CHAPTER 3

Worshiping in the Tradition
Principles from the Past
for the Present

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Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name.¹

History gives forth but one utterance on the subject. Wherever Protestant Communions have been established, the institution of worship has been secured by formularies, in whose production the most able minds to be enlisted have been employed.²

Introduction

The argument of this book on Reformation worship is irenic. The liturgies collated and presented here are a subtle encouragement for the modern church to reflect critically on how she worships today. In sixteenth-century Europe, when the Reformation gospel began to take up residence in the hearts and minds of believers, the biblical truth that Jesus was Lord took on a whole new significance. Art, culture, music, civil laws, government structures, school curriculums, church architecture, and even church furniture, were all affected. The gospel permeated the whole of life, including church life. Not only were physical structures outside and inside church buildings altered, so too were spiritual structures inside the church. The liturgy of the church service was renovated and reinvigorated in such a way that the Reformation gospel shone brightly, from the opening words to the closing benediction.

Worship War

For the Reformers, the Reformation was not simply about recovering true doctrine; it was ultimately about recovering pure worship. This is exemplified in how John Calvin spoke about his own conversion. In his reply to Cardinal Sadoleto (1539), Calvin wrote about being rescued, not only from works-righteousness, but also from false worship. For Calvin, his conversion and the work of reformation were about the movement from idolatry (in the indulgences and the Mass) to the pure worship of the true God (as he had revealed himself in the gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone). While the Reformers expended energy and time recovering and refining key doctrines—such as sola Scriptura (Scripture alone), sola gratia (grace alone), sola fide (faith alone), and solus Christus (Christ alone)—these doctrines in themselves were never the end goal. Sola fide, for example, may have been an immediate concern for the Magisterial Reformers, but soli Deo gloria was their ultimate concern. And because God’s glory was their ultimate concern, how God was worshiped became a major concern. This is why statues were often torn down, walls whitewashed, rood screens demolished, altars replaced with tables, elements of public worship removed, and new elements introduced—because God was to be worshiped as he himself commanded, in spirit and in truth, with spiritual and scriptural simplicity. His worship was to be regulated by his Word, not by the whims and wishes of human imagination or innovation. The recovery of the gospel in the Reformation was ultimately a worship war—a war against the idols, a war for the pure worship of God.

Worshiping with All the Saints

As the Magisterial Reformers waged their war against idolatry, they did so with the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God. However,


while they believed in *sola scriptura* (the Bible alone), and applied this truth to liturgical reform, they did not believe in *nuda scriptura* (the Bible only). The Reformers did not write their liturgies *ex nihilo* or on a *tabula rasa*; rather, they took their cues from the ancient worship of the early church fathers, which had been corrupted by the erroneous theology of the Roman Catholic church, and they began to reform it in the light of Scripture. Thus, Martin Luther wrote in his Preface to his *Form of the Mass*:

> Therefore, in the first place, we declare openly that it is not and never has been our intention to abolish utterly the whole formal worship of God, but to cleanse that which is in use, which has been vitiated by the most wicked additions, and to show its pious use.

Calvin entitled his Genevan liturgy, *The Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers ... According to the Custom of the Ancient Church*. Ludwig Lavater described the practices of Heinrich Bullinger’s church in Zürich in a similar way: “As much as possible, it has restored all things to the first and simplest form of the most ancient, and indeed, apostolic church.” Tradition mattered to the Reformers. It was the living faith of the dead, not the dead faith of the living. And they were determined not to move the ancient boundary stones set up by their fathers in the Faith (cf. Prov. 22:26). The Reformers thus maintained certain ancient elements of worship in their public services, such as the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Apostles’ Creed. They believed that when the Church worshiped on earth, she ought to show her age—one which reached back, not just to the early church fathers (with the Apostles’ Creed), nor even to Christ (with the Lord’s Prayer), but to Moses and Israel at Sinai (with the Ten Commandments).

Any church that cuts itself loose from this stream of Christian worship throughout history is a church that risks severing itself from her heritage, and from her Head. For Christ is Lord of the Church’s history and heritage; he is Head of his body, the Church—a Church formed, not in the last six years, but over the last six millennia, since God first spoke his formative word of grace in the
Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15). Thus, when the Church gathers for worship today, she ought to reveal her ancient roots. We worship on the shoulders of those who have worshiped before us. We worship with all the saints—present and past (Heb. 12:22–24).

