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# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “CHRISTIAN WORSHIP”?



In order to speak intelligently about “Christian worship,” one must first decide just what this term means. It is not an easy expression to define. Yet until one reflects on what is distinctive about authentic Christian worship, it is all too easy to confuse such worship with irrelevant accretions from present or past cultures in which Christians have worshiped.

First of all, “worship” itself is an exasperatingly difficult word to pin down. What distinguishes worship from other human activities, particularly those noted for their frequent repetition? Why is worship a different type of activity from daily chores or any habitual action? More specifically, how does worship differ from other recurring activities of the Christian community itself? What distinguishes worship from Christian education or works of charity, for instance? Is a “seeker service” meant to be worship?

And second, once we have made up our minds about what we mean by “worship,” how do we determine what makes such worship “Christian”? Our culture is full of various types of worship. A variety of oriental religions have made their advent in many communities. Many practice worship but obviously it is not Christian. What distinctive marks make some worship “Christian”? For that matter, is all worship offered by the Christian community always “Christian”?

None of these are easy questions to resolve but they certainly need to be probed. And they are not simply speculative matters of theoretical interest alone. Defining what is distinctive about Christian worship is a vital practical tool for anyone who has

responsibility for planning, preparing for, or leading Christian worship. The continuing appearance of new forms of worship has made this type of basic analysis even more crucial for those people charged with worship ministry. Such people are constantly involved in decision making as they serve the Christian community through worship leadership. The more practical the decision, the more necessary the theoretical foundations often become. Is a certain act, such as pledging one's allegiance to a national flag, appropriate in Christian worship? Or is that act out of place? Should other acts, such as celebrating the adoption of a child, which we have not customarily included in worship, find a place in the worship life of the church? Or is that not appropriate in Christian worship? Only if one has a working definition of "Christian worship" can one cope with such practical problems.

I shall explore three methods of clarifying just what we mean by "Christian worship." I have increasingly come to feel that the most adequate approach is a phenomenological one, which simply describes what Christians usually do when they come together for worship. Although this may seem the most simple and straightforward method, careful observation is essential if we are to understand the meanings of the structures or services Christians use over and over again for worship. Most of this book will concentrate on describing the development, theology, and use of actual structures or services.

It is helpful, second, to explore some definitions of greater abstraction that Christian thinkers have used to explain what they understand Christian worship to be. A third method examines some of the key words Christians choose most often (in various languages) to express what they experience as worship. These three methods should force us to reflect on what we ourselves mean when we speak of "Christian worship." In addition, we must consider some of the factors giving both diversity and constancy to Christian worship.

## THE PHENOMENON OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

One of the best ways to determine what we mean by Christian worship is to describe the outward and visible forms of worship

by Christians. This approach looks at the whole phenomenon of Christian worship as it might appear to a detached or alien observer trying to grasp what it is Christians do when they come together.

Christian worship belongs to a wide category of human behavior known as ritual and is the subject of the academic discipline of **ritual studies**. The term "ritual" is used in a variety of ways but seems to have certain abiding characteristics. First, it is behavior; second, by its very nature ritual is repetitive. Third, it is social activity and serves some communal function. George Worgul describes it succinctly: "as a repeated interpersonal behavior, ritual is purposeful."<sup>1</sup> It is of great interest to anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. Various kinds of ritual are necessary to the cohesive existence of any human community. Whether it is the celebration of a national holiday, the opening of a new highway, or a college football weekend, ritual plays a vital role in making a proper observance. Family rituals include birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, and visits from grandchildren.

Christian worship, as a repeated social behavior with definite purposes, is probably the most common form of ritual in many Western societies. We can analyze it as a whole because, despite all the different cultures and historical epochs in which it occurs, Christian worship has employed remarkably stable and permanent forms. We shall speak of these as **structures** (such as a calendar for organizing a year's worship) or as **services** (such as the Lord's Supper). Despite constant adaptation, these prove to be remarkably durable. One way to describe Christian worship is simply to list these chief structures and services. We do not need to go into great detail here since most of the book will discuss them much more thoroughly.

In the late twentieth century, liturgical scholars often speak of the essential structures and services collectively as an *ordo*, from the term used by the Russian Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemmann. Gordon W. Lathrop, a Lutheran theologian, describes the *ordo* as a "core Christian pattern" of worship which he identifies as consisting of Sunday and the week, the service of word and table, praise and beseeching, teaching and bath, and the year and Pascha (Easter).<sup>2</sup> United Methodist theologian Don E. Saliers

prefers to speak of a “canon” of basic structures “that have endured the test of time.”<sup>3</sup> He adds the “pastoral offices” to the list.

While useful in identifying historically central items, the limitation of such categories is that they suggest that the *ordo* or canon is limited and, presumably, closed. This method ignores ecstatic worship which has been around for centuries (1 Cor. 14:6-19), in which Paul himself excelled (v. 18), and which may have been the most prevalent form of Christian worship at mid-first century and may again be predominant at mid-twenty-first century. It overlooks the richness of recent centuries in developing new functions for worship and creating new forms to fulfill them. For example, early Methodist worship in England took on a new missional function which demanded new services (watch nights) and new components in familiar services (hymnody).

With these cautions in mind, we shall immediately do what Schmemmann, Lathrop, and Saliers suggest: list the chief components of the perennial structures and services as a means of defining Christian worship. Even within the New Testament, we see indications of a weekly structure of time. This structure was soon elaborated in various annual calendars for commemorating events in the memory of the Christian community: Christ’s death and resurrection, for example, and memorials of various local martyrs. Eventually, daily schedules for public and private prayer were devised. Daily, weekly, and yearly schedules of time are still important components of Christian worship, and we shall survey the operation of these in chapter 2. For our present purpose, however, one thing we can say about Christian worship is that it is a type of worship that relies heavily on the structuring of time to help it fulfill its purposes.

Just as they have found it necessary to arrange time, Christians have always found it convenient to organize a space to shelter and enable their worship. Though various forms have been tried by different cultures over the centuries, the requirements in terms of space and furnishings have remained remarkably consistent. We turn to these in chapter 3.

In addition, since early times, Christians have found music a vital means of expression for their acts of worship. Music is the subject of chapter 4.

In ancient times and up through today, Christians have used a small number of basic services. The first of these is services of daily public prayer. Within the category of daily prayer, there are various forms, some of which are described in chapter 5.

A second type of service focuses on the reading and preaching of scripture and hence is often referred to as the "service of the word." It is familiar as the usual Protestant Sunday service; it also serves as the first portion of the eucharist or Lord's Supper. We shall examine the various forms of this type of service in chapter 6. It provides a constant order, which many Christians identify as their prime experience of what Christian worship is.

