

The Irony of Contemporary Presbyterian Worship

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Observers of the current religious scene in the United States should not be faulted if they sometimes lose track of that ever-present but always elusive dividing between liberal and evangelical Protestants.¹ Without a scorecard, identifying the players on each side is tricky, especially when it comes to matters of liturgy and worship. The slippery quality of Protestant divisions, for instance, was recently on display in the pages of *First Things*, a journal that leans heavily to the cultural, political and Roman Catholic right. On one page, in a short review of Donald Miller's new book on Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard Movement, the churches that have done much to popularize Praise & Worship forms of worship (hereafter P&W), the reviewer lauds these movements as the wave of the future for American Protestantism. Even though they are anti-ritualistic, anti-creedal, and anti-intellectual, they also emphasize personal accountability and obedience to biblical norms. Their search for simplicity, accordingly, makes them the odds-on favorite to beat those churches "dominated by eighteenth-century hymns, routinized liturgy, and bureaucratized layers of social organization."²

Two pages later, in a review of Gertrude Himmelfarb's book, *One Nation, Two Cultures*, the analysis continues to be upbeat about the cultural and religious right that contemporary evangelicalism has become. The reviewer notes that Himmelfarb believes America is experiencing yet another Great Awakening and that this will provide a "modest reformation" of the "elite cultural revolutions of this century."³ The impression conveyed by *First Things*,

¹For evidence of just how elusive this division is, see Douglas Jacobsen and William Vance Trollinger, Jr., eds., *Re-Forming the Center: American Protestantism, 1900 to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

²Walter Sundberg, review of *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*, *First Things* 98 (Dec 1999), 59-60.

³Anonymous, review of *One Nation, Two Cultures*, *First Things* 98 (Dec 1999), 64.

then, is that evangelical Protestantism in the form of the charismatic renewal is an ally of cultural traditionalists in the contemporary culture war.⁴

What these reviewers fail to notice, along with the authors of the books under review, is that the cultural sensibility of evangelicals that is embodied in contemporary worship is at odds with the traditionalism, formalism and cultural standards advocated by cultural conservatives, whether Protestant, Roman Catholics, Jewish or secular. And for that reason, perceptive readers of *First Things* must have been reaching for Dramamine to calm stomachs upset by the sudden shift in perspective.

Let me explain. People with strong ethical beliefs, according to books like those by James Davison Hunter and Gertrude Himmelfarb, are supposed to be on the conservative end of the cultural spectrum. That supposition puts evangelicals squarely on the cultural right. In contrast, the mainline churches, whose morals many think are somewhere in the vicinity of Ted Turner's, are supposed to be on the liberal side of the culture wars. But the worship wars are another matter altogether.⁵ When it comes to order of worship and liturgical forms, evangelical Protestants turn out to be about as conservative as the scriptwriters for the "Simpsons" television show. Meanwhile, mainline Protestants have emerged as the chief advocates of traditional worship and liturgy. What is more, the worship wars confuse most of the categories used to assess the culture wars. If the cultural left and right are supposed to have different ethical standards, with the left being relativists and the right advocating strict moral standards, what does it say about evangelical morality if the proponents of contemporary worship seem to disregard the first table of the Decalogue – after all, these commandments have a fair amount to say about worship? In other words, the cultural and religious left in American Protestantism turns out to be the liturgical right; and – hold on to your seats – the cultural and religious right is actually the chief force behind liturgical liberalism. Hence the confusion of *First Things*'s readers to keep track of cultural conservatism among Protestants in the United States.

Why few have yet to note these inconsistencies and reversals is not as much the concern here as it is simply to acknowledge the significant error of equating the culture and worship wars. Such an acknowledgment is necessary if those who cherish and wish to perpetuate the distinctive character of Reformed worship are to make any headway within their own congregations or discern genuine allies in the wider culture. For the same inconsistencies and reversals

⁴For a sustained expression of this argument, see James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

⁵For some of the recent salvos in the worship wars, see Elmer L. Towns, *Putting An End to the Worship Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997); Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); and Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

that hamper interpreters of the worship and culture wars also plague those who would try to make sense of contemporary American Presbyterianism. Ever since the exodus of J. Gresham Machen and his small band of followers from the northern Presbyterian Church, the premise guiding most studies of twentieth-century Presbyterianism has been that the mainline church is liberal and the sideline ones conservative. Of course, the conservative-vs.-liberal shorthand does not receive unanimous approval. But whether you choose other rubrics, such as sectarian vs. ecumenical, dogmatic vs. broad-minded, or traditional vs. progressive, most Presbyterians have an innate sense that a substantial divide separates the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. from either the Orthodox Presbyterian Church or the Presbyterian Church in America, and that this division corresponds in large measure to the former's discomfort with being right-wing and the latter's fears about liberalism.⁶

This premise regarding the left and right wings of American Presbyterianism would suggest that anyone looking for traces of John Calvin's liturgy, for instance, should have a better chance of finding it in those denominations that look more to the past for examples of faithfulness than those that have endeavored to adapt Christianity to modern times. But such a seeker would be sadly misinformed since more congregations in the PCUSA are likely to follow the Genevan order of service than those in the OPC or PCA. If this judgment sounds fanciful, consider that at the same time the PCUSA was releasing a new hymnal that featured as complete a Psalter as any Presbyterian hymnal of the twentieth century other than those of the Covenanters, the crusty OPC was phasing out its traditional hymnal while flirting with the publication of a praise-song/chorus book for congregational use in worship.⁷ The circumstance that saved the OPC from this liturgical nightmare had less to do with the collective wisdom of the saints than reports that the proposed songbook did not include the best of the recent products from the CCM industry. Which is just to say that making sense of the different parties in American Presbyterianism is as difficult as spotting the fault line between liberal and evangelical Protestants.

⁶For some of the recent literature on twentieth-century American Presbyterianism, see Rick Nutt, "The Tie that No Longer Binds: The Origins of the Presbyterian Church in America," in Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder and Louis B. Weeks, eds., *The Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 236-56; Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists & Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); and William J. Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism: Competition in a Protestant House* (Knoxville, Tn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

⁷Not much has been written on Presbyterian hymnody. But one place to start is Morgan F. Simmons, "Hymnody: Its Place in Twentieth-Century Presbyterianism," in Coalter, et al, eds., *Confessional Mosaic*, 162-86.

