

IN THE WORD MADE FLESH: TOWARD A SACRAMENTAL UNDERSTANDING OF WORDS IN WORSHIP

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Thesis under the direction of Professors Robert MacSwain and James F. Turrell

My argument is that words proclaimed and received in the Church's worship have a sacramental character equal to that of baptism and eucharist. The argument is occasioned by the debate surrounding Open Table in the Episcopal Church. In reviewing the positions for and against the practice of welcoming unbaptized persons to receive communion, I determined that both proponents of Open Table (who may be said to prioritize the Eucharist in the church's sacramental life) and proponents of the traditional, "font-to-table" sequence (who may be said to prioritize baptism) neglect the sacramental role of words. As "sacramental," words can be powerful vehicles of God's grace that point to the incarnational presence of the Word (Jesus) among us. They effect a real transformation that is initiatory, in calling a person to conversion, a concern of those who advocate Open Table. Words also form and sustain committed believers, a concern of those who advocate for the traditional sequence. Specifically, as sacramental, words draw us into closer intimacy with Jesus, make tangible the hope that he incarnates, and inspires us in mission with him. This three-fold effect is highlighted in each of the chapters below.

In three chapters entitled, "Words of God," "Words about God," and "Words Made Flesh," I consider how the reading of Scripture, preaching, and the eucharistic prayer function sacramentally within the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Chapter One traces the history of reading Scripture in worship from the Jewish synagogue service to the current American *Book of Common Prayer*. Thomas Cranmer's liturgical reforms

and his prefaces to the Great Bible ground this chapter in the Anglican tradition. Special emphasis is given to the notion of intelligibility in Cranmer's liturgical reforms and his use of English in worship.

Chapter Two expands the discussion of Scripture to include words in preaching as sacramental. Beginning with Moses and the prophets, I consider the almost physical imperative to proclaim God's word that characterizes Old Testament preaching. John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles continue this stream in the New Testament. Jesus' preaching ministry, in particular, is marked by his opening or breaking the topics about which he spoke. His life is shown to be an incarnate exposition of the texts, a living sermon.

I then trace the history of preaching from its decline in the Middle Ages through the Reformation. Lancelot Andrewes, the sixteenth-century preacher, provides an example of "metaphysical" preaching that sought to draw participants into the imaginative world of Scripture and give them words to "chew" and to be nourished on. Andrewes's dependency on God's grace, evidenced in his private prayers, opens onto a discussion of the peculiar sacramental relationship that exists between God and the preacher. Andrewes's careful attention to Scripture also highlights the preacher's sacramental task of drawing the church into closer communion with God and making them at home in the world of Scripture, whose center is the incarnate word, Jesus.

Chapter Three examines the history and structure of various eucharistic prayers to show how the sacramentality of words in the liturgy of the word carries over into the liturgy of the table. The chapter's aim is to show how the eucharistic prayer is itself an instance of proclamation. It also provides a context in which to explore the doctrine of

Introduction

It was in connection with the reading of the Gospel that Christians first came to speak of the presence of Christ in the eucharist. Christ is present in the proclamation of the Word. He is present “when two or three are gathered together” in the assembly of the faithful (BCP: 102). Only when we have said this can we speak of Christ’s presence in the eucharistic bread and wine.¹

–Leonel Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing*

This project is occasioned by the debate surrounding the practice of “Open Table” in the Episcopal Church. Though familiar with the practice in other denominations of communing unbaptized persons, I first heard it outlined as a theological problem for the Episcopal Church in a lecture given by Robert MacSwain at The School of Theology of The University of the South.² In the lecture, MacSwain outlined Open Table proponents’ main arguments, which may be categorized under the headings of witness and identity. Open Table, they claim, “bears witness to the life and ministry of Jesus” and is an “effective witness to our culture”; additionally, it provides a “better foundation” for the Church.³ In other words, the church’s true identity is best expressed in its retrieval of Jesus’ radical hospitality.

Seeking to build on my earlier thesis, written for the Master of Divinity degree, I looked to the Open Table debate as a way of talking about practices of testimony in

¹ Leonel Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1985), 131.

Henceforth cited as *Praying*.

² See Robert MacSwain, “The Unbaptized Church? A Rather Critical But Hopefully Fair Consideration of ‘Open Communion’” (lecture, Senior Ecclesiology, The University of the South, Sewanee, TN, Advent Semester, 2009). MacSwain notes that proponents of unrestricted communion, like Stephen Edmonson, use the term “Open Table” in a way that suggests denominational branding. The term is used throughout this paper for the purpose of convenience.

³ Ibid.

mainline Protestant traditions.⁴ In that paper, I explored the lack of narrative witness to the Gospel in the worship and mission of churches like the Episcopal Church. The question I posed was simple: are we able to tell our own stories in light of the story of Jesus? Is anybody other than the preacher able to articulate her lived experience of the Gospel in a way to which other people can relate? Proponents of Open Table seemed to me to be tracking a similar theme. As MacSwain noted, they speak about the practice in terms of witness. Furthermore, they do not neglect the component of proclamation: Richard Fabian, co-founder of St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco, insists that “the communion invitation is our best opportunity to tell people what we believe they receive, and we should tell them plainly.”⁵ Quite apart from determining whether Open Table was a commendable practice, I looked to both sides of the debate to learn something about how the Episcopal Church understands the idea of witness.

Proponents of Open Table advocate unrestricted communion, based on their interpretation of Jesus’ table ministry. Though critical of the practice, James Farwell has charitably described its proponents’ concern to model the Church after Jesus’ ethics, which they see as marked by the erasure of “boundary lines between the outsider and

⁴ The thesis, written at Vanderbilt Divinity School in 2006, is entitled “Grace and Response: Reconsidering Evangelism in ‘Word’ and ‘Deed’.” In it, I propose that a renewed theology of evangelism depends on the ability to explain one’s theological intuitions in terms of her personal story and to subject this narrative to biblical and communal tellings of the Gospel. The problem underlying the thesis is that the discomfort many liberal Protestants feel with both evangelism and testimony (witness) prevents interpersonal ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

⁵ Richard Fabian, “First the Table, then the Font,” St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, www.saintgregorys.org/Resources_pdfs/FirsttheTable.pdf (accessed June, 2010). Henceforth cited as “First the Table.”

insider.”⁶ Jesus’ radical hospitality, they argue, was most evident in the meals he ate with people who were “outside the circle of holiness.”⁷ For this reason, Fabian speaks of the meal as Jesus’ “chosen teaching sign.”⁸ By eating with people who were themselves ritually impure, Jesus highlighted the immediacy of the kingdom of God and the urgent response that it demands. Noting that this theme was behind all of Jesus’ parables, Fabian writes, “God comes to you ready or not, beyond any hope that you might prepare or control the event.”⁹ Kathryn Tanner, in her response to Farwell’s challenging essay on Open Table, nuances the conversation about Jesus’ hospitality, noting that it is less about uncritical openness than “unconditionality.” The Last Supper, after all, was an invitation-only event. What mattered was not who was there, but that no person there was worthy to eat it.¹⁰

Farwell would likely take issue with Tanner’s characterization of the disciples’ unworthiness. An advocate of the traditional sequence, “font-to-table,” he would claim that baptism does, in fact, make us worthy to eat the Lord’s Supper. As an instance of the “both-and” of salvation, baptism and eucharist together “encode . . . the radical gift of grace and the radical call to discipleship.”¹¹ Baptism joins a person to the Body of Christ, inaugurating him into the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection “in which,

⁶ James Farwell, “Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus: On the Practice of ‘Open Communion,’” *Anglican Theological Review*, 86:2 (Spring 2004): 218. Henceforth cited as “Baptism.”

⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁸ Richard Fabian, “Holy Food for Holy People” St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, www.godsfriends.org/Vol10/No3/HolyFood.html (accessed June, 2010). Henceforth cited as “Holy Food.”

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Kathryn Tanner, “In Praise of Open Communion: A Rejoinder to James Farwell,” *Anglican Theological Review* 86:3 (Summer 2004): 476. Henceforth cited as “In Praise.”

¹¹ Farwell, “Baptism,” 225.

by the pattern of their lives, disciples enter into the embodiment of Jesus' continuing ministry in the world."¹² Farwell stresses that communing only the baptized does not dilute Jesus' hospitality or circumscribe his table ministry. Rather, eucharist is where disciples who have ritually committed themselves to Jesus' vision of God's kingdom gather "in intimate communion with Jesus" and are "empowered to move out into wider ministries of evangelism and service," including non-liturgical meals.¹³ For Farwell, the "sacramental nexus" between baptism and eucharist is sustained by a "logic of participation" that depends on an informed commitment to the kingdom of God embodied in a life of discipleship.¹⁴ The practice of Open Table disturbs the balance between divine gift and intentional response that baptism and eucharist *together* represent: "the (baptismal) call to transformation assumed by the eucharist and the desire for transformation strengthened by the eucharist *toward a particular form of life* drops away."¹⁵

Farwell, and others like him who support the Episcopal Church's canonical statement that only baptized people are eligible to receive communion, seek to uphold the primacy of baptism as "the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's body."¹⁶ In fact, one of Farwell's most poignant critiques of the practice of Open Communion is its "departure from the paschal ecclesiology at the heart of contemporary liturgical renewal, which links baptism and eucharist to a post-

¹² Ibid., 224.

¹³ Ibid., 222.

¹⁴ Ibid., 223.

¹⁵ Ibid., 227, original emphasis.

¹⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 858. Henceforth cited as *BCP*. The statement describing who is eligible to receive communion is found in *Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006), Title I, Canon 17, Section 7.

Constantinian understanding of mission.”¹⁷ The articulation of this “paschal ecclesiology” lay at the center of the Liturgical Movement in the twentieth century. The shift toward a more scriptural and patristic understanding of baptism as paschal – a participation in the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection – was undertaken by Roman Catholic scholars involved in the Second Vatican Council. Their historical and ecumenical research resulted in a more fulsome understanding of the work of the Spirit in baptism, an emphasis on adult baptism and a dedicated catechumenal process, and an idea of the whole baptized Church as the people of God, “consecrated into a holy priesthood to worship God in the liturgy.”¹⁸

In the Episcopal Church, similar historical learnings and theological emphases culminated in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. The Prayer Book supports a paschal ecclesiology, the axis of which is the celebration of the Great Vigil of Easter. This event is the focal point of the year, “the primary annual feast of juxtaposition” where the story of Jesus’ life is set next to the story of his people and “the year itself [is] made to echo the gospel.”¹⁹ The Vigil is an ancient context for baptism, and its place at the center of the church calendar spotlights the rites of Christian initiation.²⁰ The pride of place given the Vigil in the Prayer Book, and the dignity of the baptismal rite itself (especially the Baptismal Covenant, which is a remarkably expansive articulation of Christian belief) point to baptism as the foundational rite of the Episcopal Church.

¹⁷ Farwell, “Baptism,” 215.

¹⁸ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori / Triumph, 2001), 176. Henceforth cited as *Doors*.

¹⁹ Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 75.

²⁰ Mitchell, *Praying*, 8.

The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* does more than assert the primacy of baptism. Or rather, it is thoroughgoing in its expression of baptismal identity. For, a second point around which the Prayer Book pivots is the celebration of the Eucharist as “the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day and other major Feasts.”²¹ The Eucharist is “historically and theologically the climax and completion of the rite of baptism” and is also the “final repeatable act of the sacrament of Christian initiation.”²² The pattern of Prayer Book worship, therefore, is one of repetition and renewal based on the celebration of Christ’s resurrection at Easter and on our own dying and rising with him in the sacrament of baptism.

Both Farwell and Tanner note, however, that this paschal ecclesiology based on the revitalization of Christian initiation has failed to capture the imaginations of many Episcopalians. Farwell laments the development of a “eucharistic ecclesiology in which the life and identity of the church is centered, not around the full symbolism of Easter, but around the Sunday gathering whose sense of being a ‘little Easter’ is eclipsed.”²³ Tanner likewise describes a situation wherein “the gathered community is now very clearly defined by the community gathered for the eucharist in a way that was not the case before.”²⁴ She also depicts the “reality” of the baptized public gathered for the eucharist. Many of them are babies or children, who cannot intentionally commit to the vision of God’s kingdom that Farwell describes. Furthermore, she claims that his logic of participation gives too much credit to baptized adults, who are as unlikely now as at any

²¹ *BCP*, 13.

²² Mitchell, *Praying*, 116.

²³ Farwell, “Baptism,” 230.

²⁴ Tanner, “In Praise,” 481.

point in history to be “committed and informed.” Tanner writes, “They have been initiated into a mystery and into a kingdom for which they remain unworthy.”²⁵ The result of the current eucharist-centered climate is that the table assumes meaning independent of the font. As Farwell notes, the eucharist can signify many things at one time; and as proponents of Open Table insist, what it signifies must be made clear to those who receive it. However, eucharist as a stand-alone event risks losing its significance as an overall transformed pattern of life and a renewal of baptismal identity and mission.²⁶ Instead, it weighs exclusively on the side of “strength and encouragement,” hospitality and inclusivity.²⁷

The above emphases are, in fact, what the Open Table group wishes to witness to in their evangelistic welcome. Sara Miles, who started La Bodega Food Pantry out of St. Gregory’s Church in San Francisco, likens this ministry of hospitality over and over again to the celebration of the eucharist: “It’s as necessary and intimate as breaking bread together: daily bread, the bread of Heaven, and the bread that we become.”²⁸ In a compelling reimagining of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Stephen Edmonson reads the mission of the church onto the figure of the “True Elder Son,” who does not scorn, but seeks the younger son “in order to slay the fatted calf and invite him to the feast.” In this way, “baptism confers on one not the right to be invited to the feast: this is the status of

²⁵ Ibid., 477.

²⁶ See Farwell, “Baptism,” 230-31.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Sara Miles, “Opening the Table,” St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, www.godsfriends.org/Vol14/No1/opening-the-table.html (accessed June, 2010).

the younger son that is proper to all of God's children."²⁹ Here the charge to baptized persons is to be proactively and unconditionally generous with what we have. What we have is best exhibited in our meal, Jesus' great teaching symbol, which "showed what it was really like to live with God."³⁰ For proponents of Open Table, this understanding of the meal is the "better foundation" on which to build the church, a people formed by acts of gracious hospitality and radical acceptance rather than studied, deliberate commitment alone. Fabian finally appeals for his church's practice of Open Table in terms with which it is difficult to quarrel: the Eucharist is "a feast where God pours Jesus' living Spirit freely on the whole world,"³¹ where like early Christians "we are spreading the good news about Jesus in a Spirit we cannot control."³²

While invoking the Holy Spirit has the appearance of playing a trump card, in this instance it does more than suggest a warrant for the practice of Open Table. Fabian's words about the Spirit's extravagance, poured uncontrollably on the whole world, call to mind the story of the crowd at Pentecost found in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Ironically, this chapter contains a verse that is congenial to opponents of Open Table. Acts 2:41-42, which is paraphrased in the Baptismal Covenant, chronicles the traditional sequence of events that lead to table fellowship: "So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

²⁹ Stephen Edmonson, "Opening the Table: The Body of Christ and God's Prodigal Grace," *Anglican Theological Review* 91:2 (Spring 2009), 221. Henceforth cited as "Opening."

³⁰ Fabian, "Holy Food."

³¹ Fabian, "Holy Food."

³² Fabian, "First the Table."

The message referred to in these verses is Peter's proclamation to Jewish people from all parts of the world, who had gathered at the sound of the apostles speaking in foreign languages. Peter's Spirit-inspired address begins with the recitation of Scripture, locating the *kerygma* of Jesus' death and resurrection in the context of the story of Israel. Making use of titles ("Messiah") and proper names (David, Abraham) that were already meaningful to the group, Peter identifies Jesus as the sign of the reign of God and charges the gathered crowd to affirm this truth. Furthermore, Peter identifies Jesus as the one who has power to give the gift of the Holy Spirit, and promises that those who are baptized in his name will receive the Spirit, too. Hearing his words, the crowd was "cut to the heart." They repented, were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, and continued in the practices described above.

The Pentecost proclamation in Acts 2 show that there is, in fact, something that precedes both baptism and other Christian practices, like the eucharist. The Spirit does move freely among us. One of the most powerful ways that she manifests herself is in words proclaimed and words received. In their attempts to emphasize *either* baptism *or* eucharist as the sacrament that best expresses the church's witness and shapes its identity, or best effects conversion, those involved in the Open Table debate neglect the crucial role of words in the church's worship. Scripture, proclamation, and words of prayer and invitation are powerful vehicles of God's grace in that they point to the real presence of Jesus among us. They effect a transformation that is initiatory (like baptism) in calling a person to conversion, and nourishing (like the eucharist) in that they sustain the believer in faith. What is more, words create something new. The New Testament is the story of the first Christians using the images and words of Israel and the Mediterranean world to

give voice to the new thing that they had discovered in Jesus. Gordon Lathrop places this creative process at the heart of the church's sacramental life:

A pattern is clear: our old words and actions are made to speak a new grace. Just as the rich hopes and symbols of people of the first century became materials that were transformed into ways early Christians spoke of Christ, so our gatherings, our actions and words, our hopes, are also drawn into the same transformation. Christian corporate worship is made up of chains of images: our gathering, our washing, our meal are held next to biblical stories, themselves reinterpreted chains, and this whole rebirth of images is itself biblical.³³

Neither baptism nor eucharist stands on its own, but depends on an interpretive context comprised of words: words of God in Scripture, words about God in preaching, and words to God in prayer. All of these words find their center in Jesus, God's own Word incarnate.

The lack of attention paid to this more sacramental understanding of words brings to light a trend that prevails in the Episcopal Church at large. In an article entitled, "The Poverty of Preaching in the Episcopal Church," Owen Thomas locates a gradual devaluing of the Ministry of the Word beginning with the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century. He cites John Henry Newman's statement about a person who frequently listens to sermons: "Had he been taught as a child, that the Sacraments, not preaching, are the sources of divine grace ... we could not have had so many wanderers from our fold, nor so many cold hearts within it."³⁴ Newman and the Oxford Movement were not alone in their esteem for the eucharist. The emphasis on the sacraments as a

³³ Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 23-24

³⁴ John Henry Newman cited in Owen C. Thomas, "The Poverty of Preaching in the Episcopal Church," *Anglican Theological Review* 85:3 (Summer 2003), 434-35. While he points to the Oxford Movement as a group that valued the eucharist above and beyond preaching, Thomas makes a broad statement that "deemphasis on preaching is a general phenomenon in American churches" (431). Newman himself was a frequent and substantial preacher.

means of salvation, understood as “participation in the divine life,” is characteristic of the Catholic tradition that informs the Anglican ethos.³⁵ The more Protestant emphasis on salvation as “restoration of a broken relationship,” which comes as a *preached* word of “divine favor and forgiveness,” has been accented less in recent experience.³⁶ In his article, Thomas hopes that the Episcopal Church might develop a theology of preaching that is more in line with the charge given priests at their ordinations: bold proclamation embodied in word and deed, of the gospel of salvation that nourishes and strengthens God’s people with the riches of God’s grace.³⁷

In addition to the ordinal, which is laden with a sense of the priest’s call to proclaim the Gospel, there reside in the Anglican tradition numerous resources for a renewed understanding of words as sacramental. The Reformation heritage’s emphasis on Scripture, exemplified by Thomas Cranmer’s liturgical reforms, and the preaching of Caroline Divines such as Lancelot Andrewes are foundational examples. Furthermore, the very incarnational theology (expounded notably by William Temple in the twentieth century) that supports a high sacramentality also supports reflection about Jesus as the Word of God. This sort of reflection is essential for promoting a sacramental understanding of words and for achieving a balance between word and sacrament in the church’s worship.

