

Worship Observation

By John Duffy (B.Th. Online)

Introduction

This essay will examine the nature of Christian worship from a Biblical and theological view. After defining the integral purpose behind worship, it will superficially note the worship elements progression from the Apostolic and Ante-Nicene periods, through the Reformation and compare it with the observed *Presbyterian Church of Australia* [PCA] parish, *Nambour Presbyterian Church* [NPC].

Liturgical or theological terms are described in White's *Glossary* (2006)¹.

Assembled Christian Worship

The characteristic of all worship is summarised in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* [WSC] Question 1, which claims *the chief end of men is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever*². This is the exclusive, fundamental difference in regards to any other human ceremony or ritual (although it shouldn't be). There are several aims in worship, both theocentric and antropocentric. Critically important is the necessity that God is glorified in spirit and truth [John4:24], not only outwardly.

Firstly and supremely, worship is to **sanctify the name of the God**, and reverence His sovereign authority [Rev.5:12-14]. This reverence is derived from consideration that God has appointed His own worship in His Word, and should not be based on human "form, custom, or the precepts of men"³. Two poles reflect either the **regulative** principle of worship (as applied by Calvin and Knox) maintained today in the PCA, as opposed to the **normative** principle (endorsed by Luther and Richard Cox). Owen compared this worship to the marriage covenant, the believers married to Christ⁴. They also sanctify God's name by **exercising the means of grace** and

¹ White, S. J. (2006). *Foundations of Christian Worship*. Westminster John Knox Press.214-225.

² Ward, R. S. (2000). *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English: a Modernised Text Commemorating the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-49*. New Melbourne Press. 67.

³ Beeke, J. R., & Jones, M. (2012). *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*. Reformation Heritage Books. 675.

⁴ Owen, J. (2000). *The Works of John Owen* (W. H. Goold, Ed.; Reprint). Banner of Truth Trust. (Original work published 1968). 15:455.

the gospel ordinances (Acts 2:41-42). White (2006) refers to this as service or “sacrifice” to God⁵.

There is an **eschatological aspect** to worship, whereby the church is an “outpost of heaven” in the sojourn to glory. It provides a sweet foretaste of the joy in heaven to come⁶. This not only provides comfort and hope, but focuses saints on the immanence of eternity towards a sanctified life.

From a human perspective, worship is **edifying of the saints’** faith. True devotion is an act of faith (in God’s precepts and promises), which the institutions of God further enhance faith. This is based on the efficacy of all His institutions (without additions or removals) depending on God Himself⁷.

There is a **mutual love and communion** that develops between worshippers. This is effected by celebration of the **Lord’s Supper**, and by the relationship all believers have by the **communion with each person of the Divine Trinity**.

Another component is the **evangelistic aspect** of worship⁸. Not only as a means of pastorally training disciples to be salt and light, or even to evangelise themselves (with which they are often dismissed with the benediction), but as a providential exposure to the unregenerate who may attend the service. In “Seeker Sensitive” services, this may often be over-emphasised, to the detriment of genuine spiritual worship to God, however the Lord has promised His word will accomplish what He wills (Is. 55:11).

Components of Christian Worship

For decades, the author has always used Acts 2:42 as a template for the **fundamental aspects of assembled New Covenant worship** (refer Figure 1). After **Baptism** (a singular event for a believer, v.41), the saints devoted themselves to the **Word of God, Fellowship, the Lord’s Supper, and Prayers** (including **Praise**).

⁵ White, S. J. (2006). *Foundations of Christian Worship*. Westminster John Knox Press.2-3.

⁶ Sibbes, R. (1977). *Works of Richard Sibbes* (A. B. Grosart, Ed.; Reprint). Banner Of Truth Trust. (Original work published 1864) 5:74-76.

⁷ Beeke, J. R., & Jones, M. (2012). *A Puritan Theology*. 676.

⁸ O’Brien, G. (2014). *Christian Worship: a Theological and Historical Introduction*. Uniting Academic Press. 26.

