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CONSIDERING THE “WORD AND COMMUNION”
BALANCE IN REFORMED EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCHES

By

PHILLIP SANDIFER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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Presbyterian Churches

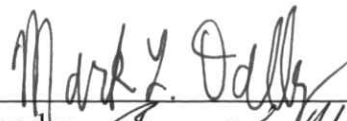
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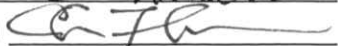
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the conceptual framework for balancing the preaching of the word and the sacrament of communion, and to evaluate whether such a framework might be implemented within Evangelical Presbyterian churches. While individuals may or may not have a preference for the observation of the Eucharist, this study sought to engage the historical narrative of such, seeking to discover a potential mandate from the early and ongoing church. Then, if such a mandate or precedence could be determined, to ask whether the contemporary church is effectively following it. Finally, if a mandate or precedence exists and is not being followed, the researcher sought to explore what obstacles might be in play.

This study employed a qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews with eight pastors and one worship director in the three predominant Presbyterian denominations. The review of literature and analysis of individuals focused on four key areas: historical/theological precedent for word and communion balance, historical analysis of communion frequency, ongoing church politics, and contemporary cultural considerations.

This study concluded that while the literature and the interviews concur that there should be a balance between the preaching of the word and the celebration of communion in worship, opinions vary regarding the optimum “frequency” of communion observation. However, there is no variation with regard to the preaching of the word. Further, the literature and the interviews show an ongoing debate at play with regard to achieving the optimum communion frequency, as its observation is strongly compromised by personal preference and by cultural considerations.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Luke 22:17-20 records a description of the words and activities of Jesus Christ at the last supper,

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."¹

Since this is one of the few recorded instances of Jesus giving liturgical instruction to his disciples for the future, Jesus's admonition to "do this in remembrance of me" likely led to the early church's ongoing reenactment of this significant moment. However, generations of Christian theologians have consistently debated what this moment should mean for regular ongoing weekly Christian worship liturgy. Were Jesus' words a command or a suggestion? Furthermore, was there an implied template or expected timing to its reenactment? Many elements of Jesus' words may seem unclear. However, it is clear that the celebration of this Eucharistic moment became, and has been maintained as, a Christian sacrament since the beginning of the early church. Nonetheless, the intended frequency of its observation (both historically within the early church as well as what is intended for ongoing liturgy) remains in question.

¹ Luke 22:17-20 (ESV).

The New Testament does not clarify the intended frequency of the Eucharist. Robert Taft, emeritus professor of oriental liturgy at Rome's Pontifical Oriental Institute maintains that by the middle of the second century, "Sunday and Eucharist formed a unity as the symbolic celebration of the presence of the Risen Lord amidst His own, a presence that signals the arrival of the New Age. And it is generally agreed that everyone present communicated."² It is also apparent that until the seventh century, communion was also taken for various reasons by the faithful outside of Mass. This continued and even expanded after Constantine. By the end of the fourth century there was a decline in communion participation and a debate ensued as to whether or not the many opportunities for which communion could be taken were extravagant. Many officials felt that communion without a community of believers (as with the mass) should not take place. The reformers of the sixteenth century sought to remedy the extravagant numbers of communion and return it to its proper place as being observed only when the community of believers gathered but they were not successful in this regard. Today, the Catholic Church has largely restored what is felt to be a proper communion observation – that is during the weekly mass. The Orthodox Church however generally celebrates communion only once or a few times per year. The frequency with which Protestant Churches celebrate communion varies from denomination to denomination and church to church.

² Robert Taft, "The Frequency of the Eucharist Throughout History," in *Can We Always Celebrate the Eucharist?* ed. Mary Collins and David Power (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 13.

According to pastor and professor of biblical theology at Columbia Theological Seminary Ronald S. Wallace, Calvin defined a sacrament as “an external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences His promises of good-will towards us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and we in our turn testify our piety towards Him, both before Himself and before angels as well as men.” To him, the sacraments were “a visible sign of a sacred thing,” which concurred with Augustine’s definition.³ Calvin further believed that Jesus’ words led to the earliest church celebrating the sacrament of communion every time it met together. He believed that when Jesus said “Do this in remembrance of me” he meant it as a consistent and continual activity. He states, “For there is not the least doubt that the Sacred Supper in that era was set before the believers every time they met together.”⁴ Furthermore, Horton notes that when Calvin presented his *Articles for Organization of the Church and Worship* at Geneva it asserted, “It is certain that a Church cannot be said to be well ordered and regulated unless in it the Holy Supper of our Lord is always being celebrated and frequented....”⁵ But what does “always being celebrated and frequented” mean? Calvin proposed that it meant weekly and he proposed that the Lord’s supper be part of the weekly liturgy in Geneva. In fact, in sharp contrast to the churches of today which celebrate communion “at least” yearly or “at least” quarterly or monthly and consider that to be “frequent,” Calvin’s “frequent” intended “at least” weekly. That is, he saw room for Christians to celebrate communion

³ Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 133.

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1581 Edition*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 2008), 930.

⁵ Michael S. Horton, “At Least Weekly: The Reformed Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper and of its Frequent Celebration,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 11 (2000): 147.

even more frequently than weekly. However, for a variety of reasons, the governments of Geneva and Strasbourg did not see things the way Calvin (and Martin Bucer) saw them and thus set the stage for a “less frequent” celebration of the Eucharist. To Calvin, this clearly went against what the Lord intended. As with the governments of Geneva and Strasbourg, contemporary church leadership in Presbyterian churches today maintain a variety of reasons why “frequent” celebration of the Eucharist generally seems to be sufficient within a monthly or even quarterly context. Hoping that future reformers would correct what he viewed as a mistake by the Genevan authorities, regarding communion frequency Calvin wrote late in his life: “I have taken care to record publicly that our custom is defective, so that those who come after me may be able to correct it the more freely and easily.”⁶

Reformed Presbyterian churches in America draw upon the liturgical restructuring as a result of the Reformation and particularly the theology of Calvin for a great deal of their current worship liturgical patterns. However, the liturgical norms in these churches today reflect widely ranging views with regard to the frequency of the observation of the communion sacrament. It seems to vary from church to church as to whether these views are based upon foundational theological underpinnings or upon other cultural considerations which clashed over the years with theological ideals. While the theological descendants of Calvin (including ultimately Presbyterians) focused their liturgical preferences upon the pre-eminence of the word of God above all else, an aversion to anything seemingly Catholic also appears to have also affected ongoing liturgical thinking.

⁶ David T. Koyzis, “The Lord’s Supper: How Often?” *Reformed Worship* 15 (Spring, 1990): 41.

Farris helps us understand that in our culture, as with the Corinthians of the New Testament, the gift of teaching and preaching can be used for good as well as for distractive purposes. In drawing this comparison he states, “The Corinthian’s esteem clever speech too highly and fight over the relative value of their spiritual gifts.” He goes on to say that “it is possible that the sources of conflict in a congregation are actually misused blessings.”⁷ Therefore, in light of the admonition to balance word and sacrament, might not the preaching of the word be as open to frequency evaluation as the observation of the sacraments.

Problem Statement

Are Reformed Presbyterian churches in America giving proper consideration as to whether or not their liturgical choices with regard to communion frequency conform to the very tenets upon which their historical theology was formed? Today, what some have called the “Evangelical Christian Sub-culture”⁸ in America has spawned the “seeker”-focused movement as well as the more recent “missional” and “emergent” movements. These movements have influenced the mindset of church leaders seeking to determine the proper liturgical focus for their congregations. It is unclear whether or not the leaders of these movements trust the ability of the gospel in the Lord’s Supper to speak for itself into current generations and contribute to Christian worship services in the way envisioned by the church fathers. Do they offer additions or substitutes for what may appear to them to be a more culturally relevant (or at least more culturally palatable) updating on what the gospel proclaims? In doing so, have they distanced themselves from

⁷ Stephen C. Farris, “Preaching for a Church in Conflict,” in *The Folly of Preaching: Models and Methods*, ed. Michael Knowles (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2007), 146.

⁸ Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), 5.

things considered “traditional” in the same way that many early Protestants distanced themselves from things considered Roman Catholic? Is it possible that they may be making the same mistakes as some of the early reformers by not giving proper weight to that which might still be spiritually productive to ongoing generations? Even still, Sproul maintains, “I don’t think there was anything more important to the worship of the Christians in the early apostolic church than the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.”⁹ Might something so significant to the worship of the early Christians also have ongoing significance in our time and culture?

Interestingly, even while the leaders of newer movements continue to explore what they consider to be more effective (or at least more current) ways of relating the gospel to new generations, a renewed contemporary interest in historically- based theology and the historical liturgy is occurring. Recently the Wall Street Journal noted “signs of a church- focused evangelicalism. Many young evangelicals may be poised to reconsider denominational doctrine, if for no other reason than that they are showing fatigue with typical evangelical consumerism.”¹⁰ At the same time, theological scholars are encouraging churches generally considered to be traditional or mainstream in liturgical practice to re-evaluate whether they are themselves embracing and making use of the historical liturgy in an effective and proper way. Contrasting the historically documented views of Calvin with “the typical Sunday morning worship service as being a preaching service in which the sermon is regarded as the centerpiece,” reformed scholar

⁹ R. C. Sproul, *A Taste of Heaven: Worship In the Light of Eternity* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2006), 110.