Virtually every Christian community has some means of distinguishing those who belong within its body from outsiders. In terms of forms of worship, this designation takes place in various services of Christian initiation. Baptism is the most widely known of these rites but catechesis, confirmation, first communion, and various forms of renewal, affirmation, or reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant are important parts of the ritual process too. Most Christian communities are currently rethinking their theology and practice for making one a Christian, which we shall discuss in chapter 8.

Since New Testament times, we have testimony of Christians gathering to celebrate what Paul calls "the Lord's supper" (1 Cor. 11:20). For many Christians, this is the archetypal form of Christian worship. Only a small minority avoid celebrating it in outward forms. In many churches, it is a weekly, or even daily, experience. Chapter 9 will deal with the forms and meaning of the Lord's Supper.

Finally, there are a variety of occasional services or pastoral rites common in one form or another to almost all worshiping Christian communities. Some of these mark steps in life's journey, which we may or may not repeat: services of forgiveness and reconciliation or services for healing and blessing the sick and dying. Others are one-time rites of passage such as weddings, ordinations, religious profession or commissioning, or funerals. Many of these are called for only as the occasion demands. Many of life's stages and experiences are common to all people, Christian or not. Occasional services to mark some of these journeys or passages have evolved into permanent types of Christian worship. We shall explore these in chapter 10.

Obviously, these basic structures and services do not cover all the possibilities in Christian worship, but they do describe the vast majority of instances of such worship. Various prayer meetings, sacred concerts, revivals, novenas, and a wide range of devotions may be added to them. But, for most Christians, all of these are clearly subsidiary to the items we have listed above and are, to a certain degree, dispensable. Accordingly, our discussion in this book will be chiefly concerned with the basic structures and services with only occasional mention of other possibilities.

Thus our first answer to the question, What is Christian worship? is simply to list and describe the basic forms Christian worship takes and to say these define it best. Nonetheless, we must also investigate other approaches.

## DEFINITIONS OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Our purpose in looking at the various ways different Christian thinkers have spoken about Christian worship is not to compare practices but to stimulate reflection. The best way to grasp the meaning of any term is to observe it in use rather than to give a simple definition. So we shall look over the shoulders of several Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic thinkers to see how they use the term. None of these varying uses of the term excludes the others. Frequently they overlap, but each application adds new insights and dimensions, thus complementing the rest. This effort to "say what we mean and to mean what we say" is a continuing one that is subject to revision as our understanding of Christian worship matures and deepens.

One of the most attractive definitions of Christian worship can be found in a sermon preached by Martin Luther at the dedication of the first church built for Protestant worship, Torgau Castle, in 1544. Luther says of Christian worship "that nothing else be done in it than that our dear Lord Himself talk (*rede*) to us through His holy word and that we, in turn, talk (*reden*) to him in prayer and song of praise."<sup>4</sup> A similar approach appears in the *Large Catechism* where Luther says that in worship the people "assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then praise God with song and

prayer."<sup>5</sup> Thus worship has a duality, revelation and response—both of them empowered by the Holy Spirit.

John Calvin had many negative things to say about idolatry and superstition in worship. But "God has given us a few ceremonies, not at all irksome, to show Christ present."<sup>6</sup> The ultimate purpose of Christian worship is union with God: "We are lifted up even to God by the exercises of religion. What is the design of the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, the holy assemblies, and the whole external government of the church, but that we may be united (*conjungant*) to God."<sup>7</sup>

Anglican Archbishop Thomas Cranmer found the end of the ceremonies of worship to be the "setting forth of God's honor or glory, and to the reducing of the people to a most perfect and godly living."<sup>8</sup> Worship, then, is directed to God's glory and to human recititude. Cranmer is echoed in modern theologies that link worship to social justice.

The duality of revelation and response is echoed by Russian Orthodox theologian, George Florovsky: "Christian worship is the response of men [*sic*] to the Divine call, to the 'mighty deeds' of God, culminating in the redemptive act of Christ."<sup>9</sup> Florovsky is at pains to stress the corporate nature of this response to God's call: "Christian existence is essentially corporate; to be Christian means to be in the community, in the Church." It is in this community that God is active in worship as much as the worshipers themselves. As a response to God's work both in the past and in our midst, "Christian worship is primarily and essentially an act of praise and adoration, which also implies a thankful acknowledgement of God's embracing Love and redemptive loving-kindness."<sup>10</sup>

These ideas are reinforced by another Orthodox theologian, Nikos A. Nissiotis, who stresses the presence and the actions of the Trinity in worship. He states: "Worship is not primarily man's [*sic*] initiative but God's redeeming act in Christ through his Spirit."<sup>11</sup> Nissiotis stresses the "absolute priority of God and his act," which humans can only acknowledge. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the church as the Body of Christ can offer worship that is pleasing as an act both from and directed to the Trinity.

In Roman Catholic circles, it has been common to describe worship as "the glorification of God and the sanctification of

humanity." This phrase comes from a landmark 1903 *motu proprio* on church music by Pope Pius X in which he spoke of worship as being for "the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful."<sup>12</sup> Pope Pius XII repeated this expression in his 1947 encyclical on worship, *Mediator Dei*. The same definition appears frequently in the 1963 Vatican II *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* which "in more than twenty places corrects the former definition of the liturgy and speaks first of the sanctification of man [*sic*] and then of the glorification of God."<sup>13</sup> That reversal of order presents this question: Which takes precedence, glorifying God or making people holy? Many of the debates about worship have revolved around that question, a question particularly pertinent for church musicians.

Should worship be the offering of our best talents and arts to God—even in forms unfamiliar or incomprehensible to people? Or should it be in familiar language and styles so that the meaning is grasped by all even though the result is less impressive artistically? Fortunately, these are false alternatives. Glorification and sanctification belong together. Irenaeus tells us the glory of God is a human fully alive. Nothing glorifies God more than a human being made holy; nothing is more likely to make a person holy than the desire to glorify God. Both the glorification of God and the sanctification of humans characterize Christian worship. Apparent tensions between them are superficial. Humans must be addressed in terms they can comprehend and must express their worship in forms that have integrity. Addressability and authenticity are both part of worship. Furthermore, artistically naive people have often created high art through their genuineness of expression.

In many churches it has also become normal to describe Christian worship as the **paschal mystery**. Much of the popularity of this term is due to the writings of Dom Odo Casel, O.S.B., a German Benedictine monk who died in 1948. The roots of the term are as old as the church. The paschal mystery is the risen Christ present and active in our worship. "Mystery" in this sense is God's self-disclosure of that which surpasses human understanding, of the revelation that was hitherto hidden. The "paschal" element is the central redemptive act of Christ in his life, ministry, suffering,

death, resurrection, and ascension. We can speak of the paschal mystery as the Christian community sharing in Christ's redemptive acts as it worships.

