

A Synopsis of Dom Gregory Dix's
The Shape of the Liturgy
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To immerse oneself in Dom Dix's magisterial *The Shape of the Liturgy*¹ is a holy experience. The work indeed is imposing, and no doubt many students, upon looking at its thick binding, small print, and 752 pages, trembled before it like the children of Israel before Mount Sinai. However, if we let him, this scholarly monk will take us to sacred places no one else can, even into the very primal beginnings of our Christian faith. It is true that he is an academician and is very careful in his analysis of countless documents in various antiquated languages, but his heart is touched with the fire of God, and this lightens the potential heaviness of his topic. In fact, at times he is absolutely inspired, inviting us who persevere with him into hidden places and moments clouded by ancient mists, bringing us before the very altars of the saints who first experienced the holy Eucharist with the Apostles.

Having said this, it is acknowledged that not everyone, for one reason or other, is able to plow through these dense pages. I thought it might be helpful to write a synopsis of the book, not only for the sake of those who might benefit from it, but also for my own sake to clarify in my own thinking what the great liturgist is trying to say. It must be carefully noted by the reader that I am not a liturgist and that I make no claim to follow fully all the subtle arguments that run through the work. I would gladly accept corrections by any who are acquainted with the book. It is my hope that after reading this, some might be motivated to read this mighty classic for themselves.

DEFINITION: WHAT IS THE LITURGY?

Dix defines "liturgy" as "...the act of taking part in the solemn corporate worship of God by the 'priestly' society of Christians, who are the body of Christ, the church" (1).² It was understood to consist of two parts in the primitive Church. The first part is called the *Synaxis* (Greek for "meeting"), and the second part the *Eucharist* (Greek for "thanksgiving"). The *Synaxis* is of synagogue origin, and followed the pattern: greeting, lesson (OT Reading), Psalmody (usually chanted), lesson (Apostolic writings and Gospel readings), sermon (a charismatic function of the Bishop), dismissal of those who did not belong to the Church, prayers, and dismissal of Church. Those who were not confirmed were not considered to be a part of the Church, and were not allowed to offer prayers to God; that is why they were dismissed before the prayers (Chapter 3).

¹ London: A&C Black, 1945.

² Liturgy is derived from the Greek (the noun form is λειτουργία, and the verb form is λειτουργέω), which the Apostles themselves used to describe their ministry and worship (e.g. Acts 13:2 where it is used with regard to Paul and Barnabas). The word is used to describe priestly service in the OT sense (cf. Luke 1:23 and Heb. 8:6 with Ex. 28:35).

The *Eucharist* is not directly tied to synagogue worship like the *Synaxis* but has its roots in Jewish piety. Specifically, the “Last Supper” was in fact a “*habura*”³ meal, a religious meal where those who wished to gather for special devotion did so on the eve before Sabbaths or Festivals. We will speak more on this below. Here it will suffice to say that it classically was understood to be a four-fold action consisting of an **offertory of bread, prayer, fraction** and **communion**. It is critical here to understand the Eucharist as an action in which the priestly Church, made up of the four orders of bishop, priest, deacon, and laity,⁴ come together with their Lord Jesus as He offers Himself as a sacrifice in the bread and the wine to the Church. This was not understood to be a “re-sacrifice” of Christ, but rather the original sacrifice of Christ made present. In other words, there is an “...indissoluble *unity of the Eucharist with the sacrifice of Christ Himself...*” (244). In this action the Church not only becomes one with her Lord, but the members also declare unity among themselves. Moreover, participating in this act, the Church then offers herself as a sacrifice in *Eucharist* so as to become the sacrificed body of Christ to the world (247). Finally, the act of Eucharist not only binds the Church with Christ’s sacrifice in the past, but it also draws the Church into the future, to the very throne and Kingdom of God made present, as Revelation 4-5 describes heavenly worship, with the whole Church of all ages.⁵

The Eucharist, therefore, is an act in which believers in the present enter into the past and the future through their union with Christ through the consecrated bread and wine, made the body and blood of Christ. It was the one thing, along with baptism, that distinguished them as Christians, and it was also the central Christian act of worship.⁶ Originally, the Eucharistic service was relatively short, done on the first day of the week, and not necessarily connected to the *Synaxis*, as it is usually done today. Dix contends vigorously throughout his book that the Eucharist, anciently understood, was not primarily a “subjective” experience of reflection or of personal insight or feeling, although these might have accompanied the act. It was an act of sacrifice in which all participated according to their order within the priesthood that bound them together with their God,

³ Hebrew חֶבְרָה (the ח, transliterated as *h*, is pronounced as the “ch” in Bach) from the root חָבַר meaning “friend”. It therefore was a “friendship meal” where groups bound together in sincere and common purpose gathered together in preparation for religious feasts.

⁴ I Peter 2:5. “The laity are an ‘order’ in the church no less than the ‘holy orders’ of the clergy, and were anciently required to undergo three years’ preparation and training before they were allowed to enter baptism and confirmation” (p. 2, footnote 1). “The word λαϊκός (*laikos*) ‘a layman’ in the East c. A.D. 300 still meant ‘one of the people of God’, with all the rights and high duties and destinies that implied. By c. A.D. 450 it had almost come to mean ‘profane’ as opposed to ‘sacred’ (480).

⁵ Alexander Schmemmann criticizes Dix’ “exclusively eschatological” emphasis in understanding the Eucharist. He points out that Dix, in emphasizing the “world renouncing” theology of the primitive Church (Dix, 265, 326), de-emphasizes the primitive Church’s Hebrew sensitivity to the Eucharist’s power to sanctify time in the present. “In other words the eschatology of the Eucharist is not ‘world renouncing,’ not a turning away from time, but above all the affirmation of the reality, the certainty and presence of the Kingdom of Christ which is ‘within,’ and which is already here within the Church, but which will be manifest in all glory only at the end of ‘this world.’” *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), Chapter 2 (quote from p. 73).

⁶ Dix reminds us that the Eucharist was central to Christian life 20 years before the first New Testament document and over a hundred years before the canonization of Scripture (3).

and it became the basis of Christian unity, love, and service. This was the worship of the martyrs, and this was the worship of those who overcame the Roman world.

