

The Westminster Directory and Reform of Worship

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In the current “worship wars” of North American churches, every agenda for reform and renewal of the church finds expression as a liturgical program.¹ The Westminster *Directory* as a classic of the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition invites us to contribute more than programs. We are in need of good theology, in worship that serves the glory of God and a right enjoyment of God’s grace. My reason to read the Westminster *Directory* with Presbyterians today is not to argue another liturgical program but to reflect on a classic formulation of the Reformed tradition of worship.

The *Directory for the Public Worship of God* articulates an ideal that currently challenges the heirs of the Assembly at Westminster: the rediscovery of a *Reformed rite*, a common worship with theological integrity, spiritual character and forms that invite participation. In the reforms of the Westminster Assembly we read the attempt to frame a liturgy that is instructed by the proclamation of the gospel as the power of God. The *Directory* of the Assembly represents a conception of worship theologically informed in its design, and oriented to a properly theocentric participation on the part of worshipers. Common prayer of this depth is much to be desired in our day.

The *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, or “Westminster Directory,” remained in force in English law only fifteen years, 1645 to 1660.² The same *Directory* became a part of the Scottish church standards, but it had only a modest career insofar as its direct influence on the worship of the Church of Scotland can be demonstrated.³ A more significant role for the *Directory* emerged in

¹Thomas H. Schattauer, “A Clamor for the Contemporary: The Present Challenge for Baptismal Identity and Liturgical Tradition in American Culture” in *Cross Accent* No.6, July 1995; the author discusses the “worship wars” in the clash of perspectives behind proposals for change in public worship practices.

²An Ordinance of Parliament for the taking away of the Book of Common Prayer and for establishing and putting in execution of the Directory for the publique worship of God,” January 3, 1644 (by the then current calendar), *The Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, 3 vol. ed. by C. H. Firth and R.S. Rait (London: H.M.S.O., 1911). The Assembly at Westminster concluded work on the *Directory* on December 27, 1644, at the end of more than 70 sessions in addition to the many sub-committee meetings. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland acted on February 3, 1645; the Scots Parliament on February 6. The text is available in several church publications; a useful edition is by Ian Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, Grove Liturgical Study No.21 (Bramcote Notts.: Grove Books, 1980). See: F.W. McNally, *The Westminster Directory, Its Origin and Significance* (unpubl. Ph.D. dissertation; University of Edinburgh, 1958); Thomas Leishman, *The Westminster Directory, edited with an Introduction and Notes*, Church Service Society (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1901) which includes supplementary documents; Stanley R. Hall, *The American Presbyterian Directory for Worship: History of a Liturgical Strategy* (unpubl. Ph.D. dissertation; University of Notre Dame, 1990)

³The American Presbyterian directories for worship of the last two centuries derive ultimately from two documents adopted by the Church of Scotland. First, *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, as enacted by the English Parliament in January, 1644/45, was adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The second document, the *Directory for Family Worship*, was enacted in 1647 (August 24, 1647, the “Act for observing the Directions of the General Assembly, for secret and private Worship, and mutual Edification, and censuring such

other settings, as in the churches of North America where it became the basis of worship standards for American Presbyterians.⁴

Charles W. Baird, whose 1855 *Eutaxia, or The Presbyterian Liturgies* was the first systematic American study of the landmarks of Reformed and Presbyterian worship, identified the “directory for worship” and the “discretionary liturgy” as the two characteristic strategies for guiding worship in Reformed liturgical history and practice.⁵ A directory for worship rather than the discretionary liturgy distinguished Presbyterians from the Reformed churches of the continent. On the other hand, the directory distinguished the Presbyterian approach to worship from the Free Church perspective. Both approaches, however, represent a single tradition, Reformed worship, which cannot be adequately characterized as the presence or absence of an official book.

What might American Presbyterians learn from the Westminster *Directory*? I will discuss the makeup of the *Directory*, and some crucial issues that were involved in its composition. Then I will examine the Sunday service of worship according to the *Directory*, and I will attempt some observations for the reform of worship in our time.

I

The Westminster *Directory* was an original attempt to reform worship, produced by committee work and debate. Various lines of influence and similarities can be traced between the *Directory* and the liturgical books of British Protestant churches: on one hand, the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England and on the other the *Book of Common Order* of the Church of Scotland (with the other examples of the Genevan model).⁶ The *Book of Common Order*, which was primarily a guide for the minister in the way of the Reformed churches of the continent, is more similar to the *Directory* than either are to the English book.⁷

as neglect Family-Worship”), and published as *Directions of the General Assembly, Concerning Secret and Private Worship, and Mutual Edification; for cherishing piety, for maintaining unity, and avoiding schism and scandal*. Both these liturgical standards accompanied Presbyterians to Ireland and the American colonies. The Directory for Worship of the Presbyterian churches is, therefore, a broader document than the *Directory for the Public Worship of God* which the divines at Westminster wrote. The two Scottish documents should be considered as one standard, as they came to be in American Presbyterianism

⁴Irish Presbyterians also received and subsequently revised the *Directory* of the Church of Scotland, with editions in 1825, 1841, 1868 and 1887. The Presbyterian Church of England revised the *Directory* in 1889, 1898, and 1921, although this last was actually less a directory than a book of liturgical texts (such as the Irish also published in 1923, 1931, and again in 1942). In the Church of Scotland, the *Directory for the Public Worship of God* (1645) had an official status through the 1929 *Act of Union*

