

# **Appendix 1: In Defence of Liturgy**

## **(A Biblical defence of Liturgies)**

Should liturgical use form one of the mainstays of any future *'Underground Church?'* To adequately answer such questions relevant biblical texts must be consulted<sup>1</sup>, should no biblical evidence be found for their use they must be justifiably discarded as a man-made tradition. Closely related to this issue is the use of certain Jewish practices; are some to be accepted with others rejected on the grounds that they form an obsolete part of the Old Covenant, (Hebrews 8:13)? Further insight into both issues will be gained by looking at how Jesus Himself responded to the Jewish liturgical practices of His day. His stance is clearly portrayed in the following article (written in early 2009) which originally formed part of a book review of *'Biblical Church'* (author: Beresford Job).

### **Jesus and Liturgy**

As a child and then as a young man Jesus would have grown up in an environment steeped in synagogue liturgy.<sup>2</sup> Its influence and that of the *'haterim'* (a village-based movement where people gathered in homes to discuss Torah and any issues relating to it) would have constituted a very *'normative'* background for both Jesus and His contemporaries. He would have benefitted from both the formality of a synagogue liturgy and from informal groups too (as well as the domestic rituals of Jewish family life). The clear implication is that no fundamental incompatibility existed in Jesus' day between a formal liturgical and a less formal house group setting. Further evidence of Jesus' own acceptance of synagogue liturgy can be seen in His acceptance of the offers to preach at the synagogue, (Luke 4:16). Should He have regarded liturgy as nothing more than a man-made tradition He would simply NOT have agreed to preach in a synagogue. It could even be argued that if liturgical worship was good enough for Jesus then it should be good enough for us. We should not reject those things which He chose not to reject. Although our Lord challenged His contemporaries over many issues, having a liturgy (and using it) was not one of them. If liturgies were so very wrong then surely He would have roundly condemned them in the strongest possible terms? Indeed, the only types of prayer Jesus did condemn were the endlessly repetitive pagan prayers<sup>3</sup> and the extemporary public prayers made by the Pharisees and used by them to draw attention to their imagined virtues (Matthew 6:5-7). Liturgical practice fell into neither category.

An objection could be raised at this point, stating that Christ's participation in any liturgical ritual took place before the New Covenant was inaugurated. Christ tolerated the old things until He could offer something better. However, wouldn't Jesus have carefully prepared His disciples for any outright abolition of the liturgical worship they had known from childhood? A failure to do so would suggest either discourtesy or incompetence. Alternatively, Jesus never intended to abolish liturgical worship at all. In fact further evidence will show that, in this area, He was a transformer rather than an abolisher of liturgy.

One piece of evidence provided by Bailey p.104-112 demonstrated that Jesus took the liturgical Eighteen Benedictions of Judaism, adapted them and placed their more acceptable features into the Lord's Prayer. As Bailey p.107 observed, *"Any innovator in any age must deal with the tradition of the past. Some things are omitted while others are endorsed unchanged. Still others are accepted and rejected through the introduction of new elements. Jesus is no exception."* In this instance, Jesus deliberately took a liturgical format and used it as an important source for the foundational prayer of Christianity.

An identical pattern re-occurs in relation to the Last Supper. Here, Jesus uses the Jewish Passover meal as a basis for the sacrament of Holy Communion, (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:12-25 & Luke 22:19-24). The Passover itself followed a set format which Jesus was content to follow until the very end. Furthermore, He prescribed a phraseology that would fit-in very naturally into any liturgical setting. A ritualistic as well as a fellowship element was present and,

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<sup>1</sup> These will be taken mainly, but not exclusively from the New Testament

<sup>2</sup> This was a point often highlighted by Bailey (2008) and many of the arguments made here are based upon his findings. In contrast to those opposed to the use of liturgy, Bailey did have an expert knowledge of Ancient Middle Eastern Culture. He'd spent much of his adult life living in the region

<sup>3</sup> Arguably, Eastern Mantras would come under this condemnation, as would the endless and mindless repetition of *'The Jesus Prayer,'* advocated in an anonymous nineteenth century Russian devotional classic *'The Way of a Pilgrim.'*

like so many ceremonies, the Last Supper was a case of a fellowship built around a ritual. Jesus' deliberate actions during the Last Supper would strongly suggest that it was Himself rather than the Early Fathers who founded Church Liturgy. In this area, all they did was to try and build upon a foundation already laid by Christ. It could be argued that they built upon this foundation extremely badly (with the result that much of their work in this area needs to be corrected) but it was a foundation that had been put in place by the incarnate Son of God. At this point, it's possible to devise a proverb which says: -

