

Return to Obedience

The Role of Ritual in New Covenant Worship

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Introduction: Why Return to Ritual?

It will help at the outset if we can clear up a few terms. The discussion of ritual and formality in church is often carried out in terms of “liturgical” and “non-liturgical” worship. This black-and-white distinction is both inaccurate and too clumsy to be helpful. At any public church meeting, there is an agenda of some sort, a shared expectation for what is going to happen, and in what order. The historic and appropriate word for this is “liturgy”—which is to say that every public meeting has a liturgy of some sort, a governing set of expectations. This is obvious at your local Latin Rite Roman Catholic church, where nothing about the liturgy has changed in centuries. But your local Charismatic assembly has a liturgy too. In their case, it may be “We’re gonna get together and let the worship team do their thing until the Spirit begins to speak to people, and when that dies down, we’ll have a sermon,” but that’s a liturgy, that’s an order of service. A “non-liturgical worship service” is an oxymoron.¹ It would be much more accurate, and much more helpful, to talk in terms of a sliding scale of formality in liturgy, a spectrum with the old Latin Mass and Chrysostom’s Divine Liturgy at one end, and the Toronto blessing at the other.

With that distinction settled, let’s talk. The evangelical world is fast returning to all sorts of ritual, to formal liturgy. You can find numerous magazine articles and books on this subject throughout the American Christian world, including some recent ones in GES publications and conferences, so I won’t take the time to try to prove the point here.

The conservative response has been negative, to say the least. Conservative evangelicals tend to believe that the movement from the Old Covenant to the New was a move from physical ritual to spiritual reality, and that we now worship “in spirit and in truth,” without all the trappings. Historically, this understanding would say that the simplicity of the New Testament church quickly became encrusted with the barnacles of needless ceremony. The Protestant Reformation liberated us from all that Roman Catholic ceremony—so goes the story—and we move forward in renewed simplicity.

From that vantage, the contemporary return to more formal liturgy and ritual is nothing less than a disaster. At the very least it is encumbering spiritual worship with needless complications, and at worst it is a return to Rome. I am here to offer a different point of view.

I will argue that a serious and obedient look at commands and patterns of worship set forth in the Bible will oblige us to return to formal liturgy and ritual in some ways that look very much like what we presently see in the current trend. At the same time, I want acknowledge at the outset that the current trend is mostly *not* the obedient, biblically-driven return to ritual that I am arguing for. It is wicked to pursue any style of worship because it is fashionable, or because it shocks Mommy and Daddy, or purely on aesthetic grounds, as you might pick out an end table or a sofa. For the conservative in the room—which is most of you—this means that I will cheerfully join you in rejecting any return to formality that is driven by the covetous lust to be trendy, shocking, or cool, but I will argue that your own position pays as little attention to Scripture as the one you are rejecting.

¹ For this observation I am indebted to Douglas Wilson’s various writings on the subject.

To put this in more concrete terms, let me offer an example. I read some time ago about a Baptist pastor who began his ministry in Arkansas in the early 1900s. Being a practical man—a thing then fashionable—he set about to abolish all needless ceremonies and reduce the church service to the essentials only. For example, the church had previously stood to hear the reading of Scripture; he abolished this practice on the grounds that the Bible never commanded it. He gave no consideration to why the practice existed or whether it accorded with the whole picture of biblical worship; it was enough for him that the Bible never commanded it. It was therefore impractical and unnecessary, and it had to go. Of course, if he were consistent, he would have thrown out the church pews on the same grounds: the Bible never commands us to sit to hear teaching, either. But he didn't, and this is because he was a creature of his age, and in his age, pews were considered practical. This man was, in his time, a revolutionary, and a revolutionary *of the sort that was fashionable in his time*.

His revolution was replaced by another revolution in the seventies and early eighties, when Calvary Chapel-style music and informal worship practices began to crowd out the so-called 'traditional' worship (which was really nothing of the kind). That revolution is now being replaced in turn by yet another, in which ritual is returning to the worship service. I am not in favor of *any* of these revolutions, and I maintain that as Christians we are required to be at war with the revolutionary turn of mind that drove *all* of them. We are called rather to a slow and steady obedience founded on Scripture, which turns out to be quite a different thing, even when it looks similar from outside, which it occasionally does.

New Testament Principles and Commands

One of the key points at the outset is that not every practice need be justified by a direct command. Scripture presents a particular picture of worship. Part of the picture will be presented to us in imperatives, but other parts will be presented as story or image (as we will shortly see in Hebrews). The stories and images are fully as authoritative, in their way, as are the commands, and we are responsible not to clash with either.

As we will see, this discussion cannot be confined to the New Testament; the New Testament authors keep dragging the Old Testament in. But if I start with the Old Testament I will be pelted with well-thumbed copies of *Dispensationalism Today*, and perhaps deservedly so. So let us begin with the things that were directly written to the church, and see where those passages will lead us.

Physical rituals are required

Right from the outset, we encounter two rituals in the Church: baptism and the Lord's Table. There is a great deal of debate about the particulars of how the rituals should be observed: immersion or sprinkling, leavened or unleavened bread, whole loaves or precut wafers, grape juice or wine, and so on. Those are all important questions that I'm not going to touch today, for the most part. For our purposes, it is sufficient to notice some basic properties of these rituals. They are physical, participatory, multisensory experiences. They are tangible. We don't just think about water, we feel it—the temperature and texture, the cool of the air on our wet skin as we stand afterwards, slightly shivering, clothing sticking to our bodies. We don't just think about bread and wine, we eat and drink—

we feel the roughness of the bread in our mouths and let the wine's flavors flow over our tongues, lingering on after we've swallowed.

