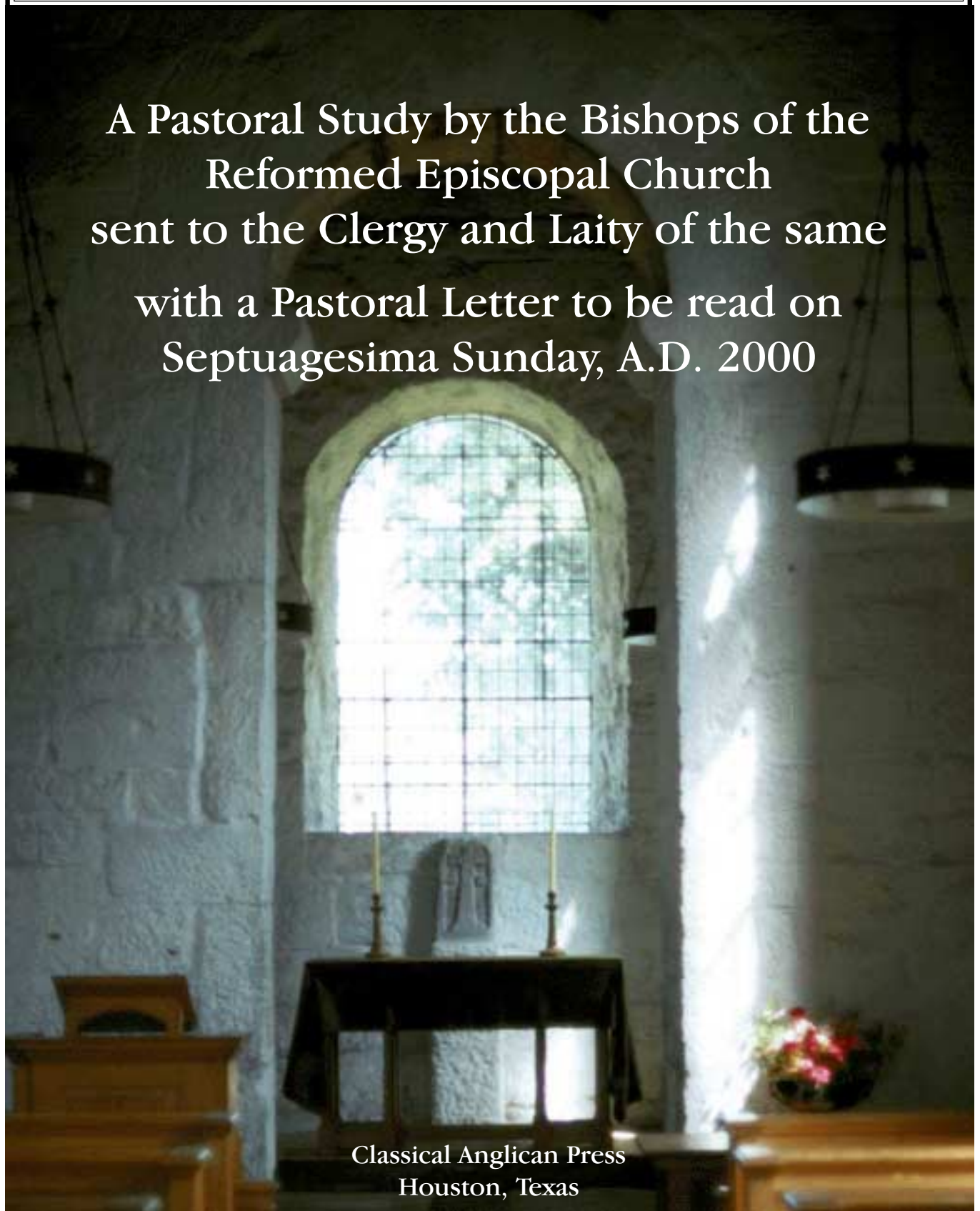


Concerning the Holy Communion

A Pastoral Study by the Bishops of the
Reformed Episcopal Church
sent to the Clergy and Laity of the same
with a Pastoral Letter to be read on
Septuagesima Sunday, A.D. 2000



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AN INTRODUCTION: Where Judgment Begins

THIS material is presented to the parishes of the Reformed Episcopal Church as a means to examine our public worship. In honor and recognition of the preeminence of our Lord Jesus Christ, our worship on the day that celebrates his resurrection ought to center on him by means of his own Word and Sacrament. Whatever supports, enhances, and dignifies this central focus can be of service; whatever diminishes, confuses, or degrades this focus should be set aside. In the Book of Common Prayer, it is the Order for Holy Communion that is designed specifically to honor the Saviour on his day through Word and Sacrament. As it is through Jesus Christ by one Spirit that we have access to the Father (*Eph. 2:18*), so we believe that it is through the Word and Supper of our Lord that our access to the Father by one Spirit takes shape in Christian worship. To take Word and Sacrament as normative for Christian worship is contrary to many of the popular trends in evangelical worship today. We believe that the Biblical and historic norms for worship put Christ more clearly at the center.

If judgment begins at the house of God and if the house of God is to be a house of prayer for all people, then the question of our worship is a critical question. Every form of Christian worship incorporates that which is of God with that which is of man. In that sense, Christian worship is itself a kind of incarnation of the divine with the human. The dominical Word and Sacrament require an ecclesiastical arrangement and response. While the Lord himself has established the central elements and content of Christian worship, it is the Church that arranges, enacts, and elucidates what the Lord has given.

Whenever ecclesiastical elements take precedence over the dominical, however, worship is distorted and the divine is made subservient to the human. If the industry of entertainment enters Christian worship, for instance, detracting from or displacing divinely instituted elements, then Christian worship is distorted. Or if the preacher allows either

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his own or his people's love for preaching to overshadow or dislodge from worship whatever does not serve that focus, then Christian worship is distorted.

That churches have been used of God whose public worship lacked certain forms of devotion and duty that are instituted of God, evident within the New Testament Church or clearly perpetuated in the post-Apostolic Church, is obvious. God and his grace cannot be bottled up in specific forms and orders of worship. Churches that faithfully read more of the Bible in public worship than other churches, for instance, or that celebrate the Lord's Supper more frequently, do not automatically have more of the Spirit. And yet, the public reading of Scripture and the celebration of the Lord's Supper are essential elements in the form and order of the church's worship.

In the Reformed Episcopal Church today there are many new parishes that are forming as our Church is slowly spreading out across the country. In the process, many new liturgical customs and practices for the Reformed Episcopal Church are emerging. Some older Reformed Episcopal customs and liturgical practices are on the decline. Most of the customs, whether old or new to us, are simply ecclesiastical in nature; they are not institutions divinely ordained for the worship of the Church. The relative good of specific ecclesiastical customs and arrangements must be evaluated by the general principles of theology, good order, intelligibility, Christian charity, and serviceability in the performance of what God actually has instituted for Christian worship. Good order and general public intelligibility, for instance, may be just as critical of excessive and extravagant ritual as they are of all indecency, irreverence and disregard for any imposition of order. More ceremony and ritual do not add up to more reverence and piety. But, neither do more spontaneity and informality.

Restoring the Lord's Supper to its central place in Sunday worship, however, is something different. The Lord's Supper, though it must be ecclesiastically ordered and arranged, is not an ecclesiastical institution. It is a dominical sacrament of the Gospel. Holy Communion is an essential element in Christian worship on the Lord's Day. Some may



choose to read the Biblical material differently, but the historical material is irrefutable. Holy Communion is normative Christian worship for the Lord's Day. While a particular parish may be permitted by its bishop and pastor to continue its own practice of celebrating Holy Communion less frequently, especially in the case of mission parishes, it should nevertheless recognize what is the norm Biblically and historically. A parish that does not want to celebrate and receive the Holy Supper on a weekly basis should not be forced to do so, which even the Protestant Reformers had to recognize. But every pastor and parish should understand some of the Biblical and historical rationale that identify Word and Sacrament as the fullest embodiment of Christian worship in this time of pilgrimage. For the Lord's Day gathering, Word and Sacrament are the normative means of worship as well as the normative means of grace.