*"If the walls are crumbling  
But the foundation is sound  
Knock down and replace the walls  
But keep the foundation intact."*

Such a principle needs to be followed in relation to liturgy. Ripping out a good solid foundation does nothing but weaken any future building. The writer can only vividly recall how the determined anti-liturgical stance present within many of the so called '*New Churches*' of the 1980s had, by the mid-1990s, allowed them free reign to participate in the most embarrassing of errors – namely the Toronto Deception. They had recklessly disregarded those safeguards inherent within a bible-based liturgy which would have countered such a development. The warning in Revelation 22:19's that those taking away a teaching or practice commended in God's Word would lose a share of spiritual life was tragically fulfilled.

None of this excludes any of the informal approaches wisely recommended by House Church leaders like Beresford Job, but it does refute the argument that liturgy should have died on the cross. It didn't! During the Last Supper Jesus took a Jewish liturgical tradition (enshrined in the Passover Ceremony) and used it as a means to point to His own redemptive work. Indeed, a good test of any liturgy is to ask "*Does it give an unambiguous witness to Christ's redemptive work?*"

### ***A Mistaken Assumption***

One of the flaws within any anti-liturgical stance is his assumption of a hiatus in the early Church's use of Jewish Liturgy – believing it went out with Christ's death before being '*sneaked back in.*' in by naughty Church Fathers like Clement of Rome or Justin Martyr. A certain Dr John Drane stated "*It was only much later that the Lord's Supper was moved to a special building and Christian prayers and praises that had developed from the synagogue and other sources were added to create a grand ceremony.*"<sup>4</sup> This statement argues that a gap of time existed between the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles from c.30-90AD and the adoption of liturgy around c130-150AD. However, the use of liturgical material by early Church Fathers like Clement of Rome (c.95AD) and Ignatius of Antioch<sup>5</sup> (c.107AD) appears to completely refute this argument.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, given the early Churches growing anti-Semitism, it's hard to see how by the second century it would have wished to have made use of anything of Jewish origin. By then the relationship between the Jewish and Christian communities had become very strained. Even a moderate like Justin Martyr was extremely patronizing towards the Jewish Faith in his '*Dialogue against Trypho.*'<sup>7</sup> It would seem far more plausible to assume that the Early Church had never abandoned Jewish Liturgy in favour of the more spontaneous approach to worship that Paul commended in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and Colossians 3:16. Following the example of the apostles the early church had simply carried on using the Jewish Liturgy, '*Christianising*' those parts that needed some adaptation. Indeed, Early Church documents (like the Didache) would appear to suggest that a Pauline approach to worship did not exclude the use of elements taken and

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Beresford Job p.91

<sup>5</sup> Both of whom who may have known the apostles.

<sup>6</sup> For specific examples please refer to Staniforth's translation of their writings in Radice's '*Early Christian Writings*' pp.54-56, 77-78 and 128.

<sup>7</sup> This piece of literature appears to have been based upon a debate he'd had with a Jewish refugee who'd escaped the final defeat of the Bar Kochba revolt around 136AD.

adapted from the Jewish Liturgy. Embedded within that very early document is a church 'manual' (possibly late first century) which contains an early Eucharistic liturgy (complete with responses) along with instructions allowing for freer forms of worship under the pastoral direction of the Apostles and Prophets.<sup>8</sup> This would suggest that the Early Church had felt free to use a liturgical form of worship and a freer, more relaxed style of worship. The above dovetailed together and there was no conflict between the two.

Equally telling was some of the worship material used in the Epistles and The Book of Revelation. 1 Corinthians 13 appears to have begun as a hymn of love whilst Ephesians 5:14 is a quote (possibly from a hymn) which must have been repeated enough for it to have become well known. The famous angelic song of Revelation 4:8 especially lent itself to liturgical use – being a regular feature in Eastern Orthodox worship. Some scholars like Apel (1958) have even argued that church music originated in the Jewish Synagogue Liturgy. As he remarked on p.34 *“the Christian rite and its chant are rooted in the Jewish Synagogue. Different though the new message was from the teaching of the synagogue it was presented in forms to which they had been accustomed by a long tradition...In view of these numerous bonds between the two [Jewish and Church] rituals it is only natural to assume that there existed a musical tradition leading from the Jewish to the early Christian chant.”* Such a tradition, (which required a fair degree of skill) could not have been passed on if there had been a complete break with the synagogue liturgy – as BJ presupposes.

