

Reaction:

Worship Developments after the Reformation that Call for Careful Appraisal

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TYLER R. PEIL

From the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, questions about the substance and form of worship have hinged on questions about the nature of the gospel—what is it and what is its goal? The Reformed, Pietists, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Revivalists, Pentecostals, and Evangelicals all bring their particular theological understanding of the nature of the gospel to bear on liturgics, preaching and hymnody.

Lex orandi, lex credendi is observable in church history whether faith and practice are orthodox or not. Lutherans constantly evaluate worship forms and do this best when they are clear about the use and telos of both the law and the gospel. A historical analysis of worship practices outside of Lutheranism aims to help us view our own time and practice more clearly and reinforces the truth that how one worships reflects what they believe and vice versa.

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
and every common bush afire with God,
but only he who sees takes off his shoes.¹

It is a particular gift of grace to see the divine behind the common, but as you pray before presiding or in the smiling eyes that have come so close to receive what looks like only a wafer, probably in a moment you did not see coming, but especially needed, it hits you profoundly: this place is crammed with heaven. Not the same old sinner, but the body of Christ, the communion of saints, his. Not only a wafer, Jesus Christ here for this one in front of you. Not a boring hymn or lackluster prayer, but hearts alive to God, stirred to sing and call on his holy name. Not just another Sunday, the day the Lord has broken into our time, in real time, to bring down every kind of kindness and grace that a soul could hold. For all you have put into this, you are relieved and delighted to remember you are just an instrument, but one who too, is crammed with heaven.

I suggest we see far too little behind the common (service). I suggest you read or reread Mark Paustian's devotional *Our Worth to Him*, for a "thick description" of what is really going on when the two or three come together in the Name. Paustian has a distinct advantage in my opinion, lenses of Lutheran theology, that allow him to see Christ all over the place, and especially in the particular places (means) the Lord has promised to cram full of heaven.² He is not searching for a spirit or the Spirit, he is resting as one who has been found and takes off his shoes, not for fear, but for the joy and holiness of it all. This kind of seeing is more than a few convictions; it is a paradigm.

For my part, I am offering a "thin description" of what you see with a different set of theological lenses, or "spirit," as Luther might say.³ I have taken the assignment to be telling you the story of what has been going on around us from St. Mary's in Wittenberg, 1524, to St. John's in Wisconsin, 2024. Did Protestant worship start singing the new song in a different key? Or is it a different song altogether?⁴ Is it hard to tell sometimes?

I know some things to be true of you because I worship and serve at worship in the same culture you do. Since the 1700s American Protestants have been trying to make sense of a rapidly changing culture and how they fit in it, and how the gospel fits. There are anxieties about how to worship and how to evangelize among pastors. Sometimes the members of a congregation press them on the pastor. I think we are always wise not to act too quickly, fellow sons of Luther. We are responsible to evaluate and reevaluate, to be well-informed, thinking men of God, who handle sacred things with all the wisdom and love we can muster and who press on together, nudging each other along the way to make each other better men and better pastors.

¹ Excerpt from *Aurora Leigh*

² He is a theologian of the cross in the way of Luther, in my opinion...seeing behind things by trusting God's perspective in faith while so many things look so weak and plain in human perspective.

³ He could meet Ulrich Zwingli at 14 points in Marburg. But the radically different understanding of the Holy Supper left him saying, "We are of a different spirit than they." Philip Cary has called the gap between Luther and Zwingli (or their ancestors) "narrow but deep."

⁴ Maybe something "painted another color" (FC SD X 5: Under the title and excuse of outward adiaphora, things are proposed that are in principle contrary to God's Word, although painted another color.)

Located. Incarnate.

Lutheran theology and practice of worship is centered on Christ's salvific benefits delivered in the means of the Holy Spirit

Literary critic Harold Bloom identifies “the American religion” with the beginning of the Second Great Awakening with a revival at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, 1801. His thesis is that American Christianity has a enthusiastic and gnostic core:

Walt Whitman was the crucial celebrant of what I think we yet will call the American Religion, the momentary fusion of all denominations in an amalgam of Enthusiasm and Gnosticism that marked the beginning of the end of European Protestantism in America, and which began in the Cane Ridge Revival of 1800.⁵

Bloom is no friend of Christianity, but his diagnosis has something worth investigating: namely, the location of God among men. Everyone wants to be in touch with God. But how? Where?

It is my thesis that considering the location of the divine is a helpful way to see our position in the story of Christian worship. Where one seeks God is an epistemological and theological question that has immense implications for Christian practice. The Lutherans invest heavily in the gospel being an external, objective, reality, the touch of God really present, graciously for us, within borders revealed: the Christ and the means of his Holy Spirit. Lutheran worship assumes that we humans do not merely assent to something intellectually, but worship is a bodily experience because we are body and soul creatures, fully redeemed.⁶

Adam and Eve wanted knowledge that was not given to them and they sought divine things in the one place they were told not to go. East of Eden, most everything they had known destroyed, where would the One who made them and made them the Promise come close again? How would they know?

The Lord revealed himself in some more immediate ways than we are used to: a pillar of fire, a cloud of glory, thunder at Sinai, in visions and dreams. Yet, he is still hidden while revealed in those things, cloaking himself in means to be near without damage to them. Even as he spoke directly, he mediated his presence, locating himself in times and places. He spoke to them in the voice of Moses and prophets. He was present in a particular Holy of Holies. For Moses, Nadab, Aaron, Abihu and the 70, a theophany on a particular pavement of sapphire.

He devised the patterns for his children to find Him and to approach Him safely. They would be consecrated (Ex 19:10) and wash their garments. They would receive the covenant with blood (Ex 24:8). The priests would sacrifice on their behalf (2 Chr 5:6). They, in turn, praised their Lord with thanksgiving and prayer (2 Chr 5:11-13). But all of this, by design, left them hoping for a true and perfect Son of God and in the last days, he arrived, the Son of David.

⁵ Harold Bloom, WSJ, quoted at <https://www.historynewsnetwork.org/article/harold-bloom-walt-whitman-americas-greatest-artist>

⁶ I have philosophical questions that I have not reached the bottom of, but I like thinking about. Consider the question: what makes me a Christian? Is it believing? Yes. But that has begun to sound like a classic post-Enlightenment answer to me - centered on intellectual assent. Faith in Christ? Yes. But this line is intriguing: worship is what makes us Christian. The Divine Service is God acting and justifying and forming by Word and Sacrament. Is it another way of saying, *lex orandi, lex credendi*?

He came with such specific borders and definition - the human body of Jesus Christ - that the Magi could worship Him in a house. And Joseph of Arimathea could move his dead body into a tomb. This body is the location of God's Word (Jn 1:1; Jn 14:6-11; Jn 5:24, et al). This body is the Promise enfleshed who came from the Father and has made him known. (John 1:18). So the Lord's glory is hidden behind human flesh and no one has to wonder where to find him. You cannot reach him or see him but you can know him and it is no secret (knowledge), "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known." (Jn 1:18, NIV) He, in his flesh, is the way into the presence of the holiness of the Father (Heb 10:20) for us in heart and body (Hebrews 10:22) to enter his presence, by way of his flesh, not otherwise. We share in his life, death and resurrection by faith in Him. We do this together, as community of God (Heb 10:25). And in this we have a safe entrance to God's presence to receive divine gifts. We call this Christian worship: the ones washed in the blood come into the holy place through the flesh of the flawless High Priest who is also the unblemished, atoning sacrifice.

They come to heavenly Jerusalem when they gather in his presence as now and not yet, and earth and heaven overlap in Christ. The writer to the Hebrews tells us what is happening:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:22-24)

To Jesus the Mediator of the better covenant still mediating. (Heb 8:6; FC SD VIII, 78) To the new covenant. To the sprinkled blood that speaks.

