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UNITY AND UNIFORMITY: TOWARDS A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

Locating this paper in one theological discipline is a somewhat difficult task. This is perhaps so as the paper attempts to use its co-authors' backgrounds in systematic theology and church history to probe what is, if anything, a niche within a sub-discipline: applied ecclesiology.

The immediate backdrop to this paper is the current debate on worship in the Free Church of Scotland, which focuses on whether all congregations within the denomination must observe strict uniformity of worship (in this case, inspired materials of praise without instrumental accompaniment). Central to this discussion is whether a Christian church should prize uniformity as its highest ideal.

The general position with which the authors engage is one typical of conservative Scottish Presbyterian ecclesiology: the claim that catholicity within a denomination necessitates a strict level of uniformity regarding the elements, content and style of cultic worship among its member congregations. Due to this, whether one attends a Free Church service in an Island village, a Glaswegian council estate, central Edinburgh, the Doric North East or cosmopolitan London, it is expected that the service will, in terms of liturgical elements and style, be substantially the same.

Although this work is framed within the debate of a particular denomination, the issues raised are of the utmost relevance to all who with the Apostles' Creed believe in the catholicity of Christ's church and the Triune reality of God. Indeed, the principle of uniformity is not the unique creation of Scottish Presbyterians. It is also the norm within Roman Catholicism: whether one attends Mass in Rome, Brazil or India, the liturgical elements, aesthetic and until relatively recently language have

historically been uniform.¹ The same can be said of the Greek Orthodox Church: orthodox worship in Athens, Greece will be markedly similar to that in its Georgia namesake.² Indeed, this trait has also become a major feature within mainstream evangelicalism, where a bland, uniform Hillsongesque style exerts an international dominance.

Thus, while this article finds its immediate context within the life of a small Scottish Presbyterian denomination, the issues it handles are of far wider significance.

From the vantage point of systematic theology, it will be argued that the ideal of uniformity (in this case as applied to contextualised ecclesiology) is wholly inconsistent for those who confess the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as one God in eternal co-existence. If the church's God is the Trinity, it will be put forward, its highest ideal should be unity-in-diversity.

Moving then into the realm of church history three areas will be considered, the challenge of maintaining unity in diversity in the New Testament church, the ambivalence of the magisterial Reformers to the question of uniformity and the effects of the dream of 'uniformity of worship' on the life of Scottish Presbyterian churches will be examined.

I. UNITY OR UNIFORMITY: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Unity or Uniformity?

The theologian's calling is to be a wordsmith; this much is predetermined by the very nature of theology. His daily task is to handle words with care, conscious of their subtleties and nuances. In the absence of such a basic commitment to the specificity of truth, his contribution to theology will invariably muddy rather than clear the waters.

Such a need for lexical precision affects this discussion at the outset. Rudimentary questions must be posed: are 'unity' and 'uniformity' mere synonyms? Is a uniform church the ultimate expression or antithesis of Christian unity? In what sense, if any, do unity and uniformity differ?

¹ It should be noted that the same debate over unity or uniformity exists within Roman Catholic theology. See, for example, Peter C. Phan, 'How much uniformity can we stand? How much unity do we want? Church and Worship in the Next Millennium' in *Worship*, 72 no. 3 (May 1998), 194-210.

² In the Orthodox world there is also a debate over uniformity of liturgy. Cf. In favour of uniformity: Bishop Demetri (Khoury), *The Need for Good Choirs and Good Music*, <http://www.antiochian.org/1169507979>; contra, Anon. *Orthodox Liturgical Renewal and Visible Unity*, at <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/vilemov-07-e.html>. Both retrieved 9.10.09.

Interestingly, these questions formed a major focus of the Neo-Calvinist revival in the early 20th century Netherlands. Its outstanding dogmaticians Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) provide a relevant case study of ecclesiology in relation to the Trinity. Indeed, Bavinck acknowledges the need for terminological clarity in this area. ‘Thoughtful people have always been troubled by the problem of unity and diversity, oneness and multiplicity.’³ When one examines how Bavinck and Kuyper attempted to solve this problem, one quickly notes their total aversion to the ideal of uniformity. Nowhere is this clearer than in the former’s speech ‘Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life’.⁴ Kuyper begins with the assertion that sin is essentially uncreative. Its ‘dynamic drive’ is to parody God’s action.

Sin always acts so: it puts the stamp of God’s image on its counterfeit currency and misuses its God-given powers to imitate God’s activity. Itself powerless, without creative ideas of its own, sin lives solely by plagiarising the ideas of God.⁵

He then goes on to claim that God’s ‘kingdom model’ is one of unity and diversity. Kuyper writes, ‘In God’s plan vital unity develops by internal strength precisely from the diversity of nations and races.’⁶ This is parodied in the Europe-wide drive towards uniformity in the aftermath of the French Revolution: ‘but sin, by a reckless levelling and the elimination of all diversity, seeks a false, deceptive unity, the uniformity of death.’⁸ Kuyper traces the ideal of uniformity from Eastern antiquity to modern Europe, focusing on the Europe-wide effects of the French Revolution.⁹ Modern uniformity, he claims, is seen on various levels. Architecturally, Paris sets the trend, Brussels replicates and Amsterdam follows suit. Cit-

³ Herman Bavinck, ‘On Inequality’ in *Essays on Religion, Science and Society*, ed. John Bolt, tr. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2008), p. 145.

⁴ Abraham Kuyper, ‘Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life’ in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* ed. James Bratt (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids: 1998), pp. 19-44.

⁵ Kuyper, op. cit., p. 22.

⁶ Kuyper, op. cit., p.22

⁷ Kuyper uses the terms ‘true uniformity’ and ‘false uniformity’, and ‘uniformity’ and ‘unity’ interchangeably. The pairs convey the same meaning.

