

According to the Custom of the Ancient Church: Recovering the Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship

By Glen J. Clary

In April of 2017, Hank Hanegraaff, popularly known as the Bible Answer Man, stunned the evangelical world by joining the Eastern Orthodox Church.¹ Of course, Hanegraaff is not the first evangelical to swim the Bosphorus; his conversion to Orthodoxy is only the most recent example of many others who have done the same. Beginning in the 1980s, converting to Orthodoxy became somewhat of a trend among certain evangelical groups. Peter Gillquist, who led over 2,000 evangelicals into the Orthodox Church, and Frank Schaeffer, son of Francis Schaeffer, are well-known examples of that trend.² Within the Reformed community, swimming

the Bosphorus does not seem to be as popular as swimming the Tiber—converting to Catholicism. Some notable examples of the latter include Peter Kreeft, Kenneth Howell, Scott Hahn, and Jason Stelman—the chief prosecutor in Peter Leithart’s trial.³ There is another group of evangelicals, however, who have grown disillusioned with evangelicalism but who are unwilling to leave the Protestant church. These evangelicals often find themselves walking the Canterbury trail.⁴ For them, Anglicanism is the ideal *via media* between Geneva and Rome.

What is it that makes Orthodoxy, Catholicism, or Anglicanism so appealing to these evangelicals? Any simple answer to that question would surely be inadequate to account for every case. However, in the personal testimonies of those who have converted to one of these traditions, there are two common themes: (1) a desire to connect with the historic Christian church, and (2) a longing to experience genuine communion with God through liturgical worship. Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism all claim to have a direct link to the ancient church, and they all maintain that their liturgical customs are in total continuity with the worship of the ancient church. The irony of this modern phenomenon is that it was a rediscovery of the church fathers and a desire to recover ancient Christian worship that led to the formation of the Protestant church to begin with. As Hughes Oliphant Old convincingly argued in his doctoral thesis, the Reformers deliberately and scrupulously endeavored to reform the worship of the church according to patristic customs.⁵ Calvin claimed as much when he entitled the Genevan Psalter *The Form of Church Prayers and Hymns with the Manner of Administering the Sacraments and Consecrating Marriage According to the Custom of the Ancient Church*.⁶

If Protestantism was an attempt to reconnect with and recover the practices of the ancient church, then why do contemporary evangelicals, “who look to the ancient

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1. Sarah Zylstra, “Bible Answer Man’ Converts to Orthodoxy” at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2017/april/bible-answer-man-hank-hanegraaff-orthodoxy-cri-watchman-nee.html>. Retrieved on April 20, 2017.

2. Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2010); and Frank Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone: The Quest for Orthodox Faith in the Age of False Religions* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994).

3. Peter Kreeft, “Hauled Aboard the Ark,” in *Spiritual Journeys*, ed. by Robert Baraam (Boston, MA: Daughters of St. Paul, 1987); Kenneth Howell, *Something Greater is Here* (CHRresources, 2015); Scott Hahn, *Rome Sweet Home* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2009); and Jason Stelman, *Misfit Faith: Confessions of a Drunk Ex-Pastor* (New York: Convergent Books, 2017).

4. Robert Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 1985).

5. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Black Mountain, NC: Worship Press, 2010; 1975).

6. See Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) 113; and Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, 1961), 197–210.

church for Christian roots deeper and older than Billy Graham,” often end up leaving the Protestant church?⁷ The obvious answer is that evangelicalism has drifted far from its historical roots. Modern evangelicalism is generally disconnected from and tends to be apathetic toward historic Christianity. Modern evangelical worship, in particular, bears little resemblance to the worship of the ancient church or even to the historic Protestant church. To put the matter frankly, when Christians long for a more substantial worship experience than the superficial, seeker-driven, self-indulgent concerts and pep talks commonly found in evangelical worship, they often search for it outside of the evangelical world, even if that means having to lay aside long-held prejudices against non-evangelical churches. Annie Dillard captured the sentiment well when she wrote, “I have overcome a fiercely anti-Catholic upbringing in order to attend Mass simply and solely to escape Protestant guitars.”⁸

While evangelicalism has become unmoored and has increasingly drifted from its historical roots, there has been a resurgence of interest in patristic studies among Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican scholars; this began with the Oxford Movement, blossomed in the Liturgical Movement, and culminated with the Second Vatican Council. For the most part, however, the contemporary Reformed church has shown little interest in patristic studies, and consequently, it is ill-equipped to answer challenges to Reformed worship regarding its link to the historic Christian church. Reformed Christians are generally unprepared to defend the claim that their worship is in continuity with the liturgical customs of the ancient church.

My goal in this article is not primarily to defend that claim but to show why that claim was even important to the Reformers. Why were they so eager to recover the liturgical customs of the early church? If Scripture alone is infallible and is a sufficient rule for theology and worship, then why bother studying the history of the ancient church? Does it really matter if Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican churches claim to have the fathers on their side, so long as we have Scripture on ours? Who needs the fathers when you have the Bible? In this article, I will explain why the Reformers did not so easily dismiss the question of historical continuity with the ancient church by a simple wave of the magic wand of *sola Scriptura*.

The second goal I have for this article is to demonstrate how recent patristic scholarship can be used to vindicate and advance Reformed worship. In my opinion, the Reformers succeeded in recovering worship that was consistent with the customs of the ancient church;

but the process of reforming the church is incomplete. There is much more work to be done, and we are in a good position today to do it. With the profusion of patristic scholarship in the last century, our knowledge of the worship of the earliest Christian communities has greatly advanced. The Reformed church, however, has simply not kept up with this progress in patristic studies. In this article, I hope to demonstrate how recent patristic scholarship (looking particularly at the *Didache* as an example) can be used to continue the work that the Reformers began in the sixteenth century.

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

In the first place, it is important to recognize that the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* does not preclude the proper use of tradition in theology and worship.⁹ *Sola Scriptura* “was never meant as a denial of the usefulness of the Christian tradition as a subordinate norm in theology.”¹⁰

While the Protestant reformers’ conception of *sola Scriptura* established the Bible as the primary standard authorizing Christian theology and practice, they did not conceive of rejecting wholesale the history of the church’s tradition. In fact, many reformers considered the early church fathers secondary authorities to scripture as well as important teachers of biblical interpretation.¹¹

At the dawn of the Reformation, there were two dominant views of tradition, which Heiko Oberman has labeled Tradition 1 and Tradition 2.¹² “Tradition 1,” says

7. George Kalantzis and Andrew Tooley, *Evangelicals and the Early Church: Recovery, Reform, Renewal* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012) 85.

8. Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 19.

9. Sinclair Ferguson, “Scripture and Tradition,” in *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000); Heiko Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 280–85.

10. Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1985), 284.

11. Esther Chung-Kim, *Inventing Authority: The Use of the Church Fathers in Reformation Debates over the Eucharist* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 1.

12. See Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 269–96; Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 361–422; and Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 53–66. Cf. Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1987), 140–151.

