

Word and Sacrament

Tracing the Theological Movements of Reformed Worship

Paul Galbreath

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To Jan, companion on this journey called life

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Foreword

Since the sixteenth century, leaders in the Reformed Protestant movement have affirmed that the visible church is recognized where the word is preached and heard and where the sacraments are rightly administered according to Christ's institution (as Calvin put it in the *Institutes*). As the early Reformers affirmed these central symbols of Word and sacrament, they looked to biblical and early church materials to critique existing sacramental theology and practice, to call the church to greater faithfulness to Scripture and relevance to the world around.

Four centuries later, the twentieth century witnessed a new spirit of ecumenical respect and shared learning, especially focused on biblical and early church scholarship. This led, by the second half of the century, to significant liturgical and sacramental reforms among Reformed Protestants, often using patterns common to Catholics as well as other Protestants. Church leaders began to critique older patterns of Word and sacrament that divided Christians from one another. Churches began to preach from a common lectionary, accompanied by increasing convergence in sacramental practice. Again, this emerged from a desire to reflect more fully the richness of Scripture and to speak a healing word to the world.

In this volume, Paul Galbreath continues and critiques both of these movements, embodying the spirit of Reformed Protestantism as “*reformed and ever being reformed according to the Word of God*.” To this familiar adage, Galbreath implicitly adds an ethical purpose: “*for the sake of the earth and the poor*.”

Shaped by his years of serving as a pastor, theologian, and seminary professor deeply engaged in liturgical and sacramental renewal, Galbreath argues that our theological presuppositions shape liturgical development. This was true for Calvin in the sixteenth century, for Barth in the early twentieth century, for the formation of the *Worshipbook* and the *Book of Common Worship* in the late twentieth century, and it remains true today. Given this reality, he argues, we need to make “conscious theological choices for the language and images that we use in worship.”

This might sound like an obvious claim, but as Galbreath points out, this emphasis on the priority of theological presuppositions over liturgical practice challenges some interpretations of a key motto of liturgical renewal: the emphasis on *lex orandi, lex credendi*. This Latin phrase (most simply translated as “law of praying, law of believing”) often attributed to the fifth-century theologian Prosper of Aquitaine has been much discussed in liturgical-theological circles, to underscore the way that worship practices (*orandi*) shape statements of belief (*credendi*) and that we therefore need to attend to the coherence between the two. On the one hand, Galbreath concurs—liturgical action can indeed shape people’s commitments over time, and this is precisely what drives his critique of current practices that do not do this well. But he also argues forthrightly that Reformed liturgies have rarely begun with the priority of existing liturgical forms; instead, Reformers like Calvin have begun with theological commitments born of biblical interpretation, which has then shaped liturgical reform.

In focusing on biblical interpretation as shaping theology, which then shapes liturgical reform, Galbreath embodies a classical Reformed commitment to *scriptura* (though not *sola scriptura*) as the basis for liturgical revision. His confidence, like Karl Barth, in the possibility of the strange new world of the Bible to inspire our living in right relationship with God, one another, and the world reveals him as a Reformed pastor-theologian. And in the spirit of *semper reformanda*, Galbreath uses his close reading of Scripture to critique the liturgical decisions of earlier Reformers—as he does, for instance, with Calvin’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 in relation to the table, as well as Calvin’s defense of infant baptism based on the analogy of circumcision. In this way, Galbreath honors the tradition of Calvin himself, even where he disagrees with Calvin’s conclusions.

In this volume, we see a theologian and pastor deeply shaped by the mid-twentieth-century liturgical renewal movement who has both appreciation for and enough distance to be critical of some of the developments of that movement (including the Revised Common Lectionary, and the emphasis on salvation history and its focus on atonement theory that has shaped baptismal and eucharistic praying). This is his distinctive gift as an insider to the movement—and it may be possible only now, fifty years on.

We also encounter here a Presbyterian pastor-theologian who is both active leader in and active critic of the church he serves. For instance, Galbreath celebrates the 1993 *Book of Common Worship*, and he contributed to the 2018 revision of that denominational resource as well as the accompanying revision of the authoritative Directory for Worship in the *Book of Order*. His emphases on care of the earth and preferential option for the poor cohere with values articulated in the current Directory for Worship (see W-5.0304 and W-5.0305).

Even so, he longs for the church to do better, to turn increasingly to local communities to craft worship that is truly the work of the people, with stronger attention to care for the earth and people who are poor. He grows weary of congregations who are more concerned about decency and good order than about the crises that threaten our planet and vulnerable human lives.

In the face of the ecumenical developments in the twentieth century, Reformed theologians must ask: What are the distinctive insights of Reformed theology of Word and sacrament, and how do these relate to the wider ecumenical world? We no longer sharply define ourselves over against Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Anabaptists, and others. What do we offer to the church catholic that is distinctive—and is distinctiveness the goal? Some scholars have focused on the role of the Holy Spirit in Word and sacrament as a particular gift of Reformed Protestantism. Galbreath agrees with this move, as evident in his discussion of Calvin's prayer for illumination, and in the work of twentieth-century French liturgical theologian Jean-Jacques von Allmen. He worries that such attention to the role of the Spirit has been lost, and in its place has come the emphasis on doctrine and rationality. He also worries that attention to the Spirit has been obscured by attention to printed words on a page. This focus on pneumatology needs to be retrieved among Reformed Christians, and it needs to be shared with others.

