

SUPPLEMENT 3

LITURGICAL COMMITTEE

(Arts. 90, 135)

The synod of 1964 appointed the Liturgical Committee and gave it this mandate:

- "a. to review all our liturgical literature in the light of its history, its theological content, and the contemporary needs of the churches; and to recommend such revisions or substitutions as the results of this review might recommend.
- "b. to study liturgical usages and practices in our churches in the light of Reformed liturgical principles and past synodical decisions, and to advise synod as to the guidance and supervision it ought to provide local congregations in all liturgical matters."

It soon became apparent to the committee that this mandate could be significantly fulfilled only by way of a thorough study of the history of Christian worship in general and of Reformed worship in particular. Therefore, in harmony with the intention expressed to the synod of 1966 (Acts, 1966, p. 262) the committee has concentrated its initial effort on the order for the Sunday morning service of worship. In this work it has been served by the counsel of many colleagues outside the committee. The resulting order and its rationale are offered in the present report. The committee has now turned its attention to the baptismal service and confidently anticipates presenting a report embodying orders for the baptismal service to the synod of 1969.

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to synod and to the administration of Calvin College for releasing Dr. Lewis B. Smedes from part of his teaching duties last semester so that he could prepare the initial drafts of the report. Without his diligent and competent labors our report would still be in very primitive form. Dr. Smedes' colleagues on the committee wish to take this opportunity to express public thanks to him for his thorough, systematic, and timely work.

At the conclusion of this study report you will find our formulation of specific requests for synodical action. May the Lord be pleased to grant his indispensable blessing to the synod in its consideration of this and other important matters coming before it.

THE FORM OF WORSHIP

Introduction

The business of liturgy is to offer the people of God the most suitable means of worshiping their Lord together. If, as we believe, worship is the most typical and crucial act of the church, then liturgy deserves the church's most careful and constant scrutiny. We do not need to believe that the present liturgy of the church is terribly amiss in order to justify

our concern for its state or to seek ways in which it can be improved. The church's liturgy, being the form and manner of its worship, demands the church's on-going criticism. It is chiefly from the sense of its importance, then, and not from a suspicion that things are badly askew, that this study of liturgy proceeds.

The liturgy is the whole church's business. It is what *all* the people do in obedience to and love of their God. No person is permitted to leave liturgy to the experts as long as he is a worshipping member of Christ's church. Moreover, it is what the people of the church do together. Therefore, a common understanding of what is being done is required for a liturgy to be useful as the embodiment of common worship. For these reasons, it is a mistake to thrust a liturgy on the people at the word of experts. Liturgies must be understood and, above all, practiced by people. In the long run, liturgies are created, not by theologians, but by the people themselves. Aware of this fact, the liturgical study committee is not asking synod to adopt and prescribe a uniform order of worship for the churches. We wish rather to report on the direction in which we are being taken by our study, to ask synod to send us on in this direction, and to provide the congregations an opportunity to consider our suggestions, eventually to try some of them, and to report to us on their experience.

We must acknowledge that we have discovered it necessary to begin from the very beginning. The committee as a whole started its study of the liturgy as novices, and we still have much to learn.

I. WHAT LITURGY IS

Liturgy is what people do when they worship. This, at least, is what the word has come to mean, and is the definition which the committee uses. The word "liturgy" has an interesting enough history; but its use in the church and not its etymology defines it. Originally, in Greece, it meant the public service that people performed, perhaps by paying taxes or the like. The associations were wholly secular. Only later, as the Christian era approached, was the word used for pagan religious services.

The scholars who translated the Old Testament into Greek used the word liturgy for the service performed by the priests in the tabernacle and temple. Here, the word did not imply "people at work," but was used for the special services which were the prerogative of the priests and Levites (cf. Numbers 4:37; 16:9). The translators even shied away from using the word for service in pagan cults; only twice is it used for service done by pagan priests (II Chron. 15:16; Ezra 4:12). They did not use it for common services at all. Liturgy, in the Old Testament, is the privilege of the clergy in the ritual worship of Jehovah.

The New Testament enlarges the scope of the word liturgy, using it not only for service done by the people, but by people outside of the sanctuary. The book of Hebrews uses it for the ancient priestly service (Hebrews 9:21; 10:4), but insists that Jesus Christ has obtained a better liturgy (Heb. 8:6). Jesus is the liturgete of the true tabernacle in heaven (Heb. 8:2). On the other hand, the priests of the old tabernacle are said to

have performed the *latreia*, a word which, in the Old Testament, is used of the services of the people (cf. Heb. 13:10). Thus, in the language of Hebrews, the distinction between priestly (liturgy) and lay service (*latreia*) breaks down. St. Paul goes further. He carries liturgy into the area of the people's service outside as well as inside the sanctuary. The generous offerings made by the people of Corinth (II Cor. 9:12) and Rome (Rom. 15:27) may have been made as part of their worship service. But Paul refers to the *faith* of the people as a liturgy of sacrifice (Phil. 2:17) of which Paul's very life is the libation. He calls Epaphroditus' service the completion of the people's liturgy (service) to Paul (Phil. 2:30), a service which clearly stretches outside the ritual. And, finally, he refers to the secular governors as the *liturgetes* of God (Rom. 13:6).

Thus, in the Bible, the word liturgy begins at the altar and ends in the broader stretch of service by the people outside the sanctuary.

Later, in the church's vocabulary the word is put back in the sanctuary. And this is where we take it up. Liturgy has come to mean those acts done by the church in its solemn assembly with God.

Here, it also has variations—depending on which circle one happens to move in. We take it simply as the acts done by the congregations in worship. The notion that only "high" churches, with introits, sanctuses, and split chancels have liturgical services is rejected; the barest of Puritan services are as liturgical as an Eastern Orthodox mass. The imprisonment of the word in the context of formularies is also rejected; a Christian Reformed church is doing liturgy even though it does not read any of its "liturgical forms." The common Lutheran practice of referring to those parts of a service exclusive of the sermon and the sacrament is also rejected; the liturgy is the whole of the service. We also turn aside a common Catholic use of the word as referring especially to the Eucharist; the church is liturgical on those Sundays when it stops short of communion. Again, every church has a liturgy, whether it worships with set forms inherited from the ages or whether it worships in the freedom of the moment. The only question is whether we have the best possible liturgy; it is never whether we have a liturgy.

In view of this, we have no intention of leading the church into more liturgy. We do not intend to ask congregations to become more liturgical than they are. We only intend to ask whether a more fitting liturgy is possible. The criterion for the proper fit will have to be talked about later.

II. WHAT WORSHIP IS

All Christians worship God in the name of Jesus Christ. But they do not all agree on the meaning of worship. There is an ecumenical consensus that worship is necessary. There is not a consensus on what worship is. The variations in the *liturgies* of Christian churches betray—to some extent—the variety of ways in which worship is understood.

a. *Two One-sided Interpretations*

We can point to two extremes in the way Christians tend to explain what happens, or ought to happen, when the people of God gather for

worship. No liturgical tradition captures either extreme to the exclusion of all else; differences in liturgy are created more by differences in stress and emphasis than by total opposition.

Listen to the voices of two liturgiologists, each echoing the concept of worship which his own community embraces. *First*, an Anglican, E. L. Mascall: "... the ultimate and supreme criterion by which any liturgical form is to be judged is its adequacy to provide a means by which Christian men and women may offer adoration to almighty God. All else is secondary and, in the last resort, irrelevant." Here, liturgy is the form which the people use to offer the adoration due to a worthy (i.e., worship-able) God. The direction of worship is God-ward. The action is by men and women, acting together as the body of Christ. The intention is the performance of service by men in praise to God. *Second*, a Lutheran, W. Hahn: "Worship is first and foremost God's service to us. It is an action by God, which is directed to us. . . . The essence of worship is to be found in the disclosure of the Word of God." Here, liturgy is an occasion for God to speak to His people. The direction is man-ward. The primary action is by God. The intention is to the performance of service by God, as He instructs and challenges people.

These are extremes. No church, to our knowledge, has ever constructed a liturgy solely of praise or solely of proclamation. When the Catholic tradition allowed the liturgy to become a spectacle which the people passively observed in awe, it perverted the real intent of Catholic worship. When Protestants turned the liturgy into a preaching service that stressed the intellectual apprehension of truth to the exclusion of most everything else, it was turning away from the intent of the Reformers.

b. *The Dialogic Character of Old Testament Worship*

Worship within the Old Testament tradition was a two-laned avenue; in it God moved toward man and man moved toward God. The acts of worship involved a rhythm of action flowing man-ward from God and God-ward from man. Whenever the congregation of God met in solemn assembly, it came to meet the living God who spoke and acted in the meeting, but who was also pleased to hear His people speak and pleased to receive their offering of praise. Worship for the people of the living God has always been a dialogue.

The dialogue, however, has taken many forms in the worshipping experiences of God's people. We cannot in this report note in detail all the acts and aspects of worship in the Old Covenant. But a brief glance at that worship will call attention to its truly dialogic character.

(1) *Temple Worship*

The worship that was offered in the temple was primarily a God-ward action. The *latreia* (Hebrew, *'abodah*) of the people was centrally a sacrificial act, but prayer and praise were also prominent. Worship rose in the temple, like the smoke of the altar coals, upward to God. But the dialogic aspect of worship was by no means absent. Israel worshipped no silent God. The very presence of His sanctuary in the midst of His people, erected by divine command, spoke of covenant nearness. Its structure and furniture, together with the prescribed sacramental

acts continually performed within its precincts, spoke of His holiness and of His grace. At the temple were the covenant tablets, and there the priests gave instruction in the law of the Lord. From the sanctuary, too, the prophets sometimes spoke. There the forgiveness of God was proclaimed, and there the priestly benediction pronounced. The worship of Israel at the sanctuary answered to, and was answered by the Word of the covenant God.

(2) *Passover Celebration as Worship*

But worship was not confined to the temple. The Passover celebration was the action of a worshipping people. It involved a liturgy performed in the home as well as in the Temple. Although its components were modified somewhat as history went on, there were three basic components throughout: (1) the sacrifice of an animal and the spilling of its blood, (2) the eating of a joyful meal, and (3) the explanation of its significance (cf. Ex. 12). All of these carried profound implications for the life of the participants and for our understanding of the character of the meeting of people with God in worship.

The entire Passover celebration was a recollection of the act of God by which He redeemed His covenant people Israel. It was a memorial, then. As a memorial it took on the aspect of praise. But the entire celebration was at the same time a proclamation—a sacramental publication of what God had done, and a summons to commit oneself to the covenant life which God had made possible by His saving acts. When the words of explanation were spoken to the young, they explained what the Passover rites proclaimed. *Together*, acts and words, all the ingredients pointed to the redemptive act of God. Hence, Passover was proclamation. Moreover, God Himself acted in the Passover. He spoke through His appointed ritual and renewed His covenant pledge to be their God. The Passover, then, was a convergence of action and words by both God and people: action by God and people, and word by God and people—a dialogue.

(3) *Synagogue Worship*

When the temple was not available, the center of Hebrew worship was relocated in the synagogue. Here the stress was obviously laid on the man-ward direction of the Word; yet, the action was still two-directional. The Lord spoke through the Law and the Prophets. But the people answered in confession, prayer, and praise. Synagogue worship, by the way, is the channel by which an age-old liturgical custom entered into Christian worship where it has endured in almost all Christian liturgies, except our own, viz., the people's Amen—the word spoken by all to affirm that the prayer offered through the mouth of the president was the prayer of the people. Worship in the synagogue was of the same basic pattern as that of the Passover, and even of the temple, though the stress was inverted. The Word spoke of the acts and the promises of God, and of the demands implied by them. And the words of the people spoke of praise and adoration (here also the *Sanctus* (Isaiah 6) was uttered) as well as of commitment.

The prophetic rebuke against the temple sacrifices and our Lord's de-

nunciation of the Pharisees' synagogal exercises were indictments, not of the worship that was *meant* to be practiced there, but of the perversion of worship through moral and spiritual failure on the part of the people. Cultic action, then as now, could be turned to a means for trying to buy God off so that men could be free to pursue their ungodly course in the world. It could, then as now, become a means of self-glorification, an expression of religious pride. When this happens, the prophetic voice denounces both the pride and the liturgical monstrosity that pride makes of worship. But, when worship really occurred—in temple, Passover, or synagogue—the prophetic voice and the priestly sacrifice, the Word addressed to man and the words addressed to God, the proclamation and the adoration, converged in the dynamics of dialogue.

c. *New Testament Worship*

The dialogue continues in New Testament worship. It is hinted at in a general way in Luke's description of the typical activity of the early believers: they continued in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42). The specific meaning of "fellowship" is perhaps not clear; it could refer to fellowship together, fellowship in the Spirit, or the more particular fellowship of the sacrament. At any rate, it describes the activity of the church in terms of receiving the apostles' teaching, the word of the cross, and of action in response to that word.

Two new realities determined the content and character of New Testament worship. One is the *past historical event* of Christ's death and resurrection. The other is the *continuing presence* of Christ, through His Spirit, within the worshipping community. Both of these realities undergird and define all of the worshipping acts of the church.

The historical reality of the words and acts of the Savior becomes the content of *proclamation*. The preaching of the church always pointed back to that event. And, because in Christ the surer word of prophecy (II Peter 1:19) had been spoken, because in Him God had spoken as He formerly spoke through the prophets (Hebrews 1:2), the proclamation of that historical reality became God's Word to the worshipping people. Furthermore, since the Christian community was called into being by the Redemptive Event, proclamation was an indispensable ingredient to worship. In turn, however, this proclamation of past history was effective within worship only because Christ was present in His Spirit within the community. His presence in the worshipping community was the source of power to make the proclamation more than an announcement of the fact of Christ's death and resurrection; His presence enabled the proclamation to effect in the lives of the worshippers a saving participation in the redemption proclaimed and thus to make them worshippers in "spirit and in truth." Thus, both the historical fact and the continuing presence of Christ defined and qualified proclamation as the living Word of God to the congregation.

Both past and present realities determined *the response* of the congregation at worship to God as well as God's Word to it. Prayers, for instance, were offered *in the name* of Jesus Christ who was crucified

and risen; but they were effective as the Spirit prayed in and through the congregation. Baptism was practiced *in the name* of the Son, as well as of the Father and the Spirit, and thus pointed back to the cross and resurrection as the orientation for the new life of the believer; (Romans 6:3-5) but baptism was through the Spirit (I Cor. 12:13). The new song was about the act of God in Christ, but was sung in the Spirit. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was a proclamation and a memorial of Christ's death in past time; (I Cor. 11:23-26) but it was a genuine communion in the body and blood of the Savior only as Christ was present in it through His Spirit (I Cor. 10:16). Thus, in the worshipping response of the congregation as well as in the proclamation of God's Word, indeed at every moment in the worship, both the historical reality and the continuing presence of Christ are definitive and determinative.

When it is said that the worship of the New Testament church followed the pattern of the synagogue, we should understand this only with an important qualification. As far as we know, Christians continued the formal pattern of the dialogue carried on in the synagogue. The law and prophets were read and prayers were spoken. But now the Old Testament was read and heard *as fulfilled in Christ*; the reality of Christ illumined the reading and conditioned the hearing of the Old Testament. But, even more significantly, the breaking of the bread and drinking of the wine brought a whole new dimension into the character and form of worship.

Exactly what was said and done when the New Testament church celebrated the death of Christ in His supper, is a complex and hard question to answer. We are here concerned more with the inner ingredients of the supper than with the precise liturgical questions, though the two are not wholly separable. But even the essential events are not simple, clear-cut, discrete events. Rather, they converge in a most remarkable way. Here, the pattern of the dialogue (God's Word and man's response) cannot be arranged in clear division of parts. The dialogue is present; but God's acts and the congregation's acts converge.

There is, for example the *proclamation* of the Gospel. The objective and past acts of God in Christ are remembered and celebrated, and thus affirmed publically. But *how* is God's Word proclaimed? It is proclaimed by the action, the doing, of the congregation. ("As often as ye *do* this, ye proclaim. . .") Here, the actions of the congregation are the Word of God visible. Of course, the proclamation of the cross is not located exclusively in the isolated act of eating and drinking; the sacrament is a whole, consisting of the words of the Gospel and the words (prayers) of the people. But the whole thing is a *doing* by the people. The proclamation is not limited to the pre-communion preaching, which is then complemented by the doing of the sacramental action. The proclamation is in and through the doing, which includes the apostolic recollections of Christ. So, here the dialogue is remarkably unique: God speaks (proclamation) through and in the congregation's acts.

But the action of the people is also a communion in Christ, and hence is the occasion for the people's response. Of course, there is a response

to God that is elicited *by* the communion. This response is carried out into the full range of human life. But the sacramental eating and drinking itself embodies the congregational response. We partake *in* faith; in eating and drinking the congregation affirms the cross and its power, and affirms the congregation's own readiness to *be* God's cross-bought people. The communion action is a faith action in which the people declare to God their Yes to His promise of fellowship in the body and blood of Christ. Hence, the one action is both proclamation and response.

There is one more dimension in which the convergence of divine and human action occurs. In the communion, proclamation and response converge as they are both oriented to the historical event of the cross; but the continued presence of Christ creates the possibility for another convergence. In the sacrament, God comes to the congregation in action, through His Spirit, comes powerfully into participants to bring the life of Christ to manifestation there. But at the same time, the believer responds as he partakes in what God promises to do and actually does: he affirms by his partaking of bread and wine that he is indeed a man in Christ and a man in whom Christ lives.

Thus, the inherent rhythm of God's word and man's response, God's acts and man's affirmation, is sustained in the sacrament. But here the dialogue *structure* is altered. For here, especially, the dialogue becomes a kind of harmony rather than an antiphony; the divine and human parts are sung together rather than in response to one another. The man-ward and God-ward directions of worship are both present.

