

Lezing 1: Theology of the Glory of God in Worship

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A. Liturgical Actions—Covenantal, Relational,

Consider two lists of verbs that describe what happens in worship:

List A: seeing, listening, touching, gesturing, smelling, imagining, speaking, singing

List B: praising, lamenting, confessing, thanking, being convicted, being inspired, being comforted

List A focuses on embodied sensory experience, the rudiments of artistic production and reception. These words are not unique to worship. They are building blocks for all human actions and interactions. We can not worship without these verbs. And they are the reason that the arts matter in worship: the arts elevate, deepen, and sharpen each of these basic sensory actions and prime them as acts of worship.

List B catalogues a list of actions that comprise the corporate, covenantal relationship Christians have with God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit. They are metaphoric terms, drawn from the realm of interpersonal human relationships, which the scripture uses to depict and evoke the way we know and experience God. The list includes both active verbs (praising, lamenting, confessing, thanking), and passive verbs (being convicted, inspired, and comforted) to highlight how our relationship with God is dialogic, comprised of both messages we communicate to God in prayer, and messages God communicates to us through scripture and through the nourishment offered at the Lord's table. These covenantal actions are modeled for us in the Psalms, protected fiercely by the prophets, and exemplified in the most faithful examples of Christian worship over the past twenty-plus centuries.¹

These two lists, each indispensable for worship, are related in a very simple way: the list A verbs help us accomplish list B actions. For example, we view an artwork in order to praise or confess. We sing in order to thank or to lament. The list A verbs help us realize the ultimate purpose or goal of worship, which is to engage, enact, and enjoy the covenantal relationship we have with God in Christ. As embodied, human actions, these list A verbs have enormous potential to make our interaction with the triune God more vivid, real, and evocative. As Nicholas Wolterstorff has argued persuasively, "Good liturgical art is art that serves effectively the actions of the liturgy. . . . Liturgical art, much of it participatory in character, is the art of a community, at the service of its liturgical actions

¹ For more extensive account of a covenantal theology of worship, see, for example, Leanne Van Dyk, ed., *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

and not at the service of aesthetic contemplation.”² This is a remarkably deep goal or *telos* for artistic engagement. The goal of the liturgical artists is not to generate artworks that merely “connect with” people, but rather to enable them, corporately, to participate in acts of Trinitarian covenantal renewal.

Many of worship’s largest problems occur when the connection between these list A and list B actions is unclear. When worshipers finish a song and simply think “what a powerful, driving rhythm,” when worshipers see a colorful banner and think “what vivid colors,” then artworks have not lived up to their highest potential. Instead, liturgical artists long hear worshipers to say “truly your song, your poetry, your dance helped us to pray and to listen to God.”

In this way, liturgical artworks promise to deepen a congregation’s participation in the profoundly relational and covenantal acts of public worship, provided that artists and congregations actively resist both the temptation to make artworks ends in themselves, and the temptation to soften the covenantal dimensions of worship into some sentimental substitute. The shift into this deeper mode of engagement requires intentionality, and often a willingness to set aside some of the conventions of artistic engagement that arise in art galleries, theaters, and concert venues.

In each of these examples, an artist is pausing to ask some very basic questions: What covenantal action(s) does this artwork help this congregation engage in? Is this artwork well-suited to the task? A significant number of worship-related artworks that fail in a significant way can be traced back to an artist that fails to ask these very basic questions—and to communities that never invite or expect artists to do so. These problems are not limited to artists, of course. The very same problem afflicts preachers whose speaking ultimately serves to accomplish something other than the proclamation of gospel.

Fortunately, this kind of functional, covenantal engagement can be cultivated in very simple, accessible ways. Many artistic commissions in the church would be much, much more serviceable if they would be formulated as adaptations of this sentence: “Please compose a piece of music or drama or dance or visual artwork in order to help this congregation in this time and place engage in this kind of covenantal activity.” For example, “please compose a song to help us learn how to more deeply lament the hunger in our community.”

Resisting Sentimentality

This covenantal criterion is also crucial for interrogating one of the greatest “sins” of liturgical artwork, that of sentimentality. Sentimental art invites worshipers into a mode of engagement that ultimately cheapens, rather than deepens the enactment of their collective relationship with God. Sentimental artworks, as Jeremy Begbie explains, avoid depicting evil honestly, generate a kind of emotional self-indulgence, and fan an aversion to costly action and engagement.³ As many artists will quickly attest, Christian worship seems to be a perennial magnet for attracting sentimental artworks—melodies, images, metaphors, rhythms, and palettes of color that succeed at making worship pleasant and utterly innocuous.⁴

The pastoral challenge that nearly all artistically-oriented congregations face is that of finding a constructive way to call forth works of art that avoid sentimentality. One of the best strategies is making sure that the liturgical

² Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 184, 188.