The following remarks are designed to lend some clarity to the murkiness surrounding contemporary Reformed worship as practiced by American Presbyterians. After looking at two notable, recently published books on worship by Presbyterians, analysis follows, first showing eighteenth-century precedents for the current confusion in Presbyterian circles about Reformed worship, and then how the divisions of the 1920s and 1930s furthered this disarray. The hope is that even if the ensuing argument does not persuade advocates of P&W to exchange their overhead projectors for Psalters, it may provide a clearer understanding of the genius of Reformed worship and its organic connection to Reformed theological convictions.

The State of the Art

The best place to examine the health of contemporary Reformed worship is to look at two books published during the 1980s and 1990s that represent developments in the mainline and sideline Presbyterian worlds. The first, published in 1984, entitled, *Worship That Is Reformed According to Scripture*, comes from Hughes Oliphant Old, who wrote this book while a pastor of a PCUSA congregation and now teaches homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary. The second, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, published twelve years later, is by John M. Frame, who teaches apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in California and wrote this book as part of his experience as a pianist and song leader for a PCA congregation.⁸ The differences between Old and Frame stand out even from a cursory glance at the table of contents. Old organizes his book around the traditional elements of Reformed worship, devoting separate chapters to baptism, the Sabbath, praise, the word, prayer, and the Lord's Supper. Frame, however, approaches the matter inductively, gearing his argument toward specific issues in contemporary debates. He starts with biblical teaching on worship, the order and tone of the service, the dialogical character of worship, and the place and

⁸Old, *Worship That is Reformed According to Scripture* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984); John M. Frame, *Worship In Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1996). Determining how representative these books are of their different denominations is, of course, something of a judgment call. Nevertheless, little else of book length has been written by Presbyterians in the last twenty years. What is more, Old's book bears the imprint of a denominational publisher, John Knox, one year after the reunion of the northern and southern Presbyterian churches. Meanwhile Frame's publisher, Presbyterian & Reformed, ever since the days of its founder, Samuel G. Craig, who served on the original board at Westminster Seminary, has been identified with sectarian or conservative Presbyterianism. One further consideration is that both books stem from ecclesiastical contexts that do reveal something about the liturgical character of their respective denominations. Both Old and Frame have contributed to official discussions on worship within the PCUSA and PCA respectively. Finally, both books sport endorsements from prominent faculty in their respective seminary and denominational constituencies: Old from James L. Mays at Union, Richmond and Donald Macleod at Princeton, and Frame from Richard L. Pratt and Steve Brown at Reformed Seminary, Orlando, and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. and D. Clair Davis, at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia.

function of music. In fact, in the one chapter where Frame addresses the notion of “elements,” something Old assumes, the Westminster professor concludes that Scripture nowhere gives warrant for the parts of worship drawn up by the Westminster divines in chapter twenty-one of the Westminster Confession.⁹ This may explain why Frame’s discussion of baptism occurs on two pages in comparison to Old’s chapter-length treatment, or why Frame devotes as much space to “liturgical drama” (which he does not advocate but does approve) as he does to the sacraments in general.¹⁰ In the “liberal” PCUSA, if Old’s book is any indication, the traditional elements and rites of historic Reformed liturgy are firmly in place. But in the “conservative” PCA, using Frame as a guide, the conventional pieces of Reformed worship are in flux.

The innovative and traditional expressions of contemporary Presbyterian worship are particularly evident in the concluding chapters of each book. Frame ends with a description of the typical service he regularly leads in a southern California PCA congregation, the implication of which is that such a service follows from the preceding arguments. An elder opens with announcements and an expression of welcome to visitors, followed by a reminder to those gathered that their purpose is to worship God (“we rarely have a formal call to worship,” Frame writes).¹¹ Next comes a prelude, an introduction from the pastor, two songs on overheads, and then a prayer of adoration and confession. This sets the stage for a fifteen-minute period of song – a mix of classic hymns and soft praise songs. During such singing, leadership encourages people “to clap, whistle, tap tambourines, or to otherwise use their gifts to enhance the worship.”¹² A prayer of intercession follows this round of song, which leads to another song that allows children time to leave for children’s church. Then comes the sermon. Once a month the Lord’s Supper follows the sermon, though Frame prefers Calvin’s argument for weekly observance; songs accompany the distribution of both elements. Following the sacrament, ushers take the collection while the choir sings an anthem, and then the whole congregation sings the Doxology. A formal benediction concludes the service, though Frame cautions that “ceremonial sentences” may become “empty forms over time.”¹³ Frame’s order of service, then, goes something like this: introduction, song, prayer, song, prayer, song, sermon, the Supper, collection, Doxology, and benediction. This liturgy may not reinforce the centrality of the word, but at least Frame’s congregation learns how to sing.

⁹Frame, *Worship*, 53. References to the *Westminster Confession* throughout this essay will be to the pre-1903 revised version which thanks to added chapters threw off the numbering of chapters.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 92-94, 96-98.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 146.

¹²*Ibid.*, 148.

¹³*Ibid.*, 152.

Old takes a different approach in his concluding chapter. He closes with several comments on the contribution that Reformed liturgies can make to contemporary Protestant worship. The first concerns preaching and the value of the Reformed habit of expository sermons as well as the "systematic preaching through one book of the Bible after another."¹⁴ The second point is about prayer and here Old advocates older Reformed practices of praying the psalms, accompanied by an appreciation of the way Reformed liturgies provide a "full diet of prayer," including praise, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, and intercession.¹⁵ The third contribution of Reformed worship is evident in the observance of and teaching about the Lord's Supper. Old notes how the Reformers rediscovered this sacrament as a form of communion of the saints while also retaining its Eucharistic character. He also highlights the epiclectic and diaconal aspects of Reformed sacramental teaching. Fourth, Old emphasizes the links between baptism and covenant theology in Reformed worship, the way baptism undergirds sanctification and the sacrament's place in a system of catechetical instruction. Fifth, he returns to Reformed teaching on prayer to recommend a daily service of morning and evening prayers, as well as its importance for family worship. Finally, Old concludes where the Shorter Catechism begins: "The greatest single contribution which the Reformed liturgical heritage can make to contemporary American Protestantism is its sense of the majesty and sovereignty of God, its sense of reverence, of simple dignity, its conviction that worship must above all serve the praise of God."¹⁶ It would be hard to miss as well Old's indebtedness to the Shorter Catechism's answer eighty-eight, in the way that he emphasizes the word, sacraments and prayer as means of grace.