What we have seen is this: worship in God's covenant community is a meeting between a Person and persons, as it had been from the beginning. The rhythm of worship in the New Testament is structurally the same as always. The immediate background to the Christian church's worship is the synagogue, but the synagogue worship is redefined from beginning to end by the fulfillment of the law and prophets in Christ. Still, the worship of the church is done by the articulation of God's Word and acts in the past as they are made effective by the Spirit's presence in the church, by the articulation of man's words and acts of response as they are made genuine and real by the Spirit, and in a unique way by the visible articulation of both God's acts and man's response in the action of the sacramental meal. The dialogue is the inherent structure of worship. The question of liturgy is the question of how the dialogue is appropriately and effectively articulated.

Before leaving this section, we should cast a glance at the New Testament tendency to extend the language of worship into all of life. Christ, we are told, brings in the day when we too "might serve (*latreuein*, worship) Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, *all* the days of our life" (Luke 1:74, 75). Worship is the service of God that is expressed in what Paul refers to as the liturgy of the church's faith and life. He apparently sweeps the totality of man's self-offering to God, the giving of life bodily in sacrifice, into the act of spiritual worship (*latreuein*). (Romans 12:1). There is no lack of clarity in the premise that all of life is to be lived in service before the face of God, that all of life is to be

sacred, and that every decision and every action of the disciple of Christ is to be made and done in terms of service to God. The question is whether the common life outside the sanctuary is, by Christ and His Spirit, turned into worship and whether it thus does away with the distinction between the sanctuary and the world, between worship and work.

The answer to this question is given partly in terms of the example of St. Paul himself. While no one was more aware than he that all of the Christian's existence and being is brought within the sphere of the Gospel and the Spirit, he with his fellow Christians betray no sign of indifference to the "gathering together" of the body of Christ at stated times and seasons for worship. The fact that all of life was in Christ did not seem to imply that the special hour of corporate worship was expendable. While the whole of life, in every nook and cranny, was charged with religious significance, it was called "worship" in a loose, extended sense. Calling self-sacrifice in life "worship" was a way of drawing a line straight through the ritual to the workbench; it showed how inseparable worship (in the strict sense) was tied to life; it showed that one does not leave life behind when he enters the sanctuary, but only *articulates* together with the congregation his specific and concrete praise, his specific and concrete desires, and hears the specific and concrete Word of God.

We may conclude, then, that to call life a form of worship reveals something about the religious character of life in Christ as it is experienced and practiced outside the sanctuary. But it does not water down or compromise the unique requirements and character of worship proper within the sanctuary. Worship, in the proper sense, is indeed tied to life, relevant to life, a part of life; it is not an escape from life. But it is the act of the people of God in concert, as they articulate their praise and petitions, their faith and obedience, and as they listen to an articulation of God's Word, an act which has its peculiar character, its peculiar significance, and its peculiar effect, distinct from the common life in all life's common spheres.

III. THE ENDURING STRUCTURE OF THE LITURGY

We have spoken of worship in the Christian sense as a dialogue between God and man. We must now—in barest of sketch—see how the dialogue has been given shape and form in the liturgy of the church. We shall begin with the New Testament church and wind our way up through the Reformation to the present. Our purpose is to show that, within the endless variations of style and ceremony, and in spite of temporary imbalance and distortions, there is a pattern, a structure, a basic shape, discernible in the church's liturgy through the years.

1. *The Liturgy of the New Testament Church*

Had it been the Lord's desire to provide the church with a canon for its liturgy from which it was never to deviate, He would doubtless have given it much more information than the New Testament provides. Precise rules are not found. The freedom of the Spirit is respected even while "decency and order" are commanded: the tension between freedom

and order is never relieved, but rather left to become a matrix of creative flexibility and common order, whose end was to be the edification of the church. People who, in the early days, worshipped as Christians also worshipped as Hebrews. And they had no sense of being the less Jew for being the more Christian. Hence, it is not surprising to see Christian liturgy structured by the synagogue, as that structure was given new content and life by the reality of Christ. So the liturgy of the Christian church was both old and new; the old was taken up and infused from beginning to end with a new Spirit and a new life.

Experts do not agree on the exact order of the synagogue service. And the order depends somewhat on the date of the liturgy. In any event, the liturgy was simple: the Word was read and prayers were made. The Law and the Prophets were read in turn, and the presiding person made explanatory comments. Prayer was made, in which God's acts in the past were recalled and the agony and hope of the present were confessed. The prayers were concluded with the people's *Amen*. The service was concluded with the blessing, given either by the president or an ordinary member of the congregation; like the prayer, it was concluded with the community *Amen*. From Luke 4:14-30, we see that Jesus Himself was used to participating in this service.

The simple liturgical structure of the synagogue was continued by Christian worshippers. The reading and preaching of the Word was the muscle of the liturgy; only now the Gospel of Jesus Christ illumined all the rest. At first, the Gospel of Christ came by way the apostles' reminiscences. Later, the epistles were read in the church (I Tim. 4:13). Perhaps, in the absence of the apostles, an elder may have explained them to the congregation. At any rate, the reading and proclamation of the Gospel was the backbone of New Testament liturgy.

Preaching as such did not constitute Christian worship. St. Paul preached on Mars Hill, but the church was not assembled there in worship. Missionary preaching was public. Preaching in the assembly was private. The content was the same: Jesus Christ and Him crucified. But the style and purpose were different.

The second element in the liturgy were the prayers (Acts 2:42). In them thanksgiving (eucharistis) played a large role (Phil. 4:6; I Thess. 5:18), as did intercession for the church and for civil authorities (I Tim. 2:1, 2). The congregational AMEN apparently concluded the prayers, as it did in the synagogue (I Cor. 14:16). We may gather that people stood during the prayers (Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11) with lifted hands (I Tim. 2:8). At any rate, here we have the basic ingredients of the dialogue: Word and Prayer.

But other ingredients were present. A brief confession of faith was evidently made (Acts 8:37; I Cor. 8:6). The greetings and blessings found in the epistles probably were given in the liturgy. Songs were sung (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), perhaps Psalms and also types of praise that are passed on in John's Revelation. (Cf. Rev. 4:8, 11; 5:9-13). Somewhere in the liturgy, offerings of money and/or food were made, at least this is hinted at in I Cor. 16:1, 2. And, of course, food was

brought for all to share in the love meal which was climaxed in the beginning by the sacrament (I Cor. 11:17 ff).

That the Lord's Supper was a normal event in the church's liturgy is clear. When the books of the New Testament were written the practice was already established, and some Scriptural passages were possibly quotations from the liturgy of the Supper. (e.g., Maranatha). But exactly how it was celebrated, and whether it was done uniformly in the several churches, is not made clear. The early practice of celebrating the supper as the climax to the feast of charity was, as it well known, abandoned because of its abuse. The words of Jesus that instituted the supper were very important to the celebration, as was the example He set when giving thanks prior to eating and drinking. The celebration of the Supper was an event that always included the prayers, the words of institution, and songs of praise. That is, the celebration was not a bare eating and drinking of the elements; it included the whole framework of the supper as set by the Lord on the night He was betrayed.

Thus, we have the outline of the New Testament liturgy. The disciples of Jesus came together, in the custom of the synagogue, to hear the Word and to respond in prayer and praise. They went on to proclaim the Lord's death and celebrated their redemption in the action of the sacrament. The two steps of the service were not separated from each other; they flowed into one another as the complete service of worship. The church of Christ did not adopt the synagogue service and merely add the sacrament; the gospel and the sacrament overshadowed the whole of the service and provided its Christ-centered content.

There was without doubt a great deal of freedom in the liturgy; room was allowed for the exercise of charismatic gifts, spontaneous inspiration, and the use of "tongues." Freedom, with its threats to order and intelligibility, was brought under discipline by the apostle, but never denounced. Order was stressed, not for the sake of dignity or beauty, but for the sake of edification. There are hints that other elements to be seen later had their beginnings in the New Testament church: the kiss of peace, perhaps (Romans 16:16; I Cor. 16:20).

But the substance is the Proclamation and the Response: God's Word and man's word, each in its way backed up by action—God's redemptive action and man's thankful action. The sacrament was a unique convergence of both: the liturgy of the words of Jesus and the eucharistic prayer of thanksgiving stress that even in the sacrament we have dialogue. The liturgy, in short, embodies the inner movement of worship. In a sense, the liturgical action of the New Testament church combined temple, synagogue, and Passover, and transformed all unity by the reality of Christ's coming.

2. The First Five Centuries

Justin Martyr provides us with a glimpse of the liturgy of the church as it entered the second half of the second century. We do not know how universal was the practice he describes. He probably has a fairly substantial congregation of Rome in mind, and things were perhaps simpler in small household churches. But even here, the liturgy is direct and plain.

The service is one unit of Word and Sacrament. Beginning with the Scripture reading "as long as time permits", perhaps interspersed with singing of Psalms, the service goes on to a homily delivered, when possible by a presiding bishop. After the sermon, prayers are offered, for which the congregation stands. This is the service of Word and Response. Then came the sacrament, introduced with the holy kiss of peace, which symbolized Christian brotherhood. The bread and wine are brought to the *deacons* and placed by them on the table. The prayer of thanksgiving or Eucharistic Prayer is offered by the bishop concluded by the people's *Amen*. Then the communion itself takes place, as people go to the table to receive, while standing, the bread and the wine. Thus, the order is like this:

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|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Scripture Reading | 5. Bringing of Bread and Wine |
| 2. Sermon | 6. Eucharistic Prayer |
| 3. Prayers | 7. The Communion |
| 4. Kiss of Peace | |

This is the shape of the liturgy, simple, perhaps austere, but joining all of the elements of the worship of God's people since the time of the Exodus. God speaks and people listen. People speak with assurance that God listens. Then, in the sacrament, God and His people act in concert, proclaiming the deeds of God in Christ and re-establishing the people within the faith and life of the new creation in Christ. The whole community is at work. The deacons, the people, and the bishop all have their liturgies to perform. And together they sustain the dynamic dialogue that God creates with man in His grace.

Another witness to the liturgy of the early church is found in a collection of writings called the *Apostolic Constitutions*. They reveal the liturgy as the church entered the final quarter of the fourth century. By this time, the church had come out from hiding, worshipped in freedom and even with some popularity, and was therefore able to give the liturgy a certain ceremonial adornment. The liturgy we note here is one used in some Syrian church, (Antioch?) perhaps as the parent of later Eastern liturgies.

What we notice in it is that, in spite of containing more items, its structure is the same as ever. The Word and Response, followed by the liturgy of the sacrament. (Or, as it is now called, "the liturgy of the Upper Room"). The line between the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the sacrament is clearer than it was earlier. The liturgy of the upper room is considerably elaborated, while the liturgy of the Word remains quite simple. The two are separated by the dismissal of the catechumens after the sermon.

The liturgy of the Word now includes a set form of several Scripture lessons: the Law, Prophets, Epistles, Acts, and Gospels. (5 readings).

The Liturgy of the Upper Room goes like this:

1. A Litany said by a deacon, with a concluding prayer by the bishop.

2. The Salutation and Response.

"The Lord be with you"
"And with Thy Spirit."

3. The Kiss of Peace.

This "seals" reconciliation and peace through Christ. Men and women sat on separate sides of the sanctuary.

4. The Offertory

What was, in Justin's time, the setting of the table, is now a more impressive ceremony. We now have ceremonial washing of hands by the bishop. The celebrant is given a splendid vestment to wear. While this is done, the deacons are giving the congregation a scrutiny to be sure only the faithful are present. And the elements are presented at the table by the deacons. Some liturgiologists judge that this "offertory" was the seed of the later doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice, and hence the har-binger of all the sacramental corruptions that followed.

5. The *Sursum Corda*

The salutation is given again, and then the "Lift up your hearts".

6. The Consecration Prayer

The prayer was complex. It included the thanksgiving, in the manner of the Jewish supper prayer and of our Lord's prayer at the time of the institution. The words of institution are spoken as part of the prayer.

Perhaps the key prayer is the so-called epiclesis, or prayer for the Holy Spirit. Much later, this will be the moment of the "miracle" of transubstantiation. Then follow intercession for all men, concluded with the Lord's Prayer, and the people's Amen.

7. The Elevation

The bishop holds the elements for all to see, much as our ministers do. He says aloud: "Holy things to the holy." The people respond: "There is one Holy, one Lord Jesus Christ; unto the glory of God the Father, blessed for ever. Amen."

8. The *Gloria*

The people then sing the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and the *Hosanna*:
"Hosanna to the Son of David
Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord
God is the Lord, and hath appeared unto us.
Hosanna in the highest!"

9. The Communion

The bread and wine are given to the people as they come forward to the steps of the apse to receive them. Psalm 34 was sung during this time.

10. The Thanksgiving

The deacon leads the people in a prayer of thanks for redemption and sanctification. The bishop dismisses them with a simple word: "Ye are dismissed in peace."

We cannot fail to notice that in this liturgy the familiar components

are still present, the structure is basically the same. The reading of Scripture is very prominent. The responses of the people are, for the most part, drawn directly from Scripture. And the service is concluded with the sacrament and the blessing. Actually, the service remains fairly simple. And the dialogue is carried on: Word, Response, with the convergence of the two in the sacrament.

So, in the first four centuries of the church's worship, the liturgy is a simple rite, with the people able to understand the movement and participate in it, with Scripture forming a most vital part of the service, and with the normal service climaxed by the Sacrament. A Christian Reformed worshipper, sitting in the fourth century liturgy, would feel at home there, except for the fact that there the people themselves were doing much of the liturgy, as priests of God. A fourth century worshipper sitting through a Christian Reformed service might wonder what had happened to the priesthood of all believers.

3. *Growth in the Roman Mass*

Anyone who attempts to describe the development of the liturgy in the years following the fourth century is trying the impossible. The Eastern liturgy is one thing: it grew, in a luxuriant profusion of forms, into a service of adoration; the eternal comes back into time for the period of the liturgy, and all the acts of God are represented in symbolic form, while the people respond in awe and wonder at the mighty acts of God. In the West, too the development goes in many directions. We have no intention of even pointing at them all. There are two main forms: the Gallican, with its flourish and imagery, its elaborateness and beauty, spread for awhile into much of Europe and then gradually gave way to the Roman liturgy.

The liturgy of the church of Rome began with austere simplicity, but as it gradually supplanted the Gallican (French) form it also took on many of its features. The story of how the dialogue was gradually transformed into a spectacle, of how the people were dropped from the liturgy into the role of observers, of how the balance between word, response, and sacrament was shifted into a total pre-occupation with the sacrament, and of how the sacrament was changed from a communion service into the sensational spectacle of the sacrificed host, is well known. With the drama going on at the altar conceived as the effective sacrifice of the body of Christ, it little mattered how much people actually heard or understood. And with the new doctrine of transubstantiation, it mattered very much that people instead adore the transformed elements. And with all this, it is not surprising that the people felt less and less need of actually communicating; the sacrifice was the main event, and, as for communication, the priest could do that vicariously for the people.

The Roman mass, as it had developed by the fifteenth century, was a dramatic *tour de force*, a pageant of enormous inner strength and coherence. We may agree with the Catholic, E. Masure, who says: "It is certain that the Mass, considered as a work of ritual art, is a pure masterpiece of tranquil beauty. Colour, sound, movement, all the aesthetic resources of the human body in its symbolic actions, are united and

bound together in a context of splendid, stylized archaism around this altar barely lit with a few candles, to produce one of the wonders of religious history." But even the Catholic church is discovering that religious masterpieces are one thing and an effective Christian liturgy another. A liturgy that sets the people of God in a churchly balcony, watching a religious drama, is a liturgy that has taken worship out of the heart and mouths of the people.

Still, in spite of inaudible mumbling of the celebrant, in spite of the foreign tongue, in spite of the pageantry, and even in spite of the "cursed idolatry" of the sacrifice of the Mass, the basic structure of the church's liturgy was not destroyed. For instance, the liturgy canonized by the Council of Trent (1570) betrays the familiar pattern behind its cloak of many colors. Here, in skeletal form, is how it went. (We leave out many of the ceremonials).

The Liturgy of the Word (Or Mass of the Catechumens)

Introit (With *Kyrie Eleison* [Lord, have mercy] sung by the choir).

The introit was first seen in the Gregorian Mass of the 7th century. But by this time, it is established in all the liturgies. It signals the entrance of the *clergy* into the sanctuary.

Entrance of the Clergy

Approaching the altar, the priest engages in a "service of reconciliation" (*confiteor*), with an invocation ("Our help . . ."), a confession and plea for mercy, and prayers (*collects*). As we shall see, Calvin took this over, but set it within the liturgy of the people.

Salutation (followed by prayers)

The Epistle—sung in Latin by a deacon, or priest.

The Gospel—again sung in Latin, by a deacon if feasible.

The Gospel is introduced by a great deal of attention—fetching gadgetry. Here come the bells and the incense. Both epistle and gospel have responses, sung by the clergy. Now, the priest ascends the pulpit.

Reading of the Epistle—in vernacular.

Reading of the Gospel—in vernacular

After the readings, a response is sung, a *Hallelujah* (after the epistle) and a *Benedictus* (after the Gospel).

Sermon

Nicene Creed, sung as a *Gloria*.

The Liturgy of the Upper Room (or Mass of the Faithful)

Salutation . . . followed by a call to prayer ("Let us Pray") but no prayer, reminiscent of the Protestant "let us kneel before the Lord" without a bent knee.

Offertory

During this time, the priest prepares the physical ingredients: meanwhile muttering prayers, in Latin of course. In the simpler days, this was the occasion for bringing the elements to the table.

*Salutation and Sursum Corda**Prayer of Consecration*

This is much more than a prayer; it is climaxed by the elevation of the host (i.e., the *hostia*, or victim). Carried on as dialogue between the priest and the choir, it includes prayers for the church, remembrances of Christ's sufferings, entreaty for God's acceptance of the "offering", all said privately by the priest. But there is also a recitation of the words of institution and a recollection of Christ's sacrifice. Then comes the actual consecration, and the dramatic elevation, while the choir sings "Blessed be He who cometh in the name of the Lord."

