

Gospel Worship Seminar

Goal: To help worship leaders become aware of the historical tradition and liberty characteristic of Reformed liturgy (“order of worship”) so that they can lead congregations in services that both conform to the norms of Scripture and engage the hearts of God's people for worship in spirit and in truth.

I. General Structures of Historic Liturgies*

| Rome: pre-1570 | Luther | Calvin: c. 1542 | Westminster fr. 1645 | Rayburn |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <u>Liturgy of Word</u> Choral Introit | <u>Liturgy of Word</u> Introit or Hymn | <u>Liturgy of Word</u> Scripture Sentence | <u>Liturgy of Word</u> Call to Worship | <u>Liturgy of Word</u> Call to Worship (spoken or choral) Hymn of Praise |
| Kyrie ("Lord have mercy") | Kyrie | Confession of Sins Prayer for Pardon | Opening Prayer: •Adoration •Supplication for Grace •Supplication for Illumination | Invocation (or, Adoration Prayer] ^o Confession of Sin Prayer for Pardon |
| Salutation Collect(s) | Salutation Collect | | | Assurance of Grace |
| Old Test. Reading Antiphonal Chant Epistle Reading Gradual (a Psalm sung) | Epistle Reading Hymn | Metrical Psalm | Old Test. Reading Psalm Sung New Test Reading Psalm Sung | Thanksgvng Hymn Offering Prayer of Intercession (w/ Lord's Prayer opt) |
| Alleluia | | | Prayer of Confession and Intercession | Old Test. Reading Hymn or Anthem New Test. Reading |
| Gospel Reading | Gospel Reading Apostle's Creed | Collect for Illum. Script. Reading | Prayer for Illum. Sermon Scripture | Prayer for Illum. Sermon Scripture |
| Sermon | Sermon | Sermon | Sermon Thanksgiving and Service Prayer | Sermon Service Prayer |
| Nicene Creed (sung as "Gloria") Dismissal of Non-communicants | | | Lord's Prayer Psalm Sung Dismissal (if no Communion) | Hymn of Response Dismissal/ Benediction |

General Structures - continued

| Rome: pre-1570 | Luther | Calvin: c. 1542 | Westminster fr. 1645 | Rayburn |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| <i>Liturgy of Upper Room</i> <u>[Always]</u> Offertory | <i>Liturgy of Upper Room</i> <u>[Always]</u> | <i>Liturgy of Upper Room</i> <u>[Optional]</u> Collection of Alms | <i>Liturgy of Upper Room</i> <u>[Optional]</u> Offertory | <i>Liturgy of Upper Room</i> <u>[Optional]</u> |
| Preparation of elements Salutation and Sursum Corda | Lord's Prayer | Intercessions Lord's Prayer | Invitation; Fencing | Invitation; Fencing Hymn |
| | Exhortation | Apostle's Creed sung (as elements prepared) | Setting Apart Elements | Apostle's Creed |
| | Words of Institution | Words of Institution Exhortation | Words of Institution Exhortation | Words of Institution |
| Prayer of Consecration Kiss of Peace Fraction Lord's Prayer Communion | | Prayer of Consecration | Prayer of Consecration | Prayer of Consecration |
| | Communion (w/ Hymns) | Fraction | Fraction | Fraction |
| Collect | Communion (w/ Hymns) Collect | Communion (w/ Scriptures read) Collect | Communion | Communion |
| | | | Exhortation Prayer | |
| Dismissal Blessing | Aaronic Blessing | Aaronic Blessing | Psalm Sung Benediction | Praise Hymn Benediction |

*The division of the liturgy into two main movements is historic for Presbyterians. Calvin's *The Forme of Prayers* has these two movements: The Liturgy of the Word, and The Liturgy of the Upper Room. This framework was in effect as early as the Second Century. As a result, though there is considerable variety of expression in basic liturgy, it has considerable continuity from country to country and century to century. Barkley further refines the Liturgy of the Word saying it "divides into two sections consisting of the Old Liturgy of the Word derived from the synagogue, basically the proclamation of the mighty acts of God, and the ... introduction, consisting of preparation to receive the Word. This was followed by the Liturgy of the Faithful, which is the response of the Faithful to the mighty acts of God, consisting of prayer for all men, a common confession of the church's faith, and union with Christ in a rite which contains the elements of thanksgiving, commemoration, communion ..." (p. 41)). Thus, a Protestant service without communion is typically divided into The Preparation for the Word and The Proclamation of the Word (with a Response to the Word also common).