Overall, it's clear that some New Testament passages are drawing upon Jewish worship material. If such material is to provide effective reminders of Christ it must be verbally repeated (as well as being written down) and such repetition requires the deployment of liturgy. Its repetitive use is an invaluable aid in the memorisation of divine truths amongst those who are illiterate.

A last witness pointing to the existence of an ongoing liturgical tradition is the Book of Revelation. Specific passages like Revelation 4-5, 8:1 & 15:15-16:15 reveal that worship in heaven is an elaborate affair, characterised by prostration, affirmations of faith, joyful music, the use of incense and silences. A picture is created of a 'super liturgy' and the Early Church showed a sense of reverence when it tried to ensure that its own worship reflected that of heaven. Only in that place of perfection does there exist the perfect liturgy. At best, a liturgy can provide a foretaste of the afterlife – with participants being given insight into what heavenly worship will be like. Present in that place will be liturgies of great and awesome beauty.<sup>9</sup>

What appears genuinely not to have occurred to Drane is the way liturgies can help increase rather than diminish congregational participation. One example was provided by Ambrose of Milan (in the fourth century) introduced antiphonal hymn-singing which provided encouragement to Christians under pressure from the Arian Heresy. When blessed by the Holy Spirit a liturgy can be a wonderful tool in which to engage with God, acting as a legitimate avenue whereby God can deal with particular sins and inspire a mood of worship. Often, it's only when a liturgy has done its work of orientating people to God that they can effectively begin to relate to one another.

In combination, both biblical and patristic evidence have firmly refuted Drane's argument that a gap existed between the ministry of Jesus and His apostles and the use of liturgy. The reality is this form of worship has always been present in the life of the church.

### ***What Christ Abolished***

So what aspect of Judaism did Christ abolish if not liturgical worship? The answer is given in the context of Hebrews 8:13b which predicted that the decaying Old Covenant was *“ready to vanish away.”* Specifically, this meant the system of animal sacrifices performed over and over again in the second temple. Christ's *‘once and for all sacrifice’* upon the cross ensured that God's wrath against sin had been fully pacified, leaving no need for any other propitiatory

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<sup>8</sup> Radice pp.230-234 – however, 'Apostles' is badly translated as 'Missioners' and 'Prophets' as 'Charismatists.'

<sup>9</sup> Somewhat humorously, one may add that those Christians who don't like liturgical worship on earth will have a hard time getting used to it in Heaven!

(anger appeasing) sacrifice. Animal sacrifices were completely meaningless in the New Covenant – they were a thing of the past and were to remain abolished.

However, the validity of general liturgical use wasn't under discussion in Hebrews 8:13. Any liturgy which may have been used in connection with animal sacrifices was being done away with but this did not mean that all liturgies were being done away with. Nothing could be further from the truth – the Early Christians amended and adapted current Jewish Liturgy in order to make it thoroughly Christ-centred. In doing this they were following a precedent set by their Lord. Indeed, throughout the New Testament a general pattern emerges wherein the animal sacrifices; designed to appease God's wrath were rightly abolished whilst any liturgies not centred upon such sacrifices were adapted and used in Christian worship. This difference must be borne in mind if House Church Christians are to avoid the dangerous mistake of throwing out those very traditions they were meant to keep.

Admittedly, where Christians foolishly see themselves as a separate caste of priests with a mandate to appease God's wrath through the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass then any liturgy connected with this is most certainly being used in an anti-biblical way. The same also applies should liturgies be misused to bless irregular sexual unions or to celebrate the worship of false gods in inter-faith worship. However, in this context the best remedy for '*wrong use*' is not '*no use*' but '*right use.*' Bible-centred<sup>10</sup> liturgies play an honourable role in promoting the spiritual well-being of God's people. To use them is to follow the precedent set by Jesus and His Apostles. This means that devising a liturgy can be a godly and creative activity. Liturgies built around scripture help users to engage with God as their Father in an intelligent and emotionally moving way. They provide structures which the Holy Spirit may use to point people to Jesus. Just as sails on a ship catch the wind to help guide it toward its destination, so a good liturgy can '*catch the breath of God's Spirit,*' aiding a Christian's progress on his or her journey. Structure and Spirit need not be incompatible.

