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LITURGY

Introduction

The word liturgy comes from a Greek word that means "to serve." It was used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, for the service of the priest in the temple. We use it to refer to the format or the order of the worship service.

In this chapter we will reflect on what happens in the worship service. We use the expression "worship services." The combination of "worship" and "service" is telling. It shows that to serve God is to worship Him. Serving the Lord is not forced labour but worship in adoration. By the grace of the Lord we are allowed to have fellowship with the Almighty God. It also shows that worshipping is service. The Lord God places us on this world to serve Him and this service comes out in that we worship Him. We come to church to serve God. In the third place the combination of "service" and "worship" highlights that the weekly worship service is not to be severed from our service and worship during the whole week. Certainly the services on the Lord's Days are highlights, but they are part of a life of service.

Rom 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.

1. Scripture

"We believe that this Holy Scripture fully contains the will of God and that all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein. The whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in it at length." (Art. 7 B.C.) The letter to the Hebrews speaks about this worship in wonderful terms. The Holy Spirit shows the church that her worship is to be seen within the whole of God's work.

Heb 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. 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 men, to the spirits of righteous men 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.

We also learn from the letter to the Hebrews that the service of the priest in the temple has been fulfilled by Christ and is being continued by His work as our only High Priest in heaven. We find this in the chapters 8 and 9. The last book of the Bible shows that our liturgy will come to its climax in the end, for the aim of God's plan is His eternal praise.

Rev 7:11-12

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

In order to deal with this in more detail we will first look at the way Israel worshipped the LORD and in the second place the way the Church of the New Testament may do this.

1.1. Old Testament

The LORD God created man so that man would praise and glorify Him. Adam and Eve served the Lord in perfect liturgy. This came to an abrupt halt with the fall into sin. By his fall man forfeits the privilege of living in fellowship with the LORD. He broke this communion by his disobedience. Yet the LORD restores it. He comes to Adam and Eve after they fell into sin. He gives His wonderful promise. We may see in this His electing love and sovereign good pleasure. The seed of the woman may find her strength in this reality, God with us. While the seed of the serpent finds its strength in boasting (Gen 4:23), the seed of the woman worships and seeks her strength in fellowship with the LORD.

Gen 4:26

Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.

The patriarchs lived in the reality of this fellowship. As they sojourned they called upon the Name of the LORD, inquired of Him, and sacrificed to Him. The LORD was with them. But this presence of God with

His people became more visible and wonderful with the building of the tabernacle at Mount Sinai. The LORD in His glory is willing to dwell among His people.

Exodus 40 : 33 - 38

Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out--until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels.

The worship of the LORD by Israel now centres around the tabernacle, and, later, the temple. We hear this in several Psalms.

Ps 5:7

But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple.

Ps 95:6-7

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice,

Ps 99:9

Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.

Other Psalms that speak about this are e.g. 42, 84, and 122.

The LORD in His grace initiated this communion. He therefore sets the rules that must govern it. We do not have a detailed outline of the order of worship in Israel, but we do learn enough from the Bible to teach us that it was rich and orderly. We can mention a few things. The tabernacle had to be built according to the blue print shown by the LORD. Israel was to worship the LORD in the place which He chose (Deut. 12). The people were called together by means of trumpet sound (Num.10). There was the reading of God's Word and instruction in the law (Lev.10:27). The people sang, and there were choirs (1 Chron.15 and 16). The people were sent home with the blessing of the LORD. We learn from Neh.8:7 that the people stood when the law was proclaimed, and that it responded with lifting up their hands and saying Amen. We also read about kneeling. Some of the elements of the public worship were: sacrifices, ceremonies, praise and public prayer.

2 Chr 7:5

And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God.

2 Chr 7:6

The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD's musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, "His love endures forever." Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.

2 Chr 5:13

The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud,

1 Chr 16:36

Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Then all the people said "Amen" and "Praise the LORD."

1 Chr 15:1

After David had constructed buildings for himself in the City of David, he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it.

2 Chr 5:1

When all the work Solomon had done for the temple of the LORD was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated-- the silver and gold and all the furnishings-- and he placed them in the treasuries of God's temple.

This communion between the holy and Almighty God and His people Israel was a gift of immeasurable grace. It could only come about through the shedding of blood. This explains the many sacrifices that were part of Israel's worship. This also explains the many rules and ceremonies connected to the service in the temple, think e.g. of the laws concerning clean and unclean. These laws were necessary to protect the holiness of God against the sinfulness of the people, and the other way around to protect a sinful people from the wrath of a holy God. Careful obedience showed Israel's love, dedication and respect.