Other scholars raise concerns that the embrace of liturgical and sacramental renewal in concert with wider ecumenical trends has compromised distinctive insights of Reformed faith. This concern too is one that Galbreath shares, as evident especially in his discussion of how we read Scripture in worship. Though the embrace of the Revised Common Lectionary had the laudable goals of increasing ecumenical engagement and enhancing biblical literacy, we now live in an age when three readings and a psalm every week is more than many people can absorb. For the sake of actual transformation, we may need to engage in practices of Scripture reading and proclamation that enable worshipers to wrestle more deeply and directly with biblical passages, perhaps even learning from the *lectio continua* practices of Calvin himself.

This volume is the culmination of Paul Galbreath's lifetime of work as a scholar-practitioner who has always had particular interest in how, why, and whether liturgical practice makes a difference in the lives of people and for the future of our fragile planet. Here he continues the work that he began in his trilogy *Leading from the Table* (2008), *Leading through the Water* (2011), and *Leading into the World* (2014): nurturing sacramental practice that can move us from "ego to eco-centered lives" through closer attention to the natural elements of bread and wine, water and oil, bodies and soil, trees and light, and through closer attention to communities suffering economic and political oppression. As a good Reformed theologian, he refuses to be satisfied with the status quo.

He is possessed by an unrelenting (even Spirit-driven?) drive toward more just and life-giving practices that actually make a difference in the world. How do our theological presuppositions guide us in shaping worship practices at the local level, from the bottom up, in ways that reflect scriptural commitments to care for the earth and care for the poor? Paul rescues me—rescues many of us—from romanticism about the power of liturgical practice, pressing with clear-eyed realism the urgency of the world's needs.

Martha Moore-Keish
Columbia Theological Seminary

Preface

Not everyone lays awake at night and wonders why John Calvin's theology took peculiar turns when it came to the liturgies that he wrote and used in his congregations. Similarly, I hope that others avoid the nightmares that I have about why Calvin's theological breakthroughs often became stagnant and twisted in the hands of some of his followers. Perhaps even more troublesome is the existential crisis that so many congregations face as they try to imagine a future for the Reformed tradition in a world that is increasingly bewildered by the odd language and rituals that many of us take for granted and from which some of us find comfort. These are the conundrums that I attempt to unravel in the following pages.

While it may not initially appear this way, writing a book is a collaborative process that draws on the generosity and resources of a broad community. I am particularly grateful for a sabbatical from my teaching at Union Presbyterian Seminary that allowed me to focus on this project. The seminary's librarians, especially Lisa Janes, provided significant support for my research. This work draws especially on classroom conversations with students: for over a decade in classes on worship at our campus in Richmond and for the last seven years of teaching theology at our campus in Charlotte.

Along the way, I have been supported by colleagues and friends who read drafts, provided critical feedback, and encouraged me throughout the writing process. Special shout-outs are due to Thom and Cindy Nelson, Martha Moore-Keish, and Cláudio Carvalhaes. My work was strengthened by their questions, comments, and suggestions. Additionally, I am grateful to Max and the baristas at Farewell, who not only kept me well-caffinated but also allowed me to camp out in the café while I toiled away on this manuscript. Finally, I owe deep gratitude to my family, Jan, Andi, Rena, and Taluli, whose patience and support throughout this process gave me the hope of bringing this work to a successful conclusion.

Introduction

Dear reader:

Thank you for picking up this book. It offers a series of theological reflections on my experiences as a church member, pastor, teacher, student, scholar, and curious reader/researcher. In these pages I am offering a set of guided reflections on particular periods of Reformed theology as a way to show how significant theological themes have influenced the ways that liturgical practices have been articulated and enacted. My main focus is on primary material, especially Reformed liturgies and confessions. Along the way I include key insights from significant Reformed theological figures (Schleiermacher, Barth, Moltmann) as well as recent literature, particularly in relationship to the role of Scripture and the sacraments in the Reformed tradition. The purpose of these reflections is to point to something that I believe is so obvious that we often take it for granted: namely, that our theological presuppositions and perspectives often provide the groundwork for liturgical developments and in many cases dictate the ways in which our liturgies are constructed and embodied. This is neither a surprising or radical thesis, but I aim to show ways that it has at times led to ritual confusion in our liturgical texts and practices. While this book is structured around the particularities of Reformed theology, I hope that ecumenical readers will see the ways in which their own liturgical traditions share similar tendencies.

In part 1, I examine the legacy of John Calvin, whose theological work and pastoral leadership provided the foundation for the emergence of Reformed theology as a distinct approach—theologically, ecclesiastically, and liturgically. My interest is to underscore the ways in which Calvin's theological

distinctives dictated and controlled the radical liturgical practices that were central to the Reformed Church in Geneva and were exported and embodied in the development of the Reformed movement as it took root and grew in other parts of Europe. At the center of Calvin's intellectual, spiritual, and practical approach was a commitment to Word and sacrament. Calvin viewed this as a central component of restoration to the health and faithfulness of the church and as an authentic witness to the presentation of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. Reformed Christians have been quick to point with pride to this as a hallmark of Calvin's reformation of the church's practices. While Calvin argued, wrote, and worked tirelessly to push for liturgical practices that embodied the church's commitment to Word and sacrament, a closer look at the liturgical texts will show the difficult choices that Calvin faced in pushing the church toward the vision of communal life and spirituality that he desired. While Calvin viewed his work of church renewal primarily as a return to the practices of the early church, he faced the twofold task of dismantling established liturgical practices while creating and sustaining new ones at the same time. Further complicating this herculean effort was the fact that these different approaches to Word and sacrament shared the same vocabulary but relied on different theological arguments as a basis for their use in the life of the church.¹