Mother Kirk

The early church father Cyprian said, “You can no longer have God for your Father, if you have not the Church for your mother.”5 Some quarters of modern-day Protestantism have become so anemic that such a statement appears strange and produces more than a little nervousness; but Calvin recognized its importance and expanded on Cyprian’s analogy. For Calvin, we must

learn even from the simple title “mother” how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until putting off mortal flesh, we become like angels. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. Away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation.6

We must allow ourselves to be ruled and taught by men. This is the universal rule, which extends equally from the highest and to the lowest. The church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and brings up children to God, kings and peasants alike; and this is done by the ministry. Those who neglect or despise this order choose to be wiser than Christ. Woe to the pride of such men!7

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5. Cyprian, De catholica ecclesiae unitate 6; PL 4:503: “Habere jam non potest Deum patrem, qui Ecclesiam non habet matrem.”
At its most basic, Calvin understood the “Church as our mother” to mean that the ministry of the Church was essential to the development of the Christian life. God had given pastors to the Church, and all within the Church were to be pastored. Thus, one could not consider privatized or individualized devotion as sufficient for spiritual sustenance. Rather, to be spiritually nourished required humble submission to the ordinary means of grace in Word and Sacrament, which were regularly discharged through the liturgies of Mother Kirk. This ministry of the Church naturally differed for each church depending on the country, culture, and context. However, reflection on what exactly the Reformers recovered and refined in the light of Scripture reveals some unchanging principles for the Church in the modern world.

The following are some liturgical principles for Christian worship gleaned from the past and applicable for the present.

**Christian Worship Is Trinitarian**

The liturgies of the Reformation were permeated with references to the Triune God. Prayers frequently referred to honoring and magnifying God’s name—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The prayers generally followed a Trinitarian pattern. They were made to the almighty and everlasting Father in heaven, through his Son Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit. Thomas Cranmer’s prayer at the beginning of Holy Communion, in his *Book of Common Prayer* (1552), captures the triadic structure well:

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, so that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of petition often concluded with a Trinitarian formula: “through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, forever God, world without end. Amen.” Recitation of the historic Creeds in public worship continued the Trinitarian
focus, where Articles of Faith affirmed one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—with each person’s distinctive role outlined: the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer, and the Spirit as Life-Giver. Finally, the benediction based on 2 Corinthians 13:14 maintained the focus on the Trinity until the close of the service: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

**Christian Worship Is Focused on the Incarnate Word**

The evangelical liturgies of the sixteenth century exhibited the Reformation catchcry of “Christ Alone” with their clear focus on Christ—the Incarnate Word—in his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession. Christ thoroughly pervaded the worship services of the Reformers. In his *German Mass*, Diebold Schwarz praised him as Lord, Lord Most High, Lord God, and the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Christ was the One through whom we confess our sins, with prayers of confession ending with words akin to “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Christ was also the One by whom we ask God for forgiveness. In a Communion prayer, Schwarz did this by comparing the works of Adam and Christ:

> O Lord, holy, almighty Father, eternal God, you obtained salvation for us through the wooden cross, so that life should come from the same as that from which death originated, and so that the enemy, who by the transgression of the tree overcame us all in Adam, would be conquered through the obedience offered on the tree, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Calvin did similarly in his *Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers*. In a general intercessory prayer, he prayed: “Lord, look at the face of your Christ and not us, that by his intercession your wrath might be appeased and your face might shine upon us in joy and salvation.” In some liturgies, Christ was also the One to whom we pray and confess our sins. This is seen most clearly in the direct address to
Christ contained in the *Kyrie Eleison*: “O Christ, have mercy upon us.” But the practice was also present in other prayers. In *The Testament of Jesus Christ*, Johannes Oecolampadius prayed:

> Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your Apostles: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.” Therefore, my Lord, do not look upon my sin, but upon the faith of your holy Christian Church, in which I believe, even though I do not see it. Grant peace to it, according to your divine will. Preserve, unite, and rule it, together with your heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, for with them you live forevermore.

The centrality of Christ continued in the absolution. In his *Church Practices*, Martin Bucer provided several passages focused on Christ’s atoning work that could be read out to provide assurance of forgiveness (John 3:16; 3:35–36; Acts 10:43; and 1 John 2:1–2). In Calvin’s *Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers*, having been forgiven, the Spirit’s help was implored so that God’s people might give honor and homage to Christ, their “Master, King, and Lawgiver.”

Christ was also acknowledged and adored in the historic Creeds. He was God’s only begotten Son, yet co-equal with the Father:

> Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father;
by whom all things were made.

(Nicene Creed)

Holy Communion provided the most concentrated and affectionate focus on Christ, as this Communion prayer from the *Danish Church Order* demonstrates:

> O Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, may honor and praise always be given to you for feeding our souls with this
spiritual and heavenly food. And we ask you for your tender mercy, that, as you have given it to us for a Sacrament of continual thankfulness, or daily remembrance and of charitable unity, even so, most merciful Savior, lend us always your grace, to be thankful to you for it, and not only by it to be continually mindful of our redemption purchased through your death and bloodshed, but also in consideration of the same, to increase in love toward you, and all mankind for your sake.

Thus, as can be seen, from confession to Creed, from Collect to Communion—Christ the Incarnate Word was, and remained, central to worship in the Reformation tradition.