This communion with His people is so special in the eyes of the LORD that He gives several laws to protect it. With the Second Commandment the LORD instructs His people to serve Him only in His way. All self-styled worship is an abomination to the LORD. With the Third Commandment the LORD teaches His people to call upon Him. The Fourth Commandment demands of God's people to observe the Sabbath day. The LORD protects the communion with His people against the attacks of self-willed service and ritualism. The first one says we can serve the LORD in our own way. The sons of Aaron brought strange fire before the LORD and were instantly killed (Lev. 11). The sons of Eli took the pieces that belonged to the LORD and were killed as well (1 Sam. 2:34). The second, ritualism, means that God's people go through the motions thinking that these ceremonies themselves will give them salvation. The LORD rejects this as well and tells His people to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving (Ps. 50:14)

Isa 1:12-14

When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations-- I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them

Even after they came back from captivity and were allowed to rebuild the temple (see Ezra and Nehemiah), the prophet Malachi had to warn against self-willed service and ritualism.

Mal 1:7-8

"You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty.

Mal 1:12-14

"But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD. "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.

1.2. New Testament

We learn from the Gospels that the Lord Jesus participated in the worship as prescribed by the LORD.

Luke 4:16

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read

He taught the true worship.

Luke 4:5-8

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' "

Mat 23:23-24

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

He also fulfils the Old Testament worship.

John 4:21-24

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Mat 27:51

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

After the death and resurrection of Christ the temple has no function anymore. National borders fall away. Israel of the New Testament is the Church of Christ. This church does not have to sacrifice animals anymore, but the truth and substance of the O.T. ceremonies remain (Art. 25 B.C.) The church is called to worship the Lord in truth and Spirit (John 4). If Israel was rich because of the indwelling of the LORD, how

much more the church today, because the Spirit has been poured out to dwell in the church. If Israel under Moses had to be careful in worshipping the LORD, how much more the church today. She has not come to Mount Sinai, but to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem. The indwelling of the LORD has become more beautiful and powerful, but also more serious in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 3:16

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

2 Cor 3:7-11

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Heb 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. 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 men, to the spirits of righteous men 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.

This teaches us how wonderful it is that as church we may worship. Yes, the church that is gathered in the name of the LORD, in obedience to His will may know that He is present among her to give salvation. This also warns us not to take our worship for granted and treat it lightly. In the N.T. we find several instructions in this regard as well. Think e.g. of 1 Timothy 2.

1 Cor 14:40

But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Heb 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The last book of the Bible shows that our worship will come to its culmination on the new earth. The aim of God's plan of redemption is His eternal praise.

Rev 7:11-12

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

Our worship here on earth is the beginning of this eternal song of praise.

Revelation 19 : 6 - 7

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory. For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."

2. Confessions/Church Order

2.1 Belgic Confession

The Belgic Confession calls the church a holy congregation and assembly. Coming together is part and parcel of being church. This coming together has as purpose the worship of God's name as it is regulated by the Word of God.

Art 7

We believe that this Holy Scripture fully contains the will of God and that all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein. The whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in it at length. It is therefore unlawful for any one, even for an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in Holy Scripture: yes, *even if it be an angel from heaven*, as the apostle Paul says.

Art. 27

We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Art. 32

We believe that, although it is useful and good for those who govern to establish a certain order to maintain the body of the church, they must at all times watch that they do not deviate from what Christ, our only mediator, has commanded. Therefore we reject all human inventions and laws introduced into the worship of God which

binds and compels the consciences in any way. We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God.

2.2. Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism explains this principle further.

Q/A 54

I believe that the Son of God ... gather, defends and preserves for Himself by His Word and Spirit in the unity of the true faith a church chosen to everlasting life ...

Q/A 96

We are not to make an image of God in any way, nor to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in His Word.

Q/A 98

He wants His people to be taught ... by the living preaching of His Word.

Q/A 99

Rather we must use the holy Name of God only with fear and reverence, so that we might rightly confess Him, call upon Him and praise him in all our words and works.

Q/A 103

What does God require in the fourth commandment?