Casel discusses the way that Christians live, "our own sacred history," through worship. As the church commemorates the events of salvation history, "Christ himself is present and acts through the church, his *ecclesia*, while she acts with him."<sup>14</sup> Thus these very acts of Christ again become present with all their power to save. What Christ has done in the past is again given to the worshiper to experience and appropriate in the present. It is a way of living with the Lord. The church presents what Christ has done through the worshipping congregation's reenactment of these events. The worshiper can thus reexperience them for his or her own salvation.

Each of these definitions is only a way station on the reader's own journey toward a personal understanding of Christian worship. One must remain open to discovering other definitions and coming to deeper understandings while continuing to experience and reflect upon what defines Christian worship.

## KEY WORDS IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Another useful way to clarify what we mean by "Christian worship" is to look at some of the key words that the Christian community has chosen to use when speaking about its worship. Often these words were originally secular but were chosen as the least inadequate means of expressing what the assembled community experienced in worship.

There is a rich variety of such words in past and current use. Each word and each language adds shades of meaning that complement the others. A quick survey of the most widely used words in several Western languages related to worship can show the realities being expressed.

The English language could well be envious of the German word *Gottesdienst*. Seven English words are needed to duplicate it: "God's service and our service to God." "God" is discernible but less familiar is *dienst*, which has no English cognate. Travelers will

recognize it as the word identifying service stations in Germanic lands. **Service** is the nearest English equivalent and it is interesting that we, too, use this word for services of worship just as commonly as we use it for gas stations. "Service" means something done for others, whether we speak of a secretarial service, the Forest Service, or a catering service. It reflects work offered to the public even though usually for private profit. Ultimately it comes from the Latin word *servus*, a slave who was bound to serve others. The word **office** from the Latin *officium*, service or duty, is also used to mean a service of worship. *Gottesdienst* reflects a God who "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:7) and our service to such a God.

There is only a slight difference between this concept and the one conveyed by our modern English word **liturgy**. Too often confused with smells and bells (ceremonial), "liturgy," like service, has a secular origin. It comes from the Greek *leitourgía*, composed from words for work (*érgon*) and people (*laós*). In ancient Greece, a liturgy was a public work performed for the benefit of the city or state. Its principle was the same as the one for paying taxes, but it could involve donated service as well as taxes. Paul speaks of the Roman authorities literally as "liturgists [*leitourgoi*] of God" (Rom. 13:6) and of himself as "a liturgist [*leitourgòn*] of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles" (Rom. 15:16 literal trans.).

Liturgy, then, is a work performed by the people for the benefit of others. In other words, it is the quintessence of the priesthood of believers that the whole priestly community of Christians shares. To call a service "liturgical" is to indicate that it was conceived so that all worshipers take an active part in offering their worship together. This could apply equally to a Quaker service and to a Roman Catholic mass as long as the congregation participated fully in either one. But it could not describe a worship in which the congregation was merely a passive audience. In Eastern Orthodox churches, the word "liturgy" is used in the specific sense of the eucharist, but Western Christians use "liturgical" to apply to all forms of public worship of a participatory nature.

The concept of service, then, is fundamental in understanding worship. A different concept appears behind the word common in Latin and the Romance languages, a term reflected in our English

word **cult**. In English, cult tends to suggest the bizarre or faddish, but it has an esteemed function in languages such as French and Italian. Its origin is the Latin *colere*, an agriculture term meaning to cultivate. Both the French *le culte*, and the Italian *il culto*, preserve this Latin word as the usual term for worship. It is a rich term, even richer than the English word "worship," for it catches the mutuality of responsibility between the farmer and the land or animals. If I do not feed and water my chickens, I know there will be no eggs; unless I weed my garden, there will be no vegetables. It is a relationship of mutual dependence, a lifelong engagement of caring for and looking after land or animals, a relationship that becomes almost part of the bone marrow of farmers, especially those whose families have farmed for generations on the same land. It is a relationship of giving and receiving, certainly not in equal measure, but the two are bound to each other. Unfortunately, the English language does not readily make the connection between cultivate and worship that is found in the Romance languages. Sometimes we find richer contents in the words of other languages such as the Italian *domenica* (Lord's day-Sunday), *Pasqua* (Passover-Easter), or *crisma* (Christ-anoint) than in their English equivalents.

Our English word **worship** also has secular roots. It comes from the Old English word *weorthscipe*—literally *weorth* (worthy) and *-scipe* (-ship)—and signifies attributing worth, or respect, to someone. It was and still is used to address various lord mayors in England. The Church of England wedding service, since 1549, has contained the wonderful pledge: "with my body I thee worship." The intention in this last case is to respect or esteem another being with one's body. Unfortunately, such frankness disturbs us and the term has vanished in American wedding services. Other English words such as "revere," "venerate," and "adore" derive ultimately from Latin words for fear, love, and pray.

The New Testament uses a variety of terms for worship; most of them words that also bear other meanings. One of the more common is *latreía*, often translated service or worship. In Romans 9:4 and Hebrews 9:1 and 9:6, it implies the Jewish worship in the temple, or it can mean any religious duty, as in John 16:2. In Romans 12:1, it is usually translated simply "worship"; it has a similar meaning in Philippians 3:3.

An important insight appears in the word *proskuneîn* which carries the explicit physical connotation of falling down to show obeisance or prostration. In the temptation narrative (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8), Jesus tells Satan: "It is written, 'worship [*proskunéseis*] the Lord your God and serve [*latreúseis*] only him.'" In another famous passage (John 4:23), Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the time has come "when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." *Proskuneîn* in various forms is used repeatedly throughout this passage. In a less familiar passage (Rev. 5:14), the twenty-four elders "fell down and worshiped [*prosekúnesan*]." The physical reality of worship is underscored by this verb.

Two interesting words, *thusía* and *prophorá*, are both translated as sacrifice or offering. *Thusía* is an important term in the New Testament and to the early fathers even though it was used in both pagan worship ("to demons," 1 Cor. 10:20) and Christian ("a living sacrifice," Rom. 12:1 or "sacrifice of praise," Heb. 13:15). *Prophorá* is literally the act of offering or bearing before. It is a favorite term in 1 Clement—whether referring to Abraham's offering of Isaac or to those of the clergy or of Christ, "the high priest of our offerings" (36:1). Hebrews 10:10 speaks of "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Both words play a significant, if controversial, role in the development of Christian eucharistic theology.

A much less prominent word in the New Testament literature is *threskeía*, which means religious service or cult (as in Acts 26:5; Col. 2:18; and James 1:26). *Sébein* signifies to worship (in Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7; and Acts 18:3 and 19:27). In Acts, another use of the verb designates God-fearers, Gentiles who attend synagogue worship (13:50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; and 18:7). One other term from the New Testament has important uses to describe worship. *Homologeîn* has a variety of meanings: to confess sins (1 John 1:9), "if we confess our sins"; to declare or profess publicly (Rom. 10:9), "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord"; or for the praise of God (Heb. 13:15), "the fruit of lips that confess his name."