³ See Jeremy S. Begbie, “Beauty, Sentimentality, and the Arts,” in *The Beauty of God: Theology and the Arts*, ed. Daniel J. Treier, Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundin (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 45-69, esp. 56-57.

⁴ Generating awareness of the problem of sentimentality is one the greatest hazards of work in this field. The risk of offense is astronomically high. One wise strategy is to practice art criticism with a relatively ‘safe’ topic. I have found Frank Burch Brown’s illuminating deconstruction of the height (or depth) of sentimentality in the Precious Moment Chapel to serve as one pedagogically useful example in some cultural contexts. See Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 138-145.

(covenantal) purpose of a given artwork is clear from the start. Congregations who ask a videographer or a poet to produce a work to help the congregation “pray honestly for the needs of the world in our intercessory prayer” are far less likely to wind up with kitsch than one who merely says “give us something to warm up the early part of the service” or “let’s see if we can find a home for the artwork you have already created.”

In sum, what we need are examples of liturgical art that are clearly tied to specific acts of covenantal engagement: praise, lament, confession, listening for comfort, listening for correction. And we need artworks that resist any devolution of those actions into their sub-covenantal counterparts.

B. Iconic Works of Liturgical Art

Second, the best liturgical actions and artworks are *iconic* and *idolatry-resisting*. When the Psalms testify about liturgical experience, they often speak about the worshiper contemplating nothing less than the beauty and glory of God: “so I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory” (Psalm 63:2), and “we ponder your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple” (Psalm 48:9). Though worship is clearly an embodied, multi-sensory experience, what is significant in worship is that all of this sensory experience contributes to a perception of the beauty, love, and grace of the triune God.

One tradition that clarifies range of perception is the Orthodox tradition of iconography. As Orthodox Christians regularly explain, their icons are not meant to merely looked *at*. They are to be looked *through*. We affix our eyes on the image, but our hearts and minds perceive something richer and deeper through them. We perceive something of God’s own beauty, love and grace. This is what it means for art to function in an iconic way.

“Iconic” is a fitting criterion for all liturgical art. As art, it engages our senses and bodies, and while it remains an irreducibly sensory experience, it simultaneously invites us to perceive the beauty of God. Iconic engagement, in this broad sense, has long been a staple of theological reflection on the liturgical arts. In his commentary on Old Testament worship practices, John Calvin argued:

It was not enough for the faithful, in those days, to depend upon the Word of God, and to engage in those ceremonial services which he required, unless, aided by *external* symbols, they *elevated* their *minds* above these, and yielded to God *spiritual* worship. God, indeed, gave real tokens of his presence in that visible sanctuary, but not for the purpose of binding the senses and thoughts of his people to earthly elements; he wished rather that these *external* symbols should serve as *ladders*, by which the faithful might *ascend* even to heaven. The design of God from the commencement in the appointment of the sacraments, and all the outward exercises of religion, was to consult the infirmity and weak capacity of his people. Accordingly, even at the present day, the true and proper use of them is, to assist us in seeking God *spiritually* in his heavenly glory, and not to occupy our *minds* with the things of this world, or keep them fixed in the vanities of the flesh.⁵

John Wesley’s famous directions for congregational singing conclude with this stirring summons:

Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to do this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve here, and reward you when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.⁶

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), commentary on Psalm 9:11.

⁶ Wesley, *Select Hymns*, 1761. This text is reprinted as a preface in many recently published Methodist hymnals.

In both Calvin and Wesley, and in dozens of other significant works in the history of the church, the aim is the same: to attend to, to contemplate, to savor, and to adore the sheer goodness of God. In this tradition, the greatest compliment that a worshiper can offer an artist is not “what a remarkably engaging artwork you offered us,” but rather “through your work, we gained a new glimpse of God’s beauty.”

Idolatry-Resistance

But if the liturgical arts invite us to contemplate God, then they are charged with one of the most serious tasks in the entire Christian community: resisting idolatrous concepts and images of God.

This is not the usual linkage of the ‘arts’ and ‘idolatry.’ Usually, when these terms appear together, it is in the context of anxiety about how the arts will *lead to* idolatry—especially the idolatry of the artwork or artist. This traditional concern has fueled iconoclastic movements throughout the history of the church, sometimes drawing on the second commandment’s prohibition of graven images for God.