¹⁰ Russell D. Moore, “Where Have All the Presbyterians Gone?” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 4, 2011.

Koyzis records, "...We rarely hear anyone object to sitting through sermons on a weekly basis. Yet, what we receive in the sacrament simply confirms in a vivid and direct way what we have already received in the proclamation of Scripture in the sermon. Both sermon and sacrament are means of grace that affirm and enrich our faith."¹¹

The celebration of holy communion or "the Lord's supper," also known as "the Eucharist" (which means "act of gratitude, rejoicing"),¹² is one of the historical observances within traditional or mainstream Christian denominations undergoing a re-evaluation, or re-understanding. Though fairly commonly known as an activity Christians in some manner appear to participate in, what communion actually symbolizes, enacts, or is intended to accomplish and why is not as commonly agreed upon.¹³ In many cases it is not even understood by congregations or their leadership. Author/Theologian Donald Macleod calls this lack of understanding "defective celebrations" of the sacrament. That is, according to the author, "failure on the part of the people to acquire a thorough understanding of the sacraments and on the part of the ministry to recognize and grasp fully its own crucial responsibility in them."¹⁴

This failure is largely due to the church not fully grasping or giving proper weight to the meaning of the Lord's supper in relationship to the preaching of the word.¹⁵

¹¹ Koyzis, 41.

¹² Merriam-Webster.com, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eucharist> (accessed February 16, 2013).

¹³ Leonard J. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press 2004), 188.

¹⁴ Donald Macleod, *Presbyterian Worship: It's Meaning and Method* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 59.

¹⁵ Vander Zee, 189.

Therefore, this lack of understanding by the congregations may come from a breakdown in the consistent teaching of Eucharistic meaning and method as well as the dissemination of multiple and sometimes confusing views regarding the meaning of the Eucharist. For instance, with regard to the actual purpose and context of communion, and in drawing on one of the principles gleaned from the early house churches, John McCray, professor of New Testament and archeology coordinator of graduate biblical studies at Wheaton College, asserts that the Eucharist today misses the element of sitting together in equal terms around a table inhabited by the Lord. He states, “Today the sacramental approach to the Lord's Supper, even by non-sacramental institutions like the Churches of Christ, has replaced any real connotation of the supper as a meal with all the fellowship implications it once carried.”¹⁶

Others have dwelled on the seeming loss of covenantal understanding of holy communion. For instance, professor of preaching and worship at Wesley Theological Seminary Lawrence Hull Stookey records that “frequently communion has been seen less as a gift of love from God than as a reward for virtuous living or faithful service.”¹⁷ Still others, as recorded by Dr. Ben Witherington, professor of New Testament interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary, believe that the primary purpose for the Lord's supper is “*Anamnesis*, remembering and cherishing and keeping in mind, not reenactment or representing.”¹⁸ Many, like John Mark Hicks, professor of theology at David Lipscomb

¹⁶ John McCray, “House Churches and the Lord's Supper,” *Leaven* 3, no. 3 (1995): 4.

¹⁷ Lawrence Hull Stookey, *Eucharist: Christ's Feast with the Church* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1993), 18.

¹⁸ Ben Witherington, *Making A Meal Of It* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 130.

University, believe communion to be a multi-perspective reality” (i.e., having multiple purposes) with the real issue being more of what to emphasize.¹⁹

There is a similar disparity of understanding and agreement with regard to the word and sacrament pattern of involvement within the regular liturgy. For instance, contrary to the understanding of many of today’s churches, the celebration of communion is not an isolated activity. Rather, its participation with other elements of the weekly liturgy and particularly with the preaching of the word is paramount within a Reformed theology. Returning to Calvin’s ideal, J. Frederick Holper, professor of preaching and worship at McCormick Theological Seminary, maintains that “one of the major effects of the liturgical renewal of the last thirty years has been a recovery of the early church’s understanding that word and sacrament (particularly the Eucharist) belong together when congregations assemble to worship on the Lord’s Day.”²⁰

Unfortunately, even while many reformed Presbyterians view the attainment of the weekly involvement of word and communion as a worthy goal, “an increased emphasis upon the Lord’s Supper seems out of phase with the spirit of the reformed tradition as experienced in America,” notes author/theologian Thomas G. Long.²¹ Thus, a thorough discussion is needed to help the modern church better understand the way that communion collaborates with the preaching of the word. The reality of this collaboration within the Reformed Presbyterian church, in which the preaching of the word has

¹⁹ John Mark Hicks, *Come To the Table* (Costa Mesa, CA: Leafwood Publishers, 2002), 139.

²⁰ Frederick J. Holper, “As Often as You Eat This Bread and Drink the Cup,” *Interpretation* 48, no. 1 (January 1994): 61.

²¹ Thomas G. Long, “Reclaiming The Unity of Word and Sacrament in Presbyterian and Reformed Worship,” *Reformed Liturgy & Music* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 12-17.

historically been viewed as the preeminent activity in weekly worship, is not broadly understood.

Finally, there remains debate as to the optimal frequency of the celebration of communion in the Presbyterian church today even when the concept of the collaboration of word and communion is understood and even sought. While both Luther and Calvin desired a weekly communion, the difficulty of such administration by clergy officials as well as other cultural considerations are often cited as obstacles in this regard.²² Some of these obstacles include length of service, the desire that Eucharist observation not become rote due to frequency, the preparedness of congregants to fully understand communion, as well as the difficulty of a regular preparation. These considerations deserve a broader discussion.

Purpose Statement

Pastors, elders, or other key stakeholders in new churches or in established churches seeking a new direction can benefit from research exploring the optimum word / communion balance as well as a consideration of the optimum frequency of communion observation generally. The purpose of this research is to help provide this greater historical and cultural perspective as to optimum word / communion balance within Reformed Evangelical Presbyterian churches to a stakeholder contemplating these concerns within his or her church environment.

²² Kenneth W. Wieting, *The Blessings Of Weekly Communion* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 105.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research.

1. How do church leaders currently view the theology of preaching as influencing the decisions regarding other elements of the regular weekly service including the celebration of the Lord's Supper?
2. What theological views on the sacrament of communion influence the decisions regarding the frequency of its observation?
3. What current denominational practices, church governance structure or expectations (from the pastor, congregation, leadership, and stakeholders), cultural factors, and other practical matters (such as homiletic training, sermon length, time, attention spans, etc.) influence the evaluation (or tension between) of the current preaching of the word and the frequency of communion?

These questions involve current expectations of church leadership, church congregations, denominational expectations, as well as cultural consideration generally.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study to Christian thought and practice is to offer an accumulation of facts and considerations to church stakeholders considering the possibility of pursuing a more frequent or expanded communion in their Reformed Evangelical Presbyterian church. The research directs stakeholders to the question of theological belief in word and sacrament collaboration in the regular weekly service. If stakeholders conclude that such collaboration is not warranted in their particular context, then the information presented herein will be significant in helping individuals in their

contemplation towards such a conclusion. That is, they will have received valuable information in properly evaluating the question of word and sacrament collaboration and significance.

Definition of Terms

Intinction – the method of taking communion whereby the individual receiving communion takes the bread and dips it into the chalice containing either wine or grape juice and then eats the bread with the wine or juice soaked into it.

Liturgy – “a rite or body of rites prescribed for public worship.”²³

Sacrament of Communion – the activity of the celebration of communion as commonly experienced in Presbyterian churches today. This term shall be used interchangeably with the following terms: communion, Holy Communion, the Lord’s supper, the table of the Lord, and the Eucharist.

²³ Merriam-Webster.com, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liturgy> (accessed July 4, 2013).

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this research was to provide a historical and cultural perspective as to the optimum word / sacrament of communion balance within a Reformed Evangelical Presbyterian church to a stakeholder contemplating these concerns within his or her church environment. Three specific areas of literature research were pursued. The first area was biblical/theological literature on the preaching of the word and the sacrament of communion. For instance, what are the historical / theological foundations for the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacrament of communion? The second area involved literature which explores the current practice, cultural perspectives, and considerations regarding the balancing of word and the sacrament of communion. In other words, where are we now and why with regard to the current practice of preaching the word and the celebration of the sacrament of communion? The third area involved literature related to the politics of ministry. For example, as a practical matter, how are Reformed Evangelical Presbyterian churches governed (ideally and actually)? Who makes the liturgical decisions within these church environments, and how do these liturgical decisions come about? Therefore, within the church governance framework how might decisions regarding the balance between the word and the sacrament of communion made and ultimately by whom? Finally, after these three areas of literature are reviewed, the researcher will explore cultural and contemporary issues that may affect decisions regarding the current balancing of word and the sacrament of communion.