My aim here is to show how Calvin's interpretation of Word and sacrament is primarily the result of his reading of Scripture and the way in which he constructed theological arguments. By looking closely at the liturgical texts that were used in his congregations in Strasbourg and Geneva, we get a clearer picture of the ways in which the liturgical practices were designed and developed to support theological claims. We will see the pedagogical ways that Calvin used to provide explanations that rejected previous practices and offered biblical and theological rationales for alternative ways of celebrating Word and sacrament. These liturgical texts often include a critique of the previous practices (a kind of theology *via negativa*) while gesturing (mainly linguistically) toward other possibilities. For Calvin, this is understandably a work in progress, particularly given the enormity of the task of reformation. The surprising result for me is the way in which Calvin's bold initiative quickly became codified as his theological approach spread to other parts of the European continent (and over time was taken to the "new world"). I am suggesting that because this was first and foremost a theological vision it struggled to find ways to develop embodied liturgical practices that supported the commitment to Word and sacrament that inspired Calvin's approach. As a result, Reformed liturgies have often remained at the level of theological explanation that increasingly relied on forms of reasoning to make the case for their particular approach to spirituality. Throughout much of the history of the Reformed

movement these approaches were also defined by their suspicion and rejection of any practices that were perceived as Roman Catholic.

I will begin my investigation of Calvin's contributions by looking at the positive contributions of recovering a commitment to Scripture as central to the life of the gathered assembly. This takes shape in particular ways, from the development of a distinctive prayer to a new approach to the public reading of Scripture and the role of proclamation as connected to this practice. In the next section, I will turn to look at the ways in which Calvin's rejection of the Mass led to the development of liturgical texts that supported his vision of recreating the Lord's Supper. Finally, I will explore the radical baptismal practices adopted in Geneva and especially the ways in which the liturgical texts stressed the claims of this theological vision.

In part 2, our study of the theological influences on Reformed worship focuses on those who followed Calvin's theological vision. We will examine the liturgies of John Knox and the Reformed church in Scotland as well as look at insights from early Reformed confessional statements. We will give special attention to the defining role of the Westminster Standards before turning our attention to the rise of new theological voices from the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher to Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann. We will examine how these voices eventually led to significant changes to the ways in which the Reformed tradition's commitment to the centrality of Word and sacrament took on new dimensions, both in descriptive terms in the adoption of new confessional statements and more particularly in terms of the development of new liturgies.

In part 3, the historical analysis will provide the basis for us to consider which common threads from Reformed history may provide significant guidance as well as what theological insights will resonate with those who seek to express and experience Christian faith in this postmodern and pluralistic time. Exploring these possibilities will include significant conversation with recent Reformed and ecumenical contributions around our explorations of the ongoing role of Word and sacrament in the lives of Reformed communities.

As I tell my students, the primary goal of reading theology is to nurture a critical and appreciative understanding of those who have explored dimensions of Christian faith. As a Reformed theologian and pastor, I remain inspired by the audacity and commitment of Calvin's theological vision. Furthermore, what he accomplished in the face of the perpetual reluctance to change as well as fierce hostility from some individuals in his community is mind-boggling. I know from my years as a pastor how difficult change is for congregations to embrace. Thus, the amount of dramatic change to liturgical practices that happened in a relatively short time is an area in which Calvin's contributions have often been underestimated.

At the same time, though, Calvin's struggle to find ways that fully develop embodied liturgical practices resulted in what I am suggesting is a commitment to spirituality that is largely defined by particular forms of rational argument. This can be seen both in the ways in which the Reformed church developed distinctive approaches to preaching, writing, and using creeds, and in the development of liturgical texts to support its approach to sacraments. The result is the popular portraits of Reformed Christians as the "frozen chosen." Oddly enough, while the Reformed tradition has vehemently defended its commitment to form and freedom versus any requirement of prescribed liturgical texts, by and large Reformed congregations remain rigidly defined by printed texts (bulletins) that offer prescribed responses by those who are participating in worship. Could this be the result of Calvin's attempt to prescribe proper theological reasons (along with a biblical rationale) for each component of the worship service? The rejection of form and the illusion of freedom have combined to leave Reformed congregations with types of spirituality that increasingly seem to be out of touch in an age that looks for visual and experiential ways to create communal identity.

In the hope of discovering what inspired Calvin (and for clues of what can inspire us today), we turn our attention to the dawn of the Protestant Reformation. Charting this movement is a way of tracing a family tree so that we can discover the accomplishment of our ancestors while learning more about the difficult choices they faced, the missteps they made, and the ways in which we resemble them.

