



## **The liturgy and order of the mid-sixteenth century English Church in Geneva**

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### **Abstract**

The mid-sixteenth century English church in Geneva is one of the few refugee churches at this period to have been free of dispute and discord. While its origins in Frankfurt, the absence of Lutheran hostility and the protection provided by Calvin and the local Reformed church may all be counted as reasons for its peaceable nature, it is suggested here that this also has much to do with the Order and Liturgy of the church which emphasised practicality, participation and community. The church was also one where many of its members had work to do: both as artisans and merchants as well as work of a literary nature, the greatest achievement of which was the production of the Geneva bible. Activity was undoubtedly also a factor in protecting the church from internal disputation.

### **Keywords**

*Liturgy, Practicality, Participation, Community, Harmony*

## **1. Introduction**

A reader of the above title should be forgiven for wondering what on earth could have made possible the existence of an English church in Geneva in the middle of the sixteenth century. If, however, one were to adjust the title slightly and refer to this church not as the English Church in Geneva but as the English Refugee Church in Geneva, one would, of course, give the game away. For this church was a gathering of refugees escaping from religious persecution in the England of Mary Tudor.

Here, of course, we are talking of the wave of reform of the traditional church that broke out in sixteenth century Europe and the subsequent reaction. In England, the idiosyncratic reform of the church begun by

Henry VIII had been followed by the reign of his very Protestant young son Edward VI. During Edward's reign (1547-1553) major reforms of the Church in England were undertaken, particularly in doctrine, enshrined in the 42 Edwardian Articles of Religion, and, though to a lesser extent, in liturgy. The Order of the church however remained unchanged, for the reign of the young king was short and his death in 1553 ushered in the reign of his step-sister, Mary Tudor, a vigorous defender of the traditional church. It was the subsequent persecution of supporters of Protestant reform that led to the flight of many of them from England.

At the time we are considering, most of Western Europe, outside of France and England, was constituted by the Empire, lands under the suzerainty of Charles V, a noted supporter of the traditional church. But the Empire was wide and fissiparous, one where traditional rights of local princes or city authorities had resulted in a certain tolerance of the Reformed faith, that would not normally have been accepted by the Emperor Charles V. Germany was a major part of the Empire and it was to certain cities within this area, notably Frankfurt and Strasbourg, that the exiles from England sought refuge. At a later stage Geneva also became a place of refuge, when a dissident group of people left Frankfurt and founded a church of their own in Geneva towards the end of 1555.

## **2. Background – Frankfurt**

It is important to briefly recount events in Frankfurt, for they provided the rationale for the English church in Geneva. Interestingly, the first refugees from England who were welcomed by the Frankfurt authorities were not English at all. They were a group of Walloon weavers who, under the leadership of their minister Valerand Poullain had, at an earlier stage, fled to England to escape religious persecution in the Netherlands. In the England of Edward VI these weavers had been welcomed as religious refugees but the change of regime ensured their expulsion, and within three months of the accession of Mary Tudor to the throne of England, they had left for the continent. No doubt conscious to repay the hospitality recently granted him in England, Poullain worked hard with the Frankfurt authorities on behalf of the English refugees who arrived in Frankfurt a few months later, finding them both lodgings as well as a church for worship. Even more generously the city magistrates also agreed that other Englishmen who

might come to Frankfurt for similar reasons would also be able to reside in the city. There was, however, one very important condition laid down by the town council in Frankfurt to these concessions, namely that the English “should not dissent from the Frenchmen in Doctrine or Ceremonies lest they should thereby minister occasion of offence.”<sup>1</sup>