Figure 1: Acts 2:42 in Banner



By the time of Justin Martyr (c.150AD), the liturgy had developed as outlined in Figure 2⁹. Calvin (and Knox) implemented a Reformed Communion liturgy, on which the modern PCA¹⁰ worship is adapted (with negligible changes), with the *Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers and Songs* (1566)¹¹ as comparatively shown in table 1. The Reformation of the liturgy was accompanied by the removal of most vestments, all altars, iconography, confessionals and white-washing walls (over paintings with God or the saints).¹²

Observation of PCA Worship

Since the observed worship service [**Appendix A**] was a **Service of the Word**, Table 2 outlines the three such comparative liturgies. These are Calvin's *Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers and Songs* (1556), PCA's *Worship* (2001) and the NPC's *Service* (2021).

A graphic representation of time allocated to the components of the service are presented in Graph 1.

⁹ Schaff, P. (n.d.). *Philip Schaff: Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol.1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*. www.ccel.org; Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Retrieved March 18, 2021, from <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.ii.lxvii.html> Chapter LXVII.—Weekly worship of the Christians.

¹⁰ Presbyterian Church Of Australia. (2001). *Worship: the Book of Common Order of the Presbyterian Church of Australia*. (P. Cooper, Ed.). Presbyterian Church Of Australia. <https://pcv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Worship.pdf>, 34-35.

¹¹ Gibson, J., & Earney, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*. New Growth Press. 299-336.

¹² Wallace, P. G. (2020). *The Long European Reformation: Religion, Political Conflict, and the Search for Conformity, 1350-1750* (3rd ed.). Red Globe Press. 84-86.

MacCulloch, D. (2004). *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700*. Penguin. 146-147.

Figure 2: Analysis of Justin Martyr's *Chapter 62 Weekly worship of the Christians*

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.



Chart 1: Worship Service Components based on Time (1.5 hrs)

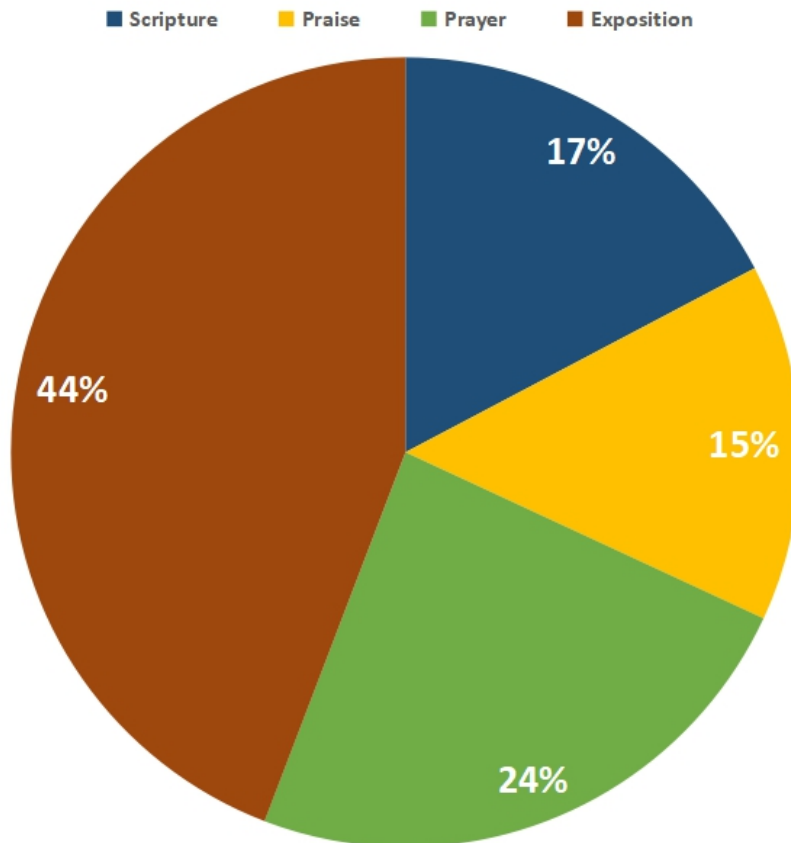


Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Historic Presbyterian Communion