Historical and Theological Perspective

Wallace says that “the Word preached by man can become “God Speaking.”²⁴ Calvin believed that when the minister in a service of worship preaches from the word of God, that Christ comes and is present and it as if he were speaking to the congregation, not the minister. Simon Chan, professor of systematic theology at Singapore’s Trinity College, suggests, “If the church is the extension of the work of the triune God and worship is the way to realize the church then the Eucharist is the supreme expression of the worship that realizes the church. Through the Eucharist the Spirit actualizes the communion between Christ and His body and between the members of His body.”²⁵

The importance of this communion event was recognized from the earliest moments of the Christian church by the church fathers. According to Leonard J. Vander Zee, author and editor in chief for Faith Alive Christian Resources, The Lord’s supper is a sacrament because it was “instituted by Christ himself and bound to the promise of His own words”.²⁶ According to Wallace, Calvin said that man, even in the contemplation of God, tends towards the earthly. Quoting Calvin, he says that even what knowledge of God he (man) might acquire would be used to “drag God down to earth,” essentially limiting God to man’s own image. The sacraments however, continues Wallace, in collaboration with the word, “act as ladders by which the mind of man can be raised to heaven.”²⁷

²⁴ Wallace, 83.

²⁵ Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 32.

²⁶ Vander Zee, 23.

²⁷ Wallace, 78.

Long says that “word and sacrament are not merely a matched pair of components found in Christian worship; they are integrative parts of a whole, each incomplete, in the final analysis, without the other.”²⁸ He points to Luke 24, arguing that historically the church did not experience the kind of “distance” between the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacrament of communion that the current church is experiencing. Furthermore, he pursues a distinction between “word plus sacrament” and “word and sacrament.” That is, people are not intended to benefit from the regular apportionment of the preached word and then from time to time receive an additional bonus – communion. Rather, the two go hand-in-hand as a regular apportionment for the nourishment of the believer.

Calvin himself expressed in his work “In the Form of Prayers and Manner of Ministering the Sacrament according to the Use of the Ancient Church (1540)” that “The Eucharist is the Communion of the body and blood of the Lord.” Consequently the people must learn “the necessity of their frequent participation in the flesh and blood of the Lord as well as to its great benefits, which are received from this participation and mastication.”²⁹ In Calvin’s *Institutes*, he says twice that the Lord’s Supper should be administered at least once a week as that is the frequency with which the church gathered. He asserts “No meeting of the church is held without The Word, prayer and dispensation of the Supper, and alms” and referencing the first century church “there cannot be a doubt that at the time Sacred Supper was dispensed to the faithful at every meeting.”³⁰ And both

²⁸ Long, 12.

²⁹ Horton, 149.

³⁰ Calvin, IV. xvii. 44, 46.

he and Bucer pleaded with the both the Geneva and Strasbourg councils to institute a weekly communion.

Interestingly, Calvin used the term “at least once” indicating that perhaps there may be cause for an even more frequent meeting at the table with the Lord. Calvin was convinced that a weekly communion (at least) was warranted because he believed that God does something at the table that is unexplainable by human beings with the feeding of his people and because the act of communion creates a familial community among the people of God when gathered together. While the denominational lines most closely descendent from Calvin failed to adopt his stance on the frequency of communion it is interesting to note that The Puritans and the Anglicans during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries actually constructed their services more fully to Calvinistic beliefs in sharing the Lord’s Supper on a weekly basis. This legacy still sees this expression today in the Episcopal and Anglican churches who serve communion weekly. Worship in Reformed denominations, including Presbyterians, has been influenced by Zwingli more than by Calvin. Zwingli separated word and sacrament to the extent of “giving every value to the word and making the sacrament a mere human work of remembrance.”³¹ This may have played a part in contributing to the impression that frequency of communion was somehow less important than the frequency of the preaching of the word.

Horton maintains that there is a significant connection between proclaiming Christ and being with Christ. He references the Word of God as a ladder to God but says that God descends to us. Quoting Gerrish, Horton writes:

³¹ George H. Tavard, “Other Horizons: Reformed Piety,” *Worship* 37, no. 7 (June/July 1963): 407.

It is crucial to Calvin's interpretation that the Gospel is not a mere invitation to fellowship with Christ, but the effective means by which the communion with Christ comes about. As with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the Spirit creates a bond between the sign (proclamation of the Gospel) and the reality of signified (Christ and all his benefits).³²

Thus word and sacrament go together – the individual hears the word (at the sermon or message) and the individual experiences the word made flesh (at the communion table).

What exactly the Lord does with our hearts and minds through the Holy Spirit at the table is a mystery. "Calvin's positive contribution lay not only in giving prominence to a liturgy of the Word, as all the reformers did, but also in keeping Word and Sacrament united and well-balanced. Calvin's liturgy never separated these."³³

Reflecting on Luke 24:13-35, Craddock maintains that "the importance of experiencing the living Christ in word and sacrament cannot be overemphasized."³⁴ He understands Luke to be speaking to a generation of Christians who did not see Jesus with their own eyes but who, nevertheless, are not "secondhand Christians."³⁵ Rather, Luke explains that "the living Christ is both the key to understanding the scriptures and the very present Lord who is revealed in the breaking of the bread. His presence at the table makes all believers first-generation Christians and every meeting place Emmaus."³⁶

Therefore when Christians experience the table of the Lord, the Lord is there with them just as he was with the disciples, just as he was on the road to Emmaus. Thus, they hear

³² Michael S. Horton, "Union and Communion: Calvin's Theology of Word and Sacrament," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 4 (October 2009): 404.

³³ Tavard, 406.

³⁴ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 286.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 287.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

his words as if they walked and talked with him and they experience his presence in the same communal, celebrative a way that the disciples did in a way that cannot be fully understood.

The family tree from which modern reformed Presbyterian churches extend originated in the Reformed and Reformed Presbyterian churches of Scotland. In 1554, the Scottish reformer John Knox moved from Scotland to Geneva due to the violence towards Protestants taking place during the reign of Queen Mary. She was attempting to return Scotland to Catholicism fully. Baird writes, “By Calvin, he was received with open arms; and in the intimate society of that remarkable man, he passed much time.”³⁷ It is clear that Knox was strongly influenced by Calvin during his time in proximity of the reformer. Nonetheless, when Knox returned to Scotland, he administered communion for the first time in 1555, “according to the form and manner which he had seen practiced at Geneva.”³⁸ The Church of Scotland thereafter settled into a once per month administration of the Lord’s Supper.

A draft of the *Book of Common Order* (1564) specifically states, “The day when the Lord’s Supper is ministered, which commonly is used once a month, or so oft as the Congregation shall think expedient, the minister useth to say as followeth...”³⁹ Interestingly, this final draft of the *Book of Common Order*, which expanded the draft from the Frankfort liturgy (from which much of the reformed liturgy in the book of common order was drawn), makes no mention of congregational discretion in potentially

³⁷ Charles W. Baird, *The Presbyterian Liturgies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960), 96.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁹ Charles Greig McCrie, *The Public Worship of Presbyterian Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1892), 110.

increasing or decreasing the frequency of communion. It states, “The Sacrament is to be dispensed on the first Sunday of every month and on the Thursday preceding there is to be an exhortation by the Pastor or some other minister.”⁴⁰ The service of the Lord’s supper was somewhat an addendum to the regular service. The regular service would place and then attention was turned to the table – the instructions and activities therein.

During the mid-1500s, still very much in the proximity of Calvin, the *First Book of Discipline* (1560) specified that “All ministers must be admonished to be more careful to instruct the ignorant than ready to serve their appetite and to use more sharp examination than indulgence in admitting to that great Mystery such as be ignorant of the use and virtue of the same.”⁴¹ According to Calvin, however, the table was such a place of mystery that he did not fully comprehend what was taking place there. How then, other than reciting the words of institution and the restrictions upon partaking, were the ministers to instruct the people? Further, while the table was a place reserved for people who had already indicated a belief in the Christian faith, it also functioned as a place where the ministers “qualified” believers so as to make sure that those partaking in the supper were also living lives of worthy of sharing in the table of the Lord.

Isbell shares, “In 1645 the General Assembly confirmed this long-standing custom of examining congregations prior to communion was to be continued. Into the seventeenth century, the Examination constituted a demanding responsibility for ministers, who could be excused from meetings of Presbytery to allow them time for

⁴⁰ Ibid., 375.

⁴¹ Sherman Isbell, “The Administration of the Lord’s Supper,” *The Master’s Trumpet* 4 (December 2006): 18.

preparing the people in this way for the Lord's Supper.”⁴² The scope of this dissertation does not extend to the argument as to whether or not the practice of examination was good from a theological perspective. It is interesting, however, to note that such an examination is not recorded on the road to Emmaus. However with regard to its impact on the frequency of communion, the practice of congregational examination did serve to administratively complicate and elongate the activity of communion, making it a more difficult task for the clergy to organize and administer. For instance, in the year 1600 at St. Andrews, as the week of the administration of communion approached, with over three thousand congregation members already examined, the event had to be postponed for one more week to give the clergy time to examine the remaining members of the congregation. This activity reflects not only that the church believed in the importance of examining its congregants in view of what they believed to be the serious activity of partaking in communion, it also shows how complex the church had allowed the observation of communion to become. Isbell notes further that “the labor of rightly preparing the people for the sacrament reduced the possibility of communion occurring at greater frequency than quarterly. The result was that into the eighteenth century a number of parishes received communion only once a year.”⁴³

Another aspect of the administration of communion during this time period was the church’s feeling that due to the communal, familial aspect of the observation of communion, church members must be fully in one accord with one another to participate. That is, part of the preparation for communion was to weed out any possibility that

⁴² Ibid., 19.