In spite of what AG Dickens<sup>2</sup> has said about the privileged nature of the refugees, Patrick Collinson has described the original Frankfurt exiles, their leader William Whittingham excepted, as nonentities, in the sense that they had held no high offices in government, the Church or the universities in England.<sup>3</sup> NM Sutherland makes a related point when she says: “The majority of the refugees claimed that they had gone into exile for the sake of the second Edwardian Prayer Book ... if this appears surprising, one must remember that many of the individuals in question had been establishment men, who still hoped to resume their interrupted careers.”<sup>4</sup> One might therefore suggest that there existed a sociological difference between the English refugees in Strasbourg, where resided many of Sutherland’s establishment men, and those in Frankfurt: the former as insiders, the latter as outsiders. But, more important would be a difference in attitude to further reform of the English church. Many of the English exiles felt that, as the process of reformation had been interrupted by the young King’s death, so it was only normal for them to continue the process of reformation from continental exile. But this attitude raised a haunting question. Where did authority reside within the Church of England now that it was transplanted, (or parts of it) to a foreign soil? As Patrick Collinson reminds us, for the exiles at Frankfurt this became an “essentially political contest for the right to consolidate the English Reformation in exile and to determine its destiny.”<sup>5</sup>

Reflective of this attitude the Frankfurt exiles soon felt sufficiently well established in their new home to send out a letter to English exiles in other

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1 Thomas Wood, *A Brief Discourse of the Troubles at Frankfurt 1554-1558*, p 24.

2 AG Dickens, *The English Reformation*, p 388.

3 Patrick Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal*, p 74.

4 NM Sutherland, The English Refugees at Geneva 1555-1559, in *History Today* (December 1977), p 780.

5 Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal*, p 73.

locations exhorting them to join them in Frankfurt. MM Knappen says of this letter “on first reading it has a strange ring for a message from one set of exiles to others who had also left their country rather than betray their faith.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, the letter hardly reads like an invitation at all but is rather “a peremptory summons, couched in the hortatory and holier than thou language of a call to repentance.”<sup>7</sup> Needless to say this approach was not appreciated in the other centres of English exile and laid the seeds for the subsequent ‘troubles at Frankfurt.’ It should nevertheless be mentioned, in justification of the Frankfurt approach, that the facilities offered them in their city of refuge were superior to those experienced by English exiles in locations elsewhere. Only in 1559, for example, were the English refugees in Strasbourg permitted to have their own church with services in English.

One of the most curious aspects of the exile, and one which would support a view that the ‘troubles at Frankfurt had not so much to do with religion as with a human power struggle, was the English exiles’ reaction to the condition laid down by the Frankfurt magistrates for their church. The author of *A Brief Discourse of the Troubles at Frankfurt* records Whittingham as describing Poullain’s Order, the *Liturgia Sacra* “as according to the Order of Geneva the purest Reformed Church in Christendom.”<sup>8</sup> As the Frankfurt magistrates had specifically asked the English exiles to follow this order, why did they not do so? The answer lies in the comment of Collinson quoted above, the exiles promptly deciding to forgo the condition laid down by the local Frankfurt magistrates, drawing up their own liturgy; all within the context of a desire to reform the Edwardian Prayer Book of 1552 and move it further in a reformed direction.

For the next eight months the English exiles in Frankfurt had endless, tedious discussions on liturgy, on each occasion ending up more or less where they had started out, until the arrival in Frankfurt of Richard Cox, a former Chancellor of Oxford University and Dean of Westminster, together with some colleagues from Strasbourg. The subsequent contest between Richard Cox and John Knox, whom the Frankfurt church had elected as one of their ministers, resulted in the victory of Cox; John Knox himself

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6 MM Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, p 121.

7 MM Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, p 121.

8 Thomas Wood, *A Brief Discourse of the Troubles at Frankfurt 1554-1558*, p 74.

being expelled from the city. Soon afterwards a group of the Frankfurt church left the city to found their own church in Geneva.

The dispute at Frankfurt has been well described by Euan Cameron as a contest between exclusivists and those whom one might call inclusivists.<sup>9</sup> The former took the view that worship should only include that, which could be proved to be scriptural. The latter, in contrast, would outlaw only what was explicitly contrary to scripture. So the conflict at Frankfurt raged over the 1552 Book of Common Prayer. Ironically, once the dissidents had left Frankfurt for Geneva Cox began his own revision of the 1552 Prayer Book which has prompted Cameron to observe that the “ideological differences between Knox and his Frankfurt adversaries were really fewer and slighter than the rhetoric employed suggests.”<sup>10</sup> One might also add that they could have been avoided altogether had the Frankfurt exiles followed the original stipulation of the Frankfurt magistrates namely that they “should not dissent from the Frenchmen in Doctrine or Ceremonies, lest they should thereby minister occasion of offence”<sup>11</sup> But the experience in Frankfurt must nevertheless be counted as one of the factors behind the subsequent peaceable nature of the English church in Geneva The inclusivists may have won in Frankfurt but no one wanted to restart the battle in Geneva where a liturgy reflecting the exclusivist position came to be accepted by both the initial and subsequent members of that church.

