marshall* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 26.

Against Partee, however, Fesko goes on to argue that later John Owen clearly embraces union with Christ and at the same time gives priority to the doctrine of justification over sanctification, that is, holding to an *ordo salutis*.[106] According to Owen, UWC

> is the cause of all other graces that we are made partakers of; they are all communicated to us by virtue of our union with Christ. Hence is our adoption, our justification, our sanctification, our fruitfulness, our perseverance, our resurrection, our glory.[107]

Thus, Owen's view is not fundamentally different to Calvin's 'fount of all good things.'

Approaches to UWC in contemporary Reformed scholarship have become more nuanced. I noted in Chapter 2 that there are at least two schools of thinking here: the confessional and the biblical-theological. My own analysis of contemporary worship theology in Chapters 4 and 5 noted some correspondence between these approaches to UWC and worship theology, the confessional aligning with the covenantal group and the biblical-theological with the Christological. William B. Evans in fact goes further to argue for three positions which emphasize one of the key elements of union with Christ, the forensic dimension of justification, and the transformatory aspect of sanctification.[108]

Evans notes that the Biblical-Theological Trajectory (exemplified by Vos, Murray, Gaffin, *et. al.*), affirms traditional conceptions of divine sovereignty in salvation, 'as is the double imputation of the sin of the believer to Christ and the righteousness of Christ to the believer, and a firmly forensic conception of justification.'[109] Showing a respect for the confessional tradition, this view seeks to affirm overarching biblical themes; Vos, for example, calling for a biblical-theological method that is sensitive to the organic unfolding of redemptive history as it is revealed in Scripture.[110] Within this view, union with Christ is foundational to all aspects of salvation. John Murray has written:

> Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ.... It is not simply a step in the application of redemption; when viewed, according to the teaching of Scripture, in its broader aspects it underlies every step of the application of redemption. Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.

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[106] Fesko, 9.
[107] John Owen, ed. W. H Goold, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 21:149–50.
[108] William B. Evans, "Déjà Vu All Over Again? The Contemporary Reformed Soteriological Controversy in Historical Perspective," *Westminster Theological Journal* 72 (2010): 138.
[109] Evans, 138.
[110] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 5-18.

> Indeed, the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ and salvation has in view the realization of other phases of union with Christ.[111]

Importantly, the imputation of Christ's righteousness is seen as being consequent to spiritual union with Christ. As such, Ryken states:

> Union with Christ is logically prior to justification by imputation . . . [and] is the matrix in which imputation occurs. It is on the basis of our spiritual and covenantal union with Christ that our sins are imputed to him and his righteousness is imputed to us.[112]

The primary concerns of this trajectory, Evans concludes, is that 'Scripture teaches both forensic and synthetic justification, *and* it indicates that one's eternal destiny hinges in some sense on the ongoing life of faith and obedience.'[113] The priority and singularity of union best integrates these biblical emphases and affirms the unity of salvation in Christ.

Against this view is what Evans labels The Revisionists Wing, exemplified by Norman Shepherd and the Federal Vision movement. With deep concerns about 'cheap grace,' stress is given to the necessity of obedience and the connection of faith and obedience.[114] Viewing with suspicion the isolated conversion experiences of the American Revivalist tradition and the perceived lack of ongoing faith and obedience, there is 'a turn toward the objective in religion, toward the churchly and sacramental.'[115] Critically, this view develops upon the traditional view of justification. For example, soteriological imputation is challenged in that its exponents deny the imputation of the active obedience of Christ to the believer. Peter Leihardt furthermore argues that justification is more than merely forensic, having a transformatory dimension.[116]

The third view is the Repristinationist Wing, who are reacting both against the revisionism described above and the Biblical-Theological Trajectory and which questions to some degree the classic sequential *ordo salutis* and its affirmation of a single spiritual union with Christ. The over-riding motive of its exponents (namely faculty members of Westminster Seminary in California– Michael Horton, Scott Clark and David VanDrunen), is the safeguarding of the Reformation doctrine of justification by grace through faith. This occurs through a vigorous defence of the

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111 John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 161.
112 Philip G. Ryken, "Justification and Union with Christ" (paper presented at the meeting of The Gospel Coalition at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, May 23, 2007), 7.
113 Evans, 141.
114 Evans, 141.
115 Evans, 142.
116 Peter Leithart, "Justification as Verdict and Deliverance: A Biblical Perspective," *Pro Ecclesia* 16 (2007): 56-57.

Law/Gospel hermeneutic. If salvation is to be truly gracious, then law and gospel must be distinguished.

> In contrast to the Revisionists, who view the Law/Gospel distinction as genetically Lutheran rather than Reformed, these figures stress the essential continuity of Lutherans and Reformed on this matter, although the attitude toward law is more positive than one finds among some Lutherans.[117]

Justification is in this sense given clear priority in the application of redemption. As Scott Clark states, 'according to Reformed theology, definitive justification produces sanctification.'[118] As such, Law and Gospel, and works and grace must be kept separate and distinct.

While my own broad approach will most closely align with Evans' Biblical-Theological Trajectory noted above, a potentially more helpful method in considering UWC and worship is what might be described as an exegetical-theological approach, seen in the work of Mark Garcia and Constantine Campbell, which while not addressing worship in particular, seeks to avoid confessional bias and allows biblical-theological and systematic systems to listen harmoniously to one another.

Garcia's work on Calvin suggests that the latter saw union with Christ as granting the believer a twofold grace, simultaneously and inseparably: justification and sanctification. This is in contrast with the way many have traditionally interpreted Calvin—who see him as making justification logically prior to union with Christ, as its forensic basis.[119]

> Theologically, [the Pauline *ordo salutis*] reflects the union believers have with Christ by the Spirit through faith. Specifically, the Spirit of union replicates in the experience of the faithful what was true of Christ in his own earthly experience. This experience consists primarily of a transition from humiliation to exaltation, suffering to glory, or obedience/good works to eternal life.[120]

As such, Calvin, he claims, viewed this doctrine as describing more than just spiritual union, looking further to its physical elements in order to explain a union of the closest intimacy.[121]

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117 Evans, 145-146.
118 R. Scott Clark, "The Benefits of Christ: Double Justification in Protestant Theology before the Westminster Assembly," in *The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne R Spear* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007), 133.
119 Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 255.
120 Garcia, 255.
121 Garcia, 257.

> The solution, however, is not to move in the direction of an essentialist ontological model which is not supported by Calvin's texts, but to read Calvin's language in the light of his eucharistic and sacramental context. As in his teaching on the Supper, communion with Christ is much more than mental but less than baldly physical or essential. It is real and true not by a miracle of ontological oneness but by the blessing of the Spirit's work who unites Christ and his own. Calvin's striking language for the intimacy of union with Christ must be located, first, in the wider context of his effort to distance himself from Lutheran and Roman Catholic assumptions about real communion and, second, in his teaching regarding the Spirit as the bond of union—whether this union is considered in its sacramental or its specifically soteriological (justification/sanctification) aspects.[122]

Following the remarks I made in Chapter 2 that Calvin deliberately saw the sacraments as mark (or identifier) of the Church rather than of its essence, I would question the weight Garcia gives to this aspect of Calvin's doctrine of UWC. Having said that, he is right to suggest that 'the function of union with Christ within Calvin's *unio Christi-duplex gratia* soteriology points to an influence that is more than merely structural or formal.'[123] At the very least union with Christ is *constitutive* of the application of redemption.

Against the Christocentric (and more arguably more affectionate) approach taken by Calvin, Campbell displays an anthropocentric bias in suggesting that this doctrine be considered under four umbrella terms of *union*, *participation*, *identification* and *incorporation* to capture what it means to be united to Christ.'[124] Language around *participation* in Christ, in particular, is given significant emphasis in contemporary thinking on this subject.[125] J. B. Torrance, however, views UWC theology as particularly critical to informing worship theology. Against what he describes as a *unitarian* approach to worship, centring around that which 'I do,' his trinitarian approach sees the believer participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father.

> [Worship] means participating in union with Christ, in what he has done for us once and for all, in his self-offering to the Father, in his life and death on the cross. It also means participating in what he is continuing to do for us in the presence of the Father and in his mission from the Father to the world. There is only one true Priest through whom and with whom we draw near to God our Father. There is only one Mediator between God and humanity. There is only one offering which is truly acceptable to God, and it is not ours.[126]

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[122] Garcia, 258.
[123] Garcia, 267.
[124] Constantine Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 29.
[125] For example, Dunn suggests that participation in Christ is a more natural way to understand Pauline soteriology than the justification metaphor. James D. G Dunn, *The theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), Ch 5. Against this view, Hoekema summarises union with Christ as having its roots in divine election, its basis in the redemptive work of Christ, and an actual union being established with God's people in time. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).
[126] James Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 20–21.

However, even if we accept Campbell's four categories of *union*, *participation*, *identification* and *incorporation,* we nonetheless observe a resonance between the ideas of spiritual worship and service in the way I have already outlined; and as such, an exploration of the relationship between worship and UWC is worth some further consideration. For the sake of brevity and clarity I will do so using the NT's own dual statements of this theme: *we are in Christ* and *he is in us*.

7.b We are in Christ

In his sermon on Ephesians 2:5–6 Calvin makes the claim: God 'has joined himself to us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him we are made partakers both of him and all his benefits.'[127] If the *means* of worship is a key concern in John 4, then in Ephesians Paul leaves no doubt to the means of access to God: in Christ.

> Even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ[128]—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:5–6).[129]

For Paul, spiritual rebirth is not achieved through human effort but by God's grace through salvation in Christ and effected by the Holy Spirit. 'It is not intended that we should be so bold as to think to approach Jesus Christ,' Calvin argues, 'as though we were linked to him of ourselves and of our own nature, but that it is done in the power of his Holy spirit, and not in the substance of his body.'[130] For those in Christ, therefore, access to God is granted, with the ultimate blessing that they might stand faultless before him.

If the *place* of worship was a key concern in John 4, Paul's language of UWC answers that same question:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* with *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and blameless before him* (Eph 1:3–4).

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127 Calvin. *Sermons*, 289

128 'This third phrase [in Christ] which modifies the verb *blessed* signifies that God's gracious gifts come not only through the agency of Christ but also because the recipients are incorporated in him who is himself in the heavenly realm.' O'Brien, 97.

129 'Elsewhere in Paul the language of dying and rising with Christ (e.g., Rom. 6:3–4; Col. 2:11–12, 20; 3:1, 3) focuses particularly on being joined with Christ in the events of redemptive history… The same point is made in Ephesians 2:6 with its focus on God's having raised believers in Christ Jesus. The additional element in Ephesians, which goes beyond anything mentioned elsewhere in Paul, is that God has seated them with Christ in the heavenly realms. This fresh point, however, is simply making explicit what was implied in Colossians 3:1–3.' O'Brien, 171.

130 Calvin. *Sermons,* 601

In line with Hebrews, the church is located in the eschatological realm where it receives God's heavenly blessings. Believers are seated with Christ as a result of the salvation he has achieved, a fact emphasized by a string of passive verbs highlighting the lack of human contribution.

If the *continuity* of worship (across old and new covenants) is a concern in John 4, then in Paul's mind, the uncovered mystery of the church (Eph 1:8–9) is understood as entirely consistent with the biblical-theological narrative ark that begins with the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12.

> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for *you are all one in Christ Jesus*. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Ga 3:28–29).

If the *role of the Spirit* is vital to the spiritual worship of John 4, then Paul sees the ritual worship of the believer (even in the metaphoric sense) as a spiritual mark of those found in Christ.

> For we are the circumcision, *who worship* [*latreuontes*] *by the Spirit of God* and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also… For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order *that I may gain Christ and be found in him*, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Phil 3:3–9).

It is critical to Paul's argument that Christians 'serve by the Spirit' rather than find their identity in works of the law, which can never lead to a state of righteousness. Such righteousness is only attainable by faith.

Paul's *in Christ* language is clearly and fundamentally soteriological. So unsurprisingly, the qualities and consequences of being in Christ are shared with those qualities we have observed about spiritual worship—that it is attained by the work of Christ, that the place of blessing is in the heavenly realms, that the time of worship belongs to the eschatological gathering of the church, and that spiritual worship is effected in the believer by the Holy Spirit.

7.c Christ is in us

The other aspect of UWC is that 'he is in us.' While it is not so simple (or even necessary) to separate these two sides of the UWC coin, I would suggest that 'Christ in us' statements are concerned less with the soteriological aspects of 'spiritual worship' and more with the *benefits* of Christ's indwelling to the believer.

> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but *Christ who lives in me*. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20).

The focus here is not the human approach to God or the perfection and purity obtained by Christ. Rather it is Christ's indwelling as the means of service in ordinary life, and particularly within the life of the Christian community. In Colossians 3, for example, Paul argues that being *raised in Christ* results in a new practical morality, with the *indwelling word of Christ* manifesting itself in thankfulness, in gospel proclamation, and in the singing of spiritual psalms, hymns and songs; but that ultimately every action of life be performed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (3:17). It is Christ's indwelling that enables the believer's all-of-life service.

7.d Both concepts – Romans 8

Romans 8 brings together both aspects of spiritual worship and service worship within the umbrella of UWC.[131]

> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are *in Christ Jesus*. For the *law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus* from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering,[132] he condemned sin in the flesh, *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us* (Rom 8:1–4).

Of note is the reference to Christ as a sin offering. While there is some parallel with Hebrews (10:12–14), in this case, the intention seems less about portraying Christ as the perfect sacrifice offered by the perfect worshipper, so much as viewing his sacrifice as fulfilling the legal requirements of the law.

There is perhaps therefore more resonance here with John's Gospel, where the association between Spirit and life is a key theme, and central to the idea of spiritual worship in chapter 4. Dunn notes, in fact, how deeply rooted in Jewish thought this connection is, suggesting that it 'is equally fundamental to the earliest Christian theology, particularly of Paul and John, bringing to expression the basic Christian claim that God has now (eschatological now) begun through the Spirit to fulfil his original creative purpose in making man.'[133] In this sense, spiritual worship

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131 See also John 6:56; 15:4; 1 John 4:13.

132 Some commentators prefer a more general, less sacrificial sense. Dunn, suggests that 'such a sacrificial allusion would be wholly natural and unremarkable in a first century context.' James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 422.

133 Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 418.

might be considered, not so much as new worship, but the worship God always intended. Is Paul then simply speaking of the Spirit in a legal sense? Schreiner rightly claims that the statement about the power of the Spirit should not be limited simply to forensic freedom. Rather, 'Paul refers here to the actual liberating work of the Spirit that produces a new quality of life in believers.'[134]

Paul is not seeking to give priority to either the life-giving or life-changing aspects of the Spirit's work. UWC requires both, as does spiritual worship.[135] In emphasizing the physical necessity of sin being dealt with in the flesh, Paul anticipates a transformed spiritual (though experienced in the physical) life in Christ. 'What it means for Christian spirituality is that Christ and Spirit are perceived in experience as one—Christ known only in and through the Spirit, the Spirit known only as (the Spirit of) Christ.'[136] As such, 'if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness' (Rom 8:10).

If spiritual worship can be equated in any sense with Paul's legal and life-giving work of the Spirit, it is equally the Spirit's work to bring about the eschatological anticipation of service worship. If service in the Spirit gives confidence in the troubles and hardships of the Christian life, that confidence is founded once again on the ongoing heavenly worship of Christ.

> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed *is interceding for us*. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Rom 8:34–35).

When the reader finally lands at Romans 12:1, Paul's command to offer the body as a sacrifice can only then be understood in the context of Christ's prior and perfect sacrifice and his ongoing work of meditation.

The theme of UWC within Paul's letters is a multifaceted doctrine which cannot simply be understood as synonymous with the spiritual worship of John 4, nor the service worship we are about to examine further. And yet, key aspects of spiritual worship, (of having a new identity in Christ, effected by the Spirit, stemming from his own sacrificial offering and intercessory role),

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134 Schreiner, 401.
135 Schreiner states that, 'those who are in Christ… are right in God's sight by virtue of the work of Christ on the cross. The judicial work of God in Christ is the basis by which the law can be fulfilled in their lives. By the work and power of the Holy Spirit they are able to keep the law… In Paul's theology genuine obedience to the law, demanded and promised in the OT, is realized.' Schreiner, 408.
136 Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 430.

define what it means for the believer to be *in Christ*. Furthermore, the logic of UWC expects the believer to engage in a new life of service: the physical demonstration of *Christ in us*—the idea which I will now examine.