The Communion

(With an elaborate sequence of priestly action, hid for the most part, from the people)

Thanksgiving

A Psalm is sung, prayers are offered, John 1:1-14 is read.

Dismissal

There is a great deal that was tragic about the Roman Mass. We need not take this occasion to point out what is familiar enough. What we do need to notice, however, is that neither the conversion of communion into sacrifice nor the exile of the people from the acts of worship could destroy the structure of the liturgy. Hid beneath clerical domination and liturgical embroidery is the structure, at least, of the ancient dialogue: Word of God, Response of His people, and the celebration of the Supper. The balance was distorted so badly that the Word of God was all but swamped by ceremony. And as that happened, the response was also stolen from the people and given to the choirs and clergy. But while the instrumentation was badly fouled, the symphonic structure was still the same.

At this point, it is necessary to note one aspect of the service that grew up in the late middle ages as a kind of step-brother of the Mass. It is a preaching service, called the *prone* (perhaps from the French, pulpit). Apparently, in some places, it was inserted into the service prior to the Mass, as an effect to bring some teaching into the liturgy. By itself, it resembles a Protestant preaching service. A man by the name of J. B. Surgant describes it in his *MANUALE CURATORUM*. Surgant was a priest in Basel (where Zwingli studied) at the beginning of the 16th century. Here is how the prone went:

1. Votum or Invocation: "In the name of the Father, . . ."
2. Scripture reading—in Latin and in the vernacular.
3. Sermon
4. Intercessions.
5. Lord's Prayer, with paraphrase of each clause.
6. Apostles' Creed.
7. Decalogue.

We mention the prone because, where it existed within the Mass, it tended to restore some balance—at least—to the dialogue of worship. But when lifted out of the liturgy and made a service of its own, it created a new *imbalance*.

4. *The Reformation*

The light of the Word at the Reformation broke through the church's liturgy as thoroughly as it did the church's theology. That the Reformers performed surgery on the liturgy of the medieval church comes as no surprise; what may surprise some is that fact that they did not do wholesale amputations.

The liturgy was purified inwardly; the theological and spiritual content was transformed. All that smacked of the meritorious sacrifice of Christ in the Mass was cut away. Altar gave way to table; sacrifice made way for communion. The balance between Word and sacrament was restored—not by diminishing the importance of the sacrament but by up-grading the place of the Word. The extraneous extravaganzas of pomp and ceremony was all but eliminated—but only to let the essentials of the liturgy become the more prominent. The people were restored to their liturgical office as priests at the altar of praise; they were led down from the observer's balcony into the field of liturgical action. The purification of the liturgy was radical enough to give the impression that the Reformers all destroyed the old and created a new liturgy *ex nihilo*.

But they did not create a liturgy *ex nihilo* any more than they created a theology *ex nihilo*. They used and reshaped what liturgies were at hand. And they did not all use the same material nor the same tools.

Zwingli, for instance, found the medieval prone service convenient and suitable to his notions of worship. This rational man had little truck for mysteries intertwined with tangible things; to him, Mind spoke to mind—and this was the essence of churchly action in its assembly. While he did prepare a service for the sacrament, he assumed that the normal worship service would be without it. Preaching the Word; this was the be all and almost the end all of worship. Even congregational singing was ignored; alone among the Reformers, Zwingli made no contributions to praise in song. With some minor adjustments, the liturgy of the medieval preaching service became the whole liturgy.

When John Calvin came to Geneva, he worshipped with a liturgy established by Farel. But Farel had simply adopted Zwingli's liturgy almost intact. The title of his booklet of worship concludes with, "the manner in which the preaching begins, continues, and ends. . . ."

Thus, if we wish to discover Calvin's contribution to the liturgy, we must follow him to exile in Strassbourg. The French speaking congregation to which he ministered there had not been allowed by the authorities to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Nor had it had any other leadership in worship. Thus, Calvin was able to begin where he wanted to begin. He called his service book: **THE FORM OF PRAYERS AND MANNER OF MINISTERING THE SACRAMENT ACCORDING TO THE USE OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH**. This might suggest that he had discovered Justin's liturgy and copied it. But, in fact, there lay

a liturgy to hand in Strassbourg. And Calvin said: "As for the Sunday prayers, I took the form of Strassbourg and borrowed the greater part of it." What was this liturgy Calvin borrowed?

Martin Bucer had come to Strassbourg earlier. It was his liturgy that Calvin had translated from the German into French for his own use. But Bucer also found a liturgy already present in Strassbourg. The Lutheran, Diebold Schwarz, had produced a German Mass for the people in 1524, one of the earliest vernacular liturgies. He set about to slice off all the objectionable parts of the Roman Mass, put the people to work saying prayers, the creed, and such ancient responses as the *Kyrie*, the *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, and *Benedictus*. The ceremonies were reduced; the meaning of the sacrament changed; the preaching reformed—but the structure hidden beneath the medieval paraphernalia was retained: Word of God, Response of Man, and Sacrament.

This was the service that Bucer took over. He modified it still further. He introduced Psalms for people to sing in metre. He changed the vocabulary: Mass became the Lord's Supper and Altar became the Holy Table. Scripture readings were longer, and were done in sequence from a book of the Bible instead of the old Roman lectionary. The sermon was longer. But the framework of the Mass was still intact: liturgy meant the service of the Word of God, the words of men in response, with both converging in the sacrament.

Here was the difference in background between Bucer and Zwingli: Bucer accepted the whole framework of the Mass and Zwingli adopted only the prone. Bucer's was a liturgy of Word and Response, with Sacrament; Zwingli's was a liturgy of the Word.

Calvin followed Bucer. By setting Bucer's and Calvin's Strassbourg liturgy side by side, we can see how similar they were, and how both retained the basic structure of the ancient liturgy.

<i>Bucer's Strassbourg Liturgy</i>	<i>Calvin's Strassbourg Liturgy</i>
1. Confession of sins	1. "Our help is in the name of the Lord".
2. Words of Pardon (Promise)	2. Confession of Sins.
3. Absolution. (Pronouncement)	3. Words of Pardon (Promise)
4. Hymn, Psalm—or Gloria	4. Absolution (Pronouncement)
5. Prayer for Illumination	5. Decalogue (Sung by congregation)
6. Lessons from Scripture	6. Prayer for Illumination
7. Sermon	7. Lessons from Scripture
8. Offering of Alms	8. Sermon
9. Apostles' Creed (sung)	9. Offering of Alms
10. Intercession and Prayer of Consecration	10. Intercessions
11. Lord's Prayer	11. Lord's Prayer with Paraphrase
12. Exhortation	12. Apostles' Creed (sung)

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 13. Word of Institution | 13. Words of Institution |
| 14. Communion | 14. Exhortation |
| 15. Post Communion Prayers | 15. Communion |
| 16. Benediction | 16. Post Communion |
| | 17. <i>Nunc Dimittis</i> in metre |
| | 18. Benediction |

We see from this that Calvin's liturgy was basically catholic in structure, catholic in the sense that it was in the stream that flowed through the church since the days of the Old Covenant. We see that while he radically reformed, he did not destroy the traditional liturgy. We shall have opportunity to note various separate items in the liturgy when we discuss them separately. Suffice it to underscore here that the structure of the liturgy endures through the Reformation: Word of God, Response of the people, and Sacrament. That Calvin was not permitted to pursue this course in Geneva does not detract from his convictions on the matter: "I have taken care to record publicly", he wrote in 1561, "that our custom is defective, so that those who come after me may be able to correct it the more freely and easily." The defect was especially the infrequent celebration of the Lord's Supper.

5. *The Development of the Dutch Liturgy*

In 1553, in the city of London, there worshipped two groups of Reformed people. One group spoke French. The other spoke Dutch. The French group was led by Pollanus, the Dutch group by the Polish nobleman, A'Lasco. Pollanus had been Calvin's successor in Strassbourg. He took over Calvin's liturgy. A'Lasco had had no direct contact with Calvin; but he had met and been impressed by Zwingli. He wrote out his order of service, along with his church order, under the title: *Forma ac Ratio*. An elder in the Dutch church in London, Martinus Micronius, apparently translated A'Lasco's work, perhaps made some alterations in it, and published it in the city of Frankfort, in 1555. This liturgy was more like Zwingli's.

The refugees left England when Mary, the Catholic zealot, came to the throne. The French group ended in Frankfurt, where it shared church facilities with a group of exiled Anglicans. The Dutch group, after several abortive sojourns elsewhere, ended in Frankenthal in the Palatinate. Here, a strong churchman by the name of Peter Datheen became their leader. He had been at work on the liturgy before the London refugees came. And a Palatinate liturgy had been in existence before Datheen worked at it. Datheen's great work was not on the order of worship, but on the formularies and prayers for use in the liturgy. There is some obscurity as to the origins of his forms and prayers, but at least some of it was his own composition.

We know he translated the Catechism. He also published a Dutch edition of the Psalms. He spoke of the forms and prayers as being those "used among us." What he perhaps meant was that they were in use in the Palatinate church, not just the London refugee group.

The Palatinate liturgy had a variety of sources. It was influenced by Micron's orders—published in Frankfurt before the refugees came to Frankenthal. It used some of Calvin's forms. It was undoubtedly influenced by Ursinus. And most scholars assume that the Lutherans in Frankenthal influenced it too.

So, while Datheen is—if anyone is—the father of our Dutch liturgy, he did not begin *de novo*. Back of him is the Palatinate liturgy, back of which in turn is Micron (and A Lasco), Calvin, Ursinus, and perhaps a touch of Lutheranism. This helps account for the fact that our liturgical forms do not always breathe a spirit and tone which echoes the tone of the creeds.

Datheen had not paid much attention to the liturgy as such, taking over what was in existence in the Palatinate—which had also been influenced by Micron's "London liturgy." Datheen's chief contribution was the composition of prayers and instructional formularies, much of which is found in the so-called "liturgical section" of our Psalter. It is difficult to be exact about the actual order of service that went with Datheen into the Dutch services in Holland, because he did not spell it out in detail.

The service used in the Palatinate, went about like this:

1. Salutation

(No Votum)

2. Prayer Before Sermon

This was a lengthy prayer that included extensive confession of sin.

3. Scripture Reading

4. Sermon

5. Long Prayer

Confession of Sin and Proclamation of the Keys—as an introduction to the prayer.

6. Psalm

7. Blessing

By the time this service became the common Sunday service in Holland, it had undergone some changes. The Confession was put *before* the sermon, and was merely included in the prayer before the sermon—which prayer was introduced by an exhortation to repentance.

The structure of this liturgy is not patterned after Calvin's. But the most crucial aspect of it is that it assumes that this service is a complete liturgy. The sacrament does not figure in the liturgy in any real sense. However, the dialogue was not wholly forsaken. The basic elements of the liturgy were: Prayer—Word—Prayer. But the emphasis fell, not on response but on the Word.

This liturgy went through minor modifications at various early Dutch Synods. It was almost always assumed that the liturgy of the sacrament is something apart from the normal liturgy. The synod of the Hague, in 1586, said: "Each church shall celebrate the Lord's Supper as it judges to be most edifying." It still assumed that the sacrament would be celebrated at the end of the full liturgy. But as time went on, the liturgy

ignored the sacrament. As a result, when the sacrament *was* celebrated it came as a *substitute* for the full liturgy in many Dutch churches: when the Lord's Supper was celebrated, they dropped the normal liturgy of the Word.

The Dutch church of the late 16th century decided that the moments prior to the worship service ought to be filled with Scripture reading and Psalms, lest the church be disturbed by idle chatter. And the things done *before* the service began gradually to take on a kind of order: we find, for instance, the reading of the law, the creed, and the like. The service itself began with the vatum, which came after these items. Only later, did the "preliminaries" become a part of the liturgy itself; it was accomplished simply by moving the vatum up prior to what had previously been the warm-up. It was not until 1933, that a Dutch synod actually defined the order of worship for the whole church. This is the order that had already come to be common practice—in the Christian Reformed Churches of the U.S.A. as well as in Holland.

The synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken in 1966, established a new order of service which is the most creative change in the liturgy of that church to this time. We shall have occasion to comment on this order from time to time when we discuss the several components of the liturgy.

The Christian Reformed liturgy is, thus, an inheritance from the Dutch church which inherited it from the Palatinate which grew from a variety of soils. Only in 1916 did a call come for a look at our liturgy. This was spurred, however, not so much by a desire for liturgical reform as by a fear of liturgical innovation that was apparently beginning in some congregations. As a result, an effort was made to construct a liturgy that would be satisfactory to all and incumbent on all. Such a liturgy was decreed by the Synod of 1928. But the church could not digest it; it choked on the "absolution" that had been given a place in the liturgy following the law and confession. In 1930, the new liturgy was dropped—after considerable protest and agony.

Meanwhile, individual congregations have taken considerable steps toward creating liturgies of their own, mostly by way of introducing new ways of doing basically the same thing that the traditional liturgy embraces. But no concerted effort has been spent on the liturgy as such. Denominationally endorsed liturgical change has been largely confined to revisions of the formulary for the Lord's Supper.

Conclusion

We have, during this lengthy excursion into history, tried to show that throughout the church's history a liturgical structure has endured, but that this structure was altered by Zwingli and the Dutch Reformed tradition. That enduring structure was: Word of God addressed to man—word of man addressed to God—a Sacrament, in which proclamation and response, the giving of grace and the offering of thanks, converge. The underlying question of our liturgy is whether we can truly recapture the enduring structure of the liturgy of the Christian church, and thus become more Calvinistic and more catholic, at the same time. The

more immediate question is whether we can give better structure to the liturgy as we have inherited it and employed it to this time.

Apart from the question of the sacrament, we must observe that the enduring structure is not wholly lost in our liturgy. There has been a tendency to make worship a preaching service, to be sure. But the element of response has been present: prayers are offered, psalms and hymns are sung, and offerings are made. The question is whether the people themselves have been given a fair opportunity to participate in their response, or whether the clerical domination of the liturgy has been too great. If there is any single movement apparent among our congregations, it is the movement towards a greater participation of the people in their liturgy. And, finally, the question is whether we have together found the most appropriate and effective means of shaping and structuring the dialogue in the liturgy. It is to this question that the remaining part of this report is addressed—and to which other reports in the future will be directed.

IV. CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING THE LITURGY

In a report submitted to the Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken (1965), a committee serving that church listed four motifs which ought to guide the church in any review and reform of its liturgy. We are confident that these four motifs can indeed serve as our criteria, both in judging old forms and creating new ones. They are: (1) the biblical motif; (2) the catholic motif; (3) the confessional motif; and (4) the pastoral motif. These are criteria that allow the Word of God, the history of the church, the faith of the church, and the contemporary needs of the people of God to be primary in all our judgments on the liturgy. Let us pause briefly to consider each one.

1. *The Biblical Motif*

The Bible does not prescribe an order of worship; hence we do not contend that the church must do only those things expressly commanded for worship. But the Bible is our basic orientation. From the Bible we get the command to worship. From the Bible we learn to know the God whom we worship. From the Bible we learn our real status as worshippers. From the Bible we learn to judge the content of the church's prayers, its songs, and its proclamation. It is in the light of God's covenant approach to man that the basic structure of the entire liturgy must be built. And it is from this motif that the question of the frequency of the sacrament must be answered.

2. *The Catholic Motif*

In its worship, the church is never merely a group of people whose thoughts and acts are sociologically determined; the people worship as members of the community of faith, including the community of the past, as well as the universal body of Christ in the present. The catholic motif demands that Christians of any time or place in the past or present ought to be able to recognize our worship as Christian worship. We do not worship, we do not come before God's face first of all as nationals, or

moderns, or denominations, but as Christian people. The meeting with God on earth, imperfect as it is, is a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, where the only requirement for worship is participation in Christ. When it comes to worship, protestants have wished to be reformed and catholic, not sectarian. Sectarian liturgy comes from a calloused divorce from the universal church.

For this reason, we must let the tradition of the Christian church judge our liturgy. This does not imply that everything in the church's past must be restored; tradition itself is under judgment. But it does mean that we do not reject—without sound reason—those forms and manners which the universal church has found proper in worship. The Reformation itself can be a guide; the Reformers did not reject the historic pattern of Christian worship; they restored it. We are persuaded that too many traditional ingredients have been needlessly lost to our own liturgy.

Respect for tradition in liturgy is a fence against individualism and sectarianism. It keeps us from trying to improve liturgy through gimmickry and novelty for the sake of novelty. It will keep reminding us of what is essential and what is peripheral. It is also the best teacher of the lesson of flexibility; for it is in the history of liturgy that we observe the constant fluidities along with the underlying stability of the church's liturgy.

3. *The Confessional Motif*

The confessional motif serves as counterweight to the catholic. Every congregation comes to worship as a people committed to a perspective on God and man, committed to a creed. And creeds are, as a historical fact, not only ecumenical, but denominational. A congregation is bound to a decision, made in the past but reaffirmed in the present, bound to decisions that shape and limit its worship. The creeds, of course, do not spell out liturgical forms or define liturgical details. But the church at worship is limited by its confessions; worship ought to be consistent with them at the least and embody them at the most. This does not mean that liturgy is simply a vehicle by which to teach the content of the creeds. But it does mean that the convictions expressed in the creed ought to be carried out in the liturgy. For instance, to take a most obvious case: the confession of the sacrament in the creed will limit and define the content of prayers offered at the time of the sacrament; we are prohibited by the creeds from asking God to accept a sacrifice of Christ in the sacrament. This is but one example of how the confessions influence every part of the liturgy.