### 3. The position of Geneva

The new city of refuge, into which the Frankfurt exiles arrived in the autumn of 1555 had undergone dramatic change in the previous half century. Ruled throughout the Middle Ages by a Prince Bishop, Geneva ultimately owed its allegiance to the House of Savoy, of whom the bishop was normally a member. The key to the dramatic change referred to above appears to have been economic. Geneva had long been an international crossroads, the junction of several major trade routes: its city fairs had played an important part in regional trade since the thirteenth century.

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9 Euan Cameron, *Frankfurt and Geneva. The European Context of John Knox's Reformation*. Roger A Mason ed, *John Knox and the British Reformations*, p 62.

10 Ibid., pp 67-68.

11 Wood, *Brief Discourse*, p 24.

However, the city's economic success had aroused the jealousy of the Kings of France, who made great efforts to promote Lyon as an alternative centre for trade and finance. In this they were successful for Geneva's fairs peaked around the mid fifteenth century with both bankers and merchants subsequently moving away from Geneva to neighbouring Lyon.

In 1500, Geneva thus looked less well placed economically than it had done fifty years earlier giving rise to a movement in favour of closer ties with the cities of the Swiss Confederation. Very broadly speaking one could say that people of new wealth supported this movement while the older established classes tended to support the rule of the Duchy of Savoy. The 'new wealth' group inevitably contained within it an element of resentment of the traditional church and its wealth and was thus considerably boosted by the adoption of the reformation in the neighbouring Swiss canton of Berne in 1528. In May 1536 Geneva followed suit when its citizens voted to establish the Reformation in their city.

The years that followed have generally been represented in the popular literature as those of a 'theocracy' under the authority of Jean Calvin. Such a picture forgets that the city authorities expelled Calvin, who first arrived in Geneva in 1536, in 1538 and, even when he returned in 1541 at the invitation of the Geneva town council, he did not have everything his way. Much of the next fourteen years was taken up fighting his opponents for, as Knappen reminds us, speaking of Calvin, "not until 1555 did he gain anything like a free hand in Geneva, so that his real power lasted only ten years. He was frequently forced to compromise with the Council, and might even be outvoted by his fellow ministers."<sup>12</sup> However it is undoubtedly true that Calvin was in a better position to help the Frankfurt exiles that arrived in Geneva in 1555 than he would have been a few years earlier.

#### 4. The order of the English Church

On 10<sup>th</sup> June 1555 Calvin had approached the Geneva town council requesting permission for the Frankfurt exiles to reside in Geneva as well as for the provision of a church for their own use. The Frankfurt exiles arrived in Geneva on the 24<sup>th</sup> October and, the following month, on the

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12 MM Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, p 137.

11<sup>th</sup> November 1555, the city council granted them the use of the church Ste Marie la neuve that was to be shared with the Italian Protestant exile community. On the 29<sup>th</sup> November, Christopher Goodman and Anthony Gilby - who, in the absence of John Knox, had been chosen by their fellow exiles as ministers of the church – swore an oath of allegiance to the city before the local magistrates. Thus began the life of the English church in Geneva, whose existence would terminate less than four years later when the exiles returned home on the accession of Elizabeth to the throne of England.

The choosing of ministers referred to above brings us right into the question of Order. Among the various exile communities, Order became a much less controversial issue than Liturgy. All exile communities out of England, to the extent that we have records, appear, almost out of necessity, to have adopted some aspects of Order prevalent in the Reformed churches on the continent of Europe. Bishops or lay patrons, for example, could hardly appoint ministers, as this was the Church of England in exile. It should come as no surprise therefore to learn that the English church in Geneva followed the classical Reformed pattern with ministers, elders and deacons as its governing constituents.