PART I

Calvin's Legacy

Scripture

Long before Martin Luther tacked his list of items to debate on the Wittenberg door in 1517, a hunger to hear and read the Bible had emerged as a way to foster new forms of community across the European continent. The Protestant Reformation did not happen overnight. A variety of factors contributed to the long trajectory that prompted leaders to advocate for change. While one can point to different starting places, a helpful way to chart the course of transition is to start by noting the established method for theological discourse that held the day. Scholasticism, a theological method championed by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, became the standard way to present theological truths. In his classic work, *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas provided a pattern for theological arguments by showing the ways that philosophy, particularly Aristotle's writings (whose work had been preserved by Muslim scholars and recently rediscovered by Christians), could be used to present the doctrines of the church. This approach was developed as a way to make sense of Christian faith. In the hands of a genius like Aquinas, it provided an impressive attempt at summing up the teachings of the church. As a method that encouraged theological debate in order to refine and prove arguments, it could also devolve into purely speculative issues (e.g., Can God create a stone so heavy that even God cannot lift it?). Scholasticism remained the dominant method of theology that shaped leaders like Luther and Calvin even as they advocated for new approaches.

In contrast to scholasticism, the rise of humanism in northern Italy sought educational reform by pointing to the need for a return to primary sources. The emphasis on grammar and rhetoric was inspired by the reading of classic

sources in their original languages (thus its rallying cry became *ad fontes* or “back to the sources”). Rather than pursue abstract ideas, humanism sought to identify a basis for truth claims. While the differences in these approaches were seen primarily as a matter of scholarly debate, at the cusp of the sixteenth-century reforms even some of the common folks attending mass in their local parish were increasingly aware of major issues: (1) that theology in the form of the teachings of the church was out of touch with daily life and (2) that certain practices of the church were increasingly corrupt, particularly the emphasis on raising money through the selling of indulgences and the attention given to relics.

Musicians and artists contributed to the sense of social unrest by fostering visions of new ways of life shared together.¹ Instead of the concentration of wealth held by a few, they steadily produced an imagined alternative way of communal life. Scripture emerged as a primary resource, especially with an emphasis on the prophetic tradition and the apocalyptic texts. The prophetic passages provided images of religion that advocated for change by drawing attention to the call for justice and the plight of the poor. In this era of social unrest, eschatological texts provided a basis for a liberative cry for release from the authoritarian systems that controlled society.

The closing decade of the fifteenth century carried with it a wide sense of apocalyptic change. Europe teetered on the brink of massive transformation as the process of expansion and control of the Americas emerged as a way to create new wealth for those in positions of power. The church legitimized these actions by providing the authority and rationalization for the expansion and plundering of the resources that would be discovered and captured. Pope Alexander VI (a member of the prominent Borgia family), one of the most colorful and corrupt leaders in the history of the papacy, wrote the papal bull, *Inter caetera*, that sanctioned the voyage to the “new world” as an act of expanding Christendom by taking the teachings of the church to the “heathens” who lived there in an involuntary exchange for the gold and spices in their territory. Alexander VI seized upon this opportunity as a financial basis for his ambitious building projects (including villas for his mistress and family). Similarly, the hunger for increased wealth by the royal and business elite provided the financial backing for Christopher Columbus and others who crossed the Atlantic in pursuit of resources to feed the growing appetite for expansion.

The result of these diverse processes was a growing divide between the haves and the have-nots. While the common people increasingly longed to hear voices that advocated for change, those in power leveraged practices that produced the income to support the vast ecclesial and secular empires that were working to expand their bases. In other words, a serious disconnect continued to grow between institutional concerns and the plight of common

peasants. Into this cauldron, the work of pamphleteers and traveling preachers nurtured the sense of dissatisfaction, particularly of ecclesiastical leaders who seemed more interested in raising money and supporting the status quo than in addressing the concerns of those struggling to get by.

In this context, calls for change coalesced around a particular watchword: *sola scriptura*, Scripture alone. Scripture as the grounds for seeing the world in a new way grew out of the experience of those who led the charge for reform. In Germany, Martin Luther's study of the Bible prompted him to call for debate on a list of ecclesial malpractices that he identified as divergent from Scripture. For Luther, the issue was primarily an existential one. His reading of Romans challenged the way in which he had sought to achieve salvation. Luther sensed that in spite of his intense study and devotion, he still could not measure up to the demands of a wrathful God. It was in his exploration of Scripture (Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews) that he discovered a liberative word that challenged the way in which he had constructed his life as an Augustinian monk. His meditation on Romans 1:17, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith,'" provided the hermeneutical key that broke open his theological perspective. For Luther, it was no longer the good works that he accomplished that were instrumental, but instead the righteousness provided by God in Jesus Christ that was the source of faith.

Scripture provided the breakthrough moment for Luther (and other reformers), and it quickly became the benchmark to test the veracity and faithfulness of theological and ecclesial claims. Luther's attack on the selling of indulgences grew out of his recognition of grace as a free gift of God and a rejection of any attempts to earn or buy merit. Scripture alone was never intended as a rejection of tradition but as a corrective move that insisted on the priority of Scripture in theological debates. The Reformers shared a familiarity with the writings of the church fathers that drew on their education both in terms of scholasticism and humanism. The distinction that emerged in their work was an insistence on the priority of Scripture when debating teachings and practices of the church.²

CALVIN'S USE OF SCRIPTURE

While the study of Scripture produced significant theological insights, our interest here is around the use of Scripture as a distinctive component of worship. On the one hand, Calvin and other reformers shared a belief that hearing the Word in worship on a regular basis would produce similar insights to their own transformative moments. Thus, the focus on Scripture became a

central hallmark across different streams of the Protestant Reformation. Distinct differences emerged, however, in the ways in which worship reflected on the role of Scripture. For Luther, the reading and preaching of the Word was a central component of Sunday worship. Luther's liturgical approach in the *Deutsche Messe* was primarily to preserve the mass but also to offer the service in the vernacular language of the people.

