

# Knox 500

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John Knox (1514-1572)

# *Ordained Servant Online*

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### *From the Editor*

It seems like all of the magisterial reformers are turning 500. They'd be pleased to know they've lived this long. So the fiery, pulpit-splitting Scot is still sounding his trumpet. But one very clear note in his repertoire seems to be missing from our modern commemorations, his theology and practice of corporate worship. In my own journey with Reformed theology, worship and liturgy were my last discoveries—and that was fortuitous, because the pastor under whom I did an internship in seminary was a church historian, and we used an historic Reformed liturgy in worship. So I offer some thoughts on this important topic in “John Knox and the Reformation of Worship.”

On a narrower aspect of our liturgical heritage, Jeffrey Wilson tackles a neglected element of worship, “The Sursum Corda,” in a three-part article. While the topic may seem too limited for a three part article, it provides an example of the value of careful church historical study for the practice of worship. I also think the topic itself is of value.

It is always useful to rethink what we do by habit. This exercise both reinforces the value of what we do and sometimes helps us make a good thing better. Ryan McGraw offers some helpful thoughts on “How to Pray at Prayer Meetings.”

In the review department, don't miss Dennis Johnson's review of the final volume (7) of Hughes Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, and David Booth's review of Jerram Barrs, *Delighting in the Law of the Lord*.

John Donne reminds us of the grace by which we have been called to worship in “Holy Sonnet XV.”

Finally, after a long window nap Eutychus is back, addressing an important question, “Do Presbyterians Lack Joy?” “And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead” Acts 20:9. I always have to remind myself that his joy came only after falling out of a window.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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*Ordained Servant* exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

# Servant Thoughts

## John Knox and the Reformation of Worship<sup>1</sup>

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

In the midst of the so-called “worship wars,” many Reformed churches seem to have forgotten their roots. The magisterial Reformers believed that the reformation of worship was the most essential aspect of reforming the church. Without it they understood that Reformed doctrine would never take root in peoples’ lives.

John Knox, for five hundred years since his birth, has been maligned, along with his Reformation colleagues depicted in the statue in Geneva (Calvin, Zwingli, and Farel). At his funeral, Scottish regent James Douglas, fourth Earl of Morton, said, “Here lies one who never feared any flesh.”<sup>2</sup> Reformation historian Roland Bainton called him “the most implacable of all the Reformers.”<sup>3</sup> He is justly famous for standing up to Mary Queen of Scots in his effort to establish the Church of Scotland on Reformation principles. He was the most powerful preacher of his age and wrote many, very effective, practical tracts and treatises. What is not fully appreciated is his reformation of worship. Those who do appreciate this aspect of his ministry tend to emphasize his development of the “regulative principle” of worship and his consequent critique of Roman Catholic worship, especially the Mass. However, what he helped put in its place is often overlooked.

### I. A BRIEF SKETCH OF KNOX’S LIFE

#### Early Years [1513-15?–1545]

Sixteenth-century Scotland was “almost beyond the limits of the human race,” according to the Earl of Moray in 1564.<sup>4</sup> It was very rural in character—the largest city, Edinburgh, had a population of only 15,000. Spiritually it was full of Roman Catholic superstition, and half the wealth was in the hands of the clergy. It was also a pawn of European politics, but by the 1520s trade brought the German Reformation to Scotland.

John Knox was born between 1513–1515 in Gifford near Haddington in East Lothian, fifteen miles east of Edinburgh. His was a hard rural life—his father was probably killed in battle at Knox’s birth. But young John was talented, and thus headed for priesthood. He attended grammar school at Haddington and went on to Saint Andrews University, where

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<sup>1</sup> This article is adapted from a Reformation Day lecture given at Amoskeag Presbyterian Church, October 29, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (New York: Scribner’s, 1974), 283. Quoting from D. Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, vol. 3, ed. T. Thompson (Edinburgh: Wodrow Soc., 1842), 242.

<sup>3</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon, 1952), 180.

<sup>4</sup> Iain Tait, “The Exiled Reformers of Sixteenth-Century Geneva,” printed lectures given at Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, TN, September 17–21, 1973, page 1 of Lecture I. Much of this brief history is based on these largely unpaginated lectures.

Professor John Major exposed him to a critique of clerical excesses. The seeds of the Reformation were being planted in young Knox as the thinking of Erasmus and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples came to Saint Andrews via students from University of Paris. Knox also came under the influence of the powerful preaching of Alexander Seton, a former Black Friar. During this time, Patrick Hamilton, who was martyred in 1528, had brought Lutheranism from Wittenberg to Scotland.

Knox was probably ordained in 1536 as priest, likely functioning as a minor church lawyer. Sometime about 1543–45, when Knox was about aged thirty, through his study of Jerome and Augustine, and his hearing Scripture preached by the prior at Greyfriar's Monastery in Inverness, Knox was converted to Reformed Christianity. John 17, in particular, taught him the importance of dependence on Christ alone for salvation.

### **Early Public Ministry: Wishart and St. Andrews [1546–1549]**

Knox became a disciple of the fiery Reformed preacher George Wishart, while serving as a tutor to the sons of a Scottish nobleman who denounced popery and the Mass. He served as Wishart's bodyguard, wielding a two-handed sword, during a five-week preaching tour in Lothian. When they encountered danger in Haddington, Knox was about to defend Wishart, who said "gang back to your bairns Maister Knox."<sup>5</sup> Nine hours later Wishart was arrested and brought to Cardinal Beaton (known to be a drunk and a womanizer) at St Andrews. The next day Wishart was strangled and burned while uttering a gracious prayer: "I beseech thee, Father of heaven, forgive them that have, from ignorance or an evil mind, forged lies of me: I forgive them with all my heart. I beseech Christ to forgive them that have ignorantly condemned me."<sup>6</sup> This event had a profound effect on Knox.

On May 29, 1546, the castle at St. Andrews was seized by Protestants, who killed Cardinal Beaton. On April 10, 1547, Knox arrived at the castle with group of students from the University for asylum. He taught them letters, humanities, Latin and Greek, and lectured on the Gospel of John. The people pleaded with Knox to preach since their pastor, John Rough, was unlearned. Knox responded, "I won't run where God has not called me."<sup>7</sup> Rough asked Knox to preach in the presence of the congregation during Sunday worship. Knox fled to his room and wept for fear of martyrdom and the awesome responsibility of preaching. But under duress, he agreed.<sup>8</sup>

His first sermon, on Daniel 7:24–25, was preached in the presence of the faculty of St. Andrews, including some of his former teachers, such as John Major.<sup>9</sup> He proved justification by faith and called the pope anti-Christ. He preached with power, causing some to comment, "He strikes at the root."<sup>10</sup> Knox also administered the first Lord's Supper served in Scotland since the Middle Ages. It was simply observed, and all partook of both elements.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 29–30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 30. Cf. John Fox, *The Second Volume of the Ecclesiastical History: Containing the Acts and Monuments of Martyrs: with a General Discourse of the Later Persecutions Horrible Troubles and Tumults Stirred up by Romish Prelates in the Church: with Diverse Other Things Incident to this Realm of Scotland and England* (London: The Company of Stationers, 1684), 526.

<sup>7</sup> Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Whitley, *The Plain Mr. Knox* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Reformation Society, 1960), 30–31.

<sup>9</sup> Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 48.

<sup>10</sup> Whitley, *The Plain Mr. Knox*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

In June of 1547, the castle was seized by twenty-one French galleys. Knox was condemned as a “heretic” and sentenced to nineteen months at the oars with some of the worst French criminals. When asked to kiss a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary, Knox tossed it overboard with his usual gusto, saying, “She is light enough. Let her swim.”<sup>12</sup> This intense suffering strengthened his spiritual convictions. During this ordeal, he learned to pray the Psalms. Seeing the steeples on the Scottish shore, he longed to return and preach the gospel. Never again did the terrors of life intimidate or treasures of this world allure him.

### **Ministry in England under Edward VI [1549–1554]**

Early in 1549, Knox was freed in France, probably in a prisoner exchange, and returned to the safe haven of England under Edward VI’s benevolent reign.<sup>13</sup> Knox was licensed to preach under this godly king, who supported the Reformation (son of Henry VIII). His congregation was a garrison of six hundred men at Berwick-on-Tweed, a border town in the northeast of England. Many were converted. While there he wrote a moving treatise on prayer published in 1553.<sup>14</sup>

During this time, Mrs. Elizabeth Bowes, a noble woman from the area, came to hear Knox preach. She was deeply depressed and looking for consolation. She found it in the gospel and in turn became like a mother to Knox. Soon thereafter, he married her daughter Marjorie.<sup>15</sup>

Knox’s unequivocal preaching against the Mass earned him a summons to account for his position before the Council of the North in Newcastle in April 1550. He ably demonstrated before Bishop of Durham that the Mass is idolatrous. His preaching in the area around Newcastle raised quite a stir.<sup>16</sup>

In 1551, Knox was appointed Chaplain in Ordinary to King Edward VI. His first sermon at court attacked the practice, advocated in the second edition of the Book of Common Prayer (1552), of compulsory kneeling before receiving the Lord’s Supper. Presses were stopped to insert a caution that “kneeling” was not worshipping the elements. Knox’s preaching drew large crowds. He observed that godly and ailing Edward was surrounded by Ahithophels. Court life sickened him. Knox refused the bishopric of Rochester in Kent.<sup>17</sup>

On July 6, 1553, King Edward died, and Mary Tudor took the throne. Knox warned the church of being shipwrecked on the rocks of Roman Catholic idolatry. He fled north under pursuit and was smuggled to France on a boat from Newcastle.

### **The Marian Exile [1554–1559]**

Having arrived safely in Dieppe, Knox wrestled with the question: “Am I a coward?” Matthew 10:23 was a comfort, “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next.” Eventually arriving as an exile in Geneva, Knox declared it to be “the most perfect school

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>13</sup> D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 261.

<sup>14</sup> Whitley, *The Plain Mr. Knox*, 44–45.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 46–47; Tait, “The Exiled Reformers,” Lecture III, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Tait.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 9.

of Christ that ever was since the days of the apostles.”<sup>18</sup> Soon after Knox arrived, Calvin sent him to Bullinger in Zurich to receive counsel on the “divine right of kings” and the right to redress grievances. Meanwhile, French Mary of Guise seized the Scottish throne.