Calvin 1566	Worship 2001
<u>Votum</u> (Ps. 124:8)	Call to Worship or Scripture Sentences
Exhortation	Psalm or Hymn of Praise
Confession	Prayers of Adoration and Confession
Prayer for Forgiveness	Assurance of Pardon
Psalm	Psalm or Hymn
Prayer for Illumination	Old Testament Reading
Scripture	Psalm or Hymn
Sermon	New Testament Reading
Intercessions	Prayer for understanding of the preached Word.
Lord's Prayer Paraphrase	The proclamation of the Word of God
Prayer of Preparation	Confession of Faith (Apostles' or Nicene Creed)
Apostles' Creed	Announcements
Words of Institution	Prayers of Intercession
Long Exhortation	Offering/Collection
Distribution	Prayer of Dedication
Psalms/s or Scripture	The Invitation to the Lord's Table
Prayer of Thanksgiving	Communion Psalm or Hymn
Benediction	Prayer & The Grace
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word of God Psalm / Hymn Prayer Lord's Supper 	The words of Institution
	Prayer of Thanksgiving
	The Lord's Supper
	The Peace
	Prayers of Thanksgiving
	Psalm or Hymn
	The Blessing

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Presbyterian Service of the Word

Calvin 1566	Worship 2001	Nambour 2021
		Intimations - prayer points for church business, presbytery, seminar, Calvin institute's Bible study
<u>Votum</u> (Ps. 124:8)	Call to Worship or Scripture Sentences	Call to Worship Ps. 148:1-6
Exhortation	Psalm or Hymn of Praise	Doxology Majesty
Confession	Prayers of Adoration and Confession	Prayer Invocation, Adoration and Confession
Prayer for Forgiveness	Assurance of Pardon	OT Reading Neh. 4 & 6:15-16 - Rebuilding the Wall of Jerusalem
Psalm	Psalm or Hymn	Praise Come We Who Love the Lord!
Prayer for Illumination	Old Testament Reading	
Scripture	Psalm or Hymn	Prayer Offertory, Thanksgiving and Supplication
Sermon	New Testament Reading	NT Reading Eph. 6:10 - 20 The Armour of God
Intercessions	Prayer for understanding of the preached Word.	Prayer for preacher endurance & Word illumination
Lord's Prayer Paraphrase	The preaching of the Word of God	Sermon Our God will fight for us! - Neh. 4:20
	Psalm or Hymn	Prayer for understanding and applying the preached Word.
Benediction	Confession of Faith (A Creed or Scriptural Statement)	<p style="text-align: center;">KEY</p> <p> Word of God</p> <p> Prayer</p> <p> Praise</p>
	Offering/Collection	
	Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession.	
	The Lord's Prayer (optional).	
	Psalm or hymn.	
	The Blessing	Benediction Rev. 4b-9 & Three-fold Amen
Offering (when retiring)		"Offering" Covid safe (when retiring)

Analysis of NPC Worship

Infrastructure and furniture

The building is very minimalist, externally and internally. The well-illuminated interior was conducive for individuals to read their own Bible and hymns. Theologically **Reformed**, the first obvious note was there was no imagery depicting any Biblical or theological narratives or concepts. There were no icons, statues, candles, etc. cursory observation revealed a large **cross** above the pulpit, the only obvious feature it was a place of Christian worship.

