

# CHURCH HISTORY

“Now these things took place as examples for us...”

## Appendix I - History of Church Worship, Pt. 2

### Papal Procession



The pomp and pageantry of the Mass reached new heights. It continues to be reflected in this papal procession entering St. Peter's basilica in Rome.

### The Catholic Counter-Reformation (1545-1648) and The Council of Trent (1545-1563).

The Catholic church's reaction to Protestant worship changes was to double down on Roman forms of public worship. Most of the work of the council had to do with affirming traditional Catholic doctrines while recognizing some past excesses. There were some discussions about too many personal masses, too many saints' days, the need for more frequent communion. But beyond the establishment of a uniform missal (book of texts to be used in worship) no definitive decrees were made concerning the church's worship. They left the matter of liturgy to the pope. This led to the service centering more on the priest and even less on the members. But the church realized the members needed to be doing something. This is when we see an effort to involve them by increasing the color, music, and the ceremonial in the service. Ornate vestments, magnificent paintings and statues are added to encourage devotional thought. The worship and its setting becomes something to look at and be inspired. The priest did one thing, the choir another, while the people gazed and listened. All this was employed to make the Sunday service “a good show.”

The Catholic leadership eventually saw a need to involve the congregation more which led to some congregational singing and the use of hymnals to sing much simpler music. But the Catholic mainstream would continue in the Counter-Reformation tradition until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

An observation: When a church has strong doctrinal control through central church government and a bound creed, the need for strong, detailed teaching in the service is not felt. But when a church places emphasis on individual responsibility in study and knowledge, and believes strong doctrinal teaching must be done to propagate what might be new or unique views, then preaching is emphasized in the service. It is the main opportunity to indoctrinate the membership. This is clearly seen in the Reformation. Catholicism had strong centralized government and absolute control over doctrine. Extensive

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## Reformation Churches

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The Reformation churches lack the opulence and excess of the Catholic churches. They are not without quality craftsmanship but devoid of lavish and expensive show of the cathedrals that were built across Europe. John Calvin's famously said all he needed was "four walls and a sermon."

teaching in the service was not deemed necessary. So the other main part, the Lord's Supper (Mass, Eucharist) is emphasized. In the Reformation churches with the major doctrinal changes of the movement, the leaders felt a strong need to indoctrinate the members with their reformed teaching. Thus, we see a great emphasis on public teaching in the Sunday service, the Lord's Supper observance being minimized to monthly, quarterly or, even, annual observance. This practice would also continue for some time.

Further Protestant reaction to the elaborate and outward emphasis on Catholic worship will lead to Reformation church buildings becoming much simpler in construction and plainer in appearance. Large colorful stain glass windows, images, elaborate priestly vestments begin to disappear. "Four walls and a sermon" was all that John Calvin had required of the worship service. These changes will remain in most protestant churches for three centuries.

Reformers will also begin to emphasize the unity of the worship, in which each part is tied to a theme and all parts reflect a single theme and unity in the participation of all.

The most important revolution in worship can be expressed in one word: intensity. Dissatisfied with the dry Deism of natural religion and the bureaucratic routine of established state churches, alternative leaders arose intending to reach a sense of intimacy with the person of Jesus Christ. Baptists and Evangelicals everywhere, Pietists among Lutherans, Methodists among Anglicans, and diverse free-church groups all shared a continuing Protestant antipathy to "popish" ceremony, in favor of an attempt to *recover the simple agape (love feast) of early Christians*.

### The 18th Century Great Awakening

The First Great Awakening that began in eighteenth-century New England was an effort to recover the conversion experience. Yet, intense preaching and public conversion is only one way to maintain a sense of contact with the divine. Such transcendence of ordinary experience may be the austere silence of the Quakers or tongue speaking of Pentecostals.

"Inner light" (a term used to describe these groups) is a synonym for "enthusiasm," the literal indwelling of God that was the goal of many Protestant movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet, it was sometimes hurled as a reproach, as though their worship was abandoning divinely sanctioned order for capricious chaos. "Inner light" churches may at first glance seem to be unstructured in their worship, but their ritual does follow a pattern.