After a brief return to Geneva, Knox received a call to become the pastor to the English exiles in Frankfort in 1555. He arrived only to encounter worship wars instigated by Dr. Richard Cox, dean of Westminster, who demanded uniformity according to the Book of Common Prayer. Knox, on the other hand, was willing to compromise between Book of Common Prayer and Genevan Service Book. Sadly, the Frankfort congregation was divided, and Knox was forced to resign. He returned to Geneva in November 1555, where he found a new congregation of English exiles. There Knox gave himself to study and helped translate the Geneva Bible, especially the marginal notes.<sup>19</sup> Several months later, part of the Frankfort congregation, along with William Whittingham, came to Knox in Geneva.

In late 1555, Mrs. Bowes and Knox’s wife Marjorie pleaded with Knox to come and rescue them from the tyranny of the reign of Bloody Mary. Upon his secret return, Knox found a new hunger for the gospel in Edinburgh and Scotland, where Reformed Christians were sheltered by the Protestant nobility under the leadership of the Duke of Argyle. Knox returned to Geneva with Mrs. Bowes and Marjorie.<sup>20</sup>

The English exiles in Geneva asked Knox to be their pastor (along with Christopher Goodman). During his ministry (1556–1558), Knox grew as a minister and Reformer. He developed his own order of worship, Reformed Church Order, known as the “Geneva Book.”<sup>21</sup>

Then in 1558, he received a letter from four Scottish noblemen requesting his return. Three months later, he resigned and set out alone for Scotland. He was stopped at Dieppe after hearing news of persecution and the return of northern England to Rome. Knox preached to the Huguenots in La Rochelle and then returned to Geneva dejected, and gave up on the possibility of the Reformation of Scotland.

Back in Geneva, he wrote *The First Blast of the Trumpet against that Monstrous Regiment of Women* against Bloody Mary (Tudor) for her burning of martyrs in England. At this time, Mary of Guise ruled Scotland from France, with her daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, crowned at age sixteen. Knox overstated his case and offended Queen Elizabeth. Christopher Goodman wrote a treatise *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Observed*. Both were published in Geneva and embarrassed Calvin and Beza.<sup>22</sup>

### **Ministry in Scotland: Scottish Reformation [1559–1572]**

Finally, in November 1558, Mary Tudor died. Knox left Geneva, as honorary burgess, in the spring of 1559. Traveling via Dieppe, Knox arrived at the port of Leith in Edinburgh on May 2, 1559. “John Knox is come!” rang throughout Scotland. He arrived in the midst of a meeting of bishops and priests on the subject of the reform of the church.<sup>23</sup> The Queen Regent decreed a meeting of the pastors at Stirling on May 10. Protestants and their army went along. She then called it off. Knox preached for forty days under threat of being shot.

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas M’Crie, *The Life of John Knox* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1845), 129.

<sup>19</sup> Whitley, *The Plain Mr. Knox*, 85.

<sup>20</sup> Tait, “The Exiled Reformers,” Lecture III, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans*, 275.

<sup>22</sup> Tait, “The Exiled Reformers,” Lecture III, 15–16.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Meanwhile, fourteen priests were converted at St Andrews. The Queen then attacked and killed a number of the Protestants from Leith, forcing the Protestants to retreat to Stirling. There Knox preached on Psalm 80, “Take a stand for God’s eternal truth,” stirring up his followers to stand against the Queen Regent. Eventually English troops were sent, and the French forces withdrew.

Then the Scottish Parliament convened, rejecting the authority of the pope and declaring the Mass illegal. The National Covenant, Confession, and Book of Discipline were approved with astonishing speed. From then on, Knox preached regularly at St. Giles Church in Edinburgh.

From 1561–1572, the Counter-Reformation in Europe took aim at Scotland, hoping it to be the easiest to overturn. In 1561, Mary Queen of Scots (Mary Guise’s daughter) returned from France and held a Mass in her royal chapel. She was a subtle, sly, beautiful, and deceptive flatterer. But Knox was not afraid to denounce her. She summoned him, and a famous debate ensued. Mary insisted, “You must obey the prince, therefore his religion.” Knox retorted, “Religion gets its authority from God, not the prince.” Mary responded, “May subjects resist the prince?” Knox answered, “Yes, when princes ‘exceed their bounds.’” Mary stood amazed for fifteen minutes, and then responded, “Then princes should obey you and the people?” Knox insisted, “No, both prince and his subjects must obey God. May you be blessed like Deborah.” She wept once, not out of hurt or sorrow, but out of petulant stubbornness. Knox was not rude and uncouth as he is often depicted. He was plain, and to the point, but always courteous.

Mary was unfaithful to her second husband and plotted his murder. She abdicated her throne and was beheaded for treason by Elizabeth in July of 1567. The Earl of Moray ruled, known as “the good regent,” until he was assassinated. Then James VI began his reign.

Meanwhile, Knox was shot at in his house in Edinburgh. The bullet hit a chandelier. Thus, Knox was urged to retire to St Andrews. His wife, Marjorie, had died in 1564. He was remarried. Knox was deeply affected by the St. Bartholomew Massacre in France in 1572. He died November 24, 1572. He put up his sword and went to be with his Lord.<sup>24</sup> Truly he was the “trumpeter of God.”<sup>25</sup>

## II. KNOX’S REFORMATION OF WORSHIP

“The Scottish Reformation was preeminently a struggle over worship.”<sup>26</sup>

### What Knox Learned in Scotland and Geneva

In 1549 at Berwick-on-Tweed, Knox wrote a treatise, “Declaration of the Christian Belief in the Lord’s Supper.” It was published in 1550. His first sermon as chaplain to King Edward VI, as we have seen, attacked the practice, advocated in the second edition of the Book of Common Prayer, of compulsory kneeling before receiving the Lord’s Supper. During the worship conflict in Frankfurt, in which Cox advocated submission to this practice, a revised version of Calvin’s *Forme des Prières* (Form of Prayers), with William

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 17–21.

<sup>25</sup> Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 284.

<sup>26</sup> Kevin Reed, “Knox and the Reformation of Worship in the Scottish Reformation,” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, ed. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1992), 332.



Whittingham's help (along with Anthony Gilby, John Foxe, and Thomas Cole), became the Form of Prayers or Genevan Service Book for the English Genevan congregation that was published in early 1556.

Knox learned from Calvin to think through the form of worship so as not to add elements which were the inventions of men, such as required kneeling at the Lord's Supper. He also used Valerian Poullain's *Liturgia Sacra* (Poullain was Calvin's successor in Strassburg). He translated one of the confessions of sin, and composed his own Eucharistic prayer.<sup>27</sup>

### **What Knox Learned in Geneva and Scotland**

The Genevan Service Book or Book of Geneva became the Service Book of the Church of Scotland. Here is the Sunday Morning Service or liturgy from Genevan Service Book 1556. This is considered the first Puritan prayer book:

A Confession of sins  
A Prayer for pardon  
A metrical Psalm  
A Prayer for illumination  
The Scripture Lection and Sermon  
The Long Prayer and the Lord's Prayer  
The Apostles' Creed (*said by the minister alone*)  
A metrical Psalm  
A Blessing (*either 1 Corinthians or Numbers*)

The Lord's Supper  
A Psalm in metre while the elements were prepared  
The Words of Institution  
The Exhortation  
*Sursum corda*  
The Consecration  
The Fraction and Delivery  
The Communion while Scripture is read  
The Post-Communion Prayer  
Psalm 103  
*Gloria in excelsis*  
The Blessing<sup>28</sup>

### **The Foundation of the Regulative Principle**

The Regulative Principle was forged in Frankfurt with roots in Geneva. The preface to the Form of Prayer, known as the Book of Geneva, gives the first known statement of the Regulative Principle. The author was William Whittingham, who brought this principle back to England. This became a hallmark of English Puritanism.

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<sup>27</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Guides to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 139–40.

<sup>28</sup> Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Glasgow: Dacre, 1948; repr., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 31 (modern edition).

Because there is no way more ready or sure to come to him, than by framing ourselves altogether to his blessed will, revealed unto us in his Word . . . a form and order of a reformed church, limited within the compass of God's Word.<sup>29</sup>

In his first sermon at St. Andrews, in answer to the subprior's questions about adding ceremonies, Knox said: "Now, if ye will prove that your ceremonies proceed from faith, and do please God, ye must prove God in expressed words has commanded them."<sup>30</sup> It should be remembered that the Regulative Principle was limited to church government and worship. The New Testament was the standard, though principles were gleaned from the Old.

### **The Forms of Worship: Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition**

Historian Horton Davies observed that the Genevan liturgy was "biblical, didactic, and congregational."<sup>31</sup> One of the great discoveries of the Reformation was that Reformed public worship gives practical form to Reformed doctrine, and thus practical form to the Christian life. In turn every aspect of worship is informed by the Word of God. Each element must be warranted by the Word. Even the exact order of worship must have biblical logic, although the particular order is not expressly warranted, and thus was understood to be somewhat flexible. Calvin counseled compromise where liturgical elements do not effect the substance of faith, and encouraged pastoral patience in seeking reform.

## **III. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REFORMATION OF OUR WORSHIP**

### **We Should Glean from Our Liturgical Roots**

After becoming Reformed in doctrine, I was amazed to discover the richness of the Reformed theology and practice of worship—something that did not seem important to those who originally convinced me of the Reformed faith. This is still a largely untapped source in the life of our churches. *Ad fonts*, "to the fountains or sources," was a cry of the Reformation.

Perhaps the dominance of technology, novelty, and the forms of popular culture have inhibited the use of our liturgical past in forming our present orders of worship. When we minimize the importance of forms of all kinds we are missing the inextricable relationship between form and substance. Forms are never merely a matter of style, as conventional wisdom would have us think. For example the formal attire at most weddings is an expression of the importance of the occasion. The particular ways that we do things are the expression of the things themselves.

Also, what we do not do is as important as what we do. So, when Knox objected to kneeling at the Lord's Table, he was objecting to adding an element not expressly required in the New Testament. So the absence of corporate confession of sin, assurance of pardon, and confession of faith using the historic creeds says something about our priorities as officers in charge of worship.

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<sup>29</sup> Iain H. Murray, ed., *The Reformation of the Church. A Collection of Reformed and Puritan Documents on Church Issues* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 75.

<sup>30</sup> Kevin Reed, "Knox and the Reformation of Worship," 296.

<sup>31</sup> Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, 119.

## **We Should Not Ignore or Shun Liturgical Forms of Worship**

It would be useful to ask if the Westminster Directory's, and thus our own (OPC), lack of liturgical forms is necessarily a good thing. Was the Puritan position something of a reaction to the Anglican imposition of a prayer book? Or was there practice removed from the official governing documents of the church for good reason?

