

# Roots of Reformed Worship

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## The Reform of Worship at Strasbourg

In our first issue, we considered the work of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich. Zwingli brought much needed reform to the Church in Zurich. He produced in the German language two services based on medieval vernacular orders for preaching and for lay communion. In doing this he rejected in total the mass. The effect was to sever the liturgical unity of word and sacrament that had been characteristic of Christian worship since at least the time of Justin Martyr (mid 2<sup>nd</sup> Century). Yet even this was a massive improvement over the medieval situation where the people rarely heard a sermon and only communed once a year. Regular expositional preaching and quarterly communion was a great improvement in the spiritual life of the church in Zurich.

In this issue we turn our attention from Switzerland to Southern Germany, and in particular, the city of Strasbourg. One of the early reformers there was Diebold Schwarz. Schwarz' contribution to the reform of the church was the translation and adaptation of the Latin mass in 1524. This predated both Zwingli's German language services (1525) and Luther's *Deutsche Messe* (1524). Luther's liturgy was also a translation and adaptation of the Latin mass. In fact, almost all of the liturgies produced during the initial Reformation were either translations and adaptations of the Latin mass or adaptations of vernacular preaching and communion orders on the model of Zwingli.

A typical Presbyterian service as we know it today would take three more centuries to be developed. A required liturgy was characteristic of Reformed services until after the Westminster Assembly. Hymns would not begin to replace psalmody until the days of Isaac Watts (18<sup>th</sup>

Century). A return to the public recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed would not occur until the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. From a history of liturgy perspective, a traditional Presbyterian service is really not that traditional. But to return to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the reform in Strasbourg took a very different approach to the liturgy than Zwingli had taken in Zurich.

When Schwarz set about the work of translating the mass into German, the evangelicals controlled only a chapel in the Cathedral, not the main service. The result was that Schwarz translated and revised the medieval low mass, not the high mass. The high mass was the direct medieval descendent of the ancient Roman liturgy. It was a Lord's Day liturgy designed to be performed by a bishop assisted by priests, deacons and a choir. The low mass was a simplification of this complex liturgy to allow it to be performed by a priest assisted only by a deacon. This was required by the multiplication of Masses that marked the official piety of the medieval western Christianity. The Catholic Church of the eastern half of the Roman empire never allowed such a multiplication of eucharistic services and so never developed a shortened, simplified divine liturgy. In Orthodoxy the Eucharist is celebrated only on Lord's Day and only one Eucharist is celebrated in any one location. In the West, Masses were said daily or even more frequently. Most of time the form of the mass was the low form. The low mass was essentially a spoken mass that did not require a choir to chant prescribed responses. This would have significant consequences for Reformed approaches to worship as we shall see later. We may note in passing that Luther's *Deutsche Messe* was derived from the high or sung mass.

Schwarz' initial effort did not initially involve a restoration of preaching to the order of the service. The low mass still contained the lectionary structure to support a sermon, but the actual act of preaching had disappeared. Schwarz' service was only a translation and theological purification of the mass. But Schwarz' work would undergo a series of refinements and improvements at the hands of Martin Bucer. Bucer's revisions restored the sermon among other matters. The result was a significant restoration of the liturgical tradition of the ancient Church, namely the union of the liturgy of the word with the liturgy of the supper. This marked the first major difference between Zurich and Strasbourg. In the name of reform, Zwingli severed the tie between preaching and the supper. The liturgy of supper became a separate and occasional liturgy. The liturgy of the sermon became the regular Lord's Day service of the people of God. In Strasbourg, the Lord's Day service was a unified liturgy of sermon and supper as it had been in the ancient Church. At first the supper was celebrated each Lord's Day in all the churches. By the time Calvin sojourned in Strasbourg (1538-1541), the practice would be for the supper to be celebrated weekly in the Cathedral church and monthly in the parish churches. The reason for the shift to monthly celebration (except at the Cathedral) was probably due to the reluctance of the people to partake on a weekly basis when the medieval custom was annual. We will never know how this would have been resolved because Strasbourg reverted to Roman Catholic control as a result of the military victory of Charles V over the Protestant princes. By 1549 Bucer was no longer in Strasbourg but at Cambridge in England. However, the liturgical work of Schwarz and Bucer would have effects beyond Strasbourg and Cambridge.

