



OUR WORSHIP

Whether you are familiar with our services or not, we believe it is important for everyone to understand why we worship the way we do. The question of why we do things in a particular way is good and right. Please do not feel uncomfortable to ask us! We're sure some have wondered if this is nothing more than following the dry-as-dust traditions of men. Not at all. We desire our worship to be vigorous and robust in offering praise to God. We find it important to express our worship to God with three concerns. Worship must be biblical, historic, and truly catholic.

The purpose of this little pamphlet is to show that our worship here fits these categories, and why. Then, we will explore some of the specific questions we have been asked along the way. If we do not touch on a question you have, please let our pastor know.

On the face of it, our worship book, called the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) is 70% direct quotes of parts and passages of the Bible. Another 20% is a paraphrase of the Bible, and 10% drawn from biblical teachings. But it is more than just quoting a bunch of verses, more than pulling verses from all parts of the Bible to fit the things we want. The services conform to biblical worship scenes; those in heaven as well as those on earth. Those scenes serve as a model for the worship within the Reformed Episcopal Church, and the larger Christian church over the ages. Thus, the worship is biblical, even if you are unaccustomed to seeing some of the Scriptural principles put into practice.

This short study should deepen your understanding of biblical worship. Permit us to anticipate some of your questions, especially the ones that form the foundation for why we worship the way we do.

Why do we come for worship?

The answer determines everything about the service. Are we there for God, or for ourselves? Why do we come for worship?

Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating . . . one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God . . . I do not praise you. For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread . . . In the same manner also He took the cup . . . For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:20-26)

The answer to the question, “Why do we come for worship?” determines everything about the service. It can only be answered one of two ways: We are in worship for God, or we are there for man.

If we come to worship for man, we become principally concerned with such questions as, “Are we having a good time?” “Is this service giving us a good feeling?” “Are we getting good fellowship?” “Do we like the preacher?” “Are we moved by the sermons?” These questions have one common denominator. They reflect man-centered purposes for worship, because they all have to do with man. Don’t misunderstand. Many of these question touch legitimate concerns. But they are not sound Biblical purposes for worship, for the “coming together” mentioned in the above passage.

The Bible clearly teaches that the purpose of worship is for God. The Apostle Paul rebuked a group of Christians for putting their own selfish desires before God’s glory, for “coming together” for man-centered reasons. The Corinthian church cared only about stuffing their own mouths, having a good time, and celebrating together. They had lost sight of the real purpose which was to “show forth the Lord’s death” (I Corinthians 11:26). They were not to be taking the Supper primarily for themselves, but for the Lord. How they felt and what they liked were not reasons for coming to worship.

As a matter of fact, Christians may not feel good when they “come together.” In the same passage the Apostle Paul says Biblical worship will make some people sick if they come for the wrong reason (I Corinthians 11:30). They may begin to feel miserable or sick because there is sin in their lives. They are made to feel this way so that they will repent. How we feel or even what we think about Biblical worship is not the point. We are not the point at all. God is. We come to worship Him! Once we’ve settled why we come for worship, the rest falls into its Biblical place, making formal worship reasonable.

Why is your worship so formal?

Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:22-25)

Corporate worship is an official occasion. It is not casual time. Instead, it is a special moment when the church as a whole enters the very throne room of God. It is a special time before God in a way that the church is not before Him at any other time. If this is not the case, if the church does not specially come before God’s presence on the first day of the week in its worship, then these words do not make any sense: “Let us draw near [to God] . . . not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . . and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:19-25). From the context of this passage, the apostle compares the temple of the Old Testament and the heavenly temple manifested in the New Testament. The old temple is removed; the veil keeping out God’s people is torn; and access is made available to the heavenly temple. Therefore, Paul says, “draw near” to worship Him.

If the church does specially “draw near” to God in worship, then God’s people should reflect this reality in their attitudes and actions. They should demonstrate all of the dignity and reverence such an occasion demands. This is the heart of why we worship the way we do. We come to worship with the conviction that we are entering the court of the King of kings. Indeed we are! Shouldn’t we then make our actions count, being careful not to do things that are offensive to God? I think the answer to the question of formality lies in the modern Church’s failure to view worship as real entrance into the presence of the Living God. Once this is grasped, however, our perspective changes, and all of the questions about more formal (liturgical) worship can be answered.