By the analogy of faith, those with ears to hear know where to find this safe entrance before God:

But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom 10:6-9)

Not climbing or digging. He is near in a word, the word concerning faith, Jesus is Lord, raised from the dead. The Word is preached and the Lord is right there. (LC V 31) *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. (Rom 10:17)*

So they call on the one they have heard of (Rom 10:14), by name, and the Lord is right where his name is. (Num 6:24 and 1 Kgs 9:3)

They come to receive his body and his blood, right where he says he will be, in the bread and the wine (Matt 26). They come to a sprinkled baptismal water that holds a flood of grace and they bring their children and they are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Ac 2) They come for someone to speak the word of release from God: I forgive you all your sins. (Jn 20)

This is the stunning thing. He is hidden there in the gospel to reveal, to bless us, to touch our hearts, to forgive our sin, to make us alive, to keep us alive, to put who He is right in front of our faces, to show us who we are, to free us from ourselves for divine life, to enlighten, sanctify and keep us in the one true faith which pins every hope on Christ. The stunning thing is that *what* God reveals is his giving heart, his deep desire to have us, his promises that will not fail us, his abiding presence with us and all of this in his Son and him crucified. And all of his Son hidden in word and sacrament.

So to come together as the assembly to draw near to God has clearly defined borders. It is quite as simple as going to the refrigerator because that is where the food is located, food you need to live. Can you imagine if you had an impulse to try to find supper at the table but never went to the fridge? You sit at the table and wait. There is a specific place you find the food.

Lutheran theology of worship doesn't immediately dictate a form for Lutheran practice; it forms a paradigm for the best practice. A believer stands in the presence of God to receive the gifts of the Gospel, mediated through the means of the Spirit, and to receive this goodness with thanksgiving as a community. It is a paradigm of gift through means; mediated presence and yet real presence. Hidden presence but also revealed truth. These are sturdy borders. We can know where the one thing needed is located. There is a place you always find God for you.

So there is a clear goal in worship and it is the gospel. The gospel. More than a transfer of information or remembrance, it is a present reality where the Holy Spirit breaks in, God crushes, comforts, saves, and empowers. The goal is the gospel delivered as an end in itself. The means are the ends (that justify!). It is thus sacramental, the gift found where it is promised.

This was the theology that formed the historic pattern we usually call "the Liturgy." Drawing on the synagogue and Passover, the Christians had a home for the proclamation of Christ and serving up Christ's sacraments.

The remarkable resilience of what we call liturgy is a study in itself. As Pr. Behnken showed us, it was mostly standing as the house that earlier Christians built, with rooms and furniture and landscaping added along the way, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. But it was home. A location for meeting with the Lord because it is a house built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, a house built for proclaiming Christ with a bath for washing and a table for supper with Jesus.

When you have the best gifts a human being can receive on this planet, you need a place and space that uses them well. Here, pastor, is the home built over centuries, the way the conversation has been going between the Lord and his people for a very long time before you came along. Find a place there in the long wisdom of the Church. Take it, use it well, pass it down to the who knows how many years that come after you. By the way, it doesn't always have rich curb appeal, but get the people inside and pour yourself into its sameness and variety with passion and they'll be grateful for that home.

The Lutherans

Luther's worship reform was conservative but opened a door to reforms he never intended

The Babylonian Captivity made the case that worship depends entirely on God's activity, not on human beings. As radical as *The Babylonian Captivity* was in the Western Church, it was

actually extremely conservative in its affect on worship. James White: “Luther’s quarrel with existing worship was a lover’s quarrel. [...] For Luther, a break with the past could be justified only by the highest of authorities, the word of God.”⁷

In hindsight, *The Babylonian Captivity* was certainly an impetus of the unleashing of Christian worship and doctrine from its medieval forms. In Wittenberg it was a conservative Reformation. But elsewhere it became more like letting a pendulum loose from one extreme with no mechanism to stop it in the middle.

In 1523, Luther cleansed the divine service of the “prattling and rattling” of ceremonies that kept Mary from sitting at the feet of Christ for the one thing needed, as he described it.⁸

The order of worship (*Formula Missae* - 1523):

Introit
 Kyrie
 Gloria
 Collect
 Epistle
 Gradual or Alleluia
 Gospel
 Nicene Creed
 Sermon
 Sursum Corda
 Preface
 Words of Institution
 Sanctus
 Benedictus and Elevation
 Lord’s Prayer
 The Peace
 Optional Prayer
 Distribution (and Agnus Dei)
 Collect
 Benedicamus
 Benediction

There is so much going on here. Consider how the laity are learning they are the priesthood of believers. Where only the priests had formerly received the Sacrament weekly or daily, now it was the privilege of the assembled people of God. Further, the people received the cup as only the priests had (for maybe 400 years). *The Babylonian Captivity* had made this statement doctrinally, but the people learned it in actual practice.

Preaching became central to Lutheran worship, usually an expository on a biblical text but with connection to the lives of the common people and centered on justification by faith in

⁷ White, James. *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989) 37

⁸ Luther, Martin. “Concerning the Order of Public Worship, 1523.” Pages 7-14 in vol. 53 of *Luther’s Works*. Translated by Paul Zeller Strodach. Edited by Ulrich S. Leupold. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965.

Christ. They were treated to the joy of being brought from dead to alive, entirely on the back of Christ and his merit and his Spirit.

Reflecting justification by grace through faith in Christ alone, Luther's worship reforms inspired hundreds of church orders throughout and beyond Germany, which provided a local, liturgical structure for worship. It seems that Lutheran worship has always resisted a rigid form despite most often having the same basic components. Luther: "we are neither papists nor Karlstadian, but free and Christian."⁹

The Castle Church at Torgau was the first church built specifically for Lutheran worship and was dedicated by Luther in 1544. The emphasis was on audibility and visibility in a simple rectangular shape with a lofted roof, but the sanctuary was adorned with beautiful artwork and symbolism. The centrality of the Word preached and the altar table and church music are still obvious. There is always a theology behind a practice. Wittingly or unwittingly, ritual is reflecting and teaching something and the Lutherans knew it: from arts, to ceremony, to architecture.¹⁰

The years that followed gave the Lutherans a time to wrestle through the meaning of "neither papistic nor Karlstadian" in architecture, and indifferent things associated with worship, such as furniture, and the arrangement of pulpit, altar, and font. In some places, like Leipzig, there was a weekly eucharist. It seems many places did not have the communicants, or for some other reason the celebration of the sacrament became much less frequent.

The middle of the 17th century brought the influence of Pietism to Lutheran doctrine and practice, emphasis was placed on personal spiritual renewal, prayer life and small group studies (*collegia pietatis*) for broader use of Scripture. Preaching became more focused on matters of the heart and the emotional experience of rebirth and sanctified living. Nicolas von Zinzendorf led a group in the eighteenth century called the Moravians who would have an influence on John Wesley's theology. Mark Noll suggests that the Evangelicalism that comes out of 18th century Britain closely resembles Lutheran pietist movements of the 17th century, although the movements were diverse.¹¹

Lutheran worship in America was lackluster at best, maybe unrecognizable.

The early forms of American Lutheran liturgies related more or less the doctrinal position of the bodies that espoused them: the liturgies were lax, because the synods themselves were confessionally unsound, and on the other hand, the synods advanced heresies, because they imbibed unsound doctrines, in their worship.¹²

Henry Melchior Muehlenberg was an exception. In 1748 he produced about 40 handwritten copies from his memories of the liturgy at St. Mary's in London.

Wilhelm Loehe and Klaus Harms brought confessional and liturgical renewal to America in the mid 19th century. C.F.W. Walther and Grabau came with a distinctly Lutheran identity and

⁹ J White, *Protestant Worship*, 48

¹⁰ *Lex orandi, lex credendi*

¹¹ Noll, Mark A. *The Rise of Evangelicalism, The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003) 60-65

¹² Paul W. Spaude, *The Lutheran Church Under American Influence* (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1943), 74. Spaude quotes Wentz, A.R.

American Lutherans had a decision in front of them: will American Lutheran worship be distinctive or accommodate to the religious culture around it?

