

Modern Church Liturgy:  
The Worship Experience Continued Throughout History

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## Abstract

Liturgy is prevalent in every church. Whether a church claims to be nonliturgical or not, it follows a method of structures, rituals, and systems set in place through centuries of use. Additionally, every micro difference in the ceremonies adhered to develops into that specific church's expression of worship. Worship comprises the extent and limit of our actions and thoughts, resulting in liturgy falling under this category.

This paper argues that the only reason liturgy has remained largely unaltered throughout centuries of the church is due solely to the religion of ancient Israel. The Jews' structure and elements used in their worship have paved the way for the use of liturgy in the religions and denominations of the West up until today. Catholicism and modern Christianity have followed suit by developing a relatable liturgy, which proceeds from the established liturgy of their Jewish ancestor.

## Introduction

Many newly started churches, or off-shoot plants from mother churches, are following the same trend: they identify themselves as nonliturgical. This seems to be the one criterion when searching for a church that “fits” our comfort level or our personality. Why is the overt presence or apparent lack of liturgy the main thing Christians are concerned with in their home church? Should not the preaching of the gospel message—“...it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...”<sup>1</sup> be our priority when determining the authority of the churches we attend?

Nonetheless, the subject of liturgy can be confusing and altogether terrifying. However, the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines liturgy as “a fixed set of ceremonies, words, etc., that are used during public worship in a religion”. But after all, many immediately think of the five parts of the Ordinary of the Catholic Mass when they hear the term *liturgy*. And did not the church split over disputes regarding unbiblical practices of the Catholic Church? Why, then, would the church want to implement structures and ceremonies so heavily associated with the institution involved in the Great Schism?

The use of liturgy, however, predates the Mass several thousand years, beginning in the period of Jewish Antiquity. The modern church’s liturgy, including the so well known Catholic liturgy, has sprung and evolved from the liturgy of the ancient Jews. Though many denominations may view themselves as unstructured and may lean toward an untraditional service, every Christian church adheres to a liturgy stemming from ancient Israel and follows a set of ceremonies and rituals, no matter what its denomination or background.

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<sup>1</sup> Eph. 2:8 (NIV)

The understanding of liturgy is imperative in our churches because God ordained the structure of the church service throughout of the book of Leviticus. Many churches, particularly charismatic ones, believe that following a liturgy in a service is living under the curse of the law and not in the freedom of grace Christ gave us by dying on the cross. But this misunderstanding has created a rift between the body of Christ and its different denominations. The beauty of the liturgy is that it is flexible enough to allow all expressions of worship. An understanding of the history of the liturgy and how helpful it is will dispel lingering ignorance and fear residing in the modern church, and will allow a new freedom of worship and comradery between denominations.

### **Worship and Liturgy Related**

It should be made clear that liturgy is a part of worship; conversely, worship is a part of liturgy. They are not so much interchangeable with each other as reliant on one another. Frank Senn refers to worship as being more than, and less than, liturgy.<sup>2</sup> It is more, in that it contains the devotional practices of groups and individuals along with congregational praise and prayer. It is less, in that liturgy includes ritual, whereas worship does not. Ritual involves the actions of a community before God and the interactions of a community with one another.<sup>3</sup> All worship should be directed toward God. Though worship is “performed” at every moment and may involve actions or attitudes involving other persons, its ultimate object of focus is God. For this reason, ritual plays little part in worship.

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<sup>2</sup> Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*. (Fortress Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Harold Best states in his book, *Unceasing Worship*, that everybody worships.<sup>4</sup> His definition of worship is “...the continuous outpouring of all that I am, all that I do and all that I can ever become in light of a chosen or choosing god.”<sup>5</sup> All of our actions are either directing us toward evil or toward righteousness. We must make a conscious effort to direct our continuous worship toward God. Because all we do is worship, liturgy falls under this category. Although our worship is unceasing, there are times when designated, corporate or individual worship is beneficial. This can be seen throughout the Bible.

And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians [in the Exodus], the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant. Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: ‘I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation...’<sup>6</sup>

Then Samuel said to the people, ‘Come, let us go to Gilgal and there reaffirm the kingship [of Saul].’ So all the people went to Gilgal and confirmed Saul as king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.<sup>7</sup>

This illustrates that fixed times of worship and offerings existed for the Old Testament Jews.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts*, (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 14:31-15:2a (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> 1 Sam 11:14-15 (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> Abraham Zebi Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development*. (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1967), 10.