We believe that the modern Church has become so preoccupied with the freedom to be casual that it has lost the sense of God as King. The notion of respect, dignity, and honor are gone. If we think about the different times of formality and informality in our own homes, we can begin to see the rationale for formal time in the Church. There are times when we are very serious with our children and don’t want them to take what we say lightly. We expect them to listen and answer back with ordered courtesy: “Yes sir,” or “No ma’am.” Then there are occasions when we play and our children crawl into our laps and get tickled. There are those moments when our children and we dress casually and we play or work in the yard together. There are also times when they want to perform for us. Sons would put on their best clothes and play the piano. Our daughters would put on their best dresses and dance for us. They wanted to dress up for their parents because they were performing.

Isn’t it interesting that when our children want to perform for their parents they don’t have a problem with dressing up? This is the idea of formality in worship. It doesn’t mean that there are not informal times such as our Wednesday night prayer meeting or home Bible studies. It means, however, that there are formal times where we present our best, and perform for God, our High and Majestic King. Just as in life there are formal and informal times, so in the Church there is the same dynamic.

Why is the pulpit off to the side?

If we are drawing near to the throne room of God, the furniture in the room should reflect this Scriptural truth. The Table of communion pictures the Lord’s throne to which the Church approaches in worship. It is in the center because God is the center of activity, not man. To emphasize further this centrality of Jesus Christ, the pulpit and the lectern are placed to the side. Furthermore, Holy Scripture is read in a different place from where it is preached to point out that although preaching is important it is not the same as the Bible. What man says is different from what God says. Thus, the central position of the Table (called an “*altar*” in some churches) is to underscore the centrality of Jesus Christ as Lord and Head of the Church.

Why do the ministers wear special clothing?

In Biblical worship, the ministers wear distinctive garments to cover their clothing in the Old and New Testaments (Revelation 4:4). Why? They represent someone beyond themselves, namely, Jesus Christ. They cover their clothing with other garments to point away from themselves and to Christ. When they lead the worship, they are not just “good old Joe.” They hold an office as a minister of God and the clothing signifies the office. For example, a judge wears a black judicial gown because he does not act for himself. He represents the law and government of this land. In the same way, a minister represents the law and government of another kingdom by the clothing he wears. Just as the

location of the table emphasized the centrality of Christ, the minister's clothing has Christ-centered meaning as well.

The basic color for worship is white, representing the light and glory of the Resurrection. This white garment (a *surplice*) is normally worn over a long black gown called a *cassock*. It symbolizes the death on the Cross. The two together emphasize the finished work of Christ.

Over the surplice and cassock the minister often wears a long narrow strip of cloth around his neck: either a black preaching scarf, called a *tippet*, or a colored one when communion is served, called a stole. This mantle represents the "yoke" of Christ, as He said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me . . . for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). The yoke was literally a harnessing device for oxen in the time of Christ. Being harnessed with a yoke, an ox could bear a load. When Christ says that He is the "yoke," He means that He literally carries the burdens of this life. When the minister wears the stole, he is preaching a visual sermon, reminding people of the Christ who bears their burdens.

To symbolize further that the minister is a servant, he also wears special clothing for his everyday work. This should be viewed as his uniform, just as any special service for the community has a distinct uniform: firemen, police-men, doctors, and so forth. The standard symbol of clerical clothing is the collar around the neck. This neckband was around slaves in the ancient world. The Church adopted this as its distinctive symbol for its ministers to emphasize their being "slaves for the Lord." Certainly every believer is a slave for Christ, but the minister specially represents this function. In his calling he actually symbolizes the priesthood of the whole Church, the priesthood of Christ. The clothing of the minister points to Jesus Christ and sets Him apart in the throne room of worship and life.

Why do you sit, kneel, and stand in worship?