Figure 3: External View



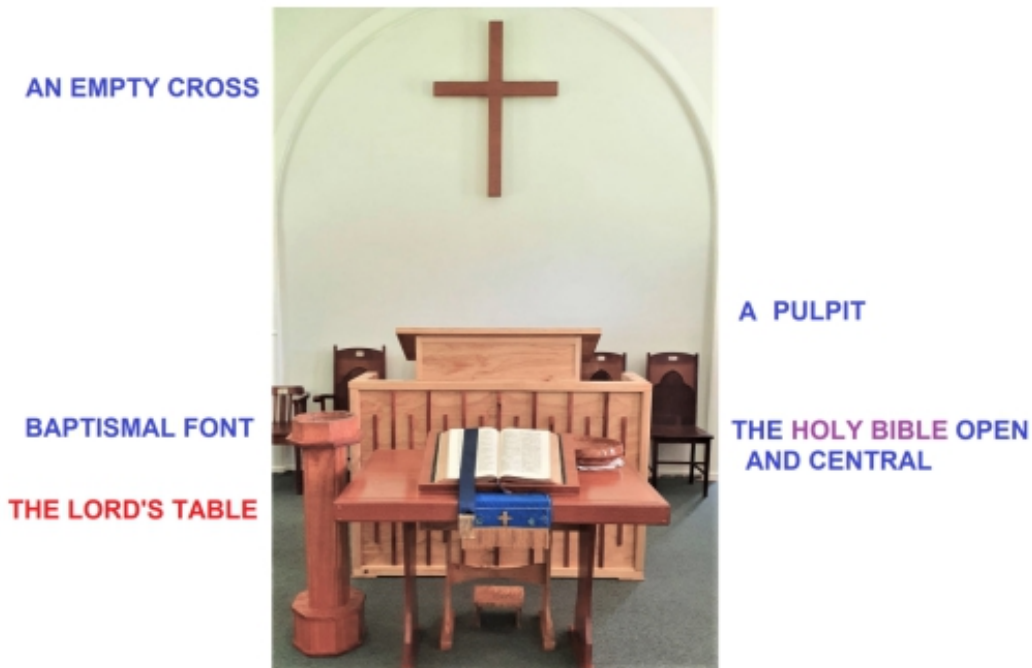
Figure 4: Internal View



Figure 5: Daïs



Figure 6: Furniture



Sacred Spaces

There was no particular area in the building one observed as **sacred place**, except during the service (and that was only to prevent distraction of worship). Worshippers seemed to freely move about the entire building, sensitive to others' prayers or contemplation, until the service started.

Commencing, the **Kirk Session Clerk** presented announcements before welcoming the Minister. He directed all aspects of the liturgy according to an **Order of Service** [Appendix A]. Elders read the **Bible Readings**, and most congregants followed in their own Bibles.

Sound

The preacher announced and paused before each **prayer**; which composed a **quarter of the 1.5 hour** worship (Graph 1). They included an *Invocational* (in *Call to Worship*), *Adoration and Confession*, *Thanksgiving* (including *Offeratory*) and *Supplication*. The first Bible reading was prefaced by the a prayer of illumination of all Scripture. The preacher twice offered a prayer of illumination and strength for the sermon (before and after). A **Benediction** and **Three-fold Amen** (sung by the congregation) concluded the service.

Hymns were standing *a capella* from the sheets, and concluded with **Amen**. They included a **Doxology** at the start. **15%** of time was devoted to **praise** (Graph 1).

Scripture exposition (based on original languages) was **44% of the service** and rituals addressed Biblical and theological terminology to a more mature (~60 years) congregation. A plate was at the Lord's table and near the front door (to enable a **retiring Offering**).

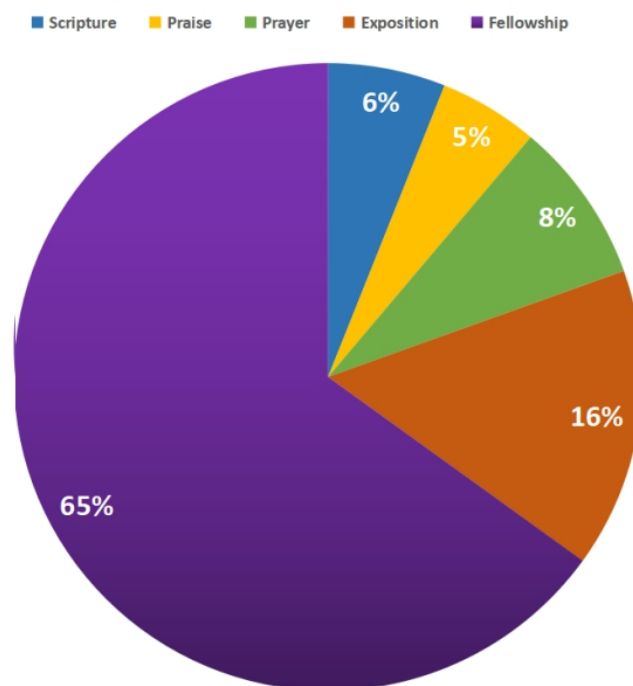
Community

An interesting feature was **the total absence of vestments** and no way to distinguish between the Session and the congregation from attire.