**Christian Worship Is Saturated with the Written Word**

The liturgies of the Reformation churches were permeated by Scripture. Services included various readings from the Old and New Testaments, the Gospels, and the Psalms. Indeed, the Psalter—that ancient hymnbook of the Church—was set to various musical tunes and formed the backbone of much Reformation worship. However, Scripture was present in the service in more than simply sung psalms and read Bible lessons; it was also carefully woven into each element of divine worship. The services often began with a psalm or sentence of Scripture; the exhortations, confessions, and absolutions were scriptural in content; and the Collects and longer intercessory prayers were effused with scriptural phraseology. The Reformers not only held a high doctrine of Scripture; they practiced it in their weekly worship. They understood that the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; they are pure, enlightening the eyes (Ps. 19:8). The Reformers embraced the necessity of the written Word for salvation and the importance of the sweep of the Scriptures for the Christian life. The Word was to have “free course” in the church, as Luther said, because by it “we torment Satan”—a truth he captured in his famous version of Psalm 46, “A Mighty Fortress”: 
And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God has willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.8

**Christian Worship Is Centered on the Preached Word**

The Reformers understood the priority of preaching in Jesus’s ministry (Luke 4:18), and that of the Apostles (Acts 6:2), and were determined to devote themselves to the preaching and teaching of the Scriptures (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:1–2). The purpose of the Reformation preaching was to elucidate the meaning of the written Word, which was now able to be heard in the common tongue. In doing so, the Reformers were zealous to handle rightly the Word in such a way as to drive home the truth, and to protect their flock from error. Reformation homilies and postils encapsulated the teaching of Scripture and applied doctrine to many contemporary issues of the day. The sequential and expository method of preaching did likewise; but it parsed the Word of God with such care that not only the preacher, but also the hearers, were bound to the whole of God’s Word.

It is rarely incumbent on the modern preacher to use prewritten and authorized homilies. This makes the necessity of a thoughtful preaching program all the more important. A good lectionary geared to the liturgical calendar provides such a framework, as does a wise plan for preaching consecutively through books of Scripture. For without the careful handling of Scripture—in order to preach the whole counsel of Scripture—the subject and content of the sermon would be largely directed by the personal preferences and interests of the minister alone. The result would likely

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8. Third stanza.
resemble the “blue ducks” spoken of by Luther in his *German Mass*, or the practices spoken of by John à Lasco in his *Form and Method*, where mutilated stories or places of Scripture, sometimes without head or tail, are set before the people, in such a way that these things that are set forth are not sufficiently explained and the things that are not set forth are generally neglected and are almost never brought into contact with the people.

Those with a high view of the Scriptures will be naturally inclined toward an expositional method of preaching which carefully parses and preaches the scheduled text, for the careful mining of the riches of God’s Word invariably yields wonderful treasure. Yet this mining requires—as the Reformers knew all too well—serious training in the ancient languages of the Scriptures, and time for preparation. Calvin prepared so well for his sermons that he ascended the pulpit each week with no notes and only his Hebrew or Greek Bible. Yet it is interesting to observe that he never referred to the original languages in his sermons. His preparation was deep and thorough; his preaching, simple and clear. It was economical, too. As with many of the Reformers, Calvin preached multiple sermons per week, and so he had to rely greatly on the Holy Spirit to let the Word do its work. While some of the Reformers’ practices may be hard to emulate in our present day, the central focus on the preached Word in public worship is indispensable for the Church in any age.

**Christian Worship Incorporates the Visible Word**

Undergirding the significant theological debates between the Lutheran and Reformed camps over the presence of Christ, and the intramural debates among the Reformed camp itself, was the universal agreement on the importance of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Christian worship entailed two kinds of service: the

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service of the Word and the service of the Lord’s Supper. While they were distinct, they were, for many of the Reformers, inseparable. Indeed, often the service of the Word naturally led into the service of the Sacrament. The Lord’s Supper was not hastily “tacked on” to the “end” of the service of the Word—a practice that modern evangelical churches would do well to remedy. Rather, the Reformers understood the Lord’s Supper to be of great pastoral import—invaluable as a means of grace, and equal in importance to the service of the Word. For the Lord’s Supper was not only a sign of Christ’s body broken and his blood shed; it was also a means of spiritual strengthening through the same Lord Jesus. The differing approaches to the frequency of Communion did not necessarily reflect differing understandings of its importance. This is perhaps best seen in the carefully crafted words of the services of the Lord’s Supper, which reflected on the Lord’s passion and death, climaxed in the various forms of distribution, and which found their dénouement in the gentle and heartfelt words of post-Communion praise. The liturgies of the Reformation intended for there to be a profound meeting with Christ at the table. For example, in his *Form and Manner*, Oecolampadius said that God’s people were to reflect upon the words of institution in the Supper, “as if you sat near Christ and heard it from him.” The spiritual profundity of encountering Christ in the Supper was well captured by Cranmer:

[O]ur Savior Christ has not only set forth these things most plainly in his holy Word, that we may hear them with our ears, but he has also ordained one visible sacrament of spiritual regeneration in water, and another visible sacrament of spiritual nourishment in bread and wine to the intent, that as much as is possible for man, we may see Christ with our eyes, smell him at our nose, taste him with our mouths, touch him with our hands, and perceive him with all our senses. For as the Word of God preached, puts Christ into our ears, so likewise these elements of water, bread and wine, joined to God’s Word, do after a sacramental
manner, put Christ into our eyes, mouths, hands and all our senses.\(^\text{10}\)

Such effective (and affective) words challenge the modern minister to reflect on how he regulates this visible Word. If the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper presents Christ to his people with such pastoral profundity—to “all our senses,” as Cranmer put it—why would any church minimize this pastoral ministry by neglecting or limiting the practice of the Lord’s Supper? The command of the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed to “take and eat,” to “drink and remember,” is as relevant today for the modern church as it was to the small apostolic church that met for the Last Supper. “It is a visible word,” wrote English Reformer John Hooper, “that preaches peace between God and man, exhorts to mutual love and godly life, [and] teaches to condemn the world for the hope of the life to come.”\(^\text{11}\)

**Christian Worship Is Tied to Church Discipline**

Many of the Reformers tied the Lord’s Supper to church discipline and the purity of the Church. Fencing the table from unrepentant sinners was as important to them as dining at the table with repentant sinners. In many of the liturgies, long lists of different kinds of sinners were read out, warning such people that they were not welcome at the Lord’s table unless they repented. In his introduction to the words of institution in *Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers* (1566), Calvin banned from the table

all idolaters, blasphemers, despisers of God, heretics, and all who form separate parties to break the unity of the Church, all perjurers, all those who rebel against their father and mother and against their superiors, all fomenters of seditious or mutiny, quarrelers, fighters, adulterers, debauchees,

\(^{10}\) Thomas Cranmer, *A defence of the true and catholike doctrine of the sacrament of the body and bloud of our sauiour Christ . . .* (London: Reginald Wolfe, 1550), RSTC 6000, sig. C.ii\(^{r}\).

thieves, hoarders of wealth, plunderers, drunkards, gluttons, and all those who lead a scandalous life.

Calvin commanded such people to “abstain from this holy table lest they pollute and contaminate this sacred food, which our Lord Jesus Christ gives only to his servants and faithful ones.”

In many Reformation churches, announcements were made well in advance of when the Lord’s Supper was to be celebrated and all communicant members were encouraged to search their hearts and lives for hidden sins and to repent of them before partaking of the divine mysteries. They were also encouraged to resolve any offences or disharmony among themselves before coming to the table: “Therefore,” wrote Calvin,

according to the exhortation of Saint Paul, let each one test and examine his conscience, to know whether he truly repents of his faults and is sorry for them desiring from now on to live in holiness and in conformity with God; and above all, whether he trusts in the mercy of God and seeks his salvation wholly from Jesus Christ; and whether renouncing all hostility and malice, he has the good intention and the courage to live in harmony and brotherly love with his neighbors.

The warnings for unworthily partaking of the body and blood of Christ were solemn and discriminating. But the invitations to come and participate were warm and welcoming. As much as unbelieving, unrepentant sinners were not welcome at the table, believing, repentant sinners were. So Calvin wrote,

If we have such a testimony in our hearts before God, let us not doubt in the least that he acknowledges us to be his children and that the Lord Jesus is speaking to us, bringing us to his table and offering us this Holy Sacrament, which he delivered to his disciples. . . . let us all be assured that the vices and imperfections that are in us will not prevent him from receiving us, nor from making us worthy to share
in this spiritual table. For we do not come insisting that we are perfect or righteous in ourselves, but rather, seeking our life in Jesus Christ, we confess that we are dead. Let us understand, therefore, that this Sacrament is a medicine for poor, spiritually sick people and that the only worthiness that our Lord requires of us is to know ourselves well enough to be displeased with our vices and to find all our pleasure, joy, and contentment in him alone.

For the Reformers, a church that no longer tied church discipline and church purity to the Lord’s Supper was a church that had lost sight of the benefits and dangers of partaking of the Supper. Cranmer provided a sufficient summary of both kinds of partaking in his Book of Common Prayer (1552):

For as the benefit is great, if with a truly penitent heart and lively faith we receive that Holy Sacrament (for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood; then we dwell in Christ and Christ in us, we are one with Christ, and Christ with us), so is the danger great, if we receive the same unworthily (for then we are guilty of the body and blood of Christ our Savior; we eat and drink our own damnation, not considering the Lord’s body; we kindle God’s wrath against us; we provoke him to plague us with diverse diseases, and all kinds of death).

That John Knox and the Middelburg Puritans borrowed these words of Cranmer nearly verbatim in their respective liturgies reflects the importance of tying church discipline and church purity to the Church’s Meal. Warning and welcome were then, and remain now, an integral part of Christian worship.