Following the oath of allegiance to the city of Geneva taken by Gilby and Goodman, Charles Martin records of the exiles that “ils s’y appliquèrent avec zèle”<sup>13</sup> in drawing up a constitution and liturgy of the church. For, as early as February 1556 there emerged from the printing press of Jean Crespin in Geneva: a confession of faith, constitution and liturgy of the church, together with a collection of fifty one psalms and an English translation of the catechism of Calvin. These works, with the exception of the catechism of Calvin and the collection of fifty one metered psalms, became incorporated in *The Service, Discipline and Forme of the Common Prayers and Administration of the Sacraments used in the English Church of Geneva* more generally known as the *Forme of the Common Prayers*.

Following the confession of faith, there appears in this volume a section entitled “Of the Ministers and their Election” devoted to “what things are chiefly required in the Ministers” and “Of their office and duty”. The first

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13 Charles Martin, *Les Protestants Anglais réfugiés à Genève*, p 79.

part is unexceptional but the second is interesting in that while it states that the Pastor's "chiefe office standeth in preaching the Word of God and ministering the Sacraments."<sup>14</sup> It is clear that the minister is under the Word not above it: "his counsel rather than authority taketh place."<sup>15</sup> Equally interesting is the last sentence of this section, covering excommunication: "and if so be the Congregation upon just cause agree to Excommunicate, then it belongeth to the Minister, according to their general determination, to pronounce the sentence, to the end that all things may be done orderly and without confusion."<sup>16</sup>

Subsequent to the comment on the office and duty of Ministers there appears one on "The manner of electing the Pastors or Ministers." It is worth considering this question in some detail given the importance devoted to the topic by historians of the period. In the case of the English church in Geneva it was not a direct democratic procedure but one, which Martin describes as an "election au second degree."<sup>17</sup> The words "if there be choice" occur in this section, implying that there might not be a choice and indeed Gilby and Goodman served as ministers, in the absence of Knox in Scotland or Dieppe, throughout the life of the church, being confirmed in their position each year. But had there been a choice, produced by the congregation, the candidates would then be examined for good behaviour and sound doctrine. The examiners – the existing ministers and Elders – would offer a theme or text to the candidate who would then be asked to comment on it to the 'examiners' in private. The existing ministers and elders would then make their recommendation to the congregation who, after eight days of reflection – during which it would be possible to raise opposition to the proposed candidate – would be asked to confirm (or not) by vote the recommendation of the existing ministers and elders.

The somewhat authoritarian tone of the election procedure is apparent but it would be worthwhile, in this context, to compare it with procedures laid out in the *Liturgia Sacra*. In Poullain's order the elders of the church made the initial selection of the candidates i.e. the initial participation of

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14 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 7.

15 *Ibid*, p 7.

16 *Ibid*, p 7.

17 Charles Martin, *Les Protestants Anglais*, p 97.



the congregation was cut out. However, the congregation had a free choice from among the proposed candidates i.e. no one candidate was heavily recommended by the elders. It also appears that the vote was in secret. “Et aussi sont ils adiurez tous que nul ne doit communiquer à autre, celui qu’il veut nommer.”<sup>18</sup>

One sees here both the nuances of difference between the two orders as well as what might be described as a tension between liberty and authority in both of them. Be that as it may Martin says of both the *Forme of Common Prayers and the Liturgia Sacra* and their system of election that “ni les ordonnances de Calvin, ni la constitution de l’Eglise de France de 1559, n’ont accordé une aussi grande part aux membres de l’église dans le choix de leurs pasteurs ou des membres de leurs synods.”<sup>19</sup> He even suggests that, in spite of constitutional procedure, universal direct suffrage probably operated at the English church in Geneva.

The election of elders and deacons followed a similar pattern, the difference in function between the elders and ministers being that the elders could neither preach nor administer the sacraments. They were, however, central to the administration of the church, “in counselling, admonishing, correcting and ordering, all things appertaining to the fate of the congregation.”<sup>20</sup> However, no action could be taken by the elders without the consent of the minister and no action of the minister without the consent of the elders.

Martin takes the view that the “admirable institution des anciens – a contribué pour sa bonne part à la (l’église reformée) préserver du cléricalisme, en initiant les simples fidèles à son gouvernement.”<sup>21</sup> This is a widely held view, offsetting what JJ Scarisbrick sees as a reassertion of clericalism occasioned by Protestantism,<sup>22</sup> with the emergence of the minister as both socially and intellectually superior to some of his

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18 Valérand Poullain, *Liturgica Sacra*, p 223.