John Franke, “represents the single-source understanding [of revelation], which emphasizes the sufficiency of Scripture as the exclusive and final authority in the church.”¹³ Tradition is not a second source of revelation but is co-inherent with the content of Scripture; therefore, Scripture and tradition are identical in content. “There is no revealed truth in tradition which is not first found in Scripture.”¹⁴ Tradition 1 asserts the priority of Scripture over the church and allows “tradition a derivative but important secondary role” in theology and worship.¹⁵ Oberman argues that Tradition 1 is the view of the ancient church, and that the Reformers were attempting to preserve that view in their doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. Likewise, McGrath says, “It is certainly true that the *sola Scriptura* principle was employed more radically by the early Reformed theologians than had ever been previously envisaged,” but *sola Scriptura* was not an innovation of the Reformers; it is identical to Tradition 1.¹⁶

Tradition 2, on the other hand, presents a dual-source theory of revelation. Revelation is contained partly in Scripture and partly in tradition. Gabriel Moran explains, revelation “is divided between two sources; part of revelation is found in Scripture, but the rest is contained only in oral tradition, that is, in truths handed down from apostolic times in addition to the Scripture.”¹⁷ Thus, Scripture and tradition are two equal authorities and supplementary sources; they are coequal norms.¹⁸ McGrath summarizes Tradition 2 as follows:

‘Tradition’ is ... understood to be a separate and distinct source of revelation, *in addition to scripture*. Scripture,

it was argued, was silent on a number of points—but God had providentially arranged for a second source of revelation to supplement this deficiency: a stream of unwritten tradition, going back to the apostles themselves. This tradition was passed down from one generation to another within the church.¹⁹

The Council of Trent officially adopted Tradition 2 when it decreed that divine revelation is contained both in the Scriptures and in unwritten traditions (*in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus*) which were received by the apostles either from the mouth of Christ or were dictated to them by the Holy Spirit, and that these traditions have come down to us “transmitted as it were from hand to hand.”²⁰ Furthermore, the Council stated that it “receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety and reverence” both the books of the Bible and also the unwritten traditions “as having been dictated, either by Christ’s own word of mouth, or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession.”²¹ Thus, as Oberman argues, the Council of Trent adopted the late medieval view of tradition, while the Reformers adopted the earlier view of the ancient church.

The Council of Trent ... responded to the threat of the Reformation by affirming a two-source theory. This affirmation by the Catholic Reformation of “Tradition 2” declares that the Christian faith reaches every generation through two sources: scripture and an unwritten tradition. This extra-scriptural tradition is to be treated as having equal authority as scripture. In making this declaration, the Council of Trent appears to have picked up the later, and less influential, of the two main medieval understandings of ‘tradition’—leaving the more influential to the Reformers.²²

The main point here is that the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* does not preclude the proper use of tradition in matters of theology and worship. Rather, in keeping with the view of tradition in the patristic age (Tradition 1), the Reformers saw tradition not as a second source of revelation but as co-inherent with the content of Scripture. While they clearly affirmed the priority and sufficiency of Scripture in establishing theology and worship, they also allowed “tradition a derivative but important secondary role.”²³

THE PROPER USE OF THE FATHERS

As we noted above, Reformed worship has deep roots

13. John Franke, “Scripture, Tradition and Authority: Reconstructing the Evangelical Conception of *Sola Scriptura*,” in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Lara C. Miguez and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 195.

14. Robert E. McNally, “Tradition at the Beginning of the Reformation,” in Joseph F. Kelly, ed., *Perspectives on Scripture and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, Inc., 1976), 65.

15. Muller, *Dictionary*, 284.

16. McGrath, *Intellectual Origins*, 150.

17. Gabriel Moran, *Scripture and Tradition: A Survey of the Controversy* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 35.

18. Muller, *Dictionary*, 284.

19. Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 97.

20. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 2:80; cf. H. J. Schroeder in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1978), 17.

21. Schaff, 2:80.

22. McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 109.

23. Muller, *Dictionary*, 284.

in the early church. According to Calvin, the worship of Geneva was “according to the custom of the ancient church.” Calvin’s claim explicitly attests to his “desire to return to the pure usages of the earliest Christians and his simultaneous campaign to eradicate what he believed to be dangerous medieval distortions.”²⁴ It has long been recognized that the Reformers were “the direct heirs of Christian humanism.”²⁵ It is no surprise then that the Reformation was “characterized by the slogan *ad fontes*, ‘back to the sources.’”²⁶ The Reformers derived their theological and liturgical ideas from the original sources of Scripture and the writings of the church fathers. Thus, Philipp Melancthon claimed that Martin Luther had “done nothing else than to call us back to Scripture and also to the fathers who came the closest to the meaning of Scripture.”²⁷ The Reformers saw themselves as standing in the traditions of the ancient church. In their mind, “the evangelicals were ‘the true, old Church,’ which had never ceased to be, but which had been hidden, ‘like the sun behind the clouds.’”²⁸

According to Ford Lewis Battles, “Calvin followed the tradition, common to humanists and Reformers alike, of viewing the Early Church as a golden classical period. The fathers are ‘the ancient writers of a better age of the church.’”²⁹ For example, Erasmus metaphorically described Scripture as “a fountain flowing into a golden river of patristic theology, and then degenerating into the dirty rivulets of scholasticism.”³⁰ For the Christian humanists and the Reformers, patristic theology and liturgy represented “a purer state of affairs.”³¹ The early church was “the primitive and purer church,” says Calvin.³² Therefore, patristic literature is valuable because it allows us to draw closer to the pure fountain of Holy Scripture. The earliest Christian writings—such as the works of Justin Martyr, Cyprian, and Tertullian—are like windows through which we catch a glimpse of how the apostolic church worshipped. To reform the liturgy “according to the custom of the ancient church” is to stand in continuity with the apostolic tradition.

On the Reformers’ use of the fathers, Irena Backus states that the fathers of the church shaped the theology of the Reformers “in such a way that a tacit hierarchy of sacred texts is established with the Bible at the top broadening out into a pyramid of patristic evidence, indispensable in its turn for construction of a Biblical theology.”³³ The fathers were seen as fallible, though generally reliable, interpreters of Scripture, and although they were not above criticism, they were not to be lightly esteemed. Martin Bucer says,

Any works produced subsequent to the canonical Scriptures, of whatever content or origin, must be tested by the faithful and measured by the Scriptures themselves and believed and accepted *only if shown to be derived from the actual Scriptures*: yet nonetheless . . . the writings of the early saints and the orthodox Fathers are to be received with respect.³⁴

Calvin echoed Bucer’s words when he wrote,

For, although we hold that the Word of God alone lies beyond the sphere of our judgment, and that Fathers and Councils are of authority *only in so far as they accord with the rule of the Word*, we still give to Councils and Fathers such rank and honour as it is meet for them to hold, under Christ.³⁵

Thus, for the Reformers, Scripture is the *norma absoluta*; it is the touchstone by which all “other writings are to be tested.”³⁶ The fathers of the church are *testes veritatis*, witnesses to the true teaching of Scripture. “Only the scriptural revelation can be the norm of doctrine, but the teachers and confessions of the church are aids in interpretation insofar as they are witnesses of the truth that manifests its presence and preservation in

24. Lee Palmer Wandel, ed., *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 233.

25. Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), xvii.

26. Franke, 198.

27. Philipp Melancthon, *Selected Writings*, ed. Elmer Ellsworth Flack and Lowell J. Satre (MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), 74. Likewise, Zwingli says, “We never taught a single word that we have not taken from Holy Scripture or the Fathers;” *Zwingli and Bullinger*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 24, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 256.

28. Rupp, xxii.

29. Cited in A. N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 40.

30. Nicholas Thompson, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and Patristic Tradition in the Theology of Martin Bucer, 1534–1546* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 28.

31. Thompson, *ibid.*

32. *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 22, ed. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 215; cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1:11:13 and 4:9:8.

33. *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Irena Backus, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 2:644.

34. *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, ed. David F. Wright (Abingdon, Eng.: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 260; emphasis added.