This issue is of the utmost importance because, should a denial of liturgy persist then at the very least a practical, '*user-friendly*' teaching tool will have been lost. And how many years must pass before a return to the use of sound bible-based liturgies is ever made? Arguably, to neglect liturgies may not constitute an '*actual taking away from scriptural doctrine*' but it would certainly represent a diminution of scriptural practice. It's like removing the teacher's notes – the very thing needed in order to understand and make practical sense of the textbook. Liturgy is a scripturally-based tool, readily available to those wishing to use it. Doing away with liturgy would incur a loss of spiritual life and growth (Revelation 22:19). The resulting inner dryness would only increase a Christian's vulnerability both to human error and to spiritual deception. To discard liturgy would be to repeat the mistakes made by certain anti-liturgical Protestant groups like the Quakers. As the example of the Quakers amply shows, an anti-liturgical bias leads inexorably to theological liberalism and to a subsequent loss of authentic Christian identity. For all of its many good points, the present House Church Movement runs the risk of wrecking its own future should it choose to continue with its anti-liturgical stance. The reality is that liturgies are rooted in the teaching and practice of New Testament Scripture. They help sum-up what should be believed in and practiced, thereby reducing the tendency to '*make things up*' as one goes along.

Also, scripture points out that "*by their fruits you shall know them,*" (Matthew 7:20b). Over the long term the '*fruit*' of liturgical practice has been good. Not only has liturgy acted as '*salt and light*' in daily life (Matthew 5:13-14), but it has, across the ages, stimulated the commissioning of great music and artistic endeavours such as those by the outstanding German organist Johannes Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). It has also provided a doctrinally sound base, acting as a '*breaking mechanism,*' and slowing down the rate of apostasy which has been taking place within many denominations. Only after Western Anglicanism abandoned the Book of Common Prayer did it begin to completely collapse and even then its rate of collapse was slower than the rapid demise of Western Pentecostalism (which had never possessed any liturgical tradition in the first place.)<sup>11</sup> Liturgies also provide a sense of common identity and stability, necessary in

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<sup>10</sup> The reviewer assumes that to be '*bible-centred*' is also to be '*Christ-centred*' (with no real difference existing between the two). This is because the Bible acts as God's window onto Christ.

<sup>11</sup> The reviewer saw how it took only four years for Pentecostalism (having no recourse to liturgy) to fall into overt neo-paganism as compared to the forty years it took for the same thing to happen to the Church of England (with its

order to hold diverse groups of people together. Their use emphasises that the worship of God can be both a community as well as an individual experience. Moreover, as liturgies are used the Holy Spirit is given further scope to minister – creating that sense of genuine spiritual unity to be found in Christ alone. They have also (as the reviewer has previously mentioned) saved many a session from being a complete waste of time.

### ***Answering Criticisms***

One criticism levelled against a Biblical Liturgy is that its precise approach to doctrine could create unnecessary division amongst God's people – undermining attempts by well-meaning Christians to bring greater unity to the Church. One response to this objection is to brusquely retort *'since when has a good slice of biblical truth not brought division?'* This was a point Jesus Himself made when He stated that one effect of His teaching would be to *'divide households,'* (Luke 12:51-53). Division also resulted from the ministry of the apostles and other historical major Church movements like the Reformation. Should division occur then Christians need to ensure that the level of acrimony is kept as low as possible and that any subsequent schism does not act as an excuse for gratuitous bloodshed. Believers in Christ must never think that they are any more immune from the murderous passions which can afflict people of other religions. They most certainly aren't!<sup>12</sup> Unless tamed by God's Spirit, the Christian can kill just as easily as the next person.

Perhaps it's helpful to realize that truth divides simply because it inflames the innate rebelliousness which dominates every unregenerate heart. It also divides because it challenges powerful groups who have a vested interest in propagating some form of deception.<sup>13</sup> When God reveals a fresh truth from His Word people often respond with rebellion. This was the case with the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the time of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and it's still the case today where whole hierarchies like the Anglican Church in America are in militant rebellion against biblical standards of morality. Warped by sin, they much prefer a comforting lie to a discomfiting truth.

As for the specific objection that *'Biblical Liturgies'* will disrupt well-meaning attempts to create Church unity the only way to respond is to query *'What's the lesser of evils – division or a false unity bringing a loss of Christian identity and a growing integration with a godless New World Order the policies of which will bring humanity to the brink of extinction?'*<sup>14</sup> If religious division can cause much evil so can an undiscerning unity which blindly submits to a non-biblical *'group-think'* mentality. A variety of psychological studies have confirmed that a certain degree of dissent is (so long as it's in accord with the correct thing) necessary in order to prevent abuses from developing within an organization. Especially at the institutional level, it's easy to see why many of today's ecumenical endeavours represent an apple cart which really does need to be tipped over – the apples in it having been contaminated by a deadly poison. Christians need to be aware that there are some forms of unity which are just not worth aspiring to. If the price of unity is a surrender of biblical truth then forget it – such a unity really isn't worth pursuing.

