

Appendix I- Worship that is Biblical, Reformed, and GA Relevant

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I am thankful for the recent interaction regarding worship at the 31st General Assembly. I think it is helpful for us not only to experience worship together as teaching and ruling elders at General Assembly but also to reflect and dialogue on that experience as part of an ongoing fruitful discussion of worship in the PCA. The initial article by Terry Johnson as well as those by David Marney and Bill Douglas have brought out many of the issues that are discussed throughout the PCA today. I would like to enter the discussion by particularly responding to Terry Johnson's initial article.

I appreciate some of the fine work Terry Johnson has done in worship. His articles in the *Westminster Theological Journal* a few years back are very insightful and his *Leading in Worship* resource book of Reformed liturgies is extremely helpful. I require my students in the Master of Divinity class on Christian Worship at Covenant Theological Seminary to purchase and make use of *Leading in Worsahip*. However, I believe his article on "Worship at the 31st General Assembly" is both disappointing and misses the mark on some key matters.

With all of the wonderful sermons, confessions, scripture readings, and prayers as well as the overwhelmingly rich, biblical, and historic content of the words sung in the music, I find it surprising that the discussion of worship at General Assembly was reduced to the appropriateness of certain styles of musical expression and the wisdom of those leading the music vocally and instrumentally not being ordained teaching elders.

Because musical expression was at the heart of the article, I did a detailed study of all of the songs sung both congregationally and as special music at General Assembly and by my calculations the results show a very different summary than Terry Johnson gave in his article. I discovered that of the 26 hymns that we sang, 13 (i.e., 50 percent) had words that are in the Trinity Hymnal; 20 (i.e., 77 percent) had words written before 1875; and, 16 (i.e., 62 percent) had tunes that were written after 1935. [A detailed listing of all the songs, dates, and composers follows this article as an appendix for those who want to look at it in detail.]

I personally would like to have seen a better overall balance of tunes with a greater number written in the past. Additionally, I would like to have seen some use of African-American, Korean, and Hispanic worship expressions by some of our brothers in the General Assembly. However, I don't think the numbers add up to "4 - 1/2 of our 5 General Assembly worship services were contemporary" unless one only defines contemporary worship as recently written musical tunes and/or the use of instruments other than organ and piano.

In this article I would like to address three important issues - biblical worship, Reformed worship, and worship relevant to the General Assembly context.

What is biblical worship? Biblical worship is worship in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24) which means according to the Word of God and with a heart full of love for God. Biblical worship is offered through the Lord Jesus Christ as the only mediator who stands in the congregation and declares God's name to His people and sings God's praises with His people (Hebrews 2:11-12 and Psalm 22:22-31) - praises that includes the diverse songs of all nations, all generations, and all socio-economic classes. Biblical worship is Christ-centered and Gospel-centered as people from every tribe and tongue and language and nation sing praise to the Lamb who was slain (Revelation 5:9-13).

Biblical worship is Word-centered in all of the elements of prayer, reading of Scripture, preaching, confessions of faith, offerings, singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and the sacraments. Biblical worship makes use of the gifts of God's people (I Corinthians 14:26) under the wise oversight and leadership of qualified and trained elders (Hebrews 13:17; I Timothy 3:1-7). These are overarching biblical principles by which to evaluate true worship.

Additionally, the instruments of biblical song in the glorious days of David with 4000 Levites appointed as full time musicians to assist in worship included wind instruments, stringed instruments, and percussive instruments (I Chronicles 13:8; 15:8; 23:3-5). New Covenant worship both fulfills those days and anticipates the even greater glories of eternal heavenly worship.

What is Reformed Worship? Reformed worship includes the principles just mentioned under biblical worship along with some additional distinctions that reflect our biblical and theological understanding and emphasis. Reformed worship is consistent with the "Regulative Principle of Worship" which defines worship as "...instituted by (God) Himself, and so limited by His revealed will, that He may not be worshipped...(in) any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture." (Westminster Confession of Faith 21-1). This means that Reformed worship includes a deep reverence before our all-holy God that takes our sin seriously; overwhelming joy in the presence of our Father who loves, forgives, and adopts us by grace into His family and invites us to be seated as honored guests at His table; expository Christ-centered preaching that fills the mind with truth and transforms hearts and lives to the glory of God by the power of the Holy Spirit; Word-saturated worship filling our prayers, songs, creeds, offerings, and sacraments; re-presentation of the Gospel for justification and sanctification in multiple ways throughout the corporate worship; musical expressions that carry biblically sound content in songs that are expression of heartfelt worship consistent with the words being sung and the context of the worshipping congregation; worship as dialogue between God and His people; and worship that is amazed over and over again at the grace of God for undeserving sinners appropriated and applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit beginning in the corporate worship service experience itself.

