

Liturgy, part 1: Against Liturgy-Bashing

By Tim Nichols

It has been a while since our last position paper, but if you recall it was a discussion of the total contradiction between Christianity and unbelief. God is the most comprehensively biased being ever to exist—He has an opinion about literally *everything*—and it is our duty as Christians to think His thoughts after Him. Only in this way can we come to possess the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, that is, all the skills worth having and all the facts worth knowing, because *all* these things are hidden in Christ. The unbelieving world, by contrast, does not do this. Instead, they refuse to glorify God and thank Him, and in their ingratitude they become futile in thought, dark in heart, and foolish idolaters pretending to be wise—hence the total contradiction between Christianity and unbelief.

Sadly, believers can be gulled into thinking the unbeliever's thoughts after him, rather than thinking God's thoughts after Him. When we do this, we get kidnapped, robbed of the treasures that are in Christ, and we also become futile, dark, and foolish. Nowhere is this more true than in our thinking about church.

In the next few position papers, I will be addressing some key points about the way we “do church.” We have some deficiencies that need correcting, and we'll be discussing them in the coming months. Before we do that, though, we need to clear out some of the pervasive myths and fuzzy thinking that plague discussions of this kind. More specifically, before we can discuss what sort of liturgy we ought to have, we have to discuss why we should have liturgy *at all*. In this paper, we'll be considering the case against liturgy, and why it doesn't hold up.

“We Are Not A Liturgical Church”

The only possible answer to this is, “Yes, you are.” If it is a church at all, it holds public meetings, and in those meetings something happens. Those happenings take on a certain pattern in any church, and people always resist change to that pattern. In supposedly “non-liturgical” Baptist churches, I have often heard old pastors give their young “preacher boys” the sage counsel, “Son, when you take your first pulpit, don't you dare to change the order of service.” They're not kidding. If it's Welcome-Hymn-Announcements-Hymn-Offertory-Sermon-Doxology, that's what people are used to, and a new pastor might as well cut his own throat as move the announcements to after the second hymn.

Other churches consciously do something different every week in an effort to “keep it fresh.” But even so, they have an agenda by which they do things every week: “not what we did last week.” Still other churches go so far as to have open meetings, where the body assembles and sits in chairs, “waiting for the Spirit to lead.” But this, too, is an agenda for the meeting.

The proper ecclesiastical word for this agenda is “liturgy,” and liturgy is inevitable. Avoiding the term by some awkward circumlocution like “order of service”—or even worse, having no word for it at all—avoids only the word, not the concept. All churches, then, are liturgical churches.

Moreover, liturgy *does* have an effect on us, whether we’re aware of the effect or not. In fact, the real difference between so-called “liturgical” churches and the so-called “non-liturgical” churches is that one consciously understands the effects of liturgy and seeks to harness it (or at least, did at one time), and the other is willfully ignorant. Purely as a matter of good stewardship, we as a church need to grow aware of our liturgy. It turns out that the Bible has some things to say about the conduct of the church service, and we won’t be able to obey them if we’re not paying attention to what we’re doing.

“Vain Repetition”

Another very common objection is that anything we do over and over, the same way every time, loses meaning. It becomes nothing more than meaningless routine, and Jesus specifically warned us against repetition in our prayers. (Presumably, the principle extends to other acts of worship as well.)

A closer look at the situation tells a different story. First of all, Jesus’ command is not against repetition as such, but against *vain* repetition. There’s a rather sizable difference. Psalm 136, for example, repeats the refrain “His mercy endures forever” at the end of every single verse—that’s 26 times in one psalm. Deuteronomy 27:11-26 describes a ritual in which half of Israel stands on one mountain, and half on another across the valley. The Levites were to shout out “Cursed is the one who __,” naming a different sin every time, for twelve different sins, and all the people were to shout back “Amen.” Then there’s the sacrificial system—ascension offerings every morning and evening, the same feasts observed the same way every year, and so on. Talk about repetition! All of these repetitions are prescribed by God Himself. Are we really going to say that this is the sort of thing that Jesus was talking about?