Still, one could explain Old's traditionalism by the early date of his book's publication, a time when P&W had not yet become popular. For instance, if he had written ten years later, Old may well have stressed music in the way that Frame does by giving over a fourth of his book to the new genre of worship songs. (Two years later Frame also wrote a sequel which defended "contemporary" Christian music.)¹⁷ In fact, one of the telltale signs that Frame is writing for a different era is the primacy of music in his considerations. Nevertheless, Old displays an awareness of the kind of arguments Presbyterians have used to replace older orders of worship with the simple (some might say unimaginatively limited) pattern of song, prayer and sermon. For instance, in the introduction, Old shows some familiarity with recent attempts to make worship pleasing. But he is not impressed by these horizontal concerns. "We are often told," he writes, "that we should worship in order to build family solidarity: 'the family that worships together stays together.'" But Old adds that the Canaanite fertility cult offered a

¹⁴Old, *Worship*, 172.

¹⁵Ibid., 173.

¹⁶Ibid., 176-77.

¹⁷John M. Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1997).

similar sentiment. "True worship," Old remembers, "is distinguished from all of these in that it serves above all else the praise of God's glory."¹⁸

Similarly, at the conclusion of the book Old gives every impression that he would not succumb to the seeker orientation of modern worship. In what remains the best illustration for explaining what has happened to Presbyterian worship since the publication of this book, Old prophetically dismisses all "contemporary" efforts to make worship user-friendly.

In our evangelistic zeal we are looking for programs that will attract people. We think we have to put honey on the lip of the bitter cup of salvation. It is the story of the wedding of Cana all over again but with this difference. At the crucial moment when the wine failed, we took matters into our own hands and used those five stone jars to mix up a batch of Kool-Aid instead. It seemed like a good solution in terms of our American culture. Unfortunately, all too soon the guests discovered the fraud. Alas! What are we to do now? How can we possibly minister to those who thirst for the real thing? There is but one thing to do, as Mary the mother of Jesus, understood so very well. You remember how the story goes. After presenting the problem to Jesus, Mary turned to the servants and said to them, "Do whatever he tells you." The servants did just that and the water was turned to wine, wine rich and mellow beyond anything they had ever tasted before.¹⁹

It would be hard to imagine that Old wrote without sufficient knowledge of the changes transforming Presbyterian liturgy since the early 1980s.

Perhaps the most dramatic of those changes has come in the element of song and Old's chapter on the ministry of praise demonstrates the same theocentric emphasis that characterizes the book. Even though Old is clearly a traditionalist, he does not emerge as an ally of covenanters and other exclusive-psalmody advocates. He clearly recognizes the centrality of psalms to the ministry of congregational song and is well aware of Calvin's and later the Puritan's practice of singing from the Psalter exclusively. But Old prefers the liturgies of the first Reformed churches in Constance and Strasbourg that used both hymns and psalms. What is more, Old goes so far as to claim that Isaac Watts "exemplifies the Reformed doxological tradition at its best" with its blend of psalmody and hymnody.²⁰ To be sure, Old has a point in faulting contempo-

¹⁸Ibid., 2.

¹⁹Ibid., 177.

²⁰Ibid., 55. This verdict on Watts looks less astute when compared to the observation of Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* ([1948] Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), 176, that the "primary aim of Watts, was a radical departure from the literalism of older versions of the Psalms" through a "freer and more inspiring verse." On the basis of Davies' comments one could conclude that Watts was simply an eighteenth-century version of today's CCM musicians, since Watt's aim was to make worship more attractive and evangelical through the use of contemporary song. Of course, Davies agrees with Old. But it is not clear that either man sees any negative consequences in Watts' hymnody or that the case against exclusive psalmody as too literalistic and constraining ends up making assumptions about worship like advocates of P&W (a la Frame).

rary proponents of exclusive-psalmody for musical woodenness. Still, he does not appear to pay full heed to his own estimation of the psalms, such as when, following Calvin, he writes, “the psalms lead us in the right manner of offering the sacrifice of praise to God. . . . In the psalms we hear of God’s mighty acts of creation, providence and redemption.” What then could be a better way of expressing “the sense of awe and wonder which we have when we enter the presence of God”?²¹ But even if Old ends up departing from Calvin here, he strives mightily to ensure that congregational singing be first and foremost a means of exalting the name of God.

Frame’s discussion of music, however, takes off in a decidedly different direction and bears all the marks of the recent worship wars, with the author nonchalantly siding with the rebels. Frame begins where Old ends. He agrees that the preeminent function of worship is to honor God and that music must fulfill this requirement. But by a sleight of hand Frame turns song as praise into music that attracts. Music, he argues, “enhances God’s word by making it more vivid and memorable” and this vividness and memorability drive the word into believers’ hearts, motivating them to praise and obedience.²² Frame even suggests that a worship service consisting entirely of music would be a good thing. Music also makes worship intelligible. This, in fact, is perhaps the chief point of Frame’s book. From his perspective, the teaching of 1 Corinthians 14 is that worship must be intelligible, even to non-believers. It is little wonder, then, that Frame spends almost a quarter of his book on music and that he sides with the advocates of contemporary forms of worship. Contemporary praise songs, guitars, rock music, roll, dance, lifting hands, clapping – all of these are legitimate means for reaching new converts and retaining teenagers in the church. Frame even thinks that instrumental music without singing is a legitimate part of Reformed worship. His rationale is that “God wants his people to be transformed in every area of their lives,” so the form of emotional communication and emotional edification that instrumental music provides “is as important in worship as intellectual communication.”²³ Such a brief for music not only ignores the centrality of the word that has characterized Reformed theology and liturgy, but also upsets the Calvinistic preoccupation with directing all parts of the service to the praise and glory of God.

As great as the differences are between Frame and Old on song in worship, they are merely manifestations of a deeper discrepancy, one that is filled with irony since it goes to the heart of what it means to be conservative and liberal. Frame and Old write with two distinct purposes. The former is concerned to find a way for Presbyterian traditionalists to worship in novel ways. Here Frame’s prefatory remarks are revealing. “I hope to state the fundamental

²¹Ibid., 53, 40.