⁴³ Ibid.

church members were in significant disagreement with one another over social or business issues. “Persons who remained un-reconciled were debarred from the Lord’s table,” according to Isbell.⁴⁴

In addition to the pre-service examination of the congregation and attempts on the minister’s part to encourage resolution of conflict, the practice of “fencing” the table of the Lord also took place prior to and within the ceremony of communion. This practice was strongly influenced by the governments of both Scotland and England, where the civil magistrates so strongly pressed the church to “give us your advice as to what sins should exclude from the communion, and we will ratify your advice so far as it meets with our approval, and then leave it to the local magistrate to decide on communion claims as on any other matter of civil law.”⁴⁵ Fortunately, the church leadership fought the allowance of this request. Nonetheless, it is recorded in historical Presbyterian documents that the state admonished the church as follows, “The keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power to shut that kingdom against the impenitent both by the word and censures, and to open it unto penitent sinners by the ministry of the gospel and by absolution from censures as occasion shall require.”⁴⁶ It is historically significant that the government intruded so completely into the communion rights of Christians. Further, it is historically significant for the discussion of communion frequency and word and sacrament balance that the church’s power to judge the hearts and minds of Christians was so pervasive.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁵ Andrew Edgar, *Old Church Life in Scotland*, (London: Alexander Gardner, 1885), 161-162, <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/fencingtable.html> (accessed July 22, 2013).

⁴⁶ Church of Scotland. *The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, etc.* 1855.

The Scottish reformed tradition changed dramatically after 1645, when the “*Directory for the Public Worship of God*” was released. Barkley remarks, quoting Hageman that, up to this time, the reformed churches “were no less liturgical than the Lutheran or Anglican Church.”⁴⁷ He points out further that this directory was also a document for ministers, not congregation members. Therefore, it was no longer in the hands of the people themselves. One of the main changes that took place at this time was that the celebration of the Lord Supper became less frequent. Interestingly, this occurred even though the *Directory* itself clearly said, “The Communion, or the supper of the Lord, is frequently to be celebrated.”⁴⁸

In 1648, the general assembly of the Church of Scotland approved the Westminster Larger Catechism calling it “a Directory for catechizing such as have made some proficiency in the knowledge of the grounds of religion.”⁴⁹ It was intended for use by those Christians who were more mature in their faith. T.F. Torrance notes, however, that it was chiefly designed as a directory for ministers in their teaching of the reformed faith Sunday by Sunday.⁵⁰ According to the larger catechism, of those who hear the word preached, it is required that they “attend it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the readiness of mind, as the word of God: meditate, and confer

⁴⁷ John M. Barkley, *The Worship of the Reformed Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), 31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁹ Johannes Geerhardus, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*, ed. G. I. Williamson (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), x.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xi.

of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.”⁵¹ Those who receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper are to prepare themselves as follows,

Before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves of their being in Christ, of their sins and wants; of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance; love to God and the brethren, charity to all men, forgiving those that have done them wrong; of their desires after Christ, and of their new obedience; and by renewing the exercise of these graces, by serious meditation, and fervent prayer.⁵²

The Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechism as well as the Westminster Confession are the foundational documents for today’s Presbyterian Church dating back to 1648, and yet there is little mention in any of the documents with regard to the synergistic relationship which takes place between the preaching of the word of God and the celebration of the sacrament of communion. Calvin expressed, “There is no use in the Sacraments unless the thing which the sign visibly represents is explained in accordance with the word of God.”⁵³ According to Macleod, “Calvin puts the Lord’s Supper within the context of the Word because it is a visible sign of the promises which that Word declares.”⁵⁴ Therefore, the fact that such a significant word and sacrament interaction was not emphasized or even discussed as such in the catechisms and confession is significant and perhaps contributed to the trajectory of the ongoing significance (or lack thereof) and frequency of communion. According to Macleod, by the end of the eighteenth century,

⁵¹ Ibid., 455.

⁵² Ibid., 493.

⁵³ Macleod, Donald. *Word and Sacrament: A Preface To Preaching and Worship* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 67.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

the Scottish services of worship were the “barest in Christendom. The sermon was everything.”⁵⁵

As Presbyterianism came to America, it developed as a mixture of the Puritan and Scottish Reformed traditions. In both, the sermon remained the preeminent worship service element. In Scotland and America, the sacramental season took hold as an added event in the 1700s, whereby the church session issued tokens admitting those deemed worthy to the Lord’s Table. Tokens had actually already been in use and issued to potential communicants as early as 1560. Application ahead of time was often required. The actual communion service itself was preceded by a number of days of other activities, including service of preparation and token distribution. In Scotland, the practice of sitting at long tables covered with linen tablecloths lasted well into the 1900s, and the *Book of Discipline* required a bell to call the people together to the tables (which were also required). Thus, instead of a “word and sacrament” formula present on a regular basis in Presbyterian services, the sacramental season made of the holy fairs became an “add-on” (word plus sacrament formula) event, maintaining the sermon as the weekly main event.

The sacramental season methodology of observing communion lasted into the 1800s, although the 1788 directory encouraged a “streamlined communion service at least quarterly” and, interestingly, omitted from the directory was a “call for a shorter but more frequent communion service.”⁵⁶ The holy fairs were replaced in America by mass revival meetings with “extravagancies replacing ordinary word and sacrament ministry as

⁵⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁶ William B. Bynum, “The Genuine Presbyterian Whine: Presbyterian Worship in the Eighteenth Century,” *American Presbyterians* 74, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 168.

the means of grace. Another cause of the devaluation of the Reformed sacramental doctrine was the fear of Romanism.”⁵⁷

Additionally significant during this time period was the teaching of John Nevin. Nevin maintained that there is a “true” union with Christ that takes place at the table as “the Holy Spirit infuses us with ‘mystical union’ with Christ.”⁵⁸ Further, as with Calvin, Nevin believed that “In the supper believers really participate in Christ’s person.”⁵⁹ Nevin writes, “We partake not of certain rights and privileges only, which have been secured for us by the breaking of His body and the shedding of his blood, but of the veritable substantial life of the blessed Immanuel himself, as the fountain and channel by which alone all these benefits can be conveyed into our souls.”⁶⁰ Therefore, Christians actually encounter Christ (not their rights and privileges) but the whole Christ at the table as if they were on the road to Emmaus.

Horton writes that Nevin (who aligned with Calvin’s Classical Reformed view of the sacraments) “was concerned that ‘our modern Puritans’ are more subjective and rationalistic than the Reformers-and even than the original Puritans themselves.”⁶¹ Thus, the influence of the Puritan sacramental practice on the ongoing development of the Presbyterian church liturgy concerned Nevin. Interestingly, Calvin, the lawyer and equally the rationalist, concluded, like Nevin that something “mystical” and

⁵⁷ Horton, 160.

⁵⁸ Brian R. Kom, “Honoring the Lord and His Supper: An Exegetical Refutation of the Reformed Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper,” presented for the Minnesota District Pastor’s Conference at Breezy Point Resort on April 28, 2003, 8.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1846), 220.

⁶¹ Horton, 162.

unexplainable happens at the table. This is likely a frustratingly difficult theology for a rationalist to embrace.

Melton reveals that a rational approach also pursued the preaching function in the liturgy with a focus on practical communicative matters. For instance, in 1787, the newly formulated Presbyterian General Session of the United States appointed a committee to visit and potentially revise the Westminster Directory for Worship. The phrase “The Minister is to be careful not to make his sermons too long, so as to interfere with or exclude the more important duties of prayer and praise; but preserve a just proportion between the several parts of public worship”⁶² is an example of the attentiveness to the sermon’s practical role in the service. The directory suggested thirty to forty-five minutes as an acceptable length. Again, while addressing some practical aspects of the sermon’s purpose, the committee did not seek to link more clearly the activity of preaching to the work and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, in either liturgical purpose or frequency of observation.

The historical / theological / academic tension between the views of John Nevin and those of Charles Hodge, under whom Nevin studied at Princeton, would shape the word and sacrament dialogue for the next century. Nevin held a view similar to that of Calvin – that what took place at the Eucharist was in many ways unexplainable and yet was used by God in participation with the preaching of the word to create a full understanding of God’s truth. Hodge’s views were more closely aligned with those of Zwingli and Bullinger. Among other things, Hodge believed that the presence of the body and blood are only “to the mind,” and that “Nevin and Calvin’s doctrine of union with

⁶² Julius Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 25.

Christ would result in justification being based on righteousness that is in us rather than a righteousness that is for us.”⁶³

Hoffecker writes that Hodge’s views on the sacraments unfolded in such a way as not to offend other evangelical views. He defines the sacraments as “efficacious means of grace, not merely exhibiting to, but actually conferring upon those who worthily receive them, the benefits which they represent.”⁶⁴ He views the Lord’s Supper as primarily a “memorial of the death of Christ,” as well as “the appointed means for making a public profession of religion” and a “seal of the covenant of grace.”⁶⁵ Thus, these two views carried forth; Calvin’s and Nevin’s view which held that “there was a mysterious power in the sacraments beyond human understanding that touched those who received them with God’s grace,” whereas “Hodge took a harder line against any notions that the sacraments had a mysterious, inexplicable power.”⁶⁶ Given Hodge’s influence as a professor of theology at Princeton, as well as his abilities as a noted homilist, he occupied a position of significant influence, having taught systematic theology at Princeton from 1840 until his death in 1876.