Before we can begin to explore a sacramental understanding of words in the worship of the church, the use of the term *sacramental* must be addressed. *Sacrament* refers to one of a distinct number of rituals that churches throughout the years have

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 435-36.

³⁷ Ibid., 441; See *BCP*, 531; 534.

judged to signify a sacred reality and to confer grace in powerful ways. In the Episcopal Church, baptism and eucharist are the only official sacraments. Other “sacramental rites” (which are considered to be official sacraments in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches) include confirmation, ordination, holy matrimony, reconciliation, and unction. The Catechism in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* states that these rites stand apart as “they are not necessary for all persons in the same way that Baptism and Eucharist are.”³⁸ Together with the two sacraments, the sacramental rites help us to hope and give us a sense of what our ultimate hope is. God is not confined to them, but they are “patterns of the countless ways by which God uses material things to reach out to us.”³⁹

The idea of hope is a helpful one for arriving at a workable sense of the word “sacramental.” For Christians, hope has a definite horizon: we hope that in the fullness of time, God will be all in all, that Jesus will make all things new, and that we will be completely united with him. Hope is also an active thing. Even to *think* hopefully, without doing anything observable, is to participate in something beyond oneself. Finally, at the latter point, hope comes through grace. It is only by virtue of God’s power working in us that human beings continue to see and to imagine the world as God’s own, and to align themselves in hopeful ways with God’s mission.

It is necessary, then, that the term “sacramental” should describe something that is rooted first and foremost in Jesus, the “actual historical presence in the world of the eschatologically triumphant mercy of God.”⁴⁰ “Sacramental” also denotes something that

³⁸ *BCP*, 860.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 861.

⁴⁰ Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 15.

brings us closer to Jesus, makes Jesus present to us, and allows us to participate in him. In this way, the sacramental describes a relationship. It represents the shape of Christ's relationship to us – his ministry among us, his death for us, his resurrection with us – and draws us into deeper intimacy with him. It does this in a way that is tangible. In the case of words, this involves vocalizing and hearing, as well as seeing and touching printed words and books.

The two official sacraments of the church, baptism and eucharist, reflect what the term sacramental can mean in definitive ways. The conversations around them in the Open Table debate celebrate the manner in which they do this. For Farwell, the commitment that a person makes in baptism ushers her into “the context of a life poured out for the kingdom,” which lends to the eucharist a character of “intimate communion” like no other.⁴¹ Here content (kingdom), action (mission), and relationship (grace) are united in one moment of transformative response. For Tanner, Fabian, and others, to come to the Eucharistic table is to experience “the gift of a new life to the undeserving through Christ's unconditional offer of grace ... being incorporated into Christ's life as a member of his body, the church.”⁴² Edmonson adds that grace “is understood less as an infused quality of the soul and more as a renewal of relationship.”⁴³ Intimacy with Jesus and transformation through him are again at the heart of the sacrament.

In what follows, I propose that the words Christians use in worship have a sacramental character equal to that of baptism and eucharist. This sacramental character consists of drawing us more intimately into communion with Jesus, making tangible the

⁴¹ Farwell, “Baptism,” 221-22.

⁴² Tanner, “In Praise,” 482.

⁴³ Edmonson, “Opening,” 223.

hope that he incarnates, and inspiring us in our mission with him. In two chapters entitled “Words of God and “Words about God,” I will consider how Scripture and preaching, respectively, function in the liturgical life of the Church, namely in the liturgy of the word in the service of Holy Eucharist.⁴⁴ I will draw on the aforementioned examples of Thomas Cranmer and Lancelot Andrewes to locate this consideration in Anglican history and tradition. In a subsequent chapter, “Words Made Flesh,” I will note how the understanding of Jesus as God’s Word constitutes a sacramental thread that ties the ministry of the word to the ministry of the table, and how the eucharistic prayer is itself sacramental. William Temple’s commentary on the Gospel of John grounds this section in a historically Anglican context.

Both the Protestant Reformation and the Liturgical Movement of the twentieth century had as goals the restoration of the dignity of the word in worship and in the lives of Christians. This paper will contribute to the ongoing realization of that goal in the Episcopal Church by identifying how Scripture and preaching hold a place of like importance to the sacraments of baptism and eucharist in our tradition. A renewed emphasis on words will also provide another perspective on the current debate about baptism, eucharist, and Open Table. Finally, it is my hope that as worshipping people realize the value of the words of their liturgies, they will find more and more that they are able to articulate their own experiences of God’s grace, and to witness to the new reality of God’s kingdom, which they have been called to serve.

⁴⁴ The titles “The Word of Jesus” and “The Word about Jesus” are used by Orthodox theologian John Breck in his book, *The Power of the Word in the Worshipping Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), 16-17. Henceforth cited as *Power*.

Chapter 1

Words of God: Scripture

There is an earnestness about the relationship of the Christian and his Bible. He simply must know all he can about Jesus Christ as he is in constant relation to Him through his faith and worship He does not, however, read alone. He reads as a member of the Body of Christ.⁴⁵

–Robert E. Terwilliger, *Receiving the Word of God*

It has been said that the *Book of Common Prayer* takes the Bible, and makes liturgy out of it.⁴⁶ In fact, a quick glance through the index of scripture citations in Marion Hatchett's *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* shows that all but nine books of the Old Testament, and all but one epistle from the New Testament are cited, paraphrased, or alluded to in the Prayer Book's litanies, versicles, canticles, collects, and liturgies.⁴⁷ Christian communities have long prayed the Scriptures. In the course of worship, this action does not serve an exclusively didactic or ethical function, but a sacramental one: "scripture helps to create the sacred space in which the community comes to *be* in the presence of God."⁴⁸

The service of Holy Eucharist is composed of two balanced parts. In the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, the liturgy of the word is called "The Word of God," and the

⁴⁵ Robert E. Terwilliger, *Receiving the Word of God* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1960), 51.

⁴⁶ William Palmer Ladd paraphrased in Michael Johnston, *Engaging the Word* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1998), 148.

⁴⁷ See Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 665-70. Henceforth cited as *Commentary*. Though it is common in academic writing to use the term "Hebrew Bible," in this paper I will follow the New Testament scholar Amy Jill Levine's recommendation that Christians use the term "Old Testament," particularly when referring to the books' uses in Christian history.

⁴⁸ Michael Johnston, *Engaging the Word* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1998), 149.

liturgy of the table is called “The Holy Communion.” The bipartite structure of the eucharistic rite can be traced back to the second century. Prior to that time, Christians met regularly for an early-morning service in which they prayed, sang, and read Scripture. In the evening, they gathered for supper. The morning and evening services were likely wedded when the Roman government forbade the existence of private clubs. Wine and bread from the community meal, and the prayers associated with them, were joined to the morning service of prayer, song, and Scripture.⁴⁹ The writings of Justin Martyr and Irenaus of Lyons provided descriptions of a unified Eucharistic service as early as 150 CE and 185 CE, respectively.

The prayers and actions that make up the liturgy of the table evoke and rehearse a great deal of scriptural material. However, it is in the liturgy of the word where we find the most straightforward presence of Scripture in the eucharist. At the heart of the liturgy of the word is the reading of the lessons, which brings today’s worshipping communities into contact with large portions of texts from the Old Testament, the Psalms, and the New Testament. This part of the liturgy has its roots in the ancient Jewish synagogue service. From the beginning, Christian communities met to hear lectors read the Hebrew Scriptures, collections of stories about and sayings of Jesus, and the letters of prominent missionaries and teachers, like Paul. In Chapter Sixty-Seven of his *First Apology*, Justin writes that in the course of a Sunday meeting, “the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits.”⁵⁰ The Jewish synagogue

⁴⁹ Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 73. Henceforth cited as *Liturgy*.

⁵⁰ Peter G. Cobb, “The Liturgy of the Word in the Early Church,” in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, et al (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 226. Henceforth cited as “Liturgy of the Word.”

service employed a system of *lectio continua*, with set readings for special days of feasting or fasting. Though there is no firm evidence that early Christians used Jewish lectionaries, they seem to have adopted a similar pattern of course readings.⁵¹ Soon, lessons were fixed for Easter and other holy days, such as Christmas and the Feast of the Epiphany. The first authoritative lectionary dates from the fifth century, and includes readings for a variety of feast days. The first complete lectionaries date from the seventh century.⁵²

Originally, three lessons were read during the course of a worship service, including one from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. Even so, by Justin's time the New Testament writings came to occupy a privileged place in Christian communities. By the middle of the first century, the apostle Paul had begun to use the term "word of God" to refer to his own message about Jesus' resurrection.⁵³ Formerly, this term referred only to the word of God spoken to the prophets. The early church owed its existence to the *kerygma* – the message about Jesus that Paul and the other apostles proclaimed. In the daily lives of its members and in its worship the church sought to bear witness to this message by "guarding and proclaiming the traditional belief that originated with the apostles."⁵⁴ The Scriptures judged to most accurately portray Jesus' life and teachings and to most aptly theologize about this message began to play a decidedly prominent role in worship. By the end of the sixth century in Rome, only two

⁵¹ Senn, *Liturgy*, 74.

⁵² Cobb, "Liturgy of the Word," 227. Venerius, bishop of Marseilles, commissioned the first authoritative lectionary in the mid-fifth century.

⁵³ Frederick E. Crowe, SJ, *Theology of the Christian Word: A Study in History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 28.

⁵⁴ Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1976), 236. Henceforth cited as *Ministry*.

readings were heard each Sunday, both from the New Testament.⁵⁵ This practice continued throughout the medieval period in both Western and Eastern rites.

At the time of the Reformation, the Sarum Use (the Roman Rite adapted for worship at Salisbury Cathedral) was prevalent throughout England. The liturgy of the word – or ordinary of the mass – preserved the pattern of two New Testament readings begun in the medieval church.⁵⁶ First, a lector, deacon, or priest read from one of the Epistles. A response to the reading followed: *Verbum Domini / Deo gratias* (“The word of the Lord” / “Thanks be to God”). Though lay lectors read the first lessons in the early church, Leonel Mitchell notes that this ministry “was usurped by the clergy at a period when few people were able to read.”⁵⁷ Following the Epistle, rubrics in the Sarum Use directed one or more cantors to station themselves on the steps leading to the choir. The gradual (named for the step, or *gradus*, on which the cantor stood) was then chanted or sung in response to the Epistle. Originally a responsorial psalm intended to be sung after the Old Testament reading, the gradual was a required element of the liturgy of the word throughout the medieval period. It preceded the Alleluia, which was chanted or sung before the Gospel reading in festal or ordinary seasons.⁵⁸

The reading of the Gospel involved a great deal of ceremonial in the Sarum Use. As noted, the Alleluia was sung, as well as the sequence (a text sung in conjunction with the Alleluias) or the tract (a text sung in lieu of the Alleluias during penitential seasons).

⁵⁵ Cobb, “Liturgy of the Word,” 226.

⁵⁶ On weekdays during Lent, the first lesson was taken from the Old Testament. See Hatchett, *Commentary*, 325.

⁵⁷ Mitchell, *Praying*, 135.

⁵⁸ *The Sarum Missal in English*, A. H. Pearson, trans. (Hartford: The Church Press, 1868), 290-321. Henceforth cited as *Sarum*. During penitential seasons, a “tract,” or verses of a psalm sung through without response, replaced the more festal Alleluia.

The deacon then presented the bread and wine for the eucharist, that they might be blessed by the priest. He proceeded to cense the middle of the altar only, for “the lectern is never censed either at Mass or Matins before the Gospel.”⁵⁹ The deacon received the Gospel book and presented himself to the priest with the petition, “Bless” or “Bid a blessing.”⁶⁰ The priest prayed that God would be in the deacon’s heart and on his lips, so that he might worthily proclaim the Gospel. As the deacon made his way to the lectern or pulpit, he was preceded by a thurifer and torchbearers. He then turned toward the altar to begin reading. In many places it would have been customary for the congregation to stand, as this practice dates at least to the third century.⁶¹ The deacon announced the Gospel and the congregation responded, “Glory to you, O Lord,” at which point they were directed to cross themselves.⁶² Following the reading and the congregation’s final response, the deacon kissed the book. The ordinary of the mass continued with the Nicene Creed, and the deacon was instructed to bring the Gospel book to the priest before the offertory so that he might kiss it. The basic structure of the Roman rite included a sermon following the Gospel. However, rubrics in the Sarum Use do not indicate that exposition of the lessons was obligatory.

This was the liturgy of the word that Thomas Cranmer inherited when King Henry VIII of England appointed him Archbishop of Canterbury in 1533. In a break with the papacy in Rome two years earlier, Henry had declared himself the Supreme Head of the Church in England. As this English “reformation” had more to do initially with

⁵⁹ Pearson, *Sarum*, 296.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 330.

⁶² Pearson, *Sarum*, 297.

church governance, and less with explicit liturgical or theological dissatisfaction, the pace of radical change within the church was slow. Henry was not eager to transform religious observance, nor were English people entirely disenchanted with the church.⁶³

Henry did wish, however, to make an English translation of the Bible available in all parishes in his realm. During the Middle Ages, English people (like other Europeans) were familiar with scriptural material. Not only were their religious experiences shaped by biblical lore, but so much of everyday life occurred in relation to the church that, “inevitably, they were exposed to extensive portions of Scripture.”⁶⁴ Yet, the average parish priest could not read the Bible in Latin, and translations in English consisted primarily of portions of text inserted into meditations or popular legends.⁶⁵ Scriptures were not viewed as the property of Christians as a group. Rather, they were something set apart for authorized persons within the church to teach and to guard. This attitude accounts for the scandalized reactions of many people to early vernacular translations, like that of John Wycliffe, which were put forward to “renovate the church and society.”⁶⁶

The leaders of the Reformation in Europe were influenced by Renaissance humanists, whose scholarly method involved seeking out the original sources of texts and ideas. Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther led the way in translating the Old and New Testaments into languages other than Latin. Moreover, they provided a rationale for why reading Scripture was important for the average Christian layperson. The Reformers

⁶³ Senn, *Liturgy*, 370.

⁶⁴ William P. Haugaard, “The Bible in the Anglican Reformation,” in *Anglicanism and the Bible*, ed. Frederick Houk Borsch (Wilton: Morehouse Barlow, 1984), 18. Henceforth cited as “Bible.”

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

regarded Scripture as a means to wisdom, moral formation, authentic appropriation of church teaching, and knowledge of Jesus: “We cannot call any man a Platonist, unless he have read the works of Plato. Yet call we them Christian, yea and divines, which never have read the scriptures of Christ.”⁶⁷ The Reformers advocated for the translation of the Bible into various and intelligible native languages. They hoped that every Christian would have greater access to Scripture and would be transformed by it. At the same time, they did not support idiosyncratic interpretations of Scripture, undertaken apart from the church. Luther himself believed that his challenge to Roman Catholic teaching came not as a “private Christian, but as a professor of Scripture to whom the Church had granted the doctorate.”⁶⁸

In England, humanist scholarship, supported by Henry, and growing Lutheran influence created a climate that was hospitable to the translation of Scripture and some liturgies into the vernacular. Scholars and statesmen began work on the first complete, authorized version of the Bible in English. In 1538, a royal injunction required all parish clergy to secure one Bible in its entirety, to place it in a convenient place, and to encourage their parishioners to read it (with pastoral guidance). The injunction described the Bible as “the very lively word of God, that every Christian man is bound to embrace, believe, and follow, if he means to be saved.”⁶⁹ The Great Bible was complete by 1540, and its second edition bore a preface by Thomas Cranmer.

Though he was not entirely responsible for its creation, Cranmer had been a driving force behind the English Bible. Part of a group of Cambridge dons who met

⁶⁷ Desiderius Erasmus, cited in *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁹ A royal injunction of 1536 cited in *ibid.*, 46.

regularly during the 1520s to discuss Lutheran ideas, he later encountered them first-hand while engaged in diplomatic work for Henry. While traveling in Europe, Cranmer observed Lutheran worship services, spoke with Lutheran theologians, and even married the niece of Nuremberg Reformer Andreas Osiander.⁷⁰ Though Cranmer was influenced by a number of theologians and Reformers, the movement represented by Luther and like-minded theologians (like Martin Bucer) had an initial, important effect on his thought.⁷¹

The text of Cranmer's "Preface to the Great Bible" gives some insight into his own views on Scripture. It begins with an apologia for making a vernacular translation available. People who would challenge such a thing, Cranmer asserts, are as "mad" as those who would "refuse in darkness, light; in hunger, food; in cold, fire."⁷² God's word is light, food, fire, and also a source of "ghostly succor and comfort," an "armor or fortress" against the world's assaults, and "salve" for the souls of all people. The bulk of Cranmer's "Preface" is his recounting of a sermon by John Chrysostom, wherein the latter argues that every Christian should immerse himself in Scripture. Cranmer paraphrases Chrysostom's words for those who fear that the Bible is beyond their comprehension:

For the holy ghost hath so ordered and attempered the scriptures, that in them as well publicans, fishers, and shepherds may find their edification, as great doctors their erudition But the Apostles and prophets wrote their books so that their special intent and purpose might be understood

⁷⁰ Ibid., 370.

⁷¹ Samuel Leuenberger, *Archbishop Cranmer's Immortal Bequest: The Book of Common Prayer and the Church of England: An Evangelistic Liturgy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 6. Henceforth cited as *Immortal*.

⁷² Thomas Cranmer, in *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. Gerald Bray (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 234. Henceforth cited as *Documents*.

and perceived of every reader, which was nothing but the edification and amendment of life of them that readeth or heareth it.⁷³

Cranmer devotes a great deal of energy in the “Preface” to setting forth the idea that “to the reading of scripture none can be enemy.”⁷⁴ More than this, he points to the inherent goodness of the Scriptures, foreclosing the notion that anything in them might lead people astray: “In the scriptures be the fat pastures of the soul, therein is no venomous meat, no unwholesome thing; they be the very dainty and pure feeding.”⁷⁵

As noted, Henry was ambivalent about reforming trends within the church. Nevertheless, the use of the Great Bible made its way, step-by-step, into the church’s worship, until English people were hearing the Epistle and Gospel read in their own language just as other reformed churches in Europe were doing.⁷⁶ Henry issued injunctions to ensure that lay people did not read, interpret, or discuss Scripture in the liturgy. At the same time, he continued to enforce the directive that all parishes should have an English Bible.⁷⁷ Despite this, conservative bishops were successful in their attempts to curtail the reading of Scripture by poor people and the public reading of Scripture by most classes of people. These measures, they explained, would protect the church’s teaching authority. Henry’s final year as king saw the burning of many of the Reformers’ books, as well as English translations of the New Testament.⁷⁸

Given the cautious pace of change in England, and Henry’s shifting attitudes, Cranmer was not able to institute wholesale revision of the liturgy during the king’s

⁷³ Ibid., 237.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 238.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Haugaard, “Bible,” 50.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

lifetime. However, after the monarch's death in 1547, Cranmer discovered a more congenial environment in which to continue the work of revision. The new king, Edward VI, was a young person who had been educated by Protestant tutors. His council of advisors included a number of influential men who favored the ideas of the continental reformers. In tandem with Cranmer, they ordered that homilies be read in the churches, and that English be used more and more in worship. To this end, a short communion service in English was inserted into the Latin mass 1548, and the first *Book of Common Prayer* was authorized and mandated for use in 1549.⁷⁹

The title of the first Prayer Book, *The Booke of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, after the Use of the Church of England*, indicates the architecture of reform as undertaken by Cranmer. Corporate prayer and sacraments – baptism and eucharist – would be foundational for the life of the church. Furthermore, Cranmer was building on rites already in use in England, primarily Sarum. More so than most continental reformers, Cranmer remained faithful to the Roman canon of the mass, or eucharistic prayer, in his 1549 Prayer Book.⁸⁰

A few years later, in 1552, Cranmer completed a revision of this first text. It is often said that the more reformed rites contained in the 1552 book represent his original intentions with regard to liturgical revision. More likely, the 1552 Prayer Book represents the natural development of Cranmer's theology, especially as it was worked

⁷⁹William P. Haugaard, "From the Reformation to the 18th Century," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, eds. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 7. Henceforth cited as "Reformation."

