Return to Rome? The Need for a Modern Worship Reformation

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The immediate causes for Reformation in various regions, as well as what caused divisions among various Reformation figures, are diverse. However, much of what lay at the core of what both unified Reformers in their reaction against the Roman Catholic Church and what ended up dividing them in the end, involved theology and practice of worship.

Yet what is remarkable is that some of the very same problems with worship that the Reformers criticized with medieval worship have appeared again in contemporary worship. No, the contemporary church has not denied the five *solas* or submitted once again to Rome; rather, the practices of contemporary worship suffer from some of the same fundamental problems that Rome's worship did at the start of the sixteenth century.

Core Problems with Medieval Worship

Although much of the development of worship during the Middle Ages was originally rooted in biblical prescription, example, and theology, heresy did grow, and several aspects of how many Christians worshiped by the end of the fifteenth century made significant reformation necessary. Although the specific dogmas we associate with Roman Catholicism today were not officially canonized until the Counsel of Trent, which met from 1554–1563, many of the Roman Church's heresy was already developed by the early 1500s. For example, the doctrine of purgatory came in 593, prayer to Mary, saints, and angels in 600, kissing the pope's foot in 709, the canonization of dead saints in 995, the celibacy of the priesthood in 1079, the rosary in 1090, transubstantiation and confessing sins to a priest in 1215, and the seven sacraments in 1439.

Problems specifically with worship can be summarized with the following categories:

Sacramentalism

One of the first significant errors in late medieval worship was sacramentalism, attributing the efficacy of an act of worship—especially the eucharistic elements—to the outward sign rather than to the inner working of the Holy Spirit. Christians during this period came to believe that just by performing the acts of worship, they received grace from God, whether or not they were spiritually engaged in the act. Along with this belief came the idea of *ex opera operato* ("from the work worked"), the belief that the acts of worship work automatically and independently of the faith of the recipient.

Excurses: Sacrament

Before I summarize the Reformers' criticisms of sacramentalism, I need to take a brief discursis to discuss the original meaning behind the word "sacrament," because as we shall see, while the early Reformers objective to sacramental*ism*, they continued to use the term "sacrament."

Like ancient Israel, early Christians considered worship on the Lord's Day to be sacred—set apart from the regular, mundane activities of life, and therefore what took place in corporate

worship was also sacred. This day was "the Lord's" in a way different from all other days, and the eucharist was a table belonging to the Lord—"the Lord's Table"—in a manner distinct from other tables. The word that emerged to describe the sacred nature of these things was "sacrament." This term comes from the Latin word *sacramentum*, which referred to an oath of allegiance, which itself came from the term *sacrare*, which mean "to consecrate." This concept fittingly described both baptism and the Lord's Supper, sacred oaths taken in entrance to and continual communion with the body of Christ. Likely the first to use the term "sacrament" for both baptism and the Lord's Supper was Tertullian.[1] He suggested that in the eucharist, the bread represents (Latin, *repraesentare*) and is the "figuring" (Latin, *figurare*) Christ's body. Later in his Latin translation of the Greek NT, Jerome would use the word *sacramentum* to translate the Greek word *mysterion* ("mystery"),[2] early Christians considering baptism and the Lord's Supper to be mysteries, and Augustine (354–430) would later define a sacrament as "the visible form of an invisible grace."[3]

Necessity of faith

Martin Luther stressed the need for personal faith in those who wished to participate in worship. The mass is not, Luther insisted, "a work which may be communicated to others, but the object of faith, . . . for the strengthening and nourishing of each one's own faith."[4] Martin Bucer's most significant work on the subject, *Grund und Ursach* ("Ground and Reason"),[5] called the Roman view of the Table "superstition."[6] He insisted that worship that is "proper and pleasing to God"[7] must always be based upon "the sole, clear Word of God."[8]

These Reformers insisted that the sacraments were limited only to the two Christ himself commanded and were considered visible signs of spiritual realities. Though the sacraments are means of grace given from God, then are not effectual in and of themselves; rather the benefits of the means of grace to sanctify a person necessitate the sincere faith of the worshiper and were brought about ultimately by the inner work of the Holy Spirit.

Sacerdotalism

Medieval worship also developed the error of sacerdotalism, the belief in the necessity of a human priest to approach God on the behalf of others. As a result of the drastic increase of church attendance in the fourth century, a strict distinction between clergy and laity had

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[1] Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, vol. 3, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 319–474.

[2] Theodore B. Foster, "'Mysterium' and 'Sacramentum' in the Vulgate and Old Latin Versions," *The American Journal of Theology* 19, no. 3 (July 1915): See.