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (Romans 12:1)

Worship is "service" according to the Scripture. It is not passive, no less than a servant is to be passive before his master. It is active. How many times have people said that worship is an experience. This misses the point. It is an act which purposefully engages the participants in adoration of the Lord. Worship is not something to sit back and enjoy. It is spiritual service, spiritual work.

Since worship is an act of showing reverence, various postures are assumed in the service.

The general rule of thumb found in the Bible is: kneel to pray, sit to listen, and stand in response. The worshippers in the REC use all three. Those in the modern church may be tempted to ask, "Why all the getting up, sitting down, and even kneeling? Why can't we just come in and sit down?"

First, kneeling is the most common posture in Scripture for prayer. The Apostle Paul says, "I bow my knees unto the Father" (Ephesians 3:14). He adds, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him [Christ] . . . that every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:9-10). Kneeling for prayer expresses a variety of attitudes: humility, respect, submission, thankfulness, and praise. The common position of sitting for prayer in most evangelical

churches is nowhere to be found in Scripture; never do we see Abraham, David, or even Jesus sit for prayer. Instead, one finds in the Bible a different posture for a very good reason. The bodily action of bending the knees in prayer puts form to our attitudes.

Why? As Thomas Howard writes, “Our innermost attitudes cry for a shape. They long to be clothed with flesh. We can see this wherever we turn: we are happy, and our face muscles stretch into smiles; we are sad, and our tear ducts go to work; we are ashamed, and our neck muscles incline our heads forward; we are awed, and our mouths gape open; we are exasperated, and we throw up our hands; we are angry, and we clench our fists.” Prayer involves the whole person. Worship should not just be a mental act, simply listening to a sermon. Kneeling, in many ways, represents what the whole of life should be.

Second, sitting is an appropriate way of hearing Holy Scripture read and preached. You will notice that the Bible is read more in this type of service than in others. Many churches hardly ever read Scripture, which is a sad statement. In Reformed Episcopal Churches, and other faithful Anglican congregations like it however, the Old and New Testaments are read in Morning Prayer along with a reading from the Psalms. In fact, the Psalms are normally read or sung responsively, again emphasizing the activeness of worship, answering back to the Lord His own Word which is actually what man’s whole life should be.

Third, standing to respond is a way of showing respect. You will notice that every time Holy Scripture is read, the congregation will stand and say or sing a response of praise. These responses are usually sections of Scripture or ancient hymns called *canticles*. The posture of standing is also the appropriate response for our whole life. When God speaks, the Church should walk forward in Christ.

So, the physical movement in the service — standing, sitting, and kneeling — is quietly teaching God’s people important lessons. They are to respond with action when God speaks. Yet, they are not to respond in just any old way they want. They should take action according to the Scriptures. And finally, they are to take action that speaks for what the whole of life should be: submission (kneeling), listening (sitting), and walking in Christ (standing).

Why various symbols such as candles and the cross?

And thus the sons of Israel did, as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the Lord spoke to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel; and they carried them over with them to the lodging place, and put them down there. Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day. (Joshua 4:8-9)

“The common stuff of our mortal life is girded with symbols: wedding rings, diplomas, medals, badges, handshakes, flags, uniforms, birthday candles, Christmas wrappings, bridal gowns, school colors, roses, lilies, kisses, even table settings. All of these gestures, clothes, and artifacts say something. They convey meaning to us.” (Thomas Howard) This truth about symbols originates in the Bible. Holy Scripture speaks of all kinds of symbols that reinforce the relationship between God and man. They are not to be worshiped, but they do serve a couple of important purposes.

First, symbols visually teach important truths in the Bible. In the Scripture above, a pillar of stones was built to symbolize how God had delivered His people. It was made of stones from the riverbed to remind God's people that He had raised them up out of the waters of judgment, reminiscent of the Flood and the Red Sea parting. This symbol was an addition to other symbols among God's people, such as circumcision and Passover, not to mention all the symbols used in the Tabernacle, the central place of worship. It supported a Biblical reality and even supported truths taught in other symbols; in this case it touched on a concept related to circumcision.