Other important voices in the dialogue about the Lord’s Supper were John Adger (1810-1899), John Dick (1764-1833), and William Cunningham (1805 – 1861). Adger, a Princeton Seminary graduate and professor at Columbia Seminary in South Carolina, concurred with Nevin and “affirmed the Incarnation as his starting point and argued for

⁶³ Kom, 9.

⁶⁴ W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Charles Hodge, the Pride of Princeton* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2011), 225.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge, Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 211.

‘real spiritual presence’ of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper.”⁶⁷ He aggressively criticized Hodge’s translation or representations of a number of important documents and maintained Hodge’s case against “real spiritual presence” to be “preposterous.”⁶⁸ Both Dick and Cunningham, prominent theologians in Scotland, criticized Calvin’s view of the sacraments, leaning in their doctrines more strongly toward the views of Zwingli.

The views of A.A. Hodge, the son of Charles Hodge who filled his father’s chair of systematic theology until his own death in 1886, held a theology of the sacraments that was “virtually indistinguishable from that of his father.”⁶⁹ Benjamin Breckenridge (B.B.) Warfield, who then succeeded Hodge as professor of theology and remained in that position until his death in 1921, believed that the Lord’s Supper was primarily a sacrificial meal, an opinion that was his primarily focus in his article “The Fundamental Significance of the Lord’s Supper.” In this article, Warfield says, “the most salient fact connected with the institution of the Lord’s Supper is, of course, that this meal took place at, or to be more specific, in the midst of, the Passover Meal.”⁷⁰ There is no mention in the article at all about the significance of the Lord meeting his people at the table in any form, nor does he discuss the significance of the Lord’s Supper event in relation to the preached word.

⁶⁷ Keith A. Mathison, *Given For You* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 159.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁷⁰ Benjamin Brekinridge Warfield, “The Fundamental Significance of the Lord’s Supper,” Monergism.com, <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/supper.html> (accessed July 18, 2013).

As the nineteenth century came to a close, most orthodox Presbyterian beliefs came under fire. While it is debatable which view of the Lord's Supper may have been considered orthodox at the time, certainly the view of both of the Hodges, that a supernatural activity at the table was not taking place, proved to be most acceptable among Presbyterian churches. The non-supernatural nature of the Lord's Supper event, including the view that the formula was "word plus sacrament" not "word and sacrament," was subtly embraced by both Orthodox and Modernist Presbyterians thereafter.

Current Practice of Word and Sacrament Balance

Long says that in American Presbyterian and Reformed congregations today, "the resistance to frequent communion is broad and deep."⁷¹ Additionally, the Lord's supper has drifted to a place in the liturgy where it is peripheral to what believers are intended to receive from God. South African author Jonanda Groenewald relates in an article examining the earliest followers of Jesus that "Although the Eucharist still plays an important role in the liturgy of many Christian churches today, the spiritual dimension that was so important in the 1st century seems to be lacking in institutionalized churches."⁷²

Mathison notes the amount of dialogue regarding the Lord's Supper that has taken place historically, especially around the time of the Reformation, in comparison with the amount of dialogue that has taken place in the twentieth century. He records that "the

⁷¹ Long, 12.

⁷² Jonanda Groenewald, "Show, Tell and Re-enact: The Reason Why the Earliest Followers of Jesus Found the Eucharist Meaningful," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 67, no. 1, Article # 877 (2011): 9, <http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/viewFile/877/1553> (accessed July 25, 2013).

Reformers devoted volumes of books, letters, tracts, and sermons to the subject...In our own day, however, the Lord's Supper is rarely the subject of books or sermons."⁷³ He believes that within Reformed denominations, there has been a long and gradual shift that began very shortly after the Reformation from the doctrine of Calvin, which held to the real presence of Christ at the table (and which he believes to be the more biblical doctrine) to that of Zwingli, which holds a more symbolic memorial view of the sacrament of communion. Further, Mathison believes that even when there is discussion that takes place regarding the Lord's Supper in current culture, the debates typically have more to do with its observance than its nature.

For instance, member churches of the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) have recently debated the communion distribution methodology of "intinction." That is, the method of taking communion whereby the individual receiving the elements takes the bread and dips it into a chalice containing either wine or grape juice and then eats the bread with the wine or juice soaked into it. Opponents of intinction argue that the elements should be received in two separate movements. That is, the bread should be received and eaten, and then the wine should be received separately. Colonial Presbyterian Church of Kansas City, Missouri maintains an ongoing discussion of whether it is better to pass the communion elements down the rows, with each person taking a piece of bread/wafer and the little cup of wine/grape juice, or to have individuals stand in line to be served. This is not an uncommon discussion in congregations that have a large population of elderly people. Another discussion with regard to the observance of communion versus the nature of communion has to do with the use of wine versus the use

⁷³ Mathison, xv.

of grape juice. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), which has historically used grape juice at communion, recently spent significant time debating whether they should offer wine, either in substitution for grape juice or in addition to it.

With regard to the frequency of the observance of communion, Mathison notes that “Most Presbyterians and Reformed churches observe the Supper on a monthly or quarterly basis, but there are others that observe it more or less frequently.”⁷⁴ He also notes that while there are some churches that observe the Lord’s Supper only once per year, “There are a growing number of Reformed churches that observe the Supper on a weekly basis.”⁷⁵ Mathison also expresses the opinion that how a congregation views the nature of communion will largely determine the frequency with which they observe communion. He concurs with Michal Horton that “One’s view of the nature of the Supper plays no small part in determining frequency.”⁷⁶ Those who view the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as simply a remembrance of him, or to use Mathison’s term “mental recollection,” likely see no need to celebrate it more than once per month. However, if a congregation views the Lord as actually being present at the table, and believes that the activity taking place at the communion table is the imparting by Christ of effectual means of grace, then celebrating communion weekly may not seem frequent enough.

Churches argue that because there is not a formal command in scripture regarding the optimum frequency of celebrating the Lord’s Supper, they are free to celebrate it as frequently as they see fit. Mathison counters this line of reasoning in two ways. First, he

⁷⁴ Ibid., 292.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 293.

notes that the same argument could be used against virtually anything that is done on a weekly basis in Reformed worship services. That is, there is also no explicit command in the New Testament to preach, teach, pray, or sing on a weekly basis. Second, he points out that because the New Testament does provide explicit teaching on the nature of the Lord's Supper, frequent observance would be a natural extension of and understanding of this nature.

Another contemporary objection with regard to the frequency of observance of the Lord's Supper is that it is a Roman Catholic practice. Mathison explains that weekly celebration of communion was the practice of the early Christian services long before there became an official Roman Catholic Church. He also points out that the Roman Catholic Church was the institution which made the celebration less frequent. This was revisited by the Catholic Church, and since Vatican II, there has been a significant trend towards a more frequent communion during the mass within the Catholic Church.

Another objection to the more frequent celebration of communion is that it would "obscure the centrality of the preaching of the word."⁷⁷ Few people appreciated and argued for the centrality of the word in worship services more than Calvin. However, he believed that there is a synergistic nature between the preached word, which conveys the word of God to the congregation, and the sacrament of communion, which seals the word of God. Mathison says, "The preached word and the visible word are complimentary, not contradictory."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ibid., 296.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 297.

One of the most popular objections to a more frequent communion is that if Christians observed communion more frequently, it would become less meaningful to them. According to Mathison, this makes little sense. He maintains that this line of reasoning can be applied to every aspect of a worship service. He says “In fact, the entire service can become a matter of going through the motions and mouthing words that we do not sincerely mean.”⁷⁹ Mathison believes it is worth considering that “the practice of the church, as described in the New Testament, was regular, weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper.”⁸⁰ Further, for several centuries following, this practice continued.

Because the established and centralized church (the Holy Roman Church) moved away from the weekly practice at worship, the practice became infrequent during the Middle Ages. However, because the Reformation was in many ways a call to return of the worship of Christ to the methods of the apostolic fathers, the frequency of communion was a significant discussion. Mathison expresses that while the topic was of significant discussion in their time, the Reformers were unable to achieve a weekly celebration of communion. However, he continues, the church traditionally settles for what is preferred or dictated by denominational powers, thus it is “this ingrained tradition that is the only thing preventing the Reformed churches from finally achieving the goal of the early Reformers as Calvin by returning to the ancient Christian practice of weekly communion.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

The Politics of Ministry

Sally Brown Geis, author and editor for *Quarterly Review* (a journal of theological resources for ministry), maintains, “Within any social institution, the distribution and use of power among members determines decisions about program priorities, the allocation of resources and the deployment of personnel.”⁸² The church, as a modern social institution, must pursue its ideals and fundamental principles within the constraints of a certain amount of internally political and externally cultural, practical considerations. Thus, churches have governance bodies that differ amongst denominations, and they often vary from church to church within a particular denomination. Furthermore, church leadership can have certain internal cultural dynamics that affect decisions regarding all matters under its authority, including the liturgy. A stakeholder evaluating the proper balance between word and sacrament must take these political and cultural factors into account.