The magisterial Reformers, as well as the Presbyterian Puritans, like Calvin and Knox, Wittingham, etc., did not oppose liturgical forms or written prayers *per se*, but only their imposition on ministers and churches. The Westminster Assembly used both prescribed and extemporaneous prayers. The Independents (Congregationalists) were the ones who promoted extemporaneous prayers exclusively.

In Scotland, especially in the South and West, there was considerable anti-liturgical sentiment. As James Hastings Nichols observes:

As we turn to the [Westminster] Directory for Worship, the first striking fact about the document is that it is not a liturgy or service book at all, after the fashion of Calvin, Cranmer, or Knox.<sup>32</sup>

Would we do well to consider “suggested forms of worship” as our Reformed forefathers did? We do so for funerals, weddings, and the sacraments. Calvin, Cranmer, and Knox each used service books with liturgies.

We must assess how the electronic media environment is affecting our understanding of and practice of worship and fostering formless worship

Our entire attitude toward worship is shaped by our culture, which idolizes the visual image over against the written and spoken word, the novel against the traditional, the entertaining against the serious, the popular against the classical, the immediate against the eternal, the informal against the formal.

Since every medium is an inherent part of the message it communicates, the elements of worship should not be “supplemented” with the chief purveyors of modern culture—electronic media. They subtly bring their own messages into worship, often eclipsing the gospel; muting the reverence and awe that should be the atmosphere and attitude of worship; and truncating the full range of biblical truth, in particular the place of lament and grief.<sup>33</sup>

## **We Should Consider the Reading and Preaching of Scripture as the Supreme Act of Worship**

Preaching is often wrongly distinguished from worship, as if preaching is something different from worship, and that worship consists of praise and prayer. But if we are to regain a proper understanding of preaching as the supreme act of worship, then we should consider three ingredients that are essential to preaching, and should thus be always in the forefront of our thinking and practice.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> James Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 99.

<sup>33</sup> See Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures, Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), especially chapter 8.

<sup>34</sup> Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 1:7.

First, preaching must be spiritually powerful. Near the end of his life, in a condition so weakened that he could barely climb into the pulpit of Saint Andrews, it is said by one observer that

before he [Knox] was done with his sermon he was so active and vigorous that he was like to ding the pulpit in blads [pieces], and fly out of it. . . . he maid me sa to grew [quake] and tremble, that I could not hald pen to wryt."<sup>35</sup>

Second, preaching must be seen as the center of true worship. As covenantal communication, preaching is always two-way. The hearer is always to be a worshipper. If preaching is the supreme act of worship, then should this not be reflected in the order of worship? The liturgies of the Reformation placed the ministry of the Word at the center, rather than the end, of the liturgy, with an approach to the Lord, declaring the gospel, at the beginning, and a response to the Word, including a confession of faith, a pastoral prayer, and the Lord's Supper, at the end.

Third, preaching must be understood as God speaking. John Calvin's own view of the centrality of preaching is reflected in the Ecclesiastical Ordinances, which were framed under his influence:

The first part of the office of the pastor, says the Ordinances, is "to proclaim the Word of God, to instruct, admonish, exhort and censure, both in public and in private." . . . Calvin will very frequently use the most definite language to assert that the preaching of the gospel is the Word of God. It is as if the congregation "heard the very words pronounced by God himself." A man "preaches so that God may speak to us by the mouth of a man."<sup>36</sup>

Despite having a naturally reserved personality, he exercised rare freedom in the pulpit. "His manner of delivery was lively, passionate, intimate, direct, and clear."<sup>37</sup> For Calvin, the sermon itself was an act of worship as it engaged the congregation in the reality of redemption.<sup>38</sup>

As we reflect on the life and ministry of John Knox, on the occasion of the five hundredth anniversary of his birth, especially his reformation of worship, may the Lord give us grace and wisdom to continue that noble reforming effort.

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<sup>35</sup> Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 270.

<sup>36</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin* (Tring/Batavia, IL/Sydney: Lion, 1987), 106.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

# Servant Worship

## The Sursum Corda is Catholic

### Part 1

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by Jeffrey B. Wilson

One Sunday after worship, in which communion was served, fellow worshipers were talking in the hallway. A member of the church approached me and said, “That language we use in worship during communion, I remember saying it when I was a boy in the Catholic Church.” I searched his face for any signs of distress or alarm. Neither was evident. Rather, he was excited about noticing this liturgical language in a new way. I told him it is called the *sursum corda* (lift up your hearts), and we chatted about it and the recollections of his youth. As a pastor in a Presbyterian Church, I have learned that finding similarities in Presbyterian worship with Roman Catholic worship is a warning flag for some people. When we attend worship, it can be unsettling to look for one thing but find another. We look for what we have known and what is familiar to us. This is especially true when we attend the worship of churches within the same liturgical and theological tradition, or in the same denomination. Even members of church traditions without fixed forms of worship (Presbyterian churches are guided by principles of worship) often expect some semblance of uniformity, particularly if they have strong convictions about worship. There is the current trend in many churches to mix it up a bit, to try to be offbeat, in order to capitalize on the disturbance it causes. More non-Christians will hear the gospel and be attracted to a current and relevant church—so the argument goes. But most of those who come to the church I serve want a form of worship rooted in the Word of God and well placed within historical Christian worship. Since our church is Presbyterian there are certain assumptions people have for our worship, and when there is something that does not fit those assumptions, like the *sursum corda*, it can be unsettling to say the least.

The *sursum corda* is Latin, and because it is a Latin phrase, many Protestants immediately suspect that it is Roman Catholic. The Catholic Tridentine Mass uses Latin, and the post-Vatican II Mass still retains many Latin words. Presbyterian churches, however, have largely abided by the principle of the Protestant Reformation to use vernacular language in worship so everyone can participate in the service and do so intelligently. Presbyterians have removed all foreign language phrases from their worship, and conservative Presbyterian churches like our own have maintained this practice. Of course the *sursum corda* can be translated into the language of the people and used, intelligently, by all. Besides being the first words of the Latin phrase, the *sursum corda* is also the technical name for the litany between the pastor and the congregation which prefaces the Eucharistic prayer. It has been used for centuries by many different kinds of churches in their worship. The response is as follows:

Pastor: Lift up your hearts.

Congregation: We lift them up to the Lord.

Pastor: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Congregation: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

This response then leads immediately into the prayer of thanksgiving. It is not unusual to have Latin and Greek names of elements of worship in Presbyterian churches. To wit, we have names like the *Gloria Patri*, the *Doxology*, and many of the tunes we use for our hymns have non-English names, such as *Mit Freuden Zart* (the tune for *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*) and *Laudate Dominum* (the tune for *Sing Praise to the Lord!*). Along these lines, the words *sursum corda* can be used in reference to a part of worship without using that phrase in worship.

Latin nomenclature is one thing, usage is another. There is still the abiding concern that the *sursum corda* is Roman Catholic because it is used in the Mass. It is the purpose of this essay to rapidly survey the principal liturgies of Eastern and Western Christianity, including early Reformed liturgies, to see how broadly the *sursum corda* has been used in worship. For this survey, two easily accessible resources have been used. The first is *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* by Jasper and Cuming.<sup>1</sup> The other is *Liturgies of the Western Church* compiled by Bard Thompson.<sup>2</sup> These collections are of great help for understanding the place of the *sursum corda* in Christian worship.

Although there is the Jewish background, Christian worship did come into its own. Jasper and Cuming suggest that the early church felt a need to distance its worship from actual Jewish prayers. However, the style, structure, and concepts of Jewish prayers continued to exert an influence on Christian worship.<sup>3</sup> This is true for the *sursum corda*, as will be explained below. As far as scholars can discern, there were no fixed written prayers for the communion service in the first two hundred years of Christianity. Jasper and Cuming conclude that the early church was more regional, and the communion prayers were at the discretion of the local bishops, although there was the expectation that certain elements from the New Testament accounts of the Lord's Supper would be included, such as the words of institution, the prayer of thanksgiving, and the *anamnesis* (remembering).<sup>4</sup> By the end of the fourth century, the standardization of communion liturgies and prayers of thanksgiving is well attested.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars have grouped the various early communion liturgies into five or six families.<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this essay, five families of liturgies will be reviewed for their use of the *sursum corda*; the East Syrian, the West Syrian, the Alexandrian, the Roman and North African, and the Gallican and Mozarabic. These different groups of liturgies have their own characteristics even though, over the course of time, they influenced each other.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–33. These pages refer to the *Didache* and Justin Martyr as two of the earliest examples of writings listing elements that should be included in the communion service without providing specific prayers of thanksgiving for the communion meal. Even Hippolytus, who provides a complete Eucharistic prayer for communion, allows for the bishop to use his own words or a fixed form.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. For further reading, see Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 115–16. Senn believes Diocletian's organization of the regions of the Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century, and Constantine's Edict of Milan, indirectly contributed to the standardization of Christian liturgy.

<sup>6</sup> Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (repr. 1960, Continuum: London, 2001), 156. Dix identifies six, primary, standardized communion liturgies; Frank Senn discusses five, *Christian Liturgy*, 115ff; Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, throughout their work, indicate the complexity of the influence of one liturgical region on another.

The East Syrian family of communion liturgies is one of the oldest. These intrinsically related forms of worship originated in the eastern region of the Roman Empire. In this area was the city of Edessa, one of the earliest centers of Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Jasper and Cuming call attention to the strong presence of Semitic style and expressions in this family, with some of the liturgies composed in the Semitic dialect of Syriac.<sup>8</sup> One notable form of worship within this genus is the Liturgy of Addai and Mari, originating in Edessa. On the whole, it shows the sources of an ancient form of worship, although changes were made over the years.<sup>9</sup> The *sursum corda* from the sixth-century version of the Liturgy of Addai and Mari is below:

Celebrant: Up with your minds.

Congregation: They are with you, O God.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of the strong Jewish characteristic of the *sursum corda* in the service of Addai and Mari, it bears a Greek influence as well with the use of “minds” instead of “hearts.”

Antioch was the ancient center of the West Syrian family of rites of worship. The worship that arose in this region had a widespread influence on many liturgies in other areas, such as the Alexandrian and East Syrian. Furthermore, the West Syrian churches experienced the great Christological debates focused on Arius and Monophysitism. Not only did these controversies divide the churches, they affected their worship.<sup>11</sup> The West Syrian family includes the liturgies of St. James in Jerusalem and The Third Anaphora of St. Peter (also called the Sharar). The style of this family of liturgy also lies behind the rite of John Chrysostom, which became the principal form of the Byzantine liturgy. One interesting feature that shows up in the West Syrian liturgies is a Hellenistic, as well as Semitic, influence on the *sursum corda*. The *sursum corda* for the liturgy of St. James begins with the response:

Celebrant: Let us lift up our mind and our hearts.

