

The Westminster Confession on Worship
The Worship of the Church, § 2.0-2.3

- I. Reforming the worship of the Western Church.
 - A. Beginnings in Germany and German-speaking Swiss cities.
 1. Medieval Mass overhaul.

Sacrifice of the Mass central; service in Latin; preaching rare; clergy conducted worship; lay people were spectators.
Praise was left to the Office (worship of the clergy) or to the choir
Church discipline was left to the Confessional and Penance
Sacramentalism bred superstition, e.g., Communion wine transubstantiated into blood of Christ was too holy for lay people. They only got a wafer.
 2. Symbols.

The Reformers understood the importance of signs and symbols. They insisted on the re-establishment of the genuine signs of the NT.

 - a. The sign of the Lord's Supper is the sharing of a meal.
Replaced altar with table, got rid of processions, candles, rich vestments.
 - b. The sign of the Lord's Day: resurrection and redemption.
Celebrate the Lord's resurrection and await his coming. The church's witness to these things in the preaching of the gospel.
 3. Content.
 - a. Authority of the ministry and importance of the sacraments.
The church as a community: common faith, common worship, Lord's Supper and discipline.
 - b. In Geneva under Guillaume Farel, 1537.
Weekly Lord's Supper, church discipline, something to take the place of the catechumenate of the ancient church [led to development of catechisms].
development of psalmody.
 - c. In Strasbourg under Calvin (French refugees), 1539.
Within one year the first French Psalter was published.
 4. Practice.

After Calvin's call to Geneva, the influence of the Geneva Psalter (1542) and its liturgy and pastoral practices spread through the training of ministers.
- II. A Reformed and Confessional Perspective on Worship.
 - A. The worship of the whole Church.

The Church includes all generations: Ephesians 3:20-21; Hebrews 12:22-24.
Thus each generation is not free to modify worship to suit what seems to fit the cultural moment.
 - B. The Confessions of Faith of the Church.

"Through our *Confession* and *Testimony*, we recognize the spiritual unity we share with our fathers in the faith."
"The worship of God by the Church was a sacred gathering set apart from the rest of life and governed according to its own rules by God's Word."

III. The Westminster Assembly's Doctrine of Worship, part 1.

Over 70 sessions on the study of worship. First document produced: *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, March 1645.

Principles that govern the worship of the Church:

- A. Scripture is sufficient to direct the Church in its worship.
 1. People need to be able to know the Bible, *WCF 1.8*.
 "that the word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner" (*Confession*, 1.8)."
 2. Preface to Directory.
 ...Wherein our care hath been to hold forth such things as are of divine institution in every ordinance; and other things we have endeavoured to set forth according to the rules of Christian prudence, agreeable to the general rules of the Word of God.
 3. God has told us everything we need to know for church life, *WCF 1.6*.
 4. What are circumstances?
 "such practical issues as how long a section of Scripture to read, what parts of the Bible should be read more frequently, how long to preach, how often to give interpretive comments after the reading, which petitions to pray before or after the sermon, exactly when and where to meet, and so on."
- B. God's covenantal grace makes our worship possible.
 1. God is all-sufficient; he does not need us or our worship.
 "[God] is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures" (*Confession*, 2.2).
 2. God brings us into his presence by his Covenant of Grace.
 "Christ as our Mediator reveals God's will to us by his Spirit speaking in his Word, offers himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and rules us as our King (see *Shorter Catechism* Questions 24-26).
 3. The means of administering the covenant of grace.
 - a. Old Covenant.
Confession, 7.5
 - b. New Covenant.
 ...the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, *Confession*, 7.6.
 - c. The means of grace are all public, for the church assembled.
 - d. Our good intentions do not make innovative rituals or practices right.
 "Good works are only such as God hath commanded in his holy word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretence of good intention. (*Confession* 16.1)"
- C. Liberty of conscience must be preserved in the worship of God.
 1. Our Christian consciences are free from believing or doing anything contrary to the Word of God.
Confession, 20.2.
 2. Ordinary life versus worship.
 In matters of faith and worship, freedom of conscience means not being obligated to believe or do anything "beside," that is, *in addition to*, the Word of God."