THE FOUR-FOLD SHAPE OF THE EUCHARIST

1. Origins of the Eucharist: The *Habura*

As we mentioned above, the Last Supper was not a Passover meal, but a *habura* meal on the eve of the Passover. It was customary at this meal, as was usual for all Jewish meals at the time, for the leader or host of the meal to take bread and break it with the blessing “Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, eternal King, Who bringest forth bread from the earth”. After taking a piece himself, he would then distribute it to all around the table. Once this was done, the meal followed, with each fresh dish blessed by the leader, and each person blessing his own cup at each refill with “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, eternal King, Who createst the fruit of the vine”. Then, at the conclusion of the meal, came the “blessing” (*beraka*), or thanksgiving prayer,⁷ which was said by the host over a cup of wine, who, after taking a sip, passed it around the table for all to partake of it (50ff.).

What Jesus did at the Last Supper was to take this *habura* meal, which was well-known to the disciples and a meal He was sure they would observe in the future, and transform it into a meal of the New Covenant. Specifically, Jesus took the initial breaking of the bread and distribution with the concluding blessing and passing of the cup, and pronounced it His body and His blood, and told them, “This do in remembrance of me”. Originally, the Eucharist was accompanied with a meal which was called the “Lord’s Supper”, or “Love Feast” (*agape*), and Dix believes this was probably the case at the time of the writing of I Cor. 11, although this is not all that certain. It is clear, however, that by the second generation of Christians (Ignatius, A.D. 115), the Eucharist (*beraka* without the *habura*) was separated from the agape feast (*habura* without the *beraka*) (99).⁸

2. The Shape of the Eucharist in its Pre-Nicene Setting

It is Dix’s contention that the meaning of the Eucharist is necessarily connected with the form of the Eucharist, and where the form deviates from the classical four-fold shape, “it will be found that some part of the primitive fullness of the meaning of the Eucharist has been lost. And – in the end – it will be found that this has had equally notable results upon the Christian living of those whose Christianity has been impoverished (xiii).” It is

⁷ Hebrew בְּרַכָּה (*beraka*) which was used for the short blessing over foods and wine, but also for the long prayer at the end of the meal. Dix prefers to call this concluding prayer a “thanksgiving” prayer to distinguish it from the short blessings. The Hebrew בְּרַכָּה is translated into the Greek εὐχαριστία, from which our English “Eucharist” comes, meaning “Thanksgiving”.

⁸ The *agape*, which was the same thing as the “Lord’s Supper,” soon became merely a religious feast, remnants of which survived into the fifth century (100).

therefore crucial to Dix's argument to understand the structure of the Eucharist. He understands the Eucharist as "a single clear swift action in four movements, with an uninterrupted ascent from the offertory to the communion, which ends decisively at its climax (104)".

No unbeliever or non-baptized catechumen was allowed to be present at the Eucharist. The Bishop was seated on the cathedra behind the altar with his presbyters seated in a semi-circle around him, facing the congregation. It began with the giving of the peace, "The peace of God be with you", and the congregation responded, "And with your spirit."⁹ This introduced the "kiss of peace" which was critical for a unified action.¹⁰ Before the service the deacons spread a linen corporal over the altar, and placed upon it the little loaves of bread and little flasks of wine the people had brought. The Bishop, and the presbyters who were "concelebrating" with him, would rise and add their own oblations of bread and wine (**offertory**). After rinsing their hands, they laid hands in silence upon the oblations, and the Bishop would offer the **Eucharistic prayer** and a solemn doxology, to which the people would respond "Amen". The Bishop, and then the presbyters, would then break the bread before them (**fraction**) and then, after the clergy partook, they distributed it to the congregation (**communion**). The vessels were cleansed, and the deacons dismissed the congregation. The faithful would take some consecrated bread home so as to have communion on mornings in which the liturgy was not celebrated (103ff.).

3. The Offertory

The earliest of Church fathers¹¹ understood the Eucharist to be a sacrifice, something offered to God.¹² The altar was symbolic of Christ,¹³ upon which they offered themselves to God in the form of the bread and wine, and upon which God offered Himself through Christ in the same forms (117). The Bishop, or Presbyter acting in his stead, was symbolic of God receiving the sacrifice; in reality, "the real offering was an act of the people through the deacons... the celebrant's part at most was to 'commend' the oblation made by the church to God, not to make it himself (118)". The offertory, therefore, was not a mere ceremony; it was a preparation for a sacrifice where God and His people met together in Christ. The people sacrificed their wealth and themselves

⁹ The congregational response "with your spirit" indicates the fact that the Bishop or Priest possessed a charisma received at ordination by which God spoke to the Church through his "spirit".

¹⁰ The unity of the Church is the essence of the sacrament (106). See Matt. 5:23f., I Cor. 10:17, and the Didache xiv.

¹¹ Clement of Rome in his Letters (A.D. 96), Justin in his Dialogues (A.D. 150), and Hippolytus in his Apostolic Tradition (A.D. 215) in Rome, noted for its conservatism and adherence to tradition, and Ignatius (A.D. 115), and Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp before going to Gaul (A.D. 185) representing the Eastern tradition.

¹² The Greek terms *prosphora* (προσφορά = oblation) and *thusiasterion* (θυσιαστήριον = altar) are employed by the earliest fathers to describe the Eucharist; the same vocabulary is used in the LXX and the NT in reference to both OT sacrifices, and the sacrifice of Christ.

¹³ Hebrews 13:10, "We have an altar (θυσιαστήριον) from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat". See also Ignatius, *Magnesians*, vii.

(“There you are on the table ... there you are in the chalice” – St. Augustine, 118). Here we see clearly that the Eucharist was an *action* that made the Church one with God and with one another.

4. The Eucharistic Prayer

After the rinsing of hands and the laying on of hands upon the Elements¹⁴, the Bishop would then give the Eucharistic Prayer. Dix points out that there are two parts to this prayer. The first is made up of a series of thanksgiving utterances that anciently arose from the Jewish *beraka* (blessings) of the *habura* feast, rewritten to conform to the New Covenant (217). In it God is thanked for creation and His redemption in Jesus Christ. This is the most ancient part of the prayer. Although there is no standard form of this prayer in the pre-Nicene Church, a comparison of the ancient prayers we do have (Roman, Egyptian, and Syrian traditions) shows that there are liturgical principles that do underlie all the traditions (214), providing a uniformity (220). Out of this ancient prayer a “second part” developed in the last half of the second century (224). This part of the Eucharistic prayer gives the meaning of the act, explaining the meaning of the offertory that took place prior to the prayer and explaining the meaning of the communion that is to follow (228). The pivot between these two parts is the reference to the Last Supper, “On the night He was betrayed, our Lord took ...”. This reference to the Last Supper might or might not have belonged to the original primitive prayer, but in all subsequent traditions it has become the great pivot between the thanksgiving (first part) and that which expresses and defines (second part, 227f.). Dix claims, therefore, that by the end of the second century the two-strata prayer of thanksgiving and explanation was intact. During the late second century to the early fourth century, there was a certain variety and flux to these two parts, but by the late fourth and early fifth centuries there was a general uniformity of both structure and content (231).¹⁵