But the idolizing of artists and artworks is not the only form of idolatry that plagues the Christian life. There is another, sometimes more insidious form of idolatry, an idolatry of distortion. We worship an idol not only when we treat an object as if it were God, but also when we conceive of divine life, divine glory, and divine redemption in sub-Christian ways, in ways that do not live up to the rich biblical depictions of God’s being and character. The arts are one way that God’s Spirit can and does answer that prayer.

Consider an artwork that aims to resist idolatry, a hymn and anthem text by the Iona Community’s John Bell.

Lift up your heads, eternal gates, Alleluia!
See how the King of glory waits, Alleluia!
The Lord of Hosts in drawing near,
the Savior of the world is here. Alleluia!

But not in arms or battle dress, Alleluia!
God comes, a child, amidst distress, Alleluia!
No mighty armies shield the way,
only coarse linen, wool, and hay, Alleluia!

God brings a new face to the brave, Alleluia!
God redefines who best can save, Alleluia!
Not those whose power relies on threat,
terror or torture, destruction or debt, Alleluia!

God’s matchless and majestic strength, Alleluia!
In all its height, depth, breadth, and length, Alleluia!
Now is revealed, its power to prove,
by Christ protesting, “God is love,” Alleluia!
—John L. Bell (GIA anthem)

This is a text of resistance. It attempts to correct the myopic perception that salvation comes best through human power structures. At the same time, the text subverts any notion of God that is sullied and degraded by a too raw-fisted concept of divine power. This painting clearly resists various sentimental images and icons that depict Jesus as merely a kindly friend, or an overly sanguine companion.

The church's long resistance to the arts in worship arises in part because of its deep (and valid) concern about idolatry. The arts, like any area of human achievement, can quickly become idolatrous. But the arts can also be an effective tool of resistance—a potent antidote to imagining God in idolatrous ways.

Now any artist who sets out to displace idolatrous conceptions of God—like any theologian, preacher, or pastoral caregiver who attempts the same—will quickly discover the spiritual dangers that accompany the prophetic task. Being asked to help a congregation perceive God's glory more truly can easily lead to a self-righteous attitude about the truth that we artists, or we theologians, or we preachers think we possess. This means that every aspiring liturgical artist, like every pastor, preacher, and theologian, needs to practice the kinds of spiritual disciplines that will resist this kind of self-righteousness, and participate in relationships of spiritual accountability and discernment. Ultimately, resisting idolatry, like worship itself, is a task for a community to engage in.

But when this kind of spiritual discernment and accountability is in place, artists rightly assume a potent prophetic and priestly task of helping a congregation perceive the glory and beauty of the triune God. This stunning claim means that 'resisting idolatry' is one of the leading callings for every aspiring liturgical artist. Every one of us needs to wake up every morning eager to name which idol of the imagination we are eager to resist and which aspects of divine beauty we are eager to highlight (and adore!).

In sum, the most fitting liturgical artwork is corporate, functional, iconic and idolatry-resisting. Each of these criteria invites artists to new modes of creativity, engagement, and purpose. Each of them warrants a kind of disciplined attention by artists and the communities that support them. This can be accomplished by probing some very basic questions:

- How can the making of a liturgical artwork be accomplished in a communal way?
- How might my artistic gifts testify to the corporate character of the Christian faith?
- How can my artwork speak to the wide range of people in the congregation, and what can I do to enable worshipers to understand and experience this artwork more deeply?
- What can I do so that my artwork is not merely admired (or dismissed!), but rather is experienced as an act of prayer or proclamation?
- What can I do so that my people see through (or "listen through") my artwork to perceive the beauty and glory of God?
- What distorted notion of God's beauty and character can my artwork resist? What neglected positive quality of God's beauty can my artwork highlight?

None of these questions need squelch creativity. But they can serve to discipline creativity—a discipline that emerges out of a rich, theological understanding of worship and the Christian life. May God's Spirit strengthen, inspire, and challenge artists of all kinds to take up their prophetic and priestly tasks among God's worshipping people.

APPENDIX 1: Ten Core Convictions About Christian Worship (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship)

On the tenth anniversary of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in 2007, we identified ten core principles and practices to present as our central convictions about vital Christian worship. We pray that these ten convictions have already been at the heart of our work so far, and we pledge that they will be even more formative for our institute in the work that lies ahead of us. And we hope our many ecumenical partners and contacts find them clear, compelling, and most of all enriching for their own worship and ministry. These ten core convictions are not innovations. They are timeless truths from Scripture and the rich history of Christian worship. Today, each conviction remains theologically crucial, pastorally significant, and culturally threatened. The importance of one or all of these convictions risks being obscured by cultural trends outside the church, and disputes about the mechanics and style of worship within the church. This attempt to reiterate and reinforced the importance of these ten core convictions will lead, we pray, to more fruitful (if not necessarily easier) conversations about the meaning and practice of Christian worship.

