
The Lord's Supper in Reformed Churches in an Age of Liturgical and Ecumenical Renewal: 1900-1968

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The liturgical and ecumenical movements of the twentieth century created a climate for liturgical study and reform never before seen in the history of the Christian churches. Under the influence of these movements, the understanding and practice of worship in Roman Catholic, Anglican, Reformation, and free churches would undergo significant changes. These changes are most dramatically reflected in the proliferation of liturgies for the Eucharist or Lord's Supper that appeared in the latter half of the century.¹ In this essay, I attempt to demonstrate how these movements contributed to changes in conception of the shape and meaning of the Lord's Supper in churches belonging to the Reformed tradition.

I begin by sketching a survey of the modern liturgical movement. At the turn of the twentieth century, some theologians became acutely aware of a need to integrate the individual Christian into the corporate life of the church. In response to this need, many began to give increasing attention to the liturgy, since it is the liturgy that binds individuals together in the corporate act of worship. Second, I introduce the modern ecumenical movement. The emergence of the Faith and Order movement in the early twentieth century provided an unprecedented occasion for Christian churches to engage in interconfessional dialogue about the doctrines that have historically divided them. Since it is in the meaning and practice of the sacraments that the "deepest and most stubborn divisions among the churches" have arisen, it is no accident that Faith and Order was intensely concerned with the problem of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper from the outset.² Analysis of how both these movements shaped the understanding of the Lord's Supper in Reformed churches makes it possible to appreciate changes in conception of this sacrament reflected in theological statements and eucharistic liturgies that came out of them in the latter half of the twentieth century. In the concluding part of this essay, I substantiate this claim by considering briefly the eucharistic liturgy that the Reformed Church in America (RCA) adopted in 1968.³

1. See Frank C. Senn, ed., *New Eucharistic Prayers: An Ecumenical Study of Their Development and Structure* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

2. Robert Hotz, "Sacrament," *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Nicholas Lossky et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 885-889.

3. This small Dutch Reformed communion traces its origins from the sixteenth century reforms

I indicate how this liturgy embodies many of the ideals that the liturgical and ecumenical movements both promoted and consolidated among the Reformed churches, and thus is illustrative of the changes in conception that the Lord's Supper underwent among them.

THE MODERN LITURGICAL MOVEMENT

Origins

In the early nineteenth century, a French Benedictine, Prosper Guéranger (1805-1875), inaugurated a project of liturgical restoration in the Roman Catholic Church, setting the stage for the modern liturgical movement. Having felt called to a liturgical vocation in 1829, Guéranger refounded the Benedictine abbey at Solesmes, France in 1833 for the purpose of forming there a monastic community devoted both to the celebration of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours and to the study of the Scriptures, the history of the liturgy, the lives of the saints, and mystical and ascetical theology. Guéranger used the phrase "liturgical movement" to designate a growing interest among both intellectuals and the faithful in reforming Roman Catholic worship practices in France after generations of neglect.⁴

Let us hope that the liturgical movement which is expanding and spreading will awaken also among the faithful the meaning of the Divine Office, that their attendance in church will become more intelligent, and that the time will come when, once more imbued with the spirit of the liturgy, they will feel the need to participate in the sacred chants.⁵

This *desideratum* of Guéranger received an official stamp of endorsement in 1903 when Pope Pius X issued his *motu proprio*, *Tra le sollecitudini*, on church music.⁶ In this pronouncement Pius X advocated a return to the use of Gregorian chant in public worship as a means to encourage the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy of the church. Two years later Pius X reinforced this

in the southwest German principality of the Rhine Palatinate, during the time when the elector Frederic III ruled the territory (1559-1576). Its eucharistic liturgy can be found in *The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America together with the Psalter Selected and arranged for responsive reading*, ed. Gerrit T. Vander Lugt (New York: The Board of Education, 1968), 63-70. (Hereafter cited as *Liturgy and Psalms*.)

4. R.W. Franklin, *Nineteenth-Century Churches: The History of a New Catholicism in Württemberg, England, and France* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), 3.

5. *Institutions liturgique*, Vol. 3 (Paris: Julien, Lanier et Ce, Editeurs, 1851), 170-71; cited in Robert L. Tuzik, *How Firm a Foundation: Leaders of the Liturgical Movement* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1990), 17.

6. For the text, see *Worship and Liturgy: Official Catholic Teachings*, ed. James J. Megivern (Wilmington, NC: McGrath Publishing Company, 1978), 16-26.

theme of the corporate character of the liturgy when he issued a decree calling for more frequent reception of Holy Communion.⁷

These papal pronouncements heralded profound changes in Roman Catholic thought and practice regarding worship. The point of departure for these changes has been associated with *Le Congrès National des OEuvres catholiques de Malines* (Malines, Belgium) held in 1909. Historians identify a paper delivered there by a Belgian Benedictine, Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960), as the formal origin of the modern liturgical movement.⁸ Beauduin drew inspiration from an important theme in the *motu proprio* of Pius X: the true and indispensable source for the Christian spirit is the active participation in the holy mysteries and solemn prayer of the church.⁹ Beauduin made three assertions about the liturgy. First, it is the primary means of instructing the faithful in the holy mysteries of the Christian faith. Second, it is the means through which the faithful learn the language of the church's prayers necessary for the proper nourishment of their spiritual lives. Finally, above all, as corporate prayer the liturgy binds the lives of individual Christians to the one visible church, expressing the unity for which Jesus prayed in the Gospel of John (17:20-23).¹⁰ But if the liturgy is to reclaim its central and integrating role in the life of the church, it must be rendered intelligible to all the faithful. Accordingly, Beauduin proposed to the conference the adoption of the following measures:

- (1) the translation of the Roman Missal, so that it might serve as the main devotional book among the faithful;
- (2) the promotion of the recitation of Compline in the home, and the encouragement of the attendance of the parochial mass and Vespers;
- (3) the restoration of Gregorian Chant, in keeping with the *motu proprio* of Pius X; and
- (4) the scheduling of annual retreats for parish choirs to centers of liturgical worship and life.¹¹

These pragmatic proposals illustrate the influence of pastoral concern for individual Christians in parish assemblies on the modern liturgical movement during this early phase. Renewed interest in the liturgy was undoubtedly part of the pastoral response to the pressing need for genuine community in

7. *Sacra Tridentina: Decree on Frequent and Daily Reception of Holy Communion* (December 20, 1905) in *Worship and Liturgy: Official Catholic Teachings*, 27-32.

8. See Bernard Botte, *From Silence to Participation: An Insider's View of Liturgical Renewal*, trans. John Sullivan (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1988), 10.

9. *Tra Le Sollecitudini* in *ibid.*, 17-18.

10. For a summary of the paper, see Raymond Loonbeek and Jacques Mortiau, *Un Pionnier Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960): Liturgie et Unité des chrétiens*, vol. 1 (Louvain-La-Neuve: Editions de Chevetogne, 2001), 79-81.

11. Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Evangelical and Catholic* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), 613.

a modern world increasingly fragmented by the forces of urbanization and secularization.¹² In an amplified and longer version of the paper, *La Piété de l'Eglise, principes et faits*,¹³ Beauduin argued that liturgical renewal would generate a deeper sense of community amid these deplorable conditions, for the liturgy facilitates an inner understanding of the church as the body of Christ. Beauduin identified the church's liturgy as the medium through which Christ acts to organically unite the members of his body with himself and with one another: "By means of living the liturgy wholeheartedly Christians become more and more conscious of their supernatural fraternity, of their union in the mystical body of Christ."¹⁴

Concern to restore the *communio*-character to the liturgy and the sacraments was not limited to Roman Catholic liturgical studies. The Reformed Church in America (RCA) emphasized a strikingly similar concern to reclaim for the liturgy its rightful place in the thought and life of its congregations. One member of its liturgical committee would insist that the "deepest meaning" of Christian personhood is expressed in the "communion and fellowship of Christians in their common worship of their God and Savior."¹⁵ But at this early stage of the liturgical movement the insights that Beauduin and others sought to apply to the existential needs of the members of parish assemblies still required a solid foundation in exegetical, historical, and theological research. The next phase of the liturgical movement emphasized its coherence with the spirit of the liturgy, Scripture, and the teachings of the church fathers.¹⁶ Among the most outstanding scholars here include the German Benedictine Dom Odo Casel (1886-1948), of the Abbey of Maria Laach, a leading center of liturgical scholarship; the Swedish Lutheran Bishop Yngve Brilioth (1891-1959); and the Anglican Benedictine Dom Gregory Dix (1901-1952). In the period between the two World Wars, these scholars challenged conventional views of the history and meaning of Christian worship in a way that would dramatically alter the liturgical landscape of many churches—including that of the Reformed churches—in the years that followed.

12. *Ibid.*, 611. In the informative first chapter, "The Continental Liturgical Movement and its Influence," in his *Worship and Theology in England: The Ecumenical Century 1900-1965*, Vol. 5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), Horton Davies characterizes Beauduin as a "man who knew the supreme importance of worship, but also the extraordinary difficulty of maintaining the life of devotion in the crowded tenements of the industrial cities of present-day Europe, and with the apparent lack of any nexus between worship and daily work" (24).

13. Originally published in 1914.

14. Laboré Beauduin, *La Piété de l'Eglise, Mélanges liturgiques* (Louvain, 1954), 171-178.

15. Gerrit T. VanderLugt, "Principles of Reformed Worship," *The Church Herald* (May 11, 1951), 8.

16. Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 268.

Odo Casel

Casel's seminal contribution to the liturgical movement was his "mystery theology" or "theology of the mysteries."¹⁷ The content of the Christian message can be reduced neither to a set of dogmatic propositions nor to a moral code, but in essence is the mystery (*mysterion*) of God's saving plan (*oikonomia*), hidden in eternity, but revealed and realized progressively in time and in the world.¹⁸ Its final revelation and first realization appeared in Jesus Christ. In this connection, Casel appealed to the Letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, which refer to Jesus Christ as the "mystery of God's will" (Eph. 1:9), and the "mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints" (Col. 1:26).¹⁹

So then this mystery is no less than God's self-revelation in the incarnate Logos, the Son of God having become flesh. But at the heart of this mystery is the *pasch*, a term that designates the passing of the Son of God from this life, through his death on the cross, to his new life in the Spirit, through his resurrection and ascension into glory. The content of the mystery therefore comprehends the person of the incarnate Son of God and his saving actions for the church. The church is embraced in this mystery through these saving actions and is the form in which God's saving plan in Jesus Christ is further revealed and realized. According to the Letter to the Ephesians, the goal of this mystery is the unity of all human beings with God and with one another, when the "times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (1:10).