The service of Word and Sacrament, however, is a moral rather than a mechanical instrument and means of grace. A moral instrument offers and nurtures a living bond between persons. It touches on the character of a vital relationship. Mechanical instruments work without regard to life, personhood, or relationship. The mechanical is the force of the impersonal. The moral is the power of the personal. To treat a moral instrument as if it were mechanical would be to degrade and deface it. The restoration of Word and Sacrament in the worship of the Church will not bring peace, therefore, where people refuse to be reconciled. Holy Communion is fundamentally about conversion. Conversion is not only an event, marked by a turning from darkness to light, but it is also a process of "pressing on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." In that sense, conversion is either ongoing toward our full conformity to Christ or it is nothing.

If we practice a sacred Communion in worship but live divisively and prejudicially in the world, we are hypocrites. If we take the memorials of his body broken and blood shed, but refuse in any way to be broken or poured out for others in service, we are hypocrites. Word and Sacrament as moral instruments relate to all of life.

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*You cannot drink the cup of the Lord
and the cup of demons.*
1 Corinthians 10:21

This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
1 Corinthians 11:25

*What right have you to ...take my covenant in your
mouth, when you hate instruction and cast my words
behind you?*
Psalm 50:16b,17

*What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits
toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call
upon the name of the Lord.* Psalm 116:12,13

Restoring Word and Sacrament to the regular order of the church's Sunday gathering, therefore, will not solve the problem of a dying church that refuses to face its condition and take the painful steps necessary to address it. Holy Communion is not a panacea for all parishes with problems. It is neither a church growth tactic nor a methodology for quick and easy renewal. Rather, Holy Communion is first and foremost an act of faith and obedience upon the Word and promises of our Lord Jesus Christ. If the restoration of Word and Sacrament as the normal Sunday practice of the parish is to contribute to the health and well-being of the parish, it must be taken as part of a holistic reformation of our lives and our fellowship around the Lord Jesus Christ. To that end we begin with judgment at the house of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ABOUT THE INTRODUCTION

Be sure to read all Scripture passages listed in the lesson before answering the questions.

1. What is a sacrament? What is a dominical sacrament? How many sacraments are there?
2. What is *transubstantiation*? What is *consubstantiation*? Who holds these positions, and where in our Church documents do we address these two concepts?
3. What reasons would be used for a less-frequent celebration? In what ways does a less-frequent celebration of the Supper put Christ at the center?
4. "A weekly communion is too frequent, and makes the Supper less special." Analyze this statement.



5. In what ways do we say that judgment begins in the house of God?
6. How do we understand the expression, “The Lord’s Day”?
7. What is meant by the sentence, “The service of Word and Sacrament ... is a moral rather than a mechanical instrument and means of grace.”?
8. What does 1 Corinthians 11 say about those who receive the Supper in an unworthy manner? What makes someone worthy or unworthy when coming to the Supper? What restrictions do the rubrics at the end of the service place on receiving Holy Communion?
9. With specific reference to the Holy Communion, what steps must be taken by individuals, by parishes, and/or by the whole Church for God’s renewal and blessing?

Vocabulary check:

Be sure you know the meaning of the following terms used in the Introduction.

- A. sacrament
- B. ecclesiastical
- C. dominical
- D. celebration
- E. sabbath, Lord’s Day

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What God Has Joined

IMAGINE two different people from two different places with two different points of view. Such a combination could be the beginnings of a war, or it could also be what we call a marriage. And sometimes, unfortunately, the difference is hard to discern. Marriage is the merging of two separate lives into one shared life. Admittedly, each one could survive without the other but neither one would be complete. When we come to the shape of historic Christian worship, we are likewise introduced to the marriage of two, once separate, forms of devotion. The normal shape of the early Christian Sunday liturgy was the fusion of two different practices from two different places with two different points of view. And although one may be done without the other, only together is each one complete. Little children are hardly able to imagine mother and father as being anything but mother and father together forever. Only together is the home complete. But homes do not always stay together. The two that became one can drift very far apart.

What we call Holy Communion is actually the marriage of what were once two separate types of liturgical acts of worship. What became the inseparable couplet in Christian worship has often been called Word and Sacrament. But to be a little more historically precise, we might better identify the couple as Synagogue and Upper Room, both of which had the Word in different ways.

Christianity began with Jewish people who were unquestionably devoted to their Jewish faith. Jesus himself was a Jew, as were the first of his followers. And every Sabbath Day found them in the synagogue for Jewish worship. In Jerusalem stood the one temple for all nations. The temple was the place of sacrifice and atonement for sins. There was no other temple in the land. But in every Jewish town and village there stood a Jewish synagogue. The synagogue was a place to meet for prayer and instruction. Here the Law and the Prophets were read aloud to the people. Their Jewish faith was confessed, and their prayers were said. Chris-



tians continued to do these things when they came together in one place. They had done them all their life. They had done them with Jesus in their new life.

Christian worship is a marriage of the synagogue service with what Jesus instituted in the upper room. The upper room is where Jesus met with his disciples on the night of his betrayal. Here Jesus took bread and wine, and by his word made them what they had not been before, the very signs of his body and blood given for us. Jesus did it, and he instructed his disciples to keep doing it. And so they did.

Steadfastly, they continued in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.
Acts 2:42

On the first day of the week...the disciples came together to break bread.
Acts 20:7

Along the road to Emmaus on the day of his resurrection, Jesus brought the Word to two very despondent disciples. By his own Word he opened to them the Hebrew Scriptures. As a kind of service of the Word, it led to a Gospel culmination spoken by our Lord himself. The Gospel is the high point of Holy Scripture. Once the Scriptures had been opened, Jesus came with his company to the table where he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. “And their eyes were opened, and they knew him,” (*Luke 24:31*). If the service of the Word finds culmination in the Holy Gospel, the service of the holy Supper comes to culmination in the reception of Communion. Receiving Communion is the high place of our sacramental participation in him. Returning to Jerusalem, the enlightened couple tell the others what he had said to them, and “how he was known in the breaking of bread” (*Luke 24:35*). The Emmaus couple found Jesus through the marriage of Word and Sacrament.

Two different practices from two different places with two different points of view are likewise united in one Holy Communion as the central service of Christian worship in the Book of Common Prayer. What the liturgy joins together as one in form is meant to join us together as one in faith. The liturgy of Holy Communion celebrates what God in Christ has done for us, which we receive from him by the

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Holy Spirit. The service of the synagogue prepares the way for the sacrament of the upper room. What the worshipers need, and by God's grace what they receive is, Christ, "Christ within you, the hope of glory."

On what grounds do churches resist the restoration of Word and Sacrament to every Sunday service? Do they fear that making such a union normative for worship is to take a step toward Rome? Let not your worship be defined by antipathy and fear. Roman Catholics also read the Gospel, say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and sing many a Protestant hymn. What Biblical and theological rationale do churches have for their monthly or quarterly celebrations of Holy Communion? Rome is not the only Church to elevate extra-biblical tradition to a place beyond all Biblical and theological critique. Do we believe that Christian liberty allows a Church to determine how often the Holy Supper shall have a place in their worship? Why not allow that same Christian liberty to relegate the reading of the Word of God to a once a month or once a year occasion? If Jesus gave his disciples a commandment in the upper room saying, "Do this in remembrance of me," will he be dishonored if, when we come together, we do it weekly in his honor as did the early Christians and most Christians ever since? This is his very own command for what we are to do in worship. For the weekly collection and the preacher's sermon we have no such explicit command from the Savior, and yet we do them every week. If our worship is done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, could we do anything better in his name than the very Supper he instituted to be done in remembrance of him?

The aim of the Christian gathering is the glory of God, and the upbuilding of the body of Christ, which is Paul's main point in 1 Corinthians 14. To that end, the whole Service truly offers the genuine gift of God to all that come. God does not tease us with empty promises or vacuous signs; although, what He offers can also be refused, which is the essence of unbelief. Christian Worship brings us into the presence of the divine mystery.

Whereas magic is a pretentious manipulation of the supernatural, Christian worship is an enacted confession of



dependence on him who cannot be manipulated but has given the promise of his Word and Sacrament to those who “are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under His table.” Our faith is seen then in how we come. Every time we come to the table, we come as sinners to receive and to be received. And, thereafter, we go out into the highways and hedges with that same love and welcoming grace. What happens at the table is a sign for all of life. The two, both our worship and our living, shall become one. And we keep coming back till He comes again, where we shall take our place at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ABOUT CHAPTER ONE

Be sure to read all Scripture passages listed in the lesson before answering the questions.