⁵*Eutaxia* was published anonymously by Baird in 1855; in 1856 as *The Presbyterian Liturgies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957)

⁶The Genevan models of worship, in the sense used here, are traced from the liturgy of the Frankfort congregation of Marian exiles and the Puritan derivatives that include Knox’s 1562 book as well as the English books commonly identified as Middleburgh and Waldgrave editions of the *Booke of the Forme of Common Prayer(s)*; Peter Hall, *Reliquae Liturgicae* (Bath: Binns and Goodwin, 1847), and *Fragmenta Liturgica* (Bath: Binns and Goodwin, 1848)

⁷Neither the Scottish *Book of Common Order* nor the *Directory* were for use by worshipers. The book in the people’s hands in Reformed churches of the Genevan tradition was the psalter. The *Book of Common Order* was bound with the psalms, however, and often it was referred to simply as the “Psalmbook.”

In addition to service books, some precedent for a directory can be found. The Scottish Assembly as early as 1641 had proposed a "directory" to guide worship. Alexander Henderson was to compose it, but the idea soon became moot in light of the Solemn League and Covenant.⁸ A document dealing with family worship was published in 1641 in Edinburgh, and it was itself a sort of directory.⁹ And yet another example was found in Thomas Cartwright, *A Directory of Church-Government* (1574-1590), reprinted in London in 1644.¹⁰ The idea of a summary of directions, or "directory," was not novel.

Nevertheless, the Westminster *Directory* is a unique document, as an authoritative liturgy for a national church. As one English commentator notes, "It was the first attempt after the Reformation to combine order and freedom in a way that demonstrated how reform of liturgy could be profoundly unitive because it was faithfully Biblical."¹¹ It was the last liturgy (aside from the English *Book of Common Prayer*) imposed by law for an English-speaking Reformed church as the prescribed liturgy.

Parliament's enactment of the *Directory* left no doubt that worship was to be enforced by law, and the prayerbook was to be replaced by the new document.¹² The Church of Scotland asserted their usages in the act of adopting the *Directory*, including the order of the prayers in Sunday worship, the public nature of the celebration of baptism, and the specific ceremonies for the Lord's Supper as it had been celebrated in Scotland.¹³ In neither case, England or Scotland, did this document carry any such authority in the practice of the churches. It would seem that the *Directory* is more important in the last 150 years than in its first 200 years, if it is questioned as to its impact on the liturgical practice of the Reformed churches. It was a statement of the practiced wisdom of a century of Reformed worship, as formulated by the divines met at Westminster. It continues to have a role as precisely a classic statement of a Reformed rite, which is worth study not only for

⁸Henderson's description of the worship of the Church of Scotland in his *The Government and Order of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh [sic], printed for James Bryson, 1641) has clear kinship to a directory, though with far less detail than the *Directory* that the Assembly would frame; see *Government and Order*, 15-28

⁹No author is identified for *Familie Exercise, or The service of God in Families* (Edinburgh: Robert Bryson, 1641). This became the foundation for the 1647 *Directory for Family-Worship*. See Hall, *American Presbyterian Directory*, 80-83; "Family Worship and Liturgical Renewal in Congregations," *Reformed Liturgy & Music* XXV/2, Spring 1992, 76-81

¹⁰Text in *American Presbyterianism, Its Origin and Early History*, Charles Augustus Briggs (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), i-xvii. Elizabethan Puritans Walter Travers and Thomas Cartwright wrote in 1574, *Ecclesiasticae Disciplinae et Anglicanae Ecclesiae ab illa aberratione, plena e verbo Dei et dilucida Explicatio*. It was translated that year by Cartwright. A second edition published at Geneva in 1580, revised 1584-1590. In 1644 a copy was published in London

¹¹Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 3

¹²The "Ordinance of Parliament for the taking away of the Book of Common Prayer, and for the establishing and putting in execution of the Directory for the publique Worship of God" was reinforced by a subsequent ordinance "for the speedy dispersing and publishing of the Directory, and for punishing of such as shall not use or shall deprave the said Directory" (passed August 23, 1645)

¹³For the 1645 Act of the General Assembly, see Leishman, *The Westminster Directory*, appendix B, 161-169

the sake of ecclesial memory but for the wisdom it may provide to those who seek a Reformed rite in the contemporary churches.

II

The *Directory* provided a statement of the Puritan piety that had been preached, prayed and lived through the preceding century. Now it was to be formulated within a systematic perspective, which later was defined in the *Confession* and catechisms of the Assembly. A high view of worship as reformed according to the Word of God was expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*:¹⁴

(T)he 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.

This had already been set forth in the preface to the *Directory*, as the aim to hold forth for worship “such things as are of divine institution in every ordinance; and other things...according to the rules of Christian prudence, agreeable to the general rules of the word of God.”¹⁵ The *Directory* stated the commitment to worship that is “according to Scripture” in a way that combined particular biblical warrants (or “divine institution”) that were recognized in the tradition (specifically, as the product of the exegesis and debate in the Assembly), with a sense of the liturgical forms and ceremonies common worship requires.

