

Reading Guide



All About All Saints Class



ALL SAINTS

PRESBYTERIAN

Thank you for your interest in learning “All About All Saints.” This name for our membership class is a little ambitious as there’s no way we can communicate everything about our church in just four hours. But we’ll do our best to tell you “a lot” about All Saints. (Maybe we should change the name!) Also, this class is not exclusively for those who have already decided that they want to become members of our church. It is also for those still exploring the church or even Christianity itself.

Joining a church is a big decision. It’s the making of a covenant similar to the one made in marriage. Both marital and membership covenants are unions, established through vows, which are so encompassing that the covenant partners share one life. That is ultimately true for all baptized members of the universal Church (all Christians in all traditions and in all places), but it is also true, secondarily, of participants in every local church. Church members, by God’s grace and through faith, share one life with each other, and that life is none other than the life of Christ Himself!

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Galatia: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). That confession is true of all Christians, both individually and collectively, which means that not only the whole Church but also each and every local church can say: “We have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer we who live, but Christ lives in us. And the life we now live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God...” In fact, that is exactly what we do say each and every time we gather together for worship – that by grace through faith we live together in union with Jesus, and in Him we are bound to one another.

In one sense, joining a local church like All Saints is like joining a new family. In the church family, we receive spiritual nourishment, protection, counsel, care, direction, and accountability, in the hope that together we become people like Jesus and, as our mission statement says, *live and love as the Body of Christ in Austin and for the world.*

In the Bible, churches are like flocks and people like sheep, with Jesus being the ultimate Shepherd of the family of God (Ps 95:7). Under His authority, pastors and elders are ordained and responsible for everyone whom the Lord calls into membership at their specific church. At All Saints, we see this responsibility to shepherd our portion of Christ’s flock as a wonderful privilege. To that end, we want every new member to join with great confidence of God’s leading and placement among us.

Our All About All Saints class, along with the rest of the membership process, is designed to help us get to know one another better and discern God’s leading. Thank you for worshipping with us and for your interest in learning more about membership in our church. Nothing delights and encourages us more than seeing people added to our church family.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Frickenschmidt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Tim Frickenschmidt

MEMBERSHIP CHECKLIST

For those pursuing membership at All Saints, please look over the following outline of our membership process. We hope that you will worship with us for a few months - in person, online, or a combination of the two - before making the decision to pursue membership..

- ☐ *Attend the “All About All Saints” class.*
- ☐ *Complete an interview with an elder or pastor.*
- ☐ *Complete and submit the Membership Forms.*
- ☐ *Publically take the 5 Membership Vows in worship.*

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MISSION, STRATEGY, AND VISION

by Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt

In order to understand who All Saints is as a church and what our calling is in Austin and the world, three terms must be defined – mission, strategy, and vision. Mission is what we strive by God's grace to be and do every day, as a community, as individuals, and as families - mission is oriented in the present. Strategies are the practical decisions and commitments by which our mission is accomplished; they are past-oriented because they are the means or avenues we have committed ourselves to in order to achieve our purpose in the present. Vision is future-oriented and imaginary; it is a picture, an imaginary description of what our purpose and strategies will eventually become. Vision is the long-term goal on the horizon towards which we are moving and working.

This paper is an apologetic of sorts, outlining and arguing for some basic concepts behind a renewed articulation of All Saints' mission as a church. Subsequent papers will outline the contours of a comprehensive church vision and the strategies necessary to take us there.

All organizations have a mission to accomplish or a purpose for existing; it may be implicit and unstated (as it has generally been at All Saints) or it may be clearly defined; but a common mission is at the center of any organization, the church included, in its daily life and work. So what is All Saints' mission? How do we conceive of and articulate what we are striving everyday to be and do?

I think the answer to this notoriously complicated and slippery question of mission has been embedded within the Eucharist portion of our worship liturgy, spoken and prayed weekly by us for years. The very last prayer we offer prior to the elements being served is: "Send us out to be the body of Christ in the world." That is the final and climactic prayer of not only one portion of our service, but of our service as a whole. It is also, I believe, our mission as a church – ***To Live and to Love as the Body of Christ in Austin for the World.***

God has redeemed His church in Christ and by the Spirit to live; this is our mission – to live a particular and unique life where God has planted us corporately and individually. "Life" is one of the great, foundational themes of Bible. "In the beginning God created..." (Gen 1:1) What did He create? Life. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:1-4) Jesus was born, lived, died, rose, and ascended for more than just intellectual assent to His teachings, or for His followers to have satisfying relationships with one another, or for them to perform acts of mercy and justice. Jesus came to impart life – a life of faith, hope, and love in an intimate relationship with Him of such mysterious depth that the Apostle Paul describes it as analogous to the relationship between a person's head and the rest of his or her body. This means that to be a Christian and to be the Church is to share one life with God.

Consider one of Paul's summary statements about the Christian faith: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." (Gal. 2:20) Elsewhere he also writes: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Rom 5:1,5) The Church's primary mission is simple: to live out Jesus' life and love for God, others, and this world where and with whom we find ourselves. God redeems us, imparts the new life of

His Spirit to us, and places us in His world for the blessing and service of others and the glory and honor of God.

So, how do we do this? How do we live as Christ's Body in this world? What does it mean to live as people in union with Jesus and one another, as people sharing the same life? What does life *in* Christ and *for* Christ look like? Very briefly, we live as the Body of Christ on a trifold path: through worship, spiritual formation, and service. If our calling as the church is life, then these are the three means by which life is found, embraced, fostered, and employed.

Worship

First, in order to live as the body of Christ in Austin for the world, we gather together with one another to **worship** the Triune God each week. Our life in Christ as His people begins in corporate worship and is renewed during this time Sunday after Sunday, season after season, year after year. Worship is the most vital part of the Christian life – not the *only* part to be sure, but the most important part. In worship we listen to God's Word read and preached, we receive the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and we pray in response to that which we hear and receive through liturgy and song. We do this because these are God's means of administering His redeeming grace to us – Word, Sacraments, and prayer. Through these means, God gives new spiritual life to people, creating and renewing faith in the hearts of worshipping participants, and then He sends those same worshippers out into His world to serve others in their daily lives as His people. In order to be sent out to live in the world as Christ's church, we have to come together in worship as Christ's church – without the coming in, there is no going out; without the gathering together for worship, there can be no sending out for formation and service. Our life as Christians begins in corporate worship.

Spiritual Formation

Secondly, we live as the Body of Christ through **spiritual formation**. Again, the Apostle Paul: "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slave you want to be once more... my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" (Gal 4:8-10, 19). To have Christ "formed in us" means, at least, that our individual interior lives and characters, as well our relationships and common corporate character, are "conformed to the image of Jesus" (Rom 8:29). It means that from the inside out, from our hearts to our actions, and from our thoughts and emotions to our speech and behavior, we resemble Jesus, so much so that our lives smell like Him! Seriously? Yes! Paul also writes: "We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing..." (2 Cor 2:15).

The question is "How?" How do we as followers of Jesus become conformed to Christ in our spiritual lives so much so that we embrace the same obedience to God the Father in which He lived while on earth? Dallas Willard attempts to answer this question in an essay entitled, "Spiritual Formation in Christ, A Perspective On What It Is and How It Might Be Done." He writes,

"The spiritual side of the human being, Christian and non-Christian alike, develops into the reality which it becomes, for good or ill. Everyone receives spiritual formation, just as everyone gets an education. The only question is whether it is a good one or a bad one. We need to take a conscious, intentional hand in the developmental process... We have counted on preaching, teaching, and knowledge or information to form faith in the hearer, and have counted on faith to

form the inner life and outward behavior of the Christian. But for whatever reason, this strategy has not turned out well. The result is that we have multitudes of professing Christians who well may be ready to die, but obviously are not ready to live, and can hardly get along with themselves, much less with others.”

Does this sound familiar? Are Willard’s words a description of your spiritual journey? Do they summarize your story? They do for many. So what are we to do? Doing, or better yet, *practicing* is a major part of the answer. Christian spiritual formation can be conceived of as the re-shaping of the inner life – the spiritual side of our humanity – by the Holy Spirit through God’s means of administering His grace, especially the Word of God, the Sacraments of the Church, and prayer. And the Church for centuries has recognized the role of certain practices, or spiritual disciplines, that help massage the grace of God received in worship into the hearts of believers during their daily lives between Sundays. These practices center upon two of the three primary means of grace: Scripture and prayer. Christian disciplines, such as meditating on Scripture, confession, prayer, fellowship, sabbath, fasting, solitude, silence, and the like are nothing more than tools to help people listen to God speak to them from the Scriptures and then lead them in answering God as personally and honestly as they can in lives of prayer.

Two errors must be avoided as we think about Christian spiritual formation. First, it is not a “works righteous” attempt to earn God’s favor; our formation is not meritorious. Again, Dallas Willard:

“We must stop using the fact that we cannot *earn* grace (whether for justification or for sanctification) as an excuse for not energetically seeking to *receive* grace. Having been found by God, we then become seekers of ever fuller life in him. Grace is opposed to earning, but not to effort. The realities of Christian spiritual formation are that we will not be transformed “into his likeness” by more information, or by infusion, inspiration, or ministrations alone. Though all of these have an important place, they never suffice, and reliance upon them alone explains the now common failure of committed Christians to rise much above a certain level of decency.”

Also, Christian spiritual formation is not individualistic. God is our Father; Jesus is our Elder Brother; the Holy Spirit lives in all believers as the guarantee of our common inheritance as members of God’s family. We are not alone in our discipleship to Christ. God places us in a church, in friendships, in a marriage, in a family so that we will have others to walk with in the Christian pilgrimage. We need others to read the scriptures with and help us understand and apply them; we need others to confess our sins and encourage us on to fuller obedience to God; we need the wisdom of others, who will gaze into our lives and counsel us how to faithfully live out our common life in the particular callings we have been given. This is a major reason why All Saints has had, and will maintain, an emphasis upon participation in small groups that meet regularly for study, discussion, and prayer. The formation of our individual interior lives only happens in and through a community committed to sharing the life and practice of the Christian faith together.

Service

Thirdly, we live as the Body of Christ through **service**. Service, or self-giving, is probably the “avenue” that needs the least description because it is so plainly and regularly spoken of in the Scriptures. For example, when James and John ask Jesus to put them in charge of all of the people in his kingdom, second in command behind only him, Jesus responds: “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and

whoever would be first among you must be a slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mk 10:42-45) James and John conceived of Christianity as for them, of discipleship as consumerism, of Jesus and the Church as existing to make them happy and great. They come to Jesus attempting to force Him into a “your-life-poured-out-for-me” mold, and He refuses, insisting that He came to give His life away, to pour it out for others and their redemption. Why? Because Jesus is the revelation of God in the flesh and, as John learned and later taught, “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) What is central to God’s character is self-giving, self-donation, self-sacrifice - love, in other words. The God of the Bible is first and foremost a God who gives and serves; He is a God of grace. And the people who have come to know Him, experienced His grace, and share in the fellowship of His Triune life and love will be a giving and serving people, a people of grace.

This is the reality behind Jesus’ parable about the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, where Jesus speaks about His followers feeding Him, giving Him a drink, welcoming Him as a stranger, clothing Him, and visiting Him when He was sick and in prison. Jesus followers in the parable are confused and ask when they did these acts of service to Him. And He tells them, “As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (Mt 25:40) The Apostle Paul speaks similarly when he issues the command “Serve the Lord” in the context of loving others with a “brotherly affection” by giving money, showing hospitality, and offering enemies food and drink. (Rom 12:9-21)

Though this aspect of living in Christ probably needs the least description, it typically needs the most exhortation. Christian Smith, in his book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, has described the dominant view of God in our culture as “moralistic, therapeutic deism.” The “therapeutic” aspect of that description arises from the rampant social assumption that the goal of life is not self-denial, sacrifice, or service, but to be happy and successful so that people may feel good about themselves. According to Smith God’s job description in the minds of many of us is to restore our lost self-esteem, while we consume the offerings of others.

But Jesus desires more from his Church; He desires life for us. This, however, requires that we “deny [ourselves] and take up [our] cross daily and follow [Christ]. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for [Jesus’] sake will save it.” (Lk 9:23-24) Christ is calling us to serve Him in word and deed, inside the church and outside the church, locally in Austin and internationally around the world, through giving money and through giving labor, in our individual vocations and in corporate initiatives, by making food and by making art, and more.

By God’s grace may we answer His call. And may we begin with those near to us: our neighbors and neighborhoods, with our co-workers and our classmates. May All Saints live as salt and light in Austin, as a city within a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden.

ALL SAINTS SPIRITUAL FORMATION PRACTICES

1) **DAILY OFFICE:** Daily Office refers to our daily work as followers of Christ - to read and pray Scripture. It refers to set times in the day where we pause, rest, change gears and meditate on God's Word and pray it back to him. The Psalms speak of listening and speaking to God 7 times a day, so that our doing (writing, raising children, growing businesses, counseling others, cleaning dishes, folding laundry) is always grounded in our being (a beloved son or daughter, a forgiven brother or sister). The beauty of the office is that it can be made more simple or complex as time allows. All Saints has created three versions of the Daily Office based on the The Book of Common Prayer.

2) **SPIRITUAL DIRECTION:** There are three types of Spiritual Direction. The classic model of direction involves a director and a directee. A spiritual director is someone that's probably a little bit further along on the journey who can help lead through all the twists and turns. It's someone that you intentionally meet with regularly for prayer, direction, support. It's someone who listens, cares, questions and counsels. It's someone you trust and respect and are willing to follow. Often, the best directors are not clergy.

The second type of direction is what All Saints calls Triads. Triads are a group of 3 women or 3 men who commit to meet together for at least one hour once a month from September-May. In a Triad, you extend fellowship and encouragement to two other believers by listening to what's going on in their life enough to know how to pray for them, and looking for the Spirit's work in their life. In a confidential setting, Triads celebrate victories and blessings while also sharing struggles, wounds and trials. Each person encourages the other through faithful attendance, listening, prayer, and discrete, timely, life-giving words (Proverbs 18.21).

The third type of Spiritual Direction is more commonly known as mentorship. Like the classic model, this is a one-on-one relationship between someone who is further along and able to give guidance and someone who receives that wisdom and instruction. A mentorship is often centered on a common career or interest.

3) **SMALLER GROUPS:** The Christian journey isn't walked alone, but in community with other Christians. We're not called to love, serve, know people in general, but specific and particular ones. It's in community that we mature and develop as Christ-followers with family, friends and small groups. This community should most naturally be tied to one's local church community.

4) **STUDY:** The Christian life is complex. Scripture is complex. We need to learn from others. Christian theology is a wonderful resource, friend and guide. Study occurs both in individual and group settings.

5) **SABBATH:** We're reminded every night that we are finite creatures in desperate need of rest. We're reminded more fully of that every week. But in a technological world, rest is especially hard to come by. We can work late into the night; e-mail, texts and calls seldom stop and our work hours are varied and blurred. But, we still need to have rhythms, patterns and habits, where we put aside our work and rest so that we might be recreated and re-energized. The ancient Christian practice of Sabbath is a much-needed one today.

6) **RETREAT:** This is a little longer version to the daily and weekly rest. It's a little longer version of daily reading and prayer. It's an extended and intensified time to listen, learn, pray, be silent, be alone and/or with others and enjoy God's amazing grace.

7) TITHING & SACRIFICIAL GIVING: The apostle Paul asks the rhetorical question: What do you have, that you have not received? (1 Corinthians 4:7). The answer is nothing. Everything we have in life we have received as a gift. But, in our pride, we often think that the things we have attained in life have come from own strength, wisdom, and ingenuity. They haven't. They're all a gift. Even and especially our financial standing. Tithing or sacrificial giving is a tangible reminder that we're not ultimately to live self-directed lives, but God and other-directed ones. Sacrificial giving is a discipline to make us more generous, joyful, caring and gracious people. The paradox of Christianity is that we are more blessed, satisfied, and fulfilled when we give, rather than when we receive. It was true of our Savior and it's true of us. The goal of sacrificial giving is to more fully display the generosity of Jesus to us in our giving to others.

8) FASTING & MODERATION: We were not made for excess or over-indulgence in anything (other than God!), but to enjoy all things in moderation. One of the ancient practices of the church is to abstain from food (but also other things) for a season, so that we might more fully hunger for God. Learning how to deny ourselves is hard. But learning to say no and to live moderately is vital for those called to "take up our cross" and follow Jesus.

9) HOSPITALITY: We were made for friendship, relationship and community. True community isn't only receiving from others, but also giving to others. Hospitality is an ancient practice of loving neighbors, strangers, friends in real and tangible ways. It's a way of opening up our lives to others and to God through them. It's a way of embodying the grace that we've received- God's lavish, loving, warm welcome.

10) SERVICE: Just as Christ came not to be served, but to serve, so we also should seek to serve others in real and practical ways. Christian service isn't ultimately about a to-do list, but an attitude, stance, posture. The apostle Paul opened most of his letters with these words, "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ." The Greek word he used, was that of the lowest servant. This meant that for Paul, everybody was above him- children, slaves, barbarians. He was ready and eager to serve because he knew he had been served by Christ. Paul's posture is much-needed today, as we seek to become more like Jesus, the true servant of all.

THE BIBLICAL STORY

From Creation Regained by Albert M. Wolters

The Bible tells a single story, from the origin of all things in Genesis 1 to the consummation of all things in Revelation 22. One way to trace the flow of the biblical story is to describe it as a drama that unfolds in six acts. In act one God creates the world as his kingdom. His original purpose for the creation is revealed and he pronounces it very good (Gen. 1). Human beings are created as God's image to develop and care for the creation in communion with God (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15). In act two the whole of God's good creation, including all of human life, is contaminated by human rebellion (Gen. 3). A tension now emerges in the narrative between the goodness of creation and the evil that defiles it. This tension demands a resolution.

In act three God announces that resolution: He will crush sin and the disastrous effects that were unleashed by Adam and Eve's rebellion (Gen. 3:15). He chooses and forms a special people with the mission to bear his redemptive purpose for the world (Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 19:3-6). They are called to be a community that embodies God's original good creational design for human life. This people is

In act four that promise is kept when Jesus of Nazareth steps onto the stage of history. He announces that he has been sent to realize the expectation of Israel and to fulfill Israel's calling by bringing God's salvation to a broken world (Lk. 4:18-19). His announcement is that the kingdom of God has arrived, that God's power by the Spirit to liberate and heal creation is now present in him (Mark 1:14-15; Matt. 12:28). His life reveals and demonstrates the kingdom. He gathers Israel to be a rallying point for all nations. His death accomplishes the victory of the kingdom. His resurrection guarantees the reality of kingdom.

Before the resurrected Christ ascends to the Father he gathers together the disciples, the nucleus of a newly gathered Israel, and gives them their marching orders: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). This defines the existence of the community of Christ-followers: they are called to continue the witness to the kingdom that Jesus began. What Jesus did in Israel the church is to do in the whole world. The continuing mission of this community to witness to the kingdom constitutes act five of the biblical story. This "era of witness" has now lasted about two thousand years and will continue until Jesus returns to complete his work of renewal. That final work of the judgement and renewal of the entire creation constitutes the sixth and final act of world history.

