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# SYMBOLS OF GOD'S PRESENCE TO THE CHURCH

## Verbal and Nonverbal

GERARD S. SLOYAN

**A**t the beginning of the first millennium of the Christian era, synagogues were all-purpose buildings for assembly in village and town. Great numbers of them were to be found in Jerusalem and the larger cities of the diaspora. One of the purposes to which the buildings were put was weekly gathering for instruction in Torah, hence to this day the Yiddish term survives as *shul*. The people did not assemble in them for prayer but for learning. Prayer for the Jews was and is in the home and family. On the three great pilgrimage feasts and for Jerusalemites throughout the year, the common worship of sacrifice was in the Second Temple of Herod's construction on Holy Zion. The building was magnificent, as we know, "out-Solomoning" Solomon's Temple or the poor patch on it reconstructed after the return from exile (see Ezra 3:8–13; 5–6). We have some hints of the brocaded vesture of the priests both from Ezra and Exodus 28, which contains dreams of how it must have been before the Chaldean onslaught brought the Temple down. The Psalms with their preliminary musical notations, largely undecipherable because the meaning of the terms is unknown, testify to musical renditions of schools of cantors of a high order. Yet, those brief hints do not tell us what we would dearly like to know: how the daily and festal ritual of sacrifice was carried out. We can only say, "It must have been magnificent." Surely the sights and sounds filled the worshipping crowds with an awe to match that inspired in Jesus' rural companions by the building itself (see Mark 13:1). We know that the daily prayer book devised by the Rabbis much later (called the *Siddur*) tried to parallel the daily hours of Temple prayer.

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The early Palestinian believers in the crucified and risen Christ gathered in people's houses for prayer and study, in the synagogues to which they were admitted for more instruction, and in the Temple, while it stood, for public prayer in act. At the Temple's demolition, they and believers of the diaspora like them undoubtedly added the weekly worshipful meal, both parousia-expectant and memorial, to the study of their Scriptures that prophesied the one who proved to them on every page to be Jesus the Anointed One. We do not know what form the meal of blessing (*bērākāh*) and offering (*qōrbān*) took. We can only be sure that it was ritualized from the beginning. Public prayer that was not ritual would be unthinkable to the Jew, Temple or no, as it would be to the pagan Greek. For a leader merely to have pronounced Jesus' words over bread and cup that changed ordinary food and drink, which was then consumed by the assembly, would not have occurred to Semitic believers. Worship was ritual behavior by definition, but what form the worship took we do not know.

#### **SYMBOLS OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE IN SPEECH AND IN NONVERBAL ACTS**

The earliest words of thanks and praise we have—after the reminiscences of the Lord's Supper that differ in wording in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians—occur in *The Teaching (Didachē) of the Twelve Apostles* from about 125 C.E.<sup>1</sup> There, what seemed to be the verbal formula effecting change—although it may be simply a christological hymn—speaks of thanks to the Father “for the Holy Vine of David, your servant” over the cup, then the same over a piece (*klasma*) of bread, with thanks for “the life (*zōē*) and knowledge (*gnōsis*) revealed through Jesus, your servant.” There follows a prayer that likens the bread of blessing to the fragments once scattered over the hills—the multiplication miracle? grains sown and harvested?—that become one loaf, just as the church from the ends of the earth must be brought together under God's reign. Only the baptized may partake of this meal, the text says; then a longer prayer of thanks is given that culminates in, “Let Grace come [meaning Christ's coming at the end] and this world pass away,” followed by a final *Maran atha*, “Our Lord, come.” If the first prayer were a true formula for the Lord's Supper we should not be surprised, for a Syrian eucharistic rite still in use that bears the names of Addai and Mari does not have Jesus' words of institution. Importantly, the Lord's Day gathering for the breaking of bread must be accompanied by prayers for the forgiveness of sins “that your sacrifice (*thysia*) may be pure” (*Did.* 14), the first recorded mention of that term for the rite.

Justin, a Palestinian gentile martyred at Rome toward 165, provides the next extant witness to the rite over “the food we call Eucharist” in his *First Apology* (*I Apol.* 66). He gives a brief account of how “the food conse-

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<sup>1</sup>Theodorus Klauser, ed., *Doctrina duodecim apostolorum; Barnabae epistula* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1940); Cyril C. Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 161–79.

crated by the word of prayer that comes from him [Christ]" transforms "common bread or common drink" into "the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus."<sup>2</sup> He quotes Jesus' words at the Supper as from Mark 14:22–25 and 1 Cor 11:23–25. The command, "Do this for my memorial," however, placed before the mention of "my body" and "my blood," indicates the wording of the rite with which he is familiar. In the next brief chapter, Justin sketches the sequence of events in the Sunday ritual. First, the "memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read" (*I Apol.* 67). Then the person placed before the assembled baptized (*ho proestōs*), in a discourse, "urges and invites us to the imitation of these noble things" and offers prayers and thanksgivings over the bread and wine and water that are brought to him. He "distributes the consecrated elements which each one receives, while the remainder are sent to the absent" via the assistants (*diakonoi*).

