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Part 1

Psalm 149

Music has its origin in the eternal life of the Triune God. Music flows from God into the creation, beginning with creation. As the corporate image of God, music is a fundamental aspect of human life, especially worship and work. All of life, indeed all of history, has a musical element, reflecting the inner rhythms of God's own Triune life.

Creation allegories by Christian storytellers depict the world being sung into existence. Is there any biblical basis for this?

- Job 38, Zeph. 3
- Triune model
- The musical quality of the OT Scripture
- No hard line between speech and song

Our focus is the sacred music of the church. Insofar as the church is a culture of her own (the new Jerusalem/Israel/kingdom), she is going to develop her own musical forms. History bears this out. Of course, even within the church these can vary some in different times and places. American Christians and Chinese Christians will not sing exactly the same things. But the point is, the church is going to use music differently (that is, for a different purpose) than the world, and so it will quite naturally develop musical forms suited to that purpose. It will develop a type of music that is indigenous to its own life. In studying the history of music, many people are surprised to find that so much of music's development took place through the church, for the sake of corporate worship. Those innovations then trickled out into the world, where they were put to a different use.

We need to have a clear sense of what we're trying to do with church music. The goal is not to just have music that sounds different, just for the sake of being different, but to develop music that is *suited for the purpose of corporate praise*. Having different music is not enough in itself; it must be different because of its origin, design, and use.

Of course, how different the church's music is from the surrounding culture's depends on all kinds of factors. The church's relationship to the world is fluid, not static. Sometimes the world is more rebellion against God than other times;

sometimes the influence of the church on the culture is a trickle, other times a flood. But even in a fully disciplined Christian culture, I think worship music would be its own genre.

The Psalms are the church's inspired book of praise and prayer. Any foray into church music must begin and end with the psalter. We could turn to any number of psalms to develop an overarching theology and philosophy of the ministry of sacred song. But we will focus on the climax of the psalter, the conclusion of Book 5 and entire corpus: Psalms 149-150. I will not deal with the overall structure of the Psalter, or with the musical qualities of the Psalter as whole (See Jim Jordan's work for a good introduction to those aspects of the Psalter). Instead, we will exegete these two psalms and apply them to our present cultural context.

Psalm 149:

1 Praise the LORD!

Sing to the LORD a new song,
And His praise in the assembly of saints.

2 Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;

Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.

3 Let them praise His name with the dance;

Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp.

4 For the LORD takes pleasure in His people;

He will beautify the humble with salvation.

5 Let the saints be joyful in glory;

Let them sing aloud on their beds.

6 Let the high praises of God *be* in their mouth,

And a two-edged sword in their hand,

7 To execute vengeance on the nations,

And punishments on the peoples;

8 To bind their kings with chains,

And their nobles with fetters of iron;

9 To execute on them the written judgment—

This honor have all His saints.

Praise the LORD!

V. 1-5 describe the worship of God's people. V. 6-9 describe the warfare of God's people. Worship is basic training; it prepares us for the battles God calls us to

fight. But more than that, worship itself is our primary form of warfare. The psalm really doesn't change the subject. Worship *is* warfare.

V. 1, 9 – The psalm is bracketed by commands to praise, a common feature of the psalms at the end of Book 5.

V. 1 – Command to sing. V. 5 accents exuberance in singing.

Note this is corporate singing in the assembly. Biblical worship is the opposite of pagan worship. Pagans either abuse their physicality or seek to escape it. In biblical worship, the physical provides the medium through which praise is offered. Praise is a matter of bodies singing, kneeling, raising hands, etc. from the heart, in unison. Liturgy is a corporate dialogue between God and his people – he speaks to us and we speak to him. Singing is a way speaking to God in glorified speech.

Singing both expresses and builds unity. The Spirit, the Divine Musician, draws us together through music. The church fathers routinely used the image of the church as a choir to metaphorically describe the unity of the body, as all our lives blend together in harmony.

