

Dix, D.G. (1945). *The Shape of the Liturgy*. Glasgow: The University Press.

In August 1941, Dom Gregory Dix of Nashdom Abbey, England, delivered a paper to the General Chapter of the Cowley Fathers, a great community of Anglican monks. From that paper grew a classic work on the Eucharist that displayed the treasures being uncovered by the liturgical renewal movement of this century. The central ritual of Christendom, the Lord's Supper, is explained in *The Shape of the Liturgy*.

"What I have tried to understand," says Dix in his introduction, "is not only when and how, but why that standard structure or shape of the liturgy took and kept the shape it has." This discusses what Christian liturgy is.

According to the New Testament account of the Last Supper, the Lord performed seven "actions":

- * Took bread.
- * Gave thanks over the bread.
- * Broke the bread.
- * Distributed the bread, saying certain words.
- * Took a cup.
- * Gave thanks over the cup.
- * Gave the cup to His disciples, saying certain words.

It has been the liturgical practice of the church ever since to consolidate these seven actions into four:

- * Offertory. "He took..."
- * Prayer. "He gave thanks..."
- * Fraction. "He broke..."
- * Communion. "He gave..."

The outline of the Eucharistic Prayer (using Prayer A of the Book of Common Prayer) follows:

- * Sursum corda. "Lift up your hearts..." (dialogue between celebrant and people).
- * Preface (and proper preface). "It is right..." (including a variable preface for particular seasons and days)
- * Sanctus. "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might" (and Benedictus, "Blessed is He who comes in the name...")
- * Post-Sanctus. (Review of salvation history: creation, etc.)
- * Institution narrative. "On the night he was handed over..." (and memorial acclamation: "Christ has died...is risen," etc.)
- * Anamnesis and oblation. "Recalling (re-enacting) his death...we offer..."
- * Epiclesis. "Sanctify (these gifts) by your Holy Spirit..."
- * Prayer for benefits of communion. "Sanctify us...that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you..."
- * Doxology. "...all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father..."
- * Great Amen.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Most readers will find the above outlines need explanation. Such background can be found in briefer and more popular books such as *Worship in the Early Church* by Ralph Martin (a Baptist), and *Word, Water, Wine and Bread* by Willimon (a Methodist).

2. There is a liturgy that draws on Jewish ritual, is faithful to the Biblical record and intent, respects the tradition of the centuries, and binds all Christian worship. All Christian churches have a liturgy. The questions are: how good is this liturgy, where did it come from, and how is it serving worshippers?

3. Young (and, indeed, all) people need ritual. Given explanation as to how faithful worshippers have always brought offerings to God, how temple, synagogue and early Christians gave us the basis of our Eucharist, young people are delighted to develop liturgies of their own. A retreat that plans its communion service with the pastor can be a highlight of the year's youth program.

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