

New World, New Temple, New Worship: the Book of Revelation in the Theology and Practice of Christian Worship – Part 3

Martyn Cohan

Analogous periods of covenantal transition

In Part 2 we argued that Revelation describes the inauguration of worship in the heavenly sanctuary of the new covenant. There are a number of analogous transitional events in the Old Testament which establish worship in a new sanctuary. These important events are recorded in Exodus 19–24 and 2 Chronicles 5–7. It is important to note that although Exodus 19–24 takes place at Sinai before the tabernacle is constructed, the act of covenant renewal described is nevertheless programmatic for tabernacle worship. Evidence that the tabernacle was patterned after Sinai is seen in the glory cloud descending from the mountain to the Most Holy Place. Furthermore, the levels of access granted to the people and their representatives correspond: only Moses and Aaron had access to the mountain top and the Most Holy Place; representatives had access to the mountainside and the Holy Place; while the people could gather at the foot of the mountain and at the courtyard. This tripartite division confirms that we are correct in thinking of the tabernacle as a portable Sinai. It is more obvious that 2 Chronicles 5–7 record the worship service that established worship in the Solomonic temple. Therefore, the worship in both the tabernacle and the temple was established by means of a worship service.

Observing the establishment of worship in the heavenly temple of the new covenant is less straightforward since the temple in question is spiritual and comes down from heaven. At Sinai, the whole community witnessed the events. Solomon called representatives from all the families of Israel to the dedication of the temple. In Revelation, Christ calls John up to witness and write about the worship service that inaugurated the worship of the new temple. In order to demonstrate that John witnesses a worship service, we outline the events at Sinai and the temple and then compare and contrast them with Revelation.

Exodus 19–24.

1. The Word of God, spoken by Moses, calls the people together (19:1-9).
2. The people ceremonially separate themselves from uncleanness to signify confession and repentance (19:10-15).
3. At the trumpet call, the people approach God and Moses their mediator ascends the mountain (19:16-24).
4. Moses descends and God speaks the Decalogue to all the people (20:2-20).
5. Moses ascends to receive the Book of the Covenant (20:21).
6. Moses descends and brings God's word to the people (24:3)¹
7. The people respond by promising to obey (24:3).
8. Burnt offerings and peace offerings are sacrificed (24:4-5).
9. The word is once again read to the people (24:7).
10. The people respond by promising to obey (24:7).
11. The blood of the covenant is sprinkled on them, confirming that the covenant has been 'cut' (24:8; cf. Heb. 9:19-22).
12. Access is granted into God's presence (24:9-10).
13. God celebrated a covenant meal with representatives of the people who, presumably, partook of the peace offerings (Exod. 24:1-2, 9-17).

2 Chronicles 5–7:

1. In response, Israel assembled before the king, his elders and priests (5:2-5).²
2. Initially, there is a great sacrifice (5:6).
3. Priests enter the inner sanctuary (5:7-10).
4. Singing of praise with musical instruments (5:11-13).
5. The glory cloud fills the house (5:13-14).
6. Solomon proclaims the Word of God to the people (6:1-11).
7. Solomon's prayer of intercession on behalf of the people (6:12-42).³
8. Fire consumes the sacrifices and glory fills the temple so the priests cannot enter (7:1-2).
9. The people fall down and praise God (7:3).
10. Israel partakes of the peace offerings in a feast (7:4-9).
11. Certain of the blessing of God, the people are dismissed (7:10).

Revelation 4–22:

1. John is called up to witness the assembly around the throne and sees the priestly elders singing praise (4:1–5:3).
2. John weeps because of the unworthiness of all humanity (5:4).

3. The sacrificial lamb appears before the throne—the high priest of chapter 1 has offered himself (5:5-7).
4. The assembly responds in praise (5:8-14).
5. The scroll is opened by breaking the seals (6:1-8:5).
6. The prayers of the saints ascend, like incense, to the throne (8:3-5).
7. God responds with fire (8:5) [Pentecost].
8. The trumpets proclaim the word (8:6–11:14).
9. The elders praise God (11:15-18).
10. The temple is opened in a glorious way (11:19).
11. The symbolic pictures proclaim the word (12:1–15:1).
12. The martyrs respond in song (15:3-4).
13. The sanctuary is opened and is filled with glory: no one can enter (15:5-8)
14. Judgement is poured out from heaven (chs. 16–18).
15. The marriage supper of the lamb meal (19:1–22:5).
16. Christ's army is sent out into the world (19:11–20:10).
17. Benediction (22:6-21).

Structural analysis of these transitional events

These transitional events have the same basic structure.