This image of a six-act play highlights that there is a narrative unity, one story that binds all the parts together. It also shows us that there is a progressive, unfolding structure. The problem has been that we often don't understand the Bible as one unfolding story. Lesslie Newbigin tells the story of a learned Hindu scholar who once complained that Christians have misrepresented the Bible: "I can't understand why you missionaries present the Bible to us in India as a book of religion. It is not a book of religion – and anyway we have plenty of books of religion in India. We don't need any more! I find in your Bible a unique interpretation of universal history, the history of the whole of creation and the history of the human race. And therefore a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history. That is unique. There is nothing else in the whole religious literature of the world to put alongside it." His complaint is that the Bible tells one unfolding story about the world, the whole world – universal history, the true story of the world – yet Christians have reduced it to a book of religious or theological or even worldview truths.

How has this happened in the Christian community? The one story of the Bible is broken up into chunks or bits. Some break the Bible up into theological proof-texts and reconstruct the truths into a systematic theology. Others use devotionals to break the Bible into devotional bits that give immediate comforting promises and challenging exhortations. Others break the Bible into moral bits that provide ethical guidance. It is even possible to undermine the narrative structure of Scripture by reducing the Bible's teaching to a creation-fall-redemption worldview. To miss the grand narrative of Scripture is a serious matter; it is not simply a matter of misinterpreting parts of Scripture. It is a matter of being oblivious to which story is shaping our lives. Some story will shape our lives. When the Bible is broken up into little bits and chunks – theological, devotional, spiritual, moral, or worldview bits and chunks – then these bits can be nicely fitted into the reigning story of our own culture with all its idols! One can be theologically orthodox, devotionally pious, morally upright, or maybe even have one's worldview categories straight, and yet be significantly shaped by the idolatrous Western story. The Bible loses its forceful and formative power by being absorbed into a more encompassing secular story.

This is not to say that there is no place for systematic theology, devotional reading of Scripture, biblical ethics, or an elaboration of the biblical worldview. In fact, all of these uses of Scripture are valid. We will argue later that worldview exposition is essential to equip the church in its mission of making known the good news. The problem comes when any of these uses of Scripture lose their grounding in the narrative context of Scripture and become abstracted chunks that are accommodated to a more ultimate story that is not rooted in Scripture.

This last statement calls for further elaboration of the world view significance of story. There is increasing interest today in narrative as a worldview category – even the ultimate worldview category. Central to this renewed attention to story is the recognition that human beings interpret and make sense of their world through a story. As Lesslie Newbigin puts it: “The way we understand human life depends on what conception we have of the human story. What is the real story of which my life story is a part?” That is to speak of story, not in literary categories, but as the essential shape of a worldview-founding narrative, as an interpretation of cosmic history that gives meaning to human life and all of reality. Story provides the deepest categorical framework in which human life is to be understood. There is no more fundamental way in which human beings interpret their lives than through a story.

Wolters, Albert M. *Creation Regained*. Second ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005. 123-26. Print.

THE GREATEST DRAMA EVER STAGED IS THE OFFICIAL CREED OF CHRISTENDOM

by Dorothy Sayers

Official Christianity, of late years, has been having what is known as “a bad press.” We are constantly assured that the churches are empty because preachers insist too much upon doctrine—“dull dogma,” as people call it. The fact is the precise opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man—and the dogma is the drama.

That drama is summarised quite clearly in the creeds of the Church, and if we think it dull it is because we either have never really read those amazing documents, or have recited them so often and so mechanically as to have lost all sense of their meaning. The plot pivots upon a single character, and the whole action is the answer to a single central problem: What think ye of Christ? Before we adopt any of the unofficial solutions (some of which are indeed excessively dull)—before we dismiss Christ as a myth, an idealist, a demagogue, a liar or a lunatic—it will do no harm to find out what the creeds really say about Him. What does the Church think of Christ?

The Church’s answer is categorical and uncompromising, and it is this: That Jesus Bar-Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, was in fact and in truth, and in the most exact and literal sense of the words, the God “by Whom all things were made.” His body and brain were those of a common man; His personality was the personality of God, so far as that personality could be expressed in human terms. He was not a kind of *dæmon* or fairy pretending to be human; He was in every respect a genuine living man. He was not merely a man so good as to be “like God”—He was God.

Now, this is not just a pious commonplace; it is not commonplace at all. For what it means is this, among other things: that for whatever reason God chose to make man as he is—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—He had the honesty and the courage to take His own medicine. Whatever game He is playing with His creation, He has kept His own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from man that He has not exacted from Himself. He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair and death. When He was a man, He played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worth while.

Christianity is, of course, not the only religion that has found the best explanation of human life in the idea of an incarnate and suffering god. The Egyptian Osiris died and rose again; Æschylus in his play, *The Eumenides*, reconciled man to God by the theory of a suffering Zeus. But in most theologies, the god is supposed to have suffered and died in some remote and mythical period of pre-history. The Christian story, on the other hand, starts off briskly in St. Matthew's account with a place and a date: "When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the King." St. Luke, still more practically and prosaically, pins the thing down by a reference to a piece of government finance. God, he says, was made man in the year when Cæsar Augustus was taking a census in connection with a scheme of taxation. Similarly, we might date an event by saying that it took place in the year that Great Britain went off the gold standard. About thirty-three years later (we are informed) God was executed, for being a political nuisance, "under Pontius Pilate" —much as we might say, "when Mr. Joynson-Hicks was Home Secretary." It is as definite and concrete as all that.

Possibly we might prefer not to take this tale too seriously—there are disquieting points about it. Here we had a man of Divine character walking and talking among us—and what did we find to do with Him? The common people, indeed, "heard Him gladly"; but our leading authorities in Church and State considered that He talked too much and uttered too many disconcerting truths. So we bribed one of His friends to hand Him over quietly to the police, and we tried Him on a rather vague charge of creating a disturbance, and had Him publicly flogged and hanged on the common gallows, "thanking God we were rid of a knave." All this was not very creditable to us, even if He was (as many people thought and think) only a harmless crazy preacher. But if the Church is right about Him, it was more discreditable still ; for the man we hanged was God Almighty.

So that is the outline of the official story—the tale of the time when God was the under-dog and got beaten, when He submitted to the conditions He had laid down and became a man like the men He had made, and the men He had made broke Him and killed Him. This is the dogma we find so dull—this terrifying drama of which God is the victim and hero.

If this is dull, then what, in Heaven's name, is worthy to be called exciting? The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused Him of being a bore—on the contrary; they thought Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him "meek and mild," and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies. To those who knew Him, however, He in no way suggested a milk-and-water person; they objected to Him as a dangerous firebrand. True, He was tender to the unfortunate, patient with honest inquirers and humble before Heaven; but He insulted respectable clergymen by calling them hypocrites; He referred to King Herod as "that fox"; He went to parties in disreputable company and was looked upon as a "gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners";

He assaulted indignant tradesmen and threw them and their belongings out of the Temple; He drove a coach-and-horses through a number of sacrosanct and hoary regulations; He cured diseases by any means that came handy, with a shocking casualness in the matter of other people's pigs and property; He showed no proper deference for wealth or social position; when confronted with neat dialectical traps, He displayed a paradoxical humour that affronted serious-minded people, and He retorted by asking disagreeably searching questions that could not be answered by rule of thumb. He was emphatically not a dull man in His human lifetime, and if He was God, there can be nothing dull about God either. But He had "a daily beauty in His life that made us ugly," and officialdom felt that the established order of things would be more secure without Him. So they did away with God in the name of peace and quietness.

"And the third day He rose again"; what are we to make of that? One thing is certain: if He was God and nothing else, His immortality means nothing to us; if He was man and no more, His death is no more important than yours or mine. But if He really was both God and man, then when the man Jesus died, God died too, and when the God Jesus rose from the dead, man rose too, because they were one and the same person. The Church binds us to no theory about the exact composition of Christ's Resurrection Body. A body of some kind there had to be, since man cannot perceive the Infinite otherwise than in terms of space and time. It may have been made from the same elements as the body that disappeared so strangely from the guarded tomb, but it was not that old, limited, mortal body, though it was recognisably like it. In any case, those who saw the risen Christ remained persuaded that life was worth living and death a triviality—an attitude curiously unlike that of the modern defeatist, who is firmly persuaded that life is a disaster and death (rather inconsistently) a major catastrophe.

Now, nobody is compelled to believe a single word of this remarkable story. God (says the Church) has created us perfectly free to disbelieve in Him as much as we choose. If we do disbelieve, then He and we must take the consequences in a world ruled by cause and effect. The Church says further, that man did, in fact, disbelieve, and that God did, in fact, take the consequences. All the same, if we are going to disbelieve a thing, it seems on the whole to be desirable that we should first find out what, exactly, we are disbelieving. Very well, then: "The right Faith is, that we believe that Jesus Christ is God and Man. Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Who although He be God and Man, yet is He not two, but one Christ." There is the essential doctrine, of which the whole elaborate structure of Christian faith and morals is only the logical consequence.

Now, we may call that doctrine exhilarating or we may call it devastating; we may call it revelation or we may call it rubbish; but if we call it dull, then words have no meaning at all. That God should play the tyrant over man is a dismal story of unrelieved oppression; that man should play the tyrant over man is the usual dreary record of human futility; but that man should play the tyrant over God and find Him a better man than himself is an astonishing drama indeed. Any journalist, hearing of it for the first time, would recognise it as News; those who did hear it for the first time actually called it News, and good news at that; though we are apt to forget that the word Gospel ever meant anything so sensational.

Perhaps the drama is played out now, and Jesus is safely dead and buried. Perhaps. It is ironical and entertaining to consider that once at least in the world's history those words might have been spoken with complete conviction, and that was upon the eve of the Resurrection.

Sayers, Dorothy L.. *The Whimsical Christian*. 1st ed. New York City: First Collier Books, 1987. 11-16. Print.

From *Heavenly Participation*

by Hans Boersma

...Christian tradition, may have argued that in the hereafter we will be playing harps on the clouds (though it would not be an entirely unpleasant business). However, I am fairly confident that the extent of our eschatological transfiguration will be much more thoroughgoing than many of us suspect and that even our biblical language will literally prove infinitely inadequate to the task of describing the earthly reality that will have been transformed or divinized into our heavenly home.¹

For Saint Paul, heaven is our home. After all, he insists that our citizenship papers carry the stamp of heaven. “[O]ur citizenship is in heaven,” he plainly remarks (Phil. 3:20; cf. Eph. 2:12). This citizenship of Christians is incompatible with attempts to turn earthly ends into ultimate concerns. Speaking of enemies of the cross, the apostle observes: “Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things” (Phil. 3:19). The heavenly identity of believers is, according to Paul, already a present reality. The rather realized eschatology of the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians is emphatic about this present reality. For Paul, it is not as though believers here on earth somehow identify with a faraway ‘place called “heaven.”’ Rather, they have a real or participatory connection with heaven. The central paschal event - Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension - is something Christians participate in: God “made us alive with Christ,” Paul insists (Eph. 2:5). He “raised us up with Christ” (Eph. 2:6; Col. p). The result of this sharing in Christ is that believers participate in heavenly realities. We are seated with Christ “in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6; Eph. 1:3).

To be sure, St. Paul’s otherworldliness does not stand in absolute opposition to every this-worldly orientation. Rather, heavenly participation means that life on earth takes on a heavenly dimension. The church, through her participation in heaven, is called upon to make known the wisdom of God “to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 3:10). Heavenly participation implies a battle “against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). Precisely because heaven is already present on earth, the moral lives of Christians on earth are to reflect their heavenly participation. “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. p-2). The apostle then comments on the vices that are connected to the “earthly nature” (Col. 3:5) and encourages believers to follow the virtues of Christ (Col. 3:5-17). Participation in heaven changes life on earth: paradoxically, only otherworldliness guarantees proper engagement in this world.

Not only is heaven the “place” in which Christians are already at home today, but it also marks their origin and aim. Believers are blessed “in the heavenly realms” because heaven is the place of their eternal predestination “in Christ” (Eph. 1:4, 11). The origin of the Christian hope lies in Christ - and thus in heaven. Likewise, the prize for which Paul aims and toward which he “strains” is the “heavenward” call in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14; cf. 2 Tim. 4:18).²

1. There is a great deal in Wright’s eschatology that has my warm endorsement. I appreciate, for instance, his understanding of the resurrection as “life after life after death” (*Surprised by Hope*, pp. 148-52), his insistence that heaven and earth are not antithetical realities (pp. 104-6), and his belief that the resurrection entails the transformation of earthly realities (pp. 100, 162). Wright also makes clear that he does not know how exactly our positive contributions will make their reappearance in the final kingdom (though he is sure that Bach’s music will be there - p. 209). Still, the consistent focus is on this-worldly realities. As an aside, on the issue of justification, Wright defends the “participationist” element of soteriology, which a strictly “juristic” view ignores (*Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2009], 32, 72). It seems to me that Wright’s helpful participationist emphasis on union with Christ requires a much greater emphasis on participation in heavenly realities.

2. Again, C. S. Lewis seems to echo this Pauline theme: “I have come home at last! This is my real country!” cries the Unicorn toward the end of *The Last Battle* while stamping his right fore-hoof on the ground. “I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this” (*The Chronicles of Narnia* [New York: Harper Collins, 2001], 760).

One of the reasons Neo Platonism has been so attractive to theologians throughout the centuries is that the Neo-Platonic view of the cosmos “going out” from God and “returning” to him - the so-called exitus-reditus schema - was broadly compatible with Pauline Christianity.¹ According to the well known Pauline hymn of Philippians 2, the pattern of Christ - who humbled himself by coming to earth and was exalted by returning to heaven (Phil. 2:6-11) - must be the pattern of the church. Contemporary theology needs, it seems to me, a recovery - a *ressourcement* - of this Pauline focus on our “heavenward” call.

In line with this Pauline focus, Saint Augustine borrowed from the Platonic tradition when he centered his account of the history of the city of God on the reality of heaven. Heaven, Augustine explains, was the source and destination of the city of God. The bishop begins his treatment of “the rise, the development and the destined ends of the two cities” by referring to “two classes of angels,” namely, the angels of light and the angels of darkness.² The Fall in paradise ensured that both cities had their counterparts in human history. While Cain belonged to the city of man, Abel belonged to the city of God. Unlike Cain, Abel never built a city, because “the City of the saints is up above, though it produces citizens here below ...” (XV.1). Christians are pilgrims on earth, since their citizenship is in the heavenly city of God. This city, Augustine maintains, “is said to come down from heaven because the grace by which God created it is heavenly. This City has been coming down from heaven since its beginning, from the time when its citizens began to increase in number” (XX.17). For Augustine, already today, heavenly participation is a reality for the citizens of the city of God.

Augustine concludes his account of the pilgrimage of the citizens of the heavenly city with a discussion of the eschatological reality in which believers will see God face to face (1 Cor. 13:12; John 3:2). This beatific vision will produce a peace far transcending human understanding (Phil. 4:7):

It surpasses our understanding: there can be no doubt of that. If it surpasses the understanding even of the angels, so that St. Paul in saying “all understanding” does not make an exception of them, we must then take him as meaning that the peace of God, the peace that God himself enjoys, cannot be known by the angels, still less by us men, in the way that God experiences it. (XXII.29)

Here Augustine has an eye for mystery: he recognizes that the full reality of heavenly participation far transcends the categories of the earthly city. Heaven - the place of Christ’s eternal dwelling place - is the place where the church finds both her origin and her destination. Heaven is the Christian home. Augustine sketches his account of the heavenly city without worrying about whether the Platonic and the Christian traditions are compatible on this point. Along with nearly all Christian theologians prior to modernity, he was convinced that the Christian faith is about heavenly participation and that this biblical insight allows for some kind of Platonist-Christian synthesis.³

Let me clarify that the language of heavenly participation in no way downplays or undermines the significance of the earthly city. Our identification with the heavenly city should not tempt us to disparage earthly concerns. “[I]t is altogether right,” the Bishop of Hippo claims in *The City of God*, “that the soul should learn to look for those temporal blessings from God, and from him alone ...” (X.14). Indeed, Augustine argues, “it would be incorrect to say that the goods which this [earthly] city desires are not goods” (XV.4; cf. XXI.24). For Augustine, we should not despise temporal blessings; Christians,

3. To be sure, the Neo-Platonist exitus-reditus schema involved the doctrine of necessary emanation, which Christian theology universally rejected. See chap. 1 below, under subheading “Christianity and the Platonic Heritage.”

2. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984), XI.r. Hereafter, references to this work appear in parentheses in the text.

3. Throughout this book I use the phrase “Platonist-Christian synthesis.” I do not mean to suggest with it that Platonism and Christianity merged to form an entity that was greater than either of the two. As will become clear, it is my conviction that the Christian faith judiciously appropriated certain elements of Platonic thought in the process of Christianizing the Hellenic world.

should not view the ends of the earthly city as inherently evil or tainted. Nonetheless, Augustine - and most Christian theologians following him - does carefully distinguish between the ends of the earthly city and the aim of the heavenly city. The former ends are on a much lower scale of significance than are the latter: "Now physical beauty, to be sure, is a good created by God, but it is a temporal, carnal good, very low in the scale of goods ... " (XV.22). It is thus altogether appropriate to have a certain kind of "contempt of the world" (*contemptus mundi*). Augustine claims that the "inferior goods of this world ... although essential for this transitory life, are to be despised [*contemnenda*] in comparison with the eternal blessings of that other life" (X.14).

The contempt with which the great African bishop speaks is not an absolute contempt; it is a comparative or relative contempt. Earthly enjoyment pales in comparison to heavenly participation. Augustine's relative contempt for earthly goods was also that of the latter-day Platonist-Christian C. S. Lewis: "But what, you ask, of earth? Earth, I think, will not be found by anyone to be in the end a very distinct place. I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region in Hell: and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself."¹ Paradoxically, earthly realities carry significance only when we refuse to rank them first.² Far from downplaying or undermining the significance of the earthly city, heavenly participation is its only warrant. Throughout this book I will make the argument that when we abandon Augustine by turning created realities from objects of penultimate interest into objects that have ultimate importance, we ironically end up losing their significance.

The subtitle of this book speaks of the weaving of a sacramental tapestry. The Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann presents a lucid picture of what I mean by the "sacramental tapestry" that characterized the Christian consensus of the fathers and the Middle Ages (the Great Tradition).³ In his book *For the Life of the World*, Schmemmann rejects the opposition between nature and the supernatural, and he attempts to reintegrate the two sacramentally. The "sacramental tapestry" of the subtitle speaks of a carefully woven unity of nature and the supernatural, according to which created objects are sacraments that participate in the mystery of the heavenly reality of Jesus Christ. Schmemmann makes the point that everything in the so called world of nature is meant to lead us back to God. In that sense, created matter is meant to serve eucharistically. By treating the world as a eucharistic offering in Christ, received from God and offered to him, we are drawn into God's presence. Schmemmann puts it this way: "The world was created as the 'matter,' the material of one all embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament." Thus, when he discusses baptism and the Eucharist - the two material elements for which we usually reserve the term "sacrament" - Schmemmann makes a point of connecting the water, as well as the bread and the wine, with the rest of the cosmos: "Baptism," he insists, "refers us inescapably to 'matter,' to the world, to the cosmos."⁴ In baptism and Eucharist we witness the restoration of matter to its original function. Elsewhere, Schmemmann puts it beautifully:

Christ came not to replace "natural" matter with some "supernatural" and sacred matter, but to restore it and to fulfill it as the means of communion with God. The holy water in Baptism, the bread and wine in the Eucharist, stand for, i.e. represent the

6. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (1946; reprint, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 11.