The first part of the prayer begins with what has been called the “Great Thanksgiving”. It is very old, originating, as we have said, in pre-Christian Jewish prayer. Even then, however, it has been “baptized”, so to speak, with Christian meaning. Dix explains the ancient “Lift up your hearts” and the response “We lift them up to the Lord” as eschatological in nature in that they were “intended to remind the ecclesia that the real action of the Eucharist takes place beyond time in the ‘age to come’, where God ‘has made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’...” (126f.). Along these lines, the “Amen” at the end of the prayer of consecration was left in its original Hebrew, and understood to be an “eschatological sigh” that could be translated “would that it might be so” (129).

¹⁴ Dix (124ff.) says that these traditions are not explicitly mentioned in the earliest of documents, but believes that they are old nonetheless on the basis of Old Testament practice and/or their natural appropriateness to the liturgy. The washing of hands is first mentioned in St. Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 348).

¹⁵ Dix therefore challenges both the traditional Roman Catholic claim that the Eucharistic prayer was a unity from the beginning and in a fixed form in the pre-Nicene Church on the one hand, and critical scholarship that claims that there was all variety and nothing was fixed until the post-Nicene period (230ff.).

While the Eucharistic prayer is certainly an act of praise and worship, it also was understood to be an act of consecration. It is an action of the whole Church as a community of priests according to the orders of Bishop, priest, deacon, and laity; the Bishop was distinguished from the others merely in that he was the presiding priest among a congregation of priests (269).¹⁶ Technically, it is not what the Bishop or priest does that consecrates the bread and wine, but what the body does. Here it is important to see that the ancient idea of apostolic succession has more to do with the unity of the Church universal, linking each body of believers together by the laying of hands on their bishop, than with the act of consecration.¹⁷ In fact, it is crucial to comprehend that what is happening in the prayer is an invocation of Christ to do the actual act of consecration, for no person can accomplish what can only be accomplished by God (276).¹⁸

At this point we might wonder if there is a “moment of consecration” in the prayer itself in which Christ performed. Dix contends that early on, it was the four-fold action of the Eucharist as a whole, viewed through the Eucharistic prayer, that made the rite what it was. Though this was the case, the prayer of thanksgiving in its primitive form, that is, the “first half” of the Eucharistic prayer, was understood to be a prayer of consecration (238). The idea of a particular “moment” when this happened during the prayer was a fourth century novelty. Before this time the prayers were still relatively fluid, so a particular point could not be universally established. The prayer as a whole was the consecration (240). It was only when the Eucharistic prayer began to be fixed in both its halves that a particular point of consecration was identified. This moment, called the *epiklesis* (Greek *ἐπικλήσις*, “naming”), eventually found its place in the second half of the prayer, the part that defines the Eucharistic action. In some instances the point of consecration was identified in the “Institution Narrative” in our Lord’s words “This is my body” (275). It was not until St. Cyril of Jerusalem (348 B.C.) that the actual phrasing “that He may make the bread the Body of Christ” established the actual moment of *epiklesis*.¹⁹

But what actually happened at this consecration? It is here that the Eucharist departs most radically from the old Jewish *habura*. At the moment of *epiklesis*, the bread and wine cease to be common but are transformed into Eucharist. It is here that we must quote Dix to some length, because this idea is absolutely crucial to the life of the Church and to her history:

¹⁶ The Eucharist is an act of the Church as an organism. This being the case, it is hard to comprehend the Roman practice of priests celebrating Mass alone apart from the gathered body of believers.

¹⁷ Dix believes that Jesus would certainly accept a Eucharist celebrated by sincere Christians outside of a Bishop or priest with apostolic succession, but it would be outside the unity of the mystical body in the fullest sense in that they would not be celebrating in the spirit of Matt. 5:24 where there is a gathering without reconciliation (272). However, a Eucharist without unity is an oxymoron.

¹⁸ The “Spirit” that overshadowed Mary was unanimously interpreted in the pre-Nicene Church as in fact the *logos* of God, the Second Person of the Trinity (276). As developed in the Eastern Church, the Holy Spirit became to be seen as the active agent in the consecration, and Christ the passive agent. In the West, Christ has remained an active agent in the consecration (292).

¹⁹ The idea of a “moment” was not new, but Cyril was the first to encode it in the liturgy (199). In our usual liturgies, it comes after the prayers of thanksgiving, and right before the Institution Narrative.

It was as obvious to the senses in the first or second century as it is today that from offertory to communion these gifts retain their physical qualities, all the experienced reality of bread and wine. Yet no language could be more uncompromising than that of the second century writers (and indeed that of the New Testament) about ‘discerning the Lord’s Body’ – as to the fact that what is received in communion *is* the Body and Blood of Christ. There is no hesitation, no qualification. “The Eucharist *is* the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which Flesh suffered for our sins and which God the Father raised up” (Ignatius). “The food which has been ‘eucharistised’ *is* the Flesh and Blood of that Jesus Who was made Flesh’ (Irenaeus). “How can the Gnostics claim that the bread which has been ‘eucharistised’ *is* the Body of their Lord and the Cup of His Blood, if they confess Him not to be the Son of the Creator of this world?” (Justin). It is as though the metaphysical questions about the correlation of bread and wine with Body and Blood which have so troubled the mind of the Christian West since the ninth century simply did not exist for these writers (244).

The bread and the wine existed for the primitive Church in two realities, heaven and earth, just as Christ existed in the realities of His two natures. To partake of Christ was to experience heaven on earth. He was the Tree of Life made available for the first time since the Fall. Not to partake was exile and death; one could not be a Christian without it, for one participated in Christ through it.²⁰ The Eucharist was a holy mystery to be experienced, not something to comprehend with the mind and reduce to rational categories. The consecration of the Eucharist is as miraculous an event as was the virgin birth itself.