First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained and that, especially on the day of rest, I diligently attend the church of God to hear God's Word, to use the sacraments, to call publicly upon the LORD, and to give Christian offerings for the poor.

Second, that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, let the LORD work in me through His Holy Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

2.3. Church Order

By its liturgy the church presents itself in public as a Reformed church. For this reason the Church Order addresses the public worship.

Art. 52

The consistory shall call the congregation together for worship twice on the Lord's Day. The consistory shall ensure that, as a rule, once every Sunday the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is proclaimed.

Art. 53

Each year the churches shall, in the manner decided upon by the consistory, commemorate the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as His outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Art. 55

The metrical Psalms adopted by general synod as well as the hymns approved by general synod shall be sung in the worship service.

Art. 56

The sacraments shall be administered only under the authority of the consistory, in a public worship service, by a minister of the Word, with the use of the adopted Forms.

3. Goal

The goal of our liturgy is that in worshipping we may show ourselves thankful to God and He may be praised by us. This in turn leads to the following goals of the worship service:

- to hear God's Word and use the sacraments;
- to confess the Name of the Lord;
- to call publicly upon the Lord, and praise Him in song;
- to give Christian alms.

4. Form and Contents

The worship service is the covenantal meeting of the LORD and His Church. He is present in her midst by Word and Spirit to give her salvation. She may respond with thanksgiving and praise. No doubt the preaching of the Word of God is central to the worship service, yet liturgy is more than preaching. Liturgy includes the whole of the covenantal meeting of God and His people. Because we meet the LORD our worship must come from the heart and reflect careful obedience.

This is an important element in connection with liturgy. The love to the Lord comes out in worshipping Him with careful obedience. The Bible alerts us to the two dangers of self-willed service and ritualism. On the one hand self-willed service says, it doesn't matter how you worship, what counts is what lives in your heart. This leads to a rejection of ceremonies and order. On the other hand when these ceremonies are seen as a purpose in themselves, ritualism may be the result. We read about these two dangers in the Bible, we also meet them in the history of the church. The way to get out of this is not by making it a choice of either or, for that would mean giving in to a false dilemma. The form and contents of worship are not opposed to each other. In fact, the form in which we worship has everything to do with what lives in our hearts. The two have to be in harmony. The Lord Jesus did not disregard the ceremonies in Israel, He fulfilled them. The same can be found with the apostles, or later with the Reformers. Take the time of the Great Reformation, the worship as prescribed by Rome had deteriorated into ritualism. The Reformers rejected this and rightly pointed to the call for faith. But they also rejected the approach of the Anabaptists who wanted to do away with every form. Calvin's exposition in His Institutes book IV, chapter 10 is very instructive in this regard. We need rules and laws, but these rules and laws must be in agreement with the Word of God and not obscure Christ. Carefulness in keeping the laws that govern our communion with and worship of the Lord reflects the love that lives in our hearts.

This has implication for evaluating the liturgy. To reflect on liturgy is important, but can also be over done. It is good to see whether the worship of the Lord is taking place in the proper manner. Carefulness is required in this respect. On the other hand, changes are always possible, but not always desirable. It should not be that change are made just to keep the attention of the members. Yet, when we look at our order of worship, we may ask ourselves questions, such as, Can it be done better? Is the worship of the Lord enriched if we change? Will it build up the congregation? It is important to think about these questions. The church should not get stuck in ritualism nor propose change for the sake of changing. Our desire is that our worship here on earth is in harmony with the praise of God's Name by angels and saints that surround His throne. If changes are considered, it is important to involve the congregation. This gives the overseers opportunity to explain the reasons for these changes and allows the congregation to have input as well.

5. The Order of Worship

The LORD gave clear and detailed instructions regarding the worship in Israel. The manner of worship is determined by Him. The church of the N.T. does not receive the same list of ceremonies. In fact several ceremonies of the Old Testament no longer apply. This does not mean that each can do what he wants. The church has to worship the Lord in an orderly manner as well. The letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus reflect this. We also read 1 Corinthians 14 that all things should be done decently and in good order. The order of worship is not a purpose in itself, and thus can be changed if need be. The way we deal with the order of worship reflects our respect for the presence of God in the midst of His congregation.

