

Are Liturgies Authorized by Scripture?

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In some of the conservative Presbyterian denominations within the last generation there has been a renewed interest in a more liturgical form of public worship. This type of worship involves not only a revival of the church calendar and man-made holy days but also the repeated use of prayer books or prescribed written prayers. There are even pastors and writers who are Presbyterian in their church affiliation who are aggressively advocating the imposition of written prayers that are to be repeated verbatim by the minister and congregation, as well as many unauthorized Episcopal/Popish ceremonies. Given the current situation, that is, the attacks on Presbyterian or Reformed worship from within and without our churches, there is a need to consider whether or not liturgies are biblical or authorized by Scripture.

As we consider the use of liturgies there are a few things that we need to keep in mind. First, we are using the term liturgy in a restricted, more specialized sense. This point must be made because the Word liturgy (Greek *liturgia*, meaning literally public-work) is also a very general term that refers to all forms of public worship. In more modern times the term liturgy has more often been used to mean rigidly prescribed formularies for public worship such as the Romanist breviary or the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*. Thus, in this article we will be contrasting the use of biblically informed, intelligent *ex tempore* prayer as the scriptural ideal in public worship versus the use of a set form of prayer in which the right of ministers to form their own prayers is taken away.

Second, we will not be advocating the position taken by some radical Puritans and Separatists that all written out prayers, including even the Lord's prayer, are not ever to be allowed in public worship. ("The Brownists, the Barrowists, and the earliest Independents were decidedly against the repetition of the Lord's prayer."¹ They regarded it *solely* as a *model* for prayer which is never to be used as a prescribed prayer.) This position was never held by Calvin, Knox, the majority of Puritans, the early Presbyterians or the Westminster Assembly. This issue is not "no written prayers at all" versus "written prayers" but rather the imposed, required, every Sabbath use of prescribed prayers versus the biblical ideal of *ex tempore* prayer from the heart. For Presbyterians, written prayers were viewed as crutches or guides for those people who were deficient in their understanding of how to pray. Samuel Miller writes,

It is certain, that, as early as 1564, the Book of Common Order of Geneva, was in extensive use in the Church of Scotland, under the sanction of the General Assembly. But it is equally certain, that the prayers and other forms prescribed in that book were not intended to be throughout rigorously imposed on the conductors of public worship. It was, in fact, rather a "Directory" for the worship of God, than a liturgy to be verbally and servilely repeated. In the Scottish Church, during the period in which this book was

¹ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Cramer to Baxter and Fox, 1534-1690* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996 [1970, 75]), 269.

in use, the officiating minister was left at liberty to vary from it as he pleased, and to substitute prayers of his own in the room of those furnished in the book. The following quotations from the book will at once exemplify and confirm this statement: "When the congregation is assembled at the hours appointed, the minister useth one of these two confessions, *or like in effect*." Again: "The minister after the sermon, useth this prayer following, *or such like*." Similar declarations are prefixed to the prayers to be used at the celebration of Baptism, and the Lord's supper. And at the end of the account of the public service of the Sabbath, this intimation is subjoined: "It shall not be necessary for the minister daily to repeat all these things before mentioned; but beginning with *some manner or confession*, to proceed to the sermon, which, ended, he either useth the prayer for all estates before mentioned, or else *prayeth as the Spirit of God shall move his heart*, framing the same according to the time and matter he hath entreated of." And at the end of the form of excommunication, it is signified: "This order may be enlarged or contracted, *as the wisdom of the discreet minister shall think expedient*. But we rather show the way to the ignorant, than prescribe order to the learned that cannot be amended." The Scottish liturgy, then, was intended as a help to the ignorant, not as a restraint upon those who could pray without a set form. The "readers" and "exhorters" commonly used it; but even they were encouraged to perform the service in a different manner, that is, to acquire the habit of praying extemporaneously to edification.