Congregation: We have them with the Lord.<sup>12</sup>

In Hellenistic thinking, the νοῦς (*nous*, mind) was considered the center of one’s being in contrast to the Jewish metaphor of the heart.<sup>13</sup> The Third Anaphora of St. Peter has this version of the *sursum corda*:

Celebrant: Let our minds ever be lifted up to heaven, and all our hearts in purity.

Congregation: To you, Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, O king glorious and holy for ever.

In the fourth century, John Chrysostom produced his liturgy relying on those of the Apostolic Constitutions, St. Basil, St. James, and the Eucharistic prayer of the Twelve Apostles.<sup>14</sup> Below is Chrysostom’s version of the *sursum corda*:

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<sup>7</sup> Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>11</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 119.

<sup>12</sup> Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 90.

<sup>13</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 122–23.

<sup>14</sup> Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 129.

Celebrant: Let us lift up our hearts.  
Congregation: We have them with the Lord.

Chrysostom's *sursum corda* deletes the Greek *vouç* (*nous*, mind) and keeps the Semitic metaphor (heart), making the response simpler.

Similar characteristics are found in another ancient group of liturgies, the Alexandrian. Scholars have tentatively concluded that the sources for this group of liturgies are as ancient as those for the East Syrian forms of worship.<sup>15</sup> One of the distinct characteristics of the Alexandrian family is its inclusion of the intercessions after the preface in the Eucharistic prayer.<sup>16</sup> The liturgies of St Mark and the Egyptian St Basil stand out in the Alexandrian family. The liturgy of St. Mark includes the *sursum corda* before the prayer of thanksgiving, but it leaves out the verb, "lift." Instead it has the following phraseology:

Celebrant: Up with your hearts.  
Congregation: We have them with the Lord.<sup>17</sup>

The Egyptian version of the liturgy of St. Basil is so named because it may have come from the Cappadocian Church Father, Basil, who lived in Egypt for a time. It definitely bears the characteristics of the Alexandrian family, but it also has the structure of the West Syrian family of liturgies. We are reminded again of the influence of one liturgical family upon another. The liturgy of St. Basil has the *sursum corda* in the usual location at the beginning of the prayer of thanksgiving and in the following form:

Celebrant: Let us lift up our hearts.  
Congregation: We have them with the Lord.

It is universally agreed that the Egyptian St. Basil liturgy is a primary source for the Byzantine liturgy of St. Basil, and Cuming argues that it also helped shape the liturgy of St. James in Jerusalem, even more so than the West Syrian.<sup>18</sup>

Since North Africa was one of the most Roman of Rome's provinces, it is easy to understand its close relationship to the Roman family of liturgy. The liturgy in the African churches was essentially an independent variant of the Roman liturgy.<sup>19</sup> It is in this family that we find the earliest known liturgical document containing the *sursum corda*, Hippolytus's prayer, which was written around the year 215. The text is below:

Celebrant: Up with your hearts.  
Congregation: We have (them) with the Lord.<sup>20</sup>

The Roman Mass developed separately from Hippolytus. Aside from the introductory dialogue and the concluding doxology, there is nothing else in it from Hippolytus's liturgy.<sup>21</sup> The Roman Canon seems to have evolved from a number of independent prayers, with many

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>16</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 134.

<sup>17</sup> Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 59.

<sup>18</sup> G. J. Cuming, "Egyptian Elements in the Jerusalem Liturgy," *Journal of Theological Studies* 25:1 (1974): 117–24.

<sup>19</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 137.

<sup>20</sup> Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 32–34.

<sup>21</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 140.



additions coming later. The *sursum corda* was most likely part of the earliest form of the Roman service and presumably came from Hippolytus's liturgy.<sup>22</sup> Later, when the Mass was officially organized by the papal court in the seventh century, the *sursum corda* was revised with the more complete line, "Lift up your hearts."<sup>23</sup>

Although Rome became the dominant church in the West, there were other liturgical traditions in Europe. Two of them are the Gallican and Mozarabic liturgies. By the sixth century, they were well established in the areas of modern France and Spain. These were non-Roman, Latin rites that had been influenced by some of the liturgies of the Eastern Churches.<sup>24</sup> Yet they had their own form and phrases and so are classified as a distinct family. The Gallican order of worship includes the *sursum corda*, as does the Mozarabic liturgy. The latter developed in Spain, probably with influences from Constantinople. This rite uses the following sequence for the *sursum corda*:

Celebrant: Up with your hearts.

Congregation: Let us lift them to the Lord.<sup>25</sup>

Both the Gallican and the Mozarabic liturgies place the *sursum corda* immediately before the Eucharistic prayer.

This brings us to the use of the *sursum corda* in the Protestant Reformation. One of the principal aims of Protestant leaders like Luther, Bucer, Calvin, Knox, and Cranmer was to reform Christian worship. As they saw it, such worship had become encrusted with practices and theology not derived from Scripture. Therefore, they began to restore the worship of the church according to the Word of God. Significant changes were made relative to the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. Although some elements were excised and thrown to the side, the *sursum corda* was not one of these (at least for the initial Lutheran and Reformed liturgies). At the same time, the *sursum corda* did undergo a change in how it was used. Martin Luther, in his *Formula Missae* of 1523 retained the *sursum corda* in its traditional place as the preface to the Eucharistic prayer with this wording:

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

Congregation: Let us lift them to the Lord.<sup>26</sup>

However, in his German Mass of 1526, he removed the *sursum corda* from its place as the preface to the prayer of thanksgiving and moved it to the opening of his prayer of intercession at the beginning of the communion service. In doing so, he truncated it and made it an exhortation, thus eliminating the response of the people. Luther's new use of the *sursum corda* was, "Lift up your hearts to God to pray with me the Lord's Prayer."<sup>27</sup> This relocation of the *sursum corda* was significant, but Luther continued to use it as an expression of prayerful trust to God.

The Reformed liturgies of Bucer, Calvin and Knox also retained the first line of the *sursum corda*. Bucer's Strasbourg liturgy used it in one of his prayers in his suggested forms for the communion liturgy. This prayer combined the prayer of intercession and Eucharistic prayer

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 168-70.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>25</sup> Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 152.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 189, 192-93.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 196.

but instead of making it an exhortation to prayer, like Luther, Bucer put it at the end of the prayer as the goal of being set free from sin by Jesus Christ. Thus Bucer's line is, "To the end that, by all means, we as thine obedient children may ever lift our hearts and souls unto thee in true childlike trust."<sup>28</sup> Calvin also used the first line of the *sursum corda*, but, unlike Luther and Bucer, he used it in his exhortation to the congregation, focused on the words of institution in the communion service. After commenting on Jesus's institution of the meal, the Genevan order says, "Therefore, lift up your hearts on high, seeking the heavenly things in heaven, where Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father; and do not fix your eyes on the visible signs which are corrupted through usage."<sup>29</sup> For Calvin, the *sursum corda* provided the proper orientation for the celebration of the sacrament. Calvin's influence can be seen in John Knox's *The Forme of Prayers*, published in 1556. Knox follows Calvin in using the *sursum corda* to orient the congregation's faith from the earthly elements to Christ himself, whose body is seated at the right hand of God. *The Forme of Prayers* says, "Lift up our minds by faith above all things worldly and sensible, and thereby to enter into heaven, that we may find, and receive Christ."<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, Knox places the *sursum corda* at the end of his exhortation, just before his prayer of thanksgiving. Along the same lines, in 1586, some of the English Puritans produced the Middleburg Liturgy, which was similar to John Knox's *The Forme of Prayers*, making use of the *sursum corda* in the same way.<sup>31</sup>

Our brisk overview of the use of the *sursum corda* in the liturgies of the church suffices to show that it has found a place in most Christian liturgical traditions, including the Reformed. Historical time and location of the liturgies have certainly played their part in shaping the variations of the *sursum corda*. Most obviously, the word used to refer to the center of the person, whether it be "mind" or "heart," changed depending on Semitic or Greek influence. During the Reformation, concern for how the church understood its worship also created variety in how the *sursum corda* was used. However, even when there was conscientious reform in the church, the *sursum corda* was retained. Only later, with the rise of new movements in the Protestant churches (namely Puritan, Nonconformist, and revivalistic) would the *sursum corda* begin to disappear from the church's liturgy. Today some of the descendants of early Protestant worship have a renewed interest in the historical worship of the church and the place of the *sursum corda* in liturgy. One example of this can be found in the suggested form for the communion exhortation in the *Directory for the Public Worship of God* of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.<sup>32</sup> As churches give due consideration to their liturgy, hopefully they will recognize the catholic use of the *sursum corda* and not dismiss it out of hand.

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<sup>28</sup> Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 173.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>32</sup> *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), 153.

# Servant Worship

## How to Pray at Prayer Meetings: Some Practical Suggestions

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by Ryan McGraw

Prayer meetings are vital to the church. However, prayer meetings can be difficult to manage. Most who have led prayer meetings have experienced various difficulties in doing so. When Christians gather together in families or in small groups to pray, ordinarily they go to prayer directly. Yet when the church gathers for corporate prayer, the scene often changes. Instead of focusing primarily on prayer, most of the time is often used in taking requests or conducting Bible studies. The purpose of prayer meetings should be primarily to promote the Father's glory, through spreading the kingdom of his Son, by doing his will through the Spirit's power. The following directions point out some common pitfalls to avoid in corporate prayer meetings. Most of these directions respect our relations to fellow believers and how best to utilize our time of corporate prayer and to unite our hearts in it. These are practical suggestions without the force of, "thus saith the Lord." They include numerous scriptural allusions, but no direct references. The goal is to improve our prayer meetings as effective means of advancing the gospel and of edifying the saints by drawing upon the general principles of Scripture, experience, and sanctified common sense.

### **1. Limit the Petitions Largely to the First Three Petitions of the Lord's Prayer.**

The primary purpose of prayer meetings should be to spread the glory of God through the gospel. The coming of the kingdom and the doing of his will are the two primary ways that God does this. Pray for the Father to glorify himself through spreading the gospel of his Son. Pray that the Spirit would spread the kingdom through blessing the preaching of the Word, especially on the Lord's Day. This does not mean that we should not pray for the needs of the church. It means that we should pray for the needs of the church with the goal of spreading God's glory through honoring his name, furthering his kingdom, and doing his will.