This is an assembly of *saints*. We are God's holy ones, with access to holy space. In the old covenant, the people were only semi-saints. Now that the veil has been torn, the heavenly sanctuary has opened to us. Worship takes place in heaven. The fact that Ps. 149 calls the worshippers "saints" indicates it is an eschatological psalm.

We are saints only *in Christ*. He is our great High Priest. He is the worship leaders in the assembly. He leads us in song -- and in every other act of worship.

V2. – What do we praise God for? For who he is and what he has done.

God is identified as our Maker (Creator, Sustainer) and King (Lord, Redeemer).

Too much contemporary worship music falls short at just this point. Too often, it expresses the feelings of the worshipper more than truth about who God. It is more about *us* the about *God*. This is why the psalter must always serve as the standard of musical excellence (in terms of both form and content) for the church.

We also learn from the verse the proper approach to God. We are to be joyful; but we are to remember he is our King. In other words, we need to display a

kind of reverent joy (something which the modern church has a hard time imagining; cf. Heb. 12).

V. 3 – More on the physical means of worship.

What kind of dance is in view? There was no liturgical dance at the tabernacle/temple. But the service as a whole includes bodily motions that constitute a kind of corporate dance around the throne of God (procession, kneeling, raised hands, etc.).

The psalm commands instruments. There are no explicit examples of acapella singing in Scripture. The human voice is the basic instrument, but apparently God wants it augmented with other forms of instrumentation.

The center of Book 4 in the psalter is Ps. 98. Ps. 98 is a psalm about the lord becoming king. The proper response is to praise him with a “new song,” including musical instruments. This is the same theme: God is king, so his praise must be glorious. The instruments add glory.

The Bible requires these instruments to be played with skill (Ps. 33:3). This is quite offensive in our egalitarian culture, which is committed to aesthetic relativism. Skill is a form of beauty. God is the definition of beauty. Beauty is most certainly not “in the ear of the listener.” It is an objective reality. If we can’t know or discern, we cannot distinguish the true God from an idol.

To play with skill means to play in a way that is fitting and mature. To play an instrument skillfully takes effort and practice. Nothing in the Bible indicates that worship is something that should be “innate” or come naturally to fallen people.

The same principle is at work when David organizes the Levitical choir in 1 Chron. 15. Cheneniah was put in charge of other musicians precisely because of gifts and knowledge. David was pursuing musical and liturgical excellence in his worship reforms; the church should do the same. The bottom line: We need to give ourselves over to the work of worshipping God in song. In almost every other of life, we expect to have to put forth some effort and learn to new things to excel.

The traditional worship forms of the church were not elitist, but arose out of the best Christianized folk culture of the people. David, after all, was a shepherd-poet, who wrote most of his songs before his enthronement. There is no reason why beauty should be inaccessible, provided we are willing to be trained.

The modern church's marriage to pop culture forms should make us very uneasy. Pop culture is consumer driven. But we're not consumers; we're worshippers. Pop culture forms are designed to make money and have a built-in obsolescence. Worship forms need to be more durable, designed to be passed on from one generation to the next. Further, pop culture is made for entertainment; true liturgical culture is crafted in way that invites the participation of the assembled saints. (There is an odd alliance between the contemporary pop worship of the modern church and the medieval church, which was largely oriented to making the gathered people into passive spectators and observers.)

The best way to make worship a corporate sacrifice of praise, accessible to people from every age and stage of life, is to build upon the established tradition of psalmody and hymnody, with accompanists who see their role as facilitating rather than starring. As Paul Buckley argues, the psalms can never be outgrown.

V. 4 – How does God respond to our praise?

Worship begins with God's gift to us. He always takes the initiative. He invites us to gather. The sacrifices were given by God to the people (Lev. 17). The Psalms were given by God to Israel. Preaching and the sacraments are God's gift to us each Lord's Day. We come empty handed; we can only give what he first gives us.