Christian worship is immeasurably enriched by:

1. a vivid awareness of the beauty, majesty, mystery, and holiness of the triune God

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.(Psalm 63:2)

Worship cultivates our knowledge and imagination about who God is and what God has done. Worship gives us a profound awareness of the glory, beauty, and holiness of God. Each element of worship can be understood through a Trinitarian framework. Worship renewal is best sustained by attention to the triune God we worship.

Questions

- What is the picture of God we are, consciously and unconsciously, cultivating in our worship?
- In what moments of our worship do we most perceive the glory and beauty of God?
- In what way does our worship space convey God's glory?
- In what way might renewed attention to God's glory make our worship more contemplative? more exuberant? more vibrant?
- What barriers does our culture present to worshipping with a sense of God's transcendence?
- How does our picture of God help us resist idolatries?

2. full, conscious, active participation of all worshipers, in the context of a fully intergenerational community

And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. . . And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God; and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. . . the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. . . And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them. (Nehemiah 8:1, 6, 7, 8, 12)

Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name

alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. (Psalm 148:12-13)

Worship is not just what ministers, musicians, and other leaders do; it is what all worshipers “do”—through the work of the Spirit in worship. In vital worship, all worshipers are involved in the actions, words, and meaning of worship.

God’s covenant promises endure “from generation to generation.” Worship that arises out of an intentionally intergenerational community, in which people of all ages are welcomed as full participants, and whose participation enriches each other, reflects that worship breaks down barriers of age.

Questions

- How do worshipers in our community understand the nature of their participation in worship?
- How do worshipers in our community understand the purpose of their participation in worship?
- What does participation mean in addition to lay leadership of worship?
- What could we do as worshipers to prepare to be as involved in the actions and in tune with the meaning of worship as we assume our leaders are?
- How are we enabling the full, conscious, active participation of all worshipers in our worship?
- How are we failing to enable the full, conscious, active participation of all worshipers?
- How can our worship be more intergenerational in its lay leadership?
- How can our worship be more intergenerational in its participation?
- How can we better foster intergenerational community?
- What generational barriers does our culture set or lead us to expect?
- What generational barriers does our own tradition or history set or lead us to expect?

3. deep engagement with scripture

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

The Bible is the source of our knowledge of God and of the world’s redemption in Christ. Worship should include prominent readings of Scripture, and engage worshipers through intentional reading practices, art, and music. It should present and depict God’s being, character, and actions in ways that are consistent with scriptural teaching. It should follow biblical commands about worship practices, and it should heed scriptural warnings about false and improper worship. In particular, Christian worship should be deeply connected to its ancient roots in psalmody.

Questions

- How prominent is the reading and teaching of scripture in our worship?
- How engaging is the reading and teaching of scripture in our worship?
- What use of art and music could help us better engage worshipers with scripture?
- How deeply and broadly do we select biblical passages to read, sing, reflect, and preach from?

3. joyful and solemn celebrations of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which focus squarely on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in all of creation, and are deeply aware of how God’s Spirit works to nurture and strengthen faith through these celebrations,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with

him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5)

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are remarkable gifts—such tangible, physical signs of God's love for us. Obeying the Bible's commands to engage in these activities is joyful and life-giving, especially when we see the breadth what these actions mean. Baptism is at once a washing, a "drowning," a sign of new birth. The Lord's Supper is at once a meal of memory and hope, a sign of love both for God and each others, an occasion for both spiritual nourishment and challenge.

5. balanced approach to culture

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12)

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot." (Matt. 5:13)

They sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; (Rev. 5:9)

Worship should strike a healthy balance among four approaches or dimensions to its cultural context: worship is transcultural (some elements of worship are beyond culture), contextual (worship reflects the culture in which it is offered), cross-cultural (worship breaks barriers of culture through worship), and counter-cultural (worship resists the idolatries of its cultural context).

Questions

- What aspects of our worship are transcultural?
- What aspects of our worship are inculturated?
- What aspects of our worship are cross-cultural?
- What aspects of our worship are countercultural?
- Which of these four approaches comes most naturally to our worshipping community?
- Which comes least naturally?

6. disciplined creativity in the arts

Then Moses said to the Israelites: See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; he has filled him with divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of artisan or skilled designer. (Exodus 25:30-35)

Worship is enriched by artistic creativity in many genres and media, not as ends to themselves or as open-ended individual inspirations, but all disciplined by the nature of worship as a prophetic and priestly activity.

