

## WHAT IS “BIBLICAL” WORSHIP? BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS AND EVANGELICAL THEOLOGIES OF WORSHIP

MICHAEL A. FARLEY\*

Evangelical worship must be biblical worship. Because God’s revelation is the ultimate guide and norm for true Christian worship, evangelical Christians should care about properly understanding what God has revealed in his word on this subject. However, evangelicals have a hard time agreeing just what “biblical worship” is.<sup>1</sup> Many disputes about worship practices occur in part because there is no shared hermeneutical and theological framework for developing a biblical theology of worship.<sup>2</sup> The hermeneutical diversity that exists goes deeper than mere disagreements over the interpretation and application of specific texts. There is also a substantial lack of agreement about which biblical texts are relevant and applicable to Christian worship at all.

Thus, the first step toward advancing evangelical discussions about a biblical theology of worship is a greater hermeneutical self-consciousness. Where do we turn in Scripture to find norms to guide the practice of Christian worship? What kinds of biblical texts are appropriate sources for deriving a

\* Michael Farley is adjunct professor of theological studies at St. Louis University, 221 N. Grand Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63103-2097.

<sup>1</sup> “Liturgy” and “worship” are words with multiple meanings and connotations. In Christian perspective, every act and aspect of life can be considered worship, in the sense that every occasion in life is an opportunity for gratefully receiving God’s gracious gifts and responding with whole-hearted devotion. Within the context of one’s life as a whole, however, there are specific acts of devotion that embody this relational dynamic between God and his people in a more explicit and focused manner. These specific acts of worship include activities more commonly associated with the term “worship,” such as prayers of confession, praise, thanksgiving, and intercession (spoken or sung), reading and reflection on Scripture, giving of money or other offerings for the poor, participation in baptism and the Eucharist, etc. These particular kinds of worship may be performed by individuals in private, by small gatherings of Christians (e.g. families, small groups) or by a whole congregation. This essay restricts its attention to the last of these particular modes of worship, and thus “worship” and “liturgy,” even when used without any qualifying adjectives, denote the content and order of the weekly corporate worship of the entire Christian assembly in a specific congregation or parish gathered on the Lord’s Day.

<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I use the term “biblical theology of worship” broadly to mean a theological explanation and justification of Christian practices in corporate worship that draws upon the whole Bible. Some might prefer to identify this as a systematic theology of worship, while defining “biblical theology” in a narrower or more technical sense as a study of theology in a smaller subset of the canon or a descriptive study of the development of particular themes in Scripture. I use the term “biblical theology” in the former, broader sense, and not the latter, narrower sense.

Christian theology of worship? How do we make sense of the diversity of worship practices found throughout redemptive history, and how do we draw upon the full scope of biblical teaching about worship to develop a coherent and fully biblical theology that can guide Christian practice today?

My primary goal in this paper is to clarify some of the hermeneutical confusion by making evangelicals more aware of several distinct approaches to a biblical theology of worship that currently exist in the evangelical world. In my recently completed doctoral dissertation, I have examined theologies of worship in the English, Scottish, and American Presbyterian traditions, and in those traditions I have discerned three distinct approaches to biblical hermeneutics in modern liturgical theology.<sup>3</sup> I will describe those three hermeneutical models and provide examples not only from works by Presbyterians but also from works by other contemporary evangelical scholars as well.

In the order that I will present them, each successive hermeneutical model builds upon the ones that precede it. The second and third models incorporate most of the texts and practices commended by the first, and they also expand the scope of its biblical foundation and its ideals about practice by deriving a theology of worship from a larger portion of Scripture.

#### I. PRAXIS-ORIENTED REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

The first model employs a praxis-oriented regulative principle. The phrase “regulative principle” comes from Presbyterian and Reformed literature and refers to a hermeneutical principle for determining a proper biblical warrant or support for liturgical practices. A praxis-oriented regulative principle is a hermeneutical approach to a biblical theology of worship that defines the norm for Christian worship as the apostolic *practice* of corporate worship in the first-century church. Thus, according to this principle, liturgical practices are biblical only if there are explicit NT commands or normative examples of those particular practices.

The 1644 *Westminster Directory for Public Worship* provides a particularly clear example of this praxis-oriented regulative principle in action. In its treatment of the festivals of the liturgical year, it dispenses with the annual celebrations of the church calendar in two sentences: “There is no day commanded in Scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord’s day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called *Holy-days*, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be continued.” In other words, there is no annual liturgical calendar in the NT, and therefore the church should not observe one.

The *Westminster Directory* is a historically appropriate example because it was the English Puritans (and the Scottish Presbyterians most influenced by them) who developed and applied this praxis-oriented hermeneutical

<sup>3</sup> Michael A. Farley, “Reforming Reformed Worship: Theological Method and Liturgical Catholicity in American Presbyterianism, 1850–2005” (Ph.D. diss., Saint Louis University, 2007).

theory with the greatest rigor. One example will have to suffice to illustrate this approach. In 1572, two English Puritans published *An Admonition to Parliament*, which was an attempt to influence public opinion toward a Presbyterian polity and liturgy.<sup>4</sup> Because it is a polemical pamphlet, the *Admonition* does not develop an elaborate positive theology of worship; rather, it engages primarily in a critique of the English church. In that critique, however, the reader can readily infer the basic principles of the authors' theology of liturgy. One of the main pleas of the work demands that parliament reform the liturgy of the Church of England by restricting it to "those things only, which the Lord himself in his word commandeth."<sup>5</sup> This means that nothing should be done in corporate worship without "the expresse warrant of Gods worde."<sup>6</sup> By following this regulative principle, the result will be a church "rightly reformed, according to the prescript of God's word."<sup>7</sup>

The ensuing mode of argument makes clear that what the authors mean by observing the commands and prescriptions of Scripture is a return to the practice of the "olde" church, that is, the church of the apostolic age. It is impermissible to incorporate "mannes devises, brought in long after the puritie of the primitive church," because this deviates from the pattern of "ancient puritie and simplicities."<sup>8</sup>

The authors produce a lengthy catalog of contrasts between the (alleged) practice of the apostles and the sixteenth-century practices of the Church of England in church government, worship, and discipline. In the area of liturgy, the Admonitioners object to any act of worship that either adds to or alters the biblical record of apostolic tradition. Later additions rejected by the authors include the reading of both epistle and gospel lessons, the confession of the Nicene creed,<sup>9</sup> the singing of the *Gloria*,<sup>10</sup> making the sign of the cross on baptizands in the rite of baptism, which institutes "a new sacrament."<sup>11</sup> The *Admonition* also protests the following alterations of apostolic patterns: celebrating the Eucharist with wafers rather than with common bread; receiving communion kneeling rather than sitting; using eucharistic words that Anglicans "borrowe from the papists" (presumably the ancient

<sup>4</sup> Donald J. McGinn, *The Admonition Controversy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1949) 26. The *Admonition* is reprinted in W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas, eds., *Puritan Manifestoes: A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt with a Reprint of the Admonition to the Parliament and Kindred Documents, 1572* (New York: B. Franklin, 1972) 5–41.

<sup>5</sup> Frere and Douglas, eds., *Manifestoes* 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>9</sup> In a footnote to the second edition, the authors clarify that they do not reject but rather affirm the doctrine contained in the creed. Thus, accurate theological content is not a sufficient condition to warrant its liturgical use. Here is a clear example of a praxis-oriented regulative principle, which locates biblical grounds not simply on continuity with apostolic doctrine but also on continuity with apostolic practice (Frere and Douglas, eds., *Manifestoes* 13).