Now we come to our Lord’s phrase “This do in remembrance of me” contained in the prayer. The Greek word *anamnesis*, often rendered “remembrance” in English, is difficult to translate. “Remembrance”, or “memorial”, have “for us a connotation of something itself absent, which is only mentally recollected”. But remembering was not a mental act to the ancients; it was a cultic act. So it was understood in the Old Testament. When the children of Israel were called on to “remember” a saving act in the past such as the Passover or the Crossing of the Jordan, they understood themselves to be participants of the act itself. In other words, they made past events present in their worship, bridging the gap of time, so to speak, so that they understood themselves to have actually been there, although generations might have separated them from the historical event.²¹

This is most certainly the meaning of our Lord’s words in the Eucharist and most certainly how the Apostles and the early Church understood them. Worship is not bound to specific space and time; it brings Christ’s work in the historical past to the present and transports worshippers to the very throne of God with all the saints from all ages in the eschatological consummation, as described in Revelation 4 and 5. *Anamnesis*, therefore, has “the sense of ‘re-calling’ or ‘re-presenting’ before God an event in the past, so that it becomes *here and now operative by its effects*” (161). Such thinking is alien to the

²⁰ I Cor. 5:1-8 with 11:27-34).

²¹ See B. Childs *Memory and Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1962), and the Introduction to Weiser’s commentary on the Psalms in the *Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), p. 44.

modern mind; by nature we Westerners think of Christ's sacrifice "as a single historical event *in the past*".

One has only to examine their (Early Church Fathers') unfamiliar language closely to recognize how completely they identified the offering of the Eucharist by the church with the offering of Himself by our Lord, not by way of repetition, but as a 're-presentation' (*anamnesis*) of *the same* offering by the church 'which is His body.' As S. Cyprian puts it tersely but decisively in the third century, 'The passion is the Lord's sacrifice, which we offer' (162).

To let Dix's words sum up this critical concept: "... it is the indissoluble *unity of the Eucharist with the sacrifice of Christ Himself* which is the basis of the ancient Eucharistic theology" (244).

5. The Fraction

The fraction originally had the very practical function of distribution, but along with this it had symbolic meaning, as we see in I Cor. 10:17 in which St. Paul argues for unity on the basis that they partake of a single loaf. With the rapid growth of the Church, however, it became necessary to have multiple loaves which the people brought, and the Bishop and priests laid hands on them during the offertory (132). In time, the actual breaking of the bread naturally became symbolic of the breaking of Christ's body, although there was not any direct scriptural support for such an idea (133).²² In the fourth century and afterwards, the Bishop would raise the broken pieces and say "holy things unto the holy", which Dix interprets as an invitation that can best be translated "The things of God for the people of God" (135).

6. Communion

The Communion was "the climax and completion of the rite for all pre-Nicene writers" (135). The bishop would distribute the bread with the help of the presbyters. Deacons, after receiving communion from the Bishop or presbyters, would administer the chalice, retaining their ancient position as "servants of the tables" (Acts 6:2). For the theology of communion in the early Church, see the section "Definition: What is Liturgy" above.

After the communion came the ablutions, the cleansing of the vessels. Right before this, however, the early Christians would take some consecrated bread home with them so that they might partake on the weekdays when the Church did not meet for the Eucharist.

²² Dix makes the point that the ancient liturgical traditions never simply quoted Scripture; they often expanded Scripture, and sometimes very freely. The early Church did not operate with a modern passion for exegetical and historical accuracy in these matters. "There was only a strong sense that the liturgical tradition which had arisen before the scriptural narratives were canonized had its own independence and also its own control in the shape of custom" (133).

Deacons would take some and bring it to those who could not be present for one reason or other (140).

And so it was in the ancient Church. The holy Eucharist was at the very center of the Christian life; it was the one thing that identified a person as a Christian. This four-fold liturgy was relatively brief and unimpressive, taking not much more than a quarter of an hour to twenty minutes. Of all things a Christian did, however, it was participation in this rite that invited persecution from a suspicious Roman government. This was not just another pagan mystery rite, and the Roman state and culture instinctively knew this. It was the worship and total self-sacrifice of oneself to a King other than Caesar. This little rite was undermining the pagan culture, infusing new values, bonding slaves with free people, and turning the world upside down. It was the Eucharist, before the New Testament was written and long before the canon was fixed, that gave shape and definition to Christianity. It was that which gave strength and courage to the holy martyrs.

THE HISTORY OF THE EUCHARIST

What we have described above is in its essentials what the pre-Nicene Church understood and experienced with regard to the Eucharist. Dix contends that we have from the earliest period, that of 'origins' (up to A.D. 125), enough information to piece together with certainty the four-fold shape. We have less evidence for the late second and third centuries, but there is an abundance of material for the fourth. He considers the fifth and six centuries to be a night of the dark ages after the collapse of civilization. His method is to work backward from the fourth century to piece together the late second and third centuries, and to go forward to piece together what happened in the fifth and sixth centuries (737).

With the collapse of the empire in the fifth century, the East and West, which up to that time were essentially uniform, began to diverge, creating two major streams. Constantinople, building from the old Jerusalem rites, began to dominate the East over time, overpowering the ancient Syrian and Egyptian rites. The Western stream became more divergent than the East because of its political disintegration. Charlemagne worked hard to unify the liturgy in the West in A.D. 800, but his efforts fell apart with his empire in the later ninth century. In the subsequent centuries the West gradually became uniform around the Roman rite until the Protestant Reformation. Dix contends that the Reformers, far from getting back to the original ethos of the early Church with regard to the Eucharist, in reality moved further away from it, branching out of a relatively late stage in the development of the Western tradition (10). Though the East and West diverged significantly, there was still an underlying unity in the classic four-fold shape that became evident in many places. Where it is not, there are significant effects on the worship of the Church.