7. John Calvin, in his discussion of meditation on the future life, also insists on such relative contempt of the present life: "Whatever kind of tribulation presses upon us, we must ever look to this end: to accustom ourselves to contempt for the present life and to be aroused thereby to meditate upon the future life" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20 [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960], III.ix.1).

3 13. I will discuss the notion of "sacramental ontology" in greater detail in chap. 1, under "Sacramental Ontology as Real Presence."

4 Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (1982; reprint, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 22, 15, 68.

whole of creation, but creation as it will be at the end, when it will be consummated in God, when He will fill all things with Himself.¹

Schememann, in this quotation, laments the way in which we often oppose nature and the supernatural to each other. In the church's sacraments - baptism and Eucharist - we witness the supernatural restoration of nature to its original purpose. The purpose of all of matter, as I have already mentioned, is to lead us into God's heavenly presence, to bring about communion with God, participation in the divine life. Thus are the church's sacraments simply the beginning of the cosmic restoration. The entire cosmos is meant to serve as a sacrament: a material gift from God in and through which we enter into the joy of his heavenly presence.

1 15. Alexander Schememann, *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 49.

From *For the Life of the World*

by Alexander Schmemmann

"Man is what he eats." With this statement the German materialistic philosopher Feuerbach thought he had put an end to all "idealistic" speculations about human nature. In fact, however, he was expressing, without knowing it, the most religious idea of man. For long before Feuerbach the same definition of man was given by the Bible. In the biblical story of creation man is presented, first of all, as a hungry being, and the whole world as his food. Second only to the direction to propagate and have dominion over the earth, according to the author of the first chapter of Genesis, is God's instruction to men to eat of the earth: "Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed . . . and every tree, which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. . . ." Man must eat in order to live; he must take the world into his body and transform it into himself into flesh and blood. He is indeed that which he eats, and the whole world is presented as one all-embracing banquet table for man. And this image of the banquet remains, throughout the whole Bible, the central image of life. It is the image of life at its creation, and also the image of life at its end and fulfillment: "... that you eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom."

I begin with this seemingly secondary theme of food secondary from the standpoint of the great "religious issues" of our time—because the very purpose of this essay is to answer, if possible, the question: of what life do we speak, what life do we preach, proclaim and announce when, as Christians, we confess that Christ died for the life of the world? What /if e is both motivation, and the beginning and the goal of Christian mission?

The existing answers follow two general patterns. There are those among us for whom life, when discussed in religious terms, means religious life. And this religious life is a world in itself, existing apart from the secular world and its life. It is the world of "spirituality," and in our days it seems to gain more and more popularity. Even the airport bookstands are filled with anthologies of mystical writings. *Basic Mysticism* is a title we saw on one of them. Lost and confused in the noise, the rush and the frustrations of "life," man easily accepts the invitation to enter into the inner sanctuary of his soul and to discover there another life, to enjoy a "spiritual banquet" amply supplied with spiritual food. This spiritual food will help him. It will help him to restore his peace of mind, to endure the other—the secular life, to accept its tribulations, to lead a whole so and more dedicated life, to "keep smiling" in a deep, religious way. And thus mission consists here in converting people to this "spiritual" life, in making them "religious."

There exists a great variety of emphases and even theologies within this general pattern, from the popular revival to the sophisticated interest in esoteric mystical doctrines. But the result is the same: "religious" life makes the secular one—the life of eating and drinking—irrelevant, deprives it of any other meaning save that of being an exercise in piety and patience. And the more spiritual is the "religious banquet," the more secular and material become the neon lighted signs EAT, DRINK that we see along our highways.

But there are those also, to whom the affirmation "for the life of the world" seems to mean naturally "for the *better* life of the world." The "spiritualists" are counterbalanced by the activists. To be sure we are far today from the simple optimism and euphoria of the "Social Gospel." All the implications of existentialism with its anxieties, of neo-Orthodoxy with its pessimistic and realistic view of history, have been assimilated and given proper consideration. But the fundamental belief in Christianity as being first of all action has remained intact, and in fact has acquired a new strength. From this point of view Christianity has simply lost the world. And the world must be recovered. The Christian mission, therefore, is to catch up with the life that has gone astray.

The “eating” and “drinking” man is taken quite seriously, almost too seriously. He constitutes the virtually exclusive object of Christian action, and we are constantly called to repent for having spent too much time in contemplation and adoration, in silence and liturgy, for having not dealt sufficiently with the social, political, economic, racial and all other issues of real life. To books on mysticism and spirituality correspond books on “Religion and Life” (or Society, or Urbanism or Sex ...) . And the basic question remains unanswered: what is this life that we must regain for Christ and make Christian? What is, in other words, the ultimate end of all this doing and action?

Suppose we have reached at least one of these practical goals, have “won” - then what? The question may seem a naive one, but one cannot really act without knowing the meaning not only of action, but of the life itself in the nature of which one acts. One eats and drinks, one fights for freedom and justice in order to be *alive*, to have the fullness of life. But what is it? What is the life of life itself? What is the content of life eternal? At some ultimate point, with some ultimate analysis, we inescapably discover that in and by itself action has no meaning. When all committees have fulfilled their task, all papers have been distributed and all practical goals achieved, there must come a perfect Joy. About what? Unless we know, the same dichotomy between religion and life, which we have observed in the spiritual solution remains. Whether we “spiritualize” our life or “secularize” our religion, whether we invite men to a spiritual banquet or simply join them at the secular one, the real life of the world for which we are told God gave his only begotten Son, remains hopelessly beyond our religious grasp.

“Man is what he eats.” But what does he eat and why? These questions seem naive and irrelevant not only to Feuerbach. They seem even more irrelevant to his religious opponents. To them, as to him, eating was a material function, and the only important question was whether in addition to it man possessed a spiritual “superstructure,” Religion said yes. Feuerbach said no. But both answers were given within the same fundamental opposition of the spiritual to the material. “Spiritual” versus “material,” “sacred” versus “profane,” “supernatural” versus “natural”; such were for centuries the only accepted, the only understandable moulds and categories of religious thought and experience. And Feuerbach, for all his materialism, was in fact a natural heir to Christian “idealism” and “spiritualism;”

But the Bible, we have seen, also begins with man as a hungry being, with the man who is that which he eats. The perspective, however, is wholly different, for nowhere in the Bible do we find the dichotomies which for us are the self evident framework of all approaches to religion. In the Bible the food that man eats, the world of which he must partake in order to live, is given to him by God, and it is given as communion with God. The world as man’s food is not something “material” and limited to material functions, thus different from, and opposed to, the specifically “spiritual” functions by which man is related to God. All that exists is God’s gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man’s life communion with God. It is divine love made food, made life for man. God blesses everything He creates, and, in biblical language, this means that He makes all creation the sign and means of His presence and wisdom, love and revelation: “O taste and see that the Lord is good” . Man is a hungry being. But he is hungry for God. Behind all the hunger of our life is God. All desire is finally a desire for Him. To be sure, man is not the only hungry being. All that exists lives by “eating.” The whole creation depends on food. But the unique position of man in the universe is that he alone is to bless God for the food and the life he receives from Him. He alone is to respond to God’s blessing with his blessing. The significant fact about the life in the Garden is that man is to name things. As soon as animals have been created to keep Adam company, God brings them to Adam to see what he will call them. “And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” Now in the Bible a name is infinitely more than a means to distinguish one thing from another. It reveals the very essence of a thing, or rather its essence as God’s gift. To name a thing is to manifest the meaning and value God gave it, to know it as coming from God and to know its place and function within the cosmos created by God.

To name a thing, in other words, is to bless God for it and in it. And in the Bible to bless God is not a religious or a “cultic” act, but the very way of life. God blessed the world, blessed man, blessed the seventh day (that is, time), and this means that He filled all that exists with His love and goodness, made all this “very good.” So the only natural (and not “supernatural”) reaction of man, to whom God gave this blessed and sanctified world, is to bless God in return, to thank Him, to see the world as God sees it and-in this act of gratitude and adoration-to know, name and possess the world. All rational, spiritual and other qualities of man, distinguishing him from other creatures, have their focus and ultimate fulfillment in this capacity to bless God, to know, so to speak, the meaning of the thirst and hunger that constitutes his life. “Homo sapiens,” “homo faber” ...yes, but first of_ all, “homo adorans.” The first, the basic definition of man is that he is the priest. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God-and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life. the one that he receives from the world; into life in God,’ into communion with Him. The world was created as the “matter,” the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament. Men understand all this instinctively if not rationally.

Centuries of secularism have failed to transform eating into something strictly utilitarian. Food is still treated with reverence. A meal is still a rite - the last “natural sacrament” of family and friendship, of life that is more than “eating” and “drinking.” To eat is still something more than to maintain bodily functions. People may not understand what that “something more” is, but they nonetheless desire to celebrate it. They are still hungry and thirsty for sacramental life.

Meditation in a Toolshed

by C.S. Lewis

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.

Then I moved, so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.

But this is only a very simple example of the difference between looking at and looking along. A young man meets a girl. The whole world looks different when he sees her. Her voice reminds him of something he has been trying to remember all his life, and ten minutes casual chat with her is more precious than all the favours that all other women in the world could grant. He is, as they say, "in love". Now comes a scientist and describes this young man's experience from the outside. For him it is all an affair of the young man's genes and a recognised biological stimulus. That is the difference between looking along the sexual impulse and looking at it.

When you have got into the habit of making this distinction you will find examples of it all day long. The mathematician sits thinking, and to him it seems that he is contemplating timeless and spaceless truths about quantity. But the cerebral physiologist, if he could look inside the mathematician's head, would find nothing timeless and spaceless there - only tiny movements in the grey matter. The savage dances in ecstasy at midnight before Nyonga and feels with every muscle that his dance is helping to bring the new green crops and the spring rain and the babies. The anthropologist, observing that savage, records that he is performing a fertility ritual of the type so-and-so. The girl cries over her broken doll and feels that she has lost a real friend; the psychologist says that her nascent maternal instinct has been temporarily lavished on a bit of shaped and coloured wax.

As soon as you have grasped this simple distinction, it raises a question. You get one experience of a thing when you look along it and another when you look at it. Which is the "true" or "valid" experience? Which tells you most about the thing? And you can hardly ask that question without noticing that for the last fifty years or so everyone has been taking the answer for granted. It has been assumed without discussion that if you want the true account of religion you must go, not to religious people, but to anthropologists; that if you want the true account of sexual love you must go, not to lovers, but to psychologists; that if you want to understand some "ideology" (such as medieval chivalry or the nineteenth-century idea of a "gentleman"), you must listen not to those who lived inside it, but to sociologists.

The people who look at things have had it all their own way; the people who look along things have simply been brow-beaten. It has even come to be taken for granted that the external account of a thing somehow refutes or "debunks" the account given from inside. "All these moral ideals which look so transcendental and beautiful from inside", says the wiseacre, "are really only a mass of biological instincts and inherited taboos." And no one plays the game the other way round by replying, "If you will only step inside, the things that look to you like instincts and taboos will suddenly reveal their real and transcendental nature." That, in fact, is the whole basis of the specifically "modern" type of thought. And is it not, you will ask, a very sensible basis? For, after all, we are often deceived by things from the inside. For example, the girl who looks so wonderful while we're in love, may really be a very plain, stupid, and disagreeable person. The savage's dance to Nyonga does not really cause the crops to grow. Having been so often deceived by looking along, are we not well advised to trust only to looking

at? in fact to discount all these inside experiences?

Well, no. There are two fatal objections to discounting them all. And the first is this. You discount them in order to think more accurately. But you can't think at all - and therefore, of course, can't think accurately - if you have nothing to think about. A physiologist, for example, can study pain and find out that it "is" (whatever is means) such and such neural events. But the word pain would have no meaning for him unless he had "been inside" by actually suffering. If he had never looked along pain he simply wouldn't know what he was looking at. The very subject for his inquiries from outside exists for him only because he has, at least once, been inside. This case is not likely to occur, because every man has felt pain. But it is perfectly easy to go on all your life giving explanations of religion, love, morality, honour, and the like, without having been inside any of them. And if you do that, you are simply playing with counters. You go on explaining a thing without knowing what it is. That is why a great deal of contemporary thought is, strictly speaking, thought about nothing - all the apparatus of thought busily working in a vacuum. The other objection is this: let us go back to the toolshed. I might have discounted what I saw when looking along the beam (i.e., the leaves moving and the sun) on the ground that it was "really only a strip of dusty light in a dark shed". That is, I might have set up as "true" my "side vision" of the beam. But then that side vision is itself an instance of the activity we call seeing. And this new instance could also be looked at from outside. I could allow a scientist to tell me that what seemed to be a beam of light in a shed was "really only an agitation of my own optic nerves". And that would be just as good (or as bad) a bit of debunking as the previous one. The picture of the beam in the toolshed would now have to be discounted just as the previous picture of the trees and the sun had been discounted. And then, where are you?

In other words, you can step outside one experience only by stepping inside another. Therefore, if all inside experiences are misleading, we are always misled. The cerebral physiologist may say, if he chooses, that the mathematician's thought is "only" tiny physical movements of the grey matter. But then what about the cerebral physiologist's own thought at that very moment? A second physiologist, looking at it, could pronounce it also to be only tiny physical movements in the first physiologist's skull. Where is the rot to end?

The answer is that we must never allow the rot to begin. We must, on pain of idiocy, deny from the very outset the idea that looking at is, by its own nature, intrinsically truer or better than looking along. One must look both along and at everything. In particular cases we shall find reason for regarding the one or the other vision as inferior. Thus the inside vision of rational thinking must be truer than the outside vision which sees only movements of the grey matter; for if the outside vision were the correct one all thought (including this thought itself) would be valueless, and this is self-contradictory. You cannot have a proof that no proofs matter. On the other hand, the inside vision of the savage's dance to Nyonga may be found deceptive because we find reason to believe that crops and babies are not really affected by it. In fact, we must take each case on its merits. But we must start with no prejudice for or against either kind of looking. We do not know in advance whether the lover or the psychologist is giving the more correct account of love, or whether both accounts are equally correct in different ways, or whether both are equally wrong. We just have to find out. But the period of brow-beating has got to end.

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A Word About Praising

from *Reflections on the Psalms* by C.S. Lewis

It is possible (and it is to be hoped) that this chapter will be unnecessary for most people. Those who were never thick-headed enough to get into the difficulty it deals with may even find it funny. I have not the least objection to their laughing; a little comic relief in the discussion does no harm, however serious the topic may be. (In my own experience, the funniest things have occurred in the gravest and most sincere conversations).

When I first began to draw near to belief in God and even for some time after it had been given to me, I found a stumbling block in the demand so clamorously made by all religious people that we should “praise” God; still more in the suggestion that God Himself demanded it. We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence or delightfulness; we despise still more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand. Thus a picture, at once ludicrous and horrible, both of God and of His worshippers threatened to appear in my mind. The Psalms were especially troublesome in this way – “Praise the Lord” “O praise the Lord with me,” “Praise Him” (And why, incidentally, did praising God always consist in telling other people to praise Him? Even in telling whales, snowstorms, etc, to go on doing what they would certainly do whether we told them or not?). Worse still was the statement put into God’s own mouth, “whoso offereth me thanks and praise, he honoreth me” (50, 23). It was hideously like saying, “What I most want is to be told that I am good and great.” Worst of all was the suggestion of the very silliest Pagan bargaining, that of the savage who makes offerings to his idol when the fishing is good and beats it when he has caught nothing. More than once the Psalmist seemed to be saying, “You like praise. Do this for me, and you shall have some.” Thus in 54 the poet begins “save me” (I), and in verse 6, adds an inducement, “An offering of a free heart will I give thee, and praise thy name.” Again and again the speaker asks to be saved from death on the ground that if God lets His suppliants die HE will get no more praise from them, for the ghosts in Sheol cannot praise (30,10; 88,10; 119,175). And mere quantity of praise seemed to count; “seven times a day do I praise thee” (119,164). It was extremely distressing. It made one think what one least wanted to think. Gratitude to God, reverence to Him, obedience to Him, I thought I could understand; not this perpetual eulogy. Nor were matters mended by a modern author who talked of God’s “right” to be praised.

I still think “right” is a bad way of expressing it, but I believe I now see what that author meant. It is perhaps easiest to begin with inanimate objects which have no rights. What do we mean when we say that a picture is “admirable”? We certainly don’t mean that it is admired (that’s as may be) for bad work is admired by thousands and good work may be ignored. Nor that it “deserves” admiration in the sense in which a candidate “deserves” a high mark from the examiners – i.e. that a human being will have suffered injustice if it is not awarded. The sense in which the picture “deserves” or “demands” admiration is rather this; that admiration is the correct, adequate, appropriate, response to it, that, if paid, admiration will not be “thrown away”, and that if we do not admire we shall be stupid, insensible, and great losers, we shall have missed something. In that way many objects both in Nature and in Art may be said to deserve, or merit, or demand, admiration. It was from this end, which will seem to some irreverent, that I found it best to approach the idea that God “demands” praise. He is that Object to admire which (or, if you like, to appreciate which) is simply to be awake, to have entered the real world; not to appreciate which is to have lost the greatest experience, and in the end to have lost all. The incomplete and crippled lives of those who are tone deaf, have never been in love, never known true friendship, never cared for a good book, never enjoyed the feel of the morning air of their cheeks,

never (I am one of these) enjoyed football, are faint images of it.

But of course this is not all. God does not only “demand” praise as the supremely beautiful and all-satisfying Object. He does apparently command it as lawgiver. The Jews were told to sacrifice. We are under an obligation to go to church. But this was a difficulty only because I did not then understand any of what I have tried to say above in Chapter V. I did not see that it is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men. It is not of course the only way. But for many people at many times the “fair beauty of the Lord” is revealed chiefly or only while they worship Him together. Even in Judaism the essence of the sacrifice was not really that men gave bulls and goats to God, but that by their so doing God gave Himself to men; in the central act of our own worship of course this is far clearer – there it is manifestly, even physically, God who gives and we who receive. The miserable idea that God should in any sense need, or crave for, our worship like a vain woman wanting compliments, or a vain author presenting his new books to people who have never met or heard of him, is implicitly answered by the words “If I be hungry I will not tell thee” (50,12). Even if such an absurd Deity could be conceived, He would hardly come to us, the lowest of rational creatures, to gratify His appetite. I don’t want my dog to bark approval of my books. Now that I come to think of it, there are some humans whose enthusiastically favorable criticism would not much gratify me.

But the most obvious fact about praise – whether of God or anything – strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless (sometimes even if) shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game – praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars. I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious minds, praised most, while the cranks, misfits, and malcontents praised least. The good critics found something to praise in many imperfect works; the bad ones continually narrowed the list of books we might be allowed to read. The healthy and unaffected man, even if luxuriously brought up and widely experienced in good cookery, could praise a very modest meal: the dyspeptic and the snob found fault with all. Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, praise almost seems to be inner health made audible. Nor does it cease to be so when, through lack of skill, the forms of its expression are very uncouth or even ridiculous. heaven knows, many poems of praise addressed to an earthly beloved are as bad as our bad hymns, and an anthology of love poems for public and perpetual use would probably be as sore a trial to literary taste as Hymns Ancient and Modern. I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: “Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent” The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about. My whole, more general difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what we indeed can’t help doing, about everything else we value.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent

because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with (the perfect hearer died a year ago). This is so even when our expressions are inadequate, as of course they usually are. But how if one could really and fully praise even such things to perfection – utterly “get out” in poetry or music or paint the upsurge of appreciation that almost bursts you? Then indeed object would be fully appreciated and our delight would have attained perfect development. The worthier the object, the more intense this delight would be. If it were possible for a created soul fully (I mean, up to the full measure conceivable in a finite being) to “appreciate”, that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme beauty. It is along these lines that I find it easiest to understand the Christian doctrine that “heaven” is a state in which angels now, and men hereafter, are perpetually employed in praising God. This does not mean, as it can so dismally suggest, that it is like “being in Church”. For our “services” both in their conduct and in our power to participate, are merely attempts at worship; never fully successful, often 99.9 percent failures, sometimes total failures. We are not riders but pupils in the riding school; for most of us the falls and bruises, the aching muscles and the severity of the exercise, far outweigh those few moments in which we were, to our own astonishment, actually galloping without terror and without disaster. To see what the doctrine means, we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God – drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable, hence hardly tolerable, bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression, our joy no more separable from the praise in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds. The Scotch catechism says that man’s chief end is “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.