The accomplishment of God's saving plan in the *pasch* of Jesus Christ is a unique and unrepeatable event that happened in the past. But it is Christ's will that his saving actions have a continuing presence in the church to "give healing and life to the faithful."²⁰ In this connection, Casel applied the concept of mystery to Christian worship, which he saw as the ritual performance of the essence of the Christian message. In the church's performance of its liturgical rites, especially the sacraments, Christ and his saving actions are objectively re-presented or re-actualized (*vergegenwärtigt*): "Christian liturgy is the ritual performance of the redemptive work of Christ in the Church and through it therefore, the presence of the divine salvific act under the veil of the symbol."²¹ The redemptive work of

17. *Mysterientheologie*. Casel intended this term as an expression of the very essence of the Christian faith.

18. Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship and Other Writings*, ed. Burkhard Neunheuser, O.S.B. (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press; and London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1932 for Part I, 1959 for Part II, 1962 for this English translation), 9.

19. In addition to texts from Ephesians and Colossians, Casel also often cites Heb. 1:1ff.; Jn. 1:14ff; 1 Jn. 1:2; Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:8ff. in support of his concept of the Christian mystery.

20. Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, 58.

21. Odo Casel, "Mysteriengewand," *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 8 (1928), 145.

Christ is made present in its ritual performance, so that those who participate in the liturgy are thereby made participants in the salvation accomplished through the passing of the Lord from death to life. This is attributable to the fact that Christ has entrusted the mystery of his *pasch* to the church, which through its worship is drawn into this sacrifice of Christ as it is liturgically re-presented; for as Christ sacrificed for the church, so the church through its worship takes an active part in this sacrifice, and makes it its own. Thus there is a sense in which it is proper to say that in the liturgy "Bridegroom and Bride, head and members act as one." According to Casel, the liturgy is no less than the "fulfillment in ritual of what the Lord did for our salvation...We act out the mysteries as the body of Christ; as his body we do all that the head does."²²

Casel's elaboration of the mystery of Christian worship (*Kultmysterium*) in this manner is influenced by the place that he assigned to the Hellenistic mystery rites in God's progressive working out of his saving plan in history. Casel believed that the cultic form (*Kulteidon*) of the mystery rites adumbrated the fulfillment of God's saving plan in the *pasch* of Jesus Christ. For this reason he interpreted them as a providential preparation for what God was about to accomplish for humanity in Christ.²³ Out of the variety of these mystery rites, Casel believed an ideal type could be distilled. The lord (*kyrios*) of the mystery rite is a god who appears on earth to share in the struggle and misery of humanity, to suffer and to die. But then the god returns to life, thereby renewing the whole of nature and giving new life to his companions, those initiated into his cult. In the ritual reenactment of his myth, the companions of the dying and rising god are effectively united with his fate, and thereby acquire salvation (*soteria*). This salvation is realized in perfect communion with the god after death.²⁴

In essence, then, the cult is a ritual memorial (*anamnesis*), a term used in this context to mean "a making present of some act of the god's upon which rests the existence and life of the community."²⁵ Casel saw in the form of the cult the longing of the *anima naturaliter christiana* for saving contact with God—a longing fulfilled in Christian revelation. But he did not mean to suggest that the mystery rites exercised a direct influence on Christian worship.²⁶ He did claim, on the other hand, that the common terminology implied an analogy between the

22. Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, 104.

23. For a critical reflection on Casel's understanding of the relation of the Hellenistic mystery cults to Christian worship, see Louis Bouyer, *Life and Liturgy* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 86-98.

24. Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, 53. For a succinct summary of Casel's description of the mystery rites, see Kilmartin, *Eucharist in the West*, 273.

25. Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, 53.

26. Kilmartin, *Eucharist in the West*, 273-4; I.H. Dalmais, "Theology of the Liturgical Celebration," in *The Church at Prayer: Principles of the Liturgy*, ed. Aimé Georges Martimort, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1987), 269.

two, if not in substance at least in mode of expression.²⁷ This he labored to show in adducing numerous texts from the New Testament and the church fathers in support of his theory.

Casel's contributions to a deepened understanding of the liturgy are considerable. He supplied the liturgical movement with the rationale its pioneers had sought for an objective and corporate conception of the liturgy grounded in a firm biblical and Christ-centered foundation in contrast to a subjective and individualistic conception of the liturgy. This theology proved to be enormously fruitful for continuing theological reflection on the meaning of the liturgy throughout the twentieth century, not only in Roman Catholic but also in Protestant circles. In particular, Casel's use of the category of *anamnesis* created space for further dialogue about the doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass that had divided Roman Catholic and Protestant churches since the sixteenth century.²⁸ As we have seen, the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist in Casel's theory is bound up in the liturgical re-presentation of the unique and unrepeatable event of Jesus' *pasch*. The Anglican theologian, A. G. Hebert, a member of the committee on the "Ways of Worship" appointed by Faith and Order in 1939, viewed this interpretation as a promising basis for progress in dialogue about the controverted doctrine.²⁹ Presumably having Casel and his school at Maria Laach in mind, Hebert confidently reported in 1951 that the eucharistic sacrifice "is finding in our day a truly evangelical expression from the catholic side, when it is insisted that the sacrificial action is not any sort of re-immolation of Christ, nor a sacrifice additional to His one sacrifice, but a participation in it."³⁰

Yngve Brilioth

Nattvarden i Evangeliskt Gudstjänstliv, by the Lutheran Theologian, Yngve Brilioth, is among the most influential early ecumenical studies on the meaning of the Eucharist.³¹ Brilioth's analysis of the tradition of the eucharistic celebration in the Western Church identified four elements in the various liturgical forms and doctrinal statements that he claimed were grounded in the institution narratives

27. *Ibid.*

28. For brief comparison of the Casel's theory and the statements of the Council of Trent on the sacrifice of the Mass, see Gerhard Karl Schäfer, *Eucharistie im ökumenischen Kontext: Zur Diskussion um das Herrenmahl in Glauben und Kirchenverfassung von Lausanne 1927 bis Lima 1982* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 90.