[3] Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch*, III, 84 (c. 410), in James F. White, *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 120.

[4] Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 36:51.

[5] Martin Bucer, *Ground and Reason*, 1524, in Ottomar Frederick Cypris, *Martin Bucer's Ground and Reason: English Translation and Commentary* (Yulee, Florida: Good Samaritan Books, 2017).

[6] Ibid., 110.

[7] Ibid., 103.

[8] Ibid., 90.

developed wherein the clergy did not trust the illiterate, uneducated masses to worship God appropriately on their own. Thus, the clergy offered "perfected" worship on behalf of the people. The pronouncement by the Council of Laodicea in 363 illustrates this: "No others shall sing in the church, save only the canonical singers, who go up into the ambo and sing from a book."[9] While this was a local council, it illustrates what became common among most churches in the Middle Ages.

The quality of worship became measured by the excellence of the music and the aesthetic beauty of the liturgy, and while this facilitated the production of some quite beautiful sacred music during the period, it resulted in "worship" becoming mostly what the priests did in the chancel, which eventually was often distinctly separated from the nave by high rails or even a screen. This clergy/laity separation was only exacerbated by the continued use of Latin as the liturgical language despite the fact that increasing numbers of people did not understand the language.

By the end of the fourteenth century, members of the congregation rarely participated in the Lord's Supper, and even when they did, the cup was withheld from them lest some of Christ's blood sprinkle on the unclean. Roman worship had moved from the "work of the people" (*leitourgia*) to the work of the clergy. As even Roman Catholic liturgical scholar Joseph Jungmann notes, "the people were devout and came to worship; but even when they were present at worship, it was still clerical worship. . . . The people were not much more than spectators. This resulted largely from the strangeness of the language which was, and remained, Latin. . . . The people have become dumb."[10] The people became mere spectators of the worship performed by priests on their behalf.

Congregational Participation

Luther criticized this very reality in the Preface to his *German Mass*: "The majority just stands there and gapes, hoping to see something new." The Reformers countered this mentality by insisting that each member of the congregation ought to be an active participant in worship, including praying, singing, receiving the sacraments, and hearing the Word. Martin Luther stated in the Preface to his Latin Mass:

> I also wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing. . . . For who doubts that originally all the people sang these which now only the choir sings or responds to while the bishop is consecrating?[11]

Preoccupation with Sensory Experience

Medieval Christians likewise became enamored with sensory experience in worship. Church architecture deliberately kept the nave dark and the elevated chancel bright and included

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[9] Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 14, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 132.

[10] Joseph Jungmann, "The State of Liturgical Life on the Eve of the Reformation," in *Pastoral Liturgy* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1962), 67–68.

[11] Luther, *Formula Missae*, Pelikan, Oswald, and Lehmann, *Luther's Works*, 53:36-37.

ornate, elaborate decorations. Liturgy included rich vestments, processions, and other elaborate ceremonies that included bells and incense in order to create a mystical experience.

The Reformers rejected visual images as essential to worship.

Even Luther considered them "adiaphora"—"things indifferent." He said of worship in *The Babylonians Captivity of the Church*, "We must be particularly careful to put aside whatever has been added to its original simple institution by the zeal and devotion of men: such things as vestments, ornaments, chants, prayer, organs, candles, and the whole pageantry of outward things."[12] In *On the Councils and the Church* (1539):, Luther said, "Besides these external signs and holy possessions the church has other externals that do not sanctify it either in body or soul, nor were they instituted or commanded by God; . . . These things have no more than their natural effects."

The Reformed wing argued that if they were adiaphora, they should be eliminated. For example, Ulrich Zwingli was committed to church practice being regulated by Scripture alone, leading him to advocate much more radical reforms than even Luther did. He insisted that worship practices must have explicit biblical warrant, causing him to denounce images, other ceremonial adornments, and even music from public worship since he could find no warrant for them in the New Testament.[13] His new vernacular liturgy, *Act or Custom of the Lord's Supper* (1525), was far simpler than Luther's, consisting of Scripture reading, preaching, and prayer. Zwingli adamantly opposed the use of images in worship, a conviction that came to be known as *iconoclasm*. He was convinced that worship was at its core spiritual, and thus "it is clear and indisputable that no external element or action can purify the soul."[14]

Martin Bucer rejected what he considered ceremonies of human origin, including vestments, insisting that church leaders had no right to invent new forms or to "enrich" existing forms with such innovations which either hid or replaced the basically biblical signs in worship. He noted,