Best's definition of worship is not applicable if Christ is not the focus. The book of Hebrews provides the most thorough concept of worship in the entire New Testament.<sup>9</sup> It effectively takes the rituals and ceremonies used in Old Testament worship and reshapes them in the New Testament way of thinking—one that is relatable in this day of the modern liturgy. The Old Testament practices of worship, involving the sanctuary, sacrifices, and high priests, are associated with the person and work of Jesus in Hebrews.<sup>10</sup> Hebrews makes it clear that our ownership in the new covenant with Jesus is in concordance with the fulfillment of the Mosaic covenant; we are no longer required to offer prescribed sacrifices because Jesus' sacrifice paid the eternal debt of our sins. Therefore, our daily lives and actions should reflect this truth in our worship.

Hebrews further concentrates worship on Christ by indicating him as the high priest. The high priest's role in Old Testament worship was to address the problem of sin and to remove any guilt that could provoke God's anger.<sup>11</sup> Hebrews makes it clear that the blood of Jesus is what allows sinners to draw near to God in their daily lives.<sup>12</sup> "The victim is the priest himself [Jesus] and this unity of the priest and the sacrifice brings the Mosaic cult to an end because its ideal has been fulfilled in Jesus."<sup>13</sup> Jesus has overcome the sacrificial system and is the new high priest. We are called in 1 Peter 2:5 to be a holy priesthood under our new high priest, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. This revelation molds our mindset in regard to worship. We are now the ones offering sacrifices to God; we are no longer reliant on others to perform our sacrifices for us.

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<sup>9</sup> David Peterson, "Engaging with God in the Old Testament." In *Engaging with God*, 228. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> David Peterson, "The Book of Hebrews and the Worship of Jesus." In *Engaging with God*, 229. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 230.

Now that the sacrificial system has been changed or even eradicated, the ability to express our worship freely has been granted to us. No longer are we restricted to the prescribed formula of worshipping our creator. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, adhering to rituals of worship is no longer an obligation; our newly acquired freedom has instilled in us a desire for worship rituals, albeit different ones.

### **Modern Liturgy Stemming From Ancient Jewish Liturgy**

The Christian Church receives its history from the ancient Jews. In the beginning of the Old Testament of the Bible, strict regulations are given to the Jews in regards to the form their worship is to take. As one of the Levitical priests, one is to enter the outer courts of the Tabernacle and first stop at the bronze altar. The altar symbolized the Old Testament animal sacrifice used to cover over sins and was later to be replaced by Christ. The next station is at the bronze laver used to wash away the blood of the sacrificed animal. This foretells our baptism into the body of Christ—being cleansed of the old life and born into the new life. As the priest enters the Holy Place inside the Tabernacle, he finds the golden lampstand and the table of showbread. The bread on the table foreshadows the body of Christ that was pierced and striped for our transgressions, along with the grapes that are crushed in the same way Christ's body was crushed. The light emitting from the golden lampstand signifies the light Jesus is to the world. The altar of incense releases a fragrance as a constant reminder of unceasing prayer. Separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies is the inner veil. This separated a holy God from an unholy people. But due to Christ's sacrifice, it was torn to allow unlimited access to God.

Lastly, inside the Holy of Holies resides the Ark of the Covenant. Encased in this container is the representation of the Father's throne and the manifest presence of the Most High God.<sup>14</sup>

The journey of the worshipper then follows a pattern. First, the outer gate signifies our way of approach to God. Then, our acknowledgement of God's presence is made, and we are able to submit confession and ask forgiveness of sins at the bronze altar. Building altars and offering sacrifices to God was an essential act of worship for the Jews; both elements represented God's presence in their midst.<sup>15</sup> Then, the separation and sanctification of God's people is achieved at the bronze laver. Next, God provides a way of entrance through the inner gate, we receive our priestly garments, and we are granted access into the priesthood of believers and into our ministry. The table of showbread offers a way of communion with the Father and signifies God's provision for his people. The golden lampstand gives illumination to what God has called his followers. We then offer prayer and intercession to the Triune God at the altar of incense. The inner veil provides admittance into the glory of God by the blood of Christ. And finally, the mysterious connection between heaven and earth is realized, along with God's plan for redemption, and the glorification of the church at the Ark of the Covenant. This could be considered the loose structure of the Biblical liturgy of the ancient Jews.<sup>16</sup>

### **Jewish Prayer**

The Jewish liturgy was heavily reliant on various elements—some of those being prayer, music, and the Eucharist. Throughout this paper, the significance of these components will be traced in Jewish, Catholic, and modern, Evangelical liturgies by addressing the way in which these liturgies aid in the expression of worship. The inference of worship is found in these three

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<sup>14</sup> All information in this paragraph came from the same source: Tracy Meola. "Worship of the Old Testament." Foundations of Worship Class, Colorado Christian University, 20 Oct. 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Idelsohn, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Meola

elements because of the direction in which they are offered. In the religion of Israel, there dawned the idea that prayer was the only worthy sacrifice to God.<sup>17</sup> It is through the recorded prayers of David and of other prominent leaders of Israel that we see the foundation of Israel's worship.<sup>18</sup> When a sanctuary and its cult<sup>19</sup> were lacking, the Jewish people would indulge in prayer and supplication, both as individual members of the congregation and as a whole, while being led by the priest.<sup>20</sup> Many recited prayers of the liturgy can easily be compared to the structure, language, and thematic material found in the psalms.