This Directory, as it seems never to have been servilely recited by the most intelligent of the clergy, so it was soon laid aside. How long it was used is uncertain. As the clergy became more learned and more pious, it gradually fell into disuse.²

The attitude of Presbyterians towards the use of a set liturgy is easily ascertained by an examination of the Westminster *Directory for Public Worship* which was approved by the General Assembly in 1645. This *Directory* very consciously set aside the *Book of Common Prayer* because of its negative effect on ministers and churches. It reads: "Add hereunto, (which was not foreseen, but since have come to pass,) that the Liturgy hath been a great means, as on the one hand to make and increase an idle and unedifying ministry, which contented itself with set forms made to their hands by others, without putting forth themselves to exercise the gift of prayer, with which our Lord Jesus Christ pleaseth to furnish all his servants whom he calls to that office..." The *Directory* set aside all set forms except for the formula for baptism, the administration of communion and marriage vows. When the topic of public prayer before the sermon is addressed the *Directory* says "the minister is...to call upon the Lord to this effect." The *Directory* then gives a detailed example of what a good public prayer contains. Then after the sample prayer the divines say, "We judge this to be a convenient order, in the ordinary public prayer; yet so, as the minister may defer (as in prudence he shall think meet) some part of the petitions till after his sermon, or offer up to God some of the thanksgivings hereafter appointed, in his prayer before his sermon." Presbyterianism set aside the Episcopal liturgy for free prayer because they regarded set prayers as a hindrance to Christian maturity and the free exercise of the gift of prayer.

Our central consideration in examining the liturgical concept of public worship is on whether or not common liturgical forms of devotion are biblical. We are not questioning the biblical right to say the Lord's prayer in public worship. Nor are we saying that carefully crafted written prayers are always wrong. It is the idea of a set liturgy that is used week after week that sets aside prayers from the heart that we are

² Samuel Miller, *Thoughts on Public Prayer* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1985 [1849]), 135-137.

contending with. It is our sincere desire to see the doctrinal achievements of the Westminster divines maintained.

In order to determine the wisdom and lawfulness of a prescribed liturgy let us consider the most common arguments for rigid formularies. (1) A very common argument for set liturgies revolves around the Lord's prayer. In Matthew's gospel our Lord instructs the disciples saying, "In this manner, therefore, pray" (6:9). In other words, when you pray, follow this pattern. This prayer is an example of how you should pray. But in Luke's gospel Jesus says, "When you pray, say..." (11:2). This statement is taken as an endorsement of an Episcopal style liturgical service because Christ apparently is endorsing a set form of prayer in His church. Is our Lord endorsing the imposition of a prayer book in public worship? No, not at all! There are a number of problems with this argument. First, even if we accept the interpretation that the Lucan account has the meaning of "when you pray say these exact words", this does not necessarily imply the whole prayer book service. "Say this" refers to the Lord's prayer. Our Lord did not say "say that; the Book of Common Prayer." It is one thing for a church to corporately repeat the Lord's prayer in public worship and quite another to repeat several prayers that men have written. The use of the Lord's prayer was common in many Puritan-Presbyterian churches, churches which emphatically rejected the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Second, one should be careful in developing an argument based on the literal meaning of "say" this. For, if "say" means "say these exact words" then Jesus did not follow his own principle literally. Our Lord begins by saying "whenever" which means "on all occasions of prayer" say this. But there are many minor differences between the Lord's prayer in Luke and Matthew. (e.g., The prayer in Luke's gospel omits the third petition, the conclusion, and a few phrases. It also substitutes the word sin for debts in the first clause of the fifth petition.) Interestingly, churches which recite the Lord's prayer use the fuller version in Matthew and not the shorter version in Luke where it says, "say" this. Given these considerations it is very likely that Luke 11:2ff. is also to be taken as a model prayer. Luke 11:2 is a very poor proof text for the repeated use of set forms in public worship.