²²Frame, *Worship*, 112.

²³Ibid., 130.

Reformed principles," he writes, "and I hope to justify, on the basis of these principles, some forms of worship that *are not typical of the Reformed tradition.*" Frame adds that his study reflects the recognition that some Christians prefer not to worship according to Reformed practices because "there are real problems in the traditional Presbyterian view."²⁴ This recognition does not weaken his regard for the Reformed tradition. Frame insists that he continues to affirm the theology of the Westminster Standards. But the Puritan theology of worship, which he thinks is minimal in the Confession and Catechisms, is too narrow and does not allow sufficient flexibility for congregations like his. Frame's effort is to retain the Reformed faith without the Reformed practice of worship because he sees no inherent connection between the theology of the Reformed churches and their liturgies.

Old's intention, in contrast, is to recover and perpetuate the Reformed tradition of worship. And as much as he writes with the simple goal of explaining the tradition, Old does not hide his deep appreciation for older Reformed liturgies and practices. This point should be obvious from his conclusion. Unlike Frame, Old does not regard this tradition as a burden that restricts liturgical experimentation, but rather as a fitting way to conduct the gathering of the saints before the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This does not mean that Old wants simply to reproduce older patterns of worship. He cautions against both "archaeological reconstruction" and "liturgical romanticism." "A certain amount of adaptation" is always necessary. Nevertheless, Old is unabashed in his love and respect for Reformed worship. "We recognize [the Reformers] as great because they were great! . . . At the center of their reform was a concern for the reform of worship, and they had a profound insight into the nature of worship."²⁵ This is the reason, Old concludes, for being interested in what they had to say.

Of course, Frame and Old's perspectives on the Reformed tradition are not terribly unique. Plenty of people think Reformed concerns about right worship are excessive and others, perhaps fewer in number, see great spiritual insight and beauty in Reformed worship. But what makes these authors' views poignant is the ecclesiastical affiliation of each man. If sideline Presbyterian denominations like the PCA and OPC were as conservative about the Reformed tradition as they regard themselves, then the expectation would be for Old's book to have come from a PCA or OPC minister, published by a conservative Presbyterian press. Moreover, if the mainline Presbyterian denomination were as liberal as its conservative detractors insist, then Frame's book would make more sense coming from a PCUSA officer and publishing house. And yet, the opposite is the case. The conservatives have turned modernist, if by modernism we mean the self-conscious adaptation of the faith to modern

²⁴Ibid., xv (emphasis added).

²⁵Old, *Worship*, 162, 163.

times.²⁶ And just as unlikely, the modernists have become the chief defenders of the historic Reformed faith, at least in its liturgical aspects, against efforts to preserve the kernel while refashioning a modern husk. The question is how to account for this reversal of conservative and liberal Presbyterian roles.

The American Presbyterian Predicament

Any explanation of the anomalies within contemporary Presbyterian worship has to start with history. Ever since the beginning of the eighteenth century, American Presbyterianism has struggled between formal and experiential shades of liturgy. Some of that struggle reflects the lessons that seventeenth-century English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians learned during their contests with the Church of England.²⁷ But even more crucial to the instability of American Presbyterian worship was the formative influence of revivalism and the First Great Awakening. The victory of the pro-revivalist New Side Presbyterians during the first two generations of American Presbyterian history ensured that the Olds of the tradition would always have the Frames of the New World with them.²⁸

On so many levels the revivals championed by the likes of Gilbert Tennent and Jonathan Dickinson undermined the liturgies of John Knox, Martin Bucer or John Calvin. Formally, the practice of revivalism made liturgical concerns practically unnecessary or, at least, a minor consideration. This is clearly the impression that George Whitefield gives in his accounts of traveling and speaking in the American colonies. The English revivalist never stopped to consider whether his setting was Anglican, Presbyterian, Reformed, Quaker or mixed. He preached the same way for all denominations and especially enjoyed interdenominational gatherings. In November of 1739, while preaching in German Town, Whitefield noted that there were "no less than fifteen denominations of Christians" present. And yet "all agree in one thing, that is, to hold Jesus Christ as their Head, and to worship Him in spirit and in truth."²⁹ If so many denominations showed up to hear Whitefield, the service he used must have reflected a liturgical minimalism where the traditions and forms of different Protestant groups became trifling details.

²⁶Here I am following the definition supplied by William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).

²⁷See Davies, *The Worship of English Puritans*.

²⁸On the Old Side/New Side controversy in colonial Presbyterianism, see Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949); and Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

²⁹*George Whitefield's Journals (1737-1741)*, with an introduction by William V. Davis, (Gainesville, Fl.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1969), 354. On the revolutionary character of Whitefield's revivals, see Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

The Anglican's journals confirm this conclusion when time and again he records that the basic order of service was to read prayers and preach. Another entry from 1739 is especially revealing since it concerns worship among colonial Presbyterians:

Set out for Neshaminy (twenty miles distant from Trent Town), where old Mr. Tennent lives, and keeps an academy, and where I was to preach to-day, according to appointment. We came thither about twelve, and found above three thousand people gathered together in the meeting-house yard, and Mr. William Tennent preaching to them, because we were beyond the appointed time. When I came up he soon stopped, and sung a psalm, and then I began to speak. At first, the people seemed to be melted down, and cried much. After I had finished, Mr. Gilbert Tennent gave a word of exhortation. At the end of his discourse, we sung a psalm, and then dismissed the people with a blessing. Oh, that the Lord may say Amen to it!³⁰

Obviously, this Thursday afternoon service is not necessarily representative of Sunday worship, though it is interesting to see how with its order of song, sermon and prayer, it resembles contemporary worship's configuration of elements. This example does suggest that revivalism was not good for Reformed worship because it turned the service almost exclusively into the sermon, with song and prayer being ancillary. What is more, revivals provided no place for the invocation, corporate confession and absolution, the sacraments, or Scripture lessons. Colonial Presbyterians may have received a full diet of liturgical elements on the Lord's day, but the popularity of Whitefield and the Tennent's speaking soon made the old liturgies look uninspired, which they were, compared to the revivalists' charisma. Reformed worship was not prepared to give strong competition to the new revivalistic services, not simply because of the eloquence (and perhaps manipulation) of preachers like Tennent and Whitefield but also because of the experience such sermons were designed to produce. Whitefield's journals constantly make reference to the reaction of hearers, and these responses demonstrated, at least to the itinerant evangelist, that his preaching was effective. The common reaction of a revived hearer was tears: "most wept at the preaching of faith." But silence was another indication of a truly moved soul. "I believe there were nearly two thousand more present to-night than last night," Whitefield wrote, "Even in London, I never observed so profound a silence."³¹ But just as important was the experience of the preacher himself. Upon hearing Tennent's searching sermons, Whitefield was convinced "that we can preach the Gospel of Christ no further than we have experienced the power of it in our hearts." He added that because of Tennent's conversion, the Presbyterian revivalist had "learned experimen-

³⁰Ibid., 350.