35. John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 1:66; emphasis added.

36. Lane, 29.

the life of the church.”³⁷ The testimony of the fathers serves as “an illustration of the truth of Scripture.”³⁸ Nicholas Thompson refers to this idea as the magisterial appropriation of the fathers. Commenting on Melancthon’s comparison of the fathers to witnesses in a trial, Thompson writes,

The judge could not know a story to be true unless there were witnesses to it, but it did not follow from this that the witness could change the story and continue to be witnesses to the truth. Thus the church was not greater than, or prior to, the Gospel. However in so far as the fathers and other ministers of the Word testified to the truth, they could be said to mediate between the truth and those they sought to persuade. We might call this kind of appropriation of the fathers ‘magisterial’ since it appeals to the authority and succession of the church’s teaching ministry *alongside* the Scripture, but *under* the authority of the Word and the Spirit.³⁹

Thus, the fathers were authenticators of the Protestant tradition. By appealing to the fathers, the Reformers sought to establish their theological credibility and to refute the accusation of Catholic apologists that they were guilty of inventing new doctrines.⁴⁰ In the debates between Protestants and Catholics, both sides claimed patristic support for their views, and both groups marshaled evidence from as many

patristic sources as possible, hoping to outmatch their opponents.⁴¹

The enthusiasm for the fathers, especially at the beginning of the Reformation, contributed to the sense that these ancient sources were treasures to be rediscovered. The advent of the printing press assisted in the production of an increased quantity of complete editions of patristic texts, as well as patristic anthologies.... By the middle of the century this unprecedented availability of patristic material gave a new edge to the appeal to primitive Christianity.... Since humanist scholars had taken up the work of translating the fathers with new fervor, Catholics and Protestants alike scrambled to claim the inheritance of the rediscovered ancient sources. Regardless of Catholic or Protestant views, it was a sign of the times that anyone who sought change in the church would look back to its history to reevaluate its beliefs and practices.⁴²

Thus, the Reformers were eager to use patristic literature to authenticate their theological and liturgical ideas. By appealing to the fathers as witnesses to the truth of Scripture, they were marshaling evidence to support their reforms and were demonstrating the continuity of the Reformed church with the historic Christian church.

THE LORD’S SUPPER IN THE DIDACHE

The Reformers saw patristic literature as a window through which they might catch a glimpse at how the apostolic church worshipped. Through a careful study of the fathers, they aimed to draw closer to the pure fountain of Scripture. One of the earliest Christian writings that they did not have, however, was the Didache. Since many of the fathers, such as Eusebius and Athanasius, mention the Didache, the Reformers were aware that a document by that title once existed, but they were unaware of its contents.

In 1873, “Archbishop Philotheos Bryennios was browsing in the library of the Greek Convent of the Holy Sepulchre in Istanbul when, by chance, he noticed the text of the Didache hidden away within a bound collection of early church writings.”⁴³

Almost overnight, scholars in Europe, England, and America expressed their complete astonishment that such an ancient and important work had finally surfaced. When the first English translation prepared by Hitchcock and Brown was released on 20 March 1884

37. Muller, *Dictionary*, 297.

38. Johannes van Oort, “John Calvin and the Church Fathers,” in Backus, *Reception of the Church Fathers*, 2:661–700, 690; cf. Pierre Frankel, *Testimonia Patrum: The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melancthon* (Geneva, 1961).

39. Thompson, *Bucer*, 75; cf. Frankel, 225–35.

40. For example, John Eck asserted, “No one is found in the 1490 years following the passion of Christ who has denied that the venerable Eucharist in the sacred office of the Mass is a sacrifice. The whole church spread throughout the world has always held this to be the case ... as much among those holding to the true faith as among the heretics and schismatics” (Thompson, *Bucer*, 18). Likewise, at the Baden Disputation of 1526, “Every time Oecolampadius made an attempt to argue from the Scripture, Eck challenged him to find patristic support for his interpretation and, when the Reformer failed to do so, accused him of bringing forward Biblical exegesis which was personal and arbitrary;” Irena Backus, “Martin Bucer and the Patristic Tradition,” in *Martin Bucer and Sixteenth Century Europe: Actes du colloque de Strasbourg (28–31 août 1991)*, ed. Christian Krieger and Marc Lienhard, 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 1.56.

41. It is noteworthy that in his final edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin cites the fathers 866 times (Chung-Kim, 35).

42. Chung-Kim, 4–5.

43. Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), xii; hereafter, Milavec, *Commentary*.

in New York bookstores, five thousand copies were sold on the first day.⁴⁴

If the Reformers were correct in assuming that the fountain stream of liturgical tradition is purest at its head, then the *Didache* may very well preserve the purest example of the observance of the Lord's Supper in patristic literature. Hughes Oliphant Old does not exaggerate its value when he refers to it as "the most important document we have concerning the celebration of Communion in the earliest days of church history."⁴⁵ The *Didache* represents the springtime of the liturgy and portrays a "picture of Christian worship in its simplest and purest form."⁴⁶ As Jonathan Draper observes,

The *Didache* presents evidence of the utmost significance for the study of the origins of Christian liturgy and worship, since it offers the earliest picture of baptism (7–8) and eucharist (9–10) in the early Church. It differs strikingly from traditional pictures and later practice, offering a markedly Jewish emphasis. Moreover, since liturgical practice was likely to be long established in the community before it was written down and collected in the *Didache*, it offers witness to a practice pre-dating the text by some time.⁴⁷

The rediscovery of the *Didache* provides a critical resource for doing precisely what the sixteenth-century Reformers aspired to do, namely, "reform the church's worship in light of the Biblical witness and the practice of the ancient church."⁴⁸

In many ways, the *Didache* vindicates Reformed worship. In the *Didache*, there are only two sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper); there is no liturgical calendar; public worship is required only on the Lord's Day. The *Didache* does not prescribe a fixed liturgy; worship on the Lord's Day begins with a confession of sin; the Lord's Table is fenced; the impenitent are excommunicated; etc. In these and in many other matters, the *Didache* confirms Calvin's claim that worship in the city of Geneva was "according to the custom of the ancient church." In this article, I will highlight three areas in particular where one can clearly see the continuity between worship in the *Didache* and Reformed worship: (1) the use of a discretionary liturgy, (2) the real spiritual presence of Christ, and (3) fencing the Lord's Table.

1. THE USE OF A DISCRETIONARY LITURGY

The communion prayers given in *Didache* 9–10 "are not word-for-word records of what a prayer leader recited

without fail at every eucharist."⁴⁹ They are not fixed formulas designed to be read or recited verbatim during the liturgy. Rather, the minister was to "give thanks in this manner" (*Didache* 9:1; 10:1). Liturgical historians have convincingly argued that rote prayers simply "had no place in ancient Judaism or in the early church."⁵⁰ Thus, according to Milavec, "the oral giftedness of the prayer leader was always operative, interweaving familiar patterns of prayer with fluid expansions spontaneously arrived at."⁵¹ The absence of fixed prayer forms does not necessarily indicate unrestrained spontaneity, since a minister could prepare his prayers in advance and/or use the Biblical forms of prayer such as the Psalms, while at the same time allowing for an appropriate amount of spontaneity.⁵² Regarding the eucharistic prayers in the *Didache*, Draper rightly observes,

It was in the nature of such prayers ... that they were flexible and were adapted to each situation in which

44. Milavec, *Commentary*, xii.

45. Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 121.

46. R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 3.

47. Jonathan A. Draper, "The Apostolic Fathers: The *Didache*," in *The Expository Times*, vol. 117, no. 5 (London: SAGE Publications, 2006): 177–81, 180. The majority of modern *Didache* scholars date the composition of the document to the first century, ca. 50–90 A. D. See discussion in Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Faith, Hope, and Life of the Earliest Christian Communities, 50–70 C. E.* (Mahwah, NJ: The Newman Press, 2003); Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, editors, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002); Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998); Jonathan A. Draper, editor, *The Didache in Modern Research* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); and Clayton N. Jefford, *The Didache in Context: Essays on Its Text, History and Transmission* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

48. J. Dudley Weaver Jr, *Presbyterian Worship: A Guide for Clergy* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press 2002), 28.