1. What two forms of devotion are “married” in our Communion service?
2. What was the synagogue to 1st century Jews? What does the word “synagogue” mean? When did the synagogue appear in Jewish life? What went on in the synagogue?
3. What happened in the Upper Room?
4. Of the two, Synagogue and Upper Room, which represents the Word, and which represents Sacrament? Why?
5. Do Reformed Episcopalians combine Word and Sacrament in the Communion service?
6. Is a more frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper an indication of higher churchmanship, or even a drift toward Romanism?
7. Would you object if your parish limited the reading or preaching of Holy Scripture to once a month? Support your answer.
8. What is the aim of our worship?
9. Why come to the Table at all if our Prayer Book tells us, “we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table”? Why do we keep coming back?

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CHAPTER TWO: The Holy Gospel

IN a small Texas town some years ago, a child named Jessica fell deep into a very narrow shaft in the ground. For fifty some hours the rescuers worked, cutting through the rock that encased her. She could not see; she could not move; she could not eat; and she could not know how long until they might reach her. But throughout the whole ordeal, the girl could hear her mother's voice from above speaking her name, singing songs of Winnie the Pooh, and lifting her heart with hope.

When the pressures of the world enclose us like a hard and narrow shaft, when the walls are closing in, and our spirits lie utterly cramped in the rock, there is a voice to lift our hearts, lighten our load, and renew that great redemptive hope within us. "My sheep hear my voice, and I give unto them eternal life," says the Good Shepherd. "My soul clings to the dust; Revive me according to Your word," cries the Psalmist (*119:25*).

By the Word of God all things came into being (*Heb. 11:3*). By the Word of God, every aspect of creation was orchestrated superbly into a grand symphony of praise (*Gen. 1*). Through the Word of truth, we are born again unto a living hope as coheirs of the glory in Christ (*1 Pet. 1:23*). The Word of God is living and powerful (*Heb. 4:12*). The Word was there in the beginning with God, and the Word was God (*John 1:1*). First and foremost, therefore, the Word is the one eternal Son who became flesh for us and for our salvation. The all-creating and redeeming Word is the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ to whom the Scriptures bear a faithful, definitive, and authoritative witness (*John 5:39*). The Word written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit directs us by the same Spirit to the Word incarnate, by whom we have access to the Father.

By the Holy Spirit, the Bible is the lifeline for the Church to the Son from the Father. To that end, Holy Scripture was written in order to be heard in the church (*Col. 4:16*). What had been true of the Old Testament as a Word to be heard in the synagogue likewise became a criterion for the New



Testament canon. As the churches increasingly circulated these apostolic letters and Gospel records, the need for a definitive canon or official list of books became evident. The formation of the New Testament canon of Scripture, which is the Church's list of those books she recognized as sacred Scripture, besides being definitive for doctrine and practice, is a canon of books for public reading in the Church. Holy Scripture is a book to be read aloud in every congregation. The public reading of the Bible is not merely to convey information to the mind; it is an act of faith in the living God whose word is formative, renewing, and redemptive.

Whatever options there may be in a worship service, therefore, leaving out the Bible is not one of them. "We dare not admit any form of liturgy," wrote Richard Hooker, the Elizabethan apologist for the Church of England, "as either appointeth no scripture at all or very little to be read in the Church."¹ The public reading of the Holy Scripture in the house of God is itself an act of worship. As Ezra blessed the Lord at the reading of the Torah (*Nehemiah 8:1-6*), as Jesus on the Sabbath day stood up to read from the Prophet Isaiah in the synagogue (*Luke 4:16*), and as Paul instructed churches to read aloud his letters in the church (*Col. 4:16*), so in the worship of the church today the reading of the Bible is essential.

It was characteristic of certain branches of the continental Reformation to give up the reading of Holy Scripture for its own sake in the public worship of the church. For Calvin and his followers, the public reading of Scripture in the worship of the church was only for the sake of the preaching. What was not to be preached then and there was not to be read. The most radical of the English Puritans in the late sixteenth century advocated the same practical displacement of mere Scripture reading from the church's worship. Such an agenda, however much promoted by capable Puritan preachers, is what Richard Hooker called "thrusting of the Bible out of the house of God."²

In the Reformed Episcopal Church, the Book of Common Prayer requires a generous amount of Sacred Scripture to be read in the public worship of the church. There are two prescribed lessons from Scripture in each of the

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Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer, not to mention the extensive use of the Psalter. The Order for Holy Communion prescribes a reading from an Epistle and another from one of the four Gospels, with the option for an additional reading from the Old Testament before the Epistle for the Day. Using the Book of Common Prayer keeps the rightful place for Scripture reading within the church's worship as a devotional and God-honoring act in and of itself. But not every Order of Service in the Book of Common Prayer incorporates the Scripture reading in the same way.

Like the service for Holy Communion, the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer set the Bible readings in the context of the worship and praise of God. But the Scripture lessons in the Daily Office do not give the same climactic liturgical focus to the reading of the Holy Gospel as is found in the Order for Holy Communion. In the Offices of Daily Prayer, the Scriptures are simply read as lessons from the two Testaments, substantially equivalent as divine revelation. The basic purpose of a lectionary within the Daily Office is to familiarize the participants with the overall content of the Scriptures as the Church has assembled them into one Book. Since the New Testament is much smaller than the Old Testament, the smaller Testament certainly gets repeated more often. But no ceremonial deference is given to any one part of the Bible over another. The substantial unity and importance of the whole Bible in the Church's devotion and worship undergirds this particular method for reading the Bible. As a daily practice in regular devotion, it nurtures pastors and other participants so that they become a people well-versed in the Bible.

One of the great benefits of the Reformation in England was to introduce extensive readings from the whole Bible in the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. These services were required of all the clergy but also entirely open to the laity. During the course of the middle ages, the Bible came to be reserved primarily as a book for the clergy. But, by the sixteenth century even many of the clergy had become dreadfully ignorant of the Bible. With its daily system for progressing through large portions of the Bible, and the requirement for clergy to read the Daily Offices in the



churches, the clergy gradually became a body far more knowledgeable in the Bible. Many lay people also followed the model of daily Bible reading.

As a means for pastors and people to become “mighty in the Scriptures,” as was Apollos (*Acts 18:24-28*), the lectionary of the Daily Office is rightly tooled. Learning the Bible well and learning it in the context of worship are central elements in the structure of the Daily Office. But Bible knowledge must also become centered and grounded in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, or it is not complete. Priscilla and Aquila, though hardly as well-versed in Scripture as Apollos, were still able to become his instructors because they knew and accurately understood the central work and teaching of Jesus Christ. The Gospel witness is the crux and apex of divine revelation. “God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son,” (*Heb. 1:1,2*). “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,” (*John 1:17*). “In the Law,” wrote Jerome against the Pelagians, “the servants of the Lord speak, in the Gospel the Lord himself; in the former are the promises, in the latter their fulfillment; there are the beginnings, here is perfection; in the law the foundation of works is laid; in the Gospel the edifice is crowned with the topstone of faith and grace.”³

As in the synagogue, the Pentateuch is given the place of preeminence in the regular readings of the Sabbath Day service; so, in the Church, the Gospel has historically received the preeminence in the Sunday liturgy for Holy Communion. The Lord’s Day is marked distinctively by our coming together in the Name of our Lord to hear the Gospel of our Lord and celebrate the Supper of our Lord. As the normative service of worship for the Lord’s Day, the Order for Holy Communion upholds the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as the pinnacle of divine revelation. “The Gospel is Christ’s voice,”⁴ wrote Augustine.

“Remember the words of the Lord Jesus,” St. Paul admonished the Ephesian elders (*Acts 20:35*), indicating the special place such remembered words ought to have in the church. Paul recognized the priority of the words and ac-

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tions of Jesus over Paul's own admonitions and injunctions. "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord. ...But to the rest, I, not the Lord, say..." (*1 Corinthians 7:10,12*). The Apostle knew, as did all the others who spoke as witnesses to the resurrected Christ, that the authority of the Apostolic message was rooted in the Person, work, and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread..." (*1 Corinthians 11:23*).