The church at worship expresses what it is. It also becomes what it is. Here, in the liturgy, the church emerges as a corporate entity doing what is essential to its being. This is why the liturgy must reveal the church's own decision as to what God wants it to be, do, and say before His face. The liturgy must demonstrate what the church's faith is, what its hope is, and what its life is. This is why liturgy is always subject to the church's confession.

4. *The Pastoral Motif*

This is the motif that points to the liturgy as a service, not only of, but

for the people. It will always be in creative tension with the other motifs. For this reason one asks what people are here and now, what their spiritual state and competence is, what their culture is, and what their specific needs are. This is the motif that is born of love, as the others are of faith. This motif stresses the need for flexibility as the others emphasize stability.

With this motif, we recognize that people of one place have needs and capabilities different from people in another place. Therefore, some people have both a need and a readiness for liturgical change that others do not have. This is true especially as a church broadens its embrace. It is true of the Christian Reformed Church. The people who worship in Manhattan, New York are conditioned by another culture than the people who worship in Manhattan, Montana. And the people who worship in Manhattan, Montana, in 1968 are differently conditioned than people who worshipped there in 1928. The liturgy must serve to edify; and what is useful for edification in Manhattan, New York, may be harmful in Manhattan, Montana.

Calvin is able to speak to us on this point. Speaking from his convictions on Christian liberty, and its foundation of love, he writes that the church must "permit any observances previously in use among us to be abandoned" if their lapse is good for the church. The customs "of each nation and age" ought to be accommodated. As times and people change "it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones." (*Institutes* IV/10/30) We ought not, he cautions, to "charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause." But "love will judge what may hurt or edify; and it we let love be our guide, all will be safe." (*Ibid.*)

For such reasons as these, we are not disposed to look to synod for compulsory regulation of the details of the liturgy. The synodical prerogatives in this area are the concern of church order; but we assume that, whatever the prerogatives, the voice of wisdom and love suggests that synod limit itself to directions rather than directives, to setting limits rather than defining details. Synod's province is especially the first three criteria, while every congregation best attends to the pastoral motif.

Thus, we have four dynamic sources for the assessment of any liturgical labor. They must all be allowed to function, if liturgy is to be of service to the people of God at worship. They may at times be in tension; they need never be in opposition. The faithful church will heed them all.

V. THE COMPONENTS OF THE LITURGY

A. *The Beginning*

How does the church begin its act of worship? There are no rules, and there are many precedents. The synagogue and the early Christian church, as far as we know, begin immediately with the reading of the Word. Since then, most churches have wanted to enter the sanctuary more deferentially. But there is no one way to begin.

How any meeting begins is settled, generally, by the character or office of the participants. God Himself defines the nature of this meeting. He

graciously calls His people into His presence, welcomes them into His fellowship, speaks His Word to them and listens to their words. Two things about God and His call to worship stamp the character of our weekly meeting with Him.

He is the Holy One. However close He tabernacles with us in the Incarnation, the Word, and the sacraments, He remains the God who is Holy. He is the *Awful* One. Sinners neither stroll nor storm into the Holy Mountain; they come tremblingly, by royal invitation. The response to the Holy One is awe, wonder, fear and trembling. We begin our meeting with Him, if we begin it fittingly, with a liturgical act which betrays that we know we are meeting with the Holy One of Israel.

He is the Holy One who has come to us in redemptive intimacy. He did something; He entered a covenant with us, made us His covenant partner. He divided the waters. He came down "for us sinners and our salvation." He destroyed the power of the Devil. He opened up the gateway into His Kingdom for us. "He Arose!" And His Christ "dwells in us." He has given us something to celebrate; the fact of Easter defines our meeting with God as truly as does His holiness. Therefore, the liturgy ought to reflect jubilation—the beginning ought to suggest something of its excitement, its festivity. Entering worship on a Lord's Day morning is an anticipation of entering the "new creation". And we ought to show it.

The fact of salvation defines the opening; but the character of the Holy One still qualifies it. We meet God in jubilation; but the God we meet is still the Holy One.

1. *The Psalm of Praise*

A most fitting way to enter His presence is with singing. A jubilant Psalm is perhaps the best we can do. The sound of trumpets may well be reserved for the church's special festivals. But a Psalm, expressing the joy of meeting God, while letting God remain the Holy One, serves the Reformed liturgy well as the entrance. Should it be convenient, the *Gloria*, which is specially trinitarian, may be added.

The entrance Psalm, in the Roman liturgy, signalled the entrance of the clergy. There is point to this practice. There is also good point to the entrance of the consistory during this hymn. Of course, the people stand.

Meanwhile, if a congregation discovers a way of opening the service that honors the character of God in a new way, it should be encouraged to use it.

2. *The Invocation and Greeting*

The presence of God has, with the Psalm, been approached. Has worship begun, has the meeting started? The precisionist may argue that the meeting has not begun—officially—until the Lord has announced his welcome, in the greeting. But is the worship a business meeting which opens officially with the "Call to Order"? We think not. It is a personal meeting between a reconciling God with His reconciled people. And we had better not try to pin down the exact moment when the meeting is begun.

What is the next step? Again, there is no rule. And precedent varies. In the Dutch Reformed tradition, a *votum* and salutation are said—in that order. And, given the tradition, a convincing rationale is at hand for it.

But the *votum* and salutation have a complicated background. Take, the *votum* for instance. No-one is quite sure of how this awkward Latin word crept into and managed to stay in a Reformed liturgy that otherwise kept itself clean of Romanist vocabulary. It crops up for the first, von Allman tells us, in reference to the dismissal, or *benediction*, of the late medieval mass. Somewhere, in the Dutch tradition, it was used for the beginning words—the “our help” in Calvin’s liturgy. Calvin himself never called it a *votum*, as far as we know. The word itself seems to mean a “wish” or “desire” and so, perhaps, is roughly similar to an invocation. But, today, few people know what a *votum* is; its appearance on almost every Christian Reformed “order of service” is liturgically useless; and there is every reason to drop it from our liturgical vocabulary.

So much for the word “*votum*”. What about the thing the word indicates? The saying of Psalm 124:8 (“Our help is in the name of the Lord . . .”) was originally said privately by the priest; he whispered it along with his private confession of sin as he entered the sanctuary to celebrate mass. Thus, it was not the beginning of the people’s worship; it was part of the priest’s private preparation for worship. The words were taken over by Calvin to begin the morning worship for all the people. He did not tell us why he used the words; our liturgical rationale is, in a sense, after the fact.

The “our help” is apparently an open confession of our deepest dependence and need; with it the people confess that they know where their salvation is found; and it implies an expectation that their needs will again be satisfied.

The difference between what we call a “*votum*” and what is sometimes called an “invocation” is vague. There are churches that list both of them in their orders. Only a few substitute “invocation” for the “*votum*.” Others have both a “*votum*” and a “call to worship”—while some drop the “*votum*” in favor the “call”. Others use the word “*votum*” in the printed order, while the minister issues a “call to worship” or says some other scriptural sentence.

We see no point in trying to be dogmatic about the differences between *Votum*, *Invocation*, and *Call to Worship*.

Strictly speaking, the “call to worship” is something that happens before worship begins; like the old fashioned church bell, it is sounded to summon people to the meeting. But we need not be over-precise.

The “our help” is very much like an “invocation.” The most commonly used “invocation” is the trinitarian: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Here, the invoking is implicit; it signifies that what we are about to do is to be done under the auspices of and with the help of the trine God; and it implicitly invokes His blessing and presence. The “our help” confesses the need the people have;

and it, again, implicitly invokes God to satisfy the need here and now in worship. The two are really much the same.

This is why, in most Reformed churches, either one or the other is used. Or, *both* as in the French Reformed Liturgy of Taizé, where they are called an *invocation*.

In any case, the invocation is said for the people. Surely the people need not be speechless here. Let them at least say AMEN afterward. Or, a congregation could use a form like this:

Minister: Our help is in the Name of the Lord,

People: Who made the heaven and earth.

Minister: In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

Or, the people could say an Amen, after one or another scriptural word voiced by the minister. For example, a convergence of a "call" and an "invocation."

Minister: Let us worship God. In the name of the Father. . . .

People: Amen.

Another form is that of question and an answer:

Minister: From whence comes our help?

People: Our help is in the name of the Lord. . . .

The "greeting" or salutation has deeper liturgical roots than the invocation. But even this is complicated. The earliest greeting was not the apostolic greeting, but a dialogue between minister and people:

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And with thy spirit. (i.e., And the Lord be with you too).

But this was not originally spoken at the start of worship so much as at the beginning of the service of the Upper Room, where only the communicants were present. And it also came to introduce special moments within the service, like the prayer or reading of Scripture. Besides, this greeting has the marks of wish or prayer, which is not quite the same as the *proclamation* of the Word of promise.

Dathenus began his service with the apostolic greeting: "Grace and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This apostolic greeting, spoken only by the minister, carries the overtones of a blessing or benediction; it is a kind of proclamation. The Dordt synod of 1574 commended the "Our help"—without the greeting—just as Calvin used it. But, in practice, the greeting crept back into the liturgy. And, distinctive of the Dutch Reformed liturgy, both invocation and salutation became the practice.

Though we have no inherited rationale for the use of both, one is not hard to find. The invocation (whether the "Our help" or the trinitarian form) is the humble entreaty; it confesses that God's presence with us, and our reception into His presence, is an answer to prayer. Our mere appearance at the "house of God" does not guarantee that we shall meet Him there. The greeting—and for this, we need the apostolic form, not the dialogue—is the Lord's word of welcome, His open-armed embrace of His reconciled people.

The use of the invocation and the salutation together underscore the reality that God's presence in our worship is not a manipulated presence. We do not bring Him down, as it were, *ex opere operato*, by our speaking of scriptural words. He is always free; the Spirit is never bound. And when He comes, He comes, not in genie-like response to a ministerial incantation of biblical phrases. He comes, faithful to His promise, but in answer to prayer. Hence, *invocation* as well as greeting.

If only one were used, we should have to use the greeting. God begins the liturgical dialogue. But the use of both, as one liturgical moment, perhaps reveals a sound liturgical instinct in our Dutch fathers.

For the beginning service, then, we recommend:

- a. The use of a Psalm or Gloria (or fitting hymn) to signal the entrance of the people into God's presence.
- b. The abandonment of the word "votum."
- c. The use of both the invocation and greeting—in that order.
- d. The opportunity for the people to voice at least part of their invocation.

(Note on Silent Prayer)

For people to pray in silence before the liturgy begins is, of course, very excellent. The best prelude to worship is not the organ concert, but the heart's prayer. But silent prayer is not a liturgical act. Liturgy is the action of the people in concert. A congregation in silent prayer is a group of individuals in private devotion. It would seem therefore, that the liturgy as such has no place for private, silent prayer. The place for silent prayer is prior to worship's beginning.

We would be foolish, however, were we to try to prevent individuals from praying silently during the liturgy. In fact, the liturgy should be placed with such leisure that the worshipper is not bombarded with a staccato of words; he ought to have the luxury of silence now and then.

The question is whether the order of service ought to include silent prayer as a discrete act of worship, along with the corporate acts. We think the answer is that it should not. Each congregation should seek ways to encourage private devotion prior to worship. Perhaps the organ could discretely cease a few moments before the liturgy starts. Perhaps a help would be the re-introduction of prayer benches into the church furniture; there is good reason why they should be and none but prejudicial reasons why they are not. At any rate, silent prayer prior to worship is commended. But we ought to make it plain that individual prayers in silence are acts along-side of and not part of the liturgy.

B. The Confession and Assurance

This phase of the service touches a sensitive nerve in our own liturgical history. When introduced as "The Service of Reconciliation" by synodical decision in 1928, it set off a round of hurt feelings and indignant protests, climaxed by its elimination from the service in 1930. Whether the imposition of this service by synodical decision or whether the inclusion in it of an "absolution," or both, was the reason for its still-birth in our liturgy is hard to say. At any rate, Synod's liturgical committee viewed the ruins of its liturgical labor in 1930 and labelled it a "catastrophe."

We do not wish here to recall all the arguments *pro* and *con* a "service of reconciliation." Needless to say, however, our discussion of this phase of the liturgy will cover some of the same ground traversed so painfully in our churches from 1916-1930.

In our judgment, this stage of the service is a liturgical preparation for the two cardinal phases of worship: The proclamation of the Word and the response of the people. It is not a "service of reconciliation" in the strict sense. Worship is a meeting between the Reconciler and the reconciled. Reconciled people are still and always a penitent people. And God's forgiveness is an ever new event. So, in an unclear sense, their penitence and God's forgiveness could be called an event of reconciliation. But, liturgically, the phrase makes the issue cloudy, and is better dropped.

Even the word "preparation" is ambiguous. The Roman Mass took the "preparatory" character of this service literally; it was performed by the priest prior to his ascent to the altar. Calvin took the service over from the mass, but made it a service of the people and included it within the worship service. The Taizé liturgy makes it a service of the people, but—formally—makes it preliminary to worship. The people, says Max Thurian of the Taizé community, "leave the burden of sin at the door . . . exorcizing it by confession and absolution." But, even if a case could be made for the notion that confession and assurance precede worship *per se*, it is not feasible for the typical Reformed congregation to bend its liturgy to this practice.

At any rate, we judge the service of preparation to be within the act of worship.

What are its parts?

1. *The Confession of Sin*

First, a brief historical note on the confession. Confession has always been part of the believer's daily exercise. But it appears in the church's liturgy fairly late. What came to be called the *confiteor* appears first in the middle ages. Here, as the mass was developing into an aesthetic production, the priest prepared for celebration by personal and private confession. At the foot of the altar, he uttered his private confession (introduced always by "Our help is in the name of the Lord"). Often the choir sang the Introit while his confession was being made. So, the confession was prior to, or along-side of the liturgy (hence, *para-liturgical*). The "absolution" was spoken by his assistant. Undoubtedly the liturgical confession-absolution was promoted from the private confessional. So, there is no doubt that the confession had its liturgical roots in the Roman service.

The Reformation service took on the confession, but introduced it as an action of the people—voiced by the minister. Calvin, following the pattern of the mass, had it near the beginning, prior to the sermon. Micron, in London, and Dathenus, in Frankfort, also used it, but at the end of the service, following the sermon. They apparently adapted the pattern of the medieval preaching and catechetical service, called the *Prone*, which grew up alongside the mass. For a time, we are told the Dutch service used it both before and after the sermon. But at the same

time, in the general tendency to simplify the liturgy by packing things together, it disappeared as a distinct moment and was swallowed into the "long prayer." It also appears as part of the prayer for illumination—as in our liturgical prayers.

As to its form, there is an ample harvest of good liturgical confessions. In many congregations, a penitential Psalm is sung. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this. But we may ask whether the spoken prayer is not capable of more effective confession. The Psalms offer a biblical pattern and example of penitence, but are pastorally inadequate. There must be occasions when more existential confession of more specific sins is made. The better way, we judge, is to use liturgical prayers of confession, while leaving the minister free to extemporize or prepare his own prayers suitable to his time and situation. They may, when form prayers are used, be spoken by the congregation. Or, as the situation demands, be spoken by the minister, but with the people at least adding the Amen.

Another method is for the minister to offer the prayer of confession with the congregation adding its own voice in the singing of the penitential Psalm. Or, using a form rooted in Christian worship, and used by the Reformers, the people may sing the Kyrie.

Lord have mercy upon us.
Christ have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.
And grant us Thy peace.

There should be provision of confessional prayers in any eventual service book.

2. *The Assurance*

If there was any one issue that killed liturgical change in our church, this was it. When the synod of 1928 voted to make the "absolution" a uniform liturgical usage, it aroused a response that ended, not only the absolution, but any subsequent effort to get a synodically prescribed liturgical reform.

The present committee does not wish to spell out the arguments that were raised for and against the absolution during that long discussion. But we may recall the *pastoral* concerns of both the committee and its dissenters. The committee, besides pointing to the Reformational precedent for the absolution, wanted to counteract what it thought was a sick and chronic disposition on the part of many people to be uncertain about their salvation; the committee observed a kind of introspective penchant, and even a kind of nervous pleasure in being spiritually uncertain. So, it argued out of pastoral concern, the people needed—in the liturgy—a clear, uncomplicated, uncompromising word of Gospel assurance.

As one reads the record, he notes—besides a recurring Romophobia—a fear of what we today like to call "cheap grace." Oh, it was argued, with some liturgical sense, that the proclamation of forgiveness was made in the sermon and that a discrete "absolution" was superfluous. But back

of the liturgical argument lay a sound instinct against the abstract, the general, the scatter-shot pronouncement of grace. Spoken by a mere man ("I pronounce") out over the heads of the people in general, abstracted from pastoral warning, and received without agonizing, the "absolution" came as a liturgical bargain. And when it was inserted into a denominationally prescribed liturgy, it was doomed.

But, what 1930 put out the front door of synodical discretion came back into many liturgies by the side door of congregational freedom. Called, in most cases, the "assurance of pardon," it is now common fare in Christian Reformed services.

What are we to say? The problem of the "absolution" bristles with difficult questions of the nature of the ministry, to say nothing of the nature of proclamation. The sacramental and juridical doctrine of the ministry in the Roman church makes the "absolution" an understandable, if regrettable dimension of its pastoral functions. But what of a Calvinistic "absolution"? Calvin has something to say here, hard to take for many, but part of his theology. Let us take the time to hear him.

For Calvin there was no forgiveness outside of the church. The Gospel of forgiveness was entrusted to the church and its ministry. Therefore, when the minister proclaimed forgiveness, he did it with authority. Not his own authority, of course; but it was he who spoke God's promise. Therefore, Calvin could say, about his own liturgy, that "it was no mean or trivial consolation to have Christ's ambassador present, furnished with the mandate of reconciliation." The "absolution," then, was not just a prayer, certainly not a pious wish; it was the authentic word of divine promise.

