

WORSHIP IN THE (MOSTLY REFORMED) PROTESTANT REFORMATION (1500-1600)

1. Protestant liturgical spectrum

A wide range of different Protestant liturgical traditions developed due to disagreements about (1) the way to interpret and apply the Bible to liturgical matters, (2) the value of traditions established in the early church, and (3) the scope of reform necessary to remedy the problems with late medieval worship.

Least change: Lutheran, Anglican/Episcopal

Moderates: Reformed/Presbyterian, Methodist

Most change: Anabaptist (represented today by Baptist, charismatic, and most non-denominational churches)

2. Reformed liturgical ideals and critique of medieval worship

Most of the specific reforms of the Lord's Day service in Reformed liturgies can be explained by the basic theological agenda and liturgical ideals of the Reformation movement:

2.1 Returning to ancient sources of the Bible and the early church

- **Bible governing liturgy:** Reformers (especially the Reformed tradition) sought to reform the theology and practice of worship by *stripping away all traditions that did not have adequate biblical support*.
- **Bible in liturgy:** Reformed liturgies preserved the same basic *template/order of service from the early church*. *Substantive reading and preaching* in the liturgy (usually *consecutively through whole biblical books*) with the goals of instruction and application to the hearts and lives of the people. The *nearly exclusive singing of psalms* aimed to form the church by biblical texts and language in prayer.
- **Early church as guide:** The Reformers were not revolutionaries who jettisoned church tradition altogether. Rather, they *sought to reform the liturgical traditions they inherited* from the early church while *maintaining continuity with the best of early tradition*. Indeed, the Reformers appealed to the early church and sought to model their liturgies on ancient Christian sources because they believed that these earlier models preserved the purity of biblical worship established by Jesus and the apostles.

2.2 Christ-centered and grace-centered worship

- **The gospel of salvation by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone:** This was the primary theological goal of preaching and teaching and the motive for reforming worship, church, and society.
- **Increased frequency of communion**
 - For some Reformed leaders and churches, **weekly communion** was to be the norm (e.g., Martin Bucer and John Calvin). Weekly communion stressed the Christ-centered and gospel-centered goal of the liturgy and the intrinsic connection between ministry of both word and sacrament as the concrete means through which we encounter the risen Christ and receive the grace of God in Christ by faith.
 - Others (e.g., the Swiss Reformed churches) disconnected this ancient connection between word and sacrament and modeled their order of worship on medieval preaching services. *For the first time in the recorded history of the church, Zwingli removed the Lord's Supper from the Lord's Day service and reduced the ordinary Lord's Day liturgy to a word-centered preaching service*. The Lord's Supper was only celebrated **four times per year**, which was still a great increase in frequency over medieval practice.
- **Liturgical calendar focused on Christ:** Early Reformed churches pruned the annual liturgical calendar by *rejecting the observance of saints' days* and some legalistic disciplines and *refocusing the calendar on Christ* by celebrating the major Christ-centered festivals of the annual liturgical calendar (Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost).
- **Liturgical space focused on Christ:** *No visual images or art* in order to prevent veneration of images and statues. Reformed churches *eliminated the separation of the worship space* into chancel and nave in order to

express the priesthood of all believers. Churches were built with *central pulpit and altar-table* to make the central symbols central.

2.3 Restoring active, faithful participation in corporate worship by the whole church

- Protestants celebrated liturgy only in **vernacular languages**.
- The minister spoke in an **audible voice** that all could hear.
- Early Reformed churches composed **service books** with fixed written parts for both minister and congregation to speak and/or sing to ensure theological substance and accuracy and the active participation of the whole congregation.
- A truly **corporate confession of sin and declaration of forgiveness** for the whole church became part of the Lord's Day liturgy for the first time in church history.
- **Communion for the whole church with both (ordinary table) bread and wine**. Dutch Reformed, English Puritans, and Scottish Presbyterians celebrated the Lord's Supper *seated together* at tables or in pews gathered around the table and *served one another* by passing the bread and wine throughout the congregation.
- Reformation churches produced a body of **liturgical music suitable for congregational singing**. Some Reformed churches (esp. the Swiss city of Constance and Strasbourg) produced new vernacular *hymns*. Genevan tradition used *psalms almost (but not quite) exclusively*.¹ Most Reformed churches performed *metrical psalms a capella and in unison* by the whole congregation. Psalmody was *originally sung vigorously and with syncopation*.