8. Service worship

8.a *latreuō/latreia* – religious-temple service and the service of the believer

Harold M. Best notes that the 'two words for worship—*proskynein* and *latreuein*—suggest a close relationship between worship in a given place and time and worship as an all-pervasive and ongoing condition.'[137] Yet he goes on to insist that 'we are bound up in intertestamental accord in which bowing down, serving and worshipping are identical.'[138]

I would argue, however, that if *proskyneō* worship ultimately describes the believer's spiritual engagement with God (by means of their union with Christ), then *latreuō/latreia*, particularly within the Pauline epistles, is used to express the Christian's physical and emotional response to that union. While modern translations will equally render *latreuō* as worship, it should be considered as a distinct concept: an activity rooted in religious service, or the offering of sacred service or a gift.[139] While many will still consider this to be worship[140] (in the modern English sense), it nonetheless lacks the attitudinal, relational and soteriological characteristics of *proskyneō*, and suggests an action performed out of duty or as an appropriate response. In Exodus 12:25–28 the Israelites are commanded to keep the 'service' [*latreuō*] of the Passover once they enter the promised land, after which they respond by bowing in worship [*proskyneō*]. As I noted, more formal instances of the collocation of *proskyneō* and *latreuō*, such as 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve,' (Mt 4:9–10) further suggest that these are not synonyms, but complimentary ideas: *proskyneō* referring to the attitude of worship and *latreuō* as the outward physical response. A similar collocation is found in Romans 1:25 in regards to humanity's rejection of God, displayed in their worship [*sebazomai*][141] and service [*latreuō*] of the creature

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137 Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 35.
138 Best, 36.
139 *TDNT*, 503–504.
140 Jenson, for example, argues that 'the notion of service has accrued the sense of "worship"… precisely because of its usage in the contexts of the rituals and ceremonies of Israel. More precisely put, we might say that service has the character of worship, such that we can call it, by extension, "worship." In the right context, under the right conditions, a person's or a community's service can be an act of worship fully pleasing to God.' Michael P. Jensen, *Reformation Anglican Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 37.
141 See following note re *sebō/sebazomai*. In short these words are used for the worship of non-Jews or unbelievers.

rather than the creator; the two verbs mutually interpreting and together summing up all that is involved in the veneration of idols.[142]

This sense of religious service, continuing the practice of OT temple service, is evident in the narrative of the gospels. For example, Anna 'did not depart from the temple, worshiping [*latreuousa*] with fasting and prayer night and day' (Lk 2:37). And in Acts, Paul, before Felix and Ananias, confesses 'that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship [*latreuō*] the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets' (Acts 24:14), seemingly to argue for his orthodox conformity to Jewish ritual practice.

However, within the Epistles we see a transformed use of *latreuō*, from the literal to the spiritual. 'For we are the circumcision, who worship [*latreuontes*] by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh' (Phil 3:3). While Paul affirms ritual service as one of the blessings of the old covenant, it is only because it points to Christ. 'They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship [*latreia*], and the promises' (Rom 9:4).

Likewise, the writer to the Hebrews stresses the insufficiency of religious service, where under the old covenant 'gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper [*latreuonta*]' (Heb 9:9). Acceptable religious service is seen in response to the ongoing work of Christ. 'Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship [*latreuōmen*], with reverence and awe' (Heb 12:28). Dismissing the ritual practices of the old covenant, the writer states that 'we have an altar from which those who serve in the tent have no right to eat' (Heb 13:10).

The text regularly cited to advocate an all-of-life worship position is Romans 12:1. 'I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,[143] holy

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[142] 'The second verb λατρεύω ("serve"), is used by Paul elsewhere to denote true worship (Rom 1:9; Phil 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:3; in the LXX, the verb is applied to the worship of both Yahweh and idols). The first verb ἐσεβάσθησαν (the first aorist passive form has an active meaning [BAGD]), is from σεβάζομαι ("worship"), a rare word (the form σεβομαι is more common in the NT period). Perhaps Paul uses it to add a "pagan" connotation to the first verb.' Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids; MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 113.

[143] 'Verbal and thematic links point to Rom 1:26 whose downward spiral of false and foolish worship (cf. v. 25) and corrupted minds (cf. v. 28) now finds its reversal in the Christians' "reasonable" worship and renewed mind. The second is in Romans 6, whose brief mention of the need for Christians to "present" themselves (vv. 13 and 19) as those "alive from the dead" (v. 13) is here reiterated and expanded.' Moo, 748.

and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [*logikēn*] worship [*latreian*]' (Rom 12:1). I noted earlier how Best theologically conflates the ideas of bowing down, serving and worshipping. This approach is equally evident amongst biblical scholars. Morris, for example, argues that there is a 'rich complexity' in the expression.

> In the end we are left with the fact that Paul has used two words, both of which are ambiguous. We cannot feel confident that either 'spiritual' or 'rational' is absent from the adjective or that "worship" or "service" is lacking in the noun.[144]

If this view is correct, it will go some way to explaining why this verse is readily thought to be expressing similar ideas to 1 Peter 2:5[145] and John 4:24;[146] but also to explaining why corporate worship should be considered as one, central aspect of all-of-life worship. Käsemann, for example, states that worship services

> are no longer, as in cultic thinking, fundamentally separated from everyday Christian life in such a way as to mean something other than the promise for this and the summons to it… Either the whole of Christian life is worship and the gathering and sacramental acts of the community provide equipment and instruction for this, or these gatherings and acts lead in fact to absurdity.[147]

An alternative view, however, sees Paul use of language as intentionally bringing much more precision to his argument. Schreiner argues that Paul uses *logikos* to mean 'rational' or 'reasonable,' as was common in the Greek language.

> His purpose in doing so was to emphasize that yielding one's whole self to God is eminently reasonable. Since God has been so merciful, failure to dedicate one's life to him is the height of folly and irrationality.[148]

The two terms *logikos* and *pneumatikos* in 1 Peter and Philo may be closely aligned, but it is unconvincing, he suggests, to conclude they are synonyms.

> If Paul has simply wanted to write πνευματικήν, he would presumably have done so since the πνεῦμα word group is exceedingly common in Paul and the term λογικός occurs only

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144 Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 434.
145 'You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.'
146 Moo notes the difficulty to pin down the meaning of *logikēn* in Rom 12:1. While little used in the NT and not at all in the LXX, it does, however, have a rich background in Greek and Hellenistic Jewish philosophy and religion. He suggests four possibilities: 1. Spiritual (inner mind/heart), 2. Spiritual/rational—in the sense of giving God what he demands, 3. Rational— acceptable to human reason, 4. Reasonable— in terms of fitting the circumstance, appropriate to those who have truly understood the truth revealed in Christ. He goes for 1 and 2. True worship is not simply a matter of inner attitude, but it is basic to acceptable worship (as reflected in the 'renewing of your mind'). As both spiritual and reasonable miss an important part of the meaning, he would go for a translation of 'true.' Moo, 752–753.
147 Ernst Käsemann and G. W. Bromiley, *Commentary on Romans (*Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 327.
148 Schreiner, 645.

> here… [In all instances] λογικός bears the definition 'rational,' even though is some contexts it is collocated with πνευματικός.[149]

As such, worship as it is described here does not relate to public ceremonies. Rather, it speaks of giving one's whole life to God 'in the concrete reality of everyday existence.'[150]

Arguably then, the translation 'spiritual worship' obscures the nature of the antitype. A translation of rational or reasonable service (rather than 'spiritual worship'), more clearly reflects the connection to the old covenant's ritual acts of sacrifice,[151] which Paul then transmutes to a whole of life offering: the believer's response to salvation obtained in Christ. This transformation is not just from physical to spiritual. Schreiner argues that

> We must also see that the term 'spiritualize' alone does not do justice to Paul's reshaping of cultic language. He understands the OT cult as being fulfilled because the new age is inaugurated. In other words, Paul's understanding of the cult is fundamentally eschatological. The call to worship (*latreia*) causes the theme of the letter to resurface, for the fundamental sin is the failure to worship (*latreuein;* see 1:25) God.[152]

Not that Romans 12 worship presents the solution to human sin, but is rather the outcome of Jesus' soteriological worship. Here we see the transformation of the ritual sacrifice of a third party (e.g., an animal) to the sacrifice of the actual person; and in no way is Paul suggesting the believer's sacrifice holds any soteriological weight. It is very much in response to Christ's propitiatory sacrifice that the believer can offer their own lives in service under the umbrella of God's grace. We see a similar notion expressed in (and following) Hebrews 12:28. I will explore this (with further thoughts on the relationship to corporate worship) in the next chapter. However, it is worth noting here that the immediate application of these verses by Paul take us not towards the church gathering, but rather to acts of selflessness and love, shown towards Christians and the world alike.

9. Conclusion

I have argued that NT worship is spiritual in essence and soteriological in purpose. This transformed view of OT worship is enigmatically introduced by Christ in John 4, but explained

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[149] Schreiner, 645.
[150] Schreiner, 645.
[151] The continued use of cultic language is clearly deliberate, and of the nine occurrences of *latreia* in the LXX, eight refer to Jewish cultic worship. *logikos* does not occur in the LXX but is a favourite expression of Greek philosophical, particularly Stoic, thought, in the sense of 'belonging to reason, rational.' James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 711.
[152] Schreiner, 646.

more fully in the letter to the Hebrews with Jesus portrayed as the antitype of the OT sanctuary, sacrifice and priesthood, and who's salvific actions call the church into being and service.

Without using the specific language of worship, Paul's doctrine of union with Christ picks up similar themes: that engagement with God is attained by the work of Christ, that the place of blessing is in the heavenly realms, that the time of worship belongs to the eschatological gathering of the church, and that spiritual worship is effected in the believer by the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of UWC states that participation in Christ is balanced by a response of service in the believer enabled by Christ's indwelling. I have observed that while worship and service are two related but distinct concepts, this relationship is obscured in modern translations where both ideas are translated with the one word. Such confusion, I will note in the next chapter, extends into views of the Christian gathering, which are nonetheless described by many as Corporate Worship.

CHAPTER 7
CORPORATE WORSHIP

1. Introduction

If NT worship is fundamentally spiritual in essence and soteriological in purpose, how might this position be reconciled with the common view amongst contemporary evangelicals (see Ch 4–5) that Christian worship should involve a specifically corporate element? I noted earlier the antecedents of this position in Calvin, who, while rejecting the idea that the NT contained any liturgical antitype of OT ceremony, nonetheless spoke of 'public worship' as the prayer, praise and singing of the church as the outward profession of one's inner spiritual worship (of 'faith, prayer and other acts of piety.'[1]) We then saw how the later Reformed tradition understood the church gathering to be a central aspect of spiritual worship, and required by some to be regulated according to certain biblical prescriptions. Such views continue to be held by most within the recent Reformed evangelical tradition.

On one level, to describe church liturgy as corporate or public worship is neither here nor there. As I have shown, there is little NT evidence to suggest that the gathered church engaged in any formal patterns of liturgical worship, spiritual or otherwise. Yet the contemporary meaning of the word is, of course, conditioned by its actual usage. D. A. Carson, for example, concedes, 'if one uses the term *worship* only in its broadest and theologically richest sense, then sooner or later one finds oneself looking for a term that embraces the particular activities of the gathered people of

[1] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel,* trans. T. Myers (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 211.

God described in the New Testament.'[2] He therefore settles for the term *corporate worship*, while recognizing the inherent ambiguities in it. In the following discussion, therefore, we must note that some (such as Carson) will use the term pragmatically,[3] while others will use it purely theologically (e.g., the covenantal position).

While it is not the purpose of this thesis, I will also pre-empt what follows by suggesting that the NT makes best sense of the actions of the gathered church within the *doctrine of the church*, rather than within the doctrine of worship.[4] Without doubt, these two doctrines speak to and inform one another. Paul's notion of union with Christ (UWC), for example, helps to make sense of the church's identity as the body of Christ, both ontologically and in praxis (e.g., 1 Cor 12). For example, 'in Christ' language can simultaneously encompass aspects of spiritual worship and at the same time inform the praxis of corporate worship (e.g., within Colossians 3). In this chapter, therefore, I propose to look again at instances of so-called corporate worship (understood as the actions or liturgy of the gathered church) within the NT, in order to determine if there *can* be a position that is exegetically defendable, which is consonant with my view of spiritual worship, and which is acceptable for guiding the praxis of Reformed evangelical churches.

2. Worship as adoration and action

Within the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, we find the Prayer of General Thanksgiving which contains:

> Give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days.[5]

[2] D. A. Carson, "Worship under the Word," in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 49.
[3] Carson would at the same time argue that corporate worship has a NT mandate as a special part of all-of-life worship.
[4] There is a distinct lack of connection between technical worship language in the NT and the church gathering, evidenced, for example, by Paul's single use of *proskynēo* in books such as 1 Corinthians and Colossians. However, phrases such as *en ekklēsia* re-occur throughout 1 Cor 14; the teaching and singing of Col 3:16 occurs within the context of living in union with Christ (Col 3:3) and as part of the body of Christ (Col 3:15). Similarly, the acceptable service of Hebrews 13 (and similarly in Romans 12) while not unconnected to the prior discussion of Christ's soteriological worship, is more clearly predicated by believers joining the heavenly assembly in 12:22–23, and demonstrated in ethical living rather than liturgy.
[5] The Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662), accessed June 7, 2021, https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/prayers-and-thanksgivings.

Thought to be composed by puritan Bishop Reynolds,[6] this prayer echoes the call of Romans 12:1–2 to an all-of-life service, but specifically one that looks for expression in the praise of our lips and lives. It is this principle of 'praise through lips and lives' that I would suggest provides the strongest exegetical support in connecting a biblical theology of spiritual worship with the corporate worship of the church, the latter being a response to the former. Two NT passages in particular pick up this duality of lips and lives: Hebrews 12–13 and Colossians 3.

With Hebrews, scholars generally agree that the author commends a life of service performed with thanksgiving. Some, however, prefer to see a distinction between the call to worship and the general lives of believers. Thanksgiving, suggests Ellingworth, leads

> to a life of reverent fear, within which, in their turn, the author's particular injunctions will find their natural place. Worship thus has a certain priority over practical Christian activity, but the two will go together throughout chap. 13.[7]

If this argument aims to separates liturgical and lived out service, then Attridge disagrees. While the call to worship does pick up on the previous cultic imagery, 'it is not immediately connecting it with liturgical worship but more likely a life of service viewed in Ch 13.'[8] Lane, similarly notes that while it was the Levitical priests who 'served' under the old covenant, 'with the actualizing of the new covenant, all of God's people are summoned to the worship of God in an acceptable manner."[9]

> Christians under the new covenant are to enter an experience of maturity in which all of life becomes an expression of worship. Authentic worship is a grateful response to covenantal blessing already experienced and to the certainty of the reception of the unshakable kingdom (v28). It is deepened by the frank awareness of the awesome character of God's holiness, which was disclosed in the fiery epiphany of Sinai (v 29).[10]

And again, O'Brien, argues that 'to worship or serve God *acceptably* means that believers regard every aspect of their lives as an expression of their devotion to him.'[11]

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[6] Edward Cardwell, *A History of Conferences: And Other Proceedings Connected with the Revision of the Book of Common Prayer From the Year 1558 to the Year 1690* (Oxford: University Press, 1849), 372.
[7] Paul Ellingsworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 690.
[8] Harold W. Attridge, T*he Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia, PN: Fortress Press, 1989), 383.
[9] William L. Lane. *Hebrews 9–13* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), 487.
[10] Lane, 491.
[11] P. T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 500.

> Christian worship is not limited to prayer and praise in a congregational context. Within the discourse of Hebrews words and actions that flow from true gratitude are the worship that is pleasing to God.[12]

O'Brien, in fact, goes further in emphasising the prior condition of 'thanksgiving' necessary to inspire Christian service. To do so therefore establishes such worship has having no soteriological effect. He notes how the exhortation, 'let us serve or worship God,' occurs in a relative clause which is syntactically subordinate to the call to be thankful. 'The notion of their rendering acceptable worship or service 'through thanksgiving' signifies that either thanksgiving comes to expression through such service or it is the basis and motivation for true and acceptable worship.'[13] Similarly, Bruce contends that the proper response to the grace of God is a grateful heart, and it is the words and actions which flow from a grateful heart that are the sacrifices in which God takes delight.[14] And Hughes, helpfully shows how these verses are consistent with the NT's general approach to this theme.

> Gratefulness… is the impulse, the motive force, which constrains us, as a holy priesthood belonging to the unshakeable kingdom (Rev. 5:10), to *offer to God acceptable worship* by presenting ourselves thankfully, as a living sacrifice in his service (Rom. 12:1; cf. 14:17f) and by declaring the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Such worship flows from and is a manifestation of the response of our love.[15]

I agree, therefore, that Hebrews 12 argues that by virtue of Christ's priestly and sacrificial work in bringing believers into the heavenly church they are to 'offer to God acceptable service [*latreuōmen*], with reverence and awe' (Heb 12:28).[16] It expresses a similar sentiment to that of Romans 12, and goes on in the same way to flesh out the nature of acceptable service in everyday and practical terms. Considering the weight given earlier in Hebrews to Christ's priestly and sacrificial service, if there were ever occasion to advocate for a new covenant form of ritual, we might expect to find it here. Rather, (and again noting similarities with Romans 12), the nature of acceptable service worship is to show love, hospitality and faithfulness. And it is not that the author is unaware of the exegetical surprise created here. Verses 15 and 16 involve a transformed use of cultic language, giving a new form of expression to Christian sacrifice:

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[12] O'Brien, 500.
[13] O'Brien, 499-500.
[14] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 365.
[15] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019, 560.
[16] 'This cultic term has appeared frequently in Hebrews and in particular was used to describe the aim of Christ's cleansing of the worshipers' conscience (9:14). The call to worship issued here,… thus aims at realizing what the new covenant makes possible. In the context of such worship, the unshakeable kingdom is present.' Attridge, 383.

> Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Heb 13:15–16).

We should note three things here. Firstly, acceptable service worship occurs *through Christ* (*di autou*), the believer's service being contingent on the prior spiritual worship exercised by Christ on their behalf.[17] Secondly, two kinds of sacrifice are asked of the believer, a sacrifice of praise and a sacrifice of good works.[18] Thirdly, these sacrifices are offered in response to the work of Christ, to please God rather than merit salvation.[19]

Miroslav Volf argues that these two constitutive elements, of obedient service and joyful praise, are what make up true worship of God, concluding that 'authentic Christian worship takes place in a rhythm of adoration and action.'[20]

> The purpose of action is not merely to provide material support for the life of adoration. The purpose of adoration is not simply to provide spiritual strength for the life of action. When we adore God, we worship God by enjoying God's presence and by celebrating God's mighty deeds of liberation. When we are involved in the world, we worship God by announcing God's liberation, and we cooperate with God by the power of the Spirit through loving action.[21]

In other words, the nature of service worship requires not simply offering the whole of one's life, but is effective and pleasing to God only when each of these two elements are pursued with an eye to the other. Without adoration, Volf argues, action is blind and easily denigrates into hit-or-miss activism. Likewise, without action in the world, the adoration of God is empty and hypocritical, and degenerates into irresponsible and godless quietism.[22]

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[17] 'Here, *dia* conveys the idea of mediation: praise is offered to God through or by means of Jesus, just as it is through Jesus (7:25), more specifically, through his sacrifice (9:26), that believers have access to God.' Ellingworth, 720.