Questions

- How are we incorporating the arts into our worship?
- How are we mediating the danger of not neglecting visual aspects of worship but not idolizing them, either?
- How can we better incorporate artists into our community, and cultivate the artistic gifts within our worshiping community?

7. collaboration with congregational ministries

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Cor. 12:12)

Congregational worship is mutually enriching to the full range of congregational ministries, including pastoral care, education, spiritual formation, and witness.

Questions

- How are we integrating our worship with the full scope of our congregational ministry and life together?
- How can we better integrate worship into our ministries of evangelism, fellowship, education, pastoral care?

8. hospitality

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. (Romans 12:13)

A central feature of worship is that it breaks down barriers to welcome all worshipers, including persons with disabilities, those from other cultures, both seekers and lifelong Christians, and others.

Questions

- How does our worship currently express hospitality to worshipers?
- How can we better express hospitality in our worship?

9. intentional integration between worship and all of life; we are called to live in a worshipful way

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1)

Worship fosters natural and dynamic connections between worship and life, so that the worship life of Christian congregations both reflects and shapes lives of grateful obedience, deeply engages with the needs of the world, including such specific areas as restorative justice, care for the earth, and many other areas.

Questions

- How does our worship currently express connections between worship and other areas of life?

Related resources

- www.calvin.edu/worship/idis

10. collaborative planning and evaluation

Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. (Acts 20:28)

Worship involves a collaborative process for planning and evaluating services in the context of an adaptive approach to overall congregational leadership.

Questions

- How collaborative is our current process of worship planning?
- How collaborative is our current process of worship evaluation?
- How could our worship planning be more collaborative?
- How could our worship evaluation be more collaborative?

These criteria applicable not only in specific cultural settings. They have as much to say about corporate worship offered in Kenya or Korea as in Canada or the United States. They are the kind of questions that apply to contextual ministry in any setting. They are also *theological*. They emerge not only out of historical study or aesthetic preference, but also out of reflection on the mystery of the gospel that Christians proclaim. Long-term worship renewal doesn't come out of singing a little faster, praying a little harder, or making worship a bit more proper or a bit more fun. Worship renewal can issue only from the depth and mystery of the gospel that Christians proclaim. Christian worship is strongest when it is integrally and self-consciously related to the person and work of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

APPENDIX 3: Worshiping the Triune God: Receiving and Sharing Christian Wisdom Across Continents and Centuries (2010 Edition)

Introduction

The sharing of wisdom is a common practice in many cultures—Eastern and Western, Southern and Northern—and is particularly suited for learning and sharing across cultures, generations, and centuries, both in oral and written forms. The sharing of wisdom comprises a significant strand of the biblical literature, including Proverbs and proverb-like Psalms, Jesus' beatitudes and several Pauline exhortations. To share wisdom is to knit together the sinews of Christ's body, the church. Sharing wisdom is, thus, a central practice for global Christian fellowships, like the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). When the wisdom that is shared is a faithful echo and appropriation of scriptural wisdom, a faithful testimony to the Word and "Wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1.24), then this sharing of wisdom can be a sign of Pentecost, not Babel—a gift of the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of wisdom" (Eph 1.17).

The purpose of this collection of proverbs about the practice of Christian worship is to build up the body of Christ for faithful service and ministry. This collection of proverbs is gathered by Reformed Christians. It is at once a *catholic* collection, reflecting participation in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, and a *particular* collection, reflecting the unique history, theological convictions, and practices of Reformed communities worldwide. This document was drafted in response to mandates by both World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) at its 2004 Assembly in Accra, Ghana, and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) at its 2005 Assembly in Utrecht, the Netherlands, following a period of communication with member churches from both organizations. It was developed by the worship planning team for the 2010 WCRC Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, in consultation with pastors, teachers, and other leaders throughout the world, both within and outside of the Reformed tradition, and was refined by the Worship and Spiritual Renewal Section of the Uniting General Council.