- (1) The people are gathered together for worship either by trumpet or decree.
- (2) Sin is dealt with by sacrifice. In Exodus and Revelation this sacrifice was in the past, by Passover and the cross respectively, but it is acknowledged in the liturgy by repentance or weeping.
- (3) The word is proclaimed to the people.
- (4) The people respond with declaration, prayer or sung praise.
- (5) They share a fellowship meal before being dismissed.

The pattern of worship in these transitional events was programmatic for the pattern of worship in those sanctuaries. This is confirmed by comparison with the record of Aaron's consecration in Leviticus 9 which describes in order the three main sacrifices of the normal temple liturgy: (1) the purification offering (for cleansing), (2) the ascension/whole burnt offering (symbolizing complete consecration) and (3) the peace/fellowship offering (celebrating communion). That is to say, "Worshippers are purified, ascend into God's presence, whereupon they eat and drink with God."⁴ At the macro level, these sacrifices correspond to the fivefold pattern seen in the inauguration of tabernacle worship: sin is dealt with, there is a whole-hearted response to God and finally

there is a covenant meal. In other words, following Harrison, ‘[w]hen proper atonement had been made [through the sin offering] the worshipper was to surrender his life and labor to God, as indicated by the burnt and cereal offerings. Finally, he was to enjoy fellowship with God within the context of a communion meal, which the peace offering furnished’.⁵

Wenham suggests that this ‘pattern of Old Testament sacrifices may thus provide a pattern of truly Christian worship’.⁶ We will argue that since the basic structure of the Old Testament sacrifices correlates with Revelation’s description of new covenant worship, this is indeed so. To confirm this, we will demonstrate that John intends Revelation to structure the worship of the new covenant church.

Covenant Renewal Worship

The relationship between the seven letters and the whole book suggests that John sets out a liturgy in which the churches renew covenant. First, we observe that the letters themselves are structured as covenant renewal documents. The most extended example of such a document is Deuteronomy. The covenant renewal sequence in Deuteronomy can be outlined as follows—

1. Declaration of the sovereign: God initiates the covenant renewal process through his representative (1:1-5).
2. Historical overview: Israel’s rebellion is rehearsed, highlighting the need for renewal (1:6–4:43).
3. Stipulations: A sermon, structured around the ten commandments, focuses on covenant obligations (4:44–26:19).
4. Sanctions: God calls witnesses, promises blessings and threatens curses (chs. 27–30).
5. Directions for implementation: Joshua is commissioned to lead the people into the Promised Land (chs. 31–34).

The covenant renewal pattern of the letters is as follows—

1. Declaration of the sovereign: The risen Christ who sees and measures the churches writes to each church’s ‘ambassador’.
2. Historical overview: Christ describes the present state of the church and either praises or critiques it.
3. Stipulations: Each church is told what to do.
4. Sanctions: the Lord will come soon to reward and punish.
5. Directions for implementation: an exhortation to listen and a promise to reward ‘overcomers’.

A similar covenant renewal pattern structures the whole book of Revelation. The most straightforward parallel is in chapter 1 where we meet the Christ who will investigate his churches. Each of the seven letters draws on this portrayal of Christ in the opening section which declares him sovereign over that congregation.

We see another parallel in the blessings and curses promised to the churches later in the book. The destruction of Jerusalem shows what happens when Christ comes in covenant judgement. Thus, the Laodiceans, with all their Babylonian pretensions,⁷ should take heed as they see Jerusalem spewed out (Lev. 18:28; 20:22) and buy gold, garments and eye salve while they still can engage in liturgical transactions (3:16-18; cf. 18:15). Those in Pergamum witness the seriousness of what it is for Christ to come with his sword (cf. 2:16). The Thyatirans, the ‘prototype of Babylon-the-whore’, see the consequences of spiritual adultery (17:4; 18:6-9; cf. 2:20-23).⁸

We also see the promised blessings. In the marriage supper, we have the promised meal (19:9; cf. 3:21), there are white garments (3:5 cf. 19:14), and the saints are crowned (cf. 2:10; 3:11). The overcomers (21:7) inhabit the New Jerusalem where there is no second death (20:6; cf. 2:11). The foundation stones are inscribed with names (21:14, 19; cf. 2:17).⁹ God is the light of the city (19:15; 22:16; cf. 2:26-28). The inhabitants are named in the book of life (20:12 cf. 3:5). The saints are enthroned (22:3; cf. 3:21) and there is access to the tree of life (22:2 cf. 2:7). Christ’s name is on their foreheads, and since they are also pillars, the name is on the pillar (21:2, 22, 25 cf. 3:8, 12).