*The Apostolic Tradition* is attributed probably erroneously to Hippolytus (d. 235), a Greek-speaking claimant to the bishopric of Rome after Callistus, too lax over the "lapsed" to his taste, had been elected. This document provides the earliest extant text of the ordination of an *episkopos* followed immediately by a eucharistic anaphora (*Trad. ap.* 4).<sup>3</sup> Rightly or wrongly, it is called the Hippolytan canon and is extant largely in Latin translation and later in Coptic. It serves as the basis of Eucharistic Prayer II of the *Novus Ordo* of the Roman rite of 1970 and was adopted shortly thereafter by several Protestant service books, including the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship*. Prayers of thanks over oil and blessing over cheese and olives are appended to the central prayer, the Thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), then follow the verbal formulas and brief ritual acts for the ordination of a presbyter and a deacon. Hands are not to be laid on a deacon who has been imprisoned for confessing the faith, says the text; he is a presbyter by that fact. But, for the office of bishop, such a one is to be ordained. Widows are to be appointed, not ordained, and hands are not to be laid on subdeacons, virgins, or those who say they have the gift of healing; thus reads Part 1, composed of 15 brief chapters. Part 2, in Chapters 20–22, prescribes detailed inquiries into who shall be admitted and who not to a catechumenate of three years (military commanders must resign, and any man planning to become a soldier must be rejected). Character, not the length of time in preparation, will determine admission to baptism. Four quite explicit chapters tell how the candidates are to be baptized, namely, with a sealing in oil and standing naked in the water down into which they go.

Nonverbal symbolic acts accompany baptism. A presbyter's hand is held on each candidate's head (the women presumably disrobed by other women, leaving a linen shift for modesty) as he proposes in interrogative

<sup>2</sup>*The Apologies of Justin Martyr*, ed. A. W. F. Blunt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911); Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 225–89.

<sup>3</sup>R. Hugh Connolly, *The So-called Egyptian Church Order and Derived Documents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916).

form what was to become the Apostle's Creed, to which the baptizand answers, "I believe" three times as the water is thrice poured on the head. This is early third-century practice, but the handsome *piscina* or baptismal bath of gold mosaic, with its three steps leading downward, in which Ambrose baptized Augustine in the late fourth century, can be examined in the excavations under the *piazza* of the cathedral of Milano. Byzantine-era ruins in Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya also furnish excellent examples, although not as well preserved. The bishop's prayer that speaks of the laver of regeneration of the Holy Spirit is given next as he lays a hand on the new Christians and anoints them on the forehead with holy oil (*Trad. ap.* 22). The Rite of Thanksgiving follows, in which the bishop "shall make the bread into an image (*antitypon*) of the body of Christ and a cup of wine mixed with water according to the likeness (*similitudinem* for *homoiōsin*) of the blood which is shed for all who believe in him."<sup>4</sup> Milk mixed with honey is then offered to the newborn "for the fulfillment of the promise to the fathers," namely, Christ's flesh that he gave by which believers are to be nourished like babes (*Trad. ap.* 23.2). "He makes sweet the bitterness of the heart by the gentleness of his word." Deacons proffer the cups, first of water signifying the washing of the inner person as well as the body, then the milk, the wine for tasting, first in the name of God the Father Almighty, then of the Lord Jesus Christ, and lastly of the Holy Spirit and the holy church (*Trad. ap.* 23.7–10).

Part 3 is brief and is a kind of book of discipline, addressing such topics as which specific persons may fast and when, a blessing of offerings which is "not a Thanksgiving, as is the Body of the Lord" (over grapes, figs, pomegranates, and other fruits but not cucumbers or odoriferous vegetables such as garlic), community hospitality in serving meals, and the necessary modesty of a charge for caretakers of the dead and gravediggers. Part 4 specifies such things as morning prayer and daily instruction, also prayer at the day hours: cockcrow, nine, noon, three (for those who are at home), before retiring, and at midnight, too, with one's spouse but alone if the other is not a believer. To all this is added signing oneself on the forehead, a symbol of the passion, a shield against the devil, and a reminder of one's baptism. Tracing the cross on one's upper body would come later.

## SILENCES AS TO SIGHT AND SOUND

Subsequent manuals such as the *Didascalia* and the *Constitutiones apostolorum* are much like this in content. None of the church orders tells us, however, about the vesture of presiders, if any was special to the occasion; whether candles illumined the Thanksgiving or incense was used as in Jerusalem's Temple (Ps 141:2; Isa 1:3); and which other senses of sight, taste, or bodily movement were employed in these early rites.

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<sup>4</sup>*The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 48.

About posture, Tertullian (d. circa 225), in a treatise against crowning military heroes (*On the Crown*), writes that his North African church had a rule that forbade kneeling at the eucharist between Easter and Pentecost (*Cor.* 3). The church in Rome spoke of worshipers in its earliest rite in Latin as *circumstantes*, those “standing around” the altar—retained to this day in Canon II and Great Thanksgiving G. The late second and third centuries yield only texts, namely, verbal symbols but nothing visual or olfactory. One writer of the period, however, Irenaeus of Lugdunum, modern Lyon, (d. circa 202), in his five books, *Against Gnōsis Falsely So-Called*, made the point against early gnostics that, as Jesus participated fully in our humanity by becoming flesh and blood as well as spirit, so the memorial meal should not be bloodless. It evidently was such among the Ebionites reputed to have a eucharist in water only (V.1.3).<sup>5</sup> The Ophite text from third-century Egypt, *Pistis Sophia* (IV.142), has a formula that changes wine into water with which Jesus then baptizes his disciples.