Speaking of the preeminent place that Christians give to the four Gospels over all the rest of Holy Scripture, Origen calls the Gospel "the first fruit of all the Scriptures."⁵ He then explains that this phrase should not be understood as meaning the first to come in order of growth, which would not be true of the four Gospels, but the first is really the foremost and the finest of all the fruit. All of Holy Scripture is inspired of God, worthy of belief, and possesses great authority. But the Gospel is the inner sanctum. Restoring the Gospel reading to its central place in the Sunday service of the Word is to welcome it as a genuine verbal icon of his presence, a living and powerful sign that he is himself among us in this special way.⁶

When the Daily Office of Morning Prayer serves as the primary order for worship on Sunday, however, the primacy of the Gospel on the Day of our Lord's resurrection can become clouded. To conclude all other readings from the Bible with a reading from the Gospel is to recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as the seal of divine revelation. He is the consummate Word made flesh, and the Gospels bear the preeminent witness. An ancient Syriac text on Christian worship demonstrates the antiquity of this understanding. "At the conclusion of all the Scriptures let the Gospel be read, as being the seal of all the Scriptures; and let the people listen to it standing upon their feet: because the Gospel is the redemption of all men,"⁷ (*Teaching of the Apostles*). It is also to signify our solemn recognition of the Day of his Resurrection and appearance among the assembled disciples that we stand to hear the holy Gospel after the other Scriptures are read. Dropping the weekly Sunday reading of the



Gospel in the church service would be like dropping the reading of the Torah from the Synagogue. Restoring the Gospel to the Sunday liturgy gives honor to whom honor is due. It is an expression of Biblical faith in the redemptive centrality of Jesus Christ. The four Gospels are like four pillars supporting and upholding the entire Church, said Irenaeus.⁸ We need to reinforce the pillars of the Church by restoring the Gospel to the Sunday liturgy. We need to hear the whole of Scripture with the perfection of the Gospel ever on our minds. The Gospel is the interpretive key to the Christian faith and Christian living.

Only under the sound of the Gospel can we gather as the Church, the flock that he shepherds. We cannot be the Church if we do not have the Gospel. We can have a building and a program; we can have our meetings, church suppers, and maybe even a lot of good feeling. But if we do not hear the Gospel, we do not have a church. The Gospel is the Shepherd's voice. In the Old Testament the people looked forward to the good and the God that is coming. The wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and the Lord will take away sin and death to dwell among us himself (*Isa. 11:6*). But the Gospel is the fulfillment of the promise in one Lord Jesus Christ. Restoring the Gospel reading to its central place in our Sunday service of worship bears visible and audible witness to the preeminence of the one Savior of the world.

This Gospel is not just a certain kind of preaching, even though it ought to be preached. The Gospel is not first and foremost what the preacher says and does, but rather what Jesus says and does. So we stand for the Gospel reading; like people standing for their national anthem; for the sermon we sit. It is important to have the Gospel expounded in a church. But the actual reading of the Holy Gospel ought to have priority over every preacher's exposition. In the Gospels the Savior himself preaches. Every other sermon is subordinate, and the preacher's authority is much less predictable. There is hardly a church today that would think of having a Sunday service without some sort of sermon. But there are churches without number that think nothing of a Sunday service where no Gospel reading is heard. Let the

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preachers and people humble themselves on the Lord's Day by bringing the Gospel of the Lord back as one of the bare essentials to every Sunday service. Let the preacher's sermon return to its proper place under the shadow of the Gospel, as a footnote for faith and godly living. Some footnotes are good; some footnotes are bad. Sometimes they help; sometimes they actually distract. But in the Gospel, the Shepherd's voice always sounds aloud to the sheep.

The word of the Good Shepherd defines us. "My sheep hear my voice." Preachers come and go, and not one is the same as the next; congregations change; new faces come; old faces get older still. But the Gospel is the same from one generation to the next. The Gospel takes priority over every other word. The Gospel defines us. It tells us what we are and what we are not. It tells us who God is and what he gives.

We need a Savior to save us from ourselves. We have a God so good he will not save himself the pain of saving us. He gives himself to those who do not deserve the giving. The good news may not always sound so good to us, but the Shepherd's voice always gives life. "My sheep hear my voice, and I give unto them eternal life." (*John 10:27, 28*)

The Gospel was given to be read and understood in the Church. People may read it as literature in some schools; some may study it by correspondence through the mail; but the Gospel's priority of place is always in the Church, as the Shepherd's voice to the sheep. It is the sound that leads us. With his voice, the Shepherd called the sheep forth to feed. By his word the Shepherd led them to the food he had for them. In the Church, we follow the same pattern: the Word takes us up to the table. Jesus calls us that he might feed us. And he feeds us that we might be of use in his service.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

¹ Richard Hooker, *Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* [LEP], vol.2, Collected by John Keble (Ellicott City, MD: Via Media Facsimile Reprint, 1994), 5.20.5.

² Ibid., 5.20.5.

³ Jerome, "Against the Pelagians" Book I.31, in *Letters and Select Works*, Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series*, Vol. 6, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) 464.

⁴ Augustine, "Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament" Ser-



mon XXXV.1, in *Augustine*, Edited by Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers*. First Series, Vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 266.

⁵ Origen, “Commentary on the Gospel of John” Book I.4,5, in *The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Edited by Allan Menzies, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 298,299.

⁶ For the Gospel as a verbal icon, see Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, translated by Paul Kachur (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 69ff.

⁷ *Syriac Documents*, “The Teaching of the Apostles” in *The Twelve Patriarchs*, Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 668.

⁸ Irenaeus, “Irenaeus Against Heresies” Book III.xi,8, in *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 428.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ABOUT CHAPTER TWO

Be sure to read all Scripture passages listed in the lesson before answering the questions.

1. Why does the Gospel reading have such prominence in our Communion service? Why do we stand to hear the Gospel reading?
2. What is meant by the phrase, “The Bible is a lifeline for the Church”? Can you think of examples in church history when the Church abandoned its “lifeline”?
3. Why do we use the term “canon” when speaking of Holy Scripture?
4. How much of our liturgy is taken directly or by inference from Holy Scripture?
5. What is a lectionary and what is its purpose?
6. Does the Reformed Episcopal Church require its clergy to read the Daily Office?
7. How did Aquila and Priscilla become teachers to Apollos? What lessons are to be gleaned from that?

Vocabulary check:

Be sure you know the meaning of the following terms used in Chapter Two.

- A. Daily Office
- B. lectionary, propers
- C. canon
- D. Jerome
- E. Pelagians, Pelagianism
- F. Pentateuch

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CHAPTER THREE: HOLY COMMUNION

This gift of all gifts is the best,
Thy flesh the least that I request.

George Herbert (1633)

Sign of Union / Sign of Disunion

CHRISTIANS have expressed their beliefs about Holy Communion in many different ways. In less contentious times, many of these different expressions have been regarded as complementary to one another. But sometimes the differences have become so sharp and the corresponding attitudes so adversarial that one group has entirely repudiated the Communion of another group and rejected any share in the same holy table. However sad these divisions are, however shamefully combative the opponents have sometimes been, even the polemical heat of the most passionate contenders bears witness to the importance of this sacred Supper to all the people of God in their flawed and tainted pilgrimage below. Not only, therefore, do “we have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7), but we continue to “dine with Him” as those who are the “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17-20).

Doing and Understanding

As Christians came together for worship after the Resurrection, they also came together to share the Lord’s Supper. Scripture gives indication that Communion was part of what they regularly did when they assembled as his people (*Acts* 2:42; 20:7; *1 Cor.* 11:17-20), particularly on the first day of the week. Early records of Christian worship after the time of the Apostles confirm the centrality of this Eucharistic practice (*see diagram, p. 29*). One example of this is from the late first century Didache: “On every Lord’s Day – his special day – come together and break bread and give thanks.”¹ Another example is the descriptive words of Justin Martyr around 155 A.D. explaining Christian worship: “On the day called Sunday... when we have finished the prayer, bread is



brought, and wine and water, and the president similarly sends up prayers and thanksgiving.”²

The regular observance of the Lord’s Supper came before any formal efforts were made at understanding and explaining something of its meaning. The word of the Savior is what gave meaning to the Supper. It is the word of the Lord Jesus Christ that has been spoken consistently at the Church’s Communion. When Jesus took bread and said, “This is My body,” and when He took the cup saying, “This is the New Covenant in My blood,” the whole Jewish Passover meal was clearly redefined by his Word. The meal became something more than Passover and the elements became something more than bread and wine. His Word, therefore, changed the nature of the meal. “For He spoke, and it was so; He commanded, and it stood fast” (*Psalms 33:9*).