These terms from other languages can expand the one-dimensional image of the English term "worship." All are worth pondering for insights into what others have experienced at various times and places. A few English words related to worship need some clarification.

We need to make a clear distinction between two kinds of worship: common worship and personal devotions. The clearest aspect of **common worship** is that it is the worship offered by the gathered congregation, the Christian assembly. The importance of meeting or coming together can hardly be overstated. At times, the Jewish term "synagogue" (coming together) was also used for the Christian assembly (James 2:2), but the chief term for the Christian assembly is the church, the *ekklesia*—those who are called out from the world. This word for the assemblage, congregating, meeting, convening, or gathering is used repeatedly throughout the New Testament for the local or universal church. One of the most easily overlooked aspects of common worship is that it begins with the gathering, in one place, of scattered Christians to be the church at worship. We usually treat the act of assembling as merely a mechanical necessity, but coming together in Christ's name is itself an important part of common worship. We assemble to meet God *and* to encounter our neighbors.

In contrast, **personal devotions** usually, but not always, occur apart from the physical presence of the rest of the Body of Christ. This is not to say they are not linked to the worship of other Christians. Indeed, personal devotions and common worship are both fully corporate since they share in the worship of the universal community of the Body of Christ. But the individual engaging in personal devotions can determine his or her own pace and contents, even while following a widely used structure. On the other hand, for common worship to be possible, there must be consensus on structure, words, and actions or chaos would ensue. These ground rules are not necessary in devotions where the individual sets the discipline. ("Devotion" comes from a Latin word for vow.)

The relationship between common worship and personal devotions is important. Although the subject of this book is common worship and little will be said about personal devotions, it should be clear that common worship and personal devotions depend on each other. The Anglican theologian Evelyn Underhill tells us:

[Common] and personal worship, though in practice one commonly tends to take precedence of the other, should complete, reinforce, and check each other. Only where this happens, indeed, do we find in its perfection the normal and balanced life of full Christian

devotion. . . . No one soul—not even the greatest saint—can fully apprehend all that this has to reveal and demand of us, or perfectly achieve this balanced richness of response. That response must be the work of the whole Church; within which souls in their infinite variety each play a part, and give that part to the total life of the Body.<sup>15</sup>

Common worship needs to be supplemented by the individuality of personal devotions; personal devotions need the balance of common worship.

A widely used term in recent years is the word **celebration**. It is frequently used in secular contexts and seems to have developed a vagueness that makes it rather meaningless unless used with a specific object so that one knows what is being celebrated. If one speaks of celebration of the eucharist or celebration of Christmas, the content may be clear. Since the whole community celebrates worship, the leader should be referred to as **presider** not as celebrant.

**Ritual** is a tricky term since it means different things to different people. To many people, it often implies emptiness (hence “empty ritual”), a rut of meaningless repetitions. Liturgists use the term to mean a book of rites. For Roman Catholics, the word “ritual” refers to the manual of pastoral offices for baptisms, weddings, funerals, and so on. In the Methodist tradition, “ritual” has been used since 1848 for all the official services of the church, including the eucharist, the pastoral offices, and the ordinal. **Rites** are the actual words spoken or sung in a service of worship, though sometimes used for all aspects of a service. The term can also refer to those bodies, such as Eastern-rite Catholics, whose worship follows a distinctive pattern. Rites differ from actions or **ceremonial**, the actions done in worship. Ceremonial is usually indicated in service books by **rubrics**, or directions for carrying out the service. Rubrics are frequently printed in red as the name, derived from the Latin for red, indicates. Another essential element is the pattern for each service, one meaning of **ordo** or **order** (of worship). Order, rite, and rubrics—that is, pattern, words, and directions—are the basic components of most service books.

## DIVERSITY IN EXPRESSION

Thus far, we have spoken of the common factors enabling us to speak of Christian worship in general terms. There is certainly enough basic unity that we can make many general statements and expect them to apply to most, if not all, of the forms of worship by Christian people. We need, however, to balance these general statements of **constancy** by considering the cultural and historical **diversity** that is also an important part of Christian worship. The constancy, as we have already seen, is enormous; the diversity is equally impressive. Christian worship is a fascinating mixture of constancy and diversity. We have practiced basically the same structures and services for two thousand years; people on the other side of town also practice them but in their own distinctive ways.

In recent years, we have become much more attuned to how important cultural and ethnic factors are in understanding Christian worship. A strong concern with the link between **Christian worship and justice** has emerged out of this. In a sense, this is nothing new for some Christians. Since the Quaker movement in the seventeenth century, there has been a strong awareness among the Friends that worship must not marginalize anyone because of sex, color, or even servitude. Indeed, the Quaker insistence on human equality derives directly from their understanding of what happens in the worshiping community. That means, of course, that women and slaves were expected to speak in worship—hitherto an exclusively white male prerogative.

The nineteenth-century Anglican theologian Frederick Denison Maurice advanced our thinking about worship and justice as did Percy Dearmer, William Temple, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Virgil Michel in the twentieth century. But it is only in recent years that large numbers of Christians have become sensitive to the injustice of worship forms that marginalize large segments of worshipers because of gender, age, race, or other human distinctions. The result has been efforts to change the language of liturgical texts and hymns where they have tended to make women invisible, to redo buildings that have excluded the handicapped, and to open new roles for those who were previously not welcome to serve in them.

Closely allied with the move to include all people in worship has

been the effort to take seriously the cultural and ethnic diversity within the world church. This involves encouraging respect for the variety in and the gifts of differing peoples as legitimate expressions of Christian worship. The technical name for such a process is **inculturation**; the reality is the acceptance of diversity as one of God's gifts to humanity and a willingness to incorporate such variety in the forms of worship. Music is often one of the best indicators of diversity of cultural expression. How limited have we been in emphasizing European expressions of Christian praise when a whole world sings God's glory? New hymnals have tended more and more to reflect cultural diversity, but most of them still have a long way to go before they mirror the variety of people in even a single nation.

The concern for the embodiment of justice in worship has taken many forms, but all of these efforts share a common goal of stressing the individual worth of every worshiper. Where some are neglected or relegated to inferior status because of age, gender, handicap, race, or linguistic background, these injustices are being recognized and alleviated. But it is a slow process to become aware of discriminatory practices then try to find the most equitable ways of redressing them. The result is that Christian worship becomes more complex and more diverse as it tries to reflect a worldwide community. Thus, although what we have said about constancy remains valid, the cultural expressions of that constancy are becoming ever more diverse in the present.