As to song, we may assume that all worship services were sung rather than spoken, but we are not told. Regarding bodily movement, the dismissal of the catechumens before the rite of offering (*anaphora*) is a common feature, while canons of the councils held in Asia Minor tell of the weepers (penitents) standing outside the place of assembly, the hearers and catechumens in the same posture in the *narthēx* or vestibule, the noncommunicating worshipers (*consistentes*, standers) erect throughout along with the faithful.<sup>6</sup> The latter two in the body of the building were separated from the action around the altar by a lattice (*kigklis*), as in the courts. But there was no such thing for some time to come as an *ikono-stasis*, or picture wall, separating the clergy in the act of worship from the laity.

## PRAYER AS CELEBRATION WITH NEW FREEDOMS

With the decree of Theodosius I in 380 declaring Christianity the official religion of the Empire, more data become available about the shapes of churches, the kinetic aspects of the rites, and matters such as vesture and liturgical appurtenances. Those features made the church’s worship a feast for every sense besides hearing, for the homilies of bishops continued as long as before. The writings of St. John Chrysostom (bishop of Constantinople from 397, d. 407) throw much light on the ceremonies and forms of his nearly thirty years as a presbyter in Antioch: the growing splendor of the churches, the increased awe in the face of the celebration of the “mysteries”—what the West had begun to call “sacraments”—and the increasingly fixed status of liturgical texts. Chrysostom gives the word *bēma* for sanctuary (still a synagogue word for the reader’s platform) that

<sup>5</sup>Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 386–7.

<sup>6</sup>J. H. Srawley, *The Early History of the Liturgy*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 105, with appropriate citation of sources. This small book provides much information about the liturgies—based only on the texts of the rites—of Syria, Egypt, Rome, and North Africa, as well as Constantinople.

includes the bishop's throne, the altar or holy table sometimes made of silver, curtains drawn back before communion time, barriers separating the sexes, and a railing before the sanctuary.<sup>7</sup> Chrysostom also mentions the vestments being worn by ministers and vessels made of gold and set with jewels. The development of Latin and Greek liturgical vestments from the apparel of civil magistrates is discussed exhaustively in a wide-ranging article that explores the Greco-Roman dress of the period but also that of barbarians and the later Byzantines.<sup>8</sup>

Some have been shocked by these developments, deploring them as an aping of the pagan world. It is wiser to think of them as an expression of exuberance at the new political freedom the church had begun to experience when Constantine along with Licinius issued a decree of religious liberty in the so-called Edict of Milan (313). The dress of the Roman magistracy and the imperial court were not, however, the only paradigms. There were the extensive descriptions of the Aaronite priesthood and Temple worship in Exodus (25–30) and Leviticus (8–9, 21–22), to be drawn on by a church that had repudiated the heresy of Marcion.

Marcion had taught that the Jewish Scriptures were no part of the Christian heritage, even as numbers of his second-century contemporaries were trumpeting a superior *gnōsis* as a thinking-person's Catholic faith. The gnostic challenge has been called the most serious that the church has ever faced, not because of its mythic element, but because of its claim that the superiority of spirit meant a denigration, an outright contempt for matter. The foundation of this heresy was the denial of the materiality of the man Jesus, his conception and birth by Mary, his crucifixion, and his death. Only as the spirit of Christ did God engage him for the work of human salvation. This teaching was congenial to Greek intellectuals who might already have been committed to a misconceived Platonism. They found the biblical tales including the life of Jesus crude, surely not a fit vehicle for the kind of religion they thought Christianity ought to be. The resistance to this teaching by the Church Fathers from Ignatius of Antioch (d. circa 110) to Augustine (d. 430) was unremitting.

The resistance began with the principle that Jesus Christ redeemed what the Word had assumed. But since this was humanity in its fullness—the perverse will to sin excepted—all blood, bone and sinew, mind, and will of the human creature was redeemed at root by Christ's participation in every aspect of this nature. The tradition of faith in God through him and the Spirit was as materially oriented as the religion of Israel had been. No gracious working of the Spirit upon the human spirit was thought by the

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<sup>7</sup>See *Liturgies, Eastern and Western*, ed. F. E. Brightman and C. E. Hammond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), 475–6; Fernand Cabrol, "Antioche (liturgie d')," *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, ed. Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907), 1/2:242 n. 7.

<sup>8</sup>Henri Leclercq, "Vêtement," *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, ed. Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907), 15/2: cols. 2989–3007.

apostolic tradition to diminish the body or the creaturely world as a voice of God.

