

“Little” things contribute to perfection and that is not a “little thing”. Michael Angelo Buonarotti  
Connections between the Liturgy of the Hungarian Reformed Worship and the Heidelberg Catechism (HC)

I had the honour on the V. HUN-HAN Conference to reveal the essential connections between the Liturgy of the Hungarian Reformed Worship in Transylvania (Romania) and the Heidelberg Catechism, one of the most important Calvinistic Creed.

In this essay we would go through the next topics:

1. Liturgy as dramatized confession
2. Historical background of our Reformed Liturgy
3. How the Heidelberg Catechism came into being
4. How the Heidelberg Catechism shapes the form of the Hungarian Order of Worship in The Reformed District of Transylvania in Romania in practice and how liturgy keeps alive our confession in general – (teaching sermons) and particular – we use as confession formula the answer of the first question.

## Liturgy as communication and dramatized confession

The word “liturgy” derives from the ancient Greek word leiturgia that means cooperation and joint service, in churchly area of interpretation will mean the order of acts made by believers, priests and laics. Each service, every denominational worship has its liturgy, they differ and are alike in the same time

in many ways. In this way of thinking liturgy is a dialogue between the calling God and the answering man, where man answers not only by words, but by all his life.

If we look at the Orthodox Divine Liturgy, the Roman Catholic Mass, the Liturgy of Protestant Worship, or other Liturgies used by neo protestant churches, we can observe that in a way or other they organise their liturgies around what they believe about God, Trinity, Church, Communion and believers. Liturgies are in fact dramatized confession of faith from each church. In some points they have parts in common, but we can recognize a church's set of dogma's by its liturgy. Like Christian life, the order of worship in liturgy is a cohesive whole, and the elements should complement one another and be a mirror of the Christian way of existence.

a. as Orthodox church understands it: worship is part of the heavenly worship in front of God. These can be recognized in the elements of Orthodox Divine Liturgy:

1. Preparation/Liturgy of the preparation: Proskomedia, Liturgical Objects, Vestments
2. Liturgy of the Catechumens/Liturgy of the Word: Great Litany, Antiphons, Little Entrance, Troparion, Thrice-Holy Hymn, Epistle, Gospel, Homily, Litany of Fervent Supplication, Litany for the Departed, Litany of the Catechumens
3. Liturgy of the Faithful/Liturgy of the Eucharist: Cherubic Hymn, Great Entrance, Litany of the Completion, Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, Anaphora, Epiclesis, Megalynarion, Lord's Prayer, Communion, Dismissal, Antidoron.
4. b. as Roman Catholic church understands it: worship is preparation of a believer to be in holy communion with Christ in the Last Supper. Elements of RC Liturgy according to the Latin Rite
5. Introductory Rites: Entrance, Greeting, Penitential Act, Glory to God, Collect.
6. Liturgy of the Word: First Reading, Responsorial Psalm, Second Reading (on Sundays and Solemnities), Gospel Acclamation, Gospel, Homily, Profession of Faith (on Sundays, Solemnities and special occasions), Universal Prayer.
7. Liturgy of the Eucharist: Presentation of the Gifts and Preparation of the Altar, Prayer over the Offerings, Eucharistic Prayer, Preface, Holy, Holy, Holy, First Half of Prayer, including Consecration, Mystery of Faith, Second Half of Prayer, ending with Doxology. The Lord's Prayer, Sign of Peace, Lamb of God, Communion, Prayer after Communion,

## 8. Concluding Rites: Optional Announcements, Greeting and Blessing, Dismissal.

c. as Reformed churches understands it: worship is a duty that one has to exercise in discipline by knowing himself/herself as sinner and expecting the teaching of God about Grace and Absolution, then expecting the teaching for a well-organized, self-controlled and thankful Christian life. Elements of a Calvinistic worship:

Invocation and Call to Worship, The Confession of Sin (prayer) and Brief Absolution, Reading of the Scripture, Psalm Sung, Pastoral Prayer or Prayer for Illumination, The Word of God Preached (Sermon), Prayer of Intercession and Application, ending with the Lord’s Prayer, Psalm Sung, Benediction. It did not contain liturgy for the worship for Communion, because it did not happen every day or every Sunday.