These covenant blessings, promised to the churches, actually belong to those who have washed their robes in baptism and so gather to read, hear and keep the words of the prophecy (1:3; 22:14, 18). Correspondingly, those who hear and refuse to obey face judgement. Therefore, Lord’s Day worship is when Christ comes to his churches to examine, reward and punish. These blessings and curses correspond to the final stage of the covenant renewal cycle, which is that of implementation.

The other sections of the covenant renewal cycle are as follows: (1) historical overview of the situation in the churches (chs. 2–3); (2) the stipulations of the kingdom are laid out as the seals are opened and the king calls for allegiance

(chs. 4–7); and (3) the sanctions correspond to the trumpets which describe the fate of God’s enemies and the cost of following Christ (chs. 8–14).

Therefore, as the prophecy was read aloud to them, John intends the churches to engage in covenant renewal. The congregations were called together to confess their sins, hear God’s word, resolve to keep that word and share in the sacrament. As was the case with the inauguration of tabernacle and temple worship, the inaugural pattern is programmatic for the ongoing worship of the people of God.

The liturgy for covenant renewal worship

From Revelation we may trace out the new covenant liturgy as follows—

1. Introduction (1:1-9).
2. Call to worship (1:10-20)—Christ calls his people together on the Lord’s Day.
3. Confession of sins (chs. 2–3)—Sin is identified and there is a call to repentance.
4. Ascension for praise (chs. 4–5)—The door is opened to ascend into God’s presence. The church joins in the worship of the angels around the throne.
5. Opening of the word (chs. 6–7).
6. Proclamation of the word (chs. 8–14)—this includes reading (trumpets) and preaching (the message having been internalised by the preacher just as John ate the scroll).
7. Administration of the Lord’s Supper (chs. 15–10)—a meal in which participants share in either the blessings or curses of the covenant.
8. Mission (19:11–22:7)—the church is dismissed from God’s presence into the world as Christ’s army.
9. Benediction (22:8-21).

Perhaps the section that requires most explanation is how the bowls of judgement correspond to the sacrament. The Lord’s Supper confirms (or, in the language of covenant renewal, implements) what is proclaimed in the word. Correspondingly, if the churches refuse to hear and refuse to repent, then the Supper, rather than being a time when they dine with Christ, becomes an occasion when Christ comes against them like a thief. Then, like harlot Babylon, Jezebel, the false bride, drinks from a cup of wrath which can cast one down onto a sick bed (2:22). This is illustrated in the Corinthian church

where, because of their disobedience, a number of the congregation had died or were sick (1 Cor. 11:30). This idea of a meal of judgement associated with false worship is seen in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve disobeyed God and, rather than partaking of the Tree of Life, ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and so brought judgement on themselves.

The basic pattern revealed for worship as covenant renewal is—

1. God calls us together—we praise him
2. God cleanses us—we confess and experience forgiveness
3. God consecrates us—we ascend to where his word is proclaimed and we respond with prayer and praise
4. God communes with us—we eat a meal in his presence
5. God commissions us—we go out to serve him.

Practical Implications

Three things should now be clear: (1) a definite liturgical structure or sequence has been revealed; (2) the decisive judgement on the old world, by the destruction of its centre of worship, inevitably leads to a new world centred around worship in a new temple; and (3) liturgy involves covenant renewal worship. However, regarding (1), few within the Reformed community have examined whether Scripture demands or reveals such an order. In considering (2), some Reformed liturgists argue that, with the abolition of the ceremonial law,¹⁰ the early church rightly understood its worship according to the model of the synagogue, rather than the temple, because synagogue worship was ‘essentially the worship of the temple minus the apparatus of sacrifice: temple, priest, altar, victim, incense, and ritual’.¹¹ Some believe that reintroducing the language of the temple is precisely the error of Rome. This has led some to assert that the defining marks of new covenant worship are ‘simplicity over complexity, preaching over ceremony, Word over Sacrament’.¹² Consequently, in terms of (3), this emphasis on synagogue and simplicity means that major aspects of the covenantal renewal cycle are lost.

In exploring the implications of the liturgical structure, we will discuss the appropriateness of temple imagery and then investigate how the covenantal aspect of worship can be emphasised. We shall refer to some key moments in liturgical history which will illuminate the practical implications of this study.