In contrast, the Reformed movement used its reading and interpretation of Scripture as the basis for distinguishing virtually all aspects of worship from Roman Catholic practices. Scripture served as the primary rationale for the ordering of worship and became the way in which Reformed congregations developed their liturgies. While Scripture was recognized as the source of liberation from the constraints of the authoritative teachings and the abuses of the church, the use of Scripture in worship was primarily intended as support for distinctive theological claims and as a pedagogical support for the emergence of this alternative theological movement.

An overview of one of Calvin's liturgies demonstrates the way in which Scripture is used to support the theological perspective of this nascent movement. The service begins with a citation from Psalm 124:8: "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Amen."³ The significance of this starting point is to assert Scripture as the initial word spoken to the assembly (in contrast to the mass, where the priest intones the Trinitarian formula as the initial theological and doctrinal assertion to the congregation). The choice of a psalm is noteworthy for a number of reasons. It reflects Calvin's deep affection for the Psalms as a primary source of spirituality. This devotion to the Psalms is reflected in Calvin's insistence on the congregation's singing of the Psalms as a distinctive feature of the Reformed tradition. The Psalms provided a key resource in the encouragement of household piety that was a distinctive aspect of Calvin's theology. Additionally, the use of the Psalms reinforces Calvin's commitment to the Hebrew Scriptures as a positive source of revelation that we will see in the third use of the law in the liturgy. Finally, a brief reference to Scripture provides a clear example of a biblical warrant—a way of using Scripture in the liturgy that continues to be an important part of Reformed worship today. (For example, note how the service for the Lord's Day in the most recent edition of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s *Book of Common Worship* in 2018 still provides a scriptural citation in the right-hand column of each page as a way to show biblical support for each aspect of the service).

A second use of Scripture in Calvin's liturgy in Strasbourg occurs following the confession of sin where "the Minister delivers some word of Scripture to console the conscience."⁴ The importance of this act is to ground the absolution of sin in the promise of Scripture (rather than solely in the declarative power of the priest on behalf of the church). Here Scripture provides the teaching

that delivers the congregation from sin. Following this practice is Calvin's use of the decalogue as a source of instruction on how to live in community. Calvin understood this as the third and most important use of the law. Luther articulated that the (first) use of the law is to convict us of sin and a second use of the law (from Luther's colleague Phillip Melancthon) was to provide ethical norms for society. Calvin's emphasis on the third use of the law was in terms of its role in nurturing Christians in their life together in community. In Strasbourg, the congregation sang the first table of the law immediately following the absolution. Then the minister offered a prayer that included thanksgiving for the gift of God's revelation that would "instruct them in the righteousness of thy law" and "that it may also be inscribed and impressed upon our hearts."⁵ The congregation followed by singing together the second table of the decalogue as a declaration of the way in which they would share life together. In the Genevan liturgy, the congregational singing of a Psalm took priority over the singing of the decalogue. The emergence of these new practices reinforced Calvin's commitment to a liturgy that draws on the promises of Scripture.

We will look more closely at the practice of reading Scripture and the commitment to preaching on biblical texts in the next section of this chapter. Here we will simply note the attention that is given to the public reading of Scripture and the extended time dedicated to the explanation of biblical texts as a way of promoting theological literacy. The focus here is on a particular hermeneutical approach to Scripture: that is, it is more than reading Scripture for its own sake but is imbedded in a way of interpreting Scripture within a particular theological framework and perspective. The reading and interpretation of Scripture became the primary focal point for the service that Calvin referred to as "the incomparable treasure of the church."⁶

Calvin's reading of Scripture, alongside the influence of Luther, Zwingli, and other Reformation leaders, led to his acceptance of baptism and Communion as the two sacraments instituted by Christ. This came in stark contrast to the Roman Catholic emphasis on seven primary sacraments (baptism, confirmation, Communion, reconciliation/penance, marriage or ordination, anointing of the sick/last rites) as ways in which the church offered grace through the cycles of life. In its place, Calvin's emphasis on cultivating household piety provided an alternative pattern of spirituality that linked the witness of the church with that of daily life. Calvin's definition of sacraments and his reflection on the role of sacraments drew heavily from the writings of Augustine (as is often the case in Calvin's theology). Calvin describes sacraments as aids to our faith by which God offers us a visible word or sign (directly citing Augustine).⁷ In this broad context, Calvin develops an understanding of sacrament that is linked to God's covenants as portrayed in Scripture. Calvin describes an array of signs that point to God's promises, for example the tree of life in the Garden of Eden

or the rainbow following the flood.⁸ For Calvin, though, it is still important to underscore the role of sacraments in the life of the church. While Calvin echoes Augustine's description of "Old Testament sacraments" (circumcision, purifications, sacrifices), their value is in the way that these signs point to Christ. While we will have more to say about the acceptance and appropriateness of the language of Old Testament sacraments in a later chapter, Calvin developed the notion in terms of the way in which sacraments as signs were fulfilled by Christ. This allows Calvin to acknowledge a limited role for Old Testament signs that pointed to Christ while also making the case for the ways in which baptism and the Lord's Supper show Christ "more richly and fully."⁹

While Calvin longed for a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper, he never received approval for this change. Instead, the service of Word became the dominant form of gathering both on Sundays and in the weekday services, with the focus clearly on building biblical literacy within the community. Given the dramatic level of change to Communion practices advocated by Calvin, including the full participation by the congregation around the table, Calvin conceded that it would require substantial education in order for the congregation to grow into the new liturgical practices.

