

Baptist Worship Forms: Uniting the Charleston and Sandy Creek Traditions

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The roots of the Southern Baptist Convention were recently discussed by Walter B. Shurden in the 1980 Carver-Barnes Lectures at Southeastern Seminary.¹ Shurden identified four traditions which have shaped the "Southern Baptist Synthesis"; others insist there are more.² But perhaps all would agree that in worship practice the first two historical patterns—those of the Charleston and the Sandy Creek traditions—have persisted in Baptist life, in both contrast and synthesis. During the past three hundred years, the more things have changed, the more they have remained the same!

The Charleston Tradition

Historical records are not complete, but it is apparent that the Charleston, South Carolina, tradition began in the closing years of the seventeenth century (ca. 1695). The First Baptist Church of Charleston was the first Baptist church established in the South and the Charleston Association was the first cooperative effort of southern Baptist churches.

Shurden points out that order was the most characteristic quality of the Charleston group. Founded on the Baptist heritage of both England and New England, the church and association encouraged the adopting of a confession of faith (as a consensus, not a creed), the education of ministers, and cooperation in associational life. Shurden describes Charlestonian worship style:

It represented a style in public worship that was ordered and stately, though pulsating with evangelical warmth. The ordinances were more important to these eighteenth-century Baptists than to many of their successors. Worship appeared to be neither spontaneously charismatic nor primarily revivalistic. It was directed toward heaven, not earth. The object was to praise God, not entertain people.³

There is no record of the early worship patterns followed in the Charleston church. It is characteristic of Baptists that their separatist and nonconformist heritage causes them to be hesitant to prescribe any worship order. In fact, in the published history of the Charleston congregation,⁴ there is almost no mention of worship practice, except for occasional references to baptism and the Lord's Supper, some comments on the contrasting preaching styles of pastors (Richard

Furman, 1787-1825, and Vance Havner, 1934-1939), and the record of three different organs used (a Henry Erban pipe organ installed about 1845, a Hammond electronic instrument purchased in 1939, and a Wicks pipe organ installed in 1970).

It may be assumed that during Furman's leadership in what has been called Charleston's Golden Years worship followed a design similar to that suggested in 1768 by Morgan Edwards, former pastor of First Baptist Church in Philadelphia, who traveled widely throughout the South compiling histories of Baptist work in the several states.

A short prayer, suitably prefaced
Reading of Scripture
A longer prayer
Singing (congregational)
Preaching
A third prayer
Singing
The Lord's Supper (on appointed Sundays)
Collecting for the necessities of saints
Benediction⁵

Edwards strongly urged the use of a congregational "amen" at the close of prayers—a scriptural rubric that is ignored by most nonliturgical congregations in our day (see 1 Cor. 14:16). He also favored the wearing of a "master's gown" by those who had earned that academic distinction.

The Sandy Creek Tradition

While the Charleston group were known as "General Baptists," the zealous followers of Shubal Stearns who settled in Sandy Creek, North Carolina, in 1755 were called "Separate Baptists." Strongly influenced by the George Whitefield renewal movement in the colonies, they practiced a charismatic variety of worship whose central purpose was evangelism. John F. Loftis describes it:

In general, worship among Separate Baptists was characterized by informality, noise and disorder. Separate preachers exhibited an energetic, passionate, and loud proclamation style. Congregations were often moved to tears, screaming, and even rendered prostrate. Members of the congregation entered spontaneously into the service with prayers and exhortations. Even young converts and women were encouraged to respond to the movement of the Spirit.⁶

Shurden says that where the label "order" belongs to the Charleston Baptists, "ardor" would describe those from Sandy Creek. The only qualifications required of their preachers were a conversion experience and "the call." Education was not required; rather, it was discouraged.

Their worship was revivalistic. Stearns and company were a highly emotional, deeply pietistic kind of people. They had one value: winning people to Jesus Christ and to an emotionally identifiable experience. Faith was feeling and every Sunday was a camp meeting. Their praise of God was not vertical but horizontal. Unlike the city slickers at Charleston, they did not praise God by praising God; they praised God by reaching women and men. They had a mourner's bench and they expected public groaning, not polite amens. They were ardent revivalists.⁷

In basic worship acts, there was probably little difference between the Charleston and the Sandy Creek traditions in the eighteenth century. Both used preaching, praying, and singing. The contrast appeared in the types of textual material and the manner of delivery. For instance, Regular Baptists sang psalms at first, and later, the hymns of Isaac Watts and other English Calvinists. Separate Baptists, at least by the late eighteenth century, were committed to the lively "spirituals" which characterized the continuing revivalist movements in frontier America.