### THE CREEDS AS SYMBOLS, MATERIAL OBJECTS BY THE SCORE

The earliest creed on record occurs in an apocryphal work of 160–70 in Asia Minor, the *Epistle of the Apostles*.<sup>9</sup> In an allegorical explanation of Mark 6:39 (Jesus' command to sit down on the green grass), it gives five articles of faith: in the Father, in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, and in the remission of sins. The first of these calls the Father, in a Latin translation of the extant Ethiopic, *dominatorem universi*, the equivalent of *pantokratōr*, as is found in all Greek creeds thereafter. The word means all-powerful, hence the Latin *omnipotens*, and was probably framed to counter the gnostic claim that a demiurge had created the visible universe. The God of orthodox belief was the one who had done so by universal power; there was no other creator god. The term *pantokratōr* as descriptive of the Father remained in all creedal statements until Nicaea (325), when there was added to it in apposition, "maker of all that is seen and unseen." Undoubtedly the affirmation was meant to deny the teaching of any who would hold that not all came from the one creative hand.

The conviction that all that is is the work of the creator God means, among other things, that God is self-disclosed or revealed to us human beings through the book of the world. There is nothing in the cosmos or on earth that does not speak God's grandeur to a human race open to the message. The whole of creation is a book of symbols or, as some prefer to say, is a sacrament of God. "Symbol" in Greek means something that is cast together, as in a comparison with a counterpart or a series of things assembled that belong together. It was the word for a creed among early Greek-speaking Christians probably because the basic articles of faith were recited there in a single formula. The idea that a creed was a token by which Christians could recognize each other came later (like the meaning of certain symbols generally) and does not have much etymological merit.

There can be symbols of every sort, starting with words, which are symbols of ideas, but then also in music, chemistry, and mathematics. A large body of the symbol family is arbitrary. There are arbitrary signs and others that bear some relation, whether more or less, to the thing signified. These are properly called symbols. The red traffic light or sign near a manhole says danger because it is the color of spilt blood. Green is the color of growing things and hence is a sign of life or safe passage, but the relation is more remote. Nothing about amber signifies caution, it is simply neither red nor green; importantly, it is more visible than blue or purple.

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<sup>9</sup>*Enchiridion symbolorum: Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, editio 23 (Barcelona: Herder, 1962) §1 (p. 17); cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1950), 82.

A good example of symbol may be the four elements of nature for the Greeks: earth, air, fire, and water. All sustain human life, all can destroy human life. As they occur in nature, they possess the power to be one or the other. That may best describe symbols: significant objects that somehow contain the reality for which they stand. Onomatopoeic words such as gurgle, rip, or sigh are thus more symbolic than those whose sounds bear no discernible relation to the reality they signify.

The people of ancient Israel, notably the poets but at times the legists and chroniclers, heard God's voice in many symbols that spoke "YHWH" or "Elohim" to them. Chief among such symbols were water, air, and the earth that is humanity's home and without which there is no life. But when water flooded the wadis or was "the deep," the Mediterranean, when the air was a cyclonic wind uprooting the trees, these were inimical forces in their unleashed majesty (see Ps 29:3–10). The sun, moon, and stars spoke God to Israel but always as symbols of the divine, never as objects of worship. Their purpose was practical, as Genesis insists, marking out the day, the night, and the seasons (see Ps 74:15–17). The light spoke God to them, and darkness did not.

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There was a whole family of symbols of God much closer to home and hearth than the cosmos. Domestic fire was one of them, also the universal solvent, water, that slaked the parched throat. The oil of the olive was another: fuel for the small clay lamps, an ingredient in the cooking, and ointment for burns and sun-baked skin. Bread of barley and wheaten flour stood for life, wine for celebration. Like oil, it was also a cash crop in trade. Honey and wax from the bee (Ps 19:11; 22:15b), the ant and the slug for industry and laziness (Prov 6:6–9), the cooking pot (Eccl 7:6), yeast (Exod 12:19–20), dough (Neh 10:37[38]), and meal and honey (Leviticus 2) were all somehow voices of God in the people's everyday lives—and so in their worship.

Christians, Jews and gentiles alike, did not at any time say self-consciously, “We must now act symbolically in our public prayer.” Because the flesh united to the word was the great visible sign of God's presence in their midst, they engaged in incarnational behavior from the start. All that was material was put in the service of the people's thanks and praise. When the gnostic challenge, with its demand to worship in spirit only, became intense, they responded incarnationally all the more. Bread

and wine, water and oil, tapers and candles, and incense were invested with further meaning by the biblical word. The Father of all heard loud hosannas in many tongues: chanted psalmody; the lyre, horn, and cymbal; representations of Jesus, his holy Mother, and the apostolic band in statue and picture; and multicolored vesture and polychromatic pillars and ceilings of meeting places called churches (*kyriaka*, “Lordish houses”).<sup>10</sup> When the emperor Leo III the Isaurian (d. 741)—influenced by monophysite and manichean tendencies in the East and possibly burgeoning Islam—decreed the destruction of all images, the bishops and theologians responded with a single voice. True, they said, a three-dimensional representation of God could only be the Word-incarnate Christ himself, but images in two dimensions, the masterful icons of the monks, were secondarily incarnate symbols of the one true incarnation.