<sup>10</sup> The authors claim that liturgical use of this hymn began around AD 130. Apparently, even the practices of the early second century were not sufficiently simple and pure for a church reformed according to the Scriptures (Frere and Douglas, eds., *Manifestoes* 14).

<sup>11</sup> Frere and Douglas, eds., *Manifestoes* 26.

eucharistic prayers) rather than only the words of institution in the gospel narratives; conducting worship “pompously” with “singing and pyping”; and the use of vestments by the minister.

According to the *Admonition*, all of those practices in worship are forbidden because they lack biblical warrant, and the requisite biblical warrant is scriptural testimony of apostolic commands or practice. If the NT does not explicitly record an example of a particular practice or command Christians to do it, then it lacks biblical warrant, and the church must not engage in that practice.

The use of Scripture in the *Admonition* is quite narrow. Citations of Scripture are overwhelmingly drawn from the NT. Citations from the OT are rare, and in the sections devoted to worship they are employed to refer to negative examples<sup>12</sup> or to practices abolished and superseded by Christian worship.<sup>13</sup> The *Admonition* cites later liturgical traditions only as evidence of illegitimate alteration or addition to the original purity and simplicity of the early church’s worship. This kind of regulative principle focused on repristinating apostolic practice is pervasive in Reformed liturgical polemics into the nineteenth century,<sup>14</sup> and even continues to the present day in a few Reformed circles.<sup>15</sup>

While the Puritan and Presbyterian traditions devoted the most energy to the theoretical development of this hermeneutical approach to liturgical theology, the same general mode of argumentation occurs in the evangelical tradition more broadly, even among those who are not as strict as some Puritans in their application of the principle. For example, in a sermon on worship, John Piper concludes:

Let’s begin with a startling fact, namely, that in the epistles of the New Testament there is very little instruction that deals explicitly with corporate worship—what we call worship services. . . . Why are the very epistles that are written to help the church be what it ought to be in this age almost totally devoid of . . . explicit teaching on the specifics of corporate worship? . . . In the New Testament there is a stunning indifference to the outward forms and places of worship. And there is, at the same time, a radical intensification of worship as an inward, spiritual experience that has no bounds and pervades all of life. These emphases were recaptured in the Reformation and came to clear expression in the Puritan wing of the Reformed tradition.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> E.g. ignorant and unfaithful priests (Frere and Douglas, eds., *Manifestoes* 22, 25).

<sup>13</sup> E.g. the annual calendar of Jewish festivals (Frere and Douglas, eds., *Manifestoes* 24).

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Samuel Miller, *The Primitive and Apostolical Order of the Church of Christ Vindicated* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1840); R. M. Patterson, “Presbyterian Worship,” *Presbyterian Review* 4 (1883) 744–74; and the essays “General Principles Touching the Worship of God” and “Liturgies, Instrumental Music, and Architecture,” by Thomas E. Peck, reprinted in *Miscellanies of Rev. Thomas E. Peck* (ed. Thomas C. Johnson; Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1895).

<sup>15</sup> See Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, eds., *Worship in the Presence of God* (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary, 1992); John A. Delivuk, “Biblical Authority and the Proof of the Regulative Principle of Worship in The Westminster Confession,” *WTJ* 58 (1996) 237–56.

<sup>16</sup> John Piper, “Worship God!,” [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1997/1016\\_Worship\\_God](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1997/1016_Worship_God) (accessed November 9, 2007).

In classic Puritan fashion, Piper primarily cites the OT in order to draw contrasts between OT and NT worship. Worship in the OT was concerned with ritual and form, while worship in the NT is concerned with inward spiritual experience:

You can see what is happening in the New Testament. Worship is being significantly de-institutionalized, de-localized, de-ritualized. The whole thrust is being taken off of ceremony and seasons and places and forms; and is being shifted to what is happening in the heart—not just on Sunday, but every day and all the time in all of life.<sup>17</sup>

In this sermon, not only does Piper explicitly commend the Puritan approach to corporate worship, but he also appears to assume a similar praxis-oriented regulative principle. Piper concludes that Christians ought to be mostly indifferent to the forms of worship and even attempt to minimize the use of all "outward" forms because there are no explicit examples in the NT of the liturgical forms employed by the apostolic church in her weekly assemblies. For Piper, the only important source of liturgical norms in the Bible for the church in the present age appears to be explicit commands and examples of apostolic practice found in the NT.

D. A. Carson operates with the same framework in an essay on hermeneutical methodology in defining biblical worship.<sup>18</sup> Carson consistently writes as if the only biblical texts and practices that matter for constructing a biblical theology of worship are those explicitly mentioned in the NT. Carson's answer to the question "What should we do, then, in corporate worship?" is a list of precepts and examples of practices drawn only from the NT. When he addresses the issue of the order of worship, he acknowledges that some matters of liturgical order might be preferable to others for some (unspecified) theological reasons. However, he is primarily concerned to stress that the NT list of corporate worship practices contains "no explicit mandate or model of a particular order or arrangement of these elements," as if this observation largely ends the conversation about biblical warrant for liturgical order.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, he emphasizes that a number of ancient Christian liturgical practices (e.g. candles, use of incense, responsorial dialogue, chanting) have "no particular warrant in the New Testament," even though he does not outright condemn them.

It seems especially clear that Carson is working with a praxis-oriented regulative principle when he critiques a biblical-theological justification for the use of incense in corporate worship. Even though the use of incense has precedent in OT practice and incense appears in the NT as a symbol for prayer in Revelation, Carson maintains that this theological argument fails to justify this practice because there is no explicit record of Christians using incense in NT times. Carson's implicit assumption in this example is that the sole biblical norm for Christian worship is the practice of the

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> D. A. Carson, "Worship under the Word," in *Worship by the Book* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 51.

first-century apostolic church as it is recorded in explicit examples and commands in the NT.<sup>20</sup>

## II. THEOLOGICALLY ORIENTED REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

Other evangelical authors find ample biblical warrant for many of the particular forms dismissed by proponents of the Puritan regulative principle. They do so by adopting a different hermeneutical approach that broadens the locus of liturgical norms in Scripture to include general theological principles in addition to explicit descriptions of liturgical practice. I call this broader method a theologically oriented regulative principle.

This hermeneutical approach to a biblical theology of worship derives norms for Christian worship by evaluating the way that particular liturgical practices communicate biblical truths in ritual and symbol. Thus, proponents of this approach not only reason from explicit NT commands and examples of particular apostolic worship practices but also from general theological principles and patterns in Scripture. According to this theologically oriented method, liturgical forms or rituals are biblical insofar as they embody truths taught in the Bible, and not merely because the apostolic church actually practiced the forms or rituals in question.