William Lumpkin insists that the evangelistic emphasis of the Separates helped develop Baptists as the leading denomination in the South, who "more than any other group . . . impressed the revivalistic stamp upon American religious life."⁸ At the same time he lists the weaknesses which their modern-day successors have inherited and perpetuated: too great a dependence on mass evangelism and excessive emotional appeal, the undervaluing of ministerial education, and too little training of their congregations in Christian faith and worship.

History records that in the late eighteenth-century Regular and Separate Baptists began to join in associational cooperation and fellowship. Together they formed the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. Fraternalization, however, did not lead to homogenization! Charleston and Sandy Creek styles of worship have continued side by side, if not hand in hand, to the present day.

Later Developments in Charlestonian Worship

Of course, there have been developments in each style, which should be seen as embellishment or mutation rather than substantive change. In the Charleston tradition, there have been borrowings from traditional liturgies (as in a "Call to Worship" and response) and additions from choral and instrumental music. The following worship order is given in William Roy McNutt's *Polity and Practice in Baptist Churches*:

- Prelude
- Call to Worship — Response
- Invocation
- Choral Selection (or hymn)
- Reading of the Scriptures
- Hymn

Pastoral Prayer
Offering
Organ Meditation (or Silence)
Sermon
Prayer and Benediction
Period of Quiet, for Meditation
Postlude⁹

The typical Southern Baptist would be shocked to have no "invitation" following the sermon and might guess that this was due to McNutt's American Baptist background. This was common practice, however, in many northern, nonliturgical churches which could be called "fundamentalist." I remember it happening in the late 1940s in the little Baptist church Billy Graham once pastored in Western Springs, Illinois. The sermon was more often geared to saint-education than to evangelism. It was expected to be the climax of the service, and nothing should follow that would lessen its impact on the congregation. The need of an opportunity to respond to the sermon—at least in a hymn—was evidently not considered. We might guess that this was also normal practice in some Southern Baptist churches of the Charleston tradition, at least through the nineteenth century. The almost universal inclusion of an "invitation hymn" today is testimony to the combining of the two styles of worship.

More Recent Sandy Creek Worship

Through the years, there have also been developments in the Sandy Creek worship tradition. In general, they have mirrored the changing patterns and materials used in revival services and the mass media entertainment styles of radio and television.

I once heard John Carleton say that two kinds of activity take place on a stage. One is true drama, in which a sequence of acts and scenes add up to a total unified experience. The other is vaudeville, in which a number of unrelated acts are held together by a "master of ceremonies." If (in the imagery of Søren Kierkegaard)¹⁰ we consider full worship to be like a drama, then revivalistic worship (with its emphasis on pleasurable experience and the personality cult) more resembles vaudeville.

Few authors have given us precise directions for conducting a contemporary worship service in the Sandy Creek tradition. The following has been offered by a popular independent Baptist leader, but it might be common to many SBC churches.

Choir Opening
Song No. ____
Prayer
Special Music
Song No. ____
Pastor's Promotion
Announcements

Special Music
Song No. ____
Offering
Scripture: Brother _____
Message
Invitation
Song No. ____
Baptisms
Prayer
Closing¹¹

One common variant of the above is the combining of several songs into a "song service." Similarly, several "specials" might be united in a "musical package." Modern revivalist worship also incorporates many of the trappings of show business: staging and lighting, a stage band or full orchestra, and soloists who imitate present-day "gospel music stars"—holding a microphone in one hand and gesturing with the other. The congregation's participation is usually limited to singing familiar gospel songs or the new worship choruses that have been borrowed from charismatic fellowships.

A Healthy Experience of Corporate Worship

There is ample presentation of the nature and significance of Christian worship elsewhere in this issue. Here we offer a brief overview and a New Testament checklist in order to lay a foundation for evaluating worship forms.

Worship is the expression of our relationship with the Triune God—our Creator, Redeemer, Indweller, Loving Parent, and Righteous Judge. It is our affirmative, transforming response to God's self-revealing in Jesus Christ, in the Word written, and in the world of people and of things. In any long-term evaluation of our corporate worship experiences, we must ask: Have we prayed, planned, and worked to the end that God's self-revealing might be complete? Have we afforded an opportunity for a complete human response?