49. Milavec, *Didache*, 363.

50. See Milavec, *Didache*, 363. Prayer formulas do not appear in the tradition until the fourth century, and even these were not regarded as "fixed formulas." In fact, prayer books were not in use "before the early medieval period," Milavec, *Commentary*, 67. Even as late as the sixteenth century, there was great regional diversity in liturgical forms in both Jewish and Christian worship. In the fourteenth century, a Jewish liturgist wrote, "You will not find a single place in the world where the Eighteen Benedictions [the daily prayer] are word for word identical with the way in which the Eighteen Benedictions are recited anywhere else" (cited in Milavec, *Commentary*, 67).

51. Milavec, *Commentary*, 67.

52. Milavec notes, "Within the early Church one finds parallel expressions demonstrating that spontaneity was the normal expectation even when an abstract or schema was set out for guiding the prayer leader" (Milavec, *Commentary*, 67).

they were uttered. Thus it should be recognized that the structure and framework of the eucharistic prayers would have been the same at each community celebration, but the specific content would have varied with context.... We cannot assume that the weekly eucharist of the community of the *Didache* on the “Lord’s day of the Lord” (14:1) would have used exactly the same words each time, but the basic structure and outline of the prayers would have followed the form of the baptismal eucharist which has been preserved for us in *Didache* 9–10.⁵³

Hence, what we find in the *Didache* is a discretionary liturgy much like the liturgies produced in the Reformation era by Martin Bucer, John Calvin, and John Knox. The Reformers insisted that since God is a God of order, worship must be conducted in a decent and orderly fashion (cf. 1 Cor. 14:33, 40). Consequently, many of the Reformers published liturgies or service books to guide ministers in their task of conducting worship. Beginning in the mid-1520s, Reformed liturgies were published and utilized in several cities including Strasbourg, Zurich, Basel, Bern, Constance, and Geneva. It was Martin Bucer’s Strasbourg liturgy that inspired Calvin to publish a service book for the French-speaking refugees in Strasbourg (1540) and also one for the churches of Geneva (1542).

When John Knox pastored the English-speaking refugees in Geneva, he used an order of worship that was drawn from Calvin’s liturgy. Knox’s liturgy, known as the *Genevan Book of Order* (1556), was officially adopted as the standard of worship by an act of the General Assembly of the Scottish Presbyterian Church in 1564. Every minister in Scotland was required to “use the order contained therein, in prayers, marriage, and

the administration of the sacraments.”⁵⁴ This *Book of Common Order*, as it came to be called, was the official service book of the Scottish Presbyterian Church until it was superseded by the *Westminster Directory for Public Worship* in 1645.

Bucer, Calvin, and Knox did not produce fixed liturgies like the Roman Mass, the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, or the Book of Common Prayer. Instead, they wrote discretionary liturgies, which contained formulas for prayer and the administration of the sacraments that could be read directly from the service book. But they also allowed ministers a measure of freedom to frame their own forms, provided that these were in keeping with the liturgy. In Reformed churches, ministers were required to honor the official liturgy, but they were also allowed to pray “as the Spirit of God shall move his harte,” said Knox.⁵⁵ Discretionary liturgies do not contain fixed formulas that must be read or recited verbatim, but sample formulas for prayer and the administration of the sacraments.

The kind of liberty afforded to ministers in the discretionary liturgies of Bucer, Calvin and Knox is what we find in the communion prayers of *Didache* 9–10. This liberty is highlighted especially in *Didache* 10:7, where the church is instructed to “allow the prophets to give thanks as long as they wish.” Hence, *Didache* 9 and 10 provide sample prayers for the Lord’s Supper, which a prophet was at liberty to expand and elaborate on at his discretion.⁵⁶ The *Didache* was written for “a community in which prophets were not vague memories from a past era but persons to be honored and reckoned with in its midst.”⁵⁷ It gives specific instructions regarding itinerant prophets, which are, presumably, the prophets in view in 10:7. On the other hand, 10:7 may have in view the local prophets who presided at the Lord’s Supper. It is noteworthy that *Didache* 13:1–3 refers to settled prophets and identifies them as the teachers of the community. Furthermore, *Didache* 15:1–2 states that local bishops carry out the ministry of the prophets and teachers and should, therefore, be held in honor like them. This surely means that the liberty afforded to the prophets in *Didache* 10:7 would have been extended to local ministers.⁵⁸ Freedom in public prayer continued for the first few centuries of the church but was later restricted to prevent unorthodox ministers from using heretical expressions.

In the earliest days it is clear that the bishop was free to compose the eucharistic prayer for himself. ... Hippolytus provides a specimen prayer, but adds that a bishop need not use it, provided that his own prayer is orthodox. By

53. Jonathan A. Draper, “Ritual Process and Ritual Symbol in *Didache* 7–10,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 54 (2000): 153.

54. William D. Maxwell, *The Liturgical Portions of the Genevan Service Book* (Great Britain: The Faith Press, 1965), 8. Cf. Duncan Forrester and Douglas Murray, editors, *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996) 40.

55. “The Form of Prayers and Ministration of the Sacraments, &c. used in the English Congregation at Geneva,” *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing, volume 4 (Edinburgh: Printed for the Bannatyne Club, MDCCCLV; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1966), 4.186. Cf. *The Genevan Book of Order* (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1993).

56. Jonathan A. Draper, *A Commentary on the Didache in the Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Documents* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1983), 223–24.

57. Milavec, *Commentary*, 69.

58. This interpretation is confirmed by the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which substitutes the term πρεσβύτεροι for προφήταις at this place (cf. Jefford, *Commentary*, 56).

the end of the fourth century, unorthodox prayers were becoming a problem in North Africa, leading to the imposition of controls; and finally in 535 the emperor Justinian insists that no one should be consecrated bishop until he can repeat the prayer by heart, which implies the existence of an accepted text for him to learn.⁵⁹

All evidence from the first three centuries of the church, however, “suggests that bishops enjoyed the same liberty of improvisation” afforded to the prophets in Didache 10:7.⁶⁰ This accounts for why we have so few liturgical texts prior to the fourth century. Christians “generally do not seem to have written down their prayers but preferred oral transmission and improvisation.”⁶¹ Thus, the prayer forms in Didache 9–10 provide the structure, framework and basic content for the eucharistic prayers of the community, but they were not regarded as fixed formulas that had to be recited at each celebration of the Lord’s Supper. The prayer forms in Didache 9–10 bear close resemblance to the prayer forms in Reformed liturgies, which are not fixed, obligatory formulas—as in the liturgies of Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican churches—but sample formulas to be used at the minister’s discretion.

2. THE REAL SPIRITUAL PRESENCE OF CHRIST

In the Didache, the doctrine of the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper bears close resemblance to the Reformed doctrine of the real Spiritual presence. There is certainly no hint of the doctrine of transubstantiation in the Didache. To the contrary, the body and blood of Christ are given through the agency of the Holy Spirit, who unites the communicants to Christ by faith. Those who partake of the bread and wine receive “Spiritual food and drink” (Did. 10:3). In the Didache, as in 1 Cor. 10:3–4, the adjective “Spiritual” does not signify the nonmaterial but the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit. “Spiritual” is used in the same way in 1 Corinthians 15:44–49, where Paul contrasts the “natural body” of the first Adam with the “Spiritual body” of the last Adam. The contrast is between the first creation (represented by Adam) and the new creation (represented by Christ).⁶² The contrast is synonymous with the distinction between earthly and heavenly in 1 Corinthians 15:47, “The first man was of the earth, a man of dust; the second man is of heaven.” Hence, the distinction in 1 Corinthians 15:44–49 is between the pre-eschatological age and the eschatological age,⁶³ which is essentially the same distinction in Didache 10:3, where the didachist contrasts the earthly/pre-eschatological with the heavenly/eschatological:

You, almighty Master, created all things for your name’s sake. To *all* people, you have given both food and drink to enjoy, in order that they might give *you* thanks. But to us, you have freely given *spiritual* food and drink and eternal life through your servant *Jesus* (Did. 10:3).