Of course not. Rather than assuming that all repetition is bad, we should look at what Jesus actually said:

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions, as the heathen do because they think they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them, because your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.¹

In actually looking at the text, Jesus’ point is obvious: the heathen think that their gods do not hear them unless they repeat their requests over and over and over again. A Christian should not behave in this way, because God knows the request even before anyone asks Him for it. A Christian should pray, in other words, believing that God knows all about it, and knowing that the outcome depends on God, not on another 500 repetitions.

¹ Matthew 6:7-8

Having dealt with the biblical objection to repetition, what remains is a practical objection: if we repeat something a lot, it loses all meaning; therefore we should not repeat things a lot. It should not escape our notice that this is only a practical argument. Even if it should turn out to be true *as far as we can tell*, if God commands some kind of repetition, then we will have to trust that He knows better than we do, and do it in obedient faith, seeking understanding in due time.

Upon examination, though, it turns out that it is simply not true that repetition *in itself* causes an action to lose meaning. Taps and a 21-gun salute at a military funeral rarely fail to bring a tear to the eye, and most people find that the effect is *strengthened*, not weakened, by repetition. “Amazing Grace” is sung regularly in many churches. Is anyone prepared to suggest that it is therefore meaningless, and we should stop singing it? On the allegedly “non-traditional” side of the fence, many of the people who use the “vain repetitions” argument against the Lord’s Prayer or the Nicene Creed in liturgy are themselves devotees of contemporary praise music of the sort often derided as “7-11 music” (7 words, 11 times), or “2 verses, 3 chords, 4 hours” music. These depictions are caricatures, of course—but they are *valid* caricatures, pointedly true in the way that caricatures are. Clearly these people see some value in repetition.

But let’s take it beyond the church. How about the Pledge of Allegiance before class in schools, or the Star-Spangled Banner at athletic events? Perhaps we should stop standing up for the national anthem—after all, we’ve done it so many times, surely it has lost all meaning by now.

Of course not. That civic liturgy ingrains in us a respect for our country and its symbols, even if, like many Americans, we don’t fully understand why we do it or what the effects are. Ask yourself: “How do I respond when I see someone burning a flag?” and, more importantly, “Why is that response so strong?” For another example, look at the thrashing a public figure gets when he doesn’t observe protocol during the national anthem or the pledge.

This is not to say that it is impossible for something to become humdrum through constant repetition. Of course that’s *possible*. But it matters what you’re repeating, and that the idea that repetition, all by itself itself, makes something mundane and mindless is just so much blather.

“Ritual without Reality”

In a related, but distinct, objection, some argue that establishing a consistent form of worship puts the focus on the outward observance to the exclusion of the heart, resulting in worshippers who have ritual without reality.

It is true that this can happen. Most of us, I suspect, have seen this in action, and the Bible itself acknowledges that there are such people loose in the church: it describes them as “having a form of godliness but denying its power.”² Jesus often derided the religious leaders for observing the tiniest details of ritual while missing the entire point. For example, consider His words to the Pharisees:

² 2 Timothy 3:5

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay the tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law, judgment and mercy and faith: these you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.³

This text is often enough referred to—at least the first part—by the modern-day foes of ritual. But upon actually examining the text, the objection falls apart. The Pharisees were real sticklers for observing the Law. They didn't just give a tenth of their bank accounts; they went to their spice racks, took down the jar of cumin seed, weighed its contents, and gave a tenth of it to the temple. And they lavished all this care on Law-keeping whilst ignoring the really big points—things like mercy and faith! They deserve to be mocked, and Jesus mocks them. Notice, though, that Jesus doesn't tell them to forget the tithe and just do the important stuff; in fact, He says exactly the opposite. They should do the big stuff, Jesus says, *but they should tithe off the spice rack, too*. In other words, Jesus' prescription for ritual without reality is not “forget the ritual”—it's godly ritual done properly by godly people, in a way that *fully* honors God.

Jesus is not afraid of ritual. He even invented one Himself. Paul recounts the event to the Corinthian church:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”⁴

Do some believers abuse the Lord's Table? Of course. As a matter of fact, it is precisely because of such abuse that Paul is writing to the Corinthians. Does Paul, on this account, suggest that they should just discontinue the ritual altogether? He does not. Instead, he sharply chides them, explains that God has judged them for abusing the ritual, and commands them to do it right. Again, the prescription for ritual without reality is to observe the ritual properly.