To illustrate the different liturgical implications of this hermeneutical principle, consider again the practice of observing the liturgical year. For strict proponents of a praxis-oriented regulative principle, there is no biblical warrant for the festivals of the church calendar because the NT contains no commands or examples of annual observances of Christmas, Easter, etc., in the apostolic church. Adherents of a theologically oriented regulative principle, on the other hand, defend the liturgical calendar and common lectionary because the festivals embody central biblical truths by focusing the church's readings, sermons, and prayers on the major Christological events in redemptive history.<sup>21</sup> The annual schedule and discipline of calendar and lectionary

<sup>20</sup> By way of qualification, I reiterate that neither Piper nor Carson applies this model as strictly as some Puritans and Presbyterians have done. Piper acknowledges that worshipping with outward forms (presumably fixed liturgies like the *Book of Common Prayer*) is permissible. Carson likewise grants the legitimacy of such liturgies and leaves room for the possibility that various features of these liturgies might be superior to other modes of corporate worship on the basis of more general theological and practical considerations. However, when both authors explain their own biblical theology of worship, they appeal only to practices explicitly recorded in the NT. In the same series of essays, Tim Keller displays the same NT-centered restrictiveness about biblical norms when he infers that the *Bible* "leaves us free with regard to modes, forms, and the order of those [liturgical] elements" simply because the *New Testament* does not contain a book of liturgical directives like the book of Leviticus. Keller does not explore how the OT might inform and guide the interpretation and application of the NT ("Reformed Worship in the Global City," in *Worship by the Book* 202). For a trenchant Reformed critique of the historical innovations and impractical nature of the Puritan regulative principle, see R. J. Gore, *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003) 331–36; Horace T. Allen, Jr., "Lectionaries—Principles and Problems:

are biblical because they immerse the church in the whole Bible and magnify Christ as the center of the biblical story and of all time and human history.

Proponents of a more theologically oriented regulative principle reject the Puritan model as too restrictive. They do not, of course, reject or downplay any of the practices of corporate worship explicitly attested and enjoined in the NT; on the contrary, they argue emphatically that these practices must always be central for Christian liturgy. However, they also maintain that reflection on more general theological themes and practices in both the NT and the OT can furnish additional biblical guidance and warrant for determining the best or wisest order and forms for NT practices as well as the architectural and aesthetic environment in which they occur.

This more theologically oriented approach to liturgical hermeneutics appears in two distinct schools that differ according to their relative emphases on biblical typology or post-biblical liturgical traditions as the source and paradigm for their liturgical ideals.

1. *Patristic-ecumenical model.* The first school, the patristic-ecumenical model, is very widespread in works on liturgical theology that have emerged within the discipline of liturgical studies in the broader ecumenical world outside of evangelicalism. Those who employ a patristic-ecumenical model develop their liturgical theology in the following way:

- (a) They derive biblical warrant for liturgical practices not only by looking for NT commands and examples but also by evaluating the way that particular practices embody biblical truth, even if such practices are not explicitly attested in the NT.
- (b) They rely almost exclusively upon texts in the NT alone for their biblical foundations.
- (c) They draw their ideals for liturgical practice from post-biblical liturgies, especially liturgies from the patristic era as well as the ecumenical liturgical consensus about the eucharistic *ordo* that emerged in the twentieth-century liturgical movements (both Catholic and Protestant), which sought to recover ancient liturgical models from the era of the undivided church.

There is a large body of liturgical scholarship from non-evangelical sources that manifests these features.<sup>22</sup>

---

A Comparative Analysis," *Studia Liturgica* 22 (1992) 68–83; Horace T. Allen, Jr., "Common Lectionary: Origins, Assumptions, and Issues," *Studia Liturgica* 21 (1991) 14–30; Horace T. Allen, Jr., "Calendar and Lectionary in Reformed Perspective and History," in *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present* (ed. Lukas Vischer; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> For example, see Yngve Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice: Evangelical and Catholic* (trans. A. G. Hebert; London: SPCK, 1930); Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1954); J. J. von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (trans. Harold Knight and Fletcher Fleet; New York: Oxford University Press, 1965); Horace T. Allen, Jr., "A Companion to the Worshipbook: A Theological Introduction to Worship in the Reformed Tradition" (Ph.D.

One evangelical work that employs a patristic-ecumenical approach to hermeneutics is the recent book *Liturgical Theology* by Simon Chan.<sup>23</sup> When Chan discusses the practice of Christian liturgy, he begins with the NT emphasis on word and table (citing, e.g., Acts 2:42). The basic and normative shape for Christian worship consists of two inseparable elements: Scripture and Eucharist. Having established these two pillars of the Christian liturgical edifice in the NT, he moves almost immediately into an exposition of patristic liturgies from Justin Martyr to later church orders like the *Apostolic Constitutions*. His chapter on the order of eucharistic worship simply begins with a liturgy that reflects the ecumenical consensus derived from the retrieval of patristic models in the early Reformed tradition and especially the Protestant and Catholic liturgical movements in the twentieth century.

He spends no time attempting to derive the details of the specific order and forms of this patristic and ecumenical liturgy from the Bible itself. Rather, he adopts a liturgical framework from post-biblical tradition in the early church and argues that this particular framework has biblical warrant because it articulates and enacts central biblical themes in a substantive and time-honored fashion. For Chan, it is unimportant that several specific forms did not develop until centuries after the NT era (e.g. the eucharistic prayer, the creeds, the lectionary, the liturgical calendar). What makes a liturgy biblical is its focus on the practices of word and sacrament and its trinitarian and Christ-centered theological content.

Chan sets forth that normative theological content in a series of chapters on various biblical themes that Christian liturgy ought to express and embody in word and action. Chan argues that Christian worship has its origin and basis in the Trinity and the paschal mystery. Worship is the action of the Triune God in the church that produces a worshipping community by the sending of the Son in Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and by the sending of the Spirit in Pentecost. Therefore redeemed humanity's worship is a participation in the very communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as that communion is realized in history in the person and work of Christ and in his body, the church. Worship that is fully biblical, therefore, must explicitly tell this trinitarian story and reflect this trinitarian reality in its content and forms.

In a chapter on the church, Chan defines the church as a worshipping community, thus making worship the very essence and goal of the church's existence. He also includes helpful reflections on the way that biblical themes of eschatology and mission provide an historical frame of reference and a practical purpose for corporate worship. Worship embodies the tension of

---

diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1980); Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist* (trans. Paul Kachur; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987); Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006.

the present era as we celebrate the presence of the promised eschatological kingdom of God in Christ and yet look with longing and hope to the future consummation of the kingdom. In this era of the new covenant, worship sustains the total mission of the church as Christians gather for nourishment and redirection toward God and are then sent forth to serve and glorify God with all of our lives in the world.

Chan urges fellow evangelicals to adopt his patristic and ecumenical ideal for liturgical practice by showing how liturgies from the later patristic era express these central biblical-theological themes in much more multifaceted and substantive ways than the typical worship service found in most evangelical churches today. He clearly does not favor patristic, Reformed, and ecumenical liturgical models for merely historical or antiquarian reasons. Chan is no mere traditionalist. Rather, his dominant concern is biblical and theological content, and he shows how the particular liturgical forms most foreign to many evangelical churches (e.g. corporate confession of sin and declaration of God's forgiveness, kneeling and standing for prayer, singing of psalms, ecumenical creeds, eucharistic prayers, multiple Scripture readings governed by lectionary, observance of the full liturgical calendar) all clearly embody the trinitarian, Christ-centered, and missional focus of the Bible in word and action. According to Chan, only the fullness of this sort of historic liturgy can enable the church to maintain a proper God-centered focus on the presence and gifts of God given to the church in corporate worship and also to draw upon the full range of biblical content and biblical modes of verbal and bodily expression in responding to God.