Meanwhile, of course, we are merely, as Donne says, tuning our instruments. The tuning up of the orchestra can be itself delightful, but only to those who can in some measure, however little, anticipate the symphony. The Jewish sacrifices, and even our own most sacred rites, as they actually occur in human experience, are, like the tuning, promise, not performance. Hence, like the tuning, they many have in them much duty and little delight or none. But the duty exists for the delight. When we carry out our “religious duties” we are like people digging channels in a waterless land, in order that when at last the water comes, it may find them ready. I mean, for the most part. There are happy moments, even now, when a trickle creeps along the dry beds; and happy souls to whom this happens often.

As for the element of bargaining in the Psalms (Do this and I will praise you), that silly dash of Paganism certainly existed. The flame does not ascend pure from the altar. But the impurities are not its essence. And we are not all in a position to despise even the crudest Psalmist on this score. Of course we would not blunder in our words like them. But there is, for ill as well as for good, a wordless prayer. I have often, on my knees, been shocked to find what sort of thoughts I have, for a moment, been addressing to God; what infantile placations I was really offering, what claims I have really made, even what absurd adjustments or compromises I was, half- consciously, proposing. There is a Pagan, savage heart in me somewhere. For unfortunately the folly and idiot-cunning of Paganism seem to have far more power of surviving than its innocent or even beautiful elements. It is easy, once you have power, to silence the pipes, still the dances, disfigure the statues, and forget the stories; but not easy to kill the savage, the greedy, frightened creature now cringing, now blustering, in one’s soul – the creature to whom God may well say “though thou testest I am even such a one as thyself” (50,21).

But all this, as I have said, will be illuminating to only a few of my readers. To the others, such a comedy of errors, so circuitous a journey to reach the obvious, will furnish occasion or charitable laughter.

Lewis, C.S. "A Word About Praising" in *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, 1986) p.90-98.

GENIUS OF REFORMED LITURGY

by Nicholas Paul Wolterstorff

When the Swiss Reformers rebelled against the liturgical traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, they did so in terms of a coherent, controlling idea, a new vision. They had what we now recognize as a distinctively "Reformed" view of what we should do in liturgy and how we should understand it.

Under the leadership of John Calvin and others, these Reformers put their vision into practice and in doing so brought about the most radical liturgical reform that the Christian church has ever known. Note the word reform. The Reformers saw themselves not as beginning over but as returning to the liturgy of the early church.

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

We get a glimpse of what that early liturgy was like in the writings of Justin Martyr. "On the day named after the sun," says Justin, "all who live in city or countryside assemble." He then draws the following picture of a Christian liturgy in Rome around A.D. 150:

The service opened with someone reading the writings of the apostles and prophets "for as long as time permitted." When the reading was finished, the 'presider' addressed the people in a sermon, exhorting them "to imitate the splendid things" they had heard.

Following this "service of the Word," the people offered intercessory prayers, as Justin says, "for ourselves, for him who has just been enlightened [just baptized], and for all men everywhere." In Rome, as throughout the early church, the people stood during prayers with hands raised, and responded with "Amen."

After the prayers the people greeted each other with a kiss. Then they celebrated the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper. Along with other offerings, the people brought bread and a cup of wine mixed with water to the presider. The presider took the gifts and offered prayer "glorifying the Father of the universe through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," uttering "a lengthy thanksgiving [Eucharist] because the Father has judged us worthy of these gifts." After the people had assented with an "Amen," the deacons distributed the gifts.

An important thing to note in this liturgy is that it had two main parts—the service of the Word and the service of the Lord's Supper—and that the intercessory prayers formed a bridge between the two. The church (except for certain sects) followed this liturgical structure in all times and at all places until 1525.

Equally important in the liturgy described by Justin is the absence of division between clergy and people. The extent to which Justin refers to the people as the subject or object of the actions is striking: we pray, we eat, we greet one another, we say "Amen," the presider exhorts us. The liturgy belonged to the people.

How did these early Christians view the Lord's Supper? As the Greek word itself suggests (eucharisteo = give thanks), the overarching context was one of thanksgiving to God for creation and redemption. But the eucharist was more than thanksgiving. It was also an act of fellowship, an offering (in fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy of the pure offering of the Gentiles—Mai. 1:10-12), and a memorial, a remembrance of Christ's passion.

Giving thanks, fellowshiping, presenting an offering, and doing in memorial — all these are elements of devotion we address to God. But Justin also saw the eucharist as God's gracious act toward us. We are nourished and transformed by the eating and drinking, for "through the word of prayer that comes from him, the food over which the eucharist has been spoken becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus."

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

The liturgy as the Reformers knew it in central Europe of the early sixteenth-century was profoundly different from this second-century liturgy described by Justin. The enduring structure of Word and sacrament was still there. But across the intervening centuries the liturgy as a whole had been radically altered.

The difference in how the liturgy looked, how it sounded, and how it was done would have struck one first. The people no longer spoke; priests and choir alone voiced words. The people no longer understood what the presider said; Latin had remained in the liturgy even when the people no longer understood a word of it. The prayers were no longer "of the people"; instead they were recited inaudibly by the priest. Sermons had all but disappeared. And the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper were now rarely shared with the people.

To these and many other such practices and abuses, the Reformers reacted intensely. They recognized that the liturgy, which in the early church had given equal position to Word and sacrament, now placed almost total emphasis on its eucharistic component. The first half of the liturgy (the service of the Word) had lost its independent significance and was understood merely as preparation for the eucharist.

The eucharist too was understood and experienced in a far different way than it had once been. Gradually, over the years, people began to believe that liturgy was something the clergy did on behalf of the people. And at the heart of what God had assigned the clergy to do was celebrate the sacraments — especially the sacrament of the eucharist.

By the time of the Reformation the church came to think of a sacrament as something that both symbolized and conveyed a gift of divine grace. That is to say, in the Lord's Supper the bread and the wine effected the grace — not God by way of the bread and wine, but the bread and wine themselves. The priest was thus a dispenser of grace.

The church went on to say that once the bread and wine had been consecrated by the priest, these elements actually became the body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine were "transubstantiated." So, gradually the sacrament came to be viewed not only as a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross but also as a "propitiatory sacrifice" in which God's favor could be secured.

What did all this mean for the layperson? If we keep in mind the insistence that the bread and wine are transubstantiated into Christ's body and blood, so that Christ becomes bodily present, the

answer will not be hard to guess: adoration. Adoration of the Christ who is bodily present under the appearance of bread and wine became for the laity the central worship act. If we put all these features together, what leaps to the eye is that the medieval church had a liturgy in which, to an extraordinary degree, God's actions were lost from view. The actions were all the people's. The priest addresses God. The priest brings about Christ's bodily presence, and the laypeople adore Christ under the bread-like and winelike appearances. When they receive the consecrated bread from the hands of the priest the people are infused with grace.

The Reformers rejected the sole emphasis on the Lord's Supper, working to regain the balance between Word and sacrament...

The great Catholic liturgical scholar J. A. Jungmann puts it like this: "Hearing Mass was reduced to a matter of securing favors from God."

THE REFORMATION OF THE LITURGY

The Reformers rejected the sole emphasis on the Lord's Supper, working to regain the balance between Word and sacrament that had been present in the liturgy of Justin Martyr's day. In the medieval church, as we saw earlier, that balance was lost. The Scriptures were read inaudibly in an alien tongue, the sermon all but disappeared, and in theory and practice the entire service of the Word lost its significance and was treated merely as preparation for the Lord's Supper.

The Reformers recovered the audible reading of Scripture, in the language of the people, followed by explanation and application in the sermon. They stressed the strong tie between the Scripture reading and sermon, and saw the sermon genuinely as "God's Word." God's voice, said Calvin, resounds in "the mouths and the tongues" of preachers, so that hearing ministers preach is like hearing God himself speak. God "uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honor, but only that through their mouths he may do his own work—just as a workman uses a tool to do his work." In short, through the sovereign action of the Spirit the minister speaks the Word of God—not in the weak sense that he now reflects on the anciently spoken Word of God, but in the radical sense that God now speaks through him. In listening to church proclamation we hear God speaking.

The Reformers also insisted that we must not hear this Word from afar—that we must receive this Word of God in humility and faith. For such reception, we need the work of the Spirit. So these Reformers introduced into their liturgies the "prayer of illumination" before Scripture and sermon, asking for the presence of the Spirit. Indeed, it can be said that it was the Swiss Reformers who brought the Spirit back into the Western liturgy.

Already we have a good grasp of the controlling idea of Reformed liturgy. But it may help to also look at the Reformers' views on the Lord's Supper.

Chapter xviii of Book IV of Calvin's Institutes is a sustained attack on the Mass as it was practiced and understood in central Europe in Calvin's time. At what he calls the "crowning point" of his discussion, Calvin says that whereas "the Supper itself is a gift of God, which ought to have been received with thanksgiving, ...the sacrifice of the Mass is represented as paying a price to God, which he should receive by way of satisfaction. There is as much difference between this sacrifice and the sacrament of the Supper as there is between giving and receiving." The Lord has "given us a Table at which to

feast, not an altar upon which to offer a victim; he has not consecrated priests to offer sacrifice, but ministers to distribute the sacred banquet.”

To fully grasp what Calvin is saying here, it is important to realize that though he adamantly denies that the Lord’s Supper is a sacrifice of propitiation for sin, he repeatedly insists that it is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. “The Lord’s Supper cannot be without a sacrifice of this kind,” he says, “in which, while we proclaim his death and give thanks, we do nothing but offer a sacrifice of praise.”

Yet the fundamental structure of the Lord’s Supper for Calvin is not sacrifice but sacrament: God acting and we receiving, rather than we acting and God receiving. And, just as in proclamation, God’s action must be received in faith and applied by the Spirit. The eucharistic portion of Calvin’s Strassbourg and Geneva liturgies opens with a prayer for faithful receiving.

HERE AND NOW

By now the point will be clear: the liturgy as the Reformers understood and practiced it consists of God acting and us responding in faith through the work of the Spirit. The controlling idea in Reformed worship is that God acts in worship and that we are not to hold God’s actions at arm’s length but to appropriate them into our innermost being. Worship is a meeting between God and his people, a meeting in which both parties act—God as the initiator and we as the responders.

In the Supper, said Calvin, God seals (confirms) the promises he has made to us in Jesus Christ. Here and now he says that his promises are “for real.” Calvin’s point is not that the bread and wine are signs and seals of God’s promises. His point is that God himself here and now acts, by way of the bread and wine, to authenticate his promises.

But more than that. Not only does God promise in the Lord’s Supper that we shall be mystically united with the flesh and blood of his Son. Through his Spirit he also effectuates this promise. If we approach the Supper in faith, our faith will be nourished and strengthened, and thereby our unity with Christ in his humanity will be deepened. In “the sacred mystery of the Supper”, says Calvin, God “inwardly fulfills what he outwardly designates.”

Along with this emphasis on God as active in the sacrament comes Calvin’s sharp criticism of the Roman church for the infrequency of its lay communion. “What we have so far said of the sacrament,” he remarks, “abundantly shows that it was not ordained to be received only once a year ... It should have been done far differently: The Lord’s Table should have been spread at least once a week for the assembly of Christians... All, like hungry men, should flock to such a bounteous repast.”

Zwingli felt differently about the matter. He saw the Lord’s Supper not as a means of grace but as a mode of thanksgiving. And so, he took the momentous step of destroying the enduring shape of the liturgy, pulling apart its two high points of Word and sacrament, disposing them into two separate services, a preaching service and a Lord’s Supper service, and specifying that the Lord’s Supper service be held four times a year. It is ironic that all the confessions of the Reformed churches should side with Calvin against Zwingli on the theology of the Lord’s Supper, while their liturgies almost always side with Zwingli against Calvin.

FINELY TUNED BALANCE

To understand why the Reformed liturgy acquired the character it did over the centuries, we should note one additional curious feature, present there since the beginning: although the people were frequently and lengthily exhorted to receive God's actions with praise and thanksgiving, they were given scant opportunity to do so in the liturgy. This lack violated everything that the Reformers said about the liturgy. In their liturgical documents and theology they reveal a passionate concern that our

recital of God's actions not remain "out there somewhere" but be appropriated in faith and gratitude. Surely expressions of praise and gratitude are the appropriate implementation of this vision. Yet the exhortation tone overwhelmed worshipful expression.

Of course, one of the hallmarks of the Reformed churches—from the very beginning—has been the vigorous congregational singing of psalms and hymns. And certainly such singing is rightly seen as an act of worship and praise. Yet it must in honesty be granted that over the centuries this praise function of the congregation's singing has all too often been lost from view. H. O. Old expresses the point well: The singing "is often understood as a decoration of the service of worship, a way of achieving splendor, or perhaps as the means of giving the bitter pill of religion the chocolate coating of either culture or entertainment. At other times it has been understood as a way of achieving 'audience participation' or as a means of getting the people to respond to the preaching or praying of the pastor. At still other times it has been understood as being primarily a means of expressing the theme of the sermon or the 'Christian year,' making it a pedagogical device." Too seldom has singing been understood as the congregation's response of praise to God's actions.

Perhaps this theme of response, along with serious reflection on the appropriate frequency of celebrating the Lord's Supper, is the greatest challenge to us in the Reformed churches as we begin our fifth century: we should strive to enrich the response dimension of the liturgy so that it is no longer overwhelmed by the proclamation dimension, but exists with it in finely tuned balance. In most places preaching has rightly remained alive among us (though perhaps too seldom is it understood as God speaking). If now we can enliven the response dimension, then finally the genius of the liturgy as understood in the Reformed tradition will have come into its own: in the liturgy God and his people interact in the power of the Spirit.

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The Eucharist Makes the Church

by Hans Boersma

The past few decades have witnessed two remarkable developments in evangelical thought. First, the nature of the theological discipline appears to have undergone a change. Propositional truth, once one of the hallmarks of evangelicalism, appears to be making way for more elusive means of expression, such as narrative, image and symbol. Postmodern apprehension of essentialism, along with a suspicion of absolute truth claims, is affecting younger evangelicals' willingness to stand by the rational apologetics and theological edifices erected by a previous generation. Second, increasing doubt about our ability to capture the essence of absolute truth is turning evangelicals away from the scientific methods of higher biblical criticism. This mounting opposition to critical exegesis is all the more remarkable considering the fact that its acceptance is perhaps only half a century old and continues to meet with internal resistance, the inheritance of earlier Fundamentalist opposition to liberal theology. While the younger evangelicals are by no means identical to the Fundamentalists of the 1920s and '30s, they do share with them an aversion to some of the excesses of higher biblical criticism. The younger evangelicals seem intent on restoring theological or spiritual interpretation—a search for deeper, spiritual levels beyond the historical or literal meaning of the text, hidden in the inner recesses of the biblical text itself. Both the nature of theology and the interpretation of Scripture are experiencing the effects of our postmodern cultural mindset.

Let me make clear from the outset that I do not consider myself a postmodern younger evangelical. At the same time, I do think that some of the criticisms that younger evangelicals are directing against “modern” approaches to theology and interpretation are largely on target. Theology has suffered, also among evangelicals, from an undue desire for clarity and control—something to which the heritage of scholastic theology has, no doubt; contributed. And the same mindset has caused not only a proliferation of biblical theological methods intent on recovering the historical meaning of the text, but it has also entrenched the separation between biblical studies and dogmatic theology, between exposition and application and between theology and spirituality.

While consenting to the ever-louder criticism of a modern theological and interpretive paradigm, the underpinnings of this essay nonetheless do not stem from the same postmodern attitudes toward reality. Rather, I agree with the common perception that postmodernity is little more than modernity coming home to roost. Both, I believe, are predicated on the abandonment of a pre-modern sacramental mindset in which the realities of this-worldly existence pointed to greater, eternal realities, in which they sacramentally shared. Once modernity abandoned a participatory or sacramental view of reality, the created order became unhinged from its origin in God, and the material cosmos began its precarious drift on the flux of nihilistic waves.

It seems to me, therefore, that younger evangelicals would do well to turn to sources other than contemporary continental philosophy for their critique of the collusion between modernity and evangelical theology. One such source is Henri de Lubac (1896- 1991), who, along with others in the decades surrounding the Second World War, aimed at a *ressourcement* of the sacramental worldview that characterized the Great Tradition of the pre-modern period. Interestingly, Henri de Lubac is making a strong comeback in the English-speaking world. Over the past few years, a number of books have appeared on the theology of the great Jesuit patristic scholar: John Milbank's *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (2005); David Grumett's *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2007); Rudolf Voderholzer's *Meet Henri de Lubac* (2008) and Bryan c. Hollon's *Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* (2008). With only slight exaggeration, we might say that a genuine de Lubac revival appears to have broken out.

The recovery of de Lubac is of particular importance because de Lubac, in his own time and as a Catholic, did battle with the same problematic heritage of Enlightenment thought that younger evangelicals are opposing today. De Lubac, however, points a way beyond the flat cultural horizons of modernity—and, we might add, postmodernity—by pointing to the intuitions of the pre-critical sacramental outlook of the medieval tradition. I want to highlight de Lubac's contribution, therefore, since it draws us toward a sacramental imagination that recovers the mystical view of theology as a faith-based pilgrimage into the life of God and that looks to biblical interpretation as a sacramental opening-up of the spiritual meaning of sacred Scripture.

DE LUBAC'S TWO OPPONENTS

In order to illustrate what de Lubac—as well as other theologians in the French Catholic renewal movement *nouvelle théologie*—was after, let me turn to his recently translated 1944 work, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* (2006). (This book is, incidentally, yet another sign of the flourishing publishing industry surrounding de Lubac.) In the conclusion of his study of the development of Eucharistic theology in the Middle Ages, de Lubac situates himself against two opponents, both of whom he considers extremes. The one opponent is Protestantism. De Lubac laments the Protestant weakening of the doctrines of the Eucharist and the church. He mentions Calvin by name, charging him with “watering down” both the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist and the traditional idea of the church as the body of Christ. The two go hand in hand, maintains de Lubac. With only a “virtual presence” of Christ in the sacrament, one ends up with only a “virtual presence” of Christ in the church, too. (As an aside, those of us who have read Calvin will realize that compared to many evangelicals today, he actually had a very high view both of the Eucharist and of the church. But we'll leave that aside. Perhaps it is true that compared to de Lubac's “real presence” of Christ, Calvin only had a “virtual presence,” both in the Eucharist and in the church.)