So God gives, and we respond by giving back. How does God respond to this returning gift? The Lord takes pleasure in his worshipping people. God is pleased with our praises.

The whole point of worship is to please God, not ourselves. We are to give what he asks us to give (e.g., the psalms, tithing).

But we need to know that God can be truly pleased with us. Too many Christians go their whole lives without ever knowing their Father's smiling pleasure. Indeed, the church today is rife with theologies that flatly refuse us to think that God takes pleasure in anything we do because, after all, it's stained with sin. This is a failure of confidence in the person and work of Christ. In him, God accepts our persons and our works. God hates sin, but in Christ, the flaws that still mar our efforts are forgiven.

Further, God beautifies us with salvation. The theme of beauty is so important. If God's goal is to beautify, then surely worship itself should be beautiful. This beauty is not just an attitude; as far as reasonable/feasible, it should be demonstrated physically (music, architecture, vestments, etc.).

The proud cannot beautify God and so they lose out on receiving beauty. This beauty is actually the goal of human existence. The Bible, the biography of Adam, is God's progressive beautification of humanity by his Spirit. The pathway to this destination is humble obedience and service.

V. 5 – Joy and glory are paired up.

Note that joy is not same as "being upbeat." This is a heavy, weighty, glorious joy that only God can give.

"Sing aloud on their beds" may refer to prostration before God, or may refer to singing in the home, as the outflow of gathered worship. We're to praise God in everyday life (Col. 3, Eph. 5). Our whole lives should become a kind of song to God.

V. 6-9 Now we get to the war to end all wars. These verses depict an eschatological battle in which all the enemies of God are vanquished by his people. It is the culmination of the Bible's holy war theme.

Victory is assumed throughout. Yet there is still fighting to take place. This is a battle that has already been won (in principle), even though it remains in progress.

This battle is really a "behind the scenes" glimpse of what happens when the church worships faithfully according to the biblical pattern.

Question: Can the world be changed through music? Through singing?

Rock stars certainly think so! Pop/rock has had messianic aspirations since the 1960s (and the "music of the revolution" predates that by at least a generation or two). "Political rock" aims at changing the world. A lot of rock very deliberately appropriates religious themes, symbols, and language. It claims a kind of "ultimacy."

Thus: rock music, which should be entertainment at most, is used to try to transform the world; meanwhile, the church's sacred music, which really can change the world, has degenerated into cheap entertainment.

Of course, rock has "changed" the world, after a fashion. It has changed the role of sex and drugs in the culture. But it has not stopped the killing in Darfur. ☺

Oh yeah, it's killed plants too.

Meanwhile, rather than enthroning God on our praises so that our enemies will be scattered, the church is singing "Jesus is my girlfriend" ditties that imitate the most trite forms of pop culture. This is not the music of an army on the march. It is not the music of an army closing in on the enemy for the final kill. Whether cause or effect, the church's wimpy, effeminate music is a sign of deep immaturity.

How does the church's music change the world?

Music has power to form character (an observation that goes back at least to Plato and did not even escape Mick Jagger's notice). Music, for good or ill, has the power to shape and stimulate emotion and action. This is why it's so important to sing music that will mature the worshippers.

But sacred music in the gathered assembly has a power of different order as well. Liturgical music is largely a form of intensified prayer. In this music, we call on God to act. He hears it, and he springs to action.

[None of this is to void the principle of Christian liberty. The issue here is propriety in the worship service. There are various zones of life. In the 'woship zone' – the heavenly sanctuary – a particular kind of music is most appropriate. We are certainly free to listen to other music forms in other environments. But we need to do so ever mindful of our obligations to pursue maturity in Christ. No, you won't find "rock music" in a concordance, and no explicit commandment prohibits such music. But you find things like "beauty," "nobility," and "loveliness" in a concordance, along with a command to meditate upon these things. We're free to listen to whatever suits us, but we need to *think* about what we're doing. We should view maturing musical tastes as an aspect of sanctification.]

