Introduction to Christian Worship



Fourth Edition
Revised & Updated

James F. White

L. Edward Phillips
General Editor and Contributor

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Abingdon Press™

Nashville

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2023947888
ISBN: 9781501884627

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The cover art is a 1561 altarpiece painting from the church of Torslunde, Denmark, now residing in the Danish National Museum, artist unknown. James F. White selected it for each of his revisions of this book. While it does not reflect the rich global or ethnic variety of the twenty-first-century Church, it beautifully portrays essential actions of Christian worship, with the crucified Christ as central and Martin Luther preaching. A historical snapshot of several important topics explored in this *Introduction*.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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PREFACE

When James White published the first edition of *Introduction to Christian Worship* in 1980, there was nothing quite like it on the market: an introductory textbook authored by a Protestant scholar, but ecumenical in scope, that provided normative guidance for the planning and leading of worship based on the historical development of Christian liturgy. In the preface of the revised edition in 1990, White noted that his *Introduction* "has apparently become the most widely used textbook on worship in American seminaries, Roman Catholic and Protestant, even Orthodox and Charismatic." After another decade and the publication of the third revised edition in 2001, White remarked, "Translations of this book into Portuguese, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese are now either complete or in production." Over the span of roughly twenty years, White's *Introduction* had become the standard introductory worship textbook throughout the world.

With each new edition, White expanded the *Introduction* to support his expanding readership. In 1990, to accommodate a critique from Roman Catholic readers, he divided the chapter on "The Spoken Word" into two chapters, one on daily prayer and one on the service of the word. In 2001, the third edition expanded again with more material on liturgical diversity and social justice, plus an entirely new chapter on liturgical music.

More than twenty years have passed since the previous edition. During this time, churches have seen significant change. Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Presbyterians in the United States have all published revised liturgical books. In addition to these official publications, the technological explosion of computer-assisted communication has instigated more changes in worship, arguably even more than the invention of the printing press in

the fifteenth century. We witnessed the effects of these technological advances during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 that forced congregations to consider liturgical experiments they could barely have imagined even a few years earlier. This is, of course, only a partial list of developments in this new millennium.

Just as significantly, the field of worship as an area of academic research has continued to expand globally, culturally, and ecumenically. In each next edition of the *Introduction*, White sought to become more inclusive of the voices and perspectives of the next generations of scholars. White was himself a pioneer in establishing the liturgy as an academic field in Protestant seminaries. As he commented in the first edition, he had few mainline Protestant colleagues when he began his teaching career. Today, White's doctoral students, those whose dissertations he directed and those whom he mentored in other ways, teach in schools throughout the world and across the ecumenical spectrum. To give two examples, Deok-Weon Ahn, a contributor to this edition, teaches at an evangelical school in Korea; and Grant White, whom White acknowledges in the second edition, teaches at Sankt Ignatios College, an Eastern Orthodox school in Sweden.

White died in 2004 at the age of seventy-two, which meant the end of revisions of the *Introduction*. But it did not mean the end of the book, which continues to be widely used even as it has become increasingly dated. Undoubtedly, if White had lived to a healthy old age, he would have continued his decade revisions of the *Intro* for as long as he was able. To honor White's custom of regular updates, Abingdon Press initiated conversations in 2013 about a new revision. After much discussion with Constance Stella at Abingdon, I was asked to be the lead editor for the *Introduction to Christian Worship, 4th Edition*, a project that would involve a diverse group of contributing editors drawn from White's students (his children, if you will) and from the next generation of liturgical scholars (the grandchildren generation, to continue the metaphor). These contributing editors would revise various chapters, updating the content from their areas of expertise. Our initial plan to complete the new edition in 2020 was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but we finally have a fourth revised edition of White's *Introduction*.

White was the *Doktorvater* for three of our contributing editors: Karen Westerfield Tucker, Todd Johnson, and Deok-Weon Ahn. Westerfield

Tucker, an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church, is Professor of Worship at Boston University School of Theology. She contributed revisions and some entirely new sections to the chapters on architecture (Chapter Three), music (Chapter Four), and occasional services (Chapter Ten). She also contributed revisions to Chapter One.

Johnson, ordained in the Evangelical Covenant Church, is the former Brehm Chair of Worship, Theology, and the Arts at Fuller Theological Seminary and now serves as Senior Pastor of First Covenant Church, Seattle, Washington. He contributed revisions to Chapter One, and new material to the chapters on architecture (Chapter Three) and initiation (Chapter Eight).

Ahn is Professor of Practical Theology at Torch Trinity Graduate University, an evangelical theological seminary in Seoul, South Korea. Professor Ahn contributed an entirely new chapter on the importance of White's historical, descriptive method for teaching worship in global contexts (Chapter Eleven). In previous editions, White ended the book with his discussion of rituals concerning death and the hope of resurrection. Ahn's essay points to the new life White's teaching on worship is finding today.

Three of our contributing editors belong to the third generation of liturgical scholars. Tony Alonso, a Catholic layman, is Aquinas Assistant Professor of Theology and Culture and Director of Catholic Studies at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. Professor Alonso revised and updated the chapter on sacramental theology (Chapter Seven).

Khalia Williams, an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and American Baptist Churches USA, is Associate Dean of Worship and Spiritual Formation, Associate Professor in the Practice of Worship, and Co-Director of the Baptist Studies Program at Candler School of Theology. Professor Williams contributed an updated bibliography and was a consultant for the entire project.

Nicholas Peterson, an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, is Assistant Professor of Homiletics and Worship at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana. He revised the chapter on the "Service of the Word" (Chapter Six).

Together, we have revised White's *Introduction*, taking into account more recent scholarship while keeping as much of White's distinctive voice as possible. Readers of previous editions will notice that we have softened some (but not all!) of White's more strident assessments of historical developments, prominent figures, or specific current practices he did not like. Readers may also notice significant revisions in the accounts of early Christian worship, where historical scholarship has evolved significantly. I sometimes tell my students that we "know" less about the early church today than we did fifty years ago. By this, I mean that what scholars, including White, considered settled fact in the 1980s has been challenged by more recent historical work.

That said, the historical reconstruction work of the mid-twentieth century, questionable though it may be, continues to exert an influence on twenty-first-century practices of Protestants and Roman Catholics. In this revision, we have kept enough of the older accounts of the history of liturgical development to help make sense of our current official rites and practices. Moreover, we have revised the chapters to include more of the perspectives of the contemporary worship movement, the history of which has recently been more fully examined by two of White's former students, Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth.[1]

Other changes are worth noting. In previous editions, White used **boldface type** for persons, places, names, dates, and terminology, a feature my students found to be unhelpful for learning the material. To make the text more "teachable," we have limited the boldface type to the technical terms and important documents that teachers and planners of worship should know, such as **litany** or the ***Book of Common Prayer***. To assist the reader, we have appended lists of these technical terms at the end of each chapter.

In several instances, some of the words and phrases that White placed in bold, we have placed in italics to flag them for the reader. We have also used italics for some key concepts.

Finally, we have updated the "For Further Reading" lists, while keeping some of the "classic" texts of twentieth-century liturgical history and theology.

Overall, with this fourth edition we have sought to take to heart White's comments about teachers from the first edition: "I hope this book will aid

them [his fellow teachers of worship] in their teaching until they find better ways to interpret Christian worship. With Peter Lombard, I can say, 'If anyone can explain this better, I am not envious.'" In short, we have sought to "explain better" for the present reader, keeping in mind the humility that White and Lombard both sought to model.

I am proud to be among the first generations of doctoral students at the University of Notre Dame mentored by Jim (and I will now use the name by which his friends called him). Jim and I shared a love for The United Methodist Church in which we were both ordained. Over the years, Jim has continued to be a crucial influence on my thinking and teaching about worship.

I thank the contributing editors who remained committed to this project despite the pandemic delay. I thank Don Saliers for advising me at the start of this project in 2017. And, finally, I thank my wife, Sara Webb Phillips, who is also an ordained United Methodist elder and my first and most important conversation partner. Interestingly, for several years, Sara served as the pastor of Broadway Christian Parish United Methodist Church in South Bend, Indiana. Jim was an active participant in this small, inner-city congregation during the years he taught at Notre Dame. In many ways, Broadway Christian Parish was a laboratory where the liturgical resources of *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989) and *Book of Worship* (1992) were tested years before their official publication. This small United Methodist church is where Jim's memorial service was held a few days after his death.

I am honored to be the lead editor of this new edition, I commend Abingdon Press for committing to the project, and I look forward to being able to assign it to my students.

L. Edward Phillips
Emory University
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1. Indeed, their appropriately titled *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017) is written to be a companion to White's *Introduction*.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CHRISTIAN WORSHIP"?

To speak about "Christian worship," we first must decide just what this term means. It is not an easy expression to define. Indeed, "worship" is an exasperatingly difficult word to pin down. What distinguishes worship from other human activities, particularly those noted for their frequent repetition? Why is worship a different type of activity from daily chores or any habitual action? More specifically, how does worship differ from other recurring activities of the Christian community itself? What distinguishes worship from Christian education or works of charity, for instance? Is a contemporary service meant to be worship or evangelism or both?

Once we have made up our minds about what we mean by "worship," how do we determine what makes such worship "Christian"? Our culture is full of various types of worship. Are there distinctive marks for "Christian" worship? For that matter, is all worship offered by the Christian community always "Christian"?

None of these are easy questions to resolve but they certainly need to be probed. And they are not simply speculative matters of theoretical interest alone. Defining what is distinctive about Christian worship is a vital practical tool for anyone who has responsibility for planning, preparing for, or leading Christian worship. The continuing appearance of new forms of worship has made this type of basic analysis even more crucial for those people charged with worship ministry. Such people are constantly involved

in decision making as they serve the Christian community through worship leadership. The more practical the decision, the more necessary the theoretical foundations often become. Is a certain act, such as pledging one's allegiance to a national flag, appropriate in Christian worship? Or is that act out of place? Should other acts, such as celebrating the adoption of a child, which churches have not customarily included in worship, find a place in the worship life of the church? Or is that not appropriate in Christian worship? Only if one has a working definition of "Christian worship" can one cope with such practical problems.

I shall explore three methods of clarifying just what we mean by "Christian worship." I have increasingly come to feel that the most adequate approach is a phenomenological one that seeks careful description of what Christians do when they come together for worship. Although this may seem the most simple and straightforward method, observation is essential if we are to understand the meanings of the structures or services Christians use over and over again for worship. Most of this book will concentrate on describing the development, theology, and use of actual structures or services.

It is helpful, second, to explore some definitions of greater abstraction that Christian thinkers have used to explain what they understand Christian worship to be. A third method examines some of the key words Christians choose most often (in various languages) to express what they experience as worship. These three methods should force us to reflect on what we mean when we speak of "Christian worship." In addition, we must consider some of the factors giving both diversity and constancy to Christian worship.

THE PHENOMENON OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

One of the best ways to determine what we mean by Christian worship is to describe the outward and visible forms of worship by Christians. This approach looks at the whole phenomenon of Christian worship as it might appear to a detached or alien observer trying to grasp what it is Christians do when they come together.

Christian worship belongs to a wide category of human behavior known as ritual and is the subject of the academic discipline of **ritual studies**. The term "ritual" is used in a variety of ways, and it can be as difficult to pin

down as the term “worship.” Nevertheless, the term applies to human activity that seems to have certain abiding characteristics. First, it is behavior, meaning that it is an embodied activity. Second, by its very nature ritual is repetitive. Third, it is social activity and serves some communal function. Gail Ramshaw offers a concise description of ritual as “defined actions that are repeated, communal, and symbolic.”[1] As such, it is of great interest to anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. Various kinds of ritual are necessary for the cohesive existence of any human community. Whether it is the celebration of a national holiday, the opening of a new highway, or a college football weekend, ritual plays a vital role in making a communal, recognizable observance. Family rituals include birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, and visits from grandchildren. Through the process of **ritualization**, ordinary, everyday activities (eating, gathering, visiting, making) become marked as special and set apart from other activities.[2]

Christian worship, as a repeated social behavior with definite purposes, is probably the most common collection of ritual practices in many Western societies. We can consider it as a whole because, despite all the different cultures and historical epochs in which it occurs, Christian worship has employed remarkably stable and permanent forms. We shall speak of these as structures (such as a liturgical calendar for organizing a year’s worship) or as services (such as the Lord’s Supper). Despite constant adaptation, these prove to be remarkably durable. One way to describe Christian worship is simply to list these chief structures and services. We do not need to go into detail here since most of the book will discuss them much more thoroughly.

Today, liturgical scholars often speak of the essential structures and services collectively as an ***ordo***, from the term used by the Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann. Gordon W. Lathrop, a Lutheran theologian, describes the *ordo* as a “core Christian pattern” of worship which he identifies as consisting of Sunday and the week, the service of word and table, praise and beseeching, teaching and bath, and the year and Pascha (Easter).[3] United Methodist theologian Don E. Saliers prefers to speak of a “canon” of basic structures “that have endured the test of time.”[4] He adds the “pastoral offices” to the list. The identification of a deep *ordo* of Christian worship has been very useful for the ongoing work of the World Council of Churches as it seeks to recover fellowship across the rich variety of ecclesial

communities through publications such as *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper No. 111).[5]

While useful in identifying historically central items, the problem with such categories is that they suggest that the *ordo* or canon is limited and, presumably, closed. This method ignores ecstatic worship which has been around for centuries (1 Cor. 14:6-19), in which Paul himself excelled (v. 18), and which may have been the most prevalent form of Christian worship at mid-first century C.E. The explosive growth of Pentecostal churches around the globe, which began at the turn of the nineteenth century and continues today, shows the resilience of ecstatic forms of worship. Limiting a description of Christian worship to *ordo* overlooks the richness of recent centuries in developing new functions for worship and creating new forms to fulfill them as Christianity expanded beyond Europe into Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Or, for that matter, a narrow approach to *ordo* may complicate our understanding of Christian worship as we come to terms with the rise of computer-assisted forms of communication.

With these cautions in mind, we shall immediately do what Schmemann, Lathrop, and Saliers suggest: list the chief components of the perennial structures and services as a means of defining Christian worship. Even within the New Testament, we see indications of a weekly structure of time. This structure was soon elaborated in various annual calendars for commemorating events in the memory of the Christian community: Christ's death and resurrection, for example, and memorials of various local martyrs. Eventually, daily schedules for public and private prayer were devised. Daily, weekly, and yearly schedules of time are still important components of Christian worship, and we shall survey the operation of these in Chapter Two. For our present purpose, however, one thing we can say about Christian worship is that it is a type of worship that relies heavily on the structuring of time to help it fulfill its purposes.

Just as they have found it necessary to arrange time, Christians have often found it convenient to organize a space to shelter and enable their worship. Though various forms have been tried by different cultures over the centuries, the requirements in terms of space and furnishings have remained remarkably consistent. We turn to these in Chapter Three.

In addition, since early times, Christians have found music a vital means of worship, both through music as such and through sung text as lyrical

profession of faith. Music is the subject of Chapter Four.

In ancient times and up through today, Christians have used a small number of basic services. The first of these is daily public prayer. Within the category of daily prayer, there are various forms, some of which are described in Chapter Five.

A second type of service focuses on the reading and preaching of scripture and hence is often referred to as the "service of the word." It is familiar to Protestants as the preaching service; it also serves as the first portion of the eucharist or Lord's Supper. We shall examine the various forms of this type of service in Chapter Six. It provides a more-or-less stable order, which many Christians identify as their prime experience of what Christian worship is.

Throughout history, Christians have also privileged certain ritual actions as essential marks of the church. The chief among these various traditions have been called "sacraments" or "ordinances." Chapter Seven will consider these sacraments/ordinances in general and what it means for God to work and people to respond through visible signs and actions.

Virtually every Christian community has some means of distinguishing those who belong within its body from outsiders. In terms of forms of worship, this designation takes place in various services of Christian initiation. Baptism is the most widely known of these rites, but catechesis, confirmation, first communion, and various forms of renewal, affirmation, reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant, and in some Christian traditions, infant dedication are important parts of the process of incorporating new Christians into the church. Christian communities continue to rethink their theology and practice for making one a Christian, which we shall discuss in Chapter Eight.

Since New Testament times, we have the testimony of Christians gathering to celebrate what Paul calls "the Lord's supper" (1 Cor. 11:20). For many Christians, this is the archetypal form of Christian worship. Only a small minority avoid celebrating it in outward forms. In many churches, it is a weekly, or even daily, experience. Chapter Nine will deal with the forms and meaning of the Lord's Supper.

In addition to baptism and the Lord's Supper, there are a variety of occasional services or pastoral rites common in one form or another to almost all worshiping Christian communities. Some of these mark steps in

life's journey, which we may or may not repeat: services of forgiveness and reconciliation or services for healing and blessing the sick and dying. Others are one-time rites of passage such as weddings, ordinations, religious professions or commissioning, or funerals. Many of these are called for only as the occasion demands. Many of life's stages and experiences are common to all people, Christian or not. Occasional services to mark some of these journeys or passages have evolved into permanent types of Christian worship. We shall explore these in Chapter Ten.

Finally, Christian worship is a global phenomenon that has spread far beyond its Middle Eastern origins into every inhabited continent. Chapter Eleven will examine the rich diversity of practices that have arisen as Christianity has engaged with the various cultures of the world. We will see that there really is no way to describe worship in general. Worship always involves real, concrete communities with distinctive languages, histories, art, music, and other cultural practices.

Obviously, the basic structures and services listed above do not cover all the possibilities in Christian worship, but they do describe the majority of instances of such worship. Various prayer meetings, sacred concerts, revivals, novenas, and a wide range of devotions may be added to them. But, for most Christians, all of these are subsidiary to the items we have listed above and are, to a certain degree, dispensable. Accordingly, our discussion in this book will be chiefly concerned with the basic structures and services with only occasional mention of other possibilities.

Thus, our first answer to the question, What is Christian worship? is simply to list and describe the basic forms Christian worship takes and to say these define it best. Nonetheless, we must also investigate other approaches.

DEFINITIONS OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Our purpose in looking at the various ways different Christian thinkers have spoken about Christian worship is not to compare practices but to stimulate reflection. The apostle Paul does this in his Letter to the Romans: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1, NRSV). Paul goes on to reflect on what this embodied "spiritual worship" can mean in the lives of believers:

“Let love be genuine, be patient in suffering, contribute to the saints, bless those who persecute you, do not repay anyone evil for evil, live peaceably with all, do not overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good,” and so on.[6] In this exhortation, Paul provokes his readers to reflect on the practical meaning of worship for their lives.

The best way to grasp the meaning of any term is to observe it in use rather than to give a simple definition. So, we shall look over the shoulders of several Protestant, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic thinkers to see how they use the term. None of these varying uses of the term excludes the others. Frequently they overlap, but each application adds new insights and dimensions, thus complementing the rest. This effort to “say what we mean and to mean what we say” is a continuing one that is subject to revision as our understanding of Christian worship matures and deepens.

One well-known definition of Christian worship can be found in a sermon preached by Martin Luther at the dedication of the first church built for Protestant worship, Torg au Castle, in 1544. Luther says of Christian worship “that nothing else be done in it than that our dear Lord Himself talk (*rede*) to us through His holy word and that we, in turn, talk (*reden*) to him in prayer and song of praise.”[7] A similar approach appears in the Large Catechism where Luther says that in worship the people “assemble to hear and discuss God’s Word and then praise God with song and prayer.”[8] Thus worship has a duality, revelation and response—both of them empowered by the Holy Spirit.

John Calvin had many negative things to say about idolatry and superstition in worship. But “God has given us a few ceremonies, not at all irksome, to show Christ present.”[9] The ultimate purpose of Christian worship is union with God: “We are lifted up even to God by the exercises of religion. What is the design of the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, the holy assemblies, and the whole external government of the church, but that we may be united (*conjungant*) to God.”[10]

Anglican Archbishop Thomas Cranmer found the goal of the ceremonies of worship to be the “setting forth of God’s honor or glory, and to the reducing of the people to a most perfect and godly living.”[11] Worship, then, is directed to God’s glory and to human rectitude. Cranmer is echoed in modern theologies that link worship to social justice.

The duality of revelation and response is echoed by Russian Orthodox theologian George Florovsky: “Christian worship is the response of men [*sic*] to the Divine call, to the ‘mighty deeds’ of God, culminating in the redemptive act of Christ.”[12] Florovsky is at pains to stress the corporate nature of this response to God’s call: “Christian existence is essentially corporate; to be Christian means to be in the community, in the Church.” It is in this community that God is active in worship as much as the worshipers themselves. As a response to God’s work both in the past and in our midst, “Christian worship is primarily and essentially an act of praise and adoration, which also implies a thankful acknowledgement of God’s embracing Love and redemptive loving-kindness.”[13]

These ideas are reinforced by another Orthodox theologian, Nikos A. Nissiotis, who stresses the presence and the actions of the Trinity in worship. He states: “Worship is not primarily man’s [*sic*] initiative but God’s redeeming act in Christ through his Spirit.”[14] Nissiotis stresses the “absolute priority of God and his act,” which humans can only acknowledge. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the church as the Body of Christ can offer worship that is pleasing as an act both from and directed to the Trinity.

Pentecostal worship leaders tend to stress the affective, intimate quality of worship as divine-human interaction. John Wimber, who founded the Vineyard, a charismatic-pentecostal church movement, describes worship as “communication with God through the basic means of singing and praying, and communication from God through teaching and preaching the word, prophecy, exhortation, etc. We lift him up and exalt him, and as a result are drawn into his presence where he speaks to us.” Wimber defines worship as “the act of freely giving love to God” as “an expression of awe, submission, and respect toward God.”[15]

Melva Costen identifies both praise and empowerment as defining characteristics of worship for African American Christians. She writes: “Worship can be viewed as both praise and empowerment, as it enables communities of faith to claim the ‘right to the tree of life’ and act as agents of love and justice in the world. Empowerment means experiencing and feeling freedom as ‘realized eschatology’ in, but not limited to, corporate worship…. In these eschatological moments, a glimmer of hope is seen in the midst of struggle and suffering.”[16]

In Roman Catholic circles, it has been common to describe worship as "the glorification of God and the sanctification of humanity." This phrase comes from a landmark 1903 *motu proprio* (a papal decree) on church music by Pope Pius X in which he spoke of worship as being for "the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful."[17] Pope Pius XII repeated this expression in his 1947 encyclical on worship, *Mediator Dei*. The same definition appears frequently in the 1963 Vatican II *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* which "in more than twenty places corrects the former definition of the liturgy and speaks first of the sanctification of man [*sic*] and then of the glorification of God."[18] That reversal of order presents this question: Which takes precedence, glorifying God or making people holy? Many of the debates about worship have revolved around that question, a question particularly pertinent for church musicians.

Sometimes congregational leaders may express another tension in preparing worship. Should worship be the offering of our best talents and arts to God—even in forms unfamiliar or incomprehensible to people? Or should it be in familiar language and styles so that the meaning is grasped by all even though the result is less impressive artistically? Putting the tension this way, however, begs the question of what one means by "best talents" or "less impressive artistically," which are concepts laden with arguable or even elitist values. Fortunately, these are false alternatives. Glorification and sanctification belong together. Irenaeus tells us the glory of God is a human fully alive. Nothing glorifies God more than a human being made holy; nothing is more likely to make a person holy than the desire to glorify God. Both the glorification of God and the sanctification of humans characterize Christian worship. Apparent tensions between them are superficial. Humans must be addressed in terms they can comprehend and must express their worship in forms that have integrity. Addressability and authenticity are both part of worship.

In many churches it has also become normal to describe Christian worship as enacting the **paschal mystery**. Much of the popularity of this term is due to the writings of Dom Odo Casel, O.S.B., a German Benedictine monk who died in 1948. The roots of the term are as old as the church. The paschal mystery is the risen Christ present and active in our worship. "Mystery" in this sense is God's self-disclosure of that which surpasses human understanding, of the revelation that was hitherto hidden. The

“paschal” element is the central redemptive act of Christ in his life, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. We can speak of the paschal mystery as the Christian community sharing in Christ’s redemptive acts as it worships.

Casel discusses the way that Christians live, “our own sacred history,” through worship. As the church commemorates the events of salvation history, “Christ himself is present and acts through the church, his *ecclesia*, while she acts with him.”[19] Thus these very acts of Christ again become present with all their power to save. What Christ has done in the past is again given to the worshiper to experience and appropriate in the present. It is a way of living with the Lord. The church presents what Christ has done through the worshiping congregation’s re-enactment of these events. The worshiper can thus reexperience them for his or her own salvation.

Each of these definitions is only a way station on the reader’s journey toward a personal understanding of Christian worship. One must remain open to discovering other definitions and coming to deeper understandings while continuing to experience and reflect upon what defines Christian worship.

KEY WORDS IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Another useful way to clarify what we mean by “Christian worship” is to look at some of the key words that the Christian community has chosen to use when speaking about its worship. Often these words were originally secular but were chosen as the least inadequate means of expressing what the assembled community experienced in worship.

There is a rich variety of such words in past and current use. Each word and each language adds shades of meaning that complement the others. A quick survey of the most widely used words in several Western languages related to worship can show the realities being expressed.

The English language could well be envious of the German word *Gottesdienst*. Seven English words are needed to duplicate it: “God’s service and our service to God.” “Gott” translates in English as “God,” and they sound very much alike in both languages. Less familiar is *dienst*, which has no English cognate. Travelers will recognize it as the word identifying service stations in Germanic lands. “Service” is the nearest English

equivalent, and it is interesting that we, too, use this word for services of worship just as commonly as we use it for gas stations. “Service” means something done for others, whether we speak of a secretarial service, the Forest Service, or a catering service. It reflects work offered to the public even though usually for private profit. Ultimately it comes from the Latin word *servus*, a slave who was bound to serve others. The word **office** from the Latin *officium*, service or duty, is also used to mean a service of worship. *Gottesdienst* reflects a God who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil. 2:7) and our service to such a God.

There is only a slight difference between this concept and the one conveyed by our modern English word **liturgy**. Too often confused with smells and bells (ceremonial), “liturgy,” like service, has a secular origin. It comes from the Greek *leitourgía*, composed from words for work (*érgon*) and people (*laós*). In ancient Greece, a liturgy was a public work performed for the benefit of the city or state. Its principle was the same as the one for paying taxes, but it could involve donated service as well as taxes. Paul speaks of the Roman authorities literally as “liturgists *[leitourgoí]* of God” (Rom. 13:6) and of himself as “a liturgist *[leitourgòn]* of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles” (Rom. 15:16, literal trans.).

Liturgy, then, is a work performed by the people for the benefit of others. In other words, it is the quintessence of the priesthood of believers that the whole priestly community of Christians shares. To call a service “liturgical” is to indicate that it was conceived so that all worshipers take an active part in offering their worship together. This could apply equally to a Quaker service and to a Roman Catholic Mass as long as the congregation participated fully in either one. But it could not describe a worship service in which the congregation was merely a passive audience. In Eastern Orthodox churches, the word “liturgy” is used in the specific sense of the eucharist, but Western Christians use “liturgical” to apply to all forms of public worship of a participatory nature.

The concept of service, then, is fundamental in understanding worship. A different concept appears behind the word common in Latin and the Romance languages, a term reflected in our English word **cult**. In English, cult tends to suggest the bizarre or faddish, but it has an esteemed function in languages such as French and Italian. Its origin is the Latin *colere*, an agricultural term meaning “to cultivate.” Both the French *le culte*, and the

Italian *il culto,* preserve this Latin word as the usual term for worship. It is a rich term, even richer than the English word "worship," for it catches the mutuality of responsibility between the farmer and the land or animals. If I do not feed and water my chickens, I know there will be no eggs; unless I weed my garden, there will be no vegetables. It is a relationship of mutual dependence, a lifelong engagement of caring for and looking after land or animals, a relationship that becomes almost part of the bone marrow of farmers, especially those whose families have farmed for generations on the same land. It is a relationship of giving and receiving, certainly not in equal measure, but the two are bound to each other. Unfortunately, the English language does not readily make the connection between cultivate and worship that is found in the Romance languages. Sometimes we find richer contents in the words of other languages such as the Italian *domenica* (Lord's day-Sunday), *Pasqua* (Passover-Easter), or *crisma* (Christ-anoint) than in their English equivalents.

Our English word worship also has secular roots. It comes from the Old English word *weorthscipe*—literally *weorth* (worthy) and *-scipe* (-ship)—and signifies attributing worth, or respect, to someone. It was and still is used to address various lord mayors in England. The Church of England wedding service, since 1549, has contained the wonderful pledge: "With my body I thee worship." The intention in this last case is to respect or esteem another being with one's body. Unfortunately, such frankness disturbs us, and the term has vanished in American wedding services. Other English words such as "revere," "venerate," and "adore" derive ultimately from Latin words for fear, love, and pray.

The New Testament uses a variety of terms for worship; most of them words that also bear other meanings. One of the more common is *latreía*, often translated as service or worship. In Romans 9:4 and Hebrews 9:1 and 9:6, it implies the Jewish worship in the temple, or it can mean any religious duty, as in John 16:2. In Romans 12:1, it is usually translated simply "worship"; it has a similar meaning in Philippians 3:3.

An important insight appears in the word *proskuneîn* which carries the explicit physical connotation of falling down to show obeisance or prostration. In the temptation narrative (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8), Jesus tells Satan: "It is written, 'worship *[proskunéseis]* the Lord your God and serve *[latreúseis]* only him.'" In another famous passage (John 4:23), Jesus tells

the Samaritan woman that the time has come “when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” *Proskuneîn* in various forms is used repeatedly throughout this passage. In a less familiar passage (Rev. 5:14), the twenty-four elders “fell down and worshiped *[prosekúnesan].”* The physical reality of worship is underscored by this verb.

Two interesting words, *thusía* and *prosphorá*, are both translated as sacrifice or offering. *Thusía* is an important term in the New Testament and to the early fathers even though it was used in both pagan worship (“to demons,” 1 Cor. 10:20) and Christian (“a living sacrifice,” Rom. 12:1 or “sacrifice of praise,” Heb. 13:15). *Prosphorá* is literally the act of offering or bearing before. It is a favorite term in 1 Clement—whether referring to Abraham’s offering of Isaac, or to those of the clergy, or the offering of Christ, “the high priest of our offerings” (36:1). Hebrews 10:10 speaks of “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Both words play a significant, if controversial, role in the development of Christian eucharistic theology.

A much less prominent word in the New Testament literature is *threskeía*, which means religious service or cult (as in Acts 26:5; Col. 2:18; and James 1:26). *Sébein* signifies to worship (in Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7; and Acts 18:3 and 19:27). In Acts, another use of the verb designates Godfearers, Gentiles who attend synagogue worship (13:50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; and 18:7). One other term from the New Testament has important uses to describe worship. *Homologeîn* has a variety of meanings: to confess sins (1 John 1:9), “if we confess our sins”; to declare or profess publicly (Rom. 10:9), “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord”; or for the praise of God (Heb. 13:15), “the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

These terms from other languages can expand the one-dimensional image of the English term “worship.” In addition to biblical terms, we can find a wider understanding by looking at the comparable words for worship in various languages, such as the Spanish word *alabadle* (the imperative of *alabar*, “to praise”) or the Korean word *yebae* (“church service”). All are worth pondering for insights into what others have experienced at various times and places. A few English words related to worship need some clarification.

We need to make a broad distinction between two kinds of worship: common worship and personal devotions. The clearest aspect of **common**

worship, also known as **public worship**, is that it is the worship offered by the gathered congregation, the Christian assembly. The importance of meeting or coming together can hardly be overstated. At times, the Jewish term "synagogue" (coming together) was also used for the Christian assembly (James 2:2), but the chief term for the Christian assembly is the church, the *ekklesía*—those who are called out from the world. This word for the assemblage, congregating, meeting, convening, or gathering is used repeatedly throughout the New Testament for the local or universal church. One of the most easily overlooked aspects of common worship is that it begins with the gathering, in one place, of scattered Christians to be the church at worship. We usually treat the act of assembling as merely a mechanical necessity, but coming together in Christ's name is itself an important part of common worship. We assemble to meet God *and* to encounter other people. These assemblies need not be large, as Jesus himself promised to be present whenever "two or three are gathered" in his name (Mt. 18:20).

In contrast, **personal devotions** usually, but not always, occur apart from the physical presence of other members of the body of Christ. This is not to say they are not linked to the worship of other Christians. Indeed, personal devotions and common worship are both fully corporate since they share in the worship of the universal community of the body of Christ. But the individual engaging in personal devotions can determine his or her own pace and contents, even while following a widely used structure. On the other hand, for common worship to be possible, there must be consensus on structure, words, and actions or chaos would ensue. These ground rules are not necessary in devotions where the individual sets the discipline. ("Devotion" comes from a Latin word for vow.)

The relationship between common worship and personal devotions is important. Although the subject of this book is common worship and little will be said about personal devotions, it should be clear that common worship and personal devotions depend on each other. The Anglican theologian Evelyn Underhill tells us:

> [Common] and personal worship, though in practice one commonly tends to take precedence over the other, should complete, reinforce, and check each other. Only where this happens, indeed, do we find in

> its perfection the normal and balanced life of full Christian devotion…. No one soul— not even the greatest saint—can fully apprehend all that this has to reveal and demand of us, or perfectly achieve this balanced richness of response. That response must be the work of the whole Church; within which souls in their infinite variety each play a part, and give that part to the total life of the Body.[20]

Common worship needs to be supplemented by the individuality of personal devotions; personal devotions need the balance of common worship.

A widely used term in recent years is the word **celebration**. It is frequently used in secular contexts and seems to have developed a vagueness that makes it rather meaningless unless used with a specific object so that one knows what is being celebrated. If one speaks of celebration of the eucharist or celebration of Christmas, the content may be clear. Since the whole community celebrates worship, the leader should be referred to as **presider** not as "celebrant," though we still find use of the latter term to refer to the presider.

Ritual is a tricky term since it means different things to different people. To many people, it often implies emptiness (hence "empty ritual"), a rut of meaningless repetitions. Liturgists use the term to mean a book of rites. For Roman Catholics, the word "ritual" refers to the manual of pastoral offices for baptisms, weddings, funerals, and so on. In the Methodist tradition, "ritual" has been used since 1848 for all the official services of the church, including the eucharist, the pastoral offices, and the ordinal. **Rites** are the actual words spoken or sung in a service of worship, though sometimes used for all aspects of a service. The term can also refer to those bodies, such as Eastern-rite Catholics, whose worship follows a distinctive pattern. Rites differ from actions or **ceremonial**, which refers to the actions performed in worship. Ceremonial is usually indicated in service books by **rubrics**, or directions for carrying out the service. Rubrics are frequently printed in red as the name, derived from the Latin for red, indicates. Another essential element is the pattern for each service, one meaning of ordo or **order** (of worship). Order, rite, and rubrics—that is, pattern, words, and directions—are the basic components of most service books.

DIVERSITY IN EXPRESSION

Thus far, we have spoken of the common factors enabling us to speak of Christian worship in general terms. There is certainly enough basic unity that we can make many general statements and expect them to apply to most, if not all, of the forms of worship by Christian people. We need, however, to balance these general statements of constancy by considering the cultural and historical diversity that is also an important part of Christian worship. The constancy, as we have already seen, is enormous; the diversity is equally impressive. Christian worship is a fascinating mixture of constancy and diversity. From a very wide perspective, we may see roughly the same structures and services for two thousand years; yet people around the world, and even in different parts of the same town, practice them in their distinctive ways.

In recent years, we have become much more attuned to how important cultural and ethnic factors are in understanding Christian worship. A strong concern with the link between Christian worship and justice has emerged out of this. In a sense, this is nothing new. Centuries before Jesus, the prophet Amos decried the “solemn assemblies” when justice and righteousness are neglected (Amos 5:21-24). In the New Testament, St. Paul, likewise, criticized the Corinthian church for the unjust practices at the Lord’s Supper: “So when you get together in one place, it isn’t to eat the Lord’s meal. Each of you goes ahead and eats a private meal. One person goes hungry while another is drunk” (I Cor. 11:20-21, CEB). For Paul, this is not a matter of personal morality, but of justice. Wealthier Christians in the church at Corinth were not waiting for working-class members of the community to arrive before starting the meal.

The nineteenth-century Anglican theologian Frederick Denison Maurice advanced our thinking about worship and justice as did Percy Dearmer, William Temple, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Virgil Michel in the twentieth century. But it is only in recent years that large numbers of Christians have become sensitive to the injustice of worship forms that marginalize large segments of worshipers because of gender, age, race, or other human distinctions. The result has been efforts to change the language of liturgical texts and hymns where they have tended to make women invisible, to redo

buildings that have excluded the handicapped, and to open new roles for those who were previously not welcome to serve in them.

The concern for the embodiment of justice in worship has taken many forms, but all these efforts share a common goal of stressing the individual worth of every worshiper. Where some are neglected or relegated to inferior status because of age, gender, disability, race, or linguistic background, these injustices are being recognized and alleviated. But it is a slow process to become aware of discriminatory practices and then to find the most equitable ways of redressing them. The result is that Christian worship becomes more complex and more diverse as it tries to reflect a worldwide community. Thus, although what we have said about constancy remains valid, the cultural expressions of that constancy are becoming ever more diverse in the present.

Closely allied with the move to include all people in worship has been the effort to take seriously the cultural and ethnic diversity within the world church. This involves encouraging respect for the gifts of differing peoples in Christian worship. The technical name for such a process is **inculturation;** the reality is the acceptance of diversity as one of God's gifts to humanity and a willingness to acknowledge such variety in the forms of worship. Yet, the process of inculturation is only one aspect of the relationship of worship to the cultural practices and art of any local community. The Nairobi Statement on Worship Culture (1996), developed by the World Lutheran Federation, offers a succinct typology of four ways worship intersects with culture:

> Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways. First, it [worship] is transcultural, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture. Second, it is contextual, varying according to the local situation (both nature and culture). Third, it is counter-cultural, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture. Fourth, it is cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures.[21]

Music, for example, is one indication of the diversity of cultural expression. Since the mid-twentieth century, new hymnals have tended more and more to reflect cultural diversity, but hymnal editors have also grown increasingly

aware of a need to avoid shallow appropriation of indigenous music traditions. As the Nairobi Statement observes, a faithful Christian approach to worship and culture requires careful discernment.

Diversity is nothing new in Christian worship, although regarding it positively may be an important, more recent development. Even in the earliest liturgical texts, we see different ways of stating the same realities—whether in theological principles or human needs. The differences reflect the varieties of peoples and places. The differing liturgical books provide parallel routes to cover the same journey, but they vary in style and details, just as different peoples in various places differ in those areas that make them distinctive, such as the particularity of the native tongue of every tribe and nation. Liturgies are, most naturally, local, and as we see in Europe and the Middle East from the early church until the Reformation of the sixteenth century, a small number of cities, whose local rites won wider usage, have been particularly important in the history of Christian worship.

Let us compare two passages with identical functions from the world's two most widely used liturgies. The first is from the Roman Catholic Latin (Tridentine) Mass, and is found at the beginning of the eucharistic prayer:

> Just it is indeed and fitting, right, and for our lasting good, that we should always and everywhere give thanks to thee, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

The second is the parallel passage from the Eastern Orthodox Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom:

> It is fitting and right to sing to You, to bless You, to praise You, to give thanks to You, to worship You in every place of your dominion: for You are God, beyond description, beyond understanding, invisible, incomprehensible, always existing, always the same; You and your only-begotten Son and your Holy Spirit.

Both say the same thing, but the style and the spirit are quite different. The language of the first has been compared to the legalistic rhetoric of the Roman law court; the second, to the splendor of the court of the Byzantine

emperors. Clearly, we are dealing with two different styles of expression that emerged respectively from particular historical and cultural contexts.

Liturgical scholars have sorted out the various ancient eucharistic liturgies into distinct liturgical families. Like human families, they bear common features. Some may belong to the Alexandrian family, named for Mark, and place the intercessions in the middle of the opening part of the eucharistic prayer. Others, such as the Roman Rite, use characteristic words to introduce the words of institution: “who the day before he suffered”; while other families, such as that named after John Chrysostom, prefer the phrase “on the night on which He was delivered up.” Just as one may recognize a person’s children or siblings by facial similarities, so too, one can learn to identify the liturgical family from which a certain text comes.



Diagram 1

From the early period of church history through the Reformation, different peoples and places around the Mediterranean world and in northern Europe gave their own linguistic characteristics to Christian worship. Some features disappeared, often because of the stereotyping that printing made

available in the sixteenth century. But a wide variety persists, particularly in Eastern Orthodoxy—and within Roman Catholicism, though isolated in places like Milan, Italy, or Toledo, Spain, or in the Eastern rite Catholic churches. In these disparate rites, we have frank acknowledgment of the true catholicity, that is, universality, of the church. What may seem to be curious and quaint survivals are the voices of different peoples and places, adding their distinctive contribution to the praise of God.

It is common among historians of liturgy to identify *classical liturgical families* from various areas of the ancient world. Each of these families uses the same services of worship and the same types of service books but each shows individual peculiarities of style and expression. The relationships are shown in diagram 2.

It is easiest to go around the Mediterranean world counterclockwise for a quick enumeration of these families. We shall return to the question of distinguishing between families of rites in more detail in Chapter Nine. We know of ancient North African liturgies, but they have ceased to exist. The first surviving family we encounter is centered in Alexandria, Egypt, the most notable example known is that of Mark. It has Coptic and Ethiopian survivors today in Egypt and Ethiopia. Western Syria included the ecclesiastical centers of Jerusalem and Antioch. A liturgy, probably conflating those used in these cities, preserves the traditional name of James, the first bishop of Jerusalem. The liturgical patterns of Armenia preserve many early features and probably derive ultimately from and belong to this West Syria family. Eastern Syria around Edessa was the early center of a most distinctive family, of which the prime example is the rite named for Sts. Addai and Mari. Caesarea in Asia Minor was the home of St. Basil, and the liturgy named after him (with an earlier Alexandrian version) derives from the West Syrian pattern. Also deriving from a West Syrian background is the so-called Byzantine liturgy or **Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom**, the fourth-century patriarch of Constantinople. From Constantinople, it spread throughout much of the Byzantine Empire and Russia. Only the **Roman Rite**, at one time known as the rite of Peter, is in wider use. It is the dominant rite of Roman Catholicism. A large and mysterious family, the *Non–Roman Western* comprises the remainder, with four branches on its family tree: the *Milanese* or *Ambrosian*, the *Mozarabic*, the *Celtic*, and the *Gallican*.

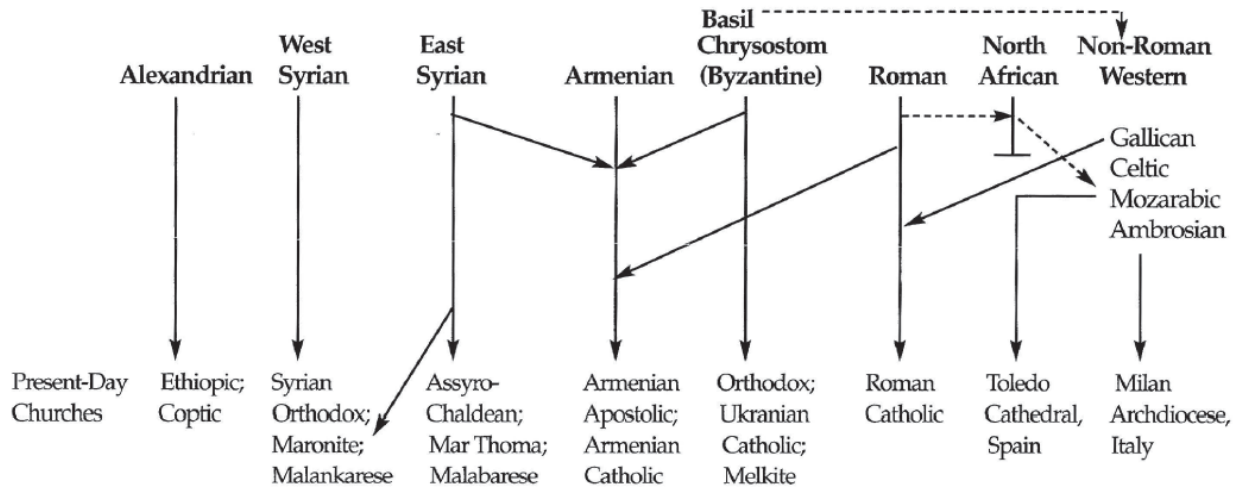


Diagram 2

The persistence to this day of this diversity within the Orthodox and Roman Catholic worlds, despite occasional efforts at suppression and standardization, is a triumph for ethnic and national differences. It represents the ability of people to preserve expressions and thought patterns that are natural and dear to them.

Diversity characterized Protestant worship from the start. Almost all Protestant worship can be divided into *nine Protestant liturgical traditions*. These are not as easily distinguished on the basis of the texts of eucharistic liturgies as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox liturgical families are, although some Protestant traditions can be easily defined in terms of service books. Some groups, such as the Quakers, have no published rites. But we can speak of distinct liturgical traditions, that is, inherited habits and assumptions about worship passed on from generation to generation. In each case, though, certain dominant characteristics have enough coherence to enable us to distinguish a distinct tradition.[22]

It is not easy to differentiate these traditions geographically since they overlap considerably. Puritans, Anglicans, and Quakers lived side by side in seventeenth-century England, if not too happily. We can chart the nine traditions of Protestant worship in diagram 3. Horizontal lines show movement in relation to conserving (right) or rejecting (left) patterns from

the medieval past. The more radical breaks from late medieval worship are indicated by groups in the left-wing column; the more conservative reformation groups, in terms of preserving continuity, appear in the right wing, and the more moderate groups are shown in the center. Subsequent shifts are indicated by horizontal lines.

Lutheran worship, originating in Wittenberg, thrived in the Germanic and Scandinavian countries in the sixteenth century and has since spread throughout the world. *Reformed* worship had its genesis in Switzerland (Zurich and Geneva) and France (Strasbourg) but quickly spread throughout the Netherlands, France, Scotland, Hungary, and England. The *Anabaptists* began in Switzerland in the 1520s. *Anglican* worship, as its name soon indicates, was that of the national church of England and represented many of the political compromises necessary for a national church. The *Puritan* (and separatist) tradition was a protest against compromises that seemed contrary to God's will as revealed in scripture.

The most radical tradition was the seventeenth-century *Quaker* movement. The Quakers' silent waiting on God without the aid of sermons, songs, or scriptures made a drastic break with the past. *Methodism*, in the eighteenth century, combined many strands, from both ancient and Reformation times, borrowing especially from the Anglican and Puritan traditions. The American democratic experiment gave birth to another tradition, especially in developing forms of worship for the unchurched in frontier camp meetings and the urban revivals of the Second Great Awakening. This American tradition continued in the twentieth century with the rise of television evangelism, and in the late twentieth century, with the rise of the "seeker church" movement. The early twentieth century also gave birth to the *Pentecostal* tradition. Globally, the Pentecost tradition and its exuberant form of worship is the fastest growing type of Christianity in the early twenty-first century.

By the beginning of the current millennium, the development of interactive computer-assisted forms of communication has led to new developments. More and more Christians are worshiping "online" in computer-assisted "virtual environments. This most recent innovation has both advocates and critics, but the same could be said of many of the historical traditions listed above. Perhaps we are witnessing the development

of yet another distinctive liturgical tradition as this practice continues to evolve.

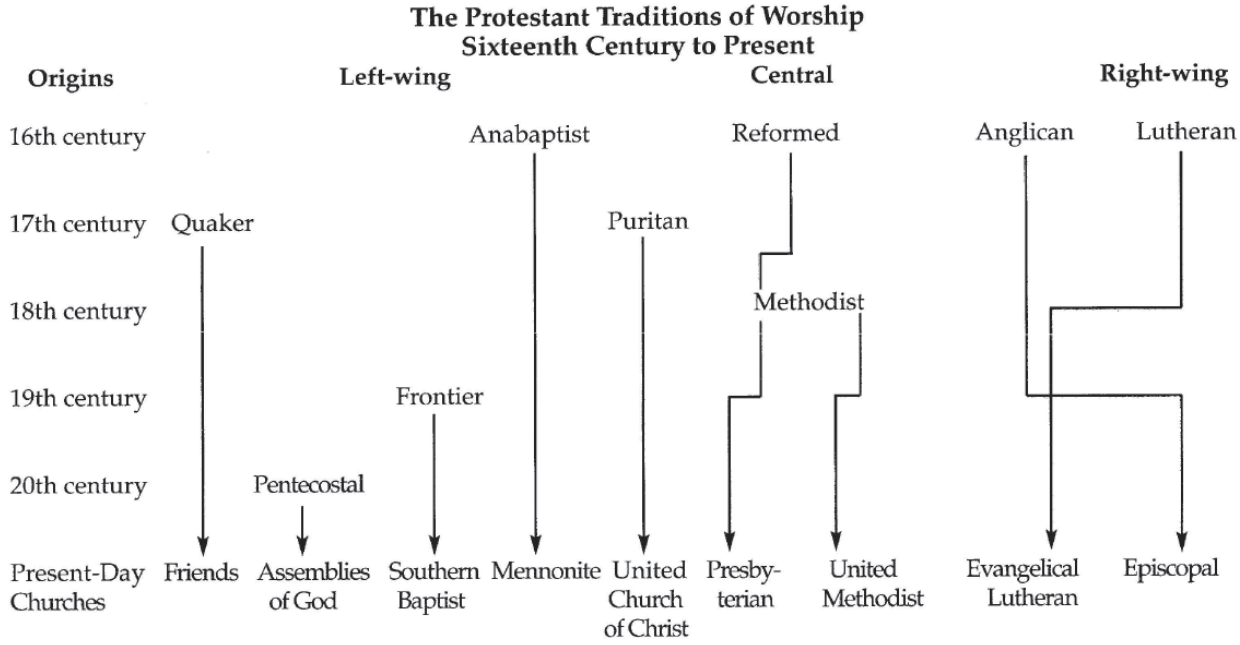


Diagram 3

The coexistence of several traditions has allowed people to seek the forms of expression for worship that are most natural for them. In eighteenth-century England, those who felt too constrained by the ***Book of Common Prayer*** (BCP) gravitated to services led extemporaneously in the Puritan tradition, and those who found such worship too clerical could find a different kind of freedom among the Quakers. Fervent hymnody and a warm sacramental life among early Methodists attracted others. Different people could match their diversities of expression by choosing the tradition that seemed most congenial to them. Yet, at the same time, a high degree of consistency existed through the generations within each tradition.

CONSTANCY IN FUNCTION

Much of the study of Christian worship revolves around studying the various service books that some churches use. Because the needs are so similar, certain types of service books recur in many different liturgical families and traditions. It is tempting, but dangerous, to identify worship

with books. Books are indeed used for much, if not most, worship, and they are certainly the easiest evidence of worship to study and analyze. But a large portion of worship is based on spontaneity, an elusive subject of inquiry. Various types of worship contain differing rates of both fixed formulas for word and action found in books and the spontaneity that ebbs and flows as the Spirit moves and cannot be found in print. Many Protestant traditions have favored *extemporaneous* or (to use the Latin term) extempore prayer. This generally designates prayer that does not follow standard text from a service book. But it does not necessarily mean completely spontaneous prayer. For example, a pastoral prayer that follows a familiar outline or includes prayer requests from the congregation may still be called extemporaneous prayer.

Where the charismatic movement has reached people, including classical Pentecostals and many African American churches, spontaneous exclamations are a vital part of worship. Quaker worship, in its classic "unprogrammed" type of meeting, is spontaneity itself, though it exemplifies the need for a self-disciplined freedom if spontaneity is to bear its best fruit. Spontaneity is not just turning people loose for individual introspection or speaking. It is the use of the various gifts of individual people for the benefit of the gathered community. Paul's words on spontaneous worship immediately follow his chapter on love (1 Cor. 13) and aim at one purpose: building up the church (1 Cor. 14:26). What gifts Christians have received are meant to be shared in community, not kept in isolation.

Early Christian worship seems to have involved some spontaneity. Most of it, however, had apparently disappeared by the late fourth century only to spring up again in some of the Reformation traditions. Pentecostal worship in the twentieth century has stressed the unexpected possibilities of spontaneous worship. The absence of service books or printed bulletins in some churches does not ensure spontaneity by any means. In many congregations, repetition has firmly established structured worship, which is followed with a high degree of predictability. On the other hand, traditions that use service books continue to allow for an increase in elements of spontaneity, especially in intercessions.

If we say little in this book about spontaneity in worship, it is not because it is unimportant but because it is so exasperatingly difficult to chronicle, since the evidence of it can be so ephemeral. But it should be clear

that worship and service books are by no means synonymous. Service books can only provide standard formulas. A healthy balance must remain between such formulas and the unwritten and unplanned elements that only spontaneity can provide. Nevertheless, even worship traditions that privilege extemporaneous worship and prayer over standardized liturgical books still exhibit identifiable liturgical patterns and actions.[23]

With this caveat, let us look at what service books can tell us about constancy in Christian worship. Virtually all worship makes use of the Bible, which itself includes many portions written for cultic purposes. The Quakers may be an exception to this statement, but widespread biblical literacy among Quakers makes up for their lack of actual reading from the Bible in public worship. Most Protestants and Roman Catholics also make use of a hymnal. In addition, worship in Roman Catholicism and several traditions of Protestantism frequently or always employ a service book. In short, one or more books are regarded as necessities for worship in most Christian traditions.

The books we shall survey are service books. They give a vivid glimpse of the constancy in Christian worship. Even though they vary among themselves, the contents have remarkable similarities. Despite differences in families and traditions, common needs, and the application of similar resources to fill those needs, are noticeable.

In the early church, a variety of books were used by several people performing ministries of worship leadership within a single service. Both laypeople and clergy had recognized ministries to perform, so they utilized books that contained the particular resources to enable them to take their distinct parts in worship. The idea of putting everything into one book, and placing that only in the hands of the clergy, is a Western medieval development. Currently, among many churches, there is a reversal of the single-book mentality and a return to various books for readers, commentators, song leaders, leaders of prayer, and priests or ministers. There are, after all, a variety of ministerial roles in leading worship, roles which can be shared among a number of people when appropriate books are available.

The invention of printing brought about a situation unknown before, the possibility of liturgical standardization. By the early sixteenth century, there were approximately two hundred versions of hand-copied mass books in use

in European parishes and religious orders. Roman Catholics, as well as many Protestants, became convinced that liturgical uniformity was progress. So, the first Anglican prayerbook of 1549 decreed that “from henceforth, all the whole realm shall have but one use.” Effectively the same thing was done in standardizing the Roman Catholic books down to the last comma with the exceptions allowed only for a few dioceses and religious orders.[24]

Today, Protestants and many Roman Catholics see standardization as a false goal. What may have been liberating in the sixteenth century seemed stifling in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In our time, many churches seek to undo the medieval clericalization that compressed all liturgical books into clerical documents and the sixteenth-century standardization that made all books identical whether for the clergy or the laity. A variety of ministries in various cultures demands a much more pluralistic approach to liturgical books. Already we see genuine liturgical pluralism with several alternative rites of equal authority made available within the same denomination’s book or books. Thus, the number of liturgical resources proliferates and only the typical ones can be mentioned.

Historically, in the Catholic Church, the book (or books) that provided the details for the structure of time was the **calendar**. Its brevity should not conceal its importance. The calendar governs those elements that change from day to day, or from season to season, in daily public prayer and the eucharist. Somewhat similar is the **martyrology**, a book of the deeds of the martyrs and other saints arranged by calendar according to the day of their death.

The services revolving around daily public prayer have entailed an entire collection of books, especially those services developed in monastic worship. Various types of books originally allowed different people to perform their individual functions. The most important was the **psalter**, with psalms and canticles arranged in a variety of ways in different editions. Some were structured according to the weekly recital of the psalms or to accord with feasts or for each hour service of the daily office. Musical portions appeared in the **antiphonary** and the **hymnal**. A **lectionary** eventually contained collections of the scripture readings.[25]

If this sounds complicated, that’s because it was; but each person only had to master certain parts, found in the appropriate book. All this changed in time, though not until many centuries had passed. Then efforts to collect

this whole library of books into a single book, the **breviary**, began to succeed. The advent of the Franciscan and Dominican orders in the thirteenth century, orders which needed to be on the road constantly, brought about widespread use of the breviary from which an isolated individual could read all the daily services. But the breviary represented a tremendous loss in the variety of ministries and in worship as a community. The 1971 *Liturgy of the Hours*, which replaced the 1568 Roman breviary, sought to return these services to both lay and clerical use.

The Reformation, in turn, compressed the breviary still further into Luther's two daily offices or those in the 1549 Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. Psalter, calendar, lectionary, and morning and evening prayer shared space with other types of worship. These moves made all types of worship available for the person in the pew, but it also resulted in a drastic reduction in the options it provided for worship.

The history of the books for initiation and the rites of passage is quite different. Originally, many of them occurred in the **sacramentary**, the priest's book for celebrating the eucharist and other sacraments. It contained all the appropriate prayers for various occasions and seasons. Baptism and confirmation, for example, occurred at the Easter vigil in the earliest books, and ordinations tended to come during the season of Lent. In the course of time, baptism and other rites were weaned away from the sacramentaries, and church developed separate books for the various offices.

Nowhere else has the constancy of Christian worship been quite so readily apparent as in the pastoral offices found in the ritual. The standard wedding service of American Methodists, for example, still contains virtually the same vows as fourteenth-century English Catholics made. The basic human needs the pastoral office address are common to all communities, Christian or other: birth, marriage, sickness, and death. Along the way all of us experience a need to have God's blessing invoked on people and things about us.

The history of the rites that concern the bishop is similar. Prayers for ordinations originally occurred in the sacramentaries and *ordines* (collections of instruction, the singular is ordo). In addition, there were rites for the blessing or consecration of such objects as churches, altar tables, vessels, vestments, bells, cemeteries, and so forth. Finally, there was an assortment of rites for excommunication for those who commit grave sin,

reconciliation for those who have become alienated from the church, blessing of holy oils, processions, and such.

Some of this material pertaining to bishops, such as the ordination services, appears as the **ordinal** in Protestant service books. Many service books contain rites for confirmation and the blessing and consecration of various persons and objects such as offices for recognizing Sunday school teachers or for laying a cornerstone.

The other principal collection of books is that dealing with the eucharist, also known as the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. We have already encountered the most important of these books, the sacramentary or missal, which included prayers for the priest's use appropriate to various seasons and events. But there are other ministries at the eucharist besides that of the presiding priest. A lectionary provided the lector, subdeacon, or deacon with lists of the beginning and endings of lections read at Mass. Eventually, the lections were included in full.[26] Musicians depended on the ***graduale*** for sung portions of the eucharist. What we call rubrics were recorded in early times in various *ordines*, which also dealt with services now found in the pontifical or ritual as well as the eucharist. By the late medieval period, the lections, musical portions, and rubrics were placed together in a single service book, the **missal**, so one priest could "say" mass by himself. Since the end of the tenth century, the missal has simply echoed the clerical monopoly of worship that had already occurred through a variety of other forces. Except for a few dioceses or religious orders, the sixteenth century standardized the missal. The *Missale Romanum* of 1570 remained scarcely changed (except for new feasts) for four hundred years until the Vatican II revisions in the 1960s. Once again the lections have been relegated to a separate volume, the lectionary, and the Gospel readings arranged according to the lectionary can be found in a separate **Gospel Book**.

The contents of the Catholic missal proved no less essential to the Protestant reformers. Most of them produced their own order of eucharist and incorporated it into their service books, sometimes accompanied by collects and lessons appropriate to the various days of the church year. Even on the American frontier, the Methodists preserved an irreducible minimum of fixed forms for the eucharist. The contents of the missal are as universal as any in Christianity and provide a fascinating study of constancy.

This list of the various liturgical books in the Western Christian tradition (to which we will not attempt to add the many books used among Eastern Orthodox Christians!) may seem overwhelming for an introduction to Christian worship. However, the important point to note is that the contents of several of the liturgical books seem to witness to those constants of Christian worship for which we are looking. The Protestant reformers in Europe merely took to its logical end the processes of compression and standardization already well underway in Roman Catholicism. Some of the reformers managed to compress calendar, breviary, ritual, processional, pontifical, and missal into a single volume. For centuries, various Protestant martyrologies were widely used for devotional reading. People and clergy shared the same books. The results—whether in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, the Reformed Church's *Book of Common Order*, John Wesley's *Sunday Service*, or various others—are remarkably similar in their consensus about the essentials of Christian worship. The latest liturgical books serve the same functions (if in newer forms) as the books whose gradual evolution we have been tracing. And today, the easy availability of the contents of liturgical books on the internet is once again leading to a new relationship of congregations to the official liturgical documents of their ecclesial traditions. Just as the invention of the printing press allowed for more formal standardization of liturgy across geographical regions, the internet provides ease of revision and sharing of liturgical materials, both new and old.

Of course, there are differences between books of the same type. The comparative study of rites is known as **liturgiology** and, in the last hundred years, has become a highly specialized science. But the striking fact that remains is the remarkable degree of constancy among these books from differing times and places about which deep human needs are reflected in, and addressed through, worship: time, prayer, sacrament, music, leadership, and ceremonies that make important life events, such as weddings and funerals.

This quick survey of the phenomenon, definitions, and key words of Christian worship, along with the discussion of diversity and constancy in such worship, will, I hope, help readers reflect on what they mean by Christian worship. Further reading, more experiences of worship, and continuing reflection will help expand this understanding.

CHAPTER ONE TERMINOLOGY

antiphonary

Book of Common Prayer

breviary

calendar

celebration

ceremonial

common worship (see public worship) cult

Gospel Book

graduale

hymnal

inculturation

lectionary

liturgiology

liturgy

Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

martyrology

missal

office

order

ordinal

ordo (see order)

paschal mystery

personal devotions

presider psalter

public worship

rite

ritual studies (see ritual)

ritualization (see ritual)

Roman Rite

rubrics

sacramentary

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1. Gail Ramshaw, *Christian Worship: 100,000 Sundays of Symbols and Rituals* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), p. 33.

2. For a brief account of the various ways "ritual" and "ritualization" are used by social scientists, see Barry Stephenson, *Ritual: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), chapter 1, "Ritualization," (pp. 5–19).

3. Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 35–79.

4. Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 166.

5. This important ecumenical resource, published in 1982, is available at https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/FO1982_111_en.pdf.

6. Excerpts from Romans 12:9-21.

7. Quoted by Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), p. 123. (WA 49, 588, 15–18).

8. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 1192.

9. Commentary on Psalm 24:7, *Commentaries* 31:248. I owe this passage to Dr. John Witvliet.

10. *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 376.

11. “Of Ceremonies,” *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London: Dent, 1964), p. 326. Spelling modernized.

12. George Florovsky, “Worship and Every-Day Life: An Eastern Orthodox View,” *Studia Liturgica* 2 (December 1963): p. 268.

13. Florovsky, “Worship and Every-Day Life,” p. 269.

14. Nikos A. Nissiotis, “Worship, Eucharist, and ‘Intercommunion’: An Orthodox Reflection,” *Studia Liturgica* 2 (September 1963): p. 201.

15. John Wimber, “Why We Worship & the Phases of Worship,” available at https://sites.google.com/site/vineyarditalia/about/why-we-worship (accessed January 29, 2023). Wimber specifically references Ps. 95:1-2 and 96:1-3.

16. Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), p. 107.

17. *Tra le sollecitudini*, in *The New Liturgy*, ed. Kevin Seasoltz, O.S.B. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), p. 4.

18. Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., *Personal Prayer and the Liturgy* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), p. 57.

19. Odo Casel, O.S.B., *The Mystery of Christian Worship* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1962), p. 141.

20. Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1936), pp. 84–85.

21. “Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture,” World Lutheran Federation (1996), available at https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/nairobi-statement-on-worship-and-culture-full-text (accessed, January 29, 2023).

22. For a more detailed delineation of these, see James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989).

23. For an account of the patterns of worship in contemporary Protestant churches in America, see L. Edward Phillips, *The Purpose, Pattern, and Character of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020).

24. The revisions decreed by the Council of Trent appeared as the *Roman Breviary*, 1568, and the *Roman Missal*, 1570. Further work produced the *Roman Martyrology*, 1584, the *Roman Pontifical*, 1596, *Caeremoniale episcoporum*, 1600, and the *Roman Ritual*, 1614.

25. Other books, which might be combined with these, include: the *passional* (the sufferings of the martyrs), the homily-book (excerpts from the Father’s expositions of scripture), the *legenda* (accounts of the saints’ lives), the responsory (with responses for use after the lessons), the *collectar* (containing the collects for the day), and an *ordo* (to show how to put it all together for the proper day and hour).

26. These were sometimes separated as an *epistolarium* containing the Old Testament and Epistle lections and the *evangelarium* for the Gospels.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LANGUAGE OF TIME

Time is such a fundamental aspect of our daily experience we do not usually think about it abstractly. Ordinarily, we assume that time—the day, the week, the year—is self-evident. If someone asks us, "What time is it?" we may consult a clock, our watch, or our smartphone. But if someone were to ask, "What is time?" we may not have an easy answer. Even physicists, philosophers, and theologians struggle to respond to that question! Of course, all people experience the cycles of day and night and the passing of seasons. But there are also cultural factors that affect our experience of time. Modern Western cultures tend to consider time something to manage or control. We value punctuality because we have easy access to clocks. Traditional cultures less affected by modern technology rely more on nature: the perceived movement of the sun, moon, and stars, growing season, monsoon season. Yet different ancient, traditional cultures had different fundamental understandings of time. Is time a flowing stream moving toward some destination, or is time essentially a perpetually turning wheel of endless cycles? Or is it somehow both, more like an unfolding spiral?

Jewish cultures of Jesus's day had a very distinctive way of understanding and calculating time. The origins of what Christians today call the **liturgical year** (or Christian year, or church year; we will use these terms more-or-less interchangeably) are bound up with this distinctively biblical theology and practice of time as the unfolding of God's plans for the world. The theology and practice of time tell us a great deal both about Christianity itself and about Christian worship. It tells us that Christianity is

a religion that takes time seriously. History is where God is made known. Without time, there is no knowledge of the Christian God, for God is revealed through events in historical time, God chooses to reveal the divine nature and will through events that take place within the same calendar that measures the daily lives of ordinary people. God's self-disclosure takes place within the same course of time as political events: "In the days of King Herod of Judea" (Luke 1:5) or "This was … while Quirinius was governor of Syria" (Luke 2:2).

When we encounter religions in which time is illusory or insignificant, we realize just how crucial time is to Christian faith. Christianity talks not of salvation in general but of salvation accomplished by specific actions of God at definite times and places. It speaks of climactic events and a finale to time. In Christianity, the ultimate meanings of life are not revealed by universal and timeless statements but by concrete acts of God. In the fullness of time, God invades human history, assumes our flesh, and heals, teaches, and eats with sinners. There are specific temporal and spatial settings to it all: "At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon" (John 10:22-23). And when his work is done, Jesus is put to death on a specific day, related to the **Passover** festival of that particular year, and rises on the third day. This story of salvation history is all part of the same time we inhabit—time that is measured by a calendar.

Christian worship, like the rest of life, is structured on recurring rhythms of the week, the day, and the year. Far from trying to escape time, Christian worship uses time as one of its essential structures. Our present time is used to place us in contact with God's acts in time past and future. Salvation, as we experience it in worship, is a reality based on temporal events through which God gives God's self to us. The liturgical practice of time enables Christians to commemorate and experience again those very acts on which salvation is grounded.

Time is also a language of communication in our daily life with significantly different meanings in differing cultures. In some cultures, for example, being late for an appointment is a token of respect to someone important, testifying that he or she is a very busy person. Christianity builds on the natural human sense of time as a conveyor of meaning by speaking the language of time in its worship. Moreover, our practices of time will

fundamentally affect our experience of time as God's revelation and action in the world.

To understand how the structures of Christian worship speak through time, we need to explore the past experiences of Christians who structured worship on the basis of time, the theological rationales for so doing, and how time functions in current practice. By studying these historical, theological, and pastoral dimensions, we can understand how time provides the foundation for so much of Christian worship.

THE SHAPING OF CHRISTIAN TIME

The way we use our time is a good indication of what we consider to be of prime importance in life. Whether it is making money, political action, or family activities, we find the time for those things and people that matter most to us. Not only does our use of time show what is important to us but it also indicates who or what is most significant to our lives. Time, then, is a definite representation of our priorities. We reveal what we value most by how we allocate this limited resource.

The same is true of the church. The church shows what is most important to its life by the way it uses time. Here again the use of time reveals priorities of faith and practice. One answer to What do Christians believe? could be, look at how they keep time!

How have Christians kept time in the past? The earliest portions of the New Testament are imbued with a sense of time as *kairós*, the right or proper time present in which God has accomplished a new dimension of reality: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15). Yet already within the New Testament itself, we see a tendency to look back, to recall past times in which things had happened. The *eschatological hope*, that is, the belief that the last times were at hand, seems to be evolving by the time Luke writes the first history of the church, the book of Acts. Even before the first century is done, remembering comes to be almost as important as anticipating.

The priorities of the early church's faith are disclosed by the way Christians of the second, third, and fourth centuries organized time. This was not systematic or planned by some council, since such gatherings were not possible as the church spread through the Roman Empire and beyond.

Rather, the early Christian practice of time was the church's spontaneous response to "the events that have been fulfilled among us" (Luke 1:1). The same type of response, the perpetuation of memories, prompted the writing of the Gospels so that others might be able to follow these events "handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (Luke 1:2). The liturgical structuring of time was not quite so systematic as the evangelists' efforts "to write an orderly account" (Luke 1:3), but its influence has been almost as consistent in shaping Christian memories as it has been in the written Gospels. Thus, for Christians, Easter became an annual event of commemoration just as much as it is a written account of Jesus' resurrection.

What was the faith of the church of the first four centuries as witnessed to by the church's use of time? It was, above all else, faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, it was trust in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, known and experienced in the holy church. Third, it was belief that God had become manifest in human flesh as Jesus Christ. This may not be a systematic summation of Christian belief; but it gives a clear indication of the heart of the faith of the early church, a faith revealed by how the church kept time.

The earliest historical evidence begins not with the Christian year but with the Christian **week**, particularly with the testimony of **Sunday**. The four Gospels are all careful to state that the women disciples discovered the empty tomb on the morning of the first day of the week, that is, the day of the week on which creation began and God "separated the light from the darkness" (Gen. 1:1-5).