### The Great Awakening in America

The movement in America changes the emphasis in public worship. In the American South, where John Wesley had experienced failure as an Anglican pastor, an important mass movement of heartfelt religious worship is called the Great Awakening, which began in New England in the 1740s. The founding preachers, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

## George Whitefield



George Whitefield is considered one of the most influential evangelical preachers of all time. He became a sensation throughout England, preaching to huge audiences. In 1738 he made the first of seven visits to the America, where he gained such popular stature that he was compared to George Washington. Whitefield's preaching tour of the colonies, from 1739 to 1741, was the high-water mark of the Great Awakening there. A sermon in Boston attracted as many as 30,000 people. His energetic, theatrical style and emotional stimulation influenced preaching for generations to come. His shrewd advertising techniques and appeals for funds have caused him to be compared to modern televangelists.

and Wesley's colleague George Whitefield (1714–1770), discouraged bodily excitement, and groaning. Yet, there was always but there was powerful and moving preaching, different from the decorum expected in established churches (where worship had slipped into being merely a token of secular citizenship or social respectability). Many denominational church doors were closed to him. The Great Awakening spread to the South, where it continues to have a dramatic impact, not only on Southern Protestantism, but also on American culture and therefore on the world.

Outside Virginia, in the Carolinas and Georgia, the South was sparsely settled. So there were gaps in the parish coverage, leaving the field open to itinerant preachers, who presented a challenge to the authority of the Anglican Church.

Southern Baptists and later Methodists called one another brother and sister and might include slaves in their religious family, offering an alternative to the hierarchical social system favored by the planter families. Southerners concentrated on issues of personal holiness, often condemning dancing and drinking, attacking obvious evils rather than analyzing profound issues. Preaching was extemporaneous and colloquial. Sometimes even a church building was lacking. There might be only a temporary gathering whose atmosphere could be all the more fervent through the pressure of a unique, fleeting opportunity proffered to people forced otherwise to live a difficult life virtually alone. *So, despite the outward simplicity of church organization and leadership, the emotional life of the church was intense.*

### The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Great Awakening

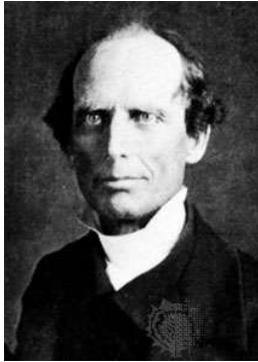
In the nineteenth century, American Protestants continued their gradual proportional move away from the “liturgical” churches when a new wave of awakening brought forth hundreds of new communities, some of whom became the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Adventists, and Disciples/Churches of Christ. These small groups grew into major forms of American religion. Although by 1850 the single largest church body in the United States was Roman Catholicism, the enthusiasm-based Methodists and Baptists were the largest Protestant denominations by the twentieth century. The latter had by now dispensed with Wesley's expectations of regular Morning Prayer and Holy Communion as provided for in his Sunday Service of the Methodists (1784). It was replaced by a more freely constructed preaching service. This was accompanied by frontier Revival Meetings with as many as 5000 gathering for days with multiples preachers speaking at the same time. Some of the old Presbyterians preached against this exercise. But still the work went on and spread in almost every direction, gathering additional force until the whole country seemed to be coming home to God.

American evangelical Protestantism found a populist model in Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875. An immensely important man in American history by any standard, his revivals were a powerful force in the rising antislavery movement and in the growth of urban

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## Charles G. Finney

1792-1875



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Considered the father of American Revivalism his influence upon Protestantism in America is hard to measure. As a young lawyer he decided he must dedicate his life to God. He told his law partner "I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause and cannot plead yours." His preaching became "fiery, like a hammer or a sword." He is thought to be the first to begin the practice of extending a public invitation to immediately commit your life to the Lord. It became a mainstay of his preaching.

evangelism. Finney organized protracted meetings that ran for several weeks. His meetings featured an "anxious bench." Anyone concerned about the state of his or her soul could come to a front pew where he or she would be addressed personally and become the subject of public prayer. Using language that uneducated listeners could "understand without the use of a dictionary," Finney offered direct and forceful preaching.