Although the church seemed *Luddite*, they had a **PA** for the pulpit and lectern, coupled with a **hearing-aid induction loop**. Most surprising was a **video camera** and **voice recorder** for an **internet ministry**.

It is worth noting, an extended **fellowship** especially after the service (morning tea) (**Graph 2**) was **65%** of 4.5 collective hours!

Chart 2: Worship including Fellowship (4.5 hrs)



Conclusion

Despite the humidity and heat in the building, the experience was interesting in its minimalism and overtly simple aspects. It was an austere ceremony. This *ecclesia* lived Acts 2:42, devoted to the Word of God, fellowship, and prayers (with praise). The author would appreciate to review a ***Communion*** service.

Paraphrasing multiple theologians, the author experienced a heart-warming worship towards a *transcendent Creator who is immanently near!*

Soli Deo gloria

Appendix A: Order of Service Sheet

There is but one King and one Head of this Church.
He is the Lord Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

- 1** Onward, Christian soldiers,
marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on
before.
Christ, the royal Master, leads
against the foe;
Forward into battle see His
banners go!
Refrain
*Onward, Christian soldiers,
marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus
going on before.*
- 2** At the name of Jesus,
Satan's armies flee:
On then, Christian Soldiers,
On to victory!
Hell's foundations tremble
At the shout of praise;
Sing the song of triumph!
Loud your voices raise!
[Refrain]
- 3** Crowns and thrones may
perish, kingdoms rise and wane,
But the church of Jesus constant
will remain.
Gates of hell can never 'gainst
that church prevail;
We have Christ's own promise,
and that cannot fail.
[Refrain]
- 4** Onward then, ye people, join
our happy throng,
Blend with ours your voices in the
triumph song.
Glory, laud, and honor unto
Christ the King,
This through countless ages men
and angels sing.
[Refrain] ~ *Matthew 16:18*

NAMBOUR



21st February 2021

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP SEMINAR ~ Saturday 24th April 2021

TOPIC: Assurance of Salvation
VENUE: Nambour Presbyterian Church [TBC]
GUEST SPEAKER: Rev Peter Bloomfield

MINISTER: Rev. David I. Cranney. (07) 5450 5983 0447190022
SESSION CLERK: Mr. Cliff Bradburn. (07) 5445 9858

More information about **Nambour Presbyterian Church** can be
found online at nepc.org.au and 

If you are visiting please introduce yourself, and if you have any questions about God's Word, you are very welcome to ask us. Please join us for Morning Tea in the Hall after the service. And if you have a special need for prayer or help, don't hesitate to share it with us.
Our **COVID-Safe Protocols** require you to remain 1.5m apart on our premises.

Call to Worship Ps. 148:1-6

Doxology Majesty

Prayer Adoration and Confession

OT Reading Neh. 4 & 6:15-16 - *Rebuilding the Wall of Jerusalem*

Praise *Come We Who Love the Lord!*

Prayer Thanksgiving and Supplication

NT Reading Eph. 6:10 - 20 - *The Armour of God*

Message *A hand to Work and a Hand to Protect - Neh. 4:17*

Praise *Onward! Christian Soldiers!*

Benediction & Three-fold Amen

Majesty! Worship His majesty.

Unto Jesus be all glory, power and praise.
Majesty, kingdom authority
flow from His throne unto His own,
His anthem raise.

So exalt, lift up on high the Name of Jesus.
Magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus, the King.
Majesty, Worship His majesty.

Jesus who died,
Now glorified,
King of all kings.

~ *Philippians 2:10,11*

1 Come, We that Love the Lord,

And let our joys be known;
*Join in a song with sweet
accord,
*And thus surround the throne.