The thanksgiving for creation—especially as enjoyed by humanity in the gifts of food and drink—is followed by a thanksgiving for the eschatological gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ, received by the communicants in the form of “Spiritual food and drink.” The food is “Spiritual” because “it is related to that sphere in which the resurrected One lives.”⁶⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that eternal life (i.e. the life of the age to come) is “ascribed to it as its consequence.”⁶⁵

In the Lord’s Supper, God freely gives us “Spiritual food and drink” and, by means of it, eternal life through Jesus Christ (Did. 10:3).⁶⁶ Thus, the Lord’s Supper does not merely supply perishable food for the body but “Spiritual food” that nourishes us to eternal life.⁶⁷ This is one of the main tenets of Reformed eucharistic theology. As Hughes Oliphant Old states,

To the eyes of faith, the Supper is a sign of the heavenly banquet, and through faith, those who participate in the sacred meal receive a foretaste of the heavenly reality. The bread and the wine of Communion are a *spiritual* food which nourishes us unto eternal life.⁶⁸

The Didache brings us close to the teaching of the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus contrasts “the food that

59. R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 5.

60. Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (London: SPCK, 2004), 38.

61. *Ibid.*; cf. Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2012), 36.

62. Cf. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1987), 83.

63. Gaffin, Jr., *ibid.*

64. Johannes Betz, “The Eucharist in the Didache,” in *The Didache in Modern Research*, ed. Jonathan A. Draper (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 272.

65. Betz, *ibid.*

66. “While the provision of food by God turns all human beings in thankfulness to the Creator, the participants in this ritual meal receive the gracious gift of spiritual food and drink, effecting eternal life, through Jesus the son/child/servant of God” (Draper, “Ritual,” 147).

67. Betz adds, “the eucharistic bread is the renewed gift of paradise and so the partial and preliminary outworking of the end time salvation. The beginning however calls for fulfillment, the partial for the total realization of the eschatological salvation, the sign for the genuine thing” (Betz, 273).

68. Hughes Oliphant Old, *Holy Communion in the Piety of the Reformed Church* (Powder Springs, GA: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), 176.

perishes” with “the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give” (John 6:27). Christ himself is this Spiritual food; he is “the bread of life” (or “the living bread”) who came down from heaven and “gives life to the world” (John 6:33, 51). Eating this bread results in eternal life for the recipients; “if anyone eats of” the bread that Christ will give, “he will live forever” (John 6:51). The language of the Bread of Life discourse is echoed in the eucharistic prayers of the *Didache*:

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life [“to us, you have given eternal life through your servant”], and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink [“to us, you have given spiritual food and drink”]. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me, and I in him [“you have caused your holy name to dwell in our hearts”] (John 6:54–56; *Did.* 10:2, 3).

In the Lord’s Supper, believing communicants receive eternal life and a foretaste of the resurrection at the last day by means of sharing “Spiritual food and drink.” The Lord’s Supper is a means of saving grace; it is a means of receiving Christ himself and the benefits of salvation. The *Didache* further teaches that the benefits received through the Lord’s Supper are given in virtue of our union to Christ. This concept is most clearly expressed in *Didache* 10:2.

We give thanks to you, holy Father, for your holy name, which you have caused to dwell (κατεσκήνωσας) in our hearts and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which you have revealed to us through your servant Jesus.

Hence, God’s holy name dwells in our hearts through his Son. The name of God here stands for God himself and is inseparable from the one through whom the name is revealed, namely, Jesus Christ. Thus, “the name” of God is best interpreted as a circumlocution

for Christ.⁶⁹ The term κατεσκήνωσας points us in the same direction, for in the Fourth Gospel, the term is used in connection with the incarnation of Christ and is further linked with the revelation of God through him. “The Word became flesh and dwelt (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us,” and he has revealed the Father whom no one has ever seen (John 1:14, 18). The connection between the *Didache* and the Fourth Gospel on this point is summarized well by Betz:

On the basis of *Didache* 10:2, the eucharist is recognizable as the sacramental descent and indwelling of Jesus in the heart of human beings, and indeed—since the saying serves as thanks for the meal—by means of the food. That is exactly the position of the Gospel of John, which also speaks more clearly than the *Didache*: “This is the bread which has come down from heaven” (John 6:58). “As the Father who sent me is living and I live through the Father, so everyone who eats me lives through me” (John 6:57). This verse proclaims the eucharist as the sacramental realization of the previous incarnation of Jesus. In the *Didache* the present eucharistic indwelling of Jesus is fairly clearly expressed (10:2); the reminder of his previous coming recedes but is echoed in a veiled way in the reference to the “vine of David” (9:2) and in the hosanna cry of 10:6 at least.⁷⁰

In the *Didache*’s doctrine of the real Spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the historical continuity between the Reformed church and the ancient church is clearly seen. As in Reformed theology, so also in the *Didache*, the Lord’s Supper is a means by which Jesus Christ himself and all the saving benefits of the gospel are communicated to believers through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

3. FENCING THE LORD’S TABLE

In chapter 14 of the *Didache*, we discover that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper took place in the context of a public assembly of worship on the Lord’s Day. The term “Lord’s Day”—an abbreviated form of the expression in *Didache* 14:1—is a technical term that was in widespread use in the ancient church to designate “the first day of the week as the Christian day of regular corporate worship.”⁷¹ Although the expression “Lord’s Day” occurs only once in the New Testament (Rev. 1:10), there is solid evidence that worship on Sunday was the custom of the apostolic church and, perhaps, originated with the various post-resurrection

69. Betz convincingly argues that “the holy name” of the Father relates to the person who reveals him, “in whom he is recognizable and visible in the sense of the Johannine Jesus: ‘He who sees me, sees the Father’ (John 14:9)” (Betz, 270); cf. Draper, *Commentary*, 212; and J. Danielou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea I: The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 155–56.

70. Betz, 270–71.

71. Richard Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” in *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day*, ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 221–50, 231; cf. Draper, *Commentary*, 270–71. E.g. see Ignatius *Magnesians* 9:1; Justin, *Dialogue* 15:8–9; 24:1; 41:4; 138:1.

appearances of Jesus on the first day of the week.⁷² Acts 20:7 is particularly relevant to Didache 14:1, since both texts mention an assembly on Sunday for the purpose of breaking bread. According to Rordorf, the phrase in Acts 20:7a—“when we were gathered together to break bread” (συνηγμένων ἡμῶν κλάσαι ἄρτον)—has “the mark of a fixed formula.”⁷³

Not only is the verb συνάγειν or συνάγεσθαι (cf. the parallel συνέρχεσθαι) a technical term for the Christians’ assembling for worship but κλᾶν (τὸ) ἄρτον also repeatedly occurs as a description of their common meal which was clearly of particular significance for them: in fact, these expressions often stand side by side (*Did.* 14:1; *Ign. Eph.* 20:2; cf. 1 Cor. 11:20). Verse 7a is, therefore, self-explanatory within its own terms: one has the impression that it conveys to every reader and hearer the setting of the assembly for the breaking of bread which was known to each one of them.⁷⁴