Joint synodical work produced the Common Service of 1888 based on the many Lutheran church orders from the 16th century. The committee borrowed English translation almost exclusively from the Book of Common Prayer along with a number of chant settings. The American Lutherans claimed they received the texts back in English that Cranmer had used from the 16th century Lutheran church orders. During the work of preparing the Service, Beale Schmucker made this comment: “If the coming generations of Lutherans have put into their mouths and hearts the pure, strong, moving words of our church’s Service from week to week and year to year, they will be brought up in the pure teaching of the church, and the church of the future will be a genuine Lutheran Church.”¹³

The Reformed

The Zwinglian and Calvinist theology is reflected in an emphasis on the Word over sacraments in worship.

Others were reordering and redacting medieval worship with a different spirit. Johannes Oecolampadius was one of the first with his 1523 *The Testament of Jesus Christ* which speaks of the real presence of Christ. That language is conspicuously absent by his 1526 service called *Form and Manner*, but both are generally the liturgical structure we recognize as the Western Rite.¹⁴

Huldrych Zwingli presided at the first use of his *Form of Prayer* attached to his *Act or Custom of Supper* in Zurich on Easter, 1525. His liturgical work witnesses to his eucharistic theology, as Luther’s did. This is from the preface to the service:

This remembrance is a thanksgiving and a rejoicing before the Almighty God, for the goodness which he has bestowed upon us through his Son, and who appears in this Feast, Meal, or Thanksgiving and testifies, that he belongs to those who believe that they are saved through the death and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁵

When the eucharist was offered, the bread would be carried around in wooden bowls, so that “pomp should not return again.” “Thereafter, they shall likewise carry around the wine, so that nobody needs to move from his place.”¹⁶ Of note is a prayer before the *Verba* which speaks of unity of “this body.” Unity through sacramental fellowship will become a very heavy emphasis doctrinally and practically by the time the Reformation makes its way to Scotland through Calvin and Knox and over to the United States by the start of the 19th century. We will consider that below. Zwingli notes that the sacrament will be received four times a year: at

¹³ Luther D. Reed, “The Common Service in the Life of the Church”, *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* XII (January 1939): 9-10

¹⁴ Oecolampadius ended up quoted favorably by Calvin and on Zwingli’s side of the table at the Marburg Colloquy.

¹⁵ Gibson, Jonathan and Mark Earngey, eds. *Reformation Worship, Liturgies from the Past for the Present*. (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018.) 183

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 193

Easter, Pentecost, Autumn, and Christmas. The service had no singing and was intended to provoke a quiet reverence. Zwingli himself favored preaching through a book of the Bible as part of formation of Christians but honored the high festivals of Christ. It is interesting to note that the Reformed, at least until recently, have generally followed a more theocentric form of worship (e.g., preaching continuously through the entire Bible) while Lutherans and other liturgical traditions have generally followed a Christocentric lectionary and Church year. Practice reflects doctrine.

The structure of *Act or Custom of the Supper (1525)*

- Prayer of Preparation
- Epistle (1 Corinthians 11:20-29)
- Response of Praise
- Gloria
- Salutation
- Gospel (John 6:47-63)
- Absolution
- Apostles' Creed
- Exhortation
- Lord's Prayer
- Prayer for Strength
- Words of Institution
- Distribution
- Psalm 113
- Prayer of Thanksgiving
- Dismissal with Peace

Zurich's standard Sunday service was Zwingli's *Form of Prayer (1525)*: (*Drawn from daily office - Prone*)

- General Prayers
- Prayer for Illumination
- Intercessions
- Lord's Prayer
- Scripture
- Sermon
- Remembrance of the Dead
- Confession
- Prayer for Forgiveness

October 1529 left two different strands of protestant reformers. Luther and companions could not come together with Zwingli and companions on one of the fifteen articles for consideration at the Marburg Colloquy. James White comments on Zwingli's worship reform and the different 'spirit' than Luther: "There is deep devotion to the eucharist evident here, but all in all Zwingli's work often seems to be a reformation directed from the head rather than the heart, as in Luther. And it cannot be ignored that Reformed worship has always seemed the most

cerebral of the western traditions.”¹⁷ That said, Zwingli lived in a pre-enlightenment worldview where God was still seen as active in creation and worship.

Zwingli’s teaching and practices introduced a theology that disregards the possibility of anything physical as a means of conveying the spiritual. Zwingli wrote, “it is clear and indisputable that no external element or action can purify the soul.”¹⁸ This theology formed the practice that has certainly had lasting effects on the sacramental piety of Reformed Churches. Once the physical had been disregarded in the means of grace, sacraments were inevitably diminished to a place inferior to the Word. Zwinglian worship reform emphasized Word over sacrament.

There is a stark difference between Zwingli’s dualism between the physical and spiritual and John Calvin’s appreciation for signs. He calls the sacraments means through which “God imparts spiritual things under visible ones.”¹⁹

Calvin's *Ecclesiastical Ordinances (1541)* was designed for oversight of people’s lives in Geneva. Calvin was a very powerful figure in Geneva and dreamed of a truly pious city that could be an example for others. For example, the ordinances provided that parents who did not raise their children in the faith would not be allowed to receive the Sacrament. The Sacrament was used for a decidedly different goal than purely a means of grace, namely church discipline.

Calvin’s service and the preparatory period required before each Communion Service seems to be a carry over of penance pushed together with Holy Communion.²⁰ “Calvin’s is basically a penitential eucharist, serving the purpose of two sacraments, that of penance and that of eucharist. For him, it seems more a case of being forgiven in order to receive the eucharist than being forgiven through receiving eucharist.”²¹

A particularly Calvinist anxiety is the question of whether one is of the elect. Once you can say that you are of the elect, you can always say it, and that becomes the place to pin the assurance of your salvation. For Calvin that means an inward and effectual call from God, in other words, conversion. Human conversion, however, is God’s sovereign choice, not man’s. The way to know that you have been converted is in the external evidence of the good fruit of the Spirit that follows in your life.²² To be fair, Calvin strongly preaches forensic justification by faith in Christ, but Calvinism’s emphasis on the evidence of faith for certainty finds its way through England to America where evangelical preaching will tend heavily toward sanctified living for certainty of faith.

As an interpretation of the Reformation principle of Scripture alone in contrast to Roman Catholic traditions, Zwingli and Calvin followed a regulative principle in worship meaning that they removed any portions of the service that could not be explicitly linked to a text of Scripture. They removed pipe organs and hymns; the congregation only sang psalms and the Commandments.

¹⁷ White, *Traditions*, 60

¹⁸*Ibid*, 61

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 61

²⁰ Calvin wanted to offer the Sacrament weekly, the City Council decided it would be offered quarterly, so Calvin staggered the communion Sundays in the churches in Geneva so that one could find the Sacrament at least monthly.

²¹ White, *Traditions*, 66

²² While the Lutherans hold to an external, objective truth of Christ *pro nobis*. One can imagine Luther answering the anxiety with the gospel: are you baptized?

“Calvin’s liturgy held up the glory of Almighty God and the poverty of sinful man. The extended exhortations attest to the importance he placed on church discipline, and the careful introspection witnesses to the importance of moral transformation that accompanied true and lively faith.”²³

Excerpts from several pages of exhortation preceding the Supper in Calvin’s service:

Therefore, according to the exhortation of Saint Paul, let each one test and examine his conscience, to know whether he truly repents of his faults and is sorry for them, desiring from now on to live in holiness and in conformity with God; and above all, whether he trusts in the mercy of God and seeks his salvation wholly from Jesus Christ; and whether renouncing all hostility and malice, he has the good intention and the courage to live in harmony and brotherly love with his neighbors. If we have such testimony in our hearts before God, let us not doubt in the least that he acknowledges us to be his children... [...] And since we are conscious of much frailty and misery in ourselves, as well as not having a perfect faith, but that we are prone rather to unbelief and distrust, so that we are not entirely dedicated to serving God and wish such a zeal as we ought...[...] For we do not come insisting that we are perfect or righteous in ourselves, but rather, seeking our life in Jesus Christ, we confess that we are dead. Let us understand, therefore, that this Sacrament is a medicine for poor, spiritually sick people and that the only worthiness our Lord requires of us is to know ourselves well enough to be displeased with our vices and to find all our pleasure, joy, and contentment in him alone.²⁴

The service in Geneva, *Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers (1545)*:

Service of the Lord’s Supper

Votum (Ps 124:8)

Confession

Prayer for Forgiveness

Words of Comfort

Absolution

Decalogue (with Kyrie)

Prayer for Illumination

Lord’s Prayer

Scripture

Sermon

Intercessions

Lord’s Prayer Paraphrase

Apostles’ Creed

Prayer of Preparation

Lord’s Prayer

Words of Institution

Long Exhortation

²³ Gibson, *Reformation Worship*, 303

²⁴ *Ibid*, 327

Distribution
 Psalm
 Prayer of Thanksgiving
 Nunc Dimittis
 Benediction

John Knox had been at the forefront of reformation in Scotland when he was forced to flee to England and eventually ended up in Geneva for a time in the late 1550s. In 1564 Knox finished a service book based on Calvin's services and the same year the Church of Scotland was founded. Knox's *The Forme of Prayers (1564)* became known as the Book of Common Order among the Scots. When Scotland and England were united under James VI, the English pressed for the Scots to use the Book of Common Prayer but they refused in favor of Knox's service.

