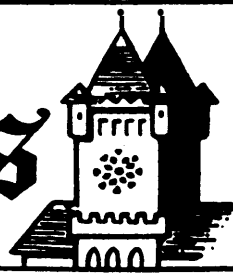


# The Geneva Papers



No. 26

© 1984, Geneva Divinity School

March, 1984

## LITURGICAL NOTES

by James B. Jordan

### No. 5: How Biblical is Protestant Worship? (Part 2)

This essay was begun in the February 1984 issue. Protestants generally, and Reformed Protestants in particular, make a great to-do about being rigorously Biblical in their approach to worship. I am asking in this essay just how true to the Bible Protestants have really been. I pointed out that it seems that Presbyterian and Reformed worship has more often used Roman Catholicism as a standard for what is done or not done, than it has the Bible. Being different from Rome is the first law of Presbyterian worship, it seems. Second, I pointed out that Biblical rigorism in worship is not the same thing as New Testament minimalism. The idea that we may use only New Testament information in formulating our worship is an Anabaptistic notion, not a Reformed one; and minimalism in worship is based on modern rationalism, not on the Bible.

Let me say a few more words about that. We took the rest of the first part of this essay to argue that the cross shape is one of the fundamental symbols and architectural structures in the Bible. Thus, the use of crosses in the Church is eminently Biblical, even though Presbyterians and Puritans have usually insisted that the use of the cross is only a "Romanist invention." The point is that the Puritan party will insist that we have some verse in Scripture which directly commands us to use the cross shape in such and such a way. They will not be impressed by the array of argument I provided in the first part of this essay.

The reason is that the Puritan approaches the Bible with preconceived ideas of what constitutes evidence and what constitutes proof. He does not get his hermeneutics from the Bible, but from modern rationalism. If the Bible indicates something "indirectly," or by way of example, this is not as good as if the Bible comes right out and says something "directly; in terms of what modern man thinks is "direct." Thus, for traditional Puritanism and Presbyterianism, the fact that the New Testament books nowhere explicitly command the use of musical instruments in worship, proves (for them) that it is forbidden to use musical instruments in worship. This is in spite of the overwhelming Biblical evidence in both Old and New Testaments that God wants musical instruments used in His worship. The point is that the Puritan and Presbyterian traditions bring arbitrary and rationalistic canons of proof to the Word of God, and demand that the Bible submit to these modern notions of logic and proof.

Van Til has taught us to think otherwise, though not all of Van Til's followers have yet caught on to the liturgical implications of his thought.

(One additional note: The printer did sloppy work on the last page of the February issue. The very last cruciform

diagram should have the limbs of the cross connected by curved lines, as if a circle had been superimposed on the center of the cross.)

I now conclude this essay by looking at a few other examples. I am not trying to be exhaustive in my survey. My sole purpose is to illustrate the point that if we are to be Biblical in our worship, we need to look back at the Bible, and not think that the Puritan/Presbyterian/Protestant tradition in worship is Biblical. At too many places, it is not.

### Posture and Gesture

I mentioned the act of crossing oneself in the first part. I am not necessarily recommending this, but I am saying that there is no reason to reject it out of hand. Christianity does not separate the soul from the body, but teaches the resurrection of the body, and affirms that we worship God in the whole person, which includes bodily movement. As Romano Guardini put it, "The man who is moved by emotion will kneel, bow, clasp his hands or impose them, stretch forth his arms, strike his breast, make an offering of something, and so on. These elementary gestures are capable of richer development and expansion, or else of amalgamation. . . . Finally, a whole series of such movements may be coordinated. This gives rise to religious action. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

Historically, the Church has always stood for certain parts of worship, knelt for others, and sat for others. Men stood for the reading of the word and for the reciting of the covenant in the law, the creed, and hymns of covenant recitation. Men knelt for prayer. Men sat to hear the Word expounded, and to eat of the Lord's Table. For some strange reason, modern evangelical Protestants sit for prayer, and for the reading of Scriptures, something even their never-kneeling Protestant forebears would have been shocked at.