The objective in worship (paraphrasing an answer from the Westminster Shorter Catechism) is that God might be glorified and that we might enjoy his presence—not that the preacher might receive our adulation or that the soloist's performance might be enjoyed and applauded. Further, Warren Wiersbe has reminded us that none of the following church emphases can be substituted for true worship: "separation," evangelism, missions, Sunday School contests, bus ministries, youth rallies, discipleship programs, church growth seminars, liturgical renewal movements, ecumenical programs, or denominational promotions.¹²

Many of these things are good and important to the local church, but they are not good in themselves. They are good only if they are a by-product of spiritual worship.¹³

Spiritual worship is our response in obedience to the first great command-

ment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30, NIV). Our second emphasis must be the expression of our proper relationship with other human beings ("Love your neighbor as yourself"—Mark 12:31).

Worship occurs in *dialogue* with God—and God always says the first word. Worship is also *offering*—we give ourselves and all that we have to God because he has already given us all things in Christ. Worship is finally *incarnation*; we may become like God because he became like us in the man Jesus.¹⁴

Because every member of the body of Christ is a believer priest, worship involves the total person in seeing/listening and in speaking/singing, in other physical actions (e.g., touching and eating), in thinking and feeling, in "willing" and becoming. In worship we use words, music, silence, space, and both natural and crafted symbols (e.g., bread and architecture).

Finally, in healthy worship there will be a proper balance between the speculative (thinking) and the affective (feeling), and between the *apophatic* (ascetic self-emptying) and the *kataphatic* (using the imagination), in order to avoid the pitfalls of rationalism (accepting reason as the supreme authority), of pietism (exaggeration or affectation of piety), of encratism (whose extreme expression might be self-flagellation), or of quietism (passive meditation).¹⁵

Worship in the New Testament Church

The New Testament gives just one example of what appears to be a full worship design: "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:26). Even so, we cannot be sure that every worship element is mentioned—what about prayer?—or that this pattern was not unique to the charismatic church at Corinth. Scattered throughout the epistles, other worship activities are listed, and all Christians claim this scriptural foundation for their liturgical planning.

Scripture Readings

"Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture . . ." (1 Tim. 4:13). "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea" (Col. 4:16). The early church read from the ancient prophets and also Paul's letters. Later historical practice was to read from both the Old and the New Testaments, or from both the epistles and the gospels.

Homily

"Devote yourself to . . . preaching and to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul preached to the people and . . . kept on talking until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

Singing¹⁶

"Psalms" (historic Jewish songs of praise, thanksgiving, petition, and lament, directed to YHWH), "hymns" (new songs which expressed their Christology, e.g., 1 Tim. 3:16), and "spiritual songs" (improvised in the fervor of ecstatic experience, probably glossolalic—Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Prayers

"They devoted themselves to . . . prayer" (Acts 2:42). We might expect that full worship would include all the types of prayer included in scripture—adoration, thanksgiving, confession, submission, dedication, petition, supplication, and meditation.

A Congregation Amen

"How can one . . . say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying?" (1 Cor. 14:16). Saying "so be it" after the "pastoral prayer" affirms that it is really the Prayer of the Congregation.

Collection

"Now about the collection for God's people . . . On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income" (1 Cor. 16:1, 2).

Physical Action

"I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer . . ." (1 Tim. 2:8). The "kiss of peace" or "holy kiss" mentioned in Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 1 Thessalonians 5:26, and 1 Peter 5:14 should be seen as warrant for members of a fellowship to greet each other, as well as visitors!

The Lord's Supper

It is generally agreed that Communion has too little meaning for our congregations because too little time is given to its observance. Full prayers over the bread and the cup include the concepts of thanksgiving (Luke 22:19), remembrance (*anamnesis*) which often contains a brief synopsis of salvation history (1 Cor. 11:25), the anticipation of Christ's return (1 Cor. 11:26), and the concept of the united fellowship of the entire Church with Christ (John 17:1a, 9b). It is interesting to note that in the mid-eighteenth century, Morgan Edwards left very complete instructions about the observance.¹⁷

Recommended: An Even Older Version of Charleston Worship

It may be that today's version of Sandy Creek worship is best suited to the

needs of an evangelistic service; it may also be appropriate for the less-formal Sunday evening service, a prayer meeting, or a Bible conference session. It is generally agreed, however, that if the standards listed above are relevant an updated version of the Charleston order will provide the best opportunity for full-orbed Christian worship. The version given by McNutt (mentioned earlier) was developed by nonliturgical churches during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and, with some alteration and considerable embellishment, is still widely used. It might be called the "Evangelical Order." In recent years most of these same American groups have altered the basic outline of that service to conform to one introduced by John Calvin for his Reformed congregations in 1542. It may therefore be called "the Geneva Order."