[18] Bruce notes how these verses reflect the fundamentally sacrificial nature of Christianity, 'founded on the one self-offering of Christ, and the offering of his people's praise and property, of the service and their lives, is caught up into the perfection of his acceptable sacrifice, and is accepted in him.' Bruce, 384.

[19] 'Through the sacrifice of praise and loving action God is worshipped in a manner that pleases him. Those who do not worship him in an acceptable way have not truly understood and appropriated his grace in Jesus, the great high priest… For the author of Hebrews the time of atonement sacrifice is past. The response of praise to God and works of love are the only sacrifices remaining for the people of God. The sacrificial language used in the exhortation to worship God acceptably in Hebrews 12:28 is complemented by the sacrificial terms used of praise and loving action in 13:15–16.' O'Brien, 528–529.

[20] Miroslav Volf, "Worship as Adoration and Action: Reflections on a Christian Way of Being-in-the-World," in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 207.

[21] Volf, 208.

[22] Volf, 210–211.

Is Hebrews 13, as some have suggested, then directly addressing the Christian gathering, and therefore speaking into corporate worship? The literary context would suggest otherwise. While a doctrine of the church underlies both chapters 12 and 13, there is no sense that the writer is using worship as a synonym for the gathering, or liturgy within the gathering. I noted in Chapter 5 the position that states that if worship is all-of-life, then the Christian gathering must also be included within that worship.[23] While the argument itself is logically valid, it is not what is being expressed by the writer in this instance. Hebrews instead takes us from the spiritual worship of Christ to Church, to acceptable service, to sacrifice of lips and lives—but not to liturgy. Service worship, therefore, is consequent of, but not antecedent to the church.

If, however, the sacrifices of lips and lives are marks of the Christian community, might we not still expect to see them reflected within the Christian gathering; not as acts of worship, or because they are theologically antecedent to the church, but because they are marks of the believer's union with Christ? To answer this question requires returning to look at the idea of the church's identity 'in Christ,' whether in an ontological state, or within its physical gatherings.

3. The church in Christ

One clear example of the service of praise and obedience within the community of the church 'in Christ' is found in Colossians 3:15–17. This chapter begins with believers 'raised with,' 'hidden in,' and 'appearing with' Christ (Paul's union with Christ language), in order to place what follows contextually within the doctrine of church, and as such within a context of spiritual worship. This language continues into verse 15 onwards.

> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col 3:15–17).

Here, Paul commands the church to act out what it means for Christ to rule and dwell within the hearts of its members. If he were advocating a response of ritual worship, we might expect to see this expressed by way of a 'vertical,' sacrificial offering of some sort. There are, of course,

[23] Moo, for example, reflects that 'regular meetings together of Christians for praise and mutual edification are appropriate and, indeed, commanded in Scripture. And what happens at these meetings is certainly "worship." But such special times of corporate worship are only one aspect of the continual worship that each of us is to offer the Lord in the sacrifice of our bodies day by day.' Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 754.

elements of the vertical in this passage (such as singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God), but equally affirmed is the horizontal: as believers participate in the ministry of the indwelling Christ, as they teach and admonish one another through their singing. Adoration and action are both, therefore, in operation within the singing of the church (16). And both are evident in the lives of the individual believers (17) as Paul advocates for a similar expression of thanks in everyday words and actions.

Is Paul, therefore, suggesting that the preaching and singing and thankful responses of the church in verse 16 are prescriptions for corporate worship? Again, the context would suggest no. Colossians 3 is speaking to the church 'in Christ', and not specifically to the physically gathered church. And in the same way that believers in Romans 12 are called to offer their bodies as living sacrifices, in Colossians 3 adoration and action are firstly the fruits of spiritual worship—of *Christ in us*, and are therefore rightly expressed within the church community, whether corporately or otherwise.

4. The church gathered

What then of those passages that specifically describe the physical gathering of the church? Is there evidence and prescription for corporate worship in these contexts?

a. Acts 2

After the events of Pentecost, we read that the first believers 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42). Is this Christian corporate worship in its most elementary form? More likely the author is presenting a summary of the devotional life of the first Christian community. The following verses, in fact, suggest that each of these activities were not occurring within one gathering, but rather, 'day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people' (Acts 2:46–47). One might speculate that after the dispersion of the church in Acts 8, these activities may have by necessity become more integrated into formal gatherings, particularly as churches established themselves in smaller regional communities without access to the temple. We can see, for example, that within Christian communities such as at Corinth, teaching, prayer, and praise are key features of the assembly (1 Cor 14) as are gatherings for the Lord's supper (1 Cor 11).

b. Revelation Chapters 4, 5 and 19

I noted earlier the 'involuntary' worship of the elders in Revelation 4 and 5. Returning to the heavenly throne room in Ch 19, this worship continues. And at the same time, the gathered multitude is commanded to praise God, and who thus respond with the song:

> "Hallelujah!
> For the Lord our God
> the Almighty reigns.
> Let us rejoice and exult
> and give him the glory… (Rev 19:6–7)

Is this psalmic response modelling a pattern of praise for the church's corporate worship, or is there more going on? More likely, the author is suggesting the fulfilment of Isaiah 25:8–10, where it is prophesied that when death is swallowed up and tears are wiped away, it will be said on that day,

> "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.
> This is the LORD; we have waited for him;
> let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Alternatively it might be referencing Psalm 118 which looks forward to the day of the Lord's salvation with the response: 'This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it' (Ps 118:24). Either way, the songs of Revelation continue a pattern of praise in response to the great acts of God's salvation. In this sense they might be considered a helpful guide for shaping a church's liturgy. However, in these examples the biblical authors are viewing salvation and praise on the eschatological plane, rather than within the local gathered assembly.

c. 1 Corinthians 14

As earlier stated, the most comprehensive description of the physically gathered church in the NT is found in 1 Corinthians 14. Uniquely, of the four occurrences of *en ekklēsia* in the NT, three of those occur in this chapter.[24]

Having described how God has given the church Spiritual gifts for its service (Chapter 12) that must be exercised in love (Chapter 13), in Chapter 14 Paul applies these principles to the church gathering. The presenting issue is prophecy[25] verses tongues, and surprisingly Paul states that a

[24] In the 1 Corinthians 14 examples, Paul is using each to argue for order within the gathering, calling for various groups to be silent, against the disorder of unregulated speaking.
[25] 'Prophecy may include various kinds of God-given, revelatory speech, including applied pastoral preaching. Verses 24–25 suggest that it could also include evangelistic preaching.' Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 237. Similarly, 'the reason for prophecy is

true manifestation of the Spirit in a corporate context will be evident not in the 'ecstatic' but in the plain words of edification (12), the culmination of which is the evangelism towards and worship (*proskynēo*) of unbelievers in verse 24.

What are Paul's underlying assumptions about the nature of the gathering here? The key principle seems to be that of edification or building up (*oikodomē*) in the word of God.[26] 'The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up [*oikodomē*] the church' (1 Cor 14:3; see also 4, 5, 12, 17, 26).[27] The assumption is that edification occurs through the teaching of the word, an idea first seen in the seeking of the 'higher gifts' in 12:21, and now in the gift of prophecy of 14:39. Paul is by no means advocating that Christian gatherings operate without the inspiration of the Spirit.[28] As we saw, the proper expression of Spiritual gifts, exercised in love, is the dominant theme of Chapters 12 to 14.[29] Within the gathering, therefore, the use of Spiritual gifts has a distinctly horizontal focus, not to be exercised selfishly or as an unthinking 'vertical' spiritual offering.[30] Rather the church should pursue the gifts which edify, the clearest example being the word gifts. 'You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up' (17). Rather,

> When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up (26).[31]

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that it speaks "edification, exhortation and comfort" to the rest of the people. These three words set forth the parameters of the divine intent of prophecy, and probably indicate that in Paul's view the primary focus of a prophetic utterance is not the future, but the present situation of the people of God.' Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 657.

[26] 'This latter theme is developed in two ways: by insisting on *intelligibility* in the gathered assembly and by giving guidelines for *order*.' Fee, 652. Similarly, 'The elucidation or application of Christian truth is intended. All these activities which shade too finely into one another for rigid distinctions to be profitable or even accurate, are of advantage to the Christian assembly, but without them, speaking in tongues (as far as the assembly is concerned) sheer sound, signifying nothing.' C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968), 317.

[27] 'Although there can be little question that Paul prefers prophecy to tongues in the gathered assembly, v. 5 indicates that the real issue in not tongues per se, but *uninterpreted tongues* (cf. v. 130, since an interpreted tongue can also edify… The edifying of oneself is not a bad thing; it simply is not the point of gathered worship.' Fee, 653.

[28] 'It should be noted that Paul does not contrast 'speaking with the mind' with 'speaking with the Spirit,' but with 'speaking with a tongue.' Prophecy and tongues are closely allied in that each is speaking in Spirit, differentiated in that the prophet speaks with the mind also.' Barrett, 322.

[29] Fee states that 'the imperative "eagerly desire spiritual gifts," although it resumes the argument from 12:31, is nonetheless not a precise repetition. The verb remains the same, but the object is no longer "the greater *charismata*," but *ta pneumatika*, which probably means something like "utterances inspired by the Spirit." Fee, 654–655. Likely the difference is a matter of emphasis for Paul, where the context has narrowed the activity of the Spirit to within the community of worship.

[30] In 14:14–16 Paul particularly criticises praying and praising in the Spirit without engaging the mind. 'Paul's desire is that the inexpressible delight in God that saturates the preconscious and emotional dimensions of the Christian self may embrace the reflective mind too.' Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 2006), 241.

[31] Fee suggests that this list is not prescriptive of the assembly, stating that 'it is possible that some of this was already going on; but the rest of the context, including chap. 12, suggests that this is a corrective word rather than a merely

Surprisingly, the singing of hymns (*psalmon*),[32] is listed here amongst other 'word' ministries. Although as I noted with Colossians 3:16, for Paul, singing's primary function is as a ministry of the word for horizontal edification (alongside its other vertical qualities). And in order to emphasise the principle of clarity, he closes with the injunction that all these things should be done decently and in order.[33]

The purpose of 1 Corinthians 14, therefore, is not a liturgical prescription for the Christian assembly. While it does clearly recognise those activities commended to the church and confirmed in other parts of the NT: teaching/prophesying (1 Tim 4:13), prayer (1 Tim 2:1), praise (Heb 2:12), singing (Col 3:16),[34] Paul's purpose is to commend the selfless use of gifts within the church in order to build up, and not as 'vertical' offerings of worship. In this sense, the service of the church is to be viewed as exactly that: as service, and not as the context for offering sacrificial gifts.

5. Excursus: Alternative views of corporate worship

5.a John Frame

John Frame's theology of worship is of interest because of his attempts to synthesize a number of the views we have considered. On the one hand, he claims to uphold the regulative principle of worship, yet is equally critical of its modern adherents in their narrow application of the

descriptive one.' Fee, 690. Barrett agrees: 'It is often said, with reference to verse 26, that the assembly of chapter xiv is an informal kind of 'service of the word', in which hymns, prayers, and various kinds of sermon have their place, but not the Christian supper. There is no evidence to support this view, apart from the fact that in chapter xiv nothing is said about eating and drinking; this silence is quite inconclusive, since in this chapter Paul is dealing with various forms of Christian speech, and sticks firmly to his point… This was probably the main, perhaps the only, weekly meeting of the church; and in a church so given to speaking with tongues it is hard to think that no such speaking, and no prophesying, accompanied the meal—that is, the material of chapters xi and xiv belongs together.' Barrett, 325–326.

[32] It is unclear in this instance as to whether hymns are referring to biblical psalms, pre-composed hymns or extemporized songs. Thistleton, 247.

[33] The notion of being silent in church (see earlier note regarding *en ekklesia*) is not one of creating an atmosphere of quiet reverence but of giving priority to word proclamation and listening. Paul argues that the basis of all these instructions is ultimately theological. 'It has to do with the character of God, probably vis-à-vis the deities of the cults, whose worship was characterized by frenzy and disorder. The theological point is crucial: the character of one's deity is reflected in the character of one's worship.' Fee, 697.

[34] Fee suggests that this singing might best be called 'a kind of charismatic hymnody,' in which spontaneous hymns of praise were offered to God in the congregation, even if some may have been known beforehand. Fee, 671.

principle.[35] His approach, rather, has some similarities to ours in that he sees UWC as an overarching category to contain both all-of-life and corporate worship.

> Christian worship should be full of Christ. We come to the Father only by him (John 14:6). In worship we look to him as our all-sufficient Lord and Savior. Christ must be inescapably prominent and pervasive in every occasion of Christian worship.'[36]

Worship in Christ, therefore, 'presupposes the once-for-all accomplishment of the redemption to which the Old Testament Jews looked forward.'[37] But as we are no longer required to perform the ceremonies of the OT, 'what is left is worship in the broad sense: a life of obedience to God's word, a sacrifice of ourselves to his purposes,' a life of priestly service.[38] The Christian gathering, however, is not merely worship in the broad sense. Something more is happening, he suggests, which is why it deserves a special name.

> We may describe the New Testament meeting as 'worship,' as long as we use other terms to differentiate between the different kinds of worship. Or, we can withhold the term *worship* from the Christian meeting—but then we must find other terminology to express the divine presence in the meeting and the special homage given there to God.[39]

While sitting theologically within the tradition of covenantal evangelicalism, Frame is far more prepared than others to emphasize the all-of-life aspects of worship. Yet at the same time, he recognizes that when the church meets with God something special happens. He commends describing the gathering as worship because 'although Scripture doesn't speak specifically of the Christian meeting as a worship service, it does use worship terminology for some of the things that we do at the meeting,'[40] presumably the language around sacrifices, gifts, praises, prayers, and the church as a holy temple and priesthood. But more importantly, there is a difference of degree when God's people meet against what they do throughout their lives. Frame sees that in the

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[35] John M. Frame, "A Fresh Look at the Regulative Principle: A Broader View," last updated June 4, 2012, accessed March, 9, 2021, https://frame-poythress.org/a-fresh-look-at-the-regulative-principle-a-broader-view/. Frame argues that scripture functions the same way in worship services as it does in any other area of human life. 'We seek to find out what God says, and we apply His prescriptions to specific situations by the use of godly wisdom, itself subject to the Word. In other words, the regulative principle for worship is the same as the regulative principle for all of human life.'

[36] John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1996), 29.

[37] Frame, *Worship*, 29.

[38] Frame, *Worship*, 30.

[39] Frame, *Worship*, 30. A more recent exponent of this view is Matthew Merker, who states: 'Christians are called to offer God our whole individual lives as worshipful sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). But when we gather as a congregation, something unique happens: we enjoy Christ, exalt God, and edify one another together as his covenant people. The whole is more than the sum of the parts.' Matthew Merker, *Corporate Worship: How the Church Gathers as God's People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 27.

[40] Frame, *Worship*, 33–34

gathering, God actually draws nearer, an ontology that persists whether one feels God's nearness or not.[41] When we meet in Jesus' name, he meets with us.

> The name of Christ is inseparable from Christ himself. To praise his name is to praise him. To baptize into his name is to baptize into Christ. To believe in his name is to believe in him. It is in that wonderful name that we meet.[42]

Frame is right to situate both the broad and narrow aspects of worship within our UWC. The weakness in his position, however, is that without the logic I have proposed (that Christ's worship establishes the church in which we participate), he misses any sense that the church gathering is an expression of Christ dwelling in us. Rather, to meet in the name of Christ means meeting because of him, for purposes that arise out of our common commitment to Jesus.[43] This assumes that worship is still in some way the work of the believer. Rather than the church being gathered, the church meets. Rather than existing 'in Christ,' for Frame we 'associate with Christ' or act in his name.

5.b. William Taylor

William Taylor,[44] on the other hand, holds the view that worship is all-of-life, but *not* church. Jesus alone, he states, 'initiates his people's worship and leads his people's worship.'[45] The over-emphasis on church as a place of worship he blames on the experientialism pursued by modern evangelicals over meeting Jesus in the word.

> The concept of special 'worship meetings' and 'worship leaders' and 'worship songs' is in danger of being profoundly misleading and unhelpful. It suggests that there are special places of worship for a special cast of worshippers, as if there is one group of people who are more to do with worship than everybody else.[46]

For Taylor, coming to church to worship is to attempt to gain access to God by what we do or manufacture.[47] Rather we should note the inseparable relationship between hearing God's word (the purpose of the Christian gathering) and our worship throughout life.

> True worship is a response to what God has already done, which we hear about in God's word. True worship embraces all of life in all the world to the glory of God. The purpose of our meeting together is to hear the truth of the gospel, to encourage one another in

[41] Frame, *Worship*, 34.
[42] Frame, *Worship*, 35.
[43] Frame, *Worship*, 35.
[44] Rector of St Helen's Bishopsgate, London.
[45] William Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship* (Leyland: 10Publishing, 2021), 31.
[46] Taylor, 77.
[47] Taylor, 56.