The ways in which these distinctively Reformed principles are expressed vary from congregation to congregation, nation to nation, and generation to generation. However, that which unites us in biblical and Reformed worship is not a uniform style or expression but our unity in these Gospel-centered principles present in our worship. The beauty and genius of Reformed worship is that its distinctive core values are able to be expressed with flexibility in time and place. This contrasts with the high church desire to get and keep the correct fixed form as well as the free church desire to remove all form.

Reformed worship is able to maintain fixed elements with flexible application in ways that maintain the heart of biblical and Reformed worship distinctives. Our unity is not in a common unified liturgy. Our unity is in Christ and our desire to express our worship of Him from new hearts in accord with His Word through Christ our mediator. This is done with all of the beauty and wonder of the good news of the Gospel reflected in all of the biblically commanded elements of New Covenant worship.

John Calvin did not simply adopt the "common Reformed liturgical culture" of Switzerland in the 1500's. That common Reformed liturgy excluded the element of song in worship. Calvin insisted on adding song in worship and did so with great innovation. He had the Psalms translated into French and placed in western meter so they could be sung. He also had gifted musicians write "new songs" to capture and express the emotion of the psalm, some of which were sung during the administration of the Lord's Supper. He also had young children teach the new songs to the worshipping congregation!

What is worship relevant to the General Assembly context? Worship that is relevant to the GA context is faithful to biblical and Reformed worship in ways that reflects the faithful worship of local churches in the PCA in the annual gathering of the teaching and ruling elders of the PCA. A local PCA presbytery leads the denominational leaders in times of worship before our glorious God. This year's committee from Central Carolina Presbytery planned the five worship services in connection with the theme of "The Supremacy of Christ." As indicated on the back of the worship booklet the presbytery invited four PCA teaching elders from outside of Central Carolina Presbytery to preach (Dr. Skip Ryan as outgoing moderator, Dr. Bryan Chapell, Dr. Richard Pratt, and Dr. Tim Keller) and one pastor from within their presbytery (Bruce Marcey). The presbytery assigned the responsibility of planning four of the worship services to four of their area churches under the leadership of teaching elders from those churches (Christ Covenant Church, Uptown Church, Hope Community Mission, and Metrolina Ministries). One of the services was under the leadership of TE Kevin Twit with RUF at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. Those in charge of the worship services made use of the musical personnel from their respective ministry settings.

The use of women and unordained men in worship leadership was limited to musical leadership in facilitating the singing vocally and instrumentally. To suggest (as Terry Johnson does) that it is unwise to use women and unordained men in such musical capacity because it might lead to confusion regarding elder leadership seems to disregard the leading role that elders took in the organization, planning, and oversight of the worship. The Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 14:26 most certainly assumes that various people are part of the "everyone" who comes to worship exercising their gifts under the authoritative oversight of the elders. The General Assembly planners operated consistently with this biblical instruction.

General Assembly worship in the PCA has historically been overwhelmingly weighted in the direction of both song words and music that are written before 1875 (as 20 of the 26 songs this year were in the source of the words).

In 1999 I was co-chairman of the Great Lakes Presbytery worship committee for General Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky. I was eager to plan worship services that were faithful to biblical and Reformed worship and that reflected the presbytery churches and the denomination as a whole. Therefore we planned the Tuesday night service with a fifteen piece orchestra from our Muncie, Indiana, congregation playing classical and traditional music to accompany congregational songs. We also planned the Thursday night service with a ten piece praise band from our Dayton, Ohio, congregation to accompany both traditional and contemporary congregational songs. Many of the teaching and ruling elders present expressed appreciation to us for planning GA services that reflected more accurately the totality of the present worship practice in the PCA.

The committee of Great Lakes Presbytery was not trying to "shock" or "convert" local churches from worshipping in valid ways that are biblical, Reformed, and relevant to the cultural heart language of any particular local church. We were simply trying to honor God while reflecting and expanding the denomination's understanding of valid worship expressions. We were seeking to make room for fresh expressions of our ancient biblical and Reformed faith. I suspect that this year's committee from Central Carolina was seeking to do something similar. While we may argue that we included too many contemporary musical expressions, I for one am very thankful for the careful planning of worship services that honored and glorified our Lord Jesus Christ consistent with the heart of biblical and Reformed worship.