Second, symbols in the central place of worship not only pointed to important spiritual lessons, but they created a glorious atmosphere for worship. Remember, if the people of God draw into the Lord's throne room during worship, it is appropriate to decorate the room to reflect this reality. The REC uses candles to symbolize the light and presence of the Lord. Some churches may have great vaulted ceilings or even golden domes to convey the vastness of the heavens of the Lord. The use of symbols to convey special messages and to establish a beautiful environment is commended, although not commanded, in the Bible.

Probably the most common symbol in the Church is a cross. The membership does not worship the symbol itself. Rather, they are reminded of the most central event in history, the Death and Resurrection of Christ, by seeing the cross in the center. The cross is a tree pointing all the way back to the tree of life in the garden. Only this tree is even more the symbol of the cross in the garden on Golgotha where Christ died for the sins of the world. It reminds us that Christ has brought man back to His garden in the presence of God. The cross is one of the fundamental Biblical symbols, holding before the Church her victory over the world.

Symbols are a part of life. They are not forbidden by God. If they are, then "we would have to go through our own houses and throw out all the stuffed animals from the children's beds, and all the pictures from the walls, and all of the Hummel figures and wood carvings from the bric-a-brack shelves. We would never have paid homage at the Lincoln or Jefferson Memorials, since these shrines were dominated by huge graven images." (Thomas Howard) Perhaps some Christians would have no problem throwing out these things, but if they do, it is not because Scripture commands them. Symbols have a definite Biblical place in worship and life!

Why do we read prayers and repeat so much?

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

The whole Church is called a priesthood. Since the people of God are priests, they should be actively involved in worship. They should be the ones conducting worship. In biblical worship, the ministers lead, but the people are actually performing the worship. The people are able to do this because they know how to worship. They have been trained with a tool called the prayer book. It is not intended to replace the Bible. Reformed Episcopalians bring their Bibles to church. The prayer book, though, is to worship what the hymnal is to music. It is designed to equip the people for doing the work of the priesthood.

The recited prayers are part of the training manual for worship. They are not the only kind of prayer, for there will also be “free” prayer during worship. Our Book of Common Prayer has special places for the ministers to say extemporaneous prayers. The set prayers follow Biblical examples such as the Lord’s Prayer. They are usually well-stated prayers that uniquely express the common needs of God’s people. They are called “collects” because they are a collection of the needs of Christians that are brought to God by the minister.

Set prayers are prayers that have a unique history to them. The following prayer has a special story attached to it: “O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; defend us thy humble servants in all assault of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” This prayer was written by a minister in the city of Rome sometime during the fourth century A.D. It was composed at a time when barbarians were about to conquer the city. On the night on which it was prayed, the barbarians mysteriously left and never came back. The Church has kept this prayer which God so profoundly honored.

The common objection to read prayers are that they are not sincere. But this is not necessarily the case. People read vows at a wedding or even memorize what they say. Does this mean that they are insincere? Hardly. In fact, human beings very carefully choose their words when they really have to mean them. Remember, this is how people act at special occasions before special people.

But how about the repetition? Doesn’t this lead to deadness? No, again. Humans usually like to repeat what they love. Favorite, oft-recited portions of scripture such as Psalm 23, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Beatitudes, all serve to illustrate this. How about certain hymns, Christmas carols, or simple songs such as Jesus Loves Me? These are repeated by the same people over and over. Does the repetition mean they are insincere or don’t mean what they say? Not at all. They are repeating what they love and mean. In fact, repetition is difficult when people don’t mean what they are saying. This is true of every aspect of worship.

Finally, repetition has been called the “mother of learning.” Repetition is a way of learning basic elements of anything, including worship. Most Christians don’t know how to worship because they have been led to believe that it comes naturally. It doesn’t, no more than anything in the Christian life comes naturally. It must be learned. And, since repetition is the most basic way of learning, the worship service involves repeating certain important parts.

Why do you observe the Church Calendar?