1. Fourth Century

It is a common argument, especially among Protestants, that the conversion of Constantine and the empire to Christianity in the fourth century marked the end of the “purity” of the Church. While the fourth century did bring about changes, they were very conservative with regard to form, especially the four-fold shape of the liturgy, although rather radical in the interpretation of the spirit of these forms (303). The most obvious shift was in the Church’s self-perception. It was no longer the persecuted Church that met for Eucharist in private but an accepted Church that met for Eucharist in public. Dix claims that this shift affected the Church’s world-view, especially with regard to the way it viewed time in the Eucharist. He contends that whereas the early persecuted Church was eschatological in orientation, looking forward with longing to the consummation of time in the Eucharist, the fourth century Church, no longer an enemy to society, made peace with the world. The Eucharist therefore became historical in orientation, looking back to the redemptive work of Christ in the crucifixion and resurrection. The pliable meaning of the word *anamnesis*, which could be reduced to mere cognitive “remembrance”, could possibly have been an entryway for this understanding (305). For Dix, St. Cyril of Jerusalem is the pivotal force in this shift.²³

The Church now operated with what is called a “realized eschatology”. The Kingdom of God was here and now. Magnificent churches began to be built, and many of the “bells and smells” of the imperial court made its way into liturgy. “Lights and incense, golden chalices and jeweled altars – that was how the survivors of the Diocletian persecution worshipped at the Eucharist!” (311). Dix, however, quickly tells us that this did not mean that the Church was instantly made corrupt. The primitive Church, even in the catacombs, had not been iconoclastic or puritan, with regard to art and beauty in worship.²⁴ They did not have the means and opportunity to make rich their worship, although they did what they could. In other words, worship was from the beginning viewed as ceremony, something that was experienced by the whole man, body and soul, senses and spirit, including the emotional and volitional, not just the mental. There is nothing inherently Christian about worship as a mental activity that is “exercised by a strictly psychological ‘attention’ to a subjective emotional or spiritual experience” (312). Rather, the richness of the OT language of liturgical Temple worship was immediately transferred to the Eucharist (e.g. Clement in the first century). Like Old Testament worship, the Eucharist was a corporate liturgical act, not merely a personal subjective experience. It is incredibly naïve for certain Protestants to assume that the danger of formalism is an issue with liturgical worship alone, for “it is a danger inseparable from any system of *public* worship as such, Christian or otherwise...” (314). Hypocrisy dresses itself in any number of outfits.

²³ No doubt Dix’s reconstruction gives us important insight into the shifts in the fourth century. Schmemmann challenges his thesis that the pre-Nicene Church was exclusively eschatological without any idea of the power of the Eucharist to sanctify time in the present. See footnote 5.

²⁴ “Music and painting, incised chalices of precious metal, and even sculpture, can all be proved to have been employed in the service of Christian worship before A.D. 250 by literary evidence or by actually existing remains” (314).

The crux of the issue was that the Church of the fourth century found itself with the surprising task of baptizing the whole of a pagan society overnight. The shift was from a spiritual elite, ready at any moment to die for their faith, to a world-embracing organization. Jesus, the Galilean, conquered the Empire that crucified him. The Roman crucible with all its teeming masses tipped, and there was a mighty rush into the Church. What could the Church do? Consider this quote:

The missionary triumph of the fourth century was not less Christian than the dogged faithfulness of those before it, though it reaped with joy where they had sown with tears. And in its effect upon the world and upon the church it was incomparably many-sided. It is no wonder if the liturgy – the supreme expression of the church’s life – has ever since borne the marks of that immense expansion of its grasp on human living, to the partial obscuring of its earlier character. Yet the liturgy remained then and has remained since what it always had been, the worshipping act of the Body of Christ towards God, by which His eternal kingdom ‘comes’ in time (392,3).

There were those, of course, who bemoaned the fact that the Church opened her gates to let in the teeming masses. It was during these years, from 325 to 375, that the monastic movement expanded as well. Many went to the deserts, and many became “domestic ascetics”, all trying to protect and recover the purity of the Christian life. But “monasticism was in no way anti-clerical or anti-sacramental in principle”. They would not think of abandoning the Eucharist. They did, however, continue and develop “the pre-Nicene system of private prayer and the subjective aspects of personal edification in which the corporate worship of the *ecclesia* had been conspicuously lacking” (326).

And so the fourth century was the great moment of the Church where she became public, and this corresponded to the development of a more elaborate ceremonial liturgy. “The Eucharist was now being performed in a world where every public act secular or religious had always been invested with a certain amount of ceremony as a matter of course” (398). Some vestments, such as the chasuble, rather than being innovations, were in fact the common garb of old Roman dress.²⁵ They became distinctive in the sixth century when the style changed and the Church remained conservative; the old clothing became distinctively liturgical (404). In this century, therefore, there was no intention to distinguish between clergy and laity in dress; this happened accidentally over time. In the Middle Ages it became as accepted and right that clergy wear distinctive vestments. Incense, an important element in the worship of the OT and the NT Church, had ceased during the first and second centuries because of the demand of persecutors to burn incense to pagan divinities, but now began to make its way back into the liturgy, especially in the Eastern Churches (426ff.). It may be helpful here to quote Dix’s summary of this topic:

²⁵ Before A.D. 800 the Church avoided vestments like those of the OT priests; from early on, it was customary policy to celebrate in the normal dress of important laymen of the time. This was so for the practical reason of expense and persecution, but also to distinguish Christianity from the mystery religions of the time whose priests dressed in elaborate vestments. There were, however, vestments that developed later in the mediaeval period such as the mitre, cope, gloves, and surplice (405).

This brief and inadequate survey of the development of the accessories of ceremonial will have served its purpose if it makes clear how far it was from the intention of the fourth century church to convert men from heathenism by any imitation of the pagan ceremonies to which they were accustomed. The whole core and substance of the ceremonies as well as the rites of the Eucharist in the fourth century were continued unchanged from pre-Nicene times; they can be traced back uninterruptedly through the formation of the ‘four-acted shape’ of the Eucharist to the *chaburah* rite of the last supper (430).

Dix goes on to remind us that “it is impossible to reduce Christianity either to a spiritual philosophy or even to pure theology. It is always a religion...” (432). This means that people will invariably place their own cultural stamp and customs on the liturgy. So, for instance, the fourth century Church invented certain symbolic gestures (e.g. genuflection, the lavabo, censing the altar) to evoke an atmosphere of reverence, adoration, and purity of intention. These, however, did not in any way undermine the essential unity of the four-fold shape, which remained the same everywhere at this time (433).

There is one negative development at this time, however, and that is the shift in the roles of the holy orders of the *ecclesia*. Originally, the Bishop’s function was liturgical; he had “almost a liturgical and sacramental monopoly as high priest of the whole ‘priestly’ body, the church” (33). He was the principle teacher and preacher as well (31). It was the priestly function to assist the Bishop in these functions, but their main role was that of governing the *ecclesia* in concert with the Bishop and fellow presbyters. When the Church exploded in growth in the fourth century, the Bishops gave up their liturgical and teaching functions and took on the ancient role of the priest, becoming administrators, albeit now over large territories, and the priests took on the ancient role of the Bishop by becoming liturgical and sacramental in their local churches. At the same time the order of deacon began a slow atrophy, especially in the West. Originally vital personal assistants to the Bishop in the service, with their own calling and gifting, the position now became a mere rung in the ladder to the advancement of priesthood. The diaconate began to cease as an “order” (136). Likewise, with the influx of nominally Christian masses, the essential idea of “laity” as a priestly order began to deteriorate. “Thus ‘priesthood’, which had formerly been a function of all members of the Church with the bishop as ‘high priest’, became a special attribute of the second order of the ministry” (34). This had the unfortunate effect of making the Eucharist something that is “said” by the priest, instead of an act of the whole congregation, each functioning supernaturally according to their parts and gifts (35).