Robert Webber also relied upon the same sort of patristic-ecumenical model in crafting his biblical theology of worship. In most of his work (and particularly in more programmatic works that summarize his liturgical and hermeneutical methodology), Webber begins with a cursory overview of the key NT practices that define Christian worship and then moves quickly to an exposition and defense of post-biblical liturgies from the early church.<sup>24</sup>

Like Chan, Webber typically appeals first to the NT to establish a few basic principles for Christian liturgy. First, Webber draws on NT texts to argue that corporate worship centers on the ministry of word and table. The ministry of God's Word in the reading and preaching of Scripture and the ministry of God's Word in the Lord's Supper are the two fundamental foci around which Christian liturgy takes shape. For Webber, this pattern also establishes the more general principle that recounting and enacting God's story in the church's liturgy happens in symbolic forms that are both verbal and non-verbal. Since sacramental forms are a constitutive part of Christian worship, Christians must acknowledge that worship involves the response of the whole person in mind, heart, and body. Thus, a biblical theology of

<sup>24</sup> For example, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 87–205; *Worship Is A Verb* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985); *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) 93–115; "An Evangelical and Catholic Methodology," in *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options* (ed. Robert K. Johnston; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985). The essay "An Evangelical and Catholic Methodology" is also online at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=14>.

worship will attend to matters like ritual gesture and bodily posture, color and other visual symbolism, architectural setting, and other physical/tangible ways that corporate worship is embodied.

Second, Webber also appeals to the NT to argue that corporate worship is an action of the whole church, and thus Christian liturgy ought to provide for worship that calls for a response to God that involves the whole person. Arguing from the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, Webber maintains that fully biblical worship provides opportunities for the whole congregation to participate actively in responding to God's actions throughout the whole liturgy.

Having begun with basic NT principles and practices, Webber typically moves forward in history to the post-biblical liturgical developments of the first six centuries. He explains that "because the New Testament does not provide a systematic picture of Christian worship, guidance may be sought regarding worship from the practice of the early church."<sup>25</sup> Like Simon Chan, Webber favors the early church's liturgical patterns because they develop apostolic tradition in theologically substantive ways and inscribe the fullness of biblical, apostolic truth into the regular rhythm of the church's life and ministry in a very concrete manner. For Webber, patristic liturgies are eminently biblical not only because they maintain the NT complementarity of word and sacrament and enable the active participation of the whole congregation, but also because they present and enact in word and action the central story of Scripture. Biblical worship has an explicitly trinitarian and Christ-centered content that focuses on presenting the story of God from creation to incarnation to re-creation in Christ and his kingdom. In patristic traditions of prayer, creedal confession, reading of Scripture, sacramental ceremony, responses/acclamations, songs, art, architecture, and gesture/posture, Webber finds the trinitarian heart and story of Scripture expressed and embodied in ways that are superior to the modes of evangelical worship that emerged from the influence of Puritanism and revivalism in the post-Reformation era.

For Webber, liturgy is a vital way that the church preserves, teaches, and experiences biblical doctrine. He notes the irony that evangelicals who are keen to maintain and defend the early church's consensus about biblical doctrine usually ignore or reject the early church's consensus about the liturgical forms that communicate and preserve that doctrine in the life and worship of the church.

Further, in the same way that the church has wrestled with its understanding of Christ and the Scripture through creeds, commentaries, systematic theologies, and the like, so also the church has developed ways to do its worship. These include structural forms, written prayers, hymns, rules for preaching, the church year, the lectionary, and numerous symbolic ceremonies. Interestingly, in the early church these resources were being developed at the same time that creedal statements were coming into being. Yet, we evangelicals who affirm the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds and boast

<sup>25</sup> Webber, *Worship Old and New* 43.

that we remain faithful to their intent are profoundly neglectful of the liturgical forms and theological perception of worship shaped by some of the same Church Fathers. Specifically we need to recognize that those who have gone before us, those who have wrestled the meaning and interpretation of the faith in creeds and liturgy, were women and men of faith. To accept the creeds, on the one hand, and reject the liturgies by inattention that often expresses itself in disdain, on the other, is contradictory and unwise. For orthodoxy was primarily given shape in the liturgy, and the creeds were originally part of the larger liturgical witness. We recognize that the early church was unusually gifted with the spiritual leadership of Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, and Augustine. Yet we neglect to study the worship of the church which reflects their faithfulness to Christ and the orthodox tradition.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, we see that Webber's agenda for liturgical renewal is not driven primarily by merely aesthetic or historical concerns but first and foremost by a desire for the church to embrace and practice the fullness of biblical orthodoxy.

Unlike Chan, Webber does not completely neglect the specific forms of corporate worship in the OT. Indeed, he claims that biblical theology of worship builds on both NT and OT together:

Principles of worship may be drawn from both the Old and the New Testament. . . . In the Old Testament, God gives His people specific directions regarding the how, when, and wherefore of meeting Him in worship. These directions contain principles that were not abrogated for the Christian church.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, his discussion of OT worship is relatively rare, and he tends to use the OT only to find additional examples or parallels to what he first finds in the NT. For example, Webber argues that the covenant renewal event in Exodus 24 establishes "the most basic structural elements for a meeting between God and His people." These elements are "the very substance of public worship" and "are found later in the more detailed descriptions of Judaic and Christian worship": assembling in response to God's call, active participation by the whole congregation, proclamation of the word of God, renewal of personal commitment in response to God's word, and a sealing of God's relationship with his people by a dramatic symbol.<sup>28</sup> The Tabernacle, Temple, and the Levitical system of sacrifices chiefly teach that "there is a physical side to spiritual life and activity" and that biblical worship has concrete, embodied forms in particular places and rituals led by ordained persons. All of these specific principles that Webber draws from the OT are found in the NT as well. While this does establish some general lines of continuity between corporate worship in different eras of redemptive history, it does not demonstrate that the OT makes any distinctive contribution to

<sup>26</sup> "An Evangelical and Catholic Methodology," <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=14> (accessed November 9, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Webber, *Worship Old and New* 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 24–25.

Webber's biblical theology of worship except as further illustrations and proof-texts for principles that he finds in the NT.<sup>29</sup>

2. *Biblical-typological model.* The second school employing a more theologically oriented regulative principle is a biblical-typological approach to hermeneutics. It differs from the patristic-ecumenical school in that it draws upon both OT and NT in developing a biblical theology of worship. Whereas the other two models remain almost exclusively focused on the NT, this third hermeneutical model finds a substantial number of liturgical principles for guiding Christian worship in the OT as well.

Those who employ a biblical-typological model develop their liturgical theology in the following way:

- (1) They derive biblical warrant for liturgical practices not only by looking for NT commands and examples but also by evaluating the way that particular practices embody biblical truth, even if such practices are not explicitly attested in the NT.
- (2) They not only rely upon NT practices and principles but also devote substantial attention to the OT. By reading the OT with a typological lens, they seek to derive normative principles and patterns of practice from the OT that can shape Christian liturgy when suitably translated into forms appropriate for the new covenant community.
- (3) They largely embrace and value the same post-biblical liturgies esteemed by the patristic-ecumenical group. However, they devote much more attention to finding biblical warrant for those liturgical patterns and developments in the OT, and they are much more willing to critique and adapt those post-biblical liturgies on the basis of their biblical theology of worship.