All of worship according to the *Westminster Directory* has its governing principle in the authority of Scripture. Worship that is “according to Scripture” is the basic norm of a Reformed rite. The divines were at one here with John Calvin. “God is never worshiped aright but when we receive him as he presents himself to us.”¹⁶

Worship requires speaking and acting concretely, and reform of the church’s worship must address elements of worship in a way that can guide practice. The theory of ordinances of worship provided a mediation between the witness of Scripture and the attention that must be given to concrete provision necessary for worship services. The church is equipped with the “ordinances,” or the primary parts of worship known from Scripture, and indicated by the subtitle of the *Westminster Directory: A Directory for “Publique Prayer, Reading the Holy Scriptures, Singing of Psalmes, Preaching of the Word, Administration of the Sacraments, and other parts of the Publique Worship of God, Ordinary & Extraordinary.”*

The *Directory* deals with the order of Sunday worship, and the two sacraments; the pastoral offices; and the times and places of worship. The breadth of attention is indicated by the chapter headings:

Of the Assembling of the Congregation

¹⁴Chapter, “Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day.”

¹⁵The *Directory* was debated prior to the *Confession*. The phrase “agreeable to the general rules of the Word of God,” was not part of the original draft; Leishman, *Westminster Directory*, 13. It may have been added by the Commons, as was a similar phrase in the *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1643. This may have been aimed to forestall the claims of the Church of Scotland and acknowledge the English Independents; both exercised influence far greater than numbers in the Assembly

¹⁶“(T)he foundation of true worship is obedience.” *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*; the exposition of John 6:15

Of Publique Reading of the holy Scriptures
 Of Publike Prayer before the Sermon
 Of the Preaching of the Word
 Of Prayer after the Sermon
 Of Baptisme
 Of the celebration of the Communion
 Of the Sanctification of the Lords Day
 The Solemnization of Marriage
 Concerning Visitation of the Sicke
 Concerning Buriall of the Dead
 Concerning Publique Solemne Fasting
 Concerning the Observation of Dayes of Publique Thankes-giving
 Of Singing of Psalmes
 An Appendix, touching Dayes and Places of Publique Worship.¹⁷

The *Directory* articulates theology in the liturgical categories of order, text and ceremony, formulated by public debate, informed by the experience of worship in the churches the divines represented.

III

The *Directory* addressed a total of 15 topics, in under 13,000 words, with a programmatic statement as its preface. The preface indicates that the new *Directory* was to provide liturgical guidance by addressing such things as are of Divine institution in every Ordinance; and other things...according to the Rules of Christian Prudence, agreeable to the generall Rules of the Word of God...[setting forth] the generall heads, the sense and scope of the Prayers, and other parts of Publique Worship...to keep like soundnesse in Doctrine and Prayer...[with] some help and furniture....

Thus, directory-guided worship was to be informed in substance and shape by Scripture. It would provide guidance for practice, some “help and furniture.” It would indicate the range of adaptations in ceremonies and ministerial expression in local practice which a coherent theological identity (a “like soundnesse in Doctrine and Prayer”) comprehends, by its requirements, limits and permissions.

There was broad agreement that the prayerbook was to be set aside, and the preface of the *Directory* sets out the shared mind of the Assembly. Presbyterians, Puritans who accepted the discipline of the Church of England and Independents, English and Scots alike shared a common heritage derived from the Genevan Reformed way and the conviction of the exclusive authority of the Bible for worship. The preface argues the Puritan convictions that exclusive reading of prayer undermined the cultivation of the gift of prayer, which is essential for ministry. Puritans also regarded the piety of the people as being retarded by merely formal participation in worship. The English Catholics or recusants, and the Caroline faction in the English Church, were understood to take comfort in the example that the *Book of Common Prayer* provided of a basically conservative mind towards worship in English church life. Political, theological and pastoral issues formed the

¹⁷Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, using the spelling, etc., of the first copy of the first edition listed in the British Library. The text is preceded by “An Ordinance of Parliament” and “The Preface”

consensus to replace the *Book of Common Prayer*, a consensus eloquently stated in the *Directory* preface.

The *Directory* was also a compromise document. The debates surfaced the strong commitments to customs and usages with which the divines were familiar, and through which they understood the authority of Scripture concretely to guide worship. The systematic ambiguities and compromises throughout the *Directory* were necessary to accommodate liturgical customs of the churches represented in the Westminster Assembly. The Scots ministers regularly clashed with the Independents in the sub-committee charged with the work, where both parties exerted far greater influence than their numbers in the Assembly.

The Scottish Church commissioners (particularly the ministers, Robert Baillie, George Gillespie, Alexander Henderson, and Samuel Rutherford) actively and effectively engaged in the work. Baillie at one point wrote to Scotland, "we must dispute every inch of our ground."¹⁸ Baillie also bemoaned the disparity of views as late as their final act, the drafting of the preface. He described it as "one party purposing by the preface to turn the Directorie to a straight Liturgie; the other to make it so loose and free, that it should serve for little use: but God helped us to get both these rocks echewed."¹⁹

The rubrics often allow latitude at critical points where some conflict over liturgical customs had emerged. The Scots would have been happier to see their own practices more definitely named. In the final paragraph of the preface, the crucial compromise to adopt the *Directory* framed this way of ordering worship in terms that seem to stress voluntary compliance. More than one commentator concludes that the preface, finally,

signals the victory of the Independents who viewed any directory for worship as an encroachment upon the activity of the Holy Spirit in the public worship of God. On the face of it, it appears that Baillie's "rock" was not "eschewed" as successfully as he complacently assumed in his public letter.²⁰

Perhaps that captures a sense of the political realities that were required to move the document to adoption. But the authority that the *Directory* has, regardless of legal enactment, was the power to clarify a coherent vision of worship and to provide useful guidance combining theological substance with pastoral sense. It succeeds in this admirably, even though the ecclesiastical worlds of England and Scotland in the latter 17th century were less than receptive to the demanding vision the *Directory* communicates.