In at least three places, the New Testament indicates a special time for worship—probably Sunday. Paul told the Christians in Corinth to set aside money for the collection on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2). At Troas, after talking until midnight on Saturday, Paul broke bread (presumably the eucharist) and remained in conversation with Christians there until Sunday dawned (Acts 20:7 and 11). John the Elder tells us he "was in the spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). The term "Lord's day," had become a Christian term for the first day of the week by the early second century. Around 115 C.E., Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote to the Christians in Magnesia and spoke of those who "ceased to keep the [Jewish seventh day] Sabbath and

lived by the Lord's Day, on which our life as well as theirs shone forth, thanks to Him and his death."[1]

The ***Didache***, a church order written sometime in the late first or early second century, reminds Christians, redundantly, "On the Lord's day of the Lord come together, break bread and hold eucharist."[2] And even pagans noticed that "on an appointed day they [Christians] had been accustomed to meet before daybreak," though Pliny, the Roman administrator in Bithynia, who wrote those words about 112 C.E. likely did not understand the significance of the appointed day.[3]

Writing in Rome, the second-century apologist Justin Martyr told his pagan audience about 155 C.E., "We all hold this common gathering on Sunday since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead on the same day."[4] Christians soon adopted the newly coined pagan term "Sunday" and compared Christ rising from the dead to the rising sun. Even today, the English and German languages speak of "Sunday," while French and Italian refer to the "Lord's Day." The *Epistle of Barnabas* called Sunday "an eighth day, that is the beginning of another world … in which Jesus also rose from the dead."[5] The themes of creation, both original and new, and light are important dimensions in the Christian celebration of Sunday as the day of the resurrection.

Sunday was a day of worship for Christians but not yet a day of rest comparable to the Sabbath or seventh day of the week in the Jewish calendar. It was made such by the Emperor Constantine in 321 C.E., "All judges, city people, and craftsmen shall rest on the venerable day of the Sun. But countrymen may without hindrance attend to agriculture."[6]

The week had even more contour to it for the early church. Luke tells of the Pharisee who said: "I fast twice a week" (18:12). But the *Didache*, in all seriousness, told Christians: "Your fasts must not be identical with those of the hypocrites. They fast on Mondays and Thursdays; but you should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays."[7] Commemorative reasons had appeared for this by the time of writing of a late fourth-century document, the ***Apostolic Constitutions*** (probably composed in Syria), stated: "Fast … on the fourth day of the week, … Judas then promising to betray Him for money; and … on [Friday] because on that day the Lord suffered the death of the cross."[8] There is evidence that some early Christians also held a certain regard for

Saturday as “the memorial of the creation” from which work God rested on the seventh day. These other days, however, were inferior in importance to Sunday.

Sunday dominated all the other days as the weekly anniversary of the resurrection. In the early church, Sunday also commemorated the Lord’s passion and death, but it was, above all else, the day on which the Savior rose from the dead. Even today, Sunday takes precedence over most other observances. Every Sunday witnesses to the risen Lord. It is the Lord’s Day, the start of the new creation. Every Sunday is a weekly little Easter, and every Easter is a yearly great Sunday.

Christians adopted the Jewish sense of the day as beginning at nightfall (“There was evening and there was morning, the first day.” Gen. 1:5). Hence the **eve** of a festival (Christmas Eve, Easter Eve, and Halloween) is a part of the liturgical day that continues at daybreak and ends at sundown. Christians have made relatively little use of the month as a recurring cycle, although Anglicans formerly used it as a basis for daily psalm readings, and some Protestants currently observe monthly celebrations of the eucharist.

Early Documents and Writers on Christian Worship

	N. Africa	Egypt	Jerusalem	Syria	Asia Minor	Rome	Milan
1st Century				*Didache*		*1 Clement*	
2nd Century		Clement of Alexandria		Ignatius *Barnabas*	Pliny	Justin Martyr	
3rd Century	Tertullian Cyprian	Origen		*Didascalia*		*Apostolic Tradition*	
4th Century		*Apostolic Church Order* *Canons of Hippolytus* Sarapion	Cyril Egeria	*Apostolic Constitutions* *Epitome*	Basil Chrysostom Theodore *Testamentum Domini*	Jerome	Ambros
5th Century	Augustine						Cassian (Marseilles)
6th Century						Benedict Gretory I	

Diagram 4

As the week and the day witnessed to Jesus Christ, so, the **Christian year** (liturgical year or **church year)** became a structure of time that

commemorated the Lord Jesus. Just as Sunday was the center of the week, the day of **Pascha** (meaning the Passover for Jews, Easter for Christians) was the focus of the year. The Pascha had been the center of the Jewish year as a commemoration of deliverance from slavery; it was no less important for Christians. Paul deliberately took over the language of the Jewish *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, another name for the Pascha:

> Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5:7-8)

This passage is the chief evidence for the possibility that the New Testament church was already familiar with a yearly commemoration of Easter. The Jewish observance of deliverance was adopted but transformed in significance by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Slavery and redemption were rehearsed, as in the Jewish Passover commemoration, but in the new sense of release from sin and death through Christ's actions.

In the second and third centuries, we have written testimony of churches observing the Pascha with services signifying the making of new Christians through baptism, laying on of hands, anointing, and first communion. Just as the Pascha had commemorated escape from slavery by passage through the Red Sea, so Paul saw baptism as a burial with Christ in which "we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead … so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4-5). In the first three centuries, the Pascha commemorated Christ's passion, death, and resurrection in one service. Tertullian tells us that "the Pascha affords a more than usually solemn day for baptism; when, withal, the Lord's passion in which we are baptized, was completed."[9] An early third-century church order, ***The Apostolic Tradition***, attributed to Hippolytus by some historians, tells us that those who were candidates for baptism fasted on Friday and Saturday, and then began an all-night vigil Saturday evening. At cockcrow, they were baptized beneath the waters and rose with Christ as from the dead.[10] While the text does not explicitly specify that the baptism took place

on Easter, it is intriguing to speculate that this was the case, especially since baptism at the Easter Vigil became a normative practice in some areas.

Early in the fourth century, the churches throughout the Roman Empire finally agreed that, unlike the Jewish Passover, which could come on any day of the week, Pascha/Easter must always fall on a Sunday. However, this had not always been the practice. While the weekly commemoration of the resurrection on Sunday developed quite early (as noted above), we know that some Christian communities continued to tie the yearly commemoration of Easter to the Jewish Passover day. The Jewish Passover was set according to a lunar calendar system, with the Passover meal falling between the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the lunar month of Nisan, a spring month. This meant that Passover could fall on any day during the week. Well into the fourth century and even later, some Christians continued this **Quartodeciman** (a Latin term roughly meaning "fourteenth-ers") practice. In the late second century, a long debate ensued between those who kept Easter on a Sunday and the Quartodecimans who followed the Jewish Passover date. The resolution of this controversy recognized the symbolic meaning of Sunday: "Never on any day other than the Lord's Day should the mystery of the Lord's resurrection from the dead be celebrated, … on that day alone we should observe the end of the Paschal fast."[11] Thus, the weekly and yearly cycles of resurrection reinforced each other, though the church lost some of the Jewish practice of the calendar.

These Jewish roots to Pascha, however, were not lost entirely. Jewish lunar months begin with the new moon, and the Jewish feast of Passover falls in the middle of the spring month of Nisan, which is the night of a full moon. The church developed a formula for Easter that determined it would be celebrated on the first day of the week (Sunday) after the first full moon after the spring equinox.[12] Thus, the Christian solution for determining the calendar day for Easter retained some connection to the Jewish lunar-month calculation for Passover. Moreover, the fact that Christians would commemorate Easter on a Sunday, the first day of a seven-day week shows they also retained the Old Testament system of the week. Daily life of the Roman Empire was organized around calendar months and market days rather than weeks. Jews were unique in the Mediterranean world by keeping seven-day weeks based on, ostensibly, the creation story in Genesis, chapter one. Without that story and God's commandment to rest on the seventh day

(Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15), there is no compelling reason for observing a seven-day week or for celebrating the resurrection every first day of a week. The very fact that Christians kept both a semblance of the Jewish lunar calendar and a seven-day week shows the deep connection they had with the God of the Old Testament. Over the course of the fourth century, the ancient unified Pascha that commemorated all the events of Jesus' passion and resurrection, divided into distinct commemorations (see diagram 5). The expansion seems first to occur in Jerusalem, where time and location converged at the sites of Jesus' life and ministry. By the fourth century, with the general end of Christian persecution in the Roman Empire, Jerusalem had become a popular pilgrimage site. To serve the throngs of pilgrims who were arriving from all over the world, the Jerusalem church there began to hold a separate commemoration for each event in the life and passion of Jesus at the place where it had occurred. Scripture was mined for evidence about the time and place of all the events of Christ's last week in Jerusalem. We have a good idea of what had developed by 383 C.E. as chronicled in the travel diary of a Spanish woman (probably a nun) named Egeria. This woman recorded her experiences in the Holy Land to give talks to friends at home about all the places she visited. About a third of her notes have survived and give us a fascinating depiction of how late fourth-century Jerusalem had developed its way of keeping time.

Egeria tells us that what we now call Passion Sunday or Palm Sunday, or the first day of Holy Week, was "the beginning of the Easter Week[13] or, as they call it here, 'The Great Week,' … All the people go before him [the bishop] with psalms and antiphons, all the time repeating, 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.'"[14] There were minor services on the next three days, except on Wednesday when a presbyter (an ordained elder) read about Judas' plot to betray Jesus, while "the people groan and lament at this reading." On Thursday, after everyone had received communion, all "conduct the bishop to Gethsemane," where Jesus spent time in prayer before his arrest. And on Friday, the congregation gathered at Golgotha where the people venerated the fragments of the cross as they walked by the cross and kissed it. [15]

By the end of the century, the historicizing process was complete. Augustine, writing from Hippo in North Africa around the year 400, stated as an accepted fact that "it is clear from the Gospel on what days the Lord

was crucified and rested in the tomb and rose again" and that the church has "a requirement of retaining those same days."[16] The ancient unitive Pascha had been broken into separate commemorations: **Maundy** or **Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday**, and the **Easter Vigil** on the eve of Easter, along with **Passion** or **Palm Sunday** and the three lesser days of Holy Week. This gives us **Holy Week** beginning with Passion/Palm Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, (Spy) Wednesday, Maundy or Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The English term "Easter" comes from the Old English *eastre*, a pagan spring festival, but Romance languages still use forms of "Pascha." Easter Day is the beginning of **Easter Week**.

Closely connected with Easter are two seasons: Lent and the fifty-day Easter Season. The origins of Lent are controversial among liturgical historians. It was customary to think that **Lent** originated as the final intensive period of preparation for those **catechumens** (converts under training) who had been set apart to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. New evidence shows a possibly earlier practice, a post-Epiphany fast of forty days in Egypt, associated with Christ's forty days in the wilderness, which immediately follows the account of his baptism in the Synoptic Gospels.[17] At any rate, the *Council of Nicaea*, 325 C.E., first referred to Lent as "forty days" and made it immediately precede Easter. Around 350 C.E., Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem told those about to be baptized, "You have a long period of grace, forty days for repentance."[18] By Augustine's time, Lent, that "part of the year … adjoining … and touching on the Lord's passion," had become a time of fasting and preparation for all Christians, baptized or not. Lent begins on a day eventually known as **Ash Wednesday** because of the *imposition of ashes* on the forehead, a practice dating at least from the late eleventh century. The Sundays in Lent are not counted as part of the forty days, since Sundays, according to long tradition, are not fast days.

Far more important than Lent was the **Easter Season**, the fifty days extending the celebration of Easter through the Day of Pentecost. The great fifty days (originally called "the Pentecost" which means, literally, "fifty days") were at first far more important than the forty days of Lent. Augustine tells us: "These days after the Lord's resurrection form a period, not of labor, but of peace and joy. That is why there is no fasting and we pray standing, which is a sign of resurrection. This practice is observed at

the altar on all Sundays, and the Alleluia is sung, to indicate that our future occupation is to be no other than the praise of God."[19]

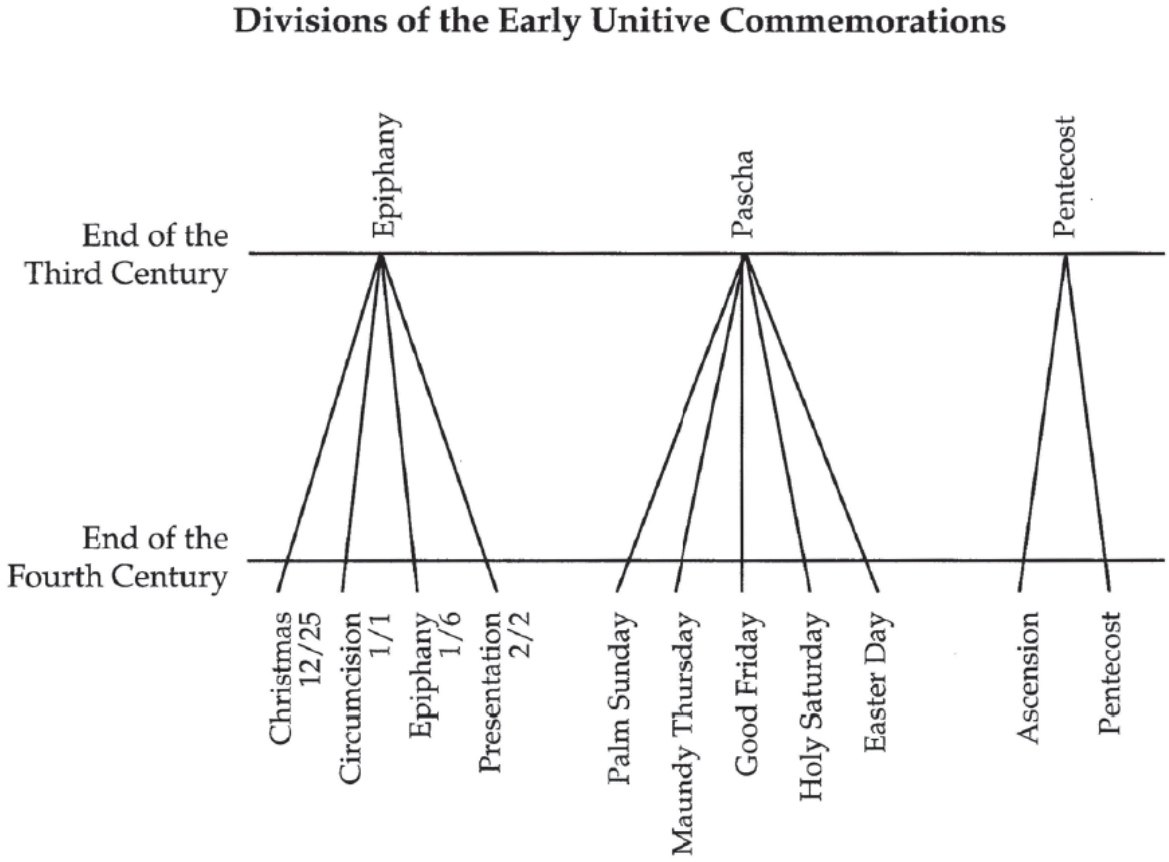


Diagram 5

To summarize, the resurrection is commemorated by a day each week—Sunday; a festival each year—Easter Day; and a season—the Easter Season. There can be no doubt about the centrality of the resurrection in the life and faith of the early Church.

The most significant development in the fourth-century calendar was the elaboration of Holy Week. Much of this elaboration occurred in Jerusalem, very likely under the leadership of Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop from 349 to 386 C.E. Egeria, mentioned above, gives us a full report of what was being done in Jerusalem shortly before Cyril's death. As visitors to the Holy Land, such as Egeria, returned to their home countries, they recounted their experiences and sought to recreate them in their local churches. Consequently, some of the practices of the church in Jerusalem became

common throughout Christianity and represent some of the church's oldest liturgical treasures.

In 1955, under Pius XII, the Catholic Church reclaimed some of these more robust historical practices, and the rites of Holy Week were further reformed after Vatican II in the 1960s. Indeed, many Protestant service books today show the influence of the early Christian practices of Lent, Holy Week, Easter Day, and Easter Season. The fourth-century pilgrim Egeria would no doubt be amazed at how her travel notes continue to inspire Christians in the twenty-first century. For Palm/Passion Sunday the fully developed rites include an opening procession with palms and a dramatic reading (usually with several readers) of one of the passion narratives from the Gospels. Maundy Thursday begins in Roman Catholic and Anglican cathedrals with the **Chrism Mass** for the consecration of the three sacramental oils used in parish churches during the year: olive oil for baptism, chrism (olive oil and balm) for confirmation, and olive oil for anointing of the sick. The **Easter Triduum** (a Latin term meaning "three days") extends from sunset on Maundy Thursday to sunset on Easter Day. These are the three most holy days of the Christian year. Maundy Thursday evening is marked by a eucharist commemorating both Christ's gift in giving this sacrament at this time and the events of his passion that followed. Often, *foot washing* is included (John 13:3-17), and, at the conclusion of the service, the *stripping of the church* may occur in which all textiles, crosses, and images are removed or covered until Easter eve.

Traditionally, the Lord's Supper is not celebrated on Good Friday or Holy Saturday, the Netherlands Reformed Church being an exception. The ancient Good Friday rite includes the service of the word with extensive *intercessions for the world* and its people, *veneration of the cross (kneeling* before it or kissing it, a practice going back to fourth-century Jerusalem), the singing of the *reproaches* (based on Lam. 1:12), and possibly, giving of communion with elements consecrated on Maundy Thursday. A seventeenth-century Hispanic rite from Peru, the Three Hours, is based on the seven last words of Jesus from the cross. Many Protestant churches have adopted this into a "Seven Last Words" service to commemorate Good Friday. A service of **Tenebrae** (darkness) may occur on any or all of the last three days of Holy Week with the reading of either psalms along with

lessons or the passion narrative; in either case, the service includes the gradual extinguishing of candles on a special large candlestand.

Easter eve climaxes the whole year with the Easter Vigil as the church gathers in darkness on Saturday night to celebrate the resurrection. The Easter Vigil includes kindling of new fire and lighting of a special large candle, the **paschal candle;** the singing of the ancient hymn known as the ***Exsultet*** (meaning "Rejoice," as this hymn begins "Rejoice, heavenly powers"); the reading of nine lessons (mostly from the Old Testament); the blessing of water for baptism or renewing of baptismal vows or both and celebrating the Easter eucharist.

In ancient times, the week after Easter (Easter Week) was devoted to instruction of the newly baptized about the meaning of the sacraments. Fourth-century collections of these catechetical lectures (the so-called **mystagogical catechesis)** survive, attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. These lectures are very important documents for recovering both the practices of various Christian centers and the differing interpretations these bishops give to the sacraments. On the Sunday following Easter, the new Christians doffed their white robes as fully initiated and instructed members of the body of Christ.

Second in importance in early centuries was the celebration of another event, the Day of **Pentecost**. Like the Pascha, it was also a Jewish feast: "You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the Lord" (Lev. 23:16). Sometime during the first century C.E., the Day of Pentecost came to reflect, for Jews, the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. Paul contrasts this with the giving of the Spirit: "Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory … how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory?" (2 Cor. 3:7-8). For Christians, the Day of Pentecost commemorated the birthday of the Church when, with the noise of a wind, tongues of flame rested on the disciples, and they began to talk in other tongues (Acts 2:1-41). The book of Acts is a chronicle of the work of the Spirit-filled church in its earliest years.

The Day of Pentecost also began as a unitive feast that originally included commemoration of the **Ascension**. Tertullian suggests that Christ had ascended into heaven at Pentecost.[20] And in the first half of the fourth century, Eusebius speaks of "the august and holy solemnity of Pentecost

[that is, the fifty days], which is distinguished by a period of seven weeks, and sealed with that one day on which the holy Scriptures attest the ascension of our common Savior into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Spirit."[21] In other words, for almost four centuries, the Day of Pentecost commemorated both the ascension of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. By the end of the fourth century, these two commemorations had been separated. The *Apostolic Constitutions* describes forty days after Easter as the proper time to "celebrate the feast of the ascension of the Lord." Once again, the biblical witness has been historicized to date past events. In this case, Acts 1:3 and its mention of the "forty days" during which Jesus taught his disciples suggests the date of the ascension. Where there had previously been one feast, by the late fourth century there were two: Ascension Day and the Day of Pentecost. Christ was in heaven, and the Holy Spirit dwelled in the holy church on earth.Ascension Day and the Day of Pentecost. Christ was in heaven, and the Holy Spirit dwelled in the holy church on earth.

The third chief event in the calendar by the fourth century was **Epiphany**. Its origins are obscure; they were not Jewish but maybe Egyptian. The date may relate to the belief that Jesus was conceived on the date of his death, sometimes believed to be April 6, placing his birth on January 6. The Epiphany signified several things, all of which had to do with the beginnings of Jesus Christ's work of manifesting God. This feast referred to the birth of Christ (with which two Gospels begin), to the Magi (in the West), to the baptism of Jesus (with which the other Gospels begin), and to the first miracle of which John's Gospel says: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." The common theme of all these events is Jesus Christ manifesting God to humans. Appropriately, the early church often called this day "The Theophany" (manifestation of God), and some Eastern Orthodox churches still do. The prologue to the Fourth Gospel sets the theme: "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (1:18). For some churches, January 6 may have begun the church year, symbolized by beginning the reading of one of the Gospels on this date. [22]

Epiphany underwent a split, probably beginning in Rome, during the first half of the fourth century. Our earliest explicit mention of the new feast, **Christmas**, occurs in a Roman document, the "Chronograph of 354" (also known as the "Philocalian Calendar") that reflects usage of the feast by

about 336 C.E. It lists December 25 as *"natus Christus in Betleem Iudeae."* This date competed with a relatively new pagan festival of the Unconquered Sun as the sun begins to wax again at the winter solstice. (By the fourth century C.E., the Julian calendar in use in that period was off by four days.) Gradually, the new festival of Christmas took over part of the commemorations of the Epiphany. John Chrysostom told a congregation in Antioch on Christmas Day, 386 C.E.: "This day … [which] has now been brought to us, not many years ago, has developed so quickly and borne such fruit."[23] The following Epiphany Day, he explained: "For this is the day on which he was baptized, and made holy the nature of the waters…. Why then is this day called Epiphany? Because it was not when he was born that he became manifest to all, but when he was baptized; for up to this day he was unknown to the multitudes."[24]

The Epiphany, then, is older than Christmas and has a deeper meaning. Instead of simply being an anniversary of the birth of Christ, Epiphany testifies to the whole purpose of the incarnation: the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ in his birth and the beginning of his ministry (the baptism when he is proclaimed "My Son, the Beloved"). And the mighty signs and teachings, narrated in the Gospels as Jesus accomplished this manifestation, provide an opportunity in the Season after Epiphany (or Ordinary Time) for commemoration of those works and teachings of Jesus that led up to the final events in Jerusalem.

A council in Spain in 380 C.E. decreed that "From December 17 until the day of Epiphany which is January 6 no one is permitted to be absent from Church."[25] This is a precedent for the season of **Advent** at a time when Christmas itself was still unknown in Spain. By the fifth century, a forty-day season of preparation for the Epiphany was being practiced in parts of Gaul. Rome eventually adopted a four-week Advent before Christmas.

A process similar to that which had splintered the Pascha into a series of commemorations also operated with Christmas. As a Jewish boy, Jesus would likely have been circumcised and named on the eighth day after his birth. Luke tells us: "After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus" (2:21). Accordingly, the commemoration on January 1 became known as the Feast of the **Circumcision** or the **Name of Jesus**. Roman Catholics now keep this as the **Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**. Luke 2:22-40 gives the story of the **Presentation in the**

Temple (or **Purification of Mary** or **Candlemas)**, an event which would have occurred February 2, forty days after his birth, according to Jewish law. The **Annunciation** mentioned in Luke 1:26-38 would have happened nine months before Christmas, falling on March 25. Elizabeth was then six months pregnant and Mary's subsequent **Visitation** to Elizabeth (recorded in verses 39-56) was fixed on May 31, or just before the birth of John the Baptist, identified as June 24 (three months after the Annunciation). John's birth came at the summer solstice when the sun wanes until the birth of Christ: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). All these developments are combinations of Luke 1 and 2 and obstetrics.

The general shape of the Christian year was complete by the end of the fourth century, establishing what is called the **temporal cycle**. This cycle essentially commemorates the life of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Parallel to the temporal cycle, but of less central importance, is the development of the **sanctoral cycle**, those fixed dates commemorating the deaths of saints aside from dates based on Christmas). These dates began early; the "Martyrdom of Polycarp" mentions a commemoration of a second-century martyr. These commemorations honored local heroes and heroines of the faith. Tertullian tells us, "As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings for the dead as birthday honors."[26] After all, one's birth into eternity (death) was far more important than his or her birth into time. Unhappily, the temporal cycle based in the life of Jesus became increasingly obscured with sanctoral cycles, especially after a list of local saints was supplemented with saints from other regions, and relics of saints were moved from place to place.

A few notable additions to the calendar occurred after the fourth century: **Trinity Sunday**, the Sunday after the Day of Pentecost, was introduced about 1000 C.E. Unlike other feasts, it represents a theological doctrine unrelated to a historical event. In the West, the ninth century saw the designation of November 1 as **All Saints Day**. It had earlier springtime precedents, but the Gallican placement of it in the harvest season was accepted by Rome about 835 C.E. By then, too, the **Assumption** of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven was kept throughout the West on August 15. In the thirteenth century, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday began to be observed as **Corpus Christi**. Later Roman Catholic developments were the mandatory observance of the **Immaculate Conception** (meaning the

conception of the Virgin Mary) on December 8 (eighteenth century), the **Sacred Heart of Jesus** (nineteenth century), and **Christ the King** (or **Reign of Christ**, twentieth century).

Let us recapitulate. John Chrysostom, in a sermon preached in 386 C.E., effectively sums up the liturgical year:

> For if Christ had not been born into flesh, he would not have been baptized, which is the Theophany [Epiphany], he would not have been crucified [some texts add: and risen] which is the Pascha, he would not have sent down the spirit, which is the Pentecost.[27]

In the fourth century, the three great primitive feasts—the Epiphany, the Pascha, and the Day of Pentecost—had seen a split from these feasts of related days: Christmas, Good Friday, and Ascension, along with lesser days.

Gregory Dix, a liturgical historian of the twentieth century, interpreted these developments as a sign that the fourth-century church was becoming "reconciled to time" and was losing its fervent expectation of the end of time.[28] But this reconciliation to time was inevitable. People want to know, to visualize, to experience for themselves; this is a very normal human desire. Worship builds on our humanity. What happened in the fourth century was that the church developed a more dramatic way of participating in the central realities Christians experienced—manifestation, resurrection, and the indwelling Spirit. Eschatological fervor had slackened long before the peace of the church under Constantine. But the imagination of Christians directed backward in time was no less fruitful, and it intensified their perception of the incarnation. The success of these fourth-century innovations is shown by their vivid presence among us today.

All in all, the liturgical year is a very satisfactory reflection of the life and faith of the early church that has changed little over the following centuries. Modern efforts to systematize and tidy up the calendar have never been very satisfactory. Granted the ancient church year leaves large gaps in the calendar, especially after the Day of Pentecost. But its strength lies in its firm grasp of the core of the Christian experience and in its ability to reflect vividly that Christ has made God manifest, that Christ has risen from the dead, and that Christ sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in the holy church.

The sixteenth-century reformers took various approaches to the calendar. Martin Luther (1483–1546) eliminated saints' days by seeking "to celebrate only on Lord's Days and on Festivals of the Lord, abrogating completely the festivals of all the saints…. We regard the festivals of the Purification [Presentation] and of the Annunciation as festivals of Christ, like the Epiphany and the Circumcision."[29] From the sanctoral cycle in its *Book of Common Prayer* (hereafter *BCP*), the Church of England retained prayers and readings to commemorate only those saints mentioned in the Bible, in addition to All Saints Day.

The Church of Scotland was more radical. Its 1560 *Book of Discipline* condemned all "feasts [as they term them] of apostles, martyrs, virgins, of Christmas, Circumcision, Epiphany, Purification, and other fond feasts of our Lady. Which things, because in God's scriptures they neither have commandment nor assurance, we judge utterly to be abolished from this realm; affirming further, that the obstinate maintainers and teachers of such abominations ought not to escape the punishment of the civil magistrate."[30] Eighty-five years later, the *Westminster Directory* echoed the same sentiment, "Festival days, vulgarly called Holy Days, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued."[31] The *Directory* did, however, urge days of "Public solemn fasting" and "of Public Thanksgiving" to acknowledge God's judgment or favor shown through current events, such as storms or bountiful harvests.

John Wesley, (1703–1791) always the pragmatist, abolished "most of the holy-days … as at present answering no valuable end."[32] His calendar included the four Sundays of Advent, Christmas Day, up to fifteen Sundays after Christmas, the Sunday before Easter, Good Friday, Easter Day, five Sundays after Easter, Ascension Day, Sunday after Ascension Day, Whitsunday, Trinity Sunday, and up to twenty-five Sundays after Trinity. Wesley's journals reveal a personal fondness for All Saints Day. Not long after his death in 1791, American Methodists abandoned both Wesley's calendar and lectionary.

Renewed interest in the church year among American Protestants occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, a period in which aesthetic approaches to worship tended to increase. Professor Fred Winslow Adams of Boston University School of Theology promoted a new season he called **Kingdomtide**. Kingdomtide originally appeared in a Federal Council of

Churches publication, *The Christian Year*, published in 1937 and 1940. A somewhat similar experiment was briefly tried by American Presbyterians from a suggestion made in 1956 by Allan McArthur, a Scottish pastor, to have a season of "God the Father" in the fall. [33] After four years of trial use, this was abandoned.

Since Vatican II, a profound new interest in the calendar has emerged and a deep new appreciation has developed around how our lives as Christians are shaped and reflected by the way we keep time. The first landmark was the new ***Roman Calendar***, which went into effect among Roman Catholics on November 30, 1969, the first day of the liturgical year 1970. It is the fruit of the most careful review ever attempted of how Christians use time. Many of the new Roman Catholic reforms have since been adopted or adapted by major Protestant bodies in many parts of the world, a sign of fruitful ecumenical cooperation.

One Roman Catholic change has not been adopted by most Protestants, that of treating the weeks after the Epiphany and the Day of Pentecost as "Season of the year" or **Ordinary Time**. Other changes, however, have been widely accepted, such as keeping the Sunday after the Epiphany as the **Baptism of the Lord** or the last Sunday of the church year as Christ the King or Reign of Christ. The Lutheran practice of commemorating the Sunday before Ash Wednesday as Sunday of the **Transfiguration of the Lord** has been adopted by many churches, though Roman Catholics have observed this on August 6 since the fifteenth century.

For the first time in four hundred years, an ecumenical calendar is being followed by many Protestants and Catholics around the world. There is basic agreement on most of the greatest feast days, which Roman Catholics now call **solemnities**, less common observance of the subsidiary **feasts**, and still less of **memorials** or saints' days. The newest calendar is the result of a careful attempt to recapture the structure and meaning of the oldest calendar, the one filled out in the fourth century. This revised calendar has become an ecumenical witness to the priorities of Christian faith, just as the oldest Christian calendars did.

THEOLOGY FROM THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

How the church kept time in the early centuries has been discussed in detail because, as so often happens in Christian worship, if we understand the experiences of the church's first four centuries, we have gained the heart of the matter. It will be worthwhile, though, to reflect a bit on the meaning of this.

The calendar of the early church centered upon what God had done and continued to do for the world through the person of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. The liturgical year underscores the futility of our efforts and exults in God's victories for us. In short, the church year is a constant reminder of gifts that we cannot create but can only accept. Pius Parsch called it "the church's year of grace."[34] Moreover, by recapitulating the events in the life of Jesus, the liturgical year is a curriculum for disciples of Jesus.

In briefest terms, the church's year of grace functions to proclaim Jesus Christ until he comes again and to testify to the Holy Spirit indwelling the church in the meantime. The church year is both proclamation and thanksgiving. In much the same way as Jewish and Christian prayer recites what we give thanks for, the Christian year proclaims and thanks God for God's marvelous actions, beginning with creation itself, which establishes the rhythm of the day and week. Christians and Jews praise God, not in abstract terms, but by reciting the marvelous works of God. It is a think/thank process by which we glorify God through recalling what God has done. The liturgical year reflects the very nature of Christian prayer and our relationship with God. Much of its power comes through reiteration. Year after year, week after week, day by day, our participation in these cycles of time as acts of God can free us from a spirituality based on ourselves and our efforts, by pointing us to God's works instead.

How does time bring us closer to God? The Christian year is a means by which we relive for ourselves all that matters of salvation history. When we recall the past events of salvation, they come alive in their present power to save. Our acts of remembrance bring the original events back to us with all their meaning. And so we continue to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). These events become part of our personal history as we relive salvation history by rehearsing it in our worship. Thus, Christ dies again in our consciousness every Good Friday. And every Easter, indeed, every Lord's Day, we are witnesses to the resurrection.

The Christian year becomes a vital and refreshing (in the most profound sense) means through which God gives God's self to us. Each time we worship, the year, week, and day push us a bit deeper into our encounter with God. We perceive one aspect of Christ's being baptized this year, another next year, but we never touch bottom.

The Season of Advent is both a time of thanks for the gift of Christ to us in the past and a time for anticipation of Christ's second coming. It contains both warning and promise. Christmas Day rehearses God's self-giving in the birth of Jesus Christ. The **Season of Christmas** continues this commemoration through the Epiphany.

In the **Season of Epiphany** (also Ordinary Time, or the Season after Epiphany), the appointed Gospels stress the various ways in which Jesus Christ has made God manifest to us through mighty signs and teachings. These begin with the Baptism of the Lord (when Jesus' Sonship is declared and his ministry begins). The Sundays after Epiphany continue with readings about the signs and teachings by which Jesus made his glory known through manifesting God. The season ends with the Last Sunday after Epiphany or Transfiguration Sunday (in many Protestant churches) in which Jesus is once again proclaimed: "My Son, the Beloved."

During Season of Lent we participate in that final trip to Jerusalem and hear of the sacrificial love shown in Christ's passion and death. The **Season of Easter** begins with **Easter Vigil and our celebration of the empty tomb** and concludes on the **Day of Pentecost**. The **Ascension of the Lord** commemorates the end of Christ's historical visibility and the beginning of his sacramental visibility.

The the Season after Pentecost (or Ordinary Time or Kingdomtide) signals the long interim of the new covenant church until Christ comes in glory. Both the Old Testament and the New remind us of God's continuing saving works. The Last Sunday after Pentecost, The Reign of Christ (Christ the King), pushes us to anticipate the consummation of all things when Christ comes in glory as Sovereign over all, and all human failures and achievements are, at last, made of no account, a most comforting doctrine. Then, the following week, we are once again into the Season of Advent, and the year starts over afresh.

The minor Christological feasts have evangelical values that we are just beginning to discover. The Name of Jesus, The Presentation, The

Annunciation, and The Visitation are biblical, Christological commemorations. They call attention to Christ's full humanity and identification with human social patterns. All Saints Day is Christological, too. It does not dwell on the virtues of the saints but on the love of Christ who works in people throughout time to accomplish God's purposes. The chief benefit of commemorating the saints is the recognition through them of Christ, who never leaves us without a witness. If the commemoration of individual saints could help us realize this, then such piety could once again serve a "valuable end."

In actual parish life, of course, the Christian year is only one of many calendars by which congregations live. There are various national calendars, which add events often deserving commemoration in churches as an aspect of the process of local inculturation of worship. In the British Isles, such dates as Mothering Sunday, Harvest Festival, or Remembrance Sunday are usually recognized in prayers and hymns. Rarely in the United States do Mother's Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving Day go unrecognized. Ethnic groups keep their identity through other festivals (St. Patrick's Day and Dyngus Day). Churches in Mexico and many Hispanic Christian congregations in the United States commemorate the day before All Saints Day as the **Day of the Dead**. Church life is also affected by the academic year, which governs the vacation plans of parents. And the financial year is a fact of church life that can hardly be ignored.

Some of the days in church calendars in England and in the United States developed out of the Sunday school movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Sunday school movement designated certain Sundays of the year according to themes: Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Student Day, and Mission Sunday all grew out of or were promoted by the Sunday school movement. Congregations usually evolve their own pragmatic Special Day calendar, which gives a necessary structure to congregational life. An annual event for many country churches is **Homecoming Sunday** in which former residents return for worship and a meal on the grounds, often in the vicinity of the graveyard where relatives are buried. More common in parts of the United States is the annual **revival**, a week of preaching services that often ends with the eucharist. **Rally Day** (a special day in the Sunday school) marks the beginning of the Sunday school year; Loyalty Sunday calls for pledges of money to support the

congregation's ministry; and the Christmas pageant is an annual event involving all generations. Frequently, Sundays are set aside to raise funds for various charities or to promote good causes. Many Protestant churches keep the first Sunday of October as **World Communion Sunday**. All of these are significant events in the life of local congregations. They do, indeed, call more attention to human activity than to God's actions, but they accent aspects of the congregation's ministry to the world.

This thematic, "Special Days" approach to Sunday worship is quite different from the temporal cycle of the historic church we have been describing. And occasionally the two systems can clash, as when "Mothers' Day" happens to coincide with the day of Pentecost. Perhaps a helpful way to negotiate such a clash is to acknowledge that a thematic "Special Days" calendar and the temporal cycle based in the life of Jesus and the New Testament church are very different ways of marking time in the church year. Both may be important, but they matter in different ways with different levels of importance. The pragmatic calendar with its focus on ourselves always needs the balance of the traditional Christian year, which points beyond us to God's work for us. Ultimately that is what makes our work for others possible.

FUNCTIONING OF THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

Every service of Christian worship is composed of two kinds of acts of worship: ordinary and propers. The **ordinary** elements are those that remain the same: the basic structure of the service and the items in it, such as the Lord's Prayer, the offering, the Nicene or Apostles' creed, and a doxology. The **propers** are those elements that change daily or weekly. We read different lessons, sing varied hymns, pray a variety of prayers, and (we hope!) hear a somewhat different sermon whenever we gather for worship.

The importance of the propers in Christian worship is that they supply variety and interest, as they vary according to the days of the liturgical calendar. Although the ordinary parts provide a necessary constancy that allows for worshipers to learn the basic forms of worship by heart, Christian worship without the propers could become a dull repetition of the same thing week after week. Without the constants that the ordinary parts provide, Christian worship would be chaos.

Variety is an important ingredient. The Good News of Jesus Christ is much too wide and deep for a single service or even a whole season. Each time a congregation gathers for worship is a different event. Never before and never again will exactly the same people be assembled in the same context for worship. But the uniqueness of each gathering goes beyond that. The life of the local community, as well as that of the national and global communities, is never the same from week to week. Christian worship reflects this in its affirmation that every day is a different occasion. Christmas is not Easter nor is the Sunday after Easter the same as the Sunday before Labor Day, though the attendance may be about the same. A wedding is not a funeral though the flowers may be similar. A Sunday evening service is not even the same occasion as that morning's service, for the people are apt to behave in a more relaxed fashion. Each occasion for worship is unique.

Variety, then, is an important characteristic of Christian worship since worship relates both to the eternal gospel and to daily life. Nothing is a better source for variety and interest in Christian worship than careful, robust engagement with the Christian year. The first question to raise when planning any service is, When does it occur in the Christian year? The answer should be our first and best clue to guiding our planning.

The **calendar**, we have said, is foundational for most services of Christian worship. The calendar in diagram 6 is that of the current *Revised Common Lectionary*.[35] The reader will probably want to refer to it frequently while reading the following explanations.

The calendar is based on two cycles: one culminating in the resurrection on Easter Day and the other focusing on the incarnation on Christmas Day. The seasons of Advent and Lent serve as times of preparation and expectancy; the seasons of Christmas and Easter rejoice in the events they commemorate. The Season of Epiphany and the Season after Pentecost have less distinct meaning and function as Ordinary Time.

A few details are necessary in keeping time with the church. The number of Sundays in the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter is constant. There are either one or two Sundays in the Season of Christmas. The number of Sundays after Epiphany or Pentecost (Ordinary Time) varies, and different churches have varying means of choosing the lections for these. For most North American Protestants, the final Sunday of the post–Epiphany season

(just before Ash Wednesday) is always the last Sunday after the Epiphany (Transfiguration Sunday). These churches and Roman Catholics keep the Sunday before Advent as The Reign of Christ or Christ the King (last Sunday after Pentecost).

SUNDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS

SEASON OF ADVENT

First Sunday of Advent to Fourth Sunday of Advent

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day)
First Sunday after Christmas
New Year's Day
Second Sunday after Christmas

SEASON OF EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

Epiphany of the Lord
First Sunday after the Epiphany (Baptism of the Lord)
Second Sunday after the Epiphany to Ninth Sunday after the Epiphany
Last Sunday after the Epiphany (Transfiguration Sunday)

SEASON OF LENT

Ash Wednesday
First Sunday in Lent to Sixth Sunday in Lent (Passion Sunday or Palm Sunday)
Holy Week
- Monday of Holy Week
- Tuesday of Holy Week
- Wednesday of Holy Week
- Holy Thursday
- Good Friday
- Holy Saturday

SEASON OF EASTER

Resurrection of the Lord
- Easter Vigil
- Easter Day

Second Sunday of Easter to Sixth Sunday of Easter
Ascension of the Lord (Sixth Thursday of Easter)
Seventh Sunday of Easter
Day of Pentecost

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Trinity Sunday (First Sunday after Pentecost)
Second throughTwenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Reign of Christ or Christ the King (Last Sunday after Pentecost)

SPECIAL DAYS

Presentation of the Lord (February 2)
Annunciation of the Lord (March 25)
Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (May 31)
Holy Cross (September 14)
All Saints (November 1)
Thanksgiving Day (Fourth Thursday of November, U.S.; Second Monday of October, Canada)

Diagram 6

It may help to remember that, as far as Sundays and festivals are concerned, each season except Advent begins and ends with a distinctive day. The Season of Christmas extends from Christmas to the Epiphany, the Season of (or after) Epiphany from Epiphany through Transfiguration Sunday, the Season of Lent from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday, the Season of Easter from Easter Vigil and Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost, and the Season after Pentecost from Trinity Sunday through Reign of Christ or Christ the King.

A few dates may be unfamiliar or have special problems. In various churches, Epiphany Day may be celebrated on the first Sunday of January, combined with the first Sunday after Christmas, or observed with the Baptism of the Lord. The Baptism of the Lord is a new festival for Western Christians though closely associated with Epiphany. Baptism of the Lord comes on the first Sunday after January 6 (the Day of Epiphany).

Among many churches, Passion Sunday and Palm Sunday used to be commemorated on two different Sundays, with Passion Sunday falling on the fifth Sunday of Lent, and Palm Sunday beginning Holy Week, the week before Easter. However, since the liturgical reforms of the twentieth century, these two days are now regarded as a single day on which both the Palm Sunday lesson and the passion narrative may be read. The effect of this combined service is that the celebratory tone of Palm Sunday, as it commemorates Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, quickly turns attention to the fickle crowd that will shout "Crucify him!" The readings begin with a parade and end with a lynch mob!

The Easter Vigil is usually celebrated on the Eve before Easter Day. Ascension Day is sometimes commemorated on the seventh Sunday of Easter. The Day of Pentecost has recovered its earlier place as the fiftieth day and the last Sunday of the Season of Easter, which means Pentecost always falls on Sunday. Furthermore, since Easter falls on a different calendar day each year, as we note above, the seasons of Lent and Easter shift along with Easter Day.

All Saints Day, in some churches, may be observed on the first Sunday of November when November 1 is not a Sunday. The last Sunday of October, once observed as Reformation Sunday (the Sunday after

Reformation Day, October 31), has now been dropped by many churches. Instead, it now seems more appropriate to commemorate our common inheritance with All Saints Day.

For those who keep the minor Christological feasts, there are other possibilities. The color for each is usually white. The Holy Name of Jesus (January 1) calls to mind Jesus' humanity and his full identification with human society (cf. Luke 2:15-21). Presentation of the Lord (February 2) was traditionally called Purification or Candlemas since the candles to be used each year were blessed on this occasion. It can also call attention to the aged in our society who, Luke tells us, were the first to proclaim the Lord (Anna and Simeon) (cf. Luke 2:22-40). **Annunciation of the Lord**—Lady Day in some countries (March 25)—calls attention to the power of the humblest person to fulfill God's will (cf. Luke 1:25-38). **Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth** (May 31), with its dialogue between two women, calls attention to the incarnation and contains Mary's Song, the radical Magnificat—in essence, the social creed of Christianity (cf. Luke 1:39-56). Holy Cross (September 14) focuses on the sacrifice of Christ.

Roman Catholics also keep other additional solemnities: Mary, Mother of God (January 1); Joseph, Husband of Mary (March 19); Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart, Birth of John the Baptist (June 24); Peter and Paul, Apostles (June 29) Assumption of Mary (August 15); and Immaculate Conception (December 8).

If the calendar is the foundation of Christian worship, many churches may consider the first floor to be the **lectionary** or list of scripture readings **(lections)** appointed for the days of the Christian year. One of the most significant changes in Protestant worship in recent decades has been the widespread adoption of a lectionary. The use of it in worship as the basis of preaching has affected the worship of thousands of congregations, though the purpose of the lectionary serves an even larger purpose than preaching. The reading of scripture, as an action itself, proclaims God's word in the congregation, even if the preacher decides not to use the lectionary as the sermon text. All too often, earlier, haphazard methods of choosing scripture had eliminated extensive portions of God's word and reshaped scripture in the preacher's image. Social activists might be partial to passages from the prophetic books and conservatives to the more rigid passages in the pastoral epistles. Yet both, in choosing passages they found congenial, were in effect

rewriting scripture. Liberals and conservatives were equally guilty of revising God's word in accordance with personal preferences.

One of the most useful outcomes of the post–Vatican II era has been an ecumenical lectionary. Begun after Vatican II by the Roman Catholic Church, several years of work by a full-time staff and eight hundred consultants—Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—brought it to its present form. Published as *The Lectionary for Mass*, for Roman Catholics, it is the most carefully prepared lectionary in all Christian history. The *Common Lectionary* was published in 1983 and replaced in 1992 by the *Revised Common Lectionary*, and it continues to be reviewed and revised. It is now in use in English-speaking Protestant churches around the world. The most distinctive feature is permitting long Old Testament narratives to unfold, week by week, during the Season after Pentecost.

How do the most recent lectionaries work? Both the Catholic and the Protestant versions are three-year lectionaries. The years are designated A, B, and C. Year C is a year, such as 2022, that is evenly divisible by the number 3. The church year begins between November 27 and December 3 of the preceding civil year, so Advent in the civil year December 2022, is part of the church year 2023, and in year A.

Since the Roman Catholic reforms of Vatican II, the lectionaries of most Catholic and Protestant churches appoint three lessons. The first is usually from the Old Testament, the second usually from an Epistle, and the third always from a Gospel. After Easter, readings from the book of Acts serve for the first lesson instead of the Old Testament. Augustine in Africa and John Chrysostom in Constantinople both give witness to their churches reading the book of Acts during the Easter Season, showing the practice has roots in antiquity. Occasionally, readings from Revelation take the place of the Epistle. In the course of three years, the lectionary covers most of the New Testament and large portions of the Old Testament.

In weeks after Pentecost, there are two different systems for the first reading. One track follows Old Testament stories or other passages more or less continuously. For example, in Year A, the continuous track reads through most of the book of Exodus. The other track is less continuous, and instead it pairs the Old Testament readings thematically with the Gospel reading for the day. The second (Epistle) lessons, on the other hand, are read more or less in order from Sunday to Sunday as they are found in the Bible

(lectio continua). Most of First Corinthians is read in order during the Season of Epiphany over the three-year cycle. For the third (always Gospel) lesson, year A is devoted to reading the Gospel of Matthew; year B to Mark; and Year C to Luke. Portions of the Gospel readings in all three years are filled in from the Gospel of John, most notably in Year B, which covers Mark, the shortest of the Synoptic Gospels.

As we have indicated, the lectionary provides a comprehensive method for reading much of the Bible aloud in the congregation at worship over three years. After that, it is time to start over again. There are two exceptional dates: on Passion/Palm Sunday and Good Friday a full passion narrative is read, often in dramatic fashion. For the Easter Vigil, provision is made for nine lessons, seven of them from the Old Testament.

If the first question to ask in planning any service is "Where are we in the liturgical calendar?" the second may be "What does the lectionary provide?" Often, the reading is reflected in the opening prayer, the psalm, the hymns, the choral and instrumental music, the sermon, and the visual materials used. The use of a lectionary along with the liturgical calendar makes it possible to plan services months or even years in advance. This is especially useful for musicians and artists who need a great deal of advance preparation.

Since the calendar and lectionary shape other choices, we must examine their effect of each of them in turn. An **opening prayer** can articulate the general thrust of the events of the day in the liturgical calendar and can alert the congregation to the lessons that will be read. The Roman Catholic Missal provides opening prayers (and alternatives) for Sundays and special occasions. Episcopalians and Anglicans retain the ancient term **"collect"** for opening prayers, and Episcopalians provide them in "traditional" and "contemporary" language. "Prayer of the Day" is the Lutheran term, "Opening Prayer" the United Methodist, and "Prayer of the Day" or "Opening Prayer" the Presbyterian. Whatever term we use, this first prayer at the beginning of worship indicates that worship is a conversation with God from the start.

The lectionary appoints psalms as responses to or commentaries on the lessons. The Roman Catholic and the Revised Common lectionaries provide lists of psalms chosen deliberately to relate to the lectionary. Technically, a psalm serves as a response, rather than as a lesson, but it does pair

thoughtfully to the lessons. Indeed, the medieval church understood the psalms to be prophesies about Christ, prayers to Christ, or, in several cases, Jesus' prayers to God (cf. Matt 27:45, where, from the cross, Jesus prays Psalm 22:1). The typological connection of psalms to the person of Jesus is deep in our tradition.

Almost all denominational hymnals list hymns appropriate for seasons, festivals, and special occasions. Most hymnals also have a scriptural index that lists biblical references in the hymns and a topical index that lists hymns according to the key themes. In addition to hymns, the lectionary and liturgical calendar have inspired the church's choral and instrumental music. When well planned, choral music can mesh successfully with the ministry of the word by providing a musical commentary on the lessons. Use of the calendar and lectionary can help church musicians in their planning since it gives them lead time to order and rehearse music appropriate to the liturgical day.

Nothing is as thoroughly affected by the reading of scripture as the **sermon**. There are several direct results from the widespread use of the lectionary for preaching. First, it has made feasible the publication of several top-quality aids to biblical study in the form of commentaries and other resources to improve homiletic use of the Bible.[36] Second, the lectionary has emboldened many preachers to preach on a much wider selection of scripture than they might otherwise select. That does not mean that one should preach on all three lessons at one time. Sometimes they relate to one another well; more often than not, the second lesson goes a separate way. But to preach on any one of these texts may encourage the preacher to study and ponder many portions of God's word that are unfamiliar or challenging. Third, preachers who follow the liturgical year and the lessons carefully find themselves probing deeper into Christology. One simply cannot preach on the Baptism of the Lord, the Transfiguration, Passion or Palm Sunday, Ascension Day, All Saints Day, The Reign of Christ, and so on, without being forced to make up one's mind about Jesus Christ and what it means to be a disciple. Many preachers have agreed that preaching from the lectionary improves the content of their sermons. And many have been surprised at how relevant assigned passages often are for their congregation's time and place.

As we hope this introduction has shown, the use of the lectionary for preaching and worship planning has both practical and theological grounds. Nevertheless, many congregations, especially those with Free Church or nondenominational backgrounds, choose to develop sermons and propers around thematically shaped series that run for several weeks: “The Sermon on the Mount,” “The Gifts of the Spirit,” “The Ten Commandments,” and so forth. This also can be done very well, and may even, on occasion, be used fruitfully in congregations that typically follow a lectionary. One strength of the thematic approach is that a sermon can be an effective format for teaching-oriented sermons around biblical, theological, or social topics. Some worship leaders and preachers alternate between lectionary and thematic preaching, perhaps following the lectionary during Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter (the major Christological seasons), but shifting to sermon series after Epiphany and Pentecost, when the lectionary itself tends to be more thematic. Whatever approach a congregation employs, however, planning for adequate preparation and leadership remains important for all these reasons we have given above.

Finally, we must say a word on the visuals that can be derived from the lectionary and calendar. They, too, provide ordinary and proper components of worship, though of a different type from verbal texts. With the use of textiles, graphics, and other visuals we can have, in effect, a new church setting each Sunday. For example, where projections are possible, a screen or wall can be whatever we want to project on it. We are limited only by the horizons of our imagination.

Some of the things we have learned about worship in the last few years seem irrevocable. In 1965 few, if any, churches had ever used audio-visual projectors. By now, many if not most congregations have some form of projection equipment and use this for all sorts of texts, art, and video. If the gospel can be proclaimed visually, why should it not be? Each new dimension we add to our perception of the Good News would seem to be a clear gain.[37]

How do we do it? The simplest concept is just using pure color. Colors signify different meanings in various cultures, and we must recognize this. Color helps form general expectations for any occasion. Most of us do not wear flamboyant colors to a funeral. Traditionally, purples, grays, and blues have been used for seasons of a penitential character, such as Advent and

Lent, although any dark colors could be used. White has been used for events or seasons with strong Christological meaning, such as the Baptism of the Lord or the Season of Easter; yellows and golds are also possibilities at such times. Red has been reserved for occasions relating to the Holy Spirit (such as the Day of Pentecost or ordinations) or for the commemorations of martyrs. Green has been used for seasons of less pronounced character for Ordinary Time such as the Season of Epiphany or the Season after Pentecost. These longer seasons need not stagnate in a single color or hue any more than nature retains a monotonous green. After all, nature is not static. The delicate yellow-greens of spring progress to the deeper hues of summer and then to the bright yellows and reds of autumn. The absence of any colored textiles from Maundy Thursday to the Easter Vigil is a striking use of contrast. Contrast itself is one of the prime forms of communication in visual materials. We must also recognize that different cultures have concepts of the meaning of colors that will affect their liturgical use.[38]

Many traditions, such as Roman Catholics and Anglicans, have a standard practice for the color of clergical and altar vestments: purple for Lent, white for Easter, red for the Pentecost, and so on. Yet, even among these churches, recent decades have seen some expansion of the color palate. For example, for centuries, the liturgical color for Advent was purple, which made it seem as if it were another penitential season. Today, the standard color of choice for Advent is blue! This shift in color signals a shift in our understanding of Advent, which now is understood to be a time of serious but eager longing for the coming of Christ, in commemoration of his birth and in anticipation of his coming again in glory.

Colors and textures can be used most effectively in textiles for hangings on pulpits, on lecterns (if any), for the stoles worn by ordained ministers, or for ministerial vestments. Sometimes bolts of colored cloth may simply be hung as giant abstract banners. Banners can be hung almost anywhere in the church. Increasingly we see a move to large-scale banners, fifteen feet in length or so.

Certain objects—such as an **advent wreath**, a lenten veil, palm branches, or a paschal candle express different seasons. Symbols evoke different occasions, too: a star, a crown of thorns, or tongues of flame. Even the lack of objects can be a powerful form of communication. The absence of any flowers and candles during Holy Week can say much.

A word of caution is necessary. None of these colors, textures, images, or objects is merely a decoration or an ornament. If they are used as such, they are trivialities not worth the time or effort they consume. But if used to add one more dimension to our perception of the Good News, they can be well worth considerable effort and expense. Much work goes into a sermon, meant to be preached only once. In the same way, some artistic work to present the gospel may be used only once. Some congregations, for instance, employ visual artists to sketch or paint during a service much like a musical offering to God or a proclamation through dance. When designing liturgical art, we may best begin by asking—will it help the congregation open their collective imagination to the powerful mystery of God in Jesus Christ? If so, then the art is serving a fitting purpose.

All in all, Christians are called to proclaim the gospel by every means available. The Christian year and the lectionary based on it are two vital resources for this. If keeping time with the church can make for more faithful Christians whose temporal rhythms of life are shaped by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, then exploring all the possibilities such a discipline can offer is most worthwhile.

CHAPTER TWO TERMINOLOGY

Advent, Season of

advent wreath

All Saints Day

Annunciation of the Lord

Apostolic Constitutions

Ascension

Ash Wednesday

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin

Baptism of the Lord

calendar

Candlemas (see Presentation in the Temple)

catechumens

Chrism Mass

Christ the King

Christian year

Christmas Day

Christmas, Season of

church year

collect

Corpus Christi

Day of the Dead

Didache

Easter

Easter, Season of (see Easter)

Easter Triduum

Easter Vigil

Easter Week (see Easter)

Epiphany, Season of (see Epiphany)

Exsultet

Feast of the Circumcision (see Name of Jesus)

feasts

Good Friday

Holy Saturday

Holy Thursday (see Maundy Thursday)

Holy Week

Homecoming Sunday

Immaculate Conception (of Mary)

Kingdomtide

lectio continua

lectionary

lections (see lectionary)

Lent, season of

liturgical year

Maundy Thursday

memorials

mystagogical catechesis

Name of Jesus

opening prayer

ordinary

Ordinary Time

Palm Sunday

Pascha

paschal candle

Passion Sunday (see Palm Sunday)

Passover

Pentecost

Presentation in the Temple

propers

Purification of Mary (see Presentation in the Temple)

Quartodeciman

Rally Day

Reign of Christ (see Christ the King)

Revival

Roman Calendar

Sacred Heart of Jesus

sanctoral cycle

sermon

solemnities

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (see Name of Jesus)

Sunday

temporal cycle

Tenebrae

The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus

Transfiguration of the Lord

Trinity Sunday

Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth

week

World Communion Sunday

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1. Cyril Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 96.

2. Kirsopp Lake, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 1:331.

3. Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 6.

4. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, p. 287.

5. Kirsopp Lake, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1:397.

6. Bettenson, *Documents*, p. 27.

7. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, p. 174.

8. James Donaldson, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, hereafter *ANF* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1899), 7:469.

9. Tertullian, "On Baptism," trans. S. Thelwall, ANF, 3:678.

10. See Paul F. Bradshaw, "The Apostolic Tradition Reconstructed: A Text for Students," *Joint Liturgical Studies* 91 (Norfolk, U.K.: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2021), p. 23, and note 27.

11. Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, trans. G. A. Williamson (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 230.

12. An equinox is a day in the solar year when the days and nights are equally long. There is both a spring and a winter equinox.

13. Egeria uses "Easter Week" for the week before Easter. Today, "Easter Week," would be the week starting on Easter, and "Holy Week" would be the week before Easter.

14. *Egeria's Travels*, ed. and trans. John Wilkinson (London: S.P.C.K., 1971), pp. 132–33.

15. In the fourth century C.E., the Jerusalem church built a basilica over the tomb of Jesus' resurrection and transferred the remnants of the cross to a portion of that same building complex, which made these artifacts accessible for the conduct of processions and services during Great Week (Holy Week). For an introduction, see Lester Ruth, Carrie Steenwyk, and John D. Witvliet, *Walking Where Jesus Walked: Worship in Fourth-Century Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010).

16. Augustine, "Letter 55, To Januarius, "in *Letters*, trans. Wilfrid Parsons, *Fathers of the Church* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1951), 12:283.

17. Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1986), pp. 194–203.

18. William Telfer, trans., *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 68.

19. Augustine, *Letters*, 12:284–85.

20. Tertullian, "On Baptism," 3:678.

21. Eusebius, "Life of Constantine the Great," E. C. Richardson, trans., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, hereafter *NPNF*, 2nd series (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890), 1:557.

22. Talley, *Liturgical Year*, pp. 129–34.

23. John Chrysostom, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 2, ed. Bernard de Montfaucon (Paris: Gaume, 1834), p. 418.

24. Chrysostom, *Opera Omnia*, 2, p. 436.

25. Cited by L. Duchesne, *Christian Worship*, 5th ed. (London: S.P.C.K., 1923), p. 260, n. 3.

26. Tertullian, "De Corona," *ANF*, 3:94.

27. Chrysostom, *Opera Omnia*, 1, p. 608.

28. Gregory Dix, *Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre, 1945), p. 305.

29. "Formula Missae," Bard Thompson, ed., *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 109.

30. “Book of Discipline,” *John Knox’s History of the Reformation in Scotland*, vol. 2 (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1949), p. 281.

31. *The Westminster Directory* (Bramcote, Notts, U.K.: Grove Books, 1980), p. 32.

32. *John Wesley’s Prayer Book* (Akron: OSL Publications, 1991).

33. *The Christian Year and Lectionary Reform* (London: SCM Press, 1958).

34. Pius Parsch, *The Church’s Year of Grace* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1964–65), 5 vols.

35. Available at https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/ (accessed February 10, 2023).

36. See, for example, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, 12 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

37. The Puritan tradition of the seventeenth century embraced an extremely minimalist approach to church architecture, art, and music, as these provoked sensual experiences that would distract worshipers from a mental focus on God and God’s word or even lead to idolatry (i.e., the biblical prohibition on graven images in Exodus 20:4-6 and Deuteronomy 5:8-10). Today, few congregations adhere to this minimalist approach.

38. Kathy Black, *Worship Across Cultures* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

CHAPTER THREE

THE LANGUAGE OF SPACE

It should not surprise us that a religion whose fundamental doctrine is the incarnation should take space seriously in its worship. Not only did Jesus Christ enter human time, but he also came to dwell among us, occupying a specific and definite place in Judea. The New Testament is full of place names; Jesus was at Jerusalem, Bethany, the Sea of Galilee, the River Jordan, and so on.

The same is true for the rest of salvation history. The Jewish and Christian God is known by events that occur among men and women, not on Mt. Olympus or in Valhalla. Space on earth is holy, not because of the place itself but because of what God does for humans in that place. In the Bible, saving events happen at some ordinary field, well, or village street. Today such places would be as familiar as a shopping mall. The location is indifferent, the event is crucial.[1]

Of course, after the event, the place becomes significant as a bearer of meaning: the place where something happened. Jacob had a dream at a remote place and woke to exclaim that it was a fearsome place, the house of God, the gate of heaven (Gen. 28:17). His dream provoked him to erect a pillar and give the place a new name, “House of God,” that all might know about the event. We have already seen how fourth-century Jerusalem shaped all subsequent Christian worship by commemorations at the times and places where climactic events in Christ’s life and death occurred. Fourth-century pilgrims to Jerusalem were still shown the sycamore tree Zacchaeus had climbed to see Jesus—once an ordinary tree but by then a

holy place. Europe eventually became dotted with pilgrimage places where an event had made a spot and the space around it significant. All these testify to the eloquence of the language of space. A religion of the incarnation must have its feet planted firmly on the ground. God and humanity meet at a place, whether it is as humble as an ordinary desert bush or as magnificent as the Jerusalem Temple.

Every Christian community needs a place to worship the Incarnate One. The place can be anywhere, but it must be designated so the body of Christ knows where to assemble. Early missionaries in the British Isles simply set a cross on a pole to determine the place for worship. Eventually, such places were roofed and walled, and these scheduled spaces thus were organized for the convenience and comfort of the worshipers. We call the art of organizing space "architecture." Today, we are so accustomed to the Christian use of architecture that, in many languages, the word "church" refers to the building just as much as to the body of believers.

The relationships between architecture and what Christians do when they worship are complex. Church architecture not only reflects the ways Christians worship but it also shapes worship or, not uncommonly, misshapes it. In the first place, the building helps define the meaning of worship for those gathered inside it. Try to preach against triumphalism in a baroque church! Try to teach the priesthood of all believers with a deep gothic chancel never occupied by any but ordained clergy! Second, the building dictates the possibilities in our forms and styles of worship. We may want good congregational song, but do the acoustics swallow up each sound so that all seem mute? Or do we have to give up any hope of movement by the congregation because everyone is neatly filed away in pews? We soon realize that architecture presents both opportunities and limitations. Some possibilities open and others close. We may with difficulty worship without buildings; often we worship with difficulty because of them.

The COVID-19 pandemic expanded our understanding of appropriate spaces for Christian worship, not only by reclaiming the out-of-doors as a location for community worship (e.g., parks and parking lots), but also by inviting positive considerations of the use of technology and virtual space. Worship online via the internet, which previously was often dismissed as inappropriate for theological and pastoral reasons, became, for many

congregations, the only viable option for gathering the community “face to face” for worship and fellowship. After lifting COVID in-person restrictions, many communities saw fit to continue worship options using the internet alongside in-person worship in a building, and so online worship is appropriately considered in this discussion of space.

The way space is organized reflects and shapes Christian worship so much that we must examine why and how space speaks a language that is important for worship. In this case, it is best to interpret theory first, then to survey the history before offering practical conclusions from the history of church architecture. We will also consider the opportunities and challenges of technology and virtual spaces. Finally, we will consider the role of the visual arts.

THE FUNCTIONS OF LITURGICAL SPACE

How does the organization of space reflect what happens in Christian worship? To answer this, we may usefully describe Christian worship as “public speaking and touching in Christ’s name.” Another way of saying the same thing is that in worship, we speak for God, to God, and to one another as we reach out to others in God’s name. This is unquestionably a severe oversimplification of what happens in Christian worship, but it does make clear that Christian worship is action that requires space. This crucial insight is not apparent in more abstract definitions.

Let us begin, then, by asserting that worship depends on God, but it occurs through the instruments of human speech and the human body. In worship, God acts in self-giving through human words and bodies, and we give ourselves to God through our words and bodies.

How does God act in self-giving through words? God speaks God’s word to us through the mouths of humans. That seems a strange way to reach people; it displays a far greater trust in humans than most of us would ever have. But it is God’s way as scripture repeatedly testifies, as God says to a reticent Jeremiah, “I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9), or to tongue-tied Moses and Aaron, “I will be with your mouth and with his mouth” (Exod. 4:15). There can be no doubt that in biblical faith God calls human beings to speak God’s word.

There are a few requirements for effective public speaking. It is important to sustain eye contact with those to whom one is talking. Eye contact is part of reaching out in love to others and is integral to speech. Mark tells us, “Jesus, looking at him, loved him” (Mark 10:21). Looking is part of loving.

Spatially, this implies a straight line or a direct gaze between the speaker and the hearer. In a building, the speaker may need to be elevated a few inches so that the heads of others do not interfere with sight lines, but too high an elevation becomes a visual barrier. Likewise, pillars, partitions, and other physical barriers must not intervene. The participating listeners and the speaker must meet face-to-face. The best space for face-to-face encounter is organized along a horizontal axis as if there were a straight line from the speaker to the person in the middle of the audience. This is the arrangement of the synagogue where people come together to hear God’s word read and expounded or a meetinghouse where Christians assemble to hear the gospel.

Self-giving occurs in speech to people gathered along a horizontal axis from human speaker to human hearer. If that were all that Christian worship involved, then planning a worship space would indeed be simple. But God not only places God’s word in our mouths, God also uses our hands. And this is where organizing space for Christian worship gets complicated. We must provide not only for receiving the word but also for receiving the sacraments. God’s self-giving comes in both ways. All good worship architecture is a compromise to provide for both types of divine activity. The whole history of church building is the history of compromises between arrangements best for speaking in God’s name and those best for touching in God’s name.

If the path of the speaking voice is a horizontal axis, the locus of the outstretched hand is on a vertical axis. The reach of the human voice can be artificially extended—not so the human arm. God has created each of us small enough so that we can reach out only about a yard. The image this physical limit suggests is people gathered in concentric circles around a vertical axis. On that vertical axis may be an altar table, a font or pool, or simply a person. From there we can reach out—and God can reach out through our hands—to the community around us.

In other terms, we need both a synagogue and an upper room for Christian worship. We need space in which we can both project our voice and reach out our hands, whether it be hands baptizing a new Christian, hands giving the Lord's body at the eucharist, hands laid on a head, hands uniting the hands of a couple, hands blessing or reconciling, or hands sprinkling a coffin. Not only do we speak for God, but we also touch others for God. And we must be close enough really to touch them. A woman touched the hem of Jesus' garment and power passed to her. We touch others' heads, lips, or hands, and power passes to them. But our reach is limited by arms which, unlike our voice, cannot be stretched by a microphone. We need intimate concentric space to touch in God's name. The scale is that of the human body.

How do we reconcile space organized along a horizontal axis with space situated around a vertical axis? There is a paradigm of worship itself in the problem, the God to human represented by the vertical, the human to human represented by the horizontal. Soon, we shall trace different ways this tension has been resolved historically.

But what of the words people offer to God? There are few spatial requirements for this; prayer and praise can be offered anywhere people assemble. Above all else, a church building is a place for people to come together. In Quaker terms, where many candles are brought together there is more light. Christians can speak to God wherever they can assemble for worship. Spatial requirements for this act are not specific. Churches once tended to suggest that God was high and lifted up—maybe in the dim recesses of the rafters or at the end of the chancel. Today we are more inclined to suggest that God is with the worshipers, not in a remote holy spot. Some worship buildings place the cross in the midst of the congregation to state this fact. However the assembly may be arranged, access to fellow worshipers is all that is necessary to speak to one another in Christ's name.

Of course, we cannot touch God, but each of us can reach out to others in God's name. In recent years, the **passing of the peace** has become a prominent sign of reconciliation and love as Christians embrace one another or shake hands during worship. Other possibilities include pronouncing God's forgiveness after a prayer of confession, an act that can be done with the hands even better than the voice (a sign of the cross traced on the

forehead, for example). Foot washing is a dramatic occasional act. And, in services of reconciliation, we may reach out our hands as a sign of forgiveness. All that seems necessary for these aspects of worship is accessibility to one another.

We can break down the components of space for speaking and touching in God's name more specifically. Most Christian worship necessitates six different **liturgical spaces** where worship occurs and three or four **liturgical centers**, that is, furnishings from which worship is led. It is amazing how few and simple the physical necessities for Christian worship are. But since we never encounter them in isolation, we may not be aware of them individually. If worship space can be compared to a complete sentence, we will now look at the individual words that compose that sentence.[2]

In recent years, we have become much more aware of the importance of **gathering space** as a key liturgical space. The Christian community needs to assemble to worship, and the act of gathering may be the most important single activity of the congregation. In the heroic age of the early church, the very act of assembling could produce martyrs. In every age, forming the body of Christ is the first act of worship—one in which all participate. Therefore, space that marks the temporary separation of the community from the world outside and where individuals form a community deserves careful attention in the design of worship space.

The second type of space is **movement space**. Christian worship demands considerable movement. Revivalists in the nineteenth century and charismatics today remind us that to move people spiritually, we must also move them physically. Christians seem to be restless pilgrim people. The people who gather must take their places, but even then, processions, weddings, funerals, baptisms, offerings, and receiving communion involve further movements, and more rearranging of the community at worship. Movement is an integral part of worship, and aisles and cross aisles demand careful planning.

The largest space is usually **congregational space**. Basically, a church is a people place. The Greek temple kept the money on the inside and the people on the outside. Christians use the money for the world outside and serve the people inside. Classic Quaker meetinghouses consist almost entirely of congregational space and make it manifest that God's presence is

known amid God's people. In an important passage, Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL*) lists as one of the ways that Christ is present in the church's liturgical celebrations: "He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for he promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20)" (par. 7). We might also add that Christ is also present in the poor and oppressed in our midst.

Choir space or a space for singers and instrumentalists may be the most challenging space to deal with, especially when there is uncertainty about the role of a singer or a dedicated group of singers in worship. Such space may also need to accommodate dancers. The chief role or roles assigned to the musicians should determine the location and design of this type of space.