Moreover, the grammar of Acts 20:7a indicates that the breaking of bread was “the basis and goal” of the assembly.⁷⁵ The disciples had gathered together “in order to break bread.” Thus, the stated purpose of the meeting is described from the perspective of this particular act, though other activities, such as Paul’s preaching, also occurred in the assembly. If Rordorf is correct that Acts 20:7a is “a fixed formula,” then the purpose of every Christian assembly on the Lord’s Day was “to break bread.”⁷⁶ This is evidently the teaching of Didache 14:1. Moreover, the kind of meal in view in chapter 14 is eucharistic in nature, indicated by the dual phrase “break bread and give thanks” (14:1). This expression echoes the language employed by Luke in the book of Acts to describe the communal meal of early Christian assemblies. As Witherington explains,

Acts 2:42 and 46 and 20:7 and 11 all suggest that this sort of breaking of bread took place in the context of an act of communal gathering and worship. ... Such times together involved praying, teaching, singing, and eating in homes. On the whole then, a good case can be made that “the breaking of bread” was Luke’s shorthand for the special Christian meal that came to be called the Lord’s Supper by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.⁷⁷

It is noteworthy that the Didache provides the earliest extra-Biblical witness to the practice of observing the eucharist each Lord’s Day. Weekly communion was apparently the universal practice of the church in the first few centuries, and it is well attested in patristic

sources.⁷⁸ It also appears to be the practice of the apostolic church (cf. Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17–34). It is important to note that many of the Reformers recognized the Biblical and patristic roots of weekly communion and desired to see it implemented in their churches. It is well known that Calvin was unsuccessful at doing so in Geneva and that he went on record with his disappointment over the matter.⁷⁹ His thoughts on the subject are expressed in several of his writings. The Lord’s Supper, he says, should be celebrated “very often, and at least once a week.”⁸⁰ According to Acts 2:42, says Calvin, “no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving.”⁸¹ Elsewhere, he argues that for the church to be properly ordered, it “would be well to require that Communion of the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ to be held every Sunday at least as a rule.”⁸² Calvin’s desire to have communion each Lord’s Day, however, was never fulfilled, and he hoped that future generations would be more successful at restoring the practice. “I have taken care,” writes Calvin, “to record publicly that our custom [in Geneva] is defective, so

72. Cf. Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (London: SPCK, 2004), 39; Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1968), 215–37.

73. Rordorf, *Sunday*, 199.

74. Rordorf, *Sunday*, 199.

75. Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. by A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance (London, SCM Press, 1969), 29.

76. Cf. Cullmann, 29.

77. Ben Witherington, III, *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord’s Supper* (Baylor, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007) 30. This interpretation is the standard Reformed understanding of “the breaking of bread;” e.g. see John Murray, *Collected Writings* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 2:380; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 3:445–46; John Owen, *Works* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1862), 15:512; Zacharius Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Co., 1888), 586; Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:17.44. It is by far the most popular view among New Testament scholars today; see the long list of examples provided in Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 1003–4.

78. Cf. Didache 14:1; Justin Martyr’s *First Apology* 67 (c. 155 AD); Tertullian’s *Apology* 39 (197 AD).

79. The city counselors of Geneva insisted on quarterly communion because this was the practice of Bern; see Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 19, 24.

80. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:17:39; cf. 4:17:44.

81. *Ibid.*, 4:17:44.

82. *Ioannis Calvini opera omnia quae supersunt*, ed. William Baum, Edward Cunitz, and Edward Reuss, 59 vols. (Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke, 1863–1900), 10.213.

that those who come after me may be able to correct it the more freely and easily.”⁸³

The chief concern of Didache 14 is the purity of Christian worship. The didachist characterizes the worship of the community as a sacrifice that needs to be guarded from defilement in order to be pure, and therefore acceptable, to God. Two specific directives are given in order to achieve this cultic purity. In the first place, 14:1 says that after the saints have assembled for worship on the Lord’s Day, they are to confess their sins prior to the eucharist. Secondly, 14:2 adds, “But do not allow anyone who has a quarrel with his companion to assemble with you until they have been reconciled.” A failure to carry out either directive would result in the defilement of the community’s worship.

The confession of sin in verse 1 is “the penitential prayer of the whole community gathered on the Lord’s Day to offer a pure sacrifice to the Lord.”⁸⁴ This confession of sin is not private but public, since it occurs after the saints have already assembled.⁸⁵ Furthermore, it appears to be a corporate confession rather than a confession of individual persons before the community.⁸⁶ This is suggested by the corporate nature of the sacrifice. In other words, if the sacrifice is corporate, then the confession that maintains its purity is corporate as well.

Moreover, the confession in Didache 14:1 is a public and corporate confession of the community’s transgressions against the Torah. Though the Torah is not mentioned in chapter 14, it is undoubtedly in view, since it constituted the moral instructions that every member of the community had received prior to being admitted into membership through baptism (Did. 1:1–7:1). The key to understanding the connection between chapters 1–6 and the worship of the community is stated at the opening of chapter seven.

Now concerning baptism, baptize as follows: *Having said all these things beforehand* [to the candidate(s)], baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit with living water (Did. 7:1, emphasis added).

Therefore, prior to being baptized, each candidate had

83. Ibid., 38:I.213.

84. Draper, *Commentary*, 280. On the importance of confession in the Didache, see Carsten Claussen, “The Eucharist in the Gospel of John and in the Didache,” in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 135–164, 157.

85. Jonathan A. Draper, “Pure Sacrifice in Didache 14 as Jewish Christian Exegesis,” *Neotestamentica* 42.2 (2008): 231–32.

86. Cf. Draper, “Sacrifice,” 232.

been carefully instructed in “all these things”; that is, in “the way of life” described in Didache 1–6, which is the moral path that members of the community were to follow. Indeed, Didache 6:1 directs them to take care that no one leads them astray from “this way of the teaching [διδαχή].” It is only natural, then, that when the community assembled for worship on the Lord’s Day and confessed its sins, it had in view its transgressions of the moral teachings passed on to them before they had become members. Christ has revealed the “way of life” to the gentiles (1:1), so that his name may be “marvelous among the nations” when they offer him a pure sacrifice “in every place and time” (14:3).

The clearest connection between chapter 14 and “the way of life” in 1–6 is found in Didache 4:13–14, where the candidates are warned not to “forsake the commandments of the Lord” but to guard what they have received, “neither adding to them nor taking away” (4:13). The didachist immediately adds, “In church, confess your sins, and do not go to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life” (4:14). These instructions in 4:13–14 are clearly parallel to the directive in 14:1, which requires the community to confess its sins prior to offering the eucharistic prayers. Though the grounds given in support of the instructions are different in 4:14 and 14:1, they are not incompatible. In chapter 14, the ground is the demand for a pure sacrifice; in chapter 4, it is the conscience of the worshiper. These two ideas are closely linked in Scripture. For example, Hebrews 10:19–22 says,

Therefore, brothers, since we have boldness to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our *hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience* and our *bodies washed with pure water* (emphasis added).

As in Didache 14, the temple motif in Hebrews 10 is dominant, and the concept of moral/cultic purity as a prerequisite for worship is evident in both passages. In light of the connection between the cleansing of an evil conscience and the purity of Christian worship, one may reasonably argue that Didache 4:14 and 14:1 are parallel and complimentary. Draper writes,

The underlying thought in 4:14 is ... related to 14:1. How could the individual believer approach God in prayer if his or her conscience is polluted by transgressions? ... [I]t is the gathered community which constitutes the spiritual temple in which prayers provide a spiritual sacrifice.... When individuals come together to the

communal assembly to break bread and give thanks, they must come with a clear conscience so as not to defile this spiritual sacrifice offered by the community.⁸⁷

Since Didache 4:14 and 14:1 are parallel to each other, we may conclude that when the saints assembled for worship on the Lord's Day and confessed their sins, the corporate, penitential prayer of the community included a confession of transgressions against the Torah as interpreted in Didache 1–6. It is not hard to imagine, then, that the service of worship began with the assembled believers being summoned to confess their transgressions to the Lord.