By formulating a biblical theology of worship in this fashion, this third model draws upon a far wider range of biblical texts vis-à-vis the other two models. While its adherents acknowledge the major discontinuities that exist between the forms of worship practices in the OT and those in the New, adherents of this third model also highlight numerous continuities of basic theological principles and patterns about God and about the way he draws his people near to him in corporate worship.

Allen Ross's recent work *Recalling the Hope of Glory* is perhaps the most comprehensive evangelical study of worship in Scripture.<sup>30</sup> Ross surveys

<sup>29</sup> The one major exception to this point is the practice of observing of an annual calendar of festivals commemorating key events in redemptive history. Webber repeatedly turns to Israel's liturgical calendar in the OT as biblical justification for the principle of a liturgical calendar in liturgical calendar of Israel (*Worship Old and New* 29, 162–72; *Worship Is A Verb* 155–56; *Ancient-Future Faith* 111–12; *Ancient Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Church Year* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004] 25–26). Webber also occasionally cites the OT as grounds for processions to enter corporate worship and for corporate confessions of sin at the beginning of worship services (*Worship Old and New* 118, 121).

<sup>30</sup> Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006.

the progressive development of worship (with a special focus on corporate worship) in the whole scope of the biblical narrative from creation in Genesis to the vision of the future consummation of the kingdom of God in Revelation. Since the book treats the entire canon of Scripture, almost two thirds of the book covers worship in the OT. This OT survey not only provides a descriptive account of the forms of corporate worship but also gestures repeatedly toward a normative Christian biblical theology of worship by drawing connections between practices in the OT and NT.

For example, Ross concludes that the beauty and complex theological symbolism in the structures of the Tabernacle and Temple not only prefigure Jesus but also teach lessons about the value of aesthetics and visual art and symbol in places of Christian worship. While Ross acknowledges that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the Aaronic priesthood, he also highlights parallels between the functions of Israel's priests and Christian pastors, from which he infers the importance of the church's ordained officers taking responsibility to lead the church in corporate worship. In his analysis of sacrifices, Ross not only shows how they point to various aspects of Christ's sacrificial death but also represent a sequence of steps through which God acts to graciously renew his covenantal relationship with his people in worship. His study of the covenant renewal ceremony at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19–24 and the liturgical sequence of sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus 9 shows a consistent order of worship that moves from God's call to confession and forgiveness followed by the ministry of God's word, the response of God's people in vows and offerings, and a communion meal and divine blessing at the culmination. Ross suggests that this order ought to serve as a template for Christian worship since each component of this OT liturgy finds its fulfillment in Christian practices of corporate worship. Like Robert Webber, Ross also maintains the daily, weekly, and annual calendar of Israel's worship provides biblical warrant for the analogous development of a Christian approach to liturgical time and calendar.

Ross goes far beyond the work of Webber in providing a wealth of descriptive detail about the form and development of corporate worship in the OT. He also provides more suggestive parallels between worship in the OT and NT. However, his treatment of worship in the NT and his concluding theological reflections still seem undeveloped and not integrated. His analyses of NT practices and the liturgies of the early church that emerged after the first century make little reference to the details of his OT exposition, and his short concluding list of liturgical norms for Christian worship contains relatively little that could not be gleaned from the NT alone. Thus, I believe Ross's theological and hermeneutical bridge between the OT and NT remains undeveloped. It remains unclear how Ross integrates his exegesis and application of OT worship with his concluding discussion of norms for Christian liturgy.

Other evangelical Reformed authors appeal to the category of covenant renewal to connect the worship of Old and New Covenants. The works of Hughes Oliphant Old, Michael Horton, and John Witvliet all devote attention to the major national events of covenant ratification in the history of

Israel as a paradigm for Christian liturgy (e.g. Exodus 19–24; Joshua 24; 1 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 29; Nehemiah 8–10).<sup>31</sup> Since the coming of Christ fulfilled the promise of a new covenant, and since the NT explicitly connects eucharistic worship with the new covenant promise, these authors look to biblical texts narrating acts of covenant renewal in order to discern specific elements and principles of worship to shape the content and manner of Christian liturgy. They all agree that the central acts of covenant renewal are the proclamation of God's word, the response of God's people in new commitment (as embodied, for example, in vows or oaths), and a communion meal. Thus, a covenantal Christian liturgy will be a liturgy of both word and sacrament. One or more of these authors also highlight other features of covenant renewal ceremonies that ought to shape Christian worship such as God's sovereign initiative in calling the assembly to worship; entering God's presence through purification by confession; creeds, prayers, and sermons that recount God's mighty acts in redemptive history; and exhortation based on rehearsal of covenantal obligations or commandments.

Reading and applying OT texts at this level of detail moves this biblical-typological approach to liturgy a significant step beyond the very general approach to the OT in the work of Robert Webber. In this biblical-typological model, the OT makes its own distinctive contribution to a Christian biblical theology of worship by providing a framework for the forms and order of worship not found explicitly in the NT.

Jeffrey Meyers and Peter Leithart develop this line of argument even more fully and explicitly by elaborating the link between covenant and sacrifice in Scripture. They affirm with Old, Witvliet, and Horton that there are important liturgical patterns embedded in the ceremonies by which God established and renewed his covenants with Israel at the major turning points of Israel's history. However, they go one step further by connecting these unique historical events of covenant ratification with the regular sacrificial worship of the Tabernacle and Temple. By discerning this link between covenant renewal, Tabernacle/Temple, and sacrifice, they develop a biblical theology of liturgy by drawing upon an even larger and more detailed body of biblical revelation that speaks more directly to matters of corporate worship. Of all OT sources for a biblical theology of liturgy, these liturgical texts about the regular daily, weekly, and annual liturgical life of Israel describe the actions and events most closely analogous to Christian liturgy. Thus they also argue that this connection establishes a much broader and stronger theological bridge between worship in the OT and NT than that found in Ross's work.

In their theological analysis of the sacrificial system, Meyers and Leithart discern a specific sequence of ritual actions that form a consistent pattern of

<sup>31</sup> Hughes O. Old, *Themes and Variations for a Christian Doxology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 111–37; John Witvliet, "The Former Prophets and the Practice of Christian Worship," *Calvin Theological Journal* 37 (2002) 82–94; Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

covenant renewal. As Ross and other scholars have noted, the liturgical order in which sacrifices were offered is the following sequence:<sup>32</sup>

- (1) Sin/Purification offering
- (2) Burnt/Ascension offering<sup>33</sup>
- (3) Tribute/Dedication offering
- (4) Peace offering

Having completed this list with God's summons that initiates the sequence and God's blessing that concludes it (Leviticus 9), Meyers and Leithart argue