⁸⁰Senn, *Liturgy*, 374.

out in consultation with continental reformers such as Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr.⁸¹ The Sarum Use still undergirded the 1552 Prayer Book, though in a less obvious way.

One of the chief goals of reform in England, however, was not to preserve or to tidy up Sarum, but to infuse the rites of the church with the words of Scripture, and to pare away extraneous ceremonial in favor of more scriptural worship. It may be said that, overall, a more word-centered theology informed Cranmer's revisions, particularly in the 1552 Prayer Book. The idea that Scripture as the word of God should be at the center of the church's life is characteristic of the continental reformers, particularly those who were of help to Cranmer in revising the 1549 Prayer Book. Italian theologian Peter Martyr placed such a strong emphasis on the reading of Scripture and on preaching as to suggest that receiving communion was a "heightened form of hearing God's word."⁸² Bucer, the German reformer held that "whatever is taught from holy scripture is received as the teaching of God."⁸³ Finally, the English bishop John Hooper's work was permeated with scriptural citations, and he held the Decalogue in great esteem. Hooper wrote that Scripture, particularly as it expounded God's law, was a motivating force in conversion and sanctification and that "the word of God written is as perfect as God himself."⁸⁴

Cranmer's thoughts about Scripture, worship, and belief are again showcased in his prefaces to both the 1549 and 1552 Prayer Books. The "Preface" (it remains largely

⁸¹ Leuenberger, *Immortal*, 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

unchanged between the two versions) begins by recalling the intention of the “auncient fathers” of the church:

all the whole Bible (or the greatest part thereof) shoulde be readde over once in the yeare entendynge thereby, that the clergie and speciallye suche as were ministers of the congregacion, should (by often readynge and meditacion of Goddes woorde) be stirred up to godlynesse themselves, and be more able also to exhorte other by whole some doctrine, and to confute them that were adversaries to the trueth. And further, that the people (by dayly hearynge of holye scripture read in the Church) should continuallye profyte more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more in flamed with the love of hys true religion.⁸⁵

Cranmer goes on to list what he perceives to be accretions that have become part of the “common prayers in the Church,” namely the recitation of unbiblical legends and stories, responses, verses, “vaine” repetitions, and other ceremonies surrounding the reading and exposition of Scripture.⁸⁶ He describes a scene where Isaiah might be read in Advent, or Genesis in the weeks before Lent; yet, these books would only be begun, not read entirely, and would be read in Latin. Having laid out the problems with which churchgoers have to contend, Cranmer presents them with “an ordre for praier (as touching the readyng of holy scripture)” that is free from uncertain, untrue, and superstitious elements. The 1552 Prayer Book directs that only “the very pure worde of God, the holy scriptures ... in suche a language and ordre, as is most easy and plain for the understanding” be read in worship.⁸⁷

While Cranmer’s views on Scripture are most explicitly stated in his prefaces to the Great Bible and to the 1549 and 1552 Prayer Books, his orders for Matins and Lauds

⁸⁵ Gibson, Edmund. ed., *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (Rockville: Wildside Press, 2008), 321.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 322.

are forthright examples of what, for him, scriptural worship looked like. Cranmer famously combined the traditional monastic hours of prayer into the more public, accessible setting of a cathedral office that emphasized psalmody and the course reading of Scripture. It was his intention that the daily offices be public services of the church, rather than the private devotions of monks and priests.⁸⁸ Cranmer required that whole psalms and lessons be read in English from both the Old and the New Testament at the morning and evening offices. Irritated by the repeated interruption caused by proper readings for saints' days in the Roman lectionary, he also stripped the church calendar of most commemorations. However, were a person to attend church on Sunday only, she would have encountered the readings entirely out of context. In the case of less familiar texts, particularly those of the Old Testament, this could be confusing. Later revisions of the Prayer Book provided proper readings from the Old Testament for Sundays.⁸⁹

Similarly, Cranmer's reworking of the ordinary and canon of the mass evidenced his convictions about the Bible itself and the use of Scripture in worship. The eucharistic lectionary contained in the 1549 and 1552 Prayer Books did not drastically modify the one contained in the Sarum Use, and it did not expose churchgoers to as much Scripture as the services of Matins and Lauds. However, it was assumed that a service of Matins, Litany, and Ante-Communion would precede the communion service.⁹⁰ Cranmer's liturgy of the word – the ordinary of the mass from the Sarum Use – retained the readings from the Epistle and the Gospel only. All embellishments surrounding them were

⁸⁸ Marion J. Hatchett, "The Bible in Anglicanism," in *Anglicanism and the Bible*, ed. Frederick Houk Borsch (Wilton: Morehouse Barlow, 1984), 83. Henceforth cited as "Bible."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

removed. The priest began, “The Epistle written in the [eighth] chapter of [Romans],” and concluded with no congregational response. Immediately he began the Gospel reading with the same sentence, “The Gospel written in the [fourteenth] chapter of [John].” The congregation replied, “Glory be to thee, O Lorde” in the 1549 Prayer Book, but this was omitted in 1552. No congregational response followed the reading in either book. Likewise, the gradual, Alleluia, sequence and/or tract were all removed. In the 1552 Prayer Book, one priest is presumed to be the reader rather than a deacon or other ministers and clerks. The 1552 book also notes that the readings should be done in an “appointed” place, which was likely the pulpit.⁹¹

While our focus has been on the reading of Scripture in the lessons, additional items that were introduced in the 1549 and 1552 Prayer Books emphasize Cranmer’s scriptural orientation. The Decalogue, collects, comfortable words, and offertory sentences hemmed in the entire eucharistic service with Scripture. The Decalogue, which figured in Bucer’s rite, was to be said following the opening dialogue, and the Kyrie was a response to it.⁹² The placement of the Decalogue at the beginning of the eucharist set a scriptural context for the whole liturgy that was meant to inspire repentance and remind the congregation of God’s covenant with humanity.⁹³ It may also have reflected a desire to include some catechetical material in the worship service.⁹⁴ Though many of the collects were revised or translated from the Sarum Use, Cranmer composed a number of them. “Freed from the restraint of translating or revising a Latin original,” in almost

⁹¹ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 332.

⁹² Senn, *Liturgy*, 377.

⁹³ Leuenberger, *Immortal*, 125.

⁹⁴ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 311.

every case Cranmer's primary resource was Scripture.⁹⁵ The comfortable words were another reformed element introduced in Cranmer's Prayer Books. These sentences of Scripture, introduced as the words of Christ, St. Paul, and St. John, were spoken immediately following the confession and absolution. Their message of forgiveness served as a counterpoint to the theme of repentance begun with the Decalogue; furthermore, they shored up the biblical notion of Jesus as the one who reconciles, rather than the priest. Finally, the offertory sentences were a unique feature of the service of Holy Eucharist in Cranmer's Prayer Books. Less an introduction to the liturgy of the table, the offertory was perceived as a supplement to the sermon that was meant to put churchgoers in mind of their duty to give alms and to do good works. Sentences such as "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good workes, and glorifie your father whiche is in heaven" suggested that the real sacrifice was not the eucharistic elements, but that "the preached Word should bring forth fruit in every individual."⁹⁶

While the lessons fastened the liturgy of the word in a scriptural context, the above items carried that context throughout the worship service. They also gave the sense that Scripture acts as sort of a proof, like currency backed in precious metals. If, for instance, grace needed to be emphasized in a moment of confession and absolution, warrants from Scripture needed to be provided. Similarly, were the congregation to be asked to offer gifts, patterns from Scripture were supplied. In the setting of the Reformation, this emphasis on the biblical backing of worship may have provided practical assurance that the church's teaching was trustworthy and free of accretions.

⁹⁵ Hatchett, "Bible," 104.

⁹⁶ Leuenberger, *Immortal*, 123.

We are left with a Prayer Book that does, in fact “take the Bible and make liturgy out of it.” The liturgy of the word in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* is the product of twentieth-century liturgical renewal, but its skeleton is still the biblical worship envisioned by Cranmer, the backbone of which is the lessons. Many of the elements surrounding their reading are now allowed, such as the congregational response, the gradual, Alleluia, sequence or tract, and special ceremonies surrounding the Gospel reading. A Sunday service of Holy Eucharist in some Episcopal churches might resemble the following:

The liturgy of the word begins with an opening dialogue, collect, and hymn or song of praise. The Collect of the Day introduces the Lessons, which are taken from the Revised Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of readings used by a majority of Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches in North America. While a psalm, hymn, or anthem may follow each reading, it is common that the psalm appointed for the day be recited as a response to the Old Testament reading, and that a congregational hymn follow the Epistle. Whether sung or spoken, the psalm may be referred to as “the gradual.” Where possible, trained lay lectors read the first two lessons and may lead the congregation in reciting the psalm. The Gospel is preferably read by a deacon or other minister. Though it is stated in the Prayer Book that all of the lessons should be read from the same lectern or pulpit, in practice the Gospel is often read from the center of the chancel, facing the congregation, or is processed with torches and cross to the center of the nave.⁹⁷ In that case, the congregation turns to follow the deacon, creating something like a circle whose center is the Gospel book and its reader. The congregation is directed

⁹⁷ See *BCP*, 406.

to stand, and responds “Glory to you, Lord Christ” and “Praise to you, Lord Christ” at the introduction and conclusion of the reading. The Alleluias and sequence may be sung before and after the Gospel reading, particularly where there is a procession (in order to cover the movement of the reader and acolytes). The Prayer Book recommends that the lessons be read from “a book of appropriate size and dignity.”⁹⁸ In fact, it is common for the Gospels to be contained in a separate book, sometimes ornate, that is carried in procession as the ministers enter the worship space. Most often the book is then placed on the altar. The Decalogue and comfortable words remain only in the Rite I form of Holy Eucharist. The current Prayer Book includes Cranmer’s collects in traditional and contemporary language. It also contains the offertory sentences, absent an emphasis on almsgiving alone. Almost all of these verses refer to oblation, sacrifice, and dedication of self and of all one’s goods.

The juxtaposition of Cranmer’s Scripture-heavy liturgy with ceremonial that seems more at home in the Sarum Use appears contradictory. When we consider what it means to say that this sort of worship is sacramental, however, the synthesis is appropriate. First, it is important to explore in what sense Cranmer’s ideas about Scripture and use of Scripture in the liturgy can be said to be sacramental. The key to understanding his approach is the notion of *intelligibility*, and how rendering sacred words and actions intelligible leads to greater intimacy with Jesus, which is the goal of sacramental worship.

Intelligibility has always been a concern when Christians gather for worship. We noted that from the very beginning, groups of Christians met to hear the Scriptures read

⁹⁸ Ibid.

and expounded upon. These texts' authors tried to represent authentically the story of Jesus as they had received it, and tried to work out the significance of his death and resurrection. At the same time, their audiences tried to discern between different texts as to which ones embodied an "authentic witness to the salvation event in Jesus Christ."⁹⁹ In hearing Scripture read, in creating a canon of Scripture, and in expounding upon Scripture the early church sought to render the witness to Jesus that originated with the apostles intelligible, so that they might come to know him and learn how to live according to his vision of God's kingdom. Even catechumens, who were kept from participating in the "liturgy of the faithful" (the canon of the mass) before their baptism, remained for the lessons, sermon, and in some places the Creed.¹⁰⁰ This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

When Cranmer and his colleagues advocated for a complete English translation of the Bible, and when he began to revise the medieval liturgies, intelligibility in worship was at a nadir. The Sarum Use was in Latin, and many of its prayers were said quietly by the presiding priest alone. Ceremonial, as in the reading of the lessons and the Gospel procession detailed earlier in this paper, was elaborate and complexly symbolic. Various books helped ministers navigate the rites; yet, laypeople would have heard and understood very little of what was said. They may not have been able to interpret accurately what was happening, either. Holiness had once mandated intelligibility: in order to be holy, one needed to come into contact with and be able to understand holy things. During the medieval period, holiness mandated a measure of occlusion.

⁹⁹ Reginald H. Fuller, "Scripture," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, eds. John Booty, Jonathan Knight, and Stephen Sykes (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 89.

¹⁰⁰ Cobb, in "Liturgy of the Word," 228

Sacramental actions as a whole and the people for whom sacraments were intended were no longer considered to be holy. Rather the things themselves (i.e., bread and wine in the eucharist) were sacred, apart from the body of the church. This was true for reading, hearing, and understanding Scripture.

By overhauling the monastic and cathedral offices and streamlining the service of Holy Eucharist, Cranmer hoped to render the church's worship clearer and more intelligible. By adding long, course readings of Scripture and infusing all of the liturgies with biblical material, he shifted focus away from the sacrifice of the mass and toward "the very true and most fruitful knowledge of holy scriptures."¹⁰¹ The relative sparseness of his ceremonial, especially where the reading of the Gospel was concerned, suggested that the words of Scripture were able to stand on their own, enjoying a dignity and power that was integral to them. Like the bread and wine in the medieval mass, Scripture as the word of God possessed independent authority.

Its authority, however, was something that all members of the church needed to participate in firsthand. Cranmer did not have a mystical view of Scripture, nor did he discuss it in a way that separated it from the life of the church. For Cranmer, Scripture was meant to lead people to a deep knowledge of God, and of what they ought to do. Being able to hear and understand Scripture fostered intimacy with Jesus primarily at the level of moral formation. As noted in his "Preface to the Great Bible," Cranmer thought that Scripture could be understood generally, so that all people might be edified by it and seek to amend their lives.¹⁰² Those who were less likely to read the Bible because of their daily responsibilities or lack of education were *more* likely to benefit from it: "much

¹⁰¹ Cranmer, in *Documents*, 242.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 236.

the more it is behoveful for thee to have defense of scriptures, how much thou art the more distressed in worldly dangers.”¹⁰³

Cranmer’s conception of Scripture as something that leads us to knowledge of Jesus and of what we need to do to follow him was not purely functional. To modern ears, the idea that intimacy with Jesus consists primarily in “knowing” and “obeying” rings cold. It is possible, however, to understand this sort of encounter as a matter of committed response – exactly that idea emphasized by the opponents of the practice of Open Table. Scripture understood as God’s word is not a “direct propositional statement” that discloses God’s commands and requires our calculated assent. Rather, it describes a world that has been redeemed by God and a pattern of life that draws us into God’s redemptive purposes as it “refers us to what God is doing and what we experience as his doings.”¹⁰⁴ Scripture reveals God to us in the person of Jesus, whose story demands “not merely an intellectual acceptance of its claims,” but a movement toward him in love: “The risen Lord asks Peter not if he *believes* in Him, but rather if he *loves* Him (Jn. 21:15-17).”¹⁰⁵ When we encounter Jesus in the words of Scripture, we are moved to respond. The more we respond by drawing closer to him in love, the more we learn about and are able to imagine the hope that he incarnates, and the more our lives are shaped by his mission. When Scripture is read in worship, “the Holy Spirit uses it ever anew to proclaim the living word of salvation,” and our response to it “is the work of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Hans Schwarz, *Divine Communication: Word and Sacrament in Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 8. Henceforth cited as *Communication*.

¹⁰⁵ Breck, *Power*, 122.

¹⁰⁶ Fuller, “Scripture,” 89.

Scripture does more than show us sacred realities, as the above citation about the Holy Spirit makes clear. When Scripture is read in worship, it creates sacred space by representing what it witnesses to. Julia Gatta describes this experience:

Although we exist only within some particular moment in time, the Spirit is not confined by that moment. The words and actions of Jesus, while transacted in the past, have the power to become a living reality Just as the Holy Spirit is invoked in the eucharist to transform ordinary bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood, so a kind of *anamnesis* occurs with the reading of Scripture.¹⁰⁷

The events of Jesus' life, the witness of the apostles, and the generations of people who have heard and digested the Scriptures that we read are present in the liturgy of the word, just as the communion of saints is said to be present in the liturgy of the table. Their message about who God is and what God intends for the world transcends time and place, so that "whatever finds expression there is true now," while Jesus "still deals with our souls as He dealt with those who had fellowship with Him when he *tabernacled among us*."¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, as sacramental, Scripture in worship brings about "a transformation of consciousness" in which "things become imbued with new meaning and value."¹⁰⁹ This sense of the holiness of one's surroundings likewise extends beyond the time and place into a new conception of reality. In meeting us with the truth about God and God's creation, worship shatters our "limitations" with which we tend to mistake the "real world." Our encounter with "a true hearing of the Word begins or renews the process of

¹⁰⁷ Julia Gatta, *The Nearness of God: Parish Ministry as Spiritual Practice* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2010), 72. Henceforth cited as *Nearness*.

¹⁰⁸ William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse Barlow Co., 1985), 14. Henceforth cited as *Readings*.

¹⁰⁹ Mircea Eliade, cited in Martos, *Doors*, 8.

conversion, and throws all the complacent views shaped by our culture into question.”¹¹⁰ Scripture elicits and refreshes our commitment to Jesus’ vision of God’s kingdom and his assertion of its unquestionable ultimacy. We are inspired and persuaded to live according to and in service of this *real* “real world.”

It is for these reasons that Christians have at different times marked the reading of Scripture in worship with ceremonies that denote holiness. For example, kissing or crossing the Gospel book, carrying it in procession, censing it, or standing to hear it read are all meant to convey “the honor paid to the Gospel as the Word of God.”¹¹¹ Responding to the lessons with set phrases reminds us of the “benevolent actions of the God who revealed them.”¹¹² Worship must be intelligible, and must allow for Scripture to be intelligibly presented. Where that is the case, ceremonial augments the tangible sacredness of the Bible, and fixes it within a liturgical context that unites the liturgy of the word to the liturgy of the table. For all its complexity and linguistic unintelligibility, the blessing of the eucharistic elements before the Gospel reading in the Sarum Use highlights just that point.

A sacramental understanding of Scripture involves the understanding that the words of the Bible draw us more intimately into communion with Jesus, make tangible the hope that he incarnates, and inspires us in our mission with him. When Scripture is read in the course of our worship in the lessons, the prayers, the offertory sentences, and at other times, we are presented with Jesus himself, God’s Word incarnate. We become

¹¹⁰ Louis Weil, *Sacraments and Liturgy: The Outward Signs: A Study in Liturgical Mentality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983), 98.