29. A. G. Hebert was himself a pioneer in the liturgical movement in the Anglican Church. His contribution to the movement was his widely read, *Liturgy and Society: The Function of the Church in the Modern World* (London: Faber & Faber, 1935).

30. *Ways of Worship: The Report of a Theological Commission on Faith and Order*, eds. Pehr Edwall, Eric Hayman, William D. Maxwell (London: SCM Press LTD, 1951), 77.

31. It was first published in Swedish in 1926. An abridged English version followed in 1930. Yngve Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice, Evangelical and Catholic*, trans. A.G. Hebert (London: SPCK, 1930).

of the New Testament itself. These four elements are: thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), communion/fellowship, commemoration, and the eucharistic sacrifice. To these Brioloth added a fifth element, which he designated mystery—the element that suffuses and animates them all. Together these elements express the rich and manifold meaning of the Eucharist.³²

The thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) is expressed primarily in the great prayer that the presider offers over the bread and wine of the Eucharist. In it God is praised not only for his gifts of creation, but also for the work of redemption in Christ and the fulfillment of the divine promises.³³ Communion/fellowship in the Eucharist has a double signification: It is communion with God in Christ at the same time as it is fellowship with those who belong to Christ. This fellowship extends to the whole Church on earth, and includes not only the living, but also those who have gone on to be with Christ.³⁴ Commemoration is the liturgical proclamation of the saving acts of God in history that culminated in the passion and death of Christ. The eucharistic sacrifice is closely related to the commemoration as a representation and exhibition of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The faithful are incorporated into Christ's sacrifice through communion and not only share in the benefits of Christ's atoning death, but also in his self-offering. Thus in the eucharistic sacrifice, all four elements come together with one another.³⁵

If it is in the eucharistic sacrifice that these elements are combined, it is the element of mystery that integrates them and ensures their proper balance. Mystery, for Brioloth, refers to the real presence of Jesus Christ in the eucharistic celebration. The New Testament expresses this presence in three modes. In the Synoptic tradition, there is the "personal presence" of the Lord. Jesus Christ is the true celebrant at every Eucharist, presiding as Priest before God on behalf of the faithful, "at" rather than "on" the table.³⁶ In the Johannine tradition, there is the presence of the Lord in the sacraments. The Bread of Life uses the bread of the Eucharist as a "means of his presence" and "vehicle of his own self-communication."³⁷ The third is found in the Pauline tradition. Here the presence of Christ is in his mystical body, the Church, through which the faithful enter into the mystery of communion/fellowship.

These modes complement and complete each other. Historically, when one or two were stressed to the relative neglect of the other(s), the four elements through which the meaning of the Eucharist is expressed disintegrated, and a period of liturgical decay inevitably followed. For example, in the late

32. For a favorable review of Brioloth's schematization, see Bouyer, *Life and Liturgy*, 75-85.

33. Brioloth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice*, 278.

34. *Ibid.*, 279.

35. *Ibid.*, 284.

36. *Ibid.*, 286.

37. *Ibid.*

medieval period the exaggerated focus on the second of the three modes led to a "materialistic" interpretation of Christ's presence in the bread and wine. This incited reaction during the Reformation period. But in their concern to formulate an alternative definition of the real presence and to explain how the individual Christian appropriates the benefits of Christ's death through the reception of the sacrament, the Reformers only perpetuated this focus. Because of its relative neglect of the first and third modes of Christ's presence, the church during these two periods did not succeed in holding together the four elements, and so was unable to express adequately the meaning of the Eucharist.

In sum, the historian Brilioth served the churches in his own ecumenical context by demonstrating that the meanings of the Eucharist are multiple, and that for various reasons these received different accents in different periods and traditions.³⁸ For this reason, each ecclesial tradition can learn from one another, and also help one another to deepen together in their appreciation of the greater tradition of Christendom as a whole. On the other hand, he also showed that certain forms of expression must be present in the eucharistic forms to ensure the expression of the manifold meaning of the sacrament. These include praise, narrative recital, commemoration, self-offering, intercession, and doxology—elements that most classic eucharistic prayers contain.³⁹ Brilioth's criticisms of the liturgical forms and doctrines of the late medieval and Reformation periods constituted an indirect charge to the Protestant churches in his own day—especially those in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions—to recover the "objective expression of corporate faith and worship in a service whose name means the Thanksgiving."⁴⁰

In order to do this, however, the churches in these traditions would first have to recover the eucharistic prayer. This was certainly the case for the Reformed churches. In Calvin's Geneva, the Supper rite commenced with the singing of the Apostles' Creed and a prayer for worthy reception. Then the minister recited the institution narrative from First Corinthians 11:23-29. The following sections were penitential, consisting in an excommunication of those unworthy to participate in the sacrament, a self-examination, and the "comfortable" words (i.e. scriptural promise of redemption). Then came a long exposition of the promises that relate to Christ's institution of the Supper, culminating in the "Reformed" *Sursum corda*, which warns the people not to look for Christ in the elements of bread and wine, but to contemplate him in his glory at the right hand of the Father. The distribution followed, accompanied either by a singing of a Psalm or biblical verses read by the minister. The post-communion thanksgiving concluded the service, and the people were dismissed with a blessing.⁴¹ Thus

38. Senn, "Introduction," in *New Eucharistic Prayers*, 3.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice*, 278.