II. Specific Features of Historic Liturgies:

A. Varying Divisions of Worship Structure in Previous Discussions

| <u>Calvin</u> | <u>Barkley</u> | <u>Common Perceptions</u> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Liturgy of the Word | Liturgy of the Word | Opening "Stuff" |
| | Preparation | Choir and Singing |
| Liturgy of the Upper Room | Proclamation | Offering |
| | Liturgy of the Faithful | Sermon |
| | Thanksgiving | Benediction |
| | Communion | |

B. Various Emphases of the Different Worship Traditions

i. Calvin and Luther Liturgies:

Attempting to reflect New Testament Worship, the Reformers' liturgies were still an obvious reactive 'reflection' of the Roman liturgy. Calvin was strongly influenced by the worship style of Martin Bucer (more emphasis on sermon, reduction of ceremony, congregational involvement in worship, and Psalm singing), as well as other cultural influences. For instance, Calvin allowed Psalm singing but considered it a form of prayer, and yielded to anti-Catholic pressure to remove an assurance of pardon from his liturgy and the celebration of communion from weekly worship (though Calvin personally believed both of these excisions were mistakes and later regretted he had not been more insistent on their inclusion).

ii. Westminster Liturgy

Almost immediately the divines' exhaustive order was considered impracticable because of its length and detail. This order of worship quickly fell into disuse in England and was never accepted by the Scottish General Assembly in the original form. In fact, the Scottish adopting act which approved the *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* specifically stated that the *Directory* should "be no prejudice to the order and practice of this Kirk" (e.g., Scots resisted chapter-long and continuous readings, non-table communion, and the "long prayer" before the sermon).

The Scots were reflecting the generic Reformation reaction against imposed liturgies. This mindset of liberty of practice within general principles of order created a taste for freedom and variety that Presbyterianism continues to value. At the same time, the lack of specific direction also created an inherent formlessness leading to confusing or competing worship emphases under which Presbyterianism continues to suffer. Most of the battles Presbyterians have waged regarding worship in succeeding centuries (including our own) revolve around how much freedom and how much form is proper for Biblical worship.

iii. Rayburn

Distinctive Puritan influences (e.g., non-liturgical use of Lord's Prayer, non-insistence on "frequent" communion, and distaste for "uncommented" Scripture reading), as well as appreciation for liturgical tradition.

Note the contribution of the Irish order of service which here followed the Opening Hymn of Praise with the following two options:

| | | |
|--------------|-----|--------------|
| Confession | or, | Adoration |
| Pardon | | Confession |
| Supplication | | Pardon |
| | | Supplication |

The Irish also typically followed the call to worship with "sentences" containing an affirmation of faith (e.g. Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-3; or, affirmations appropriate for the season of the Christian year). Calvin's service also opened with the Scripture sentence, "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth" (Psm. 124:8), so that "One's first thought in the presence of God is of his greatness and majesty, followed in the light of this, by a recognition of one's own sinfulness and need" (Barkley, p. 43). This early-in-the-service affirmation of faith also appeared in the first collect of the Roman rite.

Sources for the above comments include: John M. Barkley, *Worship of the Reformed Church* (John Knox, 1967); William D. Maxwell, *A History of Christian Worship* (1936; rpt. Baker, 1982); Donald Macleod, *Presbyterian Worship* (1965, rev. John Knox, 1980); John Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Westminster, 1968); Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come Let Us Worship* (Baker, 1980).

C. Various Questions Arising from the Different Worship Traditions

- Who's right, given the differences in the traditions?
- What's out of bounds, given the commonalities in the traditions?