> this truth, to thank God for it, and to ask for his help as we go out into the world to worship.[48]

His argument against church as worship is fundamentally a soteriological one. Because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, Christians are declared right with God. As such, 'God no longer wants to be approached through priestly intermediaries in sacred places… [but gives] direct, unlimited access to the very heavens themselves, where he dwells in unmatched glory.'[49] While we might then expect an appeal to Jesus as the one true worshipper, Taylor rather puts the emphasis on 'the word' as being the means of access to the heavenly presence of God. This is not to say that the word is not Christ's word; indeed he stresses that we experience God through 'the final word of Christ'. But Christian assurance is not found in experience, but in listening to and obeying the final living word of Christ which brings knowledge of his finished work of salvation.[50]

If neither Church nor the work of Christ are worship, then true spiritual worship is a response to what Jesus has enabled, which is expressed most clearly in Romans 12:1. To worship God truly is to present your body as a living sacrifice.[51] Similarly, he points to 1 Peter in order to illustrate how OT temple language does not point us to worship within church, but to Christian engagement with the world. The expectation is that Jesus' consecrated people are now to live out their spiritual sacrifices in the world among the Gentile nations. Where once the nations came to the Jerusalem temple to worship, believers now 'as holy priests, will offer acceptable lives transformed by God's work and God's word in everyday situations.'[52] All that the physical temple represented, Taylor contends, is now replicated out in the nations. Finally, he makes reference to John 4, to reiterate that the Christian's whole of life response is shaped by Jesus' word. 'Believers are now to bow down to God in worship all the time, everywhere: all space is worship space; it is worship time all the time.'[53]

> True Christian worship, rightly understood, is a response to what Jesus has already done. God is never 'approached' in worship. Christians do not come any closer to God in worship than they already are. Believers do not need a worship leader other than Jesus.

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[48] Taylor, 3.
[49] Taylor, 49.
[50] Taylor, 51.
[51] Taylor, 33.
[52] Taylor, 75.
[53] Taylor, 99.

> He presents his people to God and brings his people to God. God is not worshipped primarily in a church building; he dwells within his people by his Holy Spirit.[54]

Such an emphasis on the word is consistent with reformed theology. Yet in disassociating worship with Christ's work (or the church gathering) he seems to be substituting 'the word' to perform the same soteriological function. While Taylor's initial concerns are essentially the same as my own, his propositions, however, sound remarkably like the position he is arguing against.

6. Spiritual worship and the church

There is no doubt that the Christian gathering is important to the NT writers; important in that it is a physical manifestation of the heavenly church that expresses the adoration and action that flows from the spiritual worship of Christ and the church's union with him. What then *is* the place of spiritual worship within the church? The answer to this question very much depends on being clear on the definition and nature of spiritual worship. In the previous chapter I argued that spiritual worship is a soteriological state, imputed to the believer by the saving work of Christ. Theologically, Calvin went some way towards developing this position, acknowledging the continuity of spiritual worship across the Biblical narrative and emphasizing the abrogation of OT ceremonies in favour of their antitype in Christ. God, he said, 'has continued to require the same worship of his name that he enjoined from the beginning.'[55] Yet his description of spiritual worship for the Christian does, however, tend towards pietism. 'The worship of God is said to consist in the spirit, because it is nothing else than that inward faith of the heart which produces prayer, and, next, purity of conscience and self-denial, that we may be dedicated to obedience to God as holy sacrifices.'[56] While it is consequential of, and enabled by, redemption in Christ, spiritual worship is nonetheless the work of the Christian. For Calvin, 'spiritual' is not of the Holy Spirit but the human spirit.

In contrast, John Owen later claimed that spiritual worship was obtained by the blood of Christ alone. It is, he stated, 'an eminent effect and fruit of our reconciliation unto God and among ourselves, by the blood of Christ, that believers enjoy the privileges of the excellent, glorious,

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[54] Taylor, 99.
[55] Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PN: The Westminster Press, 1960/1986), II.xi.13, 463.
[56] John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St John 1–10*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, eds. D.W. Torrance & T.F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), IV:23, 99.

spiritual worship of God in Christ, revealed and required in the gospel.'[57] As such, spiritual worship is not achieved by the Christian, even if it is expressed in ceremony or ordinary life. Rather, it is an immediate consequence of reconciliation, 'an access into the favour of God, who was before at enmity with them; and a new and more glorious way of approaching God in his worship than that about which they were before at difference among themselves.'[58] As we observed in chapter 2, Owen was equally committed to the idea of public worship as 'those outward ways and means whereby God hath appointed that faith, and love, and fear of him to be exercised and expressed unto his glory.'[59] Yet, the distinction between the two is clear in this thinking.

The concerns of early evangelicals, however, gave little impetus to the further development of this worship duality. And while my thesis agrees in essence with Owen's position on spiritual worship, this has not been a widely held view within the evangelical tradition. Rather, spiritual worship has been considered more as a devotional aid, rather than an ontological state. It is understandable, therefore, that a pietistic approach (over a soteriological one) would then emphasize the place of corporate worship (as a continuation of OT ritual service) as part of all-of-life obedience[60] in absence of any obvious NT liturgical structures.

It is this pietistic approach which has therefore dominated evangelical thinking on this subject. For some it is a deeply felt inner desire for God expressed through authentic public worship; or for others an inner state of mind which motivates godly behavior; and again for others something that incorporates both ideas. Stephen Charnock (1682), for example, claimed that spiritual worship was about holding the correct inner desires towards God.

> A spiritual worship is when our desires are chiefly for God in the worship; as David desires to dwell in the house of the Lord; but his desire is not terminated there, but to behold the beauty of the Lord (Psalm xxvii. 4), and taste the ravishing sweetness of his presence… To desire worship as an end is carnal; to desire it as a means… is spiritual and the fruit of a spiritual life."[61]

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[57] John Owen, *A Treatise on the nature and beauty of Gospel Worship, etc.* (United Kingdom: 1812), 55.
[58] Owen, *Gospel Worship*, 54.
[59] John Owen, 'A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God and Discipline of the Churches of the New Testament,' in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 4.
[60] This again wrongly equates spiritual worship with Romans 12 and the renewed mind.
[61] Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, (London, 1682), I:232–233.

Or later, Bishop Ryle claimed that spiritual worship becomes a higher form or state of public worship. The externals of public worship are not disputed: the reading of Holy Scripture, public praise, and the regular use of the two sacraments.[62] The test of public worship, however, is to ask if it is in fact spiritual worship: that makes one feel more keenly the sinfulness of sin; that draws one into close communion with Jesus Christ; that extends one's spiritual knowledge; and increases holiness in one's life.[63]

Charles Spurgeon, likewise, suggested that true worship was wholly mental, inward, and spiritual. Against a return to ceremonialism, he called the church to 'go back to the barns in which our fathers worshipped, or better still to the hill side, and to the green sward than go forward to anything like symbolism, which will tempt the soul away from spiritual worship.'[64] And similarly, contemporary pastor and author, John Piper states that 'right worship, good worship, pleasing worship—depends on a right mental grasp of the way God really is, truth… the inner essence of worship is the response of the heart to the knowledge of the mind when the mind is rightly understanding God and the heart is rightly valuing God.'[65] In short, spiritual worship has become about feeding the mind and soul of the believer, rather than the means by which salvation in Christ is attained and expressed. And for many others within the evangelical church, it has become a mostly irrelevant doctrine, with energy given to the seemingly more soul satisfying and participatory corporate worship.

It is significant that these views on spiritual worship have developed within a tradition which takes such a high position on scripture; a position which in its preeminent contexts has demonstrated a strong commitment to systematic contextual exegesis. My contention is that a view of spiritual worship that lacks a soteriological focus leads to a distortion of emphasis within the doctrine as a whole. While allowing for the fact that no one hermeneutic will ever be considered superior by all evangelicals, it is nonetheless apparent that some ignore the sense of the eschatological in favour of the immanent, or favour the allegorical over the typological, even though most would consider this to be against the principles of the Reformed theological tradition. It is hard to say whether confusion over the biblical language of worship has

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[62] J.C. Ryle, "Worship," in *Knots Untied*, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co.), 1977, 226–229.
[63] Ryle, 233–234.
[64] C. H. Spurgeon, "The Axe at the Root – A Testimony against Puseyite Idolatry (1866)," Sermon No. 695 in *Spurgeon's Sermons, Vol. 12: 1866* (Woodstock, ON: Devoted Publishing, 2017), 206.
[65] John Piper, "What Is Worship?" April 29, 2016, accessed March 10, 2020, https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-worship.

contributed to or is a result of various non-soteriological positions. It does seem, however, that an eisegetical approach to worship gives a disproportionate emphasis to that which can be performed and experienced; ironically a practice the Reformers were so strong to speak against.

7. A new 'soteriological' model of worship

While a necessary consequence of this study has been to question the validity of describing the Christian gathering as public or corporate worship, my intention has not at all been to diminish theological confidence in the gathering of the church. Rather, my aim has been to find appropriate ways to approach the doctrine of worship, in all of its breadth, in a manner consistent with the hermeneutical principles of the evangelical tradition, more than has perhaps been the case. Based on my exegetical study, performed within the rubrics of established reformed hermeneutical practice, I would suggest that it *is* possible to hold a legitimate biblical-theological approach to both spiritual worship (in its Biblical sense) and corporate worship (in its modern usage) which is consistent with this historical tradition, particularly when one allows the doctrine of union with Christ to control our understanding of various aspects of NT worship theology. This is what I call the 'soteriological' model of worship.

The soteriological model proposes that spiritual worship be understood primarily in terms of the actions performed by Christ on behalf of the believer and understood as a process and state of restored access to God. It speaks into the spheres of 'all-of-life' service and 'corporate worship' (actions that *are* those of the believer), when each aspect is controlled by the doctrine of the church's union with Christ, although the spiritual worship of Christ is antecedent to both these concepts. The hermeneutical key to this model is a contextual biblical theology, consistent with the exegetical practices of the Reformed evangelical tradition.

The key principles for assessing the validity of soteriological worship within this model are then as follows:

1. **Soteriological worship is fundamentally concerned with salvation**. To consider worship without reference to the atonement, (the event establishing the believer's restored engagement with God), will either relegate worship to its OT cultic context or allow an eisegetical imposition of its modern usage onto the biblical texts. Worship,

viewed through a biblical-theological lens, points to Christ, not so much that he should be worshipped (although ultimately he is), but that he would repair the broken relationship between people and God: a restoration anticipated through Israel's tabernacle/temple system (Hebrews), and explained by Jesus to a Samaritan woman in John 4.

2. **Soteriological worship is a notion derived from the whole of scripture**. Semantically, 'worship' concerns the attitude of the heart towards God, while 'service' is the expression (or fruit) of that worship in the life of the believer; a consistent pair of ideas in both the OT and NT. Theologically, however, spiritual worship is revealed progressively throughout scripture, as the exigency for people to engage with God with appropriate honour and respect and accomplished ultimately through the salvation that Christ achieves on their behalf. Though seemingly freeing the believer from any responsibility to worship God, the NT nonetheless expects the same 'reasonable' response of all-of-life service (Rom 12:1) which was required of Israel. A potentially confusing aspect of this progressive development is that Israel's cultic system (a specific part of their 'service'), is used both metaphorically by the NT writers to refer to the broader notion of all-of-life service, and typologically to explain the nature of soteriological (spiritual) worship under the new covenant.
3. **Soteriological worship is consonant with key aspects of the NT doctrine of union with Christ**. This is particularly evident in the soteriological and corporate aspects of this doctrine; soteriological, in that the believer engages in spiritual worship 'in Christ'; and corporate, in that salvation allows entry into the Christ's body, the church. The broader notion of union with Christ also then allows the church to outwardly express its Christological essence. As such…
4. **Soteriological worship results in personal and corporate acts of piety**. As a result of the saving work of Christ, God expects a response of all-of-life service of the believer. In the same way, the church is called to express its Christological identity by means of adoration and action. Furthermore…
5. **Soteriological worship helps the church shape its gatherings**. A soteriological view of worship understands the church as the gathering of believers around Christ, in both its eschatological and physical manifestations, resting on the foundation of Christ's worship. The NT picture of the heavenly gathering stresses this soteriological foundation (evidenced, not the least, in the saints' songs of praise). If the earthly church is the

physical manifestation of the heavenly[66] then it would be right to expect that any acts of corporate worship would similarly express or imply the centrality of its salvation achieved by Christ. And while there is little prescription of formal liturgy in the NT, there is, however, a stress on the soteriological necessity of Christian gatherings: in order for the church to hold fast to the hope they have in the salvation achieved in Christ's worship (Heb 10:25). The content of those assemblies are not, as might be expected, sacrificial or ritualistic in nature, but rather actions of mutual edification; actions that include prayer, praise, singing, the teaching of the word, and the sacraments; and exercised under the principles commended by Paul: of being word centred, clear, edifying, and engaging of both the heart and mind. Whether these things can or should be described as corporate or public worship, the content itself should point to the saving worship of Christ, not supplant it.

6. **Soteriological worship promotes a view of worship that is thoroughly consonant with the evangelical tradition**. While evangelicals on the whole will hold to ecclesial, liturgical and denominational traditions lightly, their pursuit of a Christocentric, bibliocentric and evangelistic faith is encouraged by a soteriological model of spiritual worship: Christocentric in that the atonement is at the heart of the believer's engagement with God; bibliocentric in that it is founded on a biblical theology which gives significant weight to contextual exegesis; and evangelistic because (as in 1 Cor 14:24–25) there is a spiritual-corporate worship cycle that that sees believers edified and unbelievers coming to faith.

How might this model work in practice? When planning a church service, one might, for instance, devise a liturgy based on a passage of scripture that expresses one or more of these ideas. The messianic Psalm 22, for example, could provide a four-part structure for a corporate worship event that affirms the spiritual worship of the church in Christ, while encouraging a responsive 'sacrifice of praise.'

a. The cry and the confidence of the suffering one (verses 1–5)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?... Yet you are holy, dwelling in the praises of Israel.

[66] See P. T. O'Brien, "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Reality," in *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter: Paternoster, 1987); see also: Chase Kuhn, *The Ecclesiology of Donald Robinson and D. Broughton Knox* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2017).

The church gathers in a posture of brokenness and distance from God, recognising that Jesus saw his own suffering as achieving both the church's salvation and the perfect praise of God.

b. The suffering one is rejected by the world (verses 6–21)

But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people… "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"
In lament and confession, the church expresses confidence in God, with an expectation of forgiveness and restitution.

c. The leader of praise 'advertises' God (verses 22–26)

I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you… The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord!
Following the model of Christ (as in Hebrews 2), the church, assured of forgiveness and salvation, offers declarations of praise and thanksgiving. Words of praise are equally words of prophetic edification within the assembly.

d. The world worships God in Christ (verses 27–31)

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.
The message of salvation, expressed in the teaching of the word and the congregation's praise, fuels their prayer for the world, particularly that all nations would come to know and experience the blessing of spiritual worship in Christ.

While not following a traditional liturgical shape, this example nonetheless allows a corporate gathering to be shaped around a biblical structure whilst retaining the traditional liturgical elements of praise, lament, confession, affirmation of faith, teaching and prayer. A soteriological focus is maintained throughout, recognising true worship to be the means by which the world engages with God through Christ; and equally allows for corporate expressions of praise.

While this is a purely hypothetical example, how the soteriological model might engage with existing forms and practices of corporate worship within the reformed evangelical tradition is the task of the next chapter. To conclude, this discussion, however, it is worth observing the way in

which one US church has sought to engage soteriological concerns within the musical aspects of its liturgy. Melanie Ross writes about the Village Church, Nashville (TVC) where the pastor, Jim Thomas, stresses the Bible's injunctions to rejoice in *God's* salvation.

> It's not some kind of self-salvation. Not pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. The world around us tells us we can save ourselves by looking inside ourselves, all that sort of thing. The Bible says no.[67]

Rather, the message preached is that we all need outside help. 'Look to the one in Psalm 13, who invites you to come with your "how longs," who has set his love on you, and is still offering you his salvation that you can rejoice in, who will be dealing with you bountifully.'[68] Singing plays an important role here. While at the end of the Psalm there is no change in outward circumstances, the singer, David, has, however, changed. The process of fixing one's trust and hope on God, and the act of singing creates an unexplainable difference in the experience of knowing salvation.

Ross views this as counter to the culture of early modernity, which sees an anthropocentric shift towards a this-worldly existence as becoming an end in itself, and where 'people began to believe that one could have a life of meaning without reference to transcendence or eternity.'[69] Unsurprisingly, this view has led to controversy, starkly evidenced in the reaction to the song *In Christ Alone*, produced by one of the Village Church's most prominent congregants/song writers, Keith Getty (and co-written with British composer, Stuart Townend). The Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song voted to exclude "In Christ Alone" from the hymnal it was about to publish in 2013.[70] They had replaced the original lyrics

> Till on that cross as Jesus died
> the wrath of God was satisfied

with

> Till on that cross as Jesus died
> the love of God was magnified

When the authors declined to let the unauthorised words be reprinted, the committee voted to withdraw the song altogether,[71] unable to endorse a doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. Getty insisted that songwriters 'need to demonstrate a grasp of the whole biblical context' and

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[67] Melanie Ross, *Evangelical Worship: An American Mosaic* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 178.
[68] Ross, 179.
[69] Ross, 183.
[70] Ross, 192.
[71] Mary Louise Bringle, "Debating Hymns," *Christian Century*, May 1, 2013, https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-04/debating-hymns/.

not be afraid to write about hard mysterious sections of Scripture.[72] This view, however, was already inconsistent with more liberal branches of evangelicalism. Steve Chalke, for instance, famously described the doctrine as a form of cosmic child abuse.