³¹Ibid., 339.

tally to dissect the heart of a natural man."³² Revivalistic preaching was geared toward experience and especially the experience of conversion. None of the other elements of worship were capable of producing such effects. Furthermore, revivals came to set the standard for worship. What was necessary for individuals to show they had been converted also became the norm for public gatherings. If the service was not moving, then it would not likely encourage genuine faith and devotion.

Of course, the exaltation of experience has never been pronounced in American Presbyterian directories for worship, and this is especially true of the eighteenth century. Though the proposed directory of 1787 and the one approved in 1789 by the General Assembly departed from the Westminster Assembly's – according to Stanley R. Hall the American directory was "generally less restrictive" on prayer, the sacraments and preaching – these innovations did not obviously stem from the experientialism and anti-formalism inherent in revivalism.³³ Still, whatever liturgical boundaries Presbyterians established formally in their directory, the piety that had once informed Reformed practice in worship had changed dramatically thanks to revivalism. Here the observations of Eric Leigh Schmidt about Reformed spirituality are especially salient.

What the Reformed Church offered in the place of the old calendar and the traditional festivals was a spiritual life of sustained discipline and devotion. . . . Day-in, day-out, Sabbath after Sabbath, the Reformed saints were to strive after joyful, harmonious communion with their God and their fellow Christians.³⁴

Schmidt adds that the steadfastness and perseverance of Reformed piety proved to be too difficult for most people. And so, the "hope for a community of saints who year-round were diligent, self-controlled, sober, prayerful, and devout within their families and outside them" eventually gave way to the intense and extraordinary experiences of revivalism.³⁵ In other words, the liturgy that sustained Reformed piety, as much as it assumed such devotion, was no longer adequate for the demands of conversion and holy living that revivalism promoted and promised.

The tensions between Presbyterian liturgy and revivalistic piety did not become immediately evident. But by the nineteenth century the discrepancy between the evangelical system of preaching, conversion and revival, on the

³²Ibid., 344.

³³Stanley Roberston Hall, "The American Presbyterian 'Directory for Worship': History of Liturgical Strategy," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1990), 163.

³⁴Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 17.

³⁵Ibid., 18.

one hand, and the order and decency of Reformed liturgy on the other began to play itself out in important ways. In the process, revivalism provided the dominant metaphor for the way that Presbyterians conceived of the Christian life, thereby calling into question the rigorous and subdued piety that Reformed worship made plausible. In fact, this is one of the arresting conclusions that follows from David B. Calhoun's two-volume history of Princeton Seminary.³⁶ Among the fascinating stories that he includes about members of Princeton's faculty is the recurring tale of boys who were baptized, reared in the church, catechized, and attended weekly services on the Lord's Day, but still sensed by the time they went off to college that they were not genuine believers and so set off in pursuit of conversion through the now common means of revival.

The classic case is that of Charles Hodge who said that as a boy he had the habit of thanking God for everything, avoiding curse words, and praying regularly.³⁷ Even discounting the older Hodge's recollections of his boyhood and what may have been an overbearing self-righteousness, his mother, pastor and elders were likely raising young Charles as a child of the covenant. But it was not until he went off to the College of New Jersey and sat under Archibald Alexander's preaching that Hodge could finally make a profession of faith, and the occasion for that decision was the revival Alexander led in the winter of 1814-1815. One of Hodge's peers who discovered the conversion told a professor excitedly of the news in the following words: "[Hodge] has enlisted under the banner of King Jesus!"³⁸ Until that moment of decision, as this comment suggests, observers of young Charles was presumed that a boy who had been baptized, who prayed, tried to live a godly life, and knew that all his life depended upon his heavenly father was actually an enemy of Christ. Thus, the elements of Reformed worship that naturally fit into the churchly and familial pattern of covenant children growing up and making a credible profession of faith was all for naught without the crisis of conversion. It should be noted that Hodge may not have been entirely comfortable with the legacy of revivalism, since in his *Constitutional History* he identified many of the emotional displays of the conversion experience with mental disorders, in addition to criticizing the New Side for abandoning the good order of Presbyterianism.³⁹ But once his surrogate father, Archibald Alexander, whose own roots were in the revivals of eighteenth-century Virginia, took issue with Hodge's critique, the junior Princeton professor recanted and gave his blessing to the New Side, attributing

³⁶David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Volume 1: Faith & Learning, 1812-1868* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994); and idem, *Princeton Seminary, Volume 2: The Majestic Testimony* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996).

³⁷Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Volume 1*, 106.

³⁸Ibid., 108.

³⁹Ibid., 254.

to the revivals of Whitefield, Edwards, and the Tennents "the religious life which we now enjoy."⁴⁰

One of Hodge's contemporaries who saw with unparalleled insight the effects of revivalism on American Presbyterianism was John Williamson Nevin. Nevin, of course, taught for Hodge while the latter studied in Germany, eventually left the Presbyterian Church when he began teaching for the German Reformed seminary at Mercerberg and over the course of his pilgrimage would come to a very different assessment of Reformed liturgy and sacramental theology from his former classmate at Princeton.⁴¹ Nevin's own recollections of his youth are worth quoting at some length because they capture so well the enormous changes in Presbyterian church life that transpired in the wake of the First and Second Great Awakenings.