IV

What would a Sunday service be like according to this guide? The *Directory* presents a full, substantial liturgy for the Sunday service. The simplicity of form is deceptive. The provisions for prayers, reading of the Bible, for preaching, singing of psalms and celebration of the Lord's Supper build a picture of the Lord's day worship projected by the *Directory*.

The outline I sketch here is a Sunday service in which there is celebration of the Lord's Supper, following the *Directory* norm, that, "The Communion, or Supper of the Lord is frequently

¹⁸The *Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, ed. by David Laing (Robert Ogle: Edinburgh, 1841) vol. 2 p.195

¹⁹Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:242

²⁰McNally, *The Westminster Directory*, 24

to be celebrated".²¹ The frequency was to be determined locally by the congregation's leaders; it was monthly or weekly for many of the English, but quite infrequent for the Scots.²² Reading without the lense of the Scottish interpretation, "frequency" as a norm stands out at the head of the chapter on the sacrament.

The public worship of the church is set within the context of the sanctification of the Lord's Day. Liturgy is related to "the duties of piety, charity and mercy," to relief of the poor as well as singing of psalms, and visiting the sick as surely as engaging in domestic prayer, reading, catechizing and discussion of sermons. The piety of the *Directory* holds public worship in close relation not only to private and domestic prayer, but to the works of love and justice towards the neighbor. And in a contemporary sounding note, the text holds forth the ideal of full, active and conscious participation, of a Christian people who "with one heart solemnly joyne together in all parts of the publique Worship."²³

The Sunday service would have two psalms, one after a "solemn calling...to the worshipping of the great name of God," and another before the blessing of the congregation at the end of the service. "Singing of Psalmes is of all other the most proper Ordinance for expressing of Joy and Thanksgiving."²⁴ Thus calling on the name of God, and praise sung with psalms, frames worship.

One of the two major controversies between the Scots and the Independents in the *Directory* sub-committee concerned the order for Sunday worship.²⁵ The Scots placed the prayers of thanksgiving and intercession after the sermon.²⁶ Others insisted on a single long prayer before the sermon, citing for this order 1 Timothy 2:1. The *Directory* crafted a compromise, with the following rubric:

We judge this to be a convenient Order, in the ordinary Publique Prayers; yet so, as the Minister may deferre (as in prudence he shall think meet) some part of these Petitions, till after his Sermon, or offer up to God some of the Thanksgivings, hereafter appointed, in his Prayer before Sermon.

This allowed for either a "long prayer," or rearrangement of the prayers so that intercessions and thanksgivings follow the sermon as the Scots preferred. In this way, the *Directory* attempted to

²¹"Of the celebration of the Communion, or Sacrament of the Lords Supper," the first sentence of the chapter. This line was retained in directories of almost all the American denominations.

²²At mid-17th century, semi-annual celebration would have been quite frequent for Scotland. See G.B. Burnet, *The Holy Communion in the Reformed Church of Scotland 1560-1960* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960). English Puritans and Independents commonly held either monthly or weekly celebration, and the same patterns were found in New England. The Scottish understanding of church discipline, and the chaotic quality of Scottish politics precluded frequency.

²³Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 24.

²⁴From the chapter, "Concerning the Observation of Dayes of Publique Thankesgiving"; Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 31.

²⁵The second concerned the Lord's Supper.

²⁶The arrangement in the chapter "Prayer before Sermon" in the *Directory* conforms more closely to the Independent use. Scottish and Puritan liturgical books (the *Book of Common Order*, and the Waldegrave and Middleburgh editions of the Genevan-type book) as well as Scottish practice at the time, placed intercessions after the sermon.

forge a liturgical uniformity among churches who retained freedom to practice their characteristic orders and liturgical customs.

The first prayer of the *Directory* service, following “solemn calling on them to the worshipping of the great name of God,” is a prayer of invocation “in the name and mediation of Christ,” asking “Pardon, Assistance, and Acceptance” for the present service, and specifically “for a Blessing on that particular portion of his Word then to be read”.²⁷

The reading of Scripture is treated as an ordinance in its own right. There would be two readings, from Old and New Testament, no less than a chapter each in length. Readings are of the canonical books only, as the *Confession* will specify. The readings are to be through the Scripture in order (*lectio continua*), with encouragement for more reading, as, e.g. in the Psalms, as deemed suitable. Some modest permission of “lecturing” is given, expositions of the Bible readings that were distinct from the preaching. It is then wisely noted, that “regard is always to be had unto the time”.²⁸

“Preaching of the Word, being the power of God unto Salvation, and one of the greatest and most excellent Works belonging to the ministry of the Gospell”²⁹ is the unifying center of worship in the sense of the importance of the sermon, and the relationship between sermon, Bible readings, prayer and praise. The sermon text is here discussed separately from the topic of the reading of Scripture as an act of worship.³⁰ There is a sign here of some loss of the clear connection between Scripture reading as such and preaching, in that no clear relationship is maintained between the text for preaching, and the *lectio continua* of readings. This may be an effect of the theory of ordinances, which loosens the functional clarity of the connection between the Bible as it is read (being one ordinance in its own right) and preached (another ordinance).³¹

The section of the *Directory* devoted to preaching describes the “doctrine, reason and use” sermon, in the “plain-style” of the high Puritan tradition.³² This discussion is unique in scope, and provides an excellent summary of the spiritual depth of the Puritan ministry of the Word. It is to be done,

Painfully, not doing the work of the Lord negligently.... Plainly, that the meanest may understand,...in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.... Faithfully,

²⁷Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 10.