This also raises an important point about the language. If we reconsider the two poorly observed rituals we discussed above, “without reality” is not quite the right description. The Pharisees really did tithe, and it really was the Lord's Table the Corinthians were desecrating. The rituals were *real*; that was the basis for the harsh condemnation in both cases. A better way to describe it would be “desecrating the ritual.”⁵

³ Matthew 23:23

⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

⁵ We'll need to devote much more discussion to the reality of ritual. For now, suffice it to say that we often think the ritual is just there to teach us some propositions, and thereafter to remind us of them. This is simply not the case; there's much more to ritual than that, as we shall see.

“Man-Made Tradition”

“That’s all very well for the Lord’s Supper,” someone might say, “but that’s not what we’re really talking about. Jesus told us to do that, and even ‘non-liturgical’ churches do. But why bother with all that man-made tradition—creeds and prayers and standing up and kneeling and such? After all, Jesus warned us against ‘teaching as doctrines the commandments of men,’ didn’t He?”⁶

It’s a good question. He did indeed, and that’s a real danger. As with any other part of the creation, it’s possible to turn the liturgy into an object of worship—and not just in “liturgical” churches. In any church, people can become so attached to their way of doing things that in their minds, it becomes the very definition of Christian worship.

This is a danger, but we may just have to risk it. We must obey the commands and patterns of Scripture in our worship, and that obedience will take a particular form—probably *not* the only possible form. As with any obedience, it is possible for us to then identify our particular way of obeying with obedience itself. That’s a problem, but ceasing to obey is not the solution. We must do what obedience requires—whatever it is—and we must humbly remember all the while that the important thing is God’s command, not our particular way of implementing it.

There is a second issue to be dealt with here, though: much of what goes on in a church service *is* man-made. Who says we need all that stuff, anyhow?

God does.

Among other instructions about church worship and order, God repeatedly commands Christians to *sing*. We’ll look at this command in more detail in the next position paper, but for the present let’s overview four key passages:

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.⁷

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord....⁸

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.⁹

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.¹⁰

⁶ Matthew 15:9//Mark 7:7

⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:26

⁸ Ephesians 5:18-19

⁹ Colossians 3:16

¹⁰ James 5:13

As you can see, singing, and in particular *psalm*-singing, is not optional. It is something that believers *must* do. In order to do this, two things are required: lyrics and a tune. Now of course we can find the lyrics in the Book of Psalms, but there are no tunes preserved in the Bible. Where do we get the tunes?

From songwriters. From human beings with musical talent, who will write the tunes and pass them on to us. And what is it that we call a practice created by human beings and passed down from one person to another? Man-made tradition.

Therefore, it ought to be obvious to us that not all man-made tradition is bad; in fact, man-made tradition is *necessary* if we are going to be faithful to the commands of Scripture. We cannot fulfill those commands without recourse to tradition. Of course, not all traditions are created equal, and in the last position paper we considered the Colossians 2:8-10 warning against being carried away by that philosophy which is according to human tradition *and not according to Christ*.

Tradition is unavoidable, but we must measure our traditions carefully, and especially our traditions of worship. We will return to this point in a moment, but first we should consider one more objection to consciously planned liturgy.

“Quenching the Spirit”

“You’ve got the whole church service scripted in the bulletin! Call to worship, a hymn, confession, another hymn, Bible reading, a *creed*, of all things!—why, even the *prayers* are written out ahead of time! Where have you left any room for the Spirit to lead? You’ve written Him right out of the entire church service!”

It’s a good question, isn’t it? Doesn’t it quench the Spirit to plan everything in advance? Doesn’t it replace authentic, heartfelt worship with slavery to a schedule and a script?

Pay very careful attention to the question. Scripting the church service in advance certainly does replace spontaneity with planning, but notice that the question assumes two very important points: first, that the Spirit leads in spontaneity, *and not in planning*, and second, that authentic worship must be spontaneous, *and not planned*.

These two assumptions are both wrong, and proving them wrong will not be difficult. The difficulty will come in understanding how deeply they have penetrated into our thinking and our lifestyles, and how thoroughly we will have to reform if we are going to successfully uproot them. But first things first.