The structure of the ancient Jewish service is comparable to the modern understanding of liturgy. The Morning Service had five parts starting with Morning Benedictions, Verses of Song, which included psalms and blessings, Creator, which involved a group of prayers addressing Israel, Standing, and Supplication. The Supplication portion of the service was a prayer by the individual worshipper done silently at the end of the service.<sup>21</sup> The *Shema*, or Creator portion of the service, contained the confession of faith and the core of Israel's belief, much like the Catholic *Credo* portion of the mass.<sup>22</sup> Oxford scholar W.O.E Oesterley states:

The influence of the Jewish Liturgy on the early Church and its forms of worship is nowhere so clearly to be discerned as in the prayers which have been preserved in early Christian literature and in the earliest forms of the Christian Liturgy. Nobody, in reading the pre-Christian forms of prayer in the Jewish Liturgy and the prayers of the early

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>19</sup> The context of a cult in this sense is different from the modern understanding. Generally, it refers to “the expression of religious experience in concrete external actions performed within the congregation or community, preferably by officially appointed exponents and in set forms”. Modern use of the word ‘cult’ to describe particular (usually extreme) religious groups should not be allowed to confuse this issue.” David Peterson, *Engaging with God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 30.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 16.

Church, can fail to notice the similarity of atmosphere of each, or to recognize that both proceed from the same mould [sic].<sup>23</sup>

Praise and thanksgiving receive much of the emphasis in the Christian liturgy; more focus is placed on our Heavenly Father and less attention is paid to our petitions, similar to the Jewish prayers adopted by the Christian church. Many parallel veins can be traced throughout the Jewish and early Christian prayers, including ones stemming from writings by Clement of Alexandria and from the *Didache*.<sup>24</sup> As Oesterley claims, some of the clearest similarities between Jewish and Christian liturgy can be found in their prayers.

### Jewish Music

Another element of Jewish liturgy was the music. In numerous passages of the Bible, musical instruments can be found in association with worship. On multiple occasions, David would play his lyre or harp for King Saul.<sup>25</sup> Instruments of all kinds—string, percussion, brass, and woodwinds—were used in the worship at the Lord’s Temple.

<sup>25</sup> [King Hezekiah] stationed the Levites in the temple of the Lord with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king’s seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the Lord through his prophets. <sup>26</sup> So the Levites stood ready with David’s instruments, and the priests with their trumpets. <sup>27</sup> Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the Lord began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel. <sup>28</sup> The whole

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<sup>23</sup> W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy*, (Oxford, 1925), 125.

<sup>24</sup> Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 301.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Sam 16:23 (NIV)

assembly bowed in worship, while the musicians played and the trumpets sounded. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed.<sup>26</sup>

These are just a few of the passages throughout the Bible that lend to the incorporated use of instruments in Israel's worship. Music and song used in the Bible and ancient Jewish liturgy had a purpose. Using music in the liturgy as worship created an atmosphere which aided receptivity in the congregation. The singing of text also abetted memorization of the doctrines and themes.<sup>27</sup> The music also heightened and illuminated the meaning of the text, just as modern music does today.<sup>28</sup>

There was a variety of different song genres used in the Jewish liturgy.<sup>29</sup> Greater Canticles were sung, which included the Songs of the Angels, the Song of Simeon, the Song of Zechariah, and the Song of Mary. The Psalms sung were also divided into categories of petition, praise, and thanksgiving. Those were then further separated into design types. These included plain, direct psalm with no strophic arrangement, acrostic poems with phrases arranged in alphabetical order in Hebrew, refrain psalms with each verse ending with the same refrain, and hallelujah psalms that began or ended with a proclamation. Psalm 136 is an example of this last type: "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. *His love endures forever.* Give thanks to the God of gods. *His love endures forever...*"<sup>30</sup> Another genre was used heavily, called special music. Many of the psalms sung resemble this—songs written to celebrate or reflect on a certain occasion. The Song of Deborah in Judges 5 and the Song of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15 are examples of this.