The answers to these questions become accessible not when one tries merely to determine which forms (or, expressions of them) are right or wrong, but when one begins to discover elements of consistency among them that reflect Biblical principles transcending culture, time, and personal preference.

III. Consistent Elements of Historic Liturgies

A. The Common Flow (looking across the historic structures):

- i. Recognition of God's character
- ii. Confession of our character
- iii. Affirmation of grace
- iv. Instruction for personal transformation
- v. Responding in Covenant faithfulness

B. The Consistent Message: The Gospel Re-presented

IV. Consistent Elements Reflected in Biblical Worship Patterns

A. Old Testament Patterns (Gospel anticipation)

i. Sinai Pattern (Deut. 5)

- God's character recognized (vv. 1-4)
- Man's character confessed (v. 5)
- God's grace affirmed (v. 6)
- Instruction for personal transformation (vv. 7-31)
- God's call to covenantal response (vv. 32-33)

ii. Temple Pattern

- God's character recognized (Ex. 40 & Lev. 1 re: Temple entry, e.g. Psm. 24, 134; cf. Jn. 1:14)
- Man's character confessed (Purification Offering)
- God's grace affirmed (Purification Offering)
- Instruction for personal transformation (Ascension Offering)
- God's call to covenantal response (Fellowship Offering)

iii. Prophetic Pattern

- Isaiah 6:1-10 (cf. Jer. 1:4-10; Ezek. 1:26ff.)
- God's character recognized (vv. 1-4)
 - Man's character confessed (v. 5)
 - God's grace affirmed (vv. 6-7)
 - Instruction for personal transformation (v. 8)
 - God's call to covenantal response (vv. 9-10)

B. New Testament Patterns (Gospel Fulfillment)

(Note: No church service is explicitly described. This may reflect Scripture's own intention to guide us by transcendent Gospel principles rather than time-locked cultural forms/preferences).

i. Individual Worship (Rom. 12:1-8)

ii. Epistle structure (e.g., Ephesians: God's character, human need, God's gracious provision, instruction in godliness, call to faithfulness)

iii. Eschatological Worship (Rev. 4-5; 19:1-10)

V. Basic Philosophy of Worship Form

1. The Worship of the Church is a Re-presentation of the Gospel
(Liturgy by word re-presents; and, Sacrament by symbol re-presents)
2. Corporate Worship Reflects the Purposes of the Gospel in Our Personal Realities
(Bringing glory to God; and, good to God's people. WSC #1)

◇ So many questions and battles are addressed by this understanding that corporate worship is nothing more and nothing less than a re-presentation of the gospel in the presence of God and his people for his *glory* and their *good*.

The *glorification* of God requires us to honor his divine attributes and mighty acts (Psalm 150: 2), and to rejoice in them (Deut. 12:12).

The *good* of God's people requires worship that promotes their love (I Cor. 14:1), encouragement (14:3), instruction (14:3-6), mutual edification (14:12, 26-28), thanksgiving (14:16), witness (14:16, 23), and conviction (14:24-25).

This *gospel* perspective will not allow us to segregate concerns about God's glory and his people's good, and thus grants much aid regarding values that sometimes seem to be in tension in our worship practices/decisions. A gospel priority will always requires us to balance reverence and relevance, transcendence and transparency, liberty and law, elevation and engagement, sobriety and joy, classical and common expression. When our question is, "How can we balance all of these?" then we should not neglect to consider whether what we are doing is consistent with our understanding of how we would present the gospel in this context.

Such a perspective leads us to understand that decisions about whether a church's approach to worship should be low or high, contemporary or traditional, simple or sophisticated, or simply eclectic is not merely a matter of arbitrary rule ("I've decided ..."), personal taste ("It's what I like ..."), church tradition (It's what we've always done"), or cultural preference ("It's what the people find acceptable or enjoyable ..."), but is rather a direct response to that church's Biblical mission, call, and purpose (which have legitimate variations). Always we are required to consider how we may re-present the gospel so as to bring the most glory to God *and* good to his people. This will require (as the gospel always does) that we abandon no essential that declares the glory of God, and ignore no means that rightly ministers to "the necessities and capacities" of the people.