3. Critique of Reformed liturgies

Several features of early Reformed liturgies that seem inconsistent with Reformed theological and liturgical ideals:

- Many Reformed liturgies **eliminated spoken corporate responses** to discourage the (often) mindless mumbling of memorized prayers and responses throughout the liturgy as they had done during the medieval Latin mass.
- Reformed **liturgies became very wordy** because pastors stressed the teaching function of liturgy by inserting lengthy theological expositions/exhortations into their liturgies of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- Reformed liturgies **emphasized human sinfulness and unworthiness repeatedly** throughout the whole liturgy, which continued and even strengthened the same tendency in medieval liturgies.
- **Monthly or quarterly communion** became the Reformed norm, although the frequency was even less in rural areas lacking access to insufficient numbers of ordained ministers.
- Reformed churches **eliminated the offertory** procession within the liturgy.
- **Arbitrary appeal to early church**.
- **Babies out with the bathwater**: Reformed churches had a tendency to **confront superstition and the abuse or distortion of pre-Reformation liturgical forms by eliminating the forms themselves**. This occurred with such forms as the pastor's declaration of God's forgiveness,² spoken congregational responses, some liturgical vestments, visual images, ancient structures of prayer for communion, and some seasons liturgical year, e.g., Advent and Lent (the Scottish Presbyterians eliminated the calendar entirely).

¹ They also sang musical arrangements of the Ten Commandments, the Song of Simeon, and the Apostles' Creed.

² Despite strong early Reformed traditions, e.g., Martin Bucer: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Let everyone, with St. Paul, truly acknowledge this in his heart and believe in Christ. Thus, in his name, I proclaim unto you the forgiveness of all your sins, and declare you to be loosed of them on earth, that you be loosed of them also in heaven, in eternity. Amen." John Calvin: "Let each of you truly acknowledge that he is a sinner, humbling himself before God, and believe that the heavenly Father wills to be gracious unto him in Jesus Christ. To all those that repent in this wise, and look to Jesus Christ for their salvation, I declare that the absolution of sins is effected, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." Calvin deleted the absolution from his Geneva liturgies as a concession to the resistance of the magistrates.

Justin Martyr (2nd Century)	Western Liturgy (4th-16th Centuries)	John Calvin (1542)
ENTRANCE (CALL TO WORSHIP) Gathering	ENTRANCE (CALL TO WORSHIP) Procession & Introit (psalm) Opening dialogue	ENTRANCE (CALL TO WORSHIP) Opening dialogue
	PURIFICATION Confession of Sin Declaration of Forgiveness <i>Kyrie eleison</i>	PURIFICATION Confession of Sin Declaration of Forgiveness
CONSECRATION/ ASCENSION Scripture Reading (OT and/or NT) Sermon	CONSECRATION/ ASCENSION <i>Gloria in excelsis</i> (sung) Collect prayer Scripture Reading (OT, Psalm [sung], NT Epistle, NT Gospel) Sermon	CONSECRATION/ ASCENSION Decalogue or Psalm (sung) Prayer for illumination Scripture Reading Sermon
OFFERING Prayers of Intercession Kiss of Peace	OFFERING Nicene Creed (Prayers of Intercession)	OFFERING Offering for poor Prayers of Intercession (+ Lord's Prayer) Apostles' Creed (sung)
COMMUNION Offerings of bread and wine Communion Prayer Communion Giving of offerings/gifts	COMMUNION Procession with offerings of bread and wine Communion Prayer (+ Prayers of Intercession + Lord's Prayer) Kiss of peace Communion Prayer of thanksgiving BLESSING Benediction	COMMUNION Words of Institution & Warning Communion Prayer Communion Prayer of thanksgiving BLESSING Benediction