We are accustomed to speaking of baptism in terms of a font or baptismal pool; less often do we think of it in terms of **baptismal space**. At worst, baptism has been a private ceremony tucked off in a remote corner of the church building. Yet every baptism is an act of the whole community, not just because it adds to the church roll, but because it witnesses to the fact that those who have gone through the waters of death and resurrection are united to Christ. Like the wedding service, baptism involves the whole church community and the more intimate circle of family and sponsors gathered around the baptized one. In terms of space, this necessitates access and space for the candidates and baptismal party in a way that does not impede participation by the whole congregation. Baptismal space is people space in concentric circles. Around the font or baptismal pool gather, first, the candidates and ministers, then family and sponsors, and, finally, the whole congregation.

Altar-table space surrounds the altar table itself. Some traditions call this area the **sanctuary**. Typically, the sanctuary is the most conspicuous space in the building, often masking the fact that its role is to serve, not to dominate. Thus, we need to avoid such barriers as excessive height, the glare of too much direct light, over-scaled furnishings, enclosure, and other ways of making this space seem a remote and detached holy spot. Strangely enough, in many denominations with little eucharistic piety, this is the one spot in the church never approached by the people. It remains more aloft

and aloof than in those denominations where people gather around it weekly.

There are also three or four liturgical centers essential to Christian worship. Again, their use reflects how we perceive the presence of Christ in our worship. A **baptismal font** or **baptismal pool** is a necessity for the sheer physical fact that water demands a container. It can be a recess in the floor (as the earliest surviving baptistery buildings reveal) or a basin mounted on a pillar. The one necessity—that it can contain water—seems more concealed than revealed in many designs. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* reminds us: “By his power he [Christ] is present in the sacraments, so that when someone baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes” (CSL, par. 7). Without a container for water, we cannot baptize or experience this form of Christ’s presence.

Christ is also “present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church” (*CSL*, par. 7). One could argue in a strict sense that a **pulpit** or **ambo** is not a necessity but a convenience. Yet if the reading and preaching of God’s word is a fresh theophany each time the people of God gather, then we need physical testimony to that belief in the form of a pulpit. The Bible may be displayed when it is not being read. The visual aspects of this form of Christ’s presence are not to be minimized. This means that bookbinding must again become a significant art form for the church.[3] However, if a Bible is displayed, it is good to use that Bible for reading aloud. In worship, the Bible is primarily for proclamation, and not as a display. A separate lectern is unnecessary and may weaken the theological focus on the unity of reading and preaching God’s Word.

There is little need to emphasize the importance of the **altar table** for Christian worship, but we need to be reminded that it is not present as the architectural focus of the building or even as a symbol of Christ. It is there because it is used; in short, just as fonts hold water and pulpits hold Bibles, altar tables hold the communion vessels. The altar tables depicted in early Christian art were small. They were ministerial altar tables, quite adequate for holding what was put on them, but not monuments to fill space or to create an architectural focus or religious symbol. It need not be large or a permanent installation, but an altar table is a necessity.

In the early church, the **presider's chair** was the center from which much of the service was conducted and the place for preaching until late in the fourth century. There has been a revival in the importance of the presider's chair since Vatican II in Roman Catholic circles. Many Protestants are still considering the appropriateness of the three pulpit chairs the nineteenth century provided for the preacher, song leader, and guest preacher, and some communities are reluctant to make clergy seating very conspicuous. The *CSL* speaks of Christ's presence "in the person of the minister," but it is questionable how much a living person can be identified with a chair in the way we associate water with a font, the Bible with the pulpit, or communion elements with the altar table. A chair does not function in quite the same way, since Christ's presence in a person does not need a furnishing to make it visible. Certainly, the presider's chair is a convenience, but it ought to be designed to human (and domestic) scale and not resemble a throne.

No more is necessary. There is a certain sense of poverty or economy of means about Christian worship. Unnecessary furnishings (lecterns, prayer desks, communion rails) may conceal the essential centers. Restraint and understatement are the most potent forms of statement. The essential spaces and centers—and only these—reveal what is primary in Christian worship.

There is also a quality in worship space that rarely takes visible form, and it is one of the most easily and tragically overlooked factors: the way space affects sound. Every church building forms a unique acoustical environment, and few things affect worship more profoundly than the way sound behaves in space. The relation of sound to space, however, needs emphasis, especially since it is so frequently overlooked when planning liturgical space. Churches are built to be used; they are usually photographed empty of people, but a church building functions as church when filled by a congregation. The very act of people assembling is an event with sound, often commencing with bells calling them to gather.

Sound exists in space, then, as well as in time. Our concern here is with all the sounds within a church building and how those sounds act in that space to shape the nature and experience of the worship offered therein. A few examples may be helpful. The large dimensions and hard surfaces of medieval stone buildings made necessary the practice of chanting prose recitations in melodic form to ensure audibility. The psalms were usually

chanted in unison to plainsong melodies that are well adapted to such an acoustical environment where sound lingers (reverberation). On the other hand, it is not accidental that congregational song in England developed in the small meetinghouses of dissenters rather than in stately medieval parish churches. Hymnody was picked up in time by Anglicans, but Congregationalists and Methodists took the lead. Their small intimate meetinghouses encouraged congregational song by making everyone feel that they were the musical performers. In similar fashion, it would be hard to imagine the silent waiting for God in Quaker worship in any place where sound is as resonant as in a large stone building.

Worship involves a wide range of sounds. How do people interact as they gather? There is the sound of feet, voices, and moving chairs mixed into worship. Babies cry and children whine. These are not sounds to be suppressed; they are the natural and welcome sounds made when forming the body. But there may be annoying sounds from outside that need to be subdued or internal mechanical hums from lighting, heating, or airconditioning that ought to be absorbed.

More crucial, though, is the spoken voice. If there is an echo bouncing off hard or curved surfaces, preaching may be difficult. Hearing the word of God ought not to be prevented by echoes. There are also similar problems with an environment that is too absorbent; it can make a person feel like a solo singer, so each one usually stops singing. Too much absorbency can make organ music lose much of its brilliance. Although requirements are not the same for the speaker and the musician, poor acoustics can frustrate both. The speaker wants no echo while the acoustical instrumentalists relish a bit of reverberation. Similarly, heavily amplified electrical instruments and voices of rock bands work best in a dampened acoustical environment, but this can discourage congregational participation. Compromises between such conflicting requirements are usually necessary.

HISTORY OF LITURGICAL ARCHITECTURE

A look at how Christians have arranged these liturgical spaces and centers over the course of history can teach us much. The relative prominence or reticence of various spaces or centers, their relation to one another, and the design of the liturgical centers themselves give us a clear

indication of shifts in practice and theological perspective. This variety in worship spaces indicates the diversity inherent in Christian worship. Yet the persistence of the same six spaces and the three or four centers is a clear witness to the large degree of constancy in Christian worship. We can only give a rapid survey of diversity and constancy, but this survey will indicate the great variety of liturgical arrangements that have been found useful.[4] The early church had to worship in makeshift quarters during periods of persecution, yet we know buildings of some magnificence were occasionally built—even while Christianity was an illicit religion. We have very little documentary or architectural evidence of the architectural setting of Christian worship before Constantine. Early Christians often met in private homes, usually those of the more well-to-do members of the community. During periods of persecution, there was always a danger that Christians could be put to death for the crime of assembling for worship or become the victims of mobs who considered such assemblies unpatriotic or irreligious. Thus, it was probably wise to use regular family furniture and rooms for such worship, then return them to their places immediately.

The domesticity of these spaces in private homes gave a sense of hospitality and intimacy that was lost when Christian worship went public. Yet the advantages of such intimate space recur whenever Christians are persecuted or an impoverished minority, such as the Anabaptists, the Amish, the Quakers, and even Christians in some countries today. We probably deceive ourselves if we think this same domestic feeling of hospitality and intimacy can be easily imitated in public buildings, yet we are equally misled if we forget the need to seek these qualities in good church architecture. These characteristics clearly shape the style of worship practiced within these settings.

We have an astonishingly well-preserved example of a house-church from Dura-Europos on the Euphrates River. It is a home that was adapted permanently for Christian worship early in the third century (long before persecution ended in C.E. 313) and destroyed in C.E. 256. The ruins indicate that a wall had been removed and two rooms were joined to provide space for the eucharistic assembly (fig. 1).[5] At one end is located a small platform, possibly for the altar table and the bishop’s chair. A room on the opposite side of the house was probably used as a baptistery. It had a bathtub-shaped font covered by a canopy and walls ornamented with

frescoes. Thus, even at this early date, we find an explicit allocation of spaces for different liturgical functions, a pattern reflected in most subsequent church buildings.

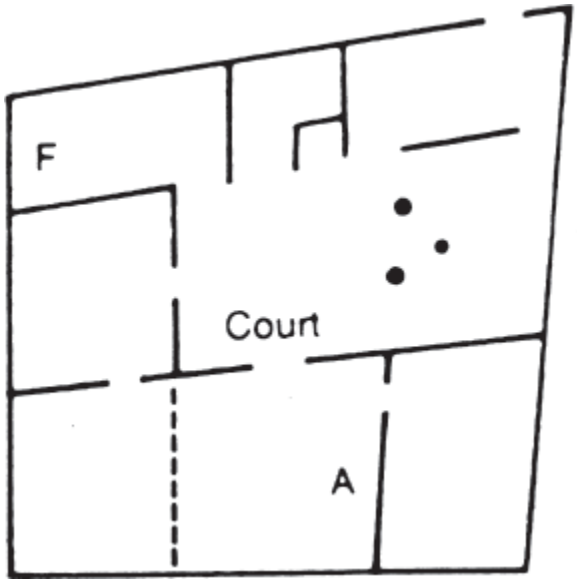


Figure 1

In the fourth century, Christianity not only became legal and respectable but was also espoused by the emperor Constantine who showered magnificent gifts on the church: nine new churches in Rome and others in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Constantinople. The worship in these magnificent new buildings matched all the sumptuousness of the imperial court—a far cry from that of the persecuted Christians huddled together in secret meetings. The emperor's architects simply adapted a well-developed building type, the **basilica** or Roman law court. The civil basilica served much the same functions as the county courthouse and high school auditorium in American towns. Most were rectangular buildings with a semicircular space, the **apse**, at one end, opposite a long people's part, the **nave**. In the apse, there was a platform with a throne for the judge, who might be flanked by scribes. The basilica was a longitudinal building organized along a horizontal axis. The church made this building type its own in the fourth century (fig. 2).

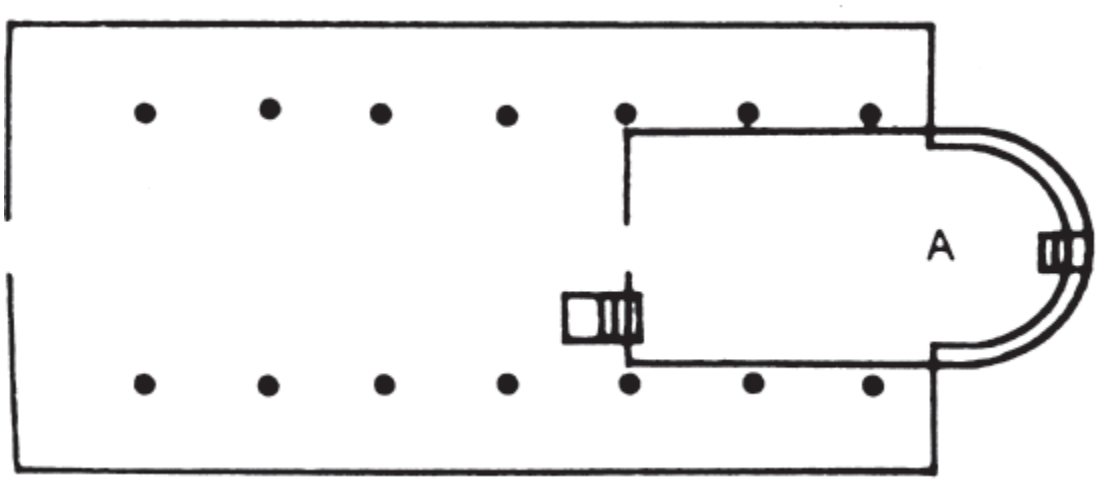


Figure 2

The bishop’s throne replaced that of the judge, and presbyters sat on either side of him. A platform for the singers extended out into the nave (indicated here by solid lines). The altar table usually appeared near the junction of the apse and the nave, and an ambo (pulpit) stood on the end or side of the platform. Preaching, at first, was done from the bishop’s throne, and the eucharistic prayer was offered facing the people across the altar table. The rest of the building was unencumbered by seating, the mobile congregation moving wherever they could best hear and see.

From an early time, the tradition of a centralized building organized around a vertical axis in the center of the building has also existed. A separate type of building for baptism, the **baptistery**, was often designed on this basis—as was the **martyrium**, or chapel over the grave or relics of a martyr. Both were based on the mausoleum. New technology for building domes over square naves led to the gradual adoption of centralized buildings among Eastern Orthodox churches instead of the elongated basilicas favored in the West. Frequently, three apses are walled off by an **iconostasis** (screen covered with images of the saints) from the central congregational space, which is frequently covered by a dome (fig. 3). The iconostasis shielded the people from the awe and mystery of the service surrounding the altar table. **Icons** (images) of the saints surround the congregation, reminding them that they worship amidst the whole company of heaven.

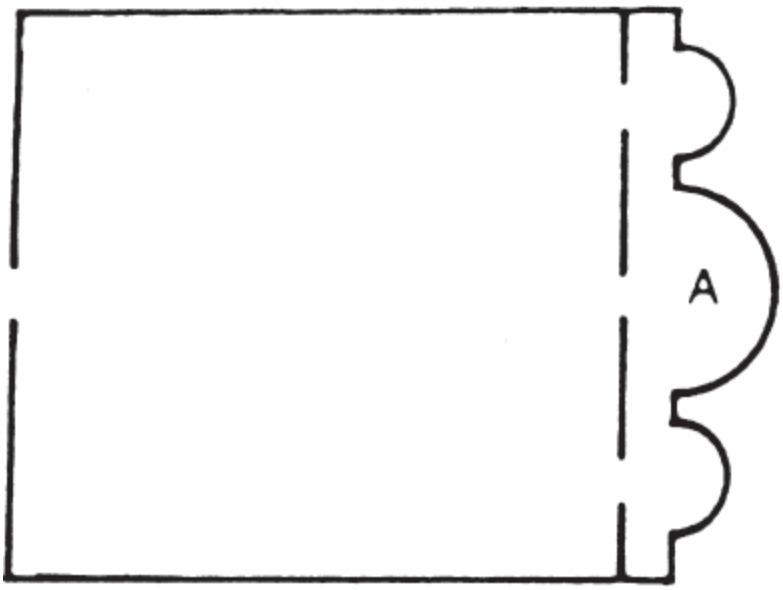


Figure 3

In the West, churches tended to develop longitudinally, partly because of technology. (The maximum width of gothic vaulting was about eighty feet, but by repeating bays, a church could be extended lengthwise.) This tendency, however, was also the result of a growing complexity in the forms of worship and the specialization of priests and lesser clergy, as well as those in religious orders. The complexity and specialization can be seen most dramatically in the relocation of the altar table from proximity to the congregational space until the sanctuary space became located at the farthest extremity of the building, away from congregational space.

The Middle Ages saw the development of highly specialized types of churches: pilgrimage churches or shrines, churches for monastic communities, collegiate churches, cathedrals, preaching churches, and ordinary parish churches. The pacesetters, though, were the monastic churches. Since a large part of the time in these communities revolved around saying and singing the seven daily offices and the night office, and since large communities could include as many as a thousand monks, it is not surprising that a magnificently functional type of building evolved, specifically designed to accommodate such worship. The most important space was the choir stalls (since the whole community was a choir), arranged in two parallel sections so that psalms could be sung **antiphonally** (alternative verses sung back and forth). In effect, these elongated choirs

provided a church within a church, often sectioned off from the nave by screens, which could be quite elaborate (fig. 4). The top often held a cross or crucifix; the term these screens in English is **rood screen**, from an Old English word for cross, “rood.” In many parts of Europe, churches displayed elaborate carvings or fabric art on the wall behind the altar, a feature known as the **reredos**. These altarpieces are some of the great treasures of the European art.

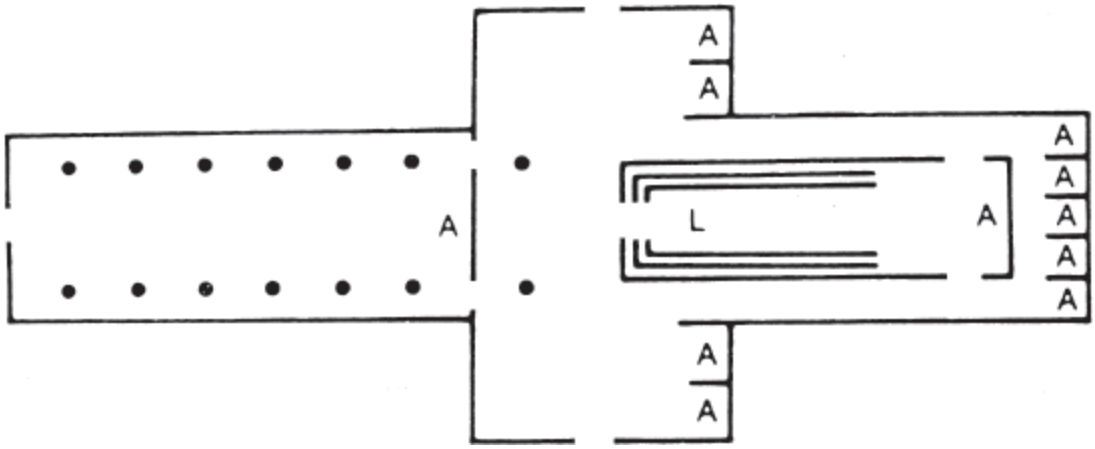


Figure 4

For a monastic community, this was a functional arrangement. A high altar table in the sanctuary served for Mass, and other altar tables were scattered throughout the building for private masses. Various other arrangements were tried for monastic communities: a choir in a western apse in Germany and a walled-in space in the middle of the nave in Spain. Cathedral churches followed the monastic pattern, often subdividing the interior space into more specialized compartments for chantry chapels where Mass was said for the repose of the dead.

It should not surprise us that these highly specialized churches had a disproportionate effect on parish churches, where most people worshiped in their village or town (fig. 5). These buildings, too, sprouted large, screened chancels, spaces used only by the local clergy and the family of the lord of the manor. But the congregation was not monks or clergy. The congregation was lay people relegated to the nave, where they could glimpse Mass while it was conducted at the altar table at the other end of the chancel. The nave often contained a pulpit around which the laity could stand.

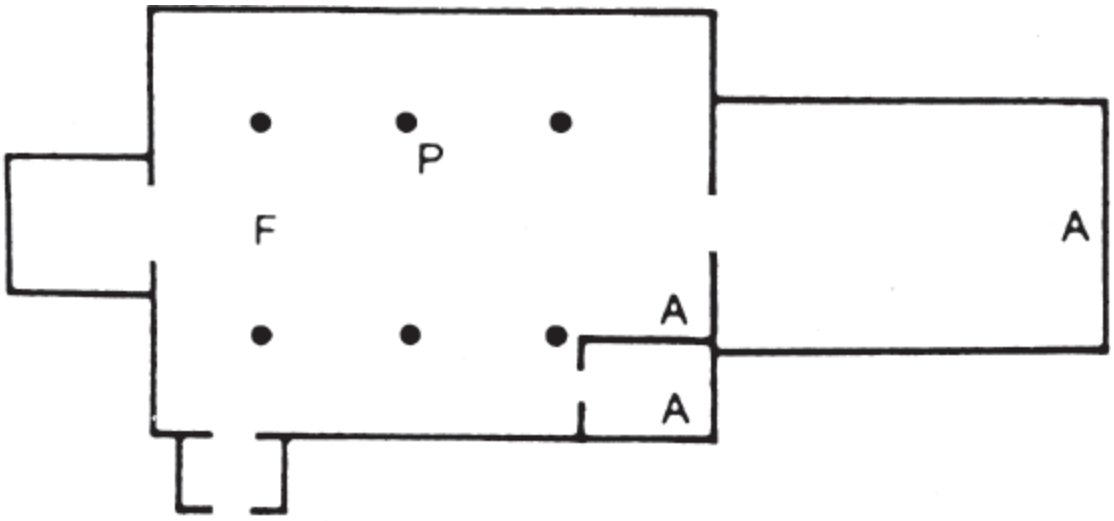


Figure 5

Unlike the monastic church, each parish church contained a font. By the late–Middle Ages, the services of baptism and marriage, both of which were largely conducted in the vernacular, began on the porch, just outside the nave, which was decorated with a vast array of sculptures, paintings, and stained-glass windows meant to instruct and to stimulate devotions. Until the fourteenth century, the nave was clear of chairs and pews. The congregation was mobile, and worshipers moved where they could see and hear best among the numerous masses and other services that may have been occurring simultaneously in different chapels around the nave. The late and gradual introduction of pews meant sitting down for worship and a congregation that was no longer mobile. As a result, congregations began to spend their time in private devotions.

Clergy and people had become so divorced that a sixteenth-century Catholic bishop wrote: “The people in the church [nave] took small heed what the priest and clerks did in the chancel…. It was never meant that the people should indeed hear the Matins or hear the Mass but be present there and pray themselves in silence.”[6] The division between nave and chancel, so functional in a monastic church, was inappropriate in parish churches but, nevertheless, imitated with zeal. The medieval parish church had become an excellent place for personal devotions (which was indeed primarily how the people used it), but it was a very poor place for genuinely liturgical worship with the “full, conscious and active participation in

liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy" (CSL, par. 4).

Over the Medieval period, theologians and laity alike began to attribute symbolic meanings to every bit of space, furnishings, and actions of worship. This fanciful development often betrayed the lost comprehension of how items were once functional and obvious in purpose.

The Protestant and Catholic Reformations saw great changes in the arrangements. The Jesuits, who had no need for choir space to say the daily office together, led the way among Roman Catholics in building sumptuous churches where the Mass could be a dazzling spectacle. The altar table once again became conspicuous without the intervening space of a choir or screens. Ornate pulpits were common.

It is hard to generalize about the Protestant experiments in liturgical architecture, so richly varied were they in trying to leapfrog over medieval developments to achieve what they, rightly or wrongly, considered to be primitive (early church) patterns in building. It was difficult, if not impossible, to teach the priesthood of all believers in a building rigidly divided into clerical chancel and lay nave. Medieval buildings were adapted by bringing all the communicants into the chancel for communion or by moving the whole service out into the nave. Sometimes the chancel was simply walled off and used for schools.

As Protestants constructed new buildings in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they experimented with a variety of shapes, though many buildings were of a centralized type. Figure 6 shows (left to right) several patterns that were drawn from German, Dutch, and Scottish examples.

The same variety of experimentation continued in eighteenth-century America. Figure 7 shows (at top) a typical Congregational meetinghouse, one of the many arrangements tried by Anglicans, and (at bottom) a Quaker meetinghouse with the movable partition between men's and women's meetings (indicated by a zigzag line).

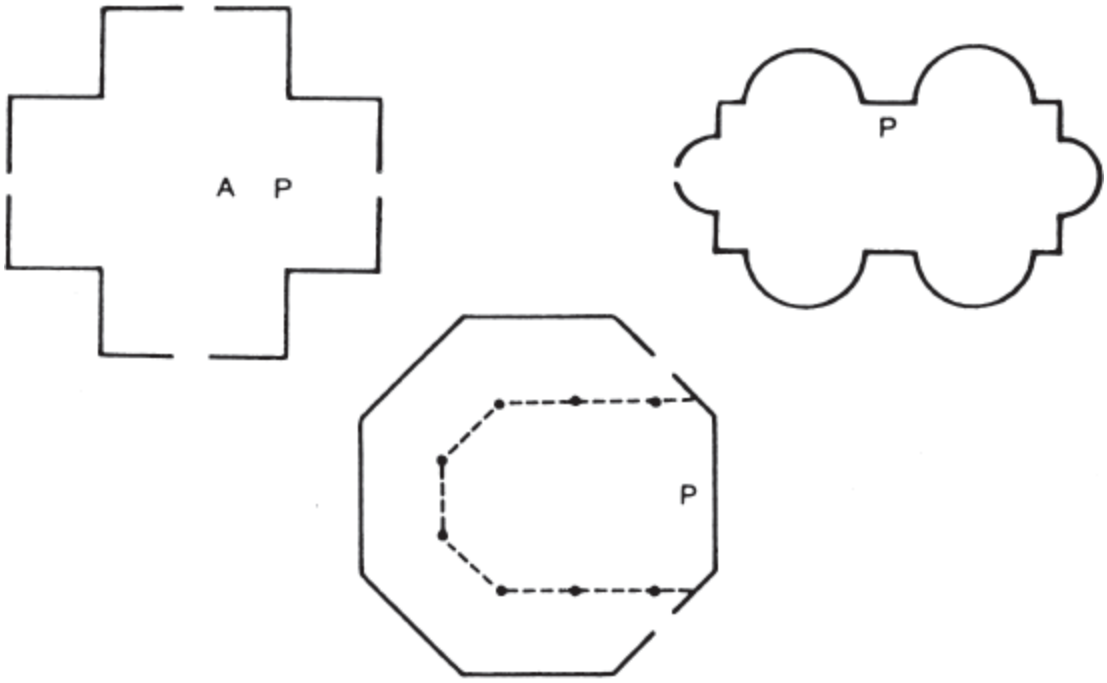


Figure 6

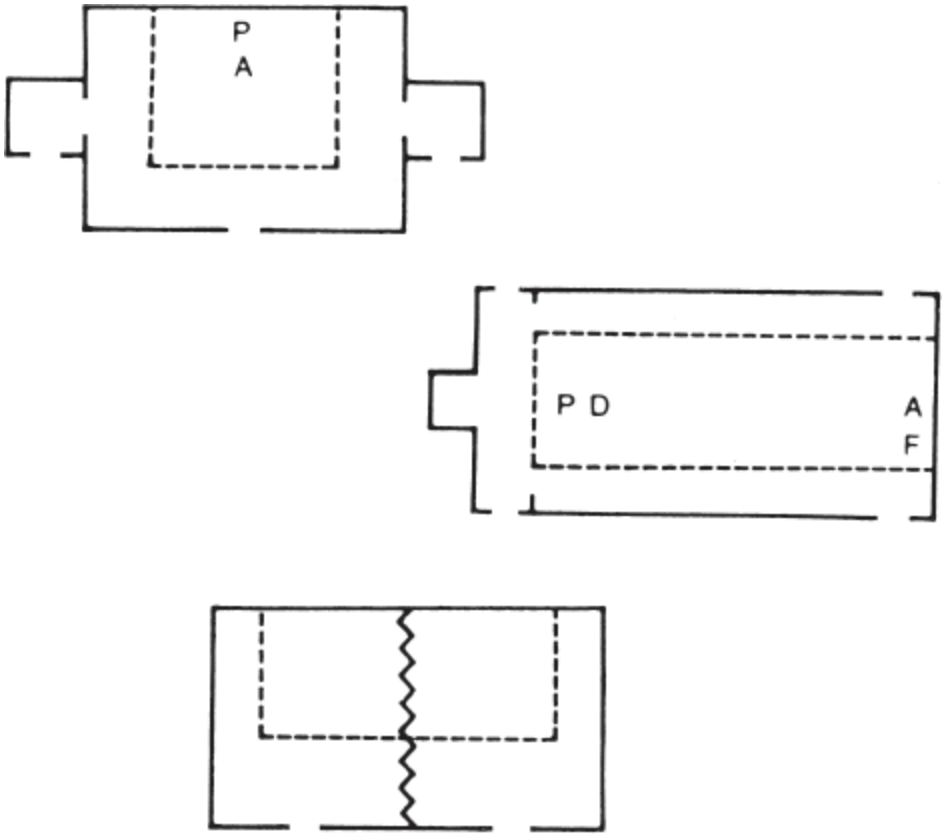


Figure 7

What do these have in common, if anything? None has a chancel; the chancel virtually disappeared from buildings constructed for Protestant worship for nearly three centuries. Instead, congregational space was magnified as choir and sanctuary space shrank or disappeared. The Quaker building is entirely congregational and movement space. A characteristic Protestant addition was construction of balconies to enable speakers to be heard by a large number of people. Balconies helped bring the total community closer together about the pulpit and Lord's table (visually and aurally), but balconies also made movement to the pulpit, font, and Lord's table more difficult.

The nineteenth century saw a reversal of these trends. The romanticism of the **Cambridge Movement** led many churches in the English-speaking world to clamor for a return to a neo-medieval type of building (fig. 8—compare with fig. 5). Revivalism, on the other hand, emphasizing pulpit personalities and massed choirs, developed the concert stage arrangement (fig. 9). Roman Catholic churches of this period tended to be variations of figure 9, with the altar table at C, a font near the door, and a diminutive pulpit off to the side of the chancel.

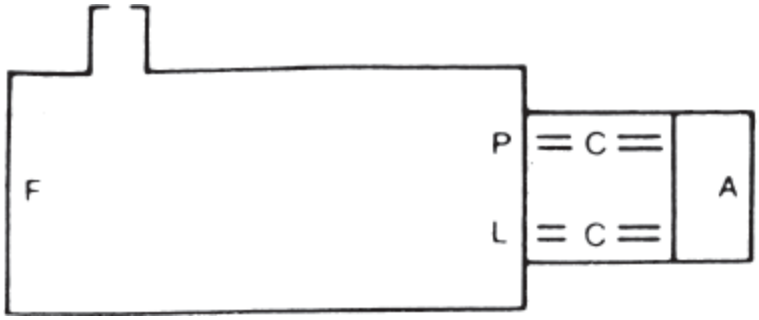


Figure 8

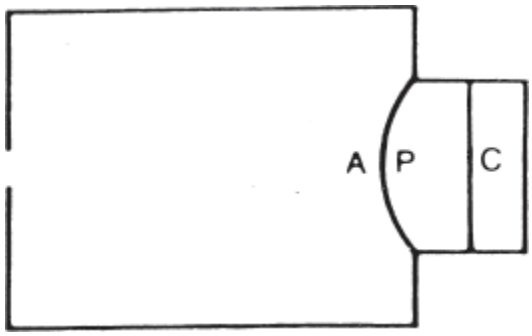


Figure 9

Since Vatican II there have been drastic changes in Roman Catholic architecture. Many of these modifications represent a move to a centralized plan, but with compromises necessary to make the spoken word function well and still allow concentric arrangements of people.

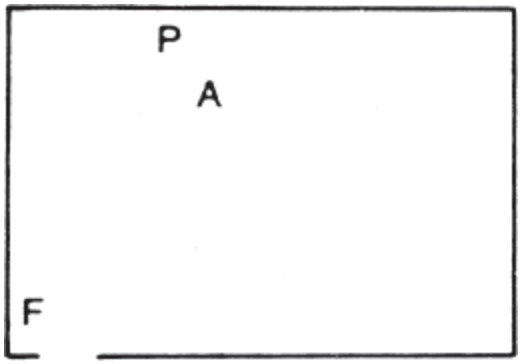


Figure 10

Figure 10 shows an arrangement that might appear in either a Protestant or a Roman Catholic church built today. Protestants would be more inclined to place the font before the congregation, but this is not unknown in recently built Roman Catholic churches. Roman Catholics would be more likely to feature a presider’s chair; Protestants generally would react against overly dominant clergy seating. Both groups are inclined to seek centralized shapes with the congregation gathered around the altar table. The fan shape has popularity among Roman Catholics.

Some of the most pronounced characteristics of current church buildings are the result of economic necessity and new construction methods. But others, such as low-profile buildings, nondirectional interior

space, and flexible seating, show deliberate attempts to recover some of the hospitality and intimacy of the house churches of early Christians.

What practical conclusions for our times can we draw from this rapid survey of the Christian experience with liturgical space? There is enough diversity mentioned here to make generalizations of any type difficult, yet when we look at these experiences with a critical eye, there is much to admire and much to deplore in each. Obviously, we have different standards of judgment than these of other ages, but we can propose some criteria of practical relevance for those who build or remodel space for Christian worship today.

1. Our first criterion is utility. How well does a building function in being used, not admired but used, by worshipers? The question can be resolved only by seeing how adequately the building serves for speaking and touching in God's name. If speaking cannot be heard because of atrocious acoustics, even though the space functions well for music, it can hardly be considered adequate. Or if the speaking is fine but the congregation is fractured into inaccessible balconies so that giving communion is difficult, the building again flunks. Clearly, there must be compromises between an ideal preaching church and a perfect sacramental church. The criterion of utility covers all uses. Churches are built to be used, not to be monuments for tourists to admire or art historians to chronicle.

2. Much of the success of the space organized most usefully for Christian worship is the result of a devotion to simplicity. Only when we understand what is basic and essential can we build well *for* worship. Restraint and discipline are crucial. The six essential liturgical spaces and the three or four liturgical centers provide the core of our discipline of simplicity. Knowing when to stop is all important. One must discuss worship before one considers architecture. Church building committees are notoriously poor clients because they do not do the homework necessary to understand what the church is and what it does in its worship. Without this information, even the best architects cannot design buildings or spaces adequate for use in worship.

3. Our survey has shown that the circumstances of Christian worship and the needs perceived are subject to change. The events of the last decades, especially, have also taught us the importance of flexibility.

Despite the constancy in Christian worship, there are strong forces shaping and changing the outward forms through which these constants are expressed. The most difficult churches to deal with today are those built, not so long ago, when we had not yet come to accept the reality of change in worship. A most important new element in our thinking about church architecture is the frank acceptance of change. John Ruskin's romantic "when we build, let us think that we build for ever" belongs to another age.[7] Instead, we should say, "When we build, let us not tie knots in the future." For we know it will be different, maybe even in a very short time. Immovable pews, massive pulpits, and fixed choir stalls belong to an age that could not even imagine the possibility of change. Both history and recent experience have taught us that what seems so true and obvious in one period may not be so in the next. Let us not try to impose our will in concrete on those who come after us. They deserve a voice, too.

4. An elusive strand throughout our historical survey has been the need for buildings that foster a sense of intimacy. This was certainly true in the early church, recovered again in many Reformation traditions, and now ardently sought in building today. The sense of intimacy is important as we emphasize participation by the entire worshiping community. Current revulsion against monumental type buildings is a healthy sign that a servant people has learned that architecture is meant to serve the community, not dominate it. This means smaller scale and less expensive buildings that allow each worshiper to play an important role in worship instead of being a lonely spectator lost in the audience. Intimacy implies a sense of hospitality, of welcoming the stranger.

5. The human spirit associates beauty with worship. Beauty, as we often are painfully aware, is an elusive quality, and consensus about what things and places are beautiful is not always easy to obtain. Yet, Christians and Jews have long professed the beauty of God that nourishes the human need for beauty. Psalm 96:9 declares: "O Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (King James Version). At their most profound, beautiful liturgical environments provoke a feeling of awe that draws us deeply into the worship of God. Sometimes this awe comes from scale, and Christians, historically, have defaulted to virtual space to elicit awe. Since the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, many congregations learned to find beauty in simplicity. In any case, attention to the beauty of worship will evolve as

churches and church architects seek to build the best possible liturgical space of which they are capable.

Utility, simplicity, flexibility, intimacy, and beauty seem to be the criteria by which we can best judge how adequately architecture and the design of spaces serves the church today. These are not the standards by which the great cathedrals of the thirteenth century were built or even the churches of the 1950s, although we can learn much from both. But the directness and honesty sought in our time can indicate new directions to add to the varied legacy of the past.

Those who have the responsibility of building or renovating space for a worshiping congregation have a wonderful opportunity to renew the life of their community. A building project can be the catalyst that makes church renewal possible. It can also be sheer hell. The *process* (planning to build) can be more important than the final *product* (the building). After all, the church is people, not a building. But planning for a building can often help the people discover, or rediscover, what it means to be the community of God's favor. Much depends on the leadership given in guiding the planning process and the willingness to take the time needed to prepare adequately.

Nevertheless, the building is not unimportant, either. After it is built, it will continue to shape worship in its image for generations. Although it is not completely true that the building will always win, we must at least recognize the building as a powerful ally and a formidable foe. Its witness may outlast its builders. The more carefully we study and reflect on Christian worship, the better equipped we will be to help plan a building that will provide the best space for speaking, acting, and touching in God's name.

TECHNOLOGY AND VIRTUAL SPACE

Technologies have always been a part of the rituals of Christian worship, so much so that they have become almost invisible. The designs and construction of church buildings, pulpits, seats, books of various types, sound amplification, and schemes for lighting the space have always been technologies present in worship. The technologies we speak of today are usually the more recent "high-tech" electronic and digital advances.

No technologies are neutral. They have a meaningful and formative quality that influences the experience of the worshipers and shapes their understandings of worship, though technologies always risk drawing attention to themselves. All this influences how the worshipers approach and understand the aim of their worship, God. It makes a difference if one is invited to kneel in worship and kneelers are provided, or if one is expected to use the floor. Or, if the singer's voice is greatly amplified by electronic means, or if the sound permeates the room purely by the acoustics of the space.

In some churches, technology is chosen pragmatically. It is not uncommon for a congregation to extend its reach by live streaming its sermon or even its entire service to another venue or campus, to broadcast the full service online live or in an asynchronous or delayed mode, or both. One might posit that the communication and relationship is different when the speaker or singer can see the persons receiving their message than when these leaders cannot see (or even know) who hears them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many more churches out of necessity entered the digital world of "virtual worship." Given the accessibility and quality of audio and video recording equipment made readily available through laptops, tablets, and phones, anyone could enter this world. Positively, this technology kept communities of faith connected during difficult times and even extended their normal reach. The challenge this created is that decisions often were made principally on a practical level: What can we do with the resources we have? The skill level in executing these virtual services varied depending on the human and financial resources of that community. Further, these churches were, at the same time, making theological decisions and revealing (intentionally or not) theological values: stronger emphasis was placed on worship as presentational than participatory. Some of the decisions made ran counter to the church's pre-pandemic theology. Roman Catholic Masses have been broadcast for over half a century, but these have always been intended as a supplement to personal attendance at the Mass. When one only has the option of attending a "virtual" Mass, the Catholic Church's belief in the sacramental character of the assembly and the assembly's participatory roles have become diminished.

One important problem that is drawing attention is how the use of technology can impose theological decisions on the congregant. In large spaces used for worship, from outdoor pontifical celebrations to indoor "mega-churches," cameras are used to project the leaders on large screens, often on either side of the liturgical event. When attending such an event in person, the individual may pay attention to the screens or not. However, once cameras become the "eyes" for worship, either on television or online, a camera operator and visual director determine what is most important for the congregation to see and hear. Similar to the way pews limited and changed congregational movement and other forms of participation, the use of digital media limits experience in ways we will only gradually understand, if history is our guide.

LITURGICAL ART

Space provides the setting for an important component of Christian worship: the visual arts. Ralph Adams Cram, the famous architect, was fond of referring to architecture as the "nexus of the arts." To a large degree this is true; architecture provides shelter not only for music and dance but also for sculpture, painting, and a variety of visual arts and crafts. But architecture does far more than just shelter the other arts; it adds to or subtracts from their effectiveness in helping Christians express their relationship to God. Technologies assist in displaying arts (e.g., in the projection of still photographs and/or of video formats), permitting their inclusion in worship when it might not otherwise be possible.

What function do the various visual arts play in Christian worship? Some traditions have avoided them altogether. At times, in the early church and the Reformation, there were violent outbursts against them, though these various outbreaks of **iconoclasm** (image smashing) were in themselves strong testimony to the power of visual images. At the opposite extreme, the arts are sometimes used simply to ornament space. Thus, tamed and innocuous, they have little potency for contributing to worship and merely provide superfluous decoration.

We must distinguish between religious art in general and liturgical art (sometimes called cultic art, especially when non-Christian examples are being considered). Most briefly stated, liturgical art is art used in worship.

“Religious art” is a much broader category and, by some definitions, includes illustrations in Sunday school literature, Van Gogh’s landscapes, or abstract art. Paul Tillich was willing to apply the term “religious” to any art that had a dimension of depth, penetrating beneath superficial observation.[8] Liturgical art, by contrast, is defined more by its use, although its subject matter is usually the divine or those through whom God has worked.

The prime function of liturgical art is to bring us to an awareness of the presence of the holy, to make visible that which cannot be seen by ordinary eyes. Liturgical art does not make God present, but it does bring God’s presence to our consciousness. As a photograph brings to mind loved ones who may be absent from us, so liturgical art opens our eyes to the unseen presence of God. There is a difference, of course; liturgical art makes us aware of a presence, not an absence.

Adequate liturgical art has a tremendous potency because of its religious power. This is the power to penetrate beneath the obvious and to convey the divine. Liturgical art must use the objects of this world to represent the immaterial. But when painting and sculpture merely reflect naturalistic reproductions of the appearance of persons or objects, they fail to penetrate beneath the surface, no matter how skillful the artist. Many popular paintings of the head of Christ represent only the human nature of Jesus and never lead us beyond the obvious. A twentieth-century painter, Georges Rouault, on the other hand, could treat this type of subject with such sensitivity that we know we stand before a suffering God. The far less skilled makers of *santos* of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hispanic culture of New Mexico and Colorado created a liturgical art of extraordinary religious power. Their images are primitive and may even be crude, but no one can contemplate them without being called to worship. They let loose numinous power in a piece of wood or canvas by relying on conviction and insight far more than academic artistic skills. Our inner eye is addressed by such art, and we discover how close seeing is to believing.

Those who destroyed liturgical art in the past recognized its religious power, but they feared that ignorant people might confuse the mirror with what it reflected. This is probably the least dangerous form of idolatry we face today. Indeed, when liturgical art calls us from indulging in the egocentric satisfying of our emotions and self-centered lives, it can break down a far worse form of idolatry.

Another characteristic of good liturgical art is its communal nature. What is encountered is not the individual experience of the artist but the insights of the total community. Good liturgical art is not noted for originality in subject matter but for capturing the experience of a community. This does not mean that the artist must even be Christian. From the ancient catacombs to modern France, successful liturgical art has been created by non-Christian artists working under the careful guidance of the Christian community, and many Christian artists have failed to produce satisfactory liturgical art because their muse called them to a personal vision rather than a communal one.

The community whose life together is meant to be served by such art is not just one generation old. It is a community of traditions. Those traditions reflect the way other generations have experienced and rejoiced in God's actions. These communities have found that some ways adequately reflect these realities in visual form. Past experience is always our point of departure in creating liturgical art for today. That is not to say liturgical art is unchanging; historical research can easily chronicle the introduction of new styles and contents. But beneath all its diversity, there is a strong underlying current of constancy in returning again and again to the same visual contents, just as we still prefer many of the same words and acts that link us to other Christians in different ages.

Part of the inherited vocabulary takes the form of visual symbols. Every mass movement creates its own visual symbols. Think of bumper sticker art on gun control, the environment, or the Confederate battle flag. Each is an instantaneous way of recalling shared beliefs, be they wholesome or not! The church has long used the same kind of visual shorthand. A crown of thorns, a manger, or tongues of flame—all these, and many more, convey shared beliefs and have done so for centuries. But symbols have a limited shelf life. Where now is the World War II "V" for victory? How many Christians now see a pomegranate or peacock and think "resurrection"? It is not easy to create fresh new symbols intentionally. They sneak up on us spontaneously. Probably thousands of people simultaneously thought of the aptness of the mathematical equal sign for expressing the justice of equality for women and men. We can await the appearance of new symbols and bury those that have died, for symbols have died when they become an esoteric code. Symbols are meant to be used because they reflect realities of

compelling importance for the lives of those experiencing them. They can be visual (images), audible (words), and kinetic (movements), but in all cases they must refer us to realities we experience.

We shall speak briefly of several media used as liturgical arts. The visual arts function in worship in two ways. Some are fixed and permanent; others are seasonal or only used occasionally. Both the commonness and the uniqueness of each event can be underscored by different liturgical arts, which can portray both continuity and change.

One of the most important of the fixed and permanent art media used in worship is sculpture. It has been greatly mistrusted in the Eastern Orthodox churches, which generally forbid sculpture in favor of two-dimensional representations. Until recently, most Reformation traditions also avoided three-dimensional forms as too tangible, though this has moderated greatly in recent decades.

Painting seemed dangerous to some of the reformers, but it must be remembered that each medieval church was itself a whole catechism, painted from floor to roof with sacred history, past and future. Some of the images (God the Father with a long beard) proved offensive to Roman Catholics as well. It was easier to print new catechisms, far less imaginative, no doubt, but far more explicit in teaching correct doctrine in an age of religious controversy. A host of artists have shown us how much painting can contribute to knowing the object of our worship in ways that transcend most verbal categories.

Much that was said about painting applies equally well to colored light, that is, stained glass. Few human creations are more beautiful or more changing than the warm splash of colored light on cold stone or plaster. We have misunderstood the medium too often by trying to make it explicitly pictorial. Its nature is closer to instrumental music, an abstraction that says something words and pictures cannot. There is no denying the emotive factors present in all worship, and stained glass seems to make an almost universal appeal to these.

Every church makes use of basketry, glassblowing, ceramics, or metalsmithing for communion vessels. These art forms provide opportunities for expressing the community’s joy in its Creator. Good quality baskets, glassware, ceramics, and silverware are available commercially in most areas. They are often superior to those stocked by

church-goods suppliers. Almost any community college has a studio art department that would welcome a chance to produce or help a congregation acquire these vessels. Bookbinding, as noted above, is a neglected but necessary art that deserves much more cultivation by the church today.

Liturgical arts for seasonal or occasional use include many possibilities, especially textiles, graphic arts, and electronic media. There has been an explosion of interest in textile arts in recent years, though their use is ancient. Undeniably part of the attraction of textiles is their impermanence. They can be removed, even discarded, after a single occasion or season. The variety of uses that textiles serve is impressive. **Antependia** or **paraments** are hangings or falls on the pulpit and lectern, and **frontals** serve in the same way to cover altar tables (though the preference today is not to conceal the form of the altar table). Seasonal colors and symbols are often used. Liturgical **banners** may be carried in processions or suspended where air currents give them movement.

More controversial are **vestments** or garb for the liturgical ministers. They are testimony to the conservatism of many clergy.[9] When barbarians swarmed down from northern Europe in the fifth century and introduced men's trousers to Rome, the clergy kept sartorial faith by continuing to wear the everyday garb of imperial Rome: the **chasuble**, a poncho-like outer covering; the **alb** or white dress-like tunic worn by men and women alike; the **stole** draped around the neck, a symbol of public office (comparable to a police badge); and the **cope**, a cloak. Derived from the tunic are the **dalmatic** with wide sleeves and slit sides, and the **surplice** with full sleeves, often worn over a long black outdoor garment, the **cassock**. Special garments are worn by bishops in some churches. Protestant clergy, academics, and judges continued to wear the black medieval scholar's gown. The eighteenth century saw the survival of a secular collar in two small, white neck **bands** or **tabs** which some Protestant clergy wear over a black **preaching robe**. The alb is now often used as an outer garment and is favored by many for its simplicity. Stoles add variety in colors, textures, and designs to whatever other garments are worn under (or over) them. Clothing is a means of communication, and what clergy wear says something about the event.

The graphic arts take as many forms as textiles. The first impression of worship is often a printed bulletin thrust into one's hand upon entering the

building, then a hymnal, songbook, or other service book. Gradually, we are coming to see that the way a page looks is almost as important as what is printed on it. Liturgical graphics have moved in recent years from depressingly drab to halfway exciting, although good examples are still rare.

Posters may be present in churches. Enlarged photos can make poignant statements, especially when lettered with key words in the lessons for the day. Obviously, some spaces are more adaptable to the display of banners and posters than others, but suitable lighting and places to hang seasonal art forms ought to be considered.

The most recent varieties of visual art forms utilize electronic media. Clips from motion picture films may be projected with sensitivity, provided the building allows this method of presentation and copyright permission is acquired. Where adequate control of lighting, flat reflective surfaces, and electrical outlets exist, projections can add a new dimension to worship that no other generation has known. Today a wall can be anything we want to project on it. The ability to use projections must be used with care, however, so that it supplements and underscores the rest of the service rather than overwhelming it. Like good liturgical music, visual art must be carefully coordinated with the entire service.

In all these art forms, we depend upon what the space will allow. The building and/or surrounding area can greatly enhance the effectiveness of the various liturgical arts, or it can hamper them. For better or for worse, the influence of the space in which we worship is crucial. How could it be otherwise in a religion grounded in the incarnation?

CHAPTER THREE TERMINOLOGY

alb

altar table

altar table space (see liturgical spaces)

ambo (see pulpit)

antependia (see paraments)

antiphonally

apse

bands

baptismal font

baptismal pool (see baptismal font)

baptismal space (see liturgical spaces)

baptistery

basilica

Cambridge Movement

cassock

chasuble

choir space (see liturgical spaces)

congregational space (see liturgical spaces)

cope

dalmatic

frontal

gathering space (see liturgical spaces)

iconoclasm

iconostasis

liturgical centers

liturgical spaces

martyrium

movement space (see liturgical spaces)

nave

parament

passing of the peace

preaching robe

presider’s chair

pulpit

reredos

rood screen

sanctuary

stole

surplice

tabs (see bands)

vestments

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1. While there is a vigorous debate among sociologists today about the specific meaning of “place” vis-a-vis “space,” we will use these words as roughly equivalent. “Place” will connote the specific location point, and “space” will connote the area around specific locations and the arrangement of persons and things within that area. See John Urry, “The Sociology of Space and Place,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology*. edited by Judith R. Blau (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), pp. 3–15.

2. For more detail, see James F. White and Susan J. White, *Church Architecture: Building and Renovating for Christian Worship* (Akron: OSL Publications, 1998).

3. Historically, there has always been a close relationship between the artists of the book and religious expression, and in no tradition has such been stronger than in Christianity. And within the range of the books’ arts, one of the most visible expressions of devotion through art has been in the field of bookbinding. The historical evidence is overwhelming, and it is a tradition that is very much alive today. But the tradition exists now more through the support of private patrons or university libraries than from commissions from the church.

4. For a more detailed historical account, see James F. White, *Protestant Worship and Church Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), chaps. 3–6.

5. In these simplified floor plans, A = altar table; C = choir; F = font; L = lectern; P = pulpit; dotted lines = balconies. Drawings are not to scale.

6. *The Letters of Stephen Gardiner*, edited by James A. Muller (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 355. Spelling modernized.

7. John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London: George Allen, 1903), p. 233.

8. “Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art,” *Christianity and the Existentialists*, Carl Michalson, ed. (New York: Scribner’s, 1956), especially pp. 134–44.

9. *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, edited by Paul Bradshaw (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp. 464–71.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SOUNDS OF MUSIC FOR WORSHIP

Both time (Chapter Two) and space (Chapter Three) come together when we begin to think about music in worship. Music exists in time because it has duration, and its temporality is characterized by meter and rhythm. But time is intrinsic to music itself, and those who make music are "time-involved creatures."[1] Even the most elementary tune uses rhythm, melody, and sometimes, harmony. Music for worship is very much determined by the specific occasion in the church year, the event observed (weddings, funerals, and so forth), and the musical preferences of the gathered community.

What we hear is also determined by the space in which music is produced. Each space for worship is actually a musical instrument that determines the quality of the music as an auditory experience. Sometimes this sound is enhanced (or degraded) by electronic amplification, the acoustical effects of furnishings or floor coverings, and the location of musical instruments and musicians within the space.

It is appropriate, then, to keep in mind that music must exist in both time and space and that these have major significance for the use of music in worship. Of course, Christian worship can and does exist without music, and a few Protestant traditions, such as the early Quakers, generally avoid the use of music altogether. For the majority of churches, however, music will serve a significant role, and may even be the most significant form of engagement for a congregation.[2] Frequently, we grasp the importance of

music best when we are deprived of it, as at a Good Friday service in some traditions.

We must begin by asking ourselves why music is considered so vital to Christian worship. Why do many congregations gladly spend a major portion of their church budget (in money, space, and time) on music? Then we must discuss what the major components of **church music** (or **sacred music** or **liturgical music)** are. We shall discuss the various forms music takes in Christian worship. Finally, we shall quickly review how music has functioned in Christian worship both in the past and in the present.

WHY DO CHRISTIANS SING?

The chief function of church music is to add a deeper dimension of participation to worship. One must be more fully aware and conscious of what one is doing in order to sing. The breath that animates each singer's song joins simultaneously with the breaths—and voices—of others to express faith and to glorify the God worshiped. The breathing together enabled by singing helps to realize the unity of the people gathered. To sing a text requires more concentration than just reciting something aloud, although overfamiliarity can make singing threadbare at times. When there is music, a deeper level of performing or listening is involved, usually, than when there is no music. Music, then, gives an added dimension to an event.

One of the reasons music aids worship is that music is a more expressive medium than ordinary speech. Music enables us to express an intensity of feeling through variety in tempo, pitch, volume, melody, harmony, and rhythm. Thus, one has a greater range of expressiveness when singing than when speaking. Music can, and often does, convey a greater intensity of feeling than would be expressed in its absence.

Another factor is the beauty of music. We must be cautious here because the creation of artistic beauty is not the purpose of worship (or of some music, either), though beauty may be of considerable value in worship. Music with minimal aesthetic qualities, nevertheless, seems to function well as a satisfactory vehicle for some individuals to express their worship. One cannot criticize a service of worship using the same standards applied to a professional concert. Many who have been taught to know what is "good" church music for "sophisticated" people fail to recognize that others also

have been taught what is “good” for various people and the circumstances in which this music is used. At every level of cultural sophistication, there are several different possibilities—some more appropriate than others for each situation. Thus, if we do not select music in accord with the culture and situation of our congregation, we are apt, instead, to be elitist in choosing.

One function of music, then, is to offer something we consider to be beautiful, no matter how meager our own musical accomplishments may be. This is why the act of singing itself involves more active participation than listening to someone else singing, no matter how superior the other’s musical attainments may be. Fortunately, we do not often have to choose between the two; we can have both music offered by an individual or a group and congregational song in the same service. But congregational song does have the distinct advantage of allowing everyone to offer to God the best sounds one can create. This cannot be replaced by someone else’s effort.

Church music is essential in adding further dimensions of feeling and beauty to our worship. If music is so important to worship, then the effects of the building on music are crucial. Sound vibrates in a church building or is absorbed into it just as in any other musical instrument. Some concert halls are built to be “tunable” with adjustable louvers so that the walls can absorb or reflect more sound. To a certain extent, this adjustment happens in church buildings too. The acoustics change as more people assemble and more sound is absorbed. The building functions in a variety of ways to affect different types of music.

The needs of **instrumental music** vary somewhat according to the instrument or the combination of instruments used. Usually, modern Western congregations prefer a bright, lively sound with some reverberation, but not enough to create an echo that would interfere with speaking. The use of instruments other than a piano or an organ demands provision of space, and often flexible space. It is best to have singers and instrumentalists adjacent to each other since it is difficult to sing to accompaniment from a distance. The whole interior of the space must be carefully planned so that sound does not turn a right angle to emerge from a chancel, or a pipe organ is not buried in a transept. The effects of surfaces and materials throughout the building will have a great impact on the quality of instrumental music heard, no matter how talented the performance.

Space has other effects on **groups of voices**. Indeed, the sound for choral music (e.g., choirs, worship singers, etc.) will be largely conditioned by the space provided for it. Before we design or set apart a space, we must ask, what is the function of choral music? Most congregations devote far more time and energy to building bigger and better choirs and groups of worship singers than to examining how they conceive them to function in their worship. But what we consider to be their chief functions will certainly determine the organization of the space and its location with regard to the other five liturgical spaces.

If the chief function of the formal choir or group of singers is conceived to be a sharing in the ministry of the word—singing *to* the congregation—a location facing the congregation may be necessary. But the voices are meant to be heard rather than seen and this location can cause problems. Other ministers should not have to compete with the singers for the congregation's attention, especially during preaching. If a singing group is considered necessary chiefly for the offering of beauty—singing *for* the congregation—a less conspicuous location could serve just as well. Increasingly, congregations are coming to understand that one of the prime functions of a choir, group of singers, or worship band is leading congregational song—singing with the congregation. This is particularly true when introducing new hymns or songs or when leading difficult mu sic. This support function is often best accomplished from behind the congregation. In any case, the singers ought to be as close to the congregation as possible, maybe even mingled with it. The old **basilican** arrangement (with the choir or group of singers in the front of the nave and surrounded by the congregation on three sides) has much to offer for all three of these functions.

Wherever the singers are located, their placement will determine the sense and meaning with which all hear what is sung. Thus, the location of the choir or group of singers is probably the single most vexing problem in organizing space for worship today. Ideally, since their role can change from week to week, their space is treated as mobile space. Some congregations, after much thought, use a choir only on special occasions and for sacred concerts. The space for the choir or song leader ought always to be related closely to congregational space so both leaders and congregation readily identify with each other and sing together. In worship, all in the gathered community are performers.

Most important of all is **congregational song**. This type of music provides an opportunity for all those present to express themselves. The prime criterion here is not beauty but adequacy of expressiveness. Congregational song must pass the test of expressing the inmost feelings and beliefs of the worshipers. When it succeeds in doing this, it is frequently (but secondarily) of great beauty.

Congregational song today includes a variety of forms, such as **psalmody** (singing the psalms), plainchant, **hymnody** (hymn singing), nonwestern songs, praise and worship songs, choruses (a short, repeated refrain), and **service music** (music to a fixed set of words in the liturgy, such as the *Sanctus*—"Holy, holy, holy"). Augustine called a hymn "the praise of God in song," but in a narrower sense, most hymns are metrical poetry set to melodies. Hymns can vary tremendously in form and content. Songs also may be free and not conform to a set meter, and they may utilize a refrain and also a bridge that connects two different sections or a verse to the refrain.

The importance of congregational song does not always prevent it from neglect. If the choir is a supplement to the congregation, except at sacred concerts, then this group of singers exists to do what the congregation cannot accomplish or to help the congregation do its singing better. Music by a dedicated group or soloist is not a substitute for congregational song.

Much of the effectiveness of congregational song depends upon acoustics. A building that absorbs sound too well embarrasses every member out of singing by reinforcing the fear of singing solo. Hard surfaces in flooring and walls can help singing greatly. In addition, the congregation should not be divided into separate transepts or balconies unless necessary. Such arrangements may be good for responsorial singing, but this form of singing is used less frequently than singing together.

Music is body art. Our inhibitions may keep us from acknowledging it, but music calls our whole body into motion. Children, unfortunately, learn not to dance. Younger children frequently break into dancing at the sound of music, but age stills them. At times, Christians have used **liturgical dance** as a major part of worship: Clement of Alexandria, in the second century, spoke of prayer as involving hands and feet. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the Shakers made dance an important part of their worship. They gave it up only when advancing age made it difficult for all members of their

community to participate. Some Christians find drumming and dancing natural ways to worship with hands and feet. Most North American Protestants are only a few generations removed from ancestors who understood hand clapping and foot tapping as a natural part of church music. African and African American worship is resplendent with congregational choreography, with everyone in the congregations clapping out the rhythms. In many Eastern Orthodox churches, the whole congregation is still as mobile today as Western Christians were before the introduction of pews in the late middle ages.

The whole body participates in worship through various **postures** (kneeling, standing, sitting), **gestures** (embracing, breaking of bread, making the sign of the cross), and movements (communing, assembling, offering). In recent years, the ancient **procession** of the whole congregation on special occasions has been rediscovered as a stirring form of witness, especially when accompanied by appropriate song and/or instru mental music. Even clothing is an important part of worship. It testifies to our understanding of the occasion and our role in it, as well as facilitating or constraining meaningful movement.

Liturgical dance has become more common in recent years. In many respects, it is comparable to choral music with trained and skilled performers providing leadership. When possible, the congregation also ought to participate actively, just as with congregational song. Where congregational space is packed full of immovable pews, the possibilities of congregational dance are greatly limited.

Silence, too, is an important part of worship. The absence of sound can often communicate much. The best use of silence depends upon discipline; silence comes to be fully corporate by being directed in such a way that all worshipers focus together in confessing sin, reflecting on a lesson just read, meditating on a topic or concern, or offering intercession. Directed silence can be intensely communal. To remain uninterrupted, silence may require shielding space from outside noise or subduing mechanical sounds within the building. Even in silence, space is all important.

FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF MUSIC FOR WORSHIP

It is nearly impossible to re-create music used for Christian worship prior to the ninth century because where musical notation survives, it is not exactly certain how it was performed. Early church musicians depended entirely on memory. Eventually, ascending or descending lines were sometimes placed above the words of a text. By the eleventh century, an Italian monk, Guido d'Arezzo, had begun to develop a means of placing signs, which we now recognize as notes, on parallel lines, thus indicating pitch by location.[3] Only later was a means found to indicate the duration of each note. During the twentieth century, Thomas Edison invented a means of preserving sound: the phonograph. Thus, what the first millennium could usually preserve only by memory, we can re-create through musical notation or reproduce through electronic means.

Technology has always influenced the development of music for worship as new musical instruments made their advent. The most dramatic of these was the pipe organ which, coming from secular origins in classical antiquity, did not make its advent in churches in the West until the tenth century. Organs first became present in large abbeys and cathedrals, but they did not become common in small parish churches until much later. Organs originally functioned to support the singing of choirs at Mass and in the daily office. During the Reformation era, organs came to support congregational song. Other musical instruments were often used for solo or group performances, and each century expanded the possibilities available. The late twentieth century brought new electronic instruments with new sounds and musical instruments not historically associated with Christian worship.

Here lies a perennial problem for music used for worship: its relationship to music in the secular world. Early Christians were aware of the religious music of their local cultures, such as that at weddings and funerals, and many took deliberate steps to avoid the associations these brought. The music of Judaism also posed a problem. The Hebrew scriptures, especially the psalms, made abundant reference to the use of musical instruments in worship, but Christians were nervous about too close a resemblance in their worship. In modern times, the advent of gospel blues posed a similar challenge: how much could music for worship resemble dance music or the sounds from nightclubs?[4] The challenge has reappeared with every new musical form and will, no doubt, continue to do so. Usually, Christians have

managed to baptize each new style and, eventually, appropriate it for church use.

At the other extreme has been sacred music not intended for worship but rather designed for the concert hall. Many of the so-called masses written in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries were never meant to be sung during the eucharist. They turned the texts of traditional service music into performance pieces for the concert stage. Johannes Brahms' *German Requiem* would make for an unbearably long funeral but a gorgeous musical tribute. Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* might be considered blasphemous in church. The relationship between the church and the world in music has been, and continues to be, ambiguous.

One factor, however, remains constant. Music for worship is meant to have a high element of participation even when it is performed by others. It is the offering of ourselves even when we are not the actual players or singers. We share in the offering of sound by the intentionality of our being present for worship. The concert hall may be purely detached performance; the church is participation. And this is most obvious when we "lift every voice and sing" in whatever musical form or style is appropriate for the community. As far as we know, some forms of music were present in Christian worship at its origins. Even at the Last Supper, a hymn was sung (Matt. 26:30), possibly a selection from Psalms 115-118. Christians were exhorted to sing "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:18-20 and Col. 3:16-17). It is quite possible that in the New Testament we have actual examples of **canticles** (songs), such as the *Magnificat* or Song of Mary, the *Benedictus* or Song of Zechariah in Luke 1, and the *Nunc Dimittis* or Song of Simeon in Luke 2.

Much had been inherited from synagogue worship: "This non-clerical, lay-led, word centered worship—where a spiritualized sacrifice of praise occupied the heart of the worship—provided an important model to the followers of Jesus."[5] Yet Christian worship tended to have more elements of spontaneity, even the ecstatic, than Jewish. There is early evidence of the development of **metrical hymns**, that is, divided into stanzas, each with repetitive meters and number of lines. Of the first three centuries, Edward Foley concludes "[t]he whole of worship is musical and to the extent that the worship belonged to the whole assembly, so did the music belong to them"[6] rather than to special singers or **cantors**.

When Christianity became legal and respectable under Constantine, worship in general and music especially became much more complicated and sophisticated. Musical instruments could be tolerated if free from pagan associations. Cantors appeared in the fourth century to lead the worshipers in singing texts or as solo performers. In time, choirs emerged so the worshiping assembly now had a variety of musical specialists. A debate arose over whether women could sing in public worship. Opponents argued from Jewish precedent and Paul's words in I Corinthians 14:34 that "women should be silent in the churches." Eventually this was resolved with the acceptance of choirs of women singers or women participating in congregational song.

Music came to play a large role in theological battles. Ambrose of Milan composed many hymns; some, such as "O Splendor of God's Glory Bright," are still sung.[7] The sixth-century Venantius Fortunatus is represented in modern hymnals by "Hail Thee, Festival Day" or "Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle." Augustine, sensitive to the power music had to distract worshipers with its beauty, insisted on the need for the text to dominate. Since the fourth century, metrical hymns have continued to be added to the treasury of church music. Hymn singing was part of the people's daily public prayer as Eusebius of Caesarea noted about 337 C.E.: "the delights of God are the hymns poured forth everywhere on earth in his Church, both morning and evening."[8]

In the Middle Ages, many of the advances in church music, such as musical notation, came from the monastics. Monastic life revolved around singing daily public prayer eight times each day and night in the section of the church known as the choir (or quire). Hence a very distinctive type of church music developed that reflected monastic life itself. This life was heavily communal, but it also focused on individual contemplation and edification. The music that evolved focused on the singing of liturgical texts, especially the entire psalter—to be sung weekly—as well as many hymns written for the liturgical year and cycle of saints. The choir space was usually divided into two parallel sections of stalls where the psalms could be sung responsively. Sometimes, single verses were repeated as an **antiphon**. Dialogues were sung as responsories or invitatories ("O Lord, open thou our lips/And our mouth shall show forth thy praise").

The musical style that developed is known as **Gregorian chant** or **plainsong**. Like monastic life, it is austere and ascetic. Gregorian chant is sung in unison rather than in harmony, so all voices are united in a single pitch. Embellishments were avoided, and the words shaped the rhythm. It is communal and contemplative. **Office hymns** were written to add to the scriptural components, for various times of day, and to commemorate special occasions; most end in a **doxology** addressed to the Trinity. A late example of an office hymn is Bishop Thomas Ken's "All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night" which ends with the familiar doxology: "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow."

In the Middle Ages, monastic forms of worship were most influential in molding daily public prayer for parochial use, developing church music, and shaping church architecture. In the Mass itself, service music evolved in parish and cathedral settings as well as abbeys. The ordinary parts (fixed musical texts of the Mass) include the ***Kyrie*** (Lord, Have Mercy), the ***Gloria in excelsis*** (Glory Be to God on High), the ***Credo*** (I Believe), the ***Sanctus*** and ***Benedictus*** (Holy, Holy, Holy … Blessed is He), and the ***Agnus Dei*** (Lamb of God).

The **propers** (varying texts) changed to fit the lessons: introit (psalm verse at the entrance rite), **gradual** (after the epistle), **alleluia** (before the gospel), **offertory**, and **communion** (usually a psalm verse during communion). Thousands of **sequences** or original poetic texts elaborating the occasion developed out of the alleluias. Virtually all these sequences were eliminated in the Roman Missal of 1570 that followed the Catholic reforms of the Council of Trent. Thankfully, some sequences were salvaged as metrical hymns for congregational use by the nineteenth-century translator John Mason Neale: "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" for Palm Sunday or "O Sons and Daughters, Let Us Sing" for Easter.

Most singing at Mass was done by choirs of men and boys and in Latin. But there were areas, such as Poland, that developed a vernacular hymnody to be sung by laypeople. The late Middle Ages saw the gradual introduction of pipe organs in larger churches.

Composers of the late Middle Ages began to employ **polyphony**, or the use of many voices simultaneously, sometimes to different texts and melodies. This demanded choirs with a high degree of musical skill. Secular tunes made their way into service music and one military tune, "The Armed

Man," became the basis for many settings of the Mass. Some questioned the appropriateness of polyphony in worship.

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century saw an explosion of new functions for music in worship, ranging from a total abolition of music in worship to a service that was almost completely musical. Within Roman Catholicism, a debate arose over whether music had become too secular to be tolerated. The Council of Trent even debated the "total suppression" of church music rather than its reform. Fortunately, reform won out, although with the provision that the clergy "shall also banish from the churches all such music which, whether by the organ or in the singing, contains things which are lascivious or impure."[9] St. Ignatius Loyola took a dim view of much music and forbade it for his novices. Yet brilliant composers of service music abounded: Giovanni Gabrieli in Venice, Orlando di Lassus in Rome, and Tomas Luis de Victoria in Madrid. Above all others, Pierluigi da Palestrina excelled in writing music with such restraint that the counterpoint did not interfere with the audibility of the text. His *Missa Papae Marcelli* of 1555 became the ideal of sophisticated music that did not submerge the text. Palestrina reached a compromise between liturgical austerity and musical elaborateness written for six parts.

Martin Luther was the first to glimpse radical new possibilities for church music. Theologically, music could enable the full participation that belongs to the priesthood of the laity. Luther loved music and placed it second only to theology as a gift from God. He envisioned a form of worship in which virtually everything but the sermon would be sung. His *German Mass*, published in 1526, consists of detailed instructions for singing the liturgy. In addition to the traditional instrumental and choral music, Luther urged the laity also to sing the ordinary parts of the Mass (*Kyrie*, and so forth). He made significant contributions to hymnody, publishing a vernacular hymnal as early as 1524 and encouraging musicians and poets to compose and write for congregational song. Luther himself wrote and composed at least thirty-seven hymns and tunes—many of them based on the psalms.

Priorities in Church Music: 1500–1800

	Roman Catholic	Lutheran	Zwingli	Calvin, Scots, and Puritans	Anabaptists	Church of England	Quakers	Methodists
Instrumental	X	X				X		
Choral	X	X				X		
Service Music	X	X				X		
Hymnody		X			X			X
Psalmody		X		X	X	X		X

Diagram 7

Thus, there is a strong theological basis for church music in Luther. All the baptized help fulfill their priestly rights and duties by singing in worship. Music provides a spiritual sacrifice that is acceptable to God. Luther envisioned what we would call musical liturgy rather than liturgical music. His successors also found that hymnody provided an ideal means for teaching the demands of the Christian life. Eventually, a "hymn of the day" was designated for Lutheran churches to complement the gospel lesson for each Sunday and feast day.

Lutheranism's greatest single contribution came in Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) who, working most of his career in the parish church of St. Thomas in Leipzig, wrote a multitude of instrumental and choral music for the weekly eucharist. At his hands, many **chorales**, usually based on a nonbiblical text, were written for both choir and congregation. He also wrote choral **cantatas** (that is meditations on the lessons), **oratorios** as sacred dramas, such as the Christmas Oratorio, and **passions** to tell the passion narrative, as in St. Matthew or St. John.