These things should tell us right from the outset that if we begin to condemn some questionable worship practice because it is multisensory, or tangible, or physically participatory, we have already gotten off on the wrong foot.² We want to say "Biblical faith does not need these physical trappings; we walk by faith and not by sight." But biblical faith obeys the Bible, yes? The Bible commands us to observe these *very* physical practices. What is more tangible than getting immersed in water (or sprinkled, as the case may be)? What is more multisensory than eating and drinking? On the evidence, ours is an embodied faith.

When our criticisms of someone's questionable worship practice would—if applied consistently—sweep away baptism and the Table, then we have gone too far. But more of this at the end of this paper.

We worship in a regimented, dignified way

Can you imagine writing to a church and saying "I'm really rejoicing to see your orderliness and faithfulness to Christ"? Most of us would never say something like that—even if we knew a church to which we could honestly say it. But in his letter to the Colossians, Paul says exactly that.³ In all its workings the church is to be orderly. This includes worship in particular: Paul challenged the Corinthians to worship "decently and in order."⁴ The two words used here imply dignity and fixed succession, regimentation, which is to say that there is a plan agreed upon beforehand, and followed through. Indeed, when Paul corrects the Corinthian worship in 1 Corinthians 12-14, he does so by imposing a plan on certain problematic aspects of their worship. The concluding exhortation to do all things decently and in order extends that same dynamic to the rest of their worship—indeed, to the rest of their church life—as well.

We worship in heaven

Although there are direct commands in Hebrews about the conduct of worship, the author is less concerned about impious worship and more concerned that his audience could abandon true worship altogether. Accordingly, the direct commands in the book focus on that issue. For our present purposes, Hebrews' big contribution is not a particular command so much as a certain picture of what is going on in worship. Since I devoted a plenary session to this already, I won't spend a whole lot of time on it here. In sum, Christ entered the heavenly tabernacle as our forerunner, and we follow after Him.

² Bob DeWaay maintains, "The Hebrew Christians were considering going back to temple Judaism....The key problem for them was the tangibility of the temple system, and the invisibility of the Christian faith." ("Why Evangelicals are Returning to Rome" Available: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue105.htm>, accessed April 10, 2010). That is exactly backwards. The Hebrew Christians were being persecuted for their public identification with Christianity; an invisible Christian faith would have caused no trouble at all. It was the visible practice of assembly together that they were in danger of forsaking; they were considering fleeing visible practice of the truth and taking up visible practice of a lie. In worship as in other areas of life, faithful Christian living leads to tangible, visible fruit.

³ Col. 2:5

⁴ 1 Cor. 14:40

When we assemble in worship, we are before the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly Tabernacle, surrounded by innumerable angels and the spirits of just men made perfect.

What does heavenly worship look like? On the face of it, this gives us some standards to go by. If we are worshipping in heaven, then our worship ought to be heavenly. Do we know what heavenly worship looks like? Well, yes. The Bible does tell us this. For example, consider Revelation 4:8-11.

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."⁵

What are we to think of this? It's like some sort of combination of antiphonal responsive reading and choreographed dance. The living creatures call out their part, and the elders respond both in words and ritual actions. And they keep doing it; clearly they are not afraid of repetition.

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."⁶

Here the scope has broadened from just the living creatures and the 24 elders to "a great multitude." When the voice from the throne calls on all God's servants to praise Him, the multitude, made up of His servants, responds. Again, the worship is ordered, structured. Also, it is "loud," to the point of being "as...mighty thunderings." No funereal "chosen frozen" liturgy here.

The Bible contains a number of other scenes, images and analogs of heaven (including the Tabernacles of Moses and David, and the Temple), and we should mine them all for a good look at the context in which we conduct our own corporate worship.

⁵ Rev. 4:8-11

⁶ Rev. 19:1-7

We pray for certain things

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He said,

In this manner, therefore, pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”⁷

Certain groups of Christians have succumbed to the temptation to say these exact words by rote over and over and over, and to think that God hears them for their many words—which is the very thing Jesus told the disciples not to do in the preceding verses!⁸ In reaction to this abuse, many in our camp have pointed out that Jesus says to pray “in this manner,” not necessarily in those exact words. This is not strictly true; in the Lukan passage (which takes place at a different time), Jesus does teach them to actually *say* the prayer.⁹ But let’s set that aside for a moment and consider praying according to the pattern, because a very strange thing happens here. Having demonstrated that we may simply pray according to the pattern, and not necessarily just repeating those particular words, we set the Prayer aside altogether and go on to pray improvised prayers that are *in no way* related to the Lord’s Prayer. Jesus taught us to pray “in this manner,” and because other people are abusing the command, we are ignoring it entirely. Ask yourself: when was the last time you prayed something that even *slightly* resembled the Lord’s Prayer? When did you last ask that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven? When did you last pray for the coming of the kingdom, or pray to be forgiven your sins *as you forgive others*? When did you last confess that the kingdom, power and glory are all God’s?

The Lord’s Prayer is probably the most famous biblical teaching on prayer, but by no means the only such instruction. Paul instructs Timothy that Christians must pray for governing officials, so that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life.¹⁰ Paul repeatedly instructs his addressees to pray for him and his helpers to boldly share the gospel.¹¹ James instructs those who lack the wisdom to see God’s hand in their suffering to ask Him for it.¹² He also instructs the elders to pray for the sick,¹³ and all believers to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another, that we may be healed.¹⁴ John instructs anyone who sees a brother committing any sin that is not a capital crime to pray for the preservation of the sinning brother’s physical life.¹⁵

⁷ Matt. 6:9-13

⁸ Matt. 6:7-8

⁹ Lu. 11:2-4

¹⁰ 1 Tim. 2:1-2

¹¹ Eph. 6:18-19, Col. 4:2-4, 1 Thes. 5:25, 2 Thes. 3:1-2

¹² Jam. 1:5, 5:13

¹³ Jam. 5:14

¹⁴ Jam. 5:16

¹⁵ 1 Jn. 5:16

These are just some of the outright commands that govern our prayers. Beyond the direct imperatives, we find examples to emulate in David, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul and many others.