Actually, diversity is nothing new in Christian worship, although regarding it in a positive way may be an important innovation. Even in the earliest liturgical texts, we see different ways of stating the same realities—whether in theological principles or human needs. The differences reflect the varieties of peoples and places. The differing liturgical books provide parallel routes to cover the same journey, but they vary in style and details, just as different peoples in various places differ in those areas that make them distinctive, such as the particularity of the native tongue of every tribe and nation. Liturgies are, most naturally, local, and as we see in diagram 1, a small number of cities, whose local rites won wider usage, have been particularly important in the history of Christian worship.



*Diagram 1*

Let us compare two passages with identical functions from the world's two most widely used liturgies. The first is from the pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic mass, the common preface of the eucharistic prayer:

Just it is indeed and fitting, right, and for our lasting good, that we should always and everywhere give thanks to thee, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

The second is the parallel passage from the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom:

It is fitting and right to sing to You, to bless You, to praise You, to give thanks to You, to worship You in every place of your dominion: for You are God, beyond description, beyond understanding, invisible, incomprehensible, always existing, always the same; You and your only-begotten Son and your Holy Spirit.

Both say the same thing, but the style and the spirit are quite different. The language of the first has been compared to the legalistic rhetoric of the Roman law court; the second, to the splendor of the court of the Byzantine emperors. Clearly we are dealing with two different styles of expression that emerged respectively from particular historical and cultural contexts.

Liturgical scholars have sorted out the various ancient eucharistic liturgies into distinct liturgical families. Like human families, they bear common features. Some may belong to the Alexandrian family, named for Mark, and place the intercessions in the middle of the opening part of the eucharistic prayer. Others, such as the Roman rite, use characteristic words to introduce the words of institution: "who the day before he suffered"; while other families, such as that named after John Chrysostom, prefer the phrase: "on the night on which He was delivered up." Just as one may recognize a person's sons and daughters or brothers and sisters by facial similarities, so too, one can learn to identify the liturgical family from which a certain text comes.

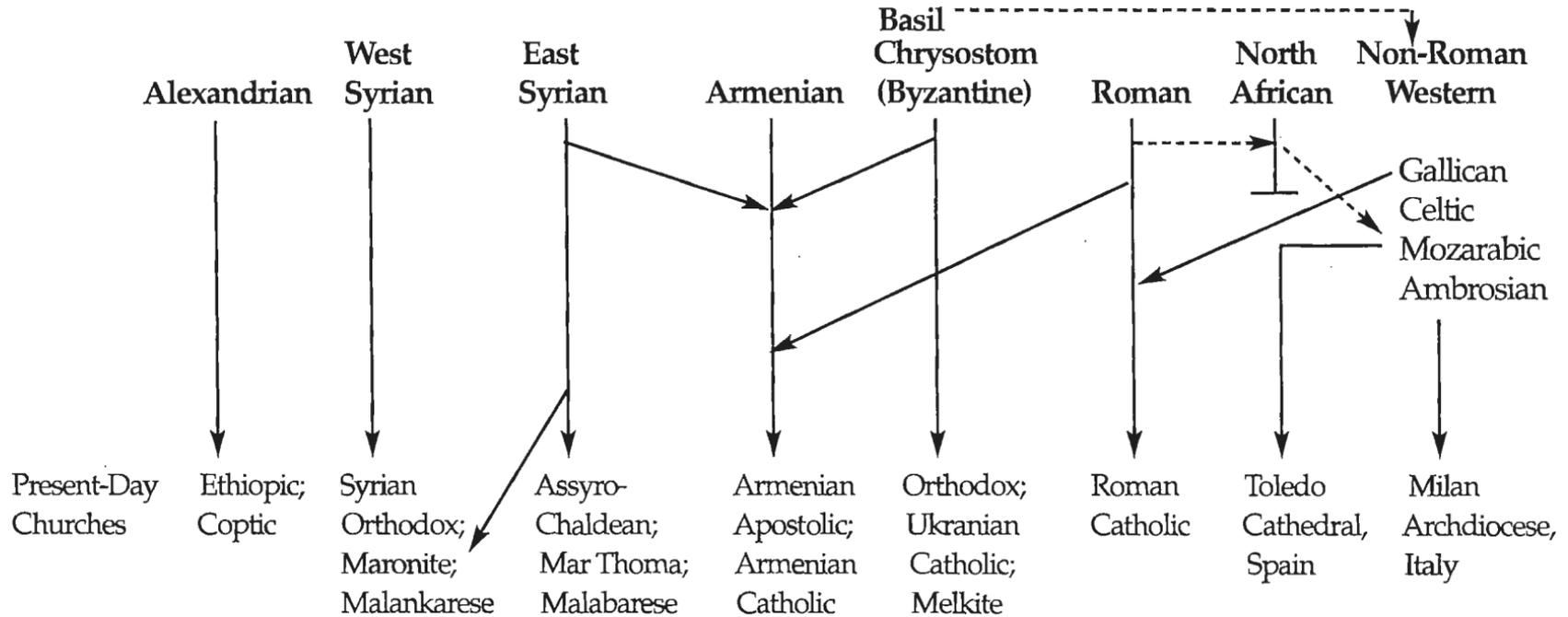
Different peoples and places around the Mediterranean world and in northern Europe gave their own linguistic characteristics to Christian worship. Some features disappeared, often because of the

stereotyping that printing made available in the sixteenth century. But a wide variety still persists, particularly in Eastern Orthodoxy—and within Roman Catholicism, though isolated in places like Milan, Italy, or Toledo, Spain, or in the Eastern rite Catholic churches. In these disparate rites, we have frank acknowledgment of the true catholicity, that is, universality, of the church. What may seem to be curious and quaint survivals are actually the voices of different peoples and places, adding their own distinctive contribution to the praise of God.

It is common to identify **classical liturgical families** from various areas of the ancient world. Each of these families uses the same services of worship and the same types of service books but each shows individual peculiarities of style and expression. The relationships are shown in diagram 2.