Scripture Sentence: Psalm 124:8

Confession of sins; Prayer for pardon

Metrical Psalm sung by the congregation

Prayer for illumination

Scripture Reading

Sermon

Collection

Intercessions

Lord's Prayer, in long paraphrase

Apostles' Creed

Communion (when observed)

Words of Institution

Exhortation

Consecration Prayer

Communion (psalm sung or scriptures read)

Post-communion prayer

Benediction¹⁸

The essential differences between the Geneva Order and the Evangelical Order are these:

1. Calvin used a general prayer of confession of sins early in the service. Of course, in an evangelical setting, this should always include an assurance of God's forgiveness and pardon, based on 1 John 1:7. In Baptist worship, a brief confession could be included in the opening invocation; on occasion, it would be well for the entire congregation to speak it.

2. The sermon follows closely the reading of the Scriptures upon which it is based. Sometimes, in the Evangelical Order, there are so many items separating the two that many people fail to see the relationship between "the Word read" and "the Word preached."

3. The offering follows the sermon. In a few churches, this is done for practical rather than for theological-liturgical reasons; the service is being broadcast or televised, and this allows the full sermon to be heard! It is better argued, however, that the offering is our positive response to God's will expressed in scripture and sermon; it properly follows the homily. In Baptist traditions, the Hymn of Response would come first; then, during the collection, there would be

ample time to counsel any who respond to the invitation, and they could be presented to the church after the offertory has been completed.

4. The last principal item of worship is the Prayers of the Congregation. This may seem to be the most radical difference in the Geneva Order. Calvin, however, was following the basic outline of all historic Christian liturgies since that recorded in Justin Martyr's *Apology* about A.D. 150.¹⁹ Again, it corresponds to the succession of worship experiences recorded in Isaiah 6: a vision of the transcendent God (vv. 1-4); confession of sin (v. 5); forgiveness, cleansing, and reconciliation (vv. 6-7); God's call and an affirmative response (v. 8); the acknowledgment of continuing need of God's help (v. 11).

Finally, it may be argued that this order follows proper protocol. God called the meeting to order. We acknowledge his worth, his Being, and his mighty deeds on our behalf; hear his Word; and respond fully in speech and song, in actions, and in changed lives. Just before leaving the place of worship, we share our common and continuing needs with each other and with God. A fully developed, contemporary service in the Geneva style would be similar to the following.

Acknowledgment of God's Presence and Worth	Instrumental Prelude (Choral Praise)
	Scripture Sentences (responsory)
	Hymn of Praise
	Prayer of Praise (Invocation)
Confession and Forgiveness	Prayer of Confession
	Assurance of Forgiveness
God Speaks	Hymn of Preparation
	Old Testament Reading
	Gloria Patri, or Anthem
	New Testament Reading
	Sermon
We Respond	Hymn of Response (invitation)
	Offering and Offertory
We Pray (When appointed)	Prayers of the Congregation
We Depart to Serve and Worship	The Lord's Supper
	Hymn
	Benediction
	Postlude

Combining the Charleston and the Sandy Creek Traditions

We have already noted that in most Charleston-tradition churches there has been a uniting of the two historic streams of Southern Baptist worship life, in the inclusion of an invitation following the sermon. Another example relates to the music style that may be preferred by a majority of our congregations. Lumpkin has reminded us:

The popular hymnody of Southern Baptists, which stands in marked contrast to the more formal and heavily didactic hymns of the Regulars, is more like the vernacular religious songs of the Separates.²⁰

In recent years, as evidenced by the contents of the *Baptist Hymnal* (1956 and 1975), our leaders have endeavored to help us recapture some of the hymnody which was used by early Regular Baptists and produced by such nineteenth-century luminaries as Jesse Mercer and Basil T. Manly, Jr. Traditions that are so closely tied to our emotional identity will not change easily or quickly. They must change if Baptists are to have a more mature, balanced worship, but it will take time and patience and careful education.