Gestures have traditionally been reserved for the officiant leading the service. As Moses prayed with hands uplifted, and as Paul enjoins (1 Tim. 2:8), hands were raised in the two-pillar position during prayer. The two pillars signify two witnesses, God's Word and Oath (Hebrews 6:13-18). Thus, two pulpits in the church, with two readings from the Word during worship; two sacraments; two elements in the Holy Communion; etc. (The two pillar position of the arms has them bent at the elbow at a right angle, and palms facing outward.) Presbyterians sometimes retain the lifting up of hands in prayer; most other conservative Protestants do not.

In the benediction, when the office bearer places (not invokes) God's blessing upon his people (Numbers 6:22-27), the hands are also held in the two pillar position. Traditionally, the phrase "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" has been added to the Aaronic benediction,

6. *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (London, 1935), p. 168.

and the sign of the cross made while it is said. Presbyterians often object to this part, but as we noted above, there is really no reason to do so, for it is but an outward gesture showing that the people are members of the cruciform body of Christ, under His government and protection.

The most obvious bodily movement missing from "Bible believing Protestant" culture and worship is the sacred dance. The psalms repeatedly enjoin dancing, yet psalm-singing churches do not dance, and neither do hymn-singing churches. If there was ever proof that a Greek rationalistic intellectualism has robbed the Church of her Biblical foundations, this is it. The African churches, which have not been ruined by rationalism, use dancing. Perhaps we shall learn from them.<sup>7</sup> Some churches still retain a shadow of the dance in the procession which begins worship. That is not much, but it is better than nothing.

The purpose of this essay is not to survey every single area where Protestantism has tended to overlook Biblical teaching. The illustrations above have been selected simply to enhance the basic point, which is that Biblical worship is a far cry from conservative Reformed and Anabaptist worship. There are a variety of pastoral considerations which must be taken into account if we are to reform our worship, and some of these dictate that we should proceed carefully, and not try to do everything at once. A later installment in this series will discuss this. For now, I am not arguing that we should institute sacred dancing tomorrow, but that we need to think seriously about eventually doing so.

I close with one final illustration. The Reformed and Presbyterian churches rejoice in their heritage of singing the psalms. Few still retain this heritage. Yet the heritage itself is suspect. Why sing the psalms in versified form? To versify the psalms is to change them, and to lose much of the content. Why not simply chant them? Chanting is very easy to learn and to do; it is simply an enhanced form of reading. When we chant the psalms, we are using the exact words of God.

Why not? *Because that's what Remans and Anglicans do!* Thus, in spite of all the brave talk, the fact is that we Reformed people are less Biblical in our worship, at some points, than are the Anglicans and the post-Vatican II Roman Catholics. And this is not even to mention the fact that most Presbyterian churches do not have the Lord's Supper every week!

7. An interesting essay on this subject is Boka di MpsaLondi, "Freedom of Bodily Expression in the African Liturgy," in Maldonado and Power, ad., *Symbol and Art in Worship*. Concilium 132 (New York: Seabury, 1950).

## STUDIES IN BAPTISM

by Ray R. Sutton

### No. 24: The Soteriology of Baptism

*"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. . . . And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 1:5; 2:17).*

The title of this essay uses the word "soteriology" as a theological term meaning the doctrine of salvation. It is not intended to imply that baptism is a salvific act in the strictest sense. Rather, we want to study the doctrine of salvation as it is symbolized in the sacrament of baptism. Previous essays have demonstrated that views of baptism convey whole systems of theology. In this study, we will see how a faulty view of baptism inverts the way of salvation.

We begin with the most fundamental aspect of salvation - God saves man, and man cannot save himself (Eph.

2:1ff.). Salvation is according to God's good pleasure (Eph. 1:11), not man's volition (Jn. 1:12). Salvation is not a cooperative or synergistic event (Eph. 2:8-10). God chose us; we did not choose Him (Jn. 15:17). Thus, *salvation comes from above, not from below.*

Baptism is a picture of salvation that comes from above. This idea appears in Jesus' statement, "ye shall be baptized with the Spirit," and Peter's interpretation of this baptism via Joel's prophecy, "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." Clearly, Peter understood Pentecost as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but we must not miss the implications concerning baptism. The Spirit was "poured out" from above.