The Protestant opponent, however, is not the main antagonist of de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum*. He devotes a great deal more time and attention to the other opponent, on the other extreme of the theological spectrum. As evangelicals, we are less familiar with this other extreme, so let me try to sketch briefly the theological context in which de Lubac is writing. One of the most notable events in late nineteenth-century Catholicism was the publication in 1879 of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*. Leo XIII was a lover of Thomas Aquinas. And in his encyclical, he put forward the thirteenth-century philosopher-theologian as a great model to follow. St. Thomas was not just an interesting figure of the High Middle Ages. Rather, he was the abiding source of truth. Thomas, insisted Pope Leo, had gathered together the teachings of the medieval scholastic, theologians in a wonderful way and Thomas had added his own further insights to this medieval body of thought, creating such an amazing synthesis that the Angelic Doctor was “rightly and deservedly esteemed the special bulwark and glory of the Catholic faith.” What Leo's encyclical and policies did was to entrench Thomist philosophy and theology as the one, normative system of Catholic thought.

The dominant mode of Catholic theology from that time on is often referred to as neo-Thomism or neo-scholasticism. Without going into detail, I will give just two characteristics of neo-scholasticism, enough to help us understand de Lubac. First, neo-scholasticism was based on a strict separation between nature and the supernatural. Philosophy served to establish truths that human reason could access simply by ‘looking at the natural world. Theology, the teachings of the church, did not enter into the picture till afterwards, once the philosophical foundation of natural truth had been laid. Supernatural, divine grace was something that was “superadded” to the realm of nature. Grace was not able to build on something already present in nature itself; rather, the supernatural world of grace was entirely extrinsic or foreign to the world of nature. Even when grace was superadded to nature, it remained extrinsic to the realm of nature. Whether or not this was actually the teaching of St. Thomas

remains a hotly debated issue, one that this article will not attempt to resolve. But what is clear is that this separation of nature and the supernatural—this extrinsicist view of reality—was the cornerstone of neo-Thomist scholasticism and dominated the Catholic Church especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The second characteristic of neo-Thomism built on the first. It was the rationalist apologetic approach both to the Bible and to the history of Christian thought. Put somewhat negatively, one went to Scripture and the tradition in order to find the truths of the Catholic faith confirmed there, just in case the reader thinks I am unduly harsh on Catholic thought, I do not think that this rationalist apologetic approach was limited to Catholic thought. Protestant scholastic theology, in the period following the Reformers, did much the same thing. Rationalist apologetics has had a fairly strong influence also on evangelical theology. This is precisely one of the aspects of the evangelical heritage against which many of the younger evangelicals are reacting. One of the most serious problems, for de Lubac and others, with this apologetic use of Scripture and tradition, is the temptation to squeeze the historical data to make them say what one already believes. To give but one example: if a person believes in transubstantiation—the teaching that the substance of bread and wine change into the substance of Christ's body and blood—neo-Thomist rational apologetics would scour Scripture and tradition in order to find such a “real presence” affirmed in the positive or historical sources of Scripture and tradition.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S “ALLEGORIZED” TEXTS

In the conclusion of *Corpus Mysticum*, de Lubac tackles his neo-Thomist opponents, as well as their seventeenth-century scholastic ancestors, all of whom de Lubac believes hardened the theology of Thomas into a rationalist system. De Lubac takes particular exception to two prominent Cardinals of the Counter-Reformation: Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) and Jacques du Perron (1556-1618). De Lubac, ever the patristic scholar and always concerned to recover the Great Tradition, accuses both of these theologians of misinterpreting St. Augustine. They cannot find transubstantiation in Augustine. They cannot find in the fifth-century bishop the “real presence” that has developed in the church over time and that has come to be official church doctrine. And this difficulty leads them to engage in mental gymnastics in their interpretation of the North-African bishop.

In one particularly well-known sermon (Sermon 227), St. Augustine repeatedly spoke about the “unity” of the body of Christ, the “unity” of the church, which he believed resulted from the celebration of the Eucharist. In one fascinating passage, he commented:

[B]efore they became bread, these grains were separate; they were joined together in water after a certain amount of crushing. For, unless the grain is ground and moistened with water, it cannot arrive at that form which is called bread. So, too, you were previously ground, as it were, by the humiliation of your fasting and by the sacrament of exorcism. Then came the baptism of water; you were moistened, as it were, so as to arrive at the form of bread. But, without fire, bread does not yet exist, what, then, does the fire signify? The chrism [anointing]. For the sacrament of the Holy Spirit is the oil of our fire.

What is one to do with a passage like this? There's no talk about real presence, let alone transubstantiation. All the focus seems to be on the unity of the believers, on their fellowship or communion, which results from the many grains being joined together in a loaf of bread. It seems as though Augustine drew an arbitrary allegorical comparison between grains joining together into a loaf of bread and believers getting together into the body of the church, what are we to do in our modern age with such airy-fairy allegorizing about the unity of the body?

De Lubac chastises the inability of the scholastic Catholic theologians of the Counter-Reformation (Bellarmine, du Perron and others) to deal with these kinds of allegorical passages in St. Augustine. In fact, the French Jesuit scholar goes further and alleges that scholastic theology is in danger of losing St. Augustine altogether: "They cheerfully divide up the ancient texts [from St. Augustine and others] relating to the Eucharist into two groups: the first group is made up of 'realist' texts, while all the 'allegorized' texts are lumped into a second group, which is abandoned." Let's pause here for a moment. It will be clear that the passage from Augustine's Sermon 227 did not refer to "real presence" and that it was not, in de Lubac's terminology, a "realist" text. St. Augustine's Sermon 227 presents an "allegorized" text. The unity of the bread functions as an allegory depicting the unity of the church. According to de Lubac, the scholastic tradition following the Counter-Reformation was at a loss what to do with such "allegorized" texts, and as a result they simply ignored and abandoned them. The loss, however, was not restricted to the "allegorized" texts. De Lubac explains that the problem extended to the "realist" texts as well: "But the so-called 'realist' texts are not always as realist as these historians would have us believe." In other words, we may not find today's church teaching on the Eucharist explicitly in St. Augustine at all. This scholastic approach to the past was laden with irony, according to de Lubac, for "by abandoning these 'allegorized texts,' they sometimes deprive us of the most effective testimony to authentic realism." Translated, all this simply means that the neo-Thomists have lost St. Augustine altogether: they cannot find any "realist" texts, and they ignore the "allegorized" texts.

This brings us to the sacramental outlook that de Lubac is so keen on recovering. According to de Lubac, it is "fear of symbolism" that lies behind the neo-Thomist approach and behind its vain search for "realist" texts, as well as its abandonment of "allegorized" texts." According to de Lubac, the neo-Thomist fear of the Protestant nemesis of symbolism is the cause of the neo-Thomist inability to properly appreciate St. Augustine and other pre-modern theologians. Of course, de Lubac agrees with his neo-scholastic opponents that Protestantism is problematic: Calvin's "virtual presence" doesn't recognize the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and thus reduces it to a mere symbol. So, de Lubac is certainly willing to join the neo-Thomists in their opposition to a merely symbolic view of the Eucharist. He is not convinced, however, that fear of Protestant symbolism is sufficient reason to buy into the neo-Thomist reading of St. Augustine. De Lubac vehemently rejects the two presuppositions that drive the neo-Thomist approach: (1) the separation between nature and the supernatural, between philosophy and theology; and (2) the rationalist apologetic that serves as the theological *modus operandi*. By contrast, de Lubac's sacramental approach to reality sees the world of nature not as separate from the supernatural, but as the gracious gift of the Creator. For de Lubac, the world of nature is never without God's presence. A sacramental approach to reality begins with theology; it begins with the assumption that what we see around us is the gift of the creator-redeemer God. Such a starting point in theology clashes with the neo-Thomist extrinsicism that regards the supernatural as an arbitrary imposition on a self-sufficient natural world.

And de Lubac's sacramental view of reality clashes not just with the neo-scholastic separation of nature and the supernatural, but also with its rationalist apologetic. St. Augustine—and, along with him much of the Middle Ages—saw the created world as a world full of symbols. They were not just symbols in which symbol "X" related to some completely different, distant reality called "Y." The symbol and the reality were not two strictly separate entities. Instead, these symbols functioned as sacraments. And a sacrament (*sacramentum*) shares or participates in the reality (*res*) to which it points. Symbols, therefore, point to and share in a reality that is much greater than the symbols themselves. The symbols only give us a small inkling of the great sacramental reality that upholds them. The problem that de Lubac has with the neo-Thomist rationalist theology is that its "realism" completely or univocally identifies symbol and reality. To neo-scholastic rationalists, "real presence" means that any talk of "allegories" represents a flight into an airy-fairy mysticism. In other words, this approach insists that once we have grasped the symbol, we have comprehended also the body of Christ. We have

exhausted the symbol; there is no sacramental reality that reaches beyond the human symbol.

THE THREEFOLD BODY

This talk about a participatory link between sacrament and reality perhaps sounds somewhat abstract, particularly for evangelicals. So, allow me to clarify by introducing “three bodies” that De Lubac mentions in *Corpus Mysticum*. The three bodies of Christ are the historical body (the body born of the Virgin), the Eucharistic body (signified by bread and wine) and the ecclesial body (the body of the church). De Lubac’s book is, in essence, an overview of how the relationship between these three bodies developed in the Middle Ages. It seems obvious that one has to make some kind of distinction between these three bodies. The very fact that we can talk about a historical body, a Eucharistic body and an ecclesial body means that we can distinguish the three. But the question remains: how much should we distinguish them? Or, and maybe this is a better way of framing the question, what is the nature of the relationship among the three bodies?

To get a hold of de Lubac’s reading of the Middle Ages, we need to remember that he wants to sail between two cliffs: on one hand, the Scylla of Protestant symbolism, which regards the Eucharistic bread simply as an arbitrary symbol “X” referring to a distant reality “Y”; and on the other hand, the Charybdis of a strict neo-scholastic focus on real presence that so identifies symbol “X” with reality “Y” that the spiritual reality in no way exceeds the symbol. How does St. Augustine situate himself among these various approaches to symbolism? One of the most interesting lines in his Sermon 227 reads as follows: “If you have received worthily, you are what you have received, for the Apostle says: ‘The bread is one; we though many, are one body.’” The comment sounds innocuous enough, but it contains two fascinating elements. First, when we think of transubstantiation, we think of the teaching that the bread becomes the body of Christ. St. Augustine says something rather different. He comments: you become the body of Christ. You become what you eat. We could also say: transubstantiation means that your substance changes into the body of Christ. At first blush, this seems like a peculiar understanding of the Eucharist. Is it perhaps a slip of the tongue? What does St. Augustine mean when he says, “You are what you have received?” It seems to me that the second fascinating element in Augustine’s comment explains the first. In the second part of his statement, the Bishop of Hippo quotes the Apostle Paul: “The bread is one; we though many, are one body.” This is a quotation from 1 Corinthians 10:17. (Interestingly, in terms of Eucharistic theology, this is by far the most frequently quoted passage among the fathers and the theologians of the Middle Ages. J.M.R. Tillard’s *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ* presents an excellent overview of the patristic interpretation of this passage.) The NIV reads verses 16b and 17 as follows: “And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” The word “body” occurs twice in this passage. The first time, it refers to the Eucharistic body. (“[I]s not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?”) The second time, it refers to the ecclesial body. (“Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body.”) Of the three bodies frequently referred to in the Great Tradition (the historical, the Eucharistic and the ecclesial body), St. Paul takes the last two and places them right beside each other. Actually, he does more than place them beside each other; he links them together. As by faith we share in the one Eucharistic body, the Spirit makes us one ecclesial body. As St. Augustine would put it: we become what we have received. Or, as de Lubac phrases it: The Eucharist makes the church. Here we arrive at De Lubac’s objection to the neo-Thomists’, with their single-minded focus on transubstantiation and real presence. He is saying: you focus so much on what makes a legitimate Eucharist, you zero in so much on the Eucharistic body, that you forget that the sacramental purpose of the Eucharistic body is to create the ecclesial body. We could also say: the sacramental reality to which the Eucharistic body points and which it makes present is the ecclesial unity of the church. Thus, there really are not three bodies, but there is only one body, one threefold body (*corpus triforme*), the various aspects of which are sacramentally related to one another.

For St. Augustine and the Middle Ages, the one body of Christ is historical, Eucharistic and ecclesial in character. And in their different manifestations, these three are sacramentally related to one another.

De Lubac begins *Corpus Mysticum* by reiterating something we have already observed—that for Augustine, and for much of the Middle Ages, Eucharist and church were closely connected: “[T]he Eucharist corresponds to the church as cause to effect, as means to end, as sign to reality.” The goal of the celebration of the sacrament was the unity or communion of the church. In the last part of the Apostles’ Creed, we confess our faith in the “communion of saints.” That is at least how we often put it. But the Latin was ambiguous. *Sanctorum communio* could be translated either as “communion of saints” or as “communion of holy things.” For the medieval tradition, it was not an either/or option. Communion of holy things— meaning, communion with the body and blood of Christ— was related to the communion of saints. The one caused the other and was related to it in a sacramental manner. De Lubac puts it this way:

[I]n the same way that sacramental communion {communion in the body and the blood} is always at the same time an ecclesial communion {communion within the church, of the church, for the church...}, so also ecclesial communion always includes, in its fulfilment, sacramental communion. Being in communion with someone means to receive the body of the Lord with them.

With all this flowery language, de Lubac simply makes the central point that the Eucharist makes the church. The theologians of the Middle Ages consistently emphasized the unity of the one body of Christ. This unity was the focus even when they distinguished the three aspects (historical, sacramental and ecclesial) of the threefold body. Sacrament and church were regarded as one and the same.

In the ninth century, explains de Lubac, *corpus mysticum* served as a technical term for the Eucharistic body, distinguishing it both from the “body born of the Virgin” and from the “body of the church,” while at the same time keeping the three closely connected. Medieval theologians talked about the “mystical body” of the Eucharist and about the “mystery” of the Eucharist to indicate both that the Eucharist was a sign of something else and to refer to the obscure depths hidden in the Eucharist. The ecclesial body was the sacramental reality to which the Eucharist pointed and which it made present. There was spirit-guided movement from the sacrament to its mysterious reality, from the Eucharistic body to the ecclesial body. The sacrament was something dynamic, not static. Or, as de Lubac puts it, “[A] mystery, in the old sense of the word, is more of an action than a thing.” This active connotation of the term “mystery” in the Middle Ages stands, for de Lubac, in opposition to the view, common in his own day, that saw the Eucharist as an arbitrary, supernatural intervention from above, unconnected to the life of the church. The purpose of de Lubac’s meticulous historical study is to overcome the extrinsicism of the neo-Thomists, which treated the Eucharist as unconnected or extrinsic to the fellowship of the church. De Lubac wants to make us see that throughout much of the Middle Ages, the Eucharist was regarded as the activity that created the unity of the church.

THE SHIFTING CORPUS

According to de Lubac, some (especially Protestants) have come to focus strictly on the sacramental purpose of the body, the church’s fellowship or unity as the intended reality of the sacrament (the *res*), while forgetting that this reality is tied to its origin in the Eucharistic body; others (especially Catholics) have come to focus strictly on the sacramental presence of Christ in the elements (the *sacramentum*), while forgetting that this real presence is tied to its purpose in the ecclesial body. What caused both Protestants and Catholics to lose the medieval sacramental mindset? What happened to tear apart this sacramental unity? Let me point out some of the central aspects of de Lubac’s historical narrative.

De Lubac points to some significant linguistic shifts. Over time, in the High Middle Ages, the word “true” (*verum*) moved from the ecclesial body to the Eucharistic body. So, Christ’s body in the Eucharist came to be seen as “the true body.” At the same time, the word “mystical” (*mysticuni*) moved from the Eucharistic body to the ecclesial body. So, the church as the body of Christ came to be seen as “the mystical body.” To be sure, de Lubac does not take issue with the use of the term “mystical body” to describe the church, but he does believe that the overall shift in terminology—with the word “true” being used for the Eucharistic body, and the term “mystical” for the ecclesial body—was problematic. Why? For de Lubac these linguistic shifts reflected (1) an increasing focus on the real presence in the Eucharist (the “true” body of Christ); and (2) a loss of the sacramental connection between the Eucharistic and the ecclesial body of Christ.

De Lubac sees the main cause of the changes occurring in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The eleventh century witnessed a sharp controversy over the Eucharist, which involved a theologian by the name of Berengar († 1088). Simplifying matters somewhat, we could say that Berengar was like an eleventh-century Calvinist. He contrasted spiritual eating to bodily eating, insisting that one did not eat the actual body of Christ, but that the eating of Christ in the Eucharist was a spiritual eating. This contrast between spiritual and bodily eating caused great consternation. Alger of Liège (1055) and others reacted strongly by insisting on a bodily consumption of Christ. And, de Lubac adds, “From the affirmation of bodily reception, we are led by implication to the affirmation of a bodily presence.” The result was that “‘spiritualist’ vocabulary gradually became, if not suppressed, at least rare,” while all the emphasis came to be placed on the real presence in the Eucharistic body of Christ. The theory of the threefold body quickly turned into a theory of a twofold body: “the historico-sacramental body and the ecclesial body.”

The new emphasis on bodily feeding and on real presence in the Eucharist meant that the ecclesial body was no longer regarded as true body (*corpus verum*). Prior to the Berengarian controversy, it seemed fitting to identify the ecclesial body as true body. The sacramental aim of the Eucharistic celebration had been the church as the “fullness of Christ,” and so this ecclesial aim used to be described quite suitably as the truth (*veritas*) of the Eucharist. But the twelfth-century shift in emphasis from the ecclesial body to the Eucharistic body made it difficult to sustain this identification of the unity of the church as the “true body.” Instead, the Eucharistic elements began to take the place of the unity of the church as *corpus verum*. Thus, around the twelfth century, the Eucharist turned into the “true body.”

At about the same time, the church became the “mystical body” (*corpus mysticum*). De Lubac points to Peter Lombard (ca. 1095—ca. 1164) a well-known twelfth-century theologian, whose work many later medieval interpreters used as the starting base for their own theological reflections. With Lombard, the Eucharist became the “proper flesh” (*caro propria*), while the church became the “mystical flesh” (*caro mystica*) or the “spiritual flesh” (*caro spiritualis*). Lombard, as well as the great scholastic theologians of the High Middle Ages, clearly distinguished the Eucharistic body from the ecclesial body. And that was only a first step. Now that the expression “mystical flesh” was used for the church, theologians would soon also use the expression “mystical body” to refer to the church rather than to the Eucharist.

THEOLOGY, INTERPRETATION AND ECUMENISM

As evangelicals, we often regard the Middle Ages as the Dark Ages. On such a reading, things went off the rail through the so-called “Hellenization” of the gospel. By the time of Emperor Constantine, if not before that, darkness had descended upon Christianity, and most of the history of the church is actually a story in which philosophical nitpicking and ignorant superstition tried to outdo one another. Both factors turned the Middle Ages into the Dark Ages. D.H. Williams, a Baptist patristic scholar from Baylor University, refers to this view as the “fall paradigm” of historiography, since the “fall” of the church, on this understanding, occurred early on in the church’s history,

while the period between the “fall” and the Reformation appeared bereft of genuine theological insight and true spiritual life. According to the “fall paradigm,” the medieval borrowings from Platonism, the allegorical interpretation of Scripture and the sacramentalist understanding of reality were all part of what we may call “the Great Christian Decline.” Only when the sixteenth-century Reformation occurred could we see the gospel again, in all its originality and freshness, unaffected by the many philosophical accretions that used to cover up the pure, biblical truth.