His Word and not theirs made the meal a Holy Communion. “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you,” wrote St. Paul to the Corinthians when their practice began to deviate from what the Apostle had first passed on to them. But the Apostle not only repeated the Word that defined the Supper, he also began to draw some implications from that Word to get the Corinthians back on track. “If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home” (*1 Cor. 11:34*). Meeting bodily hunger is not the purpose of this Supper, thus drawing a sharp line between a so-called agape meal and Holy Communion. The Word of the Lord sets this meal apart from any other. Participants in the Lord’s Supper make a proclamation of his death (*11:26*) and solidify a genuine participation in his body and blood (*10:16*), which if done faithfully is for their collective benefit, but if defiantly, then to their detriment (*11:17,27-32*).

Where churches have most often disagreed, however, has been in speaking of how the bread and wine presented at the Lord’s Table relate to the Body and Blood of Holy Communion. When Christians did begin to speak specifically about what is received in Holy Communion, they emphasized the reality and priority of God’s gift in this sacred meal. They took the Word that Jesus had given at the Last Supper as being decisive for all Christians at the Lord’s Table. “This is My Body which is given for you; this cup is the New Cov-

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enant in My blood.” They did not as yet feel compelled to provide more philosophical, much less more scientific explanations. Those definitions and the heated debates that came with them arose much later.

For most of a millenium now, many Christians have been taught that the elements of bread and wine are substantially changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. At Holy Communion, they believe that bread and wine cease to be what they were and become the Body and Blood of Christ. To defend this particular understanding, nothing was more helpful than a Christian adaptation of ancient physics as found in the writings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, whose more complete works first came to the attention of the West in the thirteenth century. Aristotle called what something really is, its substance (residing beneath). What something appeared to be, he called its accidents. Of course, Aristotle never imagined using this understanding of the physical make-up of the world as theologians would later use it to explain how bread becomes body and wine becomes blood at the Holy Supper. But a defense was needed, and Aristotle’s physics understandably proved to be the most convenient way to do it at the time. When bread and wine are consecrated, the appearance (the accidents) of bread and wine remain the same, but the underlying reality (the substance) is truly changed from bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ. In this understanding, if it is bread and wine, then it cannot be body and blood, and if it is body and blood, it cannot also be bread and wine.

In a poem from the seventeenth century entitled “The Holy Communion”³, the Protestant parson George Herbert posed his question about this particular understanding of the presence of Christ in Communion. Herbert believed profoundly in the reality of our Communion in the body and blood of Christ, but he could not accept the Roman Catholic interpretation of how that Communion is accomplished.

Oh Gracious Lord how shall I know
Whether in these gifts thou be so
As thou art ev’rywhere;
Or rather so, as thou alone



Tak'st all the Lodging, leaving none
For thy poor creature there?
First I am sure, whether bread stay
Or whether Bread do fly away
Concerneth bread, not me.
But that both thou, and all thy train,
Be there, to thy truth, and my gain,
Concerneth me and Thee.
Then of this also I am sure
That thou didst all those pains endure
To abolish Sin, not Wheat.
Creatures are good, and have their place;
Sin only, which did all deface
Thou drivest from his seat.

In this view of Holy Communion, the reality of the bread and the reality of the Presence of Christ are not mutually exclusive. What really matters for believers, based on what the promise of God affirms, is to have a genuine participation in Christ and all his benefits (“thou, and all thy train”) nurtured directly by means of these Communion elements. The various explanations of how this might happen are not as important as the affirmation itself. As truly as he took bread and said, “This is My body”, and took the cup saying, “This is the New Covenant in My blood,” so we must either truly affirm or deny it.

Very early in the second century, Ignatius of Antioch spoke of Holy Communion as “the medicine of immortality.”⁴ This belief is still echoed in our own Communion liturgy in the words of administration. “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for you [and the blood which was shed for you] preserve your bodies and souls unto everlasting life.”

Late in the fourth century in North Africa, Augustine of Hippo, commenting on the words of St. John 6:56, “He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him,” again pointed his congregation to the meaning of Holy Communion. “This it is, therefore, for a man to eat that meat and to drink that drink, to dwell in Christ, and to have Christ dwelling in him.”⁵ This understanding of Holy Com-

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munion is also expressed in our Communion liturgy in the Prayer of Humble Access. “Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, ...that we may evermore dwell in Him and He in us.”

True and Genuine Communion

I have received from the Lord that which I also delivered unto you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘Take eat; this is my body broken for you.’

I Corinthians 11:23,24

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

I Corinthians 10:16

Communion is sharing one’s own life with another. But as human beings, we live and share that life in flesh and blood. For us, communion takes place through the physical medium. Intangible graces such as love, joy, and peace reach out to us through tangible persons and actions. For us, spiritual graces are conveyed through physical agencies.

We do not communicate by telepathy, or extrasensory perception. Some may claim to have E.S.P., but they never use the E.S.P. to make the claim. The moment you put your thoughts and feelings into words, whether written or spoken, you are using the physical to convey the spiritual. “Think of the soul,” wrote the poet, Walt Whitman, “I swear to you that body of yours gives proportions to your soul somehow to live in other spheres.”⁶ One soul cannot reach out into the sphere of another but by the physical medium, the material channel. A man with a woman falls in love, but the woman he loves does not know. He makes a telephone call. He writes a letter. They take a walk; he holds her hand. Words are spoken; hearts are joined. And by the means of outward signs and actions, the inward reality is given and received. For a human being, there is no other way. The spiritual must utilize the corporal.

As Protestants, we may carefully note the specks which cloud the Roman Catholic eye of faith, but we have a few planks of our own to remove. We have often had an un-



healthy fear and suspicion of any thing sacramental as being much too physical for God's use. We are ever prepared to tell people not to trust these things, like suspicious friends telling some girl to be skeptical of roses sent from an admirer. Meanwhile, we resolutely call for all confidence in the word that we speak.

Sacraments may be abused, as may preaching and teaching, and even Bible reading. The difference between Word and Sacrament is not between what is spiritual and what is physical. Both Word and Sacrament are physical realities meant to communicate the Divine. He that gave his Word to his disciples saying, "He that hears you, hears me," also gave bread for his disciples to eat on the night of his betrayal, saying, "This is my body broken for you." If God can use physical vibrations on the eardrum from the spoken word as means to communicate himself, why should it be strange for God to use the eating of bread and the drinking of wine as means to communicate himself? "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" By the bread, we share and take part in the body; by the cup, we share and take part in the blood.

As human beings, usage more than physics determines what something is. "This is my body," says the Lord Jesus; "This cup is the New Testament in my blood." To the Hebrew mind, body is not something you have added onto the self that you are. To the Hebrew, the body is the self; the body is the person. To say, "this is my body" then is to say, "this is me." The Hebrew concept of blood is also different from ours. For us it is that liquid part of the body which hospitals can both give and take. But for the Hebrew, the blood is the life, and to offer your blood is to offer your life, your whole life. Detaching limbs and extracting chemical compounds from the body for consumption is not communion. For a personal communion, the presence of one person must come into the sphere of another. The body is the organ by which that is done - one person made present to another through the physical medium. Thus at the Passover Supper which would be his last, on the eve of his crucifixion when his enemies would attempt to destroy and bury

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him once and for all, our Lord Jesus took bread, and declaring it his body, told the twelve to eat. Usage, more than physics, determines what something is.

Consider a church building in which Christians meet to worship. There are bricks and mortar, metal and wood. And there are other buildings all around it, up and down the streets of the same city - buildings of differing cost and quality, but they are buildings just the same. We call the one a church, not because the physics are different but because the use is. Some buildings are used for gambling, which we call casinos. A church may not be as glamorous, but someone could, in theory, convert a church into a gambling hall. The physics would not prevent it. But the new usage would undoubtedly be a conversion, or rather a perversion of the building. Either way, usage more than physics determines what something is.

Consider that piece of metal wrapped around the third finger of the left hand of the newly wedded person. If it is gold or silver, why not cash it in for the money? Why not redeem the precious stone? The newlyweds could split the money, or combine it for a trip. Or perhaps the ring could be melted down, molded into a silver bullet and loaded into a handgun for protection. The physics would not prevent it. But the ring means far more to the newly wedded than the metal and the physical substance of it. Usage more than physics determines what something is.

Before Jesus Christ went to the cross, he took bread and broke it, saying, "This is my body which is broken for you." And likewise, he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood." So there is a conversion here. It is called a consecration. A conversion, not of physical substance or material composition, but a far more significant conversion of usage. For by the word of Christ himself, what is most important and significant about this bread is not what the baker has made of it for us with his flour and his oven, but what Christ makes of it for us with his Word and his Spirit. For as the body is the means of our physical presence, so by divine appointment bread and wine eaten as Christ offers them become the means of his personal communion with us.