V. 6 – Praises in mouth, sword in hand – what's the connection between these things?

What's the sword? Ultimately, the word (Heb. 4, Rev. 19, Eph. 6, etc.). Even in the old covenant situation, most warfare was fought with the sword of the Spirit rather than the sword of iron. This is a description of liturgical warfare, through the sung word of God: "Give 'em Watts....and Wesley, and Ambrose, and King Alfred, and Goudimel, and Luther, ... and especially David."

We can look at church history for examples of warfare being fought with the sung word (e.g., anti-Arian hymnody, nuns vs. Julian, the Reformation, Paulinus' missionary work).

Again, how is music a weapon of warfare in the church's military arsenal? When we enthrone God on our praises our enemies scatter (Ps. 22:3, etc.); we teach and admonish one another (Eph. 5); and we call on God in prayer (e.g., Rev. 8, Ps. 18). The church sings her way to victory, to worldwide triumph!

Who wields a sword like this? Priests used swords to offer sacrifice in the old covenant. This sword is a sign of sacrificial worship. We carry the sword because we are priest-warriors.

Note too that the reference is to corporate singing. The church is a choir is an army. This unity is another key to our warfare. This is not say all Christians should sing the same things in all times and places, but it is vital that we maintain a core of shared music with the rest of the catholic church as much as possible. The psalter and the other classic hymns, chants, and canticles are the heart of this. The church fathers certainly saw this kind of unity as vital.

V. 7 – This is the key description of what happens through the church's praise. The nations are judged (this speaks of vengeance, but could include conversion) and tyrants are overthrown.

Certainly, there is a role for political and social activism. Certainly, we must act on behalf of the poor in the public square, embodying mercy and compassion. Certainly, we should work for justice in every realm of life. No doubt, the church should be heavily involved in word and deed forms of evangelism. We know from the OT prophetic witness that our worship will not please God unless it is wedded to a corporate life of grace and holiness.

But, that being said, what is the *primary catalyst* of the world's transformation? The songs of God's people. "You say you want a revolution? . . ." Well, start singing psalms!

Again, that's not a complete answer. There is nothing magical or mechanical about this. It's not a "stand alone" solution. But this is essentially saying that *only God can change the world*. In the psalter, God gives us words we know he likes to hear, language we know he will respond to. The songs of praise in our mouths are sword to execute the enemy, but they are also prayers which stir God to action.

Psalm singing not only trains us for battle ("basic training"), it *is* the battle, the first act of our warfare, our "shock and awe" campaign. If the church sees little victory today, it may be because her songs are not attuned to victory.

Note that this is “rough” language in this part of the psalm: “execute...punishments...bind...execute.” That’s signification. The psalms mature us and toughen us. The psalms make us both harder and softer—harder in that they prepare us to suffer and die for the gospel (note that the psalter sustained Jesus’ right through his death on the cross; it would be hard to imagine him quoting praise choruses on the cross); softer, in that they make us humble and merciful.

Psalm 149 concludes by calling this our “honor.” It is an honor to sing psalms and to participate in warfare in this fashion. We “sing in the reign.” Through these songs, we execute the nations (killing them in Adam, so they can be made alive in Christ), we topple tyrants, we bind the wicked in high places.

Conclusion:

What bearing does this have on what we sing? The question everyone wants to have answered is *What shall we then sing?*

Church music is not limited to the psalter, but it has to start there. Jordan has rightly spoken of preponderant psalmody. The psalms should dominate church music.

As Jordan also argues, while metrical psalms are great, chanting is generally the best way to sing the psalms in their original forms. In it the *purest* form of psalm-singing.

Moving out from the psalter, how do we decide what else is appropriate to sing? What kind of filter/grid should we use? What criteria?