Christian Worship Affirms the Faith
Once for All Delivered

In recovering the Bible as the sole and ultimate authority in the Church, the Reformers did not abandon lesser authorities, such as
the historic Creeds—rather, they reaffirmed them. In practice, this meant that they maintained the element of Confessing the Faith within public worship. For them, the Creeds were a succinct way of reaffirming the main tenets of the Christian Faith. Working with predominantly illiterate congregations, the Reformers saw the benefit of reciting the content of the Christian Faith on regular occasions. But more than that, they wanted to demonstrate that the Reformation church was not some aberration; she was part of the true Church, standing in the Faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). For the Reformers, saying the Creeds aligned the Reformation church with the true Christian Church, and reminded God’s people of the Lord’s providential care of his Church throughout the ages. The Creeds were forged in the wars against heterodoxy, and the Church was to remember the past.

In recent times, it has become common for ministers to believe that the modern church can remain faithful with a simple “Bible-only” stance. After all, God’s Word is sufficient as well as authoritative, so why do we need the (extra-biblical) Creeds in our public worship? To argue as such, however, is to fail to grasp a basic, inescapable reality, one which is fundamental to who we are as God’s creatures. Just as God made man to be homo liturgicus, so he made man to be homo confessionalis. And just as in the Fall we did not cease to be liturgical creatures—worshiping someone or something other than God—so also in the Fall we did not cease to be creedal creatures—confessing someone or something other than God. Creeds, as with worship, are one of the foundational realities of human life, and they are integral to worship (and idolatry). So it is not whether or not we will confess our beliefs, it is who or what we will confess. For even those who confess to have “no Creed but the Bible” have just stated their Credo. Moreover, as a pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), the Church has always been a confessing Church. We confess our sins, and we also confess our Savior:

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:
He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory (1 Tim. 3:16).

A church that does not say the historic Creeds on a regular basis is like a nation that does not remember her “War of Independence” or her “Fight for Freedom.” She has forgotten where she has come from. She has forgotten who she is. She has despised her mother (Prov. 15:20). For the great historic Creeds are the wisdom of her mother passed down through the centuries and across the millennia. Ignorance can be excused to a point, but not ingratitude.  

Our Mother Kirk has left us with a rich inheritance, and we would do well to guard the good deposit, with thanksgiving.

One of the ways that we can express our thanksgiving to God is by saying a Creed each Lord’s Day. Every week—and almost to a man—the Reformers did so. The main Creed employed was the Apostles’ Creed, but Luther, Schwarz, and Cranmer also used the Nicene Creed. Cranmer was alone in using the Athanasian Creed on occasions in his service of Morning Prayer. The content of each is simple yet profound.

In the Apostles’ Creed, God the Father is affirmed as omnificent, the Maker of heaven and earth. His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is affirmed as the only begotten Son, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and who, from womb to tomb to throne, won salvation for us. He is seated now and reigning, and will soon be returning to judge the living and the dead. The Holy Spirit is affirmed as the One who brought into existence the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and by whom we enjoy communion with all the saints. The Spirit also serves as the guarantee of our future in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

The Nicene Creed reaffirms the same beliefs, expanding on the deity of the Son and the Spirit. The Son is

begotten of the Father before all worlds,

Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father;
by whom all things were made.

The Spirit is

the Lord and Giver of Life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
together is worshiped and glorified,
who spoke by the prophets.

In the Athanasian Creed we have the fullest defense of the Trinity. Here the Confession is antithetical in nature, affirming truths and denying falsehoods about the Godhead. Each person of the Trinity is affirmed as being uncreated, incomprehensible, eternal, Almighty, God, and Lord. There are also denials of tritheism interspersed throughout: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not three eternals, or three uncreated beings, or three incomprehensibles, or three Almighty, or three Gods, or three Lords—they are one God in three persons and three persons in one God. This is the catholic Faith: “That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.” Such beliefs comprise the catholic Faith, “which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.”

For the Reformers, as with the original authors of the Creeds, what was at stake in saying the Creeds was a matter of life and death. In his *Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers*, Calvin wrote that, in saying (or singing) the Creed, God’s people testify that they “all wish to live and die in the Christian doctrine and religion.” Thus when we are summoned by the minister on the Lord’s Day to stand and raise our voices as one, and to say what it is that we believe as Christians, we ought to do so with heads lifted high and with hearts burning with conviction. For in that moment we are stating fundamental truths upon which our lives depend—truths, which
in the past shook heaven and hell, and which in the future will do so again.

**Christian Worship Is a Rich Spiritual Banquet**

Just as worship on the Lord’s Day in the early church involved various elements (Acts 2:42–47), so Reformation worship reflected the variety of elements encouraged throughout the Scriptures. Those who drafted the liturgies were careful to include individual elements which were biblically based, such as confession and assurance (1 John 1:8–10), thanksgiving and general intercessions (1 Tim. 2:1–2), exhortation (Col. 3:16a), psalms and hymns (Col. 3:16b), prayer for illumination (Pss. 19:14; 43:4; Eph. 3:18–19), Scripture readings and the sermon (1 Tim. 4:13), Creeds (Deut. 6:1; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Tim. 3:16), the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1–17; Matt. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:21), the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13), and a concluding benediction (Num. 6:24–26; 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 4:7).