In the abstract, nothing about this requires that we write out our prayers ahead of time and then use those composed prayers in our worship. However, as a practical matter, we are not going to learn to pray as Scripture teaches us to do by simply bowing our heads and spewing out whatever happens to cross our minds. We're already doing that; if it is not producing the desired result already, it isn't going to. Like other forms of obedience, prayer is a discipline, and must be cultivated in a disciplined way. There is nothing for it but to make a plan and then carry it out. So sit down with your Bible, write out a prayer, and then pray it, and mean it.

If you find you need a little help in the endeavor, not to worry. Many of God's people have passed this way before you, and some of them have left their written prayers behind. Go and find them, and learn to pray from the great prayer warriors of the past.¹⁶ "He who walks with the skilled," as Solomon once put it, "will be skilled."

Bodily Attitude in Prayer

The Bible does not assert one "right" posture for prayer, but it does speak to a range of appropriate bodily attitudes in prayer. On that subject, it says quite a bit.

Raising our hands and eyes. "I desire that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting...."¹⁷ This is Paul's suggestion¹⁸ for the conduct of Christian men. It seems strange to us, because our common posture of prayer is bowed down, hands folded and eyes on the navel...or closed. But the biblical precedents for prayer are much broader than our contemporary practice.¹⁹ When Solomon dedicated the temple, he knelt down and spread out his hands toward heaven.²⁰ When Ezra blesses God, the people raise their hands and say "Amen, Amen!" and then bow and worship.²¹ David

¹⁶ If you haven't a clue where to start, start with the book of Psalms (see below). For a user-friendly way to begin tapping the resources of the church since the close of the New Testament, look at the *Book of Common Prayer*, available from your local Christian bookstore or for free online. As with all extrabiblical sources, discernment is required; nevertheless, the BCP is a treasure trove of godly prayer.

¹⁷ 1 Tim. 2:8

¹⁸ The expression here is not the language of simple command; I am indebted to Pearson for pointing this out. See Calvin Pearson, "Lifting Holy Hands? Comparing Contemporary Practice with Biblical Injunctions and Descriptions" *JOTGES* (Autumn 2007) 66-68.

¹⁹ Pearson correctly notes that lifting of hands is associated with lament and need in Scripture. Unfortunately, he also argues that the lifting of hands is *not* associated with praise, which contention doesn't stand up to his own proof texts. For example, Pearson sees lifting of hands associated with lament in Psalm 63:4 purely because it is mentioned in a lament psalm. But on the same principle, what are we to do with the very next sentence? "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; And my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips." Are we to see satisfaction and praise as expressions of lament because they are mentioned in a lament psalm? Of course not. Rather, in the midst of his trials, David affirms he will continue to praise the Lord joyfully and be satisfied in Him. The lifting of hands is here an expression of that joy in spite of sorrow, not an expression of lament. Similarly, in Psalm 134:2, Pearson sets forth a terribly tenuous connection to need or lament, ignoring the parallel within the verse itself which associates the lifted hands with blessing the Lord.

²⁰ 2 Chron. 6:12-14

²¹ Neh. 8:6

describes his prayers as “the lifting up of my hands.”²² Ezekiel describes worshipping idols as “lifting up [one’s] eyes to idols,”²³ and when Jesus prayed, He “lifted up His eyes to heaven.”²⁴

Bowing down. So when do God’s people look down in prayer? Ezra describes his experience:

At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God. And I said: “O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens.”²⁵

Jesus tells a similar story:

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector....And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”²⁶

In retrospect, this is what you would expect. Just like Mom and Dad told you, look at the person you’re talking to. God is in heaven; why are you looking at the floor? Looking down rather than at the person you’re speaking to is a posture of embarrassment, fear, shame.

But that is not the only reason to look down. Bowing down is also connected with great trouble:

My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart.²⁷

And finally, bowing down is connected with respect and even worship:

Then Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land; and he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, “If you will give it, please hear me. I will give you money for the field; take it from me and I will bury my dead there.”²⁸

And I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master's brother for his son.²⁹

²² Psalm 141:2

²³ Ezek. 8:6, 12, 15

²⁴ John 17:1, cf. 11:41

²⁵ Ezra 9:5-6

²⁶ Luke 18:10, 13

²⁷ Psalm 38:5-8; cf. Psalm 44:23-26, Psalm 145:14-15

²⁸ Gen. 23:12-13, cf. Gen. 27:26-29

²⁹ Gen. 24:48, cf. Psalm 95:6

The common denominator here is self-abasement, whether from an internal state of shame, an externally imposed difficulty, or a godly sense of one's place in the order of things. Of course there is nothing wrong with adopting this posture in prayer; there's ample biblical precedent for it. But we ought to notice that we have gone a lot further than that. We have made the posture of self-abasement our *sole* posture for prayer, and the biblical precedent is much richer than that. If you think our poverty here doesn't influence the way you pray, I've got news for you.

I can hear the rumbling: "Why does it matter if I look up or down when I pray?" God hears the prayer either way, and it's the same prayer!" There's a short answer to that question, and a long answer. The long answer would take a while, so maybe over lunch or something. The short answer is that you probably won't believe the long answer anyway without experiencing it for yourself. So don't take my word for it; try following the full range of biblical examples for six months, and see for yourself. What have you got to lose?

We Sing Psalms

God tells us multiple times in the New Testament that He wants to hear us sing psalms. Consider these three passages:

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, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.³⁰

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.³¹

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.³²

So we should sing psalms, especially to one another. There are 150 of them. How many do you know? How many does your church sing? So there's room for improvement, yes?