The document is designed to present a vision for worship and spiritual renewal in which we invite each other to deeper and more vital expression. It is not designed to impose a set of practices on member churches or to imply that worship in member churches already embodies the fullness of this wisdom. The document is designed for several uses:

- 1. The document can be used within a given congregation or denomination to shape a conversation about the gifts, challenges, strengths and weaknesses of local practices.** Those leading these conversations could pause after each proverb and ask "how has God gifted us to practice this wisdom?," "in what ways is God calling us to embody this wisdom more faithfully?," and "in what other ways would we express the wisdom of our practices related to this theme?" Each proverb is designed to elicit conversations that explore the connections between theological convictions and practices, conversations of testimony and spiritual discernment that are indispensable for fruitful ministry in any context.
- 2. The document can shape a conversation between and among congregations, denominations, and believers from quite different cultural contexts.** Those shaping these conversations could pause after each proverb and ask "how is God gifting each of us in our unique cultural contexts to practice this wisdom?" and "in what way might God be calling us to practice this more faithfully, particularly in light of what we learn from each other?"
- 3. The document is an invitation to collaborative in-depth study and further refinement.** Each proverb is a summary of a field of research and Christian reflection, drawing upon work in Biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and historical scholarship. Each proverb could be fruitfully refined after continuing reflection in light of the challenges of faithful discipleship. Thus, this collection is not designed to be final or complete. It is designed to be open-ended: any member church or ecumenical partner can easily supplement this collection with its own materials. Future WCRC gatherings could also amend this collection by adding proverbs to respond to unique challenges that arise in the future.

The ultimate goal of all of these uses, however, is not simply to enhance conversations or to result in a better document. The ultimate goal is nothing less than to elicit, by the Spirit's power, the faithful and grateful worship of the triune God. May God's Spirit bless these words and all who wrestle with them so that the church of Christ may be strengthened.

Note: for this edition of the document, the terms 'church,' 'congregation, and 'community' are used interchangeably, reflecting the different uses of our member churches. The terms 'blessed' and 'wise' alternate throughout the document, with the term 'blessed' typically used to refer to blessings God gives when we follow biblical commands, and 'wise' for judgments that congregations make in discerning God's will. We anticipate further refinement of this usage, following responses from member churches.

I. A Called and Forgiven People: Assembling in Jesus' Name

1.1 Called by the Triune God

Blessed are the people of God
who are deeply aware
that they are both called by and address *the triune God,*
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
who gathers, protects and cares for the church
through Word and Spirit—1
a God of splendour and majesty
perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ,
the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1.15).

Blessed is the community
that gratefully acknowledges
that the triune God not only receives our worship,
but also makes our worship possible,
prompting us through the Holy Spirit,
and sanctifying our offerings
through the perfect priesthood of Jesus Christ,
who during his life on earth offered
praise “to the Father,” “full of joy in the Holy Spirit” (Luke 10.21), and even now “ever lives to pray for us” (Heb 7.25).

Blessed is the congregation
that insists that believers gather to worship God
not first of all in order that God might bless them,
but because God has already blessed them.

Blessed is the congregation that then discovers
that God does indeed bless them
as they worship the triune God
who nourishes, teaches, convicts, and corrects them,
and strengthens bonds
that unite believers with Jesus Christ and with each other
through the sanctifying actions
of the proclamation of the word and corporate prayer,
through baptism and the Lord's Supper,
through fellowship, offerings, and testimony.

1 Cf Belhar Heidelberg Confession.

1.2 Corporate Assembly, the Whole People of God

Wise is the worshiping community
that “does not neglect meeting together” (Heb 10.25),
but joyfully gathers in Jesus' name,

eager to proclaim the Word of God,
to offer praise and prayer,
and to celebrate the sacraments,
each of which are actions of the whole people of God,
“the royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2.9).

Blessed is the congregation
that invites all worshipers—
including those which our cultures
may label in different ways as ‘disabled’—
to full, conscious and active participation in corporate worship,
engaging heart, soul, and mind in devotion to God,
deeply aware of how their own personal worship
participates in a much larger chorus of praise to God.

Blessed is the congregation
that expresses in its worship
the communion in the body of Christ,
the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,
the oneness that is the gift and calling of God,
that unites the young and old,
and believers of every time and place
who share a common calling by the Spirit of God in Jesus Christ.²

² Cf from WCRC materials for the Grand Rapids event.

1.3 The Holy Spirit

Wise is the worshiping community
that recognizes how the Holy Spirit works
through both reason and emotion,
through both spiritual disciplines and surprising events,
through both services that are prayerfully planned
and through moments of spontaneous discovery.

Wise is the worshiping community that recognizes that
the lasting value or spiritual power of worship
does not depend upon our own creativity,
imagination, intellect, or emotions,
but comes from the Holy Spirit,
who may choose to use any or all of these things.
For truly, worship is a gift to receive,
not an accomplishment to achieve.

1.4 Affirming and Resisting Culture

Wise is the church
that seeks to be “in” but not “of” the world,(John 15.19)
resisting aspects of the culture
that compromise the integrity of the gospel,
and eagerly engaging its culture

with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ
who comes to each culture, but is not bound by any culture.