### **BARE RUIN’D CHOIRS, WHERE LATE THE SWEET BIRDS SANG**

It is not easy to trace the motives of the reformers or their inheritors as they gradually set at naught large elements of symbol in worship. They are on record as to their reasons, but we cannot know if the stated ones were primary (perhaps even they could not). The men of the first generation were intellectuals in the Renaissance tradition: Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, Zwingli, all “men of two or three languages.” The Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek were their study, leaving the Latin Bible of twelve centuries a casualty, and that tongue for worship the same. Clearly the replacement of popular religion by biblical religion was their goal. Chantry Masses, pilgrimages, relics, and devotion to the saints were all targeted to go. It was in some respects an admirable goal, but with its realization something valuable was lost. The elimination of every sense but hearing and, for the literate, the sight of words on a printed page deprived the peasantry who had known the Bible through other avenues of sense in their familiar ways of prayer. It was not that any of the major players was a cultural philistine. Luther required more and better congregational song in worship. Zwingli was proficient in song and instrumental music. Calvin was appreciative of music, the visual arts, and other forms of beauty, although certainly not the Renaissance renderings of biblical scenes. Still, the exclusive concentration on words preached, heard, and sung gave the movement an unwitting gnostic character. Thought and prayer were of the highest value, it was supposed, when enfolded and conveyed verbally. An aristocracy of the mind inescapably emerged despite the reformers’ hopes that the common people would be drawn to the new religion, as England called it. Both there and on the continent, many found themselves unconvinced by the reformed versions of the ancient

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<sup>10</sup>For a good, brief account of rite, language, vestments, and the dress of churches, see *The Church at Prayer: An Introduction to the Liturgy*, 4 vols., ed. Aimé Georges Martimort et al. (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1987), 1:131–280.

faith. They were required, however, by the decisions of princes to hear the preaching of the learned and worship publicly in new ways.

## **RITUAL REFORM IN GERMAN-SPEAKING LANDS**

After the bull excommunicating Luther (1520) and his refuge in the Wartburg of Eisenach, he was back in Wittenberg trying to reverse the radical changes of Andreas von Karlstadt. That university colleague had been preaching fiery sermons against “graven images” and other idolatries and, on Christmas Day, 1521, in the castle church, had presided at the Lord’s Supper without vestments.<sup>11</sup> He recited the words of institution in German but not the Canon and failed to elevate the host and chalice, distributing them in both species immediately after the consecratory words. Luther’s instincts were sounder, as he argued in a series of eight sermons in response for a return to liturgical order, the necessary stability for the proclamation of the word. In 1523, he proposed a *Formula* or *Ordering of Divine Worship* that refined his *Deutsche Messe* of 1519. In it, he proposed retaining such features as the *Introit*, *Gloria*, *Gradual*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*, and *Communio* but reviled the Canon as a sacrifice and a work that had acquired “much filth and scum” over the centuries. These were not the Frankish elements that had been added to the Roman rite from the Carolingian era onward, but were among the many accretions he specified, some of which did not survive in the *Missale Romanum* of 1570. Luther promulgated his *German Mass and Order of Service* in 1526 for public use in all Evangelical churches, while not abrogating his edited Latin *Formula missae*.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, he proposed a service with Baptism and the Sacrament for the devout who would meet in house churches. Of the last named, he said, he “does not wish to begin or make rules for it” because he has not yet the persons necessary to accomplish it. What he did attend to were very detailed directions about the manner of chant and hymns for priest and people. After the Gospel should come the sermon, followed by a paraphrase of the Our Father and an admonishment, both of them “in previously determined words” for those who would wish to receive Christ’s body and blood. A traditional formula of consecration is proposed, but with the suggestion that Christ’s body be eaten immediately after the words over the bread before the cup is blessed. Luther retained most of the features of the Roman rite, slightly rearranging them, after having thoroughly analyzed the prayers of the Canon in *The Abomination of the Private Mass* (1525). But his attack on it as a sacrifice offered by the people, hence a human work, and his early conviction that as a priest he received no other share in the priesthood of Christ than had he been given at baptism, resulted in numerous changes in the Mass as ritual.

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<sup>11</sup>Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1962), 95ff.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 123–37.

All this is shown by the excellently mounted exhibit in the *Augustinerkloster* in Wittenberg, from the print shop of which a stream of pamphlets flowed until Luther's death. The various modes of his vesture are displayed, carefully dated, in a series of glass cases. They go from the chasuble, wide stole, and maniple of his early priesthood to a succession of increasingly simple garments until they arrive at an academic gown. This presents him as the doctor in theology and proclaimer of the word he thought himself to be, no longer a presider at a priestly act of symbolic sacrifice. The same was true at Baptism and at Penance, a rite he was long in abandoning. He was quite comfortable in presiding at the Lord's Supper in this vesture because it befit the ministry he had chosen. But, as a liturgy of sight and aroma and graceful movement waned, another of lengthy instruction and vocal prayer by the minister and the glory of God in song—the people's song—waxed.