The strips of colored cloth on the lectern and other pieces of furniture match the color of the minister’s stole to indicate the season of the Church year. The principle of the Church year is that time is to be redeemed and brought under the Gospel (Ephesians 5:16). To help God’s people submit time to Christ, the Church has organized the year around events in the life of Christ, again seeking to keep life Christ-centered. These events fall into different seasons of the year, each season represented by a different color. Also, since time has three patterns — daily, weekly, and seasonal — the Church seeks through its calendar to reinforce on a seasonal basis what is taught in Church on a weekly basis. For this reason, there will be special services at different seasons of the year to focus the Church’s attention on Christ.

- **Advent:** The expectation of the Messiah as king. The lessons have to do with what kind of person He is, why He is needed, and how He comes into the world. The season is both the beginning of the church year by directing our thoughts to His first coming in Incarnation, and the culmination of the church year by anticipating His second coming in glory. The color is purple to symbolize royalty and penitence in preparation for the coming of the King.
- **Christmas:** The birth of Jesus and the events surrounding His Incarnation are read and studied. The color is white for purity and glory. The Apostle John says that Christ is the greatest expression of this glory (John 1:14).
- **Epiphany:** This word, which comes from the Greek, means appearing. Epiphany tracks Christ's appearing or showing forth of Himself to the world and especially to the Gentiles (non-Jews), indicating His world mission as prophet, priest, and king. The color is green to symbolize the growth of Christ's ministry.
- **Pre-Lent:** These Sundays prepare for Lent. They are called by the Latin names: Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima, meaning seventy, sixty, and fifty days before Easter. The color is purple for preparation.
- **Lent:** This season begins forty days before Easter. It focuses on the fasting and temptation period of Christ's preparation for His ministry, a period of forty days. The application to the Church becomes a special time of repentance and self-examination. The color remains purple for penitence.
- **Easter:** This includes Resurrection Sunday and the several Sundays that follow. It points to the Resurrection of Christ and His activities until His Ascension. The color is white for purity and glory.
- **Ascension:** We worship, at this time, Our Lord who has ascended into heaven to be at the right hand of God to intercede for His Church and to build His kingdom on earth. The color is white for the glory of God.
- **Whitsunday or Pentecost:** This occurs fifty days after the Resurrection. It teaches about the coming of the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire, symbolized by the color of red.
- **Trinity:** The final and longest season (six months) of the Church year begins with a special Sunday devoted to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the basis of the Christian faith. Throughout the season, however, the ministry, miracles, and teachings (especially concerning the kingdom of God) are emphasized. The color is green for growth of the Church after Pentecost.

Why do you sing chants, psalms, and traditional music?

In our society, we are conditioned to think only in terms of the individual. The noted professor of worship at Wheaton College, Robert Webber, says that so much stress has been laid on conversion that the services are often not worship-centered in many churches. He says that in conversion-

centered services “worship center[s] no longer on the objective and corporate action of the church, but on the personal experience of the worshiper.”

Webber goes on to say that the shift from the corporate to the individual happened because some early American Christians mistakenly thought that “those who were converted needed less structure and were less dependent on others for worship.” In truth, freedom comes through structure in Christianity. For instance, people can’t make music if they don’t know music theory and notation. Real freedom requires that other people be involved in our lives to help us: to train, to encourage, and “to stimulate one another to good works” (Hebrews 10:24) as the Apostle Paul says.

Why does the modern Church abandon the principle of freedom through structure so often? I believe it is due to too much emphasis on “I” and not enough on “we,” the corporate body. Many come to worship for themselves, what “I” can get out of it, or, what “I” put into it. Biblical worship does not exclude the individual, but it is a corporate act. It draws together the entire congregation as one voice to God and one ear to listen to Him.

Furthermore, corporate worship involves the Church of all ages. We do not stand alone when we worship. We join with God’s people of times past because the Church draws near to heaven where all the departed saints dwell. Our worship should reflect not just our own age, for that would be to exclude those of the corporate body of Christ in the past. It should be compatible with the one, holy, apostolic, and universal (catholic) Church of all ages. This one-ness with the whole Church encompasses every facet of worship, especially the music.