²⁸Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 11.

²⁹Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 15.

³⁰It is a text “holding forth some principle or head of religion; or suitable to some special occasion”; Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 15. The preacher may in fact have a *lectio continua* for the sermon, distinct from the readings. In time the Puritan sermon came to work so minutely through a chapter or psalm as to fragment a sense of the regular hearing of the Scriptures; Hughes O. Old, in *Worship* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 81-85, succinctly discusses the shift in the tradition and its problematic nature.

³¹It may be, alternatively, that the lingering influence of the older Scottish “Reader’s service” is seen here, with a seam running between the first part of the service (call/ prayer/ readings/ psalm) and the service of the minister (who prays, and then presumably is to read or announce a biblical text for the sermon).

³²The relationship between the *Westminster Directory* and earlier documents is found in Puritan liturgical principles. One example worth noting is Cartwright’s directory, and the section titled “Of Preaching.” The *Directory* chapter on preaching was written by the Scots. It followed Cartwright, treating the sermon as a central act of public worship.

looking at the honour of Christ, the conversion, edification and salvation of the people.... Wisely.... Gravely, as becometh the Word of God.... With loving affection.... And, As taught of God...³³

This eloquent discussion of ministry applies to the work of prayer and preaching alike. Both are discussed with analytical precision and pastoral sensitivity characteristic of the best of Puritanism.

The originality of the *Directory* lies in the detailed and full outlines for the prayers and related liturgical texts, which occupy almost a third of the entire document. The Sunday service requires three of these prayers, which vary greatly in length.³⁴ After the readings of the Bible and a psalm, the *Directory* outlines the long prayer, which is by the preaching minister. Preaching and praying are parts of one ministry. The prayers require preparation just as surely as the sermon, but with attention to the functions and forms appropriate to common prayer. The *Directory* does not subsume this work of prayer under the ministry of preaching, but develops in the outlines a comprehensive ministry of liturgical prayer.

If the divines honored the *Book of Common Prayer* for the past it represented, they did not hesitate to criticize the effect of it in becoming, as they saw it, a means “to make and increase an idle and unedifying Ministry, which contented itself with set Formes made to their hands by others, without putting forth themselves to exercise the gift of prayer”.³⁵ The balanced approach taken by the *Directory* stresses cultivation of the gift of prayer, for minister and people. The clarity of the outlines, with their comprehensive character, offer precisely a vehicle for the cultivation of prayer as substantial theological discourse, spoken and heard.

The question of prescribed prayers or “set-forms” was posed in the test case of the Lord’s Prayer. Both the principal positions, following extensive debate, were acknowledged with a rubric: because the Prayer which Christ taught his Disciples, is not only a Pattern of Prayer, but it selfe a most comprehensive Prayer, we recommend it also to be used in the Prayers of the church.³⁶

Westminster’s compromise was achieved by providing outlines for the prayers (“the general heads, the sense and scope of the Prayers, and other parts of Public Worship”) rather than liturgical texts.³⁷ Such “help and furniture” theoretically could be turned into a full text for prayers if so desired.³⁸ According to Daniel Neal, “The Directory passed the Assembly with great

³³Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 17f.

³⁴The first prayer is outlined with under 100 words, the prayer after sermon is dealt with in just under 200 words, the prayer before sermon is treated in almost 1,700 words. Expanded by a competent minister, this material could easily provide for an hour or more of prayer. This is by no means excessively long in the context of the length of prayers during the Assembly.

³⁵Preface, *Westminster Directory*.

³⁶Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 18.

³⁷Baillie charged that the Independents, “make all set prayer, the very Lord’s Prayer it self used Prayer-wise, not only to be inconvenient and unlawfull, but to be Idolatry, and the worship of the Devil”; from *A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time* (London, 1646), quoted in McNally, *The Westminster Directory*, 220. On the other hand, Philip Nye among the Independents was for a “studied” prayer that was prepared but not “set” as text.

³⁸A liturgy which did precisely this was published in the year the *Directory* appeared, as “A Supply of Prayer for the Ships of this Kingdom that Want Ministers to Pray with Them.” The text is available in Leishman, *Westminster Directory*, 172-187. In the preface to this document there is the argument that the reality of prayer has

unanimity, those who were for set forms of prayer resolving to confine themselves to the very words of the Directory, while others made use of them only as the heads for their enlargement."³⁹ This estimation by a great Puritan historian at least describes what sorts of comprehension the scheme for the prayers could have allowed.

The "prayer before sermon" (without Scottish rearrangement) is a systematic euchological structure. It begins with confession of sin, both original and actual; expression of sin's enormity; and of particular sins, and acknowledgement of God's judgement.⁴⁰ There follows supplication for pardon, appealing to the "one oblation, the satisfaction and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of his Father, and our Father," and a Reformed version of absolution,

That the Lord would vouchsafe to shed abroad his love in our hearts by the Holy Ghost; seale unto us by the same Spirit of Adoption, the full assurance of our Pardon and Reconciliation; comfort all that mourn in Zion, speak peace to the wounded and troubled spirit, and bind up the broken hearted....⁴¹

The prayer expresses evangelical concern for the unrepentant, and leads to petitions for the grace of sanctification.