Calvin's emphasis on proper preparation for the sacrament developed into 'sacramental seasons' among the Scots. The Scottish protestants (Presbyterians) had a hatred for anything and everything Roman Catholic. They tossed out the Catholic high festivals. That left a gap in the rhythm of spiritual life and with a high view of the sacrament, they created "festal communions." These were worship-filled retreats that looked rather similar to the Catholic high festivals. Preparation for these quarterly mass communions eventually involved four or five days of intense meetings, prayers, and preaching.

Scottish immigrants brought Presbyterianism to New England, and by 1724 a "festal communion" had been held in New Hampshire. John Cuthbertson, minister to Presbyterians scattered in Pennsylvania, kept an abbreviated diary of the events of the annual Sacrament. This entry is from 1761.

August 13 - fasting day, preached twice, give all glory to God
 August 15 - preached twice, convened session, distributed tokens
 August 16 - Sabbath, preached twice, gave exhortations, sung psalm 24, came down from pulpit to read 1 Corinthians, blessed and broke and distributed. 260 communicants in 9 hours, give all glory to God
 August 17 - preached twice, dismissed with spasms, Baptized Jean and Sarah, wife and daughter to Adam Ricky.²⁵

The tokens distributed were small pieces of lead that were given out to the worthy as a ticket for entrance to Holy Communion on Sunday. This is reflective of Calvinism's concern for proper preparation and the system of church discipline that monitored behavior and faith. The preparatory sermons the day before communion services spoke of the dire consequences of coming unprepared or without the right motives and a pure heart. This strong preparation became known as "fencing of the tables."²⁶

Holy Communion could easily be a full day event because of the manner of distribution. In reaction to Catholicism, these Calvinists searched for scriptural mandate on how to serve the Supper (regulative principle). They derived long tables with people seated around them as the

²⁵Schmidt, Leigh Eric. *Holy Fairs, Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989)

²⁶Conkin, *Cane Ridge*, 17

biblical model.²⁷ Communicants came and sat with a minister at the head of the table. They ate a portion of bread and drank a cup of wine that might equal a regular meal portion. With a small number of seats and a long rite, the distribution could last nine hours as noted above by Cuthbertson.²⁸ The Scottish and Irish Presbyterians had been the only ones to receive the sacrament in this manner, until they took this practice with them to America.²⁹

The Anabaptists formed in Zurich in the 1520s over a disagreement with Zwingli on the matter of infant baptism. The Anabaptists, led by Balthaasar Hubmaier (who rebaptized 300+ with a wooden milk pail in town) looked for a purity in the church by means of a believers baptism. For the Anabaptists, only baptizing those who choose to be baptized allowed for a purer church because it was a sign that everyone wanted to be in the church (as opposed to infants who were baptized). They became the first in “Free Church” tradition of worship. They were freed from human traditions in worshiping and free to order their worship locally. The Free Church tradition of worship is essentially liturgical congregationalism.

Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* is similar to Knox's service, but perhaps a little more removed from the language of Calvin, especially in the eucharistic liturgy. Cranmer relied on ancient texts, Luther's reform, and John Calvin's companion, Martin Bucer, who was in a position at Cambridge. The *Book of Common Prayer* was really a compendium of a number of orders with instructions (e.g. Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, etc). It was mandated for all churches in England on Whitsunday 1549, with a revised edition in 1552 (and other than a few years when monarchs repealed allegiance to the Reformation, it has been the Anglican standard). The evolution of Cranmer's liturgy toward a Reformed understanding of the sacrament is clear in the revision of the 1549 BCP in 1552. Cranmer published *Defense in 1550*, denying the real presence.³⁰

The distribution formula in 1549: “The body of the our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for you, preserve your body and soul to everlasting life.” In 1552: “Take and eat this, in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith, with thanksgiving.”³¹

Book of Common Prayer (1552):

Lord's Prayer
Prayer of Preparation
Decalogue
Confession
Collects
Epistle
Gospel
Creed

²⁷ The Scottish were so opposed to the practice of kneeling for communion that John Knox insisted on only one change in Thomas Cranmer's Book of Prayer: a rubric clearly stating that kneeling at the sacrament is not a requirement.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 17

²⁹ Hymnody became acceptable to most Presbyterians about the the middle of the 19th century.

³⁰ This is based on the 39 Articles of the Anglican Church match Reformed theology well, but the Anglicans seem to agree with Calvin, Zwingli, or Luther, depending on who the Anglican preacher is. This ambiguity allowed all of England to be the Anglican Church and still have their own theological biases.

³¹ Reformation Worship, 342

Sermon
Offertory Sentences
Offering
Intercessions
Exhortation
Invitation
Confession
Absolution
Comfortable Words
Preface
Sanctus
Prayer of Humble Access
Prayer of Consecration
Distribution
Lord's Prayer
Prayer of Thanksgiving
Gloria
Benediction

As time went on, rationalism led toward deism, and an understanding of the supernatural as unthinkable, and the Church of England began to reflect a very intellectualized Christianity. Services were very simple with minimal artwork or music, and devoid of vestments, candles, and Holy Communion. The growth of wealth in the Victorian Era along with Catholic Revival (the Oxford Movement) reversed that minimalist approach and led to a revival of elaborate worship forms among the Anglicans. The eucharist became a weekly celebration in England and in the American Episcopal Church. The Anglicans began to build beautiful churches with rich symbolism. The Cathedral of All Saints in Albany, New York, built in the 1880s, is a stunning example.



The Puritans

Rejection of rites and the ceremonial

The Puritan tradition originates in Reformed Anglicanism but is distinctive. The Puritans are Calvinists of Free Church worship, meaning they were free to worship according to scriptural principle and not required to follow fixed forms, like those of the Book of Common Prayer. In their worship reforms, Calvin and Cranmer used biblical criteria as their main test in liturgical decisions, but allowed some flexibility. The Puritans believed that worship is of such importance that God would not leave it to human will to decide how he will be worshipped. They would not allow for any way of worship not directly prescribed in Holy Scripture. One problem in following the regulative principle of worship strictly is that there is little prescriptive material for worship in the New Testament; most of it is descriptive. For example, some argued that the text of the Lord's Prayer should be spoken exactly as it is; others argued it was a pattern for prayer.³² A part of the solution was a congregationalism that allowed different parishes to interpret these things differently.

The Puritan mission was to purify the Church of England of what they considered to be lingering Romanism. Three things especially bothered the Puritans in the Church of England and were essentially viewed as idolatrous: the sign of the cross in baptism, the giving of the ring in marriage, and the kneeling for the eucharist.³³

Especially put off by fixed forms, Puritans joked that the Anglican preachers were only able to read sermons from books. Many could not tolerate fixed prayers and only allowed extemporaneous prayer. John Robinson, pastor of the congregation from which the Plymouth Colony Pilgrims had worshipped, said about 'free' prayer: "If our prayers be not conceived first in our hearts before they be brought forth in our lips, they are an unnatural, bastardly, and profane birth."³⁴ The Puritans desired to be both relevant and express a deep, authentic concern in response to what seemed like a cold formalism in the Anglican service.