⁸ Kuyper, op. cit., p.23

⁹ Contextually, this speech is pivotal in the development of Kuyper’s Anti-revolutionary Party, which identified itself against the French Revolution. In this instance, Kuyper confronts the Revolution’s tendencies towards cultural uniformity within the French Republic.

ies everywhere were beginning to look the same. In terms of fashion, Kuyper saw distinctive regional and national clothing being replaced by generic, Continent-spanning styles. He also perceived age-related behaviour as subject to the same influence. Children were being dressed and expected to behave as mini-adults; and adults were, in turn, acting like children. Gone is the development from the rashness of youth to the settled assurance and *sagesse* of adulthood: child and adult alike share the same blend of half-baked maturity and immaturity. Speaking in 1864, Kuyper predicts the modern day metrosexual and notes the general blurring of gender distinctions on several levels. Lastly, he highlights the linguistic uniformity sweeping Europe in the 19th century as robbing the Continent of its deep diversity of language.¹⁰

So here we are. Everything has to be equalised and levelled; all diversity must be whittled down. Differences in architectural style must go. Age differences must go. Gender differences must go. Differences in dress must go. Differences in language must go. Indeed, what doesn't have to go if this drive toward uniformity succeeds? For what I have said so far is barely a beginning of the indictment against uniformity.¹¹

In short, Kuyper describes what David Wells has more recently called a 'world cliché culture'.¹² What is apparent in this speech is that Neo-Calvinist thought has a paradigmic dislike of uniformist reductionism. It prizes the unity of diverse parts, whilst maintaining their distinctives, rather than reducing them en route to uniformity. Kuyper describes the 'unity in diversity' paradigm as 'organic': 'there, in a word, lies the profound difference distinguishing the spurious unity of the world from the life-unity designed by God.'¹³

Bavinck maintains the same attitude towards the ideal of uniformity, particularly with application to the church. He considerably expands Kuyper's 'organic' view of the church,¹⁴ whereby the body of Christ glorifies God by being neither uniform nor multiform. Rather, it is a unity-in-diversity.

¹⁰ Following the French Revolution, Parisian French was imposed across the French Republic. Regional languages were discriminated against and often replaced.

¹¹ Kuyper, *op. cit.* p.32.

¹² David Wells, *No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), pp. 53-92.

¹³ Kuyper, *op. cit.* p. 24.

¹⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), vol. 4. pp. 329-332. Hereafter referred to as *RD*.

One asks however why Bavinck and Kuyper, rigorous intellectuals committed to Biblical, richly catholic Christian theology, expressed such an intentional disdain for the ideal of uniformity in relation to the church. In answering this question, one must begin with the bedrock of their theological system: the knowledge of God.

The Centrality of God

The centrality of God to a biblical systematic theology is no mere footnote. Indeed the doctrine of God, Bavinck claims, is 'the only dogma, the exclusive content of the entire field of dogmatics'.¹⁵

Expressed most simply, theology is the study of God and of all else in relation to God. The theologian is called to be an intentional thinker, one who grounds all other considerations in God's triune reality. 'All things are considered in the light of God, subsumed under him, traced back to him as their starting point.'¹⁶ Indeed, in grappling with the universe, humanity and Christ, the theologian is 'pondering and describing God and God alone', as nothing has meaning unless it is defined in relation to God.

The realm of ecclesiology is not exempt from this rigorous commitment to theocentrism. If the church's highest ideals are fundamentally out of step with God's own most glorious norms, they must change. In short, if one cannot locate the ideal of reductionist uniformity within the God of the Bible, the church has no right to strive towards it.

When one explores the doctrine of God in the theology of Bavinck and Kuyper, one quickly understands their desire to pursue unity, rather than uniformity within the church.

God's Norms as the Church's Ideals: Neither Multiformity nor Uniformity

In its theology of God himself, what is distinctive about the God of the Bible? A rigorous rejection of poly- or pan-theism lies at the core of Biblical revelation (Gen. 1-2; Deut. 6:4; Exod. 20:1-3). With regards to the divine, Scripture makes no allowance for the multiformity of God or gods: it asserts that there is only one God, a single divine essence.

However, at the opposite extreme, one finds uniformity. Applied to God, it defines him as a monad; a simple (in the original, theological sense), undifferentiated being in whom there is no variety or diversity. Such a theology of God-as-monad is the default position of Islam and Judaism, both of which reject outright the concept of a triune God.

¹⁵ Bavinck, RD vol. 2. p.29.

¹⁶ Idem.

In its presentation of the divine as neither a uniform monad nor a cacophonous pantheon of gods and demi-gods, Christianity presents the notion that God's own most glorious norm is his combination of unity and diversity: the shared life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is its highest standard of glory. This is clear from the facts of God's essential oneness, his unoriginated and eternal diversity, and (by virtue of his unchangeability) the teleological irreducibility of this diversity.

God's Unoriginated Diversity

In the flow of progressive revelation, Scripture gives early hints towards divine threeness (Gen. 1:26). However, it nonetheless first establishes God's oneness (Deut. 6:4). On this foundation, the New Testament reveals that this one God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

That Scripture's first concrete assertion concerns divine oneness in no way implies that this oneness somehow predates God's threeness, as though God himself developed from undiverse to diverse. His diversity, like his oneness, is unoriginated. It is simply who and what he is.

This point was settled relatively early in the church's history. In its battle with Arianism's denial of Christ's eternal sonship, the church came to boldly assert that the Christ is, 'very God of very God, begotten not created'.¹⁷ Bound up in the rationale of Alexander and Athanasius is that there never was a time when the Trinity's *ad intra* diversity was not.

Bavinck sheds much light on this, defining the divine oneness as numerically exclusive (thus the three persons are continually one in number) and internally qualitative (thus the manifold divine attributes are also in perfect harmony).¹⁸ Most interesting in Bavinck's doctrine of God is that he first handles divine diversity and then, having established that God is non-uniform, explains the sense in which he is united.

The Divine Diversity of Persons

The Christian doctrine of God differs radically from its Islamic and Jewish counterparts not on the bare principle of monotheism, but rather on how it defines this *monotheos*. Unlike the God-as-monad theology of the aforementioned religions, the one God of Christian theology is eternally, simultaneously the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, one encounters various provocative suggestions that Yahweh is somehow internally diverse. God creates humankind, in its composite male and female diversity, in 'our image and likeness' (Gen. 1:26). Various theophanic revelations point to an unimaginable

¹⁷ Nicene Creed, Article 2.

¹⁸ Bavinck, RD vol. 2. p. 170.

internal diversity within Israel's one true God (Judges 13:11-25). This astonishing development becomes full blown in the New Testament. At Jesus' baptism, three divine persons are evidently present. The Son is baptised, the Father speaks and the Spirit descends (Matt. 3:16-17). This trinitarian faith quickly becomes woven into the life of the early church. Indeed, its proclamation of the gospel becomes inextricably linked to the non-uniformity of God's personhood: on the cross, the Son offers himself to the Father with the Spirit's assistance (Heb. 9:14). The *euangelion*, considered in the light of the Triune God, is inherently characterised by unity-in-diversity.

The Divine Diversity of Attributes and Names

God's internal diversity is not limited to the threefold nature of the divine personhood. It also extends to the attributes and names eternally applied to the God of the Bible. This one God is described in many ways. He is immutable, eternal, holy, gracious, good, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient and so forth.

