

Lecture 8- Historical Overview of Worship (I): Pre-Reformation

Nostalgia “undermines the ability to make intelligent use of the past. Memory, in contrast, does not idealize the past to condemn the present, but draws hope from the past in order to enrich the present and guide the future.”

Christopher Lasch

Key Concepts

- Synagogue worship
- Early church fathers
- Roman mass

Lecture Objectives

- To outline the birth of post-apostolic Christian worship
- Briefly characterize the place of singing in the early church

Preliminary Questions

- What kind of influence ought the weight of church history to have on our discussions and debates about worship?
- If hymns can be used to teach doctrinal truths, what is it that the hymns in your church are teaching – and what doctrines are they *not* teaching?

Historical Overview of Worship (I): Pre-Reformation

Introduction: Hymn paper assignment and final exam explanations

I. The Early Church Legacy of the Temple and the Synagogue

A. Elements of synagogue worship

Worship of God apart from sacrifices

B. The perfect sacrifice of Christ reflected in the Lord’s Supper

C. Early church worship

1. Content was Christ

2. Structure was word and sacrament plus prayer and praise

3. Context was fellowship of varied house churches with recognition that the church was larger than house churches (e.g., the church at Rome)

II. The Status of Music and Worship in the Early Church Fathers

A. Justin in first apology (c. 150 AD)

1. Format of the worship service

a. Scripture readings and sermons/lessons

b. Intercessory prayers followed by summary prayer

c. Kiss of peace

d. Offering which included bread and wine for Lord’s Supper

e. Eucharistic prayer and extemporaneous prayers

f. Singing

g. Lord’s Supper (weekly)

2. Viewed as reordering of the apostolic tradition and not creation of something new

B. Letter from statesman Pliny the Younger to Trajan the Emperor (c. 62-113 AD)

Singing described as “to utter in turn songs to Christ as to a god”

C. Growing concern about use of instruments because of association with Greek pagan influences

- D. Arian use of hymns to spread heretical teachings responded to by orthodox teachers like Ephraim Syrus (307-373 AD), who wrote faithful texts to the same tunes
- E. Singing of non-scriptural texts prohibited in worship (Council of Laodicea, 360-381)

III. The Roman Mass

- A. Simple, dignified, and beautiful form at first
- B. Increasingly focused on transubstantiation (Lateran Council, 1215)
- C. Worship done by clergy in Latin in presence of passive congregation
- D. Congregational singing prohibited (Council of Constance, 1415)
- E. Increasingly elaborate and austere fixed external forms

IV. The Relationship of the Sermon and the Other Elements of Worship