Structure and Sequence

Many discussions of Reformed worship make use of the categories of ‘the regulative principle’ and so tend to ask questions about discrete ‘elements of worship’ over against questions of order and sequence. Although many ignore questions of structure, some Reformed liturgists do debate the most appropriate liturgical sequence. Some of these discussions, appealing primarily to logic and the Reformed tradition, are unlikely to persuade those looking for a more exegetical argument. Others who argue that ‘there is now no carefully prescribed temple liturgy’ advocate a structure shaped by a ‘redemptive “meta-narrative”,¹³ i.e. ‘gospel logic’.¹⁴ (Harp even points out that in Revelation ‘the order of heavenly worship seems to reflect the order of redemptive history’).¹⁵ Thus, a declaration of God’s authority would be followed by expressions of repentance and faith, followed by the means of salvation before the people are dismissed to serve God in gratitude. However, since the gospel is covenantal, those who arrange the elements of worship according to this ‘gospel design’ unwittingly advocate a liturgy very suitable for worship in the new temple.

Having established the exegetical case, here we consider the structure of the liturgy from a historical standpoint. It is significant that, in a number of ways, the pattern in Revelation was evident in some of the earliest descriptions of Christian worship. Justin Martyr records a Lord’s Day assembly which involved Word, prayer and communion.¹⁶ Pliny’s description of worship to Trajan implies a covenant ceremony with binding oaths to godliness.¹⁷ Hippolytus urged a return to apostolic worship with word and sacrament.¹⁸ When these patristic liturgies are considered alongside the fifth century liturgies of Rome, Augustine and Constantinople, there are major similarities to the pattern of call, confession, consecration, communion and commission. There are also dissimilarities: these patristic liturgies (i) distinguish the Service of the Word and the Service of the Table (in Revelation, the trumpets which correspond to the proclamation of the Word and the bowls which pertain to the negative side of the sacrament, are united in one service); and (ii) they place little emphasis on confession and they provide few formal opportunities for the people to respond to the Word.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to downplay the order and structure of even the second century liturgies. Some discussions appear to operate with an evolutionary model in which early Christian worship moves from free, unstructured and more charismatic forms into later hierarchical and ritualistic

early catholic forms. While the worship described in the epistles belonged to the foundational period and thus, like the period of David's tent was more basic and preliminary, the evidence from Revelation and the second century does not support a simple evolutionary view. This view seems to operate with the assumptions of Romanticism in which the early is simple and the simple is good. Instead, we contend that complexity may, in fact, be a mark of maturity.

Such an appeal to church history has precedents. The Reformers understood themselves to have recovered worship that was (to use titles from Old's books) *According to Scripture* with *Patristic Roots*.¹⁹ They cited the Fathers as 'witnesses to the purer forms of worship of the ancient church' that confirmed 'a usage which had been established by Scripture'.²⁰ For example, Calvin couples scriptural arguments for a covenantal understanding of the Supper with an appeal to tradition to confirm his arguments in favour of weekly communion.²¹

The Reformers did not, however, follow the pattern of the early church slavishly. Zwingli's service (1525) was stripped bare of an overtly structured liturgy and the focus was on the sermon and the minister's prayers.²² There was little emphasis on active congregational participation. In contrast, the liturgies of Luther (1526), Bucer (1537) and Calvin (1542) sought to reform the mass. By emphasising confession and by modifying the word and sacrament, they adopted something similar to the pattern that we have observed in Revelation. Luther placed the *Kyrie* after an opening psalm.²³ Bucer and Calvin introduced a set prayer of confession followed by words of pardon and absolution.²⁴ Unlike Zwingli, they emphasised not only preaching but also the need to respond to the sermon by placing the creed, intercessory prayers and almsgiving after the sermon and before communion.²⁵ Thus, it is in the liturgies of Bucer and Calvin that we find the clearest expression of the liturgical pattern for which we are arguing.

The Appropriateness of Temple Language

Having observed the structure recovered by the Reformation, we will argue that it is appropriate to describe worship in the language of the temple. Undoubtedly, the elements of Christian worship show greater empirical similarity to the synagogue, but the evidence suggests that the temple and synagogue were 'theologically integrated' and therefore, strictly speaking, cannot be isolated and detached.²⁶ Instead, the synagogue was an extension of

the temple. This unity has bearing on how we assess the background influences on Revelation's portrayal of worship in Part 1.

The following demonstrates the integration of temple and synagogue. First, within Revelation, there is no sharp antithesis between the temple and synagogue; rather, the synagogue is understood to be an outpost of the temple. Satan took up residence in the temple and sent out false teaching like streams of water (12:15). The letters to the churches describe some of the false teachers that have gone out and at least two local synagogues are described as a 'synagogue of Satan' (2:9; 3:9).