That God is the subject of these numerous predicates is also evident in the apostolic theology of the divine. Within the same breath, Paul exhorts the Romans to consider both the 'goodness and severity of God' (Rom. 11:22).

Furthermore, this one God reveals himself as the bearer of a variety of names. Is it wholly appropriate to refer to God via names of being (*el, elohim*) and personality (*Yahweh*). 'Although he reveals himself in his names, no name is adequate to the purpose. He is nameless; his name is a name of wonder.'¹⁹

What is apparent is that God's various attributes and names co-exist in perfect harmony. At no point does Scripture highlight one attribute or name at the expense of another, nor does it teach that God has or could acquire additional personal attributes. Indeed, such a claim, through its denial of divine immutability, would be scarcely less heretical than the modalist notion that God has not always been the three triune persons. The divine attributes, like the divine persons, are unoriginated and uncreated. They simply are God's attributes. They cannot and do not cancel each other out, neither is their net effect reductionism *en route* to uniformity.

In order to describe who God is (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) and what God is like (his manifold attributes), Scripture itself deems it necessary to describe this one God as a being of considerable and complex diversity.

¹⁹ Bavinck, *RD* vol. 2. p. 34.

In the beginning, the word was (John 1). Not only did this word possess independent existence, it was also simultaneously with God and was God. In the beginning, then, there was abundant unity and little uniformity. The case for uniformity as the church's highest ideal thus stands feebly before the awesome majesty of its Triune God.

God's Essential Oneness

Equally central to Scripture's doctrine of God is its emphasis on his oneness. As has been previously noted, Scripture reveals God's trinity in stages. The Old Testament's overwhelming drive is towards monotheism. In the midst of Canaanite polytheism, the God of Israel made plain to his people not simply that he alone was their only God, but that he is the only God.

The *shema* of Deut. 6:4 ('Hear, O Israel, Yahweh, Yahweh your God is one'), written to be the constant refrain of the believer's life, ingrains a default commitment to divine oneness and the aversion to polytheism which follows.²⁰

At its core, this emphasis points to a God perfectly at one with himself. Within the Godhead, a profound unity exists. Indeed, it permeates every aspect of the shared life between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. There is no division, although as has been seen, there is much diversity.

Bavinck handles this divine oneness under two headings: the unity of singularity and the unity of simplicity.²¹ The former combats polytheism and distinguishes trinitarianism from tritheism. There is only one divine essence. The latter explains that God is not a composite of various individual elements. Unlike the human body, which is made up of various finite organs, God is infinite in every sense. Thus each of the many divine attributes (truth, righteousness, life, wisdom and so forth) is identical with his essence. Everything Scripture predicates of God, it does so infinitely and perfectly: God is love, not in part but in full.

What must be stressed is that a concatenation exists between the oneness and threeness of God: each factor is essential to the other. The Tri-

²⁰ Interestingly, the word translated 'one' is *echad* (literally 'united', cf. Gen. 2:24, 'the two shall become *echad*'). This stands in distinction to *yachid* ('one' in absolute uniform isolation, cf. Judges 11:24, 'she was his *yachid* daughter'). *Echad* denotes a oneness open to internal diversity, whereas *yachid* requires strict uniformity. The Old Testament never uses *yachid* with reference to God. The consistent sense with which it uses *echad*, however, is to denote either one of many (Exod. 9:6; Lev. 5:7) or a unity-in-diversity (Gen. 2:24; Josh. 9:2; Ezra 3:1). That Deut. 6:4 chooses *echad* over *yachid* to describe the divine oneness is telling.

²¹ Bavinck, *RD* vol. 2. pp.170-7.

une God cannot be one if he is not three, and he cannot be three if he is not one. In short God's unity depends on his diversity, and his diversity depends on his unity. Even in the divine oneness, it is hard to support the notion of uniformity as a theocentric ideal.

Triune Unchangeability

However, the bare fact that God possesses much diversity neither proves nor disproves that the church should commit itself to the paradigm of unity-in-diversity. While Scripture speaks of God as a unity-in-diversity, if it can also be shown that he either was not originally so, or will eventually cease to be so, the argument falls down.

The question of whether God was always characterised by unity-in-diversity has already been answered. Both divine oneness and diversity are unoriginated. Indeed, any suggestion to the contrary is logically heretical on two fronts: first, it denies divine immutability; and second, it fundamentally misapprehends the concatenous nature of God's unity and diversity. Each presupposes the co-existence of the other, thus they can only exist in a state of uncreated harmony.

The same argument stretches forward to resolve whether God will always be a unity-in-diversity. Simply, if God is inherently triune, he must be united to be diverse and vice versa. If this changes, God cannot be God and the cosmos, created as his general self-revelation, cannot be the cosmos. In short, this is an unthinkable, impossible outcome which is never countenanced by Scripture. Biblical eschatology is characterised not by a mass reduction into eternal uniformity, but rather by the glorious eternal maintenance of unity-in-diversity in God and his redeemed bride. In the eschaton, the Father continues to be the Father; incorporeally omnipresent throughout the new creation, the Son continues to reign as the new cosmic kingdom's centrepiece, and the Spirit continues to indwell Christ's church, which is still evidently drawn from a wide diversity of ethnic, sociological and linguistic origins (Rev. 7:9).

What is Wrong with Uniformist Reductionism?

Having briefly explored the doctrine of God according to Bavinck and Kuyper, it is not hard to see why their aversion to uniformity was so strong. To return to Kuyper's aforementioned speech, uniformity is nothing less than a sinful parody of God's own glorious unity. Those committed to dogmatics as the study of God and the conforming of all else to his perfect being, it seems, must strive towards unity because uniformity is ungodly. Its logical drive is to strip the cosmos and the church of their God-glorifying diversity, which must be reduced to the point of extinction. Within the church, a uniform paradigm sees diversity as inherently

undesirable. Christ's body, it maintains, must be homogenised. The norms of the church's dominant cultural group are imposed on its minority sub-cultures with the goal that everyone look and sound the same.²²

Applying Unity-in-Diversity to the Church

The notion that God's glory is found in unity-in-diversity rather than uniformity highlights the radical nature of Christianity in the marketplace of world religions. In comparison to its non-Trinitarian monotheistic counterparts and its non-monotheistic Eastern neighbours, Christian thought moves on a different plane.

One may thus highlight three paradigms for ecclesiastical life: uniformity, multiformity and unity-in-diversity. Anecdotally at least, it would seem that the church struggles to rest in the final triniform option. Within Protestantism, the effective multiformity of highly mixed denominations often seems unworkable to committed conservatives and liberals alike, who in turn seek solace in uniformity. However, few self-styled uniform denominations pursue an absolute uniformity, dividing themselves over disagreement on the minutiae of doctrinal non-essentials. Even the most conservative Scottish Presbyterian denominations, for example, currently see no warrant for schism due to the presence of both infralapsarian and supralapsarian ministers.