Although there was great freedom of form, it seems most Puritans ended up with quite similar worship. A Sunday gathering would begin with a half hour or so of prayer and continue with an hour-long sermon with psalmody interspersed. They were generally adamantly opposed to hymns, choral music, and musical instruments in worship. Congregants were invited to question the preachers sermon at the end. The Lord's Supper was celebrated when a trained minister was available in New England, but the Eucharist was treated mostly as an encouragement to pious living, not as a means of God's grace.

The Enlightenment

Human reason and individualism take center stage

At roughly the beginning of the 18th century the Era of Enlightenment quickly began to radically change the way humans viewed reason, authority, science, politics, and religion. The new paradigm exalted humans: everything could and should be explained rationally, human reason is

³² Another example would be the question of whether speaking in tongues was necessary.

³³ White, *Traditions*, 125

³⁴ White, *Traditions*, 121

supreme, and authority can be challenged.³⁵ Enlightenment thought regards individuals as beings with autonomous rights and decisions (and eventually their own truth). The potential of progress towers over the past and America was a blank slate ready for this optimism.

The Enlightenment divide in worship is a move from the traditional view of God as the subject acting on man in worship to the exact opposite, worship is a man-centered activity that brings something to God. With that theology, worship primarily becomes a remembrance of what God did in the past, instead of an active and real presence of God in the present. The goal has shifted from receiving to doing, which has become the common understanding in American religion. The freedom of the human will to choose to accept God's grace (after prevenient grace) became a given and an appeal to the will became central to preaching and worship, as is clearly seen in the methodology of John Wesley and Charles Finney. Salvation is a potential, not a reality to be announced. Philosophers and rationalists of the Enlightenment decried the concept of sacraments as miraculous. Religion was seen as a pursuit of virtue, at best an instrument for improvement. American religion would have a different understanding of what the gospel is. James White: "The Enlightenment believed in God but it was a God who had retired, leaving the world to run according to God's design. But it was not a God who intervened in self-giving love. God's past work in Jesus Christ was to be remembered, not experienced afresh."³⁶

So also, the enlightened mind would see sacraments as a way to remember and memorialize what God had done in the past. Man was the agent performing the sacraments, mostly because God had commanded them to be performed.

It doesn't take an expert to see how deeply this philosophical shift in thinking has affected American society and Christianity.³⁷ Sacramental piety in American Christianity clearly reflects the Enlightenment much more than the Reformation.

It seems rather clear that there was a reaction against Enlightenment ideals in the next century (e.g., Romanticism). Particularly of interest is the revivalism that spread across the continent. It makes sense that after a period of seeing God as separate and other and placing heavy emphasis on human reason, the pendulum would swing to emotion exalted over reason and God as immanent, doing great works, reviving his church. (The extreme other end of the swing may be the Pentecostalism of the twentieth century.)

³⁵ Jacksonian democracy essentially gives us laymen as celebrants.

³⁶ White, James. *A Brief History of Christian Worship*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) 144

³⁷ A study in seventeenth and eighteenth century American Christianity will quickly reference Scottish Common Sense Realism, a prevailing rational way to deal with matters of faith that relied heavily on empirical evidence and so naturally downplayed anything that smelled miraculous as primitive or superstitious. Essentially it was two principles - 1. God's truth is a single unified order and 2. all people with common sense were capable of knowing that order. That optimistic view of human nature easily appealed to the American mindset. It was an attempt for a Christian to square his faith with rational thought, but that at the expense of the Word of God, of course. It is easy to get lost in the philosophical language but at the same time it is not so hard to see how spreading through universities and divinity schools, Common Sense Realism deeply affected American Christianity and worship.

The Methodists

An “American Christianity” is formed by revival worship

John Wesley (1703-1791), was the grandson of Puritan ministers but along with some friends and his brother Charles, he had a very hard time swallowing the emphasis on predestination in Puritanism. For a while Wesley studied at a Genevan Academy where he encountered Theodore Beza’s supralapsarian doctrine (what we commonly call “double predestination”).³⁸ Both Wesley and Jacob Arminius came out of Geneva with a strong reaction against it. The gracious Lord, they said, provides a prevenient grace that allows one’s will to accept the free offer of grace. Salvation is offered to all; it is up to each one to accept it.

That understanding of the role of the will and the Spirit is a vast departure from Lutheranism which confesses that the will is bound and the Spirit is the agent of conversion. The Arminians believed the will is the subject of conversion, not the object. This understanding would play well in the rational Enlightenment mind and flourish when Methodism made it across the ocean. After the first grace which enabled conversion, Wesley then looked for a second grace for certainty, a sign from the Spirit as experience. This, then, is where the Methodist pins the assurance of salvation—on a decision of the will followed by an experience of the Spirit. Implications of that can be seen far beyond what Wesley could imagine in the work of Charles Finney.

In contrast to Enlightenment thought, Wesley had a high view of the sacraments relative to the Anglican and Puritans. He and his brother Charles were pious men who formed a “Holy Club” at Oxford that focused on daily prayer and sacramental life. Generally, he followed Anglicanism, and like the Anglicans of that period, loved tradition. He proposed that ritual had just grown too routine for many. Wesley began looking to regain unchurched people in England.

He took a mission trip to America from 1735-1738. The trip was disappointing for various reasons, and he left to return to England, unsure of himself and his ministry. Some of his sailing companions were Moravians, the Lutheran pietist branch founded by Zinzendorf. Wesley was amazed at the spiritual calm and peace the Moravians seemed to find even in the midst of a few life-threatening storms. They explained to Wesley that the certainty of one’s acceptance before God is a normal part of the Christian faith life, exactly the kind of assurance Wesley was looking for, whether he could name that or not. Back in England, Wesley attended one of their meetings and experienced his heart being strangely “warmed” while listening to a reading of Luther’s Preface to Romans, and felt an assurance that he did trust in Christ and that his sins were taken away. Wesley was already a believer who had made a decision to believe in Jesus Christ by the gift of the “first grace” (or prevenient grace) which allowed him to accept Christ. This experience at a meeting of the Moravians on Aldersgate street was a “second grace” that allowed him to feel the assurance, albeit in a more sensational way than the Moravians intended.

Wesley took this novel doctrine and started fresh as an itinerant preacher especially to the unchurched, and to the new urban poor in London who had been forced to give up land and move to the city. These people were unable to rent pew space in the churches so Wesley took worship outdoors and made this class of people central to his service. His worship allowed for extempore prayer but was a fixed liturgical structure (BCP). He encouraged vigorous singing,

³⁸ Beza was a disciple of John Calvin and succeeded Calvin in Geneva. There is debate among reformed scholars whether Calvin really taught the double of double predestination (specifically that some are elected to damnation). There is no argument that Beza did in his *Table of Predestination* (1555).

testimonies, and prayers. He borrowed the concept of small group studies from the Moravians and organized the people into “classes.” Proof of attending classes was necessary for attending the Sacrament.

British Protestantism, with George Whitefield³⁹ and Wesley’s preaching, and European Pietism, especially the Moravians, had been experiencing spiritual awakenings, or “outpourings” of the Spirit, for several years and these strains grew together to become a movement called Evangelicalism.

Evangelicalism is easier to describe in traits than to define, but a helpful way to consider it might be that it is a style of protestantism. It is usually parasitic, living inside various denominations (or non-denominational groups). Some observable traits of Evangelicalism since the time of Wesley:

1. A strong emphasis on a personal conversion experience (being born again) that requires submission of will and brings assurance of salvation through personal faith;
2. A high view of Scripture;
3. A confession of the Trinity;
4. An emphasis on substitutionary atonement;
5. An emphasis on sanctification, spiritual renewal and social reform;
6. A pragmatic approach to ministry (this has been called the “effective principle” of worship - whatever accomplishes the objectives);
7. A strong emphasis on mission and evangelism;
8. A willingness to allow disagreement in non-fundamental teachings.⁴⁰

George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards are iconic figures in American religious history. Edwards is remembered as a gifted writer and outstanding preacher who wrote one of America’s most famous sermons, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. He was a resident pastor in New England before the American Revolution, and became the president of the College of New Jersey at Princeton. His Calvinist theology was driven with the evangelical press for a ‘conversion experience’ after his own awakening to the “inward, sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived in since.”⁴¹ Whitefield had a similar experience at Oxford. Immediate experience of the Spirit touching a heart had become implanted among the great colonial preachers as an effective sign of conversion after a protracted, intense, spiritual struggle.