Secondly, first century evidence appears to support this.²⁷ In literature, the Apocrypha, Philo, Josephus, and the Dead Sea Scrolls understand synagogue worship as temple worship in a different form, e.g. they describe the synagogue as a 'temple' of a 'sacred precinct'.²⁸ Archaeologically, the bathing pools in excavated Palestinian synagogues suggest that the holiness regulations of the temple might have applied. Synagogue worship was described as 'sacrifice'; offerings for the temple appear to have been stored in the synagogue; and additionally, the synagogue excavated at Beth Alpha contained a mosaic that depicted the temple and its furnishing. Thus, it is 'incorrect to categorise the Temple as "the place of the cult" on the one hand, and the synagogue as "the place of the scroll" on the other'.²⁹ The Temple and synagogue were integrated and we should not play one off against the other.

Applying this to the background influences in Part 1, we restate that there are similarities between the presentation of worship in Revelation and the worship of the temple, synagogue, or early church. In seeking to account for this we note that 'correlation is not causation'. Thus, we should not necessarily assume that Revelation was causally based on earlier liturgies, literature or practice. The relationship may be described as follows: in Revelation, the wicked temple-synagogue stood under judgement and was about to be replaced; the church was to be what those institutions failed to be, and therefore it is unsurprising if we observe some similarities between that which was passing away and that which would both replace and fulfil it. By way of causation, this occurred because (ultimately) the heavenly worship, described in Revelation, was the pattern used to structure both the worship of the temple-synagogue and its replacement, i.e. the worship of the early church.

Therefore it is entirely fitting to describe public worship in the language of the temple.³⁰ The New Testament rarely compared the church and its worship to the synagogue but frequently compared the church to the temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 12:22-24; 1 Pet. 2:1-10).³¹ Drawing on the language of the temple, in worship the Word of God cuts up the sacrifice (Heb. 4:12), prayer and song are a sacrifice of praise (1 Pet. 2:5) and our offerings are pleasing sacrifices (Heb. 13:15-16). Therefore, the biblical and historical evidence together suggest that we can speak of worship using the language of the temple. We now turn to discuss why both the biblical pattern and the concept of temple worship have largely been undermined or lost.

The loss of the structure and the temple model

In the Roman Empire, the structure was initially lost when the barbarian invaders, many of whom were Arian or pagan, converted *en masse* to orthodox Christianity. The church did not refuse baptism but did refuse communion. Communion was increasingly monopolised by the clergy and monasteries and in the late mediaeval period, the priest was often the only communicant. The structure recovered by the Reformation was lost for various reasons.³² Of particular note is the loss of structure and temple imagery, one significant cause being discussions about how Scripture regulated worship. Although debates rage over how precisely the Reformation and Puritan regulative principles differ, the fact of the matter is that the Puritan approach, sometimes articulated as ‘whatever is not commanded is forbidden’, was narrower than the formulation used by Bucer and Calvin.

It is not that the Westminster divines lacked a concept of ‘good and necessary consequence’,³³ or that they failed to use the Old Testament or emphasise the covenant.³⁴ It appears that because so much of their thinking about worship was polemically driven, there was a tendency to condemn anything that lacked explicit scriptural warrant in the form of a ‘proof text’. The application of temple worship categories to public worship appeared to some to be too ‘Roman’. Perhaps the growth in rabbinic studies also led them to emphasise the synagogue. All told, some failed to utilise the multifaceted way in which the Old and New Testament Scriptures regulate worship.

Much of the debate over worship is still polemically driven by a concern to create distance between opposing views. Poythress has brilliantly shown the

use of counterfeiting in Revelation and elsewhere argues that ‘error is always parasitic on truth’.³⁵ Thus, we should be mindful that non-Reformed churches may have retained important insights into the theology of worship, even if those insights have been practised inappropriately. Our desire should be to reclaim and reform such things rather than simply reject them out of concern to distance ourselves from false worship.

Towards a Reformation of Worship

(i) Structure

In practice, a reformation of worship will involve recovering the pattern of call, confession, consecration, communion and commission. The communion meal should be understood as an essential and logical part of the weekly meeting. The liturgy should not be unnecessarily divided by separating the sacrament from the ministry of the word. Many of the Reformers attempted to implement such a pattern: Bucer successfully implemented weekly communion for the whole church, and although Calvin argued for weekly communion on the basis of the unity of word and sacrament and the practice of the early church, the Genevan authorities did not allow it.

Calvin placed the *sursum corda* (lift up your hearts) immediately immediately before the Supper. However, Revelation’s portrayal of worship suggests that the *sursum corda* should be placed much earlier, after the confession and absolution (chs. 1–3) as it represents the call of Christ to ascend and draw near. Placing it before the ministry of the word keeps the service from being divided. Similarly, it is appropriate to sing the *Sanctus* (ch. 4:8) after the *sursum corda* because, as we ascend, our praises join with the voices of the angels around the heavenly throne.