After Finney's death, his rivals and successors worked to keep the fire glowing. Their enthusiasm was enshrined in all aspects of church life, which became the center of American communities. Moments of conversion in a temporary meeting spilled over into permanent opportunities.

### The Legacy of the Great Awakening

Protestantism, especially in the South moved farther and farther away from old traditional forms of worship. Congregational singing, along with extemporaneous preaching and praying were becoming the norm. Choirs and instrumental music returned to help liven up the service. Highly emotional services were practiced by many groups. In some, manifestations of the Holy Spirit's gifts were a consistent part of public worship. Closing invitations for conversion (borrowed from the camp revivals) became a permanent part of every worship service. All this was greatly frowned upon and belittled by Anglicans and others who clung to "high church" worship forms.

Pentecostalism has its roots in the Great Awakening and reflects the highly emotional service. Baptists and Methodists adopt many of the less emotional practices. Other groups opposed to such high emotionalism came out of this period, also.

### The Restoration Movement

The Disciples (Restoration) Movement began in America at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Objecting to the rising factionalism among denominations and desiring an overall return to Primitive Christianity, this movement practiced very conservative forms of worship.

Dedicated to the expressed authority of scripture alone, worship was very simple, based on specific examples found in the New Testament. The rejection of instrumental music and choirs further signaled their appeal to New Testament authority for all doctrine and practice. But some customs were carried over from the denominations - emphasis on preaching in the service, use of hymnals, use of shape notes and four part harmony, invitations to conversion at the close of lessons - are examples. Their less emotional service reflected a more conservative approach to worshipping God. The rejection of modern miraculous gifts of the Spirit certainly contributed to this.

Though instrumental music would become accepted by a major part of the Restoration movement churches in the later 1800's, churches of Christ would continue to oppose it and the vast majority continue to do so to this day. Worship practices have changed little among churches of Christ over the last 200 years. Such is the result of a

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## Cane Ridge Meeting House

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The home church of Alexander Campbell, the building reflects a typical rural meeting house in the late 17th & early 18th centuries.



commitment to the simplicity of worship found in the New Testament and its instruction that “all things be done decently and in order” for “God is not a God of confusion but a God of peace” (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 14:33,40).

Almost every American religious group will experience dissatisfaction by some with what is viewed as unemotional worship services. Groups will break off for reasons that include lack of emotion or what they believe is emphasis on the wrong things in the worship (preaching vs. Lord’s supper; singing vs. prayer; length of service, etc.). In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century a movement rejecting expressed biblical authority, will lead some to even accept instrumental music, choir-like worship teams and more relaxed forms of worship. Though far from prevalent, the rejection by many of some of these things is based upon not wanting to change customary practices, rather than a belief that they are really unscriptural. A progressive movement grows stronger in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that no longer bases its beliefs and practices on an appeal to “scripture alone” as authority. As they accept denominational members into their fellowship without question, denominational worship practices are brought along with them.

Worship practices in most churches of Christ today involve the same basic elements. But different emphases are found and, more frequently, acceptance of instrumental music and choirs and less emphasis on doctrinal preaching is being seen.

### Conclusion

The form of worship is most often determined by the tension between certain “extremes” - following a strict Bible pattern versus long established tradition; or strict Bible patterns versus a desire to break free from the bounds of literal interpretation of scripture. All churches fall somewhere on these spectrums.

As Bible literalists, we must learn to distinguish between these. Some traditions are unscriptural, others are not. Some practices are rooted in Biblical practices, others are not. (As already noted, we have borrowed many of our traditional worship practices from denominations - practices that are not unscriptural.) As long as clear scriptural authority can be given, variation in how we worship should be allowed, and even expected. Unity in a congregation must first be based on biblical authority, but with respect for different customs and traditions that fall within the bounds of scripture. We must always demand book, chapter, and verse but we must not demand the following of our own traditions or customs we may follow in worship. Differences from our traditions can make us uncomfortable but we must not be factious and divisive over them.

The point of our worship is not to satisfy self but to please and honor our God. As long as what we do is authorized by scripture, and our hearts are set upon our God, we will honor him and we will be edified.