Although there was no set order of these elements among the liturgies of the Reformation, they nevertheless served similar purposes during worship to display different aspects of the gospel. It is particularly noticeable that they were included in the rhythms of weekly worship without introducing an inordinate length of service (and the Reformers were concerned with service length—the Danish Church Order and John à Lasco’s *Form and Method* insisted that sermons not exceed an hour). Part of the genius of the Reformation liturgies was the economy of words used during worship. Transitional commentary between elements was kept to a minimum, while repetitive singing and incessant announcements were noticeably absent. The Reformers were not prepared to let such things break the flow of the worship service.

In short, the proper worship of God and the edification of his people required then—and still now—a rich liturgical diet, presented in a deliberate order, with nothing to distract the heart or mind of the participants.
Christian Worship Includes Serious, Structured, and Studied Prayer

A cursory glance at the prayers used throughout the Reformation liturgies reveals them to be serious prayers. They were characterized by the gravity which befits the act of corporate prayer, and the reverence which is involved with approaching an almighty and holy God. The sobering nature of sin and its effects were communicated in the prayers of confession: “[W]e are not worthy to be called your children, nor lift our eyes up to heaven,” wrote Bullinger; “we are poor sinners, conceived and born in iniquity and corruption,” wrote Calvin; and, perhaps most well-known of all, Cranmer wrote:

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men, we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against your Divine Majesty, provoking most justly your wrath and indignation against us. We earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings. The remembrance of them is grievous to us, the burden of them is intolerable.

The tone of these prayers was not the product of a self-loathing spirit or a bygone era, but that of a biblically informed, honest assessment of sin, accompanied by a godly spirit of repentance.

The prayers of the Reformation liturgies were interspersed in regular ways: at the start of the service of the Word, in the confession of sins, in the prayer for illumination before the sermon, in the service of the Lord’s Supper, and toward the end of the services as worshipers were dismissed. The common presence of general intercessions took place in obedience to the Apostle Paul’s urging “that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority” (1 Tim. 2:1–2). This often took the form of a five-fold pattern for intercessory prayer: for civil authority, for Christian ministry, for all people, for the
building up of God’s people, and for the sick and afflicted. Not only did this structure for general intercessions follow the scriptural instruction, but it prevented public prayer devolving into fixation upon parochial matters or the personal preferences of the minister. Of course, there is no scriptural injunction which limits general intercessions to these five matters—the Reformers themselves found plenty of additional matters to bring to the Lord—but, as minister and laity alike know, structured prayers help everyone to follow along, and, at the end, sound their hearty “Amen.”

It is important to note that not all prayers found in the corpus of Reformation liturgies were fixed forms—most were, but there were also various free and extemporaneous prayers included. We have little recourse to these prayers, but we can observe the practice to a certain degree in Calvin’s *Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers* and more so in Knox’s liturgy for the Genevan exiles, the *Book of Common Order*, and the *Middelburg Liturgy* of the English Puritans. The fixed forms of prayers reveal that they were studied prayers; that is, they were thoughtfully prepared through meditation on the Scriptures. They focused on the spiritual concern of the relevant element of worship, were replete with the language of Scripture, and were characterized by relative brevity and appropriate authenticity. The scriptural emphasis of these prayers is a helpful corrective to the aimlessness that can easily creep into extemporaneous prayer. The question of authenticity was also incredibly important for the Reformers—after all, they were ardently opposed to hypocrisy in every way, shape, and form. Ultimately, what mattered to the Reformers was not whether the prayers were written down, but whether they were informed by the Scriptures and spoken in the Spirit.

**Christian Worship Is Punctuated with Praise**

Throughout the churches of the Reformation—with the notable exception of Zürich—sung praises featured in the weekly worship. The Reformers reflected the biblical concern for sung praise (Eph.

13. Some of Calvin’s extempore prayers were recorded, and are published in Elsie Anne McKee, *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001).
Reformation Worship

5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13) and the biblical examples of sung portions of Scripture (Luke 1:46–44; 2:29–32; Phil. 2:5–11; Col. 1:15–26). The Bible’s own hymnbook was used in the many and varied Psalters which formed the basis for much congregational worship, the most famous of which was Calvin’s Genevan Psalter. The chief purpose of congregational singing was to praise and bless the name of the Lord, but it also conveyed a sense of active participation for the congregation, something which previously had been absent. Singing achieved the vertical dimension of praise, and the horizontal dimension of mutual edification. There were differences concerning the use of instrumental or unaccompanied music, as there were differences concerning the use of biblical and extrabiblical forms of words. Nevertheless, the Reformers had a high view of sung worship. Luther said that “next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise.”