A quite contrary direction was taken by Luther's contemporary reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, the reformer in Zurich. Zwingli was a fine musician and had composed music, but he felt guided by unconditional obedience to scripture which, for him, meant no music in public worship.[10] As a result, singing ceased in the Zurich churches in 1523, and in 1527 the city council gave orders for the destruction of the pipe organs.

Although they agreed with Zwingli on the basic austerity of worship, the Anabaptists—known today as Mennonites, Amish, or Hutterites— took a

different view. Their furtive gatherings for worship certainly did not allow for pipe organs, but they did develop a very rich hymnody. Their singing was devoid of instrumental accompaniment but rich in fervor. Anabaptist hymns are extraordinary as they are filled with the anguish of suffering and martyrdom, the fate of so many early Anabaptists. Not only do they keep alive the memories of those who have already given their lives for the faith, but these hymns also anticipate that congregations singing them will join their predecessors in suffering. The identification of the present gathered church with the church of apostolic times permeates these hymns, which function to fortify the present Christian against a hostile world, just as the early Christians faced a hostile Roman Empire. Old Order Amish use the *Ausbund*. First published in 1560, it is the oldest Protestant hymnal still in use. Recent Mennonite hymnals, however, have moved more toward the mainstream in hymnody and other forms of song, though in many communities' hymns are still sung unaccompanied.

John Calvin was more reticent than either Luther or Zwingli. Instrumental, choral, and service music as well as hymns disappeared. Still, Calvin relished the possibility of the congregation singing from such "inspired" texts as the psalms and scriptural canticles. Since these texts were from scripture, they obviously took priority over hymns which were "uninspired," or of human composure. Calvin's stratagem was to have the psalms translated into French in the form of metrical paraphrases, not exact translations but in **stanza form** with a repeatable metrical pattern. Calvin may have been influenced by hearing hymn singing in the German-speaking church of Martin Bucer in Strasbourg. At any rate, he found excellent composers, such as Louis Bourgeois (known for "Old 100th"—often used for "All People That on Earth Do Dwell" and the doxology, "Praise God") and Claude Goudimel. Calvin sought poets, such as Clément Marot, to produce the hymn texts, and he published French versions of all the psalms. He also introduced the singing of the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments). Despite a liturgy that can be excessively penitential, visitors to Geneva noted the solemnity and joy that psalmody gave to services and were impressed by the high degree of active participation achieved. All singing was congregational, biblical, and essentially from the Hebrew Bible.

Geneva became an international pilgrimage spot for visitors from all over Europe, and many returned home with the same musical ideals as

Calvin. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland adopted the exclusive use of psalmody as its music for public worship. There are still some Reformed churches that allow nothing else. They argue that only the words of scripture are worthy to praise God. The English Puritans were of a similar mind. It is not by accident that the first book published in English in the new world was their *Bay Psalm Book* (1640). Usually, the method of singing was the introduction of each line by a leader and then its repetition by the congregation, a method often described as **"lining out."**

A subsequent development was led by Isaac Watts, an English Congregationalist, who, trying to make David "speak like a Christian," produced such hymns as "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" (Psalm 90) but moved on to topics David never contemplated, such as "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." Watts' innovation of hymn singing for the English people met stubborn resistance and did not prevail among many Puritans (Congregationalists) and Presbyterians until well into the nineteenth century.

Until mid-nineteenth century a large section of the Church of England embraced more musical variety but very little hymnody. There was no theological objection to singing hymns, as there was among the Scots and Puritans, but neither was there the impetus the Lutherans and Anabaptists found for hymnody. Psalm singing fared much better, and there was a strong tradition of congregational singing of the psalms in the metrical paraphrases of Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins, published in 1562, and later the *New Version* of Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady, introduced in 1696.

Service music flourished especially in the cathedrals and collegiate churches. John Merbecke composed music for the Anglican eucharist as early as 1550; he was followed by William Byrd, Thomas Tallis, and Orlando Gibbons. In 1662, the prayer book provided **anthems** after the third collect for morning and evening prayer. Based on scripture or other texts, the anthem provided a magnificent repertoire for those in "Quires and Places where they sing" (Rubric, 1662, *BCP*). Until the nineteenth century, these places were not likely to be parish churches, but the cathedrals and colleges developed a magnificent tradition of choral music.

Several major musical changes came about in the nineteenth-century Church of England. Increasing affluence made possible the introduction of pipe organs in most parish churches, architectural changes increased the desire for parish choirs vested in surplices, and eventually, the singing of

hymns by the congregation became popular. The work of John Mason Neale in recovering medieval hymns and the collaboration of a host of Victorian hymn writers and composers made hymn singing a major part of worship in the Anglican communion. *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (first edition, 1861) provided a comprehensive musical source for daily, Sunday, and special occasion worship, and the collection's ongoing popularity among Anglicans generated revisions and updates with new texts and tunes into the twenty-first century.

Quakers in the seventeenth century felt that prepared texts were out of place in worship and were based on human will rather than God's. Thus, they dispensed with all forms of music including congregational song. It was possible, but rare, that an individual might share his or her concern with the meeting in a sung version. Silence could often suffice for a gathered meeting in the Spirit. From the nineteenth century onward, some Quaker communities took up "programmed" worship that could include preaching as well as congregational song.

When Methodism emerged in the eighteenth century, founder John Wesley preferred unaccompanied and unison singing since it best amplified the message of the text. Choral anthems were not "joint worship," that is, shared by all, and so no provision was made for service music. Drawing on ancient history, the work of Isaac Watts, and their contacts with the Moravians, Methodist leaders saw a clear need for hymns, and over six thousand texts were penned by Charles Wesley. Since the framework for Methodist worship was missional within the national church, hymns were an ideal way of reaching out to the unchurched. Hymns served not only to give praise to God but to teach doctrine and evangelize. The Wesley brothers published multiple collections addressing different subjects or themes. All these collections expressed an explicitly Methodist theology concerning the way of salvation, that is, the progression from unbelief, to active faith and trust, toward sanctification.

The nineteenth century discovered other functions for music during the time of worship. In the crusade to convert a largely unchurched American population, music was particularly useful. In camp meetings and revivals all over America, music was an important factor in preparing people to be receptive to preaching intended for conversion. Churches that had not tolerated choirs were soon adding soloists, trios, quartets, and full choirs to

their worship. Choirs were still controversial as late as the 1830s, but they soon became omnipresent, along with pipe organs, as wealth increased.

Hymnody underwent a transformation. The camp meeting blended the spirituals of both African American and Euro-American musical styles, often with simple texts for illiterate converts. Increasingly the hymn texts moved away from the objectivity of Watts and Wesley to a much more subjective, individualistic approach, singing in first person of one's experience of Jesus or one's fervent anticipation of heaven. An influential writer of gospel hymns was Fanny J. Crosby (1820–1915), whose texts, such as "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine" or "Rescue the perishing" are still popular in some communities.

Roman Catholic service music during this period had adopted an operatic style, a type of music that was highly dramatic and emotionally manipulative. It demanded highly trained choirs and professional musicians. But change was imminent in reaction to this music, which focused heavily on individual emotional responses. Study of medieval chant by the monks of Solesmes Abbey in France brought about a rediscovery of the austere objectivity of the Gregorian chant. With the strong support of Pius X (Pope 1903–14), a major effort was made to reintroduce Gregorian chant so that it could be sung by congregations, albeit in Latin. For fifty years, millions of schoolchildren were taught Justine Ward's method of singing Gregorian chant. The musical style was as foreign to modern Catholics as the Latin texts, but the object was to increase lay participation in the Mass.

Many mainline Protestant churches in the first half of the twentieth century moved to more or less frankly acknowledged classical, Eurocentric aesthetic models for worship music. This involved founding schools of sacred music (Westminster, 1926; Union, 1928) to produce competent church musicians. Thousands of churches worked to build better choirs and to install pipe organs. Hymnals were revised, each generation becoming more musically sophisticated. Musicians such as Ralph Vaughan Williams (known for tunes such as "Sine Nomine," "King's Weston," "Forest Green") wrote or arranged an abundance of quality tunes.

Meanwhile, various folk traditions persisted. Many folk melodies had found their way into collections such as *Southern Harmony* (1835) and *Sacred Harp* (1844), and shaped note music was developed to teach the musically illiterate, with a proliferation of singing schools in congregations

of all sizes. Within some African American communities, unaccompanied folk spirituals endured in a call-and-response format with improvised texts and harmonies and stylized rhythms. The Shakers developed their hymnody with much of it addressing God in feminine language. Dance became an important form of expression for their members.

Eventually, the gospel blues, promoted by Thomas Dorsey (“Precious Lord, Take My Hand”), became accepted in many African American churches despite considerable opposition, since many African American church leaders preferred, often for social and political reasons, to emulate the music found in white churches. Even so, that “white” music was typically embellished with ornaments and slides along with adjustments in rhythm and tempo to create a unique sonic experience. Black gospel continued to develop inspired by Pentecostal musicians, many associated with the Church of God in Christ. In recent years, styles from the black cultural experience have migrated into the worship setting among them (Christian) rap and (holy) hip-hop.

Vatican II brought a revolution in church music for Roman Catholics. At first, the result was constant borrowing from the Protestants, but now hymns and songs by Catholic poets and composers find their way into Protestant hymnals and song collections. Nothing is more ecumenical than church music. The music of the Taizé Community in France, with its repetition of simple texts, has been popular throughout Western Christianity. Much of the revolution in Catholic Church music has shown that, despite historic resistance to congregational singing, Catholics can sing hymns and other service music with enough encouragement and experience.[11] Pride of place has slipped away from Gregorian chant to hymnody and other forms of song. Psalmody has been recovered, often with a cantor singing the verses and the congregation repeating a refrain. Today, American Catholic congregations have freedom in choosing hymnals since the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has not mandated a specific collection.

The variety of uses for church music continues to expand. In the praise and worship style of worship, music dominates at least the first half of the service with simple and repetitive texts often projected on a screen. The texts may be based on single verses from scripture, and the musical instruments may include almost anything but a pipe organ. Brass, woodwind, keyboard/synthesizer, and percussion instrumentalists are often well-paid

professionals. In some contemporary churches, very little service music is sung by the congregation, but professional musicians provide “entertainment evangelism” with music that resonates in nostalgic style to whatever age group is targeted.

Present-day hymnals and song collections represent another significant development: the advent of a new global consciousness in the churches. As Christian churches grow in various parts of the world, they are in the process of developing their own musical styles. While earlier missionaries usually imported the music they were familiar with at home, today’s maturing churches increasingly compose and sing in musical idioms of their own culture. Furthermore, as many of these people immigrate to the United States, they bring their new musical styles with them. Congregations may intentionally choose to accentuate a global musical consciousness in their worship to emphasize the multicultural aspects of the body of Christ. Many mainline churches now have hymnals with some texts in languages other than English and with tunes unfamiliar to the English-speaking majority. That said, in recent years, Christian churches have become more sensitive to the care needed not to exploit or misinterpret the musical traditions of other cultures.

At the same time, modern technology has enabled us to hear sounds never heard before. The internet gives access to texts and music from all parts of the globe; lead sheets, musical notation, and recordings are quickly available with the click of a button, though attention should still be given to copyright permissions where required. The only limits in producing sounds of praise seem to be in our imaginations. God has given us not only tongues but hands to use in praise.

CHAPTER FOUR TERMINOLOGY

Agnus Dei

alleluia

anthem

antiphon

basilica

Benedictus

cantatas

canticles

cantors

chorales

communion

congregational song

Credo

doxology

gestures

Gloria in excelsis gradual

Gregorian chant

hymnody

introit

Kyrie

lining out

liturgical dance

metrical hymns

offertory

office hymns

oratorios

passions

plainsong

polyphony

postures

procession

propers

psalmody

Sanctus

sequences

service music

stanza form

1. Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 34–35.

2. Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 131–32.

3. Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1992), p. 44. This book and Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), are excellent general surveys.

4. Michael W. Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Dorsey in the Urban Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 185–208.

5. Edward Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music* (Nottingham: Grove Books, 1992), p. 50.

6. Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, p. 84.

7. In most recent hymnals, such information is indexed according to composers, translators, and authors.

8. Commentary on Psalm 64:10, author's translation, *Patrologia Graeca* 23, 640.

9. H. J. Schroeder, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford: Tan Books, 1978), p. 151.

10. Anthony Garside Jr., *Zwingli and the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 7–26.

11. On this problem among Catholics, see Thomas Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing* (New York: Crossroads, 1991).

CHAPTER FIVE

DAILY PUBLIC PRAYER

In previous chapters, we have seen how important time, space, and music are as vehicles of communication in Christian worship. Indeed, it is quite possible that non-Christians gain most of their impressions of Christian worship by noticing the holy days their Christian neighbors keep, the buildings Christians frequent on these holy days, and the music that fills these buildings.

Our concern in this chapter, and the following one, is the spoken or sung word as a basic form of communication for much of Christian worship. The term "word" is so important as a symbol that the Fourth Gospel uses it (*logos*) for Christ himself (John 1:1, 14). By comparison, references to "the hand of God" are only half as numerous in the Scriptures as "the Word of God." In the Protestant Reformation, the Word of God became a prominent term referring to Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the event of communication of God through human speech. These associations continue today. The ambiguity that arises from the use of "word" to imply God, book, and speech underscores the complexity and importance of this image for Christian life.

Two historic structures of Christian worship are built primarily on spoken or sung words. Other ritual actions are present in these two structures, but only in subsidiary ways. Those structures are services of daily public prayer (which we shall consider in this chapter) and the service of the word (to be discussed in Chapter Six). The latter is the primary form of worship in most Protestant churches and in some Roman Catholic congregations, especially where there is a shortage of priests.

Patterns of Daily Prayer

	Private Prayer		People's Office		Monastic		Reformation		Modern	
	Tertullian	*Apostolic Tradition*	*Apostolic Constitutions VIII*	Egeria	Basil	Benedict	Lutheran	Anglican	Various Protestant	Roman Catholic
12 M (Mid-night)										(Office of Reading variable times)
3		Cockcrow	(Sunday Vigil)	(Sunday Vigil)	Before Dawn	Nocturns				
6	Morning	Morning	Morning	Dawn	Morning	Lauds Prime	Matins	Matins (Morning Prayer)	Morning Prayer	Lauds
9	Third	Third			Third	Terce				
12 N (Noon)	Sixth	Sixth		Midday	Sixth	Sext			Midday or Noonday	Middle Hour
3	Ninth	Ninth		Afternoon	Ninth	None				
6	Evening		Evening	Lychnicon	After Work	Vespers	Vespers	Evensong (Evening Prayer)	Evening Prayer	Vespers
9		Bedtime			Nightfall	Compline			Compline,	Compline
12 M		Midnight			Midnight				Close of day, or Night	

Diagram 8

We begin this chapter, however, by looking at the history of ways Christians have prayed daily. After surveying the various histories of daily prayer, we shall describe the theological priorities of services centered in the practice of daily public (common) prayer. Then, we shall suggest the bases for pastoral decisions in planning, preparing for, and conducting daily public prayers.

HISTORY OF DAILY PUBLIC PRAYER

Our knowledge of the daily worship of the earliest Christians is meager. Apparently, a variety of Jewish customs with set prayers at set times had a strong appeal. We do not have a great deal of evidence for Jewish customs for worship in the first century C.E., but the evidence we do have is very suggestive. In Jerusalem, the Temple priests offered prayers during the daily morning and evening sacrifices, and pious individuals in the city attended these services. The Acts of the Apostles describes the disciples Peter and John doing just that, “going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o’clock in the afternoon” (Acts 3:1). We also know that the Jewish ascetic community at Qumran near the Dead Sea offered prayers at least four times

during the day, and the Dead Sea Scrolls even provide examples of some prayer texts presumably used at Qumran. By the 5th century C.E., Rabbinic teachings will establish a daily practice that combines a thrice daily praying of the *Tefillah* (a wide-ranging list of Eighteen Benedictions) with a twice daily recitation of the Shema (Deut. 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone"). Some of these hours of prayer, such as Temple sacrifices, were observed communally; other practices evolved as private or domestic observations at set times each day.[1]

Similar to these various Jewish patterns, early evidence suggests the development of private devotions for individual Christians. Paul instructed the church in Thessaloniki to "pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17), and in this injunction, he implies that the Christian life is essentially a constant dialogue with God. To give some form to this, early Christians began to identify daily patterns of specific times to pray, much as their Jewish forebears had done. Late in the first century or early in the second, the *Didache* advised Christians to pray the Lord's Prayer three times a day.[2] Others sought disciplines in the Bible itself as ways to make the scriptural injunction to "pray without ceasing" practical. Psalm 55:17 suggested prayers at "evening and morning and at noon," and Daniel prayed three times a day (Dan. 6:10). As already noted, before its destruction in 70 C.E., sacrifices had been offered in the temple daily (Exod. 29:38-39). Psalm 119:164 mentioned "Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances," and verse 62 added "At midnight I rise to praise you." When looking for biblical precedents for prayer at specific times, the early Church found various patterns to emulate.

The proper number of times for prayer during each day concerned many early Christian writers although Clement of Alexandria felt that the true Christian "prays throughout his whole life."[3] Tertullian and Cyprian called for prayer thrice during the day, referring to Daniel's example and to various acts of the apostles at the third, sixth, and ninth hours mentioned in the Bible.[4] This threefold discipline is a "sacrament of the Trinity," according to Cyprian. Both Tertullian and Cyprian also insisted on prayer at dawn and evening (see diagram 8).

The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (as it is conventionally known), in roughly the third century C.E., describes seven daily hours of private prayer, presumably followed by the more devout Christians.[5] The day began with

prayer, after which all were encouraged to participate in public instruction "in the word of God" when it was offered. At nine a.m. (the "third hour" of the day), prayer was enjoined "for in this hour Christ was seen nailed upon the tree," at noon when "it became darkness," at three when Christ died, before going to sleep, and at midnight for "in this hour every creature hushes for a brief moment to praise the Lord; stars and plants and waters stand still in that instant," and again at cockcrow when Peter denied Christ.[6] It was a rigorous pattern that structured much of the day around the passion and death of Christ.

Interestingly, in addition to the private times of daily prayer, *The Apostolic Tradition* describes a regular morning gathering for instruction and prayer. "When all have assembled, they shall instruct those who are in the assembly and having also prayed, let each one go."[7] While the central purpose of these meetings seems to be instruction rather than prayer, this may indicate the beginnings of an almost lost tradition in the West, the so-called **cathedral office** or **people's office.**[8] These were daily services attended by all Christians, though the purpose of the cathedral office was prayer and praise, rather than instruction. Evidence about these services mounts as we look to the fourth century C.E. after the persecutions ceased and Christianity was becoming more culturally dominant. In the West, however, the people's office waned over the next few centuries, and daily public prayer became an almost exclusively clerical and monastic tradition until the sixteenth-century Reformation.

We get some fleeting views of the people's office from Christian witnesses in the fourth century. Eusebius of Caesarea mentions that "throughout the whole world, in the churches of God, hymns, praises, and true divine delights are arranged for God at morning sunrise and in the evening…. These 'delights' are the hymns which are sent forth in his church everywhere in the world in the morning and evening hours."[9] Late in the fourth century, book II of the church order from Asia Minor known as the *Apostolic Constitutions* instructed Christians: "Assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord's house."[10] In book VIII, the same document gives a more detailed description of these assemblies, as in these details about the evening service: "When it is evening, thou, O bishop, shall assemble the church; and after the repetition of the psalm at the lighting up [of] the lights, the deacon shall bid prayers for

[here follows a list of different groups in the assembly] …. But after the dismission of these, the deacon shall say: 'So many as are of the faithful, let us pray to the Lord.'" We may note the significance of the **bidding prayer**, in which the deacon asks ("bids") the faithful to offer intercessions for various needs of the congregation and the world. After the bidding prayer, other prayers, a blessing, and dismissal follow. The morning pattern is similar but without the lighting of the lights.

As a corroboration of these patterns, John Chrysostom, writing from the same region of the ancient world, told newly baptized Christians they ought to gather "in the church at dawn to make your prayers and confessions to the God of all things, and to thank him for the gifts He has already given," and then each one "at evening … should return here to the church, render an account to the Master of his whole day, and beg forgiveness for his falls."[11]

The pilgrim Egeria, as we discussed in Chapter Two, took careful notes of the daily round of worship in fourth-century Jerusalem. She records that three groups participated in daily worship at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher: monks and virgins, laypeople, and clergy and bishop. Worship by the monks and virgins is the most extended with hymns, psalms, antiphons, and prayers occupying much of the day and night. Some laity join them, but the laity and clergy mostly share in the "Morning Hymns," at daybreak, again at lesser or **apostolic hours**—at 9:00 a.m., noon, and 3:00 p.m.—and in the evening at the lighting of the lamp (which she calls **lucernare**). There are psalms, antiphons, hymns, prayer for all and commemoration of individuals by name, blessing of both catechumens and faithful, and dismissal. [12] On "the Lord's Day" (Sunday), the whole multitude assembles before cockcrow for an early morning vigil with psalmody, prayer, a reading of the resurrection narrative, a procession to Golgotha with singing, a psalm, a prayer, a blessing, and dismissal. [13] At daybreak on Sunday, the eucharist follows with many sermons and "a thanksgiving" afterward.

To be sure, Jerusalem as a pilgrimage center was not typical, but daily gatherings of the devout for praise and prayer before and after the day's work seem to have been common in the bishop's church of most cities by the late fourth century. As Robert Taft describes it, "The morning hour of prayer was a service of thanks and praise for the new day and for salvation in Christ Jesus…. And vespers was the Christian way of closing it, thanking God for

the day's graces, asking his pardon for the day's faults, and beseeching his grace and protection for a safe and sinless night."[14]

The daily people's service survived relatively intact among East Syrians and Armenians. Its demise in the Western church was a slow process. Eventually, it was supplanted there by the **monastic office**. This is known variously as the divine office, daily office, choir office, or liturgy of the hours, all a series of several daily services or individual offices or **hours**. We have just seen this type of monastic prayer anticipated in Jerusalem where the monks and virgins pursued a course of reciting the psalms. Egeria was impressed by how "suitable, appropriate, and relevant" these were, but it is clear most of the laity and clergy did not attend for much of the psalmody. Increasingly, the monastic office came to dominate nonsacramental worship until the people's office disappeared in the West, leaving only remnants—such as tenebrae in Holy Week or certain services in Milan and Toledo. Both the people's office and the monastic office were attempts to obey the biblical injunction to "pray without ceasing." However, each "interpreted this differently, the former understanding it to mean that one's whole life should become an act of worship offered to God, the latter that one should try to spend as much time as possible in actual prayer."[15]

Monasticism arose, at least in part, as a revolt against what seemed to be an overly lax form of Christianity after the alliance of church and empire and the end of persecution. It was basically a lay movement in its origins. In the fifth century, Cassian reported that the early Egyptian monks observed "a prescribed system of prayers … in their evening assemblies and nocturnal vigils,"[16] that is, at the end of the day and during the night. He tells of an angelic visitant who departed after the twelfth psalm, thus establishing that a dozen psalms at matins were enough for angel or monk. In addition to psalmody and prayer, the Egyptian monks read an Old Testament and New Testament lesson on weekdays and an Epistle and Gospel on Sundays and in the Easter season.

In eastern regions, the development of monasticism brought the refinement of a daily cycle of worship. Basil, in his fourth-century *Long Rules*, cites various precedents of the apostles for prayer also at the minor hours and at midnight, along with prayer "early in the morning, so that the first movements of the soul and mind may be consecrated to God," and "when the day's work is ended, thanksgiving should be offered for what has

been granted us … and confession made." "At nightfall, we must ask that our rest be sinless and untroubled by dreams" and early in the morning "we must anticipate the dawn by prayer." He summarizes: "None of these [eight] hours for prayer should be unobserved by those who have chosen a life devoted to the glory of God and His Christ," meaning all Christians, not just monastics. [17]

Chrysostom tells us of another scheme in religious communities where, "having divided the day into four parts, … at the conclusion of each they honor God with psalms and hymns,"[18] and the day begins and ends with worship. In the *Institutes*, Cassian tells of the addition of another morning service in Jerusalem monasteries so that the series of seven services "clearly makes up according to the letter that number which the blessed David indicates … 'Seven times a day' [Ps. 119:164]."[19]

The cycle was completed in the West by adoption of the existing seven along with an office of compline on going to bed. In the early sixth century, Benedict set up the definitive Western pattern (slightly different from that of the Eastern churches), which operated until shortly after Vatican II. The scheme of daily and nocturnal prayer was:

Vespers (at the end of the working day)
Compline (before bedtime)
Nocturns or **Vigils** or **Matins** (middle of the night)
Lauds (at daybreak)
Prime (shortly thereafter)
Terce (middle of the morning, the third hour of the day)
Sext (at noon, sixth hour)
None (middle of the afternoon, the ninth hour)

Notice that this list begins with evening prayer, keeping the biblical tradition of starting the day at sundown. To these were frequently added the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, the Office of the Dead, a litany, seven penitential psalms, and fifteen gradual psalms. Praying these services each day meant a strenuous, but not exhausting, daily and nightly cycle of work, prayer, and rest. Benedict equated both work and worship as service to God: "In all things let God be glorified."[20]

Monasticism and the daily office, thus, evolved together, being virtually identified with each other. Increasingly, the eight day and night offices (known as “the canonical hours”) moved away from identification with life in the world of the laity. Monasticism set the tone for this type of worship. The clergy that served as pastors of congregations were not monks. Nevertheless, they copied the monks by holding eight services daily in the chancels of their largely empty churches. Even these chancels, as we have seen, were copies of monastic choirs, and the music sung reflected monastic chant. Secular and religious lifestyles produced only one kind of daily worship, the monastic office. All clergy were obliged to follow it; laity were free to ignore it. And ignore it they did so that “the Offices ceased to be in practice, if not in theory, the common prayer of the Christian people.”[21] A few may have listened in on weekdays and more at Sunday vespers, but the medieval office was made effectively clerical. In the late Middle Ages, well-to-do people might possess simplified service books, the lay primers which they read (aloud) in public or private. These usually also contained the offices of the Blessed Virgin and of the dead and were popular among those who could read and who could afford them. Such vernacular books helped prepare for later Reformation services.

If this daily office served ordinary people poorly, these services did succeed magnificently in digging a deep channel for the liturgical life of religious communities. In contrast to the people’s office with its selective use of psalms, Benedict had provided for systematic weekly recital of the entire psalter. Psalmody, sung responsively back and forth across the monastic choir with appropriate **antiphon** (a key verse used as the refrain) was the heart of the monastic office. Weekly recitation of psalms throughout a lifetime of stable community life shaped the lives of thousands of men and women for centuries. The monastic office also used a continuous reading of scripture—almost an athletic discipline—instead of reading only edifying portions of it as the people’s office had. A wide assortment of office hymns grew up from the fourth century onward. Fragments of early Christian sermons and other writings, legends of the saints and martyrs, a rich collection of prayers, **responsories** (dialogical prayers), and **invitatories** (calls to prayer) filled out the monastic hours. All these focused on contemplation and edification.

Change continued during the Middle Ages. Increased mobility of the clergy, the development of universities, and less time for saying the office led to widespread adoption during the twelfth century of the shortened *modernum officium* used in the papal chapel in Rome. It featured an abbreviated lectionary, more hymns, and a modified calendar. The rise of the Franciscan Order in the following century brought further pressures for brevity and an office that could be said while traveling. Structurally, the office changed: further curtailment in the amount of scripture read and more festivals of saints. The office became more and more a succession of festival days and less and less the orderly recitation of the psalter and scripture week in and week out. Even more important than change in structure was change in practice. The office had developed up to the thirteenth century as a **choral office**, said and sung together in choir by religious communities and (in parish churches) by priests and minor clergy, making use of memory in addition to the use of several books. New conditions of travel and study brought about private and individual recitation, which led to the consolidation of the various books into a single volume, a portable **breviary**. The breviary was certainly a convenience for the individual who used it, but it was also a subversion of the principle of worship together in choir with different individuals leading the singing, the readings, and the prayers from different books (see Chapter One). But so firmly did this revolutionary development assert itself that, in the sixteenth century, a newly founded order, the Jesuits, was freed from the obligation of choral recitation altogether, a fact underscored by their choir-less church buildings.

The wild tangle of festivals and complicated rules led to attempts at reform, the most successful being those of the Spanish Cardinal, Francisco de Quiñones in 1535, revised in 1536.[22] After sudden popularity, it was suppressed in 1558 and supplanted by the Roman Breviary of 1568. All other breviaries that were fewer than two hundred years old were superseded, leaving a few, such as the Monastic Breviary, in use. But, for the overwhelming majority of clergy and religious, strict uniformity was imposed, and, except for some reforms under Pope Pius X in 1911, the 1568 breviary endured until the 1970s.

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL*) of the Second Vatican Council, promulgated in 1963, mandated a thorough reform of what is now called the **liturgy of the hours**. Morning and evening prayer were declared

the “two hinges on which the daily office turns; hence they are to be considered as the chief hours…. Matins … may be recited at any hour…. Prime is to be suppressed … outside of choir it will be lawful to select any one of these three [terce, sext, none]” (CSL, par. 89). Not only was the daily schedule rearranged but also the psalms were distributed over a period of four weeks instead of one. “Readings from sacred scripture” were to be provided for “in more abundant measure,” readings from the fathers “better selected” and saints’ legends chosen “to accord with the facts of history” (*CSL*, par. 92). The Constitution did not anticipate the subsequent abandonment of saying the office in Latin, but it did encourage the laity “to recite the divine office” (CSL, par. 100).

The result was the publication in 1971 of *The Liturgy of the Hours* in which the day hinges on the old offices of lauds and vespers, familiar to both people’s and monastic offices. An office of readings, centering in scriptures and the fathers or readings about the saints, can take place at any time during the day. A person may select one of the midday hours “so as to preserve the tradition of praying in the middle of the day’s work.”[23] And compline is provided at the end of the day. The new *Liturgy of the Hours* has been criticized as bearing “a monastic stamp … more a contemplative prayer than a popular devotional service, … suitable for the private prayer of clergy and religious.”[24]

The Protestant reformers took more drastic steps to reform the practice of daily public prayer. As we have seen, by the sixteenth century, daily public prayer had become almost entirely a clerical and monastic monopoly. The religious needs of this small segment of society had prevailed over those of most people. Whereas the early people’s service was comprised of familiar and popular psalms, hymns, and prayers, the monastic life provided the leisure to treat the entire psalter as a weekly challenge and make a gesture toward reading all of scripture. Since this monastic model was the only one widely known in the West, it was widely assumed that the early people’s service had been similar. This was a dangerous bit of liturgical misinformation for it gave a quasi-monastic structure to Protestant efforts to reform daily worship, leading them to make edification more important than prayer and praise.

Various reformers found different solutions to the problem of recovery for popular use of daily public prayers. The solutions can be categorized as

those for regular parish worship, for groups within the parish, for special communities, and for family worship. There was also the possibility of terminating such worship altogether as monastic communities were abolished.

There were many attempts to adapt daily prayers for use in parish churches. In Zurich, the reformer Ulrich Zwingli inaugurated daily services which consisted largely of readings from and exegesis of scripture. The emphasis was largely on edification; the people of Zurich could attend fourteen sermons a week if they were so minded. This provided a model for a later surreptitious practice among English Puritans in which clergy gathered for weekly "prophesyings" in which all were free to question the preacher's exposition of a text. In a sense, the monastic need for edification reached its logical conclusion in Zwingli's daily services, devoted almost exclusively to edification.

Under Martin Bucer, the chief reformer of Strasbourg, the city saw the abolition of monastic life and the development of daily offices in parish churches for everyone. This involved the translation of services, composition of music, and simplification into two daily services, morning and evening.[25] The *Strasbourg Psalter of 1526* anticipated the reforms by Quiñones a decade later by disposing of the antiphons but keeping the essential structure of the Latin offices. More scripture reading and exposition were added.

Martin Luther was conservative. In 1523 and 1526, he proposed a return to two daily services: matins and vespers on **ferial days** (weekdays which were not feast days) comprising lessons, psalms, canticles, hymns, the Lord's Prayer, collects, the Creed, and preaching.[26] Although they were intended for laypeople, Luther seems to have had a special interest in the use of matins and vespers by schools and universities.

Daily public prayer survived longer in Lutheran circles than may be apparent today. During J. S. Bach's years in the Saxon city of Leipzig (1723–50), there were several prayer services each day of the week, as well as additional penitential services or sermons. A contemporary of Bach could exclaim: "Happy is he who can live in a city where worship is conducted publicly every day…. Dresden and Leipzig are fortunate, because in these two cities preaching and prayer services are held every day."[27] Not until the end of the century did such services disappear, and in parts of Romania they survived among Lutherans up to the twentieth century.

The 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship* and its successor, the 2006 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, expand Luther's pattern with "Morning Prayer: Matins," "Evening Prayer: Vespers," and "Prayer at the Close of the Day: Compline." A musical setting is printed for each. Morning Prayer includes psalmody, canticles, lessons, hymnody, prayers, and silent reflection, with the option of a "brief commentary, teaching, or personal witness."[28] Evening Prayer may begin with a service of light (procession with a large, lighted candle) and contains psalmody, hymnody, canticles, lessons, a litany, and silent reflection or other form of interpretation of the lesson. Prayer at the Close of the Day includes confession, psalmody, a brief lesson, a responsory, hymnody, prayers, a canticle, and benediction. Provisions are also made for two services of "Responsive Prayer," the "Litany," "Propers for Daily Prayers," "Psalms for Daily Prayer," and a "Daily Lectionary." The focus of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* daily offices is on prayer, singing, and silent reflection, rather than preaching. This suggests a return to the early church's people's office, which also did not regularly include preaching or exhortation.

Returning to the Reformation period, the Church of England was the success story for the reclamation of daily public prayer. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, chief architect of the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549 and 1552, was familiar with the work of the continental reformers and Cardinal Quiñones. He combined matins, lauds, and prime from the medieval English Sarum Breviary into "Matins" while vespers and compline were condensed into "Evensong." In the 1552 edition, the names became "Morning Prayer" and "Evening Prayer." The midday hours disappeared altogether. Cranmer made his purpose clear in "The Preface," where he occasionally even followed Quiñones' words. He hoped: "that the people (by daily hearing of holy scripture read in the churches) should continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion."[29] Believing (wrongly) that the "ancient fathers" had provided systematic daily reading to cover the "whole Bible (or the greatest part thereof)" each year for the people, Cranmer eliminated all "anthems, responsories, invitatories, and such like things as did break the continual course of the reading of the scripture."[30] "The rules," he claimed, were "few and easy" and only the prayer book and Bible were necessary for conducting

services. National uniformity would be secured since “all the whole realm shall have but one use.”

The scheme is simple enough; the psalms are “read through once every month”—several each day at morning and evening prayer, starting afresh at the beginning of the month. The Bible is read through in course (*lectio continua*) starting with Genesis, Matthew, and Romans (Old Testament and Gospel at matins, Old Testament and Epistle at Evensong). The rest of the service consists of a masterful blend of the elements of the Sarum breviary offices. These include the Lord’s Prayer, versicles, psalms with *Gloria Patri*, two lessons, canticles, *kyrie*, creed, Lord’s Prayer, versicles, and three closing collects. A change came in 1552 with the addition of a penitential prelude consisting of penitential sentences from scripture, a call to confession, a general confession, and absolution. Precedent for this manner of beginning is found in both Quiñones (at matins) and in the continental reformers. In 1662, additional prayers and provision for an anthem were added at the end of the services. A great tradition of sung daily offices distinguishes worship in English cathedrals and collegiate churches.

There can be no question of Cranmer’s success. Indeed, his morning and evening prayer, besides providing the daily service, became the normal Anglican Sunday service for three hundred years. Well into the nineteenth century, **The Litany** (a lengthy responsive prayer that continues to be an important feature of Anglican prayer books) and a service of the word (the first half of the Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper) that included readings, sermon, and a collection of money were usually joined to morning prayer on Sundays, causing a bit of redundancy. Popular eucharistic piety and frequent Sunday communion in the Church of England had to wait until the Methodists in the eighteenth century and the Tractarians and other church reformers in the nineteenth.

The widespread popularity of morning and evening prayer is quite understandable. Both services have a large amount of scripture and considerable congregational participation, especially when psalms and canticles are sung. The services are notable for their lack of metrical hymns. Cranmer bemoaned the lack of suitable poets to translate the medieval office hymns. As daily services, intended to be supplemented on Sunday by the eucharist, morning and evening orders did not include a sermon or a collection of money. Cranmer’s morning and evening prayer became the

well-beloved worship of the English people for centuries and nurtured a rich biblical piety. No doubt, part of the offices' enduring popularity was due to the state of the English language in 1549 and Cranmer's skill in using the spoken language of his time with its carefully balanced cadences: "erred and strayed," "wrath and indignation."

Much of the quality of Cranmer's work is reflected by the fact that only minor changes occurred in the two offices in more than four centuries. The 1979 American Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) shows, at long last, considerable development in the daily office, including 110 pages of materials. The most important change is the frank recognition that this is an age of pluralism in worship as in society. Diversity within the Episcopal Church is recognized by printing both "traditional" and "contemporary" wording of the same services. Many options appear for the first time in an American BCP: a short noonday service, "An Order of Worship for the Evening" including symbolic bringing in of light, which retrieves the *lucernarium* of the early Christian cathedral office, and a service of compline. A two-year lectionary, based on the church year, provides the lessons. But aside from supplying more options for opening sentences, antiphons, canticles, and collects, the basic pattern has changed remarkably little since Cranmer put down his pen in 1552. A basically conservative revision appears in the English *Alternative Service Book 1980* with increased alternatives for the canticles and shorter forms of morning and evening prayer.

Other Protestant churches produced a variety of forms of prayer that drew upon the liturgical renewal and ecumenical movements of the twentieth century The most ambitious, perhaps, was the 1987 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) volume *Daily Prayer* with a wealth of resources for the entire cycle of the Christian year. Much of this was included in the 1993 *Book of Common Worship* and in the 2018 *Book of Common Worship Daily Prayer Edition*. The 2014 PC(USA) hymnal *Glory to God* also contains orders for the conduct of daily prayer. In addition to morning and evening prayer, forms appear for "Midday Prayer," "Prayer at the Close of the Day," and a "Vigil of the Resurrection" for use on Saturday night. The 1989 *United Methodist Hymnal* introduces, for the first time, orders for morning and evening "Praise and Prayer." In addition, the 1992 *United Methodist Book of Worship* provides orders for midday and night plus a "Midweek Service of

Prayer and Testimony.” These are deliberate attempts to recover the pattern of the ancient Christians’ common prayer service. Indeed, even the reading of scripture in the United Methodist order is made optional, with prayer and praise being given highest priority in this newest and yet most ancient form of daily public prayer. Considered together, these mainline Protestant worship books and hymnals exhibit a continuing move toward prayer and praise as the central actions of daily prayer, with comparably less emphasis on preaching and exhortation.

Nevertheless, the official books of denominations do not represent all the variety of patterns of weekday worship for groups within parishes of the various Protestant bodies. Much impetus to these parish prayer meetings was given by the movement in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries known as Pietism. Pietism encouraged disciplined groups within the parish that were meeting on weekdays for Bible study and prayer. These were imitated in early Methodism in class meetings that met for spiritual direction, hymn singing, and prayer, much of it spontaneous. In the nineteenth century, this became the midweek prayer meeting, an important component of worship in American Protestantism. Not only were these prayer meetings often led by laity, they were also the first to give women the opportunity to speak in public worship (other than among Quakers). These informal services were social dynamite because they gave voices to those often voiceless on Sunday. The prayer meetings contributed much to the empowerment of women and led them to engage in major reform crusades and political activities, such as women’s rights, temperance, and the abolition of slavery.

Various Reformation churches also produced a variety of intentional communities, which frequently found daily public prayers natural. The Little Gidding community in England, revived in recent years, carried on a daily cycle of prayer services for two decades in the seventeenth century. Their day began with prayer services and concluded with similar services including considerable congregational song. In the eighteenth century, the Moravians evolved a system of “choirs” of single brethren or single sisters living and worshiping together with daily prayer and hymnody. Notable, too, were hourly intercessions carried on unceasingly by delegated individuals. Daily public prayer was common among many utopian communities, such as the American Shakers. The Taizé Community in France has developed its

own daily office. African American congregations developed distinctive practices that incorporated some prayer styles from Africa, such as the ring shout. Korean congregations have a rich practice of daily, early morning prayer meetings that feature a form of prayer called tongsungkido, meaning "pray aloud," during which the entire congregation prays their own extemporaneous prayer.

An important Reformation tendency was the relocation of daily public worship to the family. Family worship became an important part of the worship of English Puritans, Scottish Presbyterians, Victorian Anglicans, and their American relatives. The Scottish *Directory for Family-Worship* of 1647 laid out a daily pattern of prayer and praise, reading of scripture, and conference on the application of it. Numerous manuals and collections of prayers were published over the next two and a half centuries to guide this form of daily prayer. These patterns are far from extinct today and sourcebooks still abound such as *The Upper Room Discipline*. Indeed, the availability of liturgical resources through the internet has provided access to materials for the conduct of daily prayer in ways that were barely imaginable at the end of the previous century.

THEOLOGY OF DAILY PUBLIC PRAYER

One must see daily public prayer in the light of the totality of the Christian life to see what is significant and distinctive about it. Obviously, the great majority of Christians neither practice nor miss such a form of worship. Are we to conclude then that it is just a pious option, available for those who like that kind of thing? Or does it fulfill an important need of which many Christians have been deprived?

When one reviews the dynamics of other forms of Christian worship one is struck by the degree to which they predominantly express God's gracious self-giving to people. The normal Sunday service of the word is oriented around the proclamation of God's word through readings, a sermon, music, and other arts. The eucharist, too, largely focuses on God's self-giving through actions with bread and wine. Such services do include elements of hymnody, psalmody, and prayer, but their emphasis is elsewhere.

Daily public prayer has a different and more personal focus: our response in praise and intercession to God in daily life. It is a response, not

just to word and sacraments, but to the totality of daily experience—the sun coming up, the squabbles in the family, the tedium of work, the problems we confront in our world. Thus, it is a sharing of our words to God in a corporate fashion. Even though common forms must be used to make it fully communal, each of us supplies the gifts for which we give thanks, the complaints that we express, the joys for which we give praise. This ability to express ourselves in the setting of daily life makes daily public prayer distinctive.

Much of the importance of this kind of worship is in giving balance. This operates on several levels. *There is a need to balance daily public prayer with the weekly rhythm of Sunday (or Sabbath) worship*. We have previously mentioned the differing dynamics of the Sunday service of the word and the eucharist. It is, of course, possible to have daily sermons as Zwingli did in Zurich or a daily eucharist as some Roman Catholics and Anglicans do. But these have dynamics that services focusing on prayer and praise do not, and the more intimate quality of prayers provides a desirable balance to services better seen as weekly than as daily.

There is also the matter of the *balance between public prayer and private prayer*. We have not discussed the latter, but it is assumed that public prayer is usually accompanied by prayer in private on other occasions during the day. Neither replaces the other; each strengthens its companion. We must, then, see private prayer as the other end of the same pole, not as a distinct object. Private, devotional, unscripted prayer brings energy and focus to public prayer. But public prayer provides a good balance for private prayer in relating it to the whole of praying Christianity. Essentially, the company of many voices makes Christian prayer Christian. We do not pray against people but for them and with them. And we need the discipline of public prayer to make our own private prayers fully Christian. Otherwise, they may stray from the mark and voice private fantasies and aberrations.

In this sense, *daily public prayer is a school of prayer*. It teaches us how to pray, something in which we all need help whether we live in the first century (Luke 11:1) or the present century. It may not teach us how to pray specifically for John or Alice, but it does teach us the need to reach out to them when they need help. The 1662 prayer for “all sorts and conditions of men” now seems somewhat exclusive, but the instinct was to teach Christians to be beside all other humans in prayer. In this way, public prayer

teaches us how to pray since it transcends the limitations of our own lives. Moreover, in a profound sense, Christians can never truly be alone in prayer since we always pray as members of the body of Christ. The paradigmatic prayer that Jesus gives to his disciples is in first-person plural: “give us our daily bread...”

The third type of balance we need to reflect on is the balance *between prayer and praise and the reading of scripture*. As indicated by the remarks above, the circumstances of monastic life encouraged the discipline of constant prayer which encouraged covering the psalter weekly and the scriptures yearly. This may have been appropriate in such communities, but it provided the only model the Protestant reformers had for ordinary people, so the reformers tended to make edification the chief function of daily worship.

The ancient people’s service relegated edification to other occasions: catechesis for new believers and the Sunday service. This left the daily public prayer free to concentrate on prayer and praise in terms that were familiar. In some communities since that time, such as the Moravian, not needing to use the hymnal when singing was a real sign of belonging to the group. A wide variety of hymns might be more edifying; familiarity allowed one to voice with gusto one’s own personal feelings. So careful decisions must be made about whether daily public prayer is really meant to focus on scripture and be edifying or whether it serves a fundamentally different purpose. Certainly, scripture reading can and ought to continue in private, but it may be better that the daily public assembly is chiefly concerned with prayer and praise.

PRACTICAL AND PASTORAL ASPECTS OF DAILY PUBLIC PRAYER

Our concise account of the history and theology of daily prayer suggests some practical observations. *Simplicity* seems to be an important factor in modern reforms of daily prayer. That ties in closely with another desirable quality, *familiarity*. The point of daily prayer is frequently to be able to reflect on words that are familiar and meaningful. In this sense, the use of a mantra or repeated phrase in some oriental religions is not irrelevant. One never plunges to the bottom of the Lord’s Prayer no matter how often we say

that prayer. The twenty-third and other well-known psalms prove inexhaustible. Certain prayers and hymns continue to lead us to greater depths. Structures of daily prayer that are simple and familiar seem to be favored increasingly in our day. Much of popular religion focuses on repetition, and contemporary reforms are finding value in using standard forms for daily prayer. While familiar forms can devolve into thoughtless rote (a familiar criticism of daily prayers), perhaps this can be avoided if we intend to practice these forms "by heart," as they begin to take root deep into our daily lives. Familiarity also makes relative brevity desirable. If ten minutes are good, that does not mean twenty are twice as good. The quality of daily prayer is our concern, not the quantity of it. Short services can also induce more people to stop in the middle of a busy day or evening.

In recent years, there has been a growing sense that more actions should be coupled with daily prayers. Such things as a sign of peace given through a handshake or embrace, making the sign of the cross at the naming of the Trinity, the ceremony of lighting a large candle in the evening, or the use of incense appeal to the body and senses and make it clear that our whole being worships God, not our lips alone.

No other form of worship is affected so much by the *time of day* as daily prayer. The term "Liturgy of the Hours" recovers this sense. People are different at different times of the day; they behave differently, feel different, and have different needs. Physical metabolism is not unrelated to how people pray at different hours. Anyone planning or preparing for public prayer will need to be sensitive to the fact that humans change throughout the day. This is both part of the appeal and the challenge of daily prayer.

Much of the value of daily public prayer is that it is adaptable to the people and circumstances present. All recent revisions seem to stress flexibility, adapting things to the people and their situations. This has meant the addition of many options and alternatives. If one can judge from these new forms, *adaptability* is at a premium. Each community has a distinctive social location, and this ought to be reflected in how it prays together. A group of high school students on a retreat should not expect to pray together the same way seminary students would, or the way a group of older adults would.

The adaptability of daily prayer became obvious in new ways during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–21. As congregations scrambled to minister

during the prolonged time of quarantine, many pastors and laity found that the practice of daily or at least weekly observation of morning prayer or evening prayer with others in a congregation served to keep congregations connected to God and each other. Some pastors and congregations report that they have continued these online meetings for prayer even after the quarantine, as Christians invite each other into their homes, virtually, to start or end the day in common prayer. As we noted above, Paul exhorted the believers in Thessaloniki to “pray without ceasing” (I Thess. 5:17). Throughout the centuries Christians sought to embody this unceasing prayer in various ways, punctuating the day with specific, habitual observations of prayer at specific times, based in nature (sunrise, sunset), or salvation history (the hours of prayer in the Temple or the hours of Jesus’ crucifixion), or in anticipation (praying at cockcrow so that the thief does not catch us unaware). Perhaps what seems like completely new technological practices of interactive online prayer are merely the latest evolution of unceasing prayer as we join in the common worship of the family of God.

CHAPTER FIVE TERMINOLOGY

antiphons

apostolic hours

bidding prayer

breviary

cathedral office

choral office

compline

ferial days

hours

invitatory

lauds

liturgy of the hours (see hours)

lucernare

matins

monastic office

nocturns

none

people’s office (see cathedral office)

prime

responsory

sext

terce

The Litany

vespers

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2. *Didache*, 8, in Cyril Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers*, p. 174.

3. Clement, *The Stromata or Miscellanies*, 7, 7; ANF (New York: Charles Scribner’s: 1899), 2:354.

4. Tertullian, *On Fasting* 10, *On Prayer* 25; Cyprian, *On the Lord’s Prayer*, 34.

5. Paul F. Bradshaw, “The Apostolic Tradition Reconstructed: A Text for Students,” *Joint Liturgical Studies* 91 (Norfolk, U.K.: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2021), pp. 36–38.

6. Gregory Dix, ed., *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 36 (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), p. 63.

7. Dix, ed., *Apostolic Tradition*, 33, p. 60. See also 35, p. 61.

8. George Guiver introduces the latter term which seems the most appropriate. *Company of Voices* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1988), p. 53.

9. Eusebius, *Commentary on Psalm 64*, verse 10. *Patrologiae Graecae* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1857), 23, p. 640.

10. *Apostolic Constitutions*, book II, p. 59, ANF, 7:423; book VIII, p. 35, ANF, 7:496.

11. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, 17, trans. Paul W. Harkins, *Ancient Christian Writers* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1963), 31:126–27.

12. *Egeria’s Travels*, 24, ed. and trans., John Wilkinson (London: S.P.C.K., 1971), pp. 123–24.

13. As noted in Chapter Two, in the fourth century, the cross on which Christ was crucified (Golgotha) had been placed in the same building complex constructed over the tomb of the resurrection. The procession would not have been long.

14. Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), p. 56.

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16. Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, 2, 3; *NPNF*, 2nd series (New York: Christian Literature Co.: 1890), 11:206.

17. Basil, Question 37. *Ascetical Works*, trans. Sister M. Monica Wagner, C.S.C. (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), pp. 309–10.

18. Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Timothy*, 14; *NPNF*, 1st series, 13:456.

19. Cassian, *Institutes*, 3, 4, *NPNF*, 2nd series, 11:215.

20. Benedict, “The Rule,” *Western Asceticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), p. 327.

21. E. C. Ratcliff, “The Choir Offices,” in W. K. Lowther Clarke and Charles Harris, eds., *Liturgy and Worship* (London: S.P.C.K., 1932), p. 266.

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23. *Liturgy of the Hours: The General Instruction* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971), p. 35, par. 77.

24. Taft, *The Liturgy*, p. 316.

25. Hughes Oliphant Old, “Daily Prayer in the Reformed Church of Strasbourg, 1525–1530,” *Worship* 52 (1978): pp. 121–38.

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27. Günther Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), p. 55.

28. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), p. 302.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

In the preceding chapter on daily public prayer, we looked at one form of worship, shaped largely by the spoken word. Now we turn to the service of the word, another form of worship stemming from the spoken word. Although in both forms of worship, far more happens than just what is done by speech, the spoken word is the primary mode of communication. It is orally that the corporate memories of the community are recalled and reinforced.

The subject of this chapter includes the first half of the Lord's Supper or Mass, but the service of the word is also the regular Sunday service of most Protestants when they do not celebrate the eucharist. The term "service of the word" is thus the most comprehensive designation. Other terms used for the first half of the Mass also include foremass, ante-communion, synaxis, or proanaphora. For the usual Protestant service, other terms abound: Sunday service, morning order, preaching service, divine worship, or, in more contemporary contexts, the worship experience.

Our method will trace the various histories of this type of worship as they manifest themselves in the Lord's Supper and non-eucharistic services. Then we will survey some of the theological principles at stake before moving on to see how pastors today address historical and theological concerns.

HISTORY OF THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

We begin with a glimpse at the function of the Jewish **synagogue**. We understand that the church adopted a Jewish rhythm of time and a means of remembering emerging from that rhythm of time. And we shall again see that both Jewish structures of worship and underlying mentalities made Christian worship possible.

If the Jewish synagogue and its mentality underlie the Christian service of gathering to hear the word, we must ask, What functions did the synagogue service fulfill? Strangely enough, it seems to have originated to fulfill a communal and religious function: the survival of Israel as a diasporic people.[1] Although we lack precise information on the origins of the synagogue and its activities, many scholars theorize its origination sometime in the sixth century B.C.E. while the Jews were in Babylonian captivity. The Jerusalem Temple lay in ruins, and the nationalized worship of daily sacrifices and prayers centered there had abruptly stopped. There was no way to pick up the temple cult of sacrifice elsewhere, which had become identified exclusively with Jerusalem by that time. Israel's survival required a new beginning.

The synagogue emerged as a survival mechanism, in the same way, many diasporic groups established national or ethnic affinity clubs to maintain their identity. Israel kept its identity by remembering. It remembered what God had done for God's chosen people whose history made them unique. Israel established the synagogue as a place for hearing and discussing the Hebrew scriptures to confront the sad question, "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Ps. 137:4). Survival, for Israel, meant the ability to remember God's actions that had made them a distinctive people. And for them, the best ways to remember were through instruction and prayer together. It is difficult to tell whether synagogue gatherings began primarily for worship and prayer or educational purposes. Recalling what God had done and rejoicing in those memories—is that worship or education? It does not matter much; the result is the same. Israel could survive through worship when the sword obliterated countless other kingdoms. And the power to remember, reinforced generation after generation by worship, was too powerful even for the tyranny of Babylonia.

Eventually, the community realized that putting the corporate memories of God's actions into writing was highly useful for recalling what God had done to make the Jews a unique people. Teaching these writings through

synagogue classes was okay, but the memories came alive when the gathered community read them aloud, reflected upon them, and rejoiced in God. Homesick Jewish exiles gathered to read, reflect on, and rejoice in what God had done for their people. And every time they told the familiar stories, they renewed their self-identity.

They needed neither temple nor priests for this kind of gathering for instruction; anywhere ten Jewish men could gather, they could form a synagogue. They only needed the book and people. The lay character of synagogue gatherings cannot be overemphasized. It is worth noting that women were leaders of synagogues in some places, though this was still not common or acceptable in most synagogues.[2]

The synagogue service focused on what God had done. Jews far and wide celebrated God's actions not only by reading their history (scripture) but also in songs rejoicing in this history (psalms) and in reflection on that history (discussions, exhortations, sermons). Reading of the Law and Prophets became standard practice as Jews recalled God's gift of the law and God's use of the prophets to speak to them.

Thus, the gatherings in synagogues became a way of teaching and transmitting the corporate memories of a people with whom God had covenanted. Survival came through remembering. It was not just a dead detached past that was recalled but a living God, who was made known through past events encountered in present worship. Recitation made past events real in the present so the community could experience again and again God's saving power. Through gathering and discussing the texts of scripture, people could relive for themselves the whole history of salvation. Sharing in the recital of common memories changed individual lives, just as an adolescent gains individual identity by looking through the family photo album with the rest of the family. Identification with the community's corporate memories of what God has done for them lay at the core of synagogue worship. And the spoken word was the medium through which this occurred.

This was the type of service familiar to the earliest Christians, most of whom were Jews. We glimpse fragments of this form of gathering in the Nazareth synagogue in Luke 4:16-28. Jesus read the lesson from the prophet Isaiah and sat down to preach. At the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, "after the reading of the law and the prophets, the officials of the synagogue"

invited Paul and his companions to speak (Acts 13:15). This way of engaging the word of God through reading aloud and then through discussion or exhortation was thoroughly familiar to the earliest Christians; their Lord had sanctioned it by regular attendance (Luke 4:16), and the apostles had utilized it to the fullest.

Jewish Christians were familiar with such a pattern of engaging with scripture. Probably many continued to gather in the synagogue while also celebrating the eucharist "at home" (Acts 2:46). But soon, the synagogue was no longer suitable for Christians. By the middle of the second century C.E., we find that a fusion of these two types of gathering had taken place, tentative at first but soon becoming permanent. The synagogue pattern was grafted onto the upper room pattern, or two media fused, the spoken word and the acted sign. From the sixth to the sixteenth century, the service of the word and the eucharist became inseparable except on rare occasions such as Good Friday.

Though the union of word and sacrament may have occurred earlier, our first evidence of it appears in Justin Martyr's *First Apology* written in Rome around the middle of the second century. Justin has given us two examples of a eucharistic gathering. The first follows a baptism. The newly baptized (probably at Easter) are led to the eucharistic assembly, which offers prayer for the one just baptized, gives the kiss of peace, and immediately starts the eucharist. The other service Justin describes seems to be the typical Sunday service:

> And on the day called Sunday, there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites [us] to the imitation of these noble things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. And, as said before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water.[3]

In modern terms, there were readings from the Old and New Testaments, a sermon, and **general intercessions** or **prayer of the faithful**, that is, prayer for others. Apparently, the amount of reading was flexible but included several passages.

The *Apostolic Tradition* indirectly corroborates these details two or three generations later. The two eucharists described are both on special occasions: baptism and ordination. Neither eucharist mentions the service of the word which is still separable when another celebration precedes the eucharist. Even today, on Good Friday, in the Roman Catholic liturgical tradition, the service of the word is detachable and stands in its original simplicity apart from the eucharist. This illustrates Anton Baumstark's discovery: In feasts of the greatest solemnity the earliest elements are likely to endure the longest.[4] Thus, in the Catholic liturgical tradition, the first part of the Good Friday service shows the same conspicuous simplicity as we see in Justin: lessons, psalmody, sermon, and intercessions. The form of the Good Friday intercessions—bidding to prayer, silent prayer by all kneeling, and a summing up prayer where all stand—-is primitive, meaning it has a form that goes back to the ancient liturgical sources. Augustine tells us: "I came into the church, greeted the people with the customary greeting, and the lector started the lesson"[5]—about as sparse and abrupt a beginning as one could imagine.

But it would not remain that simple for long. If we think of a river laying down sediment, we can imagine successive layers of liturgical strata forming. This is a useful way to picture developments except that liturgical items were also moved around or dropped entirely, something even an earthquake cannot quite duplicate! First to disappear were the **Old Testament lections** from the Law and the Prophets which started to vanish in the fourth century. The **dismissal of the catechumens** (those awaiting baptism) disappeared in the West by the end of the sixth century, while remaining in the East. Catechumens were allowed to hear the word proclaimed but not to participate in the prayers of the faithful, the kiss of peace, or any of the eucharistic actions. The intercessions or prayers of the faithful also disappeared from the service of the word in the Roman Rite by the seventh century.

The rest of the earliest stratum survived: the greeting, the epistle, a responsive psalm, the gospel lesson, and the sermon. The passage of time brought further accumulations, especially at the beginning of this primitive stratum of liturgical order.

The second stratum represents introductory materials, including both song and prayer. It seems that these accretions began in the fifth century

after Christian worship became public and more elaborate. Functionally, many of them tended to embellish such vital actions as getting the clergy to the altar table and everyone in place to begin worship. Acts performed in silence, no matter how essential, always seem to invite verbal or choral accompaniment as if we never entirely trust simple action.

These developments occurred at different times in different parts of the Christian world. We can suggest only the outlines of development in the Roman Rite of the West. We have seen how terse the beginning of Augustine's service was, but within a few decades after his death an **introductory rite** had appeared that persists: introit, *Kyrie, Gloria in excelsis,* and collect. This second stratum of liturgical development seems to have been the result of unrelated accretions. The introit, the first in order of the variable parts of the Mass, was originally travel music to accompany the procession of clergy to the altar table in the manner of a psalm verse set to music. Late in the fifth century, the older prayer of the faithful was re placed in Rome by prayer in the form of a **litany** (a series of petitions each followed by a recurring response) located before the lessons and sermon. The response was the Greek phrase ***Kyrie eleison*** ("Lord Have Mercy"). By the beginning of the seventh century, the petitions themselves had disappeared in Rome though complete litanies remain in the Byzantine rite. Only the *Kyrie eleison* remained, a tiny vestige of the time when Greek was the liturgical language even of the Christians in Rome. Significantly, the disappearance of the prayer of the faithful and the litany left the Roman service of the word devoid of intercessions. A third item added was the ***Gloria in excelsis*** ("Glory to God in the Highest") or greater doxology, usually sung. Although of eastern origin, its use as part of the service of the word is confined to the West, and the ***Trisagion*** ("Holy God, holy and mighty, holy Immortal One") fills an equivalent role in Eastern rites. The **collect** or **opening prayer** brings the entrance rite to a close. The collect is a Western form for prayer that follows a formal literary pattern typically consisting of (1) an address to God, (2) a relative clause referring to some characteristic of God, (3) a petition, (4) a result clause, and (5) a concluding doxology. At this point in the service of the word, the collect functions to conclude the introductory rite and to introduce the lessons for the day. Collects are another variable part of the order for the Mass. Compilations of

collects form an important part of the great **sacramentaries** that contained the prayer texts for masses.

Let us recapitulate. The fifth and sixth centuries had seen a great elaboration of the introductory rite. The terse greeting and direct move into the lessons of the earliest stratum were replaced with a stately and musical progression of introit, *Kyrie, Gloria in excelsis*, and collect in the second stratum.

But there is yet a third stratum, deposited through gradual accumulation during the early Middle Ages. It is common today for those leading public worship to spend a few moments of preparation in personal devotions in the sacristy before entering the church to begin the public service. Gradually such personal devotions crept out of the sacristy and into the chancel. They tended to have a specific character; they were basically **apologies** for the presider's unworthiness and petitions to be made more worthy to serve God in presiding at worship. Such devotions, then as now, tend to be individualistic, subjective, and introspective. These are not bad qualities in themselves but when the function of these personal devotions was changed by incorporating them into public worship itself, an important shift occurred. It was a slow and subtle change, not something debated and decided in public synods. It signaled a shift in emphasis away from an assembly gathered to rejoice in what God had done to an assembly of individuals met to bemoan their sin before the Almighty. Eastern churches escaped much of this transformation toward penitential prayer in their orders for word and eucharist; Western churches, however, majored in it.

The result was a **preparatory rite** of opening devotions appended to the very beginning of the service of the word. These began with Psalm 43 (42), of which verse 4 of the Latin version provided an apt text: "I will go to the altar of God." The fourteenth century prefaced the psalm with a Trinitarian blessing. The next of these prayers at the foot of the altar table is the ***confiteor*** or prayer of **confession** and an **absolution** or declaration of **pardon**, operating as a cleansing station before the priest is fully prepared to begin. The penitential language of the confession shaped much of medieval, Reformation, and modern eucharistic piety. Short prayers next accompanied the priest's approaching and kissing the altar table before beginning the introit.

A further medieval accretion was the musical elaboration of the responsorial psalm, the **gradual** (from the Latin ***gradus***, "step," as the psalm was recited from the chancel step), which originally followed the Old Testament lessons. When these disappeared, the gradual was transferred after the epistle and shortened to a single verse. There it joined other sung items, the **alleluia** or **tract** (for penitential occasions). Nonbiblical elaborations of the Alleluia known as **sequences** flourished in the Middle Ages but were virtually abolished in 1570.

The Middle Ages (in the West) also added the **Nicene Creed** immediately after the sermon. This appears to have occurred as a rearguard action against Arianism (which denied the divinity of Christ). This practice of saying the creed probably originated in Spain, was promoted by Charlemagne, but was not adopted in Rome until the early eleventh century. In the East, it was adopted in the sixth century as a part of the order of the Mass itself.

The result of all these developments is the service of the word which the sixteenth century inherited, the reformers changed slightly, and the Counter-Reformation altered even less. Diagram 9 charts the various strata using parentheses to mark those items that disappeared, at least temporarily.

For better or for worse, the Protestant reformers themselves had been shaped by the late medieval version of this service with its heavy dose of penitential elements and losses of the Old Testament lection and intercessory prayer. If they had known more of the history of the rite, the reformers might have broken free from the heavily penitential form of the late Medieval church, but without that knowledge, history could not set them free. The reformers did contribute greatly to Western Christianity in advancing preaching, congregational song, and vernacular rites. In his *Formula Missae* of 1523, Luther saw little to change in the service of the word.[6] He delighted in the musical elements, the introits, *Kyrie, Gloria in excelsis*, graduals, alleluia, and sung creed. He eliminated the opening devotions and nonbiblical sequences but encouraged congregational song in German, especially after the gradual. In 1525, Luther produced his *Deutsche Messe* (German Mass) and introduced more vernacular hymns and a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer after the sermon.[7]

Though Luther did not intend it, by a long, slow process the service of the word (sometimes referred to as the **"ante-communion"** in older histories

of worship) by itself came to be the normal Sunday service among Lutherans, thus dividing the two so long wed, word and sacrament. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century brought an end to weekly eucharists in most Lutheran countries. The (1978) *Lutheran Book of Worship*, however, returned to the sixth-century pattern, and this has continued to be the pattern in (2006) *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. There is a "Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness" which may precede the service. Ten musical settings are provided. Though the normative pattern for the Sunday service advocated by *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* is a service of both word and meal, the worship book also contains a separate order for "The Service of the Word," for those congregations that want to use it. When the eucharist is not celebrated, the order is: confession and forgiveness, gathering song, greeting, *Kyrie, Gloria in excelsis*, collect (prayer of the day), first lesson, psalm, second lesson, gospel acclamation, gospel reading, sermon, hymn, creed, prayers (which may be intercessions), greeting of peace, offering, hymn, thanksgiving for the word, Lord's Prayer, and blessing with dismissal. The pattern might have seemed familiar to a sixth-century Roman Christian.[8]

The Service of the Word

First three centuries	*Fourth to sixth centuries*	*Medieval*
greeting		Psalm 43
		confiteor
	introit	
	(litany), *Kyrie* response	
	Gloria in excelsis	
	collect	
(Old Testament lections)		
(psalm)		
Epistle		
(psalm)	gradual, alleluia, tract	(sequence)
Gospel		
Sermon		
		Nicene Creed
(dismissal of catechumens)		
(prayer of the faithful)		

Diagram 9

In the Reformed tradition, greater change occurred on the assumption that the early church was being followed. We shall look primarily to John Calvin since his *Form of Church Prayers … According to the Custom of the Ancient Church*[9] of 1542 (Geneva, Strasbourg 1545) was the fountainhead from which this tradition spread, although much of its originality is due to the reformer of Strasbourg, Martin Bucer. The service is heavily penitential and didactic. This tradition seemed to relish the medieval apologies. The rite begins with a vigorous prayer of confession noting that we are "incapable of any good, and that in our depravity we transgress thy holy commandments without end or ceasing." Absolution follows, then an item introduced by Bucer, the singing of the Decalogue. **Extempore prayer** is offered, a metrical psalm is sung, a collect for illumination—an item which it was believed was common in early Christian worship but which, instead, has become a distinctive Reformed contribution—is said, and the lesson and sermon follow.[10] A long pastoral prayer of intercession, a petition, and a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer precede the concluding blessing.

Calvin preferred the eucharist to follow weekly but was thwarted by the conservatism of the Genevan magistrates who were not accustomed to receiving communion frequently. But it is important that the model for Sunday worship in the Reformed tradition was the service of the word, not the daily office. Singing of psalms came to be a hallmark of Reformed worship. They give joyful contrast to the stern penitential and disciplinary character of the service.

The ***Westminster Directory***[11] imposed the Puritan approach to worship on the national churches of England, Scotland, and Ireland in 1645, superseding the *BCP* for fifteen years and terminating the authority of the Scottish *Book of Common Order* (1564). The *Directory* is more than a book of rubrics, less than a prayer book. The order for the "Publique Worship of God" is as follows: The minister calls the congregation to worship and begins prayer by reminding the people of "their own vileness and unworthiness to approach so near him [God]; with their utter inability of themselves, to so great a work." Reading of the Word follows ("ordinarily one chapter of each testament" on a *lectio continua* basis), singing of a psalm, intercession (a very long pastoral prayer of confession and

intercession), preaching of the word, a prayer of thanksgiving, the Lord's Prayer, a sung psalm, and a blessing. This service of the word has, for several centuries, provided the basic structure of worship for much of the English-speaking Reformed tradition. Preaching is obviously the focal point of Puritan worship. The medieval, apologetic, and penitential approach looms large but there are clear gains in the recovery of Old Testament lections, the high regard for congregational psalmody, and the importance of preaching.

The 2013 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) hymnal *Gathering for Worship* provides *The Service for the Lord's Day* that embraces a historical consciousness of early patterns and yet reflects Reformation tendencies. Its structure has four parts. First comes "Gathering": call to worship, hymn of praise, psalm or spiritual song, opening prayer confession and pardon, the peace, and song of praise. Second comes "The Word": prayer for illumination, readings (lessons and a psalm as provided by the **Revised Common Lectionary)**, anthem or Gospel acclamation or alleluia, silent reflection, sermon, invitation to discipleship, hymn, canticle, psalm or spiritual song, affirmation of faith, [baptisms] and prayers of the people. The third part, "The Eucharist," contains, on noncommunion occasions: offering, prayer of thanksgiving, and Lord's Prayer. The final part is "Sending": hymn, spiritual, canticle or psalm, charge and blessing, and going forth. The *Service for the Lord's Day* encourages the use of the eucharist each Lord's Day though many congregations do not follow this pattern.

Different decisions were made by the Anglican reformers who benefited from the gratuitous advice, based on two decades of experience with vernacular liturgies, of the continental reformers. Basically, a conservative revision of the service of the word from the Use of Sarum (the Latin rite of Salisbury Cathedral), Cranmer's 1549 rite began with an introit psalm, Lord's Prayer, the collect for purity, *Kyrie, Gloria in excelsis*, greeting, collect of the day, and collect for the king.[12] The epistle and gospel followed immediately, then came the Nicene Creed and sermon. The service then moved into exhortation and the eucharist. Two items have been transplanted into the eucharist itself: intercessions appeared right after the *Sanctus* and confession comes before communion. In the 1552 version, there was a lurch in the Reformed direction: the introit psalms disappeared, and the Decalogue was added immediately after the collect for purity.[13] The intercessions have

been returned to just after the sermon and offering, and the confession now follows the exhortations, just before the ***sursum corda***. The *Kyrie* disappeared, and the *Gloria in excelsis* was banished to just before the final blessing in the eucharist. A rubric was provided for ending the service after the general prayer of intercession when communion was not celebrated. This allowed detaching the service of the word from the eucharist after a thousand years of unity. For three centuries, this "ante-communion" or "second service" with sermon followed morning prayer and the litany on most Sundays. The eucharist was not celebrated frequently in most parish churches.