2. The Early Medieval Period in the West

As we mentioned above, the liturgy of the Eucharist was in flux in the centuries after the barbarian invasion, commonly referred to as the “Dark Ages”. Dix goes into some detail about the development of the Western rite and its major shapers toward the end of this period, especially Alcuin, Charlemagne’s chief scholar and churchman (A.D. 800, see pp.

546-584). Here we will focus on how the barbarian invasion influenced the West's conception and practice of the Eucharist.

The churches now were filled with hordes of immigrant barbarians ignorant of the history and culture that birthed Christianity. These souls “followed their chiefs submissively into the fold of the church”, more out of a motive to find a place in society rather than out of conviction. They merely transferred the barbaric lifestyle of their pagan past into their new situation. Added to this, the collapse of the West brought the decline of the schools, inhibiting the Church's ability to educate clergy so as to deal with this mass ignorance (595).

The Church knew she could not offer the Eucharist freely to these decadent masses, for then they would “eat and drink judgment unto themselves” (I Cor. 11:29). This led to an overemphasis on the achieving of a high state of sanctity, and a “rigorist spirit” in preparation for the partaking of the Eucharist. “It may have been the wrong line to adopt, but the alternative is not easy to contemplate. The sordidness of conduct in those times has to be studied to be believed” (595). “To have refused the mass-conversions when they came would have been not only impossible but wrong. To have excluded them from the church if they were willing to enter it would have been to close the only door to any bettering of the conditions” (596). Here a rather lengthy quote by Dix is helpful to illumine the difficulty of the situation:

The fifth century church is, I think, more open to attack in principle than that of the fourth on the ground of accepting easy conversions, but not more so if the practical facts of the situation are taken into account. In both cases it is very hard to see how the situation could have been differently handled than it was. *But the consequences were serious* (italics are mine). All through the dark and middle ages there is an immense drab mass of nominal Christians in the background, looming behind the radiant figures of the saints and outstanding actions of the great men and women who make up the colorful foreground of the history – a mass of ignorance, squalor and poverty on which no one made any deep impression before St. Francis ... The people came to church in the dark ages, or most of them did, and morals and manners were in the course of centuries to some degree tranquillized. But down to the end of the middle ages this great lay mass, the product of the mass-conversions, was never fully absorbed by the church (596).

In the end, the Church failed in instructing the people in the meaning of the Eucharist. Lay communions became few, either for the reason that the people felt unworthy of it, or because the clergy discouraged them, or both. The Council of Agde (A.D. 506) reflects how quickly things deteriorated; it reduced the standards for being a Catholic in good standing to three communions a year, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost (597). The laity lost any comprehension of their own priesthood in the act of communion, losing “all active participation in the rest of the rite, the offertory and communion – his ‘liturgy’. He became a mere spectator and listener, without a ‘liturgy’ in the primitive sense at all” (598). The priest became the only communicant.

3. The High Middle Ages

What eventually developed in the mediaeval Western Eucharist was a rite that was presented in three ways. 1. The Pontifical Mass, which was in structure recognizably derived from the pre-Nicene Church. 2. The High Mass, an eighth-ninth century simplification of the Pontifical mass “which retained much of the old corporate character, being sung and allowing of the fulfillment of the separate ‘liturgies’ of all the ‘orders’, deacon, subdeacon, acolytes and laity as well as the celebrant, in a single act of worship” (599). This was the official form of the rite in the Middle Ages that was presented in well-equipped parish churches on all Sundays and holidays. 3. Finally there was the Low Mass, which was said by the priest so that he might be able to fulfill his obligations to perform the mass with regularity. He said it in a low voice, hence the name. It was brief and allowed the busy laity opportunity to be present at the Eucharist daily, and no doubt the faithful found that it assisted their own devotion. It became a popular rite. But consider the theological impact of this rite:

Let us be quite clear what this last development really means. The old corporate worship of the Eucharist is declining into a mere focus for subjective devotion of each separate worshiper in the isolation of his own mind. And it is the latter which is beginning to seem to him more important than the corporate act. The part of the individual layman in the corporate action had long been reduced from ‘doing’ to ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’. Now it is retreating within himself to ‘thinking’ and ‘feeling’. He is even beginning to think that over-much ‘seeing’ (ceremonial) and ‘hearing’ (music) are detrimental to proper ‘thinking’ and ‘feeling’ ... This shift of emphasis was growing in the fifteenth century, and it reached full development in the sixteenth. We call it ‘the protestant conception of the Eucharist’ (599-600).

Dix considers the Reformers both victims and products of mediaeval sacramental darkness. They tried to retain the Eucharist as central to their worship but could not carry their followers with them. In the end, the Protestant church embraced the synaxis, that part of worship derived from the synagogue, as their centerpiece. This, however, was considered not central at all in the primitive Church; they even let non-Christians and catechumens in on this. What happened was that Protestantism, in the main, has embraced the synagogue, and has rejected the temple.²⁶

Long before the sixteenth century the Eucharist passed from an objective rite of action to a subjective rite of feeling. The Reformers’ insistence on the internal and subjective doctrine of “justification by faith alone” corresponds completely with “the ‘simple said service’ performed by a single minister, at which the people had only to look and listen and silently pray” (602f.). Rather than rediscovering the primitive spirit of Christian worship, they were birthed “out of a tradition built up by eight centuries of low masses” (603). Dix gives various examples as evidence that show the link between the subjectivity of mediaeval Eucharistic devotions and reformed liturgies. Both are based

²⁶ By “temple” we mean the Eucharist as a sacrifice done in holy space. See Bishop Philip Zampino’s excellent article *Apostolic Succession* that touches on this topic.

on inner subjective and meditative personal reflections on the passion as merely a historical event (605-612).