An extensive schedule of intercession follows, for the church, for king and country, including prayers for the propagation of the gospel; for the protestant movement and Reformed churches abroad, and especially in the three kingdoms. The sense of the religious and political struggles of the time is vivid. The prayers include the king, government and nation, with a special naming of Reformed monarchs; the ministry, schools, congregation and local community; for distressed persons, seasonable weather, fruitful seasons, and the averting of God's judgements, "that we either feele or feare... as famine, pestilence, the sword, and such like."⁴² The topics in this prayer follow the pattern of the prayers in the *Book of Common Prayer* but with far more particular and detailed attention (plus some characteristic Puritan themes, including the new petition for the Parliament).⁴³

The final section of the prayer is supplication for the right use of ordinances, the Lord's Day and its duties, for God's "grace and effectuall assistance"; for growth in grace, "that the Lord... would graciously please to pour out the Spirit of Grace, together with the outward means thereof". The prayer dwells on the preacher "that hee may divide the Word of God aright," and on hearers of the Word proclaimed,

nothing to do with the differences between formal, written prayers and conceived prayer: "And, in truth, though Prayers come never so new, even from the Spirit, in one that is guide in Prayer, if the Spirit do not quicken and enliven that Prayer in the Hearer that follows him, it is to him but a dead form, and a very carcase of Prayer"; see Leishman, *Westminster Directory*, 180f. This takes the perspective of those who hear, not those who speak. The basic charge against formal or written prayers by Puritans was fourfold: it stunted the gift of prayer, it was not relevant to occasions, it produced a sense that such prayer was necessary, and it fostered hypocrisy in use; summary from Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Dacre Press, 1948), 193-198.

³⁹Daniel Neal (1678-1743), *History of the Puritans* (1732-38) as revised and enlarged edition by John O. Choules (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858) Vol.1, p.495.

⁴⁰The first 3 paragraphs of the outline.

⁴¹Paragraph 4 and 5.

⁴²Paragraph 7 and 8.

⁴³This structural comparison is indicated by McNally, *The Westminster Directory*.

that so Christ may be so formed in them, and live in them, that all their thoughts may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and their hearts established in every good word and work for ever."⁴⁴

The prayer is not only systematic and thorough in its topics, but it provides a lively impression of prayer itself, as addressed to God, in the name of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit. This is no mere treatise on prayer, but a profound expression of a praying church, "through the merits and mediation of our great High Priest the Lord Jesus," by "the Spirit of Grace," engaged in no less an act than "acknowledging the incomprehensible greatness and majesty of the Lord, in whose presence they do then in a special manner appear".⁴⁵

The prayer after the sermon is another Puritan contribution, the general thanksgiving for the grace of God, in Christ and the gospel, through the continuing providential care of God. In this prayer, "the chiefe and most usefull heads of the Sermon" are also to be turned into "some few petitions".⁴⁶ The Lord's Prayer may follow, and the singing of a psalm.⁴⁷ "After which, (unless some other ordinance of Christ that concerneth the Congregation at that time be to follow) let the Minister dismisse the Congregation with a solemne Blessing."⁴⁸

The celebration of the Lord's Supper would follow the sermon. Part of the long prayer, the thanksgiving, supplication and intercession might also follow the celebration of the sacrament.⁴⁹ A psalm and blessing would then conclude the service.

One vehemently contested issue concerning the *Directory* in the Assembly was the method for administering the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. In Scotland the communicants were seated at a table to receive both elements. The Independents of England used double consecration, serving first bread, and then the cup to communicants who remained in the pews.

The Scots refused to surrender their understanding of a ritual appropriate to a meal, the ceremony of being seated at a table. In fact, the crucial compromise obscures the attention to ceremony in the debate of this question; it reads, quite simply, "Communicants may orderly sit about...or at" the table. This chapter is rich in the ambiguities designed to comprehend opposing liturgical customs, and the modulations in meaning held to reside in them.⁵⁰

⁴⁴Paragraph 9, 10 and 11.

⁴⁵From the directions for the first prayer.

⁴⁶Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 18.

⁴⁷"The Prayer ended, let a Psalm be sung, if with conveniency it may be done"; Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 18. There is not a great deal of emphasis on psalm-singing in this document. At the same time, the Assembly would also produce a revised Psalter.

⁴⁸Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 18.

⁴⁹The Scottish pattern was to delay these prayers until after the administration of the Lord's Supper. This yielded for the order: call to worship; the prayer of invocation and illumination; Old and New Testament reading; psalm; the prayer of confession, for pardon and grace; the sermon (with preacher's text); Communion exhortation and invitation; reading of Words of Institution and the Prayer of Thanksgiving; administration at the table; exhortation; the prayers of thanksgiving, supplication and intercession; psalm; blessing.

⁵⁰See Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 362, 365-373. The *Directory* also provided for a single prayer before the fraction, but implicitly permitted the two-fold administration.