¹¹¹ Mitchell, *Praying*, 134.

¹¹² Aelred A. Rosser, *A Well Trained Tongue: Formation in the Ministry of Reader* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996), 3.

familiar with a vision of God’s kingdom that is his word to us, and are offered a relationship with him, to which we respond in love. This relationship continues to grow each time we encounter Jesus in Scripture: “Our reading of the Gospel story can be and should be an act of personal communion with the living Lord.”¹¹³

The question remains as to whether having access to the Bible – reading or hearing its words spoken intelligibly to us – is enough. If we understand Scripture to have some integral authority, does it stand on its own or does it depend, in part, on being interpreted? We may recall the atmospheric effect Scripture had on medieval people, whose lives were centered around the church in spite of the fact that they did not know Latin and did not frequently hear sermons. Does such a situation adequately embody the church’s witness and contribute to the formation of committed persons? Orthodox theologian John Breck points to the example of Jesus’ words to his disciples about his death and resurrection, about which “they understood nothing . . . in fact, what he said was hidden from them” (Luke 18:34). Breck notes, “the scriptural Word is not necessarily self-revealing”; yet, “through the inspirational and interpretive *dynamis* or power of the Holy Spirit” human words can become the word of God.¹¹⁴ In the next chapter, we will consider the role of human words in worship as we explore the sacramental understanding of preaching.

¹¹³ Temple, *Readings*, 14.

¹¹⁴ Breck, [title], 14

Chapter Two

Words about God: Preaching

When the Word of God broke into the silence of the world, it came as a word of preaching.¹¹⁵

—Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching*

Preaching, like the reading of Scripture, is an original component of Christian worship that was inherited from Judaism. From the time of the apostles, its chief purpose has been “to expound and explain the scriptures,” usually the passages that have just been read in the course of worship.¹¹⁶ Biblical accounts of preaching and the biblical imperative to preach are strong. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament use the term “proclaim” to describe the activity of prophets and apostles whose charge it was to interpret God’s word for God’s people. The Greek verb most often translated as “proclaim” is *euangelidzo*, “to bring good news.” The one who proclaims is *euangelisteis*, or an “evangelist.”

Examples of preaching found in the Old Testament include Moses’ addresses to the people of Israel and the utterances of prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Preaching does not appear as an exclusively prophetic exercise; prophecy emerges, however, in words proclaimed. Moses and the prophets model the preacher’s interpretive and confessional task to tell “what she has seen and heard” and to declare “what she believes about it.”¹¹⁷ A noticeable mark of the ministries of proclamation chronicled in

¹¹⁵ Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 70. Henceforth cited as *Preaching*.

¹¹⁶ Cobb, in “Liturgy of the Word,” 228.

¹¹⁷ Anna Carter Florence cited in Gatta, *Nearness*, 65.

the Old Testament is reluctance on the part of those who are called to be bearers of God's word. Moses famously pleads inarticulateness: "O, my Lord, I have never been eloquent ... even now that you have spoken to me; but I am slow of speech and slow to tongue" (Exod. 4:10). Isaiah counts himself among a people too impure to converse with God: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). Jeremiah believes himself to be too young to speak authoritatively (Jer. 1:6), and Ezekiel, though he does not argue with God, seems to be diminished by the prophecy that he is given to proclaim. God addresses him as "Mortal," highlighting Ezekiel's finitude relative to God's enduring word. Moreover, Ezekiel is commanded, "eat what is offered to you," and consumes a scroll before he is able to speak to the house of Israel (Ezek. 3:1). This demonstrates the way in which a preacher must digest the words of Scripture that she is to proclaim. To modern ears, however, the image of eating a scroll also suggests that God's word, once digested, is meant to penetrate every cell of our mortal bodies. If Scripture is our food, we literally become it.

The urgency of Ezekiel's call is echoed in the stories of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Moses. Amid visions of boiling pots, shuddering doorposts, burning bushes and smoking rooms, these men are given a heavy message to impart *now*. The word that they receive is not commentary or description, but judgment. It is an active word, the Hebrew *dabar*, which will accomplish and succeed in God's purposes (Isa. 55:11). It is also a word of redemption that promises real, physical freedom for enslaved and exiled persons. *Dabar* has the power to create something new, and to do so definitely and permanently. Richard Lischer observes that "every Sunday School child asks why, when Isaac discovered that he had spoken a blessing over the wrong child, he did not simply 'take it back.'" God's

word carries a “performative authority” wherein the “word spoken” becomes “the deed done.”¹¹⁸ Moses and the prophets were understandably hesitant to give their lives over to this forceful word. Importantly, God’s response to the prophets’ misgivings is empowering: “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak” (Exod. 4:12); “your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out” (Isa. 6:7); “Now I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9).

New Testament preaching begins with John the Baptist and Jesus’ calls for repentance and proclamation about the availability of God’s forgiveness and the nearness of God’s kingdom. John’s proclamation is part of a whole ministry oriented around repentance, forgiveness, and anticipation of Jesus’ arrival. The shape of John’s liturgy is proclamation, confession, and commitment: his hearers respond to his word of judgment and mercy, are converted as their hearts turn toward God in repentance, and commit themselves to God’s ways in the act of baptism.

Jesus does not baptize; yet, his preaching is one part of a ministry whose goal is conversion of life and commitment to God as a unified movement within the whole dynamic of salvation. Three discourses stand out among the record of his preaching and teaching. Luke depicts Jesus’ inaugural address to the synagogue in Nazareth: “He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him” (Luke 4:16b-17). Jesus’ verbal exposition of the text is contained in one sentence, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21). Notably, in Luke’s account of Jesus’ life and ministry, he has not yet begun to perform miracles or heal people who are sick when he reads Isaiah in the synagogue. Jesus’ interpretation of the sacred text, then, is a lived sermon,

¹¹⁸ Lischer, *Preaching*, 71.

expounded in his ministry of healing, feeding, and teaching as it unfolds in the twenty chapters that remain of Luke's Gospel. The very account of the event is also significant for the glimpse it provides of synagogue worship in the first century. Jesus would have been handed the scroll by a synagogue assistant, and would have read the Scriptures in Hebrew, preaching about them in Aramaic. Luke's description implies that Jesus chose the verses that he read, rather than continuing with the day's appointed lesson. Most importantly, the reading from Isaiah captured the vision of hope that Jesus incarnates, and the shape of his mission: good news to the poor, release for those in bondage, and sight for the blind.¹¹⁹

Jesus' second famous discourse, the Sermon on the Mount, is recorded in broad detail in Gospel of Matthew. There, Jesus speaks to a crowd of disciples about a great deal of material that would have been familiar to them from their knowledge of Torah. He calls people to reencounter and reconsider the Scriptures that have formed them and presents an ethic based on the "outworking" of the Law.¹²⁰ Jesus' synagogue address may be said to be an "opening" of sorts: he literally opens the scroll, opens the eyes and ears of his listeners to the embodiment of the Scriptures in him, and opens the horizon of God's kingdom, revealing it to be the fulfillment of Israel's hopes. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, meanwhile, is an instance of "breaking." He takes the stuff by which his people live – the beliefs that govern their relationships with one another and with God – and fractures it to reveal what it is inside. The image of breaking bread is a rich one here, as bread, like the Law, represents something that humans and God make together: it is

¹¹⁹ R. Alan Culpepper, in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. IX: Luke, John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 104-106.

¹²⁰ OAB, 1753.

God's creation, yet it involves our labor and engagement.¹²¹ Moreover, bread is broken for a reason. Its purpose "is to reduce a daunting loaf into pieces capable of being chewed and digested."¹²² In breaking open the Scriptures and the principles established by them, piece by piece, Jesus releases what is nourishing in them to "offer people a manageable portion of God's word to strengthen and sustain them."¹²³

A third unit of discourse is contained in Luke 24 and is marked again by Jesus' activity of fracturing, breaking, and ultimately opening the Scriptures. In the first part of Chapter 24, the resurrected Jesus meets two disciples on the road to Emmaus who do not recognize him. In the course of their time together, Jesus "beginning with Moses and all the prophets ... interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). Following this liturgy of the word, Jesus takes, blesses, and breaks bread, which opens the eyes of these disciples to his identity. The disciples' own words reflect that they are now more intimately related to their sacred texts, having encountered Jesus: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us" (24:32)? Following the Emmaus meeting, Jesus appears to the twelve disciples, draws their attention to his corporeal body, and eats. He then "opened their minds to understand the scriptures," recalling the law of Moses, the prophets, and the events surrounding his death and resurrection in service of the message of forgiveness and the promise of the Holy Spirit (24:44-49).

¹²¹ Carl P. Daw, Jr., *Breaking the Word: Essays on the Liturgical Dimensions of Preaching* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1994), 6. Henceforth cited as *Breaking*.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

The apostles continued Jesus' ministry of proclamation in the Book of Acts, beginning with Peter's address to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost. He recites passages of Scripture from Joel and the Psalms, and interprets them in light of what he knows to be true about Jesus.¹²⁴ Joel's vision of God's people, on whom the Holy Spirit has been "poured," allows Peter to expound on his own authority to preach, and to call his listeners to discipleship in the strength of the same Spirit. Evoking David and his words of hope in God's promises, Peter weaves the old with the new and brings a fresh word out of a recognizable context. As noted in the Introduction, Peter's words cut his listeners to the heart. Like John the Baptist, Peter moved them to turn to God in repentance and to commit themselves to Jesus' vision of God's kingdom by being baptized. The author of Acts notes that those who were baptized were people who "welcomed his message" (2:41). Their life of discipleship began with a word and a bath, which led them to a set of identifiable practices: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2:42).

Peter and the apostles who ministered with Jesus proclaimed the good news about him in such a manner as to turn the hearts of their audiences toward God.¹²⁵ Likewise, the apostle Paul preached in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts throughout the Mediterranean world. Following his own conversion and baptism, Paul's first act was to move out into the community, telling other people what he knew to be true about Jesus: "immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20). In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul and his missionary partner,

¹²⁴ Acts 2:17-21 cites Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:25-28 cites Psalm 16:8-11.

¹²⁵ See, for example, Acts 8:35, where the apostle Phillip proclaims the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch and baptizes him.

Barnabas, were set aside for the work of preaching by prayer and the laying on of hands in a moment that resembled ordination (13:2-3). Like Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, their pattern was to enter the synagogue on the Sabbath to hear Scripture read and to give “a word of exhortation” concerning it (13:14). Paul’s exhortations, like Peter and like Jesus before him, linked the truth about Jesus to the story of God’s presence with Israel from the very beginning. He nestled the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection in the Hebrew Scriptures and included a message of forgiveness: “through this man forgiveness of sins has been proclaimed to you” (13:38). When Paul spoke to non-Jews, with whom he shared no scriptural context, he used culturally relevant language and appealed to human experience. Speaking to the Athenians in Acts 17, he cited a Greek poem (“In him we live and move and have our being”) and pointed to humanity’s natural impulse for God (“they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him”). Always, he included a word about repentance and resurrection (17:26-31).

Acts contains not only a record of apostolic preaching, but a theology of ministry as it pertains to preaching. Early in the life of the Jerusalem church, deacons were chosen to care for some of the community’s needs while the twelve apostles devoted themselves “to prayer and to serving the word” (6:4). This incident defines the apostles’ “distinctive vocation as one of preaching, with its necessary basis in prayer.”¹²⁶ As the apostles moved out of the synagogues in Jerusalem and began to preach to Gentiles in other places, Peter described their ministry as one of “witness” in the form of proclamation about Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection: “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead”

Gatta, *Nearness*, 61.

(10:42). Finally, as noted, when Paul and his missionary partner Barnabas set out from the church in Antioch, they were “set aside” by prayer and the laying on of hands for the work of proclamation (13:2-3).

The apostles’ preaching ministry is best defined in terms of *witness*. The twelve stood out among Jesus’ disciples because of their proximity to him and the intimacy of their relationships with him. They were trusted as authentic witnesses to Jesus’ teaching, most especially to his resurrection. Even Paul, who did not minister with Jesus in Galilee or Judea, had an encounter with the risen Jesus. Paul distinguished the apostolic call to witness: Christian proclamation consists not in promulgating a philosophical or religious system, but testified to “the supreme event in human history, the definitive divine intervention that brought about man’s salvation”¹²⁷

Jesus, who testified to who God is and that God’s will for humankind is salvation, was the “first and greatest witness,” whose most powerful testimony was made in death.¹²⁸ For the most part, the twelve apostles’ ministry of witness culminated in their own violent deaths. Out of the legacies of Jesus and the apostles, and in a climate of persecution surrounding early Christian communities, the notion of martyrdom as the culmination of witness (*marturion*) developed.¹²⁹ As Christianity spread and opportunities for martyrdom became fewer, the idea of a “daily martyrdom” arose, marked by a heroic willingness to face death, adherence to ethical principles, and asceticism. Christian communities bore witness by “guarding and proclaiming the

¹²⁷ Cooke, *Ministry*, 235.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

traditional belief that originated with the apostles.”¹³⁰ Early Christian preaching depended on the evolving body of New Testament Scriptures to provide an authoritative account of the apostles’ teaching about Jesus, so that by the third century a standard was in place: “the exposition of Scripture is the essence of explaining the apostolic tradition,” which “consisted very largely in exposing faithfully the New Testament texts.”¹³¹

It was the privileged role of bishops in the early church to witness by proclaiming the Gospel, because of their tie to the apostolic ministry. By the third century, presbyters were delegated to preach in some places, which was to become the norm as increasing numbers of people and churches came under each bishop’s purview.¹³² Worship began with introductory psalms, hymns, and collects, then moved into the liturgy of the word. The lessons, which are described in detail in Chapter One, were typically one Old Testament reading and one Epistle, separated by a chanted psalm. Sung Alleluias, with sequence or tract, preceded the Gospel reading and the ceremonies attached to it. The sermon followed immediately, its purpose being to enlarge on and derive meaning from the Scriptures that had just been read. In many instances the liturgy of the word continued with the recitation of the Nicene Creed.

Frequently, catechumens and penitents were dismissed subsequent to the Creed. Though many explanations are provided as to the purpose of this widespread practice, these *missae* undoubtedly say something about pedagogy and the role of the sermon in the early church: before a person could participate in the community’s meal, she needed to be baptized. Before baptism, she was being instructed in the apostles’ teaching that the

¹³⁰ Ibid., 236.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid; see also Cobb, in “Liturgy of the Word,” 228.

community lived by and handed on. One effective means of performing this catechesis was the sermon – in fact, the liturgy of the word is in some traditions still called “the liturgy of the catechumens.”¹³³ Certain catechetical homilies are preserved that were addressed to people who had just been or were about to be baptized. These describe the shape and the theological significance of the rite of baptism and eucharist.¹³⁴ Preaching could be considered broadly catechetical as it depended on a soteriology that held “illumination” to be the goal of Christian moral formation. In such a context, the liturgy of the word was “aimed at bringing the Christian to contemplative communion with the divine.”¹³⁵ Preachers sought to uncover the mystery of Jesus: who he is, how he functions in the life of the individual and the community, and how he relates to the cosmological order.

Though these are weighty theological and philosophical matters, the approach most preachers took was more down to earth: Jesus as Logos was “the bearer of the only saving truth ... a practical truth that shapes and nurtures man’s life as a spirit.”¹³⁶ Sermons included a great deal of ethical material, which corresponds to other aspects of homiletical catechesis. Exhortation to right living could be a sort of knowledge-sharing that might be classified as illumination, but it was also a way of “encouraging, strengthening, converting, and feeding the life that comes with faith,” and of healing sin (or “darkness”).¹³⁷ In all of these instances,

¹³³ Cobb, in “Liturgy of the Word,” 223.

¹³⁴ Senn, *Liturgy*, 112-113.

¹³⁵ Cooke, *Ministry*, 256.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

the word of God that is communicated by preaching or teaching is sacramental. In this word the mystery of divine revelation still continues; in this word of the preacher ... the Word himself speaks. And the emphasis on what we might call doctrinal content is quite marked. It forms the basis for the moral reform that the preacher also seeks, but even this greater purity of life is hoped for as a step to deepened understanding.¹³⁸

Preaching in the early church began as an exposition of Scriptural material, through which questions about the nature of Christ and the moral life of Christians were worked out. Its purpose was catechetical; however, this term does not suggest cold didacticism, but something more like illumination, where knowledge is conceived of as an unveiling and where a person is brought closer to Jesus and drawn deeper into discipleship with him as he begins to understand his faith.

As the Patristic era continued, the emphasis on Scripture as an ethical guidebook and the sermon as training in Christian living increased. Much medieval preaching was devoted to promoting good behavior, as it was assumed that “common folk neither needed nor were capable of” understanding doctrines or serious contemplation of divine things. Though the medieval period saw the rise in the use of the fourfold method of scriptural interpretation in preaching (the literal, allegorical, moral, and tropological / eschatological readings), that era is often associated with a decline in the quality and frequency of preaching. Hatchett notes that regular preaching in the context of the Eucharist began to fade out first in Rome, and that preaching eventually came to be seen as a special calling among ministers, rather than an assumed responsibility of the priestly ministry.¹³⁹ Records of laws mandating that sermons be preached at least one to four

¹³⁸ Ibid., 256-57.

¹³⁹ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 332.

times per year indicate how broadly this component of the liturgy of the word may have been neglected.¹⁴⁰

In addition to problems with frequency in preaching, pastoral preaching suffered in many places by the early modern period. The benefice system in England and in continental Europe caused general ministerial neglect and affected all aspects of parish life. Where the sermon was concerned, pastoral insensitivity might result in an uneducated and unheartfelt sermon, or a sermon too mired in technical, ecclesiastical language to be relevant to its hearers. Cooke notes that “credulity instead of genuine belief was often instilled into the faithful.”¹⁴¹ Yet, amid what appears to have been a bleak situation, enough faithful preaching was done in the Middle Ages to inspire the first Reformers in their own ministries of proclamation, and to convince them that exposition of Scripture was at the heart of the life of the church and of the individual Christian.¹⁴²

Martin Luther, though he was foremost among the reformers in continental Europe, was a liturgically conservative reformer. While the reformation principle of increased congregational participation was key for him, this conviction, among others, was rooted in the centrality of Scripture in the worshipping assembly. Along with Bucer, who was instrumental for the reformation of the church in England, Luther maintained the importance of the eucharist and the relationship between the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the table. Worship for these reformers, however, was “ordered according to

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 286.

¹⁴² Bernard Cooke remarks on several high points in medieval preaching, including the preparation of preachers in cathedral schools and Franciscans’ itinerant preaching. See Cooke, *Ministry*, 274-85.

one important [principle]: the holy scripture, the word of God, which they placed again at the heart of church life.”¹⁴³ The liturgical life of the church

was to conform, in one way or another, to scripture; scripture was to be read in public worship in the language of the people; sermons were to be preached on the scripture readings; and liturgical practices were to be judged according to biblical norms If *sola fide* became the principle on which personal life was based, *sola scriptura* became the principle by which liturgical life was formed.¹⁴⁴

While concurrent reforms in the Roman Catholic Church emphasized the sacerdotal figure of the priest, for most reformers the role of the presbyter as proclaimer of God’s word was preeminent. The former may have thought of himself as an “instrument of the church,” authorized to teach the “orthodox traditions of the church,” whereas the latter was more prone to view himself as “the instrument of the Spirit, called to proclaim the saving and converting word of the gospel.”¹⁴⁵ Liturgically conservative reformers tended to think of preaching as part of a greater sacramental whole and to insist on the “evangelical possibilities of the liturgical actions themselves.”¹⁴⁶ Even so, and especially in Luther’s theology, the ministry of the word was preeminent.