The scholasticism of the fourteenth century contributed to this development. By this time the idea of the Eucharist as a corporate action binding heaven and earth, past and future with the present, and binding believers of all time into unity, was essentially lost. “Eucharistic theology” became another specialty among other disciplines in the university curriculums. Of great importance was the debate turning on the exact nature of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, and this served as a battleground for the philosophical schools of the Realists and the Nominalists. Obviously, the uneducated could not participate in such debates, but certainly this barren and decadent scholasticism had its impact on the Church at large and served to drive the faithful further towards “a focus of purely personal adoration of our Lord therein present to the individual”, and into “an individualistic and subjective devotion” (249).

This one-sided mediaeval view of the sacrament as above all the focus of personal religion was maintained without much change by the protestant reformers and the catholic counter-reformation alike, save that both parties (with equal energy) sought to replace personal adoration by personal reception of the sacrament, as the central point of lay Eucharistic devotion (249).

Dix would not have us think that one’s personal feelings toward God in the rite were not of importance in the primitive Church. What he is saying is that by making them central the original intent of the Eucharist to bind the Church of God into a unity is undermined. Subjectivity breeds individualism. Who we are as Christians cannot be based on feelings and experiences that may vary from one to another. The one thing that our Lord instituted to bind individuals together as one to Him was the sacrificial action of the Eucharist. But alas, the Church has managed to divide herself over the one gift Christ has given for her unity. This brings us to the Reformation.

4. The Reformation

Protestantism does not know what to do with the Eucharist. With its emphasis on inner experience, the logical end would be rejection of all external forms, and exclusive concentration on the “inner light” of Quakerism. This would be hard to explain given the importance of the Eucharist in the Bible, which historically has been considered the final authority by most Protestants. What then could the Eucharist possibly mean for a Protestant?

But it seems to me that the difficulty arises precisely out of the only meaning which Protestantism *could* assign to the Eucharist which did not contradict its own basic principle of ‘justification by faith alone’ – *viz.* that the service is a very specially solemn and moving reminder to all who attend it with faith of the passion and atonement of Christ, and so a valuable means of eliciting devout feelings of gratitude, love, confidence and union with Him in those who make use

of His ordinance. To partake of the sacrament after His example is the most solemn pledge of re-dedication to God's service that His followers can give (601).

The problem with this, however, is that the Eucharist is not any different from other forms of worship such as the normal non-Eucharistic service and private devotions.

After all, recollection of the passion and redemption, and loving aspirations of confidence and faith and union with our Lord, are commonplaces of every sincere Christian's spiritual life, in no way limited to the performance of the Eucharist ... But unless the Eucharistic action effects something specific and *sui generis* both in the Church which performs it corporately and in the individual who takes part, it is difficult to see why the Eucharist should necessarily be preferred to other forms of corporate worship (601).

For those who are 'justified by faith', everything has been effected for the believer. Communion, therefore, is reckoned as a consequence of these things. Since it effects nothing, its relevance is not all that clear. This is why many churches do it so rarely, and even then it is merely an appendage to the "real" service.

Most of the major Reformers would be appalled by this development. However, they were heirs to a degenerative form of the Eucharist of the Middle Ages, and they simply did not have access to the form and meaning of the rite originally conceived. It had become entirely focused on the passion with no understanding whatever of its eschatological orientation. The Eucharist was stalled in the past, and the problem was reduced to making the past present. The popular Roman Catholic view, which never became official Church doctrine but was widely embraced nevertheless, was that Christ was re-sacrificed at every Eucharist. Protestants, rightly rejecting this as blatantly unbiblical, opted to bring the past present by means of mere memory and reflection. It did not occur to either group that they had both missed the original intent of the rite (623).

When Luther wrote his pamphlet *On the Babylonish Captivity*, he objected to three things: 1. the practice of communion under one kind alone (cup withheld from laity), 2. the doctrine of transubstantiation, and 3. the doctrine of the Eucharist as a propitiatory or meritorious sacrifice (629). He was not interested in the historical development of these issues but rather with the practice as he saw them in the Church of his day. As for transubstantiation, Luther reacted against the philosophical explanation of how the whole substance of the bread and wine became the whole substance of the Body and Blood of Christ.²⁷ Behind his rejection of the Eucharist as being a "propitiatory and meritorious sacrifice" is his rejection of the Eucharist as being a re-sacrifice. Though Luther

²⁷ This had become a philosophical debate using Aristotelian categories of logic. Luther writes: "What is our response when Aristotle, and the doctrines of men, are made the arbiters of these very sublime and divine things? Why not hiss these ingenious inquiries off the stage, and hold to the words of Christ in simple faith, satisfied not to understand what takes place, and content to know that the true body of Christ is there by virtue of the words of institution? We do not need to understand completely the mode of divine operation." *Pagan Servitude of the Church* (= *On the Babylonish Captivity*) in John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, (NY: Doubleday, 1961) pp. 268f.

... insisted on the external reality of the Body and Blood in the Eucharist on the ground of scripture evidence, he insisted that there was no sacrifice. All that is offered to God is the prayers of the rite (*sic*). The Body and Blood of Christ are not offered to God but *to men* – to the communicant. There is still a Eucharistic action, even an action of Christ in the Eucharist – but the church does not enter into it. Her part is only to prepare herself for it and to *receive it*. We can see here the effect of Luther's perpetual primary assumption about the end of religion, that it is not the worship of God but the comfort of man (634f.).

We see that with Luther the Eucharist is not a corporate group action as anciently instituted but something passively received. Some perceived him however, to be only a halfway reformer, especially his follower Carlstadt, who thought that a pure "religion of the Spirit" had no place whatever for external actions as causes in the realm of grace. In fact, he expressed a desire to rid worship of all sacraments, but in the end even he could not go so far. He took Luther's "justification by faith alone" to its logical conclusion by denying infant baptism. Luther was horrified, but the genie was out of the bottle. Zwingli of Zurich arrived at much the same conclusion, leaving no force or efficacy at all in the sacraments. "They are bare signs or ceremonies by which a man assures *other people* rather than himself of his saving faith in Christ's redemption" (632).