### ***Positive Advantages***

Not to be overlooked are some of the positive advantages offered by a liturgical format. At their best liturgies can encourage active communal participation in worship; in fact, they can do this more effectively than the traditional *'hymn-sandwich'* of Evangelical Protestantism or the increasingly stale *'chorus-sandwich'* of Charismatic Christianity. Moreover, it's most assuredly possible and indeed very easy to blend liturgical worship with the more informal approaches favoured by House Church leaders like Beresford Job. When such a mix of worship does take place God's blessings are often very apparent through genuine manifestations of the Holy Spirit and a wonderful sense of peace. As the reviewer has observed, liturgy can complement rather

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liturgical emphasis which provided some form of positive *'breaking and slowing'* mechanism). Its use had enabled some Church of England parishes to *'stay on track'* for far longer.

<sup>12</sup> The Rwanda genocide of 1994 confirms this point all too well

<sup>13</sup> Such groups may exist either within or without the Church

<sup>14</sup> In Matthew 24: 21-22, Christ warned His disciples that only direct divine intervention could save humanity from destroying itself

than stifle free forms of worship.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the presence of liturgical worship does mean that at the very least some sound biblical content is most definitely present within any given meeting. The preaching may be boring, the music lousy and elderly Miss Jones complaining about her ailments again – but at least some blessing is being received through an interaction with divine truth which happens to be presented in liturgical form. The reviewer has attended services where the one component preventing things from falling apart has been the use of a liturgy. Within House Group meetings liturgical use can prevent the sort of petty situation arising wherein people are left praying for a pet budgerigar. Such meetings often degenerate into tedious ‘*waffling sessions*’ which lead nowhere. The reviewer has experienced (and dozed through) far too many such gatherings.

Any anti-liturgical approach can only beg the question ‘*what’s the alternative?*’ The two most common ones appear to be to warble choruses around a badly tuned guitar or a dry ‘*hymn-sermon sandwich*’ in which everything is ‘*done from the front.*’ There is also the positive fact that the type of contributions listed in 1 Corinthians 14:26 can freely occur in the context of a liturgy. During the 1980s the reviewer often saw how, in worship, there could be a beautiful progression from a liturgy (characterised by good theological content) to a time of spontaneous worship which gave scope for spiritual gifts to be used. It was a case of the liturgy providing the sails for the Holy Spirit to blow into. Liturgies can ‘*warm-up*’ gatherings by focussing people’s minds upon God, thereby placing them in a position to benefit from any subsequent form of worship.

Another advantage is the way liturgies offer such a quality of language meaning that their use enables participants to go onto express their innermost thoughts in a safe and healthy manner. The ‘*Confession of Sin*’ in ‘*The Book of Common Prayer*’ can be especially useful in clearing away any personal sins or negative emotions. As a format, set liturgies do help group members to personally engage with the truth of scripture, bringing them into contact with both the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Informal worship is fine, but can be rather self-limiting due to the general level of understanding and/or capabilities of the group members. Liturgical use offers a ‘*level playing field*’ where all can participate, regardless of capability or intellectual understanding.

### ***An Unwise Dismissal***

Given Christ’s own acceptance of liturgy it would now appear most unwise that many contemporary House Churches have chosen to dismiss liturgical worship altogether. Their decision completely circumvents the teaching of 1 Corinthians 9:22c, which states “*by all means save some.*” This would suggest that where liturgies contain the Gospel and are based upon biblical teaching then their use is most certainly valid. Dismissing them outright totally destroys one very important means of conveying biblical truth.

In the end, it’s possible to respond to the question ‘*Why Liturgies?*’ by stating that they preserve a clear and concise witness to biblical truth. Their use could be of incalculable value amidst what may prove to be very trying and difficult times ahead for the worldwide Christian community. At a more individual level, they also provide a safe structure wherein people can enjoy ‘*contact with the divine*’ without wandering into a quagmire of mindless subjectivity (so often a destructive feature of Pentecostalism). A safe and sound structure is provided for believers to be receptive to the Holy Spirit. At a more mundane level, Liturgies can counter the boredom which may arise when worship takes place without any solid doctrinal content.

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<sup>15</sup> This point is demonstrated in ‘*The Listening to God Service*’ in ‘*The Leeds Liturgy*’