It is easiest to go around the Mediterranean world counterclockwise for a quick enumeration of these families. We shall return to the question of distinguishing between families of rites in more detail in chapter 9. We know of ancient North African liturgies, but they have ceased to exist. The first surviving family we encounter is centered in **Alexandria**, Egypt, the most notable example known is that of Mark. It has Coptic and Ethiopian survivors today in Egypt and Ethiopia. **Western Syria** included the ecclesiastical centers of Jerusalem and Antioch. A liturgy, probably conflating those used in these cities, preserves the traditional name of James, first bishop of Jerusalem. The liturgical patterns of **Armenia** preserve many early features and probably derive ultimately from and belong to this western Syria family. **Eastern Syria** around Edessa was the early center of a most distinctive family, of which the prime example is the rite named for Sts. Addai and Mari. Caesarea in Asia Minor was the home of **St. Basil**, and the liturgy named after him (with an earlier Alexandrian version) derives from the western Syrian pattern. Also deriving from a western Syrian background is the so-called **Byzantine** liturgy or liturgy of **St. John Chrysostom**, fourth century patriarch of Constantinople. From Constantinople, it spread throughout much of the Byzantine Empire and Russia. Only the **Roman rite**, at one time known as the rite of Peter, is in wider use. It is the dominant rite of Roman Catholicism. A large and mysterious family, the **Non-Roman Western** comprises the

# The Classical Liturgical Families Sixth Century to Present



*Diagram 2*

remainder, with four branches on its family tree: the Milanese or Ambrosian, the Mozarabic, the Celtic, and the Gallican.

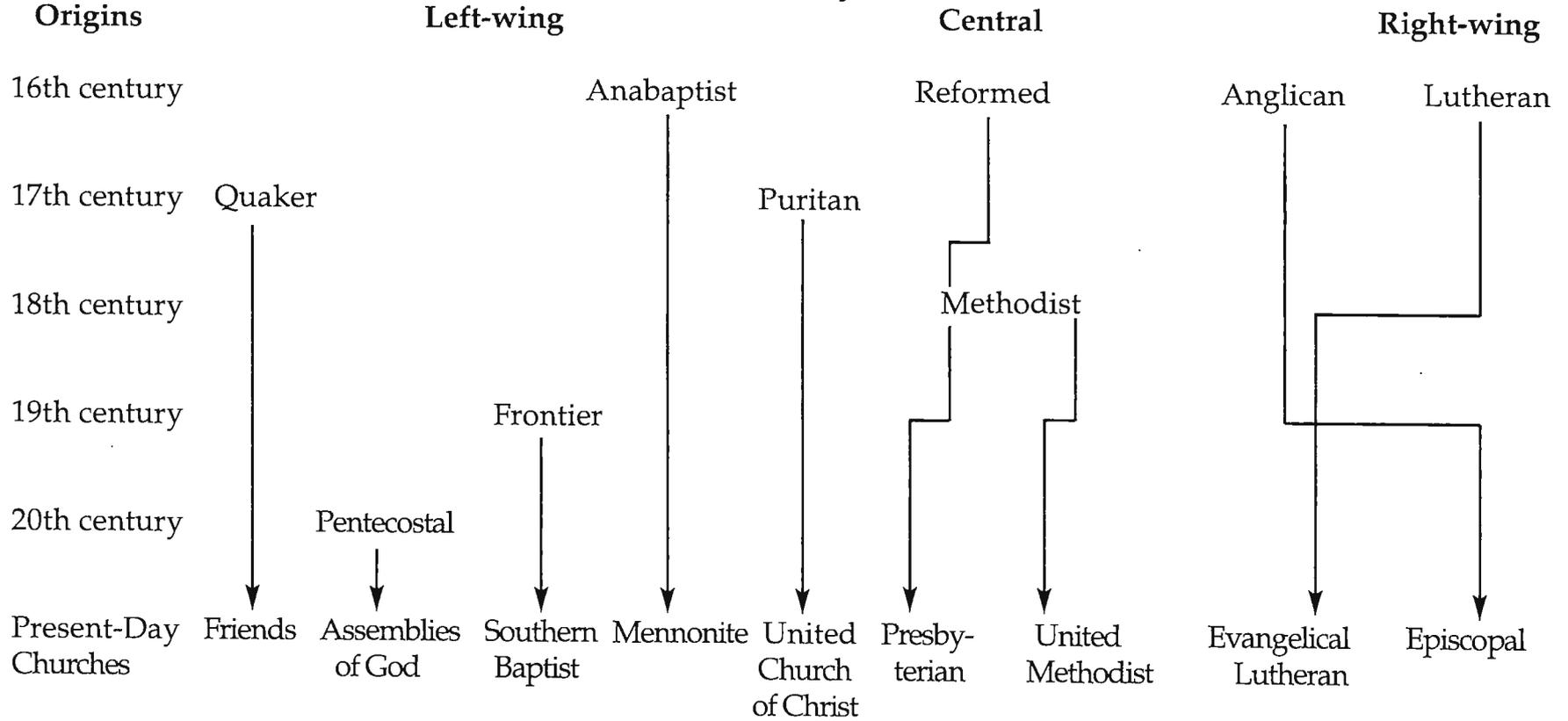
The persistence to this day of this diversity within the Orthodox and Roman Catholic worlds, despite occasional efforts at suppression and standardization, is a triumph for ethnic and national differences. It represents the ability of people to preserve expressions and thought patterns that are natural and dear to them.

Diversity characterized Protestant worship from the start. Almost all Protestant worship can be divided into **nine Protestant liturgical traditions**. These are not as easily distinguished on the basis of the texts of eucharistic liturgies as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox liturgical families are, although some Protestant traditions can be easily defined in terms of service books. Some groups, such as the Quakers, have no published rites. But we can speak of distinct liturgical traditions, that is, inherited habits and assumptions about worship passed on from generation to generation. In each case, though, certain dominant characteristics have enough coherence to enable us to distinguish a distinct tradition.<sup>16</sup>

It is not easy to differentiate these traditions geographically since they overlap considerably. Puritans, Anglicans, and Quakers lived side by side in seventeenth-century England, if not too happily. We can chart the nine traditions of Protestant worship in diagram 3. Horizontal lines show movement in relation to conserving (right) or rejecting (left) patterns from the medieval past. The more radical breaks from late medieval worship are indicated by groups in the left wing column; the more conservative reformation groups, in terms of preserving continuity, appear in the right wing, and the more moderate groups are shown in the center. Subsequent shifts are indicated by horizontal lines.

**Lutheran** worship, originating in Wittenberg, thrived in the Germanic and Scandinavian countries in the sixteenth century and has since spread throughout the world. **Reformed** worship had its genesis in Switzerland (Zurich and Geneva) and France (Strasbourg) but quickly spread throughout the Netherlands, France, Scotland, Hungary, and England. The **Anabaptists** began in Switzerland in the 1520s. **Anglican** worship, as its name soon indicates, was that of the national church of England and represented many of the political compromises necessary for a national

# The Protestant Traditions of Worship Sixteenth Century to Present



*Diagram 3*

church. The **Puritan** (and separatist) tradition was a protest against compromises that seemed contrary to God's will as revealed in scripture.