41. John Calvin, *La Forme des Prieres et Chants ecclesiastiques, avec la maniere d'adminstrer*

the classic Reformed Lord's Supper rite can be seen as a paranetic and didactic exhortation addressed to the people in the name of God instead of a eucharistic prayer addressed to God in the name of the people. The Reformers evidently did not interpret the words of Christ to his disciples "do this" to mean to "take the bread and wine, give thanks over them, break the bread, and give the bread and the cup."

Gregory Dix

The Anglican scholar, Gregory Dix, contributed to liturgical renewal by arguing that the churches in the modern West inherited their ideas about the Eucharist from the late medieval and Reformation periods. In adopting these ideas, Dix claims the churches departed from the conception of the eucharistic rite embodied in the liturgies of the early church. In these liturgies the intention of the rite can be seen to cohere more faithfully with Jesus' command to his followers to "do this." Dix's understanding of the content of this command on the basis of the early liturgical data won many adherents in Protestant worship committees. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that his interpretation of Jesus' command that informed the structure of the new order for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper adopted by the RCA in 1968.

Dix's central thesis is implied in the title of his magisterial study, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, which appeared in 1945.⁴² He claimed to have discovered a single normal or standard structure that underlies most of the great liturgical rites that have come down from the early church. This structure or "shape" consists in four essential actions, which in turn can be traced from the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. Dix observed that in these Last Supper accounts of the New Testament, Jesus is the subject of four verbs: he took; he blessed; he broke; and he gave. Since three of these verbs are repeated with respect to the cup, the New Testament actually describes a "seven-action scheme" that was condensed into a four-action scheme in the liturgical tradition. As Dix writes,

with absolute unanimity liturgical tradition reproduces these seven actions as four: (1) the offertory; bread and wine are "taken" and placed on the table together. (2) The prayer, the president gives thanks to God over bread and wine together. (3) The fraction; the bread is broken. (4) The bread and wine are distributed together.⁴³

les Sacramens, et consacrer le Mariage: selon la coutume de l'Eglise ancienne in Petrus Barth, Wilhelm Niesel, and Dora Scheuner (eds.), *Joannis Calvini Opera selecta*, volume II (München, 1926-1952), 11-58. For a critical edition of the French *La manière de célébrer la cène*, see Bruno Bürki, in *Coena Domini I: Die Abendmahlsliturgie der Reformationskirchen im 16./17. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Irmgard Pahl (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1983, 347-367. ET in Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (New York: World Publishing, 1961), 197-210.

42. London: A & C Black, 1945.

43. *Ibid.*, 48.

This theory of the "four-action shape" proved to be very influential among Reformed churches that initiated liturgical reforms in the second half of the twentieth century, including the RCA. Liturgical scholar Howard Hageman explained that his committee modeled the order in which the events of the celebration were to unfold on the four actions Jesus performed during the Last Supper. After the service of the word, the celebration of the Supper was to proceed as follows:

- a) The minister and elders gather around the Table and it is uncovered. This represents "He took."
- b) There is a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing. This represents "He blessed."
- c) This is followed by the recitation of the words of institution, accompanied by the breaking of the bread and the lifting of the cup. This represents "He brake."
- d) The elements are then given to the elders and the people after the words of distribution. This represents "He gave."⁴⁴

Hageman added provocatively that when the people assemble to "do this in remembrance of him," they should, on the basis of this scriptural mandate, follow Jesus' example not only in word but also *in action*.⁴⁵

Hageman's focus on action represents a radical departure from the classic conception of the Reformed Lord's Supper expressed in Calvin's Genevan rite. There is no intention in Calvin's rite to imitate the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper. Rather, the "do this" mandate of Jesus affords an occasion to proclaim the meaning of his atoning death to the people. This is why Calvin's Supper form, and other forms that came out of Reformed churches of the sixteenth century, read like catechetical instruction.

For Dix, the shape itself performs the meaning of the Supper. The second action in this shape, expresses the essential meaning despite variations in the content of this prayer in liturgies inherited from the early church. In entering into this action, the people enter into the redeeming action of Christ himself. His death and resurrection are made present and "operative by its effects" in the *anamnesis*.⁴⁶ Put otherwise, the Eucharist is an action in which Christ, incorporating the members of his own body into his *pasch*, proleptically transfers all who are in him into the Kingdom of his Father. It is a corporate action of the whole body of Christ, head and members together, through which the redeemed are presented to the Father in Christ as the one new humanity in him.⁴⁷ With few exceptions, Reformed did not use this kind of language to express the theology of their Lord's

44. "The Order for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," in *A Companion to the Liturgy: A Guide to Worship in the Reformed Church in America*, ed. Garrett C. Roorda (New York: Half Moon Press, 1971), 35.

45. *Ibid.*, 36.

46. Dix, *Shape of the Liturgy*, 245.

47. *Ibid.*, 751.

Supper celebrations until recently. The exegetical, historical, and theological studies engendered by the liturgical movement, as we have just reviewed them, played a critical role in transforming the Reformed understanding of the Lord's Supper. As we will see below, the ecumenical movement provided a context in which Reformed churches could interact with other communions influenced by similar ideas. As a result of this interaction, their conception of the sacrament in their own worship tradition would undergo a substantive change.