> The Lord instituted nothing physical in his supper except the eating and drinking alone, and that for the sake of the spiritual, namely as in memory of him. . . . [Yet] we have observed that many cared neither to consider seriously the physical reception nor the spiritual memorial, but instead, just as before, were satisfied with seeing and material adoration.[15]

Similar to Zwingli and Bucer, Calvin's central goal was to return to the simple worship practices of the early church, strictly following biblical prescription. He argued that "a part of the reverence that is paid to [God] consists simply in worshiping him as he commands, mingling no inventions of our own."[16] He interpreted the Second Commandment as God defining "lawful

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[12] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, Ibid., 36:36.

[13] Charles Garside, *Zwingli and the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 38, 44.

[14] Ulrich Zwingli, *Of Baptism*, 1525, in G. W. Bromiley, ed., *Zwingli and Bullinger*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 156.

[15] Cypris, *Martin Bucer's Ground and Reason*, 117–18.

[16] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 4.10.23.

worship, that is, a spiritual worship established by himself"[17] and insisted upon "the rejection of any mode of worship that is not sanctioned by the command of God."[18] Calvin also agreed with Zwingli and Bucer concerning iconoclasm.[19] He argued, "While the sacrament ought to have been a means of raising pious minds to heaven, the sacred symbols of the Supper were abused to an entirely different purpose, and men, contented with gazing upon them and worshiping them, never once thought of Christ."[20] He said elsewhere,

> Our Lord Christ, says Augustine, has bound the fellowship of the new people together with sacraments, very few in number, very excellent in meaning, very easy to observe. How far from this simplicity is the multitude and variety of rites, with which we see the church entangled today, cannot be fully told.

Individualization of Piety

All of this resulted in an individualization of piety. The only real benefit of corporate worship was the sacramental experience achieved only by a sacerdotal system and the splendor of the corporate setting. The Service of the Word diminished, and the Service of the Table became a mystical sacrament by which worshipers were infused with grace as they observed the clergy offering a sacrifice on their behalf. Herman Wegman diagnoses the problem: "The decline in medieval worship must first of all be laid to clericalization and the related individualizing of the piety of the faithful, a piety that grew apart from the liturgy. . . . This liturgy was marked by an excess of feasts, by popular customs, and by details and superstitious practices that overlaid the heart of the faith."[21] The Reformers insisted that piety should be corporate.

Contemporary Worship

Sacramentalism

Much of contemporary worship considers music to be an effectual means through which to experience God's "manifest presence." Dan Wilt argued, "Contemporary worship is creating a place where God is expected to "show up," to engage with His people, and to manifest His presence in beautiful ways."[22] Breaking from a traditional worship theology, Praise and Worship instead aims to bring the worshiper through a series of emotional stages from rousing "praise" to intimate "worship. Judson Cornwall explains the process:

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[17] Ibid., 2.8.17.

[18] John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, trans. H. Beveridge (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1844), 23.

[19] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.12.

[20] *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*.

[21] Herman A. Wegman, *Christian Worship in East and West: A Study Guide to Liturgical History* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1985), 217.

[22] J. Matthew Pinson, ed., *Perspectives on Christian Worship: Five Views* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 187.

> Praise begins by applauding God's power, but it often brings us close enough to God that worship can respond to God's presence. While the energy of praise is toward what God does, the energy of worship is toward who God is. The first is concerning with God's performance, while the second is occupied with God's personage. The thrust of worship, therefore, is higher than the thrust of praise.[23]

This change in theology of worship led to a new understanding of worship music perhaps best described by Ruth Ann Ashton's 1993 *God's Presence through Music,*[24] raising the matter of musical style to a level of significance that Lim and Ruth describe as "musical sacramentality," where music is now considered a primary means through which "God's presence could be encountered in worship."[25] They go on to explain,

> Pentecostalism also has brought a certain expectation of experience to the forms of contemporary worship. . . . Simply put, Pentecostalism contributed contemporary worship's sacramentality, that is, both the expectation that God's presence could be encountered in worship and the normal means by which this encounter would happen . . . reshaping an understanding of God's people praising and worshiping, especially as the people sang. What emerged was a sacramentality of music or corporate song expressed in biblical texts such as Psalm 22:3, where God is said to inhabit, dwell, or be enthroned upon the praises of God's people. This biblical rooting of the liturgical expectation for encountering God, active and present through the Holy Spirit, molded how the extended worship sets were to be viewed. In the early days of contemporary worship, a set was not just about having opportunity to sing songs; it was a journey of being ushered into the presence of God.[26]