Calvin strove hard to retain meaning in the Eucharist. He agreed with Zwingli that the words "this is my body" are to be understood figuratively, but disagreed that they are a bare sign. "There is a presence of Christ at the Eucharist – he does not hesitate to call it a 'Real Presence', and once to say that 'It is not by the imagination and thought that Jesus gives us His Body and Blood in the supper', but the *substance* of them is truly given unto us."²⁸ Though his language seems traditional here, what Calvin really means by "substance" of the Body and Blood is Christ bestowing His Spirit upon the individual. Dix sums it up in this way:

But for all the greater warmth and reality which Calvin's doctrine thus imparts to the notion of the Eucharist over Zwingli's, he does not meet the difficulty that what our Lord had said He was giving was not His Spirit, but His Body. The last supper is not Pentecost, even if one leads to the other. The real Eucharist action is for Calvin individual and internal, not corporate. It is one more example of the intractability of the scriptural sacraments to the Protestant theory, and the impossibility of adapting to a 'religion of the spirit' and pure individualism the institutions of a 'religion of incarnation' which presupposes the organic community of the renewed Israel ... The Reformers did not feel able thus to set aside the evidence of the scriptures, though they were unable to fit the external sacramental actions at all comfortably into their theological and devotional scheme of Christianity (633).

Luther reacted against Calvin and Zwingli by insisting that the Scripture means what it plainly says, "This *is* my body ...". Calvin and Zwingli, for their part, insisted that this

²⁸ Dix quotes Institutes IV, xvii, 19, on page 633.

would overthrow the cardinal Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone. They were both right.

In England Henry VIII had Cranmer installed as Archbishop of Canterbury against the wishes of Rome, for in him he found someone whom he could use for his political purposes against his European enemies. In fact, both men used each other to further their own agendas, Cranmer's being the purifying of a corrupt Church. Cranmer, however, did what Becket, his predecessor, refused to do, in that he placed the Church under the authority of the Crown, ultimately making the Church a puppet to temporal powers.²⁹ What is immediately important for us to consider here, however, is that Cranmer was a Zwinglian with regard to the Sacraments, especially with his Prayer Book of 1552. Accordingly, he radically altered the four-fold shape of the liturgy anciently conceived. First, there is no offertory at all, since the idea of the Eucharist as a sacrifice has been rejected. With regard to the Eucharistic prayer, the second part of the rite, the notion of consecration has been deliberately watered down to that of 'setting apart for holy use'. The "thanking" (*eucharistia*) is retained at the preface, but an *anamnesis* of the person and work of Christ is not mentioned except four weeks in the year. The doxology has been removed from the prayer and placed in the service beyond communion. There is no fraction of the bread out of fear of superstition. Finally, there is the communion, the fourth part, but Cranmer insists that it is only a token act (670f.).

The confusion in the Church of England results from the fact that the Church, as a whole, never really accepted Cranmer's Zwinglian views. The problem was that in his lifetime he was able to force through his theology by making his Prayer Book standard in the Church. Indeed, there is much to commend it, especially Cranmer's beautiful translations of old Latin prayers. Not long after his death, his Prayer Book was revised to accommodate those who held traditional beliefs about Eucharist, especially that the consecrated bread and wine were, in some sense, the Body and Blood of Christ. However, the subsequent revisions were made piecemeal without a studied consideration of the four-fold shape and were made under the control of the government rather than the Church. The Anglican congregations, thus undermined and weakened, begin to dwindle.

The Independents, Congregationalists, and Puritans simply rejected Cranmer's Church, but could not escape the sacramental chaos. They all share the central idea of Protestantism, that what is really important is the personal relationship of each individual to God. Protestants are individualists by the very nature of their theology and world-view. To restore the theology of ancient corporate four-fold action of the ancient Eucharist is by definition a negation of the basic Protestant idea (638f.). The result was the fragmentation of the Church into tens of thousands of denominations that continue to proliferate to this day.

All this was due to the lack of historical perspective during the sixteenth century. The Reformers were, "like most of us, very largely creatures of their own training. As one reads their works it is obvious that they were never able to clear their own minds of the

²⁹ Later, when the monarchy was weakened, the power over the Church shifted from Crown to Parliament (694).

late mediaeval scholastic and devotional outlook” (626). They were victims of the Mediaeval Latin Church with its subjective piety and devotional approach to the Eucharist (638f.). The ancient piety expressed in corporate liturgy and the corporate action of the Eucharist was simply no longer a part of their world-view (525). Let us conclude this part of our synopsis with this quote:

The old conception had been of the church in its hierarchic unity entering into Christ’s action, by the co-operation of all its various ‘orders’ (each having its own ‘office’, as S. Paul conceived it), and so in His action ‘becoming what is’ eternally – His Body. The new conception is of a strictly *personal* mental reflection upon His action in the past. We cannot enter into it, since as a matter of history the passion is unique and finished ... Since the real Eucharistic action consists in the individual’s own personal mental remembrance of the passion, and is not an act of the universal Body of Christ throughout time and space, there is no more need for a priest commissioned to act for the whole Body, or indeed possibility of such a priesthood. There is no possibility of pleading the Eucharist for another, or for the dead in Christ; though we may pray together *at* it (not *by* it) as we intercede at other times. And since the action is purely mental, the external means to the action – the bread and wine – need only be a ‘token’. There is no need to suppose that ‘the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ’, as the primitive church had held. In strict necessity there is no need even of the taking of the bread and wine, which is only a Christ-ordained stimulus to the real Eucharistic action, the devout remembering of His passion by the justified and believing soul dwelling upon the thought that He saved it (624).

CONCLUSION

We may not agree with all that Dom Dix has to say about the liturgy. Moreover, he is an Anglo-Catholic who is addressing the specific issues of his Anglican Church. Still, what he has to say carries the weight of intense scholarship. He with splendid lucidity describes the historical development of Western attitudes towards the liturgy. The forces of subjectivism, as we have seen, have been at work in our Western culture as early as the Middle Ages. In fact, they contributed to the Reformation’s emphasis on the interior and individual response to God in faith. Since Kant, with his subsequent influence on the theology of Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard, this subjectivism was radicalized into Modern and Post-modern existentialism. It rejected the objective nature of theology and sacramental action. The West simply cannot by nature appreciate the radical objective element in the biblical and early Church sacramental world view. In many cases it takes nothing less than a spiritual and intellectual crisis to shake us out of our subjective slumbers and the interior world of our “selves.” Those who are on a journey out of themselves and into the radical objectivity of Christ’s Table will want to consider the scholarly data Dix and others like him have provided. Much of the historical material necessary for the interpretation of the primitive Eucharist was unknown or not understood as late as the year A.D. 1900 (672). Should Christians re-evaluate their own understanding of the Eucharist in light of these findings, the outcome may very well be a

greater unity among Christians. If such unity will happen, it will happen around the Eucharist, the very means our Lord instituted to draw us together in Him.