Here are some sample criteria (I’m not trying to be comprehensive, just offer pastors and church musicians some things to think about):

1. Psalm-likeness -- Does it match the quality of the psalter in quality and form? Does it use similar types of imagery? Does it measure up to David’s compositions, or at least imitate them?
2. Beauty – Does it lead us to meditate upon what is lovely (Phil. 4)? Will it mature our musical taste buds?
3. Catholicity – Is it aimed at a niche? Or is it suitable for the whole body? Does it respect the Spirit-led wisdom of the church’s musical tradition? Do we incorporate quality music from a variety of branches of Christendom and from different eras, ancient to contemporary?

4. Fittingness/propriety – This is the genre issue. Not everything that counts as good music is appropriate for worship. We need to respect the different zones of life God has established, going back to Gen. 2. Is this music that fits with the culture of the church? Is it fitting for the heavenly sanctuary?

5. Breadth – Is it narrow in its thematic, theological, and emotional range? Does our music reflect the fullness of God’s character? The span of biblical and church history (this is where the church year is helpful)? The full range of the Christian life and Christian emotions (again, the psalter is helpful here – there should be a mix of songs suited for confession, thanksgiving, rejoicing, etc.)? We need to make sure we aren’t just singing whatever makes us comfortable or feel good. We need music that takes us out the familiar, out of our comfort zones.

6. Militant and masculine – Worship can be reduced to a militant event, though that is a primary, controlling metaphor, and should have a heavy bearing on what we sing and how we sing it.

7. Mature – Pop music today is stuck in adolescence. If church music imitates those forms, it will lock congregations into a cycle of stunted growth. Music should aim at maturity, even if such music is a bit more taxing.

8. Accessibility – We should be patient as we bring our congregations along. We probably needs lots of practice time outside of gathered worship. In the meantime, we should be careful to not exasperate the congregation by forcing them to sing a bunch of songs they aren’t ready for. We should carefully balance music that is well known and already singable, with stretching people so they’re continually learning new music forms.

9. Musical excellence – Music, like any discipline has its own standards of quality. For example, the music we sing should be technically competent, respecting the “laws” and principles of good composition. The text and tune should match. The music should have an appropriate complexity level. It should be suited for its purpose, and for the kind of accompaniment the congregation is capable of providing. Etc.

10. Theological fidelity – Obviously, the text must be anchored to biblical truth. But there is more to ask. Is the text a fit and pleasing expression of biblical truth? Is it relatively easy to memorize? Does it enrich the worshippers?

Part 2

Psalm 150

Psalm 150 is a grand and fitting conclusion, not only to Book 5 of the psalter, but to the psalter as a whole. The psalms were not thrown together at random; each book is carefully crafted to tell a story. Each of the 5 books concludes with a doxology – but Book 5 concludes with a mega-doxology.

Ps. 146-150 each begin and end with a “Hallelujah.” This is the “hallelujah” chorus of the psalter. Just as Ps. 1-2 introduce the psalter as a whole, so these Psalms wrap up the psalter as a whole. Ps. 1-2 focus on Torah and the kingship of God’s Son. These Psalms show us the outcome of a life fulfilling Torah and kissing the Son. The goal of life is not obedience or submission; it is joyful adoration. The chief aim of life is “hallelujah!”

Ps. 150 is really the crescendo to the whole psalter. It is a celebration of the victory won by God and his people at the end of Ps. 149. It is thoroughly eschatological in orientation.

The layout of the psalm is easy to discern. The main body of the psalm includes 10 commands to worship – a new Decalogue of praise, as it were. It moves through a series of aspects of praise: where, why, how, and who.

Psalm 150:

1 Praise the LORD!

Praise God in His sanctuary;
Praise Him in His mighty firmament!

2 Praise Him for His mighty acts;
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!

3 Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
4 Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!

5 Praise Him with loud cymbals;
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!

6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD!

1. Where?

We praise God in his sanctuary. In the old covenant, the temple in Jerusalem was considered God's sanctuary, the intersection point of heaven and earth.

How does this translate into new covenant categories? Jesus is God's temple; the church is God's temple.