Yet it is still not accurate say that Reformers like Luther and Bucer subordinated all components of worship to preaching. Rather, they conceived of the word of God as a “special force” that operated much like the Holy Spirit itself. God’s word had an “autonomous power” that could effect salvation even when poorly preached.¹⁴⁷ In Bucer’s thought the word was an “assembling force” through which Jesus “exhorts men

¹⁴³ Herman Wegman, cited in Senn, *Liturgy*, 299.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 299-300.

¹⁴⁵ Cooke, *Ministry* 294.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 290.

to spiritual development, proclaims pardon, attracts disciples to himself, leads them to divine life in baptism, and teaches them to observe his commands.”¹⁴⁸ The notion of Jesus speaking through the here-and-now proclamation of the Gospel was dear to Luther also, who held the word to be a means of grace equal to the sacraments. Here he understood grace not in terms of substance, however, “but in terms of communication: address and response.”¹⁴⁹ The proclamation of God’s word made Jesus actually present to the hearer, and she was compelled to respond in faith. Furthermore, proclamation was not solely a function of preaching for Luther. As sacramental, “God’s word always attaches itself to something created” and “is never disembodied.”¹⁵⁰ The word could be found in the spoken words of Scripture, in the preacher’s voice and mouth, or in the physical text of the Bible. It could be found in the presider’s hands and gestures, in the “earthly elements in the sacraments,” or in the Eucharistic prayer itself. Most importantly, “the Word that was incarnated in Jesus the Christ is always taking on flesh ... in the life of the believer who receives it.”¹⁵¹

Luther’s sense of how God’s word works in worship and in the life of an individual evokes the biblical idea of God’s creative *dabar* and of the Spirit poured out on the apostles at Pentecost. For him the word, like Scripture, possessed independent authority – in fact, as originating with God, the word was the source of Scripture’s authority. In Luther’s description of the word’s activity, one has the sense of that “special force” weaving its way unexpectedly throughout worship, and beyond. It is

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 291.

¹⁴⁹ Senn, *Liturgy*, 306.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 306-07.

something to be discovered and uncovered, rather than implemented or manipulated like a tool for the preacher.

In many ways the reformers framed their arguments against the Roman Catholic Church in terms of pastoral responsibility. Where preaching was concerned, they argued that “people need simple and direct exposure to the word of God in the Bible rather than explanations of complicated doctrinal issues.”¹⁵² However, many reformers’ reliance on lengthy expositions of biblical texts could make for sermons that were as removed and erudite as those delivered by a medieval priest using the fourfold method of interpretation. Luther is representative of a pastoral method of preaching that combined three approaches: grammatical, historical, and “life application.”¹⁵³ He began by giving an introduction to the lesson, setting it in context (historically, and in terms of the canon of Scripture), and continued by relating its significance for “the life of faith or the corporate life of the church.”¹⁵⁴ Whereas some medieval priests were steeped in the scholasticism of their day, Luther’s approaches reflect humanist scholarship with its concern for rhetoric, its emphasis on the historical world of the Scripture and knowledge of biblical languages, and its appreciation for and acknowledgement of the human condition.¹⁵⁵ Liturgical scholar Frank C. Senn notes that Luther’s method typifies the expectation that Reformation preachers “deal with two contexts in their sermons: the context of the biblical text and of the contemporary congregation.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Cooke, *Ministry*, 293.

¹⁵³ Senn, *Liturgy*, 305.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 305.

As discussed in Chapter One, Thomas Cranmer and a group of his peers met regularly during the 1520's to talk about Lutheran ideas that were current in England. He was further acquainted with Lutheran theology and worship while working abroad for Henry VIII. These encounters influenced his early liturgical reforms, particularly in respect to Scripture and preaching. Soon after Edward VI's accession to the throne in 1547, Cranmer published *A Book of Homilies* in English, perhaps inspired by Luther's own compendium of sermons for use in individual parishes.¹⁵⁷ If no sermon was given in the course of a service of Holy Eucharist, one of the homilies was to be read. While the Sarum Use did not mandate a sermon, Cranmer's 1549 Book of Common Prayer explicitly required that one be preached or read each Sunday or holy day.¹⁵⁸ The *Homilies* were meant to teach the church's stances on matters such as Scripture, justification by faith, church and state relations, and personal and civic morality.¹⁵⁹ They were also meant to help poorly educated clergy, for "if the men who were supposed to preach were ignorant, then they had to be given something good to preach."¹⁶⁰

By the seventeenth century, the Reformation was firmly established in England, along with its emphasis on Scripture and preaching. "Non-preaching priests" were either "regretted" or "violently condemned."¹⁶¹ Some church leaders, like the theologian Richard Hooker, exerted a moderating influence. Hooker held that "scriptural readings,

¹⁵⁷ Peter Toon, "The Articles and Homilies," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, eds. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 148. Henceforth cited as "Articles."

¹⁵⁸ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 332.

¹⁵⁹ Toon, "Articles," 149.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁶¹ Haugaard, "Reformation," 14.

catechetical exercises, and the homilies” counted as preaching.¹⁶² He also maintained a balance between word and sacrament, which had shifted in favor of “word” in Reformation England, particularly where Puritan influence was greatest. His broad concept of preaching reflected a sacramental understanding of the word of God that, like Luther’s, accorded it the freedom to move where it determined and to become incarnate where it willed, not bound by the sermon alone.

Hooker is often counted as the first among a group of late-sixteenth and seventeenth-century priest-scholars known as “Anglican Divines.” Beginning with him, the standard Anglican Divines represent almost a century of meaningful theological reflection in England. Along with the importance that they placed on Scripture, another remarkable aspect of the Divines’ work is their emphasis on the theme of incarnation. Hooker, for example, dealt extensively with incarnation and the sacraments in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.¹⁶³ John Donne is another figure who is often included among the Divines, and is best known for his poetry. His markedly physical and earthy style demonstrates a strong sense of holiness manifest in created things. Chief among the Anglican Divines, however, is Donne’s contemporary Lancelot Andrewes, who is counted among these priests and theologians time and time again. He is known principally for emphasizing the doctrine of the incarnation, especially as it was explicated in his preaching. In fact, his preaching style has been called “incarnational preaching.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Ibid. See Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, V.18.1-19.1 for Hooker’s treatment of preaching as “Testimony,” “Explication,” and “reading publicly the sacred Scripture.”

¹⁶³ John Booty, “Standard Divines,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, eds. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 178.

¹⁶⁴ Ellen Davis, “Holy Preaching: Ethical Interpretation and Practical Imagination,” in *Reclaiming Faith: Essays on Orthodoxy in the Episcopal Church and the Baltimore Declaration*, eds. Ephraim Radner and

In a very basic sense, Andrewes might be considered to be an incarnational preacher because of his eucharistic piety and his predilection for beauty in worship. In “typically Anglican” fashion, his belief in Jesus’ real presence in the eucharist did not depend on transubstantiation; neither did his belief in its benefits depend on receptionist ideas.¹⁶⁵ Instead, his theology was “mystical rather than speculative,” and was informed by the certain reality of the incarnation.¹⁶⁶ Andrewes held the eucharist to be “the supreme means through which the Christian obtains the grace of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶⁷ His preaching was foremost liturgical, and with “the catholic side of Anglicanism” he held that Scripture was most effectively heard and preached in a setting of regular communal worship.¹⁶⁸

Within the context of Anglican worship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, the sermon was the main event. On a Sunday, it fell before the offertory in a service that was meant to consist of Morning Prayer, Litany, and the service of Holy Eucharist.¹⁶⁹ When the eucharist was not celebrated, the sermon was the final thing, the capstone of the liturgical event, and could last for one hour. Despite his word-heavy milieu, Andrewes was skeptical of frequent preaching. As a bishop, he viewed himself as chief administrator of his see, rather than as an “itinerant preacher,” which was

George Sumner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 218-220. Henceforth cited as “Preaching.”

¹⁶⁵ Raymond Chapman, ed., *Before the King’s Majesty: Lancelot Andrewes and His Writings* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), 11. Henceforth cited as *Andrewes*.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 9; 11.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶⁸ Ellen F. Davis, *Imagination Shaped: Old Testament Preaching in the Anglican Tradition* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, Intl., 1995), 6. Henceforth cited as *Imagination*.

¹⁶⁹ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 150.

the model that some Calvinist bishops favored.¹⁷⁰ Toward the end of his career, he looked back on his ministry at one parish in London and remarked that when he preached twice a day there, “he prated once.”¹⁷¹

In Andrewes’s view, preaching required studious preparation and depended entirely on a deep and mature life of prayer. Sermons were not intended for general entertainment, but were meant to shape an “audience of intimates” over time in such a way that they might “offer themselves to God in prayer” and know that “their offering will be accepted.”¹⁷² This attitude reflects the biblical use of *homileo*, the Greek verb at the root of *homiletic*. The term implies speaking to a crowd that is not “a haphazard conglomeration of strangers,” but “people with whom one is familiar and to whom one can speak comfortably and easily.”¹⁷³ Andrewes viewed preaching as part of an overarching program of formation, the culmination of which was the eucharist. Many of his sermons contain a good deal of reflection on Jesus’ presence in the sacrament, demonstrating his commitment to a balance between word and table in worship. Following an extensive meditation on the phrase “God with us,” Andrewes’s Nativity Sermon of 1614 concludes,

For *alimentum et alitum* [food and the one fed] do *coalescere in unum*, ‘grow into an union’; and that union is inseparable ever after. This then I commend to you, even the being with him in the Sacrament of his body – that body that was conceived and born ... to be “with you”; and this day,

¹⁷⁰ Davis, *Imagination*, 17.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁷³ William Skudlarek, *The Word in Worship: Preaching in a Liturgical Context* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 93. Henceforth cited as *Worship*.

as for other intents, so even for this, for the Holy Eucharist. This, as the kindest for the time, as the surest for the manner of being with.¹⁷⁴ Andrewes is representative of a style of “metaphysical” preaching that developed during his time. Metaphysical preachers combined medieval and ancient sources with reflections on nature, history, and human experience to draw parallels and illustrations between the worlds of Scripture, Christian tradition, and the contemporary audience. They employed language poetically and playfully, and strove to create images and turns of phrase that listeners could easily remember.¹⁷⁵ Ellen Davis notes that Andrewes’s metaphysical style was not only imaginative, but had a moral effect. In creating a way for his listeners to enter the text, Andrewes showed “that there is no fixed distance between the world of the text and our own,” and that “the Scriptures delineate a moral world, and not primarily a historical one, open to all who repent.”¹⁷⁶

Metaphysical preachers like Andrewes made Scripture come alive for people in a manner that aimed for ethical transformation, self-oblation, and ultimately, *theosis*. This patristic idea that “through love and a devout sense of identification with the humanity of our Lord,” one can grow into union with God was one of Andrewes’s favorite themes.¹⁷⁷ By drawing his listeners sympathetically into the Scriptures, he caused them to actively engage something other than themselves, and to be changed in the process – something new was created in the course of the sermon. The transformation that happened there, in the liturgy of the word, was completed at the table. Again, as evident in the Nativity

¹⁷⁴ Lancelot Andrewes, “Nativity Sermon IX,” in *Ninety-Six Sermons by the Right Honourable and Reverend Father in God Lancelot Andrewes, Sometime Lord Bishop of Winchester, Published by His Majesty’s Special Command, V. 1*, ed. John Henry Parker (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 151-152. .

¹⁷⁵ Davis, *Imagination*, 19.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷⁷ Raymond Chapman, *Andrewes*, 10.

Sermon of 1614, Andrewes's preaching pointed toward the eucharist the height of worship, of the devout life, and of time: "he is in heaven, in the joy and glory there; and there he brings us to *nos cum Deo in Coelis* [we are with God in heaven], even thither."¹⁷⁸

At its best, the goals of metaphysical preaching were to re-present Jesus to the church, to elicit a response in faith, and to bring people into closer union with the divine. Apart from its ability to achieve those goals, the aspect of Andrewes's metaphysical preaching that is so striking is the manner with which he treated individual words. The poet T.S. Eliot wrote, "Andrewes takes a word and derives the world from it; squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning."¹⁷⁹ Andrewes's own description of the style was "following [a text] hard."¹⁸⁰ His tenacious exegetical method kept him tethered to the words of the Bible, digging deeper and deeper within one sermon – and, over the course of time, within one topic – showing Scripture to be a limitless source of meaning. Davis likens his approach to the monastic idea of "chewing" on Scripture.¹⁸¹ This analogy accords well with the eucharistic emphasis in Andrewes's work: in the breaking and eating of bread we become like Jesus. So, too, in plumbing the depths of the very particular words of Scripture, we gain closer unity with God. With the eucharist as his "constant referent," Andrewes's exegetical focus imbued his preaching with "almost a sacramental quality."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Andrewes, "Nativity Sermon IX," 152.

¹⁷⁹ T.S. Eliot, in F. E. Brightman, trans., *The Private Devotions of Lancelot Andrewes* (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1961), xvii.

¹⁸⁰ Davis, "Preaching," 220.

¹⁸¹ Davis, *Imagination*, 23.

¹⁸² Davis, "Preaching," 219.

As well-known as Andrewes is for his incarnational preaching, his personal prayers, or *Preces Privatae*, are an outstanding feature of his writings. These are a collection of liturgical and biblical quotations and items for intercession worked into devotional forms for Andrewes's own use. Individual phrases intended for meditation before prayer include, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" and "A man can receive nothing except it be given."¹⁸³ A prayer of petition includes the lines, "let my speech be with grace, sprinkled with salt" and "let the converse of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord my redeemer."¹⁸⁴ Andrewes's habits of prayer, especially as they touch on his role as a proclaimer of the word, point to an interesting and important item for any consideration of preaching. A sacramental understanding of preaching holds that the end of proclamation is to draw people into intimate communion, or deep relationship, with Jesus. At the heart of this task, however, stands the special relationship of the preacher to the word proclaimed.

As mentioned, Andrewes's distaste for frequent and popular sermons indicates the seriousness with which he approached preaching. His *Preces* likewise demonstrate his dependence on prayer as a source of grace in ministry. The notion that only by grace is the preacher able to proclaim any word at all recalls the reluctant figures of the Old Testament, who initially shrank from the charge given them. The Book of Ezekiel portrays their condition poignantly. What Ezekiel is given to speak are God's "very words," which is a humbling charge to begin with. It is understandable that he would feel inadequate or undeserving of being God's mouthpiece. However, more is required of

¹⁸³ Chapman, *Andrewes*, 125-126.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

Ezekiel than ego strength. For while he is given brilliant visions of fire, heavenly creatures, and sapphire, he also witnesses the destruction of his own land. He undergoes physical torment, consuming the scroll but also lying on his side for hundreds of days, and eating bread baked over dung. Additionally, as bearer of the word, Ezekiel is responsible for the people God sends him to: “because you have not warned them, they shall die for their sin ... If, however, you warn the righteous not to sin, and they do not sin, they shall surely live, because they took warning; and you will have saved your life” (Ezek. 3:21).

Perhaps most daunting is the fact of who Ezekiel is sent to warn. God does not ask the prophet to leave his home in order to address “a people of obscure speech and difficult language.” Ezekiel is called to proclaim the word to his own people, his neighbors and fellow Israelites – and God assures him, “they will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me” (Ezek. 3:7). Jesus’ own preaching ministry was marked by the refusal of his familiars to listen to him, and to believe in him: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house’” (Mark 6:4). The preacher prays to be transparent to God’s activity in the words of Scripture and in the created world spoken into being by God’s word. Above all, the preacher is transparent to Jesus, God’s word made flesh, with whom she is united in baptism and by whom she is fed in the eucharist. To cultivate this sort of transparency is to strive to be honestly receptive to all sorts of experiences and to all sorts of people. It is to open oneself to a range of human habits and emotions, and to God’s presence in startling and difficult places. It is to be an intercessory person, bringing all of these things before God in the name of Jesus, and asking that they and

oneself be transformed. This is a thrilling, yet vulnerable posture to assume. Nowhere is the preacher more vulnerable than with people who, like Jesus' neighbors, know her for the human being that she necessarily is.

The situation of a preacher who is defenseless before those who know her best magnifies the human frailty that underlies preaching in any context. To claim to speak truth to people for whom she cares, and to whom she feels some responsibility is to face, time and time again, real limitation. God's designation for Ezekiel, "Mortal!" seems apt. Where "the meagerness of our inner resources" is most palpable, preachers have no choice but "to stand before God, waiting and expectant."¹⁸⁵ As evidenced by the prophets, God does show up. When God calls Ezekiel, God not only promises to give him words, but also reassures him in the face of a difficult task: "do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words ... do not be dismayed at their looks" (Ezek. 2:6). In choosing Ezekiel, God makes him adequate to his mission. Ezekiel eats the scroll, digesting and literally incorporating the word into his body as he becomes its bearer. Importantly, though the action is jarring, Ezekiel is not repulsed by the scroll but finds that "it was as sweet as honey" (Ezek. 3:3). God's word, though intimidating, is not the enemy. Furthermore, God asserts that Ezekiel's identity does not depend on how others view him, but on the work that God has given him to do, for "whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them" (Ezek. 2:5).

The relationship between the biblical prophets and their listeners is not wholly translatable to the situation of a preacher and his church. How a preacher chooses to

¹⁸⁵ Gatta, *Nearness*, 58.

speak to his listeners and how they respond does matter. Yet, the story of Ezekiel sheds light on the peculiar communion that a preacher shares with God. This relationship is not closer or more profound than those enjoyed by people who do not preach. It is, however, a particular grace that attends the call to preach. The very dynamic between the preacher and the word, therefore, is sacramental. Living a life that is transparent to the word, its context, and its recipients draws one into an intimate relationship that, like marriage, can be a sanctifying vehicle of grace. The preacher partners with God to create something new and finds himself continually re-created.

Being made so consistently aware of one's need of grace, week in and week out, is itself a grace of the preaching life. As in other sacramental acts, one is reminded in preaching that his identity is found primarily in God, where he is united with Jesus in baptism. Our frail selves are justified selves. Lischer associates Jesus' humanity with the preacher's finitude, writing that the "human nature of Christ in our proclamation is most apparent in the folly of preaching, as men and women struggle within the limitations of language to 'name the whirlwind'."¹⁸⁶ Yet to define humanity in terms of folly, particularly in reference to Jesus' humanity, seems to miss the fact that Jesus' incarnation, his human nature, is the site of our redemption. In him we are made worthy to stand in God's presence. More than this, we are chosen instruments of divine communication. In asking us to proclaim the word, God reveals humans to be holy despite our imperfection. The prophet Isaiah spoke as one absolved, recounting that "the seraph touched my mouth with [a burning coal] and said: 'Now that this has touched your

¹⁸⁶ Lischer, *Preaching*, 75. Lischer goes on to make the meaningful point that to preach Christ crucified is the ultimate "folly," the "cause of our preaching's worldly failures." Even our successes in preaching rest paradoxically on this "failure."

lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” (Isa. 6:7). Jesus said of Paul, who persecuted Christians before his conversion, “he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Scales fell from Paul’s eyes, and he began his ministry of proclamation healed of his sins. The preacher speaks from a place of forgiveness, in order to bear a word about God’s grace to others.