But, proclamation is not authentic in and by itself; proclamation is not complete unless there is a people who hears and believes. The Calvinistic "absolution" is implicitly fenced in by some "ifs" and "buts." The very fact that it is spoken by a man of common clay summons the hearer to faith; there is nothing self-evident about *this* absolution. Moreover, it is proclaimed to those who repent; it is authoritative only if repentance is alive in those who hear it. But the church at that moment is not able to point its finger at the repentant members and say the absolution only to them; it has to speak it over the entire assembly. This is why Calvin did not simply say: "I pronounce that all of you—since all of you heard the confession—are forgiven." What he did say was this:

"To all those who repent in this way and turn to Jesus Christ for their salvation, I pronounce the absolution of their sins to be made in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The absolution is, indeed, an authentic proclamation. But it is a proclamation whose total effect is not known to anyone save the Lord himself. Thus, it is not effective in the mere saying of it. It is effective when it is heard in repentance and faith; the subjective dimension is part of the forgiving event.

Both Micron and Datheen used the absolution in their liturgies; but

they made the restriction most explicit. It allowed for no "cheap grace." Here is the Palatinate form:

"Hearken now unto the comforting assurance of the grace of God, promised in the gospel to all that believe. (Here John 3:16 is recited).

Unto as many of you, therefore, beloved Brethren, as abhor yourselves and your sins, and believe that you are fully pardoned through the merits of Jesus Christ, and resolve daily more to abstain therefrom and to serve the Lord in true holiness and righteousness: I declare according to the command of God, that they are released in heaven from all their sins, (as he hath promised in his Gospel), through the perfect satisfaction of the most holy passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. But as there may be some among you, who continue to find pleasure in your sin and shame, or who persist in sin against their conscience, I declare unto such, by the command of God, that the wrath and judgment of God abides upon them, and that all their sins are retained in heaven, and finally that they can never be delivered from eternal damnation, unless they repent."

If anyone has doubts about his self-aborrence and his resolve, he was not likely to steal cheap comfort from this "absolution." (Its similarity to the call for self-examination in our classic Lord's Supper formulary is, incidentally, obvious). Perhaps it is questionable whether it assured any of them at all. It was clearly never the mark of the Reformed absolution to spread discount assurance over the congregation.

Getting to the question, then, may we have an assurance? Clearly, the word of assurance has firm footing in our tradition. It may be argued, as the Dutch synod of Middelburg (1581) argued, that a distinct word of assurance is superfluous, that the proclamation of the Gospel in sermon form was sufficient. But the fathers had, we judge, a sound liturgical sense when they included it. The liturgy must proceed apace; it must keep moving; the order must flow. If there is confession and penitential petition, the answer must follow hard on the supplication, not half an hour later. The logic of waiting for a sermonic proclamation of pardon is good; but the liturgics of it is weak. If there is a confession, it must be answered with assurance; if man speaks of his sin to God, we must let God speak of His grace to man.

The "I pronounce" has unsavory odors, however, to many worshippers. The term "absolution," too, has proven unpalatability. But a word of assurance from the Word of God is, we judge, commendable both liturgically and pastorally.

It has sometimes taken the form of a bidding:

"Almighty God, who does freely pardon all who repent and turn to him, now fulfil in every contrite heart the promise of redeeming grace; remitting all our sins, and cleansing us from an evil conscience; through the perfect sacrifice of Christ our Lord."

(from the provisional liturgy of the Reformed Churches in America).

"May Almighty God be gracious to us, forgiving our sins, and granting to us eternal life."

(*From the Orden Voor de Eredienst of the Gereformeerde Kerken*).

The Taize absolution is a variation of Calvin's, but it opens with an exhortation to repentance and faith:

"May each one of you acknowledge himself to be indeed a sinner, humbling himself before God, and believe that it is the Father's will to have mercy upon him in Jesus Christ;

to all who thus repent and seek Jesus Christ for their salvation, I declare the absolution of the sin—in the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

It may also take the form of a scriptural sentence, as for example:

Since we have confessed our sins before the Lord, let us now lift up hearts and receive His promise of forgiveness.

Hear, then, and believe the Word of God: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us all our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Or, a modified Palatinate absolution could be used.

Hear now the comforting assurance of the grace of God, as promised in the Gospel of Christ to all who believe. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. If you have indeed repented of your sins, and if you do seek your salvation in Jesus Christ and do wish to live the Christian life, I say to you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that God has forgiven all of your sins and accepted you as His beloved child, because of the sacrifice of His Son.

I must also solemnly say to any who are not sincerely sorry for their sins, and who have no desire to live in regard of Jesus Christ, that their sins are held against them in the holy judgment of God, until they repent of them and seek forgiveness through Christ.

3. *The Gloria*

After the comforting words of God's promise, the people ought to respond. A *Gloria* is surely in place after the moment that God's amazing mercy is declared. The words of praise should be familiar ones, so that the people need not fumble their way to the hallelujah. The *Gloria Patri* is excellent. Or the first stanza of hymn No. 360 or 361, or the fourth of No. 355—or any of the deliverance Psalms—would be appropriate. But, by all means, the people must rise and join in jubilation.

4. *The Summons to the New Life*

If you hear the Ten Commandments, you are in a Dutch Reformed service. Nothing so easily identifies the Dutch Reformed liturgy. Nothing else sets it so obviously apart from other liturgical traditions.

How did the decalogue get welded to our liturgy? What are its liturgical credentials? We can give a historical rationale: it testifies to the Calvinist respect for the *unity of the covenant*. Without a sense for the integrity of the covenant of grace, the Dutch church would hardly have included the Law of Moses in its liturgy. But other churches assume that the covenant of grace is one, and have not made the decalogue an unchanging feature of their worship. Moreover, when the law was introduced, the Reformed Church was not living in a dispensationalist jungle, and felt no need of affirming its conviction via its liturgy. The presence of the law does testify to our faith in the unity of the covenant. But this does not explain why it came and stayed in our liturgy. Nor does it offer a liturgical reason for keeping it.

A few observations on the place of the decalogue in the church's liturgical history may set our question in focus. Hebrew worshippers at the synagogue, from which the early church borrowed at least half its liturgy, regularly heard lessons from the law and the prophets. But, the law included all five books of Moses—read serially and it was read after the pattern of our "lessons from Holy Scripture." The decalogue as such was not a weekly feature of the synagogue's liturgy. Nor did it occur to the early church to read the ten words. It occurs first in the medieval preaching service; here it is not a summons to obedience nor a catalyst to confession, but a catechetical device for teaching the sum of Christian truth.

Calvin planted the decalogue in the liturgy, though he did not originate its use there. What he really thought about the decalogue's *function* in worship is hard to say. In Strassbourg, while taking over the format of Bucer's service, he put the decalogue where Bucer had a *Gloria* or a Psalm in response to the absolution. We are told that Calvin was afraid of the *Gloria*, afraid that it carried the church to the place of the triumphant out of its real servant's quarters. So, some have argued, the decalogue was, for Calvin, a kind of humble *Gloria*, a *Gloria* not in *excelsis*, but in *terra* and in *culpa*. The more theological argument is that Calvin meant the decalogue to sound as a liturgical summons to righteous living; a summons that comes in the context of grace to those who have just heard and accepted the absolution. But he trips us up here by his use of the Kyrie—"Lord, have mercy"—after each commandment—which suggest that the law was used as a catalyst to repentance.

Calvin did not tell us why the decalogue was used liturgically, though he taught us volumes about its use in revelation and life. Nor does he tell us why he dropped the decalogue from his liturgy once back in Geneva. We know he was forced to abandon the absolution; the Genevese would not put up with this Romanist innovation. But, he neither tells us why he dropped the decalogue nor gives a hint that he regretted doing so. Ironically, the Calvinist churches gladly dropped his absolution, but learned to cling tenaciously to the decalogue.

All of the later precedents for the Dutch service used the decalogue—Micron, Pallanus, and Datheen. But they set it *after* the sermon. Dordt prescribed it for the afternoon catechetical service, to be used here as

a catechetical medium in the pattern of the Heidelberg. Ever since, we have not been able to decide whether the law is a teaching device or a liturgical act. A. Kuyper (*Onzo Eeredienst*, p. 215) recommended it for use following the sermon—but then as a summons to do in life what the Word taught us in the sermon. By Kuyper's time the decalogue had crept back into the morning worship service and, with the sermon the center and climax of the service, it came to be one of the preliminaries to the preaching. By that time, the law seemed liturgically inexpendable, and liturgically undefined.

While we talk about defining the liturgical function of the law we remember, of course, that the Lord is free to use His law, at any moment, to achieve whatever purpose He wishes. If He wills to use His law of a given Sunday morning to convict one worshipper of sin, summons another to obedience, and at the same time inspire another to a grateful hallelujah, no liturgical definition of the law's function will inhibit Him. But we can make only one liturgical decision about the law, and we have more than one possibility from which to choose.

The law could have three fairly well defined functions in the liturgy. (1) It could serve as a catalyst to confession. While this was not its primary purpose in its revelation, it becomes that by its inherent reflection of the character of God. We use the word "catalyst" here to distinguish this function from a pedagogical function; in the liturgy the law summons to confession, rather than as an instruction in the character of sin. It is the holy finger of God pointing to "me" as the one who fails in his life to reflect the character of God. (2) It could serve as a summons to the life of gratitude. Again, the law here is not a piece of theoretical instruction; it is not even a catechetical device. It is a direct command. (3) It could also serve as a reading from Scripture, taking its place with the other readings. The only difference from the other lessons would be that it consistently stresses instruction in the obligations of the Christian.

We may also note that the law, in Calvin's liturgy, has an apparently ambiguous function. We have already mentioned this, but it bears repeating here. When we define the liturgical function of the law, we are not excluding the possibility that a given worshipper's experience may be different from the liturgical definition.

Still, the liturgy should be understood by the whole congregation in the same way. And the church ought to decide what function it intends a given moment of the liturgy to serve. It seems to us that reading the law after the confession and assurance are spoken is the better time; it reflects the Reformed understanding of the history of salvation. There, when the people have been assured that God accepts them "in spite of what they are"—for the sake of Christ—they are immediately summoned by the redeeming God of Israel into new obedience. If, in this place, the law is also heard in the believer's ear as a gloria to God for enlisting him in His freedom-giving service, well and good.

This is not to say that a reading of the law prior to confession is improper. Far from it. The law is the "mirror" of God's holiness and the

finger of God's judgment on sin. And, our churches should have the option of setting it to this liturgical use.

Until now, in our discussion, the law has meant decalogue. But must the liturgical use of God's summons be restricted to the "ten words" from Sinai? The decalogue has, as we have seen, only limited catholic sanction in liturgical tradition. And, pastorally, too, the repetition of it has dulled its power to communicate. While God's will is generalized in no place as succinctly as in the decalogue, it is genuinely revealed in other places of Scripture. There seems to be no reason why another biblical word cannot be substituted now and then for the decalogue.

One option to the decalogue is simply another passage of Scripture that summons us to the new life in Christ. Still another, more drastic option, is to remove the law from the preparatory service and place it, as one of the scripture readings, in the service of proclamation. When this is done, the service of confession and assurance would be concluded with a Psalm or the Gloria following the words of assurance.

As in the case of the assurance, the word of God's will should receive a response from the people. They should express their intention to obey. This may, if a congregation is willing to experiment, take the form of a terse prayer at the end of each command (when the decalogue is read). For instance: "Incline our hearts, O Lord, to keep Thy commandment." Or, any of the splendid Psalms or hymns of dedication could be used.

With this, we have completed the service of confession and assurance, and are about to begin the principal acts of worship. We sang the Psalm at the door of God's house, we entreated Him at the threshold, were welcomed by Him into the vestibule. We exchanged very fitting words that established us anew on the honest basis of our respective identities—we as the entreating and forgiven sinners, He as the forgiving and challenging Lord. Now, we are about to settle into our meeting.

The order, thus far, would then—with variations—be on this plan:

- The Psalm of Praise (People)
- The Invocation (People)
- The Greeting (The Lord)
- Confession—with People's Amen. (People)
- Words of Assurance (The Lord)
- Gloria (or Psalm) (The People)
- The Summons to the New Life (The Lord)
- Dedication (People)

C. The Service of the Word of God

Before talking about the elements of this service, we must say something about the over-all pattern of the whole service from this point on. The shape of the liturgy is defined by the two main dimensions of the God-man relationship: the priority of revelation and the response of faith to it. While the discrete steps of the whole liturgy take on the form of dialogue, so do its principal divisions. After the preparatory service, the worship service is formed by two main events: the reading and proclamation of the Word and the believing and obedient response to it. In this way,

several items that are now usually preliminary to the sermon are here set in the framework of the believing response to the sermon. These are: the creed, the intercessions for all men, and the offering of gifts. These can be together called: The service of offering—our reasonable or spiritual service (Romans 12:2).

This larger pattern of worship is, however, complicated by the question of the sacrament. From earliest times, the church's liturgy was divided into two parts: the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the upper room (or, sometimes, the liturgy of the faithful). The items we will include under the service of offering were, in fact, part of the service of the sacrament. This is the way it went from Justin Martyr's liturgy, through all the countless variations in East and West, until the sermon began to diminish and the mass to fill the vacuum. When the Reformers reconstructed and purified the liturgy, they assumed that the basic pattern would be the same: Word and Sacrament. For instance, Calvin's Strassbourg liturgy had the creed, intercessions, etc., after the sermon, with the understanding that the sacrament formed the climax to the whole. When he failed, to his unending regret, to get the sacrament into the weekly liturgy, he still kept the basic order. His liturgy, then, was still: Word and Response—God's Word and our response. Liturgiologists have often called this an ante communion service—a worship that was essentially abortive. We do not understand from Calvin, however, that—in spite of his misgiving—he thought of the worship of the church in Geneva as somehow disqualified. Nonetheless, the worship was meant to be climaxed, ideally, by the sacrament.

As it stands, we are recommending the basic division of Word and Response, a division that shapes the liturgy. The question of the sacrament is relevant here because we must ask whether it fits into the service of response. The sacrament is the people's Thanksgiving, their Eucharistia, hence, their response. On the other hand, it is also an act of God, a means of His coming to us in the Spirit as He came in the Word. Hence, the sacrament is a climatic convergence of an act of God and a response of man. Thus, it should be given a special division, called perhaps: the service of the supper.

Our recommendations, then, call for a division of the Word and the Response—in the assumption that the majority of our worship services shall not include the sacrament. We do this here, not because of principiant objections to weekly communion, but in the realistic expectation that it will not become the custom. The question itself is discussed elsewhere in this report.

When and exactly why the basic pattern was scrambled, we are not able to say. But once you take the lynch pin of the sacrament out of the service, its parts are not likely to stay in order; this is probably close to the reason for the scrambling of the items of the service. It also seems clear that the Dutch Reformed order is based, not on the church's classic liturgical pattern, but on the medieval preaching service. As a rule of thumb, it can be said that the more didactic a service becomes, the less the church cares about the order or shape of its liturgy. So here, once the service be-

came a preaching service, the items that were inexpressible could be set almost anywhere—so why not scatter them somewhere before the sermon?

Both the tradition of Christian worship, the precedent of the Reformation, and sound biblical and liturgical sense, make it reasonable to urge that the ancient order be re-established, at least as an option for the churches that prefer it.

Now, then, to the service of the Word.

1. *The Prayer for Illumination*

The liturgy of the Word begins properly with a prayer for the work of the Holy Spirit. Like the prayer for the Spirit offered prior to the sacrament, this prayer is sometimes called the *epiklesis* (calling down). It is a prayer for the Spirit's illumination. But this should not be taken in a kind of Platonic or intellectualistic sense; not for sound thinking alone, but for the understanding that—in Calvin's words—begins in obedience.

It is, in some communions, offered after the Scripture is read and before the minister preaches—and is then especially a prayer for the preacher. But the prayer belongs before the Word is read. For unless we are opened to the Word by the Spirit, it is read as a dead letter. The Spirit does not make the Bible the Word of God on a Sunday morning; but He opens us to the Word so that it becomes God's Word for us.

The prayer has a secondary importance. It signals the beginning of a new and solemnly important phase of the service. We should not slide into this new stage. We must highlight it with an act that fits its special importance. The medieval liturgists had some sound intuition when they prefaced the reading of Scripture with all sorts of dramatic gestures—carrying the book from place to place, kissing the pages, burning incense, and the like. A good thing in excess travels from bad taste to liturgical subversion, of course. And when the Reformers sliced away the theatrics from the reading of Scripture, they did what had to be done. But sober simplicity when carried to excess is a surrender to liturgical formlessness.

So, a prayer for the Holy Spirit, besides admitting the need and exploring for its fulfillment, adds a psychological boost to the service of the Word.

What sort of prayer should it be? There are three forms it can take, depending somewhat on its content.

It can be a prayer only for illumination. If this is the case, it can be brief and pointed, as for instance, in the Taizé liturgy:

Come, Holy Spirit of Truth; lead us into all truth.

—or—

Lord, Sanctify us in Thy truth. Thy Word, O Lord, is truth.

It can include, more specifically, a prayer for both understanding and obedience. An example of this is found in the first authentically protestant service, developed by Diebold Schwarz:

"Almighty, ever gracious Father, forasmuch as all our salvation depends on our truly understanding Thy Holy Word, grant us that our hearts be set free from worldly things, so that we may with all diligence and faith, hear and apprehend Thy Holy Word, that thereby

we may rightly understand Thy gracious will, and in all sincerity live according to it, to Thy praise and glory. Amen."

Micron, one of the fathers of our liturgical practices, introduced this prayer—offered just before the sermon in this way:

"Since you are gathered here, Christian brothers, to hear the Word of God unto the salvation of our souls, let us before all else pray to the Lord for His divine grace (without which we can do nothing) so that I may preach nothing but the pure doctrine of God's Word and that you may hear it to the advancement of your salvation."

Whereupon followed a prayer for both the preacher and the worshippers.