This is not foreign to Scripture. Jesus had told Nicodemus that he "needed to be born from above" (The KJV says "born again."). And Jesus further clarified to Nicodemus that the birth from above is of "water and the Spirit." Thus, in some sense water-coming-from-above is a picture of salvation from above.

Our point is merely to underscore the continuity of imagery and salvation. Water comes from above, and portrays salvation coming from above. It is that simple, and although I realize there are varying interpretations concerning the water in John 3, the continuity still stands. Even if the water here does not refer to baptism - I think it does - the continuity being referred to still prevails because this is not a novel idea in the Bible.

Peter spoke of the relationship between water and salvation when he said, "While the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism cloth also now save us" (1 Pet. 3:20-21). The imagery is unmistakable; as water comes from above, salvation comes from above, and baptism signifies this salvation (See also the rain at the Red Sea for the same imagery [Ps. 77:17]). Therefore, all views concerning baptism - its meaning, mode, and recipients - must be in conformity with the sovereign grace of salvation!

What we say about salvation should not be contradicted by what we do in baptism. If practices contradict doctrine, one cannot expect orthodoxy to continue. Having stated our basic premise concerning salvation, and how it is to be signified in baptism, I wish to develop several corollaries in this and the following essays.

### Baptism As God's Claim

Since salvation is the result of sovereign grace, and baptism is a picture of this salvation, baptism is God's claim, and is not to be confused or mixed with man's response. In an earlier essay, "Watery Profession" (No. 3 in this series.), I developed that the reception of baptism is a statement of faith. Reception, however, is not the same as the sacrament. The sacrament is God's claim, and means that grace precedes faith. Putting it another way, faith is not a precondition to grace. Rather, grace is a precondition to faith.

When human action is confused with grace, the former ends up dominating. For the sacrament of baptism, this means that baptism is understood only in human terms, and fails to be comprehended as God's sovereign claim. This failure to perceive baptism as God's claim leads to misperception and misapplication.

Baptists have argued against infant baptism on the basis that the infant cannot make a profession of faith. Although I have demonstrated that the reception of baptism is the initial profession of faith, the point is that baptism is God's claim. Moreover, as a picture of God's sovereign act, the application of baptism to an infant is consistent with grace preceding faith. Geoffrey Wainwright has put it the following way.

*"The baptism of the Mosaic Exodus was given to all (pantes), though it did not suffice to save some (tines)*

because they did not respond to it in faith (1 Cor. 10:1ff.); first God acts in baptism, *and then* the baptized should understand his baptism and believe he has been saved (Rem. 6:11); the confession of faith before baptism in the New Testament is to be taken as an indication of the divine will that the person be baptized, an indication which might also be provided by the *fact of birth to Christian parents*.” [Geoffrey Wainwright, *Christian Initiation* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969), p. 12.]

It is not as though other Scriptural defenses of infant baptism are not available, but our case must start with salvation. To insist that infant baptism is in error because faith is a precondition to grace inverts salvation. Even the Calvinistic Baptist who believes in *Sovereign Grace*, eventually will invert salvation because he objects to infant baptism on the basis that the “infant has not exercised faith.” This is an argument that is completely contrary to his view of salvation, and which will ultimately erode salvation by grace.

Baptist history illustrates. Charles Spurgeon, historically the greatest Baptist preacher, referred to the “downgrade controversy.” Although he did not attribute the problem to the Baptist rejection of infant baptism, he did, however, lament the repeated tendency of Calvinistic Baptists to slide into Arminianism. In spite of his efforts to correct the “slide,” by emphasizing the doctrine *particular redemption*, history shows that the trend was not significantly altered. Even his own pastorate was consumed by Arminianism within a short period of time subsequent to his death. Why the minimal effect? The seeds of the problem lay in his Arminian supposition concerning the sacrament of baptism.