> If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by His Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil. The truth is, the cross is a symbol of love. It is a demonstration of just how far God as Father and Jesus as His Son are prepared to go to prove that love.[73]

Ross considers Chalke's statement to be an excellent summary of this position, whereby Jesus is the 'moral exemplar,' having lived a perfect moral life, dying as a martyr to demonstrate the depths of his love.[74] She suggests, however, that TVC resists both extremes by promoting a 'both-and' paradox of joy and lament.[75] In the same way, she suggests, 'the stories of Good Friday and Easter can be told and heard, believed and interpreted, two different ways at once—as a story whose ending is known, and as one whose ending is discovered only as it happens.'[76] A healthy spirituality, she insists, must be able to perceive both simultaneously and without reduction. I doubt that Getty (or Ross for that matter) are thinking about corporate worship in this instance within a soteriological or biblical-theological framework, yet that appears to be exactly what he is doing, with both aspects not in tension but in a mysterious complementarity.

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[72] Quoted in Collin Hansen, "Keith Getty on What Makes 'In Christ Alone' Accepted and Contested," *Gospel Coalition*, December 9, 2013, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/keith-getty-on-what-makes-in-christ-alone-beloved-and-contested/.

[73] Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2004), 183

[74] Ross, 194. While Chalke did receive affirmation from conservative evangelicals such as Bishop N. T. Wright, most, however, rejected this position as inconsistent with traditional evangelical confessions of faith. See, for example, Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for our transgressions: Rediscovering the glory of penal substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

[75] Ross illustrates this point by quoting Begbie, who states that in music the notes of the scale do not occupy a bounded location in our aural field. If a pianist plays the two notes of a major third, both tones can be heard simultaneously. 'The sounds neither merge nor exclude each other but interpenetrate' even as they remain irreducibly different. Jeremy S. Begbie, *A Peculiar Orthodoxy: Reflections on Theology and the Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 144.

[76] Ross, 196.

CHAPTER 8
ENGAGING THE SOTERIOLOGICAL MODEL WITH REFORMED EVANGELICAL CORPORATE WORSHIP

1. Introduction

This chapter will use the soteriological model to engage with three contrasting examples of corporate worship within the tradition. But why, at this stage, a focus on corporate worship after I have questioned its validity as a biblical doctrine? All who have substantially commented on the theology of worship (including myself) have noted various dualities at play within this doctrine. Earlier, we observed how Calvin and others described the ways in which they understood the relationship between the internal and external in the praxis of public worship. Within my exegetical study I noted various intrinsic theological connections between the internal and external elements of spiritual worship. In each case, external actions express something of motivations that prompt them; and as the emphasis in modern worship theology focuses, rightly or wrongly, on the assembled church, it is here that we find the clearest route to engaging with the theology of its exponents.

Melanie Ross has similarly noted a number of dichotomies within evangelical corporate worship—worship over liturgy, fundamentalist over ecumenical, and convergence over separatism. Between these these polarities, there is, she suggests a void:

> The 'middle'—evangelicals who respect and appreciate other Christian traditions that preach from lectionary texts, pray with fixed liturgies, and celebrate a weekly Eucharist but have chosen not to adopt these forms for their own worship.[1]

[1] Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical versus Liturgical? Defying a Dichotomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2014, 3.

While it is true that such dichotomies will be evident in a number of evangelical sub-cultures, how much this can be said to reflect the movement as a whole is not so certain. I would argue that the 'middle' is in fact well represented by the Reformed tradition we are considering—particularly, for example, amongst Anglican evangelicals within the UK and Australia. While low church expressions of corporate worship may lean towards the liturgically simplistic, they nonetheless tend to follow a traditional gospel-shaped narrative consistent with historical liturgical structures such as the *Book Of Common Prayer*. Ross suggests, however, that

> Charges of naïveté, conceptual brittleness, and archaism have perpetuated a false dichotomy: liturgical churches that embrace higher biblical criticism on one side, and hermeneutically immature fundamentalist churches on the other.[2]

Indeed, our study would suggest that if there is a higher biblical criticism at play, it is executed more accurately by the perhaps less liturgically formal Reformed groups, where hermeneutical principles are the driving force over missional pragmatics. Ross right observes, however, that,

> The most problematic charge that liturgical scholars level against evangelicalism is that nonsacramental worship celebrates individuals and their processes of decision-making instead of the Triune God. More often than not, a second charge follows on the heels of the first: evangelical worship is more 'gnostic' (concerned with salvation and the escape of the fleshly conditions of life) than it is 'Christian.'[3]

Simon Chan, for example, asserts that 'the worship of the church is essentially eucharistic because it is the Eucharist that makes the church uniquely what it is… Eucharist is the supreme expression of the worship that realizes the church.'[4] Chan, however, is not appealing to Scripture as much as he is to tradition, adopting what might easily be considered a more Roman Catholic notion—of the liturgical assembly giving the Bible authority, instead of the other way around. Rather, as Webster asserts, 'Scripture is [not] the church's invention, whether through production or authorization, and still less because the church is Scripture's patron, conferring some dignity on it by adopting it as its symbol system of choice.'[5] Against these charges of liturgical naivete, Ross argues that while 'there must be *some* theological themes present across the entirety of the liturgical rope, this does not mean that *all* the basic strands (including sacramental ones) must run through each and every worshipping tradition.'[6] Rather, evangelicals have made a distinctive

[2] Ross, *Evangelical versus Liturgical*, 58.
[3] Ross, *Evangelical versus Liturgical*, 78.
[4] Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 71-72.
[5] John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2020), 53.
[6] Ross, *Evangelical versus Liturgical*, 76.

contribution to liturgical theology by emphasizing the Trinitarian nature of revelation and the diversity of biblical genres.[7]

1.a Contemporary Worship Music (CWM)

In the introductory chapter I stated that I would not engage with the area of congregational singing in this study other than in its contribution to the broader category of corporate worship. In that light, a few comments about singing seem pertinent before considering the examples of corporate worship later in this chapter where singing plays a significant role in each. And while our earlier NT study did not observe any biblical equating of singing with worship, especially in a spiritual or soteriological sense, I recognise that in contemporary contexts congregational singing is commonly discussed as 'contemporary worship music' or CWM. Even so, I would suggest that CWM should not be thought of in quite the same way as that of the early hymn writing of evangelicalism. Monique Ingalls observes that

> simultaneously a popular music, a vernacular music, and a sacred music, contemporary worship music is distinct from traditional hymns, on the one hand, and Christian pop music for personal listening, on the other. It engages worshipers in a variety of performance spaces that were once distinct, bridging public and private devotional practices, connecting online and offline communities, and bringing competing personal, institutional, and commercial interests into the same domains. As a result, the religious activity that participants understand as 'worship' takes on new attributes as it becomes embedded within a range of other activities.[8]

While early hymnbooks undoubtably would have been produced with a level of commercial interest in mind, modern notions of the worship concert, worship artist, worship pastor and praise and worship industry are in many ways unique to the past few decades.[9] 'The contemporary worship music repertory is meaningful and affective because it spills over the bounds of church services, thoroughly pervading evangelical public ritual and the devotional practices of everyday life.'[10] For many, the collective practice of singing contemporary worship songs has become for many contemporary evangelicals the sum total of worship.[11]

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[7] Ross, *Evangelical versus Liturgical*, 58.
[8] Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1.
[9] Ross points out that praise and worship for some will not only refer to a musical repertoire, but a particular ritual structure and philosophy of worship. For example, 'within charismatic circles, "worship" came to refer to a twenty- to forty-minute segment during which a worship band leads the congregation in singing a continuous string of songs (the "worship set"). During this time, members of the worshipping community express their praise and devotion through singing combined with other characteristic Pentecostal devotional practices, including hand raising, expressive prayer postures, and ecstatic utterances such as tongues speech and prophecy.' Ross, 9.
[10] Ingalls, 2.
[11] Ross, 19.

Kelman summarises a view that exists amongst various stake holders within the American praise and worship industry-—that congregational music is somehow greater than the sum of its individual parts. Music, they suggest,

> is a medium of both collective song and individual expression, and… songs work best as worship when they become the worship of others. This remains true in congregational settings, where a shared repertoire of ritual elements allows a congregation of worshippers to sing together while still enabling individuals to express their own prayers. The sensational form of the song and the cultural practice of singing it in a congregation both create the impression that music is worship and, simultaneously, allow expressions of worship to exceed the music provided for it.[12]

While this view accurately reflects modern notions of allowing the expression of oneself within corporate ritual, thereby satisfying both personal and community ideals, it does not in reality view worship as anything other than an expression of individualism. While offering a nod towards the transcendent, it lacks any real engagement with the divine.

Anna Nekola more helpfully speaks of congregational singing as allowing connection with past tradition alongside emotional engagement (a less individualistic approach to the church corporate), and more critically of communicating truth and engaging with God.

> Music functions in congregational worship in many ways: as a vehicle for content, a site of sensory engagement, a means of connection to tradition, a place for personal expression and a channel for emotion. For still others of us, music in worship enables not only human ritual and social connection but also our access to the Divine.[13]

Whether she sees the content of singing and 'access to the Divine' as necessary to each other is unclear. However, a brief look at a key NT text on singing, Colossians 3:16, would suggest that Paul sees that they are in fact integral.

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.[14]

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[12] Ari Y. Kelman, *Shout to the Lord: Making Worship Music in Evangelical America* (New York: NY University Press, 2018), 7.

[13] Anna E. Nekola, "Worship Media as Media Form and Mediated Practice: Theorizing the Intersections of Media, Music and Lived Religion," in Anna E. Nekola and Thomas Wagner, *Congregational Music-Making and Community in a Mediated Age* (London: Routledge, 2016), 2.

[14] See also Eph. 5:18-21. While in this example singing is a fruit of being filled with the Spirit (rather than the word of Christ), the wider context of the letter would suggest that Paul envisages the Spirit filling the believer with the fullness of Christ, Eph. 3:16-19, thereby making these two passages complimentary in purpose and thought.

While not suggesting that singing is worship as such,[15] there is nonetheless a three-way human-divine engagement occurring: with God towards the church, the church with one another, and the church towards God. The 'word of Christ' is thereby the means by which God dwells within the hearts of his people; the word becomes the content of the church's teaching and admonition of one another; similarly, the word is the content of the church's thanksgiving and praise. And while arguably this passage is not specifically addressing the gathered church, it clearly *can* be applied (as it commonly is) to the context of corporate worship. Ross suggests that 'as both a local practice and globally circulating commodity, contemporary worship music reflects and shapes the concerns, convictions, and commitments of evangelical religious community even as it is shaped by the various contexts in which it is practiced.'[16] As such, the examples we will now consider will each in some way view singing in the gathering as a ministry of the word, with the goal of enabling both the instruction and praise of the church—more than it being simply a piece of the liturgical pie.

1.b Biblical theologies of worship in practice

A church's 'corporate worship' reflects, in some way, its biblical theology of worship and the hermeneutical principles by which that biblical theology is derived. I have suggested that within the Reformed evangelical tradition, theologies of worship tend to broadly fall into one of two camps, the covenantal and the Christological. As should be evident, my soteriological model derives more from the latter than the former, although it differs in that corporate worship is not understood as a manifestation of spiritual worship so much as it is an expression of the church's union with Christ.

My aim in this chapter is therefore to consider the theology behind three contrasting church services (as described in their service outlines and from personal observations), with a focus on soteriological concerns. However, an underlying task is to evaluate to what extent the relationship between theology and praxis on display is coherent and valid. To help aid the comparison, for each church I have considered their published services for Easter Sunday.

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[15] Again, this passage situates singing within the context of the church's union with Christ. Col. 3:1-3 begins this section using the language of being 'raised with Christ,' 'hidden in Christ,' and 'life in Christ.'
[16] Ross, 4.

The Soteriological Model of Worship

- **Soteriological worship is fundamentally concerned with salvation.**
- **Soteriological worship is a notion derived from the whole of scripture.**
- **Soteriological worship is consonant with key aspects of the NT doctrine of union with Christ.**
- **Soteriological worship results in personal and corporate acts of piety.**
- **Soteriological worship helps the church shape its gatherings.**
- **Soteriological worship promotes a view of worship that is thoroughly consonant with the evangelical tradition.**

2. Vaughan Roberts/St Ebbe's Church, Oxford, UK

2.a. Local and theological context

St Ebbe's Church, Oxford, is an Anglican church in the Reformed, conservative evangelical tradition. In his book *True Worship*, the Rector Vaughan Roberts aims to apply his distinctly NT doctrine of worship to three areas: the church meeting, singing, and the Lord's Supper. His approach to worship reflects Peterson's in emphasizing the horizontal, edificatory nature of the Christian gathering. The foundation of 'true worship' is found, he sees, in John 4, as a specific answer to the question of where God can be found. As such, he emphasizes the notion that there are no longer 'holy places' for the Christian.

> Some people bow towards the front on entering a church building, as if somehow God lived up there. They would be horrified if they knew we serve hot dogs from the chancel after the Sunday meeting at our church in Oxford. But there is nothing inappropriate about that. We must not think of a church building as 'the house of God.'[17]

He asserts, rather, that Christians enter into a direct and personal relationship with God when they come to a special person, Jesus Christ. 'The true worshipper is the one who recognizes Jesus for who he is, the living God, and then seeks to live accordingly.'[18] In this respect, his approach aligns with the key principle of the soteriological model. Where he differs, however, is in the believer's response to Christ's worship. The *nature* of Christian worship, he says, is as a living sacrifice, as per Romans 12:1: 'God has done so much for you, now live for him.' And it is this understanding of God's mercy towards us that empowers our worship in all parts of life.[19] This maybe simply be an issue of semantics, employing all-of-life worship language in place of that of

[17] Vaughan Roberts, *True Worship* (Carlisle: Authentic Lifestyle, 2002), 4.
[18] Roberts, 6.
[19] Roberts, 17.

service. And certainly, the soteriological model expects to see Christian service as the fruit of spiritual worship. However, in retaining worship language for the Christian life, which for Roberts is the essence of worship, he confuses (and potentially undermines) the role of Christ's work with that of the believer. Roberts argues that Romans 12–13 presents a checklist of relationships by which to measure genuine all-of-life worship: your relationship with yourself, your enemies, to authorities; all against God's standards.

> We often assume that the main reason we meet as Christians is to offer worship to God, but the New Testament does not speak in those terms. It teaches that the prime direction of our meetings is not from us to God, but rather from him to us. How have we got it so wrong? The answer is that we are still stuck in the Old Testament in our thinking. We have failed to grasp the significance of the coming of Jesus. He put an end to religion and it is about time we realized it.[20]

However, while dismissing an emphasis on liturgy (because of the greater importance of all-of-life worship), Roberts nonetheless spends the second two thirds of his book discussing these very things, presumably because the logic of all-of-life worship still requires incorporating the Christian gathering. In the sense that 'our actions in church meetings *can* be described as worship because we should be worshipping at all times, the New Testament does not [however] speak of believers gathering for the express purpose of worship.'[21] Christians, he maintains, are to meet primarily for the purpose of encouragement. While again reflecting Peterson's view here, Roberts' concerns seem more pragmatic, with a focus on mutual edification over any eschatological expectation.

Roberts takes seriously both Hebrews' injunction to continue to meet with one another and Paul's teaching on edification.[22] In fact, edification is so central to Paul's understanding of the purpose of Christian meetings that it provided the test as to whether someone should be included in the assembly. 'The question he [Paul] wants us to ask about every aspect of our meetings is: "Is it edifying?" "Does it build people up as believers?"'[23] If God's Word creates the church, then by inference it builds the church. This happens first of all through the teaching of the word and then by the sacraments, a proclamation of the gospel from God towards us, signifying both the offer and the gift of salvation in Christ.[24]

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[20] Roberts, 31.
[21] Roberts, 43.
[22] Roberts, 43.
[23] Roberts, 45.
[24] Roberts, 51.

None of this, however, discounts the vertical element of the church gathering. Praise, for example, is the way the gathered church addresses God; although it is again governed by the broader principle that our whole lives are to be an expression of gratitude. Linking both the horizontal and vertical for Roberts is singing—its purpose to build the church through an emphasis on the word of Christ (Col 3:16), and to act as a tool for praise and the expression of appropriate emotion. Though Roberts is against describing the liturgy itself as worship, prayer and praise he nonetheless considers to be *acts* of worship. This is, of course, similar to Calvin's position. Although more likely it follows Roberts' belief that worship is the result, not the heart of the meeting.

> The ministry of God's word to us is primary, for it equips all church members to engage in ministry to one another by the exercise of spiritual gifts. As we grow together in knowledge and love of God through Christ, that, in turn, will lead to praise and prayer.[25]

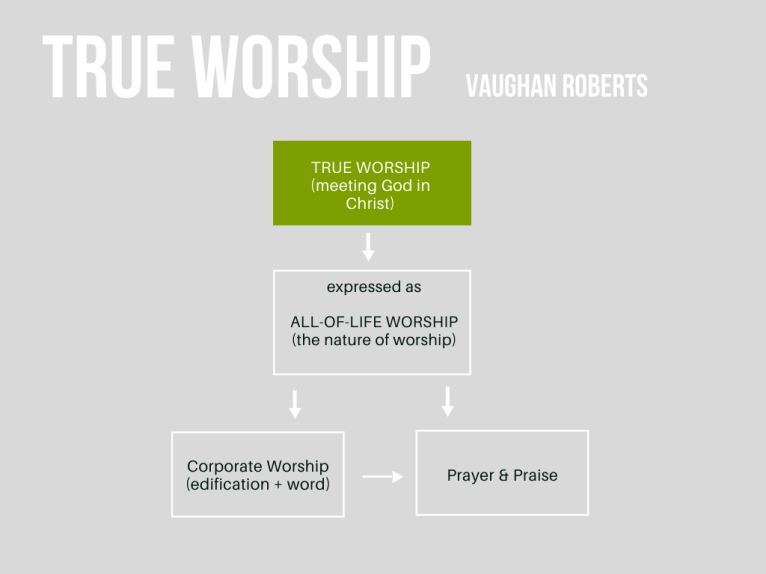

Figure 1. Vaughan Roberts word and edification model of corporate worship

2.b. Service Structure

The outline of St Ebbe's Easter Sunday service[26] shows a simple structure with minimal use of traditional liturgical elements, although still reflecting the shape of traditional Anglican (and

[25] Roberts, 62–63.
[26] St Ebbe's Church Oxford, "Sunday Services," accessed March 29, 2016, http://www.stebbes.org.uk/sunday-services.