In Datheen's penchant for splicing the various segments of the liturgy together, the prayer for illumination became a prayer of confession of sins as well. This form is preserved in our small selection of liturgical prayers. The relevant part of these prayers should be preserved in any eventual service book.

There is another form of prayer that is prominent in the church's liturgy. It is called the Collect. To get the point of this word, think of a collection of all the needs and desires of the members of the congregation offered in one prayer to God. Call it a collection of prayers and you have the idea of the Collect. There is point to adding the prayer for the needs of the congregation here. The Word is about to be preached; it must aim at the existential needs of the listeners. Why should there not, at this juncture then, be a prayer for those needs? The prayer for the needs of the world—when the congregation turns outward from itself in prayer—service to God's creatures everywhere—would come after the sermon.

We do not suggest that any of these prayers is the only correct one. The preacher should be free to use any one of these forms. But we do strongly recommend the prayer for illumination at any rate.

2. The Reading of the Word

A worshipping community that appreciates the importance of the written Word may be expected to give a prominent place to the reading of the Word in its liturgy. Ironically, however, our services tend to downgrade the reading of it. We read less of it, in the liturgy, than the church catholic has done. We make little effort to provide a liturgical staging of the reading in order to make its unique role stand in bold relief. As a result, the reading of the Word tends, we fear, to be little more than prelude to preaching. And the listener is tempted to begin his serious attention only when the minister lifts his eyes from the book and begins his sermon.

The background to this lies in a renewal of the importance of preaching combined with over-reaction against the liturgical theatrics that surrounded the reading of the Word in the Roman Mass. The Reformers brushed away the liturgical bric-a-brac when they reaffirmed proclamation. The Word of God, they realized, was meant to be preaching into the actual lives of real people, applied concretely to concrete situations; they realized that from the beginning, it was the proclamation of the living

Word that set men face to face with the risen Christ. Thus, the written and read Word had to be married to its preachment. But, as time went on, the church's respect for the written Word, the canon, was not reflected in its liturgy.

~~The fact that the church has a canon testifies to the fact that preaching alone is not enough.~~ The apostolic word, as it stands, must be allowed to do its own work in the liturgy. The so-called lections must be given a dignified and accented liturgical setting.

One way to do this is to restore the universal practice of having at least two readings. From the synagogue, the early church learned the habit of making the reading of the words of Scripture a core ingredient of worship. In the synagogue, the law and the prophets were read—framed by prayers and responses appropriate to them. The New Testament church added the reading of the apostles' letters. (Col. 4:16). Later, the evangelists were added—making for four readings. For a time the Acts of the Apostles were also read—making five. This became cumbersome, however, and the number of readings simmered down to two—the Epistles (or the Old Testament) plus the invariable reading of the Gospels. The modern-ancient Taizé liturgy restores three lessons. Our own tradition continued a reading, but limited it to a text which the minister was to expound.

We strongly recommend the renewal of a two-fold reading. It is native to the Christian church's worship. It reflects the honor given to the whole of Scripture. It allows for a reading which stands by itself, and is not only the basis for the sermon. And it is good liturgical psychology. We recommend readings from the Old and the New Testament.

Next, we must consider the liturgical setting of the reading. Without doubt, it ought to be done within the setting of the sermon. Some congregations, we note, set the reading rather widely off from the sermon. This has pedagogical weaknesses; but it has liturgical weaknesses too: reading and proclamation are two phases of the same service, and ought to be juxtaposed. This is reflected in the consistent declarations of Reformed synods on the subject. (Cf. Dordt, 1574, 1578, Middelburg, 1581, to say nothing of Grand Rapids, 1928).

But, while it must be in the vicinity of the sermon, it should not be swallowed by the sermon. We must find fitting ways to highlight the reading itself. We do not have to ring bells, kiss the pages, or parade the book about in the fashion of Roman bibliolatry. But we should frame the reading with acts appropriate to it. We have already mentioned the introductory prayer for the Spirit's illumination. Now, we recommend congregational responses to the reading. After the reading the people should sing or speak some sort of Hallelujah! It should be formalized and familiar so that it need not be burdened with a long organ prelude. The reading of the Gospels has always had special importance—not because the evangelists were more inspired than other writers, but because it contained the story of the mighty acts of God for our redemption in Christ. Whether we are able to reflect this is debatable. But at any rate, the Gospels should be answered with a joyful Hossanna of some sort. Perhaps the *Benedictus* could be revived: Hossanna, Blessed be He who

cometh in the name of the Lord! But in view of our traditional silence, perhaps so terse an acclamation would be difficult. In that case, a stanza of any number of hymns that praise God for salvation in Christ can be used.

These responses keep up the pace of the dialogue. God speaks. Men must answer. This is the revelational manner, and it ought to be reflected in the weekly encounter with God's revelation. Moreover, it underscores the community's intention to honor the occasion in which the pages of the book come alive anew as they are heard by the people together. It has uncontested support in the church's tradition. Finally, its psychological value is considerable; in the liturgy, as well as in art or drama, the framing of a thing conditions the listener to an evaluation of its importance.

Does liturgy have anything to say about the choice of Scripture readings? This is a very complicated subject, and perhaps no set of lections has ever been wholly satisfactory. The best a service book can do is provide suggestions to the preacher. But even these must have some pattern.

The Reformed preference from the beginning was to read a book through *seriatim*, like a continued story; this is called the *lectio continua*. This was the recommendation of synod after synod in the Netherlands, beginning with Dordt in 1574. But it was assumed that the sermons would also be an exposition of a whole book, *seriatim*. It was also assumed that the "second" service was a catechism service in which the *lectio continua* was not practiced.

Where ministers preach the catechism in the Sunday morning service, one of the readings will be determined by the Lord's Day—and the catechism provides a lectionary guide for this. Had we adhered to the traditional distinction between the two services, we would have a different problem than we now have. The form and purpose of our second service will be discussed in another place. But here we may say that each congregation may well reappraise its second service; there may be localities where this service could well be devoted to instruction, in which case the catechism could be assigned to that service.

Does the Christian Year offer us any help? The values of following the Christian year are at least debatable, and it is safe to say that no liturgist will ever be wholly satisfied with any set of Scripture readings designed to fit the development of the Christian seasons. The intention is to reflect the historical movement in the redemptive program; the result, however, has often been a somewhat artificial and forced arrangement of readings.

Still, the Christian sanctification of the calendar cannot be wholly ignored. We do celebrate the beginning of the new age with the Easter; Christian time begins, not with Janus, but with the risen and glorified Lord of time. And while the church year itself developed in fits and starts, it has become an all but universally accepted form to honor the advent of our Lord, the anticipation of His passion, and the time of Pentecost in our liturgies. Even the slenderized year offers guidance in the choice of Scripture lessons. We should, in an eventual service book, pro-

vide for suggested readings as helps to the minister in his selection. We should also re-evaluate the devotional intent of the seasons, in keeping with their original design; for instance, advent should be utilized liturgically as a time of anticipation of our Lord's second advent to earth.

The method to be recommended, in our judgment, is a flexible one. The church should provide a lectionary which takes into view both the Christian seasons and the value for the church in hearing the whole Word of God. In this way, sections of the Bible which are traditionally ignored can be urged for reading. Readings can be provided which, if not word for word, suggest the thread of an entire book of the Bible, and so we could restore the *lectio continua* to honor. We strongly recommend the creation of such a lectionary.

We have discussed the number, the setting, and the selection of the Scripture readings. Our motive has been to restore the reading of Scripture to a place of special honor and effectiveness in the liturgy. We have not talked about how the Scripture is to be read. This is a subject for another area of discourse. We do recognize that Scripture poorly enunciated, badly read, cannot be overcome by any liturgical adjustments.

3. The Sermon

The sermon is the core of the Christian liturgy. Along with the reading of Scripture, it both anchors worship in the revelation of God and directs it toward life and its responsibilities in the present time. In the proclamation, God comes to us and addresses us from the vantage of His decisive revelation and redemptive acts of the past and anchors our faith response to those. But He also comes to us in contemporary language and concepts to speak to the congregation in its own historical situation. This is why the Word must be not only read, but proclaimed in the liturgy.

It is important to understand that while the Reformers wished to include the sacrament within the normal liturgy, they did not thereby disparage the importance or efficacy of proclamation. Word and sacrament accompanied each other, not as though a merely intellectual discourse were complemented by reality. The Word proclaimed brought the living Christ into communion with us; the Word was a genuine means of grace. The content of both Word and sacrament was Christ. The difference was in the way Christ came. Accenting the importance of sacrament need never be a devaluation of proclamation. Without the proclamation of the Word, the liturgy would soon be a vague and contentless Christian act.

Formally, the sermon interrupts the pace and the flow of the liturgy. Here, the brief dialogues are replaced by a sustained address. God speaks at some length through the proclaimed Word. This does not mean that the worshipper is passive: listening to any elaborated word is a task that summons intense intellectual and spiritual effort, and listening to proclamation summons an intense spiritual response as well. But the liturgical act is monologic: God speaks in sustained address.

Here, too, the liturgy becomes free from set forms and familiar words. The liturgy should not catch people by surprise; but preaching must. Liturgy should not keep people tense, nervous, and wary of what comes

next. Preaching should keep them tense. The proclamation intrudes on their lives, in words of this time; the *hic et nunc* relevance of the Word is demonstrated and made effective in preaching. Here the revelation comes, correcting, comforting, challenging and confronting God's people where they live in the existential moment of their life situation. In the sermon, God is using His freedom to address people, not as Israelite nomads or Jerusalem metropolitans, but as people of the demonically dangerous twentieth century.

The preacher is free too. He is a witness of God for this time and this place, not another. In other moments of the liturgy, he speaks *for* and *to* the people in words that are more or less universal and traditional. Here he speaks to them in words that are carved by the sharp edges of the situation. He speaks prophetically, and therefore freely. Here, the liturgy is bound, not to tradition, but to the Word and the Spirit.

Liturgically speaking, the pulpit points to the table. The fact that the sermon gestures toward and is qualified by the sacrament keeps the sermon from being emasculated by secularist pre-occupations. A sermon with an eye to "memorial of the death of Christ" and to the perpetuation of the memorial until He comes again, can never atrophy into a friendly chit-chat, a discussion of one man's opinion of things in general, nor an intellectualistic digest of well-ordered eternal truths.

The Word preached is the core of our present liturgies; the problem is that it tends to be the climax as well. A climax is not something essentially different from what went on before; but it does bring everything to a head. A liturgy must not merely stop; it must come to its own kind of fulfillment. Word and sacrament offer the combination that most naturally suggest the way the service ought to reach its climactic ending. In the proclamation, the people of God are addressed as sojourners, as pilgrims in the sinful world. In the sacrament they are given a foretaste of the time "of the glorious appearing" of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:12). Everything points to the breaking of the bread as the climax of the liturgy. The movement of the liturgy is thus full of eschatological currents that ought to be realized in it.

D. *The Service of Response*

1. *The Confession of Faith*

The first offering the people make is their confession. The people are called "continually to offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of the lips that acknowledge his name" (Hebrews 13:15, 16). The creed, then, is the offering of the lips. It is the AMEN that the people say to the Word—not to the contents of a specific sermon alone, but to "all that is promised us in the Gospel and which the articles of the universal and undoubted faith of all Christians sum up" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 22).

It is more than an affirmation of agreement with the statements of the creed. Rather, the creed is used to express a life commitment to the Lord of the creed, a personal abandonment of the securities of this life for the promises and obligations that are implicit in the lordship of Jesus Christ. Taken in this way, the creed fittingly follows the sermon; for in it the community offers its YES to what God has offered in the Gospel.

Having said this, we hasten to note that arguments can be made and precedents cited for other understandings of the creed's place in the liturgy. We do not deal with many absolutes in liturgy. Hence, a brief notation on the tradition.

Early in the development of the Apostles' Creed, it was used in the baptismal service. The candidate for baptism was asked whether he affirmed the contents of the Gospel—which were enumerated, and hence became a creed. (We should ask, in this regard, whether the creed ought not be restored to a place in the baptismal liturgy). When he confessed, he was baptized, anointed, blessed with the laying on of hands, and given a bright new white gown. Thereupon, he was qualified for communion. Hence, the creed became an introduction to the service of the sacrament, a transition from the liturgy of the Word to that of the Upper Room.

Since then, however, the place of the creed is very fluid. Sometimes it is prior, sometimes after the sermon, Luther put it before. Calvin put it after the sermon and after the intercession, but just prior to the communion. Micron set it prior to the intercession. The synod of Dordt (1574) placed it at the conclusion of and as part of the prayer. Much depends on the conception of its function.

It can be thought of as a summary of the doctrine preached. It then would fittingly follow the sermon. And it is spoken by the minister. For it is not a confession by the people, but part of the teaching ministry to the people. This was its function in the medieval preaching service. Was this the concept that led Reformed liturgy to have it read by the minister?

It can be thought of—as we have done—in terms of the offering made by the people. If so, it would likewise follow the sermon, not as a summary of the teaching, but as a response to the Word. This was apparently Calvin's understanding. This is why the creed was sung by the people, and why it formed a bridge to the sacrament.

Whether it should precede or follow the prayer of intercessions is an arbitrary matter. It seemed to us that the confession forms the basis for intercession, and therefore we have set it before it.

Which creed shall be used? The confession should be expressed in words that a Christian of any time or place can recognize it as his own. The ecumenical creeds should be used, for this reason and for their brevity. The Nicene Creed enjoyed preference in the Eastern and Western churches until the Reformation. Calvin preferred the Apostles' on grounds of taste. And it has always had precedence over the Nicene. However, the latter is most functional as a common expression. It ought to be revived in our special services at least, notably perhaps on the more festive Christian days like Easter.

We have discussed the creed as a feature of the complete worship service. The custom of using it only in the second service has no rationale that we can discover. If the evening service were a catechetical service, its place there would be didactic, as a summary of Christian doctrine. But this is obviously not its purpose there in most churches. The congregation should stand to make its confession.

2. *The Intercessions*

Prayer has been an integral part of Christian worship ever since the

first Christians "persevered in the teaching of the apostles, in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). We pray at worship because the Lord commanded us always to pray. We pray as part of our offering because prayer, as Calvin said, is "the chief part of thanksgiving." It is the supreme privilege of the Christian community; for when we pray we act not only as members of the family, but as participants in the ministry of Jesus Christ for the world. Our intercessions are the beginning of our self-offering for Christ to the people of the world. Thus, the service of prayer follows the commitment of faith.

The content of the prayer at this point is chiefly intercessory for the needs of all men. We have offered, before this, the prayer of praise in our gloria and Psalms. We have offered the prayer of confession. And we have offered a prayer for the effective work of the Spirit in opening our lives to the Word read and preached. If prayer for the needs of the congregation was not included in the pre-sermon prayer, it can be offered here. The prayer of thanksgiving is traditionally, and in the liturgy we propose, offered before the sacrament. Since, however, the sacrament is not celebrated each Sunday, there must be room for thanksgiving in the congregational prayer of intercession. But the chief intent of this prayer is intercession for others.

This is the opportunity for the entire congregation to participate in the priestly office of Jesus Christ. Here, the compassion of the Lord's children for those on the outside is expressed on their behalf. As Calvin said in explaining his liturgy: "Now, the life of Christ consists in this, namely, to seek and to save that which is lost; fittingly, then, we pray for all men." This prayer should not be confined to the needs of the congregation; hence it should not be called the "pastoral prayer." It is not the pastor praying for his flock; it is the flock praying for those who are "afar off" as well as for the church.

Here it becomes clear, in the liturgy, that faith in God works toward concern for men, that love to God is directed to love for men, that the liturgy (people's service) is service to men just as it is service to God. Prayer is not a retirement from the world; it is retirement from one's personal pre-occupation with the affairs of his own small world so that he can bring to God the genuine needs of His great world.

We must now ask *how* the intercessions are best offered—as liturgical acts. We must admit that, no matter how effectual the "long prayer" may be before the face of God, it has become a dubious liturgical success. The reasons for liturgical failure in the "long prayer" pass by in parade: length, monotony, abstractness, domination by cliché, and domination by the minister. It is liturgically weak because the people, by and large, are unable to perform what the prayer demands. Not only are they silent, not only are they prevented from so much as a concluding Amen, but they are asked to follow, with no visual support (eyes are closed) a lengthy and frequently repetitive monologue. Saying nothing now of the children, the average adult today is unequipped mentally to participate fully in the "long prayer."

How can it be rescued? Concentration on the intercessory purpose of the prayer will help; the prayer should be considerably shorter than is

the average "long prayer" at present. But there are other helps. And each congregation should feel free to experiment for the sake of the people. For instance, a division of the prayer into brief and specific petitions, with each one announced: "Let us pray for the nation," the minister would say, and then proceed to a brief and specific prayer for our government—or—"Let us pray for peace in Viet Nam," and then a brief prayer, confined to that subject. Another expedient is to have deacons offer the prayer of intercession on occasion. Still another is to use both brief written prayers that are general along with brief prayers for specific people both in and outside of the congregation. The experiments in prayer will vary according to the size and character of the congregation.

One more thing should be said about the form of the intercession. Extempore prayers should not be discouraged; there must always be room in liturgical prayer for freedom. On the other hand, our people need to overcome their phobia for formed or written prayers. The less preparation put into prayers, the more formalized and jargonized prayer is likely to become. The most stylized prayers are offered in churches most fearful of formal prayer. To trust capriciously to the liberty of the Spirit in public prayer is to give hostage to the tyranny of the cliché.

3. *The Presentation of Offerings*

Among the four things the Catechism enumerates as the basic features of the liturgy (along with prayer, hearing the Word, and the sacraments) is "the giving of alms." This is the most obviously sacrificial part of the congregational response. Our concern here is only for the liturgical form in which the offering can best be made.