On Sundays when the Lord's Supper was celebrated, Scripture served as the primary way in which the actions at the Communion table were presented to the congregation. Calvin's liturgy used 1 Corinthians 11 as the theological framework during the service by beginning the celebration of the sacrament by reading verses 23–29. By selecting this text as the biblical warrant for the gathering at the table, Calvin reinforces two particular emphases that were central to this theological approach to the sacraments. First is to link the actions in the service with a biblical narrative that portrays Jesus as providing the rationale for these actions. Calvin spoke of this as the "dominical command" for the two sacraments (baptism and Communion) that he believed had sufficient biblical grounds to remain at the center of the congregation's life. The Pauline text provided the connection to the upper room tradition that would serve as a primary paradigm for the theological interpretation of the sacrament within the Reformed tradition. Second, the selection of this excerpt also clearly sets a tone that is perceived as central for the service. The emphasis on the Pauline words about worthiness provides a basis for an extended warning offered by the minister to those in the service. The minister uses this text as the basis for a lengthy declaration in which he declares that "in the name and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ" he is able to "excommunicate all idolaters, blasphemers and despisers of God."¹⁰ In the next chapter on the Lord's Supper, we will look more closely at Calvin's understanding of Communion and its role within the community. Here, our primary interest remains on the role of Scripture within the weekly worship gathering.

Finally, the service closes with two additional biblical references: First, the congregation sings either a psalm or the Song of Simeon. Once again, the words of Scripture spoken by the congregation provide a way of teaching and forming their identity as members of the covenant community. Second, the minister offers a benediction from Scripture in the form of the blessing from Numbers 6. Once again, the use of a text from the Hebrew Scripture reinforces Calvin's conviction that all of Scripture is formative for Christian life.

A DISTINCTIVE REFORMED PRACTICE

Following this overview on the role of Scripture in Calvin's liturgy in his congregations in Strasbourg and Geneva, we are turning our attention to a distinctive feature of the Reformed approach to reading Scripture. My friend and colleague Stan Hall frequently labeled the Prayer for Illumination as the *only* significant liturgical contribution to the ecumenical church. As we will see, it offered a unique way in which Calvin's emphasis on the role of Scripture was grounded in a particular theological perspective. Calvin's development of this new form of prayer provides an important theological contrast to the Mass. In the Roman Mass, a collect for the day provided a prayer that offered a transition following the opening of the service while also announcing a particular focus for the service of the day.

Prior to Calvin, Reformed liturgies experimented with an alternative form of prayer to petition God that the "Sermon and the Word of God" may "be heard with profit."¹¹ This development already foreshadows a different understanding of the role of this prayer than that of the traditional collect. Rather than summing up the opening of the service, the prayer now draws attention to the actions to come in terms of the reading and interpretation of Scripture. In creating the Prayer for Illumination, Calvin seized on this possibility and used it to draw attention to a particular theological emphasis.

The primary role of this prayer in Calvin's liturgy is to highlight the pneumatological center of Calvin's theology. In contrast to Luther's emphasis on the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture, Calvin insists that the understanding of the Word is solely the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. In his debates with the Roman hierarchy, Luther had insisted that simply reading Scripture (in the same ways in which he read it!) would lead to a shared interpretation and theological agreement. As one who came later to the Reformation, Calvin was deeply aware (and pained) by the divisions between those who advocated for change. Thus, the Prayer for Illumination points to his theological conviction that clarity comes not from our ability to understand these texts but rests on the Spirit's presence among those who gather to hear the Word read and proclaimed.

In his description of Calvin's service, Bard Thompson describes the following action: the minister leaves the Communion table from where he led the opening of the service, moves to the pulpit (Calvin's church in Geneva, St. Pierre, had an elevated pulpit near the front of the congregation), and offers an extemporaneous prayer that the Holy Spirit will bring illumination that the word may be read and proclaimed. For Calvin, the reading, hearing, and proclamation of Scripture served as the mark of the true church along with the celebration of the sacraments according to the institutions of Christ. By locating this prayer in the pulpit, Calvin underscores its theological significance as decisive for this central act of worship. Calvin is under no illusion about our ability to understand Scripture on our own. While Scripture functions as the lens that provides correction to our flawed sight, the human condition of sin prevents us from being able to attain these insights from our own knowledge or intelligence.

As a humanist, Calvin was fully committed to the serious study of Scripture in its original language. Thus, the development of an academy in Geneva dedicated to rigorous training for ministers was a key part of Calvin's reform agenda. Yet, even with this commitment, it is ultimately the work of the Spirit that brings understanding to the congregation who gathers to hear the Word read and proclaimed. Calvin views this as an act of theological collaboration in which the Spirit's presence is the animating factor in breathing life into the community. Calvin draws on the Pentecost story in the book of Acts as the source of inspiration for this portrait of the church.¹² It is the Spirit's movement that leads to understanding and brings people together in a community that experiences growth and transformation.