(ii) The covenantal aspect

More is required than simply recovering the basic liturgical sequence. The covenantal aspect of the liturgy must also be stressed. One way of doing this is to highlight the dialogical nature of the liturgy, i.e. the covenant Lord speaks and his people respond. This immediately shows that we are not considering a dialogue between equals. In the liturgy, the minister speaks on behalf of Christ. Thus his words are, as indeed in every covenant scenario, performative. He calls, absolves, preaches and invites to the Supper on Christ’s behalf. Given that one of the main applications from the seven letters was to warn and excommunicate, Christ’s minister will also exercise ministerial and declarative church power. In

Revelation, the churches (chs. 1–3) are to watch and learn from what is essentially the excommunication of Jerusalem. Therefore, after appropriate private warnings, excommunication should be carried out in front of the congregation as a lesson of how serious it is to be refused access to the feast.

Far from being spectators, the congregation are instead active participants in this dialogue. Although this insight was recovered in the Reformation it was lost by such things as an inappropriate emphasis on divine transcendence and an individualism that was suspicious of a corporate response. The congregation responds to God’s call to renew covenant in a number of ways—

(1) Verbal response takes a variety of different forms: there are set formulas such as ‘This is the Word of the Lord—Thanks be to God’; the corporate ‘amen’ has three functions as a covenantal oath sworn by the congregation, a benediction and doxology; finally, there are other vows (made to God directly) and oaths (made to others with God as witness). These are most commonly used when receiving members and at the ordination of officers, but in fact, many hymns involve making promises and commitments.

(2) The congregation also participates in the covenantal dialogue through song. Although in Revelation there is no direct and simple use of a psalm, many of the hymnic portions appear to be christological paraphrases of the Psalms. Given that Revelation is concerned with covenantal blessings and curses, the Psalter is ideal for public worship. One reason why psalm singing has declined is that many fail to place the imprecatory psalms or those which speak of curses in a covenantal context. Psalms are also appropriate because many belong to the period of the establishment of David’s kingdom and so find their fulfilment in these days as Christ rides out conquering (19:11-16).

(3) In prayer, the congregation expresses thanks for God’s ongoing blessing and also calls down God’s judgement on her enemies. Thus, prayer should be considered as the intercessions of the king’s bride seated at his banqueting table. One final perspective that Revelation gives us on the response that we make in the divine dialogue is to liken it to liturgical transactions in which we appeal to the Lord to give us what he has promised (3:18). Studying the responses in the dialogue that occurs in Revelation suggests a number of practical implications which may help worship to be done ‘on earth as in heaven’. The liturgy appears to be organised, planned and prepared. The singing is antiphonal; posture, such as prostration or standing, is important. The praise is grand and accompanied by instruments.

(iii) Applying the imagery of Revelation

Some of the images used in Revelation help us understand the true nature of covenant renewal worship.

(a) Sacred festival time

The church gathers for worship on the Lord's Day, i.e. the Day of the Lord. Such language was also used to describe the emperor feasts. In Lord's Day worship the church enters a different time: it is 'festival time' when the future inhabits the present. In chapter 1 we noted the emphasis placed on the function of Revelation by the rhetorical critics. As it gathers, the liturgy has power to create a 'new symbolic universe' that changes us and the world around us as we inhabit 'ideal time'.³⁶ The 'liturgical enactment of the divine drama' means that in each 'local performance' the contemporary actors 'actually participate in the reality that is indicated by the performance'.³⁷ In church discipline, the eschatological rule of the saints is seen.³⁸

(b) The throne in the temple on the mountaintop

In one way, the meeting begins as soon as the congregation sets out to gather 'as the church' (1 Cor. 11:18). The bottom of the heavenly court is on earth but God calls his people to ascend his holy hill (Rev. 21:16; cf. Heb. 12:22; Gal. 4:26). The barriers that prevented access to Sinai and the tabernacle-temple have gone, the door has been opened (Heb. 10:19-20) and they have been purified to approach the heavenly throne (Heb. 9:11-4). Without the eyes of faith, such congregations may look rather unimpressive gatherings. However, the saints enjoy the most privileged access to the sanctuary.

(c) The bride and the wedding feast

We have already alluded to the privileged access enjoyed by the bride seated at the table of her king. The relationship between 'all of life is worship' and the corporate gathering is seen in the bride, who unlike the harlot, is clothed in 'the righteous deeds of the saints' (19:8). In the covenant renewal the bride returns to her first love (2:4) and makes vows that pledge faithfulness.