Contemporary worship believes that the experience of God's felt presence is achieved through what they call "emotional flow" of the service, largely created through music and the "worship leader."[27] Lim/Ruth: "Flow should facilitate worshippers having an experience with God."[28] Praise and Worship liturgy is centered around the emotional "flow" of the music; worship leaders are encouraged to begin with enthusiastic songs of thanksgiving, leading the worshipers to an emotional "soulish worship," and then bringing the mood to an intimate expression where "a gentle sustained chord on the organ and a song of the Spirit on the lips of the leaders should be more than sufficient to carry a worship response of the entire congregation for a protracted period of time."[29] Zac Hicks suggests, "Part of leading a worship service's flow . . . involves keeping the awareness of God's real, abiding presence before his worshipers. As all of the elements of worship pass by, the one constant—the True Flow—is the presence of the Holy Spirit himself." This kind of flow, according to Hicks, "lies in understanding and

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[23] Judson Cornwall, *Let Us Worship* (Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Pub., 1983), 146.

[24] Runn Ann Ashton, *God's Presence through Music* (South Bend, IN: Lesea Publishing Co., 1993).

[25] Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 18.

[26] Ibid., 18.

[27] Zac M. Hicks, *The Worship Pastor: A Call to Ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 153.

[28] Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus,* 32.

[29] Cornwall, *Let Us Worship*, 158.

guiding your worship service's emotional journey."[30] "Grouping songs in such a way that they flow together," worship leader Carl Tuttle explains, "is essential to a good worship experience."[31] Lim and Ruth describe the earliest guides written to help worship leaders achieve flow, David Blomgren's 1978 *The Song of the Lord*:

> The flow should move continuously with no interruptions; the flow should move naturally (using connections from the songs' content, keys, and tempos); and the flow should move toward a goal of a climatic experience of true worship of God. Blomgren spelled out technical aspects for achieving proper flow: the content of the songs in sequence makes sense, having scriptural and thematic relatedness; the key signatures are conductive to easy, unjarring, and smooth transitions between songs; the temps of the songs (usually faster to slower overall with songs having similar temps grouped) contributing to a growing sense of closer encounter with God.[32]

The goal of music and the "worship leader" is to "usher worshipers" into the presence of God in heaven, to "bring the congregational worshipers into a corporate awareness of God's manifest presence."[33] As Michael Farley observes,

> Sacrifices were tangible means of grace that God used to draw people near to him experientially and relationally, and thus they were a kind of sacrament. If worship music falls within the category of sacrifice, then it accomplishes the same broadly sacramental function, namely, to be a tangible means through which God reveals himself and enables us to experience his special presence with us.[34]

This also explains the recent enchantment of millennials to liturgy. Zac Hicks recounts his journey from what he describes as "a kind of 'default charismatic,' thinking and believing that God's presence was located solely in the surprising, unexpected, unplanned, goose-bump moments of worship" to what he describes as falling "in love with all things liturgical and historical, locating God's presence primarily in the sacraments."[35] He says that "the sacramental traditions remind us that we can feel his presence in a powerful and multisensory way as we touch, taste, see, and smell Jesus, through the Spirit, in baptism and Communion."[36] "But later," he notes, "God lifted my head and opened my ears to listen to his Spirit's work in the broader church, among *all* the traditions."[37] No matter how we worship, he argues, "We should build the language of presence and encounter into worship."[38] In reality, his fundamental sacramental theology of worship never changed; he just exchanged one experiential theology of worship for another.

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[30] Hicks, *The Worship Pastor*, 184.

[31] Carl Tuttle, "Song Selection & New Song Introduction," in In *Worship Leaders Training Manual* (Anaheim, CA: Worship Resource Center/Vineyard Ministries International, 1987), 141.

[32] Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 33.

[33] Barry Griffing, "Releasing Charismatic Worship," in *Restoring Praise & Worship to the Church* (Shippensburg, PA: Revival Press, 1989), 92.

[34] Michael Farley, email correspondence in Hicks, *The Worship Pastor*, 35fn21.

[35] Ibid., 34.

[36] Ibid., 37.

[37] Ibid., 34.

[38] Ibid., 38.