In the offering, the body of Christ manifests its concern and benevolence for men in need—in both spiritual and physical need. It seals with sacrifice the priestly prayers just made for the needs of all men. How should it be done?

There is no single "right" way for the act of offering. However done, the offering must be the prominent act of the moment. Whether this means that the congregation should not sing during the collection is disputable; let each congregation find its way here. The introduction of the offering is important; but here too there is no single thing to do. A scriptural sentence indicating the importance and blessing of giving is proper. Perhaps a brief and tactful statement about that for which the people are giving can be useful. (The use of choirs or other offertory music at this, as well as other places, will be discussed in a later report.)

There is the question of the function and place of the minister at this time. If it is architecturally practicable, he should be at the base of the platform and not in the pulpit. For this is peculiarly a congregational act. A prayer offered either just before or after the collection is fitting. Congregations may well consider calling on one of the deacons to offer this prayer. The most fitting place to receive these gifts is at the communion table. For here is the place where a sacrifice is indeed made—a living sacrifice of ourselves as our spiritual service.

The offering is fittingly concluded by an appropriate hymn, either dedicating the offering or expressing thanks to God for the blessings out of which the offering is made.

E. *The Dismissal*

The liturgy ends with a good word. The benediction, unlike the more recent greeting, goes back to the worship of ancient Israel. The blessing has taken several forms in the church's liturgy. Chrysostom used one, apparently of his own making: "May the blessing of the Lord and His mercy come upon us, by His grace and love, now, always and forever more." In the Roman service, the bishop would simply say: "The Mass is finished. Go in peace." (It is here, by the way, that we first meet the term *votum*, expressing a desire or wish on behalf of the people). In other, older forms, we find the minister saying: "Let us go in the peace of Christ." Since the eleventh century, we find a more trinitarian word added: "Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, grant you His blessing."

In Reformation liturgies, the dismissal is more proclamatory than petitionary—more of a means of grace than a prayer. Micron's benediction went like this: "Be mindful of the poor; pray for one another. God be merciful to you and bless you. God let His face shine upon you, to the glory of His name, and preserve you in His holy and blessed peace." Here, with hints of the Aaronic blessing, the dismissal is more than a prayer. It is, in the true sense, the giving of a blessing. Calvin's preference was for the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24-26, as was Pollanus'; the Synod of Dordt, 1574, prescribed it.

The apostolic benediction has become equally accepted and as frequently used as the Aaronic. The Taize blessing is framed in dialogue:

Minister: Let us bless the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Minister: May God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, bless you.

People: Amen.

We see no reason why the synod should make any one of the several forms of benediction incumbent on the churches.

The words of the blessing are, however, related to the question of its meaning. Is the dismissal a prayer voiced by the minister, a kind of invocation of the blessing of God on our common lives? Or is it a means of grace, effective and sure, of which the minister is the voice? Is it a word of man or a Word of God? And if a Word of God, does it become effective by the saying of it, or does its effectiveness depend on the life and faith of the people?

Reformed liturgists, judging by their preference for the Scriptural words, tend to assume that it is a proclaimed Word of God, and therefore not merely a wish—a *votum*—as in the Roman dismissal, but a means of grace. This is why the Reformed minister says *You* rather than *Us*, and does not use the petitionary *May* the grace, etc. It is also why the Reformed churches limit the right to "pronounce" the benediction to ordained clergy; the unordained liturgist offers it as a prayer.

But how consistent dare we be? The Swiss Reformed liturgiologist, von Allmen, says: "The blessing is a word charged with power, in which God Himself or a man representing Him, transmits to persons . . . salvation, welfare, and the joy of living, and this same power is operative in

the greeting and the absolution." He adds: "Those ministers who transform the proclamation into a wish expressed in the first person plural are not showing humility, but sabotaging the liturgy, depriving the faithful of part of the grace which God wills to give them." (*Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, p. 140). Peter Brunner says that the church that makes the benediction a prayer "shows but little faith, and would not be obeying the obligation to use the authority committed to it by transmission of authority." We are not willing to be forced into a choice between a mere wish for blessing and a proclamation that effects the blessing. It is a promise and a gift, not a prayer. But the gifts of grace are not *guaranteed* by the words, not even the Scriptural words, recited by a minister. The apostolic blessing is the proclamation of God's gracious intention: it is rooted in the Gospel promise and, therefore, in God's desire to give peace to His people. Therefore, we need not pray at the moment. Nor need the minister say: "God will be gracious and give you peace, *if . . .*" But the promise and its proclamation *imply*, they are of such a kind that they require, a believing reception of them. They do not work *ex opere operato*. Were they not spoken, we would not have to assume that no peace would be given and that the "joy of living" would be taken away. And spoken, they do not work automatically. The authority and power of the benediction rests in God's grace that has been effectively demonstrated in Christ and become effectively operative in the Spirit; the "pronouncement" is just that, a statement of intent, not because there is peculiar power in the words, but because they signal the Spirit's power and the Lord's intention.

We refuse to be hung on the dilemma, subjective prayer or objective power, as far as the benediction is concerned. It is neither in abstraction. It is a solemn statement of God's revealed intention for His worshipping people as they leave the sanctuary and return to their common stations.

For this reason, the customary gesture of the arms stretched and palms down, carries the ancient symbolism of an endowed blessing. The minister does not conclude the service by wishing his parishioners well. He concludes by summoning them to receive the parting promises of God's mercy and peace.

F. Three Models for the Morning Worship

Our purpose in presenting these models is only to illustrate how a morning liturgy could be done. We are not recommending that synod give any or all of them official status, certainly not to the exclusion of any now in use. It should also be stressed that the actual wording of the prayers and the choice of sung responses are only illustrative of the types that can fittingly be used.

Order No. 1

THE BEGINNING

1. The Psalm of Praise

2. Invocation

Minister: Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

People: Amen.

3. Greeting

Minister: Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you, from God our Father and from Jesus Christ His Son.

THE CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

1. Confession

Minister: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us therefore pray:

People: Almighty God, we confess that we have sinned against Thee and our neighbors. We have followed our selfish desires and ignored Thy holy will. We have offended Thee in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. We have not acted in love toward fellow men. Our guilt cries out against us. Be Thou merciful unto us, O God, and forgive us for the sake of our Savior's sacrifice. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

2. Assurance

Minister: Lift up your hearts and receive the sure promise of the Gospel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and great in mercy. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. To all who believe and repent, this promise is most surely given. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

People: A hymn of praise, or the Gloria Patri.

3. Dedication

Minister: Let us now dedicate ourselves to live in obedience to the will of God.

Here follows the decalogue or another Scripture passage that declares God's will.

People: No. 252 of the Psalter. ("Thy wondrous testimonies, Lord, My soul will keep and greatly praise.")

THE WORD OF GOD

1. Prayer for Illumination

Minister: Let us pray.

Almighty God, grant us Thy Holy Spirit, that we may rightly understand and truly obey Thy Word of Truth. Open our hearts that we may love what Thou hast commanded and desire what Thou dost promise. Set us free from private distractions that we may hear and from selfish pride that we may receive the promise of Thy grace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

People: Amen.

2. Reading of the Scriptures

Minister: The Old Testament Lesson.

People: A Hymn (For example, Psalter No. 190
 "Sing a new song to Jehovah for the wonders He has wrought,
 His right hand and arm most holy triumph to His cause have brought.
 In His love and tender mercy He has made salvation known,
 In the sight of every nation He His righteousness has shown.")

Minister: The New Testament Lesson

People: A Hymn (For example, Psalter No. 360
 "Alleluia! Alleluia! Hearts to heaven and voices raise;
 Sing to God a hymn of gladness, Sing to God a hymn of praise.")

3. The Sermon

4. Post-Sermon Prayer

In this prayer, the specific needs of the congregation may be brought before God.

THE RESPONSE

1. A Hymn

2. Confession of Faith

3. Intercessory Prayer

4. The Offering

The Collection of Offering.

Minister: The dedication of the offerings.

People: A Hymn of dedication or thanksgiving.

THE DISMISSAL: the Aaronic or a Pauline Benediction

Order No. 2

THE BEGINNING

1. Invocation:

Let us worship God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

2. Greeting:

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And the Lord be with you.

Minister: Grace, mercy and peace be to you, from God the Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ.

People: Amen.

3. A Psalm of Praise

THE CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

1. The Law of God

Minister: Let us hear the Law of God, that it may convict us of our sin and incite us to seek His mercy.

Here follows the decalogue or another expression of God's will.

2. The Confession

People: We confess to Thee, Our God, and before our brethren, that we have sinned greatly, in thought, word, and deed. We have offended Thy holiness. We have failed to love our neighbor. We have followed the devices of our own hearts, and have spurned the promptings of Thy Spirit. Through our own fault, we have deserved Thy judgment. Wherefore, we beseech Thee to pardon us in Thy mercy.

O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,

Thou that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy on us;

Thou that takest away the sin of the world, receive our prayer. Amen.

3. The Assurance

Minister: To each who confesses himself to be a sinner, humbling himself before God, and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for his salvation, I declare this sure promise: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive all our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

People: The Gloria Patri or a Psalm.

The remainder of Order No. 2 is the same as the first order. (The Word of God, etc.)

Order No. 3

THE BEGINNING

1. The Psalm of Praise

2. Invocation:

Minister: Our help is in the name of the Lord,

People: Who hath made heaven and earth.

Minister: In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

3. Greeting:

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And the Lord be with you.

Minister: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

People: Amen.

THE CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

1. The Confession

Minister: Let us acknowledge before the Lord that we are sinners and seek His mercy in Christ Jesus.

People: Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed the desires of our own hearts. We have ignored Thy

will and turned aside from our neighbors' needs. Our words have not been always true nor our thoughts always pure. We have sought other gods before Thee, and have coveted the things that belong to others. Have mercy on us, O Lord. Be Thou gracious, we pray, according to the promise of Jesus Christ.

Minister: Lord, have mercy on us.

People: Christ, have mercy on us.

2. Assurance

Minister: Lift up your hearts to receive the word of the Gospel. This is a faithful saying, and worthy to be accepted, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. To all who have truly confessed and seek the mercy of their Lord, I declare in His name that He will surely have mercy and forgive all their sins.

People: Gloria Patri - or - Suitable Hymn.

THE WORD OF GOD

1. Prayer for Illumination

Minister: O God of all truth, be pleased to grant us Thy Spirit as we attend to Thy Word. Open Thou our minds that we may understand what Thou hast revealed to us. Release us from self-will that we may be ready to obey. And open Thou our lips that our mouths may show forth Thy praise. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

People: Amen, or a Hymn suitable to this intention.

2. The Reading of the Scriptures

Minister: The Old Testament Lesson

(Since the law is not read at the time of the confession and assurance, a passage revealing the will of God may be most appropriate here.)

People: A Hymn (For example, No. 319

"All glory be to Thee, Most High, to Thee all adoration; In grace and truth Thou drawest nigh, to offer us salvation.

Thou showest Thy good will to men, and peace shall reign on earth again,

We praise Thy Name forever.")

Minister: The New Testament Lesson

People: A Hymn (For example, No. 361, Praise the Savior)

3. The Sermon

4. Post-sermon Prayer

THE RESPONSE

1. A Psalm

2. The Confession of Faith

3. The Intercessory Prayer, with people's Amen, or The Lord's Prayer.

4. The Offering of Gifts

Minister: Dedication Prayer

People: The doxology or suitable hymn

THE DISMISSAL

Minister: Go in peace. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

People: Amen.

G. *The Communion Service*

We offer here a communion service which we recommend as an option to the forms that are now in use by our churches. We shall first explain and attempt to justify its parts and its order. Then we shall present a model of the service, with the understanding that some of the prayers in it may be substituted by others equally appropriate.

1. *Introduction*

a. *The Absence of The Instruction*

The most obvious aspect of this service is the absence of a formulary of instruction. The liturgy suggested here is not devoid of instruction; it only omits a special didactic formulary. Since this is a departure from Christian Reformed usage, we should explain its absence in this form. Synod will, however, note that we are submitting this new form, not as a replacement of the old, but as a suggested option that may be used by congregations desiring to do so. With this understood, we offer here the reasons for our decision to present an order for communion that lacks the instruction portion.

Though our primary concern is pastoral, the biblical, catholic, and confessional motives also play a role in our decision. The biblical mandate is to *do* something as a proclamation of the Lord's death. The *doing* includes more than the bare act of eating and drinking; it includes the thanksgiving and dedication of the people along with the proclamation of the gospel. But it does not necessarily include a lengthy theological discussion in the correct doctrine of the sacrament. The Lord's mandate which is being fulfilled in the communion service calls for a congregational *action*. Therefore, the liturgy ought ideally to be limited to the actual doing of worship.

As to the catholic character of the service, we call to mind that our didactic formularies are the special features of the Dutch Reformed liturgy inherited from the Palatinate. They have become, for many, a precious part of the communion service. But they are not the common possession of Reformed churches. We believe that by providing our congregations with the communion service proposed here, we will be giving them an opportunity to participate in a service which is within the historical Christian tradition and is no less Reformed for being catholic.

As to the confessional dimension, we must note that the liturgy must both express and be consistent with the confession of the church. We are confident that the proposed order meets these requirements eminently.

We do not understand confessional consistency as meaning that the communion liturgy itself *instructs* the congregation in the confessions regarding the sacrament. Instruction, of course, is of utmost necessity. The liturgical question has to do with the time and place for instruction. In the liturgy the people *perform* acts of worship with a mind and heart that are informed by and committed to the truth of the confessions. But instruction occurs in the preaching, especially of the catechism, and in the various other pastoral situations in which teaching is done. The liturgy itself should only be a vehicle by which the congregation actually *performs* the worshipping act.

Our primary motivation, however, is pastoral. There is, we discern, a growing sense among many of our congregations that a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper is a spiritual need. The reasons for the infrequency with which we have until now celebrated the death of our Lord in communion are known to all who are acquainted with the history of the Reformation churches; they are, in short, not principiant, but practical. Now many are desirous of a more frequent participation in the sacramental means of grace. But the formularies, with their lengthy didactic sections, are a discouragement. Moreover, with increased frequency the very purpose of the formularies is defeated with repetition; they become pedagogically ineffective. So, their liturgical purpose, which is itself questionable, is defeated by frequent repetition.

The instruction, moreover, tends to dampen the joy which ought to be expressed in the communion. It isolates the people from participation in the service. It slows the pace of the liturgy. It serves to distract rather than to concentrate attention on what is being done.

Moreover, it is a fact that the present formularies are being abbreviated and reconstructed and individualistically sliced up by ministers in the congregations which celebrate communion in the evening as well as in the morning worship. This demonstrates their appreciation of the fact that repetition of the instruction is a liturgical handicap, while it whittles down the prestige of the formulary.

For all these reasons, we have decided to recommend that the synod consider the order which we present, as an option to be used by those congregations wishing to do so.

It will be noted that various parts of the present formularies are employed in this order. The difference is that they are used in different moments of the service and are used, not as instruction, but as liturgical acts. Thus, while this order does not employ the Formulary intact, it does employ those parts which are integral to a catholic order for the communion service.

b. Relationship between the Liturgy of Communion and the Liturgy preceding it.

In the historical section (III) of this report, we noted that the Christian liturgy has always tended to embody a dialogue of three stages: The Word of God—the word of man—and the sacrament. The further we go back and the nearer we approach the New Testament church, the clearer it is that these three moments make up the one, normal liturgy for the church's meeting with God. It is not to be expected that the communion

will soon become a weekly feature of our worship. When it is celebrated, it should be integrated into the entire service; it should neither replace the service of the Word and our response, nor should it be an appendage to it. It should flow from what has gone before and be the climax of it.

But there must be a moment of transition. Though the communion is part of the entire service, it is a special part. How can the transition be made so that a new moment is introduced without suggesting that what follows is unconnected with what precedes? The moment of visible transition occurs best, perhaps, at the time of the offering. This has precedence in the church's history. Very early, the offerings were made in the form of food, including the food and drink of communion. Though our gifts are in the form of money now, the offering could be a meaningful point of transition. This could be a suitable time for the table to be prepared. Possibly the deacons—as they did in the ancient church—could bring the elements into the sanctuary and place them on the table. At this point also, the minister may take his place behind the table, to conduct the remainder of the service there. In this way, we obviously enter a new phase, even though it proceeds without interruption from what has gone before.

2. *The Liturgy Explained*

a. *The Prayer of Thanksgiving*

(1) *Rationale for the Prayer*

The Jewish custom, which was probably being followed by our Lord at the time of the institution of His supper, called for the head of the family to offer a prayer of thanksgiving prior to the meal. We read that Jesus broke bread *after* He had given thanks. This prayer recalled with thanks the acts of God on behalf of His people, specifically—in the Jewish meal—the exodus, the covenant, and the law. It has been present in the Christian liturgy for communion, as far as we know, from earliest times. Our Dutch Reformed formularies, which we shall hereafter call the Palatinate formulary, do not omit a prayer of thanksgiving, though they include it much later. By placing it at the commencement of the communion order, we shall be of a piece with the earliest Christian practices. Moreover, its use here is unquestionably appropriate, for how better could the church begin its liturgy of communion in the Lord's victorious death and resurrection than by giving thanks for the mighty redemptive acts of God on our behalf. This prayer, by the way, is also called the eucharistic prayer, and from it the title eucharist was given to the entire sacramental observance.

(2) *The Call to Prayer*

It would not be unfitting for the minister to call the people to prayer by a simple: Let us pray. There are sound reasons, however, for accenting the summons to prayer in a more striking way. There is also a very firm liturgical tradition to recommend it. Therefore, both the psychology of provoking attention at an intensely significant moment and the liturgical tradition of the church recommend the use of the dialogue here. The *Sursum Corda* ("Lift up your hearts") is most appropriately used for

this purpose. The lifting up the hearts is for the entire communion service, not alone for the single moment of eating and drinking.