19 Charles Martin, *Les Protestants Anglais réfugiés à Genève*, p 97

20 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 9.

21 Charles Martin, *Les Protestants Anglais*, pp 95-96.

22 JJ Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*, pp 39 and 44 and concluding chapter.

parishioners. But it is not a universally held view, given the power of the Reformed clergy as it emerged elsewhere, particularly in Scotland.

The third category of officer in the church was the deacon of whom the *Forme of the Common Prayers* states that: “Their office is to gather alms diligently, and faithfully to distribute it, with the consent of the ministers and Elders: also to provide for sick and impotent persons, having ever a diligent care, that the charity of godly men be not waisted upon loiterers and idle vagabonds.”<sup>23</sup> An undoubtedly suitably Protestant sting being placed in the tail! The *Forme of the Common Prayers* then mentions that the authors of the liturgy are well aware that the Scriptures make mention of a fourth kind of Minister, the Teacher or Doctor with the important qualification, *where time and place do permit*. Clearly neither time nor place did permit for the English church in Geneva, for no member of the church was appointed to the position of Doctor.

What of the people who held office at the church? Martin divides membership of the church into three categories: those who came to Geneva in October 1555, those who lived in Geneva prior to October 1555 and who joined the church on its formation and, finally, people who came to Geneva and joined the church after it was founded in November 1555. This and other aspects of the church are recorded in the *Livre des Anglois*: a list of members, officials baptisms marriages and burials at the church, compiled by William Whittingham, which he presented to the city council when he left Geneva in 1560. The records of those elected elder and deacon suggest that the church was a united one, not dominated by any one group, whatever may have been the influence of members of the founding group at inception. Looking at the list of elected elders and deacons over the life of the church gives the reader a sense of both harmony and participation.

Although Calvin thought that there were only two marks of the church: the preaching of the word of God and the administration of the sacraments – done in a pure, correct way, so to distinguish the true church from the false – the English in Geneva added a third, that of discipline. In the *Forme of the Common Prayers* the discipline as it applied to ministers is separated from discipline as it applied to the congregation, no doubt to emphasise the overriding importance of the example to be set by the minister, to

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23 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 9.

“diligently examine all such faults and suspicions, as may be espied not only among others, but chiefly among themselves, lest they seem to be culpable of that which our Saviour Christ reprov'd in the Pharisees who could espy a mote in another man's eye, and could not see a beame in their own.”<sup>24</sup> Practice what you preach. Heresy, papistry, schism, blasphemy, perjury, fornication, theft, drunkenness, usury, fighting, unlawful games and such like were regarded as cause for deposition of a minister. Other faults are said by the discipline to be more tolerable which, presumably, does not mean that they were more acceptable! The list is very comprehensive: “strange and unprofitable fashion in preaching the Scriptures, curiosity in seeking vain questions, negligence, as well in his sermons and in studying the Scriptures, as in all other things concerning his vocation; scurrility, flattering, lying, backbiting, wanton words, deceit, covetousness, taunting, dissolution in apparel,<sup>25</sup> gesture and other his doings.”<sup>26</sup>

The discipline as it applied to the congregation is a very well reasoned statement beginning with the eminently practical observation that: “As no City, Towne, House or Family can maintain their estate and prosper without policy and governance: even so the Church of God, which requireth more purely to be governed than any City or Family can not without spiritual policy and Ecclesiastical Discipline continue, increase and flourish.”<sup>27</sup> Three reasons are given for the institution of a Discipline: firstly “that men of evil conversation are not numbered among God's children,”<sup>28</sup> secondly, “that the good be not infected with companying evil”<sup>29</sup> quoting St Paul's admonition to the Corinthians “know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”<sup>30</sup> and thirdly that “a man thus corrected or excommunicated might be ashamed of his fault, and so through repentance come to amendment.”<sup>31</sup>

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24 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 11.

25 Within the Reformed church in Hungary, synod stated that “ministers should not wear fur coats or golden collars, should not keep weapons, hawks, or hunting dogs, and should leave all social gatherings immediately if music and dancing began.” Benedict, *Christ's churches Truly Reformed*, p 440.