A later Baptist Evangelist drives the point home. Billy Graham, whom Spurgeon would have severely criticized, consistently extended Spurgeon’s (representative of all Baptists) sacramental presuppositions into soteriology in his book, *How to be Born Again*. Using the supposition that faith is a pre-condition of grace, Graham stated that rebirth, a sovereign act of God, results from faith.

Although Spurgeon would have repudiated such a view concerning salvation, it must be noted that he would have rejected infant baptism with the *same* Arminian presupposition. To assert, as he surely would have and did, that an infant should not be baptized because of the absence of profession is to say that faith is a precondition of grace. This eventually makes salvation man-centered, and thus man becomes the author of his own salvation through an Arminian view of the sacrament. William Willimon has stated the problem well in his criticisms of Graham’s book.

“Throughout *How to Be Born Again*, there is no mention of baptism as the model, the norm, the Biblical and historic standard by which all our religious experiences are to be judged. Because of this, when the ‘born-again’ experience is talked about by today’s Evangelical, it is often cut off from the church, from the sacraments, or other corporate means of grace. In fact, the emotional, individualized ‘born-again’ experience becomes the *new sacrament*, the *new means of grace*.” [William Willimon, *Remember Who You Are*, (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1980), p. 86.]

Human action becomes a sacrament, and thus, the very Baptists who oppose “Romanism,” partake of the same theology. This is precisely the problem with Roman and Anglo-Catholic theology. These Churches believe the priest invests the sacraments with being and is thereby able to manipulate grace. Thus, once any human work, whether faith or the prayer of a priest, comes before grace, faith becomes the means of grace. As we have seen before, Baptist and

Roman Catholic theology are on a continuum. Both essentially participate in the same concepts despite their different manifestations.

It might be argued, however, that baptism is a human action like faith or the prayer of a priest. So, what is the difference? First, the difference is that baptism *signifies the sovereignty of God in salvation*, and not human action. When applied to an infant, this message is consistently carried forth. The Gospel is placed on the infant prior to any choice on his/her part which is precisely what happens in adult salvation. (Also, if an effusive method of baptism is applied, this imagery is not confused.)

Second, baptism is a sovereign act of *sealing*. Thus baptism is not a human action because, even though the Elder performs the sacrament, baptism is done in the *Name of the Trinity*. The *Name of God* does the claiming, not the Church or any human agency, and this means that baptism is first and foremost God’s *claim*. Moreover, although men may capriciously apply God’s Name, this does not mean that God’s Name can be manipulated. Even the “capricious” application is in the plan of God (Eph. 1:11). Whatever God’s Name claims in baptism, the result is a union unto either life or death (See essay No. 8 in this series.).

In conclusion, we have stated that baptism is God’s claim because salvation is a sovereign act. The thrust of this is that grace is a precondition of faith. Since baptism is an act of grace, faith is not necessarily visible prior to baptism in every situation. We have applied this concept to the Baptist view of infant baptism to show the Arminian leanings therein. Thus, we are reminded of what Van Tilt has said concerning the need for correct presuppositions: “It doesn’t make any difference how sharp the blade of the saw. If the set of the blade is crooked, the saw will always cut a crooked line.” Applying this to baptism, we can say that an Arminian view of the sacrament will ultimately consume one’s whole system of theology because *practice* controls the “senses” (Heb. 5:14)!

## CHRISTIANITY AND THE CALENDAR

by James B. Jordan

No. 28: The Calendar in Outline

As a rite of command performance worship, danced before the throne of God for His pleasure, the Church Year is a form of covenant recital or covenant rehearsal. The recital of the covenant in Scripture takes two forms. The first is the recounting of the great acts of redemption which God has wrought on behalf of His people. Many of the Psalms are covenant recitals, and we do this each week when we recite the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds before the throne of God.