Further, this perspective has developed an *ex opera operato* expectation similar to that of medieval worship. As Lim and Ruth note,

> As the idea of the sacramentality of praise developed, it usually picked up another quality that has characterized [Medieval] understanding of the Eucharist: a confidence in its instrumental effectiveness. In other words, the sacrament achieves what it symbolizes. . . . When God's people praise, God will be present. The teachers of praise and worship are confident in this instrumental effectiveness for praise.[39]

Lim and Ruth observe that while more recently explicit language of sacramentality has lessened among more recent Pentecostal authors, "what have not waned are the root sentiments behind this theology of sacramental praise: a desire to encounter the divine through music and a sense that when God is present God is present in active power."[40] Ruth Anne Ashton states in her *God's Presence through Music*, "Praise and worship is one of the simplest forms of entrance into the presence of God."[41]

Sacerdotalism

In much contemporary worship congregational participation is minimized by the emphasis on performed music on a stage. Again, Lim and Ruth helpfully describe this phenomenon:

> Perhaps a sure indication that associating God's presence with music has become widespread in contemporary worship is the expectation that the worship leader can facilitate the congregation's encounter with the divine by "ushering them into the presence of God." One worship scholar tells an anecdote to that effect. Relating the events at a pastor's conference in the late 1990s, the scholar noted that one pastor solicited applications for a musician's position by calling for someone who could "make God present through music."[42]

They note, "Regardless of which model was used, the role and title of a congregation's chief musician had taken on special significance as the 1980s unfolded."[43] Like clergy Medieval worship, musicians in contemporary worship have taken a central, "priestly" role in the service. The quality of worship has become measured by the excellence of the music and the atmosphere it creates. This has resulted in "worship" becoming mostly what the praise team does on the stage, which is separated from the congregation by bright lights on the stage and darkened congregation. The people have become mere spectators of the worship performed by the praise team on their behalf.

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[39] Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 134.
[40] Ibid., 131.
[41] Ibid., 134.
[42] Ibid., 122, 131.
[43] Ibid., 130.

Preoccupation with Sensory Experience

Much of contemporary worship has become enamored by the visual and spectacular in worship. For example, contemporary worship leader Bob Kaulfin suggests, "Whether the tools are low-tech candles, incense and mini-bells or high-tech video systems, intelligent lights and hazers, today's churchgoer accepts and even expects simultaneous sensory input." He goes on to say that since God is completely other, we need to ask what part our eyes play in the worship of God. "How do we SEE God?" Though he gives some cations with the visual, including our tendency toward idolatry, Kauflin insists, "When understood properly and used thoughtfully, visuals can serve to promote true worship of God."

Contemporary worship ends up definiting the essence of worship in terms of tangeable, physical and emotional experience. "Feelings of spirituality" are the aim, and worship is equated with certain kinds of feelings. Smoke, lights, video, drama, high volume, etc. are all intended to create an "atmosphere of worship," and technology in particular is critically important. As Lim and Ruth note, "Contemporary worship unplugged today is not itself."[44]

Monique M. Ingalls agrees with this assessment after her ten year study (2007 to 2017) of contemporary worship in several different settings.[45] She notes the connection between centrality of contemporary worship music and the desire of worshipers to experience "a personal encounter with God during congregational singing."[46] This expectation in worship can even reach the point, she says, of describing the longing for such an experience with phrases like "worship fix" or "worship junkie." She observes, "The language of addiction . . . evidences the overwhelming success of the major worship brands in not just responding to felt needs, but also actively producing desire."[47] Often this expectation has been created by professionalized worship music, including "worship concerts," that have set the standard for what to expect in church: "Understanding their worship concert activities as worship shapes what evangelicals expect of a 'worship experience' in other settings," she suggests.[48]

Individualization of Piety

All of this has resulted in an individualization of piety. Individual "authentic expression" has become the mark of successful worship. The only real benefit of the corporate is the sacramental experience that can be achieved only by the technologically-driven, emotionally-centered music and the power of a group setting to stimulate emotion.

Diagnosing the Problem

Medieval Worship

Theology of Worship from the Old Testament

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[44] Ibid., 7.

[45] Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[46] Ibid., 85.

[47] Ibid., 204.

[48] Ibid., 42.

Many factors account for the rise of heretical and erroneous theology and practice, including worship, during the Middle Ages. But perhaps one central factor is that in many cases, church leadership derived worship theology and practice primarily or even exclusively from OT Israel—an empire that essentially consisted of a union between the civil and religious found more support and guidelines from the OT than from the NT.