The ideal church governance mechanism is when a team of elders “oversees” the church together. The teaching pastor function is one of the most important functions of an elder/overseer. Additionally, other elders would typically have important leadership functions. However, from a practical standpoint, the modern American Presbyterian church functions in such a way that the elder-led church participates with a paid pastor who is typically the leader of other staff, as well as the representative of the elders’ discussion/decisions, in much the same way that the CEO of an organization would function.

⁸² Sally Brown Geis, “Church Perceptions of Power,” *Quarterly Review* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 214.

In his article “Notes on Pastoral Power in the Congregational Tradition,” Larry C. Ingram challenges the notion that in churches led by elders (the governance structure of most Presbyterian churches) that are elected to represent the congregation, a genuine representation takes place as a practical matter. He believes that “This failure is related not only to the desire of leaders to exercise control over others, but also to the apathy of members, who reflect their low status by assigning low priority to their activities.”⁸³ While elders often perceive themselves to be helpful to the church, as a key volunteer with certain expertise would be in any organization, the pastor is still usually perceived as the primary spiritual and strategic leader. The pastor is not only viewed as maintaining theological leadership credentials, but his/her position is also generally a full time job. Spiritual and strategic leadership is either relinquished to or demanded by pastors due to this perception that they hold a position similar to that of a CEO in the corporate world. Thus, though the ideal of representation is largely pursued, as a practical matter, instead of genuine representation, the accumulation of power still takes place.

Glenn A. Heinrichs, of the graduate school of theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, in researching ministerial power, offers that “When person B perceives that person A has expertise in specific knowledge that person B does not have, expert power is in effect. This scope of expertise requires trust of person B in person A’s knowledge and wisdom.”⁸⁴ He calls this “knowledge power.” Additionally, Heinrichs uses the term “informational power” to describe the situation whereby person A has sources of

⁸³ Larry C. Ingram, “Notes on Pastoral Power in the Congregational Tradition,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19, no. 1 (1980): 40.

⁸⁴ Glenn A. Heinrichs, “Power and Pulpit: A Look into the Diversity of Ministerial Power,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 21, no. 2 (1993): 152.

information that are independent from person A's and person B's relationship, and these sources enable person A to have an edge over person B. Professor Jackson W. Carroll of Hartford Seminary concurs with this view of authority. He teaches that one basis for a clergyperson's authority "...is his or her expertise, including both knowledge and skills important for the life of the religious group and its members...it is certainly the case that ministerial know-how has been a basis for clergy authority from the early years of the Christian church."⁸⁵ So as a practical matter, due to the fact that congregants look to the homiletically and biblically trained pastor as their source of insight and wisdom, it is likely that the greatest amount of political power in a church environment is accumulated in the hands of the pastor.

However, K. Peter Takayama and Lynn Weber Cannon, two researchers from Memphis State University, discovered that executive staff members at Presbyterian churches are more restricted than those of other denominations due to the "closer constitutional definitions of positional powers."⁸⁶ Therefore, they are not fully endowed with the authority to begin new programs without the participation of the church's elected or selected ecclesiastical leaders. They further discovered that middle level structures in Presbyterian polities "exercise a stabilizing influence on centralization."⁸⁷ In other words, though likely exercising the greatest local political influence possible within the church polity, the pastor or leading pastors in Presbyterian denominations are not presumed to hold a fully autonomous leadership role, and they must regard the input of both staff and

⁸⁵ Jackson W. Carroll, "Some Issues In Clergy Authority," *Review of Religious Research* 23, no. 2 (December 1981): 99-117.

⁸⁶ K. Peter Takayama and Lynn Weber Cannon, "Formal Polity and Power Distribution in American Protestant Denominations," *The Sociological Quarterly* 20 (Summer 1979): 321-332.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 330.

lay leadership. While ceding operational control to the full-time, paid chief executive (the pastor), respect for the traditional polity structures is regarded by leadership, which encourages them to continue to participate in the evaluation of programs and initiatives with the chief executives and their mid-level staff.

Phillip Hammond, Luis Salinas, and Douglas Sloane claim that there is a link between conceptions of authority and the pastor's ongoing practical behavior. They maintain that "the clergyman is paid, but he must rely upon dozens or hundreds of unpaid parishioners, which means that they must be persuaded that the endeavor he leads is worth following."⁸⁸ Therefore, while pastors lead the elders and convey knowledge and information power, they must also learn to be patient, politically astute, and students of their congregations. It is unlikely that other stakeholders within a congregation have this same mixture of presumed power, mandate, and equipping. Therefore, any effort to impact the ongoing balance of word and sacrament in an elder-led Presbyterian church will likely need the senior pastor to support an evaluation in the mid-level staff and elder leadership venues. And, once in that venue, while the pastor still maintains the most control theologically and strategically, informed, evaluative, and potentially persuasive discussion should still be able take place.

Other Cultural Considerations

In addition to the political outworking of church governance structures, many cultural factors can impact the liturgical decisions of the church, including the frequency of communion. Some of these factors have to do with the region of the country in which

⁸⁸ Phillip E. Hammond, Luis Salinas, and Douglas Sloane, "Types of Clergy Authority, Their Measurement, Location, and Effects," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17, no. 3 (September, 1978): 241-253.

the church is located, whether or not the church is rural or urban, the service time allocation, time and attention span of congregants, and congregational demographics such as socio-economic makeup, educational makeup, and age representation. All of these factors should be pre-eminent in the minds of the church worship planner that seeks to maintain a level of engagement with both the longtime attender as well as those recently coming to or on their way to faith.

Worship planners should be wary of the danger of disengagement. No matter what the primary cultural influencers may be to a particular church, they should be negotiated with the hope of keeping individuals in close proximity to the gospel. Pastor and author Andy Stanley suggests, “Once someone disengages, they start to process the preached information in a different way: ‘this is irrelevant; church is irrelevant; God is irrelevant; the Bible is irrelevant.’”⁸⁹ For Stanley, the key is to keep listeners travelling on a journey with those who lead. The hope, of course, is that this journey includes coming to faith in Christ. The researcher will now explore some of the inherent cultural factors that can lead to or prevent disengagement.

Time is a significant cultural consideration for the American church. There was a time when the primary event which took place on Sunday was the local worship service. However, this time frame now competes with organized sports such as football and soccer, and social/cultural events such as scout meetings. Even if these events do not take place during scheduled worship services, the competing time allocation may still take people away from home, making Sunday less restful, and tempting congregants not to attend the worship service. The fact that busy families may be anxious to get out the door

⁸⁹ Peter Mead, “The Danger of Disengagement,” Biblical Preaching.net, <http://biblicalpreaching.net/2009/03/10/the-danger-of-disengagement/> (accessed September 25, 2013).

at the end of a worship service matters to the word and sacrament balance consideration. Annette Lareau from the University of Pennsylvania has discovered that middle class families in particular are “spending more time in organized activities than in earlier decades.”⁹⁰ Naturally, the Sunday activities equation is part of this. Thus, the stakeholder who considers changing the frequency of the observation of word and sacrament should consider that if a more frequent observation of communion were to take place, and other current allocations of time were not negotiated, it might lengthen the weekly worship service. The plethora of Sunday afternoon activities available, as well as the need to provide for one’s family, are significant pulls on the attention span of Americans.

Attentiveness is another important issue to consider. The issue of service length and methodology, compared to the general attentiveness of adults in church services, is an important consideration. Should liturgical planners pay attention to such cultural data as attentiveness when constructing worship services? Should pastors pay attention to such data when deciding the proper length of a sermon?

The stakeholder considering the proper balance of the word and sacrament should understand that the discussion of sermon length and mode of delivery has always been an interesting and difficult topic (especially to individuals other than the pastor charged with organizing the liturgy of a given congregation). Purdue University professor William R.

⁹⁰ Annette Lareau, Elliott Weininger, and Melissa Velez, “Race and Class in Family Life: Time Use, Religion, and Children’s Organized Activities,” paper presented at the University of Pennsylvania Population Seminar (February 9, 2009), http://www.pop.upenn.edu/sites/www.pop.upenn.edu/files/LareauEtAl2009_0.pdf (accessed October 15, 2013).

Chaney asserts, “The average adult attention span is about twenty minutes.”⁹¹ Yet pastor, author, and theologian John MacArthur relates that the sermon length should be “as long as it takes to cover the passage adequately!” Furthermore, says MacArthur, “I am convinced that biblical exposition requires at least forty minutes. Less than this just is not sufficient to probe the text deeply.”⁹² These two points of view may be difficult to reconcile. If the average attention span is twenty minutes, yet it takes forty minutes to properly teach a passage of scripture, what is a pastor to do? Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary homiletics professor Haddon Robinson, when discussing the teaching of homiletics students in seminaries, asserts, “It is my task to help our graduates communicate to the society as it is. I may wish for the old days, but that isn’t the hand we’ve been dealt.”⁹³ This indicates that it may be wise to reach some manner of compromise between how a pastor may want to preach the scriptures and what the current culture is likely to actually absorb.