The Lord's prayer is an excellent proof text for the Presbyterian idea of a directory which gives an example of how to pray instead of the set forms of a prayer book. With a prayer book there is no flexibility to deal with specific needs, particular pressing issues and various individual prayer requests. But by following Christ's example of a sound pattern for prayer, Presbyterians have the flexibility to deal with current needs and issues. The sound pattern remains the same; thus protecting us from unintelligent ramblings and vain repetition. But the details are filled in as needed. "No prescribed forms of prayer, however simple or diversified, can be accommodated to all the circumstances, exigencies, and wants of either individual Christians, or a number of worshipping assemblies."³ Samuel Miller writes,

A practical comment on this consideration was presented at the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, which met last year, (1847.) One of the clerical members of that body, in the course of its proceedings stated that a short time before, a pious and grateful mother requested him to offer public thanks to God, on her behalf, for a signal domestic mercy. He was obliged, as he stated,

³ Ibid, 161.

to inform her, that the Church had made no specific provision for returning thanks in such cases; and that he was not able to comply with her request. He, therefore, suggested, whether it would not be expedient to frame a new office adapted to such a case, and add it to the liturgy. His proposal was laid on the table, and eventually dismissed, on the distinct plea, that it was not desirable to favour *innovation*; that they had a liturgy venerable for its age, and sufficiently comprehensive for all desirable purposes; and that it was not wise to make provision in detail for such cases as that which he had proposed.⁴

(2) Another argument for prescribed liturgies comes from Acts 1:14 which reads, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” Those who favor prayer books make two points with this passage. First, if these early Christians prayed corporately with one accord they must have had a written prayer otherwise their prayer would have taken many different directions. Second, in the Greek the definite article occurs before the word prayer (“in *the* prayer”). While this argument appears plausible, there are a number of reasons why it is essentially useless in determining whether the apostles advocated set prayers.

First, as Lenski notes, “Abstract nouns such as ‘prayer’ may or may not have the article in the Greek. The next verses show that Luke does not have in mind a continuous ten-day prayer meeting with audible praying going on constantly. The word *proseuche* is at times used in the wider sense of worship. Prayer marked these ten day gatherings.”⁵ Second, the argument *assumes* that unity in prayer can only be attained through prescribed prayers. There can be “one accord” or unity in prayer with an elder leading in prayer and there can even be unity if everyone prays together in their own words or mind on the same topic. The context here indicates they were likely praying for the gift of the Holy Spirit which was the great need immediately before them.

The main issue that needs to be addressed is: is there any evidence that Christ and the apostles instituted prescribed prayers in public worship; and, are there any historical examples of the use of set prayers in the New Testament? A reading of the New Testament reveals no evidence whatsoever for the use of prescribed prayers. On the contrary, the evidence points decisively in the direction of extemporaneous prayers (e.g., Ac. 1:24; 4:31; 6:6; 8:15; 9:40; 20:36).

A passage that is particularly devastating to the set prayer position is 1 Timothy 2:1 which reads, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” Here, Paul (writing around A.D. 63, almost a whole generation after the establishment of the New Covenant church) is instructing Timothy, a young pastor, on how to pray. Note the following observations. (a) If the inspired apostles and evangelists had introduced set prayers in the churches, why does Timothy need to be instructed on this topic? Did the early liturgies neglect all these important subjects in their petitions? The answer to this question is obvious. Clearly, the apostolic churches were not using prescribed prayers in their worship. (b) Once again we find support for the orthodox Presbyterian practice of

⁴ Ibid, 162-163.

⁵ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1961 [1934]), 41.

organized, well thought-out, comprehensive, biblical prayers from the heart instead of the use of set prayers. The apostle rejects two extremes. He does not sanction the ecstatic nonsense and totally unpremeditated ramblings found in many Pentecostal churches; and, he rejects a set prayer liturgy. Like the Westminster *Directory* he covers the areas that merit our attention so that men will learn how to form their own prayers biblically. Matthew Henry writes,

Paul does not send him any prescribed form of prayer, as we have reason to think he would if he had intended that ministers should be tied to that way of praying; but, in general, that they should make *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks*: supplications for the averting of evil, prayers for the obtaining of good, intercessions for others, and thanksgivings for mercies already received. Paul thought it enough to give them general heads; they, having the scripture to direct them in prayer and the Spirit of prayer poured upon them, needed not any further directions.⁶

If the apostolic church engaged in prescribed prayers as ritualists contend, then where are the surviving prayer books or individual prayers? If liturgies were the normal practice of New Covenant churches and thus written-out prayers were circulating throughout the Middle East, North Africa, Asia Minor, Greece and Rome would there not be hundreds or perhaps even thousands of such prayers or at least copies of such prayers in existence today. Yet there are none. It is obvious to any unbiased observer of history that liturgies with written-out prayers were an innovation that came into the churches many generations after the death of the apostles and the close of the canon.