<sup>32</sup> This full liturgical sequence is found in Leviticus 8–9 and 2 Chronicles 5–7. Cf. 1 Chronicles 15–16, where a purifying consecration of the priests and Levites (15:14) precedes the offering of ascension/burnt offerings, peace offerings (16:1), and a concluding blessing (16:3); 1 Chronicles 29, where David's prayer of confession and humility before God (29:14–15) precedes ascension/burnt offerings and a concluding feast before God (29:21–22); and 2 Chronicles 5–7, where a prayer of confession of sin and pleas for forgiveness (6:21, 26–39) precedes the sequence of ascension/burnt offering and peace offerings (7:7). Other contemporary scholars have recognized the consistency of this liturgical order and its relevance for Christian worship. In a seminal article, A. F. Rainey noted that when texts provide a narrative description of the procedural order for offering different sacrifices together in the same liturgical event, the sacrifices always occur in the same sequence: sin/purification offering, ascension offering, and peace offering. See A. F. Rainey, "The Order of Sacrifices in the Old Testament Ritual Texts," *Bib* 51 (1970) 485–98. See also Ross, *Recalling* 198; Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 66; R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980) 106–7; Philip P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 155; idem, "Levitical Sacrificial System" 25–40; W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1997) 110–13. The *NIV Study Bible* notes summarize: "When more than one kind of offering was presented (as in Num 6:16, 17), the procedure was usually as follows: (1) sin offering or guilt offering, (2) burnt offering, (3) fellowship offering and grain offering (along with a drink offering). This sequence furnishes part of the spiritual significance of the sacrificial system. First, sin had to be dealt with (sin offering or guilt offering). Second, the worshiper committed himself completely to God (burnt offering and grain offering). Third, fellowship or communion between the Lord, the priest and the worshiper (fellowship offering) was established. To state it another way, there were sacrifices of expiation (sin offerings and guilt offerings), consecration (burnt offerings and grain offerings) and communion (fellowship offerings - these included vow offerings, thank offerings and freewill offerings)." See the chart entitled "Old Testament Sacrifices," *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) 150.

<sup>33</sup> Although this sacrifice is commonly translated "(whole) burnt offering," the Hebrew word (הֲזֵבֵן) means "that which ascends." The verb from the same root means "to ascend." Meyers and Leithart favor this label for the sacrifice because the description of the הֲזֵבֵן in Leviticus highlights the animal's transformation into smoke that ascends to become a pleasing aroma to God (e.g. Lev 1:9, 13, 17). This passage through fire and transformation into smoke also correlates with the fire and smoke that signify God's presence in the Most Holy Place at the "summit" of the symbolic Mount Sinai (which in turn symbolizes the real fire and smoke in which God appeared at the summit of the real Mount Sinai). Therefore, the הֲזֵבֵן symbolizes the worshiper's ascent and incorporation into the cloud of God's heavenly presence. Meyers and Leithart also defend their translation of הֲזֵבֵן as "ascension offering" by noting that the names of the other sacrifices are related to their theological meaning and not the merely the condition of the animal. See Meyers, *Lord's Service* 79–80, 357; James B. Jordan, "The Whole Burnt Sacrifice," *Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper*, No. 11 (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 1991).

that the full liturgical sequence of covenant renewal in the sacrificial system followed this order of theological movements:<sup>34</sup>

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

This consistent ritual order represents the way of grace by which God drew his people into his special presence in corporate worship to renew and maintain his covenant relationship with Israel.<sup>35</sup>

Ross, Meyers, and Leithart all show that the theological meaning of each step in this sacrificial sequence corresponds to the meaning of distinctively Christian practices of corporate worship.<sup>36</sup> Translated and recontextualized in a Christian setting, the sacrificial order yields the following order of Christian worship:

<sup>34</sup> Leithart, “Sacrifice and Worship,” <http://www.leithart.com/archives/000960.php> (accessed February 26, 2007); Meyers, *Lord’s Service* 80–81. See also Gordon J. Wenham, “The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice,” in *Sacrifice in the Bible* (ed. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 82–84; Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1991) 41–49.

<sup>35</sup> This sequence of sacrifices aligns perfectly with the sequence of events by which God made his covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. As Allen Ross explains, at Sinai Israel first purified herself in preparation to meet God (Exod 19:9–15). Moses then ascended to the top of the mountain to receive the word of God, and he returned to read it to the people (Exod 19:16–24:6). As the people offered ascension offerings and peace offerings on the altar at the foot of the mountain, Israel responded to God’s word by offering themselves to God with a solemn oath of faith, loyalty, and commitment to God and the obligations of the covenant (Exod 24:7–8). Finally, God sealed the covenant relationship by serving a special meal in his presence on the mountain to Moses, Aaron and his sons, and some elders of Israel of God (Exod 24:9–11). See Ross, *Recalling* 173–80. Although Ross does not draw this precise point, the movement from purification to ascension/consecration to communion in the liturgy of sacrifices practiced at the Tabernacle (Leviticus 8–9) reflects and renews the event of covenant making that occurred at Mount Sinai itself, signifying that the Tabernacle functioned as a symbolic Mount Sinai. See Ross, *Recalling* 170–71; Meyers, *Lord’s Service* 79–80; Philip P. Jensen, “Levitical” 31; Peter Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2000) 83–84; John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6* (London: T & T Clark, 2004) 122–23; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 574; Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 234–35; John Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003) 392.

<sup>36</sup> Ross, *Recalling*, 198–204; Meyers, *Lord’s Service*, 51; Peter J. Leithart, *From Silence to Song* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003) 108–9.

- (1) Call to Worship: God summons us to the assembly to worship.
- (2) Purification: We confess our sins, and God cleanses us in Christ by forgiving our sins on the basis of Jesus' death as our substitute.
- (3) Consecration/Ascension: God enables us to "ascend" to heaven through the Spirit and having a special audience with the ascended Lord Jesus where we lift up our hearts with joyful praise to join the worship of heaven around his heavenly throne (Eph 2:6, Col 3:1–3; Heb 12:18–24; Revelation 1; 4–5). In that context, God speaks to us in the reading and preaching of his word in Scripture, which transforms us and re-consecrates our lives by calling us afresh to embrace our new life and identity in Christ and to live in a way that is consistent with that identity (Heb 4:12).
- (4) Offering: We respond to the ministry of the word of God by offering ourselves to God in prayer; by confessing our renewed faith, love, and loyalty to God; and by giving material gifts of money and goods to serve the mission of Jesus' kingdom.
- (5) Communion: We eat at God's table where God celebrates peace and friendship with us by serving us nothing less than his own life in the person of Jesus Christ. In this sacred meal, Jesus is both the host who presides and the food which we receive through bread and wine.
- (6) Blessing: God sends us out into the world to serve him with his blessing.

Thus a careful typological reading of the OT demonstrates that the Bible does provide instruction about the order of different elements in a worship service.

Meyers and Leithart also make a particularly important contribution by explaining the theological basis for discerning the ecclesiological and liturgical applications of these OT patterns of covenant renewal via sacrifice. While evangelicals commonly recognize that the OT sacrificial system of worship is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus, Meyers and Leithart argue that the OT also has relevance for the church's life and ministry because of the close union between Jesus and the church. Jesus' fulfillment of the OT sacrifices has implications for the church's worship because the church is the body of Christ, the new eschatological Israel founded by Jesus, and the new temple in which the Spirit of Jesus is known.

Throughout the NT, we see that typology works with a double focus: OT institutions and practices of worship are fulfilled in Christ, but also are played out in the practices of the NT church. Actually, this is a single, complex typology: OT institutions and practices are fulfilled in the *totus Christus*, both in the events that surround the death and resurrection of the Head and in the concrete continuing practices of the Body.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Peter J. Leithart, "Hermeneutics of Worship," <http://www.leithart.com/archives/000947.php> (accessed February 24, 2007).