There is a remarkably full outline for the "Thanksgiving, or Blessing of the bread and wine," which includes invocation of the Spirit, to "sanctify" the elements and to bless [God's] own ordinance, that we may receive by faith the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ crucified for us, and so to feed upon him, that he may be one with us, and we with him, that he may live in us, and we in him, and to him....⁵¹

This prayer follows the Words of Institution, and is spoken by the minister standing at the table. This moved away from the pattern of the *Book of Common Order*. The earlier Reformed Genevan pattern developed the exhortation out of the Biblical warrant, found in 1 Corinthians 11, and the minister moved from the pulpit to the table only following this. According to the *Directory*, the minister is at the table to read the narrative of institution and to pray, in what together constituted consecration or the "sanctifying" of the elements.⁵²

The prayer of thanksgiving at the Lord's Supper seems to have been part of the Scots' heritage from John Knox, whose service had a prayer for this sacramental use. The *Directory* prayer, however, is original, and duplicates neither Knox nor the prayer of the *Book of Common Prayer*. It begins in the manner of evangelical penitence that prefaces every other prayer, acknowledging misery and unworthy receipt of God's mercies. Then the prayer moves to thanksgiving to God for our redemption in Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, for the Word and Sacraments, "by which Christ and all his benefits are applied and sealed up unto us".

The second section is a profession of the Name of Christ, and his high priestly ministry, "by whom alone we receive liberty and life, have access to the throne of Grace, are admitted to eat and drink at his own Table, and are sealed up by his Spirit to an assurance of happiness and everlasting life."

The final section calls on God, for "the effectual working of his Spirit in us, and so to sanctify these Elements both of Bread and Wine, and to bless his own Ordinance".⁵³ There is the strong sense expressed in this prayer that the Christian has access to God through Christ, just as God approaches us in him, in the Word and means of grace.

The directions for the Lord's Supper, particularly when read with the *Confession*, express a high sacramental understanding. It is in this context, of a faith that hears the gospel preached, that material elements taken up in the instituted sign speak the person and benefits of Christ, "that he may live in us, and we in him, and to him". Ceremonial action is by no means neglected, but shaped to support and emphasize the perception of a sovereign gift received, and a communal meal celebrated.⁵⁴

The post-communion thanksgiving indicates the characteristic themes of the prayers that express and shape this Reformed piety:

The minister is to give solemn thanks to God, For his rich mercy, and invaluable goodness, vouchsafed to them in that Sacrament, and to entreat for pardon for the

⁵¹Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 22.

⁵²American directories reversed the *Westminster* sequence, and thus separated the use of the institution as a warrant from the prayer of thanksgiving.

⁵³Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 22.

⁵⁴The bread and wine are to be provided in "comely and convenient vessels" and "large Cups," to allow passing elements by and among the communicants; the actions of the minister communicate the reception of God's gift; the table shapes the celebration with actions appropriate to the contemporary notion of a communal meal.

defects of the whole service, and for the gracious assistance of his good Spirit, whereby they may be enabled to walk in the strength of that Grace, as becometh those who have received so great pledges of salvation.⁵⁵

The rhetoric of prayer among Puritans of the 17th century ran more to humility than to the assertive themes of joy with which we are familiar. Yet, in the idiom of the era, the *Directory* expresses an engagement of the person with God, and a strong sense of the graces and benefits of God in church and society.

The order for Sunday worship, particularly when the notion of a frequent Lord's Supper is taken seriously, has integrity as well as simplicity. There is no doubt an overly verbose quality to the many exhortations, explanations, applications and other attempts to stir and move the hearers. The sharp edge of contemporary struggle is evident, as e.g., in the intercessions and their dwelling on the Protestant concerns of the day. But it was a time of struggle, and the political tone of the whole project is not unexpected, and not least the political role of prayerbooks and public ritual. What is worthy of note in the *Directory* is the pastoral wisdom and profound theological substance, particularly of its prayer-outlines. What is worth recalling is the "bracingly trinitarian, evangelical and confessional quality" of this piety, and a system of worship that sought "an integrated response to [God's] Word and Spirit in public worship, private devotion and daily calling".⁵⁶

V

Reading the *Directory* as a classic of Reformed worship reminds us of central insights of the tradition for the contemporary reform of worship. In an era of institutional anxiety, theology is needed more than liturgical entertainments and gimmicks. The *Directory* is a witness to three central themes in worship that need attention in our practice today: centrality of Scripture, the high priesthood of Christ, and the role of the Holy Spirit, sanctification in both prayer and life. I will point to some ways these themes might bear on issues of worship.

Records of the debates on the *Directory* (partial minutes, as well as letters and notes) clarify the controversy behind seemingly simple rubrics, and the serious attention to how a Biblical liturgy can be enacted and described. In regard to the practical issue of how Scripture as authority shapes worship, Iain Murray observes

The lengthy discussion necessary on such points is a healthy reminder to us that merely to adhere to the regulative principle is not to resolve all questions instantly. Nor is it an easy solution to all questions. What that principle did achieve at Westminster was a common commitment to a basic biblical simplicity. No arguments from tradition, from aesthetic considerations, nor from expedience of any kind had any weight when it came to the question of what is to be imposed as necessary for worship.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, 23.

⁵⁶Breward, *The Westminster Directory*, Introduction, 6.

⁵⁷Iain H. Murray, "The Directory for Public Worship," in *To Glorify and Enjoy God, A Commemoration of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly* ed. by John L. Carson and David W. Hall (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 178.