The meaning of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." In two of the New Testament commands to sing psalms, the phrase is "in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," or "ψαλμοις και υμνοις και ωδαις πνευματικαις" if you prefer the Greek. Approaching that turn of phrase with a modern preunderstanding, we hear psalms (like Psalm 23), hymns (like "Amazing Grace") and spiritual songs (like "Shine, Jesus, Shine"). However, this is not the immediate reference for the phrase. A search of the Greek Old Testament shows that all three words are musical terms used in the Book of Psalms itself

³⁰ Eph. 5:18-21

³¹ Col. 3:16

³² Jam. 5:13

(mostly in the superscriptions) to describe different types of compositions within the Psalms.³³ So we should understand the phrase to mean psalms (like Psalm 3), hymns (like Psalm 6), and spiritual songs (like Psalm 18). We can sing *more* than just the book of Psalms, but we should certainly not sing *less* than that, since the Psalter itself is the primary referent of the command.

Must we sing *only* Psalms? No! In fact, we are not *allowed* to sing only Psalms. One of the commands we will encounter (and sing!) in the Psalms is “Sing to the Lord a new song!”³⁴—which is difficult to do if we are not writing new songs. Songwriting is the practice of God’s people throughout the Bible, both before and after the book of Psalms is written. Moses and Miriam compose a song.³⁵ Mary composes a song; Zacharias composes a song; Simeon composes a song.³⁶ Paul either composes or quotes from fragments of early Christian songs.³⁷ The 24 elders in heaven will sing a new song, as will the 144,000.³⁸

The Psalms are only our starting point; the songs that we must sing, our God-given primer. Worship music should sound like the Psalms—as, for example, the Magnificat does—and when our worship songs measure up to that standard, we’ll be writing great worship music again.

Our worship should not clash with the Psalms we are singing. In terms of music, this means that the musical score must, first of all, work as a fitting accompaniment to the words of the psalm; when we’re meeting that goal, then—and only then—should we argue questions of musical style.

As we begin to sing the Psalms, we will discover ourselves singing about a number of acts of worship that we are not, in fact, doing, and this sets up a tension. How many times can you sing “Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker”³⁹ while standing up before you wonder if maybe you ought to be, you know, kneeling? Likewise, we will find standing,⁴⁰ bowing down,⁴¹ raising our hands,⁴² shouting for joy,⁴³ singing loudly,⁴⁴ playing many instruments,⁴⁵ dancing,⁴⁶ and more. It is healthy that we feel that tension and seek to resolve it by incorporating the things we’re singing about into our worship.

Someone will object that all this is Old Covenant; after all, the Psalms don’t just talk about standing and kneeling and dancing; they also say things like “I will offer You burnt sacrifices of fat animals.”⁴⁷ Surely,

³³ Ψαλμοι include Psalms 3-9, 11-15, 19-25, 29-31, 38, 40-41, 43-44, 46-51 and a whole bunch more. ὕμνοι are Psalms 6, 54-55, 61, 67, and 76. Ὠδαί are Psalms 4, 18, 30, 39, 45, 48, 65-68, 75-76, 83, 87-88, 92, 108, 120-134 (the “songs of ascents” are lit. “ascension odes”). There is some overlap, e.g. Psalm 4 is both ψαλμος and ὠδη.

³⁴ Psalms 33:3, 96:1, 98:1, 149:1

³⁵ Ex. 15:1-21

³⁶ Luke 1:46-55, 1:68-79, and 2:29-32, respectively.

³⁷ Eph. 5:14, 1 Tim. 3:16, 2 Tim. 2:11-13

³⁸ Rev. 5:9-10 and 14:1-3, respectively.

³⁹ Psalm 95:6

⁴⁰ Psalms 24:3, 134:1, 135:2

⁴¹ Psalm 95:6

⁴² Psalms 28:2, 63:4, 134:2

⁴³ Psalms 5:11, 32:11, 33:3, 35:27, 47:1, 60:8, 65:13, 95:1-2, 98:4, etc.

⁴⁴ Psalms 51:14, 59:16, 81:1, 149:5

⁴⁵ Psalms 33:2-3, 81:1, 144:9, 149:3, 150:3-5

⁴⁶ Psalms 149:3, 150:4

⁴⁷ Psalm 66:15

so the argument goes, we should disregard such obsolete elements—and doesn't that call into question the dancing too? Well, no, actually, because we should *not* disregard such obsolete elements. Hebrews does not teach us to disregard them at all, but to attend to them most carefully, reading through New Covenant eyes, and then to *harmonize* with them. The psalm presents a picture of worship, and Hebrews has shown us how to harmonize with this picture after the cross. Christ is the end of all the sacrifices, and so we offer, not fat animals, but the sacrifices of fat praise and fat thanksgiving, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name—and we do not offer starved, diseased praise that clings to life by a thread.

Read in this way—which the New Testament requires us to do—the Psalms are our primer, our hymnal, the textbook of our worship. It will take a long time and a great deal of spiritual and cultural growth to integrate this mass of material into our worship.

Psalm-singing in Church history. Such a strong dependence on the Psalms sounds very strange to modern ears, but that only betrays our ignorance of our own history.⁴⁸ The church throughout history has often sung Psalms. Basil the Great writes of even mediocre Christians singing the Psalms:

For not one of these many indifferent people ever leaves church easily retaining in memory some maxim of either the Apostles or Prophets, but they do sing texts of the Psalms at home and circulate them in the marketplace.⁴⁹

Jerome writes about hearing young men at the plow, the reapers, vinedressers and shepherds singing Psalms in the field.⁵⁰ The Rule of St. Benedict devotes a chapter to the order of the Psalms in the daily services, which concludes with these words:

If this arrangement and distribution of the psalms displease anyone, let him, if he think good, order them otherwise, provided however he take care, that every week the whole psalter of one hundred-and-fifty psalms be sung; and that on Sunday at Matins, they begin it again; for Monks show themselves to be over negligent and indevout, who do not in the course of a week sing over the psalter with the usual canticles, since we read that our holy Fathers courageously performed in one day, what, God grant, that we who are negligent and tepid, may perform in a whole week.⁵¹

⁴⁸ For a quick overview of the history of church music, see Duane Garner's four-lecture series "Church Music through History," available as a low-cost mp3 download from Auburn Avenue Media at <http://auburnavenue.org/media/mp3.html>

⁴⁹ Basil the Great, *Homiliae in Psalmos*, 1:1-2, PG XXIX, 212; Trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 65-66, cited in Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1998) 70.