The "sursum corda" in the liturgy should be understood as a real ascension into the heavenly sanctuary.

If worship takes place in the sanctuary, all kinds of consequences follow, e.g., worships should follow the sacrificial pattern; worship forms should be appropriate to heaven; etc.

The "firmament" refers back to Gen. 1:6 and day 2 of creation. The firmament seems to be the chamber between God's throne, above the firmament, and the earth, beneath the firmament. The church's worship bridges heaven and earth.

2. Why?

As we saw in Ps. 149, we are to worship God for who he is and what he's done.

We worship God for his mighty acts. From an old covenant perspective, this would include creation, flood, exodus, etc. – the things God has done to show his power, especially for the sake of his people, Israel.

In the new covenant, we know the "full story." We praise God for his mighty act in Christ, for the new creation. But we also praise God for the smaller acts he performs in our lives.

But our praise does not simply focus on what God has done. It includes praising God for who he is. Of course these are inseparable – God's character is known precisely in his mighty deeds.

3. How?

The Psalmist says we are to worship God with a whole array of instruments.

Where did instruments come from? Gen 4 – from the family of Cain. Later Nebuchadnezzar included instruments in his symphony of idolatry.

But we find music redeemed, we find instruments put to use in the praise of God. This is often the pattern. The pagans “get there first,” before the priestly people. But the culture they develop can be purified and brought into the service of God.

The instruments point to exuberance in worship. Worship is both sober and joyful. Probably the closest analogy in our culture is a wedding.

The instruments point to the connection between worship and warfare, e.g., the ram’s horn was used not only to summon people for worship; the clashing cymbals are described more literally as “cymbals of the battle cry.” These are instruments used to call the people to war and lead them onto the battlefield.

The reference to dance means we are to throw our bodies, not just our minds and voices into it. Worship is to be holistic. Biblical religion is not an –ism or an ideology. It is a full-orbed way of life, and includes retraining bodily habits through corporate liturgical gestures. C. S. Lewis rightly refers to liturgical forms of worship as “dance steps.”

The word “worship” actually means “to bow down.” There is no proper worship without the involvement of the body.

Dancing in the Bible is most often associated with victory over enemies, e.g., Miriam, David. The call to dance here is a sign that the battle is won.

All this is to say: Ps. 150 is another holy war psalm. Singing Christians are fighting Christians, and vice versa. But these songs not only summon the church to battle; they summon God to battle. That’s the important thing.

Music molds culture and character. This is why the songs we sing on the Lord’s Day must be chosen with great care. Shallow songs make for shallow Christians. Wimpy songs make for wimpy Christians.

The evangelistic success of the counter-cultural church shows that a church does not have to embrace the forms of the surrounding culture in order to reach the lost. From the beginning the church was committed to developing her own musical culture as a suitable vehicle for God’s praise. Their liturgical music was not subjected to market forces, but was crafted and designed with a singular goal in view – to serve as a vehicle of corporate praise.

The contemporary church has often been maddeningly insensitive to these kinds of concerns – propriety, form/content match, cultural associations, etc. We need music forms that are fit for heaven, suitable containers of the gospel.

4. Who?

Who is to praise the Lord? Everything that has breath (or makes vibrations). All of creation is to use whatever life/energy/breath it has been given to praise God.

The medievals called this the “cosmic hymn.” All of creation dances and sings to the glory of God. The fall untuned creation, but Jesus retunes creation.

Man’s unique role as the captain of creation is to articulate creation’s praises as creation’s priest.

Finally, what of those who have breath but refuse to play their part in the cosmic hymn? See Rev. 18. There is no music, no singing, in hell.