If the transgressions confessed in the penitential prayer were violations of “the way of life,” then the prayer included a confession of offences committed against other members of the community as well as offences against God. After all, in Didache 1:2, “the way of life” is defined by the first and second greatest commandments—to love God and to love your neighbor. Furthermore, the subject of avoiding and/or resolving interpersonal conflicts is addressed on occasion in chapters 1–6. For example, Didache 3:2 says, “Do not become angry, for anger leads to murder. *Do not be* envious or quarrelsome or hot-tempered, for from all these things, murders are begotten.” Likewise, Didache 4:3 states, “Do not cause division, but make peace between those who quarrel. Judge justly; do not show favoritism when reproving sins.”⁸⁸ This verse is particularly relevant to Didache 14:2 because it addresses the necessity of reconciling quarreling members and also of reproving sins. It is significant that Didache 4:3 alludes to a judicial process of dealing with sins, particularly, in the context of settling disputes. Specifically, it states that in the act of settling disputes between members of the community, those who adjudicate the case are instructed to judge without showing partiality or favoritism. Didache 4:3, therefore, provides the background for the directive in Didache 14:2, “Do not allow anyone who has a quarrel with his companion to assemble with you until they have been reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be defiled.”⁸⁹

If a member of the community is found to be guilty of committing an offense against another member, the offender is to be excluded from the assembly until he has been reconciled to his brother. In other words, he is to be excommunicated and must not be permitted to participate in the Lord's Supper. On the other hand, excommunication is reversible if the offender repents and is reconciled to his brother. On the judicial process involved in excommunication, Draper writes,

[T]he consequences of the reproof [in Didache 4:3; 15:3] could be exclusion from the community, which implies a judicial process. After all, some community process is implied in the decision as to whether someone is guilty and must be excluded and whether the person has satisfied the requirement of repentance leading to re-admission. Clearly the community attributes great significance to resolution of quarrels between its members and presupposes some quasi-legal process whereby disputes can be adjudicated—hence the need to “judge justly” [Did. 4:3].⁹⁰

The ground given for excommunication in Didache 14:2 is cultic purity. As sins against God endanger the purity of worship, so too sins committed against members of the community result not only in intra-communal strife but in cultic defilement, if the church fails to excommunicate the offenders. For this reason, the impenitent are excluded from the Lord's Supper until they are reconciled to those whom they have wronged.⁹¹ As we have noted, the temple motif provides the theological background for cultic purity in the Didache. It is reasonable, therefore, to draw a parallel between the exclusion of non-Israelites from temple worship and the exclusion of excommunicated persons from the Lord's Supper. In both cases, there is an objective distinction between those who are in fellowship with God in virtue of their inclusion in the covenant and, on the other hand, those who are outside of the covenant and, therefore, excluded from communion with God. Unclean persons must not be allowed to enter the temple courts and eat the sacred food reserved for the priests. Likewise, the eucharist is a holy meal reserved for holy people who constitute the eschatological temple and who worship before the Lord as a kingdom of priests.⁹²

We should also point out that excommunication in the Didache not only prevents offenders from taking the

87. Draper, “Sacrifice,” 233–34.

88. Similar instructions are given in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 19:12; cf. Bradshaw, *Origins*, 40.

89. Milavec rightly notes that the reference is in the singular, so that only one person is excluded (Milavec, *Didache*, 533). Draper adds, “If only one person is excluded, this must mean that the person excluded has somehow injured another by something said or done... All in all, therefore rendering the text as ‘having a conflict’ ... leaves open the result that the community would embrace the offended party and exclude the offender” (Draper, “Sacrifice,” 231).

90. Draper, “Sacrifice,” 237.

91. Cf. Draper, *Commentary*, 280.

92. “The exclusion of offenders from the eucharistic meal of the *Didache* is based on a spiritualized understanding of temple purity as extended to the whole community in a fashion comparable to the Qumran *yahad* and the Pharisaic *haburah*” (Draper, “Sacrifice,” 223).

Lord's Supper, it removes them from the fellowship of the community altogether. Didache 14:2 says, "Do not allow [them] to assemble with you." Furthermore, Didache 15:3 states, "Reprove one another, not in anger but in peace, as you have it in the gospel. And if anyone wrongs his neighbor, let no one speak to him nor hear from you until he repents." Thus, "one who has committed a sin against his neighbor is to be shunned until he repents."⁹³ While excommunication may appear harsh to many Christians today, it is not foreign to the teaching of the New Testament. In fact, Jesus clearly taught that the church may excommunicate impenitent members for their offenses against other Christians.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them (Matt 18:15–20).

This passage envisions a judicial process that parallels the instructions in Didache 4:3. When disputes between quarrelling members cannot be resolved, the church may adjudicate the case. Furthermore, Matt. 18:17 and Didache 14:2 teach that if offenders are excommunicated from the church, then they are to be regarded as outsiders and, therefore, ritually impure. Consequently, they would not be permitted to eat the Lord's Supper, since it is a covenant meal that belongs exclusively to covenant members.

In addition to the saying of Jesus in Matthew 18:15–20, Christ also affirms the necessity of reconciliation for cultic purity. In other words, if someone has wronged his brother, he must not participate in worship until he has first been reconciled to the injured party.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there

93. Claussen, "Eucharist," 157.

94. Draper, "Sacrifice," 245; cf. *ibid.*, 247–48.

95. Draper, "Sacrifice," 248. Draper adds that this public expression of reconciliation is the meaning of the Kiss of Peace that we find

remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matt. 5:23–24).

In our estimation, the current practice of "fencing the Lord's Table" in many Reformed churches is inadequate, since it does not do justice to the demand for reconciliation. In many communion services, the impression that is given is that all one needs to do in order to partake of the Lord's Supper is to deal with one's offenses against God. But what about offenses committed against other members of the church? What about the need for restitution and reconciliation? If one has sinned against his brother, it is not enough for him to confess that sin to God. He must also make amends and pursue reconciliation before he has adequately dealt with that offense. Draper rightly says,

[O]ffences against companions in the community could not be settled in the assembly, since they would involve restitution, public apology and the acceptance of the apology. The presence of quarreling members in the assembly thus implied the presence of unresolved guilt, which would profane the purity of the worship.⁹⁴

The General Confession in most Reformed churches, however, gives the impression that we have done all that is necessary to worthily partake of the Lord's Supper if we have sincerely confessed our sins to God. The General Confession says nothing about restitution and reconciliation with regard to sins committed against others, yet this is clearly taught in Scripture.

Modern Christian liturgies understand the General Confession to refer to "sin" in the most general sense, including both the knowledge of or feeling of having wronged God and also knowledge of or feeling of having wronged the neighbour. Both are merged, for instance, in the words of the English Book of Common Prayer and its more recent successors. The result is often a sense that a person can apologize to God for some wrong done to another person and let it rest there. However, the *Didache* indicates that the early Jewish Christian church kept a separate focus on sin against God and sin against the neighbour, so that ordinary worshipers would have been aware of their need to abstain from the eucharist if they were in an unresolved quarrel with their friends, family or neighbours. They were aware that such a quarrel was not a private matter, but defiled the purity of the whole community and its sacrifice of thanksgiving.⁹⁵

While it is appropriate to include in the penitential prayer of the church a confession of all transgressions of the Law (both sins against God and against neighbor), it is equally appropriate to inform the congregation that reconciliation is mandated by Scripture. Likewise, it is important to instruct each member to examine himself regarding sins against God and also regarding interpersonal conflicts with other members. After all, the problem at Corinth that evoked Paul's instructions regarding self-examination was disunity in the church (1 Cor. 11:17–34).