26 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 11.

27 *Ibid*, p 61.

28 *Ibid*, p 61.

29 *Ibid*, p 61.

30 1 Corinthians 5:6

31 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 61.

The disciplinary procedure was based on our Lord's injunction in the gospel:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.<sup>32</sup>

Thus disciplinary procedures could eventually lead to excommunication, two aspects of which are particularly important in the Order of the English exiles. Firstly, the whole church takes the decision – though the minister pronounces the sentence – not by an elite of elders and ministers. Secondly there is the emphasis placed on repentance with the overriding importance given to the effort to win back the excommunicated member who, while barred from the sacraments, should not, as was the case with the early church,<sup>33</sup> be barred from the normal morning service where he, or she, would be exposed to the exposition of the word of God. As the discipline says:

Wherein also they must beware and take good heed, that they seeme not more ready to expel from the Congregation, than to receive again those, in whom they perceive worthy fruits of repentance to appeare: neither yet to forbid him the hearing of Sermons, which is excluded from the Sacraments and other duties of the Church, that he may have liberty and occasion to repent: finally that all punishments, corrections, censures and admonitions stretch no further then God's Word with mercy may lawfully beare.<sup>34</sup>

No record exists, either in the *Livre des Anglois* or the city of Geneva's *Registre du Conseil* or the records of the consistory of the Genevan church, of any such measure being taken against a member of the English church during its existence in Geneva. From these documents – particularly the

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32 Matthew 18:15-17.

33 Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, pp 32-33.

34 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 63.

*Livre des Anglois*, which records the elections of the elders and deacons at the English church and the wide participation of the congregation in these offices - the church of the English exiles gives the appearance of a peaceable, non-contentious community, unlike many of the refugee churches established elsewhere.

## 5. The liturgy of the English Church

The service of Morning Prayer or Sunday Morning Service formed an important part of the liturgy of the Church. Its structure, which was very simple, was as follows:

- Confession of Sins,
- Psalm (which the Congregation sing altogether in a plain tune),
- Prayer for the assistance of God's Holy Spirit,
- Sermon,
- Prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church,
- The Lord's Prayer,
- Creed,
- Psalm,
- Blessing.

It is interesting, or perhaps one should say ironic, to note that apart from the introduction of the Lord's Prayer, the above structure is identical to the first order of morning service used by the English exiles when they arrived at Frankfurt in 1554. Readers might also be surprised to see here the absence of any reference to the reading of Scripture which has led Knappen to observe that "Scripture-reading was omitted as a useless formality."<sup>35</sup> Edward Arber has also observed "in the above Calvinistic Scheme of Public Worship, the Public Reading of the Scriptures has no place."<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the key words here are Public Reading, for in the *Forme of the Common Prayers* it is laid down that there should be a weekly assembly of the congregation for Bible study and discussion. It should also be remembered

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<sup>35</sup> MM Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, p 120.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Wood, *A Brief Discourse* (edited by Arber), p 25, footnote.

that a Calvinist sermon itself is usually an explanation and application of a passage of Scripture.

Martin, throughout his comments on the liturgy of the English church, appears at pains to emphasise the differences that the English congregation established in their own liturgy vis à vis that of the church in Geneva, reminding us that, within Christian communities “du type réformé” there is a very different conception of liturgy, not only when compared to the Roman Catholic but also to the Anglican and Lutheran churches. The latter “attachent une importance très grande à l’unité du culte et du rite.”<sup>37</sup> In contrast, “les réformés ont tenu, avant tout, à en assurer la simplicité et la caractère essentiellement biblique de leur liturgie”<sup>38</sup> ... qu’ils ne tenaient pas à l’uniformité du rite et de la liturgie, et qu’ils voyaient même un avantage à certains diversités.”<sup>39</sup> It is in this spirit that the *Forme of the Common Prayers* left considerable freedom to their ministers, as illustrated in the ‘rubric’ introducing the Prayer for the assistance of God’s Holy Spirit: “The minister prayeth – as the same shall move his heart.”<sup>40</sup> In spite of the foregoing it is nevertheless worth noting that in the Sunday service of the English church in Geneva there were no less than eleven formal prayers.