In what remains, I want to suggest that this narrative—ironically common both among liberal Protestants and evangelicals with an Anabaptist background—is fundamentally flawed. And I will argue that the pre-modern view of the “mystical body” offers us a way out of the truly Dark Age of modern theology. I have in mind three related areas: (1) the character of theology, (2) the interpretation of Scripture and (3) ecumenical theology.

First, the sacramental relationship between Eucharist and church raises the question of the nature of theology itself. I mentioned earlier that the neo-scholastic theology of the early twentieth century tended to look to Scripture and tradition as sources to plunder in defence of the doctrine of the church. The historical context of biblical passages and of theological controversies was irrelevant. Scripture and tradition gave direct and full access to eternal truths. The last chapter of de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum* traces this development toward a rationalist understanding of theology. Entitled “From Symbolism to Dialectic,” this chapter moves beyond the historical changes in Eucharistic and ecclesial vocabulary. De Lubac intimates that the changes in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were part of a much larger shift—a shift in theological methodology from symbolism to dialectic, or, we could say, from a sacramental entry into the mystery of God to a syllogistic mastering of rational truths. Interestingly, it is precisely such mastering of rational truths to which many of the younger evangelicals are objecting today. And in an important way, de Lubac presents himself as their ally: he argues that the separation between Eucharist and church was the result of a rationalist mindset that transformed “symbolic inclusions” into “dialectical antitheses.”

In the controversy between Berengar and his Catholic opponents, claims de Lubac, both sides took for granted the ill-conceived separation between Eucharistic body and ecclesial body. One of the reasons, according to de Lubac, is the way both sides looked to the character of theological discourse. Berengar introduced a dialectical, syllogistic approach to theology that proved unable to affirm the mystery of the “mutual immanence” between the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and his presence in the unity of the church. De Lubac explains that a new mentality, a new way of thinking and new categories were emerging and catching people’s interests. He points directly to St. Anselm († 1109) and to Peter Abelard (1079-1142) in the twelfth century as responsible for changing the sacramental approach of St. Augustine, and he laments the resulting Christian rationalism that approached the mysteries of faith only by means of intellectual demonstration. Augustine, and the Middle Ages that followed him, looked to theology as sacramental initiation into the mystery of God. Far from being Dark Ages, the Middle Ages regarded theological discourse as an ecclesially and faith-based means of entering into the mysterious brilliance of the divine light.

Second, de Lubac wanted to re-appropriate St. Augustine’s approach to Scripture. In Sermon 227, the Bishop moved from the grain that is ground, moistened and baked to the believers’ fasting and exorcism, baptism and anointing with the spirit. The neo-scholastics, with their “realist” focus on the Eucharistic elements, were unable to deal with this kind of “allegorizing.” Put positively, a sacramental view that connects the body of the Eucharist to the body of the church implies also a sacramental hermeneutic in which the literal meaning of Scripture sacramentally points to a spiritual meaning. Allegory, in other words, is a sacramental interpretation that looks for the deeper, hidden meaning of the literal historical meaning of the text. Thus, a premodern view of the mystical body doesn’t only say something about Eucharistic theology and ecclesiology. It also addresses the interpretation of Scripture.

Again, this should be of great interest to younger evangelicals who want to move beyond purely historical-critical exegesis. Far from rejecting the historical meaning of Scripture, allegory takes it as the starting point (*sacramentum*) in search for the greater, Christological reality (*res*) of the gospel. Augustine's sacramental approach recognizes Christ as the spiritual mystery hidden in the historical realities of the Old Testament Scriptures. Or, as he puts it elsewhere, "The New lies in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed." Among modern interpreters, such an Augustinian approach will likely raise the fear that exegesis becomes a purely arbitrary affair. Both Augustine and de Lubac would likely respond that spiritual interpretation cannot go wrong as long as it takes its cue from the church's confession and bases itself on the unity of the Scripture. By contrast, a modern hermeneutic—whether of the liberal or evangelical variety—that limits itself to authorial intent cannot do justice to the deeper, sacramental meaning that the eyes of faith recognize in the Old Testament Scriptures. De Lubac's recovery of a pre-modern sacramental hermeneutic allows for a theological interpretation that from the outset is guided by faith in the Christ proclaimed by the church.

Third, de Lubac's recovery of a sacramental outlook holds genuine ecumenical potential. One of the most attractive elements of de Lubac's re-appropriation of the Middle Ages is the fact that his sacramental approach allows him to point toward a middle path between a complete separation of sign and reality on the one hand (the Protestant temptation) and a strict identification of sign and reality on the other hand (the Catholic temptation). What allowed St. Augustine and the medieval tradition to forge this middle path was the sacramental link between Eucharist and church, a link that they saw reflected in St. Paul's own link between the two in 1 Corinthians 10. Evangelicals sometimes focus too quickly on the Catholic notion of transubstantiation, in order to reject it as out of line with our understanding of the Scriptures. But we should keep in mind that de Lubac's moderate view has been enormously influential in the Catholic Church, where today it goes by the name of "communion ecclesiology." The reason for the name "communion ecclesiology" is that communion, or fellowship, is for de Lubac the sacramental reality at which the Eucharistic celebration aims. The Second Vatican Council of the 1960s irreversibly ensconced this communion ecclesiology as the official teaching of the Catholic Church. The common acceptance of the Lubacian view within Catholicism offers new prospects for fruitful dialogue. Just as the Catholic Church has begun to focus more strongly on the fellowship of the church community, so I would suggest it is time for Protestants to celebrate much more unambiguously the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

EXCERPTS FROM *DESIRING THE KINGDOM*

by James K. A. Smith

“The dialogical nature of Christian worship is a give-and-take, back-and-forth interaction: God calls us; by his grace we respond by gathering, invoking his grace and mercy; and God in turn responds to our cry. This give-and-take indicates that we are dealing with a personal God who takes the initiative to engage in a relationship with humanity. It is an exchange of gifts that indicates God’s gracious reciprocity. Implicit in this is also something fundamental about the nature of humanity: human flourishing is dependent upon our being oriented to and defined by this relationship.”

CALL TO WORSHIP

“Week after week, for millennia and around the globe, a peculiar people is gathered by a call to worship – a call that, in a sense, goes out before the service even begins, but that is then formally declared in the opening of the service in the ‘call to worship,’ often from the Psalms. ... The rather mundane fact that people show up is, however, an indicator of something fundamental: that a people has gathered in response to a call. ‘Whenever we gather for public worship... it is because we have been summoned.’”

CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON

“Now that we have been invited into a relationship with a holy God and been reminded of what he requires, a bright spotlight is shone upon not just our failures and trespasses but also our inability to do otherwise on our own. Rather than repressing this stark, haunting fact – of which we’re not a little embarrassed and ashamed – and rather than papering over it or ignoring it, the practice of Christian worship calls us to own up to it in open confession, where we are honest with God about our transgressions and agree with God that they are violations of his law. We confess both our proclivity and actions that run against the grain of the universe.

Our assurance does not stem from our own accomplishment, nor does God’s forgiveness stem from simply dismissing the demands of justice or ignoring the brokenness of creation; rather, God himself takes on our sin and its effects in the Son, on the cross, who also triumphs over them in the resurrection. Our brokenness and violence are met by the grace of God, who suffered violence for our sake and in turn graces and empowers us to reorder our desires, to recalibrate our ultimate aims, and to take up once again our vocation as humans, to be his image bearers to and for the world.”

SCRIPTURE AND SERMON

The Scriptures function as the script of the worshipping community, the story that narrates the identity of the people of God, the constitution of this baptismal city, and the fuel of the Christian imagination. ... Though the entirety of Christian worship inscribes the story of God in Christ into our imaginations, the moment of Scripture reading and proclamation of the Word in preaching is the most intense or explicit moment for the articulation of this story. This is why ‘worship is Scripture’s home, its native soil, its most congenial habitat. ... It is in liturgy... that Christians are schooled and exercised in the scriptural logic of the faith.’ In particular, the Scriptures provide the story of which we find ourselves a part, and thus the narration and absorption of the story is crucial to give us resources for knowing what we ought to do. The end of ingesting the story – ‘eating the book’ – is in order to be and become a certain kind of person and a certain kind of people.”

THE CREED

“The Creed is a moment in worship that gives us much to think about in the sense of conscious, intentional reflection; it teaches us something, formulated in assertions and propositions, and makes ontological claims about God, the world, and ourselves. Indeed, what is articulated in the Creed has been behind much of what we’ve been doing in worship. ... What we believe is not a matter of intellectualizing salvation but rather a matter of knowing what to love, knowing to whom we pledge allegiance. ... In reciting it each week, we rehearse the skeletal structure of the story in which we find our identity. Its cadences become part of who we are, and they function as rival cadences, sometimes doing battle in our imagination with the cadences of other pledges that would ask for our allegiance and loyalty.”

PRAYER

In intercessory prayer, we are reminded... that we are called, even chosen, as a people not for our own sake but for the sake of the world. Just as Adam and Eve were created to be God’s image bearers in and to the world, and just as Israel was chosen in order to be a light unto the nations, so the church is called to be the people of God to and for the world. It is because we are God’s ambassadors and image bearers, charged with caring for creation, that we bring to him the concerns of creation, praying for each other, for the church, and for the world at large.

OFFERING

“This is not really an exchange. It certainly isn’t a mutual or reciprocal gift exchange since there is a radical disproportion between the gifts we’ve received and the gifts we now offer ‘in return.’ Rather, the offering is an expression of gratitude. It is a symbolic but concrete indication that the ‘commerce’ between God and humanity is not a contract but a covenant, which traffics not in commodities but gifts.”

EUCCHARIST

Christian worship culminates in a sacrament that is a compacted microcosm of the whole of worship: the Eucharist, or Lord’s Supper. This happens in many different ways across Christian traditions, but try to imagine one selective snapshot: Recapitulating much that has gone before (law, confession, absolution, Scripture, proclamation, prayer, and thanksgiving) — liturgical practices that have called upon our ears and our knees, our eyes and our tongues, our hands and our noses — now our mouths, with a sort of sanctified salivation, begin to anticipate a new role for taste.

“On the night he was handed over to suffering and death; our Lord Jesus Christ...” (1 Cor. 11:26)

“The tangible display and performance of the gospel in the Lord’s Supper is a deeply affecting practice. Its sights and smells, its rhythms and movements, are the sort of thing that seep into our imaginations and become second nature. Just as a song makes words stick in our memory, so the sights, smells, and rhythms of the Eucharist seem to make the story both come alive and wriggle into our imaginations in a way that it wouldn’t otherwise.”

BENEDICTION

“While we have been engaged with the triune God in the practices of worship, in a dialogic dance of gift and call, call and response, pleading and receiving, eating and drinking, we have also been practicing (for) the kingdom. We’ve gathered to do what we were made for —praise and worship — and in so doing, we have been learning a language, participating in a story, undergoing training to fulfill our mission as the communal imago Dei. Christian worship is an affective school, a pedagogy of desire in which we learn not how to be spiritual or religious, but how to be human, how to take up the vocation given to us at creation. And now we are sent from this practice arena — which is the real world — into the world to be witnesses by being God’s image bearers, who cultivate the world in a way that exemplifies Jesus’s perfect ‘cultural’ labor. That now includes our cultural labor or being the church, the body of Christ, in a way that is hospitable and inviting — in a way that invites others to find their identity and vocation in Christ, to become ‘new creations’ and thus become the humans they were called to be. In short, when we are sent as witnesses, we are sent as evangelists to proclaim the good news, to announce the story of God’s redeeming and restoring a peculiar people, graced to bear his image.”

Smith, James K. A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009. Print.

EXCERPTS FROM *CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE*

by Anthony A. Hoekema

CHAPTER 2: Man as a Created Person

One of the basic presuppositions of the Christian view of man is belief in God as the Creator, which leads to the view that the human person does not exist autonomously or independently, but as a creature of God. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ... So God created man" (Gen. 1:1-27).

An obvious implication of the fact of creation is that all created reality is completely dependent on God. Werner Foerster puts it this way: "Thus in becoming, being, and perishing, all creation is wholly dependent on the will of the Creator."¹

The Scriptures make it very clear that all created things and all created beings are totally dependent on God. "Thou [God] hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas with all that is in them; and thou preservest all of them" (Neh. 9:6, RSV). That God preserves all his creatures, including human beings, implies that they are dependent on him for their continued existence. In his address to the Athenians Paul affirms that God "gives all men life and breath and everything else," and that "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:25, 28). We owe, Paul is saying, our very breath to God; we exist only in him; in every move we make we are dependent on him. We cannot lift a finger apart from God's will.

Man is not only a creature, however; he is also a person. And to be a person means to have a kind of independence – not absolute but relative. To be a person means to be able to make decisions, to set goals, and to move in the directions of those goals. It means to possess freedom² – at least in the sense of being able to make one's own choices. The human being is not a robot whose course is totally determined by forces outside of him; he has the power of self-determination and self-direction. To be a person means, to use Leonard Verduin's picturesque expression, to be a "creature of option."³

In sum, the human being is both a creature and a person; he or she is a created person. This, now, is the central mystery of man: how can man be both a creature and a person at the same time? To be a creature, as we have seen, means absolute dependence on God; to be a person means relative independence. To be a creature means that I cannot move a finger or utter a word apart from God; to be a person means that when my fingers are moved, I move them, and that when words are uttered by my lips, I utter them. To be creatures means that God is the potter and we are the clay (Rom. 9:21); to be persons means that we are the ones who fashion our lives by our own decisions (Gal. 6:7-8).

I have called this the central mystery of man because to us it seems deeply mysterious that man can be both a creature and a person at the same time. Dependence and freedom seem to us to be incompatible concepts. We grant that a child is completely dependent on his or her parents in infancy, but we note that as that child develops in the direction of greater freedom and maturity, the child becomes less dependent on his or her parents. This we can understand. But how are we to conceive of a relationship in which complete dependence on God and personal freedom to make our own decisions continue to go hand in hand?

Though we cannot rationally comprehend how it is possible for the human being to be a creature and

1. "Kitzō," TDNT, 3:1011.

2. More will be said in Chap. 12 about the meaning of the concept of freedom when applied to human beings.

3. Verduin develops this thought extensively in Chap. 5 of his *Somewhat less than God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

a person at the same time, clearly that is what we must think. Denial of either side of this paradox will fail to do justice to the biblical picture. The Bible teaches both man's creatureliness and man's personhood. Sometimes it addresses the human being as a creature; for example, when it speaks of God as the potter and man as the clay (Rom. 9:21). More often, however, it addresses him or her as a person: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15); "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

Our theological understanding of man must, therefore, keep both of these truths clearly in focus. All secular anthropologies fail to take into account human creatureliness and therefore give a distorted view of man. Any view of the human being that fails to see him or her as centrally related to, totally dependent on, and primarily responsible to God falls short of the truth. On the other hand, all deterministic anteterministic anthropologies which treat humans as if they were puppets or robots, perhaps with God pulling the strings or pushing the buttons, fail to do justice to human personhood, and therefore give an equally distorted view of man. Robert D. Brinsmead stated this point well:

"The creaturehood and the personhood of man must be held both together and in tension. When theology stresses creaturehood and subordinates personhood, a hard-faced determinism surfaces and man is dehumanized. ... When personhood is stressed to the exclusion of creaturehood, man is deified and God's sovereignty is compromised. The Lord is left standing helplessly in the wings as if man had the power to veto the plans and purposes of God."⁴...

Scripture teaches that God saves man by placing him into a covenant relationship with him. Since God is the Creator and man is a creature, it is obvious that God must take the initiative in placing his people into such a covenantal relationship – hence we say that the covenant of grace is unilateral in its origin. But since man is a person, he has responsibilities in this covenant, and must fulfill his covenant obligations – hence we say that the covenant of grace is bilateral in its fulfillment.

Further, the understanding of man as a created person helps us to answer the much-debated question of whether the covenant of grace is conditional or unconditional. Because man is a creature, the covenant is unconditional in its origin; God graciously establishes his covenant with his people apart from any conditions they must fulfill. But since man is also a person, God requires that his people fulfill certain conditions in order to enjoy the blessings of the covenant. But people can only fulfill these conditions through the enabling power of God. In the covenant of grace, therefore, both God's sovereign grace and man's serious responsibility come into focus. Hence the Bible contains both covenant promises and covenant threats, and we must do full justice to both...

Enough has been said to show that the understanding of man as a created person is both important and relevant. Theologians like myself who stand in the Reformed or Calvinistic tradition have commonly emphasized the creaturely aspect of man (his total dependence on God), and therefore the ultimate sovereignty of God in every area of life, particularly in the work of saving his people from their sins. Arminian theologians, on the other hand usually lay all the stress on man's personhood. Hence when they speak of the process of salvation they will emphasize the importance of man's voluntary decision and continuing faithfulness to God. Keeping in mind the paradox that man is both a creature and a person will help us do full justice to both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Those of us who stand in the Reformed tradition must not neglect or deny the responsibility of man; those who stand in the Arminian tradition should not neglect or deny the ultimate sovereignty of God.

Hoekema, Anthony A. *Created in God's Image*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 1986) p.5-7, 9-10.

4. "Man as Creature and Person," *Verdict* (Aug. 1978):21-22.

WHAT IS REFORMED ABOUT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY?

by Dr. Richard Pratt

People hear about Reformed Theological Seminary and often wonder why we call ourselves “Reformed.” Everyone knows the term basically means, “to be shaped or formed as before.” But what does it mean to call a seminary Reformed? What is Reformed about RTS?

Nearly forty years ago, the founders of RTS chose this name to identify the purpose of our seminary. Along with other evangelical seminaries throughout the world, our primary goal is to develop leaders for service in the body of Christ. RTS has helped to prepare thousands of pastors, counselors, missionaries, evangelists, teachers, youth ministers, and other church leaders in a variety of Christian denominations.

At the same time, however, our program at RTS is different from many evangelical seminaries. We emphasize a set of concerns that make us Reformed. What are these concerns? We can summarize our Reformed distinctives in three ways: Our Reformed Roots, Our Reformed Theology, and Our Reformed Hope.

OUR REFORMED ROOTS

We call ourselves Reformed because RTS is rooted in the Protestant Reformation. In the sixteenth century, many believers protested against false teachings in the church and returned to the true gospel under the leadership of Reformers such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. The term “Reformed” was associated primarily with Calvin’s work in the church of Geneva, but all Protestant Reformers held certain cardinal views in common.

At RTS, our historical roots extend to the central beliefs that characterized the Protestant Reformation. These commitments can be summarized in three basic doctrines: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, and *Sola Fide*.

Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone) expresses our strong commitment to the unquestionable authority of the Bible. The early Reformers saw many errors in the church of their day. Many of these false teachings stemmed from a denial of Biblical authority. The outlooks of human leaders in the church had risen to a level of authority equal to the Word of God. These human traditions led the church away from truth, and Protestants countered these false views by affirming the unique and supreme authority of the Bible.

At RTS, we believe it is very important to reaffirm the Bible as the final authority for God’s people. In many circles, the place of Scripture has been usurped by human traditions once again. Modern science, philosophy, and popular opinion have led many to deny the authority of Scripture. In response to these current problems, RTS affirms with the Reformers that the Bible is the only unquestionable authority. The apostle Paul told Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). In line with this apostolic witness, we affirm that the original manuscripts of the Bible are the inspired Word of God, without error. They stand as the final judge of truth in all areas of life. We have but one unquestionable rule of faith and life — the Scriptures.