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<sup>26</sup> 2 Chron 29:25-28 (NIV)

<sup>27</sup> Senn, 16.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Tracy Meola. "Worship of the Old Testament." Foundations of Worship Class, Colorado Christian University, 20 Oct. 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Ps 136:1-2 (NIV)

## Jewish Practice of the Eucharist

Although the term *Eucharist* may not have been first used until the Last Supper, this element still plays an important role in the liturgy of the Jews. In the worship of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, the body and blood of Christ is augured in the table of showbread in the Holy Place. As part of the ritual of worship, the striped and pierced bread was eaten and the wine was drunk by the Levitical priests. This element carries through to the meeting of the disciples with Jesus in the upper room.

*Eucharist* originates from the thanks spoken over the metaphorical body and blood of Christ at the Last Supper.<sup>31</sup> The evolution of the word *Eucharist* starts with the Greek *kharis*, meaning ‘grace’. It then forms into *eu* and *kharizesthai*, meaning ‘well’ and ‘offer graciously’ respectively. It then moves to *eukharistos*, meaning ‘grateful,’ and finally, *eukharistia*, meaning ‘thanksgiving’. Thus, the Christian ‘thank-offering’ was recognized by the church to commemorate the rite of the Last Supper.<sup>32</sup>

## Modern Liturgy’s Relation to Medieval Catholic Liturgy

The Catholic liturgy loosely follows the same structure. The *Kyrie*, meaning Lord have mercy, equates to the acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty and the forgiveness of sins at the bronze altar. The *Gloria* gives glory to God in the highest, patterned after a sinner’s thanksgiving after being cleansed from his sin, similar to a worshipper’s experience at the bronze laver. The *Credo* provides the confession of faith for the believer: I believe in one God. This is the essential faith declaration of the believer which provides admittance into the Kingdom of God. The inner gate and the table of showbread are both symbolized in the *Credo*; by confession

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<sup>31</sup> James Herbert Srawley, *The Early History of the Liturgy*, 2nd Ed., (Cambridge, Eng.: University Press, 1949), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

of our belief in one God, we receive entrance into God's presence and are able to enter into deeper communion with him.

Interwoven in the *Credo*'s words are truths of the Nicene Creed. By saying "I believe in one God", one is inferring the rest of the Nicene Creed. This creed succinctly states the doctrines of our faith: we believe in one God, the maker of all things. We believe in Jesus Christ his Son, begotten of the Father. And we believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and gives witness to Christ, in so many words. It is important to unpack the weight of the phrase "I believe in one God", because it holds the truths of our faith.

The *Sanctus*'s words of "holy, holy, holy" remind the worshipper of the golden lampstand and the altar of incense. The *Benedictus*, whose words say blessed is he, comes attached to the *Sanctus*. These words act as a sweet fragrance offered to God, similar to the incense at the altar. Finally, the *Agnus Dei* gives glory to the Lamb of God. This is in correlation with the worshipper's experience in the Holy of Holies and at the Ark of the Covenant. There, the glory of God is revealed and heaven comes to earth—a foretelling of the end times and the vision seen by John and described in Revelation. Even though a great deal of time has passed, the Messiah has come, and the steps have different names, this journey through the structure of the liturgy can be related back to the rituals found in the Old Testament and performed by the Jews.

### **Catholic Prayer**

Compared to prayer performed in the time of the ancient Jews, there was at this time much less congregant participation. Prayer and devotions at this time in church history were

referred to as “exercises of piety”.<sup>33</sup> The Catholic Church had not been designed as a vehicle of personal devotion; instead, it was meant to be a public celebration of the faith of the church.<sup>34</sup> At this time, the liturgy of the church was in disarray because it had for so long been displaying pompous piety or expressing religiosity.<sup>35</sup> This was illustrated in the private prayers said by the priest during the mass. For this reason, there was little congregant participation for fear of haughty or selfish attitudes.

Not only was prayer performed by the average congregant frowned upon, it was being outsourced. Prayer was a monk’s vocation.<sup>36</sup> They engaged in morning prayer, evening prayer, and the vigil feasts.<sup>37</sup> Because prayer formed the framework of a monk’s lifestyle, more thought was put into prayers by turning them into hymn-like, poetic chants.<sup>38</sup> This shaped the style of prayer in many churches; many clergy were expected to worship together “in choir” as if they themselves were monks.<sup>39</sup> This is reminiscent of the prayers of ancient Israel. Many of the prayers offered by Moses, David, and a number of other psalmists were done in the form of song. Their supplications would be offered to God with the accompaniment of music.

### Catholic Music

We owe much of the establishment of the musical Church calendar to Popes Leo I, Gelasius I, and Gregory the Great.<sup>40</sup> Many believe that out of the tunes composed by Gregory came what is known as Gregorian chant. The early Catholic view of music, however, was that it

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<sup>33</sup> Senn, 236.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> White, 84.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 206.

was only to serve as a vehicle for the text, not as the sole focus of worship.<sup>41</sup> Deacons were the only ones allowed to sing the chants; normal congregants did not have the skill to read the musical notation.