Therefore, the OT increasingly became the pattern for medieval worship theology and practice, the church becoming the "new Israel." For example, early theologians explicitly explained the ecclesial hierarchy based on its parallels with OT high priest (bishops), priesthood (priests), and Levites (deacons). Theologians used the OT as the basis for priestly vestments, mandatory tithing, infant baptism, altars, sacrifice, richly adorned sanctuary, incense, processions, and ceremonies. As early as the third century, for example, Tertullian described standing "at God's altar . . . [for the] participation of the sacrifice" and proclaimed, "we ought to escort with the pomp of good works, amid psalms and hymns, unto God's altar, to obtain for us all good things from God."[49] Whether he meant this in the NT metaphorical sense is debatable, but this kind of language unquestionably became more literal in later worship practice.

Priority given to the OT for worship theology also accounts for the sacramentalism, sacerdotalism, and preoccupation with sensory experience that came to characterize worship by the end of the fifteenth century. Christians desired a "worship that can be touched" led by human mediators.

The Reformers criticized this rational in particular. For example, Calvin employed a particular argument of emphasizing the critical discontinuity between OT worship and NT worship in much of his worship reforms. In commenting on Roman Catholic worship, Calvin exclaimed, "What shall I say of ceremonies, the effect of which has been, that we have almost buried Christ, and returned to Jewish figures?"[50] He complained, "A new Judaism, as a substitute for that which God had distinctly abrogated, has again been reared up by means of numerous puerile extravagances, collected from different quarters."[51] He criticized the priesthood, noting, "Then, as if he were some successor of Aaron, he pretends that he offers a sacrifice to expiate the sins of the people."[52]

Expecting the Physical Worship of Heaven

However, a second factor contributing to errant theology and practice of worship was that some theologians, rightly understanding that Christian worship is participation with the worship of heaven (Hebrews 12:22–24), nevertheless failed to recognize that this is currently something to be accepted in faith as a spiritual reality rather than expected as a physical experience. Medieval Christians wanted to experience the worship of heaven tangibly here on earth, either expecting that heaven came down to them while they worshiped or that they were led into the heavenly temple through the sacramental ceremonies. Therefore, if not bringing into worship altars and incense and adornments by appealing to OT Israel, some drew from pictures of heavenly worship, especially those from the book of Revelation. Even the church architecture pictured this theology, with the nave where the people sat symbolizing earth, the "sanctuary"

[49] Tertullian, *On Prayer*, in Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, 3:687, 690.

[50] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.10.14.

[51] Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 21.

[52] Ibid., 30.

where the mass took place a picture of heaven. In this way, they desired a heavenly worship "that can be touched."

Again, the Reformers objected. Calvin insisted, "The first thing we complain of here is, that the people are entertained with showy ceremonies, while not a word is said of their significancy and truth."[53]

Contemporary Worship

Theology of Worship from the Old Testament

Praise and Worship theology likewise produced a liturgical shape that uses the typology of the Hebrew tabernacle or temple as the foundation for its worship design to describe the emotional progression through which worshipers are led to experience "the manifest presence of God." Advocates often appeal to Psalm 95 or Psalm 100 as concise examples of their model, noting that Psalm 95 progresses from songs of rejoicing, to thanksgiving, to praise, and then to reverence, which they define as the prescribed flow of worship. Psalm 100 is an even more clear picture of the model, what Eddie Espinosa calls a "journey into the holy of holies of the temple or tabernacle." Tabernacle worship, they reason, began with "fun songs" outside the tabernacle, followed by songs of thanksgiving, leading to worship songs as they entered the holy place and intimate songs in God's presence within the holy of holies.[54] This formed what is sometimes referred to as the "Tabernacle Model," the "Vineyard Model," or the "Five Phase Pattern" of worship:

Invitation	Songs of Personal Testimony in the Camp
Engagement	Through the Gates with Thanksgiving
Exaltation	Into His Courts with Praise
Adoration	Solemn Worship inside the Holy Place
Intimacy	In the Holy of Holies

Expecting the Physical Worship of Heaven

In addition to appealing to OT worship as a foundation for their theology and practice of worship, Pentecostals also often appeal to the worship of heaven, suggesting that since Christians now worship through Christ in the heavenly temple (Heb 12:22–24), we should expect to tangibly experience God's manifest presence, whether through a visible display of his glory, miraculous gifts, or emotional rapture. The goal of music and the "worship leader" is to "usher worshipers" into the presence of God in heaven, to "bring the congregational worshipers into a corporate awareness of God's manifest presence."[55]

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[53] Ibid., 31.

[54] Eddie Espinosa, "Worship Leading," in *Worship Leaders Training Manual* (Anaheim, CA: Worship Resource Center/Vineyard Ministries International, 1987), 81–82.

[55] Griffing, "Releasing Charismatic Worship," 92.