We sing music from the entire history of the Church, dating all the way back to the second century: one example is the *Te Deum Laudamus*, (meaning “We praise Thee O God”). We do not sing music from the twentieth century only, although there have been some fine composers in this century. We are not simply trying to be “modern,” although we don’t want to exclude what is being done in our own times.

We should expect that the majority of our music is from ages past, because two thousand years of music precede us. We should anticipate less music in our services from the twentieth century for this reason. We should also understand that most church music in this century is in imitation of the secular sound. It is not written primarily for worship. At times, it has an evangelistic purpose. There may be nothing wrong with writing music to sound like the secular world for the purpose of evangelization. But the Church of the past understood that the purpose of worship is different; it is for doxology. It therefore did not write its music to sound like the secular world.

Indeed, it used to be that the world imitated the Church’s music (Mozart copied Bach). The church wrote worship music to reflect the action of drawing near to the throne room of God. Again, it operated on the premise that the best should be brought, not just from one period in history but from the Church of all ages. It should not bring trivial or out-of-place music to corporate worship on the Lord’s Day. This service is not for entertainment. (In many liturgical churches the musical instruments are at the back for this reason). The music for church worship may or may not have a contemporary sound but it will be compatible with the purposes of worship.

What is the order of the services?

There are two basic worship services: Morning Prayer and Holy Communion. Morning Prayer is a Scripture-reading service with prayer, and Holy Communion is a service where Holy Scripture is preached as well as made visible in the Lord's Supper. The order of both services is similar, though there are some differences. Dr. J. I. Packer points out that the order is easy to remember because it is the message of the Gospel itself in a liturgical format. It has a threefold Gospel pattern: **CONFESSION OF SIN, DECLARATION OF GRACE, RESPONSE OF FAITH**. This pattern repeats itself three times in the service, emphasizing again and again the only way man may come to God.

Morning Prayer

First Cycle

- **Confession of sin:** After singing and symbolically marching into the presence of God in the form of a procession (from the back to the front by the ministers and other attendants), the first act is confession of sin. Anytime someone enters the presence of God in Scripture, this is always the first step. This is always first in coming to know God. The confession of sin is said by all. It states sins of omission and commission, and sins of the heart as well as sins of the flesh. It is a well-rounded statement to include all of our sins.
- **Declaration of Grace:** After dealing with sin, the grace of God is declared to us. This is a declaration said by the minister. He does not have the power actually to forgive sins. He can only declare forgiveness on the basis of Holy Scripture for those who are "truly penitent." He does, however, comfort those who have confessed their sin with the reality of forgiveness through Christ.
- **Response of Faith:** The congregation responds with the Lord's Prayer. We should not forget that prayer is a statement of faith. It is therefore an appropriate way to respond to the free offer of the Gospel.

Second Cycle

After a brief transition by way of versicles — short exchanges between the minister and congregation — the congregation enters the second Gospel cycle.

- **Confession:** Psalms are sung and said (responsively) together. They are a way of stating man's fundamental deficiencies and needs. They are actually confessions before the Lord about man and God.
- **Grace:** After the second cycle of confession before God, grace is declared through the reading and response of Scripture. Old and New Testament portions are read as first and second lessons. After each reading, the congregation stands and announces the grace of God by singing Scripture. This is all done out of great reverence for God and His Word.
- **Response:** When the Holy Scriptures have been read, the church gives a special response of faith

in the form of the *Apostle's Creed* (or sometimes the *Nicene Creed*). The word "creed" simply means, "I believe." All churches have certain beliefs even though they might deny that they have a creed. Their "creeds" will be their hymns, sermons, Sunday school material, and so forth. Creeds are unavoidable. The historic church has always built its creeds around the Holy Trinity. In both of the standard creeds, the reader will notice this threefold division around Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a creedal expression of faith. Notice that the first response of faith was in the form of prayer. Now it is by means of a creed. The congregation has responded prayerfully and doctrinally. Both are important aspects of true faith in Christ.

Many churches that use Morning Prayer have the sermon and the offering immediately after the Creed; others will place these responses at the end of the service. The sermon and the offering are specific responses of faith. The sermon is to be centered around Holy Scripture, either the lessons for the day or some other portion of Scripture.