Edwards preached in the church. Whitefield masterfully advertised and drew huge crowds for his innovative step of outdoor services. In 1740, at age 25, he went across seven colonies on what may be the largest preaching tour of any era. It is likely that half of the population of the seven colonies heard his preaching in those ten weeks.⁴² This was the Great Awakening. These men were Calvinist Methodists and the sovereignty of God was central to their doctrine. They cared to maintain their doctrine much more than those who would come after them but they worked as tirelessly to bring in an emotional emphasis to their practice. The

³⁹ Whitefield was a contemporary of Jonathan Edwards and friends of the Wesley brothers at Oxford. Whitefield was entrepreneurial and did not mind abandoning church traditions. He was an itinerant evangelist who paved the way for later evangelicals to discard much of Christian tradition in worship.

⁴⁰ A list I assembled from various Evangelical sources

⁴¹ Noll, *Evangelicalism*, 75

⁴² Noll, *Evangelicalism*, 13

trouble for strict Calvinists is that while they can prepare hearers for conversion or a confirming experience of the Spirit, God must stir their hearts to that because he is sovereign and he alone knows the elect. So there really was not a way for them to preach the unconditional gospel to the unconverted. Edwards, Whitefield, and Methodists did not preach freedom in Christ. By the Second Great Awakening, the choice for conversion will fall to the sinner.⁴³

The Methodist Episcopal Church, formed after the Revolutionary War (1784), required the colonial churches to break ties with the English churches. The American churches did not have bishops, so parishioners weren't receiving the sacrament. After forming the new denomination, Wesley appointed two bishops: Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke. Wesley tried a revision of the BCP for Methodist worship in North America, including a weekly eucharist, but it was not widely accepted.

Francis Asbury is the real father of American Methodism, and was more in line with Wesley's flexibility than his love of tradition. Where Wesley's methodism focused on sacraments and use of the Prayer Book, Asbury's was interested in preaching and living the pious life. After Wesley's death in 1792, the orders of service were redacted rather drastically. In 1876, after former Methodist minister Dr Thomas Welch adapted Louis Pasteur's science to create a juice from grapes that did not ferment into wine, the Methodist worship documents recommended and eventually mandated, using grape juice and not grape wine for the sacrament. As one believes, so one worships.

Things were different in the expanding frontier. Churches in New England were more in settled towns. They had church buildings and resident ministers. The kind of traveling preaching that Wesley was doing in England met the need of the westward expansion of frontier settlers who were spread out and did not have settled places for churches or pastors.

Under district superintendents, circuit riders made their way across the lonely stretches of frontier. Many of the unconverted were also illiterate and so simple worship songs became popular. These songs tended to be focused on personal faith and commitment or sanctification (e.g., the evil of alcohol vs. the beauty of prayer). In their highly individualized culture, a personal relationship, more than an established community of believers, was most likely to be their understanding of religion. Methodism exploded. In Francis Asbury's lifetime alone, the number of Methodists in America grew from 600 to over 200,000.⁴⁴ There was not a system in place that could keep up with the pastoral care, but Americans did not argue with success. There seemed to be a sense of inevitability, an American spirit. Where there was a forest, now there is a city. Where there was no church, now there is a crowd.

Christian Worship: Foundations gives an overview of revivalism:

The development was characterized by freedom and pragmatism: When it comes to worship, ignore tradition and do what works. The movement's theological position was likely influenced by John Wesley's brand of Methodism, which combined perfectionism (a call for moral improvement), Arminianism (a call for a

⁴³ Then, the sinner who "chooses Christ" will actually move from freedom of choice to the bondage of maintaining that choice. The human agency in decision theology doesn't end at conversion, it starts there. Or as some have said it, what starts in bondage, ends in freedom. What starts in freedom, ends in bondage.

⁴⁴ The Methodist Episcopal Church was the oldest and largest denomination in the U.S. from its founding until 1939.

personal decision, and Pietism (a call for a religious experience).⁴⁵

By 1870, almost all American Protestants thought of America as a Christian nation. For Evangelicals, the 19th century was marked by advancements of the kingdom of God in America. Samuel Harris, Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale in the late 19th century was bold enough to say: “The sublime idea of the conversion of the world to Christ has become so common as to cease to awaken wonder.”⁴⁶ That is how much power seemed to rest in the American religious revivals.

Much of the worship “out West” was laity getting together to share their testimonies, pray, and perhaps sing. In the Methodist service orders there was provision for the people to have access to the sacrament quarterly, but it seems unlikely that always happened. Not coincidentally, Charles Wesley’s communion hymns are absent from the Methodist hymnals of 1905 and 1935 because it had been a while since they had been sung.

Methodists slowly moved into churches in the nineteenth century. They were churches designed for revivalistic preaching and for conversion and repentance, as the most important function in worship. Fanny Crosby’s many hymns reinforced the concern’s of one’s soul.⁴⁷ More choral music was added as preachers realized the power of music to create an atmosphere for conversion. Methodism was a long way from the practices of John Wesley, but the Arminian flavor was very much alive. James White on Methodist worship at this point: “Worship tended to be treated as a means to an end - making converts - rather than an end in itself.”⁴⁸

In the twentieth century, Methodist churches tended to have more middle-class people who had more inhibitions in showing emotion than some of their frontier counterparts. One congregation in Vermont made a point to discourage shouting “amen” during the sermon. Social themes became more prevalent in preaching to the already converted. Buildings became more ornate, with Gothic stylings (e.g., Duke University Chapel). Among many Methodist congregations there was a return to the fixed settings that Wesley had imagined for the American church.

One of the effects of Wesleyan revivalism is the conviction that genuine conversion is observed measurable moral progress. Lutheran preachers recognize this as the thing that invites uncertainty. It is our natural course to turn back on to ourselves. The work of preaching law and gospel is to get our eyes off of ourselves and on the cross for certainty and assurance.

Revivalism, Evangelicalism and the Second Great Awakening

The preacher begins to take center stage

As discussed earlier, the Presbyterian festal communions,⁴⁹ or sacramental seasons, were several day events that grew to be held at campgrounds. The Scottish Holy Fairs became the direct

⁴⁵ Zabell, Jon, ed. *Christian Worship: Foundations*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2023) 53.

⁴⁶ Marsden, George. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 11.

⁴⁷ Read through “Safe in the Arms of Jesus”, “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior”, “Blessed Assurance”

⁴⁸ Traditions, 165

⁴⁹ Sometimes simply called ‘communions’ by historians.

ancestor of American frontier camp meetings. From Pennsylvania to North Carolina, Scottish festal communions flourished. James McGready was the minister famous for Presbyterian revivals. Kentucky was especially fertile ground. McGready recorded eighteen revivals there between 1797 and 1800, sixteen of them being communions. The largest and most legendary American revival was organized by Barton Stone as a Presbyterian Communion in Bourbon County, Kentucky, August 1801. What came to be known as the Cane Ridge Revival saw somewhere between ten and twenty thousand people with two dozen ministers from Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist congregations. Over a thousand people communed in exactly the style that had been used in Scotland—all communicants sat at a table, each with bread and wine.

By this point the ministers involved were evangelicals in the sense that their model was to preach people to a crisis of salvation, and extract a conversion experience that ended in an exceptional joy and release in communion with Christ. One of the Kentucky ministers who attended wrote of the Cane Ridge Revival:

Sinners dropping down on every hand, shrieking, groaning, crying for mercy, convoluted; professors [of religion] praying, agonizing, fainting, falling down in distress, for sinners, or in the raptures of joy! Some singing, some shouting, clapping their hands, hugging and even kissing, laughing; others talking to the distressed, to one another, or to opposers of the work, and all this at once - no spectacle can excite a stronger sensation. And with what it is doing, the darkness of the night, the solemnity of the place, and of the occasion, and conscious guilt, all conspire to make terror thrill through every power of the soul, and rouse it to awful attention.⁵⁰

“America’s Pentecost,” as Cane Ridge has been called, was a standard Scottish communion that blew up. Within a decade, most Methodist circuits had an annual camp meeting. The Presbyterians had worshiped with a heavy doctrinal emphasis alongside these stirring experiences, and this particular event worried some of the Presbyterian clergy. It was a vague, ecumenical, and chaotic Christian experience at best and unlike any previous communion among the Presbyterians. The Methodist clergy tended to search for this kind of highly emotional spiritual ‘event’ in their worship life.