The years since have seen a gradual unscrambling of this pattern. The 1979 American *Book of Common Prayer (BCP*) represents significant gains in the restoration of the Old Testament reading and psalmody and the downplay of confession. The service of the word is titled "The Word of God" and includes a greeting, collect for purity, *Kyrie* (or *Trisagion), Gloria in excelsis,* collect of the day, two or three lessons (interspersed with psalms, hymns, or anthems), sermon, Nicene or Apostles' Creed, prayers of the people, optional confession of sin, and the peace. In short, this is the sixth-century pattern again. Similar changes have been made in the BCPs of other nations and the *Alternative Service Book 1980*.

Quaker worship does not necessarily involve the spoken word. It takes its center in a silent waiting upon God. After a period of centering down, people may rise to speak as the Spirit prompts them. There is a high sense of discipline and a strong reluctance to rush into words or to speak from oneself. Such worship does not fit into any of our patterns traced for other traditions although some during the nineteenth century American Friends split over theological and social differences. Orthodox Friends became increasingly evangelical and embraced more traditional forms of Protestant worship. Conversely, Hicksite Quakers espoused more liberal social views, namely the abolition of slavery, and embraced wholeheartedly an emphasis on preaching. Today, forms of worship within Quakerism continue to be diverse and multifaceted.

Methodism inherited the Anglican Sunday pattern of morning prayer, litany, and ante-communion with sermon. The *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (1784) made minor changes in the service of the word aside from the omission of the creed.[14] The principal change was

the expectation of hymn singing, which brought a distinctive warmth to Methodist worship. Some British Methodists tended to cling to Anglican morning prayer. John Wesley proved to be a poor judge of his followers in America. In 1792, the year after Wesley's death, the printed text of the service of the word was set aside.

What happened to the nineteenth-century American Methodists? The official book of Methodist church law, the *Discipline*, carries only a scant outline during this century: "Let the morning service consist of singing, prayer, the reading of a chapter out of the Old Testament, and another out of the New, and preaching." On balance, that sounds slightly more like morning prayer than the service of the word, though a monthly eucharist was also appended to it. Nineteenth-century Methodism moved close to the revivalism of the Frontier tradition.

Revivalism having paled, Methodism turned increasingly toward aestheticism in the early twentieth century and to historicism by the middle of the century. This has been superseded by an era of ecumenism with a common concern to recover the early roots of Christian worship. For United Methodists, this has taken the form of *A Service of Word and Table*. "The Basic Pattern of Worship" without Holy Communion includes: gathering, greeting, hymn, opening prayer and praise, prayer for illumination, lesson, psalm, lesson, hymn or song, gospel lesson, sermon, response to the word (for example, invitation to Christian discipleship, baptism, or creed), concerns and prayers, confession, pardon, peace, offering, prayer of thanksgiving, and the Lord's Prayer, hymn or song, dismissal with blessing, and going forth.

In the early nineteenth century, the *Frontier Tradition* sprang up in the American West, bringing with it a whole new function for the service of the word. Christians on the frontier were ministering to unchurched people whom they hoped to convert to Christianity. A form of worship for the unchurched was necessary. This developed out of **camp meetings**, held to bring the populace from a large area together for preaching, spiritual direction, baptism for those converted, and a concluding eucharist. Such new measures proved effective on the frontier and were gradually incorporated into the worship life of more sedate, settled regions on the East Coast.

The result was a tripartite form of the service of the word, one that is the most common today in American Protestantism. It can be experienced on

national television each Sunday. The first part begins with a service of song and praise, which places great emphasis on music. A special type of hymn developed, the gospel song, which was deeply introspective and highly individualistic, expressing the feelings of the devout. The first portion of the service also included prayer and reading of a scripture lesson. The second portion was the sermon, which was and remains highly evangelistic, calling souls to conversion and the converted to renew their commitment. All of it climaxes in the final harvest, a call to those who have been converted to acknowledge this change in their lives by coming forward, being baptized, or making some other indication of their new being. Although the sermon is the longest portion of the service, all the parts are carefully integrated.

The Pentecostal Tradition, beginning at the onset of the twentieth century, has preferred divine spontaneity to established structures. Its most dramatic form involves the use of the gift of speaking in tongues and prophecy. But more important is the insistence on freedom from "tradition" and on the unexpected possibilities the Holy Spirit brings in spontaneous singing, testimonies, and biblical readings. Within these contexts it is the movement of the Holy Spirit that organizes the communal worship.

If one thing can be clear in recent developments in all these traditions—Protestant and Roman Catholic—it is a sensitivity to the priorities of the first six centuries. We now see how captive the reformers were to medieval assumptions by making the service of the word so heavily penitential, didactic, and disciplinary. Even recent elimination of more penitential portions of services does not remove lingering feelings among many people that they still go to worship primarily to be scolded, to feel sorry, and to make amends. And we can see with Frontier and Pentecostal traditions a return to an openness to dramatic displays of the Holy Spirit and evangelism.

Much of the impetus for the newer (and older) reforms came from the Vatican II Council of the Catholic Church with the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL*). This document mandated simplicity and clarity in the Mass and stressed that "the treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly" (*CSL*, par. 51), that preaching should be normative on Sundays (*CSL*, par. 52), and that "there is to be restored, after the Gospel and the homily, 'the common prayer' or 'the prayer of the faithful'" (CSL, par. 53). The results can be seen clearly in the ***Roman Missal of 1970***. The "Order of Mass" is: entrance song, greeting, blessing rite or penitential rite or neither,

Kyrie, *Gloria in excelsis*, opening prayer, first reading, responsorial psalm, second reading, alleluia or gospel acclamation, gospel, homily, profession of faith, and general intercessions. Not only could it be used almost interchangeably with the newest rites of the Protestant traditions mentioned here but also it could almost pass for what Roman Christians did each Sunday fifteen hundred years before. Muted is much of the penitential preparatory material and recovered are emphases on Old Testament lections, responsorial psalmody, preaching, and prayer of the faithful.

Two modern variants of the service of the word emerged in the 1980s. The first, frequently known as the *seeker service*, prioritizes evangelism to the unchurched. It begins with a musical performance in a familiar style and can include skits or monologues to present and resolve an issue with which seekers may be wrestling. The talk that follows pursues this issue further, sometimes using a scriptural basis, sometimes not. Frequently, these congregations also provide a weeknight small-group or home-based gathering for committed members that provides more in-depth Christian formation. The Sunday service is the entry point to participating in the life of the local church.

The second variant, which comes out of the Pentecostal tradition, often called *praise and worship*, devotes the opening half of the service to songs of praise generally sung by the whole congregation, typically from words projected on a screen. The latter half is given over to preaching or what is frequently referred to as teaching. This has its focus on a biblical text or some topic relevant to living the Christian life in the world. This model is seen in megachurches across the world and in smaller congregations that emulate the patterns of these megachurches.

THEOLOGY OF THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

Fundamental to the traditional service of the word is hearing and responding to God’s word, mediated and expressed through human speech. God speaks to us through the lessons read and the sermon preached by humans. Speech functions in worship as a means of giving oneself. Through words we are present to others, and God is present to us. Words express our thoughts, our emotions, and our very being so that others may share in them. Words also enable us to experience the past, name the present, and envision

the future. God gives God's self to us through human speech, and we, by God's power, give ourselves to God through our speech in response. In this, we join our voices with the community of the faithful across time and space.

Structurally, this means that these types of worship revolve around God's word as read in the lessons and expounded in the sermon (if any). This was certainly the intent of the Reformers, and the importance of God's word through reading and proclamation has also become much more obvious in the post–Vatican II Roman Catholic Mass. A Reformation collect declared that God "has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning" (cf. Rom. 15:4). That "all" means that both the Old and New Testaments must form a part of worship. To communicate the corporate memories of the community of faith, its written records—the scriptures—need to be read again and again. The corporate memories give the church its self-identity. Without the continual reiteration of these memories, the Church would simply be an amorphous conglomeration of people of goodwill but without any real identity. Through the reading and exposition of scripture, Christians recover and appropriate for their lives the experiences of Israel and the early church: escape from slavery, conquest, captivity, hope for a messiah, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and mission. The church's survival depends on reinforcing these memories and hopes just as Israel's did. Worship is indeed the recapitulation of salvation history.

Of course, it is not just the recollection of past events that occurs in the readings and their interpretation. In the events narrated in the scriptures, the Christian community discerns meanings that illumine all history. Historical events which are bearers of meaning are chronicled in the Bible and give the Christian community clues for interpreting the present and future as well as past events. It is as if the playwright steps into the play to tell us what it is all about.

An excellent description of the service of the word would be "Bible service." The reading of scripture—whether done selectively or consecutively—is basic. The spoken word doubtlessly will continue to be central just as it will be the primary mode of communication for the rest of human life. Transmitting the corporate memories narrated in scripture is crucial to this service.

The importance of preaching is closely linked to the centrality of scripture. Many guides to a theology of proclamation are available.[15]

Preaching is a form of communication based on the conviction that God is speaking to us in the process. The preacher speaks *for* God, *from* the scriptures, *by* the authority of the Church, *to* the people. Four items are vital in conceiving of preaching: the power of God, the source in scripture, the authority from the Church, and the relationship to people.

It would be presumptuous to believe that we preach on our own power. God uses our voices to speak God's word; what we have to say has little power by itself. But through the power of God manifested in Good News our voices carry witnessing power. The church, through preaching, heralds the Good News of God's saving grace.

Preaching is grounded in God's word, although all other forms of learning may help interpret the scriptures. Preaching that is grounded in scripture will need to begin with a scripture text, and this raised the question of how to select a text. One value of preaching from a lectionary is that it gives us a catholic canon (even though imperfect) rather than a private canon of favorite passages. We do not preach an individual faith but rather the faith of the church, which examines and licenses us, thereby authorizing us to speak for it in preaching the faith of the universal community of believers. Preaching is constituent with hearing. A congregation of faithful people who can hear and respond to preaching is a necessary part of preaching. Through the presence of hearers of the word, God reveals God's self through preaching. The preacher as intermediary listens to God to speak to the people and listens to the people to speak to God.

Not only does God speak to us through lessons and sermon, but we also speak to God. This takes place through prayer, psalms, canticles, and hymns. Understanding worship as revelation and response is useful at this point. God takes the initiative, and we respond with our words to God's word. But we can respond only because of what God has done.

Prayer takes many forms: invocation, praise, thanksgiving, confession, supplication, intercession, oblation, and others. Each of these operates in a somewhat different way, yet all have in common that they are the creature's voice to the Creator. We may beg forgiveness, offer praise, or plead for someone else, but whatever the function the method is similar: the articulating of deeply felt human needs and concern for creation as we confess, rejoice, or plead. Prayer gives us the opportunity to speak the right words to address God with our ultimate concerns. It is an essential part of all

worship. The importance of the intercessions in the service of the word for both Protestants and Catholics cannot be overstated.

Thanks, in part, to the ecumenical Revised Common Lectionary, a rediscovery of psalmody is underway among Western Christians. *The psalms are not substitutes for lessons; they are responses to or commentaries on lessons*. In many services, psalms, or canticles, are interwoven between the lessons. They provide a jubilant form of congregational or choral response to what has been read. The psalms articulate our wonder and our marvel (and occasionally our despair) at what God has done. Sometimes they are deeply and intimately personal; at other times they are a recapitulation of salvation history. Additionally, liturgies use psalms as an invitation to worship or as an opening act of praise. **Canticles**, poetic fragments from other books in the Bible along with a few early Christian hymns, function in the same way as psalms.

In the fourth century, Christians began to supplement biblical poetry with hymns. Hymns, like prayer, function in a rich variety of ways. There are hymns of praise, thanksgiving, proclamation, contrition, invo cation, oblation, and a long list of other purposes. Like prayer and psalms, hymns are usually addressed to God and frequently recite God's acts. But hymns add another dimension: the ability to shade our meaning by adding melody, harmony, and rhythm. Hymns provide a more intense form of address to God than ordinary speech by adding another layer of participation: music that involves our whole body. As we noted in Chapter Four, hymns, spiritual songs, gospel choruses, and chants, like those found in Taizé worship, all give voice to human concerns and God's presence in the world. Liturgically, hymns provide a rather subtle bridge between different portions of a service, sometimes eliminating the need for a spoken rubric.

Finally, there are times in worship in which we speak to one another, especially the greeting, announcements, various spoken rubrics ("Let us … "), dialogues, the creed, the peace, and the blessing and dismissal. These are not just necessary stage business; these reflect the communal nature of our approach to God. We come to meet our God and we meet our neighbor first. Christians worship and talk to one another as a community of Christian disciples. Greetings and dialogues encourage us and provide us with cues while the creed helps us to build one another up as, together, we profess allegiance to the church's faith as symbolized in spoken words. In the digital

age, these words to each other can also show up in chat feeds, real time comments, and even social media posts.

God speaks to us, we address God, and we speak to one another. All these are vital parts of worship in the service of the word.

PRACTICAL AND PASTORAL ASPECTS OF THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

Only on the basis of historical and theological priorities can we best make the necessary practical and pastoral decisions that worship leadership entails. The practical decisions will vary from tradition to tradition. For Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians, the decisions will chiefly involve choosing the most apt materials provided in service books and, of course, preaching the most suitable sermon possible. Even these traditions have become increasingly open to prayer composed for the occasion ***(ex tempore)***. Faithful discernment must inform planning and preparing for worship in these traditions. Decisions of a pastoral nature must take place in terms of where we are in the liturgical year, where worship will be located, and, above all, the actual people who will be worshiping.

For people in the Reformed, Frontier, and Methodist traditions even more decisions are necessary. Although denominational publications are available in most instances, many pastors prefer to devise their own **order of worship**. Many, though not all, of the decisions to be made revolve around the order of worship. Frequently local orders risk ignoring important historical and theological issues and, consequently, undermine legitimate pastoral concerns. Sometimes the order is a legacy from the last pastor. (The tradition hardest to overcome is usually the most recent one.) And sometimes the order of worship seems to be designed after a system that passes all understanding!

Quite clearly there is no one “right” order of worship. Nevertheless, it may be of help to suggest some criteria to keep in mind while planning an order of worship in those traditions where this order is determined locally. First, we must realize the *centrality of scripture*—all of scripture—in this type of worship. As biblical literacy wanes, liturgies must rediscover the importance of a richer diet of God’s word in worship. God’s word speaks for

itself, and the lessons may (indeed should) be read whether the preacher refers to them or not in the sermon.

Second, there ought to be an obvious *sense of progression* in worship as one moves from greeting to benediction. This can be overdone. There is no obvious location where, for instance, the Lord's Prayer belongs. But one can trace development from introductory types of acts to proclamation and on to commitment with a sense of "flow" or movement.[16]

Third is the need for *clarity of function*. Generally, acts of worship that have the same function ought to come together. It is astonishing to see how far the location of preaching strays from the reading of scriptures. Yet the reading and the preaching of God's word are about as similar in function as any two acts can be. Money, service, and prayers offered for others also have a similar purpose. Questions need to be asked about the function of each act. What does it do? What is its purpose? Usually this will help clarify the link. To be pastorally responsible, orders of worship must be designed so that clarity of function enables the congregation to follow the order with ease.

In addition to the basic problem of ordering the service, there are several areas where problems are common. The first of these is that we have usually not been sensitive to the process of gathering and scattering and to how people interact during these preliminary and final acts of worship. But these are important parts of worship and need to be pondered and planned more carefully rather than simply masked by music. Areas outside the worship area must be inviting and stimulate a desire to linger and socialize rather than to hurry inside or outside.

The problem of penitential portions of the service has been mentioned. Confession of unworthiness may make sense as personal devotions for a minister in the sacristy before leading public worship, but that does not mean that penitential acts are the best way to begin public worship. They need not appear at all in most services. When they do appear, consider how the invitation to such acts can orient the community together toward the act. Contemporary thought seems inclined to suggest that penitential rites be occasional acts, particularly appropriate in Advent and Lent.

Ideally, the psalms ought to be sung. There are a variety of ways of doing this ranging from metrical paraphrases (hymns) to the various settings where a cantor or choir sings the verses of varying lengths, and the congregation joins in the refrains. Many contemporary hymnals print responses and tunes

or chants for psalms. Most of these methods of responsive singing can easily be taught to congregations, especially with help from a choir. Many contemporary praise songs are based on the psalms and can become a part of the congregation's repertoire. When the psalms cannot be sung (if there ever are such circumstances), the congregation may shout them antiphonally back and forth across the central aisle between halves of the congregation. The psalms make more sense when they are tied closely to the lessons read, as they are in most ecumenical lectionaries.

The chief problem with the **pastoral prayer** is that it often tries to do everything and often ends by doing nothing. At its best, it can be a magnificent articulation of the congregation's deepest feelings and needs. Some pastors have this gift; others of us do not. Too often the pastoral prayer is simply overloaded and tries to cover confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and all points in between as if one try were better than several. The Reformed tradition, which gave us this type of prayer, too often yielded to the temptation to use it for instruction. We would now consider this a dubious function for prayer, no matter how badly Christians in the sixteenth or twenty-first century need instruction. But the pastoral prayer can enlarge our vision while leading us in intercession or in thanksgiving, for example. It is worth noting that in more Evangelical and Frontier churches, the pastoral prayer is invitational as a response to the sermon preached. In these contexts, the pastor may invite congregants forward to pray at the altar rail by themselves or with assigned ministers. This intercessory approach may require less of the pastor's poetic language and more of pastoral presence. Nevertheless, one thing done well may be better than many done poorly.

The function of choral music, especially anthems, is problematic (cf. Chapter Four). Frequently the anthem can be used as a part of the proclamation of the word, provided it is carefully selected to join with the lections read. When simply dropped in as a musical interlude, the anthem is highly questionable. The lectionary is as useful for good choral work as it is for comprehensive preaching. When the anthem functions as a musical commentary on God's word, it can be a strong asset to worship. And because the Spirit of God is at work in every generation, churches should embrace diverse musical expressions. Do not deprive the congregation of the ministry of singing hymns and songs together and rejoicing in the praise songs across time and space.

The creed is a rather late addition to worship in the West, and far from necessary. But it can function as an appropriate response to the word, especially after a doctrinal sermon, by affirming together the faith that makes the church one. It is hard to see how a recently composed affirmation of faith can function in this way. The ancient Apostles' and Nicene Creeds can be joined in by all Christians. All other affirmations of faith are denominational or local and fail to function as symbols of the faith of the universal church, yet they do attest to a universal need to proclaim our faith. Be that as it may, it is probably best to reserve the label "Creed" for the Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed, and to use "affirmation of faith" for other statements of belief to be recited by a congregation.

Acts of offering seem to come best as a response to what has been said and heard, whether they be the offering of money, service for others, or prayer for them. "Concerns of the Church" may be statements asking for help for those in need. Prayer of intercession reaches out to all of humanity: the church, those in positions of power, those in need or distress, the local community, the world community, and (in some traditions) the dead. Clearly, this is the most worldly part of worship. It is far too easy to thank God that we are not like other people. Intercessory prayer opens us to the needs of all people and is an important act of growth and love on our part.

The service of the word will continue to evolve in form and yet retain much the same function as it enables the church to remember and to hope. The survival of the church depends upon it just as the survival of Israel depended on the synagogue service.

CHAPTER SIX TERMINOLOGY

absolution

alleluia

ante-communion

camp meeting

canticle

collect

confession, prayer of

confiteor (see confession, prayer of)

dismissal of the catechumens

ex tempore

extempore prayer

general intercessions

Gloria in excelsis

gradual

introductory rite

Kyrie eleison

litany

Nicene Creed

opening prayer

order of worship

pardon, declaration of

pastoral prayer

prayer of the faithful (see general intercessions)

preparatory rite

Revised Common Lectionary

sacramentary

sequence

sursum corda

synagogue

tract

Trisagion

Westminster Directory

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1. Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 22.

2. Levine, 512. Some research that suggests women served as Torah readers in first-and second-century Palestine. And other research indicates that women may have had some rabbinic functions too. While this was not the standard it does attest to the diversity of synagogue practices throughout the diaspora.

3. Cyril Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers*, p. 287.

4. This is Anton Baumstark's famous second law, explicated in his *Comparative Liturgiology* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1958), p. 27. The first law is that ancient elements in time tend to be duplicated by more modern items; then, when the redundancy is eventually noted, the earlier ones are eliminated (p. 23).

5. Augustine, Sermon #324, *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1863) 38, p. 1449.

6. Bard Thompson, ed., *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1961), pp. 106–22.

7. Thompson, *Liturgies*, pp. 123–37.

8. For a comprehensive narration of the Roman Mass's evolution see Uwe Michael Lang, *The Roman Mass: From Early Christian Origins to Tridentine Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

9. Thomas, pp. 197-208.

10. Hughes O. Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975), pp. 208–18.

11. Thompson, *Liturgies*, pp. 354–71.

12. Thompson, *Liturgies*, pp. 245–68.

13. Thompson, *Liturgies*, pp. 269–84.

14. *John Wesley's Prayer Book* (Akron: OSL Publications, 1995).

15. Among many theologies of preaching and the word, see Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985); David G. Buttrick, *Homiletic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); and Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987); Henry James Harris, *The Word Made Plain: The Power and Promise of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004); Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011); Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching, Third Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016).

16. On the importance of flow in worship, see Lester Ruth, *Flow: The Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020).

CHAPTER SEVEN

GOD'S LOVE MADE TANGIBLE

In previous chapters, we have discussed God's love made *audible* through music and the spoken word in worship. But another vitally important medium in Christian worship is the participatory actions known as sacraments. Sacraments make God's love audible, visible, and tangible. The sacraments play a significant role in the life of most Christians. Accordingly, the second half of this book will examine the sacraments, beginning with what is traditionally called sacraments in general; the following three chapters will study them individually.

Sacraments are a type of sign that involves acts, words, and (usually) objects. John Calvin repeats Augustine's dictum: "Add the word to the element, and there results a sacrament, as if itself also a kind of visible word."[1] More specifically, in sacraments words become part of an action using an object such as bread, wine, oil, and water.

In Christian worship, both the spoken word (as found in daily public prayer or the service of the word) and the enacted sign (as found in the sacraments) reinforce each other. A handshake does not compete with a spoken greeting as each strengthens the warmth and meaning of the other. The washing of baptism underscores words spoken about God's action in forgiving. Like eating and drinking, speaking and acting belong together in Christian worship. The same God who gave us ears to hear also gave us eyes to see.

Worship is true to the ways humans communicate with one another. The kiss does what words cannot, though words ("I love you") impart meaning

to the kiss. Much of the beauty and color of life would be lost if we had to choose between one medium or another. Instead, we say much through a nod of the head, a wave of the hand, or an embrace. Each of these enacted signs, though small in itself, is nevertheless part of the whole galaxy of actions that add to what we express in words. These revelatory actions are a means of giving ourselves to others as we convey to them what we mean or even who we are. Words do so as well, but neither more nor less, only differently.

Ever since New Testament times, the church has found certain enacted signs essential for expressing the encounter between God and humans. These signs signified sacred things and have become ways of expressing through the senses what no physical sense could perceive: God's self-giving. The sacraments call us to "O taste and see" (Ps. 34:8), to touch, to hear, even to smell "that the Lord is good." In them, the physical becomes a vehicle of the spiritual as the enacted sign causes us to experience what it represents. Obviously, only a very few such signs out of the many we use in daily life function as sacraments. The process of reaching consensus about which to designate as sacraments has been complex, as we shall shortly see.

The number of enacted signs that have been used universally in worship is limited, and there seems to be a built-in bias to conservatism in retaining those that communicate well. Those commonly used today would have been familiar at any time in Christian history. Such communally recognized signs do not change as rapidly as spoken words. Perhaps this is one reason we default to traditional expressions of these enacted signs at the solemn crises of life: birth, marriage, sickness, and death.

In this chapter, we will trace the gradual development of Christian reflection on what the church experiences in sacraments. Part of this discussion will involve familiarizing ourselves with terms Christians have selected over the centuries as the least inadequate ways to explain what they were experiencing in the sacraments. Then we will attempt to interpret the role and meaning that sacraments have in worship today. Finally, we will trace some of the consequences of this interpretation for practice.

THE HISTORY OF REFLECTION ON THE SACRAMENTS

The practice of the sacraments has seen few sudden, dramatic changes over the centuries, though there have been a few notable examples related to persecution or disease, such as the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Development in practice, for the most part, has been like the slow unfolding of a bud. Nor have new ways of understanding the sacraments developed rapidly except in a few times of controversy. Many terms we now regard as essential were unknown in the first thousand years of church history. Even the number of sacraments remained indeterminate throughout most of the Christian centuries.

Once again, we must begin with the Jewish mentality and practices that made sacraments a possibility for Christians. It is hard to imagine Christian sacramental life evolving from any religion other than Judaism. The Jewish people held in tension God's transcendence with God's concrete involvement in the actual events of human history. God was made known through events and objects that disclosed the divine will, but these events and objects were never confused with the deity. Humans, in turn, responded to God by appropriate actions and dispositions.

Christianity's deepest debt to Judaism in this area, then, is the uniquely Jewish way that certain actions and physical objects were means that God and humans could use to communicate with each other. God remained transcendent, never to be confused with the created world. Yet, even inanimate objects could gain a power to communicate "God" without being identified as God. A pillar of fire, a cloud, a volcano, daily bread, all could become ways through which God was revealed, though God is none of these. Thus, Judaism avoided a false split between the material and the spiritual. Even ordinary objects, such as water, could convey God's love to us. For Judaism, as for Christianity, the material and the spiritual are deeply bound together.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, we encounter a variety of forms of prophetic symbolism in which dramatic actions signify God's will and purpose. Frequently, the actions not only reveal but also help initiate events. The prophet Jeremiah makes and wears a yoke of iron or smashes a pot of

clay, and through such actions, he shows what God will do with Judah and how people should respond. They are part of the very events they anticipate and thus have potency to fulfill God's will.

From Judaism also comes a profound understanding of each meal as a sacred event. This most common of human social activities became, for Judaism, an opportunity for praising and thanking God as well as for forming a bond of unity between partakers. Far from mere physical necessity, the meal became a means of encountering God as provider, host, and companion.

Judaism discovered that humans could also use actions to reach God. Sacrifices of food and drink became ways of establishing and maintaining relationships with God. Although the forms and interpretations of sacrifice are complex, the central concept seems to be the use of objects of value to convey one's very being in the surrender of self for communion with God.

The sacramental life of Christianity is deeply rooted in these beliefs and practices. Because many of the earliest Christians were also Jews, these ways of thinking and doing things came naturally to them. Their belief in the transcendent, creator God set them free to use the material creation as spiritual means of worship without this use becoming idolatry, which God forbade. It was a freedom tempered by responsibility to the weaker members (1 Cor. 8) who had not yet shaken off the shackles of idolatry.

The Gospels show Jesus and his disciples using the sacramental patterns of Judaism. The disciples, possibly following a custom of ritual washing in Judaism, began baptizing early in Jesus' ministry (John 4:2). Jesus himself had submitted to baptism at the hands of John the Baptist, a fact the evangelists explain (with some difficulty) as "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). For Jesus, as to any other Jew, the annual Passover commemoration brought to life the crucial moment in their history. The Passover meal itself was an enacted story that recalled what God had done to make the Jews a distinctive people. These customs were part of the very air that Jesus and his disciples breathed. Nothing could be more natural than to transform these familiar practices in establishing a new covenant, or rather, a new means of commemorating such an event.

It is not so clear just what Jesus intended for his followers to do. Biblical scholars debate whether we have in the New Testament the actual words of Jesus to baptize (Matt. 28:19), to remit sins (John 20:23), or to eat

and drink as a memorial of him (1 Cor. 11:24-25). On the other hand, there can be little doubt that the early church considered itself to be fulfilling Jesus' will in continuing these practices in his name. Jesus received baptism, forgave sin, and kept the Passover feast. In this sense, Jesus' own actions are a firmer basis for the sacraments than reports of his words. At an even deeper level, Jesus himself, as the visible manifestation of God, is the *primordial sacrament.* The church, in doing what he did, continued his sacramental mission to reveal God.[2]

he church continued to repeat Jesus' actions from the time of his resurrection, that is, decades before the Gospels were put into written form. What we find recorded in the scriptures, then, represents sacramental practices the church had already long observed. The various **institution narratives** of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26) may tell us as much about the fulfillment of the Lord's will by churches in various locations as they do of the Lord's directives themselves.[3] In short, the sacraments are older than the written scriptures.

The church's acts of obedience to Christ, then, are our chief evidence of the foundation of the sacraments. In these acts, the first Christians sought faithfully to respond to what they understood to be Jesus' own intentions. The apostolic practices of Jesus' followers who baptized (Acts 2:41), laid on hands (Acts 6:6), prayed (Acts 2:42), healed (James 5:14), and broke bread together (Acts 2:46) are such acts of faithful response. These actions of the apostles reveal Jesus' intentions at least as much as the written accounts of Jesus' words. This means that we are not limited to a handful of passages in the Gospels in interpreting Jesus' intentions regarding the sacraments, and we can draw on the New Testament book of Acts and the epistles, which supply far more detail.

The New Testament is full of references to what later generations would call sacraments. Most numerous of all, as might be expected in a church afire with missionary zeal, are references to baptism. Second are mentions of the Lord's Supper. Widely scattered allusions appear to other sacral actions such as laying on of hands, healing, sealing, and forgiving. In none of these instances do we get much more than a glimpse of apostolic practice. Even less do we find an exposition of what these practices meant to the participants. But, taken as a whole, we discover innumerable rich and

varied insights into the sacramental faith and practice of the apostolic church. The manifold views of apostolic practice are like the different facets of a jewel. To do them justice, we must turn the jewel around so that all its facets sparkle. Unfortunately, throughout its history the Church has tended to look at only a single facet or two and to ignore the rest. We shall try in subsequent chapters to examine the rich variety of these biblical facets to get a balanced view.

The church, therefore, looks to the New Testament not as a book of laws or regulations but as the fundamental constitution for its ministry of sacraments. The Bible does not give us liturgical rubrics or a systematic sacramental theology, but instead lays a firm foundation on which these can be built. Through diverse and scattered fragments, we get glimpses of a broader and deeper reality: of early Christians responding faithfully through ritual action, word, and material elements, to the love poured out through Jesus of Nazareth. And so, we must guard against the temptation to settle for a narrowly coherent view of the earliest Christian sacramental practice and instead accept the richly varied assortment scripture presents.

We must be cautious, too, of looking to the early church for clear answers to questions about present-day sacramental practice. Even early Christian writers were more inclined to experience the sacraments than to consider them objects of theological study. Many of the terms and categories in which we think are products of much later ages. At the same time, there is much we can learn from the church's use of the sacraments in the first centuries of the Christian era.

A basic insight is revealed in the Greek word normally used for a sacrament, ***mystérion***. The usual translation, "mystery," is misleading. As the New Testament uses the term, it refers to the secret thoughts of God, which transcend human reason and therefore must be revealed to those whom God wishes these secrets to reach. In Mark 4:11, Jesus tells the disciples, "to you has been given the [*mystérion*] of the kingdom of God" while others must depend on parables. Paul uses the term to refer to Christ himself, to the apostolic preaching, to that which is spoken in the spirit, and to the hidden wisdom of God. The basic insight in the use of this same term for what we call sacraments is that *mystérion* implies acts in which God is disclosed to us. These heavenly mysteries are completely dependent upon God's acting in self-giving.

Unfortunately, the Latin word Tertullian in the early second century used to describe this reality—*sacramentum*—has none of that rich depth. *Sacramentum* is a term that referred to an oath of allegiance taken by a soldier or a vow to keep a promise. It is much more legalistic and lacks the cosmic dimension of divine personal self-giving that *mystérion* implies. It is, however, the word the Western church used from the third century onward. Historically, the term does have the virtue of suggesting the human response in the divine-human encounter.

Whatever term is used, the sacraments were more experienced by the early church than debated. Heresies abounded in other areas, but relative tranquility reigned in this aspect of the church's life, aside from occasional defenses of sacraments against those who decried any use of physical objects in worship.[4] The precise definitions with which we are familiar were unknown in the early church because no one pushed the church to define, exhaustively, what sacraments meant. Concepts such as an exact number of sacraments or the moment the Holy Spirit was given in baptism or the moment the eucharistic elements were consecrated would have been puzzling in the church's early period. For well over a thousand years there was no consensus about just how many sacraments there were. For Augustine, the list included such things as the baptismal font, the giving of salt at baptism, the ashes of penance, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and Easter Day. Only one thing mattered: that in these acted signs, God gave God's self to us.

Consequently, what we know about early practice and reflection on the sacraments is indirect and fragmentary. Tertullian wrote the short treatise *On Baptism* early in the third century, but it tells us more of baptismal discipline than theology. In *On Penance* he gives us a bit more theology but mostly practical advice. We get glimpses of actual rites in *The Apostolic Tradition* but practically no interpretation. Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Cyril of Jerusalem provide more details in the lectures given to newly baptized Christians, in which they try to interpret what the new Christians have just experienced for the first time. These mystagogical lectures (from "mystagogy," which is the process of initiation into the "mysteries," or sacraments, of the Christian faith) date from the fourth century but can be as cryptic as they are tantalizing. For us, it is tempting to read back subsequent developments in West and East into these

terse statements about what occurs in the eucharist. But these are our concerns, not theirs, and we do not live in the fourth century! Augustine provides seemingly contradictory opinions in presenting interpretations of Christ's presence in the eucharist that are both realistic and symbolic. But what to us might seem to be inconsistent only reveals that our contemporary categories are not his, and that our exclusivistic language seems somewhat impoverished by comparison.

Nevertheless, Augustine did nudge the church forward in understanding what it experienced in the sacraments. He began the attempt to define a sacrament, describing it as a sacred sign which represents what it signifies, just as bread and wine represent body and blood. Most important are his phrases "visible form" and "invisible grace" which shaped the standard late medieval definition (in Gratian and Peter Lombard) that "a sacrament is the visible form of an invisible grace." Furthermore, Augustine distinguished between the visible sacrament itself (*sacramentum*) and the power (*res*) of a sacrament. Apart from the invisible grace, the sacrament has no power of itself; only this invisible power or force can give it effect.

Another important development in the history of the sacraments emerged out of the Donatist controversy. North African schismatics known as Donatists believed that only good people could perform good sacraments. Against this belief, Augustine imparted some concepts that have lodged themselves permanently in the church's thinking about the sacraments. First, Augustine argued that the Donatists nevertheless possessed genuine baptism, though they had it unrightfully. This is true because the sacraments depend not on the human who administers them but on God. Their power is not a human one, contingent upon the moral character or doctrine of the celebrant, but it depends instead on God, who uses sacraments to bring about God's own purposes. This is at once the most important and most controversial theological statement ever made about the sacraments. Others elaborated it as the ***ex opere operato*** doctrine, that is, that God operates simply through the work being done independently of the human agent. Augustine's great contribution is to make clear that the source of sacraments is divine agency, not human agency.

If the Donatists had genuine baptism, they had it contrary to the Catholic Church's laws and without baptism's benefits. Remaining

obstinate in schism, they could not profit from the love and charity of the community into which baptism initiates one. Augustine does not draw these conclusions to their precise definition, but implicit here are the germs of much later distinctions: sacraments as *valid* (that is, conveying grace) or *invalid*; *regular* (that is, according to church law) or *irregular*; and *efficacious* (that is, beneficial) or *inefficacious*. But once Augustine bent the twig in this direction, it planted seeds that would grow into an important branch of sacramental theology and canon law.

Let us sum up what can be learned from the early church about the sacraments. The number of sacraments was indeterminate, and how they operated was undefined. More central were concerns about who could receive the sacraments and who could perform them, though even here there seemed to be considerable imprecision. What was apparent and characteristic was that Christians experienced in the sacraments God's self-giving and rejoiced in these sign-acts. Much later, John Calvin was to say of the eucharist: "I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And, to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it."[5] That could also serve as a summary of much of the early Christian witness to the sacraments.

The medieval period shows a move toward more concrete definitions and more technical terminology surrounding the sacraments. Most of our approaches to the sacraments today are so heavily colored by late medieval developments that it is hard for us to think outside of its terms. But the lateness of these developments is extraordinary. In fact, even the word **transubstantiation**—the term used to describe the change of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ that would become a source of profound division by the time of the Reformation—did not appear in any major church document until the thirteenth century.[6] Until the Middle Ages, Christians accepted that Christ was present in the eucharist but with little question of how it was the case. A modest theological debate over the nature of Christ's eucharistic presence in the mid-ninth century between two monks in Northern France—Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus—laid the foundation for a more consequential debate two centuries later. In the eleventh century, a French theologian named Berengarius resurrected the earlier debate in his attempt to articulate a more richly symbolic interpretation of eucharistic presence against a narrowly realistic one that

had gained gradual strength in both Christian thought and practice. While Berengarius was ultimately forced to retract his more symbolic understanding of the eucharist, even in the eleventh century, there was still no universal articulation of how Christians were to understand the sacramental presence of Christ in the eucharist. Even as late as the twelfth century, the number of sacraments was a subject of varying opinions. In 1140, Hugh of St. Victor listed such diverse things as the blessing of palms, the receiving of ashes, bending the knee, or reciting the creeds as sacraments, and the Third Lateran Council in 1179 spoke of "the institution of priests, … burying the dead" as sacraments. In short, from the early church to the twelfth century, there was still considerable latitude about many sacramental doctrines, practices, and even the precise definition of what counted as a sacrament.

Meanwhile, popular practice and piety had continued to change. The practice of penance underwent a radical shift from the seventh century onward, changing from a public office only for gross offenders to a private office for everyone. Slowly but surely, the rites of initiation were pulled apart in the West. Even more slowly, the church tightened its grip on the marriage ceremony. Healing became associated almost exclusively with death and was known as extreme unction. Eucharistic practice moved ever more to celebrating Mass as an awesome spectacle with the people rarely receiving communion and little, if any, participation by the laity. Even ordination changed as accessory ceremonies came increasingly to dominate the rite.

The twelfth century was a time of synthesizing scripture and the theologians' teaching, summarizing what had previously been taught, and dividing such knowledge into manageable segments. Sacramental theology showed a meteoric development. Most influential was the work of Peter Lombard, professor and (briefly) bishop at Paris, whose *Four Books of the Sentences* was completed around 1150 and became the basic textbook for Christian doctrine for almost five hundred years. It is the funnel through which all preceding developments of any significance passed on to future elaboration in the West. In a key passage, Lombard tells us:

> Let us now come to the sacraments of the new covenant; which are baptism, confirmation, the blessing of bread, that is the eucharist,

> penance, extreme unction, ordination, marriage. Of these some offer a remedy for sin, and confer helping grace, as baptism; others are merely a remedy, as marriage; others strengthen us with grace and virtue, as the eucharist and ordination.[7]

Within half a century, this became the standard list of sacraments and was made dogma by subsequent councils.

Lombard summarizes earlier teaching on each of these seven sacraments. Following Augustine, he distinguishes between sacraments of the old covenant (such as circumcision) "which only promised and signified salvation" and those of the new covenant which "give it."[8] Using language originally used by Augustine, Lombard defines a sacrament as "the sign of a sacred thing (res)." But Augustine's distinction between the ***sacramentum*** (that which is apparent to our senses) and the ***res*** (thing, that is, fruit of the sacrament), is refined further by Lombard to a threefold distinction between the *sacramentum* itself (the outward and visible), the *res* (the inward fruits), and the ***sacramentum et res*** (the two combined, that is, both sign and reality). An indication of future developments occurs in Lombard's statement that "a sacrament is properly so called, because it is a sign of the grace of God and the expression of invisible grace, so that it bears its image and is its cause."[9] Thus a sacrament sanctifies as well as signifies, and theologians writing in the following century would pursue this in detail.

At another point, Lombard looks backward to scripture. With the coming of the thirteenth century, it was taken for granted that a sacrament could only be instituted by Christ, an addition to the definition as a "visible form of an inward grace" that was to cause an explosion at the Reformation. But Lombard, while clear that Christ instituted baptism and the eucharist, apparently follows earlier belief that the apostles instituted the rest and relates that unction of the sick was "instituted by the apostles."[10] Later Catholic theologians did not follow Lombard on this point but proposed that all sacraments were instituted by Christ.

Other problems were tackled by thirteenth-century theologians, the **Scholastics**, especially around the question of proper ministrants, recipients, and the effects and operation of grace in the sacraments. While this was a period of brilliant systematic, theological development, the church's experience of the sacraments was gradually reduced to words in a

way that minimized the symbols, the ritual actions, and the response of the one receiving the sacraments. The clarity of language formulated during this time has endured, and until recently, all subsequent discussions were tied to the terminology devised in this period. The councils of Florence and Trent in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries gave official approval to the theological work done during the thirteenth century.

The most convenient summation of all this work occurred in the ***Decree for the Armenians*** published by the Council of Florence in 1439 and based on a thirteenth-century treatise by Thomas Aquinas, "On the Articles of Faith and the Sacraments of the Church." The "Decree for the Armenians" began by listing what had by then become the conventional list of seven sacraments which "both contain grace and confer it upon all who receive them worthily."[11] Three things are necessary for each of these sacraments: the proper *matter* (objects such as water), the correct words or the *form* (such as the baptismal formula "I baptize you … "), and the person of the designated *ministrant* who must have "the intention of carrying out what the church effects through him," that is, they must intend to do exactly what the church does in the sacraments (such as baptize). That means a priest does not perform a sacrament while acting in a play or by using the proper matter and form for some purpose other than that which the church designates. "Three of these sacraments— baptism, confirmation, and ordination— impress indelibly upon the soul a character, a certain spiritual sign, distinct from all others, so they are not repeated for the same person."[12] The Council then specifies for each sacrament the proper matter, form, minister, and the benefits conferred upon the recipient.

This sacramental vision, while tidy and coherent, was a far cry from that of both the New Testament and the writings of the early theologians. Over time, the sacraments gradually became a system, a carefully worked out way of life in which every important human journey or passage was ministered to with an appropriate sacrament. Birth, growth, marriage, ordination, and sickness were each marked by particular sacraments. A Christian was nourished in the sacrament of eucharist and recovered from falling through the sacrament of penance. The effects of each sacrament were carefully worked out so that those who received it with proper disposition, that is, without imposing an obstacle to its operation, could be assured of receiving the designated grace.

What are the results of these late medieval developments? The institutional church, at last, concretely articulated what it experienced in the sacraments. Using the tools of Aristotelian philosophy, it was able to provide a coherent rational account of what happened in the sacraments. But this was also its weakness. What we see in the scholastic theologians of this period is a vision of the sacraments articulated almost exclusively in rational categories rather than experiential ones. One cannot help feeling in these neat distinctions about the operation of grace a danger of knowing too much, and a forgetfulness that one is dealing with heavenly mysteries, not with that which is susceptible to philosophical solution.

What emerged was a sacramental system, a brilliant product of human ingenuity that embraced all of life and dealt with all aspects of pastoral care. But that was also its problem. There are limits to human ingenuity when reality breaks out in unexplained ways not comprehended in our philosophy. This precise system led Roman Catholicism, especially after the Reformation, to treat the sacraments in excessively juridical ways and to overemphasize the question of validity, an obsession reaching its peak in the eighteenth century. The necessary concern with affirming the sacraments' dependence on God *ex opere operato* could be diverted from its proper affirmation of grace independent of the goodness of the minister to a mechanical, almost quid pro quo, concept of grace independent of the one receiving the sacraments. Far more free were **sacramentals**, an indeterminate number of pious practices such as table blessings, the use of holy water, almsgiving, and so on, whose benefits were contingent upon the inward disposition of the performer (*ex opere operantis*). Furthermore, the whole sacramental system was tied very heavily to the ministry of the ordained clergy. Only baptism and matrimony could be administered by the laity, and, in the West, usually only bishops could confer confirmation and ordination. Women could only perform emergency baptisms and join a man in marriage.

Still, even those who question this sacramental system cannot but admire its comprehensiveness and thoroughness in caring for human needs, although they may question as well the wisdom of knowing too much about how God acts. Problematic, too, may be the late medieval restriction of the number of sacraments to seven, the belief that all seven were instituted by Christ, and the entire structure of such a tightly interlocking system. When

one is dealing with so sublime a subject as how God acts in self-giving, neat scholastic divisions and distinctions may not be an adequate substitute for awe and wonder.

Rebellion against such a finely conceived system finally exploded in the person of Martin Luther. Luther's most vehement blow at the sacramental system was struck in his ***On The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*** (1520) in which he successively breached the walls the Catholic Church had erected to protect the Mass. Written in white-hot anger, it was not a logical exposition but a forceful blast at the whole sacramental system. It is hard to overstate its influence; it shaped all subsequent Protestant thought on sacraments. Except for small groups such as the Quakers and the Salvation Army (which dispute the need for outward sacraments at all), all major Protestant groups accepted Luther's conclusion that only two sacraments were instituted by Christ, and therefore, there are only two sacraments. Luther drew the restrictions even closer than his late medieval predecessors had done by declaring that the only sacraments are those for which explicit words of Christ are recorded in the New Testament, that is, those passages in which Christ clearly commands sacraments. Even Luther had trouble with penance, for which John 20:23 comes close to a dominical injunction. If Luther had had the freedom that prevailed as late as the twelfth century to accept institution other than by Christ alone, the Reformation would have taken another course, but Luther is captive himself to the thirteenth-century qualification that a sacrament must have been "instituted by Christ." He simply took this medieval qualification to its logical conclusion by asking "where?"

The force of Luther's attack led the Roman Catholic **Council of Trent** (1545–63) to assert in defiance: "If any one says, that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord; or that they are more, or less, than seven … let him be anathema."[13] Trent did not go into details about where all seven were instituted or the contrasting opinions of the fathers. Protestants, on the other hand, maintained that only two sacraments had divine authority. Unfortunately, it was no longer possible to agree that the number of sacraments was unknown or that some could have been instituted by the apostles following Christ's own practices. Late medieval definitions had closed those doors for Protestants as well as for Catholics.

The shattering of the sacramental system may not have been what Luther wanted—although he certainly deplored its clericalism, its Aristotelian philosophy, and its works righteousness—but shatter it he did, and the pieces have never gone back together within Protestantism. Luther and his contemporaries knew less about the early church than they thought they did and far less than we think we do. And in their zeal to reform the system they sometimes overlooked its humane side, its ability to minister to the deepest human needs from birth to death. Granted, the medieval system was not without flaws, but it provided pastoral care in a comprehensive way to deeply felt human needs.

Pressure on one portion of the sacramental system was sure to distort other parts. When the sacrament of penance was abolished, how could the contrite sinner find the same concrete assurance of absolution that this sacrament had guaranteed? The result was to push the eucharist into being a penitential sacrament, a development already found in in late medieval piety. Ever since the Reformation, the Protestant eucharist has often done double duty as a sacrament of both penance and thanksgiving. After all, the deep human need to be forgiven did not disappear simply because the sacrament of penance had been abolished; it simply got transferred to the eucharist. It is perhaps more accurate to say that Protestantism has two and a half sacraments: baptism and a penitential eucharist.

The dethroning of confirmation as a sacrament was equally problematic. Instead of being reunited to baptism, the Reformation had the ultimate effect of changing it into a didactic experience expressed as a graduation exercise for those who had mastered the catechism. Much of Christian education has been built on such a dubious resolution. Medieval rationalizations of confirmation’s effects were not much better, but at least Catholicism considered confirmation a gift of God rather than an act of human education.

Matrimony and ordinations were retained but not as sacraments. It can be debated whether, in practice, ordination ever ceased being treated as a sacrament. Most Protestants treat ordination as imparting an indelible character since they do not re-ordain clergy who return to ordained ministry after leaving for some reason. Ironically, Protestantism never developed a similar rite of passage for entrance into secular vocations.

Protestants paid a penalty for the loss of healing as a sacrament, which left pastors and congregation without a ritual to enact and receive God's help in restoring health. Recent years have seen a gradual recovery of this form of sacramental ministry.

What did the Reformation accomplish regarding the sacraments? Many of its results were not intended, especially that of pushing sacramental worship from the center to the periphery of the Christian life. Recoveries came only much later in early Methodism, the Disciples of Christ, and the Oxford Movement. Luther suggested some profound insights on baptism as lifestyle that have never been done justice even by his successors. Calvin succeeded better than his contemporaries in fusing reason, biblicism, and a sense of awe before holy mysteries. In this he came closest to the early church's understanding and left a legacy that resonated with John Wesley and the Methodists two centuries later. The attempt of most Reformers to restore frequent communion to the laity would have been a tremendous gain had it not been too radical a change from the late medieval practice of infrequent reception of the sacrament. The Reformers were children of the late Middle Ages, too, but they did achieve clear gains in sacramental worship through simplified vernacular rites, more congregational participation, congregational song, a well-catechized laity, and new emphasis on preaching of the word.

Despite the dramatic rhetorical language that characterized many of the debates around the Reformation, much more of the Augustinian and medieval apparatus of thinking about the sacraments was retained than discarded. Even in railing against transubstantiation, Luther was committed to thinking of the eucharist in terms of a spatial presence. And many of the reformers preserved the essence of *ex opere operato* in thinking of the sacraments as acts of God. For them, God is the chief actor in the sacraments and humans are the recipients of what God chooses to do for our benefit through sacraments. Calvin saw the sacraments as "visible signs best adapted to our small capacity" in which Christ acts "giving guarantees and tokens."[14] This approach is frankly sacral in insisting that God uses the physical objects and actions of this world to accomplish God's will for us. The efficacy of the sacraments does not depend on us but is a gift of grace. God makes the sacraments happen, although humans are free to receive or to refuse God's gift in them.

We have said too little about the Anabaptist stream that also was part of the sixteenth-century Reformation and the various "believer baptism" churches that come from that stream. Generally, these churches strongly rejected the notions that sacraments imparted grace *ex opere operato* in any way. Their reason for this rejection was that there was little evidence to show that sacraments actually produced holy living in the lives of those who receive them as infants or even as adults. Rather than imparting grace, a sacrament was more a dominical commandment to obedience for a person who was mature and committed enough to make a faithful response. These dominical commands were **ordinances**, rather than sacraments. God worked through them only insofar as those who received them actually sought to live a godly life. An important strength of this understanding is that it emphasized how God's grace was meant to have observable, practical effect in the lives of Christians in this life. The obedient life itself was a sign of grace. This connection between godly living and the reception of Jesus' commands to baptize in the name of the Trinity or receive the Lord's Supper "in memory of me," continued to challenge such later reformers as John Wesley in eighteenth-century England and Alexander Campbell in nineteenth-century America.

The eighteenth century saw another, more subtle change but one that was even more drastic than that of the Reformation in sacramental theology. It came about in the desacralizing tendencies of the Enlightenment which rejected the very notion that God would intervene in present time or use physical objects and actions to accomplish the divine will. Slowly, for some Protestants, these views eroded the traditional Catholic and Reformation view that God acts to accomplish God's purposes through sacraments. The desacralizing tendencies played down God's role in the sacraments and magnified humanity's role even more drastically than the Anabaptists. Biblicism was still firm enough that Christians accepted two sacraments as required by Jesus' teaching.

For a vast segment of Protestantism, the two sacraments became pious memory exercises. The sacraments were occasions for humans to remember what God had done in times past. They were credited with immense practical value in stirring up humans to greater moral endeavor. Remembrance of God's past actions was a strong incentive for leading a better life. But the emphasis in desacralized Protestantism was not on God

acting now but in remembering what God had done in times past. The agency is human; we remember, we act.

There are premonitions of these developments in Ulrich Zwingli's treatise *Of Baptism* in 1525, though they are less apparent in his understanding of the Lord's Supper. Zwingli still lived in a sacral world in which God intervened in worship. But the real split that opened up as the eighteenth century progressed was between those who followed the traditional Catholic and Reformation concept of God as acting in the sacraments and those for whom the sacraments had become basically pious memory exercises. The latter included a wide variety of Protestants ranging from Anglican bishops to frontier Baptists. Even Ben Franklin indulged in some prayer book revision, making show of the practical benefits of remembering Jesus for amending one's character. If this kind of rationalism encrusted medieval piety in a shell of Aristotelian philosophy, then that of the eighteenth century created a rigidly desacralized universe in which nothing was more than its outward appearance.

In this understanding, God no longer made sacraments happen as divine action; humans made sacraments happen through human action and response to God. The latter was far more constricting because all depended upon human fervor in generating the ability to remember God's command and to respond appropriately. Frequently, that ability failed to produce an enduring fervor for remembering God and adjusting behavior. This was a Gethsemane-type of piety ("If Christ did, … can't you at least?"), and its fervor was often fragile. The eucharistic participation became more of a test of faith than nourishment of faith. The result was a great drop in sacramental worship in Protestant traditions such as that of the Lutherans, which, in some places, had maintained a weekly eucharist until late in the eighteenth century.

In light of this Protestant development, the value of the medieval Catholic *ex opere operato* doctrine is clear. If the sacraments are only pious memory exercises or tests of worthiness, then they have little chance of being the center of a vital worship. Rather, they are rather bare, legalistic acts of obedience to Jesus's command to "do this." Traditionally, the purpose of the sacraments was not to induce good ethical behavior but to give humans access to God (which, in turn, does indeed affect behavior!).

Today there remains a split in Protestantism between those who follow Luther, Calvin, and Wesley in the traditional view that God acts in the sacraments, using them as a means of grace for divine self-giving, and those who follow the desacralizing tendencies of the Enlightenment which saw the sacraments as something humans do to stimulate memory of what God has already done. This split is at least as great as was that between the Protestant reformers and their Roman Catholic contemporaries. Fortunately, neither approach is frozen in ice. In the last several decades, we see more clearly the divine self-giving that occurs in the sacraments, and we are also discovering more about their human side as this relates to communication.

NEW UNDERSTANDINGS OF SACRAMENTS

In recent decades, great changes have occurred throughout Western Christianity in the ways sacraments are understood. These changes have swept across denominational boundaries and changed both faith and practice in vast segments of the Christian world.

While the most obvious changes in sacramental practice have been in Roman Catholicism since Vatican II, change has been underway since the beginning of the twentieth century when receiving communion weekly began to be common for Roman Catholics for the first time in more than a millennium. The **Liturgical Movement** brought further changes in the direction of increased biblical study, more congregational participation, and an increased emphasis on church as community. Vatican II accelerated this process with important advances in the presentation of doctrine (especially regarding the church and sacraments) and in broad changes in worship. The post–Vatican II revision of the liturgical books brought important changes in the outward form of each of the sacraments though most conspicuously in penance and healing. Less obvious has been a move away from treating the sacraments in legalistic juridical terms (especially those of validity and regularity) to more concern about the fruits (efficacy) in people’s lives.

Within Protestantism, changes of equal significance may be detected in the widespread growth of a deeper sacramental piety. Recent decades have seen more frequent communion services, progressing from quarterly to monthly to weekly in many congregations. The emerging recovery of the eucharist as a norm for Sunday worship has also been accompanied by

more concern with baptism as a congregational act. Less detectable, but even more significant, is the gradual shift away from regarding worship simply as an intellectual experience of instruction or as an emotional outlet, to the realization that worship encompasses our total being— body, emotions, and intellect. Christians across the spectrum of traditions have shown an increasing sensitivity to the crucial role embodied rituals play in relations between humans and in the encounter between God and humans. Many have discovered that rituals such as the imposition of ashes at Ash Wednesday are as much a part of worship as the sermon. The impact of these changes likely reflects something broader than worship alone: We are discovering more about what it means to be fully human. Revived interest in the sacraments shows how deeply anthropological the sacraments are and how closely they reflect what it is to be human.

This new concern has brought focused attention to the sign value of the sacraments, that is, how well they communicate. One can baptize with a medicine dropper if all one is concerned about is validity, that is, what is the least one can do and still have a genuine sacrament. But if one is concerned with sign value, baptismal practice will communicate far more about cleansing and washing when a considerable amount of water is seen, heard, and even felt, vicariously. For those responsible for the preparation of worship, this is apparent in concern for the quality of celebration. How well does what we do communicate in human terms what God is doing? In this sense, no detail is insignificant if it heightens the sign value of what we do in the sacraments. The very humanity of the sacraments is shown in how closely they follow normal human forms of communication and relating to others. This places a heavy responsibility on those leading worship to be fully sensitive to all they communicate by voice and body as well as how the sacraments engage all the senses.

Changes in sacramental practice have often reflected new ways of understanding what we experience in the sacraments. Perhaps, the most significant breakthrough in the previous century began with the German theologian Odo Casel, Benedictine monk of Maria Laach Abbey in Germany. Casel’s theology stressed that Christian worship is a time mystery in which the reality of past events is again offered to us through our reenactment of them in worship. He avoided many of the scholastic terms from the thirteenth century and concentrated on showing how, through the

church's corporate recalling of salvation history, each Christian can appropriate these events and live "our own sacred history."[15]

Twentieth-century theological developments in the Netherlands and Belgium associated with theologians such as Edward Schillebeeckx led to further significant breakthroughs. Schillebeeckx's *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* was the most influential work on sacramental theology of the Vatican II years.[16] In it, Schillebeeckx presents Christ as the primordial sacrament through whom we encounter God. The visible sacraments are means through which we can experience a gracious personal relationship with God. The categories Schillebeeckx uses are personal human relationships, not static and juridical terms. At points, some of the insights of Calvin seem to appear; at others, modern phenomenological philosophy comes to the forefront.

A variety of factors have shaped the new approaches to the sacraments. Biblical studies have greatly illuminated our understanding of the richness and complexity of the biblical witness to the sacraments, and historical studies have traced the slow development of the Christian experience of and reflection on sacraments. Ecumenism has made each branch of Christianity more willing to share its particular experience and to appropriate those of others, as we can see in the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982) document of the World Council of Churches and the various responses of member churches.[17] Old controversies have been bypassed, frequently because of better understanding of the common heritage of the New Testament and the early church. Modern communications theory, anthropological studies, and sociological research have clarified the human content of the sacraments and led to more profound understanding of how humans relate to one another and to God.

More recent work in sacramental theology has embraced this rich variety to bridge the divisions of the past in a way that speaks to the church of the present. The French theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet has drawn on language theory and ritual studies to emphasize the sacraments as communal embodied acts of symbolic mediation. For Chauvet, the sacraments are God's way of putting grace at the mercy of the body: the body of a tradition, a culture, an institution.[18] Because the sacraments exist as the most powerful expressions of faith at the mercy of the body, Chauvet's work is an effort to take the body more seriously in the

sacraments. The consequence of such a vision is shared widely by many contemporary sacramental theologians, whatever their approach: that the sacraments should be celebrated in a way that embraces the fullness of the bodies of those who celebrate them, including the cultures and traditions in which they live. Sacraments are neither mere formulas nor mere reminders, but privileged expressions of Christian identity deeply bound to Christian social and ethical life.

Given all these factors, how can we best express the role of sacraments in the life of a Christian today? We will attempt, in terms as concise as possible, a contemporary statement of what the sacraments can mean for Christians.

First, any satisfactory understanding of the sacraments must start with the belief that *God acts in the sacraments*. That is to say, the sacraments depend upon what use God makes of them, not on human moral character, ability, or intentions. The outward, visible form is shaped by humans and may vary in detail from generation to generation, but the inward grace depends on God. The *res*, the thing or fruit of the sacrament, depends upon God, although humans can impose an obstacle to what God offers. In this sense, we can speak of the objectivity of divine grace in the sacraments.

These, of course, are the concepts Augustine used so forcefully in his debate with the Donatists. The sacraments are not contingent upon the moral character of the celebrant but depend on God alone. Humans are freed from the need to make the sacrament happen; only God can do that. Thus, the alternative, the desacralizing position, is profoundly unsatisfactory, for it makes the sacraments depend upon human agency and forces their fruitfulness to rest on the degree of fervor with which the sacraments are approached. This confuses the roles of God, the giver, and humans, the recipients. Some form of the *ex opere operato* doctrine seems essential to safeguard the crucial sense of divine activity, though this must not be pushed so far as to make grace irresistible or to leave humans completely passive.

Sacraments, as Calvin saw so clearly, are God's idea, designed by God to lead us to God. "Our merciful Lord," Calvin says, "so tempers himself to our capacity that … he condescends to lead us to himself even by these earthly elements, and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessing."[19] God knows us best and knows the need to strengthen our faith.

The Creator knows best how to address us as creatures. Sacraments, then, are God's way of acting. The sacraments are far more than pious memory exercises, for, in them, Calvin continues, God "imparts spiritual things under visible ones."

Second, *God acts in the sacraments through self-giving*. God takes the initiative in the sacraments. What is given is not some abstract idea of mechanical infusion of energy but a gracious personal relationship with God. We receive God's gift of self. Christianity proclaims that God is love, and the very nature of love is to be self-giving. In various ways in different sacraments, God acts in self-giving to us in forms appropriate to the time and occasion—as forgiveness and reconciliation in one sacrament, as acceptance in another. Gifts are the human way of giving ourselves to others. God does no less in the sacraments. Indeed, because God is given to us in the sacraments, we are able to give ourselves to others in broader and deeper ways. When God acts in self-giving, as in the eucharist, we are made one with other worshipers and enabled to serve all the world. Thus, the sacraments have the power to change all that we do through power flowing from God's initial self-giving.

God's self-giving is by no means confined to sacraments. The Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are chronicles of ways God has given God's self to humans in times past. Frequently these have taken on unexpected forms, ways of giving, not to the proud and mighty but to the meek and lowly. God is given to us in creation, in law and prophecy, and in the life together of a chosen people. God is given to us in the human Jesus, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:7). Scriptures record God's self-giving in the past. The reality of past events is made present to us in reading and expounding the scriptures, but the reality of ongoing, present *action* is imparted to us in the sacraments. They form yet another testament to the self-giving nature of God. All three testaments—old, new, and sacraments—make known to us God's will to give of self for our benefit.

Third, *through the sacraments, God's self-giving occurs as love made tangible, that is, perceptible through touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell*. For Christians, God's self-giving is perceived as the giving of God's love, "and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16). There is no love that does not make itself manifest in some way.

A human emotion as powerful as love is reflected in the way we relate to a loved one. Love is constantly seeking sign-acts by which to reveal itself to the object of our love. It may take such affectionate forms as an embrace or a kiss, the giving of a gift, or in a simple act of doing the dishes for someone. One writes letters or visits the hospital or telephones as a visible manifestation of love. These visible sign-acts are identified with love. We know others love us because of how they act toward us.

This is not an abstract principle; this is simply how people are. We need to be shown. In Jesus Christ, God showed us the fullness of divine love. But we need to be shown this love again and again. God's love manifests itself in various ways according to our varying stages and circumstances of life. God as love is given to us to uphold us in making a lifelong pledge to love another. Another form of self-giving is witnessed to as the community prays for our return to health. Love is made visible as the community rejoices in the gifts that someone has received for ministerial leadership. In these and other ways, the love of God is made perceptible to us through actions. Just as we depend on the handshake, the kiss, and the embrace to express our love so others can recognize it, so we depend upon sacraments to know the love of God. We make human love knowable by acting it out; divine love is no different.

Fourth, *God's self-giving as love is made tangible through relationships of love within the community*. Although the sacraments involve a vertical (God to human) relationship, they also involve horizontal (human to human) relationships. The sacraments are social through and through. Everywhere in the biblical narrative, God chooses to act within a community of faithful people. The sacraments function within the community, enabling Christians to build one another up in love, faith, and hope.

The sacraments are tangible vehicles of love within the community in two ways They establish new relationships of love, and they maintain and nourish existing relationships of love. When two persons give themselves to each other in marriage, God acts through the community to strengthen the couple's relationship of love by support and blessing. An ordination without the community of faith would come close to travesty. In baptism and confirmation, we move into a new relationship of love within the community as God incorporates us into Christ's body. In sickness, God

enables the community to surround us by its witness of caring love. Death marks yet another transition in which, by God's grace, we pass into eternal life in Christ. The eucharist nourishes us as our family meal, and reconciliation restores us to the family when we stumble. In all these communal signs we are built up in love, faith, and hope through the establishment of new relationships or the maintenance of existing relationships of love within the church.

In every case, it is God who acts within the actions of the community to make these relationships of love fruitful. The community of faith acts to perform the outward and visible forms of the sacraments, but it knows that the *sacramentum* is meaningless without the *res*, that inward giving of God's love. Of course, such love spills over in mission to God's entire world. Indeed, we find that the "proper reception" of the sacraments, to reference a technical concept from medieval theology, entails sharing God's love with others, because the proper reception of any gift means to use it as the giver intended.

Much of this will become more clear as we explore the sacraments one by one in subsequent chapters. Although we shall explore in some detail the outward form of each sacrament, the essential concern is not what we do but how the reality of God's love is made manifest in each case. We shall need to remember, especially when we are tempted to become preoccupied with the intricacies of matter, form, and ministrant, is this: what ultimately matters is not what we do with each sacrament but what *God* does with it.

SACRAMENTALITY

The practical consequence of all of this is the need for worship leaders to understand their ministry of the sacraments as enabling congregations to receive them fully. In other words, one needs a sense of sacramentality to celebrate the sacraments well. The opposite of this is a form of sacramental minimalism in which the bare minimum necessary to have a valid sacrament is performed. Yes, one can baptize with a medicine dropper, if necessary, and it will be a valid baptism, but any dramatic representation of God's cleansing act of forgiveness will be almost totally absent.

One must begin by observing how humans relate to one another in nonverbal ways. Love, in its demand for tangible expression, is our best

guide. In this sense, we are dealing with the humanity of the sacraments. There must be an integrity between what we say and what we do. Thus, to say, “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body,” and then to use precut cubes of bread in sealed packages is a visual contradiction of our words. The act of breaking bread in the eucharist to share it is one of the most significant forms of proclamation of the unity of the body of Christ. This act gave one of the earliest names to the eucharist, “breaking bread” (Acts 2:46). One way to visualize this is to think of how one might celebrate the eucharist without spoken words but by dramatizing all the verbs. This is definitely not recommended with congregations, but it might be a good exercise for seminarians.

Behind all this is a deeper sense of what William Temple called a “sacramental universe.”[20] Poets have often caught this better than theologians. George Herbert wrote

> Teach me, my God and King,
> In all things thee to see,
> And what I do in anything,
> To do it as for thee.
> For that which God doth touch and own
> Cannot for less [than gold] be told.[21]

This sense of a sacramental universe means that many experiences of ordinary life can be moments of revelation of God’s love, but only if we have a sensitivity to sacramentality.

It should be clear by now that I regard the number of sacraments as indeterminate, just as most Christians did in earlier centuries. That said, lest we confuse sacramentality with nature mysticism (as awe-inspiring as nature can be), we must acknowledge that the very possibility of a sacramental universe derives the second person of the divine Trinity, who is incarnate in Jesus Christ as the primordial sacrament.

This understanding of sacramentality has practical ramifications for worship. Above all, those who conduct worship with this rich understanding of sacramentality will want their leadership to express the full sign value of the sacraments and other liturgical actions. In worship, the minister’s body becomes a sacramental means of grace. When we give

communion, it must be a genuine act of giving, not a quick snatch from someone's hand. The presider and other liturgical ministers must be aware of what their bodies are saying. Above all, their bodies must say, "This is an important act of God's love."

This understanding of sacramentality will also help us with emerging modes of virtual worship that are raising old questions about the sacraments in new ways. Situating such questions within the diverse forms in which Christians have understood and celebrated the sacraments throughout history can help ground richer conversations about emerging practices in the living tradition of the church. How do we think about sacramental grace in relation to physical proximity for the celebration of baptism or eucharist? What does it mean to think about materiality and embodiment in a digital worship space? How do we avoid reverting to practices marked by the kind of sacramental minimalism the church has worked to overcome? Denominational commitments might yield vastly different answers to the question of how and whether and which sacraments can or should be celebrated in an online space. But rather than reflexively embracing or rejecting such practices, sacramental theology is rich with resources that can help guide collective discernment toward sacramental worship in spirit and in truth.

However churches consider such difficult questions in our day, the fullness of sign value will continue to be paramount. Baptism by immersion, for example, is the fullest, most robust witness to a life-transforming event. Persons immersed are dramatically and visually changed by being drenched in water—they look different and feel different. God's love is no less if we merely sprinkle or pour, but the witness to God's love is certainly far less tangible. In dealing with the humanity of the sacraments, we must take very seriously what humans perceive as well as what God does. And this is not merely a matter of the intellect but the perception of the senses—all the senses.

Sacramentality, then, is taking fully seriously our full humanity. The psalmist wrote: "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8). Tasting, seeing, touching, hearing, and smelling: these are the very gifts God has given to reveal God's self to us. The sacraments are privileged testimonies to those gifts and are at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.

CHAPTER SEVEN TERMINOLOGY

Babylonian Captivity of the Church, On the

Council of Trent

Decree for the Armenians

ex opere operato

institution narrative

Liturgical Movement, The

mystérion

ordinance

res (see *sacramentum et res*)

sacrament

sacramental

sacramentum (see *sacramentum et res*)

sacramentum et res

transubstantiation

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1. “Tractus on John,” 80, 3, NPNF, 1st series (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890), 7:344; and John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xiv, 4, Library of Christian Classics 21, p. 1279.

2. The central thesis of E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

3. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Scribner’s, 1966), pp. 106–37.

4. That is, gnostic Christians, some of whom adopted a strong anti-materialist view that considered the physical realm to be the evil creation of a fallen creator-god who opposed the God who created the spiritual realm.

5. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 32, p. 1403.

6. For a discussion of this term and its shifting meanings cf. Piet Schoonenberg, “Transubstantiation: How Far Is This Doctrine Historically Determined?” *The Sacraments, an Ecumenical Dilemma* (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), *Concilium* 24, 78–91.

7. Text in Elizabeth Frances Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System* (Merrick, N.Y.: Richwood, 1976), IV, ii, 1, p. 85.

8. Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System*, IV, i, 6, p. 82.

9. Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System*, IV, i, 4, p. 80.

10. Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System*, IV, xxiii, 3, p. 221.

11. Text in Ray C. Petry, ed., *A History of Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 324.

12. Petry, *A History of Christianity*, p. 325.

13. “Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent,” in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.), 2, 119.

14. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 1, p. 1361.

15. Burkhard Neunheuser, ed., *The Mystery of Christian Worship and Other Writings* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1962), p. 124.

16. See also Schillebeeckx’s *The Eucharist* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968).

17. The study text of the document is available at https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text (accessed February 12, 2023).

18. As suggested in the title of his book, *The Sacraments—The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

19. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xiv, 3, p. 1278.

20. William Temple, *Nature, Man, and God* (London: Macmillan, 1940), p. 473.

21. George Herbert, “The Elixir,” in *The Temple* (1633).

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHRISTIAN INITIATION

No one is born a Christian. One becomes a Christian through becoming part of a community with a distinctive way of life involving definite ethical and creedal commitments. This change in our being is marked by sacraments that proclaim what God is doing to bring us to faith.

In this chapter, we shall survey how Christians experience and understand initiation into the community of the faithful. God's love made tangible in Christian initiation involves a variety of stages and ritual actions. The central ritual action is the actual act of **baptism**, which entails a spoken declaration ("I baptize you," or "You are baptized," and so forth) along with the application of water in some way (immersion, pouring, or sprinkling. The baptism, however, is preceded by some forms of preparation, such as a period of instruction or counseling for the candidate or their parents, and it is followed by subsequent acts variously known as **confirmation, chrismation, affirmation**, or **public profession**. For most Christians, the final stage of initiation is **first communion**. In this introduction, the entire ritual process of the making of a Christian will be referred to as **Christian initiation**, and the individual portions will be named as we discuss them.