(d) The army of Christ

Another perspective on the covenant renewal cycle is that of Christ's army coming before him to be inspected. Worship is 'the central act of holy war'.³⁹ That is, their prayers cause Christ to act in blessing and judgement (8:4-5). As

Christ is enthroned in the praises of his people he is a terror to their enemies (Josh. 6; 2 Chron. 20). Christ rides out conquering through the church's ministry of word and sacrament (19:11-16). In faithful and obedient covenant renewal worship Christ's people overcome, Satan is bound and judgement falls on those who are unfaithful.

(e) Life in the New Jerusalem

Those who had entered the New Jerusalem by baptism belonged to a new social order. Leithart demonstrates from Weber's *Economy and Society* that ancient cities distinguished between the patricians and the plebeians.⁴⁰ Only patricians enjoyed access to the religious rites of the *sancta* and the political and cultural privileges associated with it. In the New Jerusalem there were no plebeians; all Christians had access to the sanctuary and participated in the sacrificial meal.⁴¹ Thus, the Supper was a sign of the church's distinctiveness. It was a sign that a new 'city' was invading the city.

Having observed, with the help of history and the imagery of Revelation, the covenant renewal liturgy for corporate worship in the new temple, we close with a call to implement a liturgy which embodies this 'worship rationale'. The Reformed liturgies of the sixteenth century embody much outlined from Revelation. Modern liturgies that lack the appropriate elements and structure, or which do not sufficiently emphasise the covenantal aspect of worship, cannot consistently embody the conclusions we have drawn from Revelation.

Conclusion

The extensive survey of scholarly explanations of the Revelation's worship language in Part 1 yielded a variety of proposals as to possible background influences, theological concerns and functional accounts. We saw that the Domitianic emperor worship hypothesis was not supported by the evidence; another explanation was required, one which took into account the book's rhetorical function and the highly significant influences of Old Testament imagery and Jewish and Christian liturgies.

Recent formulations of the preterist interpretation of Revelation offer great help in understanding both its theology of worship and its function. Thus, Revelation describes a period of decisive covenantal transition in the years leading up to A.D. 70. The destruction of the temple, which was the centre of

worship in the old creation, vindicated the establishment of a new world centred around a new temple.

John saw these events as he witnessed a worship service in the heavenly sanctuary. This service had obvious structural similarities to the events which, previously, had established worship in the tabernacle and temple. Thus, Revelation does not describe the heavenly worship in which the church on earth will one day participate. Rather, it describes the events which brought about the reality of worship in the new temple; and worship in the new temple is itself a millennial reality for the church to be understood, practised and enjoyed in the now of already-not yet.

As with previous sanctuaries, the unrepeatable inaugural event sets the pattern for ongoing worship. John intends the churches to renew covenant as they are called together into God's temple to confess their sin, approach his throne, hear his Word and then share the feast. Practically, this means—

(i) Recovering this liturgical structure

- (a) Call to worship
- (b) Confession and absolution
- (c) Consecration—i.e. a wholehearted response to the Word of God read and preached
- (d) Communion—weekly
- (e) Commission

(ii) Realising the appropriateness of temple language and thus the true place, nature and significance of worship, and

(iii) Emphasising the covenantal nature of worship and thus

- (a) The dialogical principle
- (b) The reality of covenantal curses as well as blessing which can be expressed by restoring Psalm singing; Imprecatory prayers; and Church discipline.

Therefore, as the church has confessed, *lex orandi, lex credendi*; Revelation and liturgy together have mutual explanatory power.

MARTYN COWAN is the Assistant Minister of First Saintfield Presbyterian Church, Co. Down. This article is adapted from his MTh dissertation from Oak Hill Theological College.