Being of what is called Scotch-Irish extraction, I was by birth and blood also, a Presbyterian; and as my parents were both conscientious and exemplary professors of religion, I was, as a matter of course, carefully brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, according to the Presbyterian faith as it then stood. . . . [T]hat the old Presbyterian faith, into which I was born, was based throughout on the idea of covenant family religion, church membership by God's holy act in baptism, and following this a regular catechetical training of the young, with direct reference to their coming to the Lord's table. In one word, all proceeded on the theory of sacramental, educational religion, as it had belonged properly to all the national branches of the *Reformed* Church in Europe from the beginning. . . . The system was churchly, as holding the Church in her visible character to be the medium of salvation for her baptized children, in the sense of that memorable declaration of Calvin (Inst 4.1.4), where, speaking of her title, *Mother*, he says: "There is no other entrance into life, save as she may conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us from her breasts, and embrace us in her loving care to the end."⁴²

That was the old Presbyterian order with Reformed liturgy linked directly to the means of grace as a way of building up church members in the faith. But when Nevin went from the Scotch-Irish community of central Pennsylvania up to the predominantly Puritan institution, Union College, he found no support for the churchly system in which he had been reared.

⁴⁰Quoted in *ibid.*, 255.

⁴¹On some of these differences between Hodge and Nevin, see E. Brooks Holifield, "Mercersburg, Princeton, and the South: The Sacramental Controversy in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54 (1976) 238-57.

⁴²John Williamson Nevin, *My Own Life: The Early Years* (Lancaster, Pa.: Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 1964), 2-3.

It was my very first contact with the genius of New-England Puritanism, in its character of contradiction to the old *Reformed* faith, as I had been baptized into it, in its Presbyterian form. . . . It is hardly necessary to say, that circumstanced as I then was, I had no power to withstand the shock. It brought to pass, what amounted for me, to a complete breaking up of all my previous Christian life. For I had come to college, a boy of strongly pious dispositions and exemplary religious habits, never doubting but that I was in some way a Christian, though it had not come with me yet (unfortunately) to what is called a public profession of religion. But now one of the first lessons inculcated on me indirectly by this unchurchly system, was that all this must pass for nothing, and that I must learn to look upon myself as an outcast from the family and kingdom of God, before I could come to be in either in the right way. Such, especially, was the instruction I came under, when a "revival of religion," as it was called, made its appearance among us, and brought all to a practical point.⁴³

Nevin went on to describe his conversion as inferior compared to the others produced by the "torture" of revivalism's "anxious meetings" and "mechanical counsel." And it was based on the idea that regeneration had nothing to do with the church, baptism and catechesis. In fact, revivals supposed that the churchly system of Presbyterianism was "more a bar than a help to the process," since conversion only came through "magical lapse or stroke from the Spirit of God." In sum, an "intense subjectivity" took the place of the "grand and glorious *objectivities* of the Christian life." Nevin concluded his reflections on his feeble conversion with a lament that indicates the power and riches of the Reformed liturgical system:

My own "experience" in this way, at the time here under consideration, was not wholesome, but very morbid rather and weak. Alas, where was mother, the Church, at the very time I most needed her fostering arms? Where was she, I mean, with her true sacramental sympathy and care? How much better it had been for me, if I had only been properly drawn forth from myself by some right soul-communication with the mysteries of the old Christian Creed.⁴⁴

Nevin's reflections bring home the point forcefully about the tainted history of American Presbyterian worship. Well before the church had gained sufficient stability to transplant Old World customs in the New World, American Presbyterians drank the strong brew of revivalism and have been under the influence of an alien devotion ever since. To be sure, the Presbyterian sense of decorum and order has kept alive an interest in the practices of Reformed Protestantism and so the American Presbyterian tradition has never been with-

⁴³Ibid., 8-9.

⁴⁴Ibid., 10-11. Thanks go to Thomas Boeve, a Th.M. student at Westminster Seminary, who brought this section of Nevin to my attention.

out its Hughes Oliphant Old, who see the organic connection between Reformed theology, liturgy and piety. For these Presbyterians, Reformed worship is the natural way to embody the teachings of the Reformed wing of Protestantism. But at the same time the American Presbyterian tradition has manifested a longing for extraordinary outpourings of the Spirit that revivalism supposedly provides. And this longing, which came to prominence among New Side Presbyterians and has contributed the most to the low church tendencies of the American church, could not be satisfied by the simple and formal liturgy of the Reformed tradition. To borrow Nevin's vernacular, the demand for subjectivities made nonsense of the Reformed elements' objectivities.

Still, the history of American Presbyterianism does not make it automatic that today's Presbyterian denominations on the conservative side of the divisions of the 1920s and 1930s would practically abandon liturgical worship and leave the field to their theological rivals. Here certain tendencies that are commonly associated with liberal and evangelical Protestantism may help to explain the anomalies of contemporary Presbyterian worship. The first of these has to do with evangelism, the other with the implications of biblical inerrancy.

To be sure, anyone who concluded that conservative Protestants, as opposed to the liberal mainline church, have a monopoly on evangelism would be guilty of caricature. Still, one of the factors that led to the fundamentalist controversy was the level of the northern Presbyterian Church's commitment to the Social Gospel. Some moderates held together the goal of soul winning with societal redemption, but the missions controversy of the 1930s contributed to the impression that the mainline denomination, in the words of Pearl S. Buck, did not believe in hell and so lost the motivation for the missionary enterprise. What is more, the statistics of American Protestant foreign missionaries after the publication in 1932 of *Re-Thinking Missions* confirmed this impression: the number of mainline missionaries declined while fundamentalists and evangelicals continued to send out more. Consequently, the Protestant mainstream bore the reputation, caricature though it may have been, of preaching a social gospel, while conservative Protestants proclaimed a message of heaven and hell.⁴⁵

Conservative Presbyterians emerged from the 1930s clearly committed to evangelism and regarded their evangelistically minded evangelical peers as allies because of this commitment. For this reason, when conservatives consider worship, whether its purpose or execution, they invariably make evangelism prominent. This conclusion finds wide support in Frame's book. He

⁴⁵On these developments in the PCUSA, see Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*; and Hart, *Defending the Faith*. On the effects of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy on American Protestant foreign missions, see James Alan Patterson, "The Loss of a Protestant Missionary Consensus: Foreign Missions and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Conflict; and Joel A. Carpenter, "Propagating the Faith Once Delivered: The Fundamentalist Missionary Enterprise, 1920-1945," in Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Schenk, eds., *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 73-91, 92-132, respectively.