Providing the Biblical Solution

The Regulative Principle of Worship

The first solution to problems in both medieval and contemporary worship is to submit to the authority of God's Word over worship, what is sometimes referred to as the regulative principle of worship. This position, which found early roots in the theology of Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin, reached fuller expression in the English Puritans and Separatists, including early English Baptists. Like Calvin and Knox before them, the Puritan Westminster divines rooted their regulative principle in their doctrine of Scripture:

> The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. (1:6)

Their bibliology would not allow for any additions to worship beyond what God had prescribed in his Word:

> But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture. (22:1)

The regulative principle of Calvin, Knox, and the Puritans found its rationale not only in logical extension of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, but also in the conviction that church authority was limited by clear scriptural precepts and had no right to constrain the free consciences of individual Christians. As the Westminster Confession explained,

> God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also. (20:2)

Like the Puritans, the governing principle of the early English Separatist Baptists was commitment to explicit, New Testament commands for doctrine and practice. Thus, failing to recognize any direct commands in Scripture, they aggressively opposed any kind of formalism in worship. On the subject of worship, language in the London Baptist Confession is very similar to the earlier Westminster Confession. Early English Baptists clearly insisted, like their Presbyterian counterparts, "The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself" (LBC 22:1 parallel to WCF 21:1).

Furthermore, many of the early English Baptist leaders explicitly articulated a clearly defined regulative principle. For example, John Spilsbury (1593–1668) declared, "The holy Scripture is the only place where any ordinance of God in the case aforesaid is to be found, they

being the fountain-head, containing all the instituted Rules of both of Church and ordinances."[56] John Gill (1697–1771) later proclaimed, "Now for an act of religious worship there must be a command of God. God is a jealous God, and will not suffer anything to be admitted into the worship of him, but what is according to his word and will."[57] These Baptists were not simply articulating the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* or emphasizing the authority of Scripture upon church practice, as any good Protestant would. Rather, they were insisting that the practices of the church be limited to what Scripture—specifically, the New Testament—commanded, and as William Kiffin (1616–1701) noted, "that where a rule and express law is prescribed to men, that very prescription, is an express prohibition of the contrary."[58] This concern among Baptists continued well into the early nineteenth century, as seen by John Fawcett's (1739–1817) very direct assertion,

> No acts of worship can properly be called holy, but such as the Almighty has enjoined. No man, nor any body of men have any authority to invent rites and ceremonies of worship; to change the ordinances which he has established; or to invent new ones . . . The divine Word is the only safe directory in what relates to his own immediate service. The question is not what we may think becoming, decent or proper, but what our gracious Master has authorized as such. In matters of religion, nothing bears the stamp of holiness but what God has ordained.[59]

Affirming this principle alone would go a long way in preventing the errors of sacramentalism, sacerdotalism, preoccupation with sensory experience, and individualization of piety that has plagued both medieval and contemporary worship.

Worship That Cannot Be Touched

But second, a proper application of *New Testament Revelation* to the theology and practice of corporate worship is essential for correcting errors. The book of Hebrews in particular addresses the essential discontinuities that exist between Old Testament worship and that of the New. The author was writing to Jewish Christians who were experiencing intensified persecution and were tempted to reject their Christian beliefs in a return in Judaism. In an attempt to persuade them otherwise, the author explicitly uses Old Testament worship categories—including communion, sanctuary, sacrifices, priesthood, and altar—to help Christians understand the difference between worship in the Old Testament in the New Testament, clearly elucidating the essence of Christian worship. Therefore, a careful study of the message of the book of Hebrews, including its well-developed theology of Christian worship, reveals that while NT worship has its roots in OT revelation, worship in and through Jesus Christ is superior to the worship of Judaism.

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[56] John Spilsbury, *A Treatise Concerning the Lawfull Subject of Baptisme* (London: n.p., 1643), 89.

[57] John Gill, *A Body of Practical Divinity: Or a System of Practical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures* (The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2001), 899.

[58] William Kiffin, *A Sober Discourse of Right to Church Communion* (Baptist Standard Bearer, Incorporated, 2006), 28–29.

[59] John Fawcett, *The Holiness Which Becometh the House of the Lord* (Halifax: Holden and Dawson, 1808), 25.

In chapter 12, the author climaxes his argument with a vivid description of drawing near to God for worship in the Old Testament compared with drawing near for Christians. In verses 18–24, he contrasts two mountains—Mt, Sinai, representing Old Testament worship, and Mt. Zion, representing New Testament worship.