(3) A common argument for prescribed prayers is that it is a very ancient practice of the Christian church. It has the blessing of antiquity. Aside from the fact that arguments from church history alone are not sufficient to prove anything (i.e., every doctrine or practice must first be proved by a historical-grammatical exegesis of Scripture), is it really true that the post-apostolic church embraced set prayers in public worship? The eminent theologian John Owen has thoroughly disproved the idea that church history supports a liturgical prayer service. He writes,

I know no ground of expectation of the performance of that which, as yet, men have come short in,--namely, in producing testimonies for the use of such liturgies as we are inquiring after; considering the diligence, ability, and interest of those who have been already engaged in that inquiry. Now, the silence of those who, in all probability, would have given an account of them had they been in use in their days, with the description they give us of such a performance of the worship of God in the assemblies of Christians as is inconsistent with, and exclusive of, such prescribed forms as we treat of, is as full an evidence in this kind as our negative is capable of. In those golden fragments of antiquity which we have preserved by Eusebius,--I mean the Epistles of the church of Smyrna about the martyrdom of Polycarpus, and of the churches of Vienne and Lyons concerning their persecution,--we have not the least intimation of any such forms of service. In the Epistle of Clemens, or the church of Rome to the church of Corinth, in those of Ignatius, in the writings of Justin Martyr, Clemens, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, and their contemporaries, there is the same silence concerning them. The pseudographical writings that bear the names of the men of those days, with any pretence of considerable antiquity, as the Canons of the Apostles,

⁶ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McClean, VA: MacDonald, no date), 6:811.

Quaestiones ad Othodoxos, Dionysius Hierarch. Divin, Nom., will not help in the cause; for though in some of them there are prayers mentioned,--and that for and about such things as were not “in rerum natura” in the days wherein those persons lived unto whose names they are falsely ascribed,--yet they speak nothing to the point of liturgies as stated in our inquiry.

Those who deal expressly about the order, state, and condition of the churches, and the worship of God in them, their prayers and supplications, knew nothing of prescribed liturgies; yea, they affirm plainly that which is inconsistent with the use of them. The account given of the worship of the Christians in those days by Justin Martyr and Tertullian is known as having been often pleaded. I shall only mention it in our passage, and begin with the latter. “Illuc,” saith he, (that is, towards heaven,) “suspicientes Christiani,” (not like the idolaters, who looked on their idols and images,) “minibus expansis,” (not embracing altars or images, as did the heathen,) “quia innouis, capite nudo, quia non erubescimus, denique sine monitore, quia de pectore oramus, (not as they who repeat their prayers after their priests or sacrificers, but pouring out our prayers conceived in our breasts,) *Apol.*, cap. xxx.⁷

When describing the liturgy or worship service as delineated in the writings of Justin Martyr (A.D. 166) Owen writes,

These prayers, he declares afterward, were made by him who did preside among the brethren in the assembly,--that is, the bishop or pastor; who when he had finished his prayer, the whole people cried, Amen; which leaves small room for the practice of any liturgy that is this day extant, or that hath left any memory of itself in this world. These prayers and supplication, he addeth, the president of the assembly...”poureth out according to his ability;” and...he “doth this work at large,” or continues long in his work (of praises unto God in the name of Jesus Christ). I know some have excepted against the usual interpretation of these Words, “*Ose dunamis*, although they have not been able to assign any other tolerable sense unto them besides that which they would willingly oppose. But as the rendering of them “According to his ability,” or, “As he is able,” may not only be justified, but evinced to be the only sense the Words are capable of, so the argument in hand doth not, as to its efficacy, depend on the precise signification of those two Words, but on the whole contexture of the holy martyr’s discourse; so relating to the worship of the churches in those days as to manifest that the use of prescribed forms of liturgies to be read in them was then utterly unknown.⁸