Refrain:

*We're Marching to Zion,
Beautiful, beautiful Zion;
We're marching upward to Zion,
The beautiful city of God.*

2 Let those refuse to sing,
Who never knew our God;
*But children of the heav'nly King
*May speak their joys abroad.
[Refrain]

3 The men of grace have found
Glory begun below;
*Celestial fruits on earthly
ground
*From faith and hope may grow.
[Refrain]

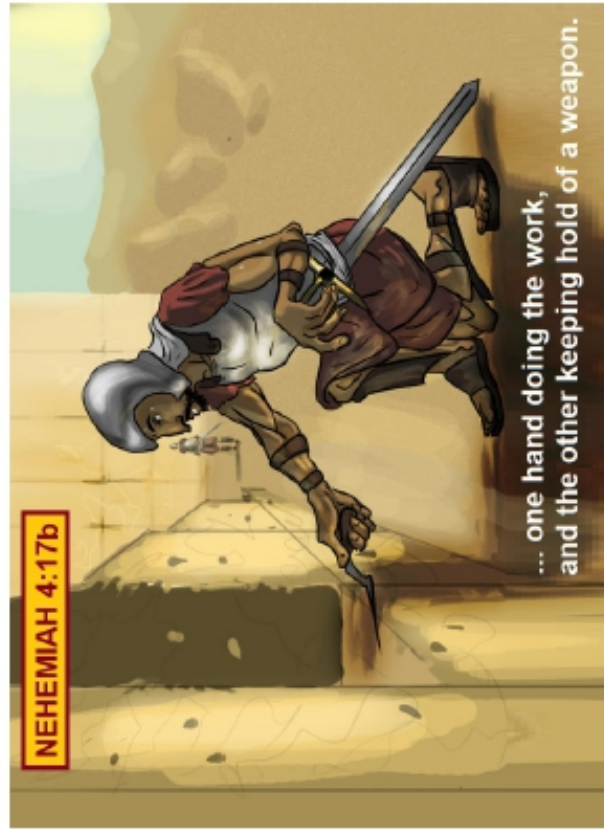
4 The hill of Zion yields

A thousand sacred sweets
*Before we reach the heav'nly
fields,
*Or walk the golden streets.
[Refrain]

5 There we shall see His face,
And never, never sin,
*But from the rivers of His Grace,
*Drink endless pleasures in.
[Refrain]

6 Then let our songs abound,
And every tear be dry;
*We're marching through
Immanuel's ground
*To fairer worlds on high.
[Refrain]

~ *Revelation 21:6*
* repeat line twice



References

Beeke, J. R., & Jones, M. (2012). *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*. Reformation Heritage Books.

Gibson, J., & Earngey, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*. New Growth Press.

MacCulloch, D. (2004). *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700*. Penguin.

O'Brien, G. (2014). *Christian Worship: a Theological and Historical Introduction*. Uniting Academic Press.

Owen, J. (2000). *The Works of John Owen* (W. H. Goold, Ed.; Reprint). Banner of Truth Trust. (Original work published 1968)

Presbyterian Church Of Australia. (2001). *Worship: the Book of Common Order of the Presbyterian Church of Australia*. (P. Cooper, Ed.). Presbyterian Church Of Australia. <https://pcv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Worship.pdf>

Schaff, P. (n.d.). *Philip Schaff: Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*. www.ccel.org; Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Retrieved March 18, 2021, from <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.ii.lxvii.html> Chapter LXVII.—Weekly worship of the Christians.

Sibbes, R. (1977). *Works of Richard Sibbes: Vol. 5: Expositions and Treatises from Portions of Several of the Epistles of St. Paul* (A. B. Grosart, Ed.; Reprint). Banner Of Truth Trust. (Original work published 1864)

Wallace, P. G. (2020). *The Long European Reformation: Religion, Political Conflict, and the Search for Conformity, 1350-1750* (3rd ed.). Red Globe Press.

Ward, R. S. (2000). *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English: a Modernised Text Commemorating the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-49*. New Melbourne Press.

White, S. J. (2006). *Foundations of Christian Worship*. Westminster John Knox Press.