THE MODERN ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT: FAITH AND ORDER

The liturgical and ecumenical movements were intimately bound up with each another. This could hardly have been otherwise, since the principal concern of the liturgical movement was to recover the meaning of the Eucharist as the worship event *par excellence* through which Christians renew their unity with Christ and with one another. Indeed, insofar as it maintained that the ultimate goal of all sound liturgy is to unite Christians with the church in all times and in all places, the liturgical movement was ecumenical in its very essence. One member of the RCA liturgical committee later perceived this clearly as he reflected on the impact that the liturgical movement had on his own denomination. "Some," he observed, "see in the liturgy not only a bridge over which men may join the ranks in the Body of Christ with Christians of every century, but also the means by which a divided Christendom may be healed of its many divisions."⁴⁸

The desire for a worldwide forum in which a divided Christendom could engage in interconfessional dialogue about the doctrines and practices that obstruct unity guided the efforts of early members of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement. For many, the ultimate goal remains to lead the churches through these dialogues to a visible manifestation of their unity willed by Jesus Christ. As one expression of the wider ecumenical impulse, the Faith and Order movement played an instrumental role in creating possibilities for the churches to progress toward this unity,⁴⁹ particularly through its work on the sacraments.

The Lord's Supper received some attention at the First World Conference on Faith and Order (Lausanne, 1927), as well as at the second (Edinburgh, 1937) but only in the context of a general discussion about the sacraments.⁵⁰ An

48. Garrett C. Roorda, "Worship and Liturgy in the Reformed Church in America," in *A Companion to the Liturgy*, 1.

49. For a general introduction to the history of Faith and Order, see Tissington Tatlow, "The World Conference on Faith and Order," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517-1948* vol. 1 (eds.) Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, (Geneva: WCC, 1954), 405-441. For the history of the use and meaning of the terms "faith" and "order," see Günther Gassman, *Konzeptionen der Einheit in der Bewegung für Glauben und Kirchenverfassung 1910-1937* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 49-50.

50. The participants at both conferences restricted their theological considerations to the

avenue for more concentrated study opened up in 1939, when the continuation committee of the Edinburgh conference decided to appoint two international theological commissions to be devoted to liturgical issues. One was instructed to address the problem of "intercommunion," the other to study the "ways of worship" characteristic of the various Christian churches.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM REFORMED CHURCHES

Analysis of papers presented by Reformed scholars to the commission on "ways of worship"⁵¹ reveals radical changes in the historic Reformed conception of the Lord's Supper that these contributors criticized using insights appropriated from the liturgical movement. Space permits consideration of only two scholars whose work is representative.

Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950), professor of the history of religions at the University of Gronigen and known for his research in the phenomenology of religion, chaired the commission on "ways of worship." He viewed Odo Casel's *Mysterientheologie* as the most important theological contribution to the churches in the past 150 years⁵² and had played an active role in the liturgical movement, helping members of Reformed churches in his own day see the rich liturgical heritage of the broader Eastern and Western ecclesial traditions more clearly than their sixteenth century predecessors.⁵³

sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, since it was on these two sacraments that all the churches represented could agree. The statements on the sacraments are contained in the final report ("Sacraments") of the sixth section at Lausanne; those at Edinburgh are found in the final report ("The Church of Christ: Ministry and Sacraments") of the fifth section. See resp. *Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne, August 3-21, 1927*, ed. H.N. Bate (London: Student Christian Movement, 1927), 390-91; *The Second World Conference on Faith and Order Held at Edinburgh, August 3-18, 1937*, ed. Leonard Hodgson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), 239-249.

51. WCC Faith and Order Paper No. 6, *Ways of Worship: The Report of a Theological Commission on Faith and Order*, eds. Pehr Edwall, Eric Hayman, and William D. Maxwell (London: SCM Press, 1951). The Reformed contributors include W.D. Maxwell, J. Schweizer, A. Graf, R. Paquier, G. van der Leeuw, and M. Thurian.

52. Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacramentstheologie* (Nijkerk: G.F. Callenbach, 1949), 239. Compare this assertion to his optimistic assessment of the potential of Casel's theology in *Ways of Worship*, 229: "The idea of representation as it is advocated in many circles nowadays, Roman Catholic as well as Anglican and Lutheran, seems to present some perspectives for a future development of sacramental theology for the Reformed Churches also."

53. He served as mentor of the *Liturgische Kring*, a group of pastors and laypersons dedicated to the renewal of liturgical life in the Netherlands Reformed Church (*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*). This group succeeded in adding to the 1563 Palatinate form for the Supper a number of eucharistic liturgies for use in Dutch Reformed congregations, and the *Dienstboek in Ontwerp* (Worship Book in Preparation) published in 1955 by the Netherlands Reformed Church bears the stamp of their labors. *Dienstboek voor de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk: in Ontwerp* ('s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum N.V., 1955). For an overview of its contents, see Howard Hageman,

Van der Leeuw drafted the introductory report and contributed one paper⁵⁴ in which he identified the separation of the sacrament from the word in typical Reformed worship as the central challenge for Reformed churches seeking liturgical renewal in the twentieth century. Sixteenth century Protestant reformers affirmed the unity of word and sacrament as the norm for Sunday worship. Calvin regarded limited lay participation in communion (only a few times a year) as a Roman Catholic abuse to be corrected but churches soon departed from his intention so that infrequent communion remained the rule in Reformed congregations into the twentieth century. Celebrated only on special occasions in a spirit of solemn reverence, the Lord's Supper was regarded as the "spiritual peak" in the life of the congregation.⁵⁵ Van der Leeuw objected that "Holy Communion can never be the acme of worship, since it is itself worship, and every gathering of the members of Christ's body is essentially a gathering at the Table where He laid down the law of the New Covenant in his blood."⁵⁶ According to van der Leeuw, the recent demand for increased celebration of the Lord's Supper in Reformed churches arose from a growing recognition of "Holy Communion" as the central act of worship.