Both Meyers and Leithart substantiate this claim by pointing to a pervasive pattern in the apostolic use of the OT that interprets the identity and worship of the church with images and models drawn from the categories of temple, priesthood, and sacrifice.<sup>38</sup>

The NT authors repeatedly describe the church of Jesus Christ as God's new temple because Jesus' presence, life, and power are found in the community of his followers, which is the very body of Christ in the world (1 Cor 12:12–27). The Christian church is God's new house, the temple of the Holy Spirit, where God dwells with his people (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19–22; Heb 8:1–2; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 21:3). Whereas the Tabernacle and Temple sanctuary (on Mount Zion in Jerusalem) had been a symbolic Mount Sinai, Christians come to the heavenly Jerusalem to renew their covenant with God in worship at the new Mount Zion (Heb 12:18–29).

This means that the same cosmic and covenantal significance of worship at the old Tabernacle and Temple in the OT now continues in an even greater and more glorious way in the church of Christ. In the worship of the church, God continues to grant his people a special audience at his heavenly throne to renew his covenant with the church. Christians gather in corporate worship as God's earthly church-temple to participate in the worship of heaven at the true heavenly tabernacle/temple (Heb 8:2; 9:12, 24; 10:19–24; 12:18–29; cf. Rev 15:5–6) in order to receive God's wisdom, life, and power for living as his royal people and participating with him in the mission of his kingdom. The author of Hebrews describes this heavenly sanctuary as the reality of which the Tabernacle established at Mount Sinai was only a copy and shadow (Heb 8:5).

The church also worships as a priesthood engaged in expressing and renewing the covenant by means of sacrifice. As a priesthood, the church offers herself to God in Christ as a "living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1). Not only is Christian service to God described as an offering of sacrifices (Phil 2:17; 4:18), but also concrete acts of worship in the liturgical assembly are acts of sacrifice. Just like the priests in the OT, the whole church is a priesthood (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10) that passes through the torn veil of the Temple to enter into the inner sanctuary of the heavenly tabernacle (Heb 10:19–25). As a church of priests, the people of God draw near to God confident of his gracious reception as they plead only the shed blood of Jesus the Lamb of God (Eph 5:2; Heb 9:26; 10:12) displayed by Jesus the high priest who leads Christians in worship (Heb 2:17; 4:14–5:10; 8:1; 9:11).

Indeed, all the major elements of corporate worship (the word of God, responses of prayer and offering of gifts, and sacramental meals) receive a sacrificial description and interpretation in the NT. First, the NT repeatedly refers to the ministry of the word of God using the image of a sword (e.g. Eph 6:17; Rev 1:16; 2:12) that splits the "joints and marrow" of believers'

<sup>38</sup> Peter J. Leithart, "Synagogue or Temple: Models for Christian Worship," *WTJ* 64 (2002) 129–32; idem, *From Silence to Song* 106–7; Meyers, *Lord's Service* 55–71. Scripture citations in the following paragraphs on the church come from these passages by Meyers and Leithart.

hearts as they submit to its active and searching scrutiny (Heb 4:12) just as sacrificial animals underwent a similar cutting of a knife.<sup>39</sup> Second, NT authors identify acts of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving as sacrifices (Rev 8:3–5; Heb 13:14–15; 1 Pet 2:5, 9). Third, material gifts given for the service of God are described as sacrifices acceptable and pleasing to God (Phil 4:18; Heb 13:16). Finally, the NT portrays the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a sacrificial act that celebrates the new covenant (specifically, as the new covenant form of Passover and of the peace offerings in general, of which Passover was one particular type).<sup>40</sup> The symbolism of body and blood offered and separated, blood poured out, and body eaten clearly recapitulates the procedures employed in animal sacrifices (Leviticus 1–7). And just as the OT liturgy of sacrifices culminated in a sacred meal at God's table, the Lord's Supper functions in the same way. The apostle Paul draws a direct parallel between the Lord's Supper and the peace offerings that Israel ate at God's altar (1 Cor 10:16–18).<sup>41</sup>

According to Meyers and Leithart, the implication of these pervasive typological patterns is that the same covenant reality experienced in the Tabernacle and Temple is fulfilled in the worship and life of the church. This fulfillment does not entail simple repetition of OT forms without change since the NT explicitly declares the cessation of the system of animal sacrifices and the old world of graded holiness symbolized spatially and liturgically in one central Temple sanctuary (John 4).

Neither does fulfillment entail the complete abrogation and irrelevance of the OT sacrificial system. Rather, it means that OT worship has undergone a transformation in the person and work of Christ so that the whole OT must now be understood through a Christological lens and applied in a manner appropriate to the new covenant context established by Christ. Thus there are both continuities and discontinuities between the meaning and ritual structures of corporate worship in the OT and the NT. Leithart expresses both the continuity and discontinuity when he explains his understanding of the redemptive-historical changes that have occurred in worship in the wake of Jesus' death and resurrection:

<sup>39</sup> Leithart maintains that "if this is merely an attempt to provide a vivid description of the power of the word, it must be said that the image fails. References to bones and marrow being cut by a double-edged sword place us in the realm of sacrificial imagery. The word is the cutting sword that dismembers us so that we may offer ourselves as sacrifices in praise and thanksgiving and prayer. . . . Owen suggested that the purpose of the image was to highlight the word's power to discern the inner recesses of the human heart, but surely there are less confusing ways to make this point, and the point would be redundant in any case, given v. 13" (*Hebrews* [7 vols.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991] 4:360–61). Bruce is no more successful when he cites A. B. Davidson's claim that joints and marrow are "attributed to" the soul and spirit (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990] 113). The idea that this image communicates the "thoroughness" of the word's operation is accurate, but it fails to explain why this image is used" ("Synagogue or Temple" 132).

<sup>40</sup> In the eucharistic institution narratives in the gospels, Jesus explains that the Lord's supper is an act of covenant renewal by alluding to the covenants established and/or promised to Israel in Exod 24:8 and Jer 31:31.

<sup>41</sup> See C. John Collins, "The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice: How Patristic Authors Can Help Us Read the Bible," *WTJ* 66 (2004) 1–23.

The fundamental claim here is that sacrificial worship did not cease with the coming of the New Covenant, but was transformed into a “spiritual sacrifice” and “sacrifice of praise.” We now do different things than ancient Israelites did, but those actions have the same meaning as the actions in the Levitical ceremonies. We no longer slaughter bulls and goats for blood purification, but we do confess our sins so as to be cleansed (1 John 1:8–9). We no longer dismember animals before the Lord’s table, but instead the Word cuts us into pieces so that we may be offered as sacrifices (Heb 4:11–12). We no longer keep Passover but we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, which fulfills Passover (among other things) and may be described as a Christian Passover. This same “transposition” from an Old to a New Covenant key can be applied to other rituals of the Levitical system. We understand what we are doing in worship through the categories of the sacrificial system, under the metaphor of sacrifice.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, defenders of a biblical-typological model of hermeneutics do not seek to replace or downplay the central practices of corporate worship recorded and commanded in the NT. Rather, they seek to bring an OT framework to bear in understanding the full significance of those NT liturgical practices and deriving additional biblical guidance for the wisest order and forms in which to engage in Christian liturgy.