As Gregorian chant, a variety of plainsong, evolved into organum with the beginning use of what could be called harmony, hymns started to be written in Latin for the morning and evening offices.<sup>42</sup> The subjects of these hymns were strictly Christological and Trinitarian.<sup>43</sup> Hymnists of this day were careful to imbue correct doctrine by refuting any heresy of Arianism<sup>44</sup> or paganism while still accommodating the humanity of the congregants.<sup>45</sup>

### Catholic Practice of the Eucharist

As time passed from the first practice of the Eucharist with the early Christians, the ritual and understanding of the Eucharist changed drastically. It was no longer viewed as a way of communion with fellow Christians; it had morphed back into a right reserved only for the priest who was worthy enough to partake.

At this time in history, the controversy of transubstantiation immersed, causing tension in the church. The concept of transubstantiation delineated that the person of Jesus was physically manifested in the bread and wine taken during the Eucharist. This system of thought first surfaced through Lanfranc's<sup>46</sup> view of God's word being mirrored in the bread and the wine. He

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 208-209.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>44</sup> Arianism refers to the heretical doctrine first proposed by Arius in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It stated that God created Jesus first, before all creation. For this reason, Jesus was not equal to God. He was not fully divine and not fully human, but he was the highest of all creation. This effectively denied the Triune God and affirmed polytheism. This heresy was later condemned as such at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. "Arianism: Christian Heresy." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. November 18, 2014. Accessed April 11, 2015. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/34124/Arianism>.

<sup>45</sup> Senn, 209.

<sup>46</sup> Lanfranc was abbot of Saint Stephen's Monastery in Caen. Senn, 251.

believed that if God's word has the power to change the existing into something else, why, then, could not the concentration of the bread and the wine change.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, it was believed that if a drop of "blood" was spilled or a piece of the "body" was dropped, the person of Christ would be defiled.<sup>48</sup> For this reason, only the priests were trusted to engage in the Eucharist in order to reduce the risk of spilling the sacraments. The Fourth Lateran Council had decreed that the faithful must receive the elements at least once a year at Easter, though many received it as many as four times a year.<sup>49</sup>

It could be said that the meaning and significance of the Eucharist was lost on the congregants who were not given the pleasure of partaking, nor did they understand the beauty of the "thank-offering" it signified. At the Last Supper, Jesus did say "... 'Take and eat; this is my body... drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant...'" but to assume that Jesus poured out his own blood into the cup or cut out his own flesh to be eaten is unfounded. Jesus' intent in offering the bread and the wine was to give the disciples a personal stake in the Kingdom of God. In effect, this act was foreshadowing the sacrifice of Jesus; this "body" will be broken for your sins, and this "blood" will be poured out for your transgressions as a symbol of a new covenant, one of grace rather than blood. Jesus' body and blood was going to eradicate the old covenant of the law and bring with it the new covenant of grace.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Meola.

<sup>49</sup> Senn, 223, James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 90.

## Modern Liturgy

As Senn describes it, catholic<sup>50</sup> liturgy is universal. It refers to the whole church and serves as the public proclamation of the gospel, through words and sacraments, celebrated by the people of God in Christ.<sup>51</sup> Roman Catholic liturgy tends to focus on the gospel of Christ and the context of the culture in which the gospel is proclaimed.<sup>52</sup> Evangelical liturgy, on the other hand, seeks to redirect the Catholic tendency of focusing on the surrounding culture and times to reminding its users that liturgy should be able to transcend and transform the culture it addresses.<sup>53</sup>

Contrary to Jewish and Catholic religions, Christianity was not practiced openly in the beginning of its foundation. Christians engaged in none of the cultic practices like festivals, sacrifices, pilgrimages, etc., as other religions did. Their ritual revolved around a communal meal that had a domestic origin and setting inherited from Judaism.<sup>54</sup> Early Christians had not established systematized ceremonies or order to their convocation; they merely studied and obeyed the teachings of Christ and of others, such as Paul, James, and Peter.

A designated liturgy for the early Christians was not established until the emergence of the *Didache*. *Didache* is Greek for teaching, referring to the Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles. It is essentially a compilation of directions taken from the Old Testament and Jesus' teachings and added to by the early Christians to instruct the newly growing Christian community. This, along with texts from the Bible that the Christians possessed, provided a written guide of the

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<sup>50</sup> In this sense of the word, catholic is not referring to the institution of the Roman Catholic Church. This term is instead referring to the word that is synonymous with universal. From here onward, Catholic will refer to the church denomination, and catholic will refer to the universal.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 47-48.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 53.