Owen concludes his essay on “The Practice in the first Three Centuries” with this sobering statement: “We may, then, I suppose, without giving occasion to the just imputation of any mistakes, affirm, That the composing and imposition of liturgies, to be necessarily used or read in the administration of the ordinances of the gospel, is destitute of any plea or pretence, from Scripture or antiquity.”⁹

(4) Another argument is that the Bible requires participatory worship. Participatory worship requires the use of a prayer book, for without a set prayer service the people are mere spectators. This is the central argument offered by James Jordan. Note that, in his argumentation for prescribed prayers, Jordan does not offer any

⁷ John Owen, “The Practice of the First Three Centuries” in *Works* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965) 16:22-23.

⁸ *Ibid*, 15:24.

⁹ *Ibid*.

commands, historical examples or even logical inferences from Scripture. Rather, he appeals to a very general overarching principle--the priesthood of believers. "The whole-personal priesthood of all believers means not only congregational participation (which requires prayer books), but also holistic 'doing'. It means singing, falling down, kneeling, dancing, clapping, processions, and so forth."¹⁰

There are a number of reasons why such arguments are fallacious. First, Jordan's argument from the priesthood of believers is not a logical inference but mere speculation. While it is true that we are all priests of God directly through Jesus Christ (obviating the need for a human priest), this truth tells us nothing about whether or not prescribed prayers are required or authorized for public worship. Given the fact that believers in both covenantal eras are called priests (cf. Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:5), yet in both covenantal administrations many duties of public worship are restricted to certain ordained men (e.g., Only priests were authorized to offer sacrifices. Only the Levites were authorized to instruct the covenant people. Pastors or teaching elders are authorized to administer the sacraments and preach in public worship in the New Testament church). The "priesthood of believers" argument simply does not give any useful information on the legitimacy of mandatory prayer books. In other words, the congregants who are described as priests in both covenantal administrations do not participate in every aspect of public worship in the same manner. If one resorts to such speculative application he can prove virtually anything.¹¹

Second, orthodox Presbyterians are not at all opposed to participatory worship for such worship is required by Scripture. The issue is *what kind of participatory worship does God authorize in His Word?* There is simply no biblical evidence for the use of set prayers in public worship. If there is evidence that can be proven by a historical-grammatical exegesis instead of mere theories based on general *non-applicable* principles, then let us see the evidence. Third, the idea that in traditional Presbyterian worship the people are mere spectators is totally untrue. Such an argument is an *ad hominem* attack. People do not need a prayer book, dancing or processions to participate in public worship as Jordan asserts. Congregants participate in the sacraments, prayer, the singing of Psalms, and the hearing of the Word read and preached. Apparently those in favor of a set liturgical service think that only *audible* prayers on a padded kneeler are truly participatory. Such, of course, is not the case. The reality is that Jordan and his followers have rejected Reformed worship in favor of a ritualistic, sacramentalist paradigm.

(5) Set prayer advocates also appeal to the Old Testament, especially the Book of Psalms as evidence of a set liturgy in the Jewish church. Attention is called to the fact that a number of Psalms contain petitions. Psalm 17 is entitled a prayer of David. At the conclusion of Psalm 72 we read, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended" (v. 20). Some Psalms such as 51 are clearly confessions of sin. Further, the Hebrew style of

¹⁰ James Jordan, *Liturgical Nestorianism* (Niceville, FL: Transfiguration Press, 1994), 32. In this book Jordan endorses Episcopal worship over Reformed worship (210), crossing oneself (212) and sacramentalism (38). Moreover, he argues that Reformed worship is Nestorian and Gnostic. Since he wrote this book he has also openly denied justification by faith alone.

¹¹ The same over-arching principle (the priesthood of believers) is used by radical Anabaptists to argue for "house churches" where all the men share in teaching, choosing praise songs, praying, etc. Such ecclesiastical anarchists have essentially eliminated the pastorate (and in some cases the entire eldership) using such reasoning.

poetry where a statement is made then immediately restated saying the same thing or almost the same thing with a different emphasis is structurally perfect for a set liturgy (e.g., “Create in me a clean heart”, then a response, “And renew a steadfast spirit within me” [Ps. 51:10]). Is not all of this excellent evidence for a set liturgical prayer service? While this is a better argument than we have seen thus far, it still falls far short of a good exegetical foundation for divine warrant for a number of reasons.