As it can be seen, is very simple if we look at the other liturgies, it is very rational, it sees the church service as a possibility and demand for making oneself ready to understand God’s will and taking the decision to fulfil it.

## Short historical background of the Hungarian Reformed Liturgy in Romania

Our Reformed Church in Romania did not develop on its own, it was organic part of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the Carpathian Basin, in the Hungarian Kingdom, and which was organised very short after the Reformation in 1517. In the beginning the Hungarian speaking Protestant Churches had followed the Lutheran wing of the Reformation, then, when pastors, who were trained abroad, came home with ideas spread by Zwingli, Calvin, Melancton and Bucer, our Church has chosen to follow the Calvinist wing of the Reformation. Most congregations in Partium (Temes, Arad, Bihar, Szatmár, Máramaros counties) and Transylvania, which are part of Romania now, became in very short time Hungarian speaking Reformed Churches, and only a few remained Lutherans. Liturgy was also reformed and reshaped, first by Luther, who started to use the translated Bible in German, and stated that everything good and well what does not go against the core teaching of the Scripture. Changes had been made by Zwingli, Bucer and by Calvin as well. He and the other protestant scholars wanted

not only to form the liturgy a bit less Catholic, but they wanted a total reformation of liturgy, so it can link back to the early Christian communities. Here is a description, how Calvin thought the church worship should be: "Calvin's service opened with the minister entering, positioning himself behind the communion table, and saying: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8).

A call to confession of sins and an appropriate prayer followed. In Strassburg he used an absolution at this point in the service ("To all those who thus repent and seek Jesus Christ for their salvation, I pronounce absolution in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."); in Geneva he replaced the absolution with a statement of forgiveness. The singing of the first table of the Law, followed by a prayer and the singing of the second table, concluded the service of confession.

As the people sang the second table of the Law, the minister entered the pulpit (in later years Calvin conducted the entire service from the pulpit). The minister then led the congregation in a prayer for illumination, concluded with the Lord's Prayer. The singing of a psalm, a Scripture reading, and the sermon followed. Calvin's service ended with collections for the poor, intercessions, singing the Apostles' Creed, brief pastoral encouragements, singing another psalm, and the Aaronic benediction."<sup>1</sup>

Calvin did not order to have Holy Communion in every Sunday, but he created a reformed liturgy for that also. It starts like the other, with calling to worship. It is followed by the confession of sin and Absolution. The Ten Commandments and a psalm is sung. Then comes the Word Read from Old or New Testament and a prayer for illumination. Preaching of the Word / the Sermon is next and prayer of intercession. Here comes the singing of the Apostle's Creed and The Lord's Supper. The Holy Communion is followed by a prayer of thanksgiving and singing, sometimes psalm, sometimes Song of Simeon. Finally, the blessing ends the ceremony. We can notice that lacks any mystical part and personal input.

Hungarian Reformed liturgy in Transylvania – Hungarian way of worship / Hungarian Liturgy

The Hungarian Reformed Liturgy has its roots in this Calvinistic heritage, but because of the special historical background of Transylvania, which initially was part of the Hungarian Kingdom, but later had to stand strong on its own, here the Reformed Liturgy has developed slightly different. In Transylvania in the first

century of Reformation the order of elements in worship and the problem of liturgy hardly occurred. For example, they talked about the altars in the Synod of Beregszász in 1552, that those should be eliminated, but there were reformed churches where in 1656 the altar was still in, and it did not mean problem. People here used the Lutheran more or less cleansed liturgy and life went on. Muslim invasion and re-catholization was our real danger. Lutheran and Calvinistic style of liturgy lives along each other centuries in Transylvania. There were endeavours during the long centuries to form a common prayer book, common liturgy for all congregations, at least in one district, but it does not happen until 1929, when a reform took place between 1929 – 1932. Four very important theologians worked on it, Makkai Sándor, Imre Lajos, Gönczy Lajos and Vásárhelyi János, the first three were professors in our Institute in Kolozsvár. The Synod accepted the Book of Common Prayer of Transylvania – so called Agenda – *Our Worship* and it was set in use on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1933.