### **2. Pray for Other Things in Light of the First Three Petitions of the Lord's Prayer.**

For example, pray for the sick so that they might know Christ better through their illnesses or come to know him in light of them. Pray that they would get well, but recognize that this is a secondary end of praying for them. This is true especially in corporate prayer, where those present are less abreast of the private details of the lives of friends for whom we pray. Do not give too much detail about those for whom we pray, either by way of requests or in your prayers. The Lord will always bless our prayers for

the growth of the saints in the midst of affliction. He will use some of our prayers for the conversion of the lost in their affliction as well. This principle should give focus to your private prayers as well as for your public prayers. In other words, do not simply pray but ask yourself why you are praying and how your prayer glorifies God.

### **3. Pray Scripture.**

Praying using scriptural language and content is the best way to be assured simultaneously that God will answer our prayers and that we will gain the consent of others in the prayer meeting. Fewer people will disagree with the Scriptures themselves in corporate prayer than will disagree with our opinions about family, politics, news, etc. If people attending the prayer meetings do not consent to the Scriptures, then such people face deeper problems. Praying Scripture is the best means of honoring God and edifying our brethren. This does not mean parroting Scripture citations back to God, but thoughtfully using and applying scriptural language and ideas. This will improve your private prayers as well.

### **4. Come to Pray.**

Do not spend too much time on prayer requests. We are gathered to pray at prayer meetings, not to be updated on the latest news. Use prayer chains or smaller groups to share small details and minor requests. Do not give minute-by-minute updates on the state of the sick. Do not enumerate the names of every lost family member and neighbor. The Lord knows our needs. Corporate prayer should prioritize corporate needs and requests. Use the Psalms as a model. The prayers contained in the Psalms transcend time and rarely include specific names or circumstances. When they do, these are usually relegated to the titles of the Psalms. We should not need lengthy requests for corporate prayer. Use other means and occasions for these purposes. This is true with regard to Bible studies as well. A short Bible study can help prepare people to participate in a prayer meeting. Long Bible studies crowd out prayer. Remember that the purpose of the meeting is prayer, not Bible study. Corporate prayer makes Bible study and preaching effective through the power of the Holy Spirit. People need to know that prayer is the main event and that it is vital even if there is no study attached. Anything that detracts from spending most of the time in corporate prayer, whether requests or studies, distorts the nature of the prayer meeting, transforming it into something else.

### **5. Do Not Be Too Specific in Corporate Prayer.**

Everyone in a prayer meeting winces inwardly when someone prays in vivid detail about the latest fight in his or her household—everyone, apparently, except the people who pray such inappropriate prayers. Respect the private details of people's lives in prayer meetings. Those who are present do not need to know most details. We sometimes act superstitiously by assuming that we need a list of names to pray for that includes every individual who concerns us. This is important in private prayer, but can be distracting in public prayer. The Lord knows their names, and he can hear corporate prayer for lost people and other needs, whether we know their names or not. This does not mean that we should never pray for people by name, but we must be sparing and do so only when it adds to the substance of the prayer meeting and promotes the efficacy of the prayers. Turning prayer into a commentary on the latest events, whether personal or in the public news, transforms prayer meetings into a gossip session. This happens more frequently than most people realize. Giving personal details on people's lives when it is

not necessary to do so does not cease to be gossip because we justify it under the excuse of praying for them. This is like using the phrase “bless your heart” in order to blunt the force of the insults and slander that are likely to follow. Corporate prayer for the kingdom of God should be less specific than private prayers. The general rule should be that the more private your prayers are the more specific they become. The point of corporate prayer is to pray, as much as possible, for corporate concerns.

## **6. Pray in a Way that Allows Most of Those Present to Say “Amen.”**

The Bible expects us to say “amen” in corporate prayer. This is the briefest and perhaps the most ancient confession of faith in Scripture. In our “amen,” we testify our desire and assurance to be heard. We cannot say “amen” unless we both understand and agree with what is prayed. This goes both ways. You should pray in such a way that you expect others to say “amen” to your prayers. Those who pray in corporate prayer meetings are speaking for every Christian present at the meeting during that prayer. In this relation, it is helpful to avoid using “I” in a prayer meeting. If you cannot preface your petition or praise with “we,” then the petition is probably inappropriate for the context. Avoid polemical issues in corporate prayer as much as possible. If you are a Presbyterian who is praying in a Baptist prayer meeting, then do not pray for the Lord’s blessing on household baptisms as a divine ordinance. Polemics are utterly inappropriate in corporate prayer. They are repulsive in this context, even where they are equally necessary in other settings. When we practice household baptisms in a Presbyterian church, then we should pray for the ordinance, whether or not everyone present agrees with it. However, praying for the spread of the kingdom and the glory of God, through Christ, by the Spirit is something that all Christians can and should unite over. We are most ecumenical when we join our hearts in corporate prayer. We should express this both by saying “amen” audibly and praying in a way that enables others to do so with us.

## **7. Avoid Political References in Your Prayers.**

We must pray for rulers and for all who are in authority that they might come to the knowledge of the truth and that they might allow us to lead quiet and peaceable lives in holiness and reverence. We should pray that they would enact just laws, punish the wicked, and reward the upright. However, Christians have differing political views. Not all of us vote the same way. So corporate prayer is not the time to sort out our differences over which president to vote for or to mention bills and referendums by name. Why should we need to? Does not God know better than we do how to direct our governing authorities? Your ideas of just laws and wars may not be the same as his. You may hold your opinions on these things, but exercise a bit of humility, especially in corporate prayer. How many wars have been fought where both sides thought their cause was just? We cannot see things as God sees them. Our perspectives are far too limited. We often think that we can pray more accurately on national and international matters than is actually the case. If everyone in the prayer meeting got what they asked for in relation to politics, then this would likely lead the nation into catastrophic disorder. Leave the specifics to your closet. Pray corporately in a way that is truly corporate. Even if your position is right, corporate prayer is the wrong context in which to press it. Corporate prayer assumes agreement among those who pray; it is neither the place nor the time to procure agreement.

## **8. Avoid Vain Repetition.**

It is useful to regard the prayer meeting as one long prayer, with several parts, offered through many voices, and with unified hearts. Christ's command to avoid vain repetition in prayer applies with equal force to prayer meetings. It is common in prayer meetings for several people to parrot the same petitions offered by others already. When others pray at prayer meetings, remember that it is your prayer too. If you would not and should not repeat the same thing over and over again in your private prayers, then neither should you repeat what others have prayed in corporate prayer. There are at least two exceptions to this rule. Repeat a petition when you have something new to add that someone else did not include. However, consider this advice in light of the directions above about not being too specific in public prayer unless it is necessary. We can also repeat a petition when it is a peculiar burden on the hearts of those who are present. For example, everyone in the prayer meeting should share a burden for the revival of the church. Neither God nor man is wearied when such concerns dominate the hearts of all who pray. Concern for the spiritual vitality of the church and the spread of the gospel is virtually a litmus test for a good prayer meeting. All of the people in the meeting could, and perhaps should, pray for revival. However, even here, use a variety of heartfelt and genuine expressions combined with texts of Scripture rather than simply repeating the same request *ad nauseam*. For five or six people to offer the same petition in virtually the same words is as obnoxious to God as it is to us when people speak to us this way in conversation. This rule does not exclude those who come to God with a child-like heart and express their prayers through stumbling and broken expressions. Contrary to the self-image of such people, such prayers ascend like incense to heaven and are music in the ears of the saints who pray with them.

### **9. Keep Your Prayers Brief.**

It is better for more people to pray a few petitions each than for a few people to try to pray for all of them, or to pray for some of them with too much detail. If you pray for someone who has cancer, for example, then pray for their spiritual and physical welfare. Those in the prayer meeting do not need to know the results of their current blood tests, etc. This will not affect in the least either the content or the efficacy of the prayer for them. Do not pray more than once unless there is some necessity for it. If the prayer meeting is particularly large, then the leadership may need to designate individuals to pray on behalf of the group. If the group is small, then the widest participation possible is desirable. In either case, petitions should be brief and to the point.

### **10. Do Not Be a Slave to the Clock.**

If the prayers fizzle out early, then the prayer meeting ends early. If the Spirit blesses corporate prayer extraordinarily and people are pleading for the spread of the gospel with vigor, then do not close until people have finished. Remember, however, that extraordinary blessings in a prayer meeting must be extraordinary. Otherwise, this term is meaningless, if not self-contradictory. Time will be less of an issue in prayer meetings if almost the entire time is devoted to prayer rather than to prayer requests or Bible study.

### **11. Do Not Turn Your Prayers into Sermons.**

In public prayer, you are speaking to God in the presence of men, not to men on behalf of God. This is one of the worst and the most common errors in prayer. If someone prays something like, "Lord, we know that you have told us to keep ourselves from temptation and that there are some people here who walk into tempting situations, and

that they know they should stop, but they do not, even though I have tried to confront them repeatedly,” then they are preaching rather than praying. This kind of prayer comes across as very similar to the prayer of the Pharisee, who “prayed to himself” and thanked God that he was not like other men. Your goal in prayer is to express the hearts of men with your voice and not to change the opinions and practices of men through your exhortation. If there are issues that must be resolved between church members, or areas where there are disagreements in doctrine or practice, then address these by way of private admonition. Some faults are liable to church discipline, while you must simply bear with others. You are not informing God or your neighbor in your prayers. You must pray in a way that others can understand and agree with you. Others often view those who preach in their prayers as disingenuous, insincere, and self-aggrandizing. You will not do good to the souls of others or your own if you turn your prayers into veiled exhortations and expositions of Scripture.

### **12. Encourage All Types of People to Pray.**

Prayer meetings are one of the best opportunities to teach children how to be an active part of the congregation. It is important to bring our children to prayer meetings and to teach them how to pray brief prayers. The prayers of children are one of the greatest encouragements to the congregation, and they are one of the best means to give the children ownership in the task of spreading the gospel. The rules that limit and shape our prayers should never discourage the weakest and least informed among us from praying. As with all other things, we learn as we do. Though this is not the place to settle the controversy, it would appear that the women participated in the prayer meeting in Acts 1.

