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Outline 1: Appearing in God's Presence

Liturgy and the worship service (I)

A. Introduction

1. The importance of this subject

Twice every Sunday, the congregation of Christ gathers together for worship. The nature of the worship service is governed by established forms and structures. Members who regularly attend church know what to expect, since regular customs and routines are followed. This can be dangerous. When one knows what will happen - since the liturgical actions are predictable - this can lead to passivity and apathy in the worship service. The glow of the events can eventually lose their lustre. Worship can become a less engaging activity. One's involvement in the worship service can falter. The joy of faith can be negatively influenced.

- It is, therefore, necessary to question the importance of the liturgy and all liturgical proceedings. We may ask:
- Why does the congregation meet? What is a worship service?
- What is liturgy? Is it only a question of how the worship service is organized, or do certain proceedings also have a Biblical background?
- How did the Reformed liturgy come into being?
- How is Reformed liturgy different from that of other churches?
- Is it really necessary to use standard forms and patterns, or does the minister have a measure of freedom in their use?

The discussion of such questions will stimulate a necessary reflection on what we are doing in church. The festive character of the worship service will then continue or return "in joyful assembly" (Hebrews 12:22). If the congregation desires to "worship the LORD with gladness" (Psalms 100:2), it must be wary of routine and boredom in the worship service.

2. The order of discussion

Liturgy and the worship service are broad topics. The *Book of Praise* contains orders of worship, forms for the sacraments, forms for discipline, forms for the installation of office bearers, and a form for the solemnization of marriage. These forms are not confessions, nor are they “forms of unity”. Rather, the churches have formulated these Biblically based forms to support the specific liturgical elements.

In addition, the *Book of Praise* contains prayers and the Church Order. In this Outline, the discussion will be limited to the meaning of the worship service and the liturgy. The following Outline will address the order of the worship service, the liturgical forms, and the prayers. An Outline will also be devoted to the Church Order even though it is not part of the liturgy.

B. The difference between liturgy and the worship service

It is useful to consider the terms *liturgy* and *worship service* at the same time, since they are closely connected. This is not to say that they are synonymous. The difference between liturgy and the worship service can be illustrated in the following way:

- The *worship service* is about the *meeting* of God and his congregation as such. These two meet because they belong together and want to have communion with each other.
- *Liturgy* concerns the *manner* in which this meeting is manifested.

In short, the worship service demonstrates *that* God and his congregation meet; the liturgy shows *how* they meet.

C. The worship service

It is impossible to imagine the life of God's people without a worship service in which they may communicate with God. A marriage in which the spouses live silently alongside each other will eventually break down. A people that may call themselves God's people cannot live without communication with God.

Evaluation: One can be appreciative of the attempt to enrich the liturgy. Too much austerity can reduce the festive character of the liturgy and shortchange the congregation in its communication with God. Even the Lord's Supper can receive a secondary position, if one looks only at the outward symbols without celebrating and experiencing it as a feast. However, the doctrines of the liturgical movement remain unacceptable.

F. Conclusion

Reformed liturgy is certainly worth studying and discussing. It will only help to increase our awareness of the worship service as a distinctive and festive occasion.

G. Tips for the introduction

1. The remarks under C.2. regarding Genesis 4:26 and the other mentioned texts are a suitable starting point for an introduction. Discuss these in conjunction with the meaning of the covenant.
2. The church service is a worship service we cannot afford to do without in our relationship with God. Using Scriptural data, try to establish what it means to "honour God".
3. Compare the Old and New Testament passages about the worship services.

H. For discussion

1. If the worship service is a dialogue in the covenant, is it correct to put all the emphasis on the sermon, e.g. as we would do with a portrait, considering the rest of the liturgy to be the frame?
2. The worship service is a dialogue. How can the congregation become more involved in each part of the liturgy?
3. Do the detailed laws which God gave for the Old Testament worship service give any indication about how congregations today must take care to have a good liturgy? Should we be paying more attention to the liturgy?