It is not always easy to draw a line between a practice and the understanding of it, between rite and reason, between liturgical studies and sacramental theology, but that is the course we shall attempt in this chapter. First, we shall survey what Christians have done and are doing now in

Christian initiation. Then we shall examine their understandings of these various acts. Finally, some conclusions for pastoral use will be drawn.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Current changes in the practice of initiation are only the latest chapters in a long history of development. Again we must look for roots in Judaism. The sources lie deep in prophetic symbolism and the use of acts and objects for encountering God. The Jewish belief that the material can affect the spiritual is central to these sacraments.

The most conspicuous Jewish antecedent of initiation was **circumcision**, a ritual sign that placed males within the covenant relationship between Israel and God. This sacrament of the old law (as Christians saw it) brought the eight-day-old Jewish male into lifelong relationship with a people with whom God had covenanted to be God and king. Even when Christian writers denied that circumcision could do any more than promise and signify salvation, the concept persisted that one was engrafted into God's people through ritual actions.

More questionable is whether first-century Judaism practiced **proselyte baptism**, that is, of male and female Gentile converts. We know that Judaism eventually did baptize converts, but it seems unlikely that such a practice would have been copied from Christianity. The first-century Qumran community that lived by the Dead Sea practiced daily ritual washing as a sign of spiritual cleansing. Washing with water is, after all, the obvious natural sign of cleansing, as 1 Peter 3:21 recognizes: "baptism … [is] not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience." Acts 22:16 echoes this: "be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name." However, it is quite a conceptual stretch to go from the daily ritual washings of Qumran to the single act of Christian baptism.

There is no question, though, of the influence of John the Baptist who baptized Jesus and many others. Paul interprets: "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus" (Acts 19:4). That sums it up fairly well: John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and a baptism of eschatological expectation of the coming Messiah. It was ethical and anticipatory. The

church could never forget that Jesus himself submitted to John's baptism as a part of conforming "in this to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Thus, the weight of Jesus' own act in receiving baptism and in allowing his disciples to baptize (John 4:2) gave paramount authority to baptism. Furthermore, Jesus identified his baptism with his own passion and death (Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50). Baptism became an image of Christ's sacrificial death. Repentance, messianic hope, and death are all represented in baptism in the Gospels.

Other acts the church appropriated were the **laying on of hands** and sealing or **anointing with oil**. Both acts signified the transmission of power and blessing (Isaac blessing Jacob in Genesis 27 or Jacob blessing his grandsons, Genesis 48), or the certification of power (Samuel anointing David in 1 Sam. 16:13). Priestly or royal power seems associated with the use of oil. The association of "anoint" and the words "Christ" and "Messiah" is clear in Greek and Hebrew since these words mean "anointed one." Both anointing and laying on of hands soon came to signify the reception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for those initiated into the "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:10).

Much more dubious is the influence of the initiatory rites of the various pagan mystery religions popular in the Roman Empire during the days of the New Testament. Certainly, there were conspicuous parallels to Christian initiation in the initiatory rites of some secret sects, but that was probably more a cause of embarrassment to the church than a source of ideas. Justin Martyr, writing from Rome ca. 155–57, dismissed the pagan rites as imitations by "wicked demons" of authentic Christian rites.[1]

The New Testament itself gives us only tantalizingly brief glimpses of actual initiatory practices. But what we see there has become determinative for all subsequent developments. Easily the most detailed account of a baptism is Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:35-38. Verse 37 (bracketed here) is absent in some texts but present in others. The whole is worth repeating.

> Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" [And

> Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”] He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

We begin with a form of catechesis, Philip instructing the eunuch. Then comes a profession of the eunuch’s faith in which he gives the correct creedal statement. Whereupon they go down “into” (*eis*) the water and Philip baptizes the eunuch. This account in Acts is essentially the core of baptism as still practiced today.

The creedal statement in Acts 8:37 focuses on Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, and not the whole Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are other texts that indicate that the earliest Christian baptisms were “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38; 8:12 and 16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16). Paul makes a short creedal statement in Romans 10:9: “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord” and repeats it in Philippians 2:11: “and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Consequently, it is all the more historically curious that Matthew 28:19 gives a baptismal formula that is clearly trinitarian in which Jesus, after the resurrection, instructs his followers to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Very likely this post-resurrection story in Matthew represents a second stage of development in actual liturgical practice and was read back into the words of the Lord by the evangelist. Whatever the historical case may be, the use of the trinitarian name as the baptismal formula is very early, as it is corroborated by the first-century text, the *Didache*, chapter 7, which uses the trinitarian baptismal formula. Virtually all baptismal rites since have used the same trinitarian formula.

The witness to the laying on of hands is far more perplexing. The Ethiopian eunuch story makes no mention of it, but this act occurs repeatedly in ambiguous and conflicting passages in Acts. This raises questions about the relation of reception of the Holy Spirit to baptism. Acts 2:38 links repentance, baptism, the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. But at Caesarea, the Holy Spirit was poured out before baptism (Acts 10:47); whereas in Samaria, the newly baptized did not receive the Holy Spirit until they received the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17). At

Ephesus, after baptism "when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them" (Acts 19:6). Two things seem likely from these accounts: the Holy Spirit and baptism are directly and intimately related, and the laying on of hands or sealing (anointing, 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13 and 4:30) seems to testify to this link by emphasizing the presence of the Spirit in those being baptized.

Practical problems began to emerge as the church started to expand over time. Hebrews raises the question of apostasy by those who have been baptized: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit … and then have fallen away" (6:4-6). This problem has vexed the church ever since: how to deal with the backslider. *The Shepherd of Hermas*, from the early second century, is a bit more lenient. Acknowledging that some deny any repentance beyond baptism, the author concedes that "after that great and holy calling [baptism], if a man be tempted by the devil and sin, he has one repentance, but if he sin and repent repeatedly it is unprofitable."[2] In modern times, the most troubling problem has been whether the New Testament accounts are compatible with the baptism of infants **(pedobaptism)**. There is explicit evidence neither for nor against the baptism of infants in the New Testament. Those who practice infant baptism are apt to be convinced that the *oikos* (household) passages which speak of the baptism of whole households (Acts 16:15 and 33; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16) are likely to have included children of the family or of resident slaves. Since the father usually determined the religion of the whole family, it is likely, they argue, that baptism was applied to all within the household as a matter of course. Those who do not practice infant baptism are prone to argue against such practice on the basis that the demands for repentance and faith on the part of those to be baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38) preclude baptism of infants.

Though there are some theological grounds for asserting that it was practiced in New Testament times,[3] on historical evidence alone we must agree with Everett Ferguson that "Tertullian's treatise, *On Baptism*, ch. 21, dating from the early 3rd century, provides the first certain literary reference to infant baptism, and that he opposed the practice."[4] Indeed, Tertullian deplores the baptism of "little children," who may grow up to embarrass or even "endanger" their sponsors who vouch for them at the baptism. A

passage of *The Apostolic Tradition*, roughly contemporary with Tertullian (or perhaps a little earlier) directs the church to "give precedence to the small children and baptize them … afterwards, the grown men; and finally the women" (*Apostolic Tradition* 21).[5] The document, obviously, is speaking of a practice long familiar but for how long? Is it apostolic or not? We have no proof either way. Nevertheless, by the fifth century, infant baptism was widespread. By the medieval period, virtually all Christians practiced the baptism of infants.

The second-century church fills out more details of initiation practices beyond the hints the New Testament accounts give us. According to the *Didache* 7, those who are going to be baptized are expected to fast beforehand, along with those conducting the baptism. Baptism is preferably in cold running water but, lacking this, water is poured "thrice upon the candidate's head in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[6] Some decades later, Justin Martyr gives slightly more detail (c. 155, as noted above) about the period of baptismal preparation known as the **catechumenate**, which involves instruction, the promise to "live accordingly," prayer, and fasting. Baptism, Justin notes, is at a place "where there is water," and candidates are washed in the name of the Trinity. Those baptized are then led to where the church is assembled and share, for the first time, in common prayer, the **kiss of peace**, and the eucharist.[7]

Much more information appears in the next century in Tertullian's treatise "On Baptism" (c. 200) and scattered throughout his other writings. Tertullian indicates a rigorous discipline for those about to be baptized involving "prayers, fasts, and bendings of the knee, and vigils all the night through."[8] The most solemn occasion for baptism, he tells us, is the Pascha (by which he means "Easter"). The Day of Pentecost comes second in preference, though any time is acceptable as the case may require. The normal administrant is the bishop, if present, then authorized presbyters and deacons, but "even laymen have the right, for what is equally received can be equally given."[9] Just before baptism comes **renunciation** of "the devil, and his pomp and his angels." Candidates are "thrice immersed" after "interrogations rather more extensive than our Lord has prescribed"[10] and then "thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction" such as Moses used to anoint Aaron into the priesthood. Next, "The hand is laid on in blessing, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit as Jacob blessed his grandsons."[11] Yet

another Old Testament image appears in the act of giving the newly baptized “a mixture of milk and honey,” a symbol of the promised land (Exod. 3:8).

The Apostolic Tradition corroborates all of this, giving us extensive detail, particularly on a long and rigorous catechumenate which could last as long as three years. During this strenuous period, catechumens are hearers of teaching, attending the service of the Word, but they cannot pray with the faithful, give the kiss of peace, or remain for the eucharist. Advanced and suitable candidates (the **elect)** are set apart each year and their conduct examined (eventually ritualized as the **scrutinies)**. They undergo a period of intense preparation with daily exorcism. If the baptism took place early on Easter morning (and based on later practice, that is possible), the candidates fast on what is probably our Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

The climax of the initiation process, presumably, occurs late at night or early Sunday morning. At cockcrow, prayer is made over the water, the candidates undress, and the bishop prepares oils of exorcism and thanksgiving. Then, after the renunciation of Satan, each candidate is anointed thoroughly with the oil of exorcism, goes down into the water, and is asked three questions, which are virtually the words of the **Apostles’ Creed** (which, to this day, the Western churches use as the baptismal creed). Each time, after affirming belief in a different person of the Trinity, the candidate is immersed. After the third washing, they come up out of the water and are anointed with the oil of thanksgiving “in the name of Jesus Christ.” Then, after dressing, the newly baptized go to meet the assembled church where the bishop lays hands on each, asking God to “make them worthy to be filled with your Holy Spirit and send on them your grace…. ”[12] The bishop then pours holy oil and lays his hands on the heads of each. Finally, the bishop seals each in the name of the Trinity, making the sign of the cross on their foreheads **(consignation)**, and gives each the kiss of peace.

The new Christians now join the congregation for the first time in prayer, the kiss of peace, and the eucharist. As can be seen, the whole rite has a variety of actions, all involving a strong sense of touch: anointings, washing, laying on of hands, signing, embracing (the kiss of peace), and eating and drinking.

Other pre-Nicene materials add a few details. The third century Didascalia Apostolorum stresses the need for a "woman deacon" to "anoint the women … for the ministry of a woman deacon is especially needful and important,"[13] especially given the practice of baptism in the nude. Egeria tells us that in late-fourth-century Jerusalem at the beginning of Lent the names of those to be baptized that Easter are given to a presbyter who keeps the record. After inquiry into their lifestyles, they begin a daily three-hour long regime of catechism and exorcism. After five weeks, they are given the Apostles' Creed to learn, which they must recite back after seven weeks, one by one, to the bishop who examines their understanding of it. Egeria noted nothing much unfamiliar in the Easter vigil but mentions the eight days of Easter week when the bishop instructs the newly initiated regarding all the sacraments that they have just experienced for the first time.[14]

This method of instructing the newly-baptized regarding the meaning of the sacraments is known today as **mystagogical catechesis**. The word "mystagogy" derives from the Greek words for "mystery" and "way of life." Fortunately, some of these mystagogical catecheses have survived in the forms of lectures given by Ambrose in Milan, Cyril (or his successor) in Jerusalem, and John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia in Antioch. Ambrose tells the new Christians the meaning of the ***ephphatha***, the ceremonial opening and blessing of the ears and nostrils (Mark 7:34). Then he describes anointing: "You were rubbed with oil like an athlete, Christ's athlete, as though in preparation for an earthly wrestling-match."[15] After baptism, there is a foot washing of the newly baptized, though Ambrose is aware that Rome does not do this.

Cyril gives us much more detail and elaborates on symbolic meanings: "Next, after removing your garments you were rubbed with exorcised oil from the hair of your head to your toes, and so you became sharers in Jesus Christ, who is the cultivated olive tree."[16] Theodore of Mopsuestia adds other details such as the role of the sponsor and clothing the newly baptized in a radiant garment. John Chrysostom gives us the **adhesion** or pledge after the renunciation, "And I enter into thy service, O Christ." He also uses the typical passive Eastern baptismal formula: "_____is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," in contrast to the active form the West adopted subsequently:

"_____, I baptize you …. " Chrysostom also tells us the candidate's head is thrice lowered into the water and raised. [17]

The most perplexing part of these rites is the variety of anointings and signings. Anointing tended to be originally a covering of the body with oil much as soap is used in bathing today, thus suggesting a preliminary to the bath of baptism or preparation for an athletic contest. **Signing** or marking with the sign of the cross (sometimes with oil) is a form of sealing or giving definite identity to the newly baptized. The location of the anointing and signing in the initiation rite, however, differed regionally among the early Christians. Early Syrian rites knew only a pre-baptismal anointing, conveying the meaning of priesthood, kingship, and gift of the Spirit. As early as the fourth century, in some places, post-baptismal anointing had become associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ambrose speaks of the "spiritual seal, … when, at the invocation of the priest, the Holy Spirit is bestowed" and lists the sevenfold gifts given (Isa. 11:2f).[18] Cyril calls anointing "the emblem of the Holy Spirit."

In summation, the early church's rites of initiation involved the whole community. In many historic churches, the full rites of initiation came at Easter at the end of a long catechumenate and consisted of a variety of acts at the Easter vigil: anointings, ethical renunciation, creedal profession, washing, laying on of hands, sealing with the sign of the cross, and first eucharist. Post-baptismal (mystagogical) catechesis followed. The whole process of conversion, from first inquiry to final and complete commitment, all became ritualized, and the process was eventually tied directly to the celebration of the resurrection.

Much of this was to change with the advance of the Middle Ages. In the East, the whole process of initiation was kept together by having the priest perform the whole rite using **chrism** (olive oil and balm) consecrated by the bishop for the final anointing. This portion of the Eastern rite is known as **chrismation**. It corresponded to the laying on of hands, which the West insisted must be done by a bishop. But the West saw a slow movement toward fragmentation and privatization of the whole. The disintegration of the unity of the rite was long and unconscious, but it did not completely fall apart until the end of the Middle Ages. For example, as late as 1533, the future English Queen Elizabeth I was baptized and confirmed three days after birth, a practice soon made impossible by the 1549 *Book of Common*

Prayer. Unfortunately, most of these changes came about for nontheological reasons. In Italy, there was a bishop in every sizable town, and it was possible to have initiation with all its parts at one time, such as Easter and place, at a **baptistery** (also spelled "baptistry"), such as those in Pisa, Parma, or Florence). But as Christianity spread into the geographically vast tribal dioceses of northern Europe, it became impossible to bring everyone to the bishop for his part in the rite. What worked in Italy did not work elsewhere and the bishop's portion of initiation was simply postponed though there was experimentation in allowing priests to do the complete rite in Gaul, Spain, and Ireland.

The origins of confirmation are problematic although Ambrose used a verb form of the word in the context of sealing in his treatise, *Concerning the Mysteries.*[19] In the fifth century, "to confirm" applied to the post-baptismal anointing and hand laying by the bishop, but not until the ninth century did it "become the normal term to use of this part of the initiatory rite."[20] Slowly its meaning changed from that of "to complete" to that of "to strengthen."

Other factors brought about changes too. The catechumenate as a period of instruction made no sense for infants. In the fifth century and following, the pressure of Augustine's theology and the fear of infants dying unbaptized, and thus being excluded from heaven (John 3:5), brought about the custom of having infants baptized within a few days of birth. Even so, as late as the thirteenth century, people in some places waited until the paschal season for baptism.

Other factors separated the various parts of initiation. First communion followed baptism for infants well into the Middle Ages. As late as the twelfth century, infants were still communicated by receiving in their mouths the priest's little finger dipped in the wine. Fear of spilling the consecrated wine eventually led to suspending reception of the wine by all laity of whatever age. Children were denied communion until they reached the age of reason but "infant communion … was not finally abolished in the Western Catholic Church until the Council of Trent" in the sixteenth century.[21] Confirmation was gradually postponed until the years of discretion, which came to mean at least seven years of age. For vast numbers of medieval people and long after the Reformation, this meant that the practical difficulties of meeting a bishop rendered confirmation an

unlikely event. Confirmation was desirable, but unlike baptism, not a necessity for salvation.

By the late Middle Ages, infants were baptized within eight days after birth by being dipped in the font in their parish church in a private ceremony. Then, they might be confirmed after reaching the age of seven (usually in a private ceremony, too) if they chanced on a bishop. And at this age they could receive communion, whether confirmed or not. The whole corporate and paschal character of initiation had been shattered along with its unity. The practice of dipping of infants in the **baptismal font** was slowly yielding to pouring the consecrated water over their heads as the Middle Ages ended.

The Protestant reformers made two significant advances with baptism. They insisted that it be made a public office and conducted in the vernacular (rather than in Latin). Both the 1549 and 1552 *BCP* insist that it be administered on "Sundays and other holy days, when the most number of people may come together." The reformers also simplified the ceremonies. Unlike his first (1523) rite, Luther's 1526 *Order of Baptism Newly Revised*[22] omitted several ritual actions that had become part of the Catholic rite of baptism: breathing on the child, the placing of salt in the infant's mouth, the first exorcism, the *ephphatha*, the two anointings, and presentation of the lighted candle. Luther retained the use of the white baptismal robe. It is a severe pruning of accessory ceremonies, but Calvin went even further, "abolishing them, so that there might be no more impediment to prevent the people from going directly to Jesus Christ."[23] In place of actions, Calvin added didactic exhortations to the ritual.

The Church of England at first preserved most of the medieval ceremonial. Retained were an exorcism and procession into the church to the font (both abolished in 1552), dipping the child thrice in the font to cover the entire body, the white baptismal robe **(chrisom robe)** and anointing (both abolished in 1552), and the sign of the cross (which became a stumbling block to the Puritans). This rite changed little in the 1662 *BCP*. In the eighteenth century, John Wesley followed the same rite with some modifications. In his early years, he insisted on dipping the infant as dictated in the rubrics ("dip it in the Water discreetly and warily"), but late in life gave sprinkling as an alternative mode.

The most radical changes came about among the Anabaptists who insisted that the only proper candidates for baptism were adult believers. They maintained that baptism should be given only to those of known purity of life and doctrine. They preferred the pure church, consisting of believers, to the state church consisting of everyone. Anabaptists were no less adamant on reconciliation; the ban was imposed on any fellowship with baptized backsliders, who could only be reconciled after a period of public ignominy.

The earliest Anabaptists practiced baptism chiefly by pouring. Eventually, some groups, such as the English Baptists, came to demand immersion, although some Anabaptists, such as Mennonites, practice pouring. Some Roman Catholics and Protestants continued to baptize infants by dipping, but this had virtually disappeared by the eighteenth century.

An early Anabaptist baptismal order by Balthasar Hübmaier, "A Form for Baptism," indicates that candidates must first be examined about faith by the bishop, then presented to the congregation. The rite involves prayer for the Holy Spirit to fill the candidates' hearts, creedal questions based on an amended Apostles' Creed, renunciation, questions on willing obedience and desire to be baptized, baptism, prayers, laying on of hands, and welcome into "the fellowship of Christians."[24] Though rejecting infant baptism, some Anabaptists, such as Hübmaier and Pilgram Marpeck, advocated a public service of **infant dedication**. Since only believers were baptized, Anabaptists and Baptists alike had no need for a separate rite of confirmation. Christian initiation was complete at one event, as it had been in the early church.

Quakers took an even more radical step. They eliminated any outward act, insisting that the Bible commanded none but commended, instead, an inward "baptism in the Spirit." Twentieth-century Pentecostals distinguish between the two. Water baptism they practice (usually) for adult believers and usually by triune immersion, but baptism of the Spirit is a separate manifestation of charismatic gifts.

Confirmation was a problem for the reformers. Luther did not draw up a rite but did not object "if every pastor examines the faith of the children … lays hands on them, and confirms them."[25] Martin Bucer cast the die for subsequent Reformed and Anglican developments by tying confirmation to

an examination of the child on his or her knowledge of the catechism. Partly as an antidote to Anabaptists, Bucer probably introduced in Strasbourg a confirmation service that was more an examination and graduation ceremony than anything else, although the pastor does conclude by stretching his hands out over the children with a blessing.[26] Calvin followed suit after a diatribe about confirmation "doing injustice to baptism." He preferred "a catechizing, in which children or those near adolescence would give an account of their faith before the church."[27] The Church of England agreed in restricting confirmation to "such as can say in their mother tongue, the articles of the faith, the Lord's Prayer, and the ten commandments" (1549 *BCP*). The bishop was the minister, making the sign of the cross on the forehead (1549) and laying his hand upon their heads (1549 and 1552). Among the Protestants, confirmation, rather than baptism, was made requisite for admission to communion, thus ratifying the late medieval end to centuries of infant communion.

The unfortunate consequence of these developments was that confirmation came to be contingent upon human knowledge—the learning of the catechism. The sacramental sense of the laying on of hands as a gracious act of God became dissipated in favor of a graduation exercise. The reformers' misreading of church history led them to salvage confirmation in a way that caused new problems for a coherent theology and practice. Later, the Puritans devised an act of profession of faith as a substitute. This had no sacramental overtones, it was simply a public profession of one's belief, often linked to acknowledging the covenant on which a local congregation was based.

All in all, the Reformation saw more subtraction than addition in the rites of initiation. Recent years have seen new directions with Roman Catholics and several Protestant traditions often converging.

The most common move has been toward recovering the unity of the initiatory rites. The most striking instance of this occurs in the Roman Catholic ***Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*** (R.C.I.A.). This represents a recovery of the extended catechumenate, which ritualizes the whole process of conversion so that the congregation shares in the individual's growth in faith. The catechumenate is spread out over months, or even years, in three stages or gateways. It begins with the inquirer reaching the state of acceptance as a catechumen, continues when the catechumenate nears

completion with election or enrollment of names at the beginning of Lent, and concludes with reception of the three initiatory sacraments at Easter. Lent is used as a period of **enlightenment** or illumination, marked on three Sundays by scrutinies, exorcisms, and presentation and recitation of the Apostles' Creed and Lord's Prayer. The whole is a recovery of primitive practice refined to fit the life of a missionary church in the world today. The Catholic "Rite of Baptism for Several Children" and "Rite of Confirmation within Mass" have been simplified, congregational participation has been increased, and a greater emphasis has been placed on the use of scripture. The baptism of children now testifies to greater responsibility on the part of parents.

A different course has been taken by Lutherans, Episcopalians, United Methodists, and Presbyterians in stressing the unity of the initiatory rites. These downplay confirmation as a separate and distinct rite but introduce subsequent occasions of **affirmation, reaffirmation**, or **renewal** of baptismal promises by all the congregation. The Episcopal *BCP* (1979) service advocates that the bishop be the normal celebrant as far as possible. There is a laying on of hands on all those being baptized, and chrism may be used in making the sign of the cross. The service may continue for others with confirmation, reception ("into the fellowship of this Communion"), and reaffirmation. The whole rite is to be set normally in the context of the eucharist. The Lutheran rite contains the laying on of hands and consignation immediately after baptism. A separate service, "Affirmation of Baptism," provides possibilities of confirmation, reception into membership, and restoration to membership. The 1989 United Methodist "Services of the Baptismal Covenant" also combines water baptism and laying on of hands and provides for confirmation and other reaffirmations of the baptismal covenant in addition to reception into The United Methodist Church and reception into a local congregation. The central prayer, the thanksgiving over the water, is recovered after a sixty-year absence in Methodist ritual. The whole congregation is encouraged to participate annually, especially at Easter, Pentecost, All Saints, or Baptism of the Lord, in reaffirmation of their own baptism. The Presbyterian reforms are similar.

Mention should also be made of the "Renewal of Baptismal Promises" now part of the Easter Vigil among Roman Catholics. The "Renewal of

Baptismal Vows" occurs on the same occasion among Episcopalians and Lutherans. A service of covenant renewal at the start of the new year is an alternative practice among United Methodists.

A common note in most of the new initiatory rites has been concentration on the essential actions: the ethical reorientation expressed by the renunciations, the creedal beliefs expressed by the trinitarian affirmation of the Apostles' Creed, the blessing of the water, the washing of baptism, the laying on of hands or sealing, and the first eucharist. Accessory actions such as multiple anointings, the *ephphatha*, the giving of salt, the white garment, and the lighted candle tend to be optional or have been eliminated. The reforms of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries include recovery of many early practices and a critical approach to later developments.

THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Baptism in the New Testament is in an eschatological context, beginning with the baptism of John the Baptist in the urgency of his preaching for repentance: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt. 3:3). Baptism is done in the expectation of the nearness of the kingdom of God. Baptism gives entrance to the kingdom: "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (John 3:5).

As the rites changed over the centuries, there were equally important shifts in the ways Christians understood what they experienced in initiation. We cannot understand the rites themselves without examining the concepts they gave expression to and how the rites were instrumental in shaping ideas about themselves in turn.

The New Testament witness to initiation is fascinating and complex. A vast array of hints and metaphors is thrown out on what initiation meant to the first Christians, but no systematic exposition of these ideas appears in scripture. Nevertheless, these biblical metaphors are the foundation of all subsequent attempts at understanding what God is doing through the rites of initiation. For the sake of convenience, we can identify the principal five New Testament metaphors of initiation: (1) *union with Jesus Christ*, (2) *incorporation into the church*, (3) *new birth*, (4) *forgiveness of sin*, and (5) *reception of the Holy Spirit*.[28]

1. Union with Christ.

We shall begin with the metaphor of initiation as bringing one into union with Jesus Christ. Paul expresses it thus:

> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom. 6:3-5)

The same idea recurs in Colossians 2:12. Baptism conveys to each one baptized both participation in the death of Jesus and the possibility of resurrection through him. What Christ has done is done for the individual named in baptism. It is a personalizing and internalizing of the climax of history as holy events are given to individuals through union with both the person and the work of Christ. We become priests with him and die and rise with him. The ancient practice of designing baptisteries to suggest going down into and rising from a watery grave is a way to make literal this sharing in Christ's death and resurrection.

2. Incorporation into the church.

Very closely related to this theme is that of incorporation into the church, the body of Christ. Paul says, "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). Probably the most egalitarian statement in all of scripture is Paul's assertion that for those "baptized into Christ … there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27-28; see also 1 Cor. 12:13). Baptism is the sign of entrance into the church no matter the age of the candidate. Hence fonts are often placed near the entrance to church buildings and some rites involve an entrance procession into the midst of the building and people.

3. New birth.

Initiation is also the new birth. Closely tied to union with Christ in death and resurrection and to joining a new body, the church, the Johannine image of new birth appears in Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus: "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (John 3:5). Implicit in this image is being a new creature in Christ Jesus, having put one's past, the Old Adam, behind one. Titus 3:5 ("He saved us … through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit") uses the key word, *paliggenesía*, or regeneration. New birth is the most feminine of images, and some in the early church some fonts were designed to suggest a pregnant woman. Baptism is spoken of as both womb and tomb.

4. Forgiveness of sin.

The most obvious thing about baptism (so obvious it is often overlooked) is the cleansing action of water representing the forgiveness of sin. In Acts 22:16, Ananias commands: "be baptized, and have your sins washed away" (see also 1 Cor. 6:11). Both 1 Peter (3:21) and Hebrews (10:22) compare baptism with an outward washing and the inward cleansing. The relation of baptism and forgiveness is clear in Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven." It became dogma in the Nicene Creed: "one Baptism for the remission of sins." The act of washing in baptism and the pre-baptismal anointing with oil are the most obvious enactments of forgiveness. The giving of a new white garment after baptism reinforces the idea of a newly clean conscience, and the putting on of Christ (Gal. 3:27).

5. Reception of the Holy Spirit.

Reception of the Holy Spirit is a complex metaphor partly because the eventual splintering of the rites of initiation in the West has raised questions about the role and timing of this reception. When this metaphor is seen in conjunction with incorporation into the church, some of these problems disappear. The church is the communal environment of the Holy Spirit's activity. To be a part of the Spirit-filled community is to receive the Holy Spirit. *The Apostolic Tradition* repeats the refrain, "in the Holy Spirit and the holy church," suggesting the church is the place where the Holy Spirit is known and experienced. The Acts 2:38 passage quoted above continues "and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Jesus' own baptism has a

theophany of the Holy Spirit visible as a dove (Matt. 3:16). Sometimes, as we have seen, the coming of the Spirit seems manifested most clearly by one portion of initiation, such as the laying on of hands (Acts 19:1-7). Other images seem to refer to the activity in initiation of the Holy Spirit: "illumination" or being "enlightened" (Heb. 6:4) or being "sanctified" (1 Cor. 6:11). The giving of salt (wisdom) or a lighted candle (preparedness) to those just baptized and the visual symbol of the dove underscore the Spirit's work in initiation.

The most important witness in the New Testament accounts is that initiation is far deeper than any single interpretation of it. Our problem is to obtain a balanced understanding that does justice to all five chief metaphors. All subsequent developments are to be held accountable to this standard of balanced understanding. Initiation is a jewel with many facets. We do not sense its full brilliance until we see all facets reflecting the light.

Probably as concise as possible a statement of these five metaphors occurs in Justin Martyr's two short accounts of initiation in his *First Apology*. He speaks of being "made new through Christ," being led into and greeted by the Christian assembly, and being "regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves were regenerated," the repentance of sins and the "washing with water" which "is called illumination."[29] Irenaeus combines several of these themes by speaking of baptism as the water without which "dry flour cannot be united into a lump of dough, or a loaf … so we who are many cannot be made one in Christ Jesus without the water which comes from heaven."[30] Clement of Alexandria favors the theme of "enlightenment"; others of the Fathers have their favorites but taken together there seems to be a fair degree of balance. What a person does not find in one place, or rite, or author is likely to appear in another.

Unfortunately, this balance has always been subject to extraneous pressure. In this case, it came about in a most unintentional fashion. Augustine made a fairly balanced use of these metaphors himself, but as a result of the controversy with Pelagius over the theology of grace, free will, and sin, he pushed the church very strongly in the direction of looking at baptism as the remedy for two kinds of sin: original, that is, the guilt we all inherit from Adam's sin, and actual, that which we commit ourselves.[31] It is a bit ironic that Augustine himself was not baptized until he was an adult, but the consequence of his systematic development of existing concepts of

original sin was to hasten the baptism of infants for fear that children dying unbaptized would be brought by the guilt of original sin to the gates of hell.

The whole medieval development tilted emphasis in the direction of the forgiveness of sin, especially that of original sin in the case of infants. As we have seen, the Easter-centered portrayal of union with the resurrected Christ was underplayed, while incorporation into the church, when that was equivalent to civil society itself in Medieval Europe, was of relatively little account. The sense of new birth lost much of its drama when only infants were baptized. The teaching of the work of the Holy Spirit was undernourished in the West, and baptism was a good example of such malnutrition. Peter Lombard has much to say about baptism, but it boils down to one word: "remission."[32] The forgiveness of sin is an important part of the biblical witness to initiation, but when it became so dominant that it crowded out the other themes, we cannot but feel that a one-sided understanding of what God does in initiation had occurred.

One of the most unfortunate of the medieval developments was in the understanding of confirmation. We have seen how this portion of initiation was separated into its own rite in the West because of conservatism in limiting it to a bishop. Throughout its whole subsequent history, the rite of confirmation has been a practice looking for a theology. Peter Lombard could find very little to say about confirmation (two pages), but he said all the early medieval church had provided: "The virtue moreover of the sacrament is the gift of the Holy Spirit for strength, who is given in baptism for remission."[33] Lombard also suggests that confirmation is needed "to be complete Christians." A sermon of the fifth-century Faustus of Riez had apparently first suggested the terminology that "we are reborn in baptism for life, and we are confirmed after baptism for the strife," leading "to confirm" to be identified with "to strengthen."[34] These are the raw materials, and practically the only raw materials, the medieval scholastics had with which to build their systems.

The 1439 *Decree for the Armenians* sums up the late medieval development (or lack of it) by telling us: "In this sacrament the Holy Spirit is given to strengthen us, … that the Christian may confess boldly the name of Christ."[35] The matter "is the chrism made from oil … and from balsam … blessed by the bishop. The form is: 'I sign with the sign of the cross and confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name….'" The normal

ministrant is the bishop though occasionally a priest can administer it with chrism blessed by a bishop. Shorn of connection to baptism, confirmation became a dangling participle.

By the time of the Reformation, baptism, confirmation, and first communion had become detached entities among both Catholics and Protestants. The Council of Trent simply solidified late medieval practices and beliefs. Baptism was not a strong point of controversy between most Protestants and Catholics, though a lively debate developed within Protestantism over it. The reformers do not sort out conveniently as to our five New Testament metaphors of initiation, though we can point out certain centers of gravity among them. The fear that infants dying unbaptized troubled them less, and so forgiveness of sins tended to recede from dominance. But new considerations, such as the doctrine of election, brought new pressures.

Luther shows some of the most profound insights, insights that still have not yet been fully appropriated. Luther's special stress is on baptism as a "promise" in which, as he says, "Christ is given us." What ensues is a lifelong covenant relationship of faith whereby our baptism is victorious over doubt and sin, for "baptism is in force all through life." Indeed, in moments of deepest despair Luther could assert that "I am baptized, and through my baptism God, who cannot lie, has bound himself in a covenant with me."[36] And in a famous line he exclaims, "There is no greater comfort on earth than baptism."[37] Luther suggests the possibility of looking at the whole Christian life in terms of a baptismal spirituality, that is, as a lifelong living out of one's baptism. Luther also comes close to stressing union with Jesus Christ and forgiveness of sin as his dominant images.

Zwingli introduced a new concept altogether: that baptism is largely a dedicatory sign. He bases his argument on the Romans 6:3-5 passage, which he interprets figuratively. Baptism, for Zwingli too, is union with Christ, but he is leery of physical signs for "it is clear and indisputable that no external element or action can purify the soul." "Hence," he concludes, "water-baptism is nothing but an external ceremony, that is, an outward sign that we are incorporated and engrafted into the Lord Jesus Christ and pledged to live to him and to follow him."[38] Zwingli's concept of baptism as badge of profession, as pledge, or as covenant sign, tends to make of it an external matter of record rather than the source of a warm inward

relationship, as in Luther. Zwingli also sets the precedent for thinking of infant baptism as a dedication rite.

Calvin deplored Zwingli's view of baptism as simply a "token or mark" of profession. Calvin stressed baptism's power to save through forgiveness or cleansing and union to Christ. But the predominant metaphor for him seems to be that of being "received into the society of the church, in order that, engrafted in Christ, we may be reckoned among God's children."[39] He was concerned to refute the Anabaptist critique of infant baptism. Infants too, Calvin insists, are within the covenant and members of the church.

The Anabaptists, of course, insisted that "young children are without understanding and unteachable; therefore baptism cannot be administered to them without perverting the ordinance of the Lord, misusing His exalted name, and doing violence to His holy Word."[40] Clearly, for them, baptism was to be contingent upon human faith and repentance. Only those already reborn could join the baptismal covenant. Although the Anabaptists' concepts of the church are quite different from Calvin's, incorporation into the company of regenerate believers is probably their dominant theme. For many of them, baptism involved not only water and spirit but also their own blood of suffering and martyrdom (1 John 5:6-8) during constant persecution. They taught and lived as if all of life was a baptism.

The Anglican prayers in the 1549 and 1552 baptismal services achieved a remarkably good balance of the biblical metaphors partly because they tend to collect biblical images. The "Articles of Religion" called baptism "a sign of Regeneration or new Birth," a phrase that caused controversy in the nineteenth century about whether baptism caused or merely signified regeneration. Anglicans retained confirmation, but by 1552 it had become more a rite praying for strengthening than an objective conferring of grace.

John Wesley added further complications by placing an emphasis on conversion as a necessary part of the Christian life after infant baptism. For reasons not entirely clear, he omitted confirmation while retaining most parts of the Anglican rites of baptism. Nineteenth-century Methodists instituted a service of Reception of Members after a period of probation for those already baptized. This was eventually replaced by calling those baptized as infants "preparatory members" until they were received as "full members" or (after 1964) confirmed. American Methodists did not have an official rite of confirmation until 1964. The distinction of preparatory and

full members in relationship to baptism and church membership continues to be the subject of controversy among United Methodists.

The recent past has seen some important developments in efforts to understand Christian initiation. It has become a center of much controversy and some enlightenment. A storm was stirred up by a lecture given by Karl Barth to Swiss theological students in 1943 and first published in English five years later as *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism.*[41] In it, Barth contended that infant baptism "is necessarily clouded baptism" and that only adults capable of understanding the event should receive baptism. Essentially Barth's approach was a cognitive one; baptism is a "representation" or "message" to the one baptized. By contrast, another Swiss theologian, Oscar Cullmann, replied that baptism is causative in that it places a person within the community where faith becomes possible rather than simply informing that person of something. Cullmann insisted that, potentially, Christ has died for all and that this is made actual when one is incorporated into the church and receives the possibility of growing up in an environment of faith.[42]

The fray was also joined on strictly historical grounds by two twentieth-century New Testament scholars Joachim Jeremias and Kurt Aland.[43] The debate is by no means resolved, as World Council of Churches important ecumenical convergence document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, clearly shows.[44] All Christian bodies from Baptists to Roman Catholics currently express doubts over their own practices and teachings. Baptists have misgivings about treating children as outside the church; Roman Catholics fear that all too often many baptized children never become part of the church's life.

Much of the debate over infant baptism versus believer's baptism seems to be a shortcut around more basic questions about the nature of sacraments. If a sacrament is a self-giving act of God, cannot infants or anyone else receive its benefits? If, on the other hand, we are speaking of an ordinance that is basically a conscious, faithful response to God's initiative, then can it be appropriate for a person who has not reached an age of reason? Thus, most pedobaptists ("child baptizers") and those baptizing only believers can never agree because they begin with two entirely different concepts of sacraments, an act of God or a human act of response to God.

This, of course, raises the question of how Christian parents among those traditions that do not baptize infants understand the relationship of their children to the church. Historically there is occasional and sporadic evidence of rites of infant dedication, such as Monica initiating her son Augustine into the catechumenate as an infant. In the Reformation period, Anabaptists did not baptize their children, but they did develop a rite of naming a child which evolved to include a thanksgiving for the child's birth. Certainly, the rise of other believer baptist traditions made the question of what rites were appropriate for an infant more widespread. In the nineteenth century during the industrial revolution when child labor was a serious concern, English Baptists created a rite giving thanks for the birth of a child to identify the child's worth in God's eyes as more than cheap labor.

In the twentieth century these infant dedication rites proliferated among believer baptist traditions and even exerted influence in pedobaptist churches. Some pedobaptist tradition theologians began to question the efficacy of infant baptism given the growing number of baptized who had marginal contact with churches as adults. This led to arguments against baptism as merely a civil religious practice of state churches. Moreover, as the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* document points out, in an age of ecumenical marriages, infant dedication could be a helpful compromise for parents coming from pedobaptist and believer baptist traditions.

One challenge of instituting and executing a rite of infant dedication is that lack of available pre-existing, denominational rites from which to draw. Often the rites in believer-baptist churches are somewhat improvised and therefore vary from occasion to occasion, pastor to pastor. Although few pedobaptist traditions have a rite in their worship books for infant dedication, dedication is sometimes performed, nonetheless, to accommodate the requests of parents. In such cases, the meaning of this rite in relationship to the ordinance of Holy Communion and other aspects of full membership in the church creates pastoral challenges. Those pedobaptist traditions which have officially sanctioned infant dedication rites have seldom addressed these pastoral and theological issues. For example, The Evangelical Covenant Church has had a dedication rite in its last three worship books (1960, 1981, and 2023), but they are three distinct

rites, varying in their theological themes both in the introduction to the rites and the rites themselves.

In addition to theological and practical issues around infant dedication, in recent years, the whole question of the unity of the various discrete rites of Christian initiation has become an important concern. This is resolved, of course, in believer's baptism because the event is a single ritual, but it increasingly seems an anomaly for those who baptize infants not to welcome them into the fullness of the family of God by sharing in communion. In some denominations, baptism, laying on of hands, and communion coming together at whatever age initiation is performed. Infants receive a small amount of communion wine and a tiny piece of bread are placed to the infant's lips. To refuse communion to baptized children now seems to make membership in the body of Christ contingent upon the ability to think conceptually. The more we learn about child development the more questionable such a restriction becomes.[45]

Another issue that is sometimes connected to the pedobaptism-believer baptism debate is the question of rebaptism. If, in the first place, baptism is a faithful and sincere human commitment, then perhaps it may be repeated if candidates believe they have fallen away from their Christian commitments. If, however, baptism is first God's gift and promise to sustain us, then to rebaptize someone calls into question God's faithfulness to this promise. In many ways, the debate is irresolvable when there is not agreement on this point. That said, many pedobaptist churches today offer rites for members to reaffirm their baptismal covenant during the liturgical year (Easter, Pentecost, All Saints, Baptism of Jesus are typical days of baptismal renewals), and this is the appropriate alternative to rebaptism in pedobaptist churches.

Historically, the problem with rebaptism involved concern about the validity of baptism more than concern about individual feelings or personal choice. [46] The issue goes back to at least the third century when Cyprian of Carthage and the bishop of Rome sparred over the problem of whether persons who had been baptized in a heretical sect must be baptized again if they joined the Catholic Church. [47] Today, Christian churches face the same problem when Christians convert from one denomination to another. A major step toward recognizing unity among ecclesial traditions is mutual acknowledgment of the validity of baptism performed in a different church,

a hope that is articulated in the World Council of Churches *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* study.

As this brief historical overview of baptismal theology shows, practical questions cannot be settled apart from study of the whole issue: What is initiation itself? The chief way forward seems to be by recovering the richness of all the biblical images with a clear sense of balance. Initiation is forgiveness of personal sin, but it is also incorporation into the church; it is God's gift, but it is also sincere human response; it is the yoke which is both easy (Matt. 11:28-30), and the way that is hard (Matt. 7:13-14). Since the late twentieth century, the developing initiatory rites of Western churches are hopeful signs of recovery of a balance of the five biblical themes presented above.

PRACTICAL AND PASTORAL ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Numerous pastoral possibilities arise out of the current ferment in initiation rites and theology. We shall mention three prime practical concerns. First and foremost is that initiation is evangelism. This was obvious to the early church, which grew by initiation. It was a lesson the modern church has been slow to learn despite the great missionary expansion of the last few centuries. Initiation is how the church grows.

There are several practical implications from this, and here we will adopt a more prescriptive and normative mode of presentation. Readers may not agree with all these prescriptions, but at the very least we would hope to provoke discussion around the ramifications of the historical account we have given.

1. Initiation must cease to be "promiscuous," that is, unrestricted and indiscriminate. Strangers who call to have the baby "done" or unfamiliar people who troop down the aisle for "walk-in" baptisms must be politely told that the pastor will be glad to call on them to begin the process of catechesis. At least, a pastoral visitation with parents or prospective candidates must always precede baptism and could often accomplish much afterward, too. For the unbelieving parents, it means that the church has to say "no," but in the process of explaining the demands of initiation the

pastor has perhaps the only opportunity for witnessing to what Christians believe. For the adult inquirer, it means enrollment in some kind of catechumenate. The supposed three-year catechumenate described in *The Apostolic Tradition* may have been a bit rigorous, but those who had been through it were willing to die (and frequently did) for their faith. The Roman Catholic "Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults" and similar rites are worth serious study by all Christians. Not only does this process give the inquirer the full support of the community during his or her growth toward full incorporation, but it also causes the congregation to reexamine the basis of its own faith.

2. Baptizing and teaching belong together (Matt. 28:19-20). The church year gives opportunities to preach on the meaning of initiation, especially at the Baptism of the Lord, Easter, Pentecost, and All Saints. It is no wonder that most Christians are confused about initiation; they have never had any kind of mystagogical catechesis to explain it to them. But they deserve to know more so that, whenever they serve as witnesses to initiation, they can be put in mind of what God has already done for them. Baptism builds up the church from within as well as from without. This means that Christian initiation is more than evangelism. It is also the church's ongoing work of Christian formation.

3. The sign value of the ritual actions and implements in initiation are vitally important. Initiation rituals are basically signifying actions; something happens for which words alone cannot suffice. The actions must be allowed to speak and not be muffled by indifference or lack of sensitivity to their sign value as actions.

Initiation is a communal act, and the community must be present. The whole congregation is a sponsor. How can one be incorporated into the body when the community is absent? Many Protestants insist that initiation always occur in the Sunday service with the whole congregation present for the weekly commemoration of Christ's resurrection. Other traditions are now moving in this direction. The gathered community itself is the foremost sign of incorporation into the body of Christ.

Baptism is washing. It is a highly tactile act that demands that water be seen, heard, and (in effect) felt by the whole congregation. Those churches that immerse have a deeper sacramental sense in this case. Under present practices, in many Roman Catholic and Protestant congregations, the

facilities and practices are both defective. Baptism often looks more like a "dry cleaning" (as it has been lampooned) rather than a vigorous cleansing. If one's concern is to communicate the life-giving flood in which God acts, abundant water communicates this best. This means that candy-bowl sized baptismal fonts are insufficient and that most modern fonts will not do. Medieval and some post-Reformation fonts were large enough for dipping a baby. That was the mode Luther clearly preferred, that the Church of England's rubric has always specified (though ignored for the last two hundred years), and that the new Roman Catholic and Episcopal rites suggest first. But it does imply facilities and practices different from those that most pedobaptist churches now have.

If our concern is to show forth by actions what God does, then sprinkling (more commonly simply moistening) with a few drops of water is most insufficient (unless we have a very anemic doctrine of God). Pouring is somewhat better if the water can be seen and heard as it splashes. Dipping (infants) or immersing or submersing (children and adults) is clearly best. To be clear, the problem with a token sprinkling is not that it will be invalid. Rather, the problem is that it is an insufficient engagement of human imagination for the extravagance of God's gift of water! If we are willing to let the act speak for itself, we will actually wash people. Above all, we should avoid making it an act of Christian cuteness; the center is God, not the baby.

Laying on of hands and anointing are dramatic actions which must be allowed to make their own witness. They should be made as personal as possible with the use of the Christian names of all those involved. Each candidate should be touched individually. When the entire congregation participates in baptismal reaffirmation or renewal, sprinkling of the whole congregation (without suggesting rebaptism) is greatly to be desired. In no way a repetition of baptism, reaffirmation or renewal is a vivid recalling of what God has already done for us in baptism. Annual services of renewal or reaffirmation are widely appreciated now.

4. Churches need to make visible the unity of the whole process of initiation. Ideally, all portions of the core initiation rites ought to be performed at the same time on Sundays, and especially on Easter Sunday, in the presence of the congregation, as many new rites suggest. In churches with bishops, when possible, the bishop could be the minister of the whole

integrated rite, thus clearly manifesting the universal church. This will mean curtailing the widespread practice of offering individual “baptism on demand” of both infants and adults.

Baptism, laying on of hands, and first communion ought to come together. Anything that implies halfway membership or preparatory membership in the church that is the body of Christ is unbiblical and a contradiction in terms. When God acts, it is not halfway or preparatory. God’s acts are unqualified self-giving. Even if individuals may reject their baptism later in life, God remains faithful to God’s promise of acceptance offered to us in initiation. The unity of the initiatory rites should witness to this. At the very least, baptism and the first communion belong together. The early church was right in understanding the eucharist as the part of initiation that is regularly repeated for all Christians. Those who have received baptism and the laying on of hands or anointing ought immediately to be welcomed to the Lord’s table, no matter at what age. If anyone is old enough to become a part of the Lord’s Body, he or she is old enough to be welcome to the Lord’s Table. The fundamental logic is this: we are born (baptism) and then we eat (the eucharist). This is the case with natural birth, and so it should be for all who are born into the family of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER EIGHT TERMINOLOGY

adhesion

affirmation

affirmation of baptismal promises

anointing with oil (see also chrismation)

Apostles’ Creed

baptism

baptismal font

baptistery (also spelled baptistry)

catechumenate

chrism

chrismation

chrismation (see anointing)

chrisom robe

Christian initiation

circumcision

communion, first

confirmation

consignation

elect

enlightenment

ephphatha

first communion (see communion, first)

infant dedication

kiss of peace

laying on of hands

mystagogical catechesis

pedobaptism

proselyte baptism

public profession

reaffirmation of baptismal promises

renewal of baptismal promises

renunciation

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

scrutinies

signing

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1. See Justin Martyr, *I Apology*, chs. 62 and 66.

2. Mandate IV, iii, 6. Kirsopp Lake, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1965), 2:85.

3. Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1950) provides the classic argument.

4. Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2009), 362. See also Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 10.

5. *The Apostolic Tradition Reconstructed: A Text for Students*, trans. Paul F. Bradshaw (Joint Liturgical Studies 91, London: Alcuin Club and the Group for Renewal of Worship; Norwich, Norfolk: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2021), p. 24.

6. *Didache*, 7 and 9, in Cyril Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 174–75.

7. First Apology, 61 and 65, in Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, pp. 282, 285.

8. Tertullian, "On Baptism," 20, *ANF* (New York: Charles Scribner's: 1899), 3:678–79.

9. "On Baptism," 17, ANF, 3:677.

10. "De Corona," 3, in E. C. Whitaker, Maxwell E. Johnson ed., *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, S.P.C.K., 2003), p. 45.

11. "On Baptism," 8, ANF, 3:672.

12. Bradshaw, *The Apostolic Tradition Reconstructed*, 25, n. 36. In this note, Bradshaw describe the difficulty of the text since not all versions include an explicit prayer for worthiness to receive the Spirit.

13. R. Hugh Connolly, ed., *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 16 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 147.

14. *Egeria's Travels*, 45-47, ed. and trans. John Wilkinson (London: S.P.C.K., 1974), pp. 143–46.

15. Concerning the Sacraments, I, 4, in Whitaker, Johnson, eds., *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p. 304.

16. Mystagogical Catechesis 2, in Whitaker, Johnson, eds., *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p. 77.

17. *Stavronikita Series* No. 2.26, in Whitaker, Johnson, eds., *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p. 100. See also Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation* (London: St. Paul, 1972).

18. *Concerning the Sacraments*, III, 8, in Whitaker, Johnson, eds., *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p. 308.

19. *Concerning the Mysteries* 42, in Whitaker, Johnson, eds., *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p. 311.

20. J. D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West* (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), p. 148.

21. Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, p. 106.

22. Ulrich S. Leopold, ed., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 53, pp. 107–9.

23. Rubrics in "The Form of Prayers and … Manner of Administering the Sacraments," text in J. D. C. Fisher, ed., *Christian Initiation: The Reformation Period* (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), p. 117.

24. Text cited by Rollin S. Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1966), pp. 143–44.

25. Fisher, *Reformation Period*, p. 173.

26. Fisher, *Reformation Period*, pp. 174–78.

27. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xix, 13, p. 1461.

28. For a more detailed account, see James F. White, *Sacraments as God's Self Giving* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), ch. 2.

29. *First Apology* 61, 65 in Whitaker, Johnson, eds., *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p. 32.

30. *Vs. Heresies*, III, xvii, 2 in Henry Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 129.

31. *Enchiridion*, 43-52; *NPNF*, 1st series (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890), 3:252–54.

32. *Sentences*, IV, ii-vi, in Elizabeth Rogers, ed., *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System*, pp. 85–116.

33. *Sentences*, IV, vii, 3, p. 117.

34. "Homily 29, On Pentecost," excerpt in Whitaker, Johnson, eds., *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, pp. 257–58.

35. In Ray C. Petry, ed., *A History of Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 32.

36. "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," *Luther's Works*, 35, p. 36.

37. "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," p. 34.

38. "Of Baptism," G. W. Bromiley, ed. *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 156.

39. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xv, 1, p. 1303.

40. Menno Simons, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," *Complete Writings*, ed. C. Wenger (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1965), p. 120.

41. Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism* (London: SCM Press, 1948).

42. Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1950).

43. Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) and *The Origins of Infant Baptism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963); Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

44. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), p. 4.

45. Urban T. Holmes, *Young Children and the Eucharist*, rev. ed. (New York: Seabury Press, 1982). Also Ruth Meyer, ed., *Children at the Table* (New York: Church Pub., 1995).

46. Some early Christian leaders were aware of the pastoral problem caused when a believer began to doubt the validity of their baptism. See, for example, L. Edward Phillips, "The Proof Is in the Eating: Dionysius of Alexandria and the Rebaptism Controversy," in *Studia Liturgica Diversa*, Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips, eds. (Portland: Pastoral Press, 2004), pp. 53–64.

47. See J. Patout Burns, "On Rebaptism: Social Organization in the Third Century Church," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* I, 4 (1993): 367–403. For a general discussion, see Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2007), pp. 92–95.

CHAPTER NINE

THE EUCHARIST

The eucharist is the most distinctive ritual practice of Christian worship. It is also the most widely used form of worship among Christians, being celebrated daily and weekly in thousands of congregations and communities all over the world. In chapter 6, we examined the service of the word, which, since early times, has formed the first half of the order for the eucharist. We now turn to the second half, the table.

Various groups use a variety of names for both halves combined: “eucharist” (that is, thanksgiving) or “Lord’s supper” (1 Cor. 11:20), “break bread” (Acts 2:46; 20:7), “divine liturgy,” “Mass,” “holy communion,” and “Lord’s memorial.” The second half by itself also is sometimes called the “eucharist,” “mass of the faithful,” “offering of sacrifice” (Tertullian), “service of the table,” “sacrifice,” “offering,” or “anaphora” (the Greek word for “offering”). Since the end of the first century, the term “eucharist” has been the most descriptive term available and the one we shall use most frequently.

Whatever the name, the content throughout Christianity is roughly the same: a sacred meal based on Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper. Despite all the diversity in practice throughout the Christian world, there is also remarkable constancy in the form the rite takes. All churches profess loyalty to what the writers of the New Testament interpreted to be Jesus’ words, actions, and intentions. The widespread similarity in eucharistic practices that has developed throughout the churches witnesses to the imprint Jesus left on this type of worship. No wonder, then, the eucharist is the most distinctive form of Christian worship. It bears the authority of Christ himself.

In this chapter, we shall briefly examine the eucharistic practices of Christians across time, their understanding of what they experience in

eucharistic celebrations, and the consequences of this history for pastoral action. There is much to cover, so we may not linger long over any topic, but we must sketch only the bare outlines of historical, theological, and practical matters.

THE HISTORY OF EUCHARISTIC PRACTICES

The very first Christians were Jews, and the Jewish background of the eucharist, as for all origins of Christian worship, is both important and complicated. Two locations for Jewish worship are significant in this regard: the temple cult and family meals. It is also likely that the gathering practices of synagogues exerted an influence, as we discussed in Chapter Six, though the evidence for this is elusive.

Since the seventh century B.C.E., Jewish sacrificial worship had been nationalized in the Jerusalem Temple. The whole sacrificial cultus had developed as a communal means of relating to God as a nation and achieving communion with God as individuals. Sacrifice was a way of life, and the daily morning and evening sacrifices of the Temple (Exod. 29:38-39) were remembered in the prayers of devout Jews everywhere. Sacrificial imagery appears in the narratives of the institution of the Lord's Supper ("my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," Matt. 26:28) and recurs throughout the New Testament, especially in Hebrews.

We have already seen how worship in the synagogue possibly exerted an influence on the Christian service of the word, but its contribution to the origins of public prayer and worship in the first-century church is less clear. There is no scholarly consensus about synagogue worship in Palestine at the time of Jesus. Synagogues seemed primarily to be community centers focused on social activities and teaching. Jewish men would sometimes gather in synagogues to perform their personal daily prayer routines, but this would not have been public worship in the way services developed in synagogues after the destruction of the Temple.[1] By the mid-second century C.E. (if not earlier), the standard form of Jewish prayer was to bless God for what God had done. Blessing God and thanking God both entailed a recital of God's mighty acts for God's people. This form of prayer can be found throughout the Hebrew psalms. Such prayers have a creedal function. God is blessed by reciting those acts one wishes to recall, thus making prayer also a form of proclamation.

A similar mentality operates in Jewish table prayers that bless God by reciting acts for which one gives thanks, for example, "we bless you, O God, who brought forth the fruit of the vine…. " It is only a natural evolution to turn

from those works of God already accomplished to beseeching God to bring about those yet hoped for in the future: “Restore thy Shekinah [glory] into Zion thy city, and the order of worship into Jerusalem” (after C.E. 70). Supplication for further mighty works is the sequel to the proclamation of what God has already done. This form and content of Jewish prayers seems to have influenced the pattern of Christian eucharistic prayers, especially the framework of blessing God through creedal prayer, though Christians preferred the verb “to thank” rather than “to bless.”

The same understanding of prayer as blessing was important for family meals, but actions were equally important. The Last Supper was obviously a sacred meal, but so were all those many other meals Jesus shared with his disciples. Each Jewish meal is a holy event shared with family or close friends. If the Last Supper was the Passover meal, as the Synoptic Gospels insist, then Jesus and his disciples were celebrating the most solemn occasion of the Jewish year, the festival when the Jews hoped and prayed the Messiah would appear. Jesus used the specified words and actions of a familiar pattern to state that the Messiah, indeed, had come. Jews continue to perform the **Passover Seder** to this day. Christians, who agree that Jesus was the Messiah, celebrate the eucharist (thanksgiving) instead.

As presented in the Gospels, Jesus used the climactic occasion of the Jewish Passover feast to establish the new covenant. According to the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), at the Last Supper, Jesus followed a conventional Passover meal mandated in Exodus 12:25-27. Passover is a liberation feast commemorating deliverance from captivity in Egypt. While we have almost no evidence of the form of a Passover meal in firstcentury Palestine, in later Jewish practice, it will become customary for children to ask, “What do you mean by this observance?” (Ex. 12:26). The elder at the head of the table will respond with the standard interpretation given in the ***Haggadah*** (the Passover ritual). This *Haggadah* may be a model for the words with which Jesus instituted the eucharist. But just as important are the actions: eating special food, breaking bread, and sharing cups of wine. Throughout the ritual, God is blessed for past events, which are once again made present in their ability to save, and God is implored to confer future benefits. Eating and drinking, as well as thankful remembering and anticipating, all go together.

The New Testament gives several accounts of the institution of the eucharist and fleeting glimpses of it as celebrated in Jerusalem, Troas, and Corinth. But there are also stories of meals of Jesus, his disciples, and multitudes before the resurrection and of Jesus with his disciples after the resurrection. It seems eating

together was an important sign of Jesus' ministry that continued after his resurrection. Two parallel sets of **institution narratives** appear in the New Testament: Mark 14:22-25 and Matthew 26:26-29 are quite similar, and I Corinthians 11:23-26 and Luke 22:15-20 have strong similarities. The Lucan account is unique (in some texts) in mentioning two cups. The slight differences between the accounts may be explained by the theory that what we have in these texts is a description of what was being said and done by several local churches in different places when they celebrated the eucharist. They all would have understood themselves as following the intentions, words, and actions of the Lord himself at the Last Supper.

The words of institution have important dimensions. In their context, they are sacrificial in speaking of a covenant made in blood. All accounts, especially the Lucan, are oriented in an eschatological direction (as was the Passover itself) in looking forward to the coming kingdom of God. In giving interpretations, albeit new and shocking interpretations, to the food and actions of the meal, Jesus was simply following the convention of how Jews interpreted the Passover meal.

A key word in the Pauline and Lucan accounts is ***anámnesis***. No single English word conveys its full meaning; remembrance, recalling, representation, and experiencing anew are all weak approximations. It captures with a Greek word what Jews express in their Passover meals when they say, "We were slaves in Egypt…. And if God had not brought our ancestors out of Egypt, we and our children and our children's children would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." In this ritual telling, those at the table recognized themselves as living beneficiaries and contemporary participants in the story of the Exodus: "We were slaves … " *Anámnesis* expresses this same sense that in repeating these words and actions, Jesus' followers once again experience the presence of Jesus as his disciples gathered at his table. In recent years, this concept has been a key term in ecumenical discussions of the eucharist as memorial with nuances of sacrifice and presence.

The actions of institution are no less important than the words. English scholar Gregory Dix made much of the **"four action shape"** of the eucharist.[2] Mark 14:22 reads: "he *took* bread, and having *said the blessing* he *broke* it and *gave* it to them" (NEB, emphasis added). These same actions are listed elsewhere: in the miracle of the five loaves and two fish (Mark 6:41), the Emmaus road account (Luke 24:30), and even among a shipload of pagans (Acts 27:35). The foods used at the Passover meal involved symbolic actions as well as utilitarian ones (dipping in bitter herbs, eating unleavened bread). Dix's most

lasting contribution has been to remind us that the eucharist is basically action. He considered four actions central: taking, giving thanks (or blessing), breaking, and giving. Of these four, the giving of thanks and giving of bread and wine are now seen as the more significant.

John's Gospel does not give details of the actual meal at the Last Supper except for words exchanged with Judas. It does give, however, a unique description of another sign-activity, **foot washing** (John 13:3-17). Apparently, the early church understood this not as an imperative but as an acted parable. Other than this story, we have no evidence of it as apostolic practice during the eucharist. The act of foot washing did, however, become part of the initiation rite in Milan in the fourth century, and, eventually, part of the eucharistic celebrations of various Protestant groups such as the Church of the Brethren,[3] some Pentecostals, some Baptists, and Seventhday Adventists. Since 1955, it has been recovered in the Maundy Thursday services of many churches.

The dating of the Last Supper is an unresolved controversy. The Synoptic Gospels present the Last Supper as the Passover meal, whereas John says it was "before the festival of the Passover" (13:1), which was the day (beginning with nightfall) when the lambs were slaughtered in the Temple (cf. also 18:28). In John's chronology, the sacrifice of the lambs coincides with the crucifixion of Jesus. Some contemporary New Testament scholars follow the Johannine dating of the Last Supper on the evening before the Passover, though many others present the Last Supper as the actual Passover meal. Given John's penchant for symbolism, it seems likely that he could have combined the sacrifice of the lambs and the crucifixion for symbolic effect. In any case, the climactic events of Christ's passion and death occur in the context of the Passover festival and are heavily colored by its celebration.

The New Testament gives us only quick glimpses of first-century eucharists, if we can properly use that word as the terminology was still developing. Acts 2:46 says the Jerusalem church "broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts," and "breaking bread" seems to be an early term for the ritual meal. A phrase in Paul's stern warning to First Church, Corinth, against unworthy partaking of the "Lord's Supper" links the eucharist to proclaiming "the Lord's death until he comes" (I Cor. 11:26). Later Protestants will gravitate to the term "Lord's Supper." Paul understands the meal as more than merely "breaking bread," since he threatens with sickness and death those guilty of eating and drinking unworthily, that is, without discerning the Lord's body in the community. Nevertheless, it is also clear that, for Paul, the Lord's Supper is still a full meal.

We catch a fleeting view of another eucharist as Paul prepared to leave Troas (Acts 20:7-12) where Eutychus slept through Paul's preaching, but we learn little else about the eucharist itself. A unique reference occurs in the Epistle of Jude where there are problems apparently similar to those in Corinth. "These are blemishes on your love-feasts [agápais], while they feast with you without fear, feeding themselves" (v. 12). The **agape** or **love feast** was a full meal and in the first two centuries of the church. Indeed, in its origin, the agape meal seems to be another word for the Christian eucharist, rather than a distinctly different form of ritual meal. By the third century, however, we find evidence of the separation of the agape feast from the eucharist as a token ritual meal. *The Apostolic Tradition* goes to great lengths to distinguish the agape from the Lord's Supper. At what time the Lord's Supper stopped being a full meal is unknown. There is slight evidence in an early (c. C.E. 112) letter from Pliny, a pagan Roman governor in Bithynia, to the Emperor Trajan. This letter can be interpreted to mean Christians in Bithynia were accustomed to an early Sunday morning eucharist and an agape in the evening but had given up the agape under persecution. For *The Apostolic Tradition*, however, the agape was an occasional church supper put on by private benefactors with clergy present. Leftovers were sent to the poor. Unfortunately, the agape fell into abuse by the rich and was proscribed by church councils in the fourth century. The blessed (but not eucharistic) bread, the **antidoron**, distributed after the liturgy in Eastern Orthodox churches may possibly be a survival. The love feast was revived among eighteenth-century Brethren, Mennonites, and Moravians and still flourishes.[4] John Wesley borrowed the practice and introduced it into Methodism in 1738. Today, the agape is sometimes promoted for use in ecumenical occasions when a eucharist is not feasible.

It is tempting to read back into the New Testament period later eucharistic practices to fill in the gaps. Yet this is risky, and we must admit that our knowledge of the first-century eucharist is very limited. Much more evidence appears in the second and third centuries. The *Didache* preserves the oldest examples of a Christian eucharistic prayer. This particular prayer has thanksgivings over a cup, then over the bread, then, after the meal, a final blessing of a cup, a pattern which looks very much like the order for the Last Supper in the Gospel of Luke. The *Didache* also includes a strict warning about not giving communion to the unbaptized, instructions to be reconciled to one's brother or sister before "offering your gift at the altar" (Matt. 5:23-24), and a famous line: "As this piece [of bread] was scattered over the hills and then was brought together and made one, so let your Church be brought together from the

ends of the earth into your Kingdom."[5] This and a subsequent phrase have a strong eschatological flavor. *Didache* 14 quotes Malachi 1:11 about a "pure" sacrifice and specifically refers to the eucharist in sacrificial language.

In Justin's *First Apology*, ca. 155, we find our first outline of the eucharist as it would be familiar to us today. Ordinarily, it would come after the service of the word, but in the first example, he references eucharist following a baptism:

> On finishing the prayers [petition and intercession] we greet each other with a kiss. Then bread and a cup of water and mixed wine are brought to the president of the brethren and he, taking them, sends up praise and glory to the Father of the universe through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and offers thanksgiving at some length that we have been deemed worthy to receive these things from him…. When the president has given thanks and the whole congregation has assented [with an "amen"], those whom we call deacons give to each of those present a portion of the consecrated [literally, "eucharistized"] bread and wine and water, and they take it to the absent.[6]

The **kiss of peace** (Rom. 16:16; 1 Pet. 5:14) is a sign of love and unity that concluded the intercessions and led to the offertory. It retains this position in the East but lost it in the West until the recent revisions in some churches. Apparently, the wording of the central prayer of thanksgiving by the president (bishop or presiding presbyter) is still fluid at this stage.

In his second account of a Sunday eucharist (ch. 67), Justin tells us the president "sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his [*sic*] ability," which shows that the prayer was improvised to some degree. He also tells how the deacons carry bread and wine to those sick and in prison, setting a very early precedent for extended communion and eventually **reservation** of the consecrated elements in churches between eucharistic celebrations. A collection is also taken for the benefit of the needy.

Our most important source of information about the early eucharist is, once again, *The Apostolic Tradition*. In this text, as soon as a new bishop is ordained, all offer him the kiss of peace. Then deacons bring forward the offering of bread and wine, and the bishop "laying his hands on it, with all the presbytery" begins the thanksgiving. Presbyters share (here silently) in the prayer, a practice later known as **concelebration**. The **great thanksgiving (eucharistic prayer, anaphora, prayer of consecration)** begins with a dialogue between the presider and the congregation.

The wording of the eucharistic prayer after the ordination of a bishop has been widely copied by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. It is the basic source for the Roman Catholic Eucharistic Prayer II. Here is a reasonable reconstruction of the prayer:

The Lord [be] with all of you.
And let all the people say:
With your spirit.
And he [the bishop] says:
Up, [with your] heart.
And the people say:
We have [them] to the Lord.
And he says, again:
Let us give thanks to the Lord.
And the people say:
It is worthy and right.

> We render thanks to you, God, through your beloved child[7] Jesus Christ, whom in the last times you sent to us as savior and redeemer and angel of your will, who is your inseparable word, through whom you made all things and it was well-pleasing to you; you sent from heaven into the virgin's womb, and who conceived in the womb was incarnate and manifested as your son, born of the holy spirit and the virgin; who fulfilling your will and gaining for you a holy people stretched out [his] hands when he was suffering, that he might release from suffering those who believed in you; who when he was being handed over to voluntary suffering, that he might destroy death and break the bonds of the devil, and tread down hell and illuminated the righteous, and fix a limit and manifest the resurrection, taking bread [and] giving things to you, he said: "Take, eat, this is my body which will be broken for you." Likewise, also the cup, saying: "This is my blood which is shed for you. When you do this, you make my remembrance," Remembering therefore his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and cup, giving thanks to you because you have held us worthy to stand before you and minister to you. And we ask that you would send your holy spirit in the offering of [your] holy church, [that] gathering [them] into one you will give to all who partake of the holy things [to partake] in the fullness of the holy spirit, for the strengthening of faith in truth, that we may praise and glorify you

> through your Child Jesus Christ, through whom [be] glory and honor to you, Father and Son with the holy spirit, in your holy church, both now and to the ages of ages. Amen.[8]

In recent years, the wording of the eucharistic prayer in *The Apostolic Tradition* has been widely copied by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike.

The prayer begins with a dialogue that includes the ***sursum corda***, here rendered "Lift up your hearts," and invites the congregation to join with the bishop in the thanksgiving. This is the way most eucharistic prayers still begin. Most subsequent liturgies move on eventually to the ***sanctus*** ("Holy, Holy, Holy"), based on Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8. *The Apostolic Tradition* does not mention the sanctus, either because it was not in use, occurred elsewhere, or was not considered necessary to mention. The **post-*sanctus*** continues thanksgiving for what God has done in Jesus Christ, recites Christ's works, and concludes this section with the **words of institution**. Indeed, this is possibly the earliest example we have of Jesus' words of institution in a eucharistic prayer. It is now widely accepted that the inclusion of words of institution arose in the fourth century as bishops felt a need to continue educating their congregations on the historical grounding of their eucharistic practice.

Following the institution narrative, we find a section known as the *anámnesis*-***oblation*** that summarizes what is being recalled and offers the bread and cup to God. *The Apostolic Tradition*'s final portion is an invocation of the Holy Spirit or ***epiclesis*** that asks God to send the Holy Spirit to make fruitful the communion of those who partake. *The Apostolic Tradition's* cites benefits desired from the Holy Spirit. It is a short step from this to **intercessions** for others, both living and dead, just as synagogue prayers had easily moved from thanksgiving by recital to supplication for further action. *The Apostolic Tradition* did not move in that direction, but it was a natural development, and eventually most eucharistic prayers contained intercessions. The whole prayer then concludes with a trinitarian **doxology** of praise and a congregational **"Amen,"** just as we found in Justin Martyr's text.