Within the Scottish context at least, unity-in-diversity is therefore not an unknown practice. The questions at hand thus concern the extent to which one is willing to pursue unity-in-diversity, and the motivation to do so. Taking the Free Church of Scotland as an example, uniformity is assumed to be the default paradigm for denominational life. However, it is not a paradigm currently followed with utter consistency, particularly concerning baptismal theology.²³ Perhaps the most pressing issue within the said debate is which paradigm – unity-in-diversity or uniformity – stands up in the light of the Holy Trinity. If God's triunity requires the

²² Phan, a Vietnamese advocate for unity-in-diversity within the Roman Catholic Church, hints at the fascinating point that uniformity in a cross-cultural denomination is never a neutral cultural homogeneity. Rather, it is the imposition of norms belonging to the denomination's dominant culture on its minority groups – in his case, culturally inappropriate Roman norms being forced on rural Asian villagers. Peter C. Phan, 'How much uniformity can we stand? How much unity do we want? Church and Worship in the Next Millennium' in *Worship*, 72 no. 3 (May 1998), p. 198.

²³ Within the Free Church of Scotland, the Western Isles Presbytery allows the baptism of adherents' children. The mainland Presbyteries generally interpret the Westminster Confession of Faith to require at least one parent to be a professing Christian.

church to pursue unity-in-diversity, this must be done in a principled, rather than haphazard fashion.

An Objection?

The most obvious objection to the application of this triform unity-in-diversity paradigm to the *ecclesia* is surely that within the Trinity there is no disagreement in the diversity. While the Triune persons take different roles in the economy of salvation, for example, these roles are complementary. They do not contradict each other. In addition, Paul's application of the unity-in-diversity principle to the church as one body with many distinct members (Rom. 12:4-8) demonstrates the same principle of accord in diversity. Can one legitimately apply the unity-in-diversity paradigm to contexts where diversity is the product of disagreement?

Bavinck answers this question in the affirmative:

Undoubtedly the divisions of the church of Christ are caused by sin; in heaven there will no longer be any room for them. But this is far from being the whole story. In unity God loves the diversity. Among all creatures there was diversity even when as yet there was no sin. As a result of sin that diversity has been perverted and corrupted, but diversity as such is good and important also for the church. Difference in sex and age, in character and disposition, in mind and heart, in gifts and goods, in time and place is to the advantage also of the truth that is in Christ. He takes all these differences into his service and adorns the church with them. Indeed, though the division of humanity into peoples and languages was occasioned by sin, it has something good in it, which is brought into the church and thus preserved for eternity. From many races and languages and peoples and nations Christ gathers his church on earth.²⁴

He is clear to distinguish this from the chaos of a multiform church where all disagreement is relativised.²⁵ In appropriating Bavinck's idea, one does well to recall Calvin's dictum, 'All the heads of doctrine are not in the same position.'²⁶ By allowing diversity proportionate to a doctrine's place in the hierarchy of truths, the church works for the redemption of its Edenic, pre-fall ideal diversity.²⁷ Indeed, this is the means by which it strides towards its *telos*; the sinless, heavenly unity-in-diversity wherein Christ's high priestly prayer for the church's oneness (John 17:21) will be

²⁴ Bavinck, *RD* vol. 4. p. 318.

²⁵ *Idem*.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.i.12.

²⁷ For a thorough and helpful discussion of this hierarchy of truths, see Donald Macleod, *Priorities For The Church* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2003), pp.100-16.

positively and eternally answered.²⁸ Schism in the name of uniformity, sin's parody of God's unity, accomplishes none of these things.

II. UNITY OR UNIFORMITY: CHURCH HISTORY

During the course of a General Assembly debate a speaker once admitted to being perplexed as to the origins of the practice of uniformity of worship and his seeking enlightenment from a highly respected father of the Church. The snap answer he received was one word, 'Sinai!' Although the authority cited was highly respected, the answer fails to satisfy. Undoubtedly, Sinai did impose upon the covenant community, during the days of its minority, a uniform doctrine of worship, which, as Calvin has argued is, as to its fundamentals, still in force, but with which the Christian church has, from its earliest years, grappled, seeking to maintain its essential unity whilst permitting diversity of worship appropriate to the cultural and situational differences endemic in its international membership.²⁹

The Apostolic Church

If uniformity of worship for the Jewish people was commanded at Sinai, for the first gentile believers, freedom from Sinai and its forms of worship was axiomatic. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), both established the right of Jewish Christians to maintain their liturgical traditions and also decreed the right of gentile Christians not to submit to circumcision, nor to conform to the ceremonial law, including Jewish practices of a liturgical nature, summarized by the expression the 'law of Moses.' It is evident that Paul was comfortable with the freedom afforded to both communities: he took the gentile Titus with him to a meeting of the Jerusalem leaders to demonstrate what the Gospel could do without the addition of Mosaic tradition and despite the application of considerable pressure refused to have him circumcised (Gal. 2:3), but later he insisted that Timothy, as one born of a Jewish mother, should be circumcised (Acts 16:3). Paul at the same time upheld gentile rights to be free of the Law of Moses and happily affirmed his own Jewishness both by explicit statement (Acts 21:39) and by his actions such as continuing to minister in synagogues

²⁸ The Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew New Testament translates *eis* (Greek: 'one') with *echad*. 'The Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew New Testament', Bible Works (Norfolk, VA: *BibleWorks* 7.0.018x.14, 2007), ad. loc.

²⁹ For a discussion of Calvin's understanding of the Decalogue in relation to worship see Hughes Oliphant Old, 'Calvin's Theology of Worship' in G. Ryken, D H W Thomas and J L Duncan (eds), *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship* (Philipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2003), p.416.

(Acts 17:10; 18:4, 19), taking part in Jewish Sabbath prayers (Acts 16:13), going up to Jerusalem for the feast of Shavuot (Acts 20:16) and participating in the rituals of temple purification (Acts 21:26).