Since our formulary contains a *Sursum Corda*, a word should be said to explain why we recommend another in its place. This formula has a precedent in Calvin's liturgy, with whose *Sursum Corda* it has considerable affinity. Both of these function didactically; they seize the occasion for the traditional *Sursum Corda*, to instruct the people against a wrong (transubstantialist) view of the sacramental elements. At the time of the Reformation such a warning was needed: it is doubtful whether the Reformed congregations are now threatened with a temptation to place too much stress on the visible elements. But, apart from this pastoral aspect, there remains the liturgical question of whether a *Sursum Corda* is the proper moment for this didactic exercise. On the other hand, the traditional dialogue is a genuine liturgical act; it is a word, brief and unencumbered, which simply calls the people to action.

As an alternative to the dialogue, we suggest a simpler form which is likewise stripped of the instructional element.

Below, then, are two forms of the summons, and several examples of the prayer itself.

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them unto the Lord.

Minister: Let us give thanks unto the Lord.

People: It is fitting for us to give thanks.

— or —

Minister: Lift up your hearts unto the Lord, for He merits our boundless thanksgiving. Let us pray.

(3) *Examples of Prayer*

It is meet and right to hymn Thee, to bless Thee, to praise Thee, to worship Thee, in every part of Thy dominion. For Thou art God, ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, the same from everlasting to everlasting . . . For Thou broughtest us forth to being from nothing, and when we had fallen didst raise us up again, and gavest not over until Thou hadst done everything that Thou mightest bring us to heaven and bestow on us Thy Kingdom to come. For all these things we give thanks to Thee, and to Thine only-begotten Son, and Thy Holy Ghost, for benefits which we know, and which we know not, manifest and concealed, which Thou hast bestowed upon us. . . .

(The Liturgy of St. Chrysostom)

Almighty and everlasting God, our heavenly Father, we praise Thee for Thy goodness to us and to all men: for Thy faithfulness which is from one generation to another, for Thy mercies which are more than we can number, and for Thy fatherly hand ever upon us, in health and sickness, in joy and sorrow, in life and death.

Above all, with Thy whole Church throughout the world, we adore Thee for Thy love in the redemption of mankind by our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom we humbly offer unto Thee our most hearty thanks and praises. We bless Thee for the descent of the Holy Spirit; for Thy

Church filled with His presence; for our baptism and nurture in the faith; and for the great hope of everlasting life. Especially at this time do we praise Thee for the Sacrament wherein Thou dost feed our souls with the bread of life.

For all these things, glory be to Thee, Lord God Almighty;
blessed be Thy name, for ever and ever. Amen.

(From Scottish Book of Common Order)

Holy and right it is and our joyful duty to give thanks unto thee at all times and in all places, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty and Everlasting God. Thou didst create the heaven with all its hosts and the earth with all its plenty. Thou hast given us life and being and dost preserve us by the providence. But thou hast shown us the fulness of Thy love in sending into the world Thy eternal Word, even Jesus Christ our Lord, who became man for us men and for our salvation. For the precious gift of this mighty Savior who has reconciled us to Thee we praise and bless Thee, O God. Therefore with Thy whole Church on earth and with all the company of heaven we worship and adore Thy glorious name.

(From the Provisional Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America)

This prayer is a variation of that used in the Western church from the 4th century.

Almighty God, with one accord we give Thee thanks for all the blessings of Thy grace; but most of all we thank Thee for the unspeakable gift of Thy Son Jesus Christ. We most humbly thank Thee that He came to us in human form, that He lived a perfect life on earth, that He died for us on the cross, and that He arose victoriously from the dead. We bless Thee for the gift of Thy Holy Spirit, for the gospel of reconciliation, for the Church universal, for the ministry and the sacraments of the Church, and for the blessed hope of everlasting life.

(From the Christian Reformed Formulary for the Lord's Supper).

b. *The Response*

(1) A custom as old as Christianity is the congregational Amen. It is restored here. Let the people say: Amen.

(2) From earliest time, going back to the Hebrew liturgies of the temple, and present in most Christian liturgies from the 4th century, is a response called the *Sanctus*. It is a response of the people to the prayer of thanksgiving for the gracious acts of God, and an acknowledgment that they are in the presence of the Holy One. While it is not present in the Dutch Reformed tradition, it is an act that deserves restoration in at least one of our orders. The Gereformeerde Kerken have included it in their new order, as has the Reformed Church in America. Perhaps the first verse of the familiar, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty" can serve this function admirably.

c. *The Words of Institution*

The use of the scriptural words of institution are universal. They occur, in varied forms, in three places in the Palatinate formulary. For

Calvin, they provided scriptural warrant for what was about to occur, giving the sacramental action its roots in the Lord's command and in sacred, apostolic tradition. In the Roman Mass, they were part of the prayer—a liturgical absurdity from which Luther rescued them. Liturgically, they form a double function: a. they give our Lord's authority to the action, and b. they make explicit the remembrance of Christ.

d. *The Remembrance*

A feature of many liturgies is the declaration on the part of the congregation that it does indeed remember and proclaim the death of its Lord. This is set within the Palatinate formulary, but is turned there into another paragraph of instruction in what is to be remembered. In the original formulary, the people are instructed or urged to remember. In the revisions now in use, the formulary declares that which is going to be proclaimed in the sacrament. But in both cases, it is didactical in form.

In the proposed order the remembrance (or, as it is classically called, the *anamnesis*) becomes an act of proclamation on the part of the people. This is proper, theologically, since the idea of remembrance is not only one of "calling to mind" privately and inwardly, but calling the act of God into the present by proclaiming it.

The act of vocal remembrance is at the same time an act of proclamation.

Below, are examples of the form this act can take.

We shall do as He commands us. We bear witness that our Lord Jesus was sent by the Father into the world, that He took upon Himself our flesh and blood, and that He bore the wrath of God on the cross for us. We confess that He was condemned to die that we might be pardoned, that He was forsaken by God that we might be accepted by Him. And we proclaim that He is risen and shall come again in glory.

(A variation of our present formulary No. 3).

Wherefore, O Lord and heavenly Father, according to the institution of thy dearly beloved Son our Savior Jesus Christ, we do celebrate and make the memorial thy Son hath commanded us to make; having in remembrance his blessed passion and precious death, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension; rendering unto thee most hearty thanks for the innumerable benefits procured unto us by the same.

(From *The Book of Common Prayer*).

Thus we do remember the suffering of Jesus Christ our Lord, who died and arose again, and lives forever. And we shall proclaim His death until He comes again. Maranatha!

(A version of the Remembrance in the Gereformeerde Eredienst).

Wherefore, having in remembrance the work and passion of our Savior Christ, and pleading His eternal sacrifice, we Thy servants do set forth this memorial, which He hath commanded us to make.

(From the Scottish *Book of Common Order*).

"Wherefore, O Lord, we make before Thee the memorial of the Incarnation and the passion of Thy Son, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into glory, and His intercession for us; while we await and pray for His return." (Taize).

c. The Prayer of Consecration

The prayer offered here was, at least since the time of *The Apostolic Tradition* a prayer for the Holy Spirit. Hence, it is also called the *epiclesis*, though in later forms the actual *epiclesis* forms one, though the central, part of a longer prayer. In the prayer that Hippolytus records, we find a brief prayer that the Spirit would unite the people in Christ and confirm them in faith. At some point, the prayer also began to include the calling of the Holy Spirit to set aside the elements. This obviously did not discourage the growth of transubstantiation; but neither is it necessarily bound to this repugnant notion. Still, the Reformed liturgies tend to avoid reference to the elements and limit the prayer to a petition for the Holy Spirit to work in the faithful participants. The Palatinate formula includes a prayer of consecration, as do the present two revisions of it. But in the order we suggest here the prayer is given a more distinct and emphatic place in the liturgical series.

Below are three types of prayers that can be offered here. Following what seems to be a universal practice, the Lord's Prayer is used at the conclusion of the prayer of consecration. The people should say the Lord's Prayer together.

(1) We beseech Thee, gracious Father, to grant us Thy Holy Spirit, that through this sacrament our souls may truly be fed with the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Unite us more fully with our blessed Lord, and so also with one another. And lift our hearts to Thee, that in all the troubles and sorrows of this life we may persevere in the living hope of the coming of our Savior in glory. Answer us, O God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying:
Our Father.

(2) We most humbly beseech Thee to send down Thy Holy Spirit to sanctify both us and these Thine own gifts of bread and wine which we set before Thee, that the bread which we break may be the Communion of the body of Christ, and the cup of blessing which we bless the Communion of the blood of Christ; that we, receiving them, may by faith be made partakers of His body and blood, with all His benefits, to our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace, and to the glory of Thy most holy name.

(Scottish Book of Common Order)

(3) Send thy Holy Spirit upon us, we beseech thee, that the bread which we break may be to us the communion of the body of Christ and the cup which we bless the communion of his blood. Grant that being joined together in him we may attain to the unity of the faith and grow up in all things into him who is the Head, even Christ our Lord.

And as this grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf and these grapes from many hills into one cup, grant, O Lord, that thy

whole Church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom.

And now as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say OUR FATHER . . .

(From the Provisional Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America)

f. *The Lamb of God*

Rooted deeply within the Christian tradition is this plea for mercy from the crucified Lamb of God. Placed here, just prior to the actual moment of eating and drinking, it forms one final appeal to the Crucified, whose death the congregation is about to celebrate. It serves to confess that in taking bread and wine, we stand at the foot of the cross to which the elements point us. No doubt many congregations would feel ill at ease using a form they have closely associated with the Roman Mass. It may be that such hymns as No. 425 or No. 430 from the *Psalter* could substitute for the Lamb of God. But any congregation wishing to use it, should be allowed the use of this brief utterance, so biblical, catholic, and Reformed.

g. *The Invitation*

The table is now ready; the liturgy has reached the solemn moment of communion. Speaking on behalf of Christ, the minister shall issue an invitation to the table. He makes specific those for whom the invitation is intended. The invitation is to penitent sinners.

The invitation is preceded or introduced by "comfortable" words of our Lord. The propriety of this is clear. The people have just declared their need of mercy, with an invocation of the Lamb. Now, the minister responds with the Lord's assurance.

Examples of the invitation follow.

The Lord has prepared His table for all who love Him and trust in Him for their salvation. All, then, who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who earnestly desire to lead a godly life, ought to accept the invitation given in the Name of Jesus Christ, and come with gladness to the table of their Lord. Come, then, for all things are ready.

— or —

Thus assured, let us come with quiet conscience and fulness of faith to keep this sacramental feast which our Lord appointed as a continual memorial of His atoning death. Come, then, for all things are ready.

h. *The People's Dedication*

At this point in the service, the people declare their participation in the sacrament to be a form of self-sacrifice. While the Reformed sacrament excluded any sense of a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, it has always stressed the sacrificial act of the people in response to our Lord's completed sacrifice. So, having indicated their intention to "remember" Christ's sacrifice, and having called on the Holy Spirit to make them faithfully receptive communicants, the people now declare their self-offering. This act is absent in the Palatinate formulary and should be restored. The people should, in the liturgy, be allowed to make explicit their intention before the world and before the Lord.

Holy and righteous Father, as we commemorate in this Supper that perfect sacrifice once offered on the cross by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the sin of the whole world, in the joy of His resurrection and in expectation of His coming again, we offer unto Thee ourselves as holy and living sacrifices.

(From the Provisional Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America).

And here we offer and present unto Thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice; and we beseech Thee mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, as, in fellowship with all the faithful in heaven and on earth, we pray Thee to fulfill in us, and in all men, the purpose of Thy redeeming love; through Jesus Christ our Lord by whom, and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory be unto Thee, O Father Almighty, world without end. Amen.

(From the Scottish Book of Common Order).

i. *The Communion*

(1) Because the manual acts have, since the meal of the Upper Room, been a prominent part of the entire service, they should be prominent in the visible service as well. For this reason, the taking of the bread and wine, the breaking and pouring of them, should be done, not casually nor out of sight of the people, but with dignity and in full view of the congregation.

(2) The formula with which the minister in our present service bids the people to eat and drink comes to us from the Palatinate liturgy. It has practically no place in the Christian tradition outside this. Still, since it has gained a firm hold in our own practice, we think it pastorally wise to maintain it here. We have, however, eliminated the phrases: "The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ" and "The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion in the blood of Christ." In their place we have set the simpler and more literal words of our Savior.

j. *The Thanksgiving*

In the early church, the people were apparently dismissed very quickly after communicating. The Reformed worship has added a thanksgiving service. Calvin delivered a rather lengthy exhortation to thanksgiving, as well as to other aspects of Christian living. Our own formularies, of course, include the thanksgiving. We suggest no change here, except to urge that the congregation be permitted to speak the Scriptural words of praise. Any of the prayers of thanksgiving in the present formularies are suitable.

[*The Offertory*]

Since the offertory of the morning service is included in the response to the Word, and since that offering is the transition into the communion service proper, there is no reason for having a second offering. Should a congregation not use the morning service we have proposed, it may well have the offertory here. If so, it should have a distinct place in the service, introduced by a Scriptural sentence or by a brief sentence of the minister's choosing.]

k. *Dismissal*

3. *A Model for the Communion Service*

The service below illustrates how the communion service would proceed on the lines set forth above. It follows naturally the service that has preceded it. The offering has been given, the table is prepared, and, with the minister standing at the table, the new phase of the worship service begins. The prayers are, of course, merely illustrative of the type of prayers to be used.

THE PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them unto the Lord.

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

People: It is fitting for us to give thanks.

Minister: Almighty God, with one accord we give Thee thanks for all the blessings of Thy grace; but most of all we thank Thee for the inexpressible gift of Thy Son, Jesus Christ. We humbly thank Thee for His perfect life on earth, for His atoning death, and His victorious resurrection from the dead. We bless Thee for the gift of Thy Holy Spirit, for the gospel of reconciliation, for the church universal, and for the blessed hope of everlasting life in Thy perfect kingdom. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

People: The *Sanctus*, Psalter Hymnal No. 318
"Holy, Holy, Holy."

THE INSTITUTION

Minister: Let us reverently hear the commandment of our Lord to remember His sacrificial death in the holy sacrament.

Here the minister reads the Words of Institution from I Corinthians 11.

THE REMEMBRANCE

People: We shall do as the Lord commands. We shall proclaim that our Lord Jesus was sent by the Father into the world, that He took upon Himself our flesh and blood, and that He bore the wrath of God on the cross for us. We shall also confess that He came to earth to bring us to heaven, that He was condemned to die that we might be pardoned, that He endured the death of the cross that we might live through Him. And we shall proclaim that He is risen and shall return in glory. This we shall do now, and until He comes again.

THE PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

Minister: Let us pray.

We beseech Thee, O Lord, to grant us Thy Holy Spirit, that by this holy supper our souls may truly be fed with the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Increase our faith; unite us more fully with our blessed

Lord, and so with one another and all Thy children. Lift our hearts to Thee, that in all the troubles and sorrows of this life, we may be strong in the hope of our Savior's coming in glory. Answer us, O God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying:

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN . . .

People: Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us Thy Peace.

— or —

A suitable hymn, such as Psalter No. 355 "O Sacred Head"

THE INVITATION

Minister: Hear now the gracious words of promise spoken by our Lord:

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest for your souls. Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.

Beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord has prepared His table for all who love Him and trust in Him for their salvation. All who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who desire to live in obedience to Him, are now invited to come with gladness to the table of the Lord. Come, then, for all is ready.

THE DEDICATION

People: Holy Father, in thanks for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in the joy of His resurrection, in the hope of His coming again, we present ourselves a living sacrifice, and come to the table of our Lord, Amen.

THE COMMUNION

Minister: According to the example and command of our Lord Jesus Christ, we do this. In the night when He was betrayed, He took bread

(Here the minister lifts the bread and holds it in view of the congregation.)

and when He had given thanks, He broke it,

(Here the minister breaks the bread.)

and said: "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

(The minister now gives the bread to the elders or deacons, who distribute it to the people. When the people are prepared, the minister says:)

Take, eat, remember and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was given for a complete remission of all our sins.

(After a fitting pause, the minister continues.)

In the same way, He also took the cup.

(The cup is now raised.)

saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

(The wine is distributed to the people by the elders or deacons. When the people are prepared, the minister says:)

Take, drink ye all of it, remember and believe, that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete remission of all our sins.

THE THANKSGIVING

The thanksgiving may take any one of the following forms:

Minister: Heavenly Father, we give Thee unending thanks, that to us sinners Thou hast devoted so rich a gift. For the communion of Thy Son Jesus Christ, for the food and drink of eternal life, we magnify Thy blessed name. Now grant us also Thy grace, that we may carry these gifts in our hearts, and that we may grow in that faith which brings forth every good work. Let the rest of our lives be ordered to Thy glory and the good of our fellow-men. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with Thee and the Holy Spirit, liveth and reigneth forever. Amen.

People: A Thanksgiving Hymn — or — The Doxology.

— or —

People: The Scriptural sentences of Thanksgiving now used in the Communion formularies.

— or —

People: A Thanksgiving Hymn, and/or The Doxology.

DISMISSAL

Minister: Now the God of Peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS:

We respectfully recommend:

1. That synod commend this report to the churches for their study and consideration;
2. That synod provide for the separate publication of this report in addition to its publication in the *Acts*;

3. That synod permit the churches to make use of the Order for Communion on a provisional basis, with a view to reporting to the committee their experiences with this Order;

4. That synod recognize Professors John Stek and Carl Kromminga as the committee's official representation at synod, and that Dr. Lewis Smedes be granted the privilege of the floor when this report is discussed.

Respectfully submitted,

John H. Stek, *Chairman*

Alvin L. Hoksbergen

Carl G. Kromminga, *Recording Secretary*

John F. Schuurmann

Calvin G. Seerveld

Lewis B. Smedes

John Vriend, *Corresponding Secretary*

Nicholas P. Wolterstorff