Now why is all this so important? *The Apostolic Tradition* gives us a prototype of the central prayer of the central act of Christian worship. We begin to see that the eucharistic prayer was, for several centuries, the most common theological statement of the Christian faith. The structure is Trinitarian: thanking God the Father, commemorating before God the Father the works of God the Son, and invoking God the Father to send God the Holy Spirit. The form is thoroughly Jewish: praising God by reciting God's past acts and invoking their

continuation. The contents also are thoroughly Christian: the recalling of what God has done in Jesus Christ and continues to do through the Holy Spirit.

This central prayer demanded a person who could faithfully represent the beliefs of the Christian community. *The Apostolic Tradition* even says: "It is not at all necessary for him to repeat these same words which we said above, as if he learned giving thanks to God by rote, but according to each one's ability he shall pray … only let him pray being sound in orthodoxy.[9] One of the most important functions of the ordained ministry is the ability of presbyters and bishops to sum up the faith of the whole church and proclaim it in prayer. No wonder second-century Ignatius of Antioch limited presiding at the eucharist to being "by the bishop or by someone he authorizes."[10] Each pastor is a theologian for the congregation—to them is entrusted the statement of the community's faith through its supreme expression, the eucharistic prayer.

In the years after *The Apostolic Tradition*, eucharistic prayers continued to develop, chiefly in an expansion of the words calling to give thanks after the *sursum corda*. This is called the **preface**, and it begins the recital of thanks. In the West, it could vary according to the season or occasion. In Eastern rites and some Protestant rites, the preface is invariable or standard.

Once one has mastered this pattern of eucharistic prayer, it is possible to improvise prayers, just as one can write sonnets in the specified form. The pattern of most eucharistic prayers adopted in the West since Vatican II includes:

dialogue preface
sanctus and *benedictus*
post-*sanctus*
(preliminary epiclesis)
words of institution
anámnesis-oblation
epiclesis
(intercessions)
doxology
Amen

While improvisation of prayer was the typical practice in the first through third centuries, by the fourth century, we begin to find more or less fixed texts coming into use. One of the earliest comes from the hand of Sarapion, bishop of Thmuis, Egypt, about the middle of the fourth century. The most distinctive element is an epiclesis directed to the "Logos," the second member of the

Trinity.[11] In the post-Nicene era, a variety of eucharistic rites developed scattered around the perimeter of the Mediterranean. (See diagram 2 on p. 23.) All have common characteristics. By the sixth century, the service of the word and the eucharist had been wed and remained so for the next thousand years.

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, important divergences in style and wording appear, witnessing to the diversity of peoples yet retaining constancy of purpose. The comparative study of these is a vast science; we can only suggest here a little of the richness of diversity present by following these liturgical families around the Mediterranean in a counterclockwise direction.

The characteristic Alexandrian or Egyptian eucharistic prayer is typified by that named after the Gospel writer Mark who, tradition has it, ministered in Alexandria. In these rites, the preface often has a long recital of God's works of creation and redemption derived from the Old Testament (noticeably absent in much of the Western tradition of eucharistic prayer).

Further East, we encounter the Antiochene or West Syrian family with important documents from Antioch and Jerusalem and the best-known example is the liturgy of St. James. This is familiar to many as the source of the hymn text, "Let all mortal flesh keep silence." Characteristic of this family is the preface with its celestial roll call. The post-*sanctus* picks up on the word "holy"—"holy you are"—in a recital of old and new covenant works. The Armenian rite is probably ultimately derived from this family though with later Byzantine influence.

Easily the most puzzling family is the East Syrian, originating in Edessa as the liturgy of Sts. Addai and Mari. Isolated by heresy and Islam, it has continued in use relatively untouched by other influences. As such, it has early roots, perhaps reflecting third-century practice in that region. The most controversial aspect is an apparent lack of words of institution, which would make it unique among historic Christian liturgies. The *epiclesis* comes last after the intercessions.

To the family of St. Basil of Caesarea in Asia Minor we owe an early version known as the Alexandrian Basil since it may have been brought to Egypt by Basil himself, around C.E. 357. This has been widely admired in recent years and forms the basis for various recent denominational eucharistic prayers. A later version, probably revised by St. Basil, is filled out with more scriptural references. It is used by the Orthodox churches of the world on ten days of the year, chiefly in Lent.

Somewhat dependent upon it is the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom or the Byzantine liturgy, the second most widely used eucharistic rite in the world

today. It, too, reflects Antiochene structure. John Chrysostom had been bishop in Antioch at the end of the fourth century. The post-*sanctus* and intercessions are relatively short and the whole prayer appears condensed in comparison with most of those already mentioned.

Turning westward, we momentarily pass over the Roman family to note an assortment of non-Roman Western rites known collectively as Gallican and subdivided into Ambrosian (or Milanese), Mozarabic (from Spain), Celtic (originating in Ireland but scattered where Celtic missionaries traveled), and Gallican in the narrow sense of Frankish-German. There are connections between these rites and those of the East, although the exact derivation is uncertain. The Ambrosian rite is still in use in the Archdiocese of Milan and the Mozarabic in one chapel in Toledo Cathedral in Spain. A common characteristic is florid language and eucharistic prayers which, except for the *sanctus* and words of institution, change entirely according to the day or season, providing extraordinary variety. It is worth noting that these rites were in the Latin language, meaning there were a variety of Latin liturgical traditions in the medieval period.

For two centuries following *The Apostolic Tradition* (if this text were from a Rome, and that is debated), there is a gap in written texts for the liturgy of the pope in Rome, known as the **Roman Rite**, although Ambrose foreshadows much that emerges in Rome, and the few surviving North African fragments show some similarities. The mists lift in Rome when we discover several early **sacramentaries**, collections of the priest's prayers for the various masses of the year, including initiation and ordinations, and various **ordines**, or collections of rubrics. Of the oldest sacramentaries, the Leonine (or Verona) Sacramentary has preserved proper prayers from more than three hundred masses, many of which may go back to Pope Leo I (440–461). The older version of the Gelasian Sacramentary may contain opening prayers and prefaces shaped by Pope Gelasius I (492–496) who seems to have polished the eucharistic prayer itself, specifically the **canon**. In the Roman Rite, the canon refers to the mostly invariable part of the prayer after the *sanctus. Th*e Gregorian Sacramentary was named for Pope Gregory I (590–604) who reformed the Roman Rite and anchored the Lord's Prayer at the end of the canon.

Various sacramentaries were in circulation in the early medieval West. Charlemagne sought standardization for purposes of imperial unity and requested a copy of an authentic Roman sacramentary. Pope Hadrian I (772–795) transmitted one to imperial headquarters at Aachen, but it turned out to be sorely incomplete for parochial purposes. One of Charlemagne's ecclesiastical

advisors, probably Benedict of Aniane, added a “Supplement” of materials drawn from the various Gallican rites then in use throughout the Empire. Two centuries later, the combined sacramentary was imposed on Rome itself by Germanic emperors. Consequently, the Roman Rite assimilated a variety of Gallican propers including additional prayers over the gifts, prefaces, and prayers after communion. As one can see from this quick historical overview, the development is very complicated! This certainly should dispel the misconception that Medieval Catholic worship was monolithic.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the eucharistic prayer remained stable. But increasingly it and the other central action, the giving of bread and wine, were surrounded by subjective **apologies** or prayers about the unworthiness of clergy and people. These tended to be penitential and introspective in tone. Accessory actions, such as censing the altar-table and washing the hands of the priest, joined private prayers of the celebrant at the offertory. The ***Agnus Dei*** (“Lamb of God”) was introduced in the late seventh century at the fraction as was **commixture** (mixing a particle of bread in the wine, a remnant of a symbol of unity of the pope and churches of his diocese). Individualistic prayers surrounded the giving of bread and wine. The **ablutions** (ceremony of cleaning the vessels and hands of the celebrant) developed as a reflection of late medieval scrupulosity about each drop and crumb of the consecrated elements. The late Middle Ages also added a last gospel (John 1:1-18), and a modern pope attached a few concluding prayers. These anticlimactic elements quickly disappeared after Vatican II.

The Eucharist in the Roman Rite Church

The Apostolic Tradition	Fourth to Sixth Centuries	Medieval
(kiss of peace)		
offertory		offertory prayers and ceremonies
	prayer over the gifts	
eucharistic prayer	eucharistic prayer	
opening dialogue		
thanksgiving	preface	
	sanctus	
words of institution		
anamnesis/oblation		
(*epiclesis*)		
	intercessions	
trinitarian doxology		
amen		
	Lord's Prayer	
	kiss of peace	
	fraction	*Agnus Dei*
		commixture
		Priest's apology ("Lord, I am not worthy")
giving of bread and wine	communion song	
		silent prayers
		ablutions
	prayer after communion	
	blessing with dismissal	
		(last Gospel)

Diagram 10

Diagram 10 shows the structure the reformers inherited. Long lost had been any grasp of the original function of the eucharistic prayer as the great thankful summation and proclamation of the church's faith. Inasmuch as this occurred at all, it had been relegated to the creed as part of the service of the word (in the West) or as a prelude to the anaphora (in the East).

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THE EUCHARIST FROM THE REFORMATION TO THE PRESENT

The medieval subjective devotions, which had crept in before and after the eucharistic prayer, became the minor that the Reformation majored in. The Anglican Prayer of Humble Access ("We do not presume to come to this thy table") is a good example of this type of piety. Its apology, "we be not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table," may be the most graphic image of the Reformation.

The Protestant reformers did, however, take some very important positive steps, although none of them caught the ancient significance of the eucharistic prayer. They put the Mass into the **vernacular**, simplified it, and (except for Zwingli and the Anabaptists) tried valiantly to restore frequent communion. But, for a laity accustomed to receiving communion rarely, or only once a year, frequent communion proved too radical a departure to win widespread success except in some Lutheran areas.

Luther gave the strongest, if not the earliest, impetus to reforming the Mass with his Latin rite, the *Formula Missae* of 1523 and his vernacular *Deutsche Messe* of 1525.[12] Luther is conservative until he comes to the canon, "that mangled and abominable thing gathered from much filth and scum," which he simply slashes down to the words of institution and sanctus.[13] In one stroke, he out-medievalized the Roman Catholic Church, which had located the moment of consecration precisely at the words of institution. Luther advocated the addition of vernacular hymnody. His German Mass retained much ceremonial including the elevation of bread and wine and instructions that the "German *sanctus*" or other hymns be sung during the distribution of the bread and hymns or the *Agnus Dei* during the giving of the cup.

Zwingli's 1523 *Attack on the Canon of the Mass* substituted four of his Latin prayers for the canon. In 1525, Zwingli produced his *Action or Use of the Lord's Supper*, which made Luther's reforms look tame. Gone were virtually all ceremonial and music. What remained was an austere commemoration and fellowship meal, practiced four times a year.

Martin Bucer's work in Strasbourg underlies much of Calvin's liturgical efforts and with Zwingli's rite helped mold the Reformed eucharistic tradition. Bucer was anticipated in Strasbourg by Diobald Schwarz and Calvin in Geneva by Guillaume Farel. Calvin's *Form of Church Prayers*, Geneva, 1542, represents the work of his predecessors brought to a definitive shape for the Reformed tradition. It was transmitted through John Knox's *The Forme of Prayers*,

Geneva, 1556, and subsequent Scottish editions to the English-speaking world. Characteristic of the Reformed tradition, the eucharist is excessively didactic. It includes a reading of the words of institution outside the eucharistic prayer as a biblical warrant for the eucharist's observance. The **fencing of tables** (reflecting 1 Cor. 11:27-32) forbade evildoers from communicating.

Practices varied greatly among the Anabaptists: Extreme simplicity characterized their celebrations, elaborated only by a highly developed hymnody. Among the English Puritans, fixed liturgies were by no means avoided in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but the *Westminster Directory for Worship* of 1645 eventually substituted ordines for sacramentaries and rubrics for rites, though it outlined a model eucharistic prayer. The Quakers, of course, insisted on silent and inward feeding on Christ while avoiding outward sacraments.

The first Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, that of 1549, carried a vernacular communion rite which was recognizably a conservative blending of the Sarum rite (a local use of the Roman Rite) of southern England with Reformation theology. Much of the 1549 *BCP*'s eucharistic theology was deliberately ambiguous, permitting both Catholic and Protestant interpretations. Three years later, this prayer book was replaced with one that removed most ambiguity and involved drastic restructuring. The canon was divided in two. The oblation was placed after communion to eliminate any traditional sense of sacrifice. Despite minor changes in 1559, 1604, and 1662, what is basically the 1552 rite is still in official use in England.

John Wesley followed the 1662 *BCP* eucharistic rite in his *Sunday Service* of 1784, only abbreviating it slightly. Wesley's two great contributions were a eucharistic revival with weekly celebrations and (with Charles Wesley) a magnificent collection of 166 eucharistic hymns. These contain a rich variety of sacrificial, eschatological, and pneumatological emphases that were absent from Protestant eucharistic piety for many centuries, but Wesley's strong eucharistic discipline and eucharistic hymns were eventually lost by his followers. An abbreviated form of his rite continued in use in America.

Pentecostals and Charismatics vary widely in the use or non-use of set forms for the Lord's Supper. They do concur that the Holy Spirit must be free to break into any pattern through spontaneous elements. Frequency of eucharists varies from weekly to rarely.

Recent tendencies in many churches center on restoration of many practices of the ancient church, all of which draw on the remarkable ecumenical work of the **Liturgical Renewal Movement** of the twentieth century. Proponents of this

movement generally agreed that most of the medieval developments were distortions of the worship of the early churches. Many of the liturgical changes in modern Western churches build upon the historical research that spawned the renewal movement. The results of liturgical revision are so similar that, in many cases, it is often hard to tell which tradition has produced a new eucharistic rite if the title page is lost.

Since the Church of South India rite first appeared in 1950, many churches have structured the eucharist around the fourfold actions of which Dix wrote. Rediscovery of the centrality of the eucharistic prayer as the church's supreme faith statement has spurred revision of existing eucharistic prayers and composition of new examples. American Lutherans recovered such a prayer in 1958. The eucharist itself is being observed more frequently in most Protestant churches, advancing from quarterly celebrations to monthly and then to weekly. The same increase in frequency had occurred among most Anglicans in the early twentieth century.

A common development has been the move to a variety of eucharistic prayers. This reflects the most significant of new developments, a forthright acceptance of pluralism as a positive good, and consequent efforts for flexibility and adaptation. As a result, the Roman Catholic Church, after being restricted to a single canon for a millennium and a half, now has several eucharistic prayers for use on any occasion and (in the United States of America) other prayers for masses with children and at times of reconciliation. Today, Catholics have a rich assortment of prayers over the gifts, prefaces, and prayers after communion.

Pluralism is reflected in the 1979 Episcopal *BCP* by the inclusion of two entire rites: one with Elizabethan language and two possible eucharistic prayers, and another in today's language with four choices. A third outlined rite also contains two eucharistic prayers.

The 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship* provided three complete musical settings, which can be used with any one of the three eucharistic prayers: a traditional scheme, the institution narrative alone, and a brief form concluding with the institution narrative. The options increased in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006), with ten musical settings. The first two of these settings include full eucharistic prayers drawing upon the Liturgical Movement of the twentieth century. The other eight allow for "freedom and flexibility in the ways worship may be shaped locally, while focusing on what the church holds in common."[14] Setting Seven draws on Hispanic musical idioms and is printed with the text in Spanish, a development that shows increased sensitivity to cultural diversity.

Significant changes have developed in the United Methodist rite as approved for the 1989 *United Methodist Hymnal*. These include four versions of "A Service of Word and Table," the chief difference in the first three being the degree of completeness of texts. The acts of confession and pardon follow the sermon and lead into the peace and offering. Five musical settings are provided for the great thanksgiving. Service IV is in the traditional terminology of the 1552 BCP, reinstated by Wesley, with the John Merbecke musical setting of 1550. In Service IV, for the first time in four and a half centuries, the two portions of Cranmer's eucharistic prayer have been reunited. A new feature for United Methodists is the provision of twenty-four approved eucharistic prayers in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 1992. These prayers vary according to the festival (Pentecost Day), season (Advent), or occasion (Christian Marriage), much as the early Gallican liturgies did.

American Presbyterians also show the influence of the Liturgical Movement in the *Book of Common Worship*, published in 1993, and the more recent hymnal *Glory to God* (2013). These provide a normative Sunday pattern of eucharistic celebration, although in practice that is still exceptional among most Presbyterians.

The influence of the Liturgical Renewal Movement on eucharistic worship is also evident among congregational traditions. Baptists, for example, have historically short, improvised prayers with the use of the Words of Institution as a warrant. However, the modern worship book produced by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples* (2005), contains two eucharistic prayers under the title "An ecumenical order" that largely follow the content and structure of prayers going back to eucharist in *The Apostolic Tradition* as well as Dix's four action shapes.

Over the range of these denominational service books, we see the influence of the Liturgical Renewal Movement with an emphasis on the gathering in Christ's name as an act of worship in itself, the use of a full service of the word with two or three lessons and psalmody, a variety of eucharistic prayers, and the sending forth into service to the world. Today, most of these printed worship books are supported by a wealth of online resources located on denominational websites. This has greatly increased the availability of season prayers and musical settings, as well as teaching materials for the meaning and practices of worship.

THEOLOGY OF THE EUCHARIST

As was the case with baptism, the context of the eucharist in the New Testament is highly eschatological. The words of institution at the Last Supper indicate the imminent coming of the kingdom: “until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16). Even the kingdom is seen in terms of table fellowship: “so that you may eat and drink at my table in the kingdom” (Luke 22:30). There is a strong sense of the imminent return of the Lord and the beginning of the kingdom of which the Lord’s Supper is a foretaste and anticipation. Each celebration invokes and advances the coming of the kingdom both by prayer and anticipation.[15]

Christians have understood the eucharist in a variety of ways. Indeed, to reduce what Christians experience in the eucharist to a single interpretation would be to miss much of the eucharist’s power, although such reductionism has often been too tempting to resist. The method we shall follow here is to trace six metaphors that Christians have used to explain what they experience in the eucharist.

We shall use the terms of Yngve Brilioth, formerly Lutheran Archbishop of Uppsala, Sweden, though we shall apply them somewhat differently. In *Eucharistic Faith and Practice*, 1926, Brilioth identified five New Testament metaphors of the eucharist. They are eucharist or thanksgiving, communion fellowship, commemoration or the historical, sacrifice, and mystery or presence. To this list, we would add another: the eucharist as the work of the Holy Spirit.

These metaphors, and possibly others, appear in fragmentary form in the New Testament, which is even more elusive in revealing the meaning of the eucharist for first-century Christians than in disclosing its form. But clearly one of the central acts in the Lord’s Supper, as in its Jewish antecedents, is thanksgiving. All four institution accounts speak of Jesus as giving thanks or blessing God. It is hard to imagine thanksgiving as absent from the joyful action that bubbled over as the Jerusalem church broke bread “with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46).

Paul stresses communion or fellowship in such passages as I Corinthians 10:16-17: “The cup of blessing we bless, is it not a sharing (*koinônía*) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing (*koinônía*) in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” The church built on the Jewish concept of the unity of those eating together. In its sharing, the community receives Christ, and the one bread becomes a sign of the unity of the communicants.

The focal point of Jewish prayer is a “think-thank” process of commemoration with thanksgiving. The key phrase used by both Paul and Luke,

“in *anámnesis* of me,” is an underscoring of this process. To remember, recall, know again, or experience anew is certainly one of the main purposes for practicing the eucharist (Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor. 11:24-25). Commemoration includes not just the incarnation but all the works of Christ beginning with creation and looking forward to Christ’s coming again (1 Cor. 11:26).

The words of institution use the language of sacrifice in recalling a covenant established by the pouring out of blood. Hebrews is particularly rich in sacrificial imagery, comparing Christ to both high priest and victim who “offered himself without blemish to God” (9:14). The church’s early appropriation of Malachi 1:11: “a pure offering,” shows how natural such imagery was to apply to the eucharist. Hebrews 13:15 also speaks of “a sacrifice of praise,” though there is no unambiguous relating of sacrifice and the eucharist in Hebrews. More important is Paul’s understanding of Jesus as having “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil. 2:7). This obedient sacrifice is memorialized by the eucharist.

In the words of the Last Supper, Christ states his presence by identifying bread and wine with his body and blood. Paul, in the words quoted above, identifies eating and drinking with sharing in the body and blood of Christ. Some would cite the John 6:51 passage as eucharistic (“The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh”). The theme of eucharistic presence as revelation can be found in Luke’s depiction of the two disciples encountering the resurrected Jesus on the evening of Easter day, when they stop for dinner at their home in Emmaus. These disciples had been walking and talking with the risen Lord for much of the way, only recognized him as Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave them the bread at table. At that movement “their eyes were opened, and they recognized him” (Luke 24:31).

The eucharist as a locus of the Holy Spirit’s work is not explicit in scripture but appears in early Christian literature and plays a major role in later prayers and theology. However, in I Corinthians 12:13, Paul writes of the unifying power of the Holy Spirit in words that have sacramental resonance and may allude to the eucharist: “We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and *we all were given one Spirit to drink”* (emphasis added).

A good balance of these basic themes appears in the early church, never worked out into full theologies, never precisely balanced, but mentioned frequently enough to show that these concepts were current in the understanding of why Christians gathered to “do this.” Even Justin’s short accounts in the *First Apology* speak of the eucharist in which the president “offers thanksgiving,” and

gives evidence of fellowship as all salute “each other with a kiss,” share in the “amen,” and partake together. The scriptures are read and the eucharistic action is introduced as being done “for my memorial.” A realistic (that is, identifying bread and wine literally with body and blood) concept of presence is suggested in calling the bread and wine “the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus.”[16] The *Didache* prays eschatologically: “Let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.”[17] Sacrificial references appear very early; the *Didache* compares the eucharist to the “pure” sacrifice of Malachi 1:11, and Clement’s First Letter speaks of those who make offerings (*prosphorá*) or gifts (*dôra*), presumably as ministers of the eucharist.[18]

Ignatius of Antioch gives us one of the strongest images of presence in speaking of the eucharist as “the medicine of immortality” and insists against the heretical Docetists that “the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour.”[19] He is equally firm that the fellowship of the church is centered in the bishop. Irenaeus declares the presence of Christ in the cup, which “is his own blood,” and the bread, which “is his own body.”[20] Cyprian speaks of fellowship in poetic terms: “As many grains, collected, and ground, and mixed together into one Mass, make one bread; so in Christ, who is the heavenly bread, we may know that there is one body, with which our number is joined and united.”[21]

The work of the Holy Spirit is expressed by eucharistic prayer in *The Apostolic Tradition*, which invokes the Father to send the Holy Spirit on the offering of the holy church and to fill those gathered to strengthen their faith in truth. This activity is defined more explicitly more than a century later in Cyril of Jerusalem’s mystagogical catecheses. He tells the newly initiated that in the eucharist “we call upon the merciful God to send forth His Holy Spirit upon the gifts lying before Him; that He may make the bread the body of Christ, and the Wine the Blood of Christ; for whatsoever the Holy Ghost has touched, is sanctified and changed (*metabébletai).*”[22] This suggests the direction the Orthodox churches subsequently took in understanding the function of the Holy Spirit in making holy and transforming the eucharistic elements. Cyril models an approach that became highly important in the East though neglected in the West until recently.

We, aware of later developments, find puzzling the way early Christians spoke of the presence in terms both realistic and symbolic. Cyril speaks in the same lecture of the bread and wine as the “sign of the Body and Blood of Christ.” Augustine uses language that sounds realistic at times and, at other times, obviously symbolic. Unfortunately, such ambiguity is no longer a

possibility for us, but it is refreshing to see the latitude of expression still possible in the fourth century. The boundaries of acceptable terms were wide.

Augustine gives us insights into the theme of sacrifice. Building on the concepts of Christ's eternal sacrifice (Heb. 9:14) and the Christians' union to Christ, Augustine says, "This is the sacrifice of Christians; we being many, are one body in Christ…. [The church] herself is offered in the offering she makes to God."[23] Thus the eucharist is a joining of the church's worship with Christ's eternal offering on its behalf. This concept of sacrifice was overshadowed in subsequent centuries.

The first thousand years of Christianity is characterized by the absence of tight theological distinctions about understanding the eucharist. Even the vocabulary for technical theological discussion of the eucharist is lacking. A variety of terms are used, each author choosing what suits his purpose best. A portent for the West appears in the suggestion of Ambrose that it is the recitation of the words of institution that accomplishes consecration: "And by what words and whose sayings does consecration take place? The Lord Jesus's…. So the word of Christ accomplishes this sacrament."[24] But the early period has a marvelous freedom in expressing what it experienced in the heart, not what had to be defined in the head. The church experienced the eucharist rather than debated it.

In the ninth century, two monks started the debate in the West, Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus, both from the Abbey of Corbie, France. Paschasius, trying to compress into words Christ's presence experienced in the eucharist, used language we would call literal or realistic; shortly later, Ratramnus tried to express the same experience in more spiritual or symbolic language. Two centuries later, controversy again erupted, this time much less friendly. Flatly rejected were the efforts of Berengarius to express in symbolic terms the experience of the presence of Christ in the eucharist. A crude confession was forced on him, affirming that the body of Christ is handled and broken by the priest's hands and crushed by the communicant's teeth. From the eleventh century onward, the eucharist became the subject not just of devout experience but also of intellectual speculation.

There is nothing wrong in this, but unfortunately, the more controversial themes came to the forefront and others quietly withered away both in piety and doctrinal development. A penitential and introspective piety prevailed rather than a joyful spirit of thanksgiving. The Mass had come to focus almost entirely on the passion, death, and resurrection with the sorrowful mysteries predominating in the West. Instead of being a "great thanksgiving," the medieval

eucharist was more like a “great melancholy”! As the rite became increasingly clerical and communion became a rare or once-a-year affair, any strong sense of communal celebration had dissipated. The Old Testament lessons were gone, and no references to creation and the rest of the old covenant salvation history appeared in the Roman canon. Thus, commemoration of Christ’s work was severely curtailed. The eschatological dimension had long since disappeared, and the Roman Rite overlooked any obvious statement of the Holy Spirit’s eucharistic activity.

Left were two areas for debate: how Christ was present and how the eucharist was a sacrifice. Late medieval theologians devoted their attention to these two areas. The most significant development was agreement on the word that described the experience of bread and wine as conveying the reality of Christ. As we have seen in Berengarius’s case, the church was groping its way toward realistic language of a spatial variety. But the word **transubstantiation** arrived late, long after the idea had been striving for expression. The term was not used definitively until 1215 when the Fourth Lateran Council spoke of “the transubstantiation of bread into body and wine into blood.”[25] The term itself has evolved in meaning in subsequent history. Using the best of philosophical tools available, especially Aristotle, the scholastics described this miracle so that it could be expressed, “the substance of the bread is turned into the body of Christ and the substance of the wine into his blood.”[26] The accidents (what is perceptible to the senses) remain unchanged, but the substance (inner reality) is miraculously transformed, contrary to all else in the natural world where all accidents and substance conform to each other. This triumph of rationalism tried to explain the mystery rather than merely accepting and adoring it.

Hand in hand with such theological definitions went practices that increasingly removed the sacred elements from contact with the people except for a dramatic showing at the **elevation** when the priest raised the bread and cup for all to see. The doctrine of **concomitance** made it clear that the whole Christ is present in every drop and crumb of the consecrated elements, so it was no longer considered necessary for the laity to receive the cup with all the dangers of spilling Christ’s blood that this entailed. With infrequent communion, the laity’s role was minimal. The priest offered Mass on their behalf in a language few people understood.

Thought about the eucharist as sacrifice also developed so that the Mass was seen as propitiatory, being performed to bring about desired purposes. Sophisticated explanations that the Mass was a memorial and not a repetition of the unique sacrifice of Calvary too often were lost on most people. In this

period, theories of the atonement focused almost exclusively on the death of Jesus as satisfying the Father's requirement of justice, and the eucharist dovetailed all too neatly into this scheme of things. Too easily, this narrow concept of sacrifice made the eucharist a means of securing God's favor rather than a proclamation of such favor already accomplished for all eternity.

Presence and sacrifice were aspects highly developed by the late medieval age but this spurt of doctrinal construction was at the expense of a balanced interpretation. If ample concern had been given to the eucharist as the proclamation of thanksgiving, the sacrament of unity, the commemoration of all salvation history, the present work of the Holy Spirit, or the foretaste of the messianic banquet, then doctrinal developments would have been far different. At least, so it seems from a modern perspective.

A reshuffling of priorities occurred in the Reformation, with limited success achieved in some instances in restoring a balanced eucharistic understanding. Unfortunately, the reformers themselves had been thoroughly formed by late medieval penitential piety, and they brought this attitude to their rites. There were few things the reformers were unanimous about, but their rejection of late medieval approaches to presence and sacrifice was virtually unanimous. The Reformation (facilitated by the use of the vernacular) did see tremendous gains in recovery of a sense of fellowship, some improvement in the breadth of commemoration, and reforms in the concepts of presence and sacrifice. Brilioth says, "The rediscovery of the idea of communion [fellowship] is the greatest positive contribution of the Reformation in regard to the eucharist."[27] Accomplishments in recovering a joyful sense of thanksgiving were mixed, acknowledgment of the work of the Holy Spirit was recovered by Calvin, and eschatological perception was rare except among Anabaptists suffering persecution.

Luther, in his Reformation manifesto, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), discarded the canon of the Roman Mass because it reeked of sacrificial language. He considered sacrifice as the "third captivity" of the Mass, and consequently was able to find little that was positive about sacrifice.[28] He did, however, wrestle with the concept of presence. Though Luther rejected the idea of transubstantiation ("the second captivity"), he did insist that the bread and wine became the substance of Christ's body and blood, while still retaining the natural substances of bread and wine just as a red-hot iron can be both iron and fire. Since Christ is everywhere present by his divine nature (ubiquity) and all the powers of his divine nature are communicated to his human nature, Luther argued that Christ can be present on a thousand altar tables

simultaneously. This solves some problems though it still states the concept of presence in spatial terms: Christ is present “in, with, and under” bread and wine. Even in protesting the “Babylonian captivity” of the Mass, Luther remained captive to medieval concepts of the eucharistic presence of Christ. That said, Luther recovered much congregational participation in the restoration of the chalice to the laity (“the first captivity”), the use of vernacular, and rich congregational hymnody.

Surely the greatest single tragedy of the Reformation was the conflict between Luther and Zwingli over the concept of presence, a fight which culminated in the Marburg Colloquy (1529). Zwingli, impatient with any concept that the physical could convey the spiritual, repudiated Luther’s teaching on presence with the view that Christ is only present spiritually by his divine nature. Zwingli’s strength was emphasis on fellowship and the spiritual union of the participants together confessing their faith, a transubstantiation of people rather than elements.

John Calvin’s role was something of a mediator between the two positions, but he added much that was his own, or rather, recovered something of the early church. God, who knows us best, uses outward signs in self-giving. Because of our sin and lack of faith, such signs are necessary; because of God’s love for us, they are effective. We feed on Christ in the eucharist, but it is made possible only through the operation of the Holy Spirit who raises our souls to heaven. The means of feeding on Christ is a “mystery, which plainly neither the mind is able to conceive nor the tongue to express.”[29] In stressing the role of the Holy Spirit and the sense of mystery, Calvin picks up some authentic early Christian strands that medieval developments had overlooked. Calvin also stresses that the Lord’s Supper implies mutual love or fellowship: “For what sharper goal could there be to arouse mutual love among us than when Christ, giving himself to us, not only invites us by his own example to pledge and give ourselves to one another, but inasmuch as he makes himself common to all, also makes all of us one in himself.”[30] His spatial location of Christ in heaven may sound crude to modern ears, and he contributes little that is positive on concepts of sacrifice, thanksgiving, commemoration, or eschatology. But Calvin’s theology recovers the centrality of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Among the Anabaptists an intense sense of fellowship thrived, reinforced by the ban against fellowship with baptized believers who had lapsed. The pure church was also a church under persecution—a reality reflected in their hymnody. Under the threat of persecution and conscious of their martyrs, Anabaptist celebrations exhibited a vivid eschatological fervor.

There has been much controversy over Cranmer's eucharistic doctrine as expressed in the first two *BCP*s. In general, his position is seen as somewhat similar to Zwingli's but with a stronger view of the value of frequent communion. "Yet he is distinguished from the Zurich reformer in esteeming the Lord's Supper more highly and in emphasizing that its faithful observance is accompanied by the operation of God's grace."[31] Zwingli's feelings for fellowship are present too, as well as a rather strong dimension of commemoration, though like most of the Reformation orders, Zwingli focuses narrowly on the passion.

John Wesley had the advantages of living in a time after the Reformation controversies and possessing a deep knowledge of patristics. Though close to Calvin in many aspects, Wesley achieved a balance that even the Genevan reformer lacked. This is reflected in the divisions of John and Charles Wesley's *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*: "As It Is a Memorial of the Sufferings and Death of Christ," "As It Is a Sign and a Means of Grace," "The Sacrament a Pledge of Heaven," "The Holy Eucharist as It Implies a Sacrifice," "Concerning the Sacrifice of Our Persons," and "After the Sacrament."[32] At last, a strong positive Protestant statement of eucharistic sacrifice occurs in Wesley, coupled with a patristic-Calvinistic sense of presence as mystery. The eschatological and pneumatological aspects are vividly present, too, as is fellowship, though commemoration and thanksgiving still focus only on Christ's passion and death.

The late twentieth century saw extraordinary developments in new understandings of the eucharist, especially for a more carefully balanced approach. Brilioth's book itself has been a contributor to this process, but much has come about through broader ecumenical contacts and greater study of the biblical, historical, and theological aspects of eucharistic theology. The problematic areas of presence and sacrifice have received the most attention, but in all areas, our understanding has greatly increased.

Vatican II made a notable contribution in restating the whole question of presence by declaring that Christ is present in the Mass not in one but in a variety of ways: in the person of the minister, in the bread and wine, in the sacramental action, in the word, and in the congregation (*CSL*, par. 7). More recently, the presence of Christ in the poor in our midst has been realized as another mode of presence. How different history might have been had these insights come a thousand years sooner!

In the early twentieth century, Catholic liturgical theologian Odo Casel opened new possibilities in portraying the Mass as a time mystery rather than a spatial mystery.[33] Other Catholic theologians have picked up another trail in

developing the concept of **transignification**, in which emphasis is on the meaning or purpose of the sacramental signs in the eucharist.[34] According to the concept of transignification, if the meaning of something is a principal component of its very being, it can be said that the bread and wine undergo an ontological change in the eucharist by coming to signify the body and blood of Christ. By analogy, a box of chocolates becomes a gift through the sign-act of giving, and then it is no longer simply candy but a means of self-giving. Similar is the concept of **transfinalization**, which places the emphasis on the category of the *telos*, that is the goal or purpose, of the eucharist as the primary category of being.[35] These concepts, which virtually equate meaning with being, admit the insights of recent phenomenological philosophy and sometimes seem to reflect Calvin's understanding of God's use of signs as a way God accommodates to human capacity. Such new approaches have not been widely accepted by Roman Catholics but have had great appeal to many Protestants as the basis for common understanding. The degree to which this has become possible is shown in the 1982 ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*.[36]

Our understanding of sacrifice has broadened immeasurably by equating it, not with just the passion-atonement aspect, but with the whole incarnation of Christ, who emptied himself of being God to take the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7). The presence of sacrificial terminology in the New Testament and early church has been more widely recognized. Recovery of such images as Augustine's picture of the church in union with Christ in Christ's eternal offering for us have made a more positive approach possible without undercutting the unique character of Christ's work already accomplished.

Commemoration is now seen in its broadest aspects as encompassing all the work of Christ from creation to final judgment. Important new liturgical developments are the inclusion of Old Testament lessons and psalmody in the Lord's Supper once again and the recovery in Western eucharistic prayers of recital of the saving works of God in the Old Covenant. Commemoration is far broader than recalling just Good Friday and Easter.

Thanksgiving has been expressed abundantly in many modern liturgies concurrent with a broadened understanding of commemoration. Eucharists have once again become joyful occasions of praise. Part of this is due to contacts with the Eastern churches, which have always maintained that one comes to church primarily to praise God for what God has done, not to tell God what sinners we are. Even the sorrowful mysteries of Christ's suffering and death are ultimately joyful.

The Eastern churches, too, have made Westerners aware of how vital the understanding of the eucharist as the work of the Holy Spirit is. Virtually all new eucharistic prayers have a distinct *epiclesis*.[37] Pentecostals, operating primarily from experience rather than theological reflection, have cherished these insights since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Evidence of new value for fellowship is abundant, as is seen in the post–Vatican II reform of a vernacular liturgy, communion received in the hand and in both species, and efforts for full congregational participation. As have Roman Catholics, the churches of the Reformation have regained the kiss of peace or sign of peace as a congregational act.

Less obvious but still significant is the increased concern with the eucharist as anticipation, looking in an eschatological direction to the heavenly banquet that will mark the completion of all things in Jesus Christ. Many new eucharistic prayers explicitly state this aspect of Christian faith. An acclamation, recovered by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike, is one sign of this: “Christ will come again.”

There is much in which to rejoice in these new understandings of what the church experiences at the Lord’s Supper. These interpretations bring Christians not only closer to the witness of the Bible and early church but also closer to each other.

PRACTICAL AND PASTORAL ASPECTS OF THE EUCHARIST

Pastoral practice should reflect how the church has grown in understanding in recent years so that one can exercise the fullest ministry in this area. There is a close relationship between theory and practice for those responsible for planning, preparing for, and presiding at the eucharist. Here, as in our comments on baptism, there are several practical implications of our account of the eucharist, and we will adopt a more prescriptive and normative mode of presentation. Readers may not agree with all these prescriptions, but at the very least, we hope to provoke discussion around the ramifications of the historical account we have given.

1. In the first place, the architectural setting will dictate many, if not all, of the possibilities open to us. Many Western traditions have moved to a free-standing altar table in recent years so that the priest or minister can face the

people across it. This became mandatory in new Roman Catholic churches in 1964, and most Protestant churches have followed suit. [38]

Not only must the presider be able to face the people, but also it must be easy for the congregation to come to the altar table if this is the practice of one's tradition. Some traditions are recovering the action of gathering around the Lord's Table, whether to stand, to kneel, or to sit around extensions of it. The very act of coming forward in the company of one's neighbors is a powerful nonverbal sign of fellowship and offering of self. The altar table must be not only visible but also accessible. Increasingly, in many churches even on non-eucharistic occasions the altar table is the focus of acts of prayer and offering while proclamation centers in the pulpit. This implies a single altar table, cleared for action, that is designed to be used and, in fact, is used. The newly reformed liturgy of most churches does not suggest a monumental altar table, conspicuous but used only as a repository for an unused Bible, flowers, candles, or other altar display.

2. The Lord's Supper is action supplemented by words. Almost all the newer eucharistic rites are based on the fourfold pattern of actions described above. Does the taking or preparing draw attention to the fact that a meal is to follow, and the table and elements must be prepared? Do we use our hands as well as our voice to express that we are giving thanks to God over the elements? Is the breaking of bread a clear sign of the unity of the one loaf broken for many? Is there an actual touch of hands as the bread is placed into the hand of each recipient? All these acts call for careful attention so that their sign value is expressed, not concealed. Good communication demands sensitive preparation.

God works through presider and people, but the presider has the responsibility to make the communication as clear as possible. We would not mumble while preaching the sermon; we should not underplay actions while acting the eucharist. These actions and words are not decoration; they are a vital part of ministry in bringing people to communion with God. At the Lord's Table, we understand how completely God knows and loves people as full human beings. The glory and majesty of God's being accommodates our humble human capacity. Thus, what we do with our hands, bodies, and voices in leading the eucharist is a vital ministry that demands sensitivity to how humans relate and communicate. There is a body language as well as a vocal one, and we must learn to speak both with eloquence.

3. The bread and wine themselves are also an important part of the action. It was sometimes said it took more explanation to make Roman Catholic school children believe that communion wafers are bread than to believe the bread

becomes Christ's body. Real bread they had seen. The use of common food is at the heart of the eucharist. Christ did not choose nectar and ambrosia, the food of the gods, but bread and wine, the food of humans. The signs must not be fake. Much of the sign value is lost when the bread becomes cardboard wafers, plastic "fish food," or anything other than what bread appears, tastes, and smells to be. The same is true of wine. Nonalcoholic wines are now available; at least the fruit of the grape must be used, not something artificial that has never seen a vineyard. The bread must be bread that can be broken easily, neither too fresh nor too stale, with care so as not to create crumbs that can fall to the floor. The act of breaking it can be one of the most meaningful parts of the service if carefully done. The act of giving is important, too. Giving a gift can be a real art; giving bread and wine are no exceptions.

Particular problems apply to giving the cup. Certainly, the highest sign value of unity is in giving the wine from a common chalice, but people in most segments of American culture believe most devoutly in germs, although few have seen one. But for those with overwhelming anxieties, these fears may be escaped by dipping the bread in a common chalice **(intinction)**, pouring from the chalice into individual cups, or giving the wine already poured in individual cups. Until modern times, the amount of bread and wine consumed was not tiny crumbs and drops but somewhat more generous portions, certainly with a higher sign value, just as an abundance of water is a more robust sign of baptism.

4. Special problems arise in ministering to the sick. The Roman Catholics have devised a system of **extraordinary ministers** (laypeople) who are trained to bring consecrated bread to the sick and elderly, sometimes daily. Another arrangement is to have several persons from the congregation join the minister or priest in a sickroom celebration, abbreviated to be sure, but nevertheless a real common service of discerning the Lord's body. Some churches now have eucharistic rites for use in the sickroom. The bringing of consecrated bread and wine to the sick has been an important ministry ever since Justin Martyr.[39]

Finally, good liturgical leaders will find that thoughtful planning, preparation, and care in conducting the eucharist in all its outward and visible aspects is necessary so that it may best communicate the inward reality of Christ's generous self-giving to us in the eucharist.

CHAPTER NINE TERMINOLOGY

ablutions

agape/love feast

Agnus Dei

amen

anamnesis

anaphora (see eucharistic prayer)

antidoron

apologies

canon

commixture

concelebration

concomitance

doxology

elevation

epiclesis

eucharistic prayer

extraordinary ministers

fencing of tables

foot washing

four action shape

great thanksgiving (see eucharistic prayer)

Haggadah

institution narratives (see words of institution)

intercessions

intinction

kiss of peace

Liturgical Renewal Movement

oblation

ordo/ordines

Passover Seder

post-*sanctus*

prayer of consecration (see eucharistic prayer)

preface

reservation

Roman Rite

sacramentaries

sanctus

Sarum Rite

sursum corda

transfinalization

transignification

transubstantiation

vernacular

Westminster Directory

words of institution

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1. For the debate among scholars of ancient Judaism, see Heather A. McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) and the counter argument in Pieter W. Van der Horst, "Was the Synagogue a Place of Sabbath Worship before 70 CE?" in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, Steven Fine, ed. (Baltimore Studies in the History of Judaism. New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 56–82.

2. Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre, 1945), along with Joseph Jungmann's *Mass of the Roman Rite*, 2 vols. (New York: Benziger, 1951–55); and Yngve Brilioth's *Eucharistic Faith and Practice* (London: S.P.C.K., 1953) are modern classics of eucharistic studies. Dix's influence especially has been profound on almost all liturgical revision since the Church of South India rite first appeared in 1950.

3. Church of the Brethren, *Pastor's Manual* (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1978), pp. 27–58.

4. Church of the Brethren, *Pastor's Manual*, pp. 27–58.

5. *Didache*, 9-10, 14, Cyril Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 175–76 and 178.

6. *First Apology* 65, Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, pp. 285–86.

7. The use of the word *child* (or the Latin here could be translated as "servant") rather than *son* to refer to Jesus Christ is an indication of the antiquity of this prayer. We have other examples from the second century that use *child* as a modifier for Jesus, but not after the third century.

8. Translation from Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), pp. 38, 40. Text amended for illustration purposes. The text of this eucharistic prayer was adapted as Eucharistic Prayer II in the Roman Missal of 1970 and in Eucharistic Prayer B, Rite II of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, to give two of many examples. It may be that this prayer from the early church is used more today than it was in the third century!

9. Bradshaw, et al., *The Apostolic Tradition*, p. 68.

10. "To the Smyrnaeans," 8, in Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, p. 115.

11. R. J. S. Barrett-Lennard, *The Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuis* (Bramcote, Notts, U.K.: Grove Books, 1993), p. 27.

12. The chronology of the most important Protestant liturgies during the five first crucial years of the effort to produce a reformed eucharist is:

1521	Andreas Karlstadt, Wittenberg Christmas Mass (German)
1522	Kaspar Kantz, "Evangelical Mass" (German)
1523	Martin Luther, *Formula Missae* (Latin)
	Thomas Müntzer, "German Evangelical Mass"
	Ulrich Zwingli, *De Canone Missae Epicheiresis* (Latin)
	John Oecolampadius, *Das Testament Jesu Christi* (German)
1524	Diobald Schwarz, *Teutsche Messe* (German)
	Guillaume Farel, *La Maniere et fasson* (French)
	"Worms Mass" (German)
	Martin Bucer, *Grund und Ursach* (German)

1525 John Oecolampadius, *Form und Gstalt* (German)
Ulrich Zwingli, *Action oder Bruch des Nachtmals* (German)
Döber, Mass for Nuremberg Hospital Chapel (German)
Martin Luther, *Deutsche Messe*

See Irmgard Pahl, ed., *Coena Domini I* (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1983).

13. "Formula Missae," in Bard Thompson, ed., *Liturgies of the Western Church*, p. 108. This book and Jasper and Cuming, *Prayer of the Eucharist*, should be consulted for the texts of Protestant rites.

14. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), p. 91.

15. See Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

16. *First Apology*, 65-67, Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, pp. 286–87.

17. *Didache*, 9, Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, p. 175.

18. First Clement, 40 and 44, Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, pp. 62, 64.

19. "To the Smyrnaeans" 7; Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, p. 114.

20. "Against Heresies" 5, 2; Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, p. 388.

21. Epistle 62, 13; *ANF* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1899), 8:217.

22. "Mystagogical Catechesis V," St. Cyril of Jerusalem's *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments* (London: S.P.C.K., 1960), p. 74.

23. "City of God," 10, 6, *NPNF*, 1st series (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890), 2:184.

24. *On the Sacraments*, IV, 14, Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, pp. 144–45.

25. Henry Denzinger and Adolf Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 33rd ed. (Rome: Herder, 1965), p. 260.

26. "Decree for the Armenians," Petry, ed., *A History of Christianity*, p. 328.

27. Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice*, p. 97.

28. It is all the more ironic that Luther discarded the canon of the Mass except for the words of institution, which, to us, seem to use such explicitly sacrificial language.

29. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 7, p. 1367.

30. *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 38, pp. 1415–16.

31. Cyril Richardson, *Zwingli and Cranmer on the Eucharist* (Evanston, Ill.: Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1949), p. 48.

32. J. E. Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth, 1948), pp. 195–249.

33. Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship and Other Writings* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1962).

34. E. Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968); Joseph Powers, *Eucharistic Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967).

35. E. Schillebeeckx, "Transubstantiation, Transfinalization, Transignification," *Worship* 40, no. 6 (1966): 324–38.

36. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982). Since the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, churches have faced unprecedented challenges to the theological understanding of "presence," both the real presence of Christ and the physical presence of worshipers. While this challenge has many forms, perhaps the most significant are questions around the use of computer-assisted forms of worship for the practices of holy communion. Here the questions often go to the heart of the eucharistic theology of a particular ecclesial body.

37. Though this is less explicit in the current Roman Catholic Canon, which is Eucharistic Prayer I. There are historic reasons for this, as we note above.

38. On the other hand, there has been some shift in more recent years toward an appreciation of the former practice in which the priest or presider faced in the same direction as the congregation, and we see this notably among Roman Catholics who gravitate toward the pre–Vatican II Latin Mass.

39. This issue of communion for the sick and those who cannot attend in person has taken on a particular urgency during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than attempting to address all the various public-health issues, we will encourage congregations to consult with their local judicatories on specific plans for future pandemics.

CHAPTER TEN

OCCASIONAL SERVICES

Life is full of recurring cycles and unique events. One may become ill on numerous occasions, but one will die only once. Christian worship has ways of ministering to the recurrent cycles of life and to the specific events within these cycles. These **occasional services** manifest the Christian community's loving care for its members as they continue their steady journey through life or pass through new and irrevocable experiences.

The journey through life involves, for all Christians, transgressions against what we know as God's will. All Christians by definition are sinners and know it. But Christian worship provides ways of dealing with this aspect of our condition, especially when the burden of sin becomes intolerable. Through various ways, Christians can repent and live with assurance that God acts to forgive sin. Various names identify the process: **penance** or **confession** are the traditional terms; **reconciliation** is the favored word at present. We shall use this last term because reconciliation suggests both the vertical sense of being reunited to God and the horizontal sense of reunion with one's neighbor.

Reconciliation is often seen as medicine for a sick soul. At the same time, Christianity ministers to bodies that are sick or injured. For some people, sickness is a rare occurrence or something they are spared entirely, but for many people it may be recurrent. Ever since the apostles, Christians have been involved in the healing of the body as well as souls. Ministry to the sick and dying has received more attention in Christian worship in

recent years than ever before. Sickness is an important part of many people's life journey, and the church must be present at these times, too.

The mountain peaks and valleys of life are occasions for Christian worship just as surely as the flat plains of day-by-day living are. The crisis points of life are marked when the community of faith gathers around individuals to express its love as people pass through various stages: marriage (for most), **ordination** (for some), **religious profession** or commissioning (for some), and death (for all). Each passage reflects three stages in varying degrees: *separation* from a past way of life, *transition* or movement when one crosses the threshold into a new order of being, and *incorporation* into a new way of life or death itself. Several are accompanied by transition periods of time (engagement, seminary studies, novitiate, declining health) as well as transitions in space (a new home, new place for ministry, new community, the cemetery).

For Christians, none of these passages is a purely private moment but rather a concern shared by the whole Christian community. A wedding signals the formation of a new family and potentially adds to the body of Christ. Even the loneliness of dying is mitigated by the belief that death does not remove one from the church but only transfers one into the larger portion, the Church Triumphant. As communal concerns, these intensely personal moments are usually celebrated within the Christian community. The community of love surrounds and supports us both in the joys of marriage, ordination, profession or commissioning, and in the sorrows of death.

God reaches out through the human community to establish new relationships of love at these special times. These new relationships are expressed in varying ways in different relationships and various kinds of love, such as conjugal or care for the bereaved. Sharing the eucharist can be an important part of the church's ministry of love in these moments of passage.

Except for ordination and religious profession or commissioning, these passages are by no means uniquely Christian but affect all people. In the ways life crises are observed, we see more clearly than anywhere else in Christian worship the influence of local culture. A great variety of customs and local practices function at these moments, occasionally in conflict with Christian faith, sometimes concurring with it, and frequently indifferent to

it. Christians have no monopoly in commemorating such passages as marriage or death, but they are certainly influenced by the ways others observe such events. It is important to know both the distinctive Christian witness on such occasions and what is culturally determined so that one can make informed decisions in dealing with specific situations. Strangely enough, the more marginal one's relationship to a Christian community may be, the more important Christian passages such as marriage and funerals often are. Indeed, they may be a person's sole contact with the community of faith. Thus, these passages are important contacts in the evangelization of marginal Christians.

We shall consider, first, services for reconciliation and healing. Then we shall look at Christian marriage followed by ordination and commissioning. Next, we will examine certain occasional rites that speak to change and loss. Finally, we will consider care of the dead. Each section considers effective ministry in a moment of deep human need. Our survey will be quick, but it will indicate some contemporary directions of faith and practice in each area.

RECONCILIATION

Not everyone needs healing of the body; everyone needs healing of the soul. Jerome speaks of baptism and reconciliation as planks to which we may cling after the shipwreck of sin. Reconciliation has certain parallels to baptism just as to physical healing. Baptism has been compared to marriage, which makes visible the establishment of a permanent relationship based on love, but even in such a relationship there come times of conflict and the need to "make up," to be reconciled. Thus, unlike baptism, which is not repeatable, reconciliation is a recurring event.

It is surprising that the New Testament tells us little about baptized sinners. Paul threatens he "will not be lenient" in Corinth (2 Cor. 13:2). Ample precedent was available in the Old Testament for the penitential practices of supplication, fasting, mourning, and wearing sackcloth. Considering the important role the text played in subsequent ages, it is amazing that the early church seems to place little emphasis on the verse that most clearly gives authority to forgive or retain sins, John 20:23. Clearly the return of sinners is sought in the Gospels, and Paul equates

bondage to sin with death. Evidence for ritual acts of reconciliation beyond the cleansing of baptism are hard to find in the New Testament.

Tertullian tells us much about the early practice of reconciliation in his early third-century treatise *On Penance*. Sin is not only an offense against God but also a wound of the church for it endangers all Christians (especially in time of persecution). Penance involved a rigorous public discipline of daily deprivation for those guilty of serious sins, such as apostasy. Penitents were excluded from the eucharist until reconciled to the church on Easter, just as the newly baptized were being admitted to their first communion. Reconciliation was indeed the plank after a shipwreck for those who had sinned grievously and destroyed the cleansing effects of their baptism. Reconciliation involved a period of fasting, wearing penitential clothing, and sexual continence. For Tertullian, the ritual process of reconciliation was usually allowed only once in a lifetime. Tertullian considers it medicinal, a way of healing a wound in the community, just as astringent medicine heals. Thus, Easter morning publicly celebrated the reconciliation of lost sheep both to God and to the offended Christian community.

Drastic changes in reconciliation occurred in the Middle Ages. Indeed, no sacrament except perhaps healing has reversed its original form so much. Originally administered by bishops, reconciliation came to be performed by presbyters; from being openly public, it became private and secret; from being practiced once or twice in a lifetime, it became yearly at least and weekly in modern times; from being the rare exception it became required of all. Much of the impetus for these changes came about through the dissemination throughout Europe of Celtic **penitentials**, handbooks prescribing penalties for wrongdoings.[1] From the seventh century, the influence of the Celtic books spread, popularizing a type of penance wholly separated from that of the public assembly of the church. Indeed, some of the early Irish confessors were laymen and laywomen, but eventually only priests could be confessors. Late medieval councils decreed that confession was necessary before receiving communion, and they required both at least yearly, a fateful link for both sacraments.

Luther drew up “A Short Order of Confession before the Priest for the Common Man” in 1529 and rewrote it as “How One Should Teach Common Folk to Shrive Themselves” two years later.[2] These seek to avoid

the artificiality of cataloging one's sins by number and species and to give one the peace that reconciliation can offer. Both forms are for private confession to a priest or father confessor. The other reformers were content to append penitential prayers and words of forgiveness to their public Sunday services.

In the twentieth century, the Catholic Church revised the rite for the sacrament of reconciliation. Vatican II had mandated revision of the "rite and formulas" of penance, and in 1973 Rome issued three distinct rites: "Reconciliation of Individual Penitents," "Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution," and "Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution." The most controversial has been the last, and its use has been very restricted. In all three rites, there is provision for the reading of scripture. The last two rites dramatize the "relation of the sacrament to the community." All participants share in general confession and praise for God's mercy. The whole represents both a recovery of and an advance beyond early practice in emphasizing the communal nature of sin and our need to be reconciled to one another by God's mercy.

Many Protestant congregations have experimented with various types of **corporate services of reconciliation**. Gradually, modern Protestants are recognizing that ritual acts of reconciliation minister to deep human needs by offering concrete ways to confront the spiritual alienation of sin. Lutherans now provide services for both "Corporate Confession and Forgiveness" and "Individual Confession and Forgiveness." Episcopalians, following practices recovered in the Oxford Movement of the nineteenth century, make provision for private "Reconciliation of a Penitent." The United Church of Christ similarly offers orders for "A Penitent Person" and "Corporate Reconciliation."

Many of these churches include penitential elements in most Sunday services, especially the eucharist. The Lutherans now provide an optional preliminary order for "Confession and Forgiveness" before the eucharist. Episcopalians provide two versions of a free-floating "Penitential Order" for use at the eucharist and rather strongly hint that, in its absence, a general confession should follow the intercessions. For Roman Catholics and many Reformed churches, the introductory rites of the normal Sunday services begin with acts of confession and pardon, a legacy of the Middle Ages.

Increased concern has been shown in recent years for penitential seasons such as Advent and Lent and occasions such as Ash Wednesday. The Puritan Tradition long had special days of humiliation and fasting as well as days of thanksgiving. There is also an old Methodist tradition of watch night services and covenant services that contained significant acts of confession and rededication to a life of Christian discipleship. The 1549 *BCP* had a service for Ash Wednesday with the fierce curses from Deuteronomy 27—a service renamed in 1662 "A Commination, or Denouncing of God's Anger and Judgements Against Sinners." The current official Ash Wednesday liturgy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) includes a lengthy "Litany of Penitence" followed by the imposition of ashes and observance of the eucharist. Somewhat more mellow observations of Ash Wednesday have become common in many churches with optional imposition of ashes. Much of the value of corporate reconciliation is of an occasional nature and could work best when tied to special times in the church year or civil life.

The Middle Ages saw development of the church's understanding of what it experienced in reconciliation. Peter Lombard has much to say about reconciliation (seventy pages), indicating great development by the twelfth century in the frequent use of this sacrament by all. Most important, he tells us "that by penance not only once, but often, we rise from our sins … true penance may be done repeatedly."[3] The process of reconciliation that Lombard discusses in detail is summed up by the Council of Florence as involving three acts of penitence as the matter of the sacrament: "contrition of the heart … confession with the mouth … [and] satisfaction for sins … chiefly by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving." The form was the words of the priest (the minister of this sacrament): "I absolve you."[4]

Reconciliation was not considered a sacrament in any of the Reformation churches although Luther encouraged private penance, and penitential elements became a conspicuous part of Sunday worship. Despite all its pastoral and theological problems, the medieval practice of penance did enable men and women to live life with the concrete assurance that God had truly acted to forgive them when they had been truly contrite, confessed to a priest, and performed works of satisfaction. The Reformation brought the sense that all Christians could exercise a priestly role to one another in confessing and pardoning one another. All Protestant traditions found

standards of discipline and judgment necessary, though means of enforcement varied. Calvin tied the disciplinary action of **fencing the tables** (that is, excluding notorious sinners, 1 Cor. 11:27) to the eucharist, and for Methodists, Wesley demanded communion tickets to verity the appropriate spiritual intention for communion. Both practices placed a severe disciplinary burden on the eucharist.

The more recent concepts behind current reforms in reconciliation are actually very old. They focus on the nature of sin as an offense against neighbor as well as God. In various rites, the whole community engages in listening to God's word in scripture, conducting examination of conscience, pleading for forgiveness, promising genuine repentance, and hearing a declaration of God's will to forgive. The corporate nature of sin in such forms as racism, nationalism, classism, sexism, gender discrimination, and other injustices which groups practice against others comes in for examination and confession in many of these rites. A recovery and ritualizing of the biblical practice of lament sometimes precedes rites of reconciliation to put complaint, complicity, and confession before God and to accentuate the need for human action. Thus, services of reconciliation are deeply representative of the Christian pursuit of justice.

MINISTRY TO THE SICK

The church's ministry to the sick has involved a variety of ritual acts over the centuries. These have ranged from simple bedside prayer to public healing services. From the 1960s, there has been a strong shift in practice on the part of Roman Catholics and increased interest among Protestants in exploring new ways of ministering to the sick.

The Gospels are full of accounts of Jesus' healing ministry, and Acts makes it clear that the apostles continued in this work. Mark 6:13 tells us the twelve "anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them" while Jesus was still with them. Apostolic practice is abundantly chronicled, but the key passage for subsequent developments is James 5:14-16. Several matters stand out in this passage. The elders or presbyters (the council presiding over a church) have a special ministry of healing. Their function is to "pray over" the sick "anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord." The purpose is definitely healing of the body, but it is also accompanied by

forgiveness of sins. Therefore, all Christians are advised to “confess your sins to one another, … so that you may be healed.”

The use of oil for healing purposes was widespread in the ancient world and was both used externally for **anointing** and taken internally by mouth. For Christians, such use was natural since “Messiah” or “Christ” means “anointed one.” Both human prayer and divine activity are joined: prayer to save and the Lord to raise up. The statement of the power to heal is strong in James 5 though no more so than Mark 16:18: “they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

The most striking part of the passage, of course, is the link of physical healing to forgiveness of sin. We are inclined to distinguish sharply between these two, but the writer is concerned with full restoration, both bodily and spiritually. Quite clearly the purpose of anointing and prayer is both physical and spiritual healing.

Our next clear insight into anointing of the sick comes in *The Apostolic Tradition*. After the eucharistic prayer, someone may offer oil and God is asked to grant that “it may afford strengthening to all tasting [it] and health to all using it,” thereby indicating both internal and external application.[5] Sarapion of Thmuis in Egypt gives us more detail; he includes a prayer over the oil after the eucharistic prayer: “that every fever and every demon and every illness may be cured through the drinking and anointing.”[6] A subsequent prayer in Sarapion’s collection is even more explicit in listing the medicinal and exorcistic virtues ascribed to the oil. In these early centuries, anyone in need of healing (or their friends) would bring oil to church, have it blessed, and then drink it or anoint themselves. The Eastern churches were more insistent on having priests perform the act of anointing. The West eventually made it normal for priests to anoint with oil that had been blessed by the bishop.

Well into the Middle Ages, the purpose of anointing the sick was seen as restoration to health, both physical and spiritual. Lombard says it has “a double purpose, namely for the remission of sins, and for the relief of bodily infirmity.” The one who receives it properly is “relieved both in body and in soul, provided it is expedient that he be relieved in both.”[7] Lombard then launches into a long defense of repetition of the sacrament in case of recurring illness. But the later twelfth century increasingly saw anointing solely as preparation of the dying soul for entrance into heaven,

as implied by the name **extreme unction**. This was a drastic change from the earlier conception and practice, which saw anointing as involving healing for both soul and body. Prior to Vatican II, the church appealed to the scholastic theologians to support the understanding that unction was the "sacrament of consecration for death."

Whereas the earliest method of anointing seems to have been wherever there was pain in the body, by the late Middle Ages anointing was performed on the eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, hands, feet, and loins—all the parts or orifices of the body believed to be capable of sin. By the fifteenth century, it was determined that it should be given only to those in danger of death. The form was: "Through this holy unction and his most tender compassion, the Lord grants thee forgiveness of whatever sins thou hast committed by the sight," and so on, the matter being olive oil blessed by the bishop.[8] The benefit is "the healing of the mind and, so far as is expedient, of the body also," a rather dubious second thought.

Subsidiary sacraments and **sacramentals** also grew up as part of the church's ministry to the sick and dying. These included a series of psalms, prayers, lessons, and sprinkling with holy water for use when visiting the sick. The priest would hear confession (if the person could hear and speak), administer confirmation if not done previously, and give last communion (the **viaticum)**. An apostolic blessing was provided, and, at death, the soul of the dying was commended to God with the prayer: "Depart, O Christian soul." In all this, just as the catechumenate made a ritual of the whole process of conversion, so the rites of the sick made a ritual of the whole process of dying as a Christian.

Little of this survived the Reformation. Calvin denounced anointing as "playacting, by which, without reason and without benefit, they wish to resemble the apostles."[9] The apostles' gift of healing was a "temporary gift," and Calvin would have none of the current way "these fellows [Catholics] smear with their grease not the sick but half-dead corpses." Cranmer preserved portions of the Sarum "order for visiting a sick man," though abbreviating it greatly. The 1549 *BCP* retained a psalm, prayers, an exhortation, the creed in interrogatory form (as at baptism), confession and absolution, psalmody, and anointing, "upon the forehead or breast only." The anointing disappeared in the 1552 revision. Cranmer's 1549 rite for "The Communion of the Sick" provided that on communion days some of

the elements should be reserved and brought from the church celebration to the sickroom (extended communion). On other days, there was to be an abbreviated celebration “in the sick man’s house.” Calvin, however, disagreed: reservation was “useless” since the sick could not hear the institution and promises. If these were recited in the sickroom there was “a true consecration,” but prior consecration was of no effect.[10] Peter Martyr sided with Calvin, and any mention of **reservation of the eucharist** vanished in the 1552 *BCP*.

All traditions continued forms for **visitation of the sick**. Most of these involved the reading of scripture, prayers, and confession for those anxious to die well. Early Methodism saw frequent sickroom communion celebrations. Anointing reappeared among the Church of the Brethren early in the eighteenth century. Pentecostal and charismatic groups that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries regularly utilized anointing, laying on of hands, and extemporaneous prayer in their private and public ministries to those ailing in body and heart, and continue such largely unscripted practices in the twenty-first century.

Public healing services have become more frequent in Protestant, Roman Catholic, and charismatic/evangelical circles. Inside and outside the United States, these are sometimes associated with shrines. Radio, television, and internet or online ministries have spread the popularity of such services enormously. Christian Science provides a healing ministry. All these efforts reflect the persistence of deep human need for healing and wholeness.

Vatican II gave instructions to broaden the sacrament and rename it the “anointing of the sick” for anyone “in danger of death from sickness or old age” (*CSL*, par. 73). Today there has been apparent success in reversing the twelfth-century narrowing so that the sacrament is given to the elderly or anyone seriously ill and may be repeated. The new rites include “Visitation and Communion of the Sick,” “Rite of Anointing a Sick Person,” “Viaticum,” “Rite of the Sacraments for Those Near Death— Continuous Rite of Penance, Anointing, and Viaticum,” “Confirmation of a Person in Danger of Death,” “Rite for the Commendation of the Dying,” and assorted texts. Many options are provided to adapt the rites for varying circumstances. For those dying baptized, three or even four sacraments are

provided as forms of therapeutic ministry (reconciliation, confirmation, anointing, and eucharist).

Within Protestantism, there has been a significant recovery of both public and sickroom healing services. The Episcopal Church renamed and extensively revised its “Ministration to the Sick.” Anointing is now provided as an integral (though optional) part of the rite, and there is provision for both sickroom celebration of the eucharist or use of the reserved sacrament. There is also “Ministration at the Time of Death” with the traditional commendation “Depart, O Christian soul” and prayers for a vigil. Lutherans provide a service for “Healing” with options for prayers, laying on of hands, and anointing. United Methodists and the United Church of Christ have both public and private healing services that allow for anointing, the laying on of hands, and may include a eucharist; the United Methodists include a eucharistic prayer appropriate for the occasion. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) provides five services under the broad heading “Healing and Wholeness” inclusive of rites for both individual and congregational settings.

There are many touchy theological issues involved in the ministry of healing, and the church has not always been willing to deal with them. The late medieval narrowing of anointing to a final catch-all sacrament of reconciliation simplified things considerably but it meant the church tended to lose sight of the unity of spiritual and physical affliction about which the Bible was so realistic. The result was a convenient but unrealistic dualism between body and soul. Though the New Testament is generally careful not to make illness the result of sin, it does show a close relation of the two as when Jesus heals by forgiving sin (Matt. 9:2-6) or in the James 5:14-16 passage. A large part of the ministry of Jesus and the apostles was spent healing people’s bodies as well as souls, and churches are commended in James 5 to do likewise.

There are certainly difficulties in the modern world in making anointing have the sign value it once did in a culture where everyone associated anointing with healing and personal hygiene. But there would seem to be real pastoral value in having such an objective act as part of ministry to the sick in order to do something visible and concrete besides oral prayers. Frequently, the sick cannot hear or understand spoken prayers but can perceive acts such as anointing and loving, appropriate touch. Given its

biblical roots and long history, anointing would seem to be a most appropriate act.

The issues pertaining to the reserved sacrament have changed greatly since the Reformation. As early as Justin Martyr, communion elements were sent to those absent (the sick and imprisoned).[11] The fears the Reformation had of adoration of the consecrated elements seem less problematic today. Fresh possibilities of ministry have opened here. A sickroom celebration with a small group of people may seem a fuller sign since the participants are present, but this is not always possible.

A central problem in ministry to the sick is how to express adequately the church's loving concern for both body and soul, the whole person. James 5:16 suggests that all Christians are to participate in confessing and praying for one another "so that you may be healed." Our Christian neighbor, to whom we are united in baptism, has a claim on us, and we on that person, to share in sustaining health. In this sense, ministry to the sick is an important relationship of love within the community of faith. Healing is a concern in which the whole community of faith makes its love for an ailing member visible. Relationships of love demand honesty and peace of conscience for which mutual confession becomes a part of healing of both mind and body.

Although only a few may have the ministry of anointing or bringing communion, all are called to engage in intercessory prayer for the sick. Ministry to the sick is by the whole Christian community, though most of it will take place outside the sickroom. Every Sunday service ought to include the sick and injured in the corporate prayers of intercession, and all members ought to engage in this ministry in their personal devotions. Ministry to the sick is an important part of making love visible as God acts through the community of faith.

A few pastoral dimensions are clear. Ministry to the sick involves participation of all the congregation, but much systematic visitation may get left to the clergy. Much could be said about the need for more objective acts of ministry such as anointing and communion. There are many places where actions speak louder than words, and the sickroom is often one of these. One often despairs of saying the right thing but sometimes an expressive gesture can be more nearly adequate. Frequently one's presence, just being there, is a foremost sign of love. But a general sensitivity to what

we do as well as to what we say ought to be cultivated. Taking the patient's hand, placing one's hand on the sick person's forehead, anointing with prayer, and giving communion are important forms of this ministry. Clergy never engage in ministry alone but share it with the rest of the Christian community. Concern for the sick ought to flow over into both public and private worship. More structures need to be devised to encourage laypeople to visit and bring communion to the sick, many of whom a pastor cannot reach regularly. This is an important part of the ministry of the laity, too important to leave to chance.

Churches need to practice public services of healing of body and soul that are not spectacular, that do not make extravagant claims, but do take seriously that God does act in self-giving in public worship. Not the least of God's gifts is the gift of healing of body and soul. Public services of healing involving reading of scripture, prayer, laying on of hands, and (perhaps) anointing testify to God's will to health and the Church's concern for people's bodies as well as their souls.

We turn now to look at the various unique events or passages through which we pass in this life. We shall consider events that are not recurrent cycles but typically occur once in a lifetime.

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

There are few, if any, occasions more joyful than a wedding. Yet the church's approach to weddings has been a slow and cautious one, always willing to leave most of the festivities outside the church door. Even now the wedding service is a curious amalgam of Christian components and elements from other sources (cultural, religious, family). The words are an unlikely match of liturgical language and legal jargon. Typically, the minister serves as both pastor and civil servant, subject to the canons or laws of both ecclesiastical and civil societies. Weddings are a strange combination of Christ and culture.