What in fact the Jerusalem Council had sanctioned was freedom to be different within the body of Christ. Had they imposed on new converts a uniform ceremonial expedient it would have strangled the gentile mission at birth. The abrogation of the principle of uniformity of worship, therefore, marks the turning point in the story of the international, multi-cultural advance of the gospel. As Köstenberger and O'Brien rightly point out, 'Once the decision has been made there is no further mention of the Jerusalem apostles (apart from 16:4), and the focus of the book is on the irresistible progress of the gospel to "the ends of the earth".'³⁰

With the first Jewish Christians being devoted to the synagogue Christian liturgical practice came to be modelled on its services, which included prayer (*tefillah*), the singing of psalms, the reading and exposition of Scripture (*torah* and *derashah*), the affirmation of a creedal statement (*shema*) and an offering (*tzedekah*).³¹ To these to these were added the sacrament of initiation, Christian baptism, and the sacrament of Christian nurture, the breaking of bread or the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7). Yet even within this simple tradition, a degree of diversity is to be found. Matthew records Jesus' Trinitarian baptismal formula (Matt 28:19), but Luke speaks of baptism in the 'name of Jesus' (Acts 2:38; 10:48). The ceremonial aspects of baptism are handled in such general terms, with what Culmann calls a 'rudimentary liturgy,' that two thousand years of debate have ensued regarding its legitimate subjects and mode.³² Likewise, New Testament scholars note plural traditions regarding the institution of the Lord's Supper, one considered attributable to Mark/Matthew and the other to Luke/Paul, the latter presumably recording the practice of the Pauline churches. Fee identifies seven differences between these traditions, although their common features are 'very similar'.³³ The point here

³⁰ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Leicester: Apollos, 2001), p.150.

³¹ Cf. C.W. Dugmore, *The Influence of the Synagogue on the Divine Office* (The Faith Press, 1964), p. 8; William D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 2. Robert W. Weller, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 38; ed. E. Jones, *The Study of Liturgy* (London: S.P.C.K., 1992), p. 69ff; ed. D. A. Carson, *Worship: Adoration and Action*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1993), p. 118.

³² Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953), p. 25.

³³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. NICNT. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), p. 546ff.

is that had liturgical uniformity been an Apostolic concern acquiescence in such diversity is not what we might expect. Paul's primary concern in dealing with issues of worship, such as the abuse at Corinth of the Lord's Supper (I Cor 11:20-34), is spiritual and ethical, drawing from him little instruction on the use of correct liturgical formulae.

Prayer at this early period is likewise pluriform and seems to have been largely extempore. It is *Didache* 8, rather than the New Testament, that provides evidence for the early liturgical use of the Lord's Prayer. Cullmann argues, on the grounds of the use of the imperative mood in Revelation 22:22, that the *Maranatha* prayer was used in some congregations as a eucharistic prayer.³⁴ There were different forms of Apostolic greetings too, of a certain 'stereotyped and solemn character' which attained early use as *vota* and benedictions, spoken at the commencement and end of the service.³⁵ To these greetings may be added a variety of doxologies as well as the liturgical use of the Jewish *Amen*.

Paul wrote at a time when three distinct liturgical traditions lived side-by-side in the church; first, there was the adaption of ancient Jewish traditions, secondly, a charismatic and spontaneous form of worship deriving from the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, and thirdly, there was the growth of a more stereotyped but distinctly Christian form of worship. It is not surprising, therefore to find his references to worship are mainly descriptive or by way of allusion, rather than prescriptive.³⁶ Rather than calling for uniformity, Paul, intent on 'building up' the church, valued diversity, insisting only that 'all things should be done decently and in order' (I Cor. 14:40).

The Reformation

As compared to the large degree of uniformity of worship imposed by the Latin rites of the mediaeval Catholic Church, the Reformation generally introduced diversity. The Reformers made little attempt to create uniformity between their disparate traditions. Luther saw no benefit in working with other Protestants to secure standardisation in liturgy and was opposed to calling a general synod for the purpose.³⁷ Where essential

³⁴ Cullman, op. cit. p. 13f

³⁵ Ibid. p. 23.

³⁶ This in no way detracts from their authority, Apostolic example has long been considered as authoritative as Apostolic precept. Cf. William Cunningham, *Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1863), p. 64ff.

³⁷ M. W. Hetherington (Ed.), *The Works of Mr. George Gillespie* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1846), vol. 2, pp. 82-85.

doctrinal agreement existed, the *Formula of Concord* (1577) advocated liturgical tolerance rather than the imposition of uniformity.³⁸

D'Aubigne's account of Zwingli's reforms at Zurich recounts that although uniformity of worship seemed unattainable the reformer was little perturbed, because he said, 'Peace dwells in our city...among us there is no fraud, no dissension, no envying, no strife. Whence can proceed such harmony except from the Lord, and that the doctrine we preach inclines us to innocence and peace?' As D'Aubigne remarks, 'Charity and unity then prevailed, although there was no uniformity.'³⁹

Calvin, famously prepared to cross 'ten seas' to bring about harmony among Christians, was indifferent to standardisation of worship, once writing that: 'trifling difference in ceremony ought not to mean so much to us that we split the Church because of it...there is no call for us to be too particular about things that are not so necessary, provided that adventitious ceremonials do not contaminate the simple institution of Christ.'⁴⁰ As William J. Bouwsma has observed, Calvin 'was usually content...to recommend general principles of worship that individual churches might apply in accordance with their various and changing needs'.⁴¹

Uniformity, however, existed within the spheres of influence of particular churches. In Britain, Protestant uniformity of worship dates from the passing of Edward VI's 1549 and 1552 Acts of Uniformity commanding and enforcing the use of Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer. All this, however, was overthrown by the imposition of a different uniformity when Mary (r.1553-1558), reverting to Roman Catholicism, repealed the previous Acts. The Elizabethan settlement produced the 1559 Act of Uniformity, entrenching the Anglican *via media* and marginalising both Puritan Presbyterianism and Roman Catholicism.

'Covenanted Uniformity of Religion.'

During the English Civil War, Scottish Presbyterians offered their swords to the beleaguered English Parliamentary army in exchange for 'covenanted uniformity of religion betwixt the churches of Christ in the kingdoms of Scotland, England and Ireland.' This was the *raison d'être* which the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), the Westminster Assembly and

³⁸ Cf. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877), vol. 3, p. 163.

³⁹ J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Religious Tract Society, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 407.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. D.W. & T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), p. 245.

⁴¹ Cited by William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 224.

its publications, including the *Directory of Public Worship*, were designed to effect. The Solemn League and Covenant was passed by both Houses of Parliament and the Scottish commissioners on 25 September 1643. As a military league its aim was to assist England against Charles I, then in a position of some strength. As a religious covenant its goal was clearly defined in its first article:

the preservation of reformed religion in the Church of Scotland... the reformation of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the word of GOD, and example of the best reformed Churches; and shall endeavour to bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in ...confession of faith, ... church-government, ... worship and catechising.