The most radical tradition was the seventeenth-century **Quaker** movement. The Quakers' silent waiting on God without the aid of sermons, songs, or scriptures made a drastic break with the past. **Methodism**, in the eighteenth century, combined many strands, from both ancient and Reformation times, borrowing especially from the Anglican and Puritan traditions. The American frontier gave birth to another tradition, especially in developing forms of worship for the unchurched. This **Frontier** tradition is the dominant one in American Protestantism today and is especially conspicuous in television evangelism. In the twentieth century, America also gave birth to the **Pentecostal** tradition. Blacks and women were among the earliest leaders in fostering this tradition.

The coexistence of several traditions has allowed people to seek the forms of expression for worship that are most natural for them. In eighteenth-century England, those who felt too constrained by the *Book of Common Prayer* gravitated to services led extemporaneously in the Puritan tradition, and those who found such worship too clerical could find a different kind of freedom among the Quakers. Fervent hymnody and a warm sacramental life among early Methodists attracted others. Different people could match their diversities of expression by choosing the tradition that seemed most congenial to them. Yet, at the same time, a high degree of consistency existed through the generations within each tradition.

## CONSTANCY IN FUNCTION

Much of the study of Christian worship revolves around studying the various service books that some churches use. Because the needs are so similar, certain types of service books recur in many different liturgical families and traditions. It is tempting, but dangerous, to identify worship with books. Books are indeed used for much, if not most, worship, and they are certainly the easiest evidence of worship to study and to analyze. But a large portion of

worship is based on **spontaneity**, an elusive subject of inquiry. Various types of worship contain differing rates of both fixed formulas for word and action found in books and the spontaneity that ebbs and flows as the Spirit moves and cannot be found in print. Though little shall be said about spontaneity, it is nevertheless an important ingredient of worship in many Western churches today.

Where the charismatic movement has reached people, including classical Pentecostals and many African American churches, spontaneous exclamations are a vital part of worship. Quaker worship is spontaneity itself, though it exemplifies the need for a self-disciplined freedom if spontaneity is to bear its best fruit. Spontaneity is not just turning people loose for individual introspection or speaking. It is the use of the various gifts of individual people for the benefit of the gathered community. Paul's words on spontaneous worship immediately follow his chapter on love (1 Cor. 13) and aim at one purpose: building up the church (1 Cor. 14:26). What gifts Christians have received are given to be shared in community, not kept in isolation.

Early Christian worship seems to have involved some spontaneity. Most of it, however, had apparently disappeared by the late-fourth century only to spring up again in some of the Reformation traditions. Pentecostal worship in the twentieth century has stressed the unexpected possibilities of spontaneous worship. The absence of service books or printed bulletins in some churches does not ensure spontaneity by any means. In many congregations, repetition has firmly established a structured worship, which is followed with a high degree of predictability. On the other hand, traditions that use service books continue to allow for an increase in elements of spontaneity, especially in intercessions.

If we say little in this book about spontaneity in worship, it is not because it is unimportant but because it is so exasperatingly difficult to chronicle, since the evidence of it is so ephemeral. But it should be clear that worship and service books are by no means synonymous. Service books can only provide standard formulas. A healthy balance must remain between such formulas and the unwritten and unplanned elements that only spontaneity can provide.

With this caveat, let us look at what **service books** can tell us

about constancy in Christian worship. Virtually all worship makes use of the Bible, which itself includes many portions written for cultic purposes. The Quakers are an exception to this statement, but widespread biblical literacy among Quakers makes up for their lack of actual reading from the Bible in public worship. Most Protestants and Roman Catholics also make use of a hymnal. In addition, worship in Roman Catholicism and several traditions of Protestantism frequently or always employ a service book. In short, one or more books are regarded as necessities for worship in most Christian traditions.

The books we shall survey are service books. They give a vivid glimpse of the constancy in Christian worship. Even though they vary among themselves, the contents have remarkable similarities. Despite differences in families and traditions, common needs and the application of similar resources to fill those needs are noticeable.

In the early church, a variety of books were used by several people performing ministries of worship leadership within a single service. Both laypeople and clergy had recognized ministries to perform, so they utilized books that contained the particular resources to enable them to take their distinct parts in worship. The idea of putting everything into one book, and placing that only in the hands of the clergy, is a medieval development that has little to recommend it. Currently there is a reversal of the single-book mentality and a return to various books for readers, commentators, song leaders, leaders of prayer, and priests or ministers. There are, after all, a variety of ministerial roles in leading worship, roles which can be shared among a number of people when appropriate books are available.

The invention of printing brought about a situation unknown before, the possibility of liturgical standardization. By the early sixteenth century, there were approximately two hundred versions of hand-copied mass books in use in European parishes and religious orders. Roman Catholics, as well as many Protestants, became convinced that liturgical uniformity was progress. So the first Anglican prayerbook of 1549 decreed that "from henceforth, all the whole realm shall have but one use." Effectively the same thing was done in standardizing the Roman Catholic books down to the last

comma with the exceptions allowed only for a few dioceses and religious orders.<sup>17</sup> Such a standardizing tendency in Rome stifled service books written in Chinese in the seventeenth century and other adaptations to indigenous cultures that might have greatly strengthened the mission to China and drastically changed subsequent history.

Today, Protestants and Roman Catholics alike see standardization as a false goal. What may have been liberating in the sixteenth century seems stifling in the twentieth. In our time, many churches seek to undo the medieval clericalization that compressed all liturgical books into clerical documents and the sixteenth-century standardization that made all books identical whether for the clergy or the laity. A variety of ministries in various cultures demands a much more pluralistic approach to liturgical books. Already we see genuine liturgical pluralism with several alternative rites of equal authority made available within the same denomination's book or books. Thus the number of liturgical resources proliferates and only the typical ones can be mentioned.

The chief book for the structure of time is, of course, the **calendar**. Its brevity should not conceal its importance. It governs those elements that change from day to day, or from season to season, in daily public prayer and the eucharist and appears in breviaries and missals. Somewhat similar is the **martyrology**, a book of the deeds of the martyrs and other saints arranged by calendar according to the day of their death.

The services revolving around daily public prayer have entailed an entire collection of books, especially those services developed in monastic worship. Various types of books originally allowed different people to perform their individual functions. The most important was the **psalter**, with psalms and canticles arranged in a variety of ways in different editions. Some were structured according to the weekly recital of the psalms or to accord with feasts or for each hour service of the daily office. Musical portions appeared in the **antiphonary** and the **hymnal**. A **lectionary** eventually contained collections of the scripture readings.<sup>18</sup>

If this sounds complicated, that's because it was; but each person only had to master certain parts, found in the appropriate book. All this changed in time, though not until many centuries had passed.

Then efforts to collect this whole library of books into a single book, the **breviary**, began to succeed. The advent of the Franciscan and Dominican orders in the thirteenth century, orders which needed to be on the road constantly, brought about widespread use of the breviary from which an isolated individual could read all of the daily services. This was also encouraged by the necessities of life in the Roman curia. But the breviary represents a tremendous loss in the variety of ministries and in worship as a community. The 1971 *Liturgy of the Hours*, which replaced the 1568 Roman breviary, seeks to return these services to both lay and clerical use.