Does the leading of the Spirit require spontaneity rather than planning? Again, we can return to the commands to sing in order to see the fallacy here. Imagine if we all just got together, and on the count of three, all began to sing whatever words happened to pop into our heads, set to whatever made-up tune we could each individually concoct at that very moment. Makes your ears hurt just thinking about it, doesn’t it? If everyone simply does his own thing, the result is chaos, just as it was in Corinth, and “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”¹¹

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 14:33

For a group to sing a song together, the individuals in the group have to know the words and the tune; in other words, they have to have a *plan* for what they're going to sing. Singing the song together is just executing the plan. Now the Spirit, speaking through Scripture, requires us to sing, and therefore requires us to have such a plan. It is only by having such a plan that we can obey the Spirit's voice. Far from quenching the Spirit, then, planning is a necessary part of following the Spirit's leading.

Some people will try to say that actually, in a properly unplanned service everyone wouldn't be doing *his own* thing, but spontaneously following the Spirit's leading. According to this argument, the service comes together as a symphonic whole, with the Spirit conducting the orchestra, as it were. But in Corinth, as in modern churches who take this position, *that's not what actually happens*.

What actually happens is chaos, and this should not surprise us. 1 Corinthians, particularly chapters 11-14, were written for just such a situation. Paul doesn't tell the Corinthians, "Stop doing your own thing and let the Spirit lead you." Rather, Paul gives them explicit instructions about how to conduct their church services—a set of liturgical guidelines to be handed down as part of the tradition. Of course, hypothetically, the Spirit *could* direct every part of the worship service spontaneously so that the result was a symphonic whole without any human planning—but Paul shows us that *the Spirit doesn't choose to work like that*. Rather, the Spirit gives guidance through Scripture ahead of time, and this guidance must become part of the planning for the service.

"Perhaps it's true that *some* planning is essential," someone might say, "but how can you be authentic when you're just following a script?" Observe the question closely: what is the underlying premise? Spontaneity is authentic; planning is not authentic. Let's test that premise by applying it to a wedding ceremony. By that standard, the most authentic weddings are spur-of-the-moment, liquor-soaked Las Vegas nuptials officiated by the bartender. Of course, we all know better. A wedding is a thoroughly orchestrated affair, and the specialness of the occasion is expressed in the careful planning and attention to detail.

To bring it into a church context, let's again consider music. When we all sing "Amazing Grace," we agree on the words and music in advance, and it is only within the frame of that agreement that we can worship musically *as a group*. Authentic *group* singing depends on that planning for its very existence.

Of course that observation doesn't necessarily settle the issue for a radical individualist. He will simply respond that we've proven that group worship is inauthentic by its very nature. Here, however, he runs smack into Scripture. Scripture demands just such musical worship. Scripture also demands that "those who worship [God] must worship in spirit and truth." God must be the one who defines correct worship, not the worshipper. If God requires group worship in spirit and truth, then that's what Christians must offer to Him. If our "spontaneous authenticity" ethic says that's impossible, then there's obviously something wrong with "spontaneous authenticity."

This goes down poorly for individualistic Americans. We may be able to see that Scripture requires these things of us, but we still want to cling to our cherished individuality, and our ethic of "authentic" spontaneity. In order to consider why that is, we need to return to the question of tradition.

The Christian View: Cultivation, Tradition and Liturgy

In the beginning, God made man after His image and according to His likeness. God placed man, not in a wilderness, but in a garden, with a mission to cultivate and protect it.¹² In due time, God finished creating humanity by creating man's counterpart, woman. To the man and the woman together God gave the instructions known today as the Dominion Mandate (or the Creation Mandate):

“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; it shall be yours for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food.”¹³

God is the owner and rightful ruler of all creation; Man and Woman were commanded to be vassal king and queen under God. The aim of their rule was to be the fulfillment of God's purpose: to cultivate and protect the creation He had made. God Himself began the cultivation effort by planting a garden in Eden, and placing Man and Woman in it. From there, He charged them to bring forth a race of kings and queens that would cultivate the whole earth.