Apostle's teaching that was relatively easy to acquire and study. Other than these texts, Christian rituals had grown to include prayer meetings, fellowship with other Christians, and preaching of the gospel.

It was not until the Protestant Reformation that was initiated in 1517 by Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* that western church liturgy took a shift. Luther's main compulsion in writing his essay was to address the corruption in the Church with regard to the selling of indulgences. He advocated for the congregation's participation in the church service, particularly with a change in language from Latin to that specific region's language and dialect. At this time, church liturgy began to evolved into the Protestant, and later Evangelical, liturgy that is so heavily associated with the modern church.

Coming out of the Reformation, churches and the clergy were careful that scripture was the center of the liturgy from which all other parts revolved.<sup>55</sup> While previous masses might have set the journey in front of the worshipper with no opportunity for individual discovery or purposeful delving, these progressing church services gave abundant occasion for the worshipper to receive new insights to previous beliefs and practices, mainly through the study of scripture.<sup>56</sup> The main vehicle of the liturgy was shifting from action and song to reading the Word of God and preaching from it.

### **Modern Prayer**

At the beginning of the Protestant Reformation and moving into the Age of Reason, prayer remained fixed in the Anglican Tradition of morning and evening prayers in the parish

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<sup>55</sup> Senn, 300.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

churches.<sup>57</sup> But as time moved on, many of the processes used in prayer and the purposes for which it was used had changed. As previously stated, modern churches extract much of their prayer structure from the ancient Jews. The Heavenly Father is the focus of these prayers expressed through praise and thanksgiving. Similarly, prayer grows out of the church's awareness as a community of celebration.<sup>58</sup> Chan believes that prayer is the prime act, of which all other actions are an elaboration. Prayer is what links our doctrine to applicable practice.<sup>59</sup> The evolution on which prayer has embarked is one of self-identification. Prayer has grown to be shaped by our own particular conception of God, humanity, salvation, and the church.<sup>60</sup> Instead of prayer being withheld from the congregant and reserved for the specially trained, it has become an everyday means of communication with our creator. Prayer is no longer confined to prescribed times and specific recitations; it can come from a place of spontaneity and improvisation. Many church-goers find prayer to be the one area in which anyone can participate, no matter how long they have known Christ.

### Modern Music

Because of the immense lack of sung prayers and songs in the vernacular at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther began writing many hymns. Later, Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley also added to the amount of singable material used in churches. Much like their ancient Jewish counterparts, they wrote about the doctrines on which their faith was founded. Although the Jews of ancient Israel did not know that the Son of God would be sacrificed as their eternal, symbolic lamb and would provide a way into God's presence, they worshipped God for his undeserved love, forgiveness, and mercy. These truths are paralleled in the hymns written by

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<sup>57</sup> White, 152.

<sup>58</sup> Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 125.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

the redeemed writers of the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Now that they had experienced the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his undeserved love, forgiveness, and grace, their hymns reflected these Christocentric themes.

### **Modern Practice of the Eucharist**

The Eucharist continued to remain at the heart of worship for the average Christian at this time.<sup>61</sup> The church became adamant that the sacraments signify grace rather than affect it, as the Catholic Church insisted.<sup>62</sup> By this time, however, the Eucharist no longer inferred communion time with fellow Christians. It was now a memorial of the grace given by Jesus on the cross. Because it now symbolized something different, many disputes and disagreements erupted in the church pertaining to the way in which the Eucharist was to be taken and for what purpose.

### **Evangelical Liturgy**

As the church came into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the liturgy of the church came full circle. More and more churches began revisiting their roots in the early Christian Church by creating community and focusing on a time of fellowship in their services. However, many churches engaged in liturgical experimentation which was spurred out of the Civil Rights movement and anti-Vietnam War efforts during the 1960s. This involved variance in music style, gathering place, and supplementary liturgical books.<sup>63</sup>

Many claim that the basic shape of the liturgy of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries follows an undifferentiated four movement structure: the gathering, the word, the meal, and the dismissal.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> White, 155.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Senn, 638.

<sup>64</sup> Senn, 645.

Obviously, ceremonial and devotional elements are added to every liturgy without obfuscating its core shape. Nevertheless, the commonality in liturgy is greater than the variations.