Wise, then, is the church
that is grateful that the gospel of Jesus
is at once transcultural, contextual,
cross-cultural, and counter-cultural.³

³ Cf Lutheran World Federation Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture.

1.5 The Goodness of the Redeemed Creation

Wise is the congregation
that makes clear that its worship
participates in the song of praise
that is offered by all creation.

Wise is the congregation that
celebrates worship as an embodied reality,
grateful for the gestures and postures
that express our praise and prayer,
and the book, water, bread, and wine,
that God ordains for our use—
the gifts of God for the people of God.

1.6 Leading God's People

Wise is the community that
calls, trains, affirms, and responds to
those gifted for leadership in all genders, ages, races, abilities
providing formative training and mentorship for them in the theology and practices of worship.

Wise are leaders in worship
who equip all the members of the community
for full, conscious, and active participation, (cf Vatican II)
taking care to express hospitality
to those who are not yet a part of Christ's body, the church.

1.7 Artistic Expression

Blessed is the congregation in which the Word is proclaimed
and prayers and praise are offered
not only through words,
but also through artistic expression:
through gifts God has given
to each local community
in music and dance,
in speech and silence,
in visual art and architecture.
Blessed are the artists
who offer and discipline their gifts
so God's people may
testify to the goodness of God, offer thanks and express repentance..

Wise are artists who are grateful
both for the limitations offered by the second commandment,
and also for the example of the biblical artists called by God
and equipped by God's people for service
according to God's commands. (Ex 35.30ff)

Wise is the church
that gratefully receives
the gifts of faithful songs and artworks
from other centuries and other cultures,
celebrating the catholicity of the church,
and cultivating creativity
through new songs and works for worship.

II. Joyfully Proclaiming God's Word

2.1 Word and Spirit

Blessed is the congregation
in which the Word of God is proclaimed
with conviction and joy
surrounded by expectant prayers
and profound gratitude
for the Holy Spirit's work
to illuminate the hearts and minds of God's people.

2.2 The Breadth of the Christ-Centered Word

Wise is the congregation
that nourishes believers
with readings and sermons that engage the breadth and depth of God's Word,
Old Testament and New Testament,
always proclaiming the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2.3 Calling Forth Rest and Witness, Justice and Peace

Blessed is the congregation
in which the proclamation of God's Word
comforts those who mourn
and confronts those who oppose God's reign.

Wise is the preacher
who invites hearers to receive God's lavish grace,
to repent from sin and evil,
to turn toward Christ,
to proclaim peace,
"to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God" (Mic 6.8).

2.4 Resisting Idolatry

Wise is the congregation
that proclaims the Word of God
in ways that actively expose and resist
both the idols that we are tempted to worship instead of God

and also the idols of our distorted understandings of God,

Blessed is the congregation
that challenges these distortions
by contemplating the person and work of Jesus Christ,
“the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of God’s being” (Heb 1.3).

2.5 Credo: The Response of Faith

Wise is the congregation
in which the proclamation of the gospel
is accepted as the word of God,
which is at work in you who believe (1 Thes 2.13),
leading to both confession and praise,
both repentance and a commitment to service,
both compassion and a passion for justice,
both personal and communal actions,
both new obedience and profound gratitude.

Blessed is the congregation
that invites believers to testify to the goodness of God
by expressing the faith of the church
that transcends and forms our individual experiences
and unites us with believers across cultures and centuries,
and by testifying to the work of God in the life of the local community.

III. Responding to God in Prayer and Offerings

3.1 Praise and Gratitude

Blessed is the church that
offers praise and thanksgiving (cf Ps 50.14, Heb 13.15),
not only extolling the beauty and glory of God,
but also contemplating, reciting,
and celebrating all that God has done
throughout history.

Wise is the congregation
that draws upon and learns from
the Bible’s own narratively-shaped prayers of
praise and thanksgiving (e.g Ps 136)
as it gives form to its own prayer.

3.2 Praying in Jesus Name, Through the Spirit

Blessed is the church that prays in Jesus’ name,
acknowledging our union with our ascended and everpresent Lord.

Blessed is the worshiping community
that prays in and through the Holy Spirit,
desiring the gifts of the Holy Spirit,
and acknowledging that as we pray
the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness,

interceding for us according to the will of God (Rom 8.26-27),
and resisting the “cosmic powers of this present darkness” (Eph 6.12).