### **13. Remember in Your Prayers to Praise the Triune God.**

This is how the Westminster Shorter Catechism appropriately closes. If our prayer meeting is more consumed with petitions than with praises, then we have lost sight of the biblical model for prayer. We should praise the triune God for who he is and for what he has done. All of our petitions should promote his glory and reputation among us and in the world. Prayer is many things, but it is an act of worship above all other things. Use the prayer meeting as an occasion to worship and glorify the Lord and to do so together. It is better to praise God with united hearts and voices than to do so alone—look at the Psalms for numerous examples of this! Praising God and seeking his glory in corporate prayer is one of the best ways to advance Christ’s kingdom and to edify his people. I have never heard a Christian say that there was too much worship and thanksgiving at a prayer meeting. This is what you will be doing when all the saints and angels are gathered in glory and when you see Christ face-to-face as he is. Praise him in your corporate prayers.

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# ServantReading

## The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church

*by Hughes Oliphant Old*

### Series Review (Part Four)

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by Dennis E. Johnson

*The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, by Hughes Oliphant Old. Volume 7: *Our Own Time*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010, xx + 714 pages, \$55.00.

This multi-volume survey of the history of “the reading and preaching of Scripture” in the church’s corporate worship spans over three millennia (from Moses to the present). Because its 4,000+ pages demand careful reading and reflection, this review has appeared piecemeal over the last couple of years. Part One, covering the first three volumes (the biblical period, the patristic age, the medieval church), appeared in the August-September 2012 issue of *Ordained Servant*. Part Two, reviewing volumes four (the Reformation and post-Reformation Protestantism and Catholicism) and five (the era of “moderatism, pietism, and awakening”), came out in February 2013. The third segment, which appeared in March 2014, addressed only volume six (“the modern age,” from the late eighteenth through the mid-twentieth century). Now at last we reach the final volume, which surveys preaching in “our own time,” the closing decades of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first. Dr. Old completed the writing of volume seven in January 2008, two years before its publication and six years before this review.

The survey and analysis of preaching in our own time continues the author’s aim to give us a catholic perspective on the church’s preaching and worship. This volume, like its predecessors, includes preaching from a variety of theological and ecclesiastical traditions. Individual chapters are devoted to the mainline Protestant denominations in North America, to a “new breed” of American Presbyterians, to recent homiletical trends in the Roman Catholic church, to African-American preaching, to charismatic churches, to Anglican and Church of Scotland preachers, and to evangelical megachurches. Geographically, too, Dr. Old strives to introduce readers to preaching in the global church, surveying the ministry of the Word in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and East Asia. A special treat is derived from Dr. Old’s personal friendship with Romanian poet/professor/preacher Joan Alexandru: in one brief (seven-page) but moving chapter, he recounts the role that *a single sermon*, preached by Alexandru in December 1989, played in the liberation of Romania through the fall of the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu.



Dr. Old has lived and ministered in the context of mainline Presbyterianism, but he is well aware of its weaknesses and appreciative of the strengths to be seen elsewhere in Christ's church. The opening chapter is entitled, tellingly, "The End of the Mainline." It profiles the preaching ministry of Henry Sloan Coffin and James A. Forbes Jr. at Riverside Church in New York City, Fred Craddock of Candler School of Theology, Fleming Rutledge and Stephen Bauman in historic Episcopalian and Methodist New York City congregations, and Methodist Bishop William Willimon. With the exception of Rutledge and Willimon, who dare to affirm and proclaim (rather than demythologize) such historic biblical doctrines as the resurrection of Jesus and to carefully expound biblical texts, Old finds mainline preaching sorely deficient in content. Though he appreciates mainline preachers' effectiveness as communicators, he critiques their existentialist hermeneutic and liberal political agenda, citing, for example, Coffin's sermons advocating acceptance of homosexual relationships and attacking opponents of abortion, preached and then published over thirty years ago (1982) in *The Courage to Love*. Dr. Old finds Coffin's handling of biblical texts unpersuasive, and he suggests that "prophetic" preaching such as Coffin's emptied mainline pews because "the problem was the message" (15). Readers of *Ordained Servant* would no doubt join me in concurring with Dr. Old's diagnosis . . . until he goes on to explain that Coffin's message was "not the right word for the right time," but an outdated expression of liberal social conscience during an era of political conservatism (16–17). Although Dr. Old's irenic and empathetic spirit is admirable, I hope (and, from other comments elsewhere, expect) that in his heart of hearts he could not envision a "right time" at any point in history for a Christian preacher to dismiss biblical ethical standards or fundamental gospel truths, as Coffin's preaching did.

This volume's cover photo of Billy Graham leads us to expect a substantive discussion of this most widely recognized—globally recognized—evangelist of our time. Chapter two is devoted entirely to the ministry of Dr. Graham. Although Dr. Old acknowledges, "If I am to be completely honest, I have to admit that Billy Graham has never turned me on, to use a slang expression" (82), he fairly sums up and frankly admires Graham's biblical convictions regarding our universal need of salvation from sin, God's provision of salvation through "the blood sacrifice of Christ's atonement" (68), the reality of coming final judgment, and the imperative of faith in Christ, which initiates a new way of life as a follower Jesus. Old also appreciates the populist flavor of Graham's "Bible belt oratory," which communicates across both generational and educational boundaries in both urban and exurban contexts.

*Ordained Servant* readers will be especially interested in chapter three, "A 'New Breed' of Presbyterians," where we meet names familiar to most of us: Sinclair Ferguson (then pastor of First Presbyterian Church [ARP] in Columbia, South Carolina); Timothy Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA) in New York City; and, perhaps less known in the OPC, Scotty Smith of Christ Community Church (PCA) in Franklin, near Nashville, Tennessee. In a footnote, Dr. Old explains that "to preserve at least a certain amount of objectivity" he will not discuss his own family's pastors at Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia, James Montgomery Boice and his successor Philip Ryken (87). Along with these pastors in confessional Presbyterian denominations, Old groups pastors such as Earl Palmer and John Huffman in the more evangelical wing of the Presbyterian Church USA. The affinity that Dr. Old discerns among these preachers, despite the

theological distance between their denominations, is that they exemplify a robust confidence in the Bible as God's Word and a bold readiness to "push back" against the anti-supernaturalism of the existentialist mainline. These "new breed" Presbyterians are conversant with the issues raised by modern biblical criticism but not cowed by them; and their pulpit ministries exemplify a rebirth of consistent expository preaching in extended *lectio continua* series—a rich legacy from the patristic and Reformation eras that fosters Christians' and churches' spiritual vitality and evangelistic witness. Noting that many of these preachers, such as Keller, expound God's Word at length each Sunday, "typically forty or forty-five minutes" (149), Old concludes with evident pleasure, "Strong expository preaching as well as strong doctrinal preaching are beginning to fill the pews that the fifteen-minute homilies of a generation ago succeeded in emptying" (172).

In a footnote at the start of this chapter (87), Dr. Old notes that he has been informed of a resurgence of expository preaching among Baptists, "especially Reformed Baptists." I am more than a little surprised, therefore, by the omission of such preachers as John Piper, who pastored Bethlehem Baptist Church from 1980 to 2013 and authored many books extolling the supremacy of God; and Mark Dever of Capitol Hill Baptist Church. Access to an abundance of resources about our contemporaries in the pulpit demanded hard choices, no doubt, about whom to include and to exclude. But I would have thought that the influence of Piper, at least, to draw young evangelicals toward an appreciation of God's sovereign grace would have warranted at least honorable mention.

Chapters four and five lift our sights beyond the borders of the United States, introducing us to "Protestant preaching in Black Africa" and then to the role of preaching in disseminating liberation theology among the Roman Catholics of Latin America. Dr. Old profiles Presbyterian preachers in Kenya and Anglicans in Uganda and Nigeria, primarily offering biographical sketches but occasionally analyzing specific sermons. In some sub-Saharan African voices, he hears a Christianized Marxist political agenda; in others, he hears the gospel of God's grace in Christ; in still others, he hears a bracing call to moral integrity and to the resistance of syncretism with indigenous African religions. In Zambia, we meet Conrad Mbewe, "the African Spurgeon," who still today proclaims God's sovereign grace in Christ to the congregation of Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka. Calling attention to the theological substance of this pastor in southeastern Africa, Dr. Old devotes several pages to Mbewe's sermon series on justification, the foundational doctrines of the faith, and Romans.

The chapter on liberation theology in Latin America shows empathy for the economic disparities and political injustices that have made Marxist activism attractive to such Roman prelates as Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo of Mexico, Archbishop Hélder Câmara of Brazil, Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, and Cardinal Eduardo Pironio of Argentina. Yet, despite the grave societal problems that liberation-theology preachers seek to address, when their preaching replaces exposition of God's Word with naked polemical assaults against "North American imperialism, enemy of Central America," the title of a sermon by Arceo (246), Dr. Old concludes, "I find the good bishop seriously lacking" (255). In Dr. Old's estimation, Archbishop Romero stood out as a conscientious interpreter of Scripture who rejected Marxism's reductionistic diagnosis of Latin America's ills in merely materialistic terms as well as its merely political-military

prescription for those maladies, calling hearers to spiritual (as well as social) liberty through Christ.

Chapter six opens with the observation that one effect of the Second Vatican Council's reform of Roman Catholic worship was a reemphasis on the preaching of the Word, which had been largely marginalized by the mass. Although appreciating Vatican II's desire to bring the proclamation of the Word back to its rightful place in worship, Dr. Old finds the quality of biblical interpretation in the sermons he samples uneven. He surveys preachers and theologians serving Roman Catholic congregations and institutions in Washington, DC; Trenton, New Jersey; Berkeley, California; Detroit, Michigan; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Albuquerque, New Mexico. He is surprised to encounter a sermon in which Jesus's transfiguration is made the grounds for a summons to oppose the death penalty (331); a Lenten sermon in which a summons to rigorous Sabbath observance "manage(s) to crowd out John 3:16 and Ephesians 2:8," the Gospel and Epistle readings assigned for that Sunday (337); and an Easter sermon in which, "instead of proclaiming that Christ is risen, the preacher begins by remarking that we don't have to believe this" (342). Much of the blame, though not all, Dr. Old lays at the feet of the practice of lectionary preaching, which works against reading and preaching biblical texts in their contexts and leaves preachers free to pick and choose among Old Testament, Gospel, and Epistle readings for a particular Sunday.