The centrality of the Spirit in Calvin's theology has often been ignored or overlooked. This remains a largely underdeveloped aspect of Reformed theology even in contemporary works. To cite but one example, Daniel Migliore writes in *Faith Seeking Understanding* that "the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has seldom received the attention given to other doctrines of the faith."¹³ Even as he calls attention to this claim and recognizes the need for closer ecumenical partnership with the Eastern Orthodox Church as well as Pentecostal and Charismatic communities, Migliore's own commitment to a christocentric theology restricts the focus on the Spirit's significance to Reformed theology in Calvin's theology.¹⁴

Pneumatology is a major component of Calvin's theology in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In book 3 of the *Institutes*, Calvin develops the animating role of the Spirit as the key to his theological system.¹⁵ Contemporary Reformed theologian Christopher Elwood describes the crucial role that the Spirit plays in Calvin's theology in terms of the role of power in providing the benefits of Christ to believers. "For Calvin it is the Spirit who . . . makes Christ present to believers, and Christ is made present by means of the Spirit's power."¹⁶

What happened within the Reformed movement that caused this primary emphasis in Calvin's theology to largely disappear? My sense is that the development of Calvinism in doctrinal directions led to a more stultified version of Calvin's theology that restricted the movement of the Spirit. While the numerous Reformed credal statements all share a basic commitment to a Trinitarian theology that reaffirms the classic Christian commitment to the Spirit, the emphasis on pure doctrine and an insistence on decency and order left little room for the Spirit to move in new directions. Over time, the characterization of Reformed congregations as the "frozen chosen" exemplifies the restrictive space for the Spirit to work within the boundaries of our theological expectations. One can see this development particularly in the historical and theological conflicts in the Dutch Reformed Church at the Synod of Dort in the seventeenth century. The articulation of strict forms of Calvinism with an emphasis on double predestination as a way to insist on the absolute sovereignty of God and salvation as solely God's action (in contrast to preserving room for human choice) led to the development of more rigid theological systems. This version, known as five-point Calvinism, was rearticulated in the twentieth century in English-speaking countries using the acronym of TULIP: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.¹⁷ While the Westminster Standards softened some of the harsher claims of Dort, they maintained the overall doctrinal emphasis that became distinctive as Calvinism developed in different parts of the world.

By contrast, the Prayer for Illumination as a distinctive element of Calvin's pneumatology must be recognized within the context of the competing forces in the emergence of the Reformed movement in sixteenth-century Geneva. On the one hand, Calvin is forced to defend and distinguish his commitment to reforming the church in a highly contested space where the debate includes vastly different understandings from those who sought to reassert a vision of a unified Roman Catholic Church (see Cardinal Sadoletto's letter to the church at Geneva¹⁸) to Anabaptists who advocated that the Protestant Reformation should go further in its attempt to restore practices of the New Testament church. To navigate this conflict, Calvin was forced to articulate a theology with ecclesial practices that provided clear directions for the church. At the same time, Calvin's experience of the Spirit's vivifying movement in his life served as a source of inspiration for his vision of communal life together. The delicate dance of the emerging identity of the Reformed movement relied on the articulation of distinct aspects of this ecclesial movement as well as on a commitment to the Spirit as the source for the community to thrive amid both internal and external conflicts. Calvin brought these diverse experiences together to provide a theological vision for the central role of the Spirit in the life of the community.

The liturgical commitment to the centrality of this prayer underscores its role in Calvin's lived theology. Note that Calvin's liturgy presents this as an extemporaneous prayer. Here Calvin's recognition of the free movement of the Spirit is embodied in a particular practice, that of eschewing a prescribed text in favor of the minister exemplifying a reliance on the Spirit to provide the words of a prayer that embodies the community's dependence on the Spirit to bring life to the gathered assembly as the Word is read and proclaimed. Calvin did offer examples of this prayer as a way to model the central theological features. The example provided from his Strasbourg liturgy provides clues to the theological focus:

Let us call upon our Heavenly Father, Father of all goodness and mercy, beseeching Him to cast the eye of His clemency upon us, His poor servants, neither impute to us the many faults and offenses which we have committed, provoking His wrath against us. But as we look into the face of the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, whom He hath appointed Mediator between Himself and us, let us beseech Him, in whom is all fulness of wisdom and Light, to vouchsafe to guide us by His Holy Spirit into the true understanding of His holy doctrine, making it productive in us of all the fruits of righteousness: to the glory and exaltation of His name, and to the instruction and edification of His Church. And let us pray unto Him in the name and favor of His well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, as He hath taught us to pray, saying: Our Father, which art in heaven, etc.¹⁹

The prayer is distinctly Trinitarian in form in naming and distinguishing each member of the Trinity. It begins with a focus on God the Father/Creator as the source "of all goodness and mercy" before turning to Christ as the Mediator between God and humanity. The prayer then names the Holy Spirit as the source of "wisdom and light" that guides the community "into the true understanding of His [God's] holy doctrine" in order that it may produce "the fruits of righteousness."²⁰ The prayer concludes with a collective recitation of the Lord's Prayer as a way for the congregation to affirm their desire for the Spirit to bring understanding to the reading and hearing of Scripture.