I especially appreciated the committee's invitation to TE Kevin Twit to plan and lead the Thursday night service. The Thursday service was a full-length example of what is increasingly happening in many of our churches where rich biblical expressions of the past are being expressed in fresh biblical ways in the present. Of the six congregational songs Kevin chose for the service, all of the words were written before 1875 and four of the six musical expressions were written originally before 1890 (though two were adapted somewhat from their original compositions).

Kevin also chose instruments that were more agreeable to the larger context of the majority of the PCA teaching and ruling elders present such as the accordion, piano, conga drums, acoustic guitar, mandolin, and double bass (by the way, double bass was used by the heirs of the Puritans in worship in this country before organs were even introduced). This use of instruments on Thursday night is somewhat different than the full instrumentation used for Indelible Grace concerts and recordings that include full drum sets, electric lead guitars and electric bass guitars, etc. Several pastors around me who come from places that do traditional music in large PCA churches commented to me how they were strongly impacted by the whole service Thursday night and its deeply moving Gospel focus as well as the way the music served that purpose in a very effective and worshipful way.

My hope for the PCA is that as the Gospel advances to the nations and passes from one generation to the next we will be careful not to put extra-biblical barriers of our own personal preferences and cultural conventions on our brothers and sisters from around the world and in the coming generations. My prayer for the PCA is that we will be eager to major on the Gospel of saving and transforming grace expressed in biblical and Reformed worship that transcends issues of musical style. Gospel-driven biblical and Reformed worship transcends style yet is able to be expressed in multiple valid styles.

I trust that our unity will be in our shared identity in Christ and our new hearts set free to worship God in spirit and in truth through our mediator Jesus Christ. I urge us to make room for those of every tribe and tongue and nation and people (and generation) to express true worship using commanded biblical elements expressed in a way that rings true to the cultural context of the worshipers.

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Appendix

Tuesday evening the congregation sang "Give Praise to God" with words by James Boice in 1999 and music by Paul Jones in 1999; "The Lord's Prayer" with words from Matthew 6:9-13 and music by Malotte in 1935; "Before the Throne of God Above" with words by Charitie Bancroft in 1863 and music by Vicki Cook in 1997; and "Jesus Lives and So Shall I" (Trinity Hymnal #706) with words written by Christian Gellert in 1757 and music by Johann Cruger in 1653. The special music Tuesday evening was "O For A Thousand Tongues" (Trinity Hymnal #164) with words by Charles Wesley in 1739 and music by Carl Glaser (1784-1829); "The Church" by Derek Webb with words and music written in 2003; "I Boast No More" with words by Isaac Watts in 1719 and music by Sandra McCracken in 2001; and "Be Thou My Vision" (Trinity Hymnal #642) an 8th century Irish poem with a traditional Irish melody.

Wednesday morning the congregation sang "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" (Trinity Hymnal #457) with words by Robert Robinson in 1758 and music by Asahel Nettleton in 1825; "You Are My King" with words and music by Billy James Foote in 1999; and "More Love to Thee, O Christ" (Trinity Hymnal #649) with words by Elizabeth Prentiss in 1869 and music by Carolyn Leutwiler in 2003.

Special music was “What Wondrous Love is This” (Trinity Hymnal #261) an American folk hymn from 1835.

Thursday morning the congregation sang “Lion of Judah” with words and music by Robin Mark in 1999; “Crown Him with Many Crowns” (Trinity Hymnal #457) with words by Matthew Bridges in 1851 and music newly composed; “Better is One Day” from Psalm 84 with music by Matt Redman in 1995; “Before the Throne of God Above” (see Tuesday evening); and “O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go” (Trinity Hymnal #708) with words by George Matheson in 1882 and music by Chris Miner in 1997.

Thursday evening the congregation sang “How Sweet and Awful is the Place” (Trinity Hymnal #469) with words by Isaac Watts in 1707 and music based on an Old Irish melody; “Arise, My Soul, Arise” (Trinity Hymnal #305) with words by Charles Wesley in 1742 and music by Kevin Twit in 1996; “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus!” (Trinity Hymnal #535) with words by Samuel Trevor Francis (1834-1925) and music by Thomas John Williams in 1890; “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (Trinity Hymnal #252) with words by Isaac Watts in 1707 and music based on a Gregorian Chant; “Thou Lovely Source of True Delight” with words by Anne Steele in 1760 and music by Kevin Twit in 1998; and “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken” (Trinity Hymnal #707) with words by Henry Lyte in 1824 and music by Mozart adapted by Bill Moore in 2001. The special music Thursday evening was “Laden with Guilt” with words by Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and music by Sandra McCracken in 2001.

Friday morning the congregation sang “Come, Now is the Time to Worship” with words and music written by Brian Doerksen in 1998; and “Breathe” with words and music written by Marie Barnett in 1995.