Reformed) liturgy; and containing, for example, a confession, creed, bible reading and intercessory prayers.[27]

Easter Greeting
Hymn: Jesus Christ is risen today (C. Wesley)
Confession
Children's Song: Mighty, mighty Saviour (M. Altrogge)
Song: See what a morning (S. Townend & K. Getty)
Creed (based on 1 Peter 1)
Prayers of intercession
Song: I will glory in my redeemer (S. & V. Cooke)
Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1–34
Sermon
Hymn: Thine be the glory (J.T. Burke)
Short form of communion

The music in the service contains both traditional and contemporary songs, the content of which suggest an affirmation of the Colossians 3:16 principles of singing the word of Christ to each other as edification (Jesus Christ is risen today), to the mind (See what a morning), to the heart (I will glory in my redeemer) and in praise/response to God (Thine be the glory). The songs are thematically linked to Easter and the sermon text. Notably lacking, however, is an OT reading, or any lectionary readings and the Lord's Prayer.

1.c. Analysis

From the published service outlines and from personal observation, services as St Ebbe's can be described as having the following characteristics:

a. Informality. In services, leaders will avoid use of 'liturgical jargon,' presumably to encourage natural engagement between clergy, regular members and visitors; in short, reflecting a horizontal emphasis.
b. Leaders avoid describing the service or its elements as 'worship,' rather speaking educationally of the particular purpose of each item. For example, "Let us use this next song as a prayer, or response, or in order to offer praise."

[27] Bryan Chapell notes the ongoing pattern of gospel-shaped liturgy evident from the early church, through to the Reformation, to today; a sequence of adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition, instruction, charge, and blessing. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

c. The mix of music tends to balance traditional hymns in the evangelical tradition with theologically rich contemporary songs (which noticeably appear to avoid individualistic language). There is a perceptible use of songs performing a liturgical function, for example, as opening praise, as confessional, as a creed, as a prayer of preparation, or as a response to the preached word.
d. The song-leading encourages congregational participation over musical performance, avoiding a sense of 'priestly' or intercessory ministry. Emotional engagement with 'the word in song', however, is both encouraged and clearly evident through joyful participation.
e. As a result of the liturgical use of singing, formal liturgical forms are minimal. Confession and creeds, however, do reflect the historic Anglican tradition; although these may equally be derived from Scripture texts (seen in the example of the Easter Sunday 'Resurrection' creed), and appear to hold the same 'authority' as the former.
f. The service structure shows a deliberate movement towards the hearing and preaching of Scripture; the songs before and after the sermon, for example, arguably function as aids to prepare and respond to the specific themes being preached upon.
g. The nature of preaching is expository and expositional in style. Arguably this sits in the English evangelical preaching tradition of, for example, John Stott, who states that word and worship belong indissolubly to each other.[28]
h. Communion occurs once a month and is similarly administered with a level of informality, a shortened form of the Anglican communion liturgy preceding the distribution. Bread and wine are passed throughout the congregation, presumably again avoiding a 'top down' priestly approach.

An edification model of corporate worship need not demand an unstudied or contemporary format. Yet within its informality, the corporate worship of St Ebbe's might still be considered to follow the shape and intention of services found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. As such it demonstrates a considered liturgical structure which emphasizes the centrality of the word in the building up, emotional engagement, praise and response of the congregation. The language of the songs, readings and formal liturgy balance a colloquial but NT-centred emphasis in the structure, suggesting a horizontal rather than transcendent outlook; and perhaps with less of an

[28] Stott contends that 'when the Word of God is expounded in its fulness, and the congregation begin to glimpse the glory of the living God, they bow down in solemn awe and joyful wonder before his throne. It is preaching which accomplishes this, the proclamation of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God.' John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 95–96.

eschatological accent than Peterson might advocate. It is perhaps, as Keller will shortly argue, a Zwinglian model. Nonetheless, the corporate worship of St Ebbe's is broadly consistent with both the bibliocentric foundations of the Anglican tradition[29] and the biblical-theological principles of Reformed evangelicalism, particularly in the way it emphasizes the preached word and mutual edification. Where Robert's model lacks theological cohesion is in the exegetical connection between the 'true worship' of Christ and an edification style of gathering. He attempts to bridge the two under an all-of-life umbrella, whilst downplaying the value of liturgy—other than it being a tool to encourage further all-of-life worship. I would suggest that the doctrine of union with Christ would speak to both facets with a higher degree of exegetical integrity, and equally inject a greater sense of the transcendent and eschatological anticipation into the gathering.

3. Tim Keller/Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, USA

3.a. Local and theological context

For Tim Keller, former pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York, worship is about directing our affections towards God, without any fundamental distinction between individual or corporate forms.

> Worship is treasuring God: I ponder his worth and then do something about it—I give him what he's worth. Every brand of worship must have those two elements. Public worship just means you're doing it in concert with others.[30]

His premise, however, is not so much a biblical-theological one. In fact, his theology begins with the definition of the English word.

> The word worship comes from an Old English word meaning "worth-ship." I define worship as a private act, which has two parts; seeing what God is worth and giving him what he's worth.[31]

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[29] Cranmer's collect for the second Sunday in Advent (and thus the second of the liturgical year) captures the spiritual dynamic of the *Book of Common Prayer* of being driven by the Word of God: 'BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.' The Church of England, accessed February 18, 2021, https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/book-of-common-prayer/collects-epistles-and-gospels/the-second-sunday-in-advent.aspx.

[30] Marshall Shelley, "What It Takes to Worship Well. An interview with Tim Keller" in *Christianity Today*, April 1, 1994, accessed June 2, 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1994/spring/4l2016.html.

[31] Shelley, "What It Takes to Worship Well."

While this might appear to avoid soteriological concerns altogether, one of his core assumptions about corporate worship is that it will have an evangelistic aim;[32] and here his argument does start to take on a biblical-theological character, beginning with God commanding Israel to invite the nations to join in declaring his glory, to seeing Jesus doing this perfectly within the gathering of God's people.

> In other words, the risen Lord now sends his people out singing his praises in mission, calling the nations to join both saints and angels in heavenly doxology. Jesus himself stands in the midst of the redeemed and leads us in the singing of God's praises (Heb. 2:12), even as God stands over his redeemed and sings over us in joy (Zeph. 3:17).[33]

In practice, this means evangelicals need to be particularly sensitive to cultural considerations when considering the praxis of what he defines as 'contemporary worship' (CW) and 'historic worship' (HW). 'Hidden… in the argument of CW enthusiasts is the assumption that culture is basically neutral and that thus there is no reason why we cannot wholly adopt any particular cultural form for our gathered worship.'[34] As such, he sees CW as an open door for mass-produced commercial music interests, a breaking of solidarity with Christians of the past, and a tendency to become dated very quickly. On the other hand, historic worship advocates are open to the charge of cultural elitism, and a bias towards the traditions of northern European culture. 'Hidden… in the arguments of HW advocates is the assumption that certain historic forms are more pure, biblical, and untainted by human cultural accretions.'[35] While advocates for CW, he claims, do not recognize sin within all cultures, those arguing for historic worship lack an awareness of the amount of common grace in the same. If there is a 'third way,' it is not what Robert Webber would label as 'blended worship.'[36] This method, Keller suggests, lumps together ancient and contemporary elements artificially, instead of interweaving them with a theological unity.[37] Rather, he advocates that corporate worship is best forged when consulting the Bible, the cultural context of the community and the historic traditions of the church.[38] The Bible, he notes, simply does not give enough detail to shape an entire service of gathered worship. To 'fill in the blanks,' therefore, we need to draw on tradition, the cultural sensibilities of the people and indeed

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[32] Timothy Keller, "Evangelistic Worship," accessed June 2, 2020, https://redeemercitytocity.com/articles-stories/evangelistic-worship.
[33] Keller, "Evangelistic Worship."
[34] Timothy Keller, "Reformed Worship in the Global City," in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 195.
[35] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 196.
[36] Robert Webber, *Blended Worship: Achieving Substance and Relevance in Worship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996).
[37] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 197.
[38] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 197.

our own personal preferences. The solution to the 'worship wars' is to 'forge new forms of corporate worship that take seriously both our histories and contemporary realities, all within a framework of biblical theology.'[39]

While not holding his to be the only way to apply a biblical theology of worship, Keller does aim to show how the historic roots of Reformed worship (that of his own Presbyterian tradition) can effectively inform and shape contemporary gathered worship. Within this tradition he notes how following either Zwingli or Calvin led to two very different 'Reformed' styles of worship. But it is Calvin's tradition he particularly feels to be relevant to post-modern people. Postmoderns, he suggests, have a hunger for ancient roots and a common history—which Calvin emphasizes through liturgy in a way that neither traditional Free Church worship or contemporary praise worship does.[40] Free church services in the Zwinglian tradition, rather, are cognition-heavy, whereas Postmoderns hunger for transcendence and experience and are distrustful of the hype of an informal 'seeker service.'

How does Keller see Calvin as applying biblical-theological principles to worship? In short, he reiterates that Calvin saw that there was no NT 'directory of worship' in the same way that Leviticus was for Israel. 'The Bible may give us basic elements of corporate worship, but it leaves us free with regard to modes, forms, and the order of those elements.'[41] Furthermore, Calvin did not claim the ability to create a pure biblical corporate worship from scratch. Rather he consulted ancient tradition to produce a simplified liturgy of the word and eucharist. But he also consciously consulted the capacities of the congregants.[42] Keller notes that Calvin went as far to claim that the liturgy he presented was entirely directed towards edification; and although this might seem to be at odds with Keller's own position, he understands Calvin as refusing to choose between transcendence and accessibility. 'Calvin refused to pit "the glory of God" against the "edification" of the participants.'[43]

As to the relationship between all-of-life and gathered worship, Keller tends to follow D. A. Carson's position. CW and charismatic churches, he suggests, hold the view that worship

[39] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 198.
[40] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 201.
[41] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 202.
[42] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 202.
[43] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 202.

happens in the service of corporate praise rather than in the world during the week. Low church evangelicals, such as Anglicans in Britain and Australia argue the opposite, that Christ completely fulfils all the cultic elements of worship—so that gathered meetings are not in any distinctive way worship, but for edification. Keller's middle position, rather, says that

> When we gather to listen, pray, and praise as a community, we are seeking to remember the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 11:25). "Remember" cannot simply be a cognitive action. It is talking about getting a "sense of the heart" of the truth so that our lives can be more conformed to what we believe. Corporate praying, corporate signing, corporate offering, and hearing God's Word all do have a distinctive worship function.[44]

Keller similarly sees Calvin as riding out a 'middle' way in this issue. If Zwingli viewed the Sunday gathering as a time of teaching and edification, Calvin knew that one purpose of the meeting was transcendence, a corporate experience of God; and distinct from the worship of Christians in all-of-life.[45] If this balance is not maintained, he suggests, you will get either an overly cognitive or overly emotional shape to your worship.[46]

As such, the 'core commitment' of Calvin's corporate worship was his rediscovery of the biblical gospel of unmerited and free grace. God's grace comes to us as a *word to believe*, rather than as a deed to be performed.[47] His balance of 'corporate worship elements' (singing, sacrament, common prayer) with the preaching of the word all flowed out of his emphasis on the sovereign free grace of God in the gospel.[48] For Keller, three practical traits flow out from this principle:

> The *voice* of Calvin's gathered worship is *simplicity of form* because of our confidence in God's grace (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2–5). The *goal* is *entering the presence of God*, in our amazement at God's grace (cf. Exod. 33.18). The *order* consists of cycles of *gospel re-enactment* for the reception of God's grace afresh.[49]

It is not immediately evident how Keller arrives at this application of Calvin's thinking on worship. We might argue that a model of simplicity, transcendence and order, while valid in itself, is not obviously of Calvin! Keller's aims are nonetheless edificatory in substance, even if evangelistic and socially minded in purpose.[50] And it is with these principles in mind, that Keller

[44] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 204–205.
[45] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 206.
[46] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 206.
[47] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 208.
[48] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 208.
[49] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 217.
[50] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 219–220.

proposes two approaches to corporate worship which he applies within in his congregations in Manhattan:

a. *Reformed Contemporary Worship*: is contemporary in mode 'with significant HW elements integrated in.'[51] Songs will largely be contemporary and led by a band. It will still contain many traditional hymns but may be set to contemporary music or arrangements. He suggests that within this there is 'simplicity of voice,' avoiding the typical sentimentality of typical contemporary worship leading. There are fewer fixed liturgical forms, although the service will still follow a shape of 'gospel re-enactment,' with elements of entrance, praise, confession and assurance, readings of scripture, use of creeds, and an emphasis on the sacrament.[52]

b. *Contemporary Reformed Worship*: is a more historic mode with contemporary elements integrated. There is a musical reliance on high culture's form and historic hymns, accompanied by organ or orchestral ensembles. At the same time, carefully selected contemporary music will be added at points to help 'lighten the tone.' This model sees more frequent communion, moderate use of liturgy, and 'an orientation toward silence, joyous awe, and wonder.'[53]

Again, Keller doesn't claim these models represent a third or middle way between historic and contemporary corporate worship, but rather that they both consistently work to integrate Bible, culture and tradition. Leaders of both models are expected to prepare in depth, in material and spiritually, in order to avoid either making off-the-cuff remarks or simply relying on liturgical formulas. Thought must be given to the leader's demeanour and the appropriate expression of emotion and accessible (though not colloquial) language. Music in either style must be of a high technical standard and artistic quality, and theologically sound, but not lacking in either. In this way Keller envisages the music contributing to a sense of transcendence as well as being evangelistically inclusive.[54]

[51] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 221.
[52] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 221–222.
[53] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 222.
[54] Keller, "Reformed Worship," 237.

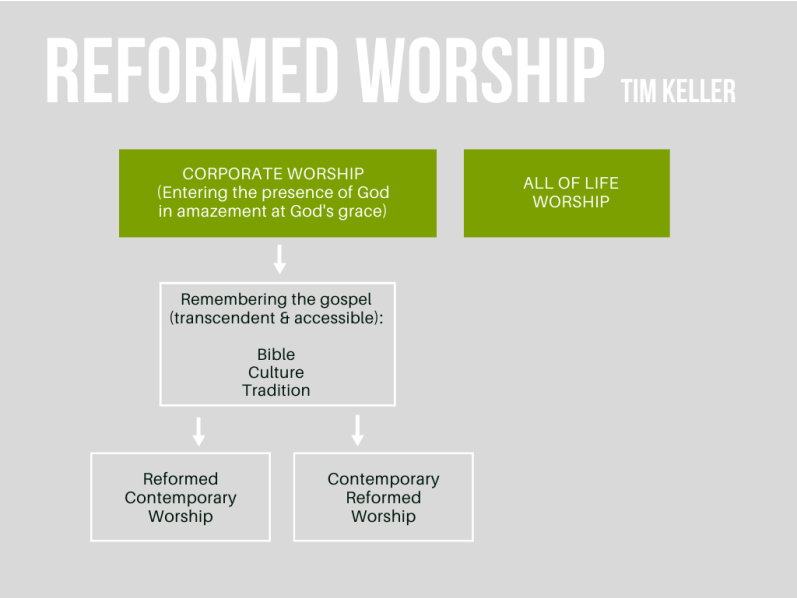


Figure 2. Tim Keller's transcendent/edification model of worship

3.b. Service Structure

Our example shows Keller's Easter Sunday service[55] following the 'Contemporary Reformed' model. The general structure follows, as he suggests, a traditional reformed service sequence.

Prelude: *Symphony No. 1 in C Major* I (Beethoven)
Preparation
Hymns: Christ the Lord is Ris'n Today/All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name
Call to Worship – based on 1 Corinthians 15:55–56
Prayer of adoration
Lord's Prayer
Doxology (sung): All Creatures of our God and King
Testimony
Confession
Confessional response (sung): Rock of Ages
Words of encouragement – 2 Corinthians 5:15
Hymn: Jesus Lives, and So Shall I
Peace
Scripture Reading: John 20:1–18
Sermon 'Encountering the Risen King'
Offertory: *Symphony No. 1 in C Major* II (Beethoven)
Prayers
Prayer of thanksgiving
Hymn: Rejoice, the Lord is King
Benediction

[55] Redeemer Presbyterian Church, "Redeemer Presbyterian Church: West Side," accessed March 29, 2016, http://www.redeemer.com/visit/redeemer_west_side.