C. Worship Issues this Philosophy Must Address (Which values can we reject?)

1. Structured vs. Free
2. Traditional vs. Relevant
3. Objective vs. Subjective
4. Doxological vs. Delightful (Note: *WCF* and *WSC* #1)
5. Solemn (dignified) vs. Celebrative (joyous)
6. Transcendent vs. Accessible
7. Vernacular vs. Excellent
8. Emotional vs. Cognitive
9. Dialogical vs. Proclamatory
10. Orthodox vs. Contextualized
11. Saved- vs. Seeker-Oriented

◊ Note there is Biblical warrant for each of these characteristics in the presentation of the Gospel. The church tends to go to war with itself when it attempts to eliminate any one of the elements in these tandems with regard to worship form, structure, expression, prayer, preaching, music, translation, etc.

VI. The Aspects of a Worship Service:

A. Gospel in Form (Note: the consistency of the presence and order of these aspects of worship across the historic liturgical traditions. What is normative about the order should be determined not by human tradition but by what makes the Gospel most accessible to the mind and heart.)

1. Adoration (Praise of God's Character and Affirmation of His Call)
2. Confession (Acknowledgment of Our Sin and Failure to Honor Him)
3. Assurance (Promise of God's Grace upon Repentant)
4. Thanksgiving (Praise and Thanks for God's Grace)
5. Intercession (Prayer for God's Further Grace in Our and Others' Lives)
6. Instruction (Application of God's Word to Conform Us to his Purposes)
7. Charge and Blessing (Call to New Obedience in the Power of Grace)

◊ Since the worship service in its essence is a "re-presentation" of the Gospel, then the thought, flow, timing, and order of each aspect of the service need to reflect appropriately how both thought and emotion are affected by prior and subsequent Gospel aspects. [E.g., Jarring movements from high praise to abject confession may make logical sense, but may not adequately weigh the time and consideration the heart (including the emotions) needs to adjust to the different aspects of the Gospel -- creating the impression that our hearts do not have to be in our worship.]

B. Purposeful in Format

1. Often the Aspects of the Service are Related to a Single Topic (usually connected to the season, sermon, or some other instructive purpose; esp. an attribute of God or the Gospel such as King, shepherd, unmerited favor, wideness of mercy, etc.).
2. As Long as its Gospel Purpose is Fulfilled, Each Aspect of the Service May Be Expressed through a Variety of Worship Components.

E.g., corporate confession may be expressed through:

- Pastoral prayer (form or extemporaneous)
- Private prayer
- Unison prayer (ancient or contemporary)
- Responsive reading
- Scripture reading
- Corporate hymn of confession
- Solo with appropriate message
- Choral piece
- Other? Such as sentence prayers?

◊ Often worship becomes stifled when particular aspects of worship are arbitrarily or traditionally limited to expression through particular components of worship.

VII. The Components of a Worship Service:

- A. Calls (Scriptural, Pastoral, Choral, Congregational, Responsive, etc.)
- B. Prayers (Collects, Forms, Scriptures, Extemporaneous, Hymns as per Calvin)
- C. Readings (Pastoral, Congregational, Choral, Antiphonal, Responsive, etc.)
- D. Music: Hymns, Solos and Choral Pieces
- E. Offerings and Collections
- F. Benedictions and Charges
- G. Transitions [Explanations and Rubrics (i.e., instructions)]
- H. Sermon
- I. Sacraments
- J. Other ? e.g. Fellowship, Testimonies ...? Was the Westminster list intended to be exhaustive? [Cf. oaths, vows, fastings (*WCF*, 21.5; 22.1, 5); hearing of the Word, church government and discipline, the ministry and maintenance thereof (*WLC* #108).]

Conclusion

History and Scripture reflect much freedom regarding the use of worship components that express the aspects of our liturgy. At the same time, the precedent of Scripture and history should guide us to maintain the aspects of our liturgy in a form that re-presents the gospel and reinforces our mission for the glory of God and the good of his people.