But van der Leeuw criticized not only the practice but also the form for the Reformed Supper. In Reformed churches, there had been an "almost exclusive relation between the Eucharist and the death of the Lord, with a total neglect of his resurrection." For this reason, the Lord's Supper resembled more a "funerary ceremony" than a "joyful feast."⁵⁷ But the "resurrection is included in the sacrifice of the Lord," which helps explain why the church of the apostolic era broke bread "with exultation," as is apparent in Acts 2:46. Here we see the ecumenical impulse to overcome the onesided confessional stance by returning to the common heritage of the church of the apostolic era.

Perhaps the most severe criticisms of classic Reformed sacramental theology and practice came from Richard Paquier (1905-1985). Paquier founded *Eglise et Liturgie*, a group of Swiss Reformed pastors and laypersons who worked towards an "ecumenically-oriented renewal of the concept of the church and the reform of worship in line with an evangelical catholicity."⁵⁸ Paquier was drawn to the

"Three Reformed Liturgies," *Theology Today* XV, no. 4 (January 1959): 508-510. Van der Leeuw's most enduring legacy may prove to be the foundation of *Studia Liturgica*, an international and ecumenical journal for liturgical research and renewal, which first appeared in 1962. Wiebe Vos, editor and founder, was a pupil and disciple of van der Leeuw, and from him "inherited a deep concern for an ecumenical approach to liturgical matters in the spirit of that great and gifted pioneer." Davies, *Worship and Theology in England, 1900-1965*, 36.

54. His death prevented him from revising and expanding this work further.

55. *Ways of Worship*, 225.

56. *Ibid.*, 226.

57. *Ibid.*, 229.

58. Bruno Bürki, "Reformed Worship in Continental Europe since the Seventeenth Century," in

liturgical life of the Anglican world, and also profoundly versed in the liturgical traditions of the churches in both the East and the West. Paquier and his group were unwilling to deepen and extend the influence of the Calvinian liturgical tradition, but instead adopted an approach to liturgical reform shaped by their studies of the liturgies of the early Church. Paquier charged that the sixteenth century liturgies of Calvin were innovations; authentic liturgy developed from the apostolic times and found expression in the classic eucharistic liturgies of the third and fourth centuries. The goal of the *Eglise et Liturgie* was to rehabilitate these liturgical sources, from which the Reformers departed in their protests against perceived abuses in the eucharistic theology and practice of the late middle ages.⁵⁹ In regard to new forms for the Lord's Supper, Paquier and his group succeeded already in 1931 in composing and distributing a "complete, ecumenically recognizable eucharistic prayer."⁶⁰ This prayer came out in several versions, and a final formulation was published in 1952.⁶¹ *Eglise et Liturgie* played an instrumental role in assisting the Reformed Church of France (ERF) and the French Reformed churches of Switzerland in recovering the traditional structure of the eucharistic prayer, and the eucharistic liturgies that these churches created after the Second World War are profoundly indebted to its pioneering labors. Through the mediation of the ERF, the RCA also owed a debt to *Eglise et Liturgie* for its own new eucharistic prayer, which in large part is a translation of one found in the *Liturgie de l'Eglise réformée de France*, first published in 1950 before it appeared in a definitive edition in 1963.⁶²

Paquier's rejection of much of the Reformed liturgical tradition finds expression in the paper that he contributed to the volume. He believed that the liturgical life of the Reformed churches was vitiated by a flawed theological conception of the relation between word and sacrament. The word of God in these churches is the "sole path from God to man." The sacraments do not have a value *sui generis*; rather they are accorded the status of a seal and a pledge of the grace that the word alone is sufficient to confer.⁶³ This conception, according to Paquier, led those in the Reformed tradition to interpret the sacraments only in terms of the word, as a *verbum visibile*, which God, in graciously condescending to

Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present, ed. by Lukas Vischer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 49. For a biographical sketch of Paquier, see also Bruno Bürki, *Cène du Seigneur—eucharistie de l'Eglise: Le cheminement des Eglises réformées romandes et françaises depuis le XVIIIe siècle, d'après leurs textes liturgiques: Volume B: Commentaire* (Fribourg Suisse: Editions Universitaires, 1985), 46-56.

59. *Ibid.*, 51.

60. Bürki, "Reformed Worship in Continental Europe since the Seventeenth Century," 49.

61. For complete texts of the 1931 and 1952 eucharistic liturgies, see Bürki, *Cène du Seigneur: Volume A*, 127-145.

62. Bürki, *Cène du Seigneur—eucharistie de l'Eglise, Volume B: Commentaire*, 165.

63. *Ways of Worship.*, 242.

frail human beings, instituted as a pedagogical aid, so that they might understand the promises addressed to them in Christ more adequately.⁶⁴ By reducing the sacraments to another form of the word, however, the Reformers were unable to prevent their churches from collapsing the one into the other. For the Reformers, in Paquier's judgment, "there [was] no difference between the Word and the sacraments, neither quantitative nor qualitative."⁶⁵