Not all were convinced, however, of the benefits of uniformity. Sensitive to the possibility of religious uniformity being tyranny masquerading as reformation, John Milton in the last line of his poem *On the Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament*, satirised Samuel Rutherford's *The Due Right of Presbyteries* (1644) with the jibe: 'New *Presbyter* is but old *Priest* writ large.'⁴² Conversely, the advocates of uniformity, such as George Gillespie, one of the Scottish commissioners, saw much more than a semantic difference between 'prelatical conformity' and 'presbyterial uniformity.'⁴³ Gillespie frankly admitted that in the early church uniformity did not extend to 'all particulars' of worship, and cites with approval the Formula of Concord's use of the tolerant adage of Irenaeus '*Dissonantia jejunii non dissolvit consonantiam fide*'⁴⁴ For Gillespie the benefits of Presbyterian uniformity should not dictate minutia; only binding the conscience so far 'as [its provisions] are grounded upon and warrantable by the word of God.'⁴⁵

Gillespie's arguments in favour of uniformity — 'the dream of Scottish ecclesiastics'⁴⁶—were twofold. First, he argued that uniformity re-

⁴² John Milton, *Complete Poems*. Vol. IV. The Harvard Classics. (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14); Bartleby.com, 2001. www.bartleby.com/4/. Retrieved 7.10. 2009.

⁴³ George Gillespie, *Works* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd.1846), vol. 2, pp. 82-85.

⁴⁴ 'Dissimilarity of fasting does not destroy similarity of faith.' Cf. Eusebius, *Church History* V. xxiv.13. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Ed. Philip Schaff, Series 2, Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p. 243.

⁴⁵ Gillespie, op. cit.

⁴⁶ William Beveridge, *A Short History of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, 1993), p. 36.

flects natural laws, for example, 'the heavens do not move sometime more slowly, sometime more swiftly, but ever uniformly'. Yet he conceded that within the harmony of the natural laws there is also diversity, 'such as the waxing and waning of the moon, the ebbing and flowing of the sea, and the like'.⁴⁷ He also argued from Scripture: in the Old Testament he saw, 'a marvellously great uniformity both in the substantials and rituals of the worship and service of God'.⁴⁸ This uniformity was based, he held, on the essential unity of God.⁴⁹ Coming to the New Testament, Gillespie argued that Paul required the Corinthians to conform to the best practice of the other churches: there was to be orderliness in the ministry of the prophets; modesty among the women as they comply with prevailing norms of decency by covering their heads in worship; the taking up a collection each Lord's Day and, in the Pastoral Epistles, the regulation of 'the ordination and admission of elders and deacons, ... widows, ... accusations, admonitions, censures, and other things belonging to church policy'.⁵⁰

Gillespie was, however, generous, pragmatic and realistic. Admitting that there is no absolute principle of uniformity required by Scripture, he saw religious homogeneity as an expedient to effect the establishment of Presbyterianism in the three nations. Likewise he found little fault in principle with Luther's lukewarmness to uniformity, but argued that things might have been rather different, 'if Luther had found as good opportunity and as much possibility of attaining a right uniformity in church government and worship as God vouchsafeth us in this age'.⁵¹

Not that the Scottish commissioners advocated any attempt to coerce England, both Henderson and Gillespie realised this was totally out of the question. Indeed, to forestall the possibility of being backed into a corner, the English commissioners had contrived the use of the term 'league' as being in their eyes less binding than 'covenant,' thus 'providing a way of escape ... should they need it'.⁵² Nor did Henderson 'presume to propose the government of the Church of Scotland as a pattern for the Church of England'.⁵³ Similarly, Gillespie presented his case for uniformity tactically and with caution, but there were few enough ministers north of the border with such level-headedness, most saw the Solemn League and Covenant as less an expedient political treaty and more a test of godli-

⁴⁷ Gillespie, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ *Idem.*

⁴⁹ *Idem.*

⁵⁰ *Idem.*

⁵¹ *Idem.*

⁵² Beveridge, *op. cit.*, p. 37

⁵³ Robert L. Orr, *Alexander Henderson, Churchman and Statesman* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 287.

ness to be applied rigorously and pursued uncompromisingly. For example Henderson's and Gillespie's fellow commissioner at the Westminster Assembly, Robert Baillie, made no bones about the nature of his commission from the General Assembly, it was 'for the propagation of our Church Discipline to England and Ireland'.⁵⁴ As John Buchan pertinently observes, 'Civil statesmanship disappears in such a mood, and all that remains is a frantic theocracy.'⁵⁵

Such was the climate in which the *Westminster Directory of Public Worship* was produced. Whilst the Scottish commissioners were committed in the production of the *Directory*, being frequently consulted on its details, and with Rutherford impatiently pressing for its 'speeding', the *Directory* did not enjoy so smooth and unchallenged a passage into the Scottish Church as its originators might have desired. The Scottish commissioners had unsuccessfully sought the retention in Scotland of well established Reformation practices, including the use of the Lord's Prayer, the recitation of the Apostles' Creed and the *Gloria Patri*. Henderson, who was deeply committed to Knox's *Book of Common Order*, did not see how he could possibly 'take upon me ... to set down other forms of prayer than we have in our Psalm Book [the popular name for the *Book of Common Order*], penned by our great and divine reformers'. Baillie deprecated the abandonment of the use of Creed, Doxology and Lord's Prayer. David Calderwood was deeply hurt by the *Directory*'s rejection of the Doxology, comforting himself with the thought he might yet sing it in heaven.⁵⁶ The General Assembly, reluctant to have *The Book of Common Order* totally eclipsed, forbade 'all condemning ... such lawful things as have been ... practised since the first beginning of reformation' and 'took in very ill part' the disuse of the Lord's Prayer and the Doxology.⁵⁷ Had not Scotland been forced to revise its public worship by the political exigencies arising from the dominance of its southern neighbour, it might have retained Knox's *Book of Common Order* and the richness of its worship, thus sparing the church much arid controversy.

With the Restoration of Charles II, the Cavalier Parliament passed the 1662 Act of Uniformity repressing Presbyterianism and establishing Episcopacy, this led in England to the ejection from their livings of ap-

⁵⁴ Beveridge, op. cit., p. 37.

⁵⁵ John Buchan, *Montrose* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), p. 125. It is worth observing the approximate chronological coincidence of covenantal fervour with the last outbreaks of witch-persecution in Scotland and that both were predominantly Lowland phenomena.