Students at RTS find our belief in Sola Scriptura put into action. Every subject in our curriculum is oriented towards rightly examining and applying Scripture to the modern world. Students are taught to take every thought — theological, philosophical, historical, scientific, artistic, etc. — captive and make it obedient to Christ under the guidance of Scripture (II Cor. 10:4). You will never find our professors questioning the absolute authority of the Bible. Instead, we face the challenges of living for Christ by submitting ourselves absolutely to the Old and New Testaments as our ultimate authority.

Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) declares the Reformers' belief that the entirety of salvation is God's gracious gift through Christ. The Reformers encountered the false teaching that human beings could contribute to their own salvation. Believers were taught that they had to add their own merit to the work of Christ in order to receive eternal life. In response to this view, the Reformers insisted that salvation is by grace alone. As the Scripture teaches, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). We are without any hope in ourselves; redemption is a gift freely given by God through grace alone.

In our day, we need to hear this message of grace as never before. Many seminaries today teach that redemption is a mixture of divine help and human effort. Some schools teach their students a social gospel; deeds of kindness and charity will bring us salvation. Others teach that God's gracious favor is found through a system of legalism: do this... don't do that. In one way or another, good moral living becomes a way for us to earn God's grace and contribute to our own salvation.

RTS is committed to resisting any idea that diminishes the wonder of God's grace in salvation. The apostle Paul tells us that the eternal promises of God belong to those who "put no hope in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). Hence, we are committed to keeping the Bible's message of grace in the classroom. We will not turn away from complete reliance on God in order to put hope in human strength. We look to Christ and Christ alone to overcome the ravages of sin in our lives and in the world.

At RTS, we also teach our students the importance of letting grace saturate our community. We work hard to have a caring, friendly atmosphere that reflects the mercy of God. There isn't one of us who is not in need of a lot of patience and mercy — both human and divine. God stooped low, really low, to scoop us up. He went to immeasurable lengths to give and forgive. How then can we not respond with grace toward the others in our seminary community? Indeed, freely we have received; freely we must give (Matt. 10:8).

At RTS, we teach that biblical obedience comes as a response to God's grace, not as a prerequisite for receiving it. We are to be motivated by love for God and gratitude for all He has done. We have no greater honor than to submit ourselves fully to the commands of a good God and let Him conform us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). At the same time, we avoid all forms of legalism that insist on life habits which go beyond the teachings of Scripture. Instead, we promote Christian liberty and affirm the dignity of the believer's conscience in applying the incontrovertible truths of Scripture. Here again, RTS stands with the Reformers and relentlessly affirms that we are saved by grace alone.

Sola Fide (Faith Alone) teaches that justification before God is a one-time event that takes place through faith alone. The early Reformers protested against a church that believed the people's eternal standing before God varied moment by moment. No one could be confident of eternal salvation. Doing good gained the favor of God; doing evil earned His anger. In response, the Protestants reaffirmed the biblical perspective: "to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith

is credited as righteousness” (Rom. 4:5). In assuring believers of their unchangeable status with God, Paul goes on to say, “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Rom. 8: 33-34). Everyone who trusts in Christ by faith for salvation receives immediate and full forgiveness of all their sins. God’s declaration of righteousness is the complete and final verdict for all who have genuine faith in the Savior.

At RTS, we believe that everyone preparing for church leadership needs to stand firmly on belief in justification by faith alone. All around us people believe their eternal destinies hang in the balance of each day’s activities. At RTS, however, we serve Christ out of the confidence that God has forgiven us of our sins, and credited to our account the righteousness of Christ. When men and women place their faith in Christ, they are set free to serve God with a bold assurance, not out of fear and dread. This confidence in our justification by faith alone then equips us to bring the Gospel of Christ to our lost and dying world.

The administration, faculty, and students of RTS admire the early Protestant Reformers for what they did; we stand with them as heralds of the Reformed faith. They had the wisdom and courage to formulate biblical truth amid much opposition. Alongside their powerful convictions, however, they also had the humility to state repeatedly, “The Reformed Church is always reforming.” Like the Reformers, we at RTS face the challenges of our day with conviction and humility. We must always look for new ways to apply the timeless truths of Scripture to our own generation. With an innovative and pioneering spirit we must engage the world of the twenty-first century just as the Reformers engaged the world in the sixteenth century. We believe the best way to prepare church leaders today is to help them sink their own roots into the great truths of the Protestant Reformation.

OUR REFORMED THEOLOGY

We also call ourselves Reformed because we affirm the theology that grew out of the Reformation. The contours of this body of doctrine are conveniently outlined in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, as well as in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

RTS is firmly committed to Reformed Theology. Every year our faculty members affirm their agreement with the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. This summary of biblical teachings provides a doctrinal orientation for all of our classes.

Reformed Theology includes many items affirmed by all evangelicals. Nevertheless, we also have some distinctive doctrinal emphases. For instance, at the heart of Reformed Theology is belief in God’s sovereignty and human dependence. Put simply, we believe the Scriptures teach that God is in complete and absolute control of His creation. We depend on Him for all we have and are. These central beliefs are especially important in Reformed outlooks on the plan of salvation.

In the first place, Reformed Theology stresses that God sovereignly accomplished salvation for His people through a single Covenant of Grace extending from one end of the Bible to the other. This covenant relationship between God and His redeemed people unfolded in many stages throughout biblical history, but these various stages are aspects of one unified Covenant in Christ. Believers before Christ’s incarnation looked ahead to salvation coming in Christ. New Testament believers look back at the redemption completed in Christ’s death and resurrection. This Covenant of Grace in Christ has always been the only divinely ordained plan for salvation from sin.

In the second place, God also displays His sovereignty and our utter dependence as He applies the Covenant of Grace to individual believers. It often helps to summarize this aspect of biblical teaching in “The Five Points of Reformed Theology:”

The Five Points

1. Total Depravity: We stress the pervasive corruption of sin. Sin reaches every aspect of human personality and leaves no nook or cranny untainted. The prophet Jeremiah writes, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). For this reason, all people are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1) and unable, apart from the inward stirrings of the Holy Spirit, to respond in faith to the offer of the Gospel. We must depend on a sovereign act of God to break the grip of sin.

2. Unconditional Election: We believe that the eternal, unconditional love of God for us is the ultimate basis of our salvation. Believers do not establish their own redemption; they utterly depend on God’s sovereign, everlasting love in Christ as the ground of their salvation. As Paul wrote, “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

3. Particular Redemption: We emphasize that Christ’s atoning death did not simply make salvation possible. Rather, His sacrifice on the cross completely accomplished the salvation of believers. Christ died for “His sheep” (John 10: 11, 15), “His Church” (Acts 20:28), and “His People” (Matt. 1: 21) to give them eternal life. God sovereignly ordained Christ’s death as the full payment for our sins. Thus, it fully satisfied the judgment of God for those who believe.

4. Irresistible Grace: We recognize that salvation comes to sinful people because the Holy Spirit sovereignly changes their rebellious hearts. He gives them the spiritual ears with which to hear the call of God. The sheep hear the voice of Christ, are known by Him, and follow Him (John 10:27). We depend on His powerful grace to transform us into new creations and to draw us to our Savior.

5. Perseverance of the Saints: We stress that God’s power will keep true believers in Christ to the end. While we recognize our responsibility to “work out our salvation” with great seriousness (Phil. 2:12), we also affirm that it is God who is at work within us both “to will and to do His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Thus, we persevere in faith with the assurance of eternal life because God sovereignly works all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

The Reformed outlook on God’s plan of salvation is the heartbeat of our seminary. We proclaim God’s sovereign grace as the only hope for a lost and dying world.

OUR REFORMED HOPE

We also call ourselves Reformed because of our hope for the future. All believers look forward to that great day when Jesus will return in glory. We share this vision with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet, throughout the centuries the Reformed branch of the church has sought ways to bring the Gospel to all areas of life.

Our Reformed Hope motivates us to expand the Kingdom in two ways. First, RTS prepares men and women to bring the Gospel to all people in every part of the world. Our faculty and administrators regularly involve themselves in a variety of cross-cultural ministries. We encourage our students to

serve every segment of American society. We prepare international students to build up the body of Christ in their homelands. Moreover, we challenge our students to consider the call to foreign missions. We are told that Christ purchased people for God “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). Therefore, the proclamation of the Gospel to all people is one of the chief aims of our seminary.

Second, our Reformed Hope looks beyond preaching and the building of the church. We believe that the Lordship of Christ extends to all areas of life. Christ is Lord not only of the church; He is supreme over the family, the arts and sciences, and human society at large. For this reason, we do not withdraw from the world. Rather, we prepare our students to bring the Word of God to bear on every dimension of human culture. As the Gospel spreads, believers are to transform their cultures to the honor and glory of God. We are the bearers of God’s image. We are to fill the earth, every aspect of the earth, with the knowledge of God our creator and redeemer, and thus fulfill the mandate given to Adam and Eve so long ago (Gen. 1:27-28).

Lots of people wonder why we call ourselves RTS. “What is Reformed about RTS?” they ask. We have touched on the basic commitments that underline this name. Now we hope you will learn more about our Reformed Roots, Theology, and Hope. They have much to offer to all Christians as they prepare to serve Christ and His church.

Pratt, Richard L. “What is Reformed about Reformed Theological Seminary?.” Reformed Theological Seminary . RTS, n.d. Web. 27 Sept. 2013. <http://www.rts.edu/Site/Resources/Booklets/What_is_Reformed.pdf>.

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THE MISSIONAL CHURCH

by Tim Keller

The rapid decline of Christendom since the end of WWII has instituted an even greater need for “missional” churches to engage the surrounding community and retell the culture’s stories through the context of the gospel.

THE NEED FOR A MISSIONAL CHURCH

In the West for nearly a thousand years, the relationship of European Christian churches to the broader culture was a relationship known as “Christendom.” The institutions of society “Christianized” people and stigmatized non-Christian belief and behavior. Though people were Christianized by the culture, they were not necessarily regenerated or converted with the gospel. The church’s job was then to challenge persons into a vital, living relationship with Christ.

There were great advantages and yet great disadvantages to Christendom. The advantage was a common language for public moral discourse with which society could discuss what was “good.” The disadvantage was that Christian morality without gospel-changed hearts often led to cruelty and hypocrisy. Think of how the small town in Christendom treated the unwed mother, for example. Also, under Christendom the church often was silent against the ruling classes’ abuses of the weak. For these reasons and others, the church in Europe and North America has been losing its privileged place as the arbiter of public morality since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The decline of Christendom has accelerated greatly since the end of World War II.

British missionary Lesslie Newbigin went to India around 1950. There he was involved with a church in a very non-Christian culture. When he returned to England some thirty years later, he discovered that the Western church now found itself in a non-Christian society as well, but it had not adapted to its new situation. Though public institutions and the popular culture of Europe and North America no longer Christianized people, the church still ran its ministries assuming that a stream of Christianized, traditional/moral people would simply show up at worship services. Some churches certainly carried out evangelism as one ministry among many, but the church in the West had not become completely missional—adapting and reformulating absolutely everything it did in worship, discipleship, community, and service so as to be engaged with the non-Christian society around it. It had not developed a missiology of Western culture, the way it had done with other nonbelieving cultures.

One of the reasons much of the evangelical church in the United States has not experienced the same precipitous decline as the Protestant churches of Europe and Canada is because in the United States there is still a heartland with remnants of the old Christendom society. There the informal public culture, though not the formal public institutions, still stigmatizes non-Christian beliefs and behavior. There is a “fundamental schism in American cultural, political, and economic life. There’s the quicker-growing, economically vibrant . . . morally relativist, urban-oriented, culturally adventuresome, sexually polymorphous, and ethnically diverse nation. . . .

And there’s the small-town, nuclear-family, religiously oriented, white-centric other America, [with] . . . its diminishing cultural and economic force. . . . [T]wo countries.”¹ In conservative regions, it is still possible to see people professing faith and the church growing without becoming missional. Most traditional evangelical churches can win to Christ only people who are temperamentally traditional and conservative. As Wolff notes, however, this is a shrinking market, and eventually evangelical churches

1. Michael Wolff, “The Party Line,” *New York* (February 26, 2001): 19.

ensconced in the declining, remaining enclaves of Christendom will have to learn how to become missional. If they do not, they will decline or die. We don't simply need evangelistic churches; rather, we need missional churches.

THE PRACTICES OF A MISSIONAL CHURCH

SPEAK IN THE VERNACULAR

In Christendom there is little difference between the language inside and outside of the church; technical biblical terms are well known inside and outside church life. Documents of the early U.S. Congress, for example, are riddled with allusions to and references from the Bible. In a missional church, however, these terms must be explained.

The missional church:

- avoids “tribal” language, stylized prayer language, unnecessarily pious evangelical jargon, and archaic language that seeks to set a spiritual tone.
- avoids “we-they” language, disdainful jokes that mock people of different politics and beliefs, and dismissive, disrespectful comments about those who differ with us.
- avoids sentimental, pompous, “inspirational” talk.
- avoids talking as if nonbelieving people were not present. If you speak and discourse as if your whole neighborhood were present (and not just scattered Christians), eventually more and more of your neighbors will find their way in or be invited.

Unless all of the above is the outflow of a truly humble-bold, gospel-changed heart, it is all just marketing and spin.

ENTER AND RETELL THE CULTURE'S STORIES WITH THE GOSPEL

In Christendom it is possible to simply exhort Christianized people to do what they know they should. There is little or no real engagement, listening, or persuasion. Often, along with exhortation there is a heavy reliance on guilt to motivate behavior change. In a missional church, the preaching and communication always assume the presence of skeptical people and consequently engage their stories.

- To *enter the culture's stories* means to show sympathy toward and deep acquaintance with the literature, music, theater, and other arts expressing the existing culture's hopes, dreams, heroic narratives, and fears.
- To *retell the culture's stories* is to show how only in Christ can we have freedom without slavery, and embrace of the other without injustice. The older culture's story called on people to be a good father/mother, son/daughter, and to live a decent, merciful, good life. Now the culture's story calls people (a) to be free and self-created and authentic (note the theme of freedom from oppression); and (b) to make the world safe for everyone else to be the same (theme of inclusion of the “other”; justice).

THEOLOGICALLY TRAIN LAYPEOPLE FOR PUBLIC LIFE AND VOCATION

In Christendom you can afford to train people solely in prayer, Bible study, and evangelism—private world skills—because they are not facing radically non-Christian values in their public life. In a missional church, the laity needs theological education to “think Christianly” about everything and to work with Christian distinctiveness. They need to know three things: (a) which cultural practices manifest common grace and are to be embraced, (b) which practices are antithetical to the gospel and must be rejected, and (c) which practices can be adapted/revised.

- In a missional situation, the renewing and transformation of the culture through the work of laypeople with distinctively Christian vocations must be lifted up as real kingdom work and ministry, along with the traditional ministry of the Word.
- Christians will have to use the gospel to demonstrate true, biblical love and tolerance in the public square toward those with whom we deeply differ. This tolerance should equal or exceed that which groups with opposing views show toward Christians. The charge of intolerance is perhaps the main “defeater” of the gospel in the non-Christian West.

CREATE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY THAT IS COUNTERCULTURAL AND COUNTERINTUITIVE

In Christendom, “fellowship” is basically just a set of nurturing relationships, support, and accountability. In a missional church, however, Christian community must go beyond that to embody a counterculture, showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money, and power.

- *In sex.* We avoid both the secular society’s idolization of sex and traditional society’s fear of sex. We also exhibit love rather than hostility or fear toward those whose sexual life-patterns are different from ours.
- *In money.* We promote a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the immigrant, and the economically and physically weak.
- *In power.* We are committed to power sharing and relationship building among races and classes that are alienated outside of the body of Christ. A missional church must be deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice and deeply and practically committed to evangelism and conversion.

PRACTICE CHRISTIAN UNITY AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

In Christendom, when “everyone was a Christian,” it was perhaps necessary for a church to define itself over against other churches—that is, to gain an identity you had to say, “We are not like that church over there or those Christians over here.” Today, however, it is much more illuminating and helpful for a church to define itself over against “the world”—the values of the non-Christian culture.

- It is very important that we do not spend our time bashing and criticizing other kinds of churches. That criticalness simply plays into the common “defeater” that Christians are all intolerant.
- While we have to align ourselves in denominations that share many of our distinctives, at the local level we should cooperate with, reach out to, and support the other congregations and churches in our area. This will raise many thorny issues, of course, but our bias should be in the direction of cooperation.

A CASE STUDY

This concept of the missional church goes beyond any program; the practices described here have to be present in every area of the church.

For example, what makes a small group missional? A missional small group is not necessarily one that is doing some kind of specific evangelism program (though that is to be encouraged). Rather, (1) if its members love and talk positively about the city/neighborhood, (2) if they speak in language

that is not filled with pious tribal or technical terms and phrases, nor with disdainful and embattled verbiage, (3) if in their Bible study they apply the gospel to the core concerns and stories of the people of the culture, (4) if they are obviously interested in and engaged with the literature, art and thought of the surrounding culture and can discuss it both appreciatively and critically, (5) if they exhibit deep concern for the poor, generosity with their money, purity and respect with regard to the opposite sex, and humility toward people of other races and cultures, and (6) if they do not bash other Christians and churches—then seekers and nonbelieving people will be invited and will come and stay as they explore spiritual issues.

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LEADERSHIP AND CHURCH SIZE DYNAMICS

by Tim Keller

One of the most common reasons for pastoral leadership mistakes is blindness to the significance of church size. Size has an enormous impact on how a church functions. There is a “size culture” that profoundly affects how decisions are made, how relationships flow, how effectiveness is evaluated, and what ministers, staff, and lay leaders do.

We tend to think of the chief differences between churches mainly in denominational or theological terms, but that underestimates the impact of size on how a church operates. The difference between how churches of 100 and 1,000 function may be much greater than the difference between a Presbyterian and a Baptist church of the same size. The staff person who goes from a church of 400 to a church of 2,000 is in many ways making a far greater change than if he or she moved from one denomination to another.

A large church is not simply a bigger version of a small church. The difference in communication, community formation, and decision-making processes are so great that the leadership skills required in each are of almost completely different orders.

SIZE CULTURES

Every church has a culture that goes with its size and which must be accepted. Most people tend to prefer a certain size culture, and unfortunately, many give their favorite size culture a moral status and treat other size categories as spiritually and morally inferior. They may insist that the only biblical way to do church is to practice a certain size culture despite the fact that the congregation they attend is much too big or too small to fit that culture.

For example, if some members of a church of 2,000 feel they should be able to get the senior pastor personally on the phone without much difficulty, they are insisting on getting a kind of pastoral care that a church of under 200 provides. Of course the pastor would soon be overwhelmed. Yet the members may insist that if he can't be reached he is failing his biblical duty to be their shepherd.

Another example: the new senior pastor of a church of 1,500 may insist that virtually all decisions be made by consensus among the whole board and staff. Soon the board is meeting every week for six hours each time! Still the pastor may insist that for staff members to be making their own decisions would mean they are acting unaccountably or failing to build community. To impose a size-culture practice on a church that does not have that size will wreak havoc on it and eventually force the church back into the size with which the practices are compatible.

A further example: New members who have just joined a smaller church after years of attending a much larger one may begin complaining about the lack of professional quality in the church's ministries and insisting that this shows a lack of spiritual excellence. The real problem, however, is that in the smaller church volunteers do things that in the larger church are done by full-time staff. Similarly, new members of the smaller church might complain that the pastor's sermons are not as polished and well researched as they had come to expect in the larger church. While a large-church pastor with multiple staff can afford to put twenty hours a week into sermon preparation, however, the solo pastor of a smaller church can devote less than half of that time each week.