It is not mechanical, magical, or impersonally automatic. No communion between persons is ever that way. When a young man brings his roses to the girl he so admires, she can still turn him away. Or she can take the roses but reject the love, the person, the real presence. In personal communion what one person gives, another must receive. And, for the Christian, the consummating symbol of what Christ gives and what we are to be is embodied in the Holy Supper.

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” We can and must commune with Christ in many more ways and places leading up to the Holy Supper. Even as husband and wife share in life with each other at more times and in other places than in the bedroom. A man may meet his wife at the local cafe to share lunch. Sometimes it is just a phone call from the office, or a loving note that makes all the difference in a day. Hand in hand, the two can walk along the shore, or just be together reading in the same room. But there is a time and a place where husband and wife meet as nowhere else, in a sacred and undefiled union, kept only to themselves. “And they two shall be one flesh.” Marriage is the image chosen by God to reflect “that mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church.” And as every marriage has a consummating act in the physical realm, so too in this life, till he come again, our mystical union with Christ is consummated in the physical Eucharist.

To some the comparison may sound degrading and irreverent. Nevertheless, comparing the union of Christ with his own to the highest physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman is precisely what Saint Paul calls a “great mystery.”

Christian mysteries are not like puzzles that either we master and solve completely before going on to better things or we abandon entirely having lost all interest in the clutter. The mystery of our Faith is nothing less than God’s own unveiling, which although fully given, can be known only in part. Such mystery cannot be completely reduced to meet the parameters of our definitions. To scrutinize the mystery we must depersonalize the mystery. God must then be

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confined to the analysis of the human mind. But can we, merely by analysis, know and comprehend by definition the love and joy shared even by two happily wedded people? How much less the blessedness of our sacred union with God incarnate?

If I could tell how glad I was
I should not be so glad -
But when I cannot make the Force
Nor mould it into Word,
I know it is a sign
That new Dilemma be
From mathematics further off
Than from Eternity.

(Emily Dickinson)⁷

The consummate symbol of our union with God incarnate in Jesus Christ is embodied in the Holy Supper. “Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, ... that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us,” concludes the Prayer of Humble Access. Only through the cross can there be such a union between a holy God and a sinful people. From a human perspective, the event of the cross was temporary, confined to a few hours early in the first century A.D. We cannot go back in history to the day when the most holy became the most defiled, when the purest encountered the most impure. But the one who died that day has come forward in history with new life to this day. To take in that life is to take in that cross where the holy meets the unholy and all is transformed. To live with him we must die with him, and to die with him is to live. In countless ways Christ reaches out to take us in. As expressed in the words of *St. Patrick’s Breastplate*:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.

By his own determination, however, the consummating act of our union with him in this life is the Holy Supper. It is not a repetition of the cross. It is a reactivation of its transforming significance between God and man. It is not our gift to him but his gift to us. What he is he offers to us,



which is the body of Christ, the mystery of the incarnation. What he is, he calls us to become, which is the body of Christ, the organ of his presence in a lost and dying world. The Church is and is called to be the body of Christ, the channel of his love, the united witness to his grace. To live by the body Christ offers in the Supper is to live as the body Christ presents to the world. It is a reconciling body, a caring, loving, and sacrificing body. As his body, it is to be a body functioning in unison, rather than in opposition, in unison with God and with itself. “For we, being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (*I Cor. 10:17*).

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

¹ Didache, XIV in *Documents of Christian Worship, Descriptive and Interpretive Sources*, by James F. White (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 183.

² Justin Martyr, “First Apology” in *Documents of Christian Worship*, by James F. White, 185, 186.

³ For entire poem see, George Herbert, “The Holy Communion” in *George Herbert, The Country Parson, The Temple*, Edited by John N. Wall, Jr., in *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 327, 238.

⁴ Ignatius, “To the Ephesians” sec. 20, in *Documents of Christian Worship*, by James F. White, 184.

⁵ Augustine, “Homilies on the Gospel of St. John”, Tractate XXVI.18, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 7, 173.

⁶ Walt Whitman, “Think of the Soul” in *Leaves of Grass* (Norwalk, CT: The Easton Press, 1977), 492.

⁷ Emily Dickinson, “If I Could Tell” *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1960), 681.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ABOUT CHAPTER THREE

Be sure to read all Scripture passages listed in the lesson before answering the questions.

1. What divisions might be in mind when it is said, “...one group has entirely repudiated the Communion of another group and rejected any share in the same holy table”?
2. Did the Reformers address the question of the frequency of Holy Communion? If so, what case did they make?
3. When Justin Martyr speaks of “the President” with re-

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- gard to the service of Holy Communion, whom does he have in mind?
4. What was the difference between the *Agapé* meal and the Eucharist? Why did the *Agapé* meal fall from use in the Church?
 4. What punishment is promised to those who eat and drink unworthily?
 5. How did the early church relate the bread and wine to the body and blood? How was that understanding changed in later centuries?
 6. The medieval church substituted Greek philosophy in dealing with worship and particularly with the Holy Communion. What modern substitutes do we see in the Church?
 7. What was George Herbert's view of the Holy Communion? How did it differ from Roman Catholic thinking? How does it differ from some Protestant thinking?
 8. What did Ignatius of Antioch have in mind in calling the Eucharist, "the medicine of immortality?"
 9. How do we respond to those who desire (or claim to have) a non-verbal, and totally spiritual relationship with God? In what ways does God use the word to communicate? In what ways does God use the physical to communicate?
 10. How do we understand the statement, "blood is life"?
 11. Explain the phrase, "Usage more than physics determines what something is."
 12. How do we understand the Communion prayer where we say, "that he might dwell in us and we in him"?

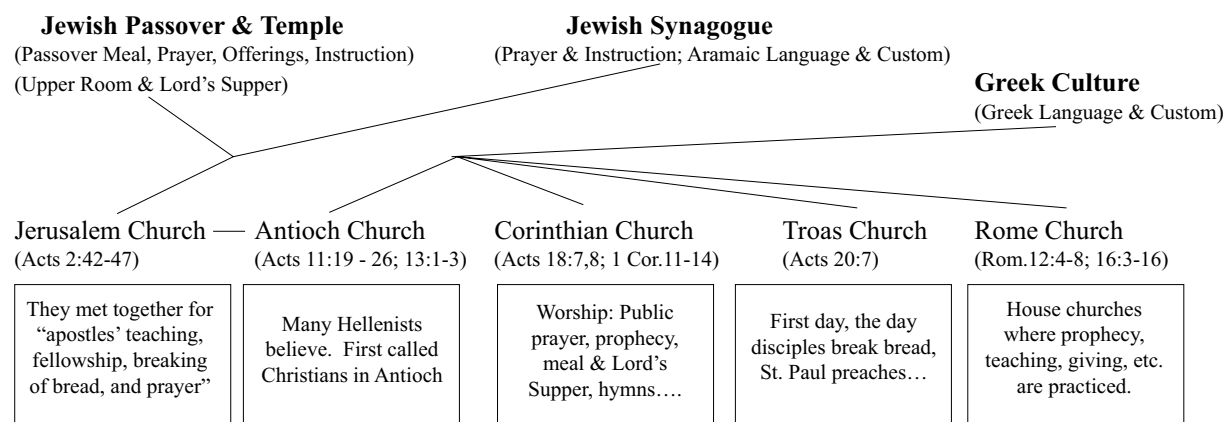
Vocabulary check:

Be sure you know the meaning of the following terms used in Chapter Three.