This word is not her own story. The preacher’s task is to tell God’s story, or God’s *spell*, the good news about Jesus. It is a sacramental activity of drawing listeners into intimate communion with Jesus, making tangible the hope that he incarnates, and inspiring them in their mission with him. Preaching toward these ends begins with Scripture. Before she can begin to deal with the appointed texts for a given occasion, the preacher must be immersed in the world of the Bible. The previous chapter treated the way in which Scripture re-presents Jesus to the church, not only making “a living reality” of his “words and actions,” but also rehearsing the witness about him borne to all the saints, in all places, at all times.¹⁸⁷ The witness about Jesus consists in describing the vision of God’s kingdom that he preached, and that he embodied. This is the content of the church’s hope and the horizon toward which the church’s mission is directed. In order to faithfully represent this witness, the preacher has to do more than explain it or decode it. She must make it her home. Immersed in the world of the Bible, its protagonists will assume all of the many dimensions that they did in their lives and in the imaginations of the writers of Scripture. The themes of war and peace, justice and revenge, sickness and healing, life and death will appear with as much color as they do in

¹⁸⁷ Gatta, *Nearness*, 72.

the present-day. She will shudder with the prophets and wonder with the magi. In a sense, her word to the church will be prophetic: “This is what I have seen!” Her word will also be personal, though it is not her possession. Rather, her relationship to the word and her interpretation of it is God’s gift to her on behalf of the people of God.

The preacher shares the world of the Bible with the church, and leads them into that world, teaching them how to know it and to feel it. In chronicling the ways in which the metaphysical preachers enabled their listeners to inhabit Scripture, Ellen Davis lights on the concept of *imagination*. She offers, “the preacher’s first and most important responsibility is to educate the imaginations of her hearers so that they have the linguistic skills to enter the world that Scripture discloses and may thus make a genuine choice about whether to live there.”¹⁸⁸ In a statement with which many narrative theologians would agree, she remarks, “The biblical preacher is a sort of elementary language teacher, not a translator, as is often considered to be the case.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, biblical preaching is formative. It layers Scripture with the idiom of faith to create an environment that supports a different sort of reality – that sacred space, or “*real* real world” that becomes intelligible to us in sacramental worship.¹⁹⁰ Just as Jesus opened the Scriptures to his interlocutors, the preacher is responsible for opening this world to others. The duty is laid bare for Ezekiel: if any of the people to whom he is sent die for their sins and he has not warned them, then God will require their blood at the prophet’s hand (Ezek. 3:18-19). Preaching is an “extension of pastoral care” that shapes “the

¹⁸⁸ Davis, “Preaching,” 204.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Weil, *Sacraments*, 22.

spiritual ground and theological outlook of a community.”¹⁹¹ If a preacher neglects to share God’s word with his listeners – to inhabit the world of Scripture and meaningfully communicate what he has experienced – his care for them will not spring from authentically spiritual resources. His words to them in preaching and in other contexts will be merely his own, unrooted in Jesus’ pastoral ministry. More importantly, if the preacher does not inspire curiosity in his listeners, or equip them with the imaginative tools necessary to explore Scripture, he fails to nurture their relationship with Jesus. Again, Davis writes that the “aim of all Scriptures is to give us an inside view of the committed relationship with the God of Israel, based upon the testimony of those most deeply experienced in it.”¹⁹² The whole witness of Scripture establishes a world from which our witness springs. The preacher lives in that world and makes it live for others.

The world of Scripture pivots around Jesus. Therefore the object of proclamation, its source, and its content is Jesus: “the proclaimed word is dependent on the written word (which, in turn, draws its life from the Incarnate Word).”¹⁹³ Luther’s depiction, outlined earlier, of God’s word let loose in Scripture, preaching, presiding, and the sacramental elements highlights the fluid interplay of words in the church’s worship. God’s word is communicated by the Spirit in all of these instances, especially “in the life of the believer who receives it.”¹⁹⁴ God’s word is God’s self-communication, and nowhere is God so fully disclosed than in the person of Jesus. Therefore, our ability to

¹⁹¹ Gatta, *Nearness*, 58.

¹⁹² Davis, “Preaching,” 208.

¹⁹³ Carol M. Noren, “The Word of God in Worship: Preaching in Relationship to Liturgy,” in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, et al (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 34. Henceforth cited as “Word.”

¹⁹⁴ Senn, *Liturgy*, 307.

hear and to speak God's word depends entirely on our being grafted into the Word made flesh.

For preaching to be sacramental, therefore, it must be fixed in Jesus. It will continue Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom, point to him as the embodiment of that kingdom, and draw others into communion with him. Lischer notes Karl Barth's insistence that "preaching does not occur as a spiritual event ... but only in continuity with the fleshly Christ."¹⁹⁵ The preacher carries on the apostles' witness about Jesus, but has her basis in Jesus' own ministry. She continually points to him, and perpetuates his mission in the church, "seizing and stretching its imagination to entertain new possibilities for human life."¹⁹⁶ Jesus' entire life was a sermon: his ministry of healing, feeding, and teaching was his physical interpretation of the synagogue lesson from Isaiah. The whole of Jesus' "life, word, and deeds" expressed his message of salvation.¹⁹⁷ Just as he "opens for us full access to God," the preacher opens for us full access to him.¹⁹⁸ Over time, as she preaches from a lectionary that highlights different parts of Jesus' life, and at various occasions that call to mind special aspects of his ministry, she breaks the entirety of his story into "pieces capable of being chewed and digested." Her listeners chew God's word, assimilate it, and are simultaneously nourished by and united with Jesus.

Moreover, for preaching to be sacramental, it must have as its horizon the hope incarnated by Jesus, the foundation of his mission and ours: "God's divine

¹⁹⁵ Lischer, *Preaching*, 74

¹⁹⁶ Ibid; Davis, "Preaching," 215.

¹⁹⁷ Noren, "Word," 33.

¹⁹⁸ Schwarz, *Communication*, 5.

communication informs us, through word and action, that in the midst of our strife-torn world a new beginning of a better world is made, a beginning whose completion will not stand out indefinitely.”¹⁹⁹ Our feasting on the word, which we enjoy in reading Scripture and in preaching, has its counterpart in the eucharistic feast, where we receive Jesus the Word as the bread of heaven. The dialogue that begins the eucharistic prayer, our Great Thanksgiving to God, underscores this point. If the liturgy of the word has convinced the church that “it is right to give him thanks and praise,” then “faith can be inspired, deepened, bolstered.”²⁰⁰

As counterpart to the liturgy of the word, the liturgy of the table employs words toward the same ends as reading Scripture and preaching: communion with and commitment to Jesus. In the next chapter we will explore the sacramental nature of words to God in prayer, namely the eucharistic prayer in the service of Holy Eucharist.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 150.

²⁰⁰ Skudlarek, 71.

Chapter Three

Words Made Flesh: The Eucharist

We need to know why we should lift up our hearts. We need some reason to be able to answer the celebrant's "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" with "It is right to give him thanks and praise" That is a question we can only answer out of faith, out of a vision and understanding of the way God is powerfully present in our world, in our lives.²⁰¹

—William Skudlarek, *The Word in Worship*

In the previous chapters, we have reflected on the history and practice of reading Scripture and preaching in the Anglican tradition. The purpose of this exercise has been to uncover resources within that tradition for promoting a sacramental understanding of words in the church's worship. We have seen that Scripture and preaching are both sacramental in the ways that they draw us into relationship with Jesus: by making him present to us, by opening our eyes to his vision of God's kingdom, and by persuading us to join our lives to his. In the liturgy of the word, we experience intimate communion with Jesus, recognize the hope that he incarnates, and are inspired in our Christian mission.

However, the liturgy of the word is not the only place in the church's worship where we encounter powerful and transformative words. The liturgy of the table, "The Holy Communion" in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, is an ensemble of dialogue, song, prayer, and action wherein bread and *boundaries* of time, place, and human limitation are fractured to reveal Jesus, God's Word made flesh. Again, as with Scripture and preaching, eucharistic prayers are an early feature of Christian worship. In what follows, we will explore the eucharistic prayers that have shaped current practice in the

²⁰¹ Skudlarek, *Worship*, 70-71.

Episcopal Church, beginning with the medieval church at the time of the Reformation. We will consider what the problems and themes that emerge along the way mean for a sacramental understanding of words of praise and thanksgiving to God in the eucharist.

As indicated in the previous chapters, an important rite common in England at the time of the Reformation was the Sarum Use. Though a variety of local adaptations of the Roman rite existed in England at the time, this prominent liturgy of Salisbury Cathedral was legally imposed on the churches of southern England in 1543, shortly before Cranmer composed his first Prayer Book.²⁰² Among contemporary rites, Sarum was highly ceremonial. For instance, a medieval English cathedral mass could have involved as many as fifteen ministers.²⁰³ Despite the extravagance of the Sarum Use, the Roman canon of the mass was known for being relatively spare and direct, especially as compared to Eastern eucharistic prayers.

The Roman rite was also notably static. Its basic structure and the words of the presider's prayer were fixed by the sixth century, and spread throughout Christian churches in the West. The rite's growing influence was concomitant with that of Latin as a liturgical language, but was also helped along by the Carolingian kings, whose reform of the church included standardizing much of its worship.²⁰⁴ Despite what appears to have been a program of progressive homogenization, the Roman rite that gained ascendancy during the medieval period was not one form of worship that emerged in isolation in the city of Rome. Rather, it was a "hybrid" rite that developed in Rome and

²⁰² D.M. Hope, "Liturgical Books," in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, et al (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 280.

²⁰³ Archdale King, [title], cited in *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 267; 269-70.

Roman North Africa, and included Gallican components from the Franco-Germanic and Celtic regions of Northern Europe, Spain, and Milan.²⁰⁵ Gallican adaptations of the liturgy continued to influence the Roman canon up to the eleventh century. At that time, Rome began to weaken in political strength while the churches in Northern Europe grew in power and influence.²⁰⁶

The core of the canon was the eucharistic prayer proper (the “Great Prayer,” or Great Thanksgiving).²⁰⁷ This prayer was originally considered to have begun with the *Sursum corda*, directing the congregation, “Up with your hearts,” and enjoining them to “raise their minds to ‘things that are above.’” It also established the movement of the prayer to God the Father, through Jesus the Son, which was echoed in the concluding doxology, “through [Jesus] and with him and in him.”²⁰⁸ Finally, the opening dialogue was the congregation’s assent to the presider’s prayer “in the name of the Church.”²⁰⁹ The *Sursum corda* was followed by the *Sanctus*, a hymn (originally sung by the congregation) joining the worship of the community on earth to that of the angels and saints in heaven. Though it was an early component of the liturgy of the table, by the fifth century the *Sanctus* was no longer considered to be part of the Great Thanksgiving. Omitting it from the portion of the prayer deemed “effective” resulted in a loss of the idea of “consecration by thanksgiving” that was part of Christian worship’s Jewish heritage.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 270; 273.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 278.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 268.

²⁰⁸ See R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1987), 166. Henceforth cited as *Prayers*.

²⁰⁹ Mitchell, *Praying* 152.

²¹⁰ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 159.

The movement away from this sense of corporate celebration of the eucharist was part of an overall trend that reached its apex in the medieval period.

It is common to associate the medieval Roman rite with the concretization of liturgical forms and the clericalization of worship.²¹¹ The Roman canon, however, contains wording that is current in many forms of the Great Thanksgiving, and contains prayers that represent the four “classic components” of eucharistic prayers: anamnesis, institution narrative, oblation, and epiclesis.²¹² Anamnesis is the Greek term for “remembrance,” and connotes a participation in the events that one is recalling. In the context of the Great Thanksgiving, anamnesis involves us in Jesus’ death and resurrection and “all of the mighty acts for which we have given thanks.”²¹³ As it involves a fuller conception of time, anamnesis also anticipates what God is yet to do in the world.

The institution narrative is itself an anamnestic recalling of Jesus’ words and actions at his Last Supper with the disciples. It is attested to in the three Synoptic Gospels, and in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. The institution narrative includes the words of institution that Jesus spoke in connection with the bread and the cup: “This is my body This is my blood” These words have often been associated with a moment of consecration in the eucharistic prayer. The ringing of sanctus bells after each eucharistic element has been handled represents this belief, as does bowing to each of the

²¹¹ Despite this perception, Jasper and Cuming note in their translation of the Mass of the Roman Rite that certain phrases denote congregational participation. See *Prayers*, 161.

²¹² James F. Turrell, “The Eucharist” (lecture, History of Worship, The University of the South, Sewanee, TN, Easter Semester, 2010).

²¹³ Mitchell, *Praying*, 165.

elements.²¹⁴ The institution narrative is the basis of the early eucharistic tradition that the Apostle Paul received and taught to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). It resembles a Passover *haggadah*, or explanation by the head of a household about the significance of the food and drink consumed.²¹⁵ The Last Supper as a meal, then, is not unusual; Jesus' "interpretive words" are what give it "new meaning."²¹⁶

"Oblation" refers to the many senses of offering that are found in the Great Thanksgiving. *Te igitur*, the prayer that begins the Roman canon, announces the sacrificial theme that is the rite's hallmark by asking for the gifts of bread and wine to be made holy in order that they may be offered back to God. *Hanc igitur*, which follows closely, asks God to accept the church's offering. Ideally, oblation refers to the offering of much more than the eucharistic elements. In the course of celebrating the eucharist, the church offers praise and thanksgiving and presents its whole self, Jesus' Body united in baptism, to be caught up in communion with God.

Finally, the epiclesis refers to the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine, and upon the church. As with the institution narrative, this is a portion of the Great Thanksgiving that is often labeled "consecratory." Mitchell addresses this tendency, noting that humans are bound by the categories of time and space and, therefore, must describe events consecutively. In reality, the "action of Father, Word and Spirit does not occur at some particular point in the prayer, but as the promised response to the Eucharistic offering."²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Patrick Malloy, *Celebrating the Eucharist: A Practical Ceremonial Guide for Clergy and Other Liturgical Ministers* (New York: Church Publishing, 2007), 177.

²¹⁵ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 8.

²¹⁶ Mitchell, *Praying*, 163.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

Despite the need to mark the varied emphases of our thanksgiving to God in a sequential way, eucharistic prayers tend to move fluidly from component to component, comprehending one theme within another, overlapping themes, and returning to others. As noted above, the text of the Roman rite begins with *Te igitur*, followed by a series of similarly brief prayers of invocation and intercession, including the oblationary *Hanc igitur* and epicletic *Quam oblationem. Qui pridie*, which falls in the middle of the canon, contains the anamnestic institution narrative in a succinct format. It is followed by an equally succinct anamnestic and oblationary prayer, *Unde et memores*, and further prayers of invocation and intercession. The canon concludes with *Per quem*, a doxology that is fundamentally oblationary: “Through [Jesus] and with him and in him.”²¹⁸ Following *Per quem*, a general “Amen” was intended to be spoken by the congregation. In fact, though the medieval mass was largely silent, the celebrant spoke audibly at this point in the prayer to signal the church’s Amen.²¹⁹

The Lord’s Prayer followed the Great Thanksgiving. This component was introduced to the eucharist early in the fifth century. Its place before the communion may reflect an early devotional practice of bringing consecrated bread home from the Sunday assembly and praying the Lord’s Prayer before consuming it.²²⁰ The setting of the Lord’s Prayer in the overall rite, following the people’s Amen and the conclusion of the great prayer to God, gives the appearance of unity, discipline, and focus as the church prepares to receive communion. This spirit of participatory celebration, however, did not always prevail in the medieval period.

²¹⁸ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 159-167.

²¹⁹ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 373.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 378; Mitchell, *Praying*, 175.

During the time of the apostles, the patristic period, and, to some extent, the early medieval period, the eucharist was celebrated as a public, communal service of thanksgiving and commemoration. Its liturgical center was the altar of one parish and it maintained a strong sense of the bishop as liturgical leader, even if he were not able to preside.²²¹ By the high medieval period, eucharistic practice and ceremonial had changed dramatically. A significant factor in the shaping the medieval eucharist was the development early on of the private mass.²²² Joseph Martos chronicles a fluid progress from patristic commemorations of martyrs to votive masses, where individuals who requested that the mass be celebrated for a “personal intention” were responsible for supplying the offertory gifts.²²³ This genealogy includes the filling up of the calendar year with remembrances of saints, and involves changes in the sacrificial understanding of the eucharist. The patristic idea of sacrifice had been focused on Jesus’ unique propitiary self-offering, with the eucharist being a “shared offering of thanksgiving.”²²⁴ *With* Jesus, both high priest and paschal victim (Heb. 5:7-11), the church recalled God’s saving event *in* Jesus back to God in a service of anamnestic and oblationary prayer. Beginning in the fourth century, however, theological reflection turned toward Jesus’ real presence in the eucharist. More and more, Jesus’ embodiment in the liturgical assembly began to be located exclusively in the bread and the wine. Confined to this visible offering, Jesus took on the character of victim, while the sacerdotal role was left to the presider alone. In this way, the eucharist came to be understood primarily as an

²²¹ Martos, *Doors*, 231.

²²² See *Ibid.*, 232; Hatchett, *Commentary*, 294; Hope, “Liturgical Books,” 282-83.

²²³ Martos, *Doors*, 231.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 230.

“atonement offering for sin.”²²⁵ This conception of the eucharist did not mandate the congregation’s full participation in the thanksgiving meal, including the eating of it:

The bishop offered the sacrifice on behalf of the people, and in this sense was always an offering of the entire congregation whether or not they ate the bread and drank the wine. And the sacrificial victim was the second person of the blessed Trinity, so there could be no doubt that it was a worthy and acceptable sacrifice whether or not the Son of God was received in communion.²²⁶

The fourth century also saw individuals growing more and more hesitant to receive communion. Concerns about post-baptismal sin, coupled with preachers’ concerns to emphasize the profound holiness of the sacrament in an age of mass conversions resulted in a situation about which John Chrysostom could say, “We stand before the altar in vain; no one comes to partake.”²²⁷ The notion of the extreme otherness of Jesus in the eucharistic sacrifice and of his supernatural presence in the elements grew stronger in the medieval period and was reflected in liturgical practice. The Sanctus was sung by a choir to cover the priest’s consecratory prayer. The clerics’ private prayers of preparation and confession were incorporated into the public rite. Ritual piety developed around the elements: priests and people alike were careful to minimize spilling crumbs or dripping wine; the congregation knelt or genuflected when the bread was showed to them or carried by them; and eucharistic hosts were placed in monstrances and often processed.²²⁸ In contrast to the practice of the early church, individuals were not allowed to take the elements with them following the liturgy. The most significant moment in the mass was neither the people’s Amen, nor the communion, but the elevation of the

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ John Chrysostom, cited in Martos, *Doors*, 229.