First, this argument ignores the Bible’s own explicit teaching regarding the book of Psalms. While the Psalter contains many different elements (thanksgiving, prayer, didactic meditations, confession, royal Psalms, Messianic Psalms, etc.), Scripture identifies it as a book of praises not as a prayer book. God calls the Psalter “The Book of Praises”. That the book of Psalms is clearly designed by God to be sung is indicated by the musical terminology found in the Psalm titles and throughout the Psalms themselves. There is the mention of chief musicians and various types of musical instruments as well as the names of melodies by which certain Psalms were to be sung. The Psalms are constantly referred to as songs, psalms (melodious songs), and hymns. As a church we are commanded to *sing* the Psalms (e.g., Ps. 81:2; 95:1-2; 98:4-6; 100:2; 105:2; etc). Further, (and this point is decisive) of the several historical examples of Psalms being used in public worship in the Bible (e.g., 1 Chr. 16; 2 Chr. 5:13; 20:21; 29:30; Ezr. 3:11) not one refers to the Psalms being used like a modern prayer book with a minister and the congregants reading verses back to each other. Every example involves Levitical choirs and/or the people of God engaged in singing praise (e.g., Ex. 15:1; 2 Sam. 1:18; 2 Chr. 23:13; Ps. 30:4; 173:ff.; Mt. 26:30; Jas. 5:13). If we were instructed by God to use the Psalms for a set prayer liturgy or if we could find an historical example in the Bible of the Psalms being used as a set prayer liturgy, then obviously the church would be obligated to at least use an inspired prescribed set of prayers in public worship. But without any such evidence the idea that the book of Psalms proves a prescribed prayer liturgy is pure speculation without solid evidence.

Second, if the Old Covenant church was using the Psalter or even an uninspired body of prescribed prayers in public worship, there ought to be some historical evidence for it. But there is no evidence at all. Samuel Miller writes,

It is alleged that public prayer under the Old Testament economy was always conducted by prescribed forms. This has been asserted, but never proved...Even in the temple service, for which so ample a provision of forms was furnished, there was no prescribed form of prayer; and even in the synagogue, or ordinary Sabbatical service of the later Jews, it has not been shown that they had any prescribed prayers, and far less that they were confined to them. If they had any such imposed forms, it is indeed wonderful that we do not find in all the inspired writings, in the works of Josephus or Philo, or in any other authentic writing, the least hint or allusion respecting them.¹²

(6) A pragmatic argument for prescribed prayers is that they prevent the great abuses of worship so common today. This is one of David Chilton’s arguments for a formal liturgy in his commentary on the book of Revelation:

¹² Samuel Miller, 139-141.

[Worship must be orderly. The elders and the living creatures do not interrupt each other or attempt to upstage one another. While worship should be *corporate*, involving the entire Church, it must not be *chaotic*. A basic standard for worship is laid down in 1 Cor. 14:40: “Let everything be done decently and in order.” Charismatics tend to have certain correct instincts—that worship should include the whole congregation—but their actual practice tends toward confusion and disorder, with everyone *individually* “worshiping” all at once. The solution, recognized in both Old and New Testaments, and by the Church throughout history, is to provide a common liturgy, with formal prayers and responses, so that the people may intelligently worship together in a manner that is both corporate and orderly.¹³

There are a number of problems with Chilton’s argument. First, his definition of participatory worship presupposes that orthodox Presbyterian worship is non-participatory. This argument is essentially the fallacy of black or white where only two alternatives are considered as if they are the *only* choices. Second, his argument from Revelation for formal liturgical worship is speculative nonsense that he learned from apostate theologians. Note that Chilton says the Old and New Testaments recognize a formal liturgical prayer service yet offers no substantiation at all for his claim. In other sections of this paper we have seen that there simply is no evidence (using a traditional historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture) for a prescribed prayer service in either the Old or New Covenant church. Third, orthodox Presbyterian worship is strictly regulated by Scripture and is not “chaotic” at all.