⁵⁰ Spurgeon, *Treasury of David* Psalm 98:5. See also Henry Donald Maurice Spence-Jones and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary: Psalms* vol. 1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1897) xi.

⁵¹ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, xviii. (online: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/gregory/life_rule.iv.xix.html; accessed March 22, 2010).

To this day, the Eastern church maintains a similar mechanism to sing through the entire Psalter in a week, if all the services are said.⁵² The Anglican Book of Common Prayer divides the Psalter into morning and evening portions so that the whole Psalter can be read or sung over the course of a month.⁵³ One of the great jewels of the Protestant Reformation was the recovery of Psalm-singing. Calvin's Geneva and England in particular saw an explosion of metrical texts and musical settings for the Psalms.⁵⁴ Westermeyer quotes a letter written by John Jewell from London in 1560:

As soon as they had commenced singing in public, in only one little church in London, immediately not only the churches in the neighborhood, but even the towns far distant, began to vie with each other in the same practice. You may sometimes see at St. Paul's Cross, after the service, six thousand persons, old and young, of both sexes, all singing together and praising God.⁵⁵

Unfortunately, we lost it again, but not before writing piles of hymnals and Psalters, many of them in English.⁵⁶ Resources abound, so it isn't hard to find a place to start.⁵⁷

How do we measure up?

I suspect the question answers itself. Whether your church's worship is the so-called "traditional" style (which is mostly composed of the 19th century's radical innovations), "contemporary" (which is mostly composed of radical innovations from the 1970s, oddly), or "blended" (whatever that is), I suspect the foregoing Scriptures give us all much to work on. But the reformation of our worship is not just a matter of correct practices—although that would be a large improvement—but also of thinking about the practices correctly. What is it that happens when we worship? To this issue we now turn.

The Lord's Table and the Christian Life: Mystical Experiences?

Coming full circle, we return to a deeper discussion of the ritual required of us by the New Testament. Baptism happens once, upon entry into the family. The Table happens repeatedly; in a very real sense, it is a large part of what constitutes the practice of the church as the church. Being the paradigmatic ritual of the Christian experience, the Table is a good place to contemplate errors on all sides of the worship wars. Among the recent revolutionaries—emergent churches and other "ancient future" folks—the idea of mystical experience in worship resonates strongly, and of course this carries over into their practice of the Lord's Table. The so-called "traditional" practice of the Lord's Table is individualistic, pietistic, heavily focused on contemplating one's sins, and ferociously dedicated to the

⁵² *The Psalter According to the Seventy: Of Saint David the Prophet and King*, trans. by Holy Transfiguration Monastery, (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1974) 228-230.

⁵³ The commonly available version in the U.S. is the Episcopal edition, although older versions are also available online. Most editions of the prayer book have used the Coverdale translation of the Psalms, originally published in 1535.

⁵⁴ Westermeyer, 153-158, 172.

⁵⁵ Westermeyer, 180.

⁵⁶ For example, the *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* of 1556, the *Bay Psalm Book* of 1640, or the *Scots Metrical Psalter* of 1650. The *Book of Common Prayer* also contained a Psalter, using the Coverdale translation of 1535.

⁵⁷ I have provided links to a number of resources at www.fullcontactchristianity.org/psalms.

proposition that it is only a symbol. Against this, the recent revolutionaries, while often no less individualistic and pietistic, have emphasized mystical experience of Christ's presence in a tangible way at the Table, usually (although not always) by appealing to a Roman view of the Table.

So who is right? Neither. The Roman overtones that plague the recent revolutionaries cannot be supported from Scripture, as we will see below. At the same time, Scripture will require us to affirm actual participation in Christ at the Table—something symbolic, to be sure, but much more than a mere illustration.

Perichoretic Unity

In His prayer for us, Jesus asks the Father that we be invited into the Triune fellowship:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.⁵⁸

"I in them, and You in Me." The Father indwells the Son, and the Son the Father. And the Son indwells us, and the Father indwells the Son. The big theological word for this mutual indwelling is *perichoresis*, and through Christ indwelling us, we share it in some fashion with the three Persons of the Triune God. Furthermore, Christ does not just dwell in us; we also dwell in Him:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.⁵⁹

Christ abides in us, and we abide in Him, in order that we might bear much fruit. We may not want to call this *mystical* union, but it is experiential union of some variety, and we will have to call it something. Whatever it is, if it appears in the Christian life, will it be a surprise if it appears also at the Table?

Pauline Outworking

The outworking of that perichoretic unity with the Godhead comes in the Christian life. We are simply not sufficient to live as we ought, but Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."⁶⁰

We might want to ask here: is this *real presence* or only symbolic? Mystical union or just an object lesson? Is Christ *really* indwelling Paul and living through him? The passage will force us, I think, to say

⁵⁸ John 17:20-23

⁵⁹ John 15:4-5

⁶⁰ Gal. 2:20

yes. This is not just a hyperbolic manner of speaking; Paul believes that Christ is really present, in union with Paul and living through him. Again, if this is a feature of walking with the Lord in the Christian life, why would it be a surprise to find a similar thing occurring at the Lord's Table?