- A. eucharist
- B. agape meal
- C. accident, incidents, substance
- D. George Herbert
- E. Ignatius of Antioch
- F. Augustine of Hippo
- G. Hesychasts, hesychasm
- H. consecration, consecrate
- I. mystery

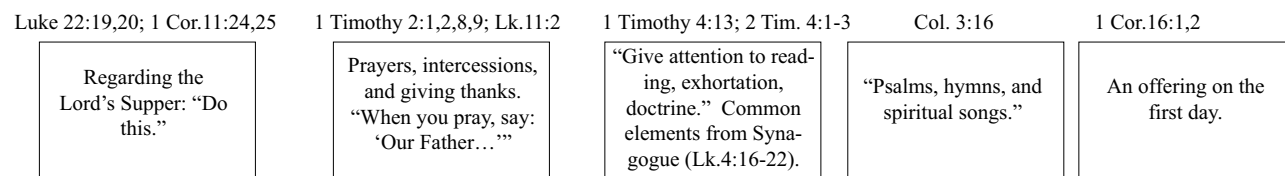


Historical Derivation of Particular “Families” of Liturgy

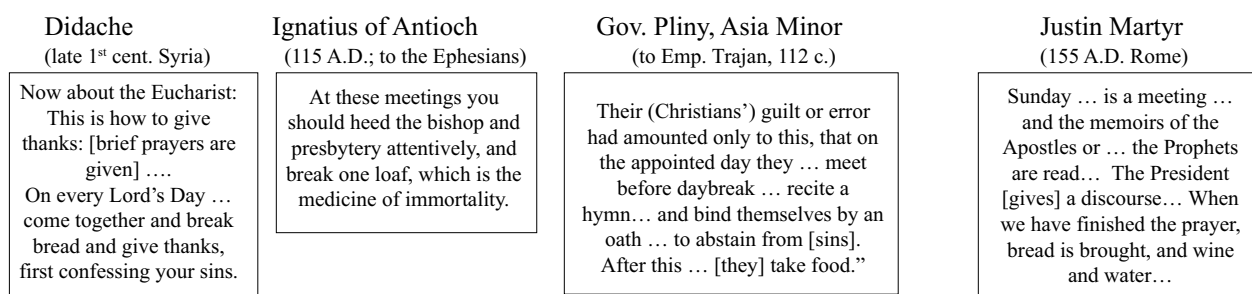


No complete description of Christian worship in any of the numerous churches is given in the New Testament. Rather, we have various glimpses of certain practices in some of these churches. These glimpses do not indicate precise uniformity of practice, although there are some elements more commonly mentioned than others. One such frequently mentioned element is teaching (whether by apostolic preaching, prophecy, exhortation, or some other form). Another is prayer. Several passages mentioned meeting on the first day of the week. And the Lord’s Supper or breaking of bread is more than once mentioned in connection with the Christian assembly on the first day.

The presence of these specific elements in Christian worship is supported by specific commands and directives in the New Testament that indicate what is to be done by Christians meeting together in worship.



Ancient Variety of Liturgies and Patterns of Christian Worship¹ (Some Common Elements of Worship: Sunday; Prayers; Instruction in Faith; Lord’s Supper)



¹ For the quotes from the Didache, Ignatius of Antioch, Pliny, and Justin Martyr, see James F. White, *Documents of Christian Worship, Descriptive and Interpretive Sources*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992) 183-186.



CHAPTER FOUR:

Elements of Communion

THE material elements of Communion have always been some form of bread and wine in accordance with what Jesus used at the Last Supper and with the practice of the first Christians. In the East, the Orthodox Church uses leavened bread, while most Christians in the West have used unleavened bread for Communion. At the time of the 16th century Protestant Reformation, some Churches in their rejection of Rome substituted leavened bread in place of unleavened. Certainly, unleavened bread was the element used at the Last Supper, and some Christians point to 1 Corinthians 5:5-8, which associates leaven with sin and calls us to “keep the feast” without it. Leaven, however, also serves as a sign of the Kingdom, as Jesus tells us in St. Matthew 13:33. Christians should therefore recognize the validity of using either leavened or unleavened bread for Holy Communion.

Particular denominations, however, may find one form of bread more appropriate than another based on considerations more related to their specific liturgy, manner of administration, appropriate decorum in worship, and the post-communion disposition of consecrated elements. Since the breaking of the bread is everywhere mentioned in connection with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament (*Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24*), whatever form of bread is used in a Communion service ought to be a form that can be readily and visibly broken before the assembled congregation. As a matter of decorum in such a solemn “partaking of the Lord’s Table” (*1 Cor. 10:21*) and such a sacred celebration “showing forth the Lord’s death till he come” (*1 Cor. 11:26*), it also seems appropriate to avoid using any form of bread that is apt to crumble and scatter as broken and administered. When it is used for intinction, bread that easily crumbles can also become distracting to others who subsequently take from the same cup. One of the most appropriate and serviceable forms of bread used for Communion in Reformed Episcopal parishes is a large wafer that is scored for easy



breaking during the service in which it is used. The use of pita bread may also be recommended. Breaking and dividing a large loaf of bread, however, often results in fragments being scattered indecorously along the chancel rail.

Whatever bread remains after the service, moreover, should be reverently consumed, set aside for the Communion of the sick, or kept for use at a subsequent service of Communion. If Jesus ordered even “the fragments to be gathered up that nothing be lost” (*Jn. 6:12*) when he fed the five thousand on the mountainside, should the Church do anything less with that bread blessed and broken as “the communion of the body of Christ” (*1 Cor. 10:16*)? If some of the remaining consecrated elements will not be utilized in any of these ways but will rather spoil, then it would be appropriate to “return them to the earth” itself.

The other element for Communion is wine, most often referred to in the Bible simply as “the cup,” which is always in the singular (*Mt. 26:27; Mk. 14:23; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 10:16,21; 11:25,26*). During late medieval times in the West, the practice of withholding the cup from the laity became widely established, which the Churches of the Reformation again restored to the people.

The Cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the Lay-people: for both parts of the Lord’s Sacrament, by Christ’s ordinance and commandment, ought to be ministered to all Christian men alike.

- Article XXX of The Thirty-nine Articles

This does not mean that Communion can only ever be received when both elements are taken, for there are times when a person who is physically unable to take the bread could still drink from the cup. Others may likewise decline the cup for unspecified reasons but could still receive Communion in one kind. But the Church itself ought not to withhold the cup from the people of God.

Some people, however, are simply averse to taking wine. In the twentieth century, with newly developed methods available for preventing fermentation, some Protestant churches began to substitute grape juice for Communion wine. At about the same time, small, individualized cups were introduced for administering the grape juice. The use of grape juice is undoubtedly irregular in the history of the

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Church. That, however, does not make it automatically invalid as an element for Communion. Preserved and bottled grape juice was simply not an option until the late nineteenth century. Neither has grape juice ever been the general drink of solemn and festive occasions, which the Lord's Supper certainly is. But for those who cannot drink wine, either because of conscience or alcoholism, it seems charitably appropriate to make some special allowances for them. Two options today are to receive Communion by means of bread only or to receive Communion by means of grape juice and bread. Both of these are clearly departures from New Testament practice, but the abounding grace of God should not be so legalistically restricted and so narrowly defined that it appears more mechanistic than personal. We can and ought to acknowledge the presence and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ among Christians who share the same essential Faith but whose Communion practice in some ways deviates from the norm of New Testament and historic Christian tradition.

The question of whether individualized cups are an appropriate substitute for the common cup, however, is not simply a matter of charity. The common cup was not an accidental choice that Jesus made for distributing the offered drink. It was a deliberate choice that is emphasized in the narrative of the Last Supper. Its use in the Bible, throughout the history of the Church, and in actual administration today, is a powerful symbol of union and communion. "Drink from it, all of you," said Jesus (*Mt. 26:27*), underscoring the communal fellowship thereby enacted. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (*Lk. 22:20*), he said, clearly identifying the one cup with the new covenant. To the Corinthians, St. Paul speaks of the cup of blessing as itself something that we bless. "The cup of blessing which we bless is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" (*1 Cor. 10:16*). That the one cup signifies the unity of Christ and of all who partake of him was specifically noted by Ignatius around 110 A.D. "For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to show forth the unity of his blood," (Epistle to the Philadelphians).

The substitution of individualized cups for a common



cup is a major change. Not everyone even in those churches that adopted the new practice welcomed the introduction of individualized cups in Communion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In Scotland, for instance, it led to a very heated debate among Presbyterians. The argument presented in favor of introducing small cups for every individual to have his own was simply that of avoiding the risk of infection. Everyone knew that Jesus had called his disciples to share one cup. They also knew of no church in nineteen hundred years that had introduced the practice of an individualized cup for each and every participant. But with the advance of medical research and the isolation of numerous microscopic germs and viruses, new concerns for proper hygiene in every area understandably emerged. To some people, in spite of the Biblical and historical significance of the Communion cup, sharing the cup suddenly seemed hygienically unjustifiable. New scientific and social trends therefore took precedence over Biblical tradition and historical practice.