Trying to trace out the forms revivalist and frontier evangelicalism used before 1800 is a bit convoluted. After Cane Ridge the pattern is quite clear. Worship moved from Protestant norms of *Preparation, Word, Meal, Sending* (proclamation with thanksgiving) to *Praise, Conflict/crisis of salvation and invitation, Harvest of souls and/or recommitment*.

The praise section was immensely important for its ability to soften hearts in advance of the preaching. Preaching was an appeal to the will for conversion, or for a more perfect imitation of Christ. The harvest was the goal; everything else aimed at producing the result. Worship leaders became more and more passionate, dynamic and dramatic.

Architecture is not indifferent in worship. The shape (form) follows the function. A particular holy space reflects meanings, values, doctrines and practice peculiar to the assembly

⁵⁰ Letter to a Kentucky minister on September 10, 1801 in *Increase of Piety*; quoted by Conkin, *Cane Ridge*, 94

that meets there.⁵¹ In the fall of 1814, the First Church of Christ (Congregationalists) in New Haven, Connecticut, moved into the church they had started building two years earlier (the war with Britain got in the way). (*See fig. 1*) The exterior had classical Greek and Roman elements, similar to those built in London in previous years. Though Puritan, these Protestants wanted a space that was formal and elaborate. The pulpit (not seen in modern photo below) was the central focal point. (*See fig. 2*) Services on Sunday would have a minister offer prayer, deliver a lengthy sermon and then the congregation might recite (or “line out”) a psalm. The congregation broke for a meal, and returned for another sermon and more prayers.⁵²

About seventy years later, in December of 1886, another elaborate church was dedicated, this time by the First Baptist congregation in Minneapolis. (*See fig. 3*) The exterior was more baroque, matching themes architects were exploring in the moment. The interior differences are especially notable. The floor was built with the forward slope common to theaters. (*See fig. 4*)



Figure 1 - First Church of Christ, New Haven, CT



Figure 2 - current interior, First Church of Christ, New Haven, CT



Figure 3- First Baptist, Minneapolis, MN



Figure 4- previous interior, First Baptist, Minneapolis

⁵¹ This certainly teaches these things to those who gather. The way of worship is the way of belief and vice versa. There are times when we enter a sanctuary not seen before and an immediate and visceral thought or emotion strikes us. That is intentional and it teaches something.

⁵² Kilde, Jeanne Halgren. *When Church Became Theatre*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 9

Horse hair cushions covered the pews. The seating was diagonal with a stage raised three feet off the ground in one corner as the focal point. A small, portable lectern was used for preaching and reading by a preacher standing on the stage. By this point, evangelical services were generally shorter. The sermon might have been a half hour and might be a commentary on a social topic or a biblical text. Prayers were offered, and either in psalm or petitions, the congregation engaged in recitative exchanges with the minister. Music had become a prominent part of the service and a quartet might be hired to perform. Many congregations had individual hymnals by this point.

Charles Grandison Finney, a businessman turned evangelical revivalist is the face of the Second Great Awakening. He is remembered for his “New Measures.” These were various psychological tactics he carefully planned and used to initiate a conversion struggle and press those who were grappling to decide for Christ. Conversions, mass conversions actually, had become an enterprise to be handled scientifically, and Finney made no apology for it, because it fit his theology of man as the moral agent, capable of free choice in the spiritual realm. He is the extreme end of Arminianism, as evidenced by his sermon titled, “*Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts.*” He operated, in evangelical fashion, in extremes, laying out the options of being damned or being saved before people, working himself into a frenzy as he preached. His famous “anxious bench” was placed below the pulpit. He sent scouts to find people who appeared to be vulnerable, and he preached to them on the bench, prayed for them from the pulpit, and asked others to pray until a conversion happened.

Finney’s Sunday service generally had the three components common to Evangelicals at this point: *Songs and praise* (warm up), *Sermon* (call to conversion), *Harvest of new converts* (reap the results).

After gaining huge revival attendance in upstate New York and New York City, Finney was recruited by a couple of Free Church Presbyterians⁵³ and a businessman to move to New York City and bring his revival indoors. His venue was the Chatham Street Chapel, formerly the Chatham Street Theater, recently leased by the same Free Church Presbyterians who recruited him. The setting matched Finney’s style. Finney was essentially a celebrity, and worship was entertainment in the sense that it was designed to be dynamic and enthusiastic enough to keep attention, and provocative enough to create a powerful emotional experience. The Chatham Street Chapel was a definitive turning point in protestant architecture that clearly echoed the anti-formalism, anti-institutional nature of worshipping assemblies, where the audience is entertained and the presenter has plenty of space to act. Christianity became marketable, but conversions also clearly became short-lived in many cases. Finney admitted the failure in upstate New York, which came to be known as the burnt over district.⁵⁴ Finney was a preacher who clearly embodied American ideals. This form of church, with a dynamic lead personality and numerical successes, was unmoored from accountability to a larger body.

Finney has been placed beside names like Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, and Andrew Carnegie when speaking about influence on American culture. His religion is still in the air the American Christians breathe. At the time our founding fathers were putting together a new

⁵³ The ‘free’ in Free Church has different meanings at different places and times in Protestantism. In this case it refers to those who left the standard Presbyterian Church because they believed parishioners should not have to rent a space in a pew, but should be allowed to come for *free*.

⁵⁴ Sadly and interestingly, the burnt over district became a laboratory for all sorts of religious experiments outside of Christianity.

nation, estimates put church membership among the people in the colonies at five percent. By 1960, that number had risen to seventy percent. Revivalism and Evangelicalism had found a way to worship that converted a continent, but that also meant that worship had a new primary purpose.

A frontier revivalistic, evangelical, hyper pragmatic pattern of worship had won the biggest share of the Protestant worship market in America. The post-Enlightenment eucharistic and baptismal piety of that form of worship is far from a gospel gift of mediated presence of Christ and His benefits. Not surprisingly, the revivalist tradition was the first to accommodate itself to new media—televangelists, virtual worship, etc. The pattern plays well: strong musical performance, fervent preaching, reaping of harvest.

The evangelicals tend toward seeing music *as* sacrament, the part of a service where the worshipper expects to experience the Spirit's presence. Musical selection seems to be more concerned about the experience it provokes than theological considerations. A quick flip through the most sung Contemporary Praise and Worship songs on CCLI will sound like much more than a different key. These songs are very different songs to a Lutheran ear, based on the lyrics, without reference to style.

Samuel Schmucker was one of the American Lutherans who believed he could use some of the American Evangelical model profitably. That there was evangelistic fervor is certain. That there was a self-centered angle at play at times is certain.⁵⁵

THE PENTECOSTALS

*What parents do in moderation, children do in excess.*⁵⁶

A natural but extreme manifestation of the Methodist Evangelicalism is the Pentecostal movement. The focus is neo-gnostic, a search for the direct, personal, special descent of the Spirit on a believer, apart from Scripture. The movement is founded on the "second grace" of Wesley's Methodism, also referred to as Baptism of the Spirit, essentially synonymous terms for an experience of the Spirit after and apart from conversion. The addition to that experience, which had originated with John Wesley at Aldersgate, was a prominent outward manifestation of the Spirit, almost exclusively the gift of tongues, which authenticated the experience. It was a place to pin the hope and assurance of justification and that belief became central to Pentecostal worship, although it is found in various denominations and in various degrees of intensity. Sometimes there is little else in Pentecostal worship than waiting and speaking in tongues.