⁵⁶ Duncan Forrester & Douglas Murray, (ed) *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), p. 62

⁵⁷ Ibid.

proximately 2,000 Presbyterian, Independent and Baptist ministers and, in Scotland, to the cruel persecution of the Covenanters, who were now considered seditious. As Martin Lloyd-Jones has shrewdly observed, now the shoe was on the other foot it ill became Presbyterians to complain, though they did so most vociferously, for in 1644 had they not themselves enforced Presbytery by Act of Parliament, with all the sanctions of the State applied?⁵⁸

After the overthrow of the Stuarts, the Revolution Settlement granted tolerance to Nonconformists in England, but not to Catholics or non-Trinitarians. It ratified Presbyterian Church government in Scotland, but made no provision for regulating worship. In 1712 Parliament curtailed the power of the Kirk by passing the Toleration Act, recognising in Scotland both Presbyterian and Episcopalian churches and granting all Episcopalian ministers willing to take the oath of allegiance to Queen Anne and the oath of abjuration of the Stuart dynasty the right to baptise and conduct marriages, thus bringing to an end centuries of legally enforced uniformity of worship, though, as the history of subsequent centuries reveals, the Kirk was well able to police its own policies.

*The Degenerate Period*⁵⁹

Scottish Presbyterian worship during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was gripped by a rigid and unimaginative uniformity and is infamous for the verbosity of its pulpit and monotony of its worship, with 'much energy invested in resisting innovations'.⁶⁰ Yet with the rise of Moderatism sermons declined, not only significantly in length, but also in fervour and Biblical content. According to Thomas Chalmers the preaching of his erstwhile colleagues was 'like a winter's day, short, clear and cold. The brevity is good; the clarity is better; the coldness is fatal. Moonlight preaching ripens no harvests'.⁶¹

The musical element of worship also reached a deplorable nadir. In her *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus, describes a not untypical service in her parish church. After the minister

⁵⁸ Martin Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), p.65.

⁵⁹ Cf. Millar Patrick, *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Churches Joint Committee on Youth, 1927), p.142.

⁶⁰ D. B. Forrester, 'Worship' in ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 896.

⁶¹ G. N. M. Collins, *The Heritage of our Fathers* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1974), p. 37.

gave out the psalm, he read in a drawling singsong as many verses as were to be sung. Then

he stooped over the pulpit to hand his book to the precentor, who ... began to himself a recitative of the first line of the keynote. [The tune was] taken up by the congregation ... [being sung with] serious severe screaming quite beyond the natural pitch of the voice ... and [with] plenty of *tremolo* lately come into fashion. The dogs seized the occasion to bark (for they always came to the Kirk with the family), and the babies to cry. When the old minister could bear the din no longer he popped up again, and leaned over, touched the precentor's head, and instantly all sound ceased. The long prayer began ...

Lest we think Elizabeth Grant was unsympathetic to country ways and country spirituality, let Hugh Miller corroborate her evaluation. Writing in *The Witness* in May 1852, he described the effect of Free Church rural psalmody: 'The combined screams of a whole congregation, all driving at the air, formed a compound of villainous sound, and scientifically a breach of every law of harmony.'⁶²

What caused this stagnation and decline was extreme and intransigent resistance to all change. As no tunes were specified for the 1650 Psalter, tradition soon supplied them in the form of COMMON TUNE, KING'S TUNE, DUKE'S TUNE, ENGLISH TUNE, FRENCH, LONDON NEW, YORK (STILT), DUNFERMLINE, DUNDEE, ABBEY, MARTYRS, and ELGIN. These twelve common metre tunes so dominated the praise of Scotland that those wishing to introduce other tunes met an insurmountable obstacle. Few ministers or precentors were bold enough to disturb the monopoly of the Twelve Tunes. One precentor who did, felt the wrath of his minister who leaned over the pulpit and smashed him over the head with the pulpit Bible!⁶³

The Second Disruption and its Aftermath

Attention has often been drawn to the fact that the *Directory of Public Worship* was a guide, not a manual prescribing the minutiae of the church's worship.⁶⁴ Such an observation although technically correct overlooks what mischief can be achieved when a desire for uniformity, coupled to a firm adherence to the *Directory* gives birth to an authoritarian interpretation of Presbyterian worship which calls for total compliance, brooks no

⁶² Millar Patrick, op. cit., p. 198

⁶³ Ibid. p. 133.

⁶⁴ Cf. e.g. D. W. H. Thomas 'The Regulative Principle: Responding to Recent Criticism' in G. Ryken, D. H. W. Thomas and J. L. Duncan (eds), *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship* (Philipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2003), p. 83.

dissent and permits no latitude. Such intolerant uniformitarianism raised its head in the late-nineteenth century and contributed to the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.⁶⁵

During the nineteenth century, through the work of its poets, such as Robert M'Cheyne, Andrew and Horatius Bonar, Walter Chalmers Smith, Elizabeth Cecilia Clephane and Jane and Sarah Borthwick, the Free Church contributed substantially to the corpus of evangelical hymnody, but it was the erudite and evangelical David Brown (1803-97), Principal of the Aberdeen Free Church College, who provided the theological rationale for the introduction of hymn-singing into the public worship of the Free Church. He argued that at the very heart of traditional Scottish Presbyterian worship lay an unresolved anomaly; while every other part of worship had undergone a radical New Testament reorientation, in which the name of Christ had been made explicit, the musical praise of the church alone remained firmly entrenched in the era of inference and shadow. Brown argued that the Christocentric orientation of New Testament worship not only justified, but demanded the use of Christian hymns. The psalms should retain their honoured place, but hymns were a valuable adjunct, 'especially those which extolled the Redeemer and made use of His incarnation, death, resurrection and future coming, to exalt the spirit of love, trust, and obedience'.⁶⁶ Such innovations were not accepted without resistance, strong opposition was voiced by the formidable Dr John Kennedy of Dingwall, who 'disapproved very strongly of the ... singing of hymns in public worship, though he used them in private'.⁶⁷ Brown's arguments, however, carried and in 1872 the General Assembly sanctioned the *Free Church Hymnbook*, in 1883 it passed legislation permitting the use of organs, and in 1898 authorised of the use in public worship of the *Church Hymnary*, in the production of which it had cooperated with both the Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterians.⁶⁸

With the exploration of union between the United Presbyterians and the Free Church of Scotland under way it became clear that doctrinal latitude similar to that provided by the 1879 United Presbyterian Church Declaratory Act would be necessary in the constitution of any projected

⁶⁵ A helpful modern account of the history of the Free Presbyterians is James Lachlan MacLeod, *The Second Disruption: The Free Church in Victorian Scotland and the Origins of the Free Presbyterian Church* (Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press, 2000).

⁶⁶ William Garden Blaikie, *David Brown: A Memoir* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), p. 188.

⁶⁷ 'Memoir of Dr Kennedy' *Inverness Courier* (1893) <http://www.johnkennedy-ofdingwall.com/articles-in-inverness-courier.php> Retrieved 7.10.2009.