The chapter on "black preaching" in the African-American church demonstrates the soundness of Dr. Old's conclusion that "it is a magnificent art form" (355), distinguished by oratorical skill in delivery, a sense of biblical typology in its content, and a love for Jesus in its piety. Analysis is given to the preaching of Martin Luther King Jr., Evangelist Tom Skinner, and T. D. Jakes, as well as other pastors with whose names I was not previously acquainted. The sensitivity to redemptive typology that Dr. Old found in this preaching especially intrigues me. His summary of a sermon by African Methodist Episcopal Minister William Watley in Newark, New Jersey, on David and Goliath almost led me to dismiss it as the predictable "be like David" moralistic exhortation, but suddenly Pastor Watley stressed that none of Israel's great leaders down through history—neither Abraham nor Moses nor Joshua nor Gideon nor any other commander—could slay the giants that threaten us. "So," Pastor Watley concluded, "God, in the wisdom of divine providence, sent the supreme giant slayer, whose name was Jesus." I look forward to reading the sermon in full to see how the preacher brought his congregation from David to Jesus, but I resonate with his Christ-centered homiletical instinct!

The chapter on "the Charismatics" introduces the ministries of preachers well-known (Aimee Semple McPherson, Oral Roberts, Jack Hayford) and lesser known (Tommy Barnett, Frederick Price) outside charismatic circles. The inclusion of Sister Aimee, who died in 1944, technically trespasses the chronological boundary of "our own time," but it sets the backdrop for successors who followed her lead by skillfully exploiting communications media to disseminate their message. In this chapter, Dr. Old's inclination toward irenic appreciation was working overtime to give the benefit of the doubt to these effective communicators, despite weaknesses for which he had critiqued others more sharply. He concludes, for example, that McPherson "preached a simple gospel of the love of Christ to a very specific people at a particular time" (404), even though the cross of Christ and atonement for sins are strangely absent both from the

articulation of the “foursquare gospel” (401) and from Old’s summary of Sister’s entertaining preaching style. Price’s serious effort to exposit biblical texts using the exegetical resources accessible to him is praised (435), while Hayford is critiqued for being “too confident that what comes off the top of his head is the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit” (443). Hayford preaches from his own religious experience, and Dr. Old recognizes that this focus on the preacher’s subjectivity can be unedifying. Yet he concludes that, as Hayford does it, “there is something very right about this . . . a balance between preaching as Word of God and preaching as personal witness” (446). A most gracious conclusion, but not altogether persuasive.

The “new age in Britain” (chapter 10) is represented by William Still (Church of Scotland); Anglicans John Stott, Richard Lucas, and (charismatic Anglican) Nicky Gumble; and Irish Presbyterian Trevor Morrow. Still, pastor of Gilcomston South Church in Aberdeen, is introduced as “one of the most creative innovators of the late-twentieth-century pulpit” (449). Yet it turns out that his “creative innovation” is a return to “regular, systematic expository preaching” (451), a recovery of the Puritan plain style in which Scripture is shown to interpret Scripture (455–57). So it appears that “creativity” in our own time sometimes takes the shape of reviving the sound approaches to preaching that have borne fruit in past generations! Although three volumes of Still’s collected works have appeared, Dr. Old expresses the hope that the large cache of Still’s sermons in the Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, Mississippi) library will eventually be published. John Stott’s *Between Two Worlds* is judged to be “far and away the most important book on preaching in our day” (461); and Stott’s thirty-year pulpit ministry at All Souls Church, Langham Place, London, demonstrated the life-transforming power of his consistent exposition of Scripture, grounded in thorough exegesis. The discussion of Lucas’s fruitful ministry at St. Helen’s Bishopgate, in London’s financial district, is tantalizingly brief, especially for those who are familiar with Rev. Lucas’s friendship with Dr. Edmund Clowney and his initiative in founding The Proclamation Trust and the Cornhill Training Course for expository preachers.

The megachurch pastors whose preaching is surveyed include Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel, Lloyd Ogilvie of Hollywood Presbyterian Church, Southern Baptists Adrian Rogers (Memphis, Tennessee) and Charles Stanley (Atlanta, Georgia), Chuck Swindoll, and John MacArthur—but not, curiously, Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church in Illinois or Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Southern California). Despite vast differences in community contexts, demographic profiles, and ministry styles, Dr. Old finds a common thread in the pastors’ commitment to “a recovery of classical Christian preaching . . . systematic expository preaching” (494). Whether addressing unchurched young surfers and “Jesus freaks” (Old’s term), as Chuck Smith began to do in the 1960s, or Southern suburbanites, these preachers buck the trend toward shorter and shorter sermonettes, expecting and receiving from tens of thousands of worshipers rapt attention to expositions lasting forty-five minutes or more: “If you have something to say, people will listen” (495). Confidence in the Bible as God’s inerrant Word, unreserved commitment to Scripture’s bold supernaturalism and God-centeredness, and insightful diagnosis of their hearers’ true and deepest needs are the hallmark of the megachurch preachers surveyed here. A statement from Ogilvie’s preface to the Communicator’s Commentary series seems to capture Dr. Old’s perspective: “A growing renaissance in the church today is being led by clergy and laity who are biblically rooted, Christ-

centered, and Holy Spirit-empowered. They have dared to listen to people's most urgent questions and deepest needs and then to God as He speaks throughout the Bible. Biblical preaching is the secret of growing churches" (506, citing Ogilvie, *Hosea-Jonah*, xi.) We confessional Presbyterians will have theological disagreements with these preachers (as, admittedly, we do with each other). Yet, when their message is viewed, as Dr. Old does, in the wider context of the various ways that God's Word is being handled in our time, we can be grateful to God that such men, rather than protégés of William Sloan Coffin, are addressing congregations numbering in the tens of thousands.

Speaking of large congregations, the final chapter discusses preaching in "the young churches of East Asia," concluding with profiles of several mega-megachurches that Dr. Old was privileged to visit in 1993. En route to Korea, the chapter introduces us to Japanese, Sri Lankan, and Chinese heralds of the gospel. Our author acknowledges that his "rapid sketch" (a mere 102 pages!) may be "fumbling and premature," but his purpose is to make us aware of ways that Christian preaching is developing on that populous continent which has been dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, Islam and Maoist communism. Readers are introduced to Toyohiko Kagawa (1888–1960), Presbyterian evangelist and social reformer, whom Dr. Old credits with shaping the social conscience of Japan—a remarkable assessment in view of the minuscule minority of Japanese who profess faith in Christ. Two collections of Kagawa's sermons in English translation enabled our author to explore his preaching in some depth. The evangelistic sermons that Kagawa preached during the Movement for the Conversion of a Million Souls (1927–34)—bold endeavor!—focused on Christ's cross as God's provision of substitutionary atonement for sinners and on how the cross summons believers to respond in devotion toward God and compassion toward the powerless and sufferers.

Technically, Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) is located in South Asia, off the coast of India; but Dr. Old did well not to exclude its Methodist preacher, D. T. Niles, whose great-grandfather had been baptized by missionaries in 1821. Though unable to access sermons that Niles preached to Sri Lankans, our author devotes several pages to summarizing the missiological insights expressed by Niles in his 1957 Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale University, *The Preacher's Task and the Stone of Stumbling*. Over a half century after Niles brought these addresses, evangelical missions continue to wrestle for clarity on such issues of contextualization, syncretism, and compromise. The summary of Niles's remarks on why Christ, his incarnation, his death, and his resurrection must always remain a "stone of stumbling" to Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists, was so tantalizing that I immediately went online to order a used copy of the collection.

For his survey of Christian preachers in China, especially under the current communist regime, Dr. Old was largely dependent on secondary sources such as David Aikman's *Jesus in Beijing* and the autobiographical *The Heavenly Man* by Liu Zhenying, also known as Brother Yun. Some sermons and sermon materials from Wang Ming-dao (1900–1991) and Watchman Nee (1903–1973) are available in English translation, so our homiletical guide was able to summarize and assess the content and tone of these preachers' ministry and piety under persecution. No doubt Dr. Old would concur with my sense that a more complete narrative of the preaching of the Word in China in recent times remains to be researched and written.

The final section of the final chapter narrates, with the flavor of a travelogue, worship services attended, sermons heard (via immediate interpretation), and interviews conducted during an extended visit to Seoul in 1993. The visitor spent time in large Presbyterian and Methodist congregations, as well as Yoido Full Gospel Church (reportedly the largest congregation in the world, at over 700,000 members). He observed the strong emphasis on prayer in the Protestant churches of Korea, the Presbyterians' extended (year-long) and conscientious catechizing of new members, and the commitment to consistent expository preaching expressed by most of the pastors whom he heard and interview. (A notable exception was Sun-Do Kim of Kwanglim Methodist Church, who takes Harry Emerson Fosdick as his model, begins with his congregants' life problems as his homiletical starting point, and critiques the negativity and fundamentalism of other Korean preachers.)

When Dr. Old asked Pastor Sang-Bok Kim of Hallelujah Church what produces effective preaching, the pastor gave two necessary ingredients: "That the preacher must speak from an unshakable confidence in the authority of the Word of God, and . . . that he must be unswervingly faithful to the text." Our author concurs: "I think he put it about as well as I have ever heard it put" (666). Although a one-and-a-half-page conclusion follows this last sentence of chapter 12, the observation from Pastor Kim and its affirmation by Dr. Old aptly concludes this astonishingly vast—vast globally and temporally—survey of the reading and preaching of Scripture as God's very Word, his Word of grace in Christ, in the worship of God's people, under old covenant and new.

In these seven volumes Hughes Oliphant Old has given a priceless gift to the church and its preachers. His overview of the ministry of the Word in the midst of the church's worship is by no means exhaustive; but it is astonishing in its scope, mind-expanding in its perspective, and highly motivating especially for those to whom God issues the high and humbling calling of heralding his glory and his grace in Jesus Christ the Lord. *Soli Deo gloria!*

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# ServantReading

## Delighting in the Law of the Lord *by Jerram Barrs*

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by David A. Booth

*Delighting in the Law of the LORD: God's Alternative to Legalism and Moralism*, by Jerram Barrs. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013, 247 pages, \$25.00.

Sanctification is one of the most challenging doctrines for Christians to grasp in a biblically robust and balanced way. It is even more challenging to pursue sanctification without wandering from time-to-time into legalism, moralism, or both. So when an experienced pastor and professor at Covenant Theological Seminary pens a book on delighting in God's law this should be a cause for celebration.

*Delighting in the Law of the LORD* is organized into twenty-four chapters written in a conversational style that is easily accessible to those without formal theological training. The opening three chapters focus on our need for God's law, while the final five chapters interact with questions of practical application that arise from trying to live in light of God's law in a secular society. Christ's relationship to and use of the law constitute the main body of the book. Each chapter concludes with a set of "questions for personal reflection and group discussion." One of the drawbacks to crafting a book fit for group study is that the repetition, which serves as the mother of learning when chapters are read a week apart, becomes the grandmother of tedium when the book is read over one weekend. Those reading this book on their own would have been better served if it had been edited into a much shorter work.