Even with a boiled-down structure of the liturgy, one can see the similarities in the present day liturgy and trace remnants throughout the centuries from the Old Testament Jewish worshippers, to the Medieval Catholic Mass, all the way to modern Protestant and Evangelical church liturgy. The gathering portion of the modern liturgy reminds observers of the outer gate and the symbolic forgiveness and washing of sins at the bronze altar and laver, respectively. Although the gathering might make one think of only the fellowship portion of a service, there is much more packed into that movement. By comparing the liturgies of a Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, and Presbyterian church, many elements emerge from the gathering portion. The average liturgy contains a call to worship, a prayer, and songs of praise, pardon, or confession. This movement effectively prepares the worshipper's heart for the next movement—the word.

The portion centered around the word lends to the preaching of exegetical sermons, rather than topical ones. Through reading and preaching from the Old Testament, the Psalms, and the New Testament, the worshipper experiences things similar to what the Jewish priests experienced at the bronze laver and the inner gate. Throughout these passages of scripture, the participant is made aware of his separation from God. However, through the inner gate we are accepted into a priesthood of believers, as it is made known throughout the reading taken from the New Testament.

As the service moves to the meal portion, the congregant is reminded of the table of showbread and what its contents represented. The bread and the wine symbolize Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the communion with the Father that we are able to engage in because

of that sacrifice. This movement of the liturgy also speaks to the tradition that began the ritual of the Eucharist—the time of fellowship that the disciples spent together, as well as the early Christians.

Finally, the dismissal speaks to the future and to what we have to look forward. The inner veil and the Ark of the Covenant remind the participant of God's uninhibited presence and the time yet to come when we will see God face to face. The dismissal portion instills this hope in the congregant through the benediction, the charge, the post-communion prayer, or the spiritual, at the close of the service. As illustrated, the liturgy of the modern church follows the footsteps of its ancestors by preserving the beauty and importance of the worship experience at the Lord's Tabernacle.

### **Pentecostal and Charismatic Liturgy**

Because the Pentecostal and Charismatic church movements stemmed out of the modern church, their liturgy follows the same four movement structure as the previously mentioned denominations. Nevertheless, they may differ in the elements used to express their worship. The charismatic denomination of churches continues to offer their prayers through praise and thanksgiving; however, a heavier emphasis is placed on intercessory prayer—prayer used for brief, concentrated courses. Because the charismatic church is characterized by an affinity for the gifts of the Spirit, with good reason, intercession holds a place of importance. The Holy Spirit is described in Romans 8:26 as the one who intercedes for us. The Holy Spirit is a Person of the Trinity who receives much attention in the charismatic church; consequently, intercessory prayer is the type of prayer that is focused on, more so than any others.

Music in the charismatic church tends to follow the trend of experimentation which all modern churches have turned to follow. There tends to be less emphasis on the singing of hymns

and psalms and a heavy emphasis on Christocentric worship and an exploration of God's character. Many believe that the modern worship service, in the terms of music, has started to become a production of performance rather than an offering of first fruits. This is mainly due to an incorporation of technological artistic expression in worship. Many charismatic churches identify themselves as either "seeker friendly" or focusing on the spiritual growth of practicing Christians. The target crowd of those churches associated with seeking the lost tends to be the younger generation in their twenties. For this reason, their expression of worship is modeled after a rock concert with colorful lights, fog machines, and loud music. Regardless of their affiliation, as long as the church's object of worship is directed whole-heartedly toward God, the presence or lack of production elements should be of no consequence when it comes to the authenticity of worship.

The celebration of the Eucharist, on the other hand, has remained mostly the same. Although the fellowship element of communion is often times deemphasized, the commemoration of Christ's sacrifice is at the heart of every celebration. The forgiveness of sins and the grace of God play a major role in the charismatic celebration of the Eucharist.

Growing up in a charismatic church, the thought was inadvertently instilled in the congregants that adherence to structure, and liturgy in particular, was robbing the Holy Spirit of his purpose. On the other hand, it was believed that a charismatic style worship service referred to a lack of planning. However, in his book *Liturgical Theology*, Simon Chan would argue that in a charismatic service, unpredictable components are rare.<sup>65</sup> These churches observe "planned spontaneous happenings" which provide a framework for impulsive events.<sup>66</sup> A tongue and an

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<sup>65</sup> Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 127.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

interpretation of that tongue given during the sermon would be frowned upon, as would the giving of a word of knowledge etc. Nevertheless, charismatic services adhere to certain unspoken guidelines in which spontaneous elements are allowed to take place.

However, charismatic, as used in the Bible, comes from the Greek word *charisma* or *kharis* meaning grace or a gift.<sup>67</sup> It refers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit as expressed in 1 Corinthians 12.