## 5.1 Baptism

In line with Reformed belief, the English exiles accepted that there were but two sacraments of the church: Baptism and Communion, and their liturgy reflects the extent to which its authors were influenced by current controversies surrounding them. In the case of the *Order of Baptism*, conscious of the influence of the Anabaptists, there appears a long introductory piece in defence of infant baptism: “which thing as he confirmed to his people of the Old Testament by the Sacrament of Circumcision.”<sup>41</sup> As young children had not been excluded from the community of God in the Old Testament so no more should they be excluded from the community of God in the New Testament. There is also the implied criticism of the

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37 Charles Martin, *Les Protestants Anglais réfugiés à Genève*, p 87.

38 Ibid, p 87.

39 Ibid, p 87.

40 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 16.

41 Genesis 17:10-14 and *Forme of the Common Prayers*, pp 35-36.

teaching of the traditional church as well as a resounding defence of the Reformed understanding of the sacrament of baptism:

And it is evident that the Sacraments are not ordained of God to be used in private corners, as charmes, or sorceries, but left to the Congregation, and necessarily annexed to God's Word, as seales of the same: therefore the infant which is to be baptised shall be brought to the Church on the day appointed, to common Prayer and preaching accompanied with the father and godfather.<sup>42</sup>

Great emphasis was given to the Reformed assertion that baptism was a public event. Private baptism played no part in Reformed liturgy and, indeed, Richard Cox, who undertook his own reform of the Book of Common Prayer after the dissidents left Frankfurt, included in it the abolition of Private baptism. The public nature of the event had several implications for the English exiles, not least those of sanctification. It was to act as a reminder to those present of the promises made at their own baptism, so encouraging them to continue to strive for holiness of life. It also reflected the world around them where church and state were linked: one state, one church. One became a member of the state by registration of birth and a member of the church by baptism.

## 5.2 Holy Communion

In the traditional church, members of a Christian congregation did not so much participate in the mass, they observed it. The Reformers took pleasure in poking fun at the traditional rite where people rushed from church to church to observe the elevation of the host. Participation in the Mass was but once a year and for the reformers to insist on a more regular participation in the Reformed communion service meant a sharp break with traditional practice. In Geneva Calvin advocated a weekly celebration but was overruled by the town council who laid down that communion would be celebrated quarterly in the city's reformed church. In contrast the *Forme of the common Prayers* provided for a monthly celebration.

Much, though not all, of the Reformed tradition placed an overriding importance on the words of St Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians

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42 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 35

regarding the suitability and preparedness of communicants wishing to participate in the Lord's supper. Thus in the *Forme of the Common Prayers* we read:

For as the benefit is great, if with a truly penitent heart and lively faith, we receive the holy Sacrament (for then we spiritually eate the flesh of Christ, and drinke his blood: then we dwell in Christ and Christ in us: we be one with Christ, and Christ with us,) so is the danger great, if we receive the same unworthily: for then we be guilty of the Body, and Blood of Christ our Saviour, we eate and drinke our own damnation, not considering the Lords Body, we kindle Gods wrath against us and provoke him to plague us with Diverse diseases and sundry kinds of death.<sup>43</sup>

But there follows an emphasis on repentance. No penitent person is to be excluded from communion, however grievous his sins may have been: "For the end of our coming thither is not to make protestation that we are upright or just in our lives, but contrawise, we come to seeke our life and perfection in Jesus Christ."<sup>44</sup>

For the Reformed Church the battle over baptism, or rather infant baptism was with the Anabaptists rather than with the traditional church. For the Lord's Supper it was not only with the traditional church – there was frequent allusion in the liturgy to the falsehood of transubstantiation – but with the Lutheran wing of the Protestant Reformation. This latter conflict not only stemmed from the exact meaning of our Lord's words: *this is my body*, but over the question of access to communion. As we have seen the English Church in Geneva, like the local Reformed church, advocated a "closed table" whereas Lutherans advocated an 'open table' But it should be remembered, and this is often forgotten, so did parts of the Reformed church. Excommunication meant denial of communion and Benedict reminds us that in Zurich the Reformed church eventually reserved excommunication for those who rejected the teachings of the church,

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43 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 46.