Table Fellowship and the Peace Offering

When we come to Christ's table to celebrate the Last Sacrifice, we are experiencing the fulfillment of the Old Covenant peace offering.⁶¹ The peace offering is about fellowship. The worshipper brings the animal, lays his hands on its head, and kills it at the door of the Tabernacle. Parts of the animal are burned on the altar, and the smoke ascends and is incorporated into the glory cloud above the tabernacle—this is God "eating" his part of the sacrificial meal.⁶² Other parts of the animal are returned to the worshipper to be eaten by him, his family, and his invited guests for a specified period of time. At the end of that time, the remains of the offering must be burned.⁶³

Think a little about the picture here and it will make sense. When you go to someone else's house for a formal dinner, you sit down and eat their food at their table. When you leave, you don't pack a doggie bag to go; it's *their* food. (At a restaurant, by contrast, you do, because it's *your* food; you paid for it.) Likewise, the picture in the peace offering is that the whole animal is slain and given to Yahweh. He eats part of the animal, and then invites the worshipper and his guests to come to the table and eat with Him. They may not dispose of the leftovers as they see fit, because the food belongs to Yahweh.

Jesus is the final sacrifice, the end of the whole thing. When He offers us His body and blood, He is offering the ultimate fellowship meal: a chance to eat the last peace offering at Yahweh's Table. It is precisely this fulfillment of the peace offering which shows that the Lord's Table is *not* a perpetual sacrifice, as the Roman church would have it. At the peace offering, the animal is slain in the first stage of the ritual. Then, for a specified period of time *after the animal is offered to God and accepted by Him*, the worshippers eat. So also Christ was slain, once for all time, and the offering was accepted by God. At the Table we are invited to eat of the sacrifice, true enough—but this does not mean the sacrifice is being re-offered to God, any more than a worshipper eating of the peace offering was re-offering the sacrifice to God. No, the opposite is taking place: the sacrifice is not being offered to God, who has already accepted it; rather, God is offering man the chance to fellowship with Him by eating from the sacrifice that God has already accepted.

By the same token, this offering is a community event by definition, a sharing of fellowship between God and man, and between man and man—all who come and eat at the feast. "Traditional" practice of the Table certainly violates this aspect of the Table's fulfillment of the peace offering, and the current revolutionaries are often just as bad.

The Mystery of the Table

⁶¹ Relevant passages are Lev. 3, 7:11-21, 19:5-8, and peripherally, Num. 6:13-21. There is also a helpful treatment of the peace offering in Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2002).

⁶² Lev. 3:11, 16

⁶³ Lev. 7:15-18, 19:5-8

A communal event. The American practice of the Table is overwhelmingly individual. We sit and examine ourselves for unconfessed sin, eyes steadfastly fixed on our navels. We are quiet, somber. Mournful, even. We don't look at each other.

What could we be *thinking*? It's a *meal*. And a fellowship meal that celebrates the central triumph of human history, at that. Nothing could be plainer than that God wants us to eat *together*, and we have managed to turn it into an event where we can have 500 people in the same room, and every single one of them eats *alone*. If God judged the Corinthians for coming to the Table divided into factions, what will He do to us when we come to the table even more divided than they were?

Jesus and Paul don't believe in transubstantiation. The Roman speculation on the nature of the Table fails the simple test of conformity to the Biblical language. In Aquinas' view as enshrined at the Council of Trent, upon the priest's blessing of the elements, the bread is Christ's body, *and no longer bread*, and the wine is Christ's blood, *and no longer wine*. Indeed, I have a Roman Catholic friend who refers to the elements of communion as "the substance formerly known as bread" and "the substance formerly known as wine." The problem here is that Paul calls it bread *after it has been blessed*,⁶⁴ and Jesus calls the cup "the fruit of the vine" *after blessing it*.⁶⁵ Scripture simply doesn't speak of the elements as though they cease being bread and wine; if we are going to submit to God and speak as He does, then neither can we.

Symbolic? By the same token, however, when Paul speaks of the Lord's Table, he does not speak of it as if it is exclusively symbolic, either. Listen to his rebuke to the Corinthians:

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." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.⁶⁶

Notice the "therefore." Paul says Jesus told us "This is My body" and "This is My blood" and *therefore* whoever eats and drinks it in an unworthy manner⁶⁷ is guilty of *the body and blood of the Lord*, and on that account, as Paul goes on to say, many of the Corinthians are sick under God's judgment, and many

⁶⁴ 1 Cor. 11:27

⁶⁵ Mt. 26:29//Mk. 14:26//Lu. 22:18

⁶⁶ 1 Cor. 11:23-27

⁶⁷ The sin in view in the passage is not partaking with unconfessed sin, as is so commonly taught in evangelical circles. The Corinthians were using the Table as a means to reinforce divisions in the church, when the whole point of the Table is our common participation in Christ. It is plainly unworthy to approach the central celebration of Christian unity in a divisive fashion.

more have died. Paul does not treat this like it is *only* a disguised sermon or an object lesson—although it certainly is that. Paul speaks as if, in some way he does not describe, a believer coming to the Table eats and drinks Christ. Exactly how such a thing might be possible has been the subject of many impious speculations, and I certainly have no answer. For our purposes, how God might accomplish this feat is not the point; the point is that He does.

When we come to Christ's Table, He says "This is my body" and gives us broken bread. He says "This is my blood" and gives us wine. We literally taste and see that the Lord is good. We digest the bread and wine, and they become part of our physical bodies; we are what we eat, after all. At the same time, we eat and drink Christ—He says so—and He dwells within us, and we are what we eat: the body of Christ.

Is that mystical union?

If it is, then we will have to make our peace with it.