The New Testament, though it frequently uses wedding imagery, tells us nothing about Christian weddings. We do have an account of the Jewish wedding feast Jesus attended at Cana (John 2:1-11), but all we learn is that it was not a somber and sober occasion. Early writers tell us little more. Apparently, the churches were content to allow local customs to persist.

These included the Roman betrothal ceremony in which promises for the future wedding were made and a ring given. The Roman wedding rite contained the joining of hands, sacrifice at the family altar, the wedding banquet with a wedding cake, and marriage bed rites. These ceremonies started at the home of the bride and concluded at the new home of the couple. The betrothal vows, joining of hands, and giving of a ring persist in Christian weddings today. The church's role for many centuries seems to have been limited to influencing Christians to marry Christians and, in some places, to encouraging couples to marry with the bishop's approval. Christian blessings were substituted for blessings in the name of pagan deities, and the eucharist might be celebrated in place of pagan sacrifice.[12]

Other contextual practices accumulated as the church converted northern Europe: rice as a fertility symbol, giving away the bride, bridesmaids dressed to confuse evil spirits who might hex the bride (apparently evil spirits were none too perceptive), the wedding veil as a similar protection, and the offering of money. For centuries, weddings continued to take place in private homes or public settings, and the church's involvement was minimal. The church's encroachment was unintentional. With the growth of more systematic legal systems in Europe, it became increasingly necessary to have written records of weddings to prevent clandestine marriages and to provide for legitimacy of offspring and uncontested inheritances. Wealthy people (cf. Jan van Eyck's portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and bride) could afford painted portraits as a record; ordinary people needed a written certificate. In most villages, the only literate person was the priest ("clergy" meant "learned"), and his presence became increasingly necessary at weddings simply to witness and record them legally. A nuptial Mass (distinct from the wedding itself) would frequently be celebrated at the parish church after the wedding and the newly married couple blessed just before the eucharistic fraction.

The legal character of the wedding ceremony is its most distinctive feature. Weddings consist essentially of a public contract freely and mutually assented to before witnesses. The traditional language, "to have and to hold," is language still used in conveyance of property. "From this day forward" dates the contract. Then follows the unconditional nature of said contract, "for better for worse." "Till death us do part" terminates the above, and "I give thee my troth" is the pledge of faithfulness to it. All this

is lawyers' talk, not liturgists' talk. Words almost identical to today's vows appear in English in fourteenth-century manuscripts, long before other liturgical documents were translated into the vernacular. The center of this most joyful occasion is a legal transaction, and the performing "ministers" of the marriage are the partners themselves.

By the twelfth century, weddings were moving to the church door or porch where most of a village's legal transactions took place in the sight of God. The priest had by now become requisite for the wedding itself. A nuptial Mass and blessing inside the church often followed the wedding. The nuptial Mass was prohibited in Advent and Lent. Chaucer tells us of his Wife of Bath, "husbands at the church door she had five" and was ready for more. Luther's wedding rite (1529) still took place at the church door and then moved inside for scripture reading and blessing. In the English Reformation, the full wedding service finally (after fifteen hundred years) took place inside the church building.

Eastern Orthodox churches have preserved distinctive symbolic ceremonies such as exchanging the vows and rings in the vestibule (the world), processing inside the church (the kingdom), crowning both bride and groom as a symbol of the kingdom of God (their future family), both drinking from a single cup, and a triple procession around a table in the nave. Theologically, the priest is considered the actual minister of the sacrament. He represents Christ, who acts in this sacrament within his body, the church.

By and large, the Reformation found few changes necessary beyond substituting the vernacular for the entire service and simplifying it somewhat. Wedding rites have always tended to be conservative since society has such an enormous stake in their proper observance. The Church of England continued to require three prior readings of **banns** (public announcements of the forthcoming wedding) thus underscoring society's involvement. The woman's promise in the *Sarum Manuale*, "to be bonere and buxum in bedde and at te borde," was dropped, but much of the medieval service was retained. Psalm 128 asking that they may "see [thy] children's children" and a prayer for the fruitfulness of the union were retained, but the church did not press for a miracle; these items could be omitted "where the woman is past child birth." Rubrics called upon the couple to receive the eucharist "the same day of their marriage."

Puritan objections brought the removal of some ceremonies, such as the giving of rings, but most of them were quietly restored in subsequent years. The tendency in Protestantism in the past hundred years has been to retain or to recover much of the pre-Reformation shape of the service. Protestants have been reluctant to accept the frankly sexual nature of the rite as it appeared in the Reformation. At least the medieval-Reformation rites acknowledged that marriage involved sex and usually produced children. The Church of England may still use that wonderful line in the vows: "With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship," but that proved too much for eighteenth-century American Episcopalians. From Luther's "Order of Marriage" comes the use of Matthew 19:6, "What God has joined together, let no one separate" and the declaration, "I pronounce them joined in marriage."[13] Cranmer and most Protestant services used these or similar words. English-speaking Protestantism generally follows the medieval-Anglican versions of the vows, including the **betrothal vows** (future tense: "N., wilt thou have … ") and the **espousal vows** (present tense: "I, N., take thee … ") and the giving of the rings ("With this ring … "). Wesley's 1662 Prayer Book revision omitted giving away the bride and her receiving a ring; his descendants restored both.

Recent revisions of the marriage rite have much in common. In most of them, the obligations of the community are underlined, such as the congregation taking a vow "to uphold these two persons in their marriage." Many newer versions try to make the wedding rite a full service with hymns, lessons, and other acts of worship provided to make it resemble a typical Christian Sunday worship service.

There has been a marked shift among Protestants toward suggesting the eucharist as part of the service for Christian couples. Roman Catholics encourage the eucharist for Catholics. Propers for nuptial eucharists are provided in several churches. In most cases, there are numerous options and far greater possibilities for flexibility than ever existed before. Several churches make provision for the blessing of a civil service held previously. A few service books contain materials for wedding anniversaries and the renewal of marriage vows.

Another common characteristic is emphasis on equality. Women no longer promise to "obey him, and serve him," and the giving away of the bride has disappeared in some services, though made an option in others. A

positive statement of God's goodness in creating us appears in many rites, though most are still reticent about mentioning the possibility (or current existence) of a family except the Roman Catholic.

Certainly, the most noticeable common feature is the espousal vow itself, worded to state lifelong intent ("as long as we both shall live"). This is specifically stated in many current official rites and is a clear sign of a split between much of contemporary culture and Christian ideals. A common feature in recent rites is avoidance of the clerical "I pronounce" in favor of a statement such as that of the United Church of Canada: "*N*. and *N*. have made a covenant of marriage before God and in the presence of all of us…. Therefore, I declare them to be husband and wife."[14]

The church's thinking about the wedding service has been greatly influenced by the fact that so much canon law focuses on questions of marriage. This has tended to make reflection on marriage revolve more around legalistic controversies than liturgical ones. Indeed, except for the Reformation debate over whether matrimony was a sacrament, theological and pastoral controversies over the rite itself were almost nil until the twentieth century.

Two New Testament passages have been of prominence in the church's thinking about marriage: the sayings of Jesus about the indissolubility of marriage (Matt. 19:9 and 5:32) and Ephesians 5:22-23. The rites of the Western church have ignored the eschatological references to Christ comparing himself to the bridegroom and his disciples as sharing in the wedding feast (Matt. 9:15; 25:1-13), an allusion to the coming reign of God. The Ephesians passage calls marriage "a great mystery (*mystérion*) … with respect to Christ and the church" (5:32, literal trans.). The church has relied on this passage as indicating the completeness of the union between husband and wife, though it may tell us even more about the union between Christ and Church. The Greek word *mystérion* became *sacramentum* in Latin, thus ensuring the eventual inclusion of marriage among the seven sacraments for Catholics.[15]

The early church had few problems in interpreting marriage in a monogamous culture. Even Tertullian could find little to complain about in the marriage rites of non-Christians as long as Christian blessings and sacrifice were substituted as equivalents.

Peter Lombard puts matrimony last in his list of sacraments and follows Augustine in noting that marriage was the only sacrament instituted before the fall, being initiated originally as a duty and, after the fall, as a remedy against lust.[16] Augustine understood quite well the evils of which he spoke but is hardly positive in recommending marriage as "a remedy for the sick." But Lombard mentions the creation narrative, Cana, and Ephesians 5, to show "that marriage is a good thing otherwise it would not be a sacrament; for a sacrament is a sacred sign."[17] Lombard shows that sexual union is necessary to reflect the fullness of the union between Christ and the church.

Indeed, some medieval theologians came to believe that the actual sexual union was the real matter of the sacrament, an act rather difficult for the church to administer. But the actual giving of the contract "by mutual consent uttered aloud at the spot" came to be considered the true form and matter of this sacrament. Since Christ had left no form, the church was free to change the actual words used but not the necessity of a mutual free consent. The church may forbid marriage because of various impediments such as clandestinity, marriage under duress, or false consent. The amount of Catholic canon law dealing with marriage is complex.

The resulting consensus (in the West) was that the couple themselves are the only proper ministrants of this sacrament, it being the one sacrament a Roman Catholic priest or bishop cannot perform, though he may administer a nuptial Mass and bless the union.

According to the *Decree for the Armenians*, the purposes of marriage are threefold: "first, the begetting of children and their bringing up in the worship of the Lord; secondly, the fidelity that husband and wife should each maintain toward the other; thirdly, the indissoluble character of marriage, for this typifies the indissoluble union of Christ and the Church."[18]

The chief change the Reformation made was to deny that marriage was a sacrament. Calvin speaks for all the reformers:

> No man ever saw it [matrimony] administered as a sacrament until the time of Gregory [VII]. And what sober man would ever have thought it such? Marriage is a good and holy ordinance of God; and farming, building, cobbling, and barbering are lawful ordinances of God, and yet not sacraments. For it is required that a sacrament be not

> only a work of God but an outward ceremony appointed by God to confirm a promise. Even children can discern that there is no such thing in matrimony.[19]

The Reformation, however, was almost as conservative in understanding the experience as it was about the rite itself. The first *BCP* tells us the ends of marriage are, first "the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and praise of God. Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication, … Thirdly, for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity." The English Puritans reversed this order and put first mutual "help and comfort." Finally, I Corinthians 13 took precedence over I Corinthians 7. Modern thought has accepted the Puritan reordering of priorities in the purpose of marriage, although popular culture is prone to stress romantic infatuation. If one had to choose between a purely romantic notion of love, based solely on mutual attractiveness rather than on mutual responsibility, then the medieval-Reformation purposes do not sound so bad. Society's need for procreation to ensure survival, though, is far less urgent today.

The most important change in recent years has been a new emphasis on marriage as covenant rather than as contract. This represents a return to a biblical and early Christian (and pagan Roman) perspective in which God is seen as acting to witness and guarantee that a covenant will be carried out with all fidelity. The medieval tendency, pursued by the scholastic theologians, to think of marriage in terms of contract instead of covenant, made it easy for the reformers to deny that matrimony was a sacrament. After all, most contracts deal with impersonal matters in which the action of God is not at all apparent. Rarely do contracts involve love. A covenant relationship, on the other hand, is based on a lifelong ideal of mutual love, not the prudence of a legal contract. It is significant that Vatican II always speaks of marriage in terms of covenant rather than as contract.

Several concerns are prominent in recent thought about the marriage rite. Vatican II mandated that various local "praiseworthy customs and ceremonies" be not only retained but also encouraged (*CSL*, par. 77). Inculturation is clearly favored if there is a clear declaration of lifelong consent in the vows on the part of both parties. The gross inequalities of the

old nuptial blessing (which prayed that only the woman “be faithful and chaste” and “fortify herself against her weakness”) are changed to “equal obligation to remain faithful to each other” (CSL, par. 78). All churches have become subject to pressures to lessen weddings as a time of worship by the addition of sentimentalities, especially in music. This raises the question of whether the church should perform wedding ceremonies.

The best argument in its favor seems to be that the church as a community of faith has an intimate concern in surrounding a Christian couple with love and in ministering to them. A new relationship of love is established when one enters the marriage covenant just as when one enters the church covenant through initiation. The wedding is a visible sign of this new relationship of love and calls others to nurture this love in the same way the church undertakes in love to nurture the faith of a newly baptized infant or adult. In both cases, the relationship of love is a permanent one. Not only does the wedding couple contract with each other but also the community itself makes a covenant to uphold them. The reading of the banns beforehand and asking if there is any impediment at the start of the wedding help underscore the social nature of marriage. The family, inaugurated at marriage, is in essence a small church modeled on mutual love within the body of Christ. The eschatological image of the Eastern churches of the family as a foretaste and small model of the kingdom of God is instructive.

Emerging and inclusive rites for some churches celebrate the unions of same-gender couples and of persons not identified by binary categories. As of 2023, same-sex marriage has been legalized in thirty-four countries around the world, notably North and South America, in Europe, South Africa, and Australia. Among churches in the United States, several have all given official recognition to same-sex marriage, though these churches also allow ministers to abstain from conducting same-sex marriages as a matter of personal theological disagreement. Some denominations, such as the United Church of Christ and The Episcopal Church, have published rites with expansive gender language and pronouns appropriate for same-sex couples.[20]

Even so, homosexuality continues to be illegal in most of Africa and all of Asia, and churches in these areas of the world face different theological and cultural pressures regarding same gender and non-binary marriage. Not

all the relevant issues are theological and cultural, however. In the United States, ministers who officiate at weddings serve as agents of the state, and this entails legal considerations. To be specific, can a minister of a church that forbids the blessing of same-sex marriages or unions still legally serve as the agent of the state if the state requires an *authorized* minister of the gospel?[21] Churches will need to address these and other evolving issues regarding marriage.

Not all the cultural issues of marriage involve members of Christian churches. What obligation, for example, do the churches have to minister to nonbelievers who ask for a Christian wedding service or desire a non-religious wedding ceremony in the church building as wedding venue? One must ask if such an arrangement is a necessary service or a surrender to a secular world. The more recent rites for marriage are specifically designed for people of Christian faith. These rites must be adapted if one or both of the couple are not Christians as a matter of integrity to avoid making statements they do not believe.

Today, many rites also take into account persons who enter into a new marriage after a divorce and may be blending families. This is a new development as Western churches have not, historically, provided specific rites of remarriage after divorce. On the other hand, for many centuries the Eastern churches have made provision for remarriage with integrity.

One trend seems clear if one can judge from recent rites. The Christian wedding is conceived of as a covenant before witnesses by two persons who, by their free and mutual consent, make unconditional promises of lifelong fidelity to each other with the help of God. There is nothing new or novel about this; it represents an understanding present ever since the New Testament. Luther (and some of the Gallican rites before him) simply reinforced this view by adding Matthew 19:6 to the rite itself: “What God has joined together, let no one separate,” words which most of the new rites contain. These words certainly imply a sacramental view of marriage even though Luther repudiated such. They indicate that God works through the church’s actions to bring about a new and permanent relationship of love.

Numerous pastoral concerns arise out of the need to show forth this distinctive nature of Christian marriage and the rite itself. Presiding at weddings is certainly one of the most joyful pastoral roles ministers or priests have but also one of the most demanding in complexity.

First, this ministry demands considerable time and skill in counseling those desiring to be married. The state has its own laws regarding who may be married, and most churches have additional standards. The role of priests or ministers is to be faithful to their church's standards and this involves the ability to say "no." Certainly this must be the case where there is no willingness or time for counseling. Frankly, refusing to perform a walk-in wedding may be performing a service for people, though unlikely to be so understood.

The positive side of counseling, both premarital and after marriage has begun, is the ability to present the church's witness to the meaning of responsible love, so widely made trivial in our society. The pastoral role, of course, is contingent upon having the congregation's support in upholding a couple's intention of a Christian marriage. We have not just the church's doctrines to present but also the church as a living community.

When clergy perform a wedding, they also act as unpaid civil servants of the state, and in some states, clergy must register and receive licensure. That means they are subject to the laws of the state, province, or country in which the wedding is performed. Violation of these laws, either through ignorance or knowingly, is a criminal activity for which there are fines and penalties. There is no substitute for making oneself familiar with the laws of the *civil jurisdiction in which the wedding is to be performed*. In the United States, no uniformity exists from state to state about when and where a wedding license is valid, the number of witnesses needed, or the method for filing the wedding certificate. The only way to be sure is to check with the county clerk in the state in which the wedding is to be performed. For example, in some states, the wedding may be performed only in the county issuing the license and sometimes only within a specific number of days.

Due respect for ministerial etiquette ought to be observed when performing a wedding in a congregation other than one's own. This ought to be done only at the incumbent pastor's invitation, who deserves a letter of thanks from the visiting minister.

All the skills of a diplomat are needed in helping to plan a wedding. Various matters, such as the music, can easily get out of hand unless there are standards of excellence and appropriateness to suggest. A general rule is that the pastor should be consulted from the very beginning of making wedding plans. Friendly persuasion can often prevent distortion of the

religious meaning of the service and lapses in appropriateness for the context of worship. Printed materials have some authority in convincing those in doubt. One's denomination can usually supply a list of recommended wedding music. Each congregation ought to publish rules for use of its property for weddings, including such items as who can use the organ, a schedule of fees for use of the church building and custodial services, where and how flowers and candles may be placed so as not to damage the furnishings or conceal liturgical centers, and rules about photographers. The minister or priest is in a much better position to require appropriate Christian ritual and music if they can refer to published rules passed by the local parish council, vestry, elders, or official board.

Most Christian couples are open to suggestions about how to make their wedding the finest possible act of Christian worship. The priest or minister must be familiar with the options available. Most new rites give several possibilities and leave much to the clergy's discretion. This is more demanding of pastoral leadership but also provides a better opportunity for ministering. One needs to be familiar with the possibilities (and problems) of celebrating the eucharist with a wedding congregation, some of whom may not be Christians. Since Western Christianity teaches that the couple marry each other and the clergy only preside, this should shape the entire service. Certainly, the couple should face each other in saying their vows and in giving the rings if such are used.

One would have to be very bold, not to say foolhardy, to try a wedding without a rehearsal. If nothing else, the rehearsal ought to build confidence in the couple, who are often very nervous during the actual wedding. The minister or priest especially should rehearse the entrance procession, the taking of hands, the exchange of vows, the giving of rings, and the recession.

Once the wedding is over and the legal details cared for, there are equally important pastoral responsibilities in marriage counseling and integrating the couple in new ways into the life of the congregation. Most of these are happy responsibilities as one watches the maturing of love. Marriage is indeed a "great mystery" through which God works and clergy are privileged to have a part.

ORDINATION AND COMMISSIONING

The majority of Christians have probably never seen an ordination, yet most Christians are served by ordained clergy. In some churches, only bishops perform ordinations, and ministers and priests may rarely be present at an ordination other than their own. Yet nowhere else does the church make so explicit its understanding of the purpose of the church and its ministry. Even though ordination is a rite reserved for the tiny minority of Christians who enter ordained ministry, it ought to be better understood by all Christians.

The witness of the New Testament to the rites of ordination is minimal. It consists in the laying on of hands with prayer after election or appointment by the apostles (Acts 6:1-6, 13:3, 14:23; 1 Tim. 4:14, 5:22; and 2 Tim. 1:6). It is accompanied by fasting and likely includes a charge to those ordained (Acts 20:28). The act of **laying on of hands**, as we have seen in initiation, is a sign of the passing on of power, blessing, or the setting apart of another person by one authorized to do so.

The New Testament tells us of a variety of ministries (1 Cor. 12:28). There is development within its pages of a small and by no means decisive list that hardly distinguishes lay from ordained ministries. The *Didache* speaks of prophets, obviously people of special gifts, and we learn from *The Apostolic Tradition* of confessors who had suffered for their faith, which was considered sufficient consecration without laying on of hands unless one was to become bishop. In *The Apostolic Tradition*, only three receive ordination: bishops, presbyters, and deacons.

The early sacramentaries contain appropriate prayers for the ordination of all three orders: typically a bidding prayer, a collect, and the ordination prayer itself.[22] Usually the last are a catena of scriptural references, beginning with Moses and culminating in invocation of the Holy Spirit for the work of the appropriate order.

The early Middle Ages saw the elaboration of four **minor orders: porter, lector, exorcist**, and **acolyte**. At first these were simply instituted by being given the tools of their trade, the *porrectio instrumentorum* or **tradition of instruments** (key, book of lessons, book of exorcism, and candle, candlestick, and cruet). The ceremony of tonsure (cutting of hair) marked the pledge of celibacy and entrance into the **major orders**, which

came to be reckoned as **subdeacon, deacon**, and **priest**. Rites for each minor order developed with an address, a formula as they were given the symbols of their office, and two prayers of blessing. The subdeacon shares in the ministry of the altar table, so celibacy was imposed at this stage. Originally these orders were permanent and not steppingstones to a "higher" order. For centuries, bishops of Rome were chosen from among the Roman deacons.

The latest revision of the *Roman Pontifical* (English trans. 1978)[22] abolished the tonsure, the minor orders of porter and exorcist, and the major order of subdeacon. It produced rites of "Institution" of readers and of acolytes and a rite of "Admission to Candidacy for Ordination as Deacons and Priests." Ordination rites for three major orders follow: bishop, priest, and deacon.

Abolition of several orders is not the only drastic simplification that has occurred in the new *Roman Pontifical*. The Middle Ages saw the accretion of a number of subsidiary ceremonies, largely the result of fusing ninth-century and tenth-century Gallican practices to the more restrained Roman rites. Such newer ceremonies included anointing the hands of the priest, vesting ordinands in the appropriate vestment, and the tradition of instruments. These had found their way, via the tenth-century Romano-Germanic Pontifical, back to Rome itself in the eleventh century. The ceremonies were further elaborated by **William Durandus**, Bishop of Mende, France, in the late thirteenth century, by the Roman curia late in the fifteenth, and became part of the *Roman Pontifical*, as revised in 1596. Until recently, the subsidiary ceremonies overshadowed the ordination prayer and laying on of hands. A series of short prayers and an imperative formula had taken the place of the primitive great ordination prayer. That prayer has now been restored to prominence. The ancient role of the people in the election of the candidates and in acclaiming them "worthy" had disappeared but is now recovered, at least symbolically.

The rites the reformers inherited were of confused priorities. It is not surprising that they had only moderate success in unraveling the historical complexities of ordination. Much of the ceremonial was eliminated. Laying on of hands seems to have been generally maintained though even this was avoided for a time in Geneva and Scotland because of fear of superstition. Minor orders and the subdiaconate were everywhere abolished. Luther

performed one of the earliest Protestant ordinations in 1525, and the rite he eventually devised, though he never published it, became the source of most Lutheran ordinations. His text of 1539 for “Ordination of Ministers of the Word” consists largely of scripture, admonitions, prayer, and the laying on of hands while reciting the Lord’s Prayer.[23] The first Anglican collection of ordination rites (the **ordinal)** dates from 1550 and was revised in 1552. The ordination formula is imperative (“Take thou” or “Receive”) rather than a prayer and is addressed to each candidate during the laying on of hands.

For many Protestants, the great change was that ordination became an act of the local congregation with election once again a real practice. Frequently ordination was practiced by members of the congregation or by ministers of neighboring churches. Most Quakers, of course, dispensed with ordained ministry altogether.

Recent revisions, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, have shown a return to the priorities of the early church. The *Roman Pontifical* and the Episcopal, United Methodist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian services all agree in making the great prayer of ordination the center of the rite with laying on of hands occurring concurrently. These central prayers are modeled on those of *The Apostolic Tradition* and replace imperative formulas with invocation. Most of these rites indicate that ordination should occur in the setting of the eucharist with those being ordained exercising their proper roles in the eucharist. The role of the congregation is magnified with opportunity for acclaiming the candidates or promising support to the ordained. Subsidiary ceremonies are retained in most cases but made clearly secondary to the ordination prayer and laying on of hands. Some churches provide related services for the installation of a pastor. These rites are more remarkable for their similarity than their diversity.

How have Christians understood the rite of ordination as functioning within the life of the church? One could easily develop an ecclesiology from the rites themselves, but our concern is with how the rites function.

It is clear from the New Testament onward that ordination is accomplished through prayer and laying on of hands. The central prayer in *The Apostolic Tradition* provides a thanksgiving to God for what God has already done in times past and an invocation of further work in giving requisite gifts to those now being ordained. Thanksgiving and supplication form this prayer much as they do the eucharistic prayer. The Western

church has been much more consistent in testifying to the work of the Holy Spirit in ordination rites than in the case of the eucharist.

The other biblical act, the laying on of hands, signifies the power and authority received by the ordinand to be exercised within the church. Varying views explain how this power and authority relates to continuity and succession whether through persons or through teachings. The variety of gifts that Paul mentions in I Corinthians 12 are all given by the Spirit for one purpose: to be used for the edification of the church. The early understanding of ordination got confused in the course of history. The scholastic urge to fit ordination into the same pattern as that of the other sacraments eventuated in the Council of Florence's decree that the matter "for the priesthood is the cup with the wine and the paten with the bread; for the diaconate, the books of the Gospel, for the subdiaconate, an empty cup placed upon an empty paten."[24] The form for priests, it declared, was, "Receive the power to offer sacrifice in the Church for the living and the dead, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Since Christ did not specify the form or matter of ordination, the church could revise practice. In 1947, Pius XII in *The Apostolic Constitution on Holy Orders* reaffirmed that the matter was laying on of hands. The form he prescribed now appears within the ordination prayer in the *Roman Pontifical*.

The reformers had difficulty accepting the concept that ordination conveys an indelible character. At his most radical, Luther saw ordination as functional in designating one Christian to do what all have the authority to do and, indeed, any could do if stranded on a desert island without benefit of clergy. "We are all equally priests, that is to say we have the same power in respect to the Word and the sacraments."[25] Ordination remained, for Luther, a public calling to "the ministry of the Word." Some churches took this even further in equating ordination with installation into the pastoral office in a local church. Reordination, however, is rarely practiced when one moves to serve another congregation or when one changes denominations. It is, however, a major problem in ecumenical work toward church unity and full communion among churches.

In general, Protestants have avoided the belief that ordination brings specific graces and have looked at it largely as designating people to certain functions. One could argue that the apostolic practice of laying on of hands

suggests a higher concept of authority than the words of theologians may concede. On the other hand, election and acclamation by the people certainly show that whatever power and authority are conferred have meaning only as used in ministry for the church. It is vital to recognize that ordination is something done for the church and not just to individuals. All Christians share in ministry. The ordained represent the local church to the universal church and vice versa. Therefore, the ordained may be called "representative" ministers except in churches where only males are ordained.

Ordination functions within the community of faith as a way of making visible a new relationship of love. The congregation rejoices in someone being called by God to serve it through ordained ministry and for the gifts of leadership he or she brings. It is a service of thanksgiving in that ordination acknowledges and thanks God for God's providential call of a person to ordained ministry and invokes God's further blessing on that individual. Ordination also functions as a formal ecclesiastical call by which the church recognizes that a person has been called of God and is now set aside as one who has suitable gifts and graces to represent the Christian community.

Much has happened in recent years to make the new ordination rites converge. If the various churches were as close in their understanding of orders and ministry as they are in the practice of ordination, Christians would indeed have reached a happy stage for Christian unity. An important statement of ecumenical progress is found in *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* although ministry remains the most controverted of the three topics.[26]

For a significant number of people, there are religious rites through which they pass into a lifetime or short period of service that may or may not involve ordination. We speak of rites that set apart persons for service limited to local communities, such as musicians, church school teachers, and elected officers or leaders, or for a more widespread ministry, among them missionaries, evangelists, and catechists. It is likely that there will be a significant increase in lay ministries in the future, making services of commissioning or installation even more important than now. All the baptized are called to serve both God and neighbor and are thus involved in ministry within the church and outside of it in workplace and school.

RITES OF PASSAGE AND TRANSITIONAL RITUALS

Over time, churches established rituals for crisis, change, and loss in the lives of persons in the community of faith. They continue to do so in light of new circumstances and concerns, such as the rites that emerged related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sacralizing ordinary and extraordinary events locates experience in the context of Christian faith and helps persons transition to a new orientation or understanding of a significant loss. Life crises and changes provide an occasion for the proclamation of the gospel, an expression of confidence in God's presence amid difficulties or challenges, and an affirmation of personal and community faith. Some Christian communities may regard certain of these rituals as "sacramental" because the rituals witness, through symbols and symbolic actions, to the loving grace, actions, and presence of God.

For some situations, the transition from crisis to new orientation may be described as a passage, using language originally developed in the theoretical and ethnographic work of Arnold van Gennep, published as *Les Rites de Passage* (1909) and later refined or developed by other scholars (e.g., Victor Turner and Bruce Lincoln). After observing structural similarities in transitional rituals from several different cultures, van Gennep proposed that these "rites of passage" move through three stages. In the *preliminal phase* (from the Latin *limen*, meaning "threshold"), a person or group is withdrawn or separated from former roles or statuses within the community or society. The *liminal* or *transitional stage* marks the "betwixt and between" period when a person or group is poised to cross the threshold into a new role and way of life within the community or society. The *postliminal or reincorporation stage* indicates the completion of the transition and re-entry, but with a new status or orientation. Christian reconciliation, sickness, marriage, ordination and commissioning, and dying and death can all be interpreted by means of this tripartite pattern. But so also can other life events: an elderly couple needing to leave their home of sixty years would benefit from pastoral and ritual support as they close the door, travel across town, and settle into a downsized apartment or nursing facility. It is not necessary to employ the threefold scheme for every needed

transition in a time of crisis or change, but keeping in mind the complexity of a situation can assist the process for the individual(s), their loved ones, and their community of faith. To the extent that such rites involve the church, they also become helpful for the ongoing interpretation of the event or situation within the community. As communal practices, moreover, rites at times of crisis or change enable the younger generations to learn and appropriate the meanings and purposes of life changes as understood by their community, thus providing a mechanism for coping with their future crises or changes.

In some cases, multiple passages may be occurring simultaneously, with some passages marked ritually and others not. For example, using van Gennep's scheme for a baby's birth: the fetus gestates in the womb, journeys through the "threshold" of the birth canal, and then emerges into waiting arms. The pregnant mother also experiences her own passage, from the discovery of pregnancy (and possible confinement), through labor and delivery, and after the baby's birth assumes the status of "new mother." Her passage could also be read as not pregnant, pregnant, and post-partum. Additional passages for the event of birth can be identified for a partner and grandparents-to-be, for an adoptive parent or parents who will assume the care of the child, and for the extended family. Thus, when reading ritual texts, it is important to ask whose passage is principally addressed and if other passages are directly or indirectly included. Prayers and other statements acknowledging these simultaneous life passages might be provided if absent in the ritual text.

Baptism is most often identified as the Christian rite related to birth, though theologically and liturgically the rite's intention is for "new" birth rather than physical birth. However, a woman's pregnancy did sometimes find liturgical expression in the form of intercessory prayers offered during Mass. A fourteenth-century petition from Provins, France, asked the congregation to "Pray for all pregnant women; that God may give them the grace to see the fruit of their womb presented at the holy baptismal font."[27] Prayers for private use during pregnancy and childbirth appeared in *The Monument of Matrones*, a collection of over 1,500 pages containing writings by women and men, that was published in 1582 by editor Thomas Bentley. This anthology was organized under seven sections or "Lamps"; approximately one third of Lamp 5 contained prayers related to

childbearing, among them ten to be said by a woman in labor and seven to be offered for a woman in labor. More recently, the Roman Catholic *Book of Blessings* (1989) has included orders of blessing for parents and for a woman prior to childbirth. These rites typically are conducted outside of Mass. The Episcopal Church, USA offers a "Blessing of a Pregnant Woman" in its 2018 *Book of Occasional Services*. In many churches, improvised prayers for those expecting a birth are offered during the time of intercessions in the main liturgy of the week, as well as in the home.

Evidence of post-partum rites is more numerous, including prayers for the purification or **"churching" of women** (in imitation of Mary's purification in Luke 2:22-24 based on the requirements of Leviticus 12) and prayers that offer thanksgiving for a safe delivery. The fourth-century Egyptian *Canons of Hippolytus* prescribed that the new mother and her midwives were to sit with the catechumens until a specified period of purification had elapsed—which was different for the delivery of a male child and a female child. Eastern Orthodox churches today still utilize several post-partum practices, with prayers on the first day after a birth, rites for the naming of a child, and the purification and entrance into the church of mother and child on the fortieth day, with prayers and actions for both.[28] By the later Middle Ages, specific Western practices were more variable but generally included purification and thanksgiving rites. The 1549 *BCP* included Psalm 121, the Kyrie and Our Father as the centerpiece of the brief "Order of the Purification of Women," which were continued even as the name and apparent purpose of the rite was adjusted to "The Thanksgiving of Women after Childbirth" in 1552. A rite similar to this "Thanksgiving" continued in the American *BCP* of 1789, though a portion of Psalm 116 replaced Psalm 121. The 1979 *BCP* completed the transition from purification to thanksgiving rite with "A Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child." The current Roman Catholic *Book of Blessings* includes a post-childbirth blessing as well as an order for blessing parents and their adopted child, whereas Protestant worship resources may offer only a single prayer for these occasions. Some Korean communities are now experimenting with Christianized versions of the traditional Korean Baek-il rite that marks an infant's one hundred days after birth and welcomes the child (non-baptismally) into the community.

Historically, some Christian liturgical resources were available when a desired pregnancy was not achieved or completed to term. The Gelasian Sacramentary (8th c.) included a set of Mass propers (*Orationes ad missas pro sterilitate mulierum*) for those unable to conceive, several of which remember before God the biblical women whose "shame" of infertility was by God's intervention turned to fruitfulness. Some medieval sacramentaries included prayers focusing upon the fecundity of Sarah, which, upon request, could be incorporated into a Mass; these found a place in the *Sacerdotale Romanum* (1585) where a short rite was added to address cases of infertility. Such prayers and rites were not included among the official texts of the Reformation, but the need for prayer resources was supplied through unauthorized collections, which is largely still the case today.[29] More attention in recent years has been given to rituals to support those experiencing pregnancy loss through miscarriage or stillbirth. United Methodists have a "Service of Hope after Loss of Pregnancy"; the Presbyterian Church, USA includes in their "Prayer at the Time of Death" a petition that speaks to miscarriage and neonatal death. Funerary rites for some churches have incorporated prayers, specified scripture readings, and texts that speak to the heart on occasions when life and death coincide.

Similar to baptism, **"confirmation"** in its theological and liturgical intention is not an age-specific rite. Nevertheless, for many of those churches that practice it, confirmation occurs at the "age of accountability or maturity," mostly considered to fall around the ages of twelve or thirteen. Thus, confirmation has served as a *de facto* adolescent rite even though it lacks textually and ritually the "adult-making" capacity that might be expected in a passage from childhood to the responsibilities of adulthood. We examine the topic of confirmation in Chapter Seven.

Various social and cultural factors send mixed messages as to when the transition from childhood to adulthood should or could or does occur. Chronological age and sexual maturity may serve as markers, but are not always definitive ones as, for example, when young people are eligible to drive a vehicle but not yet vote, or when persons in their late teens or early twenties live under "adult" supervision in university dormitories— that "adult" being an older student or perhaps even a senior citizen. Is adulthood marked by the first employment? The first major purchase (car, house)? Having children? The lack of social clarity in most cases makes ritualizing

the passage from youth to adulthood complicated indeed, and it must be asked if the ritual is able to fulfill its intention. The culturally derived Latinx **Quinceañera** for young women reaching their fifteenth birthday is designed as a passage, but there is debate whether the passage is actually to adolescence as opposed to adulthood. The Roman Catholic Church in its development of orders for blessing a Quinceañera within and outside of Mass identifies it as a transition from childhood to adolescence, though culturally it is often viewed as an adulthood rite from its original purpose to present a young woman as eligible for marriage. Churches have been developing other local programs and denominational curricula, often tied to preparation for confirmation, to address the human passage toward adulthood. There have been mixed reviews of such programs, but few will question the need to take seriously the transitioning of youth to adulthood in a postmodern society.[30]

As persons mature, they may be called upon to meet the challenges of many life passages: application to and attendance at institutions of higher education; choosing a new name; employment, change of employment, unemployment, and retirement; finding and leaving a home; divorce and remarriage; incarceration and release; being a victim of violence and facing suffering; losing a beloved animal companion; entrance into hospital or hospice care—the list is endless. Some churches are supplying ritual resources (prayers and/or rites) for these situations in both official and unofficial collections; the Roman Catholic *Book of Blessings*, for example, includes numerous orders for various personal needs and occasions. In recent years, Christians who transition their gender identity have been asking for rites to address their concrete need for ritual affirmation of this extremely significant life event. There is certainly a need for more creative work in this area to speak the truth that God stands amidst every human situation.

CARE OF THE DEAD

The final form of ministry to life’s passages is care of the dead. This is usually thought of simply as Christian burial, but that is only part of the process. The service of Christian burial consoles the bereaved and commends the deceased to God. It is a key part of a long process of

teaching, pastoral care, and remembrance. This may not seem a cheerful subject with which to end our study of Christian worship, but it does show that the Christian's whole life involves the praise of God from baptism to burial. And the observance of Christian death has much to tell us about the Christian life itself.

Attitudes about Christian care of the dead, historically, seem to have evolved through three quite different stages: hope, fear, and refusal to think about it. These are reflected in the rites themselves in various ways, some subtle and others less so. The services themselves are often crystallized attitudes about death itself, reflecting both Christian perspectives and those of the local cultures.

We have no New Testament information about care of the dead and very little from the first three centuries C.E. Even *The Apostolic Tradition* tells us nothing except to indicate that there was a Christian cemetery and that the price of burial was to be kept reasonable. Tertullian indicates a funeral eucharist and a yearly eucharist on the anniversary of death ("Of the Crowns," 3). Sarapion gives us a prayer for a dead person before burial. It is mostly recital of God's acts but turns to supplication for the deceased to be at rest, for a final resurrection, for forgiveness of sins, for consolation of the bereaved, and ends with a petition to "give to us all a good end."[31] Augustine tells of the burial of his mother, Monica, mentioning few details except his restraint in tears and the prayers of the funeral eucharist.[32]

Several general observations can be made about early Christian care of the dead. The general atmosphere of Christian burial was that of *hope* in the resurrection. Augustine's dry-eyed statement may be an exception but not too much so. The dead Christian who had kept the faith was treated as a victor, and the funeral procession had the character of the triumph accorded a victorious general on return home. Since cemeteries, in the ancient Mediterranean world, were outside the city walls, the carrying forth of the deceased was a significant part of the rite. It was done to the accompaniment of psalms of hope and praise and shouts of "alleluia." Those in the parade wore white garments, carried palm leaves and lights, and burned incense as the community marched to the cemetery in broad daylight (unlike the nighttime funerals of pagans). Previously, the body had been washed, anointed, and wrapped in linen at the home of the deceased while prayers were said.

The service at the grave involved prayer and celebration of the eucharist. Augustine notes, “The sacrifice of our ransom was offered for her [Monica], when now the corpse was by the grave’s side.” After the corpse was given the final kiss of peace, it was buried with the feet toward the rising sun. An *agape* (love feast or fellowship meal) might follow immediately, and there were services on various days after death and on the anniversary of the death. For heroes of the faith such as martyrs, these anniversaries could be important occasions. The account of the second-century death of Polycarp, “The Martyrdom of Polycarp,” speaks of the community’s intention “to gather together in joy and gladness to celebrate the day of his martyrdom as a birthday, in memory of those athletes who have gone before, and to train and make ready those who are to come hereafter.”[33]

Death, for the Christian, was a “heavenly birthday,” and the saints were commemorated on their birthday (*natalis*) into eternity (that is, their death day!) rather than on their mundane birthday into finite time. Chronicles of their lives and deaths were collected in **martyrologies**, a selection from which was read on each heavenly birthday (death day).

As with weddings, the church was much influenced by Roman burial customs, although it rejected many (such as cremation). The pagan practice of commemoration of the dead by a meal (*refrigerium*) at the gravesite was replaced by the eucharist, and Christian mourners gave food to the poor. The sense of continuity of the family through generations, centering on the family burial plot, is still strong in Rome.

The medieval ethos of Christian care of the dead took a different turn; that of *fear*. Burial came to be draped with the medieval imagination of hell and purgatory and the terrors of dying unprepared. Death became a threat used to discipline the living. Who could ignore a prayer such as that used in the York province: “Deliver him from the cruel fire of the boiling pit”? Most medieval parish churches had graphic mural paintings of the last judgment (the doom) over the chancel arch with the torments of the damned displayed with gusto. Late medieval drama often included a hell’s mouth into which unrepentant sinners were dragged. Dante shows us the whole scheme at its most sophisticated level; for others it was equally vivid and real.

The burial rites came to be permeated with awe and fear over the destination of the soul. The **office of the dead** developed out of psalms originally sung at funerals and eventually had forms to be said at vespers, matins, and lauds. Medieval burials were usually in churchyards. The body was met at the churchyard lych-gate (corpse gate), carried into the church with psalms, the eucharist was celebrated, the dead person was granted absolution, incensed, and sprinkled with holy water. Interment followed in the churchyard or beneath the church. The absolution shows the change from the early church's sense of triumphant victory. The *Dies irae* (day of wrath) chant from the twelfth or thirteenth century reflects the late medieval focus on judgment and the possibility of damnation, so different from the clear confidence of early Christians.

The Reformation did not find it easy to shake loose these attitudes, even though fear of purgatory was no longer a sanction. Luther deplored the mournful character of funerals and wanted to make them stronger expressions of hope. He condemned "popish abominations, such as vigils, masses for the dead, processions, purgatory, and all other hocus-pocus on behalf of the dead" in favor of services stressing the resurrection of the dead with "comforting hymns of the forgiveness of sins, of rest, sleep, life, and of the resurrection of departed Christians."[34] Luther left no burial rite but seems to have utilized hymns, psalms, a sermon, and simple ceremonial.

The minimum was reached in the *Westminster Directory* of 1645, which decreed that the body be "decently attended" to the cemetery but immediately buried "without any ceremony." Even funeral sermons became controversial among both the Scots and English Puritans, for they had often degenerated into eulogies of virtues real and imaginary. Some Puritans regarded burial as purely a secular matter and conducted no services. Calvin had approved of funeral sermons but never provided a liturgy for Christian burial. Usually, the Reformed tradition tolerated a service of psalmody, scripture reading, sermon, and prayer after the burial.

Anglican revisions of the burial rite were more conservative, although there was a further lurch to the left in 1552. Cranmer, in 1549, condensed the office of the dead and assimilated the churchyard procession, the committal, and an optional eucharist (for which propers were given). The service might take place entirely in the graveyard or partly in the church. A conscious effort was made to stress hope through Christ and the

resurrection. In 1552, reference to the eucharist disappeared and the service took place almost wholly at the graveside. The cautious prayers for the dead in 1549 had also vanished. The brief rite that remained consisted of sentences, prayers, Revelation 14:13, I Corinthians 15:20-58, and words of committal, while earth was cast upon the body. Subsequent history has brought expanded psalmody and more prayers. Wesley kept the 1662 *BCP* rite basically, though omitting Psalm 39, a prayer, and the committal. The great change Methodism brought was the addition of fervent hymns of hope.

Modern Christianity, all too often, has forgotten both hope and fear and refused to think about death as part of the Christian message. Cemeteries are now located out in the suburbs of both our cities and our consciousness. Burial customs have become largely commercialized. The seventeenth century saw the introduction of tombstones and private burial plots for ordinary people. Previously, like Hamlet's Yorick, one could occupy a bit of earth for thirty years until it was another's turn. Caskets became common for ordinary people in the nineteenth century and embalming at the time of the Civil War. The result is that moderns have become more superstitious about death than our medieval ancestors though much less colorful and imaginative. To pretend that we can preserve even our name, let alone our body, would doubtlessly have amused medieval people. Yet modern practice tries to camouflage the reality of death and ends up creating more fictions than any earlier age.

Too often, this has been the fault of the church, which has allowed sentimental funeral services of flowers and poetry to prevail instead of the witness of the gospel. And the church, too often, politely sidesteps mention of death in its weekly life, even during the season of Easter, the period focusing on resurrection. The teaching ministry also has neglected treating something as offensive as death.

Recent services have recaptured many of the more affirmative elements of the early Christian attitude to death. Vatican II mandated that "the rite for the burial of the dead should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death" (*CSL*, par. 81). This resurrection emphasis has been largely accomplished. The visual change from black vestments to white (for Christ and resurrection) or green (for growth) marks this strong shift. The post–Vatican II rites, which encourage the following of local custom, provide for

all or parts of the service to occur at stations: in the home of the deceased, in the parish church, at the cemetery chapel, at the grave, or combinations of these. There is also a vigil service and provision for funerals of children. Many options are provided, including celebration of a funeral Mass, anniversary masses, various commemorations, and prayers for the dead.

Other churches show the same emphasis on the paschal nature of the Christian understanding of death. The Presbyterian rite is titled "Funeral: Witness to the Resurrection," and the United Methodist rite is "A Service of Death and Resurrection." The *BCP* has two rites for the "Burial of the Dead" and an outline of a third. All three Episcopal rites contain the possibility of a eucharist as do the United Methodist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran services.[35] Prayers for the dead are an option in the BCP. The greater part of these services comprises psalmody and reading of the scriptural promises.

The Lutheran, United Methodist, and Presbyterian services begin with reference to a Christian's baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, and they show the connection between baptism and burial. The United Methodist service tries to personalize the occasion by a naming of the deceased and witnessing by those who knew the deceased to commemorate the life lived.

How does Christian faith understand the funeral? Its past has been a changing one. As late as the Third Lateran Council of 1179, it was possible to speak of burial of the dead as a sacrament—that is, throughout more than half of the church's history. But Christian burial never received the scholastic attention the seven did, and the failure of both Luther and Calvin to devise funeral rites shows that they had more pressing things to do. Thus, the funeral has never received as much theological consideration as it deserves, although psychologists, sociologists, and popular writers have leaped in to fill the void. The Christian understanding of death has received somewhat more careful theological examination.[36]

What are the possibilities for understanding the function of Christian burial apart from the utilitarian matter of disposal of the body? Two concerns stand out: *to show God's love and the community's support in consoling the bereaved and to commend the deceased to God's gracious care*.

The church works best by honesty as it consoles the living in their grief. We must beware of knowing too much about death. It remains a mystery. Efforts to probe beyond its dark veil, either in modern scientific terms or in speculative pictorial imagery, loosely based on scripture, are all unproductive undertakings. But there are two affirmations that Christian faith can make in all honesty for the benefit of the bereaved. The first of these may seem to be of little comfort, but it is vital to the course of grief and can only cause prolonged trouble if ignored. It is *the reality of death itself*. The Bible is clear: "We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up" (2 Sam. 14:14). For this reason, it is generally better, when possible, to have the body or cremated ashes present at a funeral than to have a memorial service. The reality of death is not denied by a religion with the crucifixion at its heart.

But the second affirmation is the *trustworthiness of God*. This is not a doctrine about death (about which we know very little) but a doctrine of God's trustworthiness (about which we know a great deal). Death makes humans realize how completely dependent they are upon God when all else fails. Whatever lies beyond death is also created by God and experienced before us by Jesus Christ. Christians are not bereft of hope even in the face of death; they are comforted by the only real source of hope in the world: God's gracious love.

The Christian funeral, then, testifies to the realities of death and resurrection. The strong affirmations of scripture are far more potent than any poetry about sleep, passage, or heavenly reunions. God's words in scripture and actions in sacraments are the strong medicine needed at this time, not poetry, flowers, or sentimental statements. It is important that the funeral occur in the beloved community, especially in the familiarity of the church building where words and actions of hope have been experienced on the first day of each week throughout a lifetime.

The presence of the community itself is a strong witness to God's action in love here. Other Christians being there are a visible sign of love. The community together marks the transition of the deceased to a new relationship within the church as the dead person moves to the Church Triumphant beyond the Church Militant here on earth. The role of other Christians at the funeral is to make visible by their presence the environment of love that encompasses the bereaved.

The Christian funeral helps the living to deal honestly and hopefully with death, but it also functions to commend the deceased to God. Theologically and ritually, each baptized Christian has already died and been raised with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-4). Now is the time to remember that God has already shown God's acceptance of us, an acceptance first made visible in our baptism. It is only natural to wish to commend those we love to God's keeping. The hope of resurrection in Christ is so central in Christian faith that we can hardly refrain from praying that God accomplish God's purpose for the deceased. It is most unnatural to pray for a person up to the moment of death and then be silent. God's love continues after death as well as before and carefully worded prayers can commend the dead to God's keeping without implying a belief in purgatory.

The Christian funeral, then, has two functions: ministry to the living and to the dead, although it is impossible to separate these. Both are made possible through the understanding that God acts in Christian burial, as in the sacraments, in new self-giving even at the end of life. The community of faith, entered through the waters of baptism, now for the last time again unites around one to manifest divine love made visible through the community's caring actions.

A few pastoral consequences may be briefly noted. The occasion of death is a time of a sustaining and continuing relationship for which the pastor is likely to have chief responsibility. Counseling with the family before burial and long afterward is an essential ministry. The course of grief cannot be rushed; the worst danger of all is when people refuse to grieve, and it catches up with them unawares. "Putting up a good front" is an invitation to catastrophe. There are few areas of greater need for pastoral sensitivity than counseling the bereaved.

Much of this ministry begins long before death in the teaching ministry, which helps church members understand death from a Christian perspective. Through various media, the congregation can be helped to think through the most desirable forms of funerals. Making plans for one's funeral is not necessarily a morbid preoccupation; it can be a witness to one's faith and a splendid way to advance in the understanding of life. Members of one retirement home weave their own funeral palls, a magnificent final affirmation.

Pastoral care does not come alone; others need to share with the pastor in this ministry to represent to the bereaved the concern and support of the community. Much can be done to enlist and train members of the congregation for ministry to those of their number who have been bereaved. They will have much to do to reintegrate the bereaved into the community. This is particularly important at great festivals of the year when the bereaved may feel most lonely. All Saints' Day has become an important event in many churches to commemorate both the recently deceased and all those who have kept the faith throughout history.

The Christian funeral is worship above all else, not primarily grief therapy. It should stress the strong promises of scripture to God's trustworthiness and not rely on anything less. A service of the word seems essential to proclaim and give thanks for God's goodness. Psalmody and scripture are basic, supported by sermon, hymns, prayers, and creed. The eucharist can proclaim the continuing fellowship among those in life and those in death within the body of Christ.

The presence of the body at the funeral service and the attendance of people at the committal service are to be encouraged as ways of testifying to the reality of death. Rarely should the body be displayed. It is far better to cover the casket with a **pall**, a cloth about ten feet by six feet with a large cross embroidered or appliqued on it. It testifies far better than cut flowers to the source of our hope in Christ. The pall also cuts down on ostentatious display of coffins and floral arrangements. Even when the body is to be given to medical research or to be cremated, it can usually be present at the funeral.

Funerals are a very personal occasion, and some means must be found in stressing that it was this specific person who died. This can be done without extravagant praise. But some form of personal identification from someone who knew the deceased well can be valuable. Sometimes mementos or photographs of things or people central in the life of the deceased may be displayed. Christians are identified by name in baptism and ought to be named as well in their funeral.

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acolyte

anointing

banns

betrothal vows

churching of women

confession (see reconciliation)

confirmation

corporate services of reconciliation (see reconciliation)

deacon

espousal vows

exorcist

extreme unction

fencing the tables

laying on of hands

lector

major orders

martyrologies

minor orders

occasional services

office of the dead

ordination

pall

penance (see reconciliation)

penitentials

porter

priest

Quinceañera

reconciliation

religious profession

reservation of the eucharist

sacramentals

subdeacon

tradition of instruments

viaticum

visitation of the sick

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1. See John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938).

2. *Luther's Works* 53, pp. 116–21. N.B. "Shrive" means to undergo the process of confession and penance to receive absolution of sin.

3. *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System*, IV, 3; Rogers, ed., p. 117.

4. “Decree for the Armenians.” Petry, *A History of Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 328.

5. Dix, ed., *Apostolic Tradition*, V, p. 10. Bradshaw, Johnson, Phillips, pp. 50–51.

6. R. J. S. Barrett-Lennard, *The Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuis* (Bramcote, Notts, U.K.: Grove Books, 1993), p. 31. See also p. 48.

7. *Lombard*, IV, xxiii, 3, Rogers, p. 222.

8. “Decree for the Armenians,” Petry, p. 329.

9. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xix, 18, p. 1466.

10. Calvin, Institutes, IV, xvii, 39, pp. 1416–17.

11. “First Apology,” pp. 65-67, Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, pp. 286–87.

12. “To Polycarp,” 5, Richardson, Early Christian Fathers, p. 119.

13. *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 53, pp. 110–15.

14. *The Celebration of Marriage* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1985), p. 11.

15. Though the historical development was much more complex than the translations of a word from Greek to Latin. For a full account of this history, see Philip Lyndon Reynolds, How Marriage Became One of the Sacraments: The Sacramental Theology of Marriage from Its Medieval Origins to the Council of Trent (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, University Printing House, 2016).

16. *Lombard*, IV, xxvi, 2, Rogers, p. 243.

17. *Lombard*, IV, xxvi, 5, Rogers, p. 245.

18. “Decree for the Armenians,” Petry, p. 329.

19. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xix, 34, p. 1481.

20. The Episcopal Church has published provisionally approved revised rites that take into consideration LGBTQ gender diversity. These are available here: https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21226 (accessed July 17, 2023).

21. One solution to this problem used by some couples is to marry legally in a civil ceremony, and then hold a separate celebration of Christian marriage with their community of faith. This solves the question of legality.

22. *Roman Pontifical* (Washington: International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 1978).

23. *Luther’s Works*, 53, pp. 124–26.

24. “Decree for the Armenians,” Petry, p. 329.

25. “Babylonian Captivity,” *Luther’s Works*, 36, p. 116.

26. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987), pp. 20–33.

27. J. B. Molin, “L’Oratio communis fidelium au moyen-âge en occident du Xe au XVe siècle,” *Miscellanea liturgica*, vol. 2 (Rome: Desclée, 1967), p. 360. Other petitions for pregnant women are also found in this essay.

28. For an explanation and commentary on these rites, see chapter 5 of Alexander Schmemann, *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974).

29. Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, “When the Cradle Is Empty: Rites Acknowledging Stillbirth, Miscarriage, and Infertility,” *Worship* 76 (2002): 491–97.

30. This need for a ritual process has been addressed in a program initially developed by an Episcopal Church congregation in Durham, North Carolina, that expanded under the aegis of their

denomination and has now spread ecumenically. “Journey to Adulthood,” which operates under the belief that the passage to adulthood is a process, is intended for youth in the sixth through twelfth grades. It is divided into three two-year segments that explore “Self, Society, and Spirituality,” with rites of passage that are included at different points in the program.

31. *The Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuis, Barrett-Lennard*, p. 51.

32. “Confessions” 9, cited in Geoffrey Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial* (London: S.P.C.K., 1977), p. 24.

33. “The Martyrdom of Polycarp,” V, 18, Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, p. 156.

34. “Preface to the Burial Hymns,” *Luther’s Works*, 53, p. 326.

35. Though here, as with services of marriage, we should take care not to assume that all those who attend will want to commune, or that even Christians from other churches will feel free to receive communion according to their specific church’s membership requirements.

36. For example, John Hicks, *Death and Eternal Life* (New York: Harper, 1976).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS

WITH INSPIRATION FROM JAMES F. WHITE

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Over the twentieth century, Christian worship underwent changes comparable in scope to those during the European Reformation of the sixteenth century. Most significantly, the Liturgical Movement brought about a momentous rediscovery of early Christian liturgy and enabled global access to vast amounts of that period's liturgical resources. The efforts of this movement have borne fruit in the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council as well as in the **Lima Document** published by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. Not only has communication among Christian communities achieved unprecedented depth and scale, but non-Western churches have also transformed from recipients of Western missions to contributors thanks to widespread and growing interest in their worship practices. Therefore, in addition to discussing what is essential to Christian worship as defined by its early history, Christians at large are gaining more nuanced perspectives on the

relationship between the gospel on the one hand and the cultures inhabited by non-Western churches on the other.

The first edition of James White's *Introduction to Christian Worship* appeared in 1980, with the second revised edition coming ten years later and the third edition coming out at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The revised editions show White's growing dissatisfaction with many of the assumptions of the Liturgical Movement regarding the historical norms for teaching and evaluating worship and sacrament. Specifically, White became more open to the value of liturgical diversity among the historic Western Christian churches, and he became more open to the rich practices arising from younger churches around the world that are creating new liturgical traditions and practices. In the spirit of White's expanding hospitality regarding liturgical diversity, this chapter will offer seven proposals for teaching Christian worship with consideration given to the context of these younger, ethnically diverse church bodies. The goal is not to present a single normative standard of Christian worship but to suggest steps toward a more globally informed and culturally sensitive approach that decenters the Western Christian hold over the meaning and practice of Christian worship.

SHIFT TO A DESCRIPTIVE APPROACH

The urge to look for absolute norms of Christian worship is now widely seen as a critical misstep. This tendency can be attributed to a romantic view of the early church and to the absolutization of the legacy of the Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe. Liturgical discussions today must confront the assumptions under the question, "What documents should we standardize in attempting to restore ancient forms of worship?" For example, in the mid-twentieth century, liturgical scholars accepted that the so-called *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus represented the liturgy of Rome circa 215 C.E. Almost everything about that description of this historical text has been challenged by recent scholarship on ancient church order literature. Yet, even if the *Apostolic Tradition* were from early third-century Rome, why must that give any normative value for twenty-first-century Protestant churches in, for example, Korea, which has a very different linguistic and cultural context?[1] *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus is

helpful for understanding the history of the church, but it can only be positioned as a model for current Protestant worship with several caveats.

The view that Protestant church worship should instead ground itself in the practical theologies of religious reformers such as Luther or Calvin also demands qualification. One must keep in mind the reformers' limited knowledge of the early church, as well as the diverse forms of worship informed by the "other spirits" whose presence they themselves confessed. For example, Luther and Zwingli adopted mutually incompatible positions on the sacraments. Given their ideological diversity, the reformers are a limited source for coherent maxims on worship.

White's descriptive approach can address or circumvent the issues raised by these perspectives. Over the course of his career, White sought to embody the ideals of John Wesley, the founder of The Methodist Church, as White pushed for worship reform in The United Methodist Church, the body in which he was an ordained elder. In the process of liturgical revision, White came to recognize a tension between the lived realities of smaller church communities and the prescriptive nature of many conventional worship books, leading him to place newfound importance in acknowledging the experiences and questions of these real, local communities. Out of this experience, White developed his descriptive approach as a methodology to examine a wide variety of traditions from as neutral a position as possible.[2]

One evident benefit of descriptive research that emphasizes objective analysis of worship phenomena is its capacity to provide a balanced view of different traditions rather than absolutizing certain traditions or presenting them as exemplary cases. In revealing the individuality of each local tradition, the descriptive method enables us to appreciate their uniqueness without undue influence or prejudice. Each Christian community creates its respective traditions by incorporating different elements and forms of worship drawn from its particular social, cultural, and theological background. Appreciative and empathetic descriptions of liturgical traditions can serve as invitations to a broader and more meaningful dialogue among Christian communities. This approach not only affirms the value of their cultural identity and practices but also enriches their relationships with other communities.

INTERPRET TRADITIONS MULTI-DIMENSIONALLY

According to White, the specific practices of worship can vary widely depending on cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, some elements or structures of worship have a remarkable consistency across time and geography. A merely descriptive approach is not enough. Education in Christian worship will entail a clear understanding of the universal elements. For this reason, White acknowledged the value of the broad catholic tradition, situating it as a priority alongside flexibility.

The renewal of Christian worship does not mean unconditionally restoring the traditions of previous centuries. In his later writing, White was pushing beyond the Liturgical Movement of the twentieth century with its efforts to recover the worship practices of the early Church as the prototype of Christian liturgy.[3] Any approach that narrowly valorizes historical practices is vulnerable to the error of flattening out the tradition, but it can also lead to romantic interpretations of historically complicated texts. A liturgical text, as White would often remark in his lectures, never describes the actual liturgical event, and this is true even of contemporary worship. Whether intentional or not, the pressure to hew toward historical, textual archetypes can obstruct a community's process of developing its own traditions.[4]

The abundance of examples of suppression of local development by the enforcement of textual archetypes throughout Christian history is unsurprising. As Christian missionaries introduced specific worship practices into a new location, they fostered a dynamic of passive reception that allowed the types of worship delivered by missionaries to exert absolute influence in that location. Regardless of good intentions in the moment, centralizing dynamics can operate beneath the surface, putting stumbling blocks on the path to independently defined and enacted worship. With this in mind, the reconstructed picture of worship of the early church that was promoted by the Liturgical Movement of the twentieth century must also be approached with care.

An example of such a careful approach is the work of postcolonial scholars Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns. Jagessar and Burns take

into account the political and social dynamics surrounding liturgical practices and assert that Christian faith should be understood in view of the complex relationship between the church and empire.[5] To consider Christian baptism with these perspectives in mind may allow us to see how baptism is an expression of resistance against empire.[6] Equality in Christ, in one Spirit, and in one baptism deploys irony as a means of resistance against the prevailing dominant culture as well as being a profession of belief. As a holistic and inclusive ritual of initiation, baptism constitutes a time and space in which salvation is open equally, suggesting a world of hospitality where the walls of the state, gender, and identity have disappeared (Galatians 3:28; I Corinthians 12:13). Similarly, as a site of equal participation among the baptized, the eucharist realizes and embodies God's self-sacrifice, and it not only offers a glimpse of heaven through eating and drinking the body and blood of Jesus but also symbolically inaugurates a "new heaven and new earth." The eucharist becomes a space of hybridity, where eternity and temporality, conclusiveness and expectation, achieve coherence and unity in resistance to empire.[7] This socio-cultural analysis is an example of a multi-dimensional approach that can discover key elements of baptism, the eucharist, and ministry embedded in the documents that have been passed down through history.

EMBRACE INCULTURATION

Throughout its history, the church has been concerned with how to communicate the gospel in response to the cultural demands of different times. The creative interplay between the historical norms of Christian faith and practice and the concrete cultural practices of local churches in the process of **inculturation**, a term introduced in Chapter One (p. 19). Inculturation, descriptively, names the obvious fact that Christian churches must, in some measure, engage with and adopt local languages, social arrangements, technology, and so forth to become rooted in a place. But, more positively, inculturation is the mutual conversation between gospel and culture,[8] a conversation that requires "a spirit of respect" and "leads to the mutual enrichment."[9] As such, inculturation aims for mutual dialogue with the church community and culture.

Culturally insensitive homogeneity in Christian worship can often be attributed to perspectives that lack a charitable understanding of practices embraced by different worship communities, as well as restrictive attitudes toward cultural interchange in general. Rigidity of attitudes toward culture stems from an unproductive division between the Church and the world. In the last half-century, a significant number of churches, in conversation with the needs of their communities, have been evolving their worship to better express their communities' values. This, however, is only one aspect of the importance of inculturation. The conventional story of Christian expansion, so dominant in Western Christianity, in which some churches "give" and others "receive" the content of the faith, must give way to genuinely positive mutual engagement. Such an engagement will go further than simply allowing diverse global practices to embrace such practices enthusiastically. Rather, as liturgical theologian Don E. Saliers has argued, the church must critically accept and utilize the sociocultural environment of the worship community in the light of Jesus Christ's salvation.[10] In this way, worship can be a significant part of a host culture (art, architecture, music, language) even as it challenges a host culture with the values of the gospel.

PRESERVE PERSONAL DEVOTION

According to White, "personal devotions and common worship are both fully corporate since they share in the worship of the universal community of the Body of Christ."[11] Christians should encourage personal devotional activities without disregarding the value of public worship, treating these two elements as complementary. Public worship is a place where personal devotion is practiced and validated. Devotions, however, are by nature must less regulated than public worship. Consequently, personal devotional practice often serves as the cutting edge of the inculturation of Christian practice and the gateway through which indigenous cultural habits of personal prayer become part of communal, public worship.

This is exemplified in the Korean church through the practice of *Tongsung kido*, a communal prayer during which each individual believer prays aloud in worship at the same time. By loudly voicing their personal concerns to God during common worship, the congregation is unified in

“One Spirit.” This powerful spiritual experience through *Tongsung kido* confronts feelings of economic and political disempowerment that are found in many Korean congregations, and consequently, it addresses various forms of social disillusionment. By expressing the intensity of these feelings through prayer, worshipers can find healing and reconciliation. Individuals and communities are organically connected to each other through prayer as a manifestation of social solidarity. As this example suggests, culturally authentic devotional practice can reinforce Christian worship traditions’ genuinely public, communal nature.

ENGAGE PRACTICAL LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

Practical theology is a tool with which to examine issues in the real world and develop appropriate measures to deal with them. Practical theology does not imply a weakening of the theology that it seeks to apply; rather, it tests theology through concrete experience.[12] White was a practical theologian who was always concerned with how worship could extend the kingdom of God on earth. As a worshiper himself, White promoted a practical aim for liturgical scholarship: “Christian worship is to be experienced in a worshipping community, not through books.”[13] As it relates to theological education, practical theology should inculcate a nurturing and detail-sensitive stance toward the field of ministry. It should aim beyond objective description and toward theologically sound practical applications. Guided by these priorities, worship is rightfully influenced by historical experience and the customs ingrained in each local community throughout the world.

Developing the form and content of prayer, worship, and sermons requires religious confession to work in tandem with a holistic and active application of theological knowledge. This, in turn, demands education that moves beyond the rote passing down of facts and principles and toward sincere consideration of contexts, including the liturgical leader’s specific context. For instance, theology students should not only learn the history of the sacraments and the contents of the theological debates surrounding them but also must be able to interpret how the sacraments are theologized in

one’s own community. Furthermore, theological education should prepare worship leaders to understand their denominational liturgical prayers and gain the knowledge and skill to develop their own prayers.

The study of worship must retain its original purpose for the promotion and benefit of the practice of worship. To humbly open its ears to the voice of the communities, to hear their urgencies and help transform them into reform or preservation as needed—this is the place of practical liturgical theology, and it cannot fulfill this duty without considerable effort and reflection. Such a theology will be sensitive to the practical realities of the global church.

ADOPT TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

It is important to study the rich traditions of Christian worship. However, as Byron Anderson argues, accepting a tradition just because it is a tradition, without questioning it, falls into “traditionalism.” The more proper way to inherit tradition, in this view, is to recognize its historical situation and limitations and question it.[14] White’s commitment to respecting tradition without being bound by it is instructive. His wideranging interest in the discipline of worship and his flexibility in responding to different contexts have contributed profound insights to the field and make him a model for future scholarship.

We must address the concerns of the digital age, as Christianity’s global media environment will require cultivating the ability to navigate and select genuine information. The risks of over-reliance on digital communication as well as new forms of marginalization brought about by unequal access to information, mean that, for now, limiting digital media to a supplementary tool may be desirable in certain contexts. This is the case, especially, in less economically privileged parts of the world. That said, the diversity of perspectives on the use of digital media can lead to new forms of consensus in the future on how to practice worship. Crises in the history of the church have always induced breakthroughs in Christian life, bringing unforeseen opportunities and blessings. Rather than face the world’s increasingly digital future with alarm, Christians would do well to actively seek ways to integrate these changes to the benefit of faith and worship.

GLOBAL WORSHIP: AN OPEN APPROACH

We have examined several proposals for liturgy and liturgical education in the twenty-first century in the context of younger churches around the world, with deep consideration given to the ideas and references of James White. To reiterate the central argument regarding the teaching of worship in the twenty-first century: liturgical scholarship should adopt an objective, descriptive approach without neglecting normative approaches that consider essential, definitional, and traditioned elements of practice. And we must do this with an accepting, creative, and proactive approach toward local cultures. The key is to keep this diversity of approaches in active dialogue rather than prioritizing one approach over the others. Furthermore, practical worship and education should thoroughly consider the context of each congregation.

Let us look toward a future for the Christian churches and worship where the various traditions regard each other with ever-diminishing prejudice, where traditional and non-traditional worship practices not only coexist but inform each other, and where Christians at large pursue a nurturing hospitality toward emerging traditions. As noted above, it is encouraging to see the breadth and depth of dialogue among church communities increasing in recent decades. James White leaves a significant legacy for future scholars and practitioners of Christian worship. It is a legacy that promotes ecumenically inclusive worship and worship education, working toward greater cultural hospitality while building upon a solid Christian theological foundation.

CHAPTER TEN TERMINOLOGY

inculturation

Lima Document

tongsung kido

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1. Regarding contributions and limitations, please refer to Deok-Weon Ahn, “The Significance of Apostolic Tradition for Protestant Churches in the 21st Century: From the Perspective of the Majority World,” *Torch Trinity Journal* v. 20, no. 2 (Nov. 2017): 225–38.

2. James F. White, “Forum: Some Lessons in Liturgical Pedagogy” in *Worship* 68:5 (Sept. 1994): 446. “White describes the shift to descriptive research as the greatest experience of conversion in his teaching career. Deok-Weon Ahn, “The Liturgical Methodology and Contribution of James F. White (1932–2004),” *Korea Journal of Christian Studies* 102 (2016): 247–74.

3. R. Matthew Sigler, “Mediating Tradition, Navigating Culture: Toward a Methodist Paradigm for Liturgical Engagement” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2015), p. 239. For more detailed information, see James F. White, “What Is the Liturgical Movement?” *Perkins Journal* 17 (Winter-Spring 1964): 20–22.

4. Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Intervention and Radical Research,” in *The Performance Studies Reader, 2nd Edition*, ed. Henry Bial (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 371. See Ahn, *Ecumenism, Inculturation and Postcolonialism in Liturgy: Based on the Responses of the Younger Churches to Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM), pp. 144–57.

5. Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns, *Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2011), p. 23. Also see Cláudio Carvalhaes, ed., *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One Is Holy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

6. The writer refers to Homi Bhabha’s theory on this topic. Homi Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” *The Location of Culture*, pp. 112-19. Also see Deok-Weon Ahn, “Christian Initiation from the Perspective of Postcolonialism: Resistance, Apophasis, and the Third Space,” *Theological Forum* 79 (2015): 257–82.

7. Deok-Weon Ahn, “Holy Communion from the Perspective of Post-Colonialism: Prolepsis through Hybridity and the Third Space,” *The Gospel and Praxis* 38 (2016): 146–78.

8. Ahn, *Ecumenism, Inculturation and Postcolonialism in Liturgy* (BEM), p. 30.

9. Anscar Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 56.

10. Don E. Saliers, "Liturgical Aesthetics: The Travail of Christian Worship," Arts, Theology, and the Church, ed. Kimberly Vrudny and Wilson Yates (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), p. 187.

11. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 4th ed., p. 16.

12. See John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Ada, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003).

13. White, “Forum: Some Lessons in Liturgical Pedagogy,” p. 442.

14. E. Byron Anderson, *Common Worship: Tradition, Formation, Mission* (Nashville: Foundry Books, 2017), p. 11.

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Baptism: Understanding God's Gift
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In Spirit & Truth: United Methodist Worship for the Emerging Church
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