The theological concept behind the Hungarian Reformed Liturgy in Transylvania was that the worship is part of the great worship from Heaven with Jesus Christ, is called by God and is organized by the Congregation. Because Christ is the centre of it, the written, read and preached Word must be in the centre of the liturgy, so there is no liturgy without congregation and Scripture reading. The pastor is the called and ordained person who is trained specially to lead the liturgy and to preach the Word clearly. The congregation as a community join in the heavenly worship and celebrates in the church and in personal life. Our liturgical description calls them “factors”. So, the first factor is God’s Word as written/proclaimed/visible sign – as Bible, as loudly read and preached Scripture, as Baptism and Holy Supper. The second factor is the Congregation, who is the fully responsible organizer and participant of the liturgy. The third and last factor is the Pastor, who is ordained to hold the liturgical and preaching responsibilities. He is responsible in the first place to God, then to the Congregation and thirdly to his superiors (dean and bishop). The “participants” of worship will use the elements of the liturgy to express their faith in God, trustworthiness and loyalty to the Word of God and respect to their tradition. The elements make possible the dialogue between God and his people, between Christ and His redeemed believers. While the dialogue happens, there is also a connection between past and present, ancestors and 21st century congregation, because we use the same formulas, vocations, texts, blessings and songs. Even the translated Hungarian

Bible text is from 1590, and is used ever since, with smaller corrections.

The elements of the Hungarian Reformed Liturgy in Transylvania are as it follows:

WORDLY side – when God talks to us – WORLDLY side – when we talk to God

Scripture readings	Prayers
Sermon	Our Father
Sacraments	Psalms and hymns
Unchanging texts, directives	Confession, Creed
Blessings, benediction	Donation, offertory
Absolution	Oath, vow

These elements are set in such a succession that the dialogue is possible and the Congregation is an active participant of the whole liturgy.

If we look deeper into it, we will find, that the Hungarian Reformed liturgy is shaped by a guide-book for Christians written centuries ago, but it is still relevant to our present spiritual and liturgical life. Those professors and scholars in 1929 chose to organize our liturgical understanding and worshipping life around the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism.

## How the Heidelberg Catechism came into being

The HC was written in the sixteenth century in the city of Heidelberg. It was requested by the Elector Frederick the third (1516 – 1576), ruler of the Palatinate, an ancient and very influential German province. (It was an important settlement since the Roman Empire). Before his rulership, before 1559 – 1576, lot of tension rose among Christians because of the different understanding of biblical texts and teachings, the Lutheran and the Calvinist wing of the Reformation was wrestling. Frederick wanted to have a clear understanding on the Reformed Christian teaching, based exclusively on the Holy Bible, so he asked Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, professors of the University of Heidelberg, to lead a group of scholars and pastors to create a very practical and tangible help for that. The work has started and in January 1563 was accepted by the Synod of Heidelberg as *the catechismus* of that province and it was printed three times in German

language and even in Latin in the same year. The most well-known version is the fourth print from 1563, identical with the third, when it became part of the Liturgy (Order of worship – sort of a Book of Common Prayer in Palatinate) and the HC found its place between the Christening service and the Holy Supper. The message in this was clear: The child, after being baptized, has to learn to know God by learning the HC and this may the child may arrive to be part of the Holy Supper. Growing up in faith means to learn and know the teaching of the HC, because this confession of faith offers comprehensive instruction of Reformed doctrine and theology, so it should be used both in personal spiritual life and church teaching. Its long title is: *Catechism, or Christian Instruction, According to the Usages of the Churches and Schools of the Electoral Palatinate*. The text of the confession was organized around 129 questions and answers, and in order to be even more comprehensible, it was later divided in 52 parts. This division was important, because the whole text was taught on 52 Lord’s Days of the year in the Reformed Churches. In many places the afternoon liturgy is still called *teaching service* or *catechising service*, because during these services the churchgoers were able to learn and acquire the fundamental beliefs of the Reformed denomination during centuries up until now. Frederick the third got the name *Pious*, after he made all this possible and defended the Calvinist wing of Reformation. The HC was translated in many languages, being one of the most important confession texts for the Reformed denomination all over the world.