Paquier warned that Reformed churches could establish a solid liturgical foundation for the sacraments only by drawing a proper theological distinction between word and sacrament. Without this foundation, the sacraments and any new liturgies accompanying them would always appear as "invaders, or as needless postscripts, in the minds of Churches which wish to be fundamentally Churches of the Word."⁶⁶

THE RCA'S RECEPTION OF LITURGICAL RENEWAL IN REFORMED CHURCHES

The RCA demonstrated sensitivity to currents of liturgical renewal circulating within other Reformed churches. In 1950, a young Howard Hageman published an article in *Theology Today* on the worldwide renewal of interest in liturgy and worship.⁶⁷ This enthusiastic report of his personal encounter with the liturgical and ecumenical movements reveals Hageman's commitment to liturgical and sacramental renewal. Later that same year the General Synod of the RCA would appoint him as one of four members to serve on its new liturgical committee. His liturgical scholarship and theological acumen guided this committee, after almost two decades of exacting study and experimentation, as it completed its integration of word and sacrament in Lord's Day worship and provided a form for the sacrament that adheres to the structure of the classic eucharistic prayers used by third and fourth century churches.

The order of worship the committee prepared directs the minister to move from the pulpit to the table for receiving the worshippers' offerings after the

64. *Ibid.* In this connection, see the statement of John Calvin: "[O]ur merciful Lord, according to this infinite kindness, so tempers himself to our capacity that, since we are creatures who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and, do not think about or even conceive of anything spiritual, he condescends to lead us to himself even by these earthly elements, and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessings." *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.14.3.

65. *Ways of Worship*, 242. In this connection, see also Calvin here: "Therefore let it be regarded as a settled principle that the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1292 [4.14.17].

66. *Ibid.*, 245.

67. "The Liturgical Revival," *Theology Today* VI, no. 4 (January 1950), 490-505.

sermon and prayer for blessing on the word.⁶⁸ This liturgical gesture is intended to draw attention to the second focal point of worship: it is from the *table* that the minister offers the prayers of thanksgiving and intercession.⁶⁹ When the service of the word is not accompanied by the celebration of the sacrament, by standing behind the table, the minister gives the impression that the service is normally to be completed by the Lord's Supper. Indeed, the committee members hoped that this transition from pulpit to table every Sunday would eventually habituate worshippers to expect the service to culminate in communion.⁷⁰

On those special Sundays when the Supper is celebrated, the great prayer of thanksgiving over the bread and the wine is appointed in the place of the ordinary prayers of thanksgiving and intercession, which are deferred to the end of the service. The "Communion Prayer" has the following structure:

- Introductory dialogue
- Preface
- Sanctus
- Anamnesis
- Self-Offering
- Epiclesis
- Lord's Prayer
- Words of Institution
- Words of Distribution⁷¹

This structure suggests the RCA intentionally based the new liturgy for the Supper on the classic eucharistic prayers of the early church. In doing so, the church responded to the *desideratum* of ecumenical Reformed scholars for a new form for the Supper that would be devotional rather than didactic, joyful rather than somber, and oriented to Jesus' resurrection as well as to his death. In short, the RCA recovered the concept that the Lord's Supper is a joyful celebration of praise and thanks—a Eucharist!

Furthermore, in contrast to what Calvin's form for the Supper envisaged, the celebration organized on the basis of the Communion Prayer is a corporate action, not an additional sermon delivered by the minister. Instead of a paranetic and didactic exhortation addressed to the communicants in the name of God, the action is conceived as a prayer addressed to God in the name of the communicants. Thus, it opens with an invitation for the worshippers to lift up their hearts. After a preface in which the minister thanks God on behalf of the worshippers for the gifts of creation and the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ, they respond with the *sanctus* and the *benedictus*—liturgical formulae that express the awe,

68. *Ibid.*, 14.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*, 8.

71. For the text of the prayer, see *Liturgy and Psalms*, 66-68.

wonder, and joy appropriate to the occasion.

The motivation for this joyful celebration is the Christ event. But this event is not restricted to the “perfect sacrifice that Christ offered once and for all on the cross for the sin of the whole world.”⁷² “His resurrection and...his coming again” impress on the worshippers that the Supper is not a funerary ceremony but a Supper of intimate communion with the resurrected Christ who was crucified for them.⁷³ They express their desire for this communion by offering themselves to the Father as “holy and living sacrifices.”⁷⁴ The prayer of offering serves as a bridge to the invocation of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) to transform the worshippers so that their desire to participate in the divine blessings presented to them in the *anamnesis* of the *pasch* of Jesus Christ may be actualized. Their celebration anticipates the fulfillment of this desire on the day of redemption, depicted in the New Testament image of the eschatological Supper of the Lamb. This is why the worshippers are to look forward expectantly to Jesus’ *parousia*, when his “whole church will be gathered from the ends of the earth into [his] kingdom.”⁷⁵ Thus, the joy of present and future communion with the resurrected and triumphant Lord is sustained to the very end of the prayer.

This eucharistic liturgy illustrates the changes in the understanding and practice of the Lord’s Supper in the churches belonging to the Reformed tradition. These changes, in turn, can be understood only in the context of the worldwide liturgical and ecumenical renewal movements that inspired churches across the Western ecclesial traditions during the first seventy years of the last century. I have sought to show how these movements assisted the Reformed tradition toward a conception of the Lord’s Supper that departed from the one it had inherited from Calvin. With a recovery of a celebration that can be truly called eucharistic, churches in this tradition may now claim together with others a common heritage that comes to them from the church of the apostolic era.

72. *Ibid.*, 66.

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.*, 67.