Part 3

Leviticus 9/Liturgical Order

Liturgical order: Leviticus 9:15-24

15 Then he brought the people's offering, and took the goat, which *was* the sin offering for the people, and killed it and offered it for sin, like the first one. 16 And he brought the burnt offering and offered it according to the prescribed manner. 17 Then he brought the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned *it* on the altar, besides the burnt sacrifice of the morning. 18 He also killed the bull and the ram *as* sacrifices of peace offerings, which *were* for the people. And Aaron's sons presented to him the blood, which he sprinkled all around on the altar, 19 and the fat from the bull and the ram—the fatty tail, what covers *the entrails* and the kidneys, and the fatty lobe *attached to* the liver; 20 and they put the fat on the breasts. Then he burned the fat on the altar; 21 but the breasts and the right thigh Aaron waved *as* a wave offering before the LORD, as Moses had commanded. 22 Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings. 23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, 24 and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw *it*, they shouted and fell on their faces.

- Context: Moses has led the Israelites out of slavery in the Egypt. The tabernacle has been built. The priests have been ordained. This is the first corporate worship event in the new (Mosaic) covenantal order.
- Excursus: Can Leviticus be used as a liturgical source book in the Messianic age, after the abrogation of animal sacrifices?
- New Covenant worship is the transfiguration of Old Covenant worship, both its sacrifices and its sanctuary
- The Old Covenant types and shadows find their true fulfillment in Christ, his person and work
- But they also have a "follow through," finding further fulfillment in those united with Christ. The NT repeatedly describes our worship in sacrificial categories.

- This means our task is to read the Old Covenant liturgical instruction in light of Christ, making appropriate redemptive-historical adjustments to its application. The pathway into God's presence is still marked out for us by these Levitical sacrificial models.
- Note further that some kind of "liturgy" is inescapable. If we do not derive our pattern of worship from these and other biblical passages, we still have a liturgy (that is, a form of worship, or a set of protocols for entering the presence of God), but it won't be biblical.
- A good deal of the modern church's confusion over worship stems from giving inadequate attention to the Old Covenant teaching. This is where the Bible's instruction on liturgy is most heavily concentrated. The NT does not give an "order of service" because such an order was already established.

- The sacrificial order in Leviticus 9:

[1. Call to worship – 9:5 – "Draw near" is a technical term for gathered worship, picked up by the writer of Hebrews, e. g., 4:16, 10:22]

2. Sin offering – 9:15 – Highlights confession of sin and absolution. Without an initial confession of sin, we are worshipping God with unclean hands and lips. Having been washed, we may enter God's presence.

3. Ascension offering – 9:16 – The Hebrew term "olah" means neither "whole" nor "burnt," so "whole burnt offering" is a misleading translation. It is true this is the one offering completely burned up and turned into smoke on the altar. But "olah" actually means "to go up" or "to ascend." The point of this offering, then, is that the worshipper, through his representative, ascends into God's heavenly presence as smoke, being incorporated into the glory-cloud. The fire is not judgment, but the presence of the Holy Spirit who consecrates man for God's service. This offering also highlights the cutting up of the animal with a priestly knife. This knife imagery stands behind Heb. 4:12. (Fire and sword mark the way back into God's presence after the fall in Gen. 3.) The ascension offering, in its New Covenant form, begins appropriately with the *Sursum Corda* ("We lift up our hearts to the Lord!") as our entrance into God's heavenly sanctuary. (Putting this in front of the Eucharist is a leftover from the divided service of the days when the church had a catechumenate. It is more theologically fitting to place the *Sursum Corda* after the confession of sin and before the sermon. The entire liturgy after confession takes place in heaven, not just the communion portion).

The ascension offering continues with a burst of sung praise, since we have received cleansing and access. We enter his courts with thanksgiving. It continues with the sword of the Spirit, the Word, as it is read and preached, consecrating us to the Lord's use. Prayer is an appropriate means of offering ourselves to God as well.