<sup>4</sup> There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. <sup>5</sup> There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. <sup>7</sup> Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. <sup>8</sup> To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, <sup>[a]</sup> and to still another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>[b]</sup> <sup>11</sup> All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.<sup>68</sup>

The purpose in the establishment of the charismatic church was to differentiate themselves from others by the use of the *charisma*, or the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Its sole purpose was not an unstructured worship service. It is only by years of unfortunate association that charismatic connotes unstructured. Because of this perceived inattention to the structure and beauty of the

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<sup>67</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “charisma”. Accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charisma>

<sup>68</sup> 1 Cor 12:4-11 (NIV)

liturgy, charismatic churches have received a bad reputation, and perhaps rightly so. The intent of a charismatic worship service, however, should not be to alienate the other members of the body of Christ with a perceived lack of historical and Biblical knowledge; it should be to allow the Holy Spirit to move freely throughout the structure of the liturgy.

Nevertheless, this does not undermine or demean the charismatic expression of worship. Many correlate a charismatic expression of worship to raising one's hands, dancing, clapping, or singing in the Spirit. Although the connection in some people's minds may be assumption, if one delves deeper, he finds that the true connection may be that the clapping or raising of hands, for example, is associated with the passion found in charismatic worship services. Some may find these particular expressions of worship to be uncomfortable or inauthentic. However, some of the most talked-about people of the Bible expressed themselves in these ways during worship. God referred to David as a man after his own heart<sup>69</sup> and he "[danced] before the LORD with all his might."<sup>70</sup> John, the one whom Jesus loved, himself said, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.'"<sup>71</sup> Total abandonment of one's self before the Lord may be the only way to achieve a relationship with God that exemplifies the passion that these men of God so fully exuded in their everyday lives and worship.

The structure of the formal liturgy allows room for the more spontaneous elements of the Pentecostal belief and the gifts of the Spirit.<sup>72</sup> Chan succinctly summarizes: "In short, a normative liturgy is large enough to incorporate the charismatic dimensions of worship. But if

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<sup>69</sup> 1 Sam 13:14 (NIV)

<sup>70</sup> 2 Sam 6:14 (NIV)

<sup>71</sup> Rev 1:17 (NIV)

<sup>72</sup> Chan, 127.

the normative liturgy is to have formative effect, it needs to be correctly understood, deeply appreciated and consistently practiced.”<sup>73</sup> It is only through a love, study, and understanding of the liturgy that it can be appreciated and practiced correctly. Every denomination of Christianity should abide by this instruction.

Perhaps the biggest hindrance to the acceptance of liturgy in the church is ignorance. Ignorance has led to fear of the unknown, which brings us to the rejection of liturgy. As previously laid out, following the structure of the liturgy is in compliance with history. The history of the church comes from liturgy. If churches were to understand that liturgy is God ordained and merely an expression of worship and a guideline in which worship can be engaged, fear would dissipate into eager acceptance. It is through liturgy that we prepare our hearts for God’s word and for the acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice.

## Conclusion

Every *ekklesia*,<sup>74</sup> or assembly of believers, adheres to a set of rituals, ceremonies, and orders.<sup>75</sup> Through study of liturgies in different Christian denominations, and religions altogether, the overall structure of the liturgy remains largely unaltered.<sup>76</sup> It is only through study of the ceremonies that deviance from the prescribed formula has been found.<sup>77</sup> That being said, every church abides by a liturgy. And that liturgy has been found to come from the ancient

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> *Ekklesia* is a combination of the Greek word *ek*, meaning “out of”, and the Greek word *klesis*, meaning “a calling”. It translates as “an assembly or group of citizens called together”. However, after Tyndale’s Bible was written, *ekklesia* was replaced with *congregation*, and later, *church*. A more thorough definition of *ekklesia* would be “people called out from the world and to God, the outcome being the Church”. Richard Anthony, “Christ’s Ekklesia and the Church Compared” *Devoted to Truth* Accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.ecclesia.org/truth/ekklesia.html> and “Ekklesia” Bible Hub, 1998. Accessed March 2, 2015, <http://biblehub.com/greek/1577.htm>

<sup>75</sup> Senn, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 44.

Jews of the Old Testament. Their rites, rituals, and structure have been passed on through centuries and have rested relatively unchanged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The question can then be raised, why has liturgy remained so largely unaltered over the course of history? Because the Abrahamic religions and denominations, namely Islam and Christianity, have developed from ancient Judaism, it is only logical that the structures and systems used would follow suit. Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions, thus illustrating that, modeling changing liturgy after Judaism's, would result in a tested and proven system.

Worship continues to be integrated into the 21<sup>st</sup> century's liturgy by revealing the devotional aspects and the congregational praise. Because worship is all that we do and all that we are, the structural liturgy performed in the church falls into this mode of living. It could be said that every church has its own form of worship, and through comparison and study, that worship tends to look the same, in regards to its prayer, music, and practice of the Eucharist, through millennia and across the denominational spectrum.

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