The key principle that worship is "according to Scripture" cannot be simply identified with particular ecclesiastical traditions, or reduced to distinctive customs however beloved. Neither ought the effort of renewal in worship be driven by merely pragmatic ends.

The *Directory* was unique in giving such careful attention to the role and work of preaching, emphasizing the centrality of this ministry in relation to prayer and sacrament. The Assembly revised the metrical psalmody, too, and a Psalter should also be considered among Westminster's achievements, the Scriptures in sung praise.⁵⁸

The *Directory*, like the Assembly itself, marks the end of an era in the Reformed tradition. Perhaps one sign is a loosening of the close inner connection between the *lectio continua* of Scripture in worship and the preaching ministry. Only a subtle point in the context of the Assembly, but one marker for the eventual disruption of common worship as the service of the community in which regular, systematic hearing of the Scripture read and proclaimed is integral to the rendering of praise and prayer in and by the church. In the Reformed rite, the Word of God integrates the liturgical actions of reading, preaching, hearing, praying and singing.

A great deal of enthusiasm has been generated over the last 30 years for systematic readings of Scripture and the sort of help for preaching various lectionary schemes encourage. It strikes me that in many churches *not* part of this ecumenical enthusiasm there is an emerging interest in systematic, expository preaching. There is an encouraging potential here, for a resurgence of preaching within an awakened interest in prayer and spirituality. That would of course make perfect sense within the perspective of the Assembly.

The *Directory* is valuable in our time also for its speaking of the high priesthood of Christ within the setting of the church's worship. The Sunday service begins with prayer, "in the Name and Mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ." The church prays, encouraged "in the satisfaction and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of his Father,...through the merits and mediation of our great High Priest the Lord Jesus, To professe that it is the desire of our soules to have fellowship with God in the reverend and conscionable use of his holy Ordinances".⁵⁹ At the center of the prayer of the Lord's Supper, where the faith of the community in many traditions receives a more full expression, profession of the name of Jesus Christ, his priestly ministry and the working of his Spirit is the eucharistical key to the communion, the assurance and life, which the church proclaims in the sacrament, and which it celebrates and receives with him, and in him and to him.

One benefit of a reading of the *Directory* could be more astute putting of the question, *Who is it who worships God?* It will serve the best ends of common worship and challenge the overly pragmatic, utilitarian thinking about what we do on Sunday, to acknowledge the One who worships God rightly and graciously draws us in. It would, at least, provide a different starting-point from either marketing or artificially ecumenical agendas for renewing public worship.

The *Directory* acknowledges the dependence of the church on the work of the Holy Spirit in worship. There is tension to be seen in this, in that the *Directory* often is more intent on what *we* do than on the person and works of God.

The people's participation in worship is one central concern of the *Directory*, and it is refreshingly far more radical than just giving people words to say. The precise architecture of

⁵⁸The 1650 Scots' Psalter was in the line of revisions of Rous' Psalter, although it was in fact a virtually new collection; see McNally, *The Westminster Directory*, 147-172, on metrical psalmody; see Millar Patrick, *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody* (London: Oxford, 1949), chapter 9 for a discussion of Rous' Psalter.

⁵⁹From the "Prayer before the Sermon."

prayers, like the care in the preaching ministry, suggests a trained people who are actively involved in hearing. But it is also clear that a *voice* “tunably and gravely ordered..., with understanding, and with grace in the heart” is the people’s liturgy in praising God. It is still true that participation requires far more than outward action or speaking of words alone, no matter how fine the word or gesture.

The *Directory* neglects a key text for the old Reformed way of thinking about a Biblically faithful worship. The four-fold model of Acts 2:42, “the apostles’ teaching, the *koinonia*, the breaking of bread, and the prayers,” seems to have fallen from attention in the tradition before the time of Westminster.⁶⁰ The distinct and crucial role of alms-giving, *koinonia* as care for the neighbor in need, is no longer so clearly a part of the Reformed liturgy when the *Directory* can say, at the conclusion of the chapter on Lord’s Supper, “The Collection for the poore is so to be ordered, that no part of the publique worship be thereby hindered.” Nevertheless, the tradition clearly understands serving the glory of God and the care of neighbor as both the substance of Christian life and part of the regular concrete performance of Christian piety. There is, at the very least, no license for liturgy as self-cultivation in a spiritual experience, fashionable or otherwise. Renewal of prayer and of *koinonia* in the classic Reformed sense go together.

Concern for worship in the last generation has been answered by an ever-expanding industry of liturgical resources. Ecumenical borrowings, and entrepreneurial publishing, show no indication of ceasing. There is need for tools to guide the responsible use of the abundant “help and furniture” now readily available both from denominations and the more purely commercial sources. Theological and liturgical guidance for planning of worship is more necessary than ever before, since both the range and quality of materials in use is so broad and various.

The *Directory* of the Assembly attempted to frame “a consent of all the Churches, in those things that contain the substance of the Service and Worship of God.”⁶¹ This ideal of freedom and order in worship, through a faithful attention to the witness of Scripture, which the first *Directory* sought to serve, remains the keynote for Reformed worship: catholicity of both faith and service, enlivened with an evangelical fervor, through obedience to the Word of God.

⁶⁰A careful and thorough treatment of the use of this text and its loss is found in Elsie Ann McKee, *John Calvin On the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneve: Librairie Droz S.A., 1984), in chapters 1 and 3, 19-26, 67-89.

⁶¹From the preface of the *Directory*.