

♦ P R E F A C E ♦

A DECADE ago, the original preface to *Worshipping With Calvin* celebrated the old, dry bones of Calvinism coming to life once again. The foundational labors in the 1950s of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, J. I. Packer, the Banner of Truth Trust, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, Westminster Seminary, and others continue to bear fruit. *Time Magazine* in 2009 identified a resurgent Calvinism as the third of the ten most influential movements of our time.¹ The “young, restless, and reformed” attracted commentary on blogs, magazines, and in book form.² Significant Reformed movements could be identified, not only in the traditionally Reformed denominations, but even, remarkably, in the Southern Baptist Convention. The Calvin 500 celebration of Calvin’s birth held in Geneva included speakers from Uganda, Ghana, Korea, China, and Latin America, as well as traditional sources in North America and Europe. Dynamic Reformed churches may be found in Africa, Latin America, Indonesia, and Asia. Leaders span the denominational spectrum in the United States: Ligon Duncan, formerly of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi and current Chancellor of the Reformed Theological Seminaries, John Piper of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Mark Dever of Capitol Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., Albert

1. David Van Biema, “The New Calvinism,” *Time Magazine*, 12 March 2009, http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html.

2. Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist’s Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008); “Young, Restless, Reformed,” *Christianity Today*, 22 September 2006, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html>.

Mohler of Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, David Wells (Congregational) of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and Carl Trueman of Grove City College and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are among the recognized leaders. The institutional Calvinism of the old denominations may have collapsed, and the heirs of the Puritans in the United Church of Christ and the mainline Presbyterian and Reformed denominations of the United States, Britain, Germany and Holland may be on life-support, but, as William Whyte, Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, reports, "neo-Calvinism has become a highly dynamic movement."³

Ten years later, it is even more obvious that if resurgent Calvinism continues to thrive, attention must begin to be paid to the ministry and worship that alone will sustain and perpetuate it. Thankfully, the discussion of worship has intensified over the past ten years, with a steady stream of books advocating worship that is "according to Scripture."⁴ International Calvinism must take seriously the *liturgical* reforms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not just the theological, if today's dynamism is to endure. Calvin would not

3. William Whyte, "The -ism that Calvin Started," *Church Times*, 24 July, 2009, 22. The focus of this book is mainly on the contemporary situation in the United States. While there has been a global recovery of interest in Calvinistic doctrines, there has not been the same interest in what is involved in Reformed worship services as in America. The arguments presented in this book about Reformed worship in the United States are applicable to those other places as well. The churches in the UK, Holland, France, Switzerland, Germany, South Africa, and others have a rich heritage of Reformed worship which they would do well to recover. This heritage will be seen in the many references throughout this book to historic Reformed worship worldwide.

4. We may include the following: Jonathan Gibson, ed., *Reformation Worship* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018); Jonathan L. Cruse, *What Happens When We Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020); Derek W.H. Thomas, *Let Us Worship God: Why We Worship the Way We Do* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2021); Sam Waldron, *How then Should We Worship: The Regulative Principle and Required Parts of the Church's Corporate Worship* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: Evangelical Press, 2022); Nathan Eshelman, *Worthy: The Worship of God* (Pittsburgh: Grassmarket Press, 2023); and Jonty Rhodes, *Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023); also reprints of David Clarkson, *Prizing Public Worship*, ed. Jonathan L. Cruse (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023), and Herman Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise: Meditations before and after Admission to the Lord's Supper*, trans. and eds. Cameron Clausing & Gregory Parker, Jr. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 2019).

have approved of the separation of theology from worship. “Calvin’s creedal ideas were always already liturgical-practical, conceived and articulated in the service of prayer and praise, reverence and righteousness,” Matthew Myer Boulton points out in *Life in God: John Calvin, Practical Formation, and the Future of Protestant Theology*.⁵ Reformation-era theological reform drove liturgical and clerical reform. Reformed theology determined Reformed worship, and, likewise Reformed worship was the nurturing womb from which Reformed piety and practice sprang. Theology, worship, and piety are inseparably linked, none thriving without the supporting presence of the others.

Volumes have been written on Calvin the theologian, Calvin the exegete, Calvin and the sacraments, Calvin the church leader, Calvin the alleged dictator and tyrant. But Calvin the organizer of worship services? Calvin the liturgist? Most of the standard works on Calvin fail to deal with his liturgical ideas in anything but the most cursory manner. These include biographies,⁶ monographs of Calvin and his thought,⁷ and collections of essays about Calvin

5. Matthew Myer Boulton, *Life in God: John Calvin, Practical Formation, and the Future of Protestant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 55.

6. Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row Publishers, 1950); T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin* (Berkhamsted, Herts: Lion, 1975); Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999); William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Alister McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (1990; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995); Robert W. Godfrey, *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009); and David W. Hall, *The Legacy of John Calvin: His Influence on the Modern World* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishers, 2009).

7. Georgia Harkness, *John Calvin: The Man and His Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931); Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1931; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); A. Mitchell Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin: A Modern Interpretation* (London: James Clarke, 1950); John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954); Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956); Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); E. William Monter, *Calvin’s Geneva* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967); Lucien Joseph Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974); Ford Lewis Battles, trans. & ed., *The Piety of John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer* (Grand

and his ideas and influence.⁸ At times the titles are promising, but time and again Calvin's liturgical work is either ignored or given only a superficial descriptive review without in-depth analysis or evaluation. "It is common knowledge that Calvin and worship are incongruous topics," complains Elsie McKee of the liturgical "experts," "and that whatever the strengths of those who are predestined to the glory of God, they are hopeless failures when it comes to liturgy."⁹ The best that Calvin receives from the scholarly analysts is "polite indulgence," adds formerly Calvin University and presently Belmont University's liturgical scholar John Witvliet.¹⁰

Rapids: Baker, 1978); Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation: A Study of Calvin as Social Reformer, Churchman, Pastor and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988); Wulfert de Greer, *The Writings of John Calvin, An Introductory Guide*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); H. Henry Meeter, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, sixth edition, revised by Paul A. Marshall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Randall C. Zachman, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian: The Shape of His Writings and Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

8. Calvin Memorial Addresses, *Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States at Savannah, GA*, May 1909 (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1909); David E. Holwerda (ed.), *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); W. Stanford Reid (ed.), *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Elsie Anne McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (eds.), *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); Donald K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Burk Parsons (ed.), *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, and Doxology* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2008); and Randall C. Zachman (ed.), *John Calvin and Roman Catholicism: Critique and Engagement, Then and Now* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

9. Elsie Anne McKee, "Context, Contours, Contents: Towards a Description of Calvin's Understanding of Worship," in David Foxgrover (ed.), *Calvin Studies Society Papers 1995, 1997* (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 1998), cited in John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 127.

10. Witvliet, *Worship*, 127. That Calvin did not favor the use of the word "liturgy" may be a part of the problem. Then again, neither did any of the theologians of his day. See Hughes O. Old, "Calvin's Theology of Worship," in Philip G. Ryken et al. (eds.), *Give Praise to God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003).

This well-nigh universal assessment is ironic in that Calvin may rightly be regarded as among the most influential liturgists (“worship leaders” in today’s parlance) in the history of the church. His liturgical work, much like his theological work, honors the catholic tradition while synthesizing all that preceded him in the work of the Reformers. After Calvin, all subsequent developments in the tradition of Reformed Protestantism reflect his practice in worship, even if forms were altered in response to local circumstances. His form of worship “has had great influence on all succeeding Reformed liturgies,” admits one authority.¹¹ From Calvin through the Westminster Assembly’s Directory and into the present, one can clearly trace a commitment to Calvin’s order and priorities.¹² Worship moves in the Reformed order from praise, to confession of sin, to thanksgiving, to the means of grace (intercessory prayer, the reading and preaching of Scripture, and the administration of the sacraments), to blessing. The priorities are the *lectio continua* reading and preaching of Scripture, biblical psalmody and hymnody, a full diet of biblical prayer, and frequent administration of the Lord’s Supper. Bruno Bürki, writing in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, concedes, somewhat apologetically, that the Genevan liturgy is “the durable model of worship for one of the great Christian families, the Reformed churches.”¹³

Calvin’s “Form” was quickly adopted and adapted by the French, Dutch, German, and other continental Reformed churches. Two editions of it, the French and the Dutch, were in use on Manhattan Island within a decade of the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers.¹⁴

11. J. G. Davies (ed.), *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy & Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 336.