The Reformation, in turn, compressed the breviary still further into Luther's two daily offices or those in the 1549 Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. Psalter, calendar, lectionary, and morning and evening prayer shared space with other types of worship. These moves did make all types of worship available for the person in the pew, but it also resulted in a drastic reduction in the options provided.

The history of the books for initiation and the rites of passage is quite different. Originally, many of them occurred in the sacramentary, the priest's book for celebrating the eucharist and other sacraments. It contained all the appropriate prayers for various occasions and seasons. Baptism and confirmation, for example, occurred at the Easter vigil in the earliest books, and ordinations tended to come during Lent. In the course of time, baptism and other rites were weaned away from the sacramentaries, and separate books developed for the various offices. The revolution in the practice of penance, for example, led to the compilation of "penitentials" to guide the pastor and the penitent. "Benedictionals" are collections of various blessings of people and objects. In most traditions, some blessings are the prerogative only of bishops and others of priests. The latest Roman Catholic collection is the *Book of Blessings*.

In time, these various rites of initiation and passage found their way into collections known variously as the *pastorale*, *manuale* (handbook), *sacramentale*, *agenda*, or *rituale*. Litanies, hymns, prayers and rubrics for processions found a place in the *processionale*. The Reformation churches usually incorporated many of these materials into a simple service book. For example, the *Sarum*

*Manuale* provided most of the *Book of Common Prayer* wedding service. Some churches still use the ancient terms as in the *Pastor's Manual* published by the Church of the Brethren in 1978. The *Rituale Romanum* of 1614 was, in effect, a collection of ten separate books: general rules, rites for baptism, penance, administration of the eucharist, ministrations to the sick and dying, funerals, matrimony, blessings, processions, and exorcisms. Since Vatican II, most of these rites have been revised and published as separate books. At present, there is no single-volume Roman Catholic ritual.

Nowhere else has the constancy of Christian worship been quite so readily apparent as in the pastoral offices found in the ritual. American Methodists still get married with almost the same vows as fourteenth-century English Catholics made. The basic human needs the ritual ministers to are common: birth, marriage, sickness, and death. Along the way we need to be forgiven and to have God's blessing invoked on people and things about us.

The history of the rites that concern the bishop is similar. Prayers for ordinations originally occurred in the sacramentaries and **ordines** (collections of instruction). Gradually, the bishop's special rites became collected in a special volume, the **pontifical**. In the late-thirteenth century, Bishop William **Durandus** of Mende in southern France edited a pontifical which has shaped all subsequent Western ones. Within it were services for the blessing or consecration of various persons such as confirmation, tonsure, ordinations, the blessings of abbots, abbesses, the consecration of virgins, the coronation of kings and queens, and so on. In addition, there were rites for the blessing or consecration of such objects as churches, an altar-table, vessels, vestments, bells, cemeteries, and so forth. Finally there was an assortment of rites for excommunication, reconciliation of penitents, blessing of holy oils, processions, and such.

Some of this material pertaining to bishops, such as the ordination services, appears as the **ordinal** in Protestant service books. Many service books contain rites for confirmation and the blessing and consecration of various persons and objects such as offices for recognizing Sunday school teachers or for laying a cornerstone. The Roman Catholic pontifical has been revised since Vatican II. No Protestant parallel exists for a later collection, the *Caeremoniale*

*episcoporum*, an A.D. 1600 compilation of rubrics and instructions on ceremonial for bishops. The current *Ceremonial of Bishops* was published in English in 1989.

The other principal collection of books is that dealing with the eucharist. We have already encountered the most important of these books, the **sacramentary**, which included prayers for the priest's use appropriate to various seasons and events. The term "sacramentary" has been revived in recent years for the comprehensive volume used at the altar-table in Roman Catholic churches though it does not include materials now found in the pontifical or ritual as did early sacramentaries. But there are other ministries at the eucharist besides that of the celebrant. A **lectionary**, or *comes*, provided the lector, subdeacon, or deacon with lists of the beginning and endings of lections read at mass. Eventually the lections were included in full.<sup>19</sup> Musicians depended on the *graduale* for sung portions of the eucharist.<sup>20</sup> What we call rubrics were recorded in early times in various *ordines*, which also dealt with services now found in the pontifical or ritual as well as the eucharist. Similar forces were at work here, too, as with the breviary, the ritual, and the pontifical. By the late medieval period, the clergy possessed all the books, as the lections, musical portions, and rubrics were placed together in the **missal** so one man could "say" mass by himself. Since the end of the tenth century, the missal has simply echoed the clerical monopoly of worship that had already occurred through a variety of other forces. Except for a few dioceses or religious orders, the sixteenth century standardized the missal. The *Missale Romanum* of 1570 remained scarcely changed (except for new feasts) for four hundred years until the Vatican II revision was published. Once again the lections have been relegated to a separate volume, the lectionary. Now others, besides the celebrant, are again encouraged to exercise ministerial functions at mass.

The contents of the missal proved no less essential to the Reformers. Most of them produced their own order of eucharist and incorporated it into their service books, sometimes accompanied by collects and lessons appropriate to the various days of the church year. Even on the American frontier, the Methodists preserved an irreducible minimum of fixed forms for the eucharist.

The contents of the missal are as universal as any in Christianity and provide a fascinating study of constancy.

Thus the contents of several of the liturgical books seem to witness to those constants of Christian worship for which we are looking. The Reformation merely took to its logical end the processes of compression and standardization already well under way in Roman Catholicism. Some of the Reformers managed to compress calendar, breviary, ritual, processional, pontifical, and missal into a single volume. For centuries, various Protestant martyrologies were widely used for devotional reading. People and clergy shared the same books. The results—whether in the *Book of Common Prayer*, the *Book of Common Order*, John Wesley's *Sunday Service*, or various others—are remarkably similar in their consensus in regard to the essentials of Christian worship. The latest liturgical books, currently *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (1992) and the *Presbyterian Book of Common Worship* (1993), serve the same functions (if in newer forms) of the books whose gradual evolution we have been tracing.

Of course, there are differences between books of the same type. The comparative study of rites is known as **liturgiology** and, in the last hundred years, has become a highly specialized science. But the striking fact that remains is the remarkable degree of constancy in agreement among these books from differing times and places about which deep human needs are reflected in, and addressed through, worship.

This quick survey of the phenomenon, definitions, and key words of Christian worship, along with the discussion of diversity and constancy in such worship, will, I hope, help the reader reflect on what he or she means by Christian worship. Further reading, more experiences of worship, and continuing reflection will help expand this understanding.