That the Savior's and the Church's use of a common cup was hygienically risky was more a matter of perception than demonstrated fact, of course. Today it is widely recognized that germs are most often passed by means of a common handshake or the common air that is breathed. The risk of germs is not avoided by the use of tiny individual cups, the edges of which are almost unavoidably touched by the hands of those who administer as well as the hands of those who receive.

This fear of germs, however, can also become a socially and spiritually unhealthy fear of one another. Proper hygiene is one thing; rejecting use of the common cup for fear of germs is quite another. To live in the world in community with others is to live and breathe the germs that are common. People in churches that share a common cup are no more prone to sickness and disease than people in churches that offer each person an individual cup.

Nevertheless, the practice of using individual cups is now deeply rooted in some churches. As restoring the cup to the people in the Roman Catholic Communion has proven very difficult for people long accustomed to Communion in one

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kind, so too completely withdrawing individualized cups from many Christians in evangelical churches is not likely to nurture a spirit of peace and charity. Restoring the use of the common cup is essential to observing Communion as Jesus instituted it; continuing the option for an individual cup is a charitable concession to a custom most people today simply inherited. But there should be no doubt in anyone's mind as to the central priority of the common cup in Scripture and tradition.

The common cup partaken of together signifies the common-union or communion which individual cups cannot so symbolize. Individual cups as a method for administering Holy Communion may actually serve to nurture a more individualistic, non-communal, and non-ecclesial approach to God. This danger should not be lightly disregarded. When the use of individual cups is combined with the practice of using bread that is already divided into individual portions before the service begins, then the communal symbolism both of one cup that is shared and of one bread that is visibly broken for all is absent. These Biblical and historic symbols are very important to recover.

Individualism is flatly contrary to the meaning and significance of Holy Communion. Nevertheless individualism has repeatedly found avenues of expression in the Church's practice of Holy Communion. The late medieval practice of priests privately offering a paid Mass for a departed loved one can be seen as a form of individualism which radically distorted the communal nature of the Lord's Supper. That Protestant Reformers were unable to restore the Lord's Supper as the regular Sunday Communion of the Church can also partly be explained by the individualistic approach to receiving Communion mostly in terms of benefits and dangers to the individual. The same fear that drove the laity away from the cup in medieval times also motivated their general resistance to increasing the frequency of their Communion reception when the Reformation came. Observing a priest who offers a Mass every Sunday is one thing; taking Communion from Protestant clergy who insisted on participants receiving and not just passively observing was quite another.



In 1683, a hundred and fifty years after England's break with Rome, John Tillotson, the Latitudinarian Archbishop of the Church of England, saw that it was fear of unworthy reception that contributed to a continued neglect of Communion in the Church.

[B]y the unwary discourses of some, concerning the nature of this Sacrament and the danger of receiving it unworthily, such doubts and fears have been raised in the minds of men as utterly to deter many, and in a great measure to discourage almost the generality of Christians from the use of it.¹

The fear of so many about receiving Communion in an unworthy manner to their own condemnation offset the command of the Savior for his people to “do this” when they came together. While the Apostle certainly warned against an unworthy participation in the Lord's Supper, the context of that warning relates to specific practices that undercut the full communal nature of the Lord's Supper. The Corinthian unworthiness to participate in the Supper was itself a form of individualism where “each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk,” (*1 Cor: 11:21*).

One's own individual worthiness to participate in the Lord's Supper actually requires to a sense of one's unworthiness for “even so much as the crumbs that fall from the table.” On the other hand the ministerial prerogative and duty to warn and admonish anyone living in open and notorious evil from coming to the holy table is grounded in the communal nature of eucharistic participation, lest “the Congregation thereby be offended” (BCP, post-communion rubric).

Individualism continues to be a problem in the modern world, especially in the west. Individualism, in atomistic fashion, has today reduced meaning, truth, and fulfillment for an individual to something that must be entirely within that isolated human being. Truth is what is true for each one in his own heart. Fulfillment comes by means of self-fulfillment or it does not come at all. Socially considered, individualism is the breakdown of community. Theologically considered, individualism is at odds with the revelation of God as Triune and the Church as the body of Christ. While Christianity undergirds the individuality of each hu-

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man being with a God-given dignity and fundamental sanctity, it only promises fullness of life to the individual through an associative and interactive living communion with God and with his people.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

¹ John Tillotson, "A Persuasive to Frequent Communion in the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper", *A Sermon by John Tillotson* (London: M. Flecher, 1683. Pamphlet from Princeton Theological Seminary Archives), 2.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ABOUT CHAPTER FOUR

Be sure to read all Scripture passages listed in the lesson before answering the questions.

1. Do the Articles of Religion address the matter of reserving the sacrament? Does this relate to holding some for communing the sick after the service?
2. What was the practice of the early Church in the first three Centuries?
3. What is meant by returning the elements "to the earth"?
4. Why was the Cup withheld from the laity in the Middle Ages?
5. How does the use of little glasses fit with the example of our Lord in using "the Cup"? What difficulties do people have with using a common cup?
6. How does the Bible view leaven as a symbol? Is this a guide for our use in the administration of the Bread? What kind of bread does your parish use? Why?

Vocabulary check:

Be sure you know the meaning of the following terms used in Chapter Four.

- A. manual acts
- B. latitudinarian
- C. leavened/unleavened



CHAPTER FIVE:
A Pastoral Approach toward
the Restoration of
Word and Sacrament

THIS material is a call for the restoration of Word and Sacrament as the normative worship for the Sunday gathering of the people of God. It provides a Biblical, historical, and theological framework for Christian worship. It distinguishes between the necessary ecclesiastical and dominical elements in worship, and calls for the priority of the dominical over the ecclesiastical. But clergymen whose responsibility it is to teach and provide leadership in such matters are not called to police the people, legalistically enforcing every good principle. They are rather to pastor the people, caring for them as shepherds would their own sheep.

Pastorally working for change in a parish requires teaching and listening, patience and prayer. It calls for clergy to understand and show appropriate respect for the long-standing ecclesiastical customs that have shaped the piety of the people in a given parish. That a church has long celebrated Holy Communion on a monthly basis, for instance, does not of itself mean that this church has a low view of the Lord's Supper. Pastoral care is all the more critical in the context of working toward change in a parish. Is the Lord who pursues even that one lost sheep well served by a pastor who forces a theologically commendable change on a congregation but empties the church in the process? Why even teach if force and legal decree principally carry out the pastoral charge? There will be plenty of hard choices to make in the pastoral process, and the feelings of people will sometimes be hurt. But a pastor who himself will patiently bear no pain or personal injury for the honor of God and the good of his people will not be able to pastor. Speaking the difficult word to those who do not want to hear it is essential to the pastoral charge, but walking over difficult people is the way of the dictator not the pastor.

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It is far better to build and work from solid relationships within a parish toward change than it is to preach a sermon one Sunday and make the major change the next. People need time to think through an issue that involves momentous change. They also need opportunity to experience a practice and make adjustment in a more gradual fashion.

In some parishes, introducing an early service that offers weekly Communion even for a trial period can provide an excellent means for allowing people to become accustomed to the practice. In smaller parishes this is much less of an option. For these churches, changes can be introduced in stages. Restoring a weekly reading from the Gospel would be an easy step to take. Doing the fraction with bread that clearly needs to be broken is another step. Without denying the congregation's accustomed method of taking grape juice in individual cups, the chalice ought to be visibly present on the table and offered to any who desire to receive it.

Some parishes have moved from monthly celebrations of Holy Communion to biweekly celebrations as a means of gradually moving toward the normative conjunction of Word and Sacrament. There is always the problem, however, that any temporary and partial move in the frequency of Communion can quickly become the permanent. This was the outcome of the initial compromises made by the Protestant Reformers that set Communion as a quarterly celebration year after year. It became the tradition entrenched for centuries in many denominations. Monthly Communion was itself a nineteenth and early twentieth century means to increase Communion frequency from the old quarterly pattern. But many churches that followed it have come to revere it as normative. Every tradition has a tendency to become enshrined. At some point, it is necessary simply to recognize the norm and set the wheels in motion to achieve it with a definite date in mind.

Each parish has its own personality and peculiarities. No one formula for change can work smoothly and comparably in every parish. Some will show more resistance than others. New pastors often move much too quickly with their programs to change a parish. No one needs to work more closely with his bishop and parish council than a new and



inexperienced pastor. When it comes to changing the practices, customs, and frequency of Holy Communion, this is particularly true.

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