44 *Ibid*, p 47.



indeed after 1532 positively required sinners to participate in communion “because it was believed it might inspire them to improve.”<sup>45</sup>

### 5.3 Other rites of the Church

In the *Forme of the Common Prayers* three other rites of the church are mentioned: Marriage, Visitation of the Sicke and Burial. The plain speaking of the liturgy is well reflected in the *Forme of Marriage* when it says, speaking of the ‘banes’: “to the intent that if any person have interest or title to either of the parties, they have sufficient time to make their challenge.” There is also the stipulation that the rite should be performed in church as well as frequent reference to the participation of the congregation in the ceremony.

The Visitation of the Sicke contains what one might call two gems of a Reformed liturgy. In the introduction we read the words:

We refer it to the discretion of the godly and prudent Minister who, according as he seeth the patient afflicted, either may lift him up with the sweet promises of God’s mercy through Christ, if he perceive him much afraid of God’s threatenings: or contrawise, if he be not touched with the feeling of his sins may beat him down with God’s justice: ever more like a skilful Physician, framing his medicine according as the disease requireth.<sup>46</sup>

There is also the rather remarkable prayer towards the end of the rite which remembers the work of those employed in aiding the sick in which occur the words: “and if thou take him (the sick person) from them, then of thy goodness to comfort them, so as they may patiently beare such parting and praise thy name in all things.”<sup>47</sup>

In the church in Geneva, the burial service had been abolished altogether, no doubt with the intention of banishing all thoughts of purgatory from the minds of believers. The English exiles, however, maintained a minimum of ceremony: “The corps is reverently brought to the Grave, accompanied with the Congregation, without any further ceremonies: which being buried,

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45 Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed*, p 31.

46 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p 55.

47 *Ibid.*, p.60.

the Minister if he be present, and required, goeth to the church, if it be not far of, and maketh some comfortable exhortation to the people, touching death and resurrection.”<sup>48</sup>

What can we say of this liturgy? It was certainly one dominated by prayer but it was also one enhanced by music with the singing of two psalms. It is interesting to note, in this context, that the most musically accomplished of the XVI century reformers, Huldrych Zwingli, a cellist, had banned music from all church services in Zurich. In Geneva, in contrast, Calvin introduced the congregational singing of psalms, and in this the English exiles followed suit.

Both the liturgy and the Order of the church also emphasised practicality, participation and community, factors that undoubtedly contributed to the peaceable nature of the church.

## 6. Conclusions

NM Sutherland has made the highly speculative assessment that this church was one of religious extremists.<sup>49</sup> On what is this assessment based? Presumably on the nature of the members of the congregation and the earlier disputes at Frankfurt. But whatever might be said of the original group of members from Frankfurt, other members of the church very soon outnumbered them, not only by those who already lived in Geneva and joined the church at inception but also by those who later came to Geneva from elsewhere. A close reading of the *Livre des Anglois* as well as the Geneva city records enshrined in the *Livre des Habitants* also suggests that there were English people living in Geneva at the time who were not members of the church at all and that some of them nevertheless used the facilities of the church for baptism, marriage and burial. This does not sound like a congregation of religious extremists. There is also the rather startling possibility that acceptance or signature of the Confession of faith was optional. Martin, who admits that no one was compelled to sign the church register, finds these facts perplexing and understandably so given

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48 *Forme of the Common Prayers*, p.60.

49 NM Sutherland, ‘The English Refugees at Geneva, 1555-1559, in *History Today*, December 1977, p 779

Calvin's attempts in his initial period in Geneva to force all citizens to sign a confession of faith.

But, perplexing as these factors may be, they must be counted as possible influences on the life of the church. Undoubtedly conditions of exile affect attitude and behaviour and there was at the English church a social intermixing, which would never have been seen at the time in England. The exiles in Geneva, unlike in many places of refuge elsewhere, also had work to do. But whatever importance one gives to these and other influences – of which the absence of Lutheran hostility and the protection of Calvin and the local Reformed church predominate – one should not dismiss the idea that it was the nature of the Order and Liturgy of the English church which was the overriding influence on its peaceable nature.

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