²²⁸ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 294-95.

elements following the words of institution. Bells were rung so that people who were praying privately during the largely silent service would know when to look up. Altars and reredoses were elaborately decorated, in order to provide a striking backdrop to the elevated host and chalice.²²⁹

Worship was conducted exclusively in Latin, a language that few people – and not every priest – understood. This not only contributed to a sense of the mystery of the rite, but also made the congregation passively dependent on the priest’s theology of the mass.²³⁰ Sermons were given more infrequently, as the Scripture lessons that they were meant to address were also read in Latin. When preaching did occur, it was often during the Prone, an independent service of prayer and Scripture reading without eucharist.²³¹ The focus of the mass was on the food and the drink where Jesus resided. Language was critical to ensuring that these elements were duly sacrificed. For instance, sacramentaries helped priests navigate the mass, and ensured that the correct things were said at the correct times. Jesus’ own words in the institution narrative were particularly important, as they marked the moment when the sacrifice was thought to be offered.²³² Furthermore, just as the priest protected Jesus’ body by placing the eucharistic wafer directly on a communicant’s tongue, the silent and linguistically unintelligible liturgy had a protective, containing effect. Sacred things were meant to be sheltered, not shared. To modern eyes, the average medieval layperson – who was unable to hear and to understand the Great Thanksgiving – looks more like a eucharistic spectator than a

²²⁹ Ibid., 295.

²³⁰ Martos, *Doors*, 132.

²³¹ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 296.

²³² Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 160.

baptized communicant. This period witnessed the eventual shift in the understanding and practice of the eucharist from “communal prayer” to “clerical ritual separated from the congregation by barriers of language and architecture” and from “active participation” to “passive inspiration and adoration.”²³³

It is noteworthy, then, that one of the first changes instituted by the reformers was to include portions of the liturgy in the vernacular. A relatively conservative reformer in liturgical matters, Martin Luther did not wish to do away with the Roman rite, but sought to “purify” the medieval form of worship.²³⁴ Among the most significant of his changes was the use of German. In his first Latin rite (*Formula Missae*, 1523), he allowed a vernacular hymn to substitute for the sequences and required that a sermon be preached.²³⁵ Luther’s *Deutsche Messe* of 1526 was entirely in German, and made extensive use of original hymnody.²³⁶ Another of his initial, “radical” revisions also had to do with language: Luther did away with the priest’s private prayers and with the segment of the eucharistic prayer that the priest said inaudibly.²³⁷ Luther also placed a great deal of importance on the words of institution, though his sense of their function was different than in the Roman rite. Luther did not believe that the priest’s recitation of these words in the course of the eucharistic prayer caused them to be Jesus’ real body and blood, but that Jesus’ own words about the bread and the cup, recorded in Scripture, made them so. The words of institution, which were the only portion of the Great

²³³ Martos, *Doors*, 235.

²³⁴ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 296.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 190.

²³⁷ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 296

Thanksgiving that Luther retained in his rites, represented Jesus' promise to forgive sins and to be with the church always.²³⁸

The printing press is often credited with speeding religious Reform in the sixteenth century, due to the increased availability of Bibles. Equally important was the reproduction of service books and other liturgical texts, which allowed reformers like Thomas Cranmer to mine the available Christian world for historical and ecumenical orders of worship and prayer. Cranmer was particularly influenced by German church orders like Luther's, and by the reformed Roman Catholic liturgy of Hermann von Weid, *A Simple and Religious Consultation*.²³⁹ Though Luther's changes to the service of Holy Eucharist were restrained compared to those of other reformers, Cranmer is thought to have held the most "Catholic" conception of the eucharist.²⁴⁰ Like Luther, he intended to purge the mass of its "superstitious" elements, but did not reject it as a habitual form of worship. In fact, both reformers hoped that congregations would celebrate the eucharist on Sundays and would regularly receive the sacrament.²⁴¹

Cranmer's first attempt at reform of the mass was *The Order of the Communion*, completed by a group of English scholars and bishops in 1548. The *Order* was not an independent eucharistic rite, but a series of devotions inserted into the Latin mass following the priest's communion. Some of its phrasing was taken verbatim from von Wied; however, the *Order* was intended for use in English. In fact, it was preceded in 1547 by a royal injunction that the Epistle and the Gospel be read in English during the

²³⁸ Martos, *Doors*, 248.

²³⁹ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 177-78. Cranmer also used a 1528 Venetian edition of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

²⁴⁰ Martos, *Doors*, 247.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

liturgy of the Word.²⁴² The *Order* assumed that the congregation would receive communion (both the bread and the wine) and included an exhortation to self-examination and a general confession. Interestingly, rubrics within the text indicate that the confession was to be said on behalf of the congregation by “*one of them ... one of the ministers ...or by the priest himself.*”²⁴³ If Cranmer’s own preference may be implied by his ordering of the above “ministers,” then he not only translated the liturgy into the language of the people but accorded them more participatory liturgical roles. Next came the comfortable words. Whereas von Wied’s *Consultation* allowed the presider to choose one of five sentences of Scripture to be read prior to the absolution, Cranmer set down four sentences, all of which would be recited following the absolution. This practice recalls the idea, mentioned in Chapter One, of Scripture acting as a “proof” of worship, where all of one’s words to God and about God in worship must be authenticated with God’s own words to us. Furthermore, Scripture in worship had a catechetical function for Cranmer that can be called sacramental in that it draws us closer to God by teaching us about God.

The Order of the Communion was a transitional measure. In 1549, the first *Book of Common Prayer* was issued. It combined the calendar of the church year, the daily offices, a rite for celebrating the eucharist, and orders for matrimony, funerals, and the visitation of the sick. All of the above offices and services were written in English and meant to be said in English. The structure of the 1549 eucharist was not very different from the Sarum Use. Yet, as in Luther’s rite, the priest’s private devotions and whispered portions of the canon were deleted. Likewise, as in the *Order of the Communion*,

²⁴² R.T. Beckwith, in *SOL*, 310.

²⁴³ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 229.

Cranmer's new rite assumed that the congregation would be communicated, and directed the priest to provide enough bread and wine.²⁴⁴ The Great Thanksgiving was preceded by the *Sursum corda* and *Sanctus* with fewer variable prefaces than in the Roman rite. Similar prayers of intercession and invocation followed. Cranmer retained an epicletic prayer similar to the Roman canon's *Quam oblationem*, which added the petition that God's "divine word," in addition to the Holy Spirit, might sanctify the elements. This prayer was located in the same section as the institution narrative, and while some scholars contend that Cranmer was continuing the Western emphasis on the institution narrative as consecratory, Mitchell notes that the American Prayer Book of 1789 capitalized "Word" to mitigate that perception.²⁴⁵ The words of institution were said without ritual or manual embellishments. Rubrics indicated that that the priest should hold the bread and the wine in the course of speaking about them, but forbade him from elevating them. Consecrated bread was not intended to be reserved; nor was it to be the object of adoration, as when placed in a monstrance or processed.²⁴⁶ An anamnetic and oblationary prayer following the institution narrative included the self-oblation, "we offer and presente unto thee, O lord, our selves, our soules, and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and liuely Sacrifice unto thee."²⁴⁷ The Great Thanksgiving concluded with the people's Amen, followed by the Lord's Prayer and the peace. The remaining material, including the confession, the absolution, and the comfortable words, were from *The Order of the Communion*.

²⁴⁴ Hatchet, *Commentary*, 299.

²⁴⁵ Mitchell, *Praying*, 170. For more on Cranmer's intentions, see Hatchett, *Commentary*, 355-56.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ Gibson, trans., *Prayer Books*, 390.

The revised 1552 Prayer Book included a markedly changed eucharistic rite. Much of the penitential material contained in the *Order* occurred before the Great Thanksgiving. The prayer of humble access, however, followed the Sursum corda, proper preface, and Sanctus as an entrée into the canon. This prayer strikes a penitential tone, but also states clearly what is hoped for in coming to communion: that all would be forgiven of their sins and “that we may euermore dwel in him, and he in us.”²⁴⁸ It is generally said that the eucharistic prayer of 1552 was shorn of any phrases or actions that might indicate Jesus’ real presence in the bread and the wine. For example, the epiclesis was replaced by a prayer for “fruitful reception.”²⁴⁹ The words of administration encouraged the communicant to use the bread and wine as an aid to memory and reflection: “Take and eate this, in remembraunce that Christ dyed for thee, and feede on him in thy hearte by faythe, with thanksgeuing.”²⁵⁰ Furthermore, the communion of the priest and the people occurred directly following the words of institution, at the moment when the elevation would have occurred in the Latin Rite. This change reflected “a deliberate attempt to substitute a eucharistic piety based on receiving the Sacrament for one based upon the adoration of the consecrated elements.”²⁵¹ In fact, the trend away from adoration of the elements and the popular ceremonies and beliefs attendant to it may have been of more concern to Cranmer than promoting a purely memorialist eucharistic theology. As indicated, “passive inspiration” and “adoration” had become the

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 389.

²⁴⁹ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 245.

²⁵⁰ Gibson, trans., *Prayer Books*, 389.

²⁵¹ Hatchett, *Commentary*, 302.

congregation's chief ways of participating in the eucharist. Superstition and magical thinking surely played a part in the average person's piety.²⁵²

We cannot assume, however, that sincere devotion was absent. Cranmer did not wish to diminish the church's fondness and reverence for the sacrament, but to purge it of superstitions (just as he "purged" the eucharistic rite) and clarify its objectives. The eucharist was not to be a source of miraculous benefits, nor the elements objects of adoration in themselves. However, like Bucer (with whom many scholars feel he was in agreement), Cranmer believed that the sacrament was instituted by Jesus and was a means of grace.²⁵³ Bucer's eucharistic theology held that the bread and wine did not become the substance of Jesus' body and blood. Yet, receiving the eucharist in faith caused a believer to be "uplifted" where she could enjoy "real participation of the body and blood of Christ in heaven."²⁵⁴ Cranmer's prayer for fruitful reception (which, as noted, replaced the epicletic prayer of 1549) similarly petitioned that, having received the sacrament, the communicants would be "partakers in his body and blood."²⁵⁵ While this language seems to point away from the physical, locating Jesus "out there," in distinction from the elements, the location that Cranmer was most concerned to point to is interior: "feed on him in thy heart" For Cranmer, the site of adoration was not the monstrance, but the human soul. Faithful practice demanded that one eat the bread and drink the wine and faithful response demanded that one offer himself wholly, self, soul, and body, seeking to continue in fellowship with Jesus and to do "good works."²⁵⁶ The interior

²⁵² See, for example, the "host tales" of Caesar of Heisterbach (13c.).

²⁵³ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 245.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 204-205.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁵⁶ Gibson, *Prayer Books*, 390.

movement here resulted in something more participatory and more embodied than focusing solely on the external sacrament.

Despite significant differences between the eucharist in the 1552 Prayer Book and those that went before it, the rite remained largely unchanged for over a century. In 1661, when the monarchy was restored following the Commonwealth, both Puritan and Laudian parties vied for substantial changes to the Prayer Book. The 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* altered very little of the language of worship, but included more directive rubrics that allowed for a greater variety of practices. This Prayer Book represented a compromise of sorts, lending credence to the impression that “the Church of England settled for a variety of liturgical forms and Anglican theology permitted a variety of doctrinal interpretations about the eucharist.”²⁵⁷

While the first American Prayer Book of 1789 was a conservative revision of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, its eucharistic prayer combined elements from various Scottish liturgies. Scottish non-jurors (who remained loyal to James II after he was ousted from power by William and Mary) were free to experiment with different liturgical forms, as their church existed outside of the aegis of Canterbury and Parliament. They favored a West-Syrian structure for the eucharistic prayer that began with the institution narrative, followed by anamnesis, oblation, and epiclesis. Subsequent to the American Revolution, the American Episcopal Church looked to the Episcopal church in Scotland (which was in much the same position as the American Church with

²⁵⁷ Martos, *Doors*, 251.

regard to England) for support in ordaining its first bishop, and for inspiration in revising its own liturgies.²⁵⁸

The Scottish non-jurors were among several scholars and priests who for years had been studying historic liturgies.²⁵⁹ During the late nineteenth century, Benedictine monks in France and Germany began to investigate ancient worship orders with the intent of understanding the Roman Catholic Tridentine rite more fully. The work begun by them continued throughout the two world wars. In 1945, the Anglican Benedictine Gregory Dix published a foundational study, *The Shape of the Liturgy*. This work, along with many others, formed a critical mass of scholarship around early church practices that came to be known as the Liturgical Movement. The climate of revision and renewal that it inspired led to the Second Vatican Council in 1962, and the publication of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy in 1963.²⁶⁰ The latter document emphasized lay participation in the liturgy (including receiving communion), more extensive use of the lectionary (especially the Old Testament), and the rehabilitation of preaching.²⁶¹

The American Episcopal Church was greatly impacted by the Liturgical Movement, and began a process of gradual Prayer Book revision in 1950. Liturgical renewal in the Episcopal Church sought to address many of the same problems as the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, such as rigid rites, incomplete use of the lectionary, little congregational participation, and a lack of a sense of thanksgiving and celebration at

²⁵⁸ Jeffrey Lee, *Opening the Prayer Book* (Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 58-59.

²⁵⁹ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 178. For example, the *Apostolic Constitutions* was first published in 1563, and Cranmer had looked to ancient Eastern documents when revising the English liturgies.

²⁶⁰ Martos, *Doors*, 258-260

²⁶¹ Clifford Howell, "From Trent to Vatican II," in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, et al (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 293.

the eucharist.²⁶² Marion Hatchett described the “excessively penitential” eucharistic rite of the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*:

A revision was needed to recapture the family aspect of the feast, its basic eucharistic nature, its kerygmatic function, and its eschatological implications. The sharing and worshipping community needed a rite that would remind them of creation, death, and resurrection, and provide a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.²⁶³

The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* is built around the eucharist as the church’s chief celebration, the “principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day and other major Feasts.”²⁶⁴ In structuring worship this way, the church, inspired by the Liturgical Movement, looked to the practices of early Christian communities. The *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, the *Didache*, and the *First Apology* of Justin Martyr contain rites for the celebration of the eucharist in the first centuries of Christianity, and each played a role in the process of Prayer Book revision.

While there were no standardized liturgical manuals or texts at that time that these orders were first written down, most worship services had some basic elements in common: the reading and exposition of Scripture, common prayers of intercession, the Great Thanksgiving, and communion of the baptized. As noted, local Christian communities celebrated the eucharist at one altar, presided over by a bishop. The *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* dates from the third or fourth century and purports to describe the worship of the church in Rome. It depicts the sort of dedicated eucharistic community mentioned above, and the pattern of worship that they followed, including the text of a eucharistic prayer provided for the consecration of a bishop, the *Anaphora of*

²⁶² Hatchett, *Commentary*, 307.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 307-8.

²⁶⁴ *BCP*, 13.

Hippolytus. The *Anaphora* begins with the familiar *Sursum corda*. Rather than a proper preface, the presider establishes a context of thanksgiving by rehearsing Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection in one paragraph addressed to God, "through your beloved child, Jesus Christ."²⁶⁵ The presider continues with the institution narrative, an anamnetic and oblationary prayer over the gifts, and a prayer invoking the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is sought to make the gifts holy and the church that receives them holy. The presider prays that this holiness is desired explicitly for the "strengthening of faith in truth"; however, the whole prayer is grounded in a plea for unity. The final portion of the *Anaphora*, then, establishes the "gathering into one" of all Christians as the condition for the fulfillment of the church's hopes and desires.²⁶⁶ Mitchell notes, in discussing the eucharistic prayers of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, "the eucharist is the sacrament of unity and is both the sign and the cause of the unity of the Church. Therefore, the *epiclesis* seeks after unity and peace for the sanctification of the Church."²⁶⁷

The *Didache*, a Syrian church order dating from the late first or early second century, provides an even earlier link to the theme of unity in the eucharistic prayer. It includes advice as to how the community of Christians should pray, notably that they should say the Lord's Prayer thrice daily. Instructions about the eucharist follow those for daily prayer, moving from the everyday to the weekly, from private to public, and from ritual habit to ritual feast. In Chapter Nine of the *Didache*, the author explicitly directs the reader in "how to give thanks."²⁶⁸ The text of these prayers is very simple,

²⁶⁵ Cuming, Geoffrey J., trans., *Hippolytus: A Text for Students* (Bramcote Notts: Grove Books, 1976), 11

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Mitchell, *Praying*, 168.

²⁶⁸ *Didache*, 9:1 (Cyril Richardson, from CCEL). Ch 9 may be a Eucharist or an agape meal, see J&C 20.

suggesting one or two phrases for each of the eucharistic elements. Over the wine and bread, the presider thanks God for what has been revealed to humanity in Jesus, concluding with a sort of collect, which includes a petition and ends in a doxology. The petition reads, “as this piece [of bread] was scattered over the hills and then was brought together and made one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your Kingdom.”²⁶⁹ The post-communion prayer offers repeated thanksgiving to God for the gift of Jesus, incorporates thanksgiving for creation, and repeats the petition for unity: “gather it together from the four winds into your Kingdom.”²⁷⁰ Interestingly, the section on the eucharist concludes with the admonition to let prophets pray the eucharistic prayer (“give thanks”) in their own manner.²⁷¹ The author of the *Didache* implies, therefore, that unless a presider has a particular charism, he should model his prayer of thanksgiving on the ideas and pattern described in the text.

Justin Martyr wrote his *First Apology* describing the nature of Christian worship around 150 CE. In it, Justin provides a good sense of the character of eucharistic presidency, though he gives little detail as to the content of the eucharistic prayer. The *Apology* contains a portrayal of a balanced service of word and table, celebrated on the Lord’s Day. Justin writes that on Sunday, people “who live in town or country” gather in one place to hear Scripture read. At the end of the lections, the “president” addresses the assembly about what they have heard, and calls them to emulate the “good things” to which Scripture witnesses. Following this sermon, the community prays together before bread and wine are brought forward to the president. His prayers are depicted as being a

²⁶⁹ 9:4.

²⁷⁰ 10:5.

²⁷¹ 10:7.

continuation of the community's prayers, as "the president likewise sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the people assent, saying the Amen."²⁷² Here we find two important characteristics of the "president": he presides not only at the table, but at the ambo. Put differently, the same person is designated to expound on Scripture and to host the community's meal. When Justin describes the reading of Scripture, he writes that it is read "as time allows."²⁷³ Though the lessons likely follow some course, the president may not have anticipated each week all the Scriptures that would be read. Presumably, then, he was a person whose authority in the community depended in part on his familiarity with the Old and New Testaments and other traditions about the apostles, and who was able to articulate his thoughts clearly, effectively, and relatively spontaneously. This same ability would transfer to the liturgy of the table where he would be expected to rehearse the mighty acts of God in creation and in the redemptive life and death of Christ, and to intercede on behalf of the community using no set form. In addition to "serving the word" on behalf of the community, Justin's president is also charged to steward the community's offerings for the poor: "in a word, he takes care of all those who are in need."²⁷⁴

While the text of the *Didache* lacks any reference to the institution narrative, including Christ's words about the bread and the wine being his body and blood, Justin explicitly remarks on it in his *Apology*.²⁷⁵ He does not, however, indicate whether the words of institution are an essential component of the eucharistic prayer. Instead, he

²⁷² *First Apology*, 67.1 (J & C, 30). I assume male pronoun.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ 67.1, J&C 30.