However, the chief shortcoming of this book is neither its length nor repetitiveness but its own failure to demonstrate delight in God's law. Instead of closely reading the biblical text, comparing Scripture with Scripture, Barrs points the reader toward generalities along the lines of "be more generous" and "be kinder" and risks falling into the very moralism that he wants to help the reader avoid. For example, commenting on the gleaning laws, Barrs writes:

Harvesting by hand leaves a lot of grain behind, and so from a purely economic viewpoint the command not to go through the fields a second time was very costly. However, rather than thinking of their own economic advantage, the farmers were required to leave the excess for the poor, the fatherless, the widow, and the alien in the land. . . .

We should notice that there are no statements in these laws about whether the poor are the "deserving poor" (as some speak about such matters of charity). Whether a person was poor because of tragedy or because of sin and laziness is not an issue for consideration in these commandments. A lazy or otherwise sinful man has a needy wife and children quite apart from his own needs. (105)

There are portions of God's Word, such as the "Parable of the Good Samaritan," which teach that we ought to help any and every person under some circumstances without regard

to how they fell into such hardships. Yet it seems odd to suggest that the gleaning laws required giving aid to the lazy man without regard for his laziness, when such laws offered him the backbreaking work of harvesting by hand in a field that had already been picked over, rather than simply a handout of food. Shouldn't we notice that the gleaning laws maintain both the dignity and necessity of work and fit hand-in-glove with the Apostle Paul's admonition, "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat"? (2 Thess. 3:10). In a similar vein, readers of this book might imagine that the law of the LORD forbids providing or withholding diaconal assistance to widows based upon their good works, hospitality, and service to the saints, but this is the very thing that the LORD commands through the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5:9–10. Actually delighting in the law of the LORD means paying attention to its details and holding everything the Bible says on a subject together rather than using it simply to illustrate our own preferences.

This book also truncates the law of the LORD by talking almost exclusively in favor of those aspects of the law that a liberally educated Westerner would be happy to have his or her neighbor practice. For example, it condemns without qualification a woman for insisting on modest swimsuits at a church youth group pool party because unbelievers invited to such a party "would think we are crazy to have rules like that" (196). The book consistently encourages Christians to act in a manner that is attractive to unbelievers. Without any qualification Barrs writes:

Unhappily, sometimes we are taught not only that we are to separate ourselves from sinners, but also that we are openly to condemn their behavior and to challenge them with the requirements of God's law. (274)

Granted that there is a wrong type of separation from sinners (1 Cor. 5:10) and that Christians sometimes unwisely condemn sinful behaviors rather than ministering God's grace and truth in other ways, but Barrs fails to mention that it is God who calls his people to separate from sinners (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4) and that there are ample examples in Scripture of righteously condemning sinful behavior. It may prove salutary to remind ourselves that Jesus likened his disciples to salt and light rather than to sugar, and spice, and everything nice. Even the book's treatment of the application of the law to unbelievers is strikingly man-centered and therapeutic. Barrs writes: "In seeing the loveliness of what God intends for human life, people become aware of how deep the damage is that they have done to themselves by ignoring God's commandments in favor of what will give them pleasure" (277). The emphasis falls entirely on the harm sin causes the sinner rather than the offense it is before a holy God. This is a far cry from Paul's treatment of the law in Romans 7 which culminates in the cry: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24–25).

Those seeking to grow in their understanding and delight in the law of the LORD will make far more progress by meditating on the Sermon on the Mount and the Larger Catechism's exposition of the Ten Commandments than by reading this book. Not recommended.

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# Servant Poetry

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John Donne (1572-1631)

## Holy Sonnet XV

Wilt thou love God as he thee? then digest,  
My Soulee, this wholesome meditation,  
How God the Spirit, by Angels waited on  
In heaven, doth make his Temple in thy brest.  
The Father having begot a Son most blest,  
And still begetting, (for he ne'er begun)  
Hath deign'd to choose thee by adoption,  
Co-heir to his glory, and Sabbaths endless rest.  
And as a robb'd man, which by search doth find  
His stolen stuff sold, must lose or buy it again:  
The Son of glory came down, and was slain,  
Us whom he had made, and Satan stole, to unbind.  
'Twas much, that man was made like God before,  
But, that God should be made like man, much more.

# ServantHumor

## Do Presbyterians Lack Joy?

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by Eutyclus II

Does Jesus want us to be happy? Definitions are important, of course, but Christ did say that he came to make his followers' joy complete (John 15:11). So the answer should be the affirmative. Help also comes from the Westminster Shorter Catechism which begins by affirming that man's "chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever" (WSC 1). Even if Christians experienced a degree of suffering in this life, the catechism teaches in the world to come believers will experience a form of happiness that will last eternally.

The reason for asking what seems like such an obvious question is that Pope Francis recently gave an interview in which he enumerated ten ways to bring "greater joy" to life:

- 1) Live and let live;
- 2) Be giving of yourself to others;
- 3) Be kind, humble, and calm;
- 4) Have a healthy sense of leisure;
- 5) Make Sundays a day for family time, not work;
- 6) Find dignified work for young people;
- 7) Care for creation;
- 8) Let go of the negative;
- 9) Inspire through witness and engage in dialogue;
- 10) Promote peace.

Aside from a bit of redundancy—"live and let live" sounds a lot like "let go the negative" or even an informal way of saying "be kind, humble, and calm"—what is striking about the list and the larger interview is that the pope doesn't mention Jesus or any specific devotional practice. Roman Catholics might have expected to hear something about praying to Mary who can assist with joy, or about the peace that the Mass produces which in turn yields joy. Christians more broadly might have expected the head of the largest Christian communion in the world to mention Jesus as the only true source of joy or happiness. But Francis did not.

The pope may have had a good reason for not mentioning Jesus in connection with a life of happiness because our Lord himself did not necessarily come across as joyful, and in many of his interactions with followers and opponents, his remarks could readily have produced discomfort or even pain. In Matthew 10:34, when Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword,” he was certainly not proclaiming himself a freedom fighter in the modern political sense, but neither was he offering the sort of encouragement that many Christians seek. For Jesus goes on to utter those stupendous words, “I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Matt. 10:35). As many modern Roman Catholics and Protestants construe the family and its importance to a joyful life, Christ’s words are a significant challenge. Just a few chapters later, Jesus expressed a kind of disregard for natural family ties that supported his prior claim about the demands of discipleship. Upon hearing that his mother and brothers were waiting to see him while he was speaking, Jesus replied in a manner that would trouble many Christians today: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” (Matt. 12:48). That Jesus followed up with an affirmation of “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” showed that he was not without care for those close to him (Matt. 12:50). But this seeming disregard for maintaining harmonious—even happy—family relations is not what most contemporary Christians expect.

Jesus’s prickliness toward the Pharisees, the people who were after him and whom his own ministry clearly threatened, is understandable but not its apparent extension to his disciples. For instance, in Matthew 15, Jesus calls the Pharisees “hypocrites” and claims that Isaiah was prophesying about them when he wrote: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:8–9). When the disciples responded that Jesus had offended the Pharisees, he referred to the Pharisees as “blind guides” (Matt. 15:14). Peter still did not understand and asked Jesus to explain. Jesus replied with apparent impatience, “Are you still without understanding?” (Matt. 15:16). Jesus’s frustration not only with the Jewish authorities but also his followers continued in Matthew’s account of Peter’s confession of Christ as the Son of God. Just prior to this, when his followers discovered they had no food for a meal, Jesus replied, “O you of little faith,” certainly an understandable reaction after he had just fed the four thousand (Matt. 16:8). But it was likely not the response that we would encourage of young pastors when discouraged by stubborn members of a session. The text goes on to record Jesus’s reaction to Peter’s effort to comfort his Lord by saying that Christ would not have to endure being executed. Jesus’s response, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance,” is again understandable but arguably not the model for people who want to experience joyful relations with fellow believers (Matt. 16:23).

As much as these interactions raise serious problems for anyone who might tritely recommend that Christians should do what Jesus did, they also underscore an emotional range to Christ’s incarnate existence that challenges the way many believers conceive of happiness. In his remarkable essay, “On the Emotional Life of our Lord,” Benjamin Warfield tried to account for the range of Jesus’s reactions. The Princeton theologian devoted a section of his essay to Jesus’s love for his companions and acquaintances, a love which originated from compassion, or Christ’s commiseration with the grief and

anguish of the people to whom he ministered. Warfield also devoted careful attention to Christ's anger and again attributed it to the savior's indignation at the ravages of sin. But when Warfield commented on Christ's joy, he made sure to distinguish the happiness that could only come through Christ's sinless life and atoning death from modern substitutes for joyfulness. Warfield wrote:

The perversion is equally great, however, when there is attributed to our Lord, as it is now very much the fashion to do, "before the black shadow of the cross fell athwart his pathway," the exuberant joy of a great hope never to be fulfilled: the hope of winning his people to his side and of inaugurating the Kingdom of God upon this sinful earth by the mere force of its proclamation. Jesus was never the victim of any such illusion: he came into the world on a mission of ministering mercy to the lost, giving his life as a ransom for many (Lk. xix. 10; Mk. x. 4; Mt. xx. 28); and from the beginning he set his feet steadfastly in the path of suffering (Mt. iv. 3 f.; Lk. iv. 3 f.) which he knew led straight onward to death ( Jn. ii. 19, iii. 14; Mt. xii. 40; Lk. xii. 49-50; Mt. ix. 15; Mk. ii. 1-9; Lk. v. 34, etc.). Joy he had: but it was not the shallow joy of mere pagan delight in living, nor the delusive joy of a hope destined to failure; but the deep exultation of a conqueror setting captives free. This joy underlay all his sufferings and shed its light along the whole thorn-beset path which was trodden by his torn feet. . . . If our Lord was "the Man of Sorrows," he was more profoundly still "the Man of Joy."<sup>1</sup>

Calvinists have a reputation for being dour. That image may owe to the ongoing sinfulness of Reformed Protestants. But the problem could be an insufficient standard by which to judge happiness. If Christ's example is any indication, the joy that Christians experience is different from having a nice day.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, "On the Emotional Life of Our Lord," in *Members of the Theological Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, Biblical and Theological Studies* (New York: Scribner's, 1912), 69–70.