ENDNOTES

1. 'Words' and 'law' summarise the Decalogue and Book of the Covenant being the Hebrew words introduce both legal corpora (20:1; 21:1).
2. The occasion was the annual feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-43; Num. 29:12-39; Deut. 16:13-17).
3. Solomon's intercession dwelt on matters which pertained to the curses of the covenant, e.g. military defeat 6:24-25, drought vv. 26-7, various disasters vv. 28-31 and the inclusion of the Gentiles vv. 32-3. These are pertinent themes in Revelation.
4. J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), pp. 80-1.
5. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus* (Leicester: IVP), pp. 106-7.
6. G. Wenham, *Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 66.
7. G. Campbell, "Antithetical Feminine Urban Imagery and a Tale of Two Women-Cities in the Book of Revelation," *TynB*. 55 (2004), p. 83 notes that Laodicea anticipates Babylon by boasting in wealth and her need of clothing suggests the shameful nakedness of unfaithful Israel (Ezek. 16:8, 35, 37; 23:10, 18, 29; Hos. 2:9; Nah. 3:5; Hab 2:15).
8. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
9. Cf. Eph. 2:19-22.
10. Westminster Confession XIX, iii.
11. T. L. Johnson, *Leading in Worship* (Oak Ridge: Covenant Foundation, 1996), p. 8. By way of contrast, R. T. Beckwith *The Study of Liturgy*, eds., C. P. M. Jones, G. Wainwright and E. J. Yarnold (London: SPCK, 1992), pp. 39-51 believes it is impossible to conclude which Jewish institution was most influential.
12. H. O. Old, *Worship that is Reformed According to Scripture* (Atlanta: JKP, 1984), p. 43: 'The first Christians took over many of the worship traditions of the synagogue. They did not take over the rich and sumptuous ceremony of the Temple, but rather the simpler synagogue service, with its Scripture reading, its sermon, its prayers, and its psalmody.'
13. G. Harp, "Gospel Ordered Worship," *Modern Reformation* 12 (May/June 2003): 39.
14. D. G. Hart and J. R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), p. 98. T. L. Johnson, *Leading in Worship*, p. 15; "The Pastor's Public Ministry," p. 137.
15. G. Harp, "Gospel Ordered Worship," pp. 39-40.
16. Justin, *First Apology*, pp. 65-67.
17. 'It was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as a god: and . . . they bound themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but not to commit theft or robbery or adultery, not to break their

word, and not to deny a deposit when demanded. After this was done their custom was to depart, and to meet again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food; and even this (they said) they had given up after my edict, by which accordance with your commands I had forbidden the existence of clubs.’

18. Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, “The Form for the Lord’s Supper,” W. D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship: Its Developments and Forms* (Oxford: OUP, 1936), pp. 21-25.
19. C. M. N. Eire, *The War Against the Idols* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), p. 2. The heirs of Calvin often fail to recognise that the ‘central focus of Reformed Protestantism was its interpretation of worship.’
20. H. O. Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship*, (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975), pp. 1, 233.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 307. R. S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1953), pp. 5, 71, 135.
22. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship*, pp. 81-2.
23. B. Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 131. N. R. Needham, “Worship Through the Ages,” (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), p. 397.
24. B. Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, pp. 170-1, 197-8.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 204. Old, *Worship that is Reformed*, p. 73 describes the dozen extant sermons from Bucer as fine examples of explaining the text and applying it to relevant issues. Thompson, *Liturgies*, p. 165 argues that, for Bucer, the creed ‘was both the proper response to the Word of God, and the expression of Christian renewal can commitment’.
26. P. J. Leithart, “Synagogue or Temple? Models for the Christian Worship,” *Credenda Agenda* 13, pp. 122-3.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-28.
28. D. D. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period* (Atlanta: SBL, 1999), pp. 396-414.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 404.
30. P. J. Leithart, “Synagogue or Temple,” pp. 130-32.
31. Only James speaks of the church as a synagogue (Jam. 2:2-6).
32. See, for instance, the work of P. J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), pp. 272-3. After his diagnosis, Lee calls for a ‘degnosticizing of Protestantism’ which replaces an occasional ‘unmeal-like rite’ by returning to frequent communion with ‘earthy red wine’ and ‘common bread’.
33. Westminster Confession I, vi.

34. The confession is structured around the architectonic principle of the covenant and the divines used OT texts to direct public worship; e.g. it was appropriate to stand for prayer (Gen. 18:22), respond with 'amen' (Neh. 8:6) and have two services on the Lord's Day (Num. 28:9). Westminster Confession XXII on 'Oaths and Vows' shows both an emphasis on covenanting and a desire to take seriously something what characterised worship, not only in the OT, but also, by the example of Paul in Acts, the worship of the NT church.
35. V. S. Poythress, *The Returning King* (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 2000), pp. 16-22; *God Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999), p. 169; *Symphonic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 89-90.
36. J. G. Gager, 'The attainment of millennial bliss through myth: the book of Revelation,' *Visionaries and their Apocalypses*, ed. P. D. Hanson (London: SPCK, 1983), pp.152-3.
37. M. S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, pp. 266, 270-1.
38. P. J. Leithart, *The Kingdom and the Power*, p. 179.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 177.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-5.
41. Cf. M. S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, p. 270 and his description of baptism as being 'rescripted' to participate in the real drama.