John Calvin served as pastor of the French speaking congregation in Strasbourg during his exile from Geneva. While engaged in this labor he translated and adapted the German Strasbourg liturgy for the use of his French speaking congregation. After his return to Geneva, he edited and revised his French Strasbourg liturgy for use in Geneva. The Geneva liturgy (derived from the German Strasbourg liturgy which in turn was derived from the Latin low mass) significantly influenced the liturgy of the French Reformed Churches as one would expect. However, it also deeply influenced the Church of Scotland. Just as

Calvin served as pastor in Strasbourg during his exile from Geneva, so John Knox served as pastor of the English refugees in Geneva during his exile from Britain in the reign of Mary. Knox produced a liturgy based on Geneva, *the Forme of Prayers*, that eventually became the official liturgy of the Church of Scotland. In the same era, others translated the Geneva liturgy into English and Latin where it played a role in the controversies over the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. The Strasbourg-Geneva liturgical lineage is very important in the development of Reformed worship both on the continent and in the British Isles. In our next issue we will consider the features of the Strasbourg-Geneva family of liturgies. ✠

### **Worship Diversity Among Presbyterians**

Reformed Christians have strong opinions about worship. We also have strongly divided opinions about worship. Perhaps no branch of the visible, catholic church has as much diversity in worship opinions and practices as do conservative Presbyterians in this country. What makes this amazing (or depressing) is that we Presbyterians profess to believe that the only acceptable worship is worship regulated by the Word of God. We are not traditionalists who are bound to liturgical heritage like the Orthodox churches. We are not papists who are bound to the pontiff's authority. We are not experimentalists who believe that if it feels good, do it. We hold to the regulative principle of worship. As the Westminster Confession expresses it: "But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture." To this statement of doctrine every Presbyterian minister swears his allegiance. However, if we survey the practices of conservative Presbyterian churches (churches in the OPC, PCA, and RPCNA, for example) what we find is a diversity that reflects almost every approach to worship found in Christendom. In other words, we all agree that worship is to be regulated by the Word of God, but we do not agree as to what that regulation is except in the most extreme cases (e.g., prayers to Mary and the saints).

There are at least six approaches to corporate Lord's Day worship among our churches. We can classify these as follows:

1. Neo-Puritan
2. Traditional American
3. Neo-Reformational
4. Anglican/Lutheran
5. Semi-Charismatic
6. Seeker-friendly

These categories are not hermetically sealed but represent general tendencies. In practice a congregation may have a mix of approaches either in different services or in the same service. Given this variety, it is not surprising that it has become common place to speak about "worship styles." The purpose of this essay is to describe briefly what are the characteristics of each of these approaches. The intention is to accurately represent current trends in Presbyterian worship. None of the terms is intended to be pejorative.

The Neo-Puritan approach is most often associated with a strict enforcement of the regulative principle. It is marked by a commitment to views that developed in the Puritan era especially in England and Scotland. Neo-Puritan worship holds these values:

1. It rejects all prepared or set prayers (including the recitation in unison of the Lord's Prayer).
2. It advocates the exclusive use of the Psalter without accompaniment.
3. It limits all public prayers to the Pastor who alone speaks individually in the service.
4. It has almost no ceremony except the raising of the minister's hands for the benediction.
5. It rejects the Church festivals entirely.

This approach to worship was developed during the controversies in England and Scotland that centered around the imposition of the Book of Common Prayer from the reign of Edward till the restoration of the monarchy after the Puritan commonwealth.

The Traditional American approach is historically a development from the Puritan era. The service described above as Neo-Puritan is the way most Presbyterians in America worshipped in 1740 at the beginning of the Great Awakening. The

influences of revivalism, the liturgical renewal of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the general pressures of American culture produced a significant modification of the Puritan approach. The changes included:

1. Introduction of non-inspired hymnody and musical accompaniment,
2. Re-introduction of the corporate recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed,
3. A minimal notice of the Church festivals (at least Christmas and Easter),
4. Introduction of choirs, solos, and some of the ceremony associated with them, such as processions and recessions,
5. The substitution of Ruling Elders for some of the Pastor's liturgical functions: call to worship, invocation, responsive Psalmody.

Most of us who grew up Presbyterian experienced this approach to worship in our youth. It is the image other Christians have of Presbyterian worship.