In Spirit and in Truth: A Second Look

Given all of this physicality and formality, what could it possibly mean to worship in spirit and in truth? Let's look at the context of the statement:

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."⁶⁸

The question is not whether the worship should be physical or spiritual. The question is the geographical location of the worship. Jesus says that neither Jerusalem nor Mount Gerzim will be central to the worship; rather, the worship must be "in spirit and in truth." On the face of it, Jesus has said nothing about the physicality of worship; only that it will no longer be tied to a particular earthly location. The opposition of spiritual and physical that we often see in this text is something that we bring to the text, not something the text teaches us. For further illumination on this, consider the words of Hebrews:

We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to

⁶⁸ John 4:19-24

Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name, and do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.⁶⁹

We have been turned out of Jerusalem to wander as strangers and foreigners, living like Abraham as aliens in a land promised to us, but not yet ours. We seek the city whose Builder and Maker is God.⁷⁰ That city is real, and it will one day come to rest on earth.⁷¹ Until that day, it remains in heaven—*and we go there every Sunday morning when we worship together*. This is what it means to worship “in spirit and in truth.” As we have seen, your body plays an important part.

Conclusion: Known to God from Eternity Are All His Works

When you get to church, you don’t leave your body in the car and send your spirit into the building. This is not an accident. God is not playing catch-up. He is not subjecting us to a desperately inferior but temporarily acceptable form of worship that will help us limp along until we finally forsake the prison of the body for the purity of heavenly worship as disembodied spirits. No indeed.

God made us *bodies*. Biblical worship in spirit and in truth is *physical*. If you die before the Lord returns, you will worship Him temporarily without a body, but then you will be resurrected and get your body back. *Forever*. The body is part of worship, and it was always meant to be. “Known to God from eternity are all His works.”

God knew from eternity past that He would tell us to sing Psalms, and He made us to sing, and our bodies to experience certain sensations when we sing. When He formed the ear, he already had in mind the sounds of psaltery and harp, trumpet and clashing cymbal. He gave us taste buds, knowing that He would one day give us bread and wine, that we might taste and see that He is good. He told us to lift our hands in prayer, to kneel, to bow and to dance, and built our bodies so that posture and movement would alter our emotions and perceptions. He covered our skin with nerves, knowing that one day we would use those nerves to feel the waters of baptism.

As we become obedient to what the New Testament *actually* says, we find ourselves drawn into a world of ordered, serious, and joyful service to the King of Kings, a world where faith lived out is a tangible, multisensory experience. We enter a world of water and lifted hands, of music and dance, of bread and wine, of embodied union with Christ—which is what it always meant to worship in spirit and in truth. “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusts in Him.”

⁶⁹ Heb. 13:10-16

⁷⁰ Heb. 11:8-10

⁷¹ Rev. 21:2, 10

Epilogue: A Few Words on Serving in Liturgical Reformation

It occurred to me as I was preparing this paper that I might, just possibly, convince someone of my position. I certainly hope to. Knowing that this could happen, I feel conscience-bound to make a few remarks about the practicalities of implementing liturgical change.

A person typically goes through a series of phases whilst coming to grips with the biblical facts on worship. First is shock and disbelief that the Bible actually has fairly detailed guidelines about the conduct of worship in the New Testament. As the shock wears off, it is replaced by a desperate awareness of complete ignorance as to what, exactly, the New Testament actually says. The ignorance motivates study, and soon comes euphoria as the person begins to see the whole picture come together and he finds himself absolutely captivated with the beauty of biblical worship. The euphoria quickly dissolves into despair when the person realizes that his own church is very, very far from that bright vision—and it will be a long time before it gets there, if indeed it ever does. If the person is very young, he then proceeds to scandalize his entire church and offend his leadership by trying to change everything at once. There is a better way.

The very first thing is not to agitate. Reformation is God's gracious gift from top to bottom; if He does not give it, you will not have it, no matter what you do. If God wants you to change something, He will place you in a position of influence and responsibility. If you are not in a position to change anything, don't make yourself a grief and a trouble by harassing those who are.

I debated whether to include my own experience in this. I don't want you to think I am bragging. I wouldn't dare; the changes that happened in my church were from God's hand, and only God could have done them. If you knew us, and you knew me, nothing would be more obvious to you. But if you will bear with me, I will brag on God, because I want you to know that liturgical reformation is *possible*. Sure, it takes miracles—many, many miracles—but we serve Yahweh, the Lord of heaven and earth. He does miracles. Let me tell you about some that He did with us.

When I began pastoring my church, the sermon was the *entire* Sunday morning service, and everybody thought that was a *great* thing; my people considered hearing teaching to be the highest, and therefore the only necessary, form of worship. This view was held to such an extreme that if they went to visit another church, they often would deliberately arrive 20 minutes late so they would miss the singing, and leave immediately at the end of the sermon. (Unfortunately this is no exaggeration.) It was a long time before we were even able to observe communion together. Slowly, I began to introduce Psalm-singing, and made some missteps in the process, so we backed off to using the Psalms in responsive reading. We began to study worship, and our study led us to the convictions I've outlined above—many of which I never even *suspected* prior to the study. Over the course of only a few years, we went from a highly informal sermon-only service to a very structured liturgy of composed prayers, Psalm- and hymn-singing, responsive reading, and weekly communion. As we continued our study, we became convicted of the importance of wine in communion, and in mid-March, we began that practice for the first time.

We accomplished all of this in just a few years, which is practically light speed as liturgical change goes, and it was only by God's grace that this was possible. There were, however, three key points of

faithfulness that became very important to us. First, we moved slowly and deliberately at every stage. The fruit of the Spirit is patience. We prayed. I taught from Scripture. We talked and prayed some more. We considered the next little baby step from every possible angle. We took the baby step. If it didn't work, we backed up and tried again. We knew that we would have failures, and sure enough we did. We did a lot of research, looking at how God's people had done these things before us. Some of the historical solutions didn't work for us, and we had to scrap them. Others did, and by God's grace we progressed. It all felt glacial at the time.