repeatedly justifies the use of contemporary forms or popular music by appealing to the principle of intelligibility. Worship must be God-centered, but in an interesting twist, worship that does not welcome outsiders or that is beyond the comprehension of church members does not glorify God. Frame writes,

In worship, we should not be so preoccupied with God that we ignore one another. . . . So, worship has a horizontal dimension as well as a vertical focus. It is to be God-centered, but it is also to be both edifying and evangelistic. Worship that is unedifying or unevangelistic may not properly claim to be God-centered.⁴⁶

With this subtle shift, Frame is free to dismiss the historic forms and liturgies of Presbyterians and Reformed. "We should avoid slavish imitation of older practices," he argues, "without attention to the matter of communication." Which is only to say that "our fundamental task" in worship is the Great Commission. "That divine mandate, rather than any human traditions, must ultimately guide our decisions about the order of worship."⁴⁷ Frame appears to be unaware that the traditional elements of Reformed worship, such as the reading and preaching of the word, in the words of the Shorter Catechism, are "effectual means of convincing and converting sinners" (A. 89). Indeed, his logic is one of the best examples of how evangelistic aims have trumped the purpose of worship in conservative Presbyterian circles.

Without the burden of always having to evangelize, mainline Presbyterians have been freer to hold on to a liturgical tradition that never made worship into the handmaid for evangelism. Old's book clearly demonstrates this point. His opening sentences are revealing. "We worship God because God created us to worship him," Old writes; "[w]orship is at the center of our existence; at the heart of our reason for being." In fact, any discussion of worship, he argues, must begin with the basic principle that God created man to reflect divine glory. "Worship must above all serve the glory of God." But Old is even more emphatic about the God-centered character of worship when he goes from this opening to a brief exposition of the first table of the Decalogue and declares, "[n]ot only did God create us to worship him, but he also commanded us to worship him."⁴⁸ This does not mean that Old considers intelligibility unimportant. Rather his conviction is that God will use faithful worship to accomplish the ends for which he intends. Old states this emphatically when he discusses Calvin's homiletical method.

What surprises the modern reader of Calvin's sermons is the simplicity of his sermons. We find no engaging introductions, no illustrative stories nor anecdotes, no quotations from great authors, no stirring conclusions. . . . So con-

⁴⁶Frame, *Worship*, 8.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁸Old, *Worship*, 1, 2.

fidant is the Reformer that God will make his Word alive in the hearts of his people, that Calvin simply explains the text and draws out its implications. The simplicity and directness of his style is based in his confidence that what he is preaching is indeed the Word of God.⁴⁹

It may be unfair to suggest that Frame, with his concern for intelligibility lacks Calvin's confidence, but it can be asserted with certainty that a significant difference between Frame's and Old's understanding of Reformed liturgy and worship stems from the degree to which worship must serve the purpose of evangelism.

Another important difference concerns the Bible. Again, conservatives have no doubt caricatured mainline Presbyterians when they argue that liberals do not believe the Bible is infallible and authoritative. Even so, important differences do exist between mainline and conservative Presbyterians over the nature of biblical authority, as conservative insistence upon inerrancy and statements such as the Confession of 1967 attest.⁵⁰ And these different understandings of biblical authority have had, since the 1930s, important implications for worship. To summarize as succinctly as possible: conservative Presbyterians congenitally regard tradition with suspicion because it appears to put human wisdom on a par with the Bible. In contrast, mainline Presbyterians, perhaps because they stress the humanity of Scripture, are more comfortable with the work that humans do in the service of God. The obvious inference for Reformed liturgy is that conservatives are biblicists and want to find a direct command for everything they do in worship, forgetting what the Confession of Faith says in chapter one about the good and necessary consequence of Scripture. Mainline Presbyterians, however, do not find it necessary to test everything against the Bible and, therefore, are freer to accept the traditions handed down in Reformed liturgies.

This difference is also manifestly evident in the books by Frame and Old. Perhaps the best indication of it in the former's book comes in his discussion of the Puritan regulative principle of worship. There Frame corrects what he perceives as a fault in the Puritan view. Instead of saying that the Bible governs the corporate life of the church, especially its liturgy, while allowing liberty for persons and families in their private affairs, Frame extends the Puritan notion by applying it to all of life. "In all areas of life, we are subject to biblical commands," he writes; "[h]uman wisdom may never presume to *add* to its commands. The only job of human wisdom is to *apply* those commandments to specific situa-

⁴⁹Ibid., 75-76.

⁵⁰ On the doctrine of Scripture in twentieth-century American Protestantism, see Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979); and D. G. Hart, "Evangelicals, Biblical Scholarship, and the Politics of the Modern American Academy," in David N. Livingstone, D. G. Hart, and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 306-26.

tions.⁵¹ This understanding of the regulative principle has prompted Frame to write in defense of biblicism, an argument that has a natural tendency toward theonomy since it considers biblical teaching to apply to all spheres, including that of the state. But aside from this implication, Frame's biblicism ends up giving considerable freedom in worship, to the point where he can find general principles whose application makes dancing, juggling, and drama legitimate. And the reason for this liberty is that the Bible nowhere reveals a set liturgy. As Frame puts it, "unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to prove that anything is divinely required specifically for official services."⁵² So what biblicism giveth, it quickly taketh away. And for conservatives that subtraction has typically involved anything approximating historic Christian liturgy.

Old, however, is not so squeamish about tradition. As pointed out earlier, he concludes the book with an extended discussion of the contribution that the historic forms of Reformed liturgy can make to contemporary American Protestant worship. But for Old the Reformed tradition is most useful for those who continue to regard themselves as Reformed. So he argues that maintaining the Reformed tradition is valuable simply for maintaining "contact with our roots," and because it "contains material of lasting value."⁵³ From a biblicist's perspective those reasons might seem fairly weak or arbitrary. But Old's reply is important:

A tradition which gets radically changed every generation is not really a tradition. For tradition to be tradition it must have a considerable amount of permanence and changelessness. Tradition can only become tradition when it is passed from one generation to another.⁵⁴

But just as in the case of Frame's biblicism, which promised restriction only to yield license, Old's argument for tradition turns out to give more than it initially promised, namely, being biblical. The reason for following the Reformed tradition in worship, Old writes, is because it "witnesses to the authority of Scripture." "Above all, the leadership of both the Fathers and the Reformers is to be found in the fact that they understood Scripture so well."⁵⁵ In contrast to Frame, for whom worship boils down to a choice between tradition and the Bible, Old contends that the Reformed tradition is biblical and so Frame's choice is a false one.