Dismissal
Postlude: *Symphony No. 1 in C Major* III (Beethoven)

3.c. Analysis

Considering this service within Keller's broader theology or worship we might make the following observations:

a. Of his three criteria of tradition, cultural context, and biblical-theological framework, the least attention is given to the last. Keller's deference to Calvin in informing a model of corporate worship at best *assumes* the latter's biblical-theological perspective. While Keller employs a guiding principle of 'God's gift of grace in the gospel,' Calvin's liberal attitude towards liturgical structure would if anything undermine the former's aims for transcendence and 'doxological evangelism.'

b. If Keller's service is submitting to a biblical-theological framework, it derives not so much from Calvin, but more reasonably Carson's NT edification/transcendence model. As such there is little to no use of OT in the readings, nor liturgical items. And if there *is* a theological unity in Keller's structure, it is derived from the use of historical reformed liturgical shapes.

c. Keller's service does, however, affirm both tradition and contextual/cultural considerations. It contains, for example, specifically contextual items: reflections on poetry, use of secular art music, and testimonies. It is hard, however, not to see that tradition and context mutually justify each other in the absence of any obviously biblically structuring principles. As Keller argues, the use of tradition satisfies a postmodern love of the ancient.

d. While there is no use of a creed, we note that, like at St Ebbe's, the music plays a liturgical role, particularly in the moments of adoration, thanksgiving, confession and encouragement (absolution), as well as reinforcing the theme of the preaching. The use of 'special' music, I suspect, plays an important role in supporting an experience of transcendence.

It is clear that Keller's approach to corporate worship is influenced heavily by cultural and contextual concerns, to satisfy a post-modern love of the ancient. Theologically, however, he affirms the approach of D. A. Carson, and as such shows a clear preference for NT content with a Christological emphasis. In seeking a middle way between all-of-life worship and liturgical worship, he does employ a soteriology—whereby believers are reminded of gospel truths as they engage with the world. His evangelistic emphasis is, therefore, consistent with the outcomes of the soteriological model. However, lacking the clarity of a fully worked out biblical theology there

is no strong sense of what the essence of biblical worship is. Furthermore, his appeal to Calvin fails to reflect a biblical-theological framework, and instead relies on assumptions about Reformation corporate worship from empirical rather than *a priori* evidence. As such, there is little sense of bringing the whole of scripture to bear on his theology of worship. Nonetheless, he does appeal to the principle of unmerited grace and applies this to corporate worship through a positive fostering of cultural engagement and pursuit of evangelistic and social justice concerns. In each of these ways, Keller's model/s of worship might be said to be evangelical in praxis. What is not clear is how that praxis is driven by biblical-theological concerns.

4. Jeffrey J. Meyers/Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church, St Louis, USA

4.a. Local and theological context

Of all the advocates for a covenantal perspective on worship, Meyers stands out as both a pastor and theologian. Pastor of Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri, he is concerned to educate his congregation on the praxis of a covenantal theological approach, both in the weekly service sheet and in additional literature. Not every church uses the word 'liturgy,' he suggests, but every church orders its worship service according to some rationale.[56]

> I have heard our form of worship contemptuously described as 'worship by recipe,' a reference to our practice of following a basic order and our repeated, but not slavish, use of various printed prayers, confessions, and other congregational recitations within the service. I have to ask: what's wrong with recipes? A recipe is 'a set of directions with a list of ingredients for making or preparing something' or 'a formula for or means to a desired end.' Is having a 'recipe' for worship something bad?[57]

Meyers reminds his congregation that the biblical way of worship is the way of sacrifice and the purpose is covenant renewal.[58] He argues that contrary to popular Christian opinion, the New Testament does not abrogate sacrifice, but rather, Jesus Christ fulfils and establishes the genuine meaning and practice of sacrifice and offering.'[59] And if liturgy in the New Testament is intimately connected with the biblical practice of 'offering' and 'sacrifice,' then more important than the word itself is the recognition that God has established the way of approaching him.[60] The movement of the worship service, Myers maintains, is designed to correspond to the way in

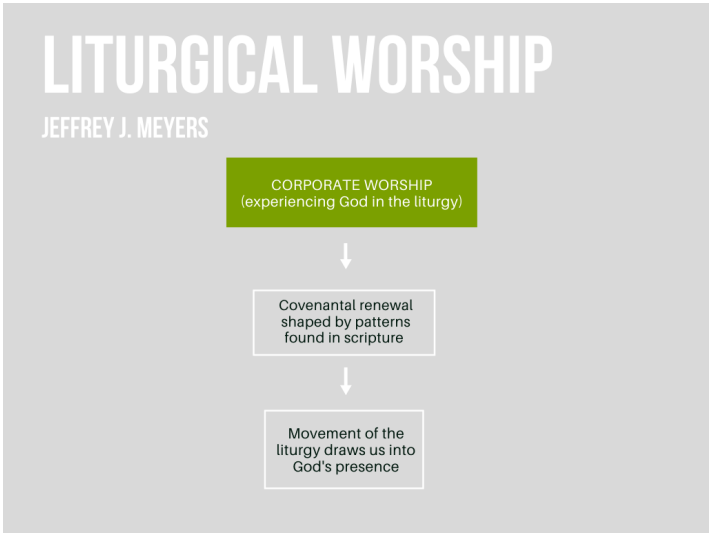
[56] Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: Worship at Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church* (St. Louis, MO: Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church, 2011), 29.
[57] Meyers, 29.
[58] Meyers, 30.
[59] Meyers, 15.
[60] Meyers, 14.

which God draws people into his presence.[61] There is little need, therefore, to not follow a similar order and pattern each week, as the movement of the service shows something of an 'ascent' into that presence along the pathway he has established. This pattern follows the fivefold order of sacrificial or covenant renewal worship:

God Calls Us
    We Gather Together and Praise Him
God Cleanses Us
    We Confess Our Sins
God Consecrates Us
    We Respond in Prayer and Offering
God Communes With Us
    We Eat God's Food
God Commissions (Blesses) Us[62]

The liturgy, as such, moves from tension to rest and from mourning to joy. God calls us together, fuels us for service, and sends us forth. In sacrificial, covenant renewal worship, 'we march out to serve God.'[63]

Meyers has no qualms that this service might be considered Catholic or Episcopalian in nature. He claims, however, that we should not define the practice of worship in reaction to other churches. 'We might very well end up throwing out the baby with the bath water, which has been done all too often in the history of Protestant worship.'[64] Rather, he advocates that we learn to better understand the rationale of formal liturgy.



[61] Meyers, 30.
[62] Meyers, 18.
[63] Meyers, 19.
[64] Meyers, 23.

Figure 3. Jeffrey J. Meyers covenantal/liturgical model of corporate worship

4.b. Service Structure

In contrast to the two previous services, the outline for the Easter Sunday service[65] at Providence Reformed Church shows the far greater extent to which Meyers holds to such a formal liturgical structure.

The Entrance
Prelude
Welcome & Announcements
[Kneeling] Silent Preparation for Worship
Call to Worship (Easter greeting)
Hymn of Praise: Jesus Christ is risen today
Salutation & Responsive Scripture: Matthew 28:19, Ruth 2:4, 1 Corinthians 15:57

Purification
Psalm 139:23–24
Confession

Ascension
Lift up your hearts…
The Sanctus
Hymn: Alleluia! Alleluia!
The Appointed Scripture Readings for Easter Sunday
The First Reading: Acts 10:34–43
The Reading from the Psalms: Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24
The Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:19–26
The Gospel Reading: Luke 24:1–12
Hymn of Praise: In Christ alone
The Kyrie
The Gloria Patri
The Sermon Text: 1 Peter 1:3–5
Sermon 'What should the Resurrection mean to you?'
Hymn: Lift up, lift up your voices now

The Tribute Offering
Choir Anthem: Up, up! my heart
The Doxology
An Easter Litany

The Sacrifice of Peace
Prayer of Thanksgiving & the Bread of Life
Hymn: Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands

[65] Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church, "Weekly Service Bulletins," March 17, 2016, accessed March 29, 2016, http://www.providencestlouis.com/weekly-service-bulletins.

Prayer of Thanksgiving & the Wine of Gladness
The Song of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis): Luke 2:30–32

Benediction
Hymn of Praise: Hail thee, Festival Day
Commission: Matthew 28:18–20
Benediction: Numbers 6:24–26
Three-fold Amen & Postlude

4.c. Analysis

Unlike Keller, Meyers is not advocating a formal liturgical structure for contextual reasons. Instead, he views the service as the means of the church entering into God's presence (perhaps not unlike some Arminian and charismatic models). 'This is the place, the location where he gathers his people around the Word and Sacraments… Without being in the Lord's special presence we have no assurance of his omnipresent help in every situation and location'[66] As such the congregation is 'called' into his presence, and the confession purifies the believer on the path into that presence.'[67]

Music also seems to play a significant role in this sense of presence. Hymns will usually highlight 'some aspect of the character and/or work of God thereby giving concrete form to the congregation's adoration and praise.'[68] But so that the music maintains a Godward focus, the organ and choir are positioned in the back of the church.'[69]

With an obvious focus on the word, the Bible saturates each element of the Liturgy, covering the OT, NT and Psalms, in addition to the text being preached upon. Unlike the St Ebbe's or Redeemer models, where the sermon is viewed as the climax of the service, Meyers' aim is to 'read, sing, pray, and recite the Word of God from the opening of the service.'[70] In this way the worship service as a whole is in some sense sermonic. 'If our worship is sacrificial, God has been wielding the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word, throughout the liturgy, and we have been responding to his voice from the moment we heard him call us into his presence.'[71]

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[66] Meyers, 33.
[67] Meyers, 38.
[68] Meyers, 34.
[69] Meyers, 34.
[70] Meyers, 46.
[71] Meyers, 46.

If there *is* a climactic moment in this liturgy it is in communion. As the service acts to cleanse and consecrate, then 'before God sends us out to serve him in the world, he first sits us down for a meal.'[72]

> He must strengthen and nourish us for the task ahead of us with bread and wine. Therefore, we are invited to sit down and eat dinner with Jesus and receive from him by faith his own life-giving flesh and blood.'[73]

While Myers distances his praxis from that of Roman Catholicism, he nonetheless sets up a similar sense of the mystical—seeking to achieve an experience of God's presence. Such a view clearly sees OT temple/liturgical practice as normative and gives the liturgy itself a level of soteriological weight over the worship of Christ. This resonance with aspects of medieval Catholicism (and with Arminianism and Pentecostalism) is, however, what the reformers sought to refute. There is no doubt that a structure soaked in Scripture *is* consistent with the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*. The question is whether the liturgy itself seems to usurp the place of *sola gratia*. That is, if corporate worship is the means by entering the presence of God, has Meyers missed what it is to worship *in Christ*? Where Keller would admit to utilizing formal liturgy for pragmatic and contextual reasons, my concern with Meyer's service is that it bypasses the doctrine of grace, and that experience and participation in the liturgy becomes a form of evangelical sacramentalism.

5. Conclusion

Each of these examples show something of what it means to be Reformed and evangelical in substance. Each places an emphasis on the word of God as the compelling factor of the liturgy; and whether formal or informal, each demonstrates the content of the congregation's praise, prayer and response as proceeding from Scripture. The reading and exposition of the word is a prominent, if not focal point of the gathering. So too is a Christological focus in the singing, litany and Bible texts. The common use of the confession and descriptive and responsive language of the hymns demonstrate a fundamental commitment (in most cases) to the doctrine of salvation by God's grace alone—the heart of evangelical soteriology. Each service seeks to facilitate engagement with God in Christ, which occurs through the ministry of the word in various forms. Finally, each gestures to towards traditional Reformed liturgical structures in following a narrative shaped by the gospel. Broadly then, these services reflect to some extent

[72] Meyers, 50.
[73] Meyers, 50.

Calvin's theological and hermeneutical principles.

The *experience* of each is of course profoundly different. And it is in this sense of experience, more than the actual shape of liturgy, that one can most clearly observe the relationship between corporate worship and its biblical-theological foundations. The semi-mystical experience of Meyers' ritualistic liturgy shows the influence of covenantal patterns of OT worship. Keller's sensitivity towards contextual and cultural concerns aims to fulfil a longing for transcendence in the gathering. The horizontal focus in Roberts' edificatory worship sees the heartfelt use of music, prayer and praise as building the church up and into Christ, a special and corporate expression of an all-of-life service. If there is a model which most closely reflects Calvin's view of public worship, I would suggest it is the latter.

Yet tied to experience is an implicit theology of where one meets God, or how one enters his presence. While each pastor would rightly say that the believer meets God in Christ, (be that in the words and songs of the liturgy, a sacramental approach to the Lord's Supper, in the church community, or in the new creation), we see differing degrees of how much this rests on the prior worship of Christ, and what responsibility the 'worshipper' therefore brings to this relationship. Given the NT's lack of formal direction for corporate worship, as nearly all our authors admit, an uncertainty remains. Meyers finds sanctuary in the patterns of the OT, affirming a high level of continuity between Israel and the Church; although I consider this to be the hermeneutically weaker approach. Alternatively, Keller and Roberts, in stressing the transformed nature of new covenant worship, present a stronger soteriological foundation. In the context of all-of-life service, their transcendent church gatherings provide an eschatological expectation of true worship in the new creation. None of these examples, however, would obviously look to the church's union with Christ to inform their approach to the gathering. Nonetheless, in many ways these services reflect Calvin (that the assembly gathers to hear the word and to pray, praise and encourage), and so remain faithful to the tradition, although perhaps without the certainty and assurance that Christ's salvific worship might bring. At the very least, an unhelpful commitment to using the language of worship to describe the nature and elements of the gathering clouds the true nature and beauty of biblical worship, obscuring the truth that, 'Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.'[74]

[74] Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages," 1763, accessed June 7, 2021, https://www.hymnologyarchive.com/rock-of-ages-cleft-for-me.

CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

1. The positive outcomes of a soteriological model of worship for ecclesiology
2. Objections to a soteriological model of worship
3. Worship fuelled by grace

This thesis has argued that the doctrine of worship within the Reformed evangelical tradition is best understood in soteriological terms. The soteriological model sees worship occurring vicariously in terms of the actions performed by Christ on behalf of the believer and witnessed primarily as a process and state of restored access to God. Such an approach will inevitably challenge existing positions on the nature of biblical worship, the practice of corporate worship, and the use of worship language within the Christian community. In my conclusion, therefore, I will address potential objections to the model. But first, I will re-state the benefits of taking a soteriological approach to worship.

1. The positive outcomes of a soteriological model of worship for ecclesiology

Viewing worship through a biblical-theological lens challenges a number of common assumptions about the nature and purpose of corporate worship. My purpose, however, is not one of reproof. A soteriological approach allows freedom from the uncertainty inherent in human initiated worship. One might ask if uncertainty in faith is necessarily negative? In many ways no; the apostle Paul famously stating, for instance, that it was through his personal struggles that he was taught the sufficiency of God's grace (2 Cor 12:9). Likewise, within Reformed theology grace is the means of the believer's certainty of being right with God, whether or not they have satisfactorily performed the liturgy or offered the appropriate sacrifice. Grace triumphs over the ineffectual salvation of works (or even grace plus works). *Uncertainty* arises when the church seeks to obtain the blessings of God through ritual worship (whether corporately or individually) and when there is an expectation that my sacrificial offering will carry some weight in pleasing or appeasing God or earning his favour. This is the nature of sacrifice: to undergo a level of physical pain for spiritual gain. For many Christians, this is experienced in the formal liturgy of Holy Communion, or in the ecstatic offering of a contemporary song, or the quasi-legalistic pietistic lifestyle. This is the theological approach seen historically in Arminian branches

of evangelicalism, which in turn seeded the more recent Pentecostal movement, which itself has had an increasing influence on the corporate worship of Reformed evangelical churches. But it is also characteristic of the sacrificial liturgies which have predominated for much of church history. Soteriological worship sees *Christ's sacrifice* as once and for all, and thereby protects the church from pursuing the mystical in the Christian gathering and legalistic pietism in the Christian life. This is consistent with the Reformers' argument that just as Christians were no longer obligated to the ceremonies of the old covenant,[1] so the church should leave behind the ceremonies of Roman Catholicism.

Of course, there are other outcomes of taking a soteriological worship position. One might be to find new language to describe the church gathering and its parts, (for example, replacing the 'call to worship', the worship time, or the worship leader). This has not been my intention, however. Corporate worship can still be a valid term for broadly discussing a church's liturgy or when used as a description for the gathering, particularly when not importing inappropriate theological weight into its use. At the same time, I would argue that the soteriological model challenges us to consider using language around worship more thoughtfully. On the one hand, to describe a hymn as a 'worship song' is neither here nor there. On the other, the use of worship language to suggest that the gathering, singing, prayer or praise, if not all-of-life service, are 'works' of the believer (to bring about God's blessing) is to miss the point of our biblical theology. A soteriological approach to worship means emphasis will be given to the gospel of grace within the liturgy, in song and in life. Songs, for example, will speak of what God has done for us, rather than what we will do for him. Liturgies will be shaped by a gospel narrative of creation—fall—redemption—consummation, where Christians are reminded of both their former alienation from God and their new means of engagement with him in Christ. Prayers will not attempt to bring us into God's presence, because the believer already has confidence of their standing 'in Christ.' Biblical language of service and adoration, glorification and magnification will be used to

[1] Calvin did not use the term 'mystical union' in the same way that medieval Catholicism or even modern Pentecostalism might be described as mystical, i.e., pursuing an experience of the presence of God. Rather, Calvin's mystical union concerns the doctrine of union with Christ and is reliant on the imputed righteousness of Christ. 'That joining of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him" Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PN: The Westminster Press, 1960/1986), 3.11.10, 736–37.

express the nuances of Christian response, rather than worship as a catch all term. Rather, to speak of the worship of the church is to refer to the saving work of Christ on its behalf. A worship song, therefore, is not an offering, so much as a declaration of forgiveness, salvation and grace. Corporate worship, as such, may be a valid description of the actions of the gathered church, but not the means of acceptable engagement with God.