A second example of a Prayer for Illumination includes Calvin's adaption of a prayer written by Calvin's mentor, Martin Bucer. This briefer text shares the common feature of naming the members of the Trinity while asserting a distinctive role for the Holy Spirit. The prayer acknowledges that our salvation is dependent upon our knowledge of Scripture. This prayer closely resembles the opening of Calvin's *Institutes* with its emphasis on the knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves, where the knowledge of ourselves leads to an awareness of our dependence on God for all of life and the knowledge of God comes solely from God's revelation known to us in Scripture. The prayer

implores God to “strengthen us now by thy Holy Spirit that our hearts may be set free from all worldly thoughts and attachments of the flesh, so that we may hear and receive that same Word.”²¹ The purpose of this prayer, then, is articulated in terms of learning how to love and serve God with “earnest delight, praising and glorifying thee in Jesus Christ our Lord.”²²

The understanding that the Spirit brings through the reading and proclamation of the Scripture leads to active responses in the life of the community. The work of the Spirit in our lives provides for our growth in Christian piety in terms of sanctification. The result or fruit of the Spirit’s work is our dependence on God and our care for our neighbor.²³ Here again there are traces of the description of the early Christian community from Acts 2 where the Spirit’s descent on the followers of Jesus leads them to share their belongings with all who are in need. Calvin hints at this connection in the formula offered at the sharing of the bread and wine during Communion, where the gathering at the Table concludes with the words: “You are commended to have love among ourselves, and especially toward the poor.”²⁴ Calvin envisions the Spirit’s movement among us as leading to specific ethical actions. Faithfulness to the reading and hearing of Scripture that contains God’s promises creates a distinct community that cares for one another and all those who are in need.²⁵

As a liturgical innovation, the Prayer for Illumination provides a tangible practice rooted in the life of the worshipping community that signifies Calvin’s commitment to a vibrant theology of the Holy Spirit. The prayer provided a place in which the commitment to and exploration of Scripture that was at the center of the Reformation was balanced by an openness to the Spirit to guide the community in its understanding and to inspire them to discover ways to live out the teachings of Scripture in community.²⁶

SCRIPTURE: READ AND PROCLAIMED

At the center of Calvin’s vision of the Christian community lies a hunger for Scripture as a guide for how to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is the regular exploration and study of God’s revelation in the Bible that provides the knowledge for us to recognize our sin—the ways in which we deceive ourselves and fail to acknowledge our dependence on God. Scripture as the corrective lens that allows us to see ourselves and God in the proper light is a favorite metaphor of Calvin. To this end, the Reformed movement adopted new practices that highlighted their central commitment to Scripture.

At the time of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic lectionary was coordinated with the liturgical year and included readings from Scripture and the lives of the saints. In contrast, the Reformed approach developed the practice

of *lectio continua*, which focused on the continuous reading of particular books of the Bible as a primary way to build biblical literacy in the lives of congregants. This historical approach, which is still followed in many Reformed congregations and more recently has been adapted to include semi-continuous readings of portions of Scripture, sees biblical pedagogy as a primary goal of worship. In the context of Calvin's time, where biblical literacy was minimal, this commitment to the regular public reading of Scripture was significant. The strength of the *lectio continua* method is that it preserves the connections within a particular text and over time provides a comprehensive sense of the way in which books were organized and written. In an era when access to Scripture had been primarily limited to the clergy, this central focus on the Word of God signified a radical shift in which the Reformation commitment to the priesthood of all believers took particular shape around the centrality of Scripture. Undergirded by an understanding of the Spirit's role in bringing understanding to communal hearing of Scripture, this method of reading Scripture emphasized a shared commitment to discovering ways that the text provides a place for us to encounter God.

This approach to reading Scripture presumes regular attendance in order for the listeners to maintain the continuity between portions of books. While attendance in Geneva was not mandatory, it was expected. In fact, periods of prolonged absence from worship resulted in summons to appear before the consistory. This attention to discipline was part of life in the Genevan community (and the role of discipline would emerge in the Church of Scotland as a third mark of the church in addition to preaching and the sacraments).²⁷ In Calvin's theology, all of Scripture was revelatory and pointed to the witness of Jesus Christ. Thus, the reading and preaching through the book of Deuteronomy was recognized as equally valid as the exploration of one of the Gospels. In Geneva, Calvin led four services each Sunday as well as preaching at services during the week.²⁸ Thus, there was a constant opportunity for people to gain regular exposure to Scripture.

The commitment to the reading of Scripture was connected to the explanation of Scripture in the form of "lively preaching" that points to "the promises of Christ."²⁹ The development of biblical literacy within the congregation is the primary task of the minister. The Reformed emphasis on the minister as a student of Scripture underscores the centrality of the proclamation of Scripture that leads to the formation of a distinct Christian community. Here the humanist roots of Calvin's training provided the basis for the attention given to the study of Scripture and the ways in which *sola scriptura* took shape in the life of congregations.

Finally, this commitment to Scripture carried with it distinct theological assumptions. While the study of Scripture may have prompted breakthrough

moments in the lives of the Reformers (Luther's reading of Romans serves as a primary example), the development of a Reformed theological perspective provided the framework in which Scripture was explored. Calvin's own summary of Christian faith (in his initial edition of the *Institutes*, which he continued to revise throughout his life) provided a hermeneutical basis from which he explored Scripture and which guided the interpretations of texts that he offered in his sermons. There is nothing either surprising or nefarious about this; in fact, all of us approach biblical texts with particular expectations and commitments. The point to recognize here is how theology prescribes ways in which our liturgical practices and preaching take particular forms. As we have seen in this chapter, Scripture provided a way to make liturgical and theological claims that distinguished the Reformed movement from the alternative Christian perspectives of its day. While each approach claimed access to the true interpretation of the Bible (and usually accompanied this with a claim that all other interpretations were heretical), it was the use of Scripture to support the theological claims and liturgical practices of the Reformed church that distinguished its approach and development.

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