12. For the present author’s essay comparing the virtues of Calvin’s “Form” and Westminster’s “Directory,” see Johnson, “Worship from Calvin to Westminster: Continuity or Discontinuity,” in Kevin J. Bidwell (ed.), *The Westminster Directory For the Public Worship of God in Modern English: How to Rightly Worship God in Public* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: Evangelical Press, 2024), 11-54.

13. Bruno Bürki, “The Reformed Tradition in Continental Europe: Switzerland, France, and Germany,” in Geoffrey Wainright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (eds.), *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 443.

14. James Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 82.

Beyond the Genevan form itself, Calvin has had a decisive influence on the broader Reformed tradition, including the Congregationalist, Baptist, Episcopal, and free church traditions. The Episcopal church, in the Prayer Book of 1552, and even in its definitive 1662 form, borrows heavily from the example of Reformed Protestantism generally, and Calvin in particular. Low-church Protestantism (including the Methodist churches!) maintained its commitment to the outlines of Genevan worship until swamped by revivalism in the late nineteenth century and the contemporary worship movement in the late twentieth. Only in the post-American Civil War era did the commitment to the order and elements of Reformed worship begin to erode, and such things as the *lectio continua* and metrical psalm singing begin to disappear. Even post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism owes considerable debt to Calvin and the Reformed tradition for its increased interest in congregational singing, vernacular Scripture reading, preaching, and expanded prayer genres (e.g. invocations, intercessions, illumination, congregational confession of sin, benediction). As “worship leaders” go, Calvin has few rivals.

Worship, as we shall describe it, is ministry. The people of God are ministered to through the preaching, praying, singing, Scripture reading and administration of the sacraments that go on in the context of worship. It is our view that these are the very practices that must be restored if evangelical Protestantism, and more particularly Reformed Protestantism, is to be revived in our day. We must again, in our day, worship with Calvin. And we must move quickly. The perils of “Wannabe Cool” Christianity are now all too evident, as twenty-something Brett McCracken points out in *The Wall Street Journal*.¹⁵ A recent study indicates that 70 percent of young Protestant adults between eighteen and twenty-two stop attending church regularly once they leave home. Baby-boomer evangelical leaders are frantically assessing what they have done wrong. “Why didn’t megachurches work to attract youth in the long term?” McCracken and others are asking. Boomer-churches labored

15. Brett McCracken, “The Perils of ‘Wannabe Cool’ Christianity,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 August 2010. See also Brett McCracken, *Hipster Christianity: When Church and Cool Collide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010).

to be hip, cool, countercultural, and relevant. High-tech wizardry, lights, amps, drama, dance, and sundry gimmicks were thought to be the key to attracting young people to the church. Yet, in the end, hip has not worked. Ministry minus extended Scripture reading, serious expositions, substantial hymnody, in-depth prayer, and the regular administration of the sacraments has tended to undermine the church's *raison d'être*. Church is no longer a serious place. Its activities fail to command the attention of the younger generation. Why bother? many are concluding. When the Covid crisis of 2020 to 2021 forced the churches to lock down, many of those locked-out never returned. What wasn't there wasn't missed. "We want an alternative" to the trendy and ephemeral that pervade pop culture, says McCracken, not "more of the same." Mr. McCracken, we think, needs Reformed worship.

Sadly, few contemporary examples of historic Reformed worship and ministry exist. One must dust off the old orders of service of Bucer, Calvin, Baxter, and the Westminster Divines to find models. Archaeological excavation alone, however, is not enough. Yesterday's liturgies and pastoral manuals must be adapted for today, a dicey though necessary task. Why should Calvinists today look back? Because the sixteenth-century reforms of worship and ministry were biblically and historically right. The most strenuous spade-work has already been done. Four hundred and fifty years ago Reformed Protestants were right about *lectio continua* reading of Scripture. This was the practice of the apostolic and patristic church. The Reformed Protestants were right to revive it, and their successors into the nineteenth century were right to persist in practicing it. Likewise, Reformed Protestants were right to revive *lectio continua* preaching; they were right to revive the singing of the psalms; they were right to insist upon scriptural language in the prayers of the church and to expect the various prayer genres to find expression in the church's public gatherings. Reformed Protestants were right to revive the covenantal understanding of the sacraments, restoring the Lord's Supper to its apostolic simplicity as a meal served on a table by a minister, received by the people in both kinds, and restoring baptism to its apostolic simplicity as a symbolic washing that both

signifies and seals. The sixteenth-century reforms of worship and ministry were exegetically, theologically, and historically correct. Yet today these reforms of worship are largely unknown, even among the heirs of Calvin.