3.3 Full Range of Human Experience

Wise is the church that,
following the example of the Psalms,
encourages honest and trusting prayers to God
that express the full range of human experience -
the ‘anatomy of the soul’—
spoken, sung or silent,
danced, dramatized or visualized—
prayers of celebration and lament,
trust and desperation,
supplication and intercession,
thanksgiving and confession,
healing and hope.

Blessed is the church that prays not only for its own needs,
but also for the needs of the world that God so loves.⁴

⁴ The phrase “Anatomy of the Soul” is from John Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms.

3.4 Gifts and Offerings

Wise is the church that gratefully practices
the giving of gifts, time and talent,
as an act of dedication and worship

Wise is the church which affirms
that all of life is lived in service to God and neighbor,
and that believers are called to be stewards of every gift of God.

IV. Baptizing and Feasting

4.1 Jesus’ Commands to Baptize and Celebrate the Lord’s Supper

Blessed is the church
that faithfully obeys Jesus’ commands
“to make disciples,
baptizing them
in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
and teaching them to obey
everything Jesus has commanded (Matt. 28:20)
and to “eat and drink in remembrance of me,” (Luke 22.19-20)
receiving these signs
as occasions in which God
works to nourish and sustain,
comfort and challenge,
teach and transform us.

4.2 Baptism

Blessed is the congregation

that announces that their true identity
is found in Jesus Christ.

Blessed is the congregation
that proclaims how the waters of baptism
are a sign and seal
of God's promises
to wash us clean,
to adopt us into the body of Christ,
to send the Holy Spirit to renew, empower,
and resurrect us a to new life in Christ.

Blessed is the congregation
that proclaims how the waters of baptism
are also a sign and seal of God's call to renounce sin and evil,
to embrace Christ, and our new identity in him
and to live a renewed and holy life.

Wise is the community
who celebrates baptism joyfully
and remembers that baptism as a means of grace and encouragement
to live out our vows of covenant
faithfulness.

4.3 Lord's Supper

Blessed is the church
that regularly celebrates the Lord's Supper
as a feast of thanksgiving, communion, and hope.

Blessed is the congregation
that not only gratefully remembers God's creating and redeeming work in Jesus Christ,
knowing his presence in the breaking of the bread,
but also gratefully receives the gift of union with Jesus Christ and Christ's body,
and looks forward to the feast of the coming kingdom.

Blessed is the congregation
that shares this meal
by "discerning the body of Christ" in its manifold oneness,
by expressing hospitality for one another
with grace and truth (1 Cor 11.29-33),
and by reflecting God's hospitality for us
in ministries of hospitality in the world.

V. A Blessed and Commissioned People Serving in Jesus' Name

5.1 God's Sending

Blessed is the congregation
in which believers are
encouraged by God's gracious blessing,
and challenged by God's gracious call
to proclaim the good news of Jesus

and to live as a healing presence in the world
in the name of Jesus.

5.2 Daily Worship

Wise is the community
that nourishes faith
by encouraging daily worship for all believers,
with emphasis on reading and meditating on God's Word,
seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
offering prayers of praise and petition,
singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,
listening for God in "sheer silence", (1Kings 19.12)
and living every moment before the face of God.

5.3 Hospitality and Evangelization

Blessed are communities
in which hospitality
is practiced in both public worship and in personal lives,
where strangers and guests are welcomed and embraced,
where the poor and marginalized, diseased and forsaken,
can find refuge under the shadow of God's wings.

Blessed are communities
in which all people are invited and challenged
to become disciples of Jesus,
receiving baptism and formation in the faith (cf Mt.28.19)

5.4 Formation for Worship

Wise are congregations
that invite and challenge believers
of all ages and abilities
to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3.18).

Blessed are congregations
that nurture the faithful interplay
of scripture, doctrines, practices, and the fruit of the Spirit.

Wise are congregations that deepen worship
through reflection on and teaching about the meaning of worship practices.

5.5 Worship, Compassion, and Justice

Blessed are congregations
whose public worship points to Jesus Christ,
and Jesus' message about the
kingdom of God.

Blessed are congregations
whose corporate worship and public witness
are consistent with each other
and faithful to God's Word,
whose worship and witness are

a testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Blessed are congregations who seek to receive
the liberating work of the Holy Spirit
who alone can break through hypocrisy
and through whom
justice and peace, worship and witness,
can truly embrace.

5.6 Maranatha: Worship and Christian Hope

Blessed are congregations
who are not content
to live only the present moment,
but whose worship expresses
the groaning of all creation
for the fullness of God's reign
in Jesus Christ.

Blessed are congregations whose
life together is summed up
in the certain hope of the prayer "Maranatha"—
"come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22.20).