²⁷⁵ J & C 20. Again, chs 9 & 10 may not be a eucharist, but ch 14, which describes a "Lord's Day," says nothing about this, either. It does, however, include the language of sacrifice.

discusses the manner in which Christians receive the bread and wine – as “the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus” – and rehearses for his readers the tradition of Jesus’ prayer at the Last Supper.²⁷⁶ So, while Justin links Jesus’ “word of prayer” to Jesus’ real presence in the community’s meal, when summarizing the president’s prayer, he simply notes, “he takes [the gifts] and sends up praise and glory to the Father of all in the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and gives thanks at some length....”²⁷⁷

While the ancient church orders detailed above provide important and influential information about the eucharist, the Bible provides an even earlier picture of the church’s practice. The earliest recorded institution narrative is found in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, written between 53 and 57 CE. In this letter, Paul is concerned to emphasize the unity and interdependency of the church, which appears to be breaking down in the Corinthians’ celebration of their community meal. Paul notes that factions within the community nullify its intent, which is to celebrate “the Lord’s supper” (1 Cor. 11:20). His description of their misdeeds (eating one’s own food without waiting for one another, drunkenness, etc.) indicate that at this early point, the event that the Corinthians gathered for was a real meal. It is likely that a blessing was said over the bread at the beginning of the meal. The group then ate, and concluded with a blessing over a cup of wine, just as Jewish ritual meals concluded with a “cup of the blessing.”²⁷⁸

Paul clarifies and reasserts the tradition about the meal that was handed down to him, and that he handed over to the Corinthians. He claims to have received this tradition from Jesus, though this could mean that he learned it from Jesus’ disciples and friends.

²⁷⁶ 66.1, *ibid* 29

²⁷⁷ 65.1, J&C 28

²⁷⁸ SOL 78.

The words about the meal that Paul received are similar to those recorded in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. The shape of what he describes also resembles these Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, as well as other stories about Jesus' feeding of the crowds, and Jesus' supper at Emmaus. Dom Gregory Dix, an Anglican priest and scholar, is credited with discerning the four-fold shape of the eucharist to which the above accounts attest: Christ took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. All but the breaking are done for the wine in the stories about the Last Supper. Early liturgies repeat this pattern, and "almost all modern liturgies have adopted this framework and have taken pains to make it clear to the worshipper."²⁷⁹

In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, John's Gospel omits any explicit reference to Jesus' words of institution. He does, however, vividly narrate events during the meal preceding Jesus' arrest. Most importantly, his book is undergirded by eucharistic concerns and is thoroughly sacramental. While several scholars have made the case for reading John's Gospel in this way, William Temple did so eloquently in his 1939 commentary, *Readings in St. John's Gospel*.

Temple was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1942-1944, and was a celebrated theologian and priest prior to his enthronement. Though he admitted to having always believed in God, as a young scholar he had difficulty accepting things in Scripture that he perceived to be "miraculous" (like the virgin birth). As Temple's thought and piety developed, however, he was more and more compelled by the person of Jesus, and the doctrine of the incarnation became the foundation of his work, about which he said, "the whole of my theology is an attempt to understand and verify the words: He that hath seen

²⁷⁹ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 13

me hath seen the Father.”²⁸⁰ The incarnation was a guiding theological principle for Temple’s engagement in issues around education, industry, commerce, anti-defamation, and women’s rights. Jesus’ coming into the world in a body had made material things holy; Christians, therefore, had a duty to bring his vision of God’s kingdom to bear in the things around them. In the preface to his last book, published posthumously in 1944, Temple expressed his hope that all aspects of life could be united in a single divine purpose “presented to us in the Bible under the name of the Kingdom (Sovereignty) of God, or as the summing up of all things in Christ”²⁸¹

In his commentary on John, Temple notes that, contrary to what many believe, the fourth Gospel is concerned to assert Jesus’ humanity (even his physicality) against Docetism.²⁸² However, its author was also aware that the pendulum might swing in the other direction, and wanted to guard against “attributing to the physical reception of the Sacrament any magical efficacy.”²⁸³ For this reason, the Evangelist’s most substantive treatment of the eucharist does not occur in his telling of the Last Supper, but in Jesus’ bread of life discourse. In John 6, Jesus feeds a crowd of people who have come to see him, multiplying five barley loaves and two fish. Following this incident, he challenges the crowd to look beyond this food to the real substance that he offers: “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die ... and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:48-51). The gift that Jesus offers is

²⁸⁰ Temple, cited in William J. Wolf, John E. Booty, and Owen C. Thomas, *The Spirit of Anglicanism: Hooker, Maurice, and Temple* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow Co. Inc., 1979), 112.

²⁸¹ Temple cited in *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁸² Temple, *Readings*, 79. Docetism is the belief that Jesus did not truly have a human nature.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

permanent, ongoing nourishment. It is participation in him and communion with him, which is life itself. Jesus does not denigrate real food – otherwise he would have expected the crowds to choose between listening to him or satisfying their hunger. Rather, Jesus asserts the primacy of relationship. As the bread of life, what he offers is communion with God. One does not casually pick up and put down a morsel of this bread, but chews on it, digests it, and is herself incorporated into *it*. It is bread for the journey, meant to sustain the life of faith. Temple writes, “It is not the momentary eating but the permanent abiding that is of primary importance.” He continues, drawing upon our own liturgical language, “That we should ‘take’ and ‘eat’ is an indispensable aid which the sincere Christian cannot omit; but the one thing that matters is that we should ‘feed on him in our hearts.’”²⁸⁴

Temple emphasizes that the significance of Jesus’ words in John 6 is found in the theme of the entire Gospel, laid out in its prologue: “The Word became flesh.”²⁸⁵ For Temple, this truth is at the very foundation of Christian belief. He notes that the process of coming to accept Jesus, which involves learning about him in Scripture, begins with “the proclamation of the apostles concerning the Word made flesh.” This Gospel itself is food, the eating of which brings one into “communion with the eternal God.”²⁸⁶ In using the term, “flesh,” to describe his human nature, John’s Jesus signals two things. First, he shows how thoroughly human he is: “St. John no doubt chose the word ‘flesh’ because it represents the material in just that phase most commonly associated with evil”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 93.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 91.

²⁸⁶ William Temple, *The Preacher’s Theme for Today: Four Lectures Delivered at the College of Preachers, Washington* (London: SPCK, 1936), 40. Henceforth cited as *Theme*.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 43.

Rather than suggesting that Jesus became sinful, however, the reverse is indicated. In becoming flesh, Jesus shows us the truth about our world, that “the material always exists in order to be the expression of and the vehicle of what is spiritual,” and that “the universe itself is a sacrament grounded in the love of God”²⁸⁸ Furthermore, in revealing created things to be the site of God’s activity, Jesus’ designation of himself as the Word – the “ruling fact of the universe” and the “self-expression of God” – makes *words* holy.²⁸⁹ The words that Jesus speaks and the words that John’s author uses about him become sacramental, carrying within themselves truth that leads us to God, and pointing beyond themselves to the source of all truth. When we read the Evangelist’s statement that Jesus, God’s Word, became flesh, we may ponder whether “as well as identifying the person of Christ with the Word he did not also intend the words he assigns to Christ also to participate in that relation, in disclosing the divine.”²⁹⁰

The above reflections about the Word made flesh in John’s Gospel are significant for our discussion of the sacramentality of the eucharistic prayers for reasons just indicated. In becoming flesh, Jesus gives created things the power to bring us to God. We have already noted how words of God in Scripture and words about God in preaching are able to draw us into intimate communion with Jesus by re-presenting him to us, showing us the hope that he incarnates in his vision of God’s kingdom, and inspiring us to unite our lives to his in mission. The ways in which Scripture and preaching do these things resemble the components of the eucharistic prayer. God’s creative and redemptive

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁸⁹ Temple, *Readings*, 4.

²⁹⁰ David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 52. Henceforth cited as *Words*.

goodness is recalled, as well as the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection: *anamnesis*. We come to understand a new reality and are moved to offer ourselves and all that we have in service to it: *oblation*. All of this is the work of the Holy Spirit, who inspires the reading of Scripture, the preaching of the word, and our worship: *epiclesis*. Jesus' response to all of these words – our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, as well as our petitions and intercessions – is to feed us. He gives us himself, the Word, forever. We feed on him in the bread and the wine, as well as in our words about and to him, and are sustained in communion with God.

Furthermore, affirming that words become sacramental in the Word become flesh, something important is asserted about what we believe to be happening in the eucharist. The history of the eucharist and of the eucharistic prayers is largely one of seeking to find Jesus in a particular place and to understand his work in a particular way. The Roman rite emerged in a church that located Jesus in the bread and the wine and rehearsed his sacrifice, believing that this act would forgive sin. Cranmer rejected this belief, and changed the eucharistic rite in several ways, primarily by making it intelligible to the church. His eucharist was also more participatory, and exposed people to more words of Scripture and preaching. These new elements allowed the congregation to carry away something tangible, which they might actually "feed on in their hearts." Yet, though he moved in the opposite direction from them, it is clear that Cranmer was as concerned as the Roman Catholic Church to address Jesus' real presence in the eucharist, and the place of sacrifice in the Great Thanksgiving. In many ways he used language to open up the rite, and in other ways he used language to close off its meaning.

We cannot use words to describe Jesus in a technical or final way. Jesus is a person, “not an intellectual proposition,” whom we experience and to whom we testify.²⁹¹ A great deal of our experience rests on the witness of others in Scripture, preaching, and rite. Our use of words to relate to him must take into account the inexhaustibility of words, to which Jesus himself witnesses by virtue of his identity as Word. For, “as the application of the term ‘Word’ to the incarnate Christ did not leave things as they were but changed how the term was understood, so sacramental words cannot be said to achieve their purpose simply as mediating words, quite distinct from what they are intending to convey.”²⁹² The words that we use in worship do more than depict scenes that draw us imaginatively into relationship with God, or set forth a way of life in a manner that is merely engaging or attractive. Words actually participate in the reality that they disclose. Because God is inexhaustible, our words about God have the power to break reality open wide – to expand our vision, enlarge our hearts, explode our horizons, and make us more responsive to and perceptive of God’s presence in all things. In the setting of the whole service of Holy Eucharist, our great celebration and anticipation of God’s movement toward the world in love,

the defined words inevitably burst out beyond any attempt to contain them. It is precisely because of the open-ended character of the images that they are able not only to exercise their power, but also to move us towards thinking in a manner transcendent to the words, of God himself. All imagery forces beyond containment The words induce us to move beyond their literal meaning towards thinking in a quite different way and so, potentially, of a quite different order of reality.²⁹³

²⁹¹ Temple, *Theme*, 32.

²⁹² Brown, *Words*, 58.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

That reality, the world-beyond-limitation into which liturgy seeks to draw us, has its center not in words, but in the Word, a person whose life was the embodied proclamation of God's kingdom, and whose Spirit is active in our words about and to him. Jesus' own proclamation – his vision of and manifestation of God's kingdom – likewise has its source in God's inexhaustible love. When we are drawn into communion with God, when we find our hope and our purpose in Jesus, we discover this love to be the eternal Word that underlies all words. The author of John wove this theme into his treatment of the eucharist. There, in the place where we expect to find the institution narrative in his Gospel, we find Jesus at table with his disciples, having just washed their feet. He draws their attention to his message, saying "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23). Then, instead of pointing to the bread and to the cup, he points to himself saying, "I am the true vine ... Abide in me as I abide in you" (John 15:1, 4a). Jesus' word, by which he is identified and in which we find our identity when we abide in him, is revealed to be this commandment: "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

In turning to Scripture and to early church orders, the Liturgical Movement sought to recover a variety of meanings, images, and phrases that Christians had used for centuries to evoke the whole history of God's relationship with God's people. The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* and the Roman Catholic *Order of the Mass*, as well as other denominations' books of worship, now contain more than one option for celebrating the eucharist, each of which has been thoughtfully and intentionally composed to reflect the classic components of the eucharistic prayer, the four-fold shape of the eucharist, and the

witness of ancient and biblical sources. In addition to these comprehensive eucharistic prayers, the rehabilitation of preaching and Scripture reading has been a goal of liturgical reform. In a concluding section we will revisit the problem of the imbalance of the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the table, and consider how the sacramental understanding of words put forth in this project might affect that issue, as well as others in the church's worship.

Conclusion

But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

–John 21:25

Describing the Tridentine mass pre-Vatican II, the Benedictine scholar William Skudlarek recalls that it was common for a priest to remove his chasuble before ascending the pulpit to preach, indicating that “the sermon was an interruption of the mass.”²⁹⁴ Before indicting the medieval period for its neglect of the liturgy of the word, Skudlarek points out that Protestant congregations suffer from the opposite problem. In denominations that historically emphasize preaching, liturgy is thought of as nothing more than a “setting” for the sermon. Lancelot Andrewes and his contemporaries’ services of Morning Prayer, Litany, and ante-communion come to mind.

This paper has endeavored to describe the sacramental nature of words in the church’s worship. I proposed that the term *sacramental* describes something that draws us into intimate communion with Jesus, makes tangible the hope that he incarnates, and inspires us in our mission with him. The first two chapters dealt almost exclusively with the liturgy of the word, exploring the reading of Scripture (words of God) and preaching (words about God) in the service of Holy Eucharist.

Chapter One traced the history of the Scripture lessons from their roots in the Jewish synagogue service to the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. Thomas Cranmer’s liturgical reforms, which involved simplifying the medieval rites while adding large

²⁹⁴ Skudlarek, *Worship*, 65.

portions of Scripture, as well as his prefaces to the Great Bible and the Prayer Books of Edward VI, provided a particularly Anglican perspective on the role of the Bible in worship. Cranmer's intent was to foster intelligibility, so that congregations could truly hear the words of Scripture and experience them as sacramental. For him this was largely a matter of moral formation. While the thought of approaching the Bible as a catalogue of "do's and don't's" in the context of Reformation England sounds puritanical, the earliest Christians had looked to the Scriptures to illuminate their understanding of Jesus and provide them with a picture of his life so that they might respond to and be formed by it. What Scripture reveals is Jesus, who draws us closer in love, embodies a vision of God's kingdom, and brings us along with him. When we enter the world of Scripture, especially in worship, our own world appears less real to us and we become more convinced that Jesus' vision and Jesus' mission are at the heart of things.

Chapter Two, on Preaching, expanded the discussion of Scripture by investigating how our words about God can be said to be sacramental. Beginning with the word of God spoken to Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament, we considered the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus, and the witness of the apostles. Three significant discourses of Jesus showed his words about God to be marked by his opening or breaking the topics about which he spoke. His interpretation of Isaiah (embodied in his own ministry), his teaching of the Law, and his conversation on the Road to Emmaus revealed to his interlocutors nothing less than himself, the truth about God. While preaching figured less and less in the church during the medieval period, church leaders in the Reformation sought to rehabilitate Scripture reading and preaching in worship. Their sense was that God's word was active in these actions, and that it enjoyed a special

freedom and integrity that moved throughout the liturgy as a whole. Martin Luther was particularly eloquent on this topic and inspired some of Thomas Cranmer's early reforms.

Following the Reformation in England, Lancelot Andrewes combined his incarnational, sacramental understanding of words and love for preaching with his well-developed eucharistic theology. The result was a style of metaphysical preaching that drew people into the imaginative world of Scripture and gave them words to "chew" and to be nourished on. Andrewes's personal prayers provided insight into the preacher's dependency on God's grace, and the sacramental relationship that she shares with God. Andrewes's dogged focus on the words of Scripture also pointed to the preacher's task, which is to draw the church into closer communion with God and help them to inhabit the world of Scripture. At the center of that world, as noted in Chapter One, is Jesus, the incarnate word.

Chapter Three, therefore, focused on Jesus as the Word of God. This chapter used the history and structure of various eucharistic prayers to show how the sacramentality of words in the liturgy of the word carries over into the liturgy of the table. It also set a context for the discussion of Jesus as the Word made flesh, which was supported by William Temple's theology of the incarnation. This discussion revealed, once more, that Jesus is at the center of all of our words; moreover, it highlighted the inexhaustibility of our words about him, and of his meaning for us. The inexhaustible store from which all words come is the love of God, the love which Jesus *is*, and which we participate in when we abide in him by keeping his words.

Though the idea for this paper was conceived in relation to the Open Table debate in the Episcopal Church, one of the fundamental problems that it sought to address was

the devaluing of words in worship exhibited by Skudlarek's description of the Tridentine mass. Though Andrewes especially shows that Anglican worship has at times been word-heavy (even too much so) the current climate is one in which the eucharist is often seen not only as the centerpiece of worship but as the sole *telos* of worship. The ultimacy which the proponents of Open Table grant to the sacrament gets at this, when they note that the service of Holy Eucharist may be the only worship service people ever attend, that a sense of hospitality and welcome depends entirely on coming to the table, and that the meal represents Jesus' chosen way of communicating his love to humanity. Temple, who advocated for the flesh and blood kingdom based on his theology of the incarnation, addressed the tendency to make of the meal the final word:

The "Real Presence" in the Eucharist is a fact, but it is not unique. The Word of God is everywhere present and active. The Bread and Wine have a symbolic meaning before they are consecrated No words can exaggerate the reverence due to that divinely appointed means of grace; but it is very easy to confine our reverence when we ought to extend it, and to concentrate it only on this focal manifestation of the divine Presence, seeking that Presence and Activity also in the Church, which itself is called the Body of Christ, and in all the world which came to be through Him.²⁹⁵

Likewise, Jesus' real presence is not confined to the portion of the liturgy that includes the communion, but is active as God's Word in all of the church's worship. Because of his free and generous presence, we need not be concerned that anyone would be reduced to being a mere spectator in worship. Words, which can be used to persuade, compel, paint, provoke, and inspire have a particularly sacramental character and function in the liturgy. Moreover, as created "vehicles of [God's] universal Presence and

²⁹⁵ Temple, *Readings*, 79-80.

activity,” they participate in God’s reality, which shatters our limitations and our incomplete *exhaustible* perceptions of the world.²⁹⁶

It is toward this reality, God’s kingdom embodied in Christ, that all words push. Our communication to God “aims toward that perfect communication,” where we will abide in Jesus, and him in us.²⁹⁷ God’s communication to us, “through word and action,” signals that “in the midst of our strife-torn world a new beginning of a better world is being made, a beginning whose completion will not stand out indefinitely.”²⁹⁸ Words in worship seek to describe this hope, and to create it by creating new people who will unite themselves to Jesus, God’s “word and action” made human. Scripture, preaching, and the rehearsal of God’s saving acts in the eucharistic prayer draw us into communion with him, a sacramental activity whose complement is baptism. They make tangible the hope that Jesus embodies, a sacramental activity whose complement is the eucharist, the “heavenly banquet when we will be with God and enjoy him forever”²⁹⁹

Finally, they inspire us in mission with him. We commit to this mission in baptism, uniting our lives with Jesus’. We renew our commitment to him, enjoy communion with him, and are strengthened by him in the eucharist. Yet, just as neither part of the liturgy bears the load of worship, neither one of these sacraments on its own makes the church, constitutes its witness, or establishes its identity. Jesus is the center of the church’s worship, the ground of its unity, the reality to which it witnesses, and the source of its identity. As God’s Word, Jesus is free to be present wherever he wills, but

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Schwarz, *Communication*, 150.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

especially in the Spirit-inspired words about him in Scripture, in our words about him in preaching, and in our re-calling of him in prayer at the eucharist.

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