### III. CONCLUSION

Evangelical scholars employ a range of very different hermeneutical strategies in applying the Bible to worship. This is not surprising, of course, since evangelicals are divided over the theory and practice of biblical hermeneutics in many areas of theology. The first step toward progress in reconciling divergent views is a clear recognition and accurate characterization of the diversity of hermeneutical approaches to constructing a biblical theology of worship. If discussion can take place at this level, evangelicals can avoid the frustrating experience of talking past one another without comprehending why one’s arguments are not persuasive to one’s interlocutors.

There is much at stake in this debate over biblical hermeneutics, because the different approaches to interpretation that I have outlined result in different agendas for liturgical praxis. So which model or models promote worship that is biblical in the fullest possible way? Although my chief goal for this paper was to describe different approaches to liturgical theology, I conclude with some brief, critical, and prescriptive analysis of each view.

The first model, a praxis-oriented regulative principle, is inadequate for several reasons. First, no NT book was written to be a complete manual of liturgics. Proponents of the Puritan praxis-oriented regulative principle often infer from this fact that Christian worship must be restricted as much as possible to the explicit commands and examples of worship practices in the NT. However, this seems to read the NT in an inappropriately narrow and legalistic fashion as if the NT as a whole is to function as a collective new covenant version of Leviticus. If none of the individual NT books were written

<sup>42</sup> Leithart, *From Silence to Song* 108–9.

to be an exhaustive liturgical manual, then it is wrong to read and apply the NT as a whole in this restrictive fashion. Not only does this misuse the NT documents, it also excludes two thirds of the canon in its approach to theologizing about worship. Liturgical theology ought to be a matter of wisdom that results from reflection upon all that God has revealed in Scripture about corporate worship in light of the person and work of Christ. Thus Christians need to employ a more theologically oriented regulative principle rather than one that would limit legitimate liturgical practices solely to those explicitly attested in the NT.

The second model, a patristic-ecumenical model that employs a more theologically oriented regulative principle, is superior to the first because it does not restrict the development of Christian liturgy by forcing it into an unnecessarily narrow and impractical straitjacket. Adherents of the second view rightly recognize that in matters that the NT does not directly address, the church can apply general theological principles to develop practices that are theologically substantive and that faithfully and explicitly embody biblical truths in a ritual and symbolic fashion.

Sometimes practical considerations force the church to employ this type of reasoning from more general theological principles beyond NT commands and examples. For example, the NT says nothing about the architectural environment of worship, and yet it is widely acknowledged that the environment always affects the way that the people of God perceive the theological nature and purpose of corporate worship. Architecture inevitably speaks a theological message that either reinforces or contradicts the content of the liturgy itself, and the church can only develop a theological approach to architecture and the aesthetic/symbolic environment by drawing upon more general biblical truths beyond the practices explicitly described in the NT. Practical considerations also force Christians to make decisions about the order of elements in the worship service, the music that is sung and/or played, the way Christians (particularly ministers) dress to participate in worship, and the type of calendar that Christians use to structure their time on a daily, weekly, and annual basis. If Christians want their decisions about these practical matters (and many others) to be as theologically informed as possible and not merely pragmatic, they will have to reason from theological principles that move beyond mere NT commands and examples of worship in order to do so.

However, the biblical hermeneutics of the patristic-ecumenical model could potentially become too open ended. While proponents of this model typically tether themselves quite firmly to specific liturgies from the early church, it is conceivable that their sometimes minimal use of Scripture could lead to needless and even harmful innovations in practice that move the church away from the central actions of word, prayer, offering, and sacrament. If a practice is justified simply because it embodies a theological truth, there are (theoretically) few limits to the invention of liturgical acts that could enter into the worship of the church.

Proponents of this model are typically conservative in their liturgical practice because they esteem historical roots and ecumenical universality.

However, this conservative restraint results from adherence to an extra-biblical liturgical framework that is only loosely connected to specific biblical practices and texts in the works of many liturgical theologians. This is due, in part, to neglect of the OT as a source and norm for liturgical theology and practice.

The third model, a biblical-typological approach, has the greatest merit and potential for developing an evangelical biblical theology of worship. This approach is the broadest of the three models because it derives a theology of worship from the whole Bible and not merely from the NT alone. At the same time, it is more restrained than the patristic-ecumenical model because it moves from the specific set of God-given practices in the OT to those of the New rather than merely correlating liturgical practices with very general theological themes or ideas.

The OT especially matters for an evangelical theology of worship because it provides biblical precedent for many ancient liturgical practices that evangelicals have forgotten or rejected. It also offers biblical guidance and wisdom concerning many disputed features of Christian worship. It is the OT that furnishes biblical foundations for a theology of the order of worship, the theological content and musical accompaniment of liturgical song, bodily posture in worship, art, architecture, color, ministerial vestments, and an annual calendar of liturgical festivals.

Is it legitimate, however, to turn to the OT to find norms for Christian worship? Since the OT remains part of the Christian canon, and since most of God's revelation about corporate worship in the Bible appears in the OT, it seems quite implausible to think that those details have absolutely no relevance or application to Christian worship. Furthermore, the NT confirms that the corporate worship practices of the OT are fulfilled not only in the person Christ himself but also in the church. Those who argue that Jesus' fulfillment of OT worship practices makes the OT irrelevant for Christian liturgy in fact separate what the NT holds together. Suggesting that OT worship *only* speaks about Jesus and not about the church is to separate Jesus from the church in a way that opposes the NT pattern of double fulfillment of the OT in both Christ *and* the church.

According to the NT, Christians continue to approach God in corporate worship on the basis of Jesus' sacrificial work on their behalf. The NT repeatedly uses OT categories of temple, priesthood, and sacrifice to interpret Jesus' sacrifice and high priestly ministry as well as the theological identity of the church and the entire range of distinctively Christian acts of corporate worship. It is the NT authors themselves who read the OT typologically and thus point Christians back to the OT to understand the full significance of corporate worship in the Christian church. The biblical-typological method of hermeneutics seems to follow from apostolic hermeneutical tradition, which teaches us that OT worship ultimately speaks of Christ and the church.

Finally, evangelicals who develop a biblical theology of worship based on this typological model of hermeneutics can make a distinctively evangelical contribution to the larger world of liturgical scholarship. In the field of liturgical studies, works that link Christian worship to the OT are rela-

tively rare.<sup>43</sup> By formulating a biblical theology of Christian liturgy that works from OT foundations in a systematic way, evangelicals can simultaneously fill a gap in current scholarship and demonstrate the theological unity and Christocentric *telos* of the biblical canon.

<sup>43</sup> For example, Paul Bradshaw omits any discussion of the Temple in his survey of recent literature on the Jewish background and influence upon Christian worship. He does acknowledge that early Christians described the Eucharist in sacrificial terms, but he attributes this to the influence of literary accounts of Temple liturgy in the OT rather than the Temple institution itself. See his *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 35. Standard reference texts commonly lack any treatment of historical or theological connections between Christian liturgy and the sacrificial worship of the Tabernacle and Temple (e.g. Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, eds., *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Robert Cabié, *The Eucharist*, ed. A. G. Martimort, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, New ed., vol. 2, *The Church at Prayer* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986). In another widely used introductory text and reference work, R. T. Beckwith briefly mentions the various sacrifices prescribed in the OT, and he acknowledges that first-century Jewish Christians continued to worship at the Temple by offering sacrifices. However, he only considers Jewish synagogue and family practices as historical influences upon early Christian liturgical theology and practice. See Cheslyn Jones et al., eds., *The Study of Liturgy*, Rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 68–80.