Huldrych Zwingli, a secular priest unlike the many regulars among the reformers, wrote an *Attack on the Canon of the Mass* in 1523 from his position as preacher in Zürich's Great Minster. He was at first not as radical in his reforms as some of the Anabaptists (*Wiedertäufer*) of that city. A distinguished Latinist, he added to the Canon four prayers of his own while eliminating the mention of sacrifice. One year later, under the pressure of the above-mentioned radicals supported by the city council, he and a team of workers achieved the stripping of the city's churches of statues and ornaments, closed the organs, and whitewashed the church walls—all this to ensure that only the word of God would be heard without distraction. The city council in spring of 1525 abolished the Mass and introduced a service he had written, in which, unlike Luther, he held the bread and wine to be reminders of Christ's sacrifice and in no way the substance of his body and blood. The Methodist scholar of worship Bard Thompson writes, "Zwingli was convinced that faith is given and nourished solely by the Holy Spirit, apart from any physical channels, any external means especially anything so crass as eating."<sup>13</sup> Whether this analysis is correct in all respects, it identifies a religion of spirit only and participates in the gnostic convictions described above. Zwingli's theology of the Lord's Supper was influential on other Reformed traditions. Through the English dissidents who came to be known as Baptists, his spare approach to worship was to characterize many who would come to American shores over the next two centuries.

## L'ÉGLISE DE LA RÉFORME

Where was John Calvin in all this? He was moving more conservatively in Geneva than his predecessor there, Guillaume Farel, a layman and humanist scholar like himself. Martin Bucer (Butzer), a Dominican friar turned diocesan priest, meanwhile was serving long as the Protestant pastor of Strassburg. He made the preaching of the word the constitutive

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 143.

act of divine worship and restricted the Lord's Supper to Jesus' words in the New Testament, followed immediately by communion, which he took to be the shape that is "old, true, and eternal."<sup>14</sup> His was a progressive simplification in rite and dress similar to those described above. Like his contemporary reformers, he worked hard to initiate congregational hymnody and was distinguished by imposing a discipline in Strassburg that would curb some of the ungoverned changes in practice to which the newfound freedoms had led.

Farel had brought the ideas of Zwingli in Zürich and Johannes Husschyn (Oecolampadius) in Basel to French-speaking Switzerland. He made the sermon paramount in Sunday worship and composed a rather wordy exhortation to repentance before communion, initiated by the phrase from Col 3:1 to "see the things that are above, not the things that are on earth." This he took quite literally to mean not looking for Christ on the altar nor any of the earthly signs that had been corrupted by the Mass. Paradoxically, despising these elements was taken to be the way to thoughts of the heavenly Christ. "Farel was even afraid of Zwingli's idea that the bread and wine were stirring pictures of Christ's passion and hence powerful aids to the mind in contemplation."<sup>15</sup>

Some have questioned how much Calvin was influenced by the liturgy of Strassburg where, at Bucer's invitation (1538–1541), he spent three years. There he served as pastor of a French-speaking Protestant parish and held a chair in exegesis at the new college founded by Jacques Sturm. He also devised an order of eucharistic service in French, based on Bucer's model. Calvin had fled Paris for Basel late in 1533 on suspicion of sympathy for his friend Nicholas Cop, new as rector of the University of Paris, who had delivered a pro-Reformation sermon on All Saints Day. At Basel, he produced the first edition of his *Institutiones* (1534–1536). His break with the Catholic Church and commitment to the Reform can be dated sometime between two visits to his native Noyon in Picardy in 1533 and 1534, the latter to resign the Church benefices that his lawyer father had obtained for him and that had paid his fees in philosophy study in Paris and law in Orléans. The break came in his twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth years, up to which time he had thought of himself as a humanist scholar, a commentator on Seneca's *De Clementia* (improving on that of Erasmus), and one "obstinately addicted to the superstitions of the Papacy. . . [from which God] pulled me out of so deep a quagmire by sudden conversion."<sup>16</sup> In that same introduction to a biblical commentary, he attaches no date to the conversion to the Reform but speaks of being

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<sup>14</sup>Thompson summarizes Bucer's successes and failures in pastoral and liturgical practice that came of his *First Principles and Initiatives* (*Grund und Ursach*), in worship, the biblical prohibition of idols, and the Johannine "the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63), understood by him as an antimaterialist axiom (see *ibid.*, 159–79).

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>16</sup>John Calvin, preface to the *Commentary on the Psalms* of 1557 in *Opera omnia quae supersunt* (Braunschweig, 1863–1900), quoted by François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 37.

“inflamed with some foretaste and knowledge of true piety.” He did not, however, give up other studies but worked only slackly on them.

By the time of his residence in Basel, he was fully committed to the new thought and was determined to leave the city in 1536 for a return to Strassburg. His enforced diversion to Geneva for an overnight stay by hostilities between Francis I and Charles V is well-known to students of his career.<sup>17</sup> Farel pressed him to remain and help him battle the town magistrates in making the new faith and worship forms prevail. He was installed as a reader in the Holy Scripture but soon began to preach and reorganize the church. The pair was ejected from the city after two years, however, upon which he went to Strassburg for the next three. Farel’s partisans in Geneva opposed the magistrates throughout their absence. It was a city torn by Catholic efforts to restore the ancient faith and the efforts of nearby Bern to gain political control of it. Both men attempted to negotiate peace in turbulent Geneva from outside. Finally, the Farel party prevailed over the city council, convincing it to recall Calvin (but not Farel) as the only way to restore civic and religious order. He was of two minds in accepting but did so in September of 1541, for an intended short stay, yet he remained until his death twenty-three years later.