Who determines this order? The Lord by His Word. But within the congregation the order is determined by the overseers. Part of their task is that all things are done decently and in good order. This is reflected in the Church Order, in that the consistory has to call the congregation together, and ensures that things are done properly. Not the individual members, nor the minister determines the order, but the council. All matters related to the order of worship have to be dealt with in the combined meeting of elders and deacons. Any changes to the order are a decision of the council. It is thus task of the overseers to make a visiting minister aware of the order that is followed. He should be expected to follow the order as agreed upon by the council. The formulations used to introduce the different parts of the liturgy are the minister's responsibility.

The Book of Praise lists two Order of Worship in common use by the churches. Order A is often called the Middelburg Order. It reflects the history and development in The Netherlands in the 19th century.

Order B is more in line with the liturgy of the Reformed Church in the time of Calvin. The main differences between these two are:

1. The reading of Scripture and sermon form one block and are not interrupted by the collection.
2. The administration of baptism follows the preaching of the Word.
3. In the afternoon the Confession of Faith follows the preaching of the Word. Several churches that use the B Liturgy have the confession of faith in the beginning of the service, and the administration of baptism before the sermon.

These orders are in common use. The General Synod does not prescribe a certain order. This is left in the freedom of the churches. Thus there can be variations. At the same time it is true that although details may vary, the churches have agreed on the basic components in the liturgy. They will be dealt with next.

6. Components of the Liturgy

6.1. The Opening

The worship service begins with what is called the Votum, the confession that our help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth. This confession expresses the proper attitude toward God in our worship. The congregation must be aware that this is not a formality but is part of a life in dependence on the Lord. This Votum is followed by the Salutation, or Greeting of Peace. The words of 1 Cor. 1:3 or Rev. 1:4,5a are used. The Lord addresses His people with a greeting which is at the same time a blessing. The difference between the salutation and the blessing at the end is that the salutation pertains to the worship service itself. This salutation is therefore a statement and not a wish.

In song the congregation responds to this salutation. Some suggest that for this reason this song should be chosen with a view to its function as answer to the salutation. This suggestion certainly has merit, at the same time it is also possible to choose a song that fits in with the sermon, or which prepares for what follows: the law and the confession of sin.

Some councils have the custom of praying before the service begins and thanking the Lord after the pm service. In the beginning of the 20th Century it was not uncommon to have a silent prayer in church as well. A few moments of silence before the Votum would allow every one to pray. This silent prayer in church has been done away with as being inconsistent with the covenant character of the worship service. With regard to the prayer in the consistory, the opinions are divided. In many consistories it was discontinued because it was felt that this custom came from the times of persecution. The consistory asked the Lord for an uninterrupted service. Since that is not the situation anymore, we do not need such a prayer. Others maintain that since the worship service takes place under the authority of the overseers a prayer is in place. The question could be asked, however, why the council would have its own prayer separate from the congregation? Do we not in the worship service ask the Lord for a blessing and express our thankfulness for the Word we have received?

Another matter is the manner in which the congregation prepares itself for worship. In the times of the Reformation it was not unusual to have a call to worship. The congregation was told to prepare to meet the Lord. Bible texts were used to express this. We may not have this practise, but the preparations for the worship services do need attention. The LORD warned Israel against thoughtless worship. Is the congregation prepared for worship? Do the families pray at home for a blessed worship service? Do we prepare by going to bed on time on Saturday so that we are able to concentrate and participate. Office-bearers must stress the beauty of the worship service, but then also the need to prepare oneself for the highlight of the week, meeting the Lord.

We have the custom that one of the elders shakes the hand of the minister before and after the worship service. It is unclear what the background and meaning of this custom is. Many answers have been given. Whatever the case, it does not indicate that the consistory agrees with the sermon. For how can one elder

decide this on his own? Or, are the elders going to have a quick meeting during the service if the minister would say something that is not right? Perhaps the best way of looking at it is that the handshake indicates that the minister is authorized by the consistory to lead the worship service. It is interesting to note that in the past some churches used the handshake only when a guest minister preached. It was not used for its own minister, since his letter of call gave him the authorization to lead the worship service.

6.2. Law/Confession/Forgiveness

The communion with God is possible only through the forgiveness of sins. This was foreshadowed under the Old Testament with the sacrifices. It is true that as church we may live in the reality of God's redemption, but at the same time the Lord requires that we confess our sin. In order to come to this confession we must submit our lives to the Ten Words of God's Covenant as the rule for our lives of thankfulness (see also Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 44, q/a 115). The reading of the Ten Words is therefore an important element in the worship service.