The Neo-Reformation approach (which is often mixed with the Traditional American approach) is a rediscovery the Reformation era liturgies of Bucer, Calvin, Knox and others. Some churches have tried to adapt and modify these liturgies for use today. This involves a rejection of the Puritan principle that all public prayers should be free, extemporaneous prayers. Instead there is a return to Reformation era practice of prepared prayers. Usually this approach involves:

1. Written prayers to be used for the service
2. Re-introduction of prayer of confession of sins with absolution at the beginning of the service.
3. Re-adoption of the Genevan gown (an unadorned black robe) for the garbing of the Pastor. This is not to be confused with priestly garbing. The black gown was used by Reformed Churches precisely because it was not Roman Catholic.

Because the Neo-Reformational approach is a recovery of old Reformed liturgical practices, it should be distinguished from the Anglican/Lutheran approach. Some Presbyterian congregations have

adopted liturgies derived from the Anglican and Lutheran sources. Such liturgies have some marked differences from tradition Reformed liturgies, though a blending of the two approaches can be found.

1. Anglican/Lutheran derived liturgies are much more responsive. They have short congregational responses, sung or spoken, that are absent from traditional Reformed liturgies. (In part this is because Cramer's and Luther's liturgies were derived from the medieval high or sung mass while Bucer's, Calvin's and Knox's liturgies were derived from the low or said mass. The sung mass had preserved the dialogue character of ancient liturgies although the people's parts had been largely taken over by choirs.)
2. Anglican/Lutheran derived liturgies usually have a lectionary structure to the Bible lessons that is coordinated with the Church year. Likewise, the variable prayers are tied thematically to the Church year.
3. Anglican/Lutheran derived liturgies usually have more ceremony including recessionals, processions, lighting of candles, and traditional medieval style of garbing.

The Semi-Charismatic approach is an adaptation of worship practices found among Charismatic (or Pentecostal) churches to function within the Reformed conviction on the cessation of revelation. Characteristics of Semi-Charismatic worship include:

1. Use of contemporary Scripture songs and choruses (though these have become popular throughout Presbyterianism) with non-traditional instrumental accompaniment (guitars, drums, etc.),
2. Singing in mass (a number of songs sung back to back, often chosen at the moment),
3. The conceptualization of the service as divided into two aspects: worship (songs, prayers, sharing) and sermon,
4. Use of a lay worship leader to conduct the worship portion of the service,

5. Allowance for vocal free prayer by members of the congregation during the service,
6. Concern for emotional expression: sharing, raising hands, clapping and sometimes liturgical dance,
7. Dislike of a set order and a planned service, that is, a preference for spontaneity.

The Seeker-friendly service is an event conducted during the customary hours of congregational worship. It is called worship but in fact is really an evangelistic event. Such an event is more of a concert of religious music with a sermon. Normally there are only one or two very brief prayers, no extended intercessions and no celebration of the sacraments. These are reserved for another meeting held on a weekday that more closely resembles a worship service. This mid-week meeting is where intercessory prayer takes place and the sacraments are administered.

It is evident from this survey that "almost" anything goes in Presbyterian worship. If you drop in on a Sunday morning service at a conservative Presbyterian church, you could experience any of the above approaches or even a combination of two or three of them! As churches that have been willing to be persecuted rather than to compromise on matters of worship, it is bizarre that such a bewildering diversity should exist among us. What is even more bizarre is the minimal theological literature that Presbyterians have produced to justify and defend their diverse worship practices and underlying convictions. There is very little written on the subject by conservative Presbyterians! There are few conferences held to consider the matter. It occupies a minimal place in the curriculum of Presbyterian seminaries. Presbyterians are pragmatically serious about worship. Presbyterian people choose between congregations based on their worship practices. Congregations advertise for new Pastors by detailing their convictions on worship.

Our desire at Echo Hills Christian Study Center is to foster a serious discussion of the biblical and Reformed theology of worship. This brief survey of diverse worship practices and convictions points to the need to think theologically about worship. So in our next issue we will turn to an initial consideration of the theology of worship.

We will also continue our series on the history of Reformed worship to provide a historical context for our theological reflection. Theology never occurs in the abstract but always in the context of current human struggles and the heritage of those who have served Christ before us. ✠

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