Exploring other teaching mechanisms, Catherine Matheson, with the Medical Education Unit at the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom has researched the effectiveness of lectures and asserts that the key to the lecture format for teaching is interactivity. Regarding the twenty minute adult attention span, she maintains that the research:

has underlined the fact that, because of the nature of lectures, it is necessary that they not be used on their own, but in combination with other teaching methods

⁹¹ William R. Chaney, “Top of the Hour Break Renews Attention Span,” *The Teaching Professor* 19, no. 6 (June/July 2005): 1.

⁹² John MacArthur, “Preaching and the Clock,” gty.org, <http://www.gty.org/resources/Questions/QA96/Preaching-and-the-Clock> (accessed November 14, 2013).

⁹³ Robert Marquand, “Sound Bite Sermon for a Busy Believers,” *The Christian Science Monitor* 87, no. 251 (November, 1995): 1-3.

such as seminars and discussions, and that the combination should depend on the learning objectives to be achieved, with a general principle that learning should be closely related to understanding and solving real-life problems as well as to encouraging higher-level thinking.⁹⁴

She maintains that lectures can be the introductory means to convey necessary information, but that this format should not be the exhaustive method. Another interesting study on lectures was conducted by Sandi Mann and Andrew Robinson in the department of Psychology at the University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom. They found that the most significant contributor to lecture boredom in terms of teaching method is the use of a PowerPoint presentation, without the addition of a compatible handout. Power Point presentations commonly accompany sermons in many American churches. It is worth noting that Matheson research was primarily conducted with medical students, a group of learners that are highly motivated to learn and achieve. Mann and Robinson's study was also conducted on a sample of college students. Most American church services will likely be a more varied group of ages and motivated learners.

In examining the attentiveness of congregations to modern sermons, Dr. Stuart Murray, Oasis director of the church planting and evangelism course at Spurgeon's College, relates, "Jeremy Thomson, a lecturer in Religious Studies at Birkbeck College, has explored this topic in a Grove booklet entitled *Preaching as Dialogue: Is the Sermon a Sacred Cow*. He writes in the introduction, 'For all the effort of preparing delivering and listening to sermons, most church members are not as mature as we might expect as a result.'"⁹⁵ He further believes that the difference between the time the preacher considers

⁹⁴ Catherine Matheson, "The Educational Value and Effectiveness of Lectures," *The Clinical Teacher* 5, no.4 (December 2008): 220.

necessary to properly teach a passage of scripture and the amount of time the average congregation member is capable of absorbing such teaching is “wasted preaching.”⁹⁶

Murray teaches that interactive preaching is a more effective use of the worship message time. He encourages pastors to consider collaborating with liturgists to create a service that is shorter on monologue and yet still communicates the point of the day’s message. For instance, elements such as music and drama can save sermon illustration time.

However, as a pastor himself, he cautions the potential change agent to consider the pastoral view of his sermon time, advising, “Not only is it safer, it feels more satisfying, more fulfilling, more ‘anointed.’”⁹⁷ Putting it bluntly, he says that preacher satisfaction takes precedence over congregational growth. Pastors may respond to cultural shifts and low levels of understanding and interest by trying harder, using more stories or visual aids, and taking additional preaching courses. These things may help, but they do not address the deeper issues. Furthermore, “congregations are locked into monologue preaching and are threatened by anything different. However boring or unproductive monologue sermons may be, they are at least safe, familiar and undemanding. Interactive preaching is none of these things: introducing it may not be popular.”⁹⁸

Relevance is an important consideration in the communication of scripture in church services. In an attempt to create more interactive teaching / preaching mechanisms, and at the same time attempt to remain in step with the culture, it has been

⁹⁵ Stuart Murray, “Interactive Preaching,” *Evangel* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 54.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

suggested that online social networks (OSNs) be incorporated into sermon delivery. For instance, one might use Twitter to gain insight into immediate reactions of individuals regarding a certain subject during the message and then address those responses in real time.

While these types of ideas may present the church as a culturally relevant entity that is “keeping up” with the times, the data suggests that as a teaching mechanism, this might not be a good idea. Researching the effect of social networking on student academic performance for Kennesaw State University, researchers Jomon Paul, Hope Baker, and Justin Cochran found that “While students feel competent in their ability to use Online Social Networks for academic purposes, they do not have the desire or willingness to do so.”⁹⁹ In fact, the researchers also found that students placed a higher value on the teaching techniques that professors chose to use apart from OSNs. This is perhaps an indication of a certain degree of trust in the expert’s teaching choices and skepticism of the attempt of academia to leverage the OSN world for teaching purposes in an attempt to be relevant. This may indicate the need for a degree of caution from pastors and worship planners who are attempting to be technologically relevant. Incorporating OSNs into a sermon message might be an unproven communication mechanism.

With further regard to attention span, in research conducted to determine the level of mind-wandering in both younger and older adults (a likely mixture of what one might find in a weekly worship service), researchers Jonathan Jackson and David Balota expected to find a decrease in cognitive activity among older adults. What they found,

⁹⁹ Jomon A. Paul, Hope M. Baker and Justin D. Cochran, “Effect of Online Social Networking on Student Academic Performance,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 28, no. 6 (November 2012): 7.

however, was a greater level of attentiveness. They theorize that this was due to the conscientiousness of older adults, and they suggest that in order to maintain attentiveness in a venue where the ages are mixed, "...one should also consider the degree to which the subjects find the task engaging and interesting. This is another important dimension to better understanding the changes in cognitive performance across the adult spectrum."¹⁰⁰

If church communicators choose to apply these findings to their profession, the result may aid them as they communicate the word of God across generations. Established, long attending church members may be engaged and challenged by a continually deepening study of the word as presented in the forty minutes message suggested by MacArthur. However, the skeptic or nominally engaged late-thirty year old couple that is already distracted with young children's activities may require a different mode of cognitive connection.

Much of the previous literature has indicated the need for church liturgical planners to understand that modern culture is in a very different place than it was even twenty years ago. However, the literature reflects that many pastors and theologians believe that more time is needed to properly teach the word of God. What if congregants are unwilling to give them that time? The literature reflects that this may be the case. The literature also suggests that relaying the word of God in more creative ways without the loss of substance may be an important part of the church's future. For instance, churches may need to develop a varied approach to messaging that is interactive, especially if the desired weekly message timeframe is longer. As communion is by nature interactive, it is

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Jackson and David Balota, "Mind-Wandering in Younger and Old Adults: Converging Evidence from the Sustained Attention to Response Task and Reading for Comprehension," *Psychology and Aging* 27, no. 1 (March 2012): 117.

worth considering the use of this sacrament as one of the collaborative activities with the conveyance of the word of God. In examining the proper word / sacrament collaboration within a worship service, stakeholders should consider this literature, which offers suggestions as to how the preaching of the word might work well within current cultural considerations. Members of current society are distracted by numerous activities, in a hurry, have short attention spans that are prone to mind-wandering. These cultural influences weighed against the historical/theological data and the historical and current view of the word / sacrament of communion balance will further prepare stakeholder as they consider changing their congregation's practices.

Chapter Three

Project Methodology

The purpose of this research was to provide a historical and cultural perspective regarding the optimum word / sacrament of communion balance within a Reformed Evangelical Presbyterian church to stakeholders contemplating these concerns within their church environment. Therefore, it is important to capture input from the current planners and practitioners of liturgical worship within the Reformed Evangelical Presbyterian tradition. A qualitative study was utilized to compliment the literature review of the topic as well as to fill in the gaps that the research neglected to fully display.

Design of the Study

The design of this study followed a qualitative approach. Sharan B. Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, identifies five characteristics of qualitative research. First, qualitative methods focus on understanding constructed meaning. Second, the qualitative researcher is viewed as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Third, qualitative research tends to emphasize inductive reasoning. Fourth, fieldwork is used as a primary mode of data collection. Fifth, positivistic research attempts to present precise findings using quantitative strategies to summarize data, while qualitative studies aim to provide rich descriptions of

phenomena.¹⁰¹ This study employed a qualitative research design and using semi-structured interviews as the primary means of data gathering.

Participant Sample Selection

The researcher's goal in selecting the participants for this study was to get as close as possible to the worship planning considerations in the Evangelical Reformed Presbyterian mindset. Therefore, the researcher contacted three pastors and one worship director in the Evangelical Presbyterian church (EPC), two pastors in the Presbyterian Church, United States of America (PCUSA), and three pastors in the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). It was important to select individuals who have served in their position for a number of years because they would be most comfortable sharing their perspectives, both from the viewpoint of theological study and from a place of vocational security. The sample of interviewees included four individuals with whom the researcher had a prior friendship/social relationship as well as four individuals with whom the researcher previously had little to no interaction.

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering. The open-ended nature of interview questions facilitated the researcher's ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues in order to explore them more thoroughly.¹⁰² Ultimately, these methods enabled the researcher to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 6-7.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, Chapter 5.

A pilot test of the interview protocol was performed to test the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature but evolved from the explanations and descriptions that emerged as the researcher did constant comparison work during the interview process. Coding and categorizing the data during the interview process also allowed for the emergence of new sources of data.¹⁰⁴

The following research questions guided the interview process:

1. How do major stakeholders in a congregation (pastor, key elder, staff members) view the theology of preaching as influencing the decisions regarding the frequency of serving communion.
2. What theological views on the sacrament of communion influence the decisions regarding its frequency of observation?
3. What current denominational practices or expectations (from the pastor, congregation, leadership and stakeholders), cultural factors and other practical matters influence the evaluation (tension between) the preaching of the word and the frequency of communion (sermon length, time, attention span, communion concerns, etc.)