We find the Ten Words in Exodus 20 and Deut. 5. There is a difference between the two passages. In Exodus 20 we hear the actual proclamation whereas in Deut. 5 Moses reminds Israel of this law. Some churches add the words of Matthew 22 to the proclamation of the law. The Lord Jesus did not give these words with the worship service in mind, yet using them has as advantage that the law is placed in its New Testament context as being the rule of thankfulness.

The proclamation of the law leads to the confession of sin. This is expressed in the prayer that follows. The Book of Praise contains several beautiful examples of such a confession. The minister can make use of these, but should not restrict himself to these.

The liturgy in the time of the Reformation also contained a proclamation of pardon. Often this was done in the form of the reading of a text which indicates that when we in true faith confess our sins, the Lord will forgive us. This practice can be connected to the Keys of the Kingdom (see Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 31). At the same time it must be stressed that L.D. 31 addresses the preaching and its acceptance by the hearers, which is broader than a declaration of forgiveness. In addition, we note that the Salutation at the beginning of the service speaks of the mercy and grace of the Lord. It is the basis on which we offer our thanks. The service begins in the reality of forgiveness. The prayer following the proclamation of the Ten Words has to express thankfulness for forgiveness.

6.3. The Ministry of the Word.

For the significance of the preaching, and the sermon evaluation see chapter 1 - 5.

At this point we focus on the place of the preaching in the worship service. As indicated earlier the preaching of the Word is central in the worship service. The covenant relationship between the Lord and His people is by means of the Word. In speaking the LORD shows that He is the Living God. This is the background of the second commandment. This leads us to the main difference between order A and B. What speaks in favour of order B is the fact that Scripture Reading and the Ministry of the Word are one block, and that they come earlier in the service.

Art. 53 of the Church Order stipulates that the highlight of God's work of salvation are remembered each year. The council has to decide how to do this. The facts of salvation have to be remembered. How this is done is in the freedom of the churches. Most churches also have a special service on New Year's Eve. The Prayer for Crops and Labour and Thanksgiving receive attention on a Lord's Day as well.

6.4. The Administration of the Sacraments

For Holy Baptism: see chapter 1 - 3 and for Lord's Supper see chapter 1 - 4.

6.5. Prayer

For Prayer see chapter 1 - 5

6.6. Singing

Within the order of worship singing is not a separate component, but has a place in all components. The Salutation, the reading of The Ten Words, the Ministry of the Word are all followed by singing. Singing is an important part of our worship. We may express our thankfulness to the LORD with song. We learn this from the Bible. The Bible also gives us many songs of praise. The Reformed churches view singing as being at the same level as prayer, as a means to express our thankfulness. It will be helpful to go into this in greater detail, after all, as we learn from Revelation, our future is the eternal song of praise.

6.6.1 Old Testament

Part and parcel of Israel's life was the call to exalt God's Name. It played an important role in its life. The Psalms were not only made but also used in Israel. In addition one can think of the feasts the Israelites observed by command of the LORD. We find in the O.T. personal songs of praise as well as songs of praise by the whole people. In fact, there is no sharp distinction. When David, or Asaph, or the sons of Korah composed their psalms they knew themselves part of the whole people and their psalms were used by the people in its worship. David appointed Asaph to take care of the singing in the worship. We know that choirs and musical instruments were involved as well (1 Chron.16; 2 Chron 5:12; Neh. 12:27). Everything that had breath is called to praise the LORD (Ps. 150).

One of the sacrifices in Israel was called the sacrifice of thanksgiving. It is described in Leviticus 7 : 11 - 15. The peace offering is an offering of thanks for the restored communion with the LORD through the shedding of blood (the burnt offering). The thank offering expressed the gratitude of the believer. Thus words accompanied this sacrifice. For when you praise and thank the LORD you do so in deed and word. From the O.T. we learn which words were spoken at this occasion. For example, at the time the ark was brought to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 16); and the dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 5). In Jeremiah 33 : 10 and 11 we read that the streets of Jerusalem will again hear the sound of joy and gladness, the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD, saying "Give thanks to the LORD Almighty, for the LORD is good, his love endures for ever." These words we know so well from Ps. 136 and other psalms. In the Book of Psalms we have an example of what was said at the thank offering. Psalm 100 has as heading: a psalm for the thank offering. Here we have an example of how Israel exalted the LORD.