2. Objections to a soteriological model of worship

a. The soteriological model gives too much emphasis to edification in corporate worship, rather than the 'affective.'

Tim Keller suggests that the view

> put forth very articulately by low-church evangelical Anglicans in Australia and Britain… argues that Christ completely fulfils all the 'cultic' elements of worship—the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the Sabbath, the Passover—so that now the language of worship is applied to how all Christians live all of life… This view contends, then, that our gathered meetings are not in any distinctive way 'worship.' The main reason that Christians gather now is for edification… [However,] to say that we meet on Sunday only for edification is a mistake… [We are] only truly worshipping when we are serving God with our entire beings, including our hearts, which must be 'affected' by God's glory.[2]

While Keller's is more an argument against undue emphasis on edification in corporate worship, he might easily level these same criticisms at my soteriological model; as it is precisely Christ's fulfilment of the cultic elements of OT worship that demands thinking about worship in soteriological terms. This is not to say that Keller is seeking anything beyond the gospel to be central in corporate worship. His issue is that edification is an overly cognitive action. He would rather pursue

> a 'sense of the heart' of the truth so that our lives can be more conformed to what we believe. Corporate praying, corporate singing, corporate offering, and hearing God's Word all do have a distinctive worship function.[3]

The weakness in this criticism is to claim that edification (and indeed its soteriological basis) is purely cognitive. A soteriological approach to worship is not against an affective response to God in the life of believer; but rather demands it (e.g., Rv 19). It does not, however, allow the

[2] Timothy Keller, "Reformed Worship in the Global City," in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D.A Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 204.
[3] Keller, 204–205.

'affective' to *shape* the nature of true worship within the biblical theological narrative. Rather, biblical praise is a result, not of human initiative, but the actions of Christ's worship, and never adding to it. Keller understands the biblical injunctions to sing or pray, etc., as commands to gather for worship rather than as the fruit of Christ's worship.[4] As I have argued, the church (gathered in Christ) is called and shown to express appropriate and affectionate gratitude for their salvation, both on earth and in heaven.

b. The soteriological model diminishes the place of corporate worship within an all-of-life framework.

David Peterson states that

> to put the focus on edification is not to suggest that church service is the one area of the Christian life where we do not worship God! The… exercise of gifts in any context may be regarded as an expression of worship, if the ministries are genuinely for the benefit of others and the glory of God. While all ministry must be understood as a response to God's grace, and not in any sense a cultivation of his favour, ministry to others is an aspect of our service or self-giving to God. Moreover, edification is really God's work in our midst.[5]

As such, he suggests speaking of congregational worship as a particular expression of the total life-response that is the worship of the new covenant. I have two concerns with this view:

1. While the soteriological model supports the NT call for edification to shape the nature of relationships within the church and towards God, this is precisely because edification is the primary expression of the church's union with Christ—and not their worship. One of the most natural activities for those 'in Christ,' rather, is to help grow one another 'in Christ,' or in other words, to edify. Challenging the idea that the believer's service is an expression of their worship, I would prefer to see 'service' as the right response to the worship of Christ.

2. The commonly cited all-of-life proof-texts (e.g., Rom 12:1 ff.; Heb 12:28 ff.) do not obviously show corporate worship to be an example or expression (let alone prime example) of reasonable service. Rather, in each case the believer is called to show love, submission and hospitality towards others.

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[4] Keller, 198.
[5] David Peterson, *Engaging With God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Leicester: Apollos, 1992), 219.

c. The soteriological model downplays a special presence of God when meeting in Christ's name.

John Frame (who agrees with Peterson and others that worship is an all-of-life activity) makes this objection in saying that

> when he [God] meets with us, [however], something special happens. The Bible uses the term 'worship' to express that special situation, even apart from the priestly ministry of the tabernacle and the temple… Although Scripture doesn't speak specifically of the Christian meeting as a worship service, it does use worship terminology for some of the things that we do at the meeting.[6]

Frame contends that the NT teaches that when God's people meet together in the name of Jesus, God actually does draw nearer, which remains true whether one feels God's nearness or not.

> The name of Christ is inseparable from Christ himself. To praise his name is to praise him. To baptize into his name is to baptize into Christ. To believe in his name is to believe in him. It is in that wonderful name that we meet.[7]

At first, it might appear that Frame is actually arguing a union with Christ position for the gathering. It is unclear, however, as to where the initiative for corporate worship stems from, as he equally uses UWC language to describe human action. For example, 'to meet in the name of Christ means meeting because of him, meeting for purposes that arise out of our common commitment to Jesus."[8] The assumption here is that worship is the work of the believer—requiring human initiative to draw God close. Instead of the church being gathered (the soteriological position), the church meets. Rather than the church existing 'in Christ' (the result of Christ's worship) the church associates with Christ or does things in his name.

The soteriological model argues that there cannot be a special presence of God in the Christian gathering that does not exist already for those in Christ.[9] To suggest otherwise requires human effort, and if that is worship, then it reflects an oddly pre-reformation stance. Of course, the NT *does* insist on the church gathering (Heb 10:25) within which exists a rich dynamic of God

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[6] John M Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1996), 33–34.
[7] Frame, 35.
[8] Frame, 35.
[9] One example where it might be suggested that God makes himself *more* present in certain situations, for example, is Jesus' statement in Matthew 18:20 that 'where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them,' is not in its context describing the church gathering; and in fact assumes a prior state of union with Christ.

ministering his word to the church, the church ministering to one another and the church ministering to God in thanksgiving, prayer and praise (Col 3:16).

d. The soteriological model rejects the notion of corporate worship all together.

In a published email conversation, Tony Payne challenges D. A. Carson on his use of worship language to describe the church meeting.

> The language and categories that dominate NT teaching about church are those of love and edification (e.g., 1 Cor 3; 1 Cor 12–14; Eph 4; Heb 10 etc.) Why don't we simply talk about what we should do in church, on the basis of these and similar passages? Why import and overlay 'worship' language, when the NT doesn't do so, and when there are so many latent dangers (which have played themselves out repeatedly in church history, the most threatening current manifestation being the charismatic 'praise and worship' industry)?'[10]

Carson's reply to Payne is that he has a too-limiting set of parameters on what it is to 'worship'.

> For you, every use of 'worship' seems to be associated with the cultic. That is what finally drives you to say that Jesus is the only 'worshipper,' the *leitourgos* in the heavenly sanctuary. Yet John 4 says Jesus seeks certain kinds of worshippers: apparently he thinks that it is still appropriate to attach the label to believers.

Whereas the soteriological model understands the worshippers of John 4 as those participating in Christ's 'cultic' worship, Carson, rather, sees this passage as redefining worship in broader terms. He states, for instance, that

> If we are to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength, that is equivalent, as far as I can see, to worship under the new covenant. We do not love God *less* when we come together. That is why, when I speak of 'worship' in connection with church, I prefer to use some sort of expression [such] as 'corporate worship' to distinguish it from the broad sweep of what worship seems to embrace under the new covenant.'[11]

Corporate worship, therefore, becomes one of several overarching categories (though certainly not the only one he allows) to describe what happens when Christians get together. In other words, Carson is restating the idea that all-of-life service is a feature of both old and new covenants (which I would agree with) but is superimposing new cultic language to contain the 'ceremonies' of the church. The umbrella term of corporate worship allows elements I would argue belong to the doctrine of the church (such as prayer, praise and thanksgiving etc.) to sit

[10] Tony Payne, "Is the church a house of worship? An e-mail dialogue with Don Carson," December 5, 2000, accessed June 16, 2020, http://thebriefing.com.au/2000/12/is-the-church-a-house-of-worship/.
[11] Tony Payne, "Is the church a house of worship?"

under it. While Carson is not at all suggesting that there is a heightened experience of worship when the church gathers, he nonetheless feels that there is sufficient warrant to claim that corporate worship is both part of *and distinct* from all-of-life worship. The soteriological model challenges the idea that biblical worship language can be understood synonymously with the language of service, and indeed that the Christian gathering fits within either theological category of worship or service.

e. The soteriological model unhelpfully emphasizes the New Testament material on worship over the Old.

Daniel Block claims that

> by driving… wedges between the Testaments, we dismiss the only Bible that Jesus and the New Testament authors had as irrelevant and lacking authority for us, and we sweep away significant continuities between the faith of ancient Israel and the early church. In so doing, we impose problems that may have existed within the Judaism of Jesus's day onto ancient Israel, refuse to let the First Testament speak for itself, and deny the true worshippers in Israel the hope that YHWH offered them with his gracious revelation. Furthermore, we rob the church of a rich resource for establishing permanent theological principles that could and probably should guide our worship.[12]

Block is the strongest voice amongst contemporary covenantal theologians to both *affirm* a NT all-of-life position on worship *and* acknowledge its lack of prescription for Christian corporate worship. Yet, he would argue that because of the minimal attention given to corporate worship in the NT, 'true Christian worship should be grounded on theological principles established in the First Testament.' Unless the NT expressly declares those principles to be obsolete, he states, we should assume continuity.[13] The soteriological model would challenge Block in two ways. The first regards the hermeneutical principles he employs to substantiate a liturgical approach to Christian corporate worship. Block indeed affirms that in Christ, the theology underlying Israelite worship finds its fulfilment.[14] It is therefore difficult to see how the ritualistic aspects of that worship must continue to the NT church. The argument that the NT's silence implies continuity appears fallacious in light of John 4 where the temple practices of Israel are nullified; and later confirmed with a fuller description of fulfilment in Christ in Hebrews and elsewhere. This leads to a second objection: which is to reject the notion that the OT ever sought to establish ongoing

[12] Daniel Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 5.
[13] Block, 25.
[14] Block, 7.

liturgical practices beyond its particular context. While we have observed that the NT richly employs cultic language in its soteriology and when thinking about the Christian gathering, read contextually, such language is clearly metaphoric. Furthermore, the ritual service of the OT, I noted, was never a substitute for actual worship of God.[15] It was, in the context of God's saving grace shown to Israel, a symbolic reminder of both the nearness and distance of God to his people, anticipating the glory of God to be revealed in Christ (Jn 1:14).

f. The Soteriological Model denies believers the ability to offer worship to God.

Robert S. Smith asks the question if

> there is anything inherently problematic with viewing 'worship' (whether by lip or life) as something we offer to God? Hardly!... we… *proclaim* His worth, *recognise* His glory, *declare* His greatness and *acknowledge* His exaltedness. Such ideas are embedded in the very heart of the biblical notion of 'worship' expressed in the physical action of bowing in homage.[16]

Smith rightly notes that the language of sacrifice, the centre point of OT worship, is clearly retained in the NT, albeit transformed into all-of-life categories. This implies, however, that the sacrifices of the Christian are still genuine offerings of worship.

But even if true, in what way can we compare the sacrificial offerings of the OT to those suggested in the New—either the moral injunctions (Rom 12) or the affective (Heb 13)? The blood offerings of the cult was the *service* required of a nation redeemed by God. As I have noted, these were a symbolic reminder of the tension between sin and redemption that lay at the heart of God's relationship with Israel; a tension that needed to be resolved. And yet the system itself created a further tension, one which is recognised throughout the OT, that God desired the heart (worship) over sacrifice (service), implying that service could only ever be the fruit of genuine worship. So, the fundamental biblical theological question remains: was the sacrificial system designed for Israel or the Christian believer? Was it designed to point to its fulfilment in the work of Christ, or to provide a model for later Christian service (including the church gathering)? If, as the soteriological model argues, the NT uses the language of sacrifice metaphorically, then it is the former. The sacrifices of the Christian can never hold soteriological weight, (nor seemingly are they tied to resolving the biblical tension of sin), but are only ever a response to God's grace

[15] Hence the regular reminders of the worthlessness of sacrificial offerings when not accompanied by heartfelt obedience: Isaiah 1:11–14, Hosea 6:6, Psalm 40:6–8, Psalm 51:16–17.
[16] Robert S. Smith, *Come, Let Us Sing. A Call to Musical Reformation* (London: Latimer Publications, 2020), 62.

in Christ. Certainly, the NT calls the church to follow the example of Christ's own sacrifice (e.g., Phil 2), but only because he is the supreme model of sacrificial service.

3. Worship fuelled by grace

J. B. Torrance was right to argue that a doctrine of worship without the mediating priesthood of Christ is *unitarian*, or something we do; as we go to church, sing songs and listen to a sermon etc. Rather, there is only one way to the Father 'through Christ in the communion of the Spirit, in the communion of saints, whatever outward form our worship may take.'[17] Where an individualistic view of worship engenders weariness, the worship of grace is the source of joy and ecstasy. 'With inward peace we are lifted up by the Spirit into the presence of the Father, into a life of wonderful communion, into a life of praise and adoration in union with Christ.'[18]

Ultimately, soteriological worship should be understood primarily as a doctrine of grace, rather than one of works; of union and communion rather than personal effort. Achieved by Christ on behalf of the believer, the only response God requires of the church is that of thankfulness. The works of service that follow, are exactly that—founded on thankfulness (Col 3:15–17); with its sacrificial offerings being the fruit of lips rather than the blood of an animal (Heb 13:15), neither of which are self-seeking. The believer's praise is thus fuelled by grace rather than obligation. And in not drawing attention to itself (as the 'performance' of corporate worship might easily do), soteriological worship puts the spotlight on the object and means of such worship (the Father and Son). Soteriological worship is not therefore about my response to the gospel, but is the gospel itself. If the heart of the gospel is about salvation of the lost, then gospel worship (our means of engaging with God) must equally be soteriological in essence. This gospel-worship framework is so strong, in fact, that its shape is reflected throughout scripture. Paul, for example, writes:

> For the *grace of God* has appeared, *bringing salvation* for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to *live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives* in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, *the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ*, who gave himself for us *to redeem* us from all lawlessness and to *purify for himself a people* for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Ti 2:11–14).

While Paul is not specifically articulating a doctrine of worship here, he is nonetheless employing a soteriological worship framework to describe life in Christ. As such, worship is:

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[17] James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 22.
[18] Torrance, 22.

a. *A display of God's grace* (11). While physical worship was and continued to be an act of obeisance of believers in both OT and NT, spiritual worship is performed by Christ on behalf of the church as a display of God's grace.
b. *The means of salvation* (11, 14). As the physical manifestation of the grace of God, Christ achieves salvation for the world, redeeming and purifying[19] his people through the offering of himself as the perfect sacrifice.
c. *The motivation for godly service* (12, 14b). Those saved by Christ reject idolatry (or false worship) and pursue inner devotion (of self-control, etc.) and outward service (of good works) towards others.
d. *Full of eschatological expectation* (13). Christ's past and ongoing acts of worship in the heavenly realms create an anticipation of God's glory to be fully revealed at his return.
e. *The source of the church* (14). Christ's worship establishes a people of his own possession; a people who desire to do good, not because their works merit God's favour or blessing but because their hearts are already purified for his service.

In this way, soteriological worship can be considered consonant with both Reformed and evangelical doctrine. It is Reformed because it affirms the five solas,[20] it is founded on Calvin's biblical-theological hermeneutic (of one covenant of grace across two administrations), is against the continuation of idolatrous and mystical ceremonies (whether they be of Israel or the Roman Catholic church) and is fundamentally Christological and word centred. These last characteristics alone make this equally an evangelical doctrine. Concerned little with denominational conformity or liturgical tradition but with the salvation of souls, soteriological worship understands evangelicalism's dual concern for godly engagement with the world and a life of heartfelt pietism. While one might argue that modern Reformed evangelicals have somewhat lost their way with worship, drawn towards personal experience within corporate worship over the more hermeneutically robust, but conceivably less 'spectacular' doctrine we have described, soteriological worship brings to the believer far greater benefits than those one might experience in a Sunday morning liturgy.

[19] Note how the language of purification is clearly reminiscent of cultic temple service.
[20] That is, salvation is by grace alone (not works); in Christ alone (as the only mediator between humanity and God); obtained by faith; understood by scripture alone; and demanding that glory of worship to God alone.

At its heart, soteriological worship centres on the vicarious worship of Christ, God's triumph of grace in the life of the believer and the church. The spiritual worship of Christ (articulated most clearly in Hebrews), is foremost a display of this grace, performed on behalf of the believer. It is this worship that establishes the church and guides its relationships and practices towards one another and the world. The spiritual sacrifices offered to God by the believer are only ever performed *in Christ*, and by his grace.

Similarly, the call to all-of-life service of Romans 12 (in continuity with Israel's service in the OT) is one which occurs only under the umbrella of God's grace, for those who know no condemnation *in Christ Jesus*; and is evidenced primarily in love towards others.

As I have identified, a key challenge in reforming an approach to worship in soteriological terms is the inherited use of worship language, defined historically in pietistic terms, and more recently in pseudo-sacrificial language (such in the songs that make the claim that, 'I will worship you.') Accepting that worship is defined to a great extent by its actual use, it is appropriate for word-centric evangelicals to bring a fresh soteriological approach to the use of worship language, particularly within the church gathering. Such an approach should not be undertaken with the aim of 'correcting' misconceptions, but rather to help the church marvel at the glory of Christ's worship. In so doing, the Bible provides a rich pallet of language to describe the human response to God and his grace. Adoration, magnification and praise are just a few of the NT expressions which describe the affective response to God's grace in Christ, without undermining the soteriological weight of true worship. The burden (and potential fear) of getting worship wrong is easily replaced with the confidence inspired in rejoicing in a great high priest who made the perfect sacrifice of behalf of his people. Coming into the presence of God was risky for Moses and the OT believer, and required the temple's sacrificial system to provide a buffer. But as John 1:14 declares: in Christ we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth. As the new tabernacle, priest and sacrifice, Christ truly is the one true worshipper.

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