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INTRODUCTION

"I," SAID A Scottish Divine, "am first a Christian; secondly, a Catholic; thirdly, a Calvinist; fourthly, a Paedo-baptist; and, fifthly, a Presbyterian."¹

When discussing the Reformed Church, which, owing to the controversy over Church-Order in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in English-speaking countries is commonly called the Presbyterian Church, it is important to stress that to be Reformed or Presbyterian it is essential to be Christian, Catholic, Calvinist, and Paedo-baptist. This applies not only to doctrine, but to worship.

In the Reformed Church all worship is centred in the person and work of Jesus Christ, His incarnation and life, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension. What is done is done "in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ". Worship must be Christian.

All Reformed Service-Books and Hymnals draw upon the devotional heritage of Christendom. In this sense, Reformed rites are Catholic. Yet this is not sufficient to give full expression to Catholicity, because to do so requires that the rites be structured and ordered in harmony with Catholic practice. They, also, should be linked to the Christian Year.

To speak of Reformed worship as Calvinistic is to run the risk of being misunderstood, because there is so much misrepresentation of Calvinism.

Christian worship rests upon a doctrinal basis, and ultimately upon the Christian doctrine of God. We do not worship a Supreme Being or an Unknown God, but One whose nature and character have been revealed to us. What, therefore, we say and do in worship must be adjusted to the doctrine of God. Worship must not be regarded as other than adoration of God as He has made himself known (in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit) to His Church.²

¹ Quoted R. Parke, *Presbyterianism*, n.d., p. 1.

² R. E. Parsons (ed.), *Worship and Education*, 1939, p. 20. Words in brackets added by writer.

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If one remembers, making due allowance for “scruples” in particulars, that the fundamental doctrine of Calvinism is the absolute sovereignty of God, it is certainly correct to say that Reformed worship must be Calvinist.

To speak of Reformed worship as Paedo-baptist does not mean that it is sufficient for a Service-Book to contain a rite for the baptism of the infant children of believers. Much more is involved, in that the doctrine of the Church must be one which holds the visible church to consist “of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children”;¹ a doctrine of marriage that holds every aspect of the union to be “in the Lord”; and a doctrine of God who is a Covenant God.

Only when expression is given to these essentials may worship be considered Reformed or Presbyterian. Leaving aside, for the moment, the Ordinal and traditional practices (for example, singing metrical psalms), let us try to understand what is meant by Reformed or Presbyterian. We have seen that worship is based on doctrine. There are three distinct classes of doctrines (i) Catholic doctrines, common to all Christians, which are summarized in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene; (ii) Evangelical doctrines, common to all Protestants, by which they are distinguished from Roman Catholics; and (iii) Particular doctrines, which are distinctive of the individual churches; for example, the Reformed are distinguished from Lutherans principally in their doctrine of the sacraments, and from Arminians in their doctrine of grace and salvation.² To speak of worship as Reformed means that as well as giving expression to Catholic and Evangelical doctrine it must also be in harmony with the distinctive doctrines of the Reformed Church.

The distinctive characteristic of Christian worship is, as we have seen, that it is “in the name of Jesus Christ”. He has revealed God to us. But this is not all. Christian worship is not simply the experience of an individual, but of the individual in community. It is the worship of a family, the church.

Three vital points arise out of this: (i) Because worship expresses our faith in God it must consist of adoration and thanksgiving, humility and repentance, learning from God, prayer for others and for ourselves; (ii) Worship is always corporate; even when a Christian is praying alone he is nevertheless praying with other Christians and with the

¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 25: 2 (hereafter referred to as WCF).

² J. M. Barkley, *Westminster Formularies in Irish Presbyterianism*, 1956, p. 14.

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Church; and (iii) Because worship is corporate, it is always outward as well as inward, and thus uses words and silence, music and action, light and colour, and so on.

We must now outline briefly the origins of Christian worship and of the Reformed rites.

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