This ethic of cultivation suffuses the story that follows, and comes to full flower in the new heavens and the new earth, in which the work can finally go forward without the hindrance of sin. We are living in that story, in between the creation and the re-creation, and therefore cultivation is the driving force of our own story, not least in the story of our worship. If every generation has to re-invent the wheel, none of us will make it very far, in any arena. Therefore, cultivation implies tradition and education into the tradition, as each generation communicates its achievements to the following generation, which will in turn build on it—“standing on the shoulders of giants,” if you will.

Cultivation Ethics in Worship

We can see this cultivation and learning played out in the history of Israel's worship, for example. The tabernacle worship was essentially silent, except for the occasional trumpet blast, and it remained so for centuries. However, when David brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem, he installed it in a tabernacle of its own. This Davidic tabernacle was *not* the tabernacle that Moses made at God's direction, the one with the bronze altar and so on; that tabernacle remained at Gibeon, and the priests continued to offer animal sacrifices there according to the Law. Other than the initial dedicatory sacrifices, there were no animal sacrifices offered at the Davidic tabernacle, but instead a service of song, consciously designed by David to parallel and accompany the animal sacrifices. If we could watch Israel in those days from a bird's-eye view, we would see the dawn break over the land as the smoke of the morning ascension offerings rose to heaven from Gibeon, and at the same time we would hear the ascension psalms of

¹² Genesis 2:15

¹³ Genesis 1:28-30

the Levites rising from Mount Zion to the ears of God. All day long, as the sacrifices continued in Gibeon, the singing would continue on Zion, until the evening ascension offerings—burnt offering and musical offering—rose together at the end of the day. These two separate ministries—animal sacrifice and musical sacrifice—would remain separate throughout the reign of David, and only with the building of Solomon’s temple did they finally come together into one place.¹⁴

Musical worship was not new to Israel, of course. Moses and Miriam had led the nation in singing praise to the Lord after He brought them across the Red Sea. But this regular service of music was an extraordinary leap forward in Israel’s worship, and it required skilled instruction to bring it about. 1 Chronicles 15 records the arrangements David made with the Levites, including the little nugget that “Chenaniah, leader of the Levites, was instructor in music, because he was skillful.”¹⁵ As with the ministry of sacrifice, the musical service required a corps of dedicated specialists to carry out the worship. Education and training would be necessary for the next generation of singers to learn the songs and worship the Lord properly, according to the traditions established in the time of David.

And so it is with us. We should expect that as we grow and develop into maturity in worship, we will acquire traditions, and train new arrivals in those traditions, so that we may all worship God together.

The Ethic of Spontaneity

And yet, somehow, the notion of acquiring traditions and having to learn and teach them rankles our individualistic American hearts. We’re very attached to the idea of spontaneity in our worship. Why is this?

The easy answer is laziness. It’s just easier to walk in, sit down, and let whatever happens wash over us with no particular preparation on our part. No doubt that accounts for some of the resistance, but I don’t think this is all of it.

A second, and nastier, answer comes from our history. Until very recently in history, people thought of themselves more as members of a group than as distinct individuals. As this began to change—one fruit of the philosophical and artistic movement known as Romanticism—an opposition was set up between civilization, on one hand, and the “authentic” individual, on the other. In its extreme form, this view manifested itself in the notion that people are essentially good, but social pressures and forces habituate them to all kinds of evil.

Cultivation, on this view, is at best phony and at worst the root of all evil; it is only the spontaneous self that is good and wholesome. No doubt this pagan idea sounds familiar; most people in our culture today believe it in one form or another—including *us*. When we object to all the planning that goes into a “liturgical” service because it ruins the authenticity of our worship, we have fallen prey to this error.

¹⁴ For more information on this critical development in Israel’s worship, see Peter J. Leithart, *From Silence to Song: The Davidic Liturgical Revolution*, (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003) for a popular-level treatment. For more technical details, see John W. Kleinig, *The Lord’s Song: The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993).