6.6.2. The New Testament

When we turn to the N.T. we are immediately met by songs exalting God's Name. Mary, Zachariah, the angels, they all sing. Also Paul calls the congregation to praise the LORD in all circumstances, to give thanks always. He himself sang psalms while in prison. When Paul speaks about the wonders of God's electing love in Ephesians 1 then the refrain is: to the praise of His glory. Limiting ourselves to the connection between the Psalms and the N.T. then we can note several elements. The Lord often quoted from the Psalms. He sang the psalms of the O.T. e.g. at the Passover. He fulfilled the psalms, we receive them through Him. Paul sees an important function for the psalms in our mutual encouragements and admonitions (Col.3:16). The book of the Psalms is the most quoted O.T. book in the N.T. Often when the Lord Jesus or the apostles want to show the fullness of God's work they go back to the Psalms. The language of the church in the N.T. is formed by the psalms of the O.T. This is not surprising. The expressions are words you learn in and with psalms become part of your language. In learning the psalms children become familiar with important words and concepts of the doctrine of salvation. Hopefully it becomes part of their thoughts and lives.

In the letter to the Hebrews we also find a connection with the O.T. thank offering. We read in Hebrews that the burnt offering has been fulfilled by the death of Christ, once for all. But the sacrifice of thanksgiving remains, it says. Hebrews 13:12 and 15: So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to

sanctify the people through his own blood. ... Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Notice here the relation between the burnt offering (Christ) and the thank offering. The fire of this N.T. thank offering also comes from the burnt offering, namely Christ. This sacrifice of praise is the fruit of our lips. There the letter to the Hebrews refers to what the person who was bringing this sacrifice would confess: The LORD is God, His steadfast love is forever more. To put it more up to date: this sacrifice of praise is the confession, I believe in God the Father Almighty etc; or: I belong with body and soul both in life and death to my faithful Saviour. The confession of the church is our sacrifice of thanksgiving. This shows how beautiful and important it is to have the creed sung.

When we turn to the last book, Revelation, a wealth of material opens up there. There we find many songs of praise, by angels, people, creation. We receive a preview of what is to come. Our future is the eternal praise, a praise which begins here already.

6.6.3. The Reformation

From the time the N.T. was written we now go to the time of the Reformation, and then especially the work of Calvin in Geneva. If we want to concentrate on the praise of God's Name in singing, then we cannot bypass what we have received in the Reformation. Still today we sing the Genevan tunes.

On May 21, 1536 the church at Geneva liberated itself from Rome. This reformation has far-reaching consequences for the liturgy of the church. The liturgy of the church of Rome was done away with. The mass was not celebrated anymore, the chanting of the priests was not heard anymore, and the organs were closed. A worship service consisted mainly of the spoken word, by the minister and but also some responses by the congregation.

At this point Calvin realized how different it must have been in the temple in Jerusalem. There was music, the people sang. This led him to the conviction that besides the spoken word there should also be the singing of the congregation as the answer of faith. Calvin saw the singing by the congregation at the same level as prayer. In our singing we respond to God's Word with the words that He gives to us, the Psalms. In his Institutes he deals with the singing of the Psalms within the part that deals with prayer: Book III, chapter 20, par. 32. The more he thought about this the more he became convinced that the song was an essential part of the worship by the church. In addition, it would strengthen the people in times of struggle and doubts, it would be a stimulus in the sanctification of life. He writes: "it both lends dignity and grace to sacred actions and has the greatest value in kindling our hearts to a true zeal and eagerness to pray." And thus on January 1537, eight months after the church had been reformed, a memorandum was given to the council of Geneva, informing the council that the consistory had decided to introduce the singing of psalms in the worship services. In this way the singing of psalms received a place in the worship service beside the ministry of the Word within the ministry of the prayers.

Calvin was of the opinion that we should use the 150 Psalms and other songs of the Bible first of all. He laboured hard to realize this goal. He also had opinion about the rhyming and the melody. The melody must be simple, supporting the text and also invigorating. He was opposed to all sentimentality when it came to words or music. From Institutes III, 20, 32: "Yet we should be very careful that our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meanings of the words .." .. and on the other hand, such songs as have been composed only for sweetness and delight of the ear are unbecoming to the majesty of the church and cannot but displease God in the highest decree." The results were the so-called Genevan tunes.

Calvin saw the need for singing the Psalms in the worship services. Calvin did this because he saw the church of the reformation standing in the catholic tradition of Israel and the church in the time of the apostles. The expression the Reformers used to refer to the singing was: The sacrifice of thanksgiving.