In classical, orthodox Presbyterianism only those things which have divine warrant (i.e., they can be proved from Scripture alone) are permitted in the public worship of God. Such a principle regulates every aspect of the worship service except things circumstantial to worship itself (e.g., type of chairs, lighting, heating system, etc) The regulative principle with one bold stroke eliminates the puppet shows, rock bands, irreverent comedy-filled “preaching” and ecstatic-gibberish “prayers”. The scriptural law of worship eliminates the inappropriate and revolting effusion of the Charismatics as well as the rigid, stifling set prayer service of the ritualists. As noted earlier, the Bible teaches the use of free prayer (i.e., prayer from the heart) that is well thought-out, premeditated, intelligent, and reverent. Jesus gave us a model for prayer and Paul gave instructions on how to pray. If we obey Scripture we will be neither Pentecostal nor Episcopal, but rather Reformed or Presbyterian in our practice. “We are persuaded that liturgies have no countenance in the word of God, and were unknown in the primitive apostolic Church; and, as Protestants, we feel bound to adopt and act upon the principle, that that which is not contained in Holy Scripture, or which cannot, by good and necessary consequence, be deduced from that which is contained in it, ought to have no place in the Church of God.”¹⁴

Fourth, anything that Chilton has written regarding public worship needs to be taken with a large grain of salt and analyzed very carefully because (a) Chilton was a follower of the heretic James Jordan and his interpretive maximalism; and (b) Chilton before his death revealed his true colors by completely rejecting the Protestant Reformation and embracing Eastern Orthodoxy (an apostate communion) and full

¹³ David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth, TX: The Dominion Press, 1987), 163.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

preterism (a damnable heresy). Jesus said, “You shall know them by their fruit” (Mt. 7:16). Chilton along with people such as James Jordan, Peter Leithart and Mark Horne are producing stinking, rotten fruit in the areas of worship, soteriology and covenant theology.¹⁵

If one were to attend a typical Charismatic or Evangelical church today one would find much entertainment, emotion and enthusiasm with little reverence, content and order. While an old-fashioned low-church prayer book service is obviously better than a modern church-growth rock and roll jam fest, there is a third alternative that is much better than both because it is thoroughly scriptural. That is, worship and prayer regulated strictly by the Bible.

(6) Another argument by David Chilton for a set liturgy, which is somewhat unique, states that the whole book of Revelation is a worship service in heaven.

The lectionary nature of Revelation helps explain the wealth of liturgical material in the prophecy. Revelation is not, of course, a manual about how to “do” a worship service; rather, it is a worship service, a liturgy conducted in heaven as a model for those on earth...[T]he Book of Revelation...is about worship as anything else...The elders and the four living creature are shown singing musical responses back and forth, carrying on a dialogue. And, in the worship of the Church on earth, that is what we do (or should do) also. We respond liturgically to the reading of Scripture, to the prayers, to the singing of Psalms and hymns, to the teaching, and to the Sacraments. For this is what we see in heavenly worship, and our worship should be structured as far as possible in imitation of the heavenly pattern.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Brian M. Schwertley, *A Defense of Reformed Orthodoxy against the Romanizing Doctrines of the New Auburn Theology* at <http://www.reformedonline.com>. Also read Calvin Beisner, ed. “Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision” in *The Auburn Ave Theology Pros & Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox theological Seminary, 2004), 305-325.