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***“Public prayer is drama, quite simply. It is theater, but it is not theatrics. We are by nature incurably drawn to ritual in the realms of both the sacred and the profane. In either, it will be good ritual or bad ritual; there is no third option.”***

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His desire to reinstitute a weekly Lord’s Supper as in Catholic days, but with the truly repentant worshipers communicating as had not been common since the patristic era, was thwarted by the town fathers. He had to settle for a celebration each quarter. The rite was chiefly a Bible service marked by preaching and teaching that stressed Christian holiness. The sermons and prayers attending Jesus’ words over bread and wine expressed Calvin’s theology of the Supper, which was closer to Zwingli’s recall of Christ’s love in voluntarily dying for human redemption than Luther’s consubstantiation, the presence of Christ body and blood to elements that remained as before. His problem with anything like a real presence in symbol was that, since the risen Christ now dwelt bodily in the glory of heaven, there was no way he could exist on myriad altar tables. “That there is no descent of the body of Christ, or any downward passage, visible or invisible, is grounded on the clearest testimony of Scripture

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 48–9, from the same *Commentary*.

(Luke 24:51; Acts 1:11; 3:21).”<sup>18</sup> Calvin insisted in his *Institutes* that the body and blood of Christ were given to believers in and through no empty symbol and spoke freely of “eating the flesh of Christ” and “grasping it so far as it is explained in the Scriptures.”<sup>19</sup> An exploration of his exegesis of John 6:51–58 yields his conviction that, based on his theological presuppositions, the passage has nothing to do with the Lord’s Supper.<sup>20</sup> People who have faith in the power of Christ are enabled to eat Christ, but believing in him is not equivalent to eating him or his flesh. Rather, eating Christ is the result of faith or possessing the Spirit. What Judas ate and drank at the Last Supper was not the body and blood of Christ because he did not have the Spirit.

There is implicit in the methodological exegesis of John 6 an ambiguity concerning the way the food and drink act as a symbol of the body and blood of Christ that is worthy of Augustine. The Saint affirmed every possible mode of the Lord’s presence in his Supper. There is one exception for Calvin. He opted for the spiritual presence that the churches of the east and west had always held, but denied a material one, namely, anything like a true local presence in or to the elements after the consecratory prayer had been spoken by the minister.

Why did Calvin write that, of all the idols he knew, none was so grotesque as that in which the priest called down Christ in his hands by “magical mumblings” while the people looked on “in simple amazement”?<sup>21</sup> That scornful dismissal may describe the faulty enunciation of the Canon in a low tone by some ignorant presiders or careless haste by others. The inner thoughts of silent congregations he had no way of knowing. He was convinced, in any case, that the Mass had been vitiated by wicked human inventions, chiefly the early Church’s identification of it as a sacrifice without biblical warrant, the invocation of the angels and the saints in an intercessory role, and the denomination of the minister who leads in it as a priest when there is but one priest, Christ.

A careful examination of much that Calvin wrote about images yields certain of his convictions: that they deceive Christians into thinking they can bring God physically near when this can be done only spiritually; that they obscure the divine majesty by posing an obstruction to meditating upon it; that some artistic representations of half-clothed women offend modesty and are better hung in brothels than in churches; and that, at root,

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<sup>18</sup>John Calvin, “Summary of Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Word and of the Sacraments” IX, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 175; cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV.xvii.12 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).

<sup>19</sup>John Calvin, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959–1961), 1:168–9, 194–5.

<sup>20</sup>See, for the conclusions drawn from this *Commentary*, with appropriate citations, Eleanor B. Hanna, “Biblical Interpretation and Sacramental Practice: John Calvin’s Interpretation of John 6:51–58,” *Worship* 73 (1999), 211–30; cf. John Calvin, “The True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood of Christ in the Holy Supper,” *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 286–7.

<sup>21</sup>Thompson, *Liturgies*, 185.

the papists worship images with *latreia* (adoration) even while apologists for them deny it. God has in fact proposed only three objects to help believers raise their minds to God in prayer but certainly not to accord them divine honors. They are the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Supper. All others divert or distract from worship of the majesty of God. Calvin pays his respects to auricular confession, Friday abstinence from meat, priestly celibacy and recitation of the hours (“long senseless words”), pilgrimages, and roadside shrines (“idols”) as gnats strained out by a Church that swallows camels of commending God’s commandments “only coldly and perfunctorily” while its devotees lead “utterly wicked lives” and give “sham obedience.”<sup>22</sup> This is the language either of a wounded lover or one convinced he is traveling the high road with little respect for those on the lower. He judges ceremonies and rites of the Church to be “the lawful order of divine worship reduced to men’s decisions.”<sup>23</sup> To honor images is dishonor to God, not only because they represent saints but because the Bible forbids idolatry, which is what image veneration is.<sup>24</sup> To read these chapters of the *Institutes* with care leads one to doubt that Calvin can believe that any Catholic, pope or peasant, worshiped wood and stone. What he wishes is that the churches and the roadsides be cleared of devotion to anyone but Christ revealed through the pure word of God. He then finds plenty of Old Testament texts to support his conviction. Interestingly, all the rites of Temple worship are acknowledged to be specified by God, but they long ago lost all force when the Word became flesh. Hence the Church offends God grievously by “aping” them.