## How HC shapes the form of our Hungarian Reformed Liturgy in practice

The following tabling shows how a theological revelation, that both liturgy and catechism forms and leads the way of being Christian, so they should empower each other in being the core of Christian life as celebration of God’s grace, gratitude and love.

<b>Heidelberg Confession</b>	<b>Christian Life</b>	<b>Order of Worship</b>	<b>Dialogue</b>
<i>The Misery of Man</i>	<i>Conversion</i>	Call for worship/Votum	World
		Invocation/Salutation/ Prayer	Word
		Opening Psalm/Hymn	World
		Scripture reading	Word
		Confessional/pastoral prayer	World
		Absolution	Word
<i>The Redemption or Deliverance of Man</i>	<i>Revival</i>	Psalm/Hymn	World
		Prayer of Illumination for the Sermon	World
		Psalm/Hymn	World
		Reading the Scripture text and Sermon	Word
<i>The Gratitude Due from Man</i>	<i>Sanctification</i>	Psalm/Hymn	World
		Prayer of Application	World
		Quiet prayers	World
		Lord's Prayer	Word and World together
		Call for donation, an- nouncements	World
		Hymn/Psalm	World
		Apostol's Creed or 1st Answer of HC	World
		Closing psalm or hymn	World
		Blessing (Benediction)	Word

In this way the Lord's Day is each week a remembrance of Christ's deeds and our confession of our faith in Him. The liturgy mirrors Christian life as it grows in Christ and reminds us the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism, on the other hand the text of the HC is an unfailing source of essences of Christian teaching. It has answers to the most questions of a human life, so it is just natural that congregations are using it on daily basis in their teaching and mission services. Our worship uses the answer of the first question as a confession of faith at



the third part of the liturgy, when it comes to the sanctification of man. It is interchangeable with the Apostle’s Creed, and there are times, when our answer to a sermon has to be: “My only comfort in life and death is that I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.”

In the Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania children learn it two years before they get their confirmation, and later on they will repeat it when they attend the afternoon services. We still have the old-school tradition to teach the HC in the Sunday afternoons, when we try to understand the great and important correlations from our Bible.

As it was demonstrated, there is a deep togetherness between the Hungarian Reformed Liturgy in Transylvania and the Heidelberg Catechism by what we are some sort of “speciality” in European liturgical understanding, but we are certainly very proud of it.

Thank you for your kind attention!

## Appendix

Calvin's Liturgies: Strassburg and Geneva <sup>2</sup>	
Strassburg, 15	Geneva, 1542
The Liturgy of the Word	
Scripture Sentence: Psalm 124:8	Scripture Sentence: Psalm 124:8
Confession of sins	Confession of sins
Scriptural words of pardon	Prayer for pardon
Absolution	
Metrical Decalogue sung with Kyrie eleison after each Law	Metrical Psalm
Collect for Illumination	Collect for Illumination
Lection	Lection
Sermon	Sermon
The Liturgy of the Upper Room	
Collection of alms	Collection of alms
Intercessions	Intercessions
Lord's Prayer in long paraphrase	Lord's Prayer in long paraphrase
Preparation of elements while Apostles' Creed sung	Preparation of elements while Apostles' Creed sung
Consecration Prayer	
Lord's Prayer	
Words of Institution	Words of Institution
Exhortation	Exhortation
	Consecration Prayer
Fraction	Fraction
Delivery	Delivery
Communion, while psalm sung	Communion, while psalm or Scriptures read
Post-communion collect	Post-communion collect
Nunc dimittis in meter	
Aaronic Blessing	Aaronic Blessing

## References

- 1 De Jonge, James J.: *Calvin the Liturgist: How 'Calvinist' is Your Church's Liturgy?* <https://www.reformedworship.org/article/september-1988/calvin-liturgist-how-calvinist-your-churchs-liturgy> , last opened on the 10th of October, 2022.
- 2 De Jonge, James J.: *Calvin the Liturgist: How 'Calvinist' is Your Church's Liturgy?* <https://www.reformedworship.org/article/september-1988/calvin-liturgist-how-calvinist-your-churchs-liturgy> last opened on the 10th of October, 2022.