> For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom
> and a tempest [19] and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers
> beg that no further messages be spoken to them. [20] For they could not endure the order
> that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." [21] Indeed, so
> terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."
>
> [22] But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly
> Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, [23] and to the assembly of the
> firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the
> righteous made perfect, [24] and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the
> sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Approaching God in the OT is physical—it can be touched; it has visual sensations—burning fire, darkness, gloom, and storm; it has aural sensations—the sound of a trumpet blast and actual words spoken from God Himself. In other words, this OT worship was decidedly sensory. This is what naturally comes to mind when considering OT worship; the Jews had a beautiful tabernacle and later a Temple that shone brightly in Jerusalem with elaborate priestly adornments, gold, and fine linens—they could *see* this worship. They had incense and burnt offerings—they could *smell* this worship. Worshipers actually had to lay their hands on the animal as it was being slaughtered, and then they would be given meat from that animal to eat—they could *feel* this worship; they could *taste* this worship. It was all very physical and sensory. It created an experience of the senses that permeated the whole being. The author also describes the response this kind of approach to God created in those who were present. This physical, sensory worship in the OT created very physical reactions—they resisted it; they begged that God stop speaking (12:19)—it was terrifying. Severe judgment was connected to this worship—if they did something wrong, they would be killed. Even an animal that touched Mt. Sinai would be stoned (12:20). Moses himself trembled with fear when God revealed himself in this way (12:21). In other words, the author means to specifically highlight the physical, tangible aspects of this worship.

In contrast, the author uses Mount Zion to represent NT worship. Christians are not actually worshiping physically in heaven yet, but in Christ they are worshiping there positionally in a very real sense—they "have come to Mt. Zion" (12:22). With the NT, God no longer has to condescend and enter the fabric of the physical universe to manifest Himself to his people; he can now allow his people to ascend into Heaven itself to worship him, which the author argues is superior to the former worship. This is possible because of Jesus's mediation on the behalf of his people (12:24), and thus Christians can now approach God with full confidence in worship.

But here is the important point: this kind of superior worship through Christ is not physical *in its essence*. Living Christians are not physically in heaven yet; when they worship, they are positionally worshiping in heaven with all the angels and saints, but they are doing so *spiritually*. That is the essential difference between these two kinds of worship. OT worship was physical; it was sensory; it happened on earth. NT worship, however, is immaterial; it is spiritual; it takes place in heaven.

Significant discontinuities exist between these two ways to worship, and it is important to note that each of these cases of discontinuity stems from the author's primary discontinuity, that of the physical vs. the spiritual. Human prophets, a mediator, priests, animal sacrifices, and a temple each represent physical realties that Hebrew worshipers could see, smell, and touch. Yet they all stand in stark contrast to the supreme spiritual reality that replaces them all—Jesus Christ. *He* is the prophet, the mediator, the priest, the sacrifice, and the temple. It is he who stands as the subject, source, and means of true worship. The OT rituals of worship were indeed shadows of the spiritual realities, but they fell short since they could not actually bring someone into the presence of God. With the coming of Christ, however, believers are actually raised up into the very presence of God, not yet physically, but spiritually. This discontinuity reveals the ultimate supremacy of worship in and through Christ over the physical worship of the OT.

Simple, Spiritual Worship

This is why the Reformers argued that worship should be spiritual and simple. Calvin said,

> For, if we would not throw every thing into confusion, we must never lose sight of the distinction between the old and the new dispensations, and of the fact that ceremonies, the observance of which was useful under the law, are now not only superfluous, but vicious and absurd. When Christ was absent and not yet manifested, ceremonies, by adumbrating, cherished the hope of his advent in the breasts of believers; but now that his glory is present and conspicuous, they only obscure it. And we see what God himself has done. For those ceremonies which he had commanded for a time he has abrogated for ever. Paul explains the reason,—first, that since the body has been manifested in Christ, they types have, of course, been withdrawn; and, secondly, that God is now pleased to instruct his Church after a different manner. (Gal. iv. 5; Col. Ii. 4, 14, 17.) Since, then, God has freed his Church from the bondage which he had imposed upon it, can any thing, I ask, be more perverse than for men to introduce a new bondage in place of the old?"[60]

He continued, "Then, as it has for the most part an external splendor which pleases the eye, it is more agreeable to our carnal nature, than that which alone God requires and approves, but which is less ostentatious."[61]

This same emphasis would go a long way in correcting many of the same errors characteristic of contemporary worship.

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[60] Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 51.
[61] Ibid., 53.