It was not a gap-filler before the sermon. Rather, it was one of the means by which the Word of God was made to dwell richly in the hearts of God’s people (Col. 3:16). Yet the Reformers were committed to making sung praise as musically rich as it was theologically rich. This was best exemplified in the liturgies of Luther and Calvin. For example, in his German Mass, Luther put Psalm 34, the Kyrie Eleyson, and the Epistle and Gospel readings to music. He explained:

We have put this music on the living and holy Word of God in order to sing, praise, and honor it. We want the beautiful art of music to be properly used to serve her dear Creator and his Christians. He is thereby praised and honored and we are made better and stronger in faith when his holy Word is impressed on our hearts by sweet music.

Following his time in Strassburg, during which he experienced the powerful sung worship of Bucer’s liturgy, Calvin developed a high view of the importance of music. He focused on recovering


15. Martin Luther, “Preface to the Burial Hymns,” in Liturgy and Hymns of Luther’s Works, 53:328.
the Psalter as the hymnbook of the church, employing a church musician to this end.

The prayers found throughout the Reformation liturgies were also a means of praise in public worship. The Reformers traced their prayerful praise back to the attributes of God: his gentleness, his goodness, his mercy, his peace, his eternality, his omniscience, his majesty, and his glory. Rooted in the wonderful character of God, the creative and saving acts of God were also frequently called into prayerful praise. Cranmer’s inclusion of the *Te Deum* and the *Benedicite Omnia Opera Domini Domino* in the regular rhythms of Morning Prayer made this point clearly. Above all, the person and work of Christ was praised, adored, and glorified. The liturgies for the Lord’s Supper were filled with heartfelt praise for the Savior of souls. Christ’s sacrifice of propitiation on behalf of his people received a reciprocal sacrifice of praise.

In short, the Reformers established two main avenues of praise to God, both of which are captured in the title of Calvin’s Genevan liturgy: *The Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers and Songs*. For Calvin, as with the other Reformers, Christian worship was to be punctuated with praise—in prayer and song.

**Christian Worship Is Well Prepared and Conducted**

Reformation services were overseen with great ministerial care. They were prepared and conducted by ordained ministers, and this included not just the choice of Bible readings and the preached sermon, but also the choice of psalms and hymns, the prayers, and the order of the elements in the service. Only in the service of the Lord’s Supper were other ministers occasionally employed to aid the officiating minister. For example, in à Lasco’s *Form and Method*—and followed by Micronius in *Christian Ordinances*, the German Palatinate Church Order, and the Dutch church’s *Psalms of David*—another minister read portions of Scripture (often from John 6 or 13–17) or introduced songs, while the officiating minister supped at the table with the people. Other than this, the main minister did everything. This, of course, does not imply a denigration of every member ministry (Eph. 4:7–16), for the Reformers earnestly desired
the empowerment of the laity. As Bucer commented in the year prior to his liturgy,

And so every member, because he is a member of Christ and an instrument of the Holy Spirit, is appointed to a particular beneficial work and activity in the body of Christ and endowed with fitness and ability to fulfil that rôle; there is no-one who is idle; no-one who is not constantly active for the good of others and also needing the others for his own good. They have various gifts according to the grace which is given them.16

However, such a focus on equipping the saints for works of service did not democratize the ordained office. For the Reformers, every member ministry was to flourish under the ministry of the ordained pastors and teachers of the flock.

Church musicians were employed to aid the praise of God’s people, but primarily for setting psalms and hymns to music. The choice of songs in the worship service, however, often remained the task of the minister. For them, the ministry of the Word and Sacrament was part of their pastoral responsibility; and since the Word of God dwelt in God’s people through singing (Col. 3:16), the responsibility for song selection was to rest with those who were called to minister God’s Word to his people. Moreover, in practice, leading worship was one way in which the minister shepherded his flock—from the front of church, modeling how to praise and pray.

That the Reformers wrote down their liturgies is an indication that they wished for their order of service, and the words contained therein, to be an aid for future ministers. It was also a guard against what Charles W. Baird would later call “the unaided individuality of the minister.”17 While there was a generous flexibility accorded to those who had different orders of service, the Reformers nevertheless believed that the elements contained in the service

16. Martin Bucer, Concerning the True Care of Souls, trans. Peter Beale (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009[1538]), 5–6. We are grateful to Ben Wilkinson for pointing out this reference.
mattered, as well as the order in which they occurred. The content and structure of the service told the story of the gospel.\textsuperscript{18} For the Reformers, not only was the gospel proclaimed in the worship service, but the worship service itself proclaimed the gospel. Key elements of the service communicated the good news of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension, as well as the Christian’s union with the same Lord Jesus. While there was no uniform order across the Reformation liturgies, there was a general, broad “gospel logic,” albeit with some variety in structure.