When it came to the praise by the congregation the reformers were not afraid to use the word they opposed so much when it came to the mass, the word, sacrifice. In this way they linked it to what took place in the temple. The praise within the Reformed churches came to stand in the catholic tradition.

The church of all ages and places is a singing church. This takes shape in a remarkable way in the time of the Reformation. Under the direction of Calvin a Psalter was made, the Genevan Psalter with the Genevan tunes. As the Reformation spread this treasure went along. It went to different nations. They sing in different languages yet they sing the same psalms. Keep in mind then the situation in the refugee cities. Refugees from different nations and different languages met each other. In spite of the language barrier, they could sing together of the greatness of the LORD. The tunes united them. Thus at the Convention of Wesel in 1568 the Dutch churches also decided to use the Genevan tunes. It reminds us of the catholic character of Christ's church gathering work. Still today believers in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Hungary, Irian Jaya, the Netherlands sing of God's mighty deeds with the same tunes.

The children are an important element in this as well. The Genevan Church Order of 1561 stipulated in Art. 79 that children must learn the Psalms, then the whole church will follow. The Dutch churches in 1568 at the Convention of Wesel agreed that in the churches where there was a school, the school teacher should teach the youth the singing of psalms, so that the congregation could sing with the children. The sacrifice of praise must also come from the new generation.

6.6.5. Hymns

"Although in Reformed liturgy the Psalms have a predominant place, [the Canadian Reformed Churches] have not excluded the use of scriptural hymns. They, too, constitute a thank offering of praise when we sing of the facts of redemption by God in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Preface *Book of Praise*, page v) General Synod Chatham 2004 adopted the Principles and Guidelines for selecting songs. These Principles and Guidelines apply to both Psalms and Hymns. They are quoted here to understand the importance of using and selecting scriptural hymns.

PRINCIPLES:

THE SONG OF THE CHURCH IS TO BE SUITABLE FOR THE CHURCH'S WORSHIP TO THE GLORY OF GOD

1. The songs of the Church are to be scriptural

In content, form, and spirit the Church's songs must express the truth of the Holy Scriptures. Augustine, referring to the singing of Psalms, said, "No one can sing anything worthy of God which he has not received from Him . . . then we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth."

2. The songs of the Church are to be a sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15)

Singing is an important element of the congregation's response to God's redeeming work in Christ Jesus and the Word proclaimed in the worship service.

John Calvin wrote, "Singing has great strength and power to move and to set on fire the hearts of men that they may call upon God and praise Him with a more vehement and more ardent zeal.

This singing should not be light or frivolous, but it ought to have weight and majesty."

3. The songs of the Church are to be aesthetically pleasing

The songs for worship are to be a beautiful blend of God-honoring poetry and music. (Psalm 92: 1-4)

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING SONGS:

1. The songs of the Church must be thoroughly Biblical. They are to represent the full range of the revelation of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Psalm 147:1)
2. The Book of Psalms is foundational for the Church's songs. Therefore, all of these Psalms, in their entirety, ought to be included in the Church's songbook.

3. When Psalms or other portions of Scripture are set to music, the words must be faithful to the content and form of the inspired text. (2 Timothy 3:16)
4. In the case of songs other than the versification of Scripture, the words must faithfully express the teaching of Scripture (Proverbs 30:6) as summarized by our Reformed confessions.
5. The songs of the Church must be intelligible (1 Corinthians 14:15) and edifying to the body of Christ. (Colossians 3:16)
6. The songs of the Church must reflect and preserve the language of the Church of all ages rather than accommodating current secular trends. (Romans 12:2a)
7. In content and form, the songs of the Church must be free from artificiality and sentimentality.
8. The music of the song should suit the text.
9. The music of the Church should be expressive of the Reformed tradition. Where possible, use is to be made of music developed in the tradition of this rich heritage (e.g., the Genevan psalm tunes and the Scottish Psalter).
10. The music of the Church should not be borrowed from music that suggests places and occasions other than the Church and the worship of God. (Ephesians 5:18-21)
11. The melodies and harmonies of church music must be suitable for congregational singing, avoiding complicated rhythms, excessive syncopation, and a wide range of pitch.