4. Tribute offering – 9:17 – The word is usually translated as “grain” in Leviticus and it is a bread offering. But the Hebrew term is often used for taxes paid to royal figures. “Tribute” better captures the sense. The tribute offering never stands alone. It always follows the others and is put on top of the ascension offering. (Note that Cain made a grain offering apart from a blood sacrifice. This is why his sacrifice was rejected.) The tribute offering must follow the others because it represents our works, the fruit of our labor. But our works are not acceptable to God apart from the blood sacrifice of Christ. When God accepts us in him, he also accepts our works. Thus, the tribute offering is not “raw material” from the earth, but requires human labor, e. g., harvesting and baking. The New Covenant conjugation is the giving of tithes and offerings, stemming from the dominion God allows us to exercise over his creation.

5. Peace offering – 9:18-21 – This offering includes a meal in God's presence. God shares from the bounty of his table. All Old Covenant feasts and festivals were variations of the peace offering. The Lord's Supper, of course, is our peace offering in the New Covenant. This is the climax of the liturgy. Note that it includes a wave offering. The offering was raised to God, and then received back from him. The meal itself is a gift from God. Raising the communion elements to the Lord is appropriate.

[6. Benediction – 9:22-23 -- Aaron raised his hands and blessed the people. We are sent out to serve God in the world, carrying his blessing as we go.]

Overview and alliteration:

Calling

Sin offering

Confession

Cleansing

Ascension and tribute offerings

Consecration

Peace offering

Communion

Comissioning

- Five further observations:

1. This pattern is simply a re-enactment of the gospel. It is driven by “gospel logic.” It has the same narrative shape as the gospel itself. We come in as sinners in need of forgiveness, renewal, and wisdom. We receive these things by faith through Christ’s appointed instruments. We respond in praise, prayer, and giving gifts to God. God feeds us at his table, blesses us, and sends us back out into the world. As we rehearse this gospel story each week in this way, it becomes more and more constitutive of our personal and corporate identity.

2. If the liturgy is simply the gospel re-enacted, then it is clear that the liturgy must be God’s service to us before it can be our service to God. This, in fact, is just what we find in the Scriptures. In Lev. 17:11, God says of the entire package of sacrificial worship, “I have given it to you.” The liturgical sacrifices are God’s doing first, and only reflexively ours. In the liturgy God gives us his gifts, and we respond in Christ by giving them back to him. This is the “liturgical circle.” The word from which we get liturgy, “leitourgia,” means “public service.” Older Christian traditions, particularly Lutherans, have emphasized the liturgy is the “Lord’s service” in an ambiguous, double sense. It is the Lord’s service to us before it is our service to him. Any other view (e. g., “we come to worship to give, not to get”) is an incipient liturgical Pelagianism.

3. While God takes the initiative in serving us through Word and sacrament in the liturgy, we must remember that even our response is given to us by grace. Christ is not only God’s gift to us, he the one in whom and through whom we offer our work of praise and thanks up to the Father. He is the true “Minister of the sanctuary” who leads us in worship (Heb. 8:4).

4. This pattern outlined above is found every time God renews his covenant in Scripture. The same basic template may also be found in Gen. 3 (with some adjustments), Lev. 1 (each individual offering is a mini-model of the complete liturgy of Lev. 9), Revelation (a worship service in heaven), etc.

5. The liturgy shapes us in a certain way. We need to be much more aware of the (often subconscious) power of ritual to mold and form our worldview and life praxis. The Enlightenment, among other influences, made us suspicious of non-verbal, non-cognitive modes of communication. We must understand everything God does to us and for us in the liturgy is precisely what we are called to do to and for the world. Thus, it is no exaggeration to claim that the liturgy is not only the source of personal Christian piety, but also the fount of Christian civilization. What we do before the throne of God on the Lord’s Day

has untold implications for how we do everything else. A gospel-shaped, gospel-rehearsing, gospel-driven liturgy fashions us into a people who live the gospel out our finger tips the rest of the week. God forgives us, so we learn to forgive others. God feeds us at his table, so we learn hospitality. God instructs us from his Word, so we come to value literacy and promote the spread of true education. And so on. The liturgy becomes a pattern for all of life.