Third Cycle

The last cycle is exclusively in the form of prayer. The tension mounts in the service, as the congregation has been drawn closer and closer to God. But as the people come to the Lord and in a sense "sit on His lap," the service ends with petitions—from children to their (heavenly) Father.

- **Confession:** The final cycle begins with another versicle transition. This versicle is an exchange in the form of a confession and re-quest: "O God, make clean our hearts within us."
- **Grace:** Next, two collects (prayers of the group as a whole) and other prayers are offered. One is specifically called, "A Collect for Grace." It is a petition for protection and safety as well as a prayer for righteousness. After the collects, prayers for the nation and the Church are said. They both ask for grace to be manifested according to the particular needs of each institution.
- **Response:** Finally, the congregation prays a prayer of "General Thanksgiving." It was originally written during the time of Puritan England to express man's response of thankfulness for God's great mercy. It is said by all as a final expression of faith. The service concludes on this third type of response: thanksgiving. The participants have therefore responded with prayer, creed, and thankfulness. Faith is prayerful, doctrinal, and grateful.

The Morning Prayer service then concludes with a simple request and benediction: "The Grace." Three times the congregation has been taken through the Gospel before the throne of God. The message of Holy Scripture has been riveted by word and action.

Holy Communion

The communion service follows the same Gospel pattern. Many of the principles are the same, except that now the church responds to God in communion, another dimension of faith.

First Cycle

- **Confession:** After an opening hymn and introductory versicle, the minister prays the "collect for purity." He then reads the law, after which the congregation prays, "Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this law."

- **Grace:** The grace of God is declared by the reading of Scripture: the Epistle and Gospel.
- **Response:** The congregation is allowed to respond in faith by saying or singing the Nicene Creed, listening to the sermon, giving a tithe and offering to the Lord, and praying for the Church Militant (Church marching on the earth).

Second Cycle

- **Confession:** The congregation is called upon to confess its sin as it enters close to God. This confession is similar to the one in Morning Prayer. It is a statement of repentance, emphasizing man's need to turn from his sin.
- **Grace:** After confession of sin, an absolution is declared. Scripture that promises forgiveness is read. The congregation is turned to the Lord as the one true source of assurance.
- **Response:** The congregation responds with the *Sursum corda*, which is simply the Latin for, "Lift up your hearts." At this point, the people of God draw near to the heavenlies such that the boundary between earth and heaven is torn away. The angels are now in the balcony as "so great a host surrounding" (Hebrews 12:1ff). Immediately after the *sursum corda*, the "Thrice holy" (historically referred to as the Trisagion) is said with a brief preface before it. This is a direct quote from Scripture: "Therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious name evermore praising Thee and saying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory; glory be to Thee, O Lord Most High. Amen.'" All of this is a response of thankfulness.

Third Cycle

- **Confession:** The final Gospel cycle begins with the "Prayer of Humble Access." This title graphically captures the essence of the prayer. It states that the Church is "not worthy to eat the crumbs under Thy table." It is a simple statement of contrition.
- **Grace:** The grace of God is expressed in the "Prayer of Consecration," where the elements of bread and wine are set apart, together with the people. Communion is a means of grace: the grace of God is applied through participation by faith in the Lord's Supper.
- **Response:** The rest of the service is one large response. Everything has led to this point. The response of faith begins with the reception of communion. The people come forward to emphasize that they are drawing near by faith. We are privileged to come and kneel before the Lord in a special way to receive His special meal. Afterwards, they return to sing the "Gloria," rejoicing at having eaten with Jesus. Finally, they pray and receive the benediction. Then the service closes with a recessional hymn, as the clergy and other attendants lead the congregation out into the world to respond with good works and living faith.

Closing Remarks

These are the services of the Reformed Episcopal Church. They are powerfully Scriptural, conveying the Gospel with a threefold witness every time they are conducted. Perhaps this is why so many great revivals have followed these worship services where they have been faithfully observed in history.