¹⁵ 1 Chronicles 15:22

The Romantic error, in turn, is a weakened form of a much more robustly pagan sin, the worship of chaos. Pagans (ancient and modern) view chaos as the generative force which brings all life, and the ancient pagan societies oscillated endlessly between the order of home and city, which preserved life, and the chaos of wilderness, drunkenness, and debauchery, which renewed and created life afresh. Either of these poles, left to itself, would destroy all life, the one by stifling it under a flood of obligations and restrictions, and the other in an explosion of random violence. Hence the oscillation, which was built right into the calendar, so that most of the year government and order prevailed, but during certain festivals chaos was invited in to rejuvenate the society. South America's Carnival and New Orleans' Mardi Gras are remnants of such pagan chaos festivals.

Whole societies also oscillate from order to chaos over time. The Romantics were reacting against an imbalance toward order, and in their revolt they gloried in all things uncultivated, uncivilized, and chaotic. It is out of their love for the uncultivated self that our present ethic of "authentic" spontaneity is born.

A Christian Response

We should now be able to see clearly that the ethic of "authentic" spontaneity rests on a story directly contradictory to the story that Christianity tells. In the pagan story, life comes from the chaotic, unrestrained, uncultivated self, and so we fail when we allow society and cultivation to mask our true self, and we live a successful life when we strip off the masks and cultivations and live naked, as it were, giving spontaneous vent to all our feelings. The Bible describes such a person as a fool.¹⁶

The biblically wise Christian tells a very different story. God planted a garden—a cultivated place if ever there was one. Man was made in God's image and according to His likeness, to be a cultivator of the whole earth. It is in cultivation of all kinds that we find and fulfill our purpose in life, that we fully realize our potential as human beings.

In our worship, as in everything else, we should be cultivators, and cultivation in worship means something analogous to what it means in a garden: taking the raw materials God has given us, ordering them in accord with God's commands, and creatively drawing something new out of the result. As we grow in obedience and understanding, we will craft godly tools and practices for worshipping God. In a word, we are going to create a liturgy. We will have to learn this liturgy together, practice it together, and modify it together as we grow more mature in worship. And we will have to train others in it so that they can stand on our shoulders and grow to heights of maturity in worship that we can't even imagine.

Afterword

I wrote this for a specific congregation in a specific place and time. It has since come to my attention that separated from its original context, the last portion of the paper can come across—at least to some folks—as a strident denunciation of improvisational worship and informal liturgy. Nothing could have been further from my intention.

¹⁶ Proverbs 29:11

Exodus 15, the Magnificat, the Song of Simeon and many other passages of Scripture give ample evidence that *ad hoc* worship should be offered, and that it can be glorious and God-honoring. I intended to attack, not spontaneous worship, but the presumption that authentic worship *must* be spontaneous. The goal was not at all to *exclude* spontaneous worship from consideration, but to *make room* for formal, planned worship as well. This came across well to the original audience, and not only was no one offended, but we were able to embrace a substantial liturgical reformation without losing anyone.

Not every congregation is ready for something like this. In fact, most aren't. If God has not put you in a position to change things, then don't make yourself a grief and a trouble to your leadership with pointless agitation. Genuine liturgical reformation, like any reformation, is a gift from God, and if He does not give it, you won't have it. There's no formula to apply, no procedure, no amount of haggling or back-room politicking or putting things to a vote—the Holy Spirit shows up and does the work, or He does not.

In the congregation this was written for, He did. For those of you who *are* in a position to change something—slow down. God may open the door for change in your congregation, and if He does, you may have the opportunity to be part of a really glorious reformation in your church's worship. But take a deep breath. Love God, love your neighbor, and remember that *you* aren't the one who makes reformation happen. Our liturgical reformation was a blessing, a gift from God that we could never have received if we were not first of all loving Him, and then loving one another, and seeking to incarnate that love in *every* worship service, and with *every* transition.

No matter where God may lead you in the end, *this* Sunday, you will do what you have done in the past—or very close to that, at any rate. Be grateful that God has given you brothers and sisters to worship with. Incarnate that gratitude meaningfully by entering into God's presence joyfully with your brothers and sisters to worship in the best way that you all can *together*. The unity of God's people is a cardinal doctrine and point of Christian living; it is the sign for which Jesus Himself prayed in John 17. Nothing could be less fitting than to *divide* the Body of Christ over how we will *come together* in worship. There may be room for improvement in our worship, but as always, godliness with contentment is great gain.