Each interview was recorded using a multi-track recording application on the researcher's iPhone.

¹⁰³ Ibid., Chapter 8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Data Analysis

As soon as possible and always within one week of each meeting, the researcher personally transcribed each interview by using computer software to play back the digital recording on a computer and typing out each transcript. This study utilized the constant comparison method of routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process. When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files, they were coded and analyzed. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying common themes and patterns across the variation of participants, as well as congruence or discrepancy between the different groups of participants.

Researcher Position

The researcher is an evangelical Christian who currently serves as the worship and arts director in a Reformed Evangelical Presbyterian church. While the researcher's current church position, worldview, and professional status could have distorted his perspective on the topic of balancing word and the sacrament of communion in worship, he believes that the use of systematic data collection procedures, multiple data sources, and peer review substantially alleviated this problem. Furthermore, his worldview influenced him to attempt to report and interpret the data with an ethic of integrity.

Study Limitations

As stated in the previous section, the participants in this study were limited to pastors serving in the Reformed Evangelical Presbyterian church. Some of the study's findings may be generalized to other similar churches in North America. However, readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of these conclusions

should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context.

Chapter Four

Findings

Eight pastors were selected to participate in this study. Of these, three are senior pastors in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), three are senior pastors in the Presbyterian Church United States of America (PCUSA), and two are pastors (one senior pastor and two associate pastors) in the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). Also, one participant is a worship and arts director in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. All of the participants were male. In the following section, each participant will be briefly introduced. All names and identifiable information of participants have been changed to protect their identity.

Introduction to Participants

Greg is a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. He is in his early forties, and he currently serves in his first senior pastor assignment. He has just begun his second year in this role. He is originally from the South, but he now serves as the third senior pastor at a church that is about thirty years old, with four hundred congregants, in a large suburban area of the Midwest. His church has always served communion on a weekly basis. It is a church which split from the PCUSA and joined the EPC. Greg received his master of divinity and his doctor of ministry degrees from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Brad is also a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. He is in his late fifties, and he is the founding pastor of his church, where he has served for twenty-seven

years. The church has eight hundred congregants and is located in a large college town not far from a major metropolitan midwestern city. He is originally from the South, and he received his master of divinity degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Kevin is the pastor of an Evangelical Presbyterian Church with 350 congregants, located in the Midwest about forty miles outside a major metropolitan area. He is in his late forties. The area in which his church is located is somewhat of a bedroom community to the larger metro area. His church was originally part of the PCUSA, but they left that denomination within the past ten years and joined the EPC. Kevin received his master of divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. He is originally from the Pennsylvania area.

Mark is the worship and arts pastor of a large Evangelical Presbyterian Church with about a thousand congregants in a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. He is in his forties and is originally from the Midwest. He holds a master of divinity degree and a doctoral degree, and as a worship and arts director and a scholar, he has thoroughly researched issues having to do with the theology of communion. Mark also teaches at a local reformed seminary located in his city.

Lloyd is the senior pastor of a large Presbyterian church in the PCUSA. His church is an older, established church in a large metropolitan city in Texas. Lloyd is in his late fifties, and he is a master of divinity graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary. This is the second church where Lloyd has served as senior pastor, and he has ministered in this capacity for more than ten years. Lloyd is originally from another part of Texas.

Peter is the current interim senior pastor of a large Presbyterian church in a major metropolitan area in Texas. He is in his sixties and is affiliated with the PCUSA. He has

served in this capacity for two years. He has served in ministry for more than thirty-five years, spending the majority of that time in Presbyterian churches. He has also served for a few years within the Methodist tradition. Previously, he served at churches in the Midwest and on the west coast, in the capacity of both senior and associate pastor. He received his master of divinity degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is originally from the east coast.

Scott is an associate pastor at a large church in the PCA, and he teaches at a reformed seminary. He is in his early sixties, and he holds a master of divinity degree and a doctor of divinity degree from Westminster Theological Seminary. He has served in churches on the east coast as well as in the southwest. He is the founding pastor of both of the PCA churches at which he has been senior pastor.

Dan is the senior pastor of a PCA church in Texas. He is in his late fifties, and he has previously served in congregations in the southeastern United States as well as in Europe. In addition to serving as a senior pastor, he has also served as a missionary, evangelist, and church planter in various parts of the world. Dan has been the senior pastor of his current church for eight years. He is the church's second pastor, and the church is twenty-one years old.

Lanny is an associate, site pastor of a large church in a major metropolitan area on the east coast. His church is a multi-site church within the PCA. Originally from Texas, Lanny is in his late forties. Before accepting his current assignment, Lanny planted a PCA church in major metropolitan area of Texas and served in the capacity of senior pastor at that church for many years. He is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, where he received a master of divinity degree.

First, the researcher sought to discover the extent to which the research subjects and their churches' stakeholders viewed their current communion frequency as being influenced by historical / theological data with regard to the preaching of the word. Next, the researcher sought to discover the extent to which historical theological data has influenced their church's worship activities with regard to convictions or policies surrounding the frequency of communion. Finally, the researcher sought to better understand the current non-theological cultural influences, the political dynamics of the individual churches, and the denominational dynamics that have possibly come to bear on their church activities with regard to the frequency of communion.

Historical/Theological Considerations Regarding the Preaching of the Word and Communion Frequency

All of the subjects interviewed were very specific that the stakeholders of their churches viewed the preaching of the word to be the preeminent activity that takes place in the worship service on Sundays. To varying degrees, they expressed that their stakeholders actually understood the theological underpinnings of this belief. Greg and Dan explained that the preaching of the word consistently points toward the celebration of the sacrament of communion. Both indicated that they have evolved to this understanding through their years of experience, conversations with associates, and further historical study. This seemed very clear to them, and they have seen the pattern played out in their individual churches, which celebrate communion every week in each of their services. Thus, they had a significant grasp of the relationship between the preaching of the word and the celebration of communion.

Brad also commented about how easily he can connect the message to the activity of communion when he transitions into the time at the table. Further, he noted that

virtually every message should be able to end at the communion table, but he did not believe that mandates a weekly communion. Though Brad's church does celebrate communion more frequently than once per month, he cautioned that Christian leaders should not defer to Calvin's writings about communion and communion frequency as much as they should consider what the scriptures say about communion. His church welcomes a great many college professors and graduate students, as his church is in a college town. Therefore, he feels that he can make the call to dedicate more time to preaching and less to communion if he still feels the two are in balance. He did say that this balance was important to him. Brad further expressed, "God has ordered us to take one day in seven and then stop and gaze upon Him. If we don't do that, life gets all out of whack." He seeks to keep this perspective for the worship service.

Kevin made it clear that the preaching of the word is the central thing in weekly worship because of its formative value for the congregation. Further, he expressed his opinion that communion does not provide the same kind of formative value. He stated, "Without the word, the sacrament of communion is snacks." Further, with regard to the stakeholders at his church, he believed that the elders did not have strong theological feelings about communion and primarily looked to him to make the theological case for its frequency. From a theological perspective, he stated that "Calvin recommends that you do take communion whenever gathered together. What's the problem with that in our mind? It becomes a thing you do by habit, and it can become rote, and you don't think about and you forget the gloriousness of it and the majesty of it and the specialness of the sacrifice." Thus, the choice at Kevin's church is to "remember communion in every service." They keep the elements on the table, yet the congregants only receive

communion eight times a year. Interestingly, Kevin mentioned also that he grew up Catholic and was struck with how non-special communion seemed to be. He said that during those times, it seemed to him a more of a magical, mysterious time than one of deeply expressed theology.

Lloyd agreed with Brad and Kevin, stating, “Faith comes from hearing from the word of God, and that becomes an important moment in the life of the church, so that the encounter with scriptures, profitable teaching, correction, reproof, training righteousness and that the preaching portion of the worship service is the primary place for that.” He reasoned that from a theological perspective, God has used the communion event in collaboration with teaching to add a tactile element to a non-tactile event. In this way, the hearers of the word become participants in the process and must actually do something – commune with their fellow worshippers with the Lord. He also agreed that every message could end up at the communion table, but he does not feel compelled to have every message end there. Also, like Kevin, the sanctuary at Lloyd’s church is purposefully set up to remind people of the importance of communion. The table with the elements remains front and center, and communion with the Lord is discussed even on non-communion Sundays.

Mark, who is a worship and arts director, related that his pastor has a significant theological understanding of the relationship between the preaching of the word of God and communion. However, he is unsure about the intensity with which the two must be connected on a regular basis. At this point, he has not seen fit to push for a more frequent celebration, nor does he draw a connection from word to communion in his regular preaching time. However, communion is served each week at one of the services that

they have within their two churches, thus giving individuals the opportunity to partake frequently. They make it a point to have communion available to the congregation should individuals desire to take communion frequently. Individuals simply have to keep up with which service at which campus is serving communion on a given Sunday. Regarding the level at which other key stakeholders understood the word and sacrament