

John Calvin arrived in Strasbourg in 1538, where he was pastor to French Reformed refugees and used a French translation of the Strasbourg Psalters (liturgies) of 1537 and 1539. When Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541, to take up the pastorate there, he instituted *La forme des prières et chants ecclésiastiques* (*The Form of Prayers*) the next year.

### The 1542 Geneva Liturgy

Calvin stated his purpose in publishing *The Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers and Songs*. . . according to the Custom of the Ancient Church, in his introductory letter to the reader, "This book will not only profit the people of this church, but also all who desire to know what form the faithful must hold and follow when they assemble in the name of Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> The normal order for Sunday worship would look like this:

(Assembly)

Opening sentence

Confession of sin

The Ten Commandments (sung)

Psalm (sung)

(Word)

Collect for Illumination

Lesson and Sermon

Prayer of Intercession

Apostles' Creed (sung)

(Meal)

The Lord's Supper

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Psalm (sung) or Canticle of Simeon (sung)

(Sending)

Offering for the poor

Blessing<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, "Epistle to the reader." *Form of Prayers* in *Johannis Calvini Opera Selecta*. (eds., Petrus Barth and Guilelmus Niesel. 5 vols. Munich: C. Kaiser, 1926-52), 2.15. English translation in Charles Garside, Jr., in *The Origins of Calvin's Theology of Music: 1536-1543* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1979), 32.

<sup>2</sup> See Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 159-210 for complete English texts of the Reformed liturgies developed under Martin Bucer in Strasbourg and John Calvin in Geneva, plus helpful introductions by Thompson.

*A biblical paradigm (Acts 2:42: A Central Norm for Reformed Liturgy)*

Martin Bucer<sup>3</sup> and John Calvin used Acts 2:42 to determine the four necessary elements in the liturgy: word, prayer, meal, and alms. Calvin makes this comment in his *Institutes*:

Luke relates in the Acts that this was the practice of the apostolic church, when he says that believers "...continued in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers" [Ac 2:42, cf. Vg.]. Thus it became the unvarying rule that no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Lord's Supper and almsgiving.<sup>4</sup>

What Calvin did with this was to develop a paradigm for Sunday worship. There were to be four elements present: the reading and preaching of the word; prayers in the language of the people; the Lord's supper; and a sharing of goods, principally through almsgiving in the service.

This liturgy has the classic *ordo* of *assembly* in God's presence around his *word* and *table* and *sending* into the world to serve.

It also contains Calvin's four elements of worship: the reading and preaching of the word; prayers; the Lord's supper; and a sharing of goods.

It can be contextualized in any/all cultures of the world.

### RESOURCES

Thompson, Bard, *Liturgies of the Western Church*. Fortress, 2003, pages 159-210. Complete texts of the Reformed liturgies developed under Martin Bucer in Strasbourg and John Calvin in Geneva, plus helpful introductions by Thompson.

Old, Hughes Oliphant, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship*, Eerdmans, 1995 Introductory essays for each of the standard prayers for Sunday worship, plus 15-20 sample prayers of each type.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture*, Revised and Expanded Edition, Westminster John Knox, 2002. The best basic introduction to Reformed worship.

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Bucer, *Grund und Ursach* (1524), *Martini Buceri Opera Omnia*, Series 1 *Deutsch Schriften. Band I Frühschriften 1520-1524* (ed. Robert Stuperich; Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1960), 211; English translation in Elsie A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 1984), 76.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536 (trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 113; *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 (trans. Ford Lewis Battles. London: SCM, 1960), 4.17.44, see also his *Commentary on Acts*, (trans. Henry Beveridge. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), 126-8.