Didache 14 characterizes the worship of the church as a sacrifice presented to God. This is clear in the two directives that safeguard the purity of the sacrifice (14:1, 2) and in the citation from Malachi that provides the divine warrant for the directives (14:3). Milavec explains,

The positive activity of confessing has the positive effect of producing a pure sacrifice; the negation or absence of conflict has the effect of avoiding the negation of the pure sacrifice, namely, defilement. In both instances the motivation is clearly drawn in the direction of assuring the community that its sacrifice is "pure." The citation from the Lord nails down the requirement that a "pure sacrifice" (14:3) was an absolute requirement, for the Lord is a great king whose name must be "wondrous among the gentiles" (14:3c).⁹⁶

Draper points out that Malachi's prophecy, cited in Didache 14:3, was "widely used in the first century AD to refer to spiritual worship as a replacement for sacrifice."⁹⁷ Likewise, the fathers of the church regularly cite this prophecy as a description of Christian worship. The saying appears in Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the Liturgy of St. Mark.⁹⁸ The fathers "regard it as foretelling the Christian eucharist, which is the only pure sacrifice."⁹⁹ That is, the Lord's Supper is the salvation historical fulfillment of Malachi 1:11–14. This is obviously the theological teaching behind Didache 14:3.

It is important to recognize that the Lord's Supper—contrary to the claims of Orthodox and Catholic theologians—is not being described as an atoning sacrifice for sin. Indeed, according to Didache 14:1–3, the worshipers must first be cleansed from sin and defilement before participating in the eucharist. Hence, the kind of sacrifice in view is not a propitiatory sacrifice but a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.¹⁰⁰ The meal itself is a *eucharistia* (thanksgiving). It derives its title from the prayers that accompany it. The eucharist, therefore, may be called a sacrifice because the prayers

of thanksgiving (which are a constitutive element of the rite) are a spiritual sacrifice presented to God. The meal may only be called *θυσία* by its association with the eucharistic prayers. One might say that as the meal takes its name from the prayers, it may also borrow the status of "sacrifice" (*θυσία*) from the prayers that belong to it. Therefore, it is "the meal in its totality" that is "a sacrifice of praise to the Father."¹⁰¹ Certainly, any interpretation of Didache 14 that reads into the text the notion of the eucharist as a propitiatory sacrifice would be anachronistic and contrary to the plain meaning of the text. As Draper explains,

The use of Mal. 1:11 in this context cannot properly be used to justify an understanding of the eucharist [in the Didache] as a sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ. ... Such theological development is nowhere evident [in the Didache], which does no more here than spiritualize the Temple sacrifice in terms of prayer.¹⁰²

In both the Old and New Testaments, we find examples of the temple sacrifices being "spiritualized" and associated with prayer and praise. Psalm 141:2 says, "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." Likewise, the apostle Peter characterizes the church as the eschatological temple and as a kingdom of priests who offer spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ.

in Scripture and in early Christian liturgy. "It seems likely that the widespread practice of the Kiss of Peace prior to the eucharist was the outward liturgical symbol of the requirement to be reconciled to the companion, already in Paul (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26), in 1 Pet. 5:14, and certainly in Justin's *First Apology* 65 (which shows other links with *Didache*);" *ibid.*, 248–49.

96. Milavec, *Commentary*, 78.

97. Draper, *Commentary*, 278. Draper also provides examples from Qumran literature and Rabbinic sources to support this claim. "The sacrifice of which Mal. prophesies," he adds, "is seen in these texts as a sacrifice of prayer and good works. It is seen especially as referring to the prayer of praise, the *εὐχαριστία* or Berakah, but the association of the word *θυσία* more and more with the Christian celebration of the Lord's Supper led to its more particular association with the meal itself, as in Justin. In Did. there is no evidence of such an application of the text to the meal itself, and it should be taken as a reference to the thanksgiving prayers of the community" (Draper, *Commentary*, 279; cf. *ibid.*, 276).

98. See Justin, *Dial.* II 7:2; 28:5; 41:2–3; Irenaeus, *Heresies*, IV 17:5; 18:1; Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 5; *Adv. Marc.* III 22; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* V 14.

99. R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 22.

100. Cf. Milavec, *Commentary*, 78.

101. O'Loughlin, 98.

102. Draper, *Commentary*, 278, 280; cf. Draper, "Sacrifice," 224, 241.

You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people ... (1 Pet. 2:5-10).

The main point here is that the Didache—with its concern to guard the purity of the Lord's Table and the sacrifice of praise offered to God by the church at the Lord's Table—bears close resemblance to the Reformed practice of fencing the table. Once again, we see Calvin's claim confirmed: Reformed worship is in keeping with the customs of the ancient church.

CONCLUSION

As we noted at the beginning of the article, some evangelicals, who desire to connect with the historic Christian church and long for genuine communion with God through historic Christian worship, often end up leaving evangelicalism and taking refuge in Orthodox, Catholic, or Anglican churches, which all claim to have a direct link to the ancient church and maintain that their liturgical customs are in continuity with ancient Christian

worship. As we have noted in this article, the Reformers also claimed continuity with the ancient church. The question then is whose side are the fathers really on? In my opinion, and as I have endeavored to briefly demonstrate from the Didache, Reformed worship stands in close continuity with the liturgical customs of the early church.

Unfortunately, however, the contemporary Reformed church has forgotten these patristic roots. It is, therefore, unprepared to answer challenges regarding its continuity with the historic Christian church and is unable to defend Calvin's claim that Reformed worship is "according to the custom of the ancient church." My goal in this article has been twofold: (1) to show why Calvin's claim was important to the Reformers, and (2) to demonstrate how recent patristic scholarship can be used to vindicate and advance Reformed worship. The reformation of the church is a work in progress—*semper reformanda*. There is much more work to be done, but to continue the work of the Reformers, we have to recognize the value of studying the early church, and we have to recover our patristic roots. This year, as we celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, let us remember that our historical roots are much older and deeper than Luther and Calvin, and by God's grace, may we endeavor to recover the patristic roots of Reformed worship. ■

In Brief: Daily Prayer in the Early Church Hughes Oliphant Old

One of the places we most clearly see the first Christians maintaining the discipline of daily prayer is in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:23-31). After Peter and John were released from prison, they went to find their friends, and they knew just where to find them. They were gathered together for daily prayer as they were each morning and evening. The contents of that prayer meeting follow amazingly closely the pattern of daily prayer as it was practiced by the synagogue. The congregation we are told, lifted up their voices together in prayer. A line from Psalm 146 is quoted. We can take this to mean that the service began with the congregation chanting several psalms. The synagogue normally began morning prayer with the chanting of Psalms 145 through 150. A passage of Scripture was quoted at length and the meaning of that passage of Scripture to the situation of the church at that time was discussed. This was followed by a prayer of intercession for the needs

of the church. This prayer service held by the apostles, like the prayer service of the synagogue, was made up of three elements: the chanting of psalms, a passage of Scripture, and prayers of supplication and intercession.

A good number of the early Christian documents witness to the practice of holding daily prayers at the church, as well as to the fact that Christian families maintained daily prayers at home. The Didache, for example, tells us that Christians were expected to pray the Lord's Prayer three times a day. We learn from Hippolytus (ca. 170-236) that about the year 200 daily morning and evening prayer was regularly held at the church. From the Apostolic Constitutions we get a rather full report of the daily prayer services in Antioch at the end of the fourth century. Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture*. Revised and Expanded Edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 148-149. ■