If Calvin and his fellow Reformers were *so* right, one might ask, then why have the worship and ministry practices of the Reformers not persisted? One may as well ask why the VHS video format beat out the clearly superior Betamax format, or, why the IBM-compatibles beat out the Apple Macintosh computing system in the 1990s. In the latter case, the Mac system was clearly superior. It was simpler to use and was immune to viruses. Yet it lost and the PCs won. Why? We leave the answers to these questions to the experts. We merely note that sometimes bad money chases out the good, as the economists say. Sometimes the best loses to that which is inferior. Apparently, bad worship has the capacity to chase out good worship. Sometimes the people of God prefer the ovens of Molech and the temple prostitutes of Baal to the relatively austere services of the temple and synagogue. We can observe this phenomenon, though we cannot explain it. Our goal will be to identify biblical norms and advocate their implementation in our day, without regard for polling data.

Because we are trying to make a case for the worship and ministry of Reformed Protestantism, what we label it has some importance. What shall we call this worship? We do not want to call it “Calvinistic worship” because when our worship is Reformed we join a tradition that is broader than Calvin, as we have seen already and shall elaborate upon shortly. “Reformed” is the better word. We hesitated to use the word “traditional,” as in “traditional Reformed worship,” though we needed to distinguish what we advocate from “hip Reformed worship.” However, we lose the battle of the labels in an age of anti-traditionalism when we call ourselves “traditional,” almost ensuring that we shall preach to no one but the choir. “Traditional Reformed worship” also has the liability of having the initials “TR Worship.” TR (Truly Reformed) is the kiss of death in some circles. We contemplated calling Calvin’s worship “classic Reformed worship.” “Classic” worked for Coca-Cola®. But “classic” sounds a lot like “classical,”

which pushes us even further back into antiquity and irrelevance, at least in the minds of some.

Likewise, we do not much like calling the new worship “contemporary.” In today’s verbal coinage, “traditional” loses to “contemporary” every time. Besides, we are really not talking about when things were established but their style and culture. “Contemporary” worship is really worship that is “pop” or “popular” in style. It borrows its forms from pop culture. On the other hand, useful hymns and prayers and orders of service are being written today (and so are “contemporary”) but are of a classic or a traditional or churchly genre.¹⁶

The label we have settled on is “historic Reformed worship” (HRW) or “the historic ministry and worship of Reformed Protestantism.” “Historic” is a less pejorative term than “traditional,” yet still conveying the sense of the depth and rootedness we wish to establish. By historic Reformed ministry and worship we mean the ministry and worship of the Reformed churches as practiced from the Reformation to the recent past. By new or contemporary worship we mean worship that borrows heavily from the styles and forms of popular culture. We joined the words “ministry” and “worship” because in practice they are inseparable. The Lord’s Day assembly for worship is where most ministry takes place. This is true for churches all across the spectrum, from liturgical to seeker. Rarely do more than a remnant of any congregation return for whatever activities the church offers on weekdays. *Worship is ministry*. Our aim is to demonstrate that the historic form of Reformed worship and ministry is greatly to be preferred to all the currently available alternatives, and for all the reasons why it was implemented at the time of the Reformation and prevailed for the succeeding four hundred years. We find ourselves very much alone as we do so, the tiniest of tiny minorities. Yet we are heartened by brave examples from church history, when the disciples of Christ

16. “Traditional and contemporary, in the present discussion, having nothing to do with dates, history, or chronology. The terms are used idiomatically, to refer to Christian hymns that have different musical properties.” – T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 41.

have found themselves isolated *contra mundum*, and have had to announce, “Here I stand,” quite alone, trusting that the world might one day catch up. This is our hope as we urge our fellow believers to join with us in the worship and ministry of the Reformed church.

The first half of this work lays the groundwork for HRW by surveying its biblical, theological, and historical foundations. The second half focuses on the nuts and bolts, the “how-to’s,” the application of historic Reformed worship and ministry today. Our hope is that many will be convinced that it can be done, and should be. The Word read, preached, sung, prayed, and displayed in the sacraments is as effective today as it ever was. When practiced by faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit, these ordinary means may be the instrument by which Christ once again builds His church, against which even the gates of hell shall not prevail.