These factors by no means exhaust the reasons for such divergence among contemporary Presbyterians in worship. But the history of Presbyterian developments in the United States cannot be discounted. Ever since the eighteenth-

⁵¹Frame, *Worship*, 43.

⁵²Ibid., 44.

⁵³Old, *Worship*, 164, 165.

⁵⁴Ibid., 162.

⁵⁵Ibid., 169.

century revivals led and promoted by New Side Presbyterians, American Presbyterianism has had a significant crack in the foundation of its liturgy, thanks to the experiential piety that revivalism encouraged. What is more, the twentieth-century division between mainline and conservative Presbyterians fed theological tendencies that have reinforced certain liturgical predispositions among these groups, with the mainstream branch providing a better context for the maintenance of historic Reformed worship and the smaller streams being susceptible to constant innovation. But this explanation in no way diminishes the irony of seeing theological conservatives turn out to be liturgical relativists and theological liberals the party of liturgical good sense.

Presbyterian Worship in a Wesleyan Culture and Pentecostal Age

As ironic as the travails of contemporary Presbyterian worship maybe, and whatever the merits of the explanation for these difficulties offered here, in the end the point is not the irony of it all. The point, rather, is what needs to be done to recover the genius of Reformed worship, whether in the mainline or sideline churches. Specifically, is there a chance for retrieving among Presbyterians in North America the sensibility that produced statements like the following from John Calvin? When asked about forms for prayer and specific rites in worship, he replied that he "highly approved" of them. His reasons tapped sentiments that are generally foreign in contemporary Presbyterian circles: first, because some ministers were unskilled in leading worship; second, forms and rites insured uniformity among the churches; and finally, they prevented "capricious giddiness and levity" from surfacing in worship.⁵⁶ To that end, Calvin recommended a catechism, and stated forms for prayer and the sacraments.

The Geneva Reformer's liturgical outlook is clearly foreign to American culture where egalitarianism, individualism and informality prevail. Indeed, one of the major obstacles to Reformed worship in the United States is the failure of Presbyterians to be discerning about the common idiom of American culture. According to the English sociologist of religion, David Martin, American culture is inherently Wesleyan.

[T]he difference between America and England is the American insistence on sincerity and openness rather than on form and privacy. The whole American style was, as is, 'Methodist' in its emphases, whereas in England the culturally prestigious style remained Anglican. 'Enthusiasm' of all kinds, religious, cultural and personal, became endemic in America; in England enthusiasm remained intermittent and the object of some mild curiosity.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Quoted in Charles W. Baird, *Presbyterian Liturgies: Historical Sketches* ([1855] Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), 23.

⁵⁷David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwells, 1990), 21.

Of course, the low church style of many Presbyterians in the United States makes it difficult to place Presbyterianism on Martin's formal/informal spectrum, not to mention the fact that the tradition did not distinguish itself in England. Still, most would agree that Presbyterianism does not inherently breed enthusiasm. So, if Martin is correct, American Presbyterians are faced with a dilemma. To make worship accessible to persons for whom informality is as common as the air they breathe is to gut Reformed worship of its reverence, dignity, and simplicity. But to do justice to the rigor of Calvinistic worship is to burn fire that may please God but certainly smells foul to residents of the United States. American Presbyterians have tried to dodge that dilemma for almost two centuries and the consequences have not been propitious for the propriety, uniformity and dignity that Calvin believed should characterize Reformed worship.

One other significant consideration is related to the first. If the informality of American culture is not fitting for Presbyterian worship, neither are the efforts to package Reformed convictions in Pentecostal and charismatic forms. In a foreword to an evangelical book on worship, the Southern Baptist scholar on hymnody, Donald P. Hustad, offers a very telling warning that applies to any liturgical tradition, but that Presbyterians should especially take to heart:

... charismatic believers have a right to develop their own worship to match their own theology and exegesis, and they have done this well. Noncharismatics should not thoughtlessly copy or imitate their worship formulae, unless they expect to enter the same 'Holy of Holies' in the same way. Instead, they should develop their worship rationale based on their scriptural understanding, and then sing up to their own theology.⁵⁸

Though Hustad's comments are directed toward song, they apply equally well to the other elements of worship. To use his infelicitous phrases: Presbyterians do have a "worship rationale" based on their "scriptural understanding." It is embodied in the treasures of the various Reformed liturgies that serious Calvinists have produced since the sixteenth century. What is more, it cannot be embodied in the forms of worship that emerge from different theological traditions. Hustad knows what Calvin knew. You cannot separate form and content.

One American Presbyterian, turned German Reformed, who saw the connection between liturgy and theology was John Williamson Nevin. He also knew how alien Reformed liturgy was becoming in the United States. Nevertheless, the alternative with which he leaves his readers at the end of his pamphlet, *The Anxious Bench*, may turn out to be the same kind of choice confronting contemporary American Presbyterians. Nevin closes this piece by asserting that two rival systems were vying for the church's attention, the one,

⁵⁸Donald P. Hustad, foreword to Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 10.

revivalism represented by the anxious bench, the other, the Reformed faith, embodied in the catechism. Of the latter he wrote, it "stands the representative and symbol of a system, embracing its own theory of religion, and including a wide circle of agencies, peculiar to itself, for carrying this theory into effect."⁵⁹ One of those agencies necessary for carrying out the Reformed system of religion is Reformed liturgy. What American Presbyterians need, and have always needed, is Nevin's sense of the organic nature of their religion, that liturgy and theology and polity are not like the parts of an automobile that can be changed for newer or better ones, but in fact that they are connected like the branches, trunk and roots of a tree. Take a limb away, damage the trunk or roots and a tree either dies or, if grafted with branches from another species, produces alien fruit. Reformed theology needs Reformed liturgy just as Reformed worship makes no sense without Reformed theology. For that reason, the Reformed tradition will never be healthy if any aspect of its system is neglected or isolated from the whole. The history of American Presbyterian worship only proves as much.

⁵⁹J. W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (Chambersburg, Pa.: *Weekly Messenger*, 1843), 56.