¹⁶ Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 24, 163. Chilton’s hostility to Reformed worship can be seen in the following quote. He writes “Liturgical puritanism is *not* ‘Protestant’; it is not even Christian... ‘Briefly, the puritan theory is that worship is a purely mental activity, to be exercised by a strictly psychological “attention” to a subjective emotional or spiritual experience... Over against this puritan theory of worship stands another—the “ceremonious” conception of worship, whose foundation principle is that worship as such is not a purely intellectual and affective exercise, but one in which the whole man—body as well as soul, his aesthetic and volitional as well as his intellectual powers—must take full part. It regards worship as an “act” just as much as an “experience.” It is this ‘ceremonious’ view of worship that is taught by the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Since all the action of Revelation is seen from the viewpoint of a worship service, this commentary will assume that the prophecy’s liturgical structure is basic to its proper interpretation.” (*The Days of Vengeance*, 24-25) Chilton quotes from Dom Gregory Dix, (*The Shape of the Liturgy* [New York: The Seabury Press, (1943)1983], 312). Chilton’s idea that Puritan worship is unchristian and non-volitional is totally untrue. The Puritans were fully engaged in all the elements of worship and all the proper biblical experiences and acts in public worship as any examination of the *Westminster Directory for Public Worship* will demonstrate. Chilton’s (and Jordan as well as his followers) real beef with Puritan worship is that it limits worship to only what is authorized in Scripture. The Puritan application of *sola Scriptura* to the sphere of worship has eliminated all the popish trash (e.g., the liturgical calendar, the sign of the cross, the use of incense and candles, priestly garments and ritualistic liturgies) that Chilton finds attractive. Chilton, Jordan and other interpretive maximalists (the first table antinomians) completely reject all the achievements of the Calvinistic wing of the Reformation in the sphere of worship (which is reflected in all the Reformed symbols and is backed up by some of the greatest minds and best exegetes of all church history [e.g., John Owen, John Calvin, Samuel Rutherford, George Gillespie, etc]) on the basis of a few general overarching, non-applicable principles. Christians should not be fooled by such dishonest pseudo-intellectualism.

According to Chilton (and the few Eastern Orthodox and modernist scholars he cites) the book of Revelation itself is a set liturgy in heaven that should be imitated as closely as possible. While this argument is creative and interesting it is completely untenable. Why? Because the book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature and was never meant to be taken literally. Therefore, it cannot serve as a guide for a public worship service. In fact, anyone who looks to Revelation in this way would be a Romanist for the book describes an altar (6:9; 8:3,5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7), incense (8:4), the ark of the covenant (11:19), trumpets (1:10; 4:1; 8:13; 9:14); harps (5:8; 14:2; 15:2) and temples (3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 2, 19; 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8; 16:1, 17). Apocalyptic literature uses figurative language and dramatic imagery to teach spiritual lessons. The mention of incense, which was ceremonial, is symbolic of the prayers of the saints. John mentions trumpets which harken back to the two silver trumpets of announcement authorized under the Mosaic administration. These trumpets are not literal trumpets but the sound of voice likened to a trumpet (4:1). They symbolize announcements of judgment. Also, the harps were not literal harps but the sound of human voices likened to the sound of harps (14:2). The harps symbolize the praise of the saints. The repeated use of ceremonial symbols that have been abrogated by Christ in the so-called heavenly liturgy destroys Chilton's argument. "The Book of Revelation is filled to overflowing with obscure rites, with thrones and temples, and with a whole host of liturgical acts that cannot possibly relate to our own circumstances of worship. The attempt to derive elements of worship from such apocalyptic literature can only lead to liturgical chaos."¹⁷

Conclusion

During this generation Reformed worship has been attacked and degraded from two very different viewpoints regarding the public worship of God. One view is rooted in Charismatic, Arminian, church growth understandings of worship while the other is rooted in much older human traditions and looks to the ritualistic liturgical forms of Romanism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglicanism as the biblical ideal. In this brief study of liturgical-prayer book worship we have seen that the mandatory weekly use of prescribed prayers in public worship discourages ministers from learning to pray from the heart according to Christ's model. It removes the needed flexibility to deal with pressing issues and emergencies. It can be easily abused by congregants by either degenerating to a mindless repetition or by producing boredom and disinterest. The Bible teaches us the use of fervent, extemporary prayer that is according to the model given us by Christ Himself. We must be diligent in learning how to pray biblically. We must avoid the cold, formal worship of the ritualists and also steer clear of the mindless, emotional ranting of those professing Christians who reject the intellect, preparation and solid doctrinal instruction. May God enable us to pray according to Jesus' model, in accordance with His own will, for His own glory. Amen.

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¹⁷ Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion: A Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody* (Pittsburg: Crown and Covenant, [1980] 1993), 94-95.