Traditional Methodists found themselves in an awkward position. The same denomination whose growth was championed by an anti-doctrine, anti-establishment message, now found itself on the defensive against these "third grace heretics." Eventually, those pursuing the third grace would break from the Methodists and holiness movements altogether.

⁵⁵ Isn't the success model and the celebrity pastor model the American Dream alive in the American Church? If you will fight for it, there's a piece of land with your name on it, with a two car garage, white picket fence, 2.5 kids, and the freedom to do what you want how you want to do it. Or, a corner lot with church sign, 2.5 converts per week, a sanctuary with a balcony and stained glass, off of subsidy and free to do what it wants how it wants to do it?

⁵⁶ de Bruyn, David. "Strange Lyre: Conclusion." *The Pentecostalization of Christian Worship*. Religious Affections Ministries. <https://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-church/strange-lyre-conclusion/>

Pentecostalism was born in 1901, but took flight at revivals, beginning with the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906. In the twentieth century, Pentecostalism had an impact on worship in nearly every denomination, and across continents. There are more than 300 Pentecostal denominations.⁵⁷ Revivals are also still happening among them.⁵⁸

Afar from Acts 2, this charismatic worship is looking for assurance apart from Christ in means, and in some senses apart from the redemptive work of Christ. Services include a calling out together, e.g., “Praise the Lord,” “Speak to me Jesus,” etc, with an understanding that this sort of group chatter reduces inhibitions. The Pentecostals seem committed to spontaneity, extemporaneous expression, and spiritual phenomena as the ends themselves. Many have expressed a problem that plagues this sort of hyper spiritualism: pursuing spontaneous spiritual highs can become as tedious and predictable as a service read verbatim from a prayer book. It is definitely a different song.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the origins of yet another major worship tradition, the Pentecostal Tradition. Spirit-filled gifts animate every service. Sacraments may seem a bit tame since the evidence of God's present activity is already so overwhelming.

Contemporary Praise and Worship

The Gap and Gift streams

Howard Rachinski may not be a familiar name but the company he founded is likely familiar: CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc.) Rachinski's pastor was Reg Layzell, a Canadian businessman who was asked to lead worship at a Pentecostal church. He had a hard time figuring out why worship was falling flat and came to the realization that what was missing was better praise. He built a theology of worship from the KJV translation of Psalm 22:3, “But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.” From this and other passages that speak of praise, Layzell explains that God ‘inhabits’ or comes to places where people praise Him. Essentially human praises in worship stimulates and moves God to come near. Then the Spirit gives the people the witness of tongues. So Reg Layzell designed a movement wherein the music is the sacrament, the place where one encounters God. He moved the borders of where God has promised his saving presence among men. This is a new take on spirit-filled worship outside of the gospel.

Lester Ruth and Swee Hong Lim have written a history of the worship music in American evangelicalism and pentecostalism since the middle of the 20th century. They have determined

⁵⁷ The Assemblies of God is the largest branch of Pentecostalism and is growing. While the two largest Protestant denominations in the U.S. (Methodists and Baptists) have seen membership and attendance decline by as much as twenty percent, from 2005 to 2020, the Assemblies of God saw sixteenth percent growth. The Assemblies of God are also growing steadily internationally. As other Pentecostal denominations have shifted beliefs, the Assemblies of God have kept a focus on speaking in tongues, a millennial reign of Christ and divine healings. Membership is young, with more than half under the age of 35 in 2019. Recent polls indicate politics may play a role, as nearly 3/4 of members report voting Republican.

⁵⁸ I was recently invited to coffee by the grandfather of one of our LES students. He is a retired Pentecostal minister who would like to get me involved in a 2025 Revival being planned at the Delta Center in downtown Salt Lake.

two different groups that write and employ some of the exact same contemporary Christian songs. The above mentioned group is labeled the “gift stream.” They are so labeled because those in the tradition of Reg Layzell understand music that is emotionally powerful and stirs the hearts of people in the right way to be a gift by which the Lord is moved to come near. The contemporary music is a gift. Most of the contemporary music on CCLI’s top ten most used Christian songs last year were written by those of this theology.

The second label is the “gap stream.” Ruth and Lim use that phrase to describe Christian worship leaders in any denomination with anxieties about how older songs are received by current worshippers. In other words, a pastor may feel like there is a gap in the musical repertoire of his congregation. Maybe it is missing something more “relevant” or “upbeat” or better for evangelistic worship, etc. The gap people generally still believe that the story in the music is more important than the power of the music (which is not required in the gift stream).

Here is a bit of good news. We do not have to rouse God from a nap or try to catch his attention. He is here. He is the one dying to summon our spirits again. He always makes the first move.

Lutheran Is Different

Evangelical preaching is thoughts and ideas to inspire.⁵⁹ Lutheran preaching is a word that gives life.

Evangelical worship understands gospel promises as potential (and abstract), for the worshipper to appropriate to themselves. Lutheran worship gives the gospel promises away to let the Lord set souls free.

Evangelical worship sees the work of Christ as a past event to remember. Lutheran worship is Christ: living, active, and present.

Liturgical worship supports and teaches Lutheran doctrine. The Historic Liturgy of Proper and Ordinary, Word and Meal is a house built for worship that finds God in the means of grace.

Will American Lutherans be distinctive or accommodating in this cultural moment? Is that not a false choice? While we wrestle with anxieties about how we fit in this rapidly changing culture, and how best to serve the people the Lord has entrusted to us, we press forward in good conscience when love and truth and best drive decisions. We can and should, in the words of Prof. Paul Koelpin, add our voice to the choir that has been singing the new song for millennia. He adds, however, that we must remember that we are only a voice, not the whole choir. This is a moment for us to offer the best of what we have been given, and to stand tall for it as so much crumbles.

In 2023, the Miriam Webster Dictionary’s word of the year was “authentic”. When you consider the celebrity culture, social media masks, and AI, it is not difficult to see a desire for something real. There are still plenty who see the church as a group of hypocrites. Concordia Seminary professor David Schmitt pointed out that if you get rid of Truth, all that is left is

⁵⁹ Or in the worst case, to entertain. Either way, the service needs a very strong speaker to appeal to and motivate people. The preacher’s ability becomes so central that megachurches form around single personalities; they are necessary because there is a limited number of pastors at that level of rhetorical skill.

authenticity. Unless you have the Truth. Then you can have both and there is no way that is not attractive in a postmodern world.

Maybe we could use a little revival of passion when it comes to making worship the best we possibly can.⁶⁰ I am certain we could use a little less of treating worship matters as if they were mere matters of personal taste. We are either witting or unwitting ritualists. We cannot escape it.

I have no desire to see ceremony or ritual policed, but we, the pastors, owe ourselves, the people we care for and our Lord an answer to why we are doing what we are doing, don't we? Invite your Bible Information Class or any class you teach to ask you the "why" question about anything in worship. My brother John will give you much more to chew on.

For our part in a little corner of the Kingdom called Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, the book in the pew rack in 2024 resembles the one from 1524, perhaps more so than any other of the Reformation traditions.⁶¹ For my part, I would love to see us keep a unity in worship practice while not expecting uniformity.⁶²

"Home" is where you live, it is a deep part of you, it protects you in the cold and separates you from outsiders, and all those who live in that place are part of your family. You can and should decorate it differently at different times. You might remodel and the roof will have to be replaced occasionally. Sometimes you might hang out outside. You are safe there, fed there, you can rest there. It fades to the back as you watch a show or read a book or sit with your family for dinner. But it holds all of that together for you, it allows these things and cares for you even when you do not notice. Then sometimes you do, and you appreciate it. For countless Christians and Lutherans, the liturgical Service we have inherited is just that kind of home. Home for me and a house for the Lord's gifts and presence. A place crammed with heaven to take our shoes off for a while.

SDG

⁶⁰ If we get half as excited about studying worship as we do about...fill in the blank

⁶¹ And yet, it of course, reaches much, much farther back. And, maybe some of the Anglicans have as much continuity.

⁶² A nice note in *Christian Worship: Foundations*, 208: "[A] strategy for variety and creativity within Lutheran parameters does two things: It broadens current range of practice and promotes unity within that range."

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