The recent widespread use of the word celebration in connection with worship suggests that most modern Christians have borrowed something of the spirit of Sandy Creek. The day has passed when Charlestonian worship would be acceptable if it were "proper and reverent"; nowadays it would be called "dull." Worship must include laughter as well as contemplation, expressing exuberant joy as well as awe.

There must also be changes in congregational participation. The Sandy Creekers were active worshipers, not spectators. This should be a challenge both to the "spectator cult" in the "showbiz" church and to the Charlestonians who limit reading, preaching, and praying to ordained ministers and deacons. Admittedly, the Separatists' participation was undisciplined and thoroughly spontaneous, like black worship or that of the pentecostals. (Since black slaves evidently worshiped with their white owners in the eighteenth century, we may well ask "who learned it from whom?")

Increasingly, nonliturgical churches who are serious about worship have become aware of the need to involve the congregation in verbal participation in prayers, litanies, and responsive statements, as well as in scripture readings. They have also decided that laypersons (of both sexes and all ages) should assist in leading worship by reading scripture and speaking prayers. In the case of the Prayers of the Congregation (spoken by the minister) it may be possible for persons to voice individual petitions spontaneously, after which the minister and the rest of the congregation should say "Amen." Finally, having experienced a multilingual rendering of the Lord's Prayer, I have often wondered why it would not be acceptable occasionally to voice our personal prayers "in concert" rather than always "in silence."

Perhaps the principal difference between the modern followers of Charleston and the successors of Sandy Creek lies in the balance of the horizontal and the vertical in worship—the awareness of the presence of other worshipers versus the awareness of God. Few pastors would express the extreme view reported to me by a seminary student: "If we have fellowship with other Christians, we have worshiped God." Nevertheless, many service attenders may presume that this is true.

The tension between the two points of view is most evident at the service's

beginning. During the organ prelude, when folk should be preparing to meet a numinous God, they are engrossed in communication with each other. Recently some churches have adopted a radical solution, acknowledging that both planned and informal fellowship may be part of a good preparation for worship. A song leader begins by leading in a number of well-known gospel hymns, perhaps including the new, popular worship choruses. The pastor asks visitors to introduce themselves, and people greet each other with complete freedom and informality. Announcements are made of the special activities of the coming week and of both the happy and the sad news from the congregation's families. Then he says, "Now let us worship God." The organist begins the prelude, and the service proceeds in good, complete Charleston order, adapted to the culture of our time.

These are only a few suggestions for how the two divergent Baptist worship traditions may profitably be combined in our day. There are many more possibilities. In a day when most folk under the age of fifty grew up responding to rock music, when television dominates our consciousness, and when many worshipers are rejecting the joys of liturgy in favor of the ecstasy experienced by charismatic groups, we cannot expect worship to be acceptable if it is at best proper, and at worst dull.

At the same time, when the service is completed, we must be assured that we have not merely been titillated by sights and sounds produced by other human beings. We must know that we have exulted in the presence of the holy and eternal God, and that in the encounter we have become more like Jesus Christ.

¹Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?" *Baptist History and Heritage* (April, 1981), 2-10.

²For example, John F. Loftis, in "Factors in Southern Baptist Identity as Reflected by Ministerial Role Models, 1750-1925" (Ph.D. dissertation, SBTS, 1987), pp. x-xii, xvi-xxii.

³Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis," p. 4.

⁴Robert A. Baker and Paul J. Craven, Jr., *Adventure in Faith: The First 300 Years of First Baptist Church, Charleston, South Carolina* (Nashville: Broadman, 1982).

⁵Morgan Edwards, *The Customs of Primitive Churches* (Philadelphia: published by the author, 1768), p. 100.

⁶Loftis, "Factors in Southern Baptist Identity," pp. 89-90.

⁷Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis," p. 5.

⁸William Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South* (Nashville: Broadman, 1961), pp. 148ff.

⁹William Roy McNutt, *Polity and Practice in Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1935), pp. 50-51.

¹⁰Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, trans. Douglas V. Steere (New York: Harper, 1938), pp. 160-166.

¹¹Jack Hyles, *The Hyles Church Manual* (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord, 1968), p. 289.

¹²Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1986), pp. 15-16.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁴See Donald Hustad, *Jubilate! Church Music in the Evangelical Tradition* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Hope, 1981), pp. 62-78.

¹⁵See Urban T. Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), esp. pp. 3-5.

¹⁶See Hustad, *Jubilate!*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁷Edwards, *Customs*, pp. 83ff.

¹⁸See Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, *The Study of Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1978), pp. 258-259.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

²⁰Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, p. 161.