This means a wise pastor may have to sympathetically confront people who are just not able to handle the church's size culture—just like many people cannot adapt to life in geographic cultures different from the one they were used to. Some people are organizationally suspicious, often for valid reasons from their experience. Others can't handle not having the preacher as their pastor. We must suggest to them they are asking for the impossible in a church that size. We must not imply that it would be immaturity on their part to seek a different church, though we should not actively encourage anyone to leave, either.

HEALTHY RESISTANCE

Every church has aspects of its natural size culture that must be resisted.

Larger churches have a great deal of difficulty keeping track of members who drop out or fall away from the faith. This should never be accepted as inevitable. Rather, the large church must continually struggle to improve pastoral care and discipleship.

Out of necessity, the large church must use organizational techniques from the business world, but the danger is that ministry may become too results-oriented and focused on quantifiable outcomes (attendance, membership, giving) rather than the goals of holiness and character growth. Again, this tendency should not be accepted as inevitable; rather, new strategies for focusing on love and virtue must always be generated.

The smaller church by its nature gives immature, outspoken, opinionated, and broken members a significant degree of power over the whole body. Since everyone knows everyone else, when members of a family or small group express strong opposition to the direction set by the pastor and leaders, their misery can hold the whole congregation hostage. If they threaten to leave, the majority of people will urge the leaders to desist in their project. It is extremely difficult to get complete consensus about programs and direction in a group of 50–150 people, especially in today's diverse, fragmented society, and yet smaller churches have an unwritten rule that for any new initiative to be implemented nearly everyone must be happy with it. Leaders of small churches must be brave enough to lead and to confront immature members, in spite of the unpleasantness involved.

There is no "best size" for a church. Each size presents great difficulties and also many opportunities for ministry that churches of other sizes cannot undertake (at least not as well). Only together can churches of all sizes be all that Christ wants the church to be.

PRINCIPLES OF SIZE DYNAMICS

Reading books on church size can be confusing, as everyone breaks down the size categories somewhat differently. This is because there are many variables in a church's culture and history that determine exactly when a congregation gets to a new size barrier. For example, everyone knows that at some point a church becomes too large for one pastor to handle. People begin to complain that they are not getting adequate pastoral care. The time has come to add staff. But when does that happen? In some communities it may happen when attendance arises to 120, while in others it does not happen until the church has nearly 300 in regular attendance. It depends a great deal on expectations, the mobility of the city's population, how fast the church has grown, and so on. Despite the variables, the point at which a second pastoral staff member must be added is usually called "the 200 barrier." That is a good average figure, but keep in mind that your own church might reach that threshold at some different attendance figure.

Here are the general trends or changes that come as a church grows larger.

INCREASING COMPLEXITY

The larger the church, the less its members have in common. There is more diversity in factors such as age, family status, ethnicity, and so on, and thus a church of 400 needs four to five times more programs than a church of 200—not two times more. Larger churches are much more complex than their smaller counterparts. They have multiple services, multiple groups, and multiple tracks, and eventually they really are multiple congregations.

Also, the larger the church, the more staff per capita needs to be added. Often the first ministry staff persons are added for every increase of 150–200 in attendance. A church of 500 may have two or three full-time ministry staff, but eventually ministry staff may need to be added for every 75–100 new persons. Thus a church of 2,000 may have twenty-five staff.

SHIFTING LAY-STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

On the one hand, the larger the church the more decision making falls to the staff rather than to the whole membership or even the lay leaders. The elders or board must increasingly deal with only top-level, big-picture issues. This means the larger the church, the more decision making is *pushed up* toward the staff and away from the congregation and lay leaders. Needless to say, many laypeople feel extremely uncomfortable with this.

On the other hand, the larger the church, the more the basic pastoral ministry such as hospital visits, discipling, oversight of Christian growth, and counseling is done by lay leaders rather than by the professional ministers.

Generally, in small churches policy is decided by many and ministry is done by a few, while in the large church ministry is done by many and policy is decided by a few.

INCREASING INTENTIONALITY

The larger the church, the more systematic and deliberate the assimilation of newcomers needs to be. As a church grows, newcomers are not visible to the congregation's members. Thus new people are not spontaneously and informally welcomed and invited in. Pathways for assimilation must be identified or established by asking questions such as these:

- How will newcomers get here?
- How will they be identified by the church?
- Where will unbelievers learn Christianity's relevance, content, and credibility?
- Who will move them along the path?
- Where will believers get plugged in?
- Who will help them?

The larger the church, the harder it is to recruit volunteers and thus a more well-organized volunteer recruitment process is required. Why is this so? First, the larger the church, the more likely it is that someone you don't know well will try to recruit you. It is much easier to say no to someone you do not know than to someone you know well. Second, it is easier to feel less personally responsible for the ministries of a large church: "They have lots of people here—they don't need me." Therefore, the larger the church, the more well-organized and formal the recruitment of volunteers must be.

INCREASING REDUNDANCY OF COMMUNICATION

The larger the church, the better communication has to be. Without multiple forms and repeated messages, people will feel left out and complain, “I wasn’t told about it.” You know you’ve crossed into a higher size category when such complaints become constant. Informal communication networks (pulpit announcements, newsletter notices, and word of mouth) are insufficient to reach everyone. More lead time is necessary to communicate well.

INCREASING QUALITY OF PRODUCTION

The larger the church, the more planning and organization must go into events. A higher quality of production in general is expected in a larger church and events cannot simply be thrown together. Spontaneous, last-minute events do not work.

The larger the church, the higher its aesthetic bar must be. In smaller churches the worship experience is rooted mainly in horizontal relationships among those who attend. Musical offerings from singers who are untrained and not especially talented are nonetheless appreciated because “we all know them” and they are members of the fellowship. But the larger the church, the more worship is based on the vertical relationship— on a sense of transcendence. If an outsider comes in who doesn’t know the musicians, then a mediocre quality of production will distract them from worship. They don’t have a relationship with the musicians to offset the lack of giftedness. So the larger the church, the more the music becomes an inclusion factor.

INCREASING OPENNESS TO CHANGE

The larger the church, the more it is subject to frequent and sudden change. Why?

First, smaller churches tend to have little turnover: individual members feel powerful and necessary and so they stay put.

Second, the larger the church, the more power for decision making moves away from the whole congregation to the leaders and staff. Too much is going on for the congregation or the board or eventually even the staff to make all the decisions as a group. As decision-making power comes into the hands of individual staff or volunteer leaders, change happens more quickly. Decisions can be made expeditiously without everyone signing on.

Further, as we saw above, the larger the church, the more complex it is and therefore the more schedules, events, and programs there are to change.

LOSING MEMBERS BECAUSE OF CHANGES

The larger the church, the more it loses members because of changes. Why? Smaller churches seek at all costs to avoid losing members. As a result, certain individuals and small groups often come to exercise power disproportionate to their numbers. If a change were made, someone invariably would experience it as a loss, and since the smaller church has a great fear of conflict, it usually will not institute a change that might result in lost members. Thus smaller churches tend to have a more stable membership than large churches do.

In larger churches small groups and individual members have far less ability to exert power or resist changes they dislike. And (as noted previously) since larger churches undergo constant change, they regularly lose members because “It’s too big now” or “I can’t see the pastor anymore” or “We don’t pray spontaneously any more in church.” Leaders of churches that grow large are more willing to lose

members who disagree with procedures or the philosophy of ministry.

SHIFTING ROLE OF THE MINISTERS

The larger the church, the less available the main preacher is to do pastoral work. In smaller churches the pastor is available at all times, for most occasions and needs, to any member or unchurched person. In the large church there are sometimes more lay ministers, staff, and leaders than the small church has people! So the large church's pastors must recognize their limits and spend more time with staff and lay shepherds and in prayer and meditation.

The larger the church, the more important the minister's leadership abilities are. Preaching and pastoring are sufficient skills for pastors in smaller churches, but as a church grows other leadership skills become critical. In a large church not only administrative skills but also vision casting and strategy design are crucial gifts in the pastoral team.

The larger the church, the more the ministry staff members must move from being generalists to being specialists. Everyone from the senior pastor on down must focus on certain ministry areas and concentrate on two or three main tasks. The larger the church, the more the senior pastor must specialize in preaching, vision keeping and vision casting, and identifying problems before they become disasters.

Finally, the larger the church, the more important it is for ministers, especially the senior minister, to stay put for a long time. As noted above, smaller churches change less rapidly and have less turnover. With this innate stability, a smaller church can absorb a change of minister every few years if necessary. But the larger the church, the more the staff in general and the senior pastor in particular are the main sources of continuity and stability. Rapid turnover of staff is highly detrimental to a large church.

STRUCTURING SMALLER

The larger the church, the smaller the basic pastoral span of care.

In smaller churches, classes and groups can be larger because virtually everyone in the church is cared for directly by full-time trained ministry staff, each of whom can care for 50–200 people. In larger churches, however, the internal groupings need to be smaller, because people are cared for by lay shepherds, each of whom can care for 10–20 people if given proper supervision and support. Thus in a larger church, the more small groups you have per 100 people in attendance, the better cared for people are and the faster the church grows.

EMPHASIS ON VISION AND STRENGTHS

The larger the church, the more it tends to concentrate on doing fewer things well. Smaller churches are generalists and feel the need to do everything. This comes from the power of the individual in a small church. If any member wants the church to address some issue, then the church makes an effort in order to please him or her. The larger church, however, identifies and concentrates on approximately three or four major things and works to do them extremely well, despite calls for new emphases.

Further, the larger the church, the more a distinctive vision becomes important to its members. The reason for being in a smaller church is relationships. The reason for putting up with all the changes and difficulties of a larger church is to get mission done. People join a larger church because of the

vision—so the particular mission needs to be clear.

The larger the church, the more it develops its own mission outreach rather than supporting already existing programs. Smaller churches tend to support denominational mission causes and contribute to existing para-church ministries. Leaders and members of larger churches feel more personally accountable to God for the kingdom mandate and seek to either start their own mission ministries or to form partnerships in which there is more direct accountability of the mission agency to the church.

Consequently, the larger the church, the more its lay leaders need to be screened for agreement on vision and philosophy of ministry, not simply for doctrinal and moral standards. In smaller churches, people are eligible for leadership on the basis of membership tenure and faithfulness. In larger churches, where a distinctive mission and vision are more important, it is important to enlist without apology leaders who share a common philosophy of ministry with the staff and other leaders.

SPECIFIC SIZE CATEGORIES

HOUSE CHURCH: UP TO 40 ATTENDANCE...

SMALL CHURCH: 40–200 ATTENDANCE...

MEDIUM-SIZED CHURCH, 200–450 ATTENDANCE

Character

In smaller churches, each member is acquainted with the entire membership of the church. The primary circle of belonging is the church as a whole. But in the medium-sized church, the primary circle of belonging is usually a specific affinity class or program. Men's and women's ministries, the choir, the couples' class, the evening worship team, the local prison ministry, the meals-on-wheels ministry—all of these are possible circles of belonging that make the church fly. Each of these subgroups is approximately the size of the house church, 10–40 people.

Leadership functions differently in the medium-sized church.

- First, since the medium-sized church has far more complexity, the leaders must represent the various constituencies in the church (e.g., the older people, the young families).
- Second, there is too much work to be handled by a small board. There are now influential leadership teams or committees, such as the missions committee or the music/worship committee, that have significant power.
- Third, because of the two factors above, leaders begin to be chosen less on the basis of length of tenure and strength of personality and more on the basis of skills and giftedness.
- Fourth, the role of the lay officers or board begins to change. In the smaller church, the officers basically oversee the pastor and staff, giving or withholding permission for various proposals. The pastor and staff then do the ministry. In the medium-sized church, the officers begin to do more of the ministry themselves, in partnership with the staff. Volunteer ministry leaders often rise up and become the decision-making leaders. Chairs of influential committees sit on the official board.

As noted above, the senior minister shifts somewhat from being a shepherd toward becoming a “rancher.” Rather than doing all of the ministry himself, he becomes a trainer and organizer of laypeople doing ministry. He also must be adept at training, supporting, and supervising ministry and administrative staff. At the medium-sized church level, this requires significant administrative skills.

While in the smaller church change and decisions come from the bottom up through key laypeople, in the medium-sized church change happens through key committees and teams. Ordinarily the official board or session in the medium-sized church is inherently conservative. They feel very responsible and do not want to offend any constituents they believe they represent. Therefore change is usually driven by forward-thinking committees such as the missions committee or the evangelism committee. These can be very effective in persuading the congregation to try new things.

How it grows

As noted earlier, smaller churches grow mainly through pastor-initiated groups, classes, and ministries. The medium-sized church will also grow as it multiplies classes, groups, services, and ministries, but the key to medium-sized growth is improving the quality of the ministries and their effectiveness to meet real needs. The small church can accommodate amateurish quality because the key attraction is its intimacy and family-like warmth. But the medium-sized church’s ministries must be different. Classes really must be great learning experiences. Music must meet aesthetic needs. Preaching must inform and inspire.

Crossing the threshold to the next size category

I have said that the small church crosses the 200 barrier through (1) multiplying options, (2) going to multiple staff, (3) shifting decision-making power away from the whole membership, (4) becoming more formal and deliberate in assimilation, and (5) moving the pastor away from shepherding everyone to being more of an organizer/administrator. You can grow beyond 200 without making all of these five changes; in fact, most churches do. Often churches grow past 200 while holding on to one or more of the smaller-church attitudes. For example, if the senior minister is multigifted and energetic, he can take care of the organizational/administrative work and still have time to visit every member of his church. Or perhaps new staff persons are added but the decision-making is still done on a whole-congregation consensus model. But to break 400, you must firmly break the old habits in all five areas. As for the sixth change—moving to new space and facilities—this is usually needed for a medium-sized church to break the growth barrier, but not always.

LARGE CHURCH, 400–800 ATTENDANCE

Character

We have seen that in the small church, the primary circle of belonging is the entire church body. In the medium-sized church, the primary circle is the affinity class or ministry group, which is usually 10–40 in size. However, in the large church the primary circle of belonging becomes the small group fellowship. This is different from the affinity class or ministry in the following ways:

- It is usually smaller—as small as 4 and no bigger than 15.
- It is more of a “miniature church” than is the affinity class or ministry. Affinity classes or ministries are specialty programs, focusing only on learning or worship music or ministry to the poor and so on. The small group fellowship does Bible study, fellowship, worship, and ministry.

Leadership also functions differently in the large church. In the small church, leaders were selected for their tenure; in the medium-sized church, for their skills and maturity. Both of these are still very desirable! But in the large church, these qualities must be combined with a commitment to the church's distinct vision and mission. The larger the church becomes, the more it develops certain key ministries and strengths that it emphasizes, and the common vision is an important reason that members join. So leaders need to be screened for vision as well as other qualifications.

In the small church, the board gave or withheld permission to the pastor(s), who did the ministry. In the medium-sized church, the board is made up of lay leaders and committee chairs who share the ministry work with the pastors and staff. But in the large church, the board must work with the senior minister to set overall vision and goals and then to evaluate the overall ministry. Unlike the small church board, they don't oversee all the staff—they let the senior minister do that. Unlike the medium church board, they may not necessarily be the lay leaders of ministry. Instead they oversee how the church and ministries are doing as a whole.

In the large church, the roles of individual staff members become increasingly specialized, and that also goes for the role of the senior minister. He must concentrate more and more on (a) preaching and (b) vision casting and strategizing. He must let go of many or most administrative tasks; otherwise he becomes a bottleneck.

While in the small church change and decisions happen from the bottom up through powerful lay individuals, and in the medium-sized church they come from the boards and committees, in the large church they happen "top down" from staff and key lay leaders.

How it grows

The small church grows mainly through new groups, classes, and ministries initiated by the pastor, sometimes with the help of an ally. I call this the "backyard approach," since it grows from informal new fellowship circles. The medium-sized church grows mainly through ministries that effectively target "felt needs" of various groups such as youth, seniors, young married couples, and "seekers." I call this the "side-door approach," since it brings in various people groups from your city or neighborhood by addressing their felt needs. The large church, however, grows through a "front-door" approach. The key to its growth is what happens in the worship services—the quality of the preaching, the transcendence of the worship experience, and so on.

Crossing the threshold to the next size category

The same five changes mentioned before need to be taken to the next level.

First change—multiplying options. Up to the "800 barrier," churches can still get away with having a mediocre or poor small-group system. The people may still be getting shepherded mainly through larger programs, affinity classes, and groups that are run by staff people directly. But if God keeps sending you new people, so that you are bumping up against the 800 barrier, you must have the majority of your members and adherents in small groups that are very well run and that do pastoral care, not just Bible study. Multiple services were more important when addressing the 200 or 400 barrier, but small group life is the key to navigating this change.

Second change—multiplying staff. Up to the "800 barrier" churches can still get away with a small staff of generalists, but after the 800 barrier there must be much more specialization. Staff members must be increasingly gifted, and not simply workers, nor even leaders of workers, but leaders of

leaders. They must be fairly mature, independent, and able to attract and supervise others.

Third change—shifting decision-making power. Up to the “800 barrier,” decision-making power was becoming more centralized—migrating from the periphery (the whole membership or the whole lay board) to the center (the staff and eventually the senior staff). Now the decision-making power must become more decentralized—migrating out away from the senior staff and pastor to the individual staff and their leadership teams. As noted above, the staff must become increasingly competent and must be given more authority to make decisions in their area without having to run everything through the senior staff or lay board.

Fourth change—becoming more formal and deliberate in assimilation. Assimilation, discipline, and incorporation of newcomers must become even more well organized, highly detailed, and supervised.

Fifth change—adapting the senior pastor’s role. The pastor becomes even less accessible to do individual shepherding and concentrates even more on preaching, large group teaching, vision casting, and strategizing.

THE VERY LARGE CHURCH...

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ROMANS 1:1-7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, 6 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

7 To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

GENESIS 1:1-3, 26-28

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light....

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image,

in the image of God he created him;

male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

GENESIS 2:15-25

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 19 Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

GENESIS 3:1-15

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

14 The LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

REVELATION 21:1-4, 22-27

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ...

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

REVELATION 22:1-5

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

LUKE 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

“The most obvious fact about praise — whether of God or anything — strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless ...shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise — lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game — praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars. I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious, minds, praised most, while the cranks, misfits, and malcontents praised least... Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, praise almost seems to be inner health made audible. ... I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: “Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?” The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about. My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what we indeed can’t help doing, about everything else we value. ...

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed... If it were possible for a created soul fully... to “appreciate”, that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme beatitude... The Scotch catechism says that man’s chief end is “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.”

- C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*

“The dialogical nature of Christian worship is a give-and-take, back-and-forth interaction: God calls us; by his grace we respond by gathering, invoking his grace and mercy; and God in turn responds to our cry. This give-and-take indicates that we are dealing with a personal God who takes the initiative to engage in a relationship with humanity. It is an exchange of gifts that indicates God’s gracious reciprocity. Implicit in this is also something fundamental about the nature of humanity: human flourishing is dependent upon our being oriented to and defined by this relationship.”

-James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*

MEMBERSHIP VOWS

In worship new members will answer the following questions in front of the congregation.

- 1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?*
- 2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?*
- 3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?*
- 4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?*
- 5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?*