⁶⁸ *The Church Hymnary*, (Edinburgh: Henry Froude, 1898).

new church. In 1892 the Free Church passed its own Declaratory Act and as a result two ministers, Donald MacFarlane and Donald MacDonald, and a number of theological students seceded and gathered around them a significant number of disgruntled Free Church members and adherents to form the Free Presbyterian Church. As well as discontent with the Declaratory Act, the Free Presbyterians also strongly objected to the departure from uniformity of worship caused by the introduction of hymns and organs.

The union of the Free Church with the United Presbyterians took place in 1900, forming the United Free Church of Scotland. Twenty-seven ministers plus a good number of elders, members and adherents choose not to enter the 1900 union and continued as the Free Church of Scotland, claiming to be the legitimate heir of the church of 1843 and entitled to the temporalities of that church. In 1905 the Free Church overturned the 1892 Declaratory Act and the following year repealed the legislation permitting the use hymns and organs.⁶⁹ Uniformity of worship was maintained and unaccompanied Psalmody was practised *de rigueur* throughout the Free Church. So assiduous was the church in maintaining this policy that in South Africa the Xhosa congregations which had adhered to the Free Church in 1900 were required to adopt an exclusive Psalmody policy even though there were only a limited number of Psalms translated into isiXhosa at the time, 'in the meantime the people happily sang the hymns with enthusiasm and harmony.'⁷⁰ Free Church elders and deacons at their ordination were, and still are, required to promise 'to observe uniformity of worship and of the administration of all public ordinances within this Church, as the same are at present performed and allowed?''⁷¹

It is sometimes alleged that it was high principle alone that led the post-1900 Free Church to re-embrace uniformity in worship.⁷² It is difficult, however, to avoid seeing some evidence of pragmatism in this decision. With the Declaratory Act discountenanced, all that seemed to stand

⁶⁹ The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. Act anent Public Worship (No. 5 of Class II.). Edinburgh, 25th May 1905. Sess. 5. <http://www.freechurch.org/images/uploads/Acts1900-1909.pdf> Retrieved 7.10.2009

⁷⁰ Bill and Elizabeth Graham, *The Ochre and the Blue: The Story of the Free Church of Scotland in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Free Church of Scotland Publications, 2009), p. 31.

⁷¹ *The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland*, 8th edition (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1995), p. 151.

⁷² For a recent advocacy of this opinion, see Jeffrey Stephen, *The Free Church of Scotland and Instrumental Music: A Warning from History*. (Elgin: Privately circulated paper, 2009).

between reunion with the Free Presbyterians was the permissive legislation regarding instrumental worship and hymn singing. The Free Church's attempts at reunion were, however, rebuffed, but by enforcing uniform worship it had opened the door for individual ministers and members to return to the Free Church. Those who did included, Revs. John Macleod, John R. Mackay, Alexander Stewart and Alexander MacRae and Mr. John MacNeilage and Mr W. R. T. Sinclair.⁷³ At the very least, commitment to uniformity might serve to deter Free Church defections to the Free Presbyterians.

With the passage of time the attractiveness of uniformity has waned and its enforcement by the Free Church may prove to have been a significant contributory factor leading to the very considerable decline in its membership over the past five decades. There is anecdotal evidence that it may also prove to be a serious impediment to a possible realignment of confessional Scottish Presbyterians.

Conclusion

The conclusions derived from a systematic theological study of this issue, especially in relation to the doctrine of God, have been set out at the end of the first section of this article. It remains only to note the lessons of church history. By surveying the period of the Apostles it can be demonstrated that within the doctrinal unity of the early church there existed a considerable diversity of worship. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) recognised diversity both as desirable and as reflecting God's plan to extend the covenant community to all nations and decided accordingly. Likewise, St. Paul dealt with problems related to worship not by imposing uniform liturgical regulations but rather carefully inculcating principles of decency and order. As a Jewish Christian ministering to gentiles, his own personal willingness to contextualise his ministry (e.g. I Cor. 19.23) demonstrates a great flexibility both in participating in different forms of worship and permitting diversity, as Cullmann helpfully puts it:

he is able to allow speaking with tongues, under certain conditions, and at the same time to repeat liturgical formulae, without giving rise to anarchy with the one or lifelessness with the other. It is precisely in this harmonious combination of freedom and restriction that lies the greatness and uniqueness of the early Christian service of worship ... Had it been possible to maintain this harmony in the service of worship the formation of sects and groups would have been most effectively choked.⁷⁴

⁷³ G. N. M. Collins, *The Heritage of our Fathers* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1976), p. 130f.

⁷⁴ Cullmann, *op. cit.* p. 32f. Emphasis original.

At the Reformation, Luther, Zwingli and Calvin saw little value in liturgical uniformity. English attempts to impose it by Acts of Parliament achieved little that was good and much that was evil, by way of recriminations, bitterness of spirit and a recalcitrant sectarianism that has dogged ecclesiastical life for centuries. Both in the hands of Anglicans or Presbyterians, uniformity of worship was a blunt instrument used to coerce a minority. In eighteenth and early nineteenth century Scotland, far from there being a 'harmonious combination of freedom and restriction' in worship, uniformity was so totalitarian that it extended to psalm tunes, permitting only a small traditional repertoire. By the early twentieth century, the pursuit of what Beveridge called 'the dream of Scottish ecclesiastics,' resulted both in numerous divisions, a proliferation of sects and denominations and a continuing tendency to schism as a result of the elevation of opinion into principle.

In responding to any vestigial desire for uniformity of worship today, church history, both biblical and subsequently, discourages a simplistic 'one size fits all' approach, rather it exhorts the exercise of congregational responsibility, on the basis that *in God's Spirit resides is his people* and in their hands he has placed his all-sufficient Word.

To be sure, there is comfort in conforming to regulations imposed by a hierarchy, but this reflects a fundamental immaturity that has in sight little more than personal liturgical reassurance, the hope that nothing might be found in other congregations of the same denomination that might jar one's sensibilities. Such an attitude denigrates the essential unity of God's people, it shows lack of respect for legitimate differences arrived at by diligent Bible study and theological reflection and subordinates to personal preferences Christ's longing that despite their diversity his people maintain a clear and visible unity 'so that the world may believe' that he was sent by the Father (John 17:21). Indeed, only a unity that, within reasonable confessional boundaries, tolerates differences and sublimates personal preferences to the common good is a meaningful witness to the world. Enforced uniformity stands testimony only to compliance to authority.

In a word, both systematic theology demands and church history demonstrates that while the church is not required to sing in unison, it is required to maintain harmony.