

A HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION

What is Worship?

English root: “To ascribe worth or worthiness to an object deserving of praise.”

More than just singing or corporate ritual, the Apostle Paul gives a spiritual meaning to it in Romans 12:1:

“Present your bodies (entire beings) to God as your spiritual act of worship.”

Therefore, any history of worship is a history of God’s people and the ways they **PRESENT THEMSELVES TO GOD.**

Throughout most centuries of Church history, Christian worship has been primarily **liturgical**, characterized by **prayers and hymns**, whose texts were rooted in, or closely related to, the **Scripture**, and particularly the **Psalter**. Very little or no spontaneous or devotional prayer in formal worship after Apostolic Age (AD 50-150)

Set times for prayer during the day were established (based substantially on Jewish models), and a **festal cycle** throughout the **Church year** governed the celebration of feasts and holy days pertaining to the events in the life of Jesus, the lives of the saints, and aspects of the Church's perception of God.

Latin phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* ("the rule of prayer is the rule of belief")—that is, the specifics of one's worship express, teach, and govern the doctrinal beliefs of the community.

I Early Church Fathers

The very early development of Christian worship is lost in the mists of history, but Christian worship is, in general, rooted in the worship of Judaism of the **Second Temple period** (Herod’s temple completed 20 BC).

The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles present the very early Christians, then still very much a part of the Jewish scene, as frequenting both the **Temple and synagogues**, as well as worshipping in **private homes**, frequently to "break bread," a term which connotes both the sharing of a meal and, within that context, celebrating the **Eucharist**.

Acts 2:42 presents the very early Church of Jerusalem as "continuing in the

- 1) **Apostles' teaching**
- 2) **Fellowship** [or "communion - *koinonia*"],
- 3) **The breaking of bread** (including music & sacraments)
- 4) **Prayer or “the prayers”**

Psalms and hymns based on them were a regular feature of Jewish worship in the synagogues, and these were also incorporated into **Christian hymns**. (See Phil. 2:6ff)

See Eph. 4:18-19 Col. 3:16-17

- Psalms
- Hymns
- Spiritual songs

All describe the Spirit-filled life!

Typical home-church meeting: See I Cor 14:26

- A hymn
- A word of instruction
- A revelation
- A tongue
- And interpretation

Method: Orderly worship & operation of the gifts v. 33

Result: Everyone is instructed and encouraged v, 31

An Early Renewal Movement gone wrong: MONTANISM (AD 120-160)

Based in Sicilia (modern Turkey) an early leader Montanus tried to combat **formalism** in the early church with an emphasis on personal prophecy from females (grew out of pagan goddess worship; female priestesses of Cybil) fiercely ascetic with an extravagant eschatology.

- **Problem:** An untrained leadership & unchecked prophecy.
- **Result:** The church condemned the movement & forbade the operation of the spiritual gifts by the laity; limited it to clergy instead of bringing it into its proper role.

II Era of Constantine/Establishment of the Eastern and Roman Churches/Decline of the Roman Empire/Rise of the Byzantine Empire

AD 313 : Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity, made it the official religion of Rome, as the Roman Empire began its decline, Byzantium becomes Constantinople until its capture by the Muslims during the Crusades (Saladin); renamed Istanbul

Two Rival Churches: (*But still one church*)

The Eastern: Greek in character, highly **ICONIC** (*Ikon*) not interested in political power

The Roman: Based in Rome, the power that begins to replace the Roman Empire as the political power in the West; highly **CREEDAL & SYMBOLIC** (statues of saints)

The Bishop of Rome becomes the first Pope (Leo 440-461)

III Medieval Practices (400-750 AD)

- **Rise of Monasticism**
 - Preservers of the Scriptures
 - Prayer communities
 - Some of the only literate members of society (-1%)
- **Rise of the Creeds**
 - Caesarea, Jerusalem, Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian
- **Rise Of the Liturgy exclusively in Latin;** at first the *lingua franca* of the Western world

Why? Memorization of doctrine since no one could read

Result: Highly formalized worship & rituals led by professionals
Clergy - “*kleros*” one who reads, i.e. “clerical”
Laity - “*laos*,” illiterate

- **Rise of CHRISTIAN VISUAL ARTS** as teaching tools; use of beautiful objects and colorful richly decorated vessels, vestments, crosses and images.

IV Charlemagne & the Holy Roman Empire 768-950AD

- Charlemagne saves Christianity from the return of pagan culture at the cost of the State domination of the Church
- Idea of Revived Roman Empire under Christ
- Reintroduces classical education
- Rise of Cathedral schools for music and arts

V Final Separation of Eastern & Western Churches in 1054/Crusades/Attempts at Reform

East

Greek Orthodox
Constantinople
Patriarch
Worship in Greek
Icons used in worship

West

Roman Catholic
Rome
Pope
Worship in Latin
Return of classical sculpture

(church architecture/saints)

- Theological disputes
- Real issue was Papal authority
- “Outside the Church – no salvation” – they excommunicated each other – only rescinded in 1962!