Given the significance of the gospel story to liturgy, the importance of educating the modern church about the dynamics of liturgy cannot be overstated. Seminaries and theological colleges also carry some responsibility in this regard. Ministerial seminaries and colleges that are serious about training ministers of Word and Sacrament will ensure that hymnology and liturgiology are an integral part of pastoral theology, alongside homiletics. Men ought to be trained how to praise and pray in public worship, as much as how to preach. As stated above, the ultimate responsibility for corporate worship is part of what it means for the minister to oversee services of Word and Sacrament. To delegate completely such a task is to separate key elements of Word ministry from the ordained office of the minister, and potentially open the door to foolishness at best, and false teaching at worst. In this regard, perhaps it is worth remembering that in the early church Arius spread his deadly heresies through songs.\textsuperscript{19}

However, the carefully organized worship of the Reformation was not just for the sake of theological orthodoxy, but also for beauty, rhythm, and persuasion. The words of these liturgies—carefully and beautifully crafted—were written in such a way as to ensure the Word of God would remain in the hearts and minds of the worshipers long after the worship service was over. The rituals and rhythms of weekly worship were meant to provide the comfort of the gospel beyond just a single day of the week. Written and

\textsuperscript{18} For further study, see Bryan Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

\textsuperscript{19} According to Athanasius, Arius wrote a compilation of songs known as the “Thalia,” which were sung by Arius’s followers. See William G. Rusch, \textit{The Trinitarian Controversy} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980), 64–66.
recited prayers and songs were then, and are now, valuable, not because they are written down, but because they are familiar and become familiar. They embed in the psyche words to pray in times of need, and words to sing in times of crisis.20

Worshiping in the Tradition

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the argument of this book is irenic. There is no proposal for one, set order of worship. Reflection on the Table of Liturgies contained in the Appendix reveals that such a task would be reductionist at best and futile at worst. While certain liturgical traditions did begin to form in the decades and centuries following the Reformation, eliminating some of the diversity, no one order predominated. This was to be expected, because men’s ordinances change “diversely in diverse countries,” as Cranmer observed. Such diversity should be embraced and respected with the same catholicity of spirit that defined Luther, Calvin, and Cranmer. Nevertheless, what did predominate within each respective country and church was a liturgical tradition. In this respect, this book is an encouragement for churches and Christians who claim to stand in the tradition of the Reformation to worship as they did. This is not to suggest (or encourage) worship that looks, sounds, or feels like it belongs in the sixteenth century. The Reformers’ insistence that services of worship be conducted, in all respects, in the vernacular strongly counters such a practice. The saying of the Ten Commandments or Lord’s Prayer or the Creeds in “old English” today is nothing more than archaism grounded in sentimentalism, and only further distances the modern church from the wisdom of the Reformation.

What then do we mean by “worshiping in the tradition”? Simply put: We mean that the biblical, liturgical elements that were passed from the ancient church to the medieval church, and which were then refined by the Reformers in the light of Scripture, should once again, and hereafter, be integral to the weekly services of Christian worship. The modern church must again learn to revel in

traditional liturgy. In this regard, orders of service ought to reflect a certain “fixed” regularity in the liturgical tradition of the Reformation churches. There is something inherently distracting about novelty in the rhythms of weekly worship. As C. S. Lewis astutely observed:

Every service is a structure of acts and words through which we receive a sacrament, or repent, or supplicate, or adore. And it enables us to do these things best—if you like, it “works” best—when, through long familiarity, we don’t have to think about it. As long as you notice, and have to count, the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don’t notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes, or light, or print, or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God.21

The problem with liturgical novelty is that, according to Lewis, “it fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about the worship is a different thing from worshipping,”22 which brings us, in closing, to the purpose of this book.

“How Then Shall We Worship?”

This book is an irenic plea for the Church (and especially her ministers) to engage again in the two-millennia-old question: “How then shall we worship?” Through the examination of Reformation liturgies from the past, there is a wealth of treasure for the present. Not only that, but lessons can be learned and principles applied. The principles outlined above, if put into practice, will ensure that the church of the future will look like the church of the past. She may, and ought to, appear in modern garb, but she ought also to

22. Ibid.
reflect the essential characteristics of her mother from whom she claims to have come.

All liturgical reform, however, ultimately proves its worth by demonstrating whether it is concerned with a beautiful Savior more than with a beautiful service. Of course, the false dichotomy ought to be avoided. Yet at the same time, for those who seek liturgical reform in today’s Church, a warning is necessary. Reformation that has the goal simply of returning to certain forms of worship from another era will, in the end, avail nothing. It is mere traditionalism—the dead faith of the living. But reformation which has the goal of lifting people’s hearts to God the Father through his Son, by his Word and Sacrament, in the grace and power of his Spirit, will avail much. It is Christian worship in the tradition of the Christian Church—it is the living faith of the dead. Such worship serves the good of God’s people and the glory of God’s name.

May it be so.