John Calvin was a finished scholar of his age. He cites the best sources he can find—numerous Church Fathers and popes among them—to support his position. But his previously held position scarcely requires multiple citation. It is this: If the New Testament does not speak of a way of worship, only human corruption and fiction can account for it, however early it was introduced.

### CHRISTIAN WORSHIP INCURABLY SYMBOLIC

The poet Schiller is reported to have said that the purpose of art is to bring us to our senses. He might have added that our senses—all our senses, not our hearing and our voice only—are meant to bring us to the Maker of all things, visible and invisible. Many Western churches with roots in the Continental or British Reformation are now recovering their sense of the senses in their worship of thanks and praise. This is a simple matter of recapturing an appreciation of the nonverbal and verbal symbols of both Testaments. Jesus availed himself of the verbal symbolism of Jeremiah and Hosea when he taught in parables. John was at home in the

<sup>22</sup>*Institutes* IV.x.10 (p. 2:1188).

<sup>23</sup>*Institutes* IV.x.9 (p. 2:1187).

<sup>24</sup>*Institutes* I.x–xii (p. 1:96–120).

art of symbol, writing a gospel in which every narrative and phrase bore a meaning beyond the literal. Austin Farrer did well to title his commentary on the Revelation of John of Patmos *A Rebirth of Images*, since this text is largely Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, and the Psalmist reborn in their wild pictorial language that assaults the senses. Only this prophetic imagery was deemed fitting as background to the One on the throne and the Lamb that was slain yet who lives. Seated beside the Ancient of Days or again on a white horse with his Name upon his thigh and his titles that are high—"King of kings" are the words, "Lord of lords"—he was the ever Faithful and True.

It was no wonder that the early believers in Christ and in the Spirit hastened to replicate biblical scenes on catacomb walls at the tombs of the martyrs. Nor should we be surprised at their adopting some elements of Temple worship once they had repudiated the Marcionite heresy and were free to pray publicly in common. Among these elements were the language of sacrifice, the vesture of Aaronic priests, clouds of incense rising like orisons to the throne, and the prayer of worship chanted by priests and people alike. To be sure, the public prayer forms of the West needed culling and refining by the late medieval and early Renaissance periods. They received it at the hands of zealous reformers of the Roman rite, such as the men mentioned above and others including Thomas Cranmer. The European Anabaptists, John Knox in Scotland, and Oliver Cromwell and his Roundheads in England were more radical than their first generation of spiritual forebears. The traditions of the latter three in divine service were largely those that came to American shores: plain people worshiping plainly who would have no truck with papist mummery. It was Anglican mummery before and after the Laudian revival, but no matter. Anti-Romanism served as an all-purpose slander.

The reformers of the fifteenth and sixteenth century had two admirable goals, that the revealed word of God be clearly preached and clearly heard, and that sinners be moved to repentance by hearing of a gracious God who was ready both to judge and to forgive. The transmission of the biblical word was paramount. There was, however, a touch of *gnōsis* in their zealous conviction. It was masked as God's speaking directly to the human spirit, but it included misprizing of the corporeal in the way that they went about it. Once one declares all symbolic behavior, much of it in the realm of beauty, a human devising, not to say a diabolic distraction, there is no end to the impoverishment of sense. Public prayer is drama, quite simply. It is theater, but it is not theatrics. We are by nature incurably drawn to ritual in the realms of both the sacred and the profane. In either, it will be good ritual or bad ritual; there is no third option. That is because the way we use the senses in public prayer is of the greatest importance. There is at our disposal the book of the world. There are the movements, the postures of the human body, and there are the arts, verbal, visual, and aural, so many avenues of sense, not to impede the word of God but to be given life and meaning by that word. Such is the oldest principle of

Christian worship. It is being restored, brought back to life, in many of the churches.

Paradoxically, the Catholic communion of the West is one of them. Five centuries ago, it was thought to be the great offender and has been ever since. Its response to the charge that its worship forms were encrusted with the patina of centuries and obscured by an ancient tongue “not understood of the people” was to make modest reforms of its numerically majority rite, the Roman, in 1570. From then until roughly 1900, its worship forms were like a stopped clock. But then a groundswell of agitation for reform began to reclaim from the clergy every role in public prayer except choral song that they had appropriated to themselves. Many roles needed to be restored to the people. The congregation as chief actor in the worship act was the goal. Some thirty-five years after the worship reforms mandated by the Second Council of the Vatican, they have begun to take hold. The *Ecclesia Romana et Catholica* has been joined by many other communions worldwide in coming to their senses about the senses.

#### ABSTRACT

Christian worship may be assumed to have been a matter of ritual from the start, because of its roots in Temple worship, common festal meals, and the baptismal practice of Jesus and John. New Testament witness to its forms is minimal, but the development of rites begins to be attested in the *Didachē*, Justin’s *First Apology*, and Hippolytus’s references to eucharist led by *episkopoi*. The *mystēria/sacramenta* were celebrated ritually in the West until the reformers’ emphasis on the biblical word and corresponding de-emphasis on the senses resulted in the triumph of spirit over matter, and of intellect over sight, sound, and movement. In our day, the former balance is being restored as worship forms begin again to engage the whole person.