The second form of covenant recital is the reading and sounding forth of the law of God. Many of the Psalms are thus didactic, and we do the same when we read the ten commandments or some other portion of the law each week. Why do we stand during covenant recital? Because it is a formal act performed before God. Even though we do not all read the law together, we respond to it by saying “Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep and enforce Your holy law,” thus putting ourselves again under obligation to live by God’s every Word.

The Church Year in Israel was organized according to these two halves. Passover commemorated and focused in on the mighty redemptive works of God. Tabernacles focused in on the teaching of the law of God. Redemption accomplished and applied; these are the two parts of covenant recital, and of the Church Year.

Accordingly, the first part of the Christological calendar

concerns the history of redemption. it begins with Advent, the time of remembering the Old Covenant, its darkness, and the promise of coming salvation. Historically, the assigned readings from the Old Testament and Gospels have concerned prophecies of the coming of the Messiah. There are traditionally four Lord's Days in Advent, symbolizing the period of 40 days which always indicates a time of waiting. it would be appropriate to remember the Annunciation to Mary during this period, unless we are terrified of even speaking of Mary!

Next come the birth and manifestations of our Savior. When Christmas is placed on December 25, the Circumcision of Christ, coming eight days later, falls on January 1, most appropriately! The third event in this section is Epiphany, our Lord's manifestation (epiphany means manifestation) to the Gentiles (the Magi). The fourth event is the Slaughter of the Innocents, a commemoration we should endeavor to revive in this era of rampant abortion. Fifth is the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, upon the purification of Mary, 40 days after His birth.

The Lord's Days between Epiphany and Holy Week deal with the life of Jesus Christ: His baptism, His temptations, His miracles, His Transfiguration, and His determination to go to Jerusalem as the sacrifice for the world. As Easter approaches, the forty days prior to it are historically called Lent, and this has been a time of fasting and mourning. I question whether we should retain/reintroduce Lent, and shall discuss my misgivings in a later essay in this series.

The Easter cycle comes next. Here the Church observes Passion Sunday (two weeks before), noting our Lord's determination to die for His people, Palm Sunday (one week before), Thursday in Holy Week (the last supper), Good Friday, and Easter. There follow the fifty days before Pentecost, which focus on Jesus' appearance to His people, culminating in Ascension.

Then comes Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit,

the great Teacher Who guides us into all truth, inaugurates the second half of the Christological cycle, which concentrates on our Lord's teaching. The first Sunday after Pentecost is traditionally Trinity Sunday, since the doctrine of the Trinity was one of the first doctrines hammered out in the history of the Church. Historically, All Saints' Day (November 1) has been included in this season also, since the work of the Spirit in the Church can so prominently be seen in the lives of those raised up by God for exceptional sacrifice or service.

We might add other special days in this section. For instance, July 4 might be a Day of Prayer for the United States of America. July 14 might be a Day of imprecation against Secular Humanism, since it is the date of the French Revolution. August 24 might be a Day of imprecation against Heresy, since it is the date both of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and of the Great Ejection in Britain. October 31, Reformation Day, needs no explanation; nor does Thanksgiving Day.

Since extended festivals were an important part of the Old Covenant calendar, and of the historic Church calendar, we can suggest two major festivals. Christmas, for obvious reasons, would be one. Easter might be the other, but usually the days before Easter are times of quiet reflection, not of festivity. Since most American churches have a Bible conference or vacation Bible school during the summer, and since Pentecost season is the time of special attention to teaching, it might be well for a Church to have a special week-long Bible conference in late summer or early September. Maybe we should kick off the new school year with a week of special meetings. This would answer to the purpose of the Feast of Tabernacles of the Old Covenant.

With this overview in mind, we shall next time begin a consideration of the lessons and propers for the calendar, beginning with Advent.

The Geneva Papers are published every month by Geneva Divinity School. A free six-month subscription is available to those who ask to be put on the mailing list. Address: 708 Hamvasy Lane, Tyler, TX 75701. A donation, tax deductible, is requested. Checks should be made out to The Geneva Papers. Permission to reproduce these sermons, in whole or in part, is granted, provided the name and address of The Geneva Papers is included.