Rise of Scholasticism: Thomas Aquinas 1225-1274 – mechanistic view of worship and sacraments

Monastic Reforms - Calling the church back to purity and love for Jesus

- Bernard of Clairvaux 1090-1153 “Fairest Lord Jesus”
- Thomas Beckett 1154-89
- Francis of Assisi 1182-1226
- Dominic de Guzman 1170-1221 (battled heresy, ended up presiding over the Inquisition)

VI Pre-Reformation Reformers

- Peter Waldo & the Waldesians (France): 1st to being worshipping in vernacular
- John Wycliffe: first translation of Bible into English
- John Hus: “The Church is founded on Christ, not Peter”
- Savronala: Italian Dominican priest preached devotion to Christ not the Church
- William Tyndale: Father of the English Bible

VII The Reformation Revolution

The Great Division: The Protestant Movement from within Roman Catholicism

Instigated by Luther, Calvin, preceded by Hus, followed by Zwingli (Switzerland), Knox (Scotland, founder of Presbyterianism)

- Historically, a reaction to the excesses and political repression of the Catholic church; selling of indulgences by Pope Leo to build St Peters Basilica in Rome
- 95 Theses at Wittenberg, Saxony (modern E. Germany)
- Luther re-introduced the **priesthood of all believers** - no longer could only priests celebrate the Eucharist or other sacraments
- Reintroduced the Scriptures to ordinary Christians; contemporaneous with the invention of the printing press and movements toward democracy springing from The Enlightenment

The Division between the Lutheran/Evangelical Church (Luther) & the Reformed (Calvin)

Lutheran/Evangelical (Luther)

Worship Maxim: If it’s not forbidden by Scripture, leave it alone; i.e. rituals

Reformed/Presbyterian (Calvin/Knox)

Worship Maxim: If it’s not explicit in Scripture, don’t do it
“Regulative principle of worship”

Spiritual Heirs

Lutheran/Evangelical (Luther)

Lutheran Church
Anglican/Episcopal/Methodists
Holiness/Pentecostal sects
“Experience” sects
 Quakers
 Shakers
 Dunkers
 Levellers
 Diggers
Ana-Baptists
 Mennonites
 Hutterites
 Evangelical Free
 Baptists (except Southern)
 Mormons
Puritan sects in England and America

Reformed/Presbyterian (Calvin/Knox)

Reformed Church
Presbyterian
Adventists
Congregationalists
Brethren in Christ
 Disciples of Christ
 Christian Church
 Church of Christ
Unitarian/Universalist Church
Christian Science
Jehovah’s Witnesses

Luther vs. Calvin

Generally: Luther emphasized a warm love for Christ; Calvin stressed forensic (legal) righteousness before God; both on the basis of faith not works

Overview of Reformation and its spread

- Northern Europe (Germanic languages) embraced it (except Ireland) and thus it spread to N America which generally remained Reformed until the great European immigrations of the mid to late 19th century
- Southern Europe (Romance languages) did not and remained Catholic
- The Eastern Church (Slavic languages) stayed Orthodox as before; did not have a Reformation
- EXCEPTION: Germany and Austria

VIII Catholic Reformation (15th-18th C.)

- Largely unsuccessful at reform but Catholic missions and social orders resulted
- Thus much of Latin America was converted while Protestants remained Calvinistic for another 200 years!

IX Pietism, Methodism & Evangelicalism 1665-1799

Problem with the Reformation: More “reform” than “revival”

Reform: Structures to hold revival

Revival: Church comes to life; lit. “warmed hearts”

Awakening: Impact on society

Background: the Religious wars of the 16th & 17th C.

X. American Revivalism 18th/19th C.

- The Anglican Church became the dominant church of the Colonies, though not the state church:
- Methodists - A derisive name arose from the Wesley’s use of spiritual techniques to foster spiritual fervor:
 - Prayer meetings
 - Hymn sings
 - Altar calls
- The 3 Great Awakenings all resulted from the impact of Pietism and Methodism (John Wesley)
- First 1726-56, Jonathan Edwards/George Whitfield
- Second 1813-46, Charles Grandison Finney
- Third 1850-60, “Layman’s Renewal” No singular leader but D.L. Moody was converted during it

All three Awakenings were accompanied by new forms of hymnody and worship renewals;

Charles Wesley: The hymn writer of the Awakenings

Another Post-Reformation split in Protestantism between emphasis on:

- Personal Conversion vs.
- Dependence on Creeds and the Sacraments

19th C saw the reintroduction of the charismatic gifts; healings, tongues associated with Dispensationalism

Many fleshly and heretical cult-like movements

X. 20th Century Revivals & Renewals

- **Modern Evangelicalism:** Heirs of DL Moody; Non- Pentecostal but full of spiritual life; worship characterized by lively gospel songs, usually pop tunes of the day converted to Christian themes; rejection of older pre-Wesley & Reformation era hymns
- **Early Pentecostalism/Holiness Movement:** Charles Parham/ JS Seymour the Azusa Street Revival; first connection to charismatic gifts with “Baptism of the Holy Spirit,” especially tongues/ecstatic speech
- **The Charismatic Renewal Movement:** Introduction of charismatic phenomena to formerly “Mainline” churches *without* the traditional legalism of Holiness; leading songwriters Bill & Gloria Gaither, bridged the gap between Pentecostals and Evangelicals
- **The Jesus Movement:** Emergence of Contemporary Christian Music and Rock
- **Renewal of Christians in the Arts:** Rejection of earlier Pietistic and Holiness views of the arts as worldly or evil
- **Emergent Church/ Ancient Future Worship:** (Robert Webber) Return to and rediscovery of the Liturgy, corporate prayers and creeds with a renewal mindset; connected to postmodern longing for connection and certainty; rejection of overt individualism in relation to God

Each new move of God is accompanied by a worship renewal appropriate for the age and culture.....But the fundamentals remain:

One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One Spirit and
TO GOD BE THE GLORY!!!