Second, we began with conviction of a biblical principle, and we did not conflate that principle with any one particular way of implementing it. When we became convicted that we must sing psalms, our initial foray into Psalm-singing did not work out very well, mainly as a result of poor judgment on my part. Because we had already concluded that Psalm-singing was a matter of necessary obedience, we did not respond to our initial failure by saying, "Well, we tried Psalm-singing, but it didn't work." We knew that if God had called us to do it, there would be a way to do it that *would* work, and we kept trying until we found a solution. Church history was often a great help here; over the last 2000 years, God's people have come up with a *lot* of ways to implement the biblical patterns of worship.

Third, we consciously set out to do all this without losing anybody—and we didn't lose anybody. Imagine a shepherd, out in the field with his sheep. He suddenly realizes he's lost track of time. He looks up and sees the sun close to the horizon, and the sheepfold is miles away. Desperate to reach the sheepfold before sundown, he hops on a Harley Davidson, yells "Follow me!" at the sheep, and roars off. Upon arriving back at the sheepfold with minutes to spare, he discovers that not even one of the sheep is with him. "Not my fault!" he says to himself. "I told those stupid sheep to follow me."

The Hell's Angel Hireling is a bad shepherd. The Good Shepherd said to the Father, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost *none*," and *He* is our model. When a good shepherd discovers that he is in the field, far from the fold with no way to get the flock back where they are supposed to be before sundown, he finds the best shelter he can for his flock and settles down to the long, painful task of keeping his sheep together and protected through the long night. It's not right, and it's not the way it is supposed to be. But it is the situation he is in, and there is no godly alternative.

Liturgical reformation is exactly that—reformation—and not revolution. Change must proceed at a pace the flock can accommodate. Some changes are just not possible in this generation, or in this century. That's okay—or rather, it isn't, but the matter is in God's sovereign control, and a shepherd can only accept it with grace and get on with the business of leading the sheep toward sanctification in ways that they *can* follow. A good shepherd learns this prayer: "God, this is wrong; this is not the way it's supposed to be. *Please bless it*; the only alternatives I've got are far worse."

Finally, in the event of roaring success, there is an overwhelming temptation to become a worship snob, which is a truly terrible way to thank God for His work in you. Imagine: you now possess the biblical facts about worship, and you have carefully and prayerfully implemented changes far and wide. God has given you success beyond your wildest imagination, your church comes together in unified and glorious biblical worship every Sunday...*and you're proud that you offer more biblical worship than any*

other church in your area. Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. God did not bring about reformation among you in order that you might hold the rest of His people in contempt. What do you have, that you were not given?

On that subject, one last bit of testimonial: At the same time all this change was going on, members of our church built relationships with another good church in the area, and began to become part of that community as well. Their worship is nothing like ours—and, we believe, a good bit less biblical. But they are our people. We have no illusions that our worship is perfect; rather, we know that God accepts it because of Christ. We recognize the same Christ in them that lives in us, and so we are confident that God accepts *their* worship for the same reason that He accepts *ours*. Therefore, when we go to worship with them now, we show up on time so that we can join them in song. Do we like their music? Not much; to my ear, it's mostly advertising jingles and pep rally music with Jesus soundbite lyrics – 20 seconds of content repeated enough times to make a 6-minute song. Pretty weak tea next to the Psalms, let me tell you. But it's what they know, and they're worshipping the Lord with it. Nothing could be less fitting than for us to go and pollute the sweet fragrance of their sincere worship with the stench of self-righteous disapproval. So we worship Jesus with them, in the best way we can presently manage *together*, and it is a glorious privilege to be able to come into God's presence together. We are not worship snobs; we are *Christians*.

I hasten to repeat: all of this is miracle from top to bottom. I just did my imperfect best to grow in understanding, obey and be faithful, and watched in amazement as the Lord gave us reformation, and with blinding speed at that.

Resources

Online Resources

You can find links to online resources and suppliers at www.fullcontactchristianity.org/psalms.

Musical and Liturgical Sources

The Book of Common Prayer. The mainspring of the English Reformation, and a gold mine of prayer, primary source liturgical procedure and information. Historically important even if you don't like it.

Cantus Christi. Moscow, ID: Christ Church, 2004. A combination psalter/hymnal that consciously offers a cross-section of church music from the last 2000 years. An excellent place to start for psalm-singing, and an outstanding aid for learning the musical history of our people. Two low-cost CD sets are also available as an aid to learning the music.

Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961. A compendium of liturgies from Justin Martyr to John Wesley; useful to get a cross-section of what the church did before modern "traditional" worship. You may be surprised how similar the church's worship was for the first 1800 years or so—even after the Reformation—and how different that is from what passes for "traditional" worship today.

Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998. A history of church music. Dry, but very helpful.

Liturgical Theology

Jordan, *The Liturgy Trap: The Bible versus Mere Tradition in Worship*. 3rd ed. Monroe, LA: Athanasius, 2008. A well-argued demonstration that a biblical, principled return to formal liturgy does not entail sliding into the Roman or Eastern churches.

Peter J. Leithart, *From Silence to Song: The Davidic Liturgical Revolution*. Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003. Using the Old Testament example of the Davidic institution of worship music in the Tabernacle service, Leithart argues for a biblical pattern of liturgical maturation over time.

Jeffrey J. Myers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship*. Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003. Sets forth the practice and theology of the "covenant renewal" worship pattern. I am not persuaded that it is *the* way to organize a church service, but it is certainly *a* productive way to organize a service, and the book is a thought-provoking read.

Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*. 6th ed. vols. 1-3. N.p.: Harper and Row, 1931. Reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. An indispensable resource containing every major, and many of the minor, creeds compiled by the church over the last two thousand years. Especially useful is its discussion of the historical evolution of the Apostles' Creed.