6.6.6. Book of Praise

The General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches held at Homewood in 1954 appointed deputies "to study the whole matter of the rhymed version of the Psalms in the English language." (Acts 1954, Art. 110, 56) The Report of the deputies is called: "Op Weg Naar Een Engelse Reformatorische Psalmbundel." Rather than suggesting a selection of songs taken from different Psalters and Songbooks, the deputies proposed to produce an English Psalter, using the Genevan Tunes. The result was the *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter*.

For the history of the Anglo Genevan Psalter and the Book of Praise, see Preface in Book of Praise (page v) and G.VanRongen, Our Reformed Church Service Book, p.62-75.

6.7. Collections

Giving Christian offering for the poor is part of the worship service. We may show our thankfulness in giving according to our blessings. The collection is thus part of the worship service.

See further: 3 - 2 Finances

6.8. Forms

The churches have adopted several Forms for use within the worship service. These Forms have a colourful history and in many ways complement our creeds and confessions. Valuable information about the history and contents of these Forms can be found e.g. in Our Reformed Church Service Book, by G.VanRongen (Inheritance Publications 1995), chapter 5.

6.9. Benediction

The closing of the worship consists of a closing song followed by the benediction or blessing. For the blessing the words of Num. 6 : 24-26 or 2 Cor. 13:14 are used. The blessing formed the climax of the worship service in the temple or tabernacle. The priest had gone with the incense into the holy place, and now came back with the joyful message that the LORD had accepted their sacrifice, therefore they could go home in peace. This meaning has only become more beautiful through the work of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit. Just read the conclusions of the letters in the N.T. God's people may know that they live under an open heaven. The blessing is not an indication that the worship service is over, but the climax of it. In the blessing the LORD promises to go with us.

7. Other elements related to the worship

There are several other items that play an important role in the worship services, but are not part of the liturgy. They are for example

- The church building. In order to worship, we need a place of worship. The task to maintain the building belongs to the Committee of Administration. See chapter 3 - 7 and Mandates and Regulations.
- Seating arrangements
- Ushers. If there are Regulations for ushers, see Mandates and Regulations
- Organists and Organ Committee. The Mandate for Organ Committee is part of the Mandates and Regulations.

8. Literature

The following books and articles are listed for further study. Much of the material of this chapter was also taken from these sources.

- C.Andree, 'Does God still do great things to us?' in Diakonia, vol.V, # 3 & 4
- K.Deddens, Where Everything points to Him, Inheritance Publications 1993.
- K.Deddens, Fulfil Your Ministry, Premier 1990, chapter IV, pages 58-132
- K.Deddens, 'A few Notes about the Worship Service', Diakonia, vol.IV, # 1
- R.Faber, 'The Reformers on Psalms and Hymns in Public Worship,' Clarion, vol.50, # 6, 7
- R.Faber, 'John Calvin on Psalms and Hymns in Public Worship,' Clarion, vol.51, # 16, 17
- R.Faber, 'The First Psalter in the Dutch Reformed Churches,' Clarion, vol. 52, # 5
- R.Faber, 'The Introduction of Evangelical Hymns in the Dutch Reformed Churches: Developments in the Seventeenth Century,' Clarion, vol. 52, # 14
- C.Trimp, De Gemeente en haar liturgie, Kampen 1983
- C.Trimp, 'Old and New in the Liturgy', in Diakonia, vol.II, # 3
- C.VanDam, 'What is Worship,' in Clarion, vol. 49, # 11-13, pages 245, 266, 289.
- G.VanDooren, The Beauty of Reformed Liturgy, Premier 1980.
- G.VanRongen, Our Reformed Church Service Book, Inheritance Publications, 1995.
- G.VanRongen, Zijn Schone Dienst.
- G.VanRongen, Met Al De Heiligen, Liturgie in de Hemel en op Aarde, III.

9. Evaluation

1. The discussion can deal with the Scriptural and confessional basis for this work, as was as the goal of it. What is the essence of Reformed liturgy? Do we all agree on this? Are there points that have been overlooked?
2. Evaluate the function of the components mentioned under point 6.
3. How much is the congregation aware of the importance of liturgy? Is this something that lives in the congregation? What can we do to improve this?
4. Does the system of ushering work properly? If necessary, review the regulations for ushers.
5. If there is an Organ Committee, does it function well? How can we promote the development of new talents.
6. Are there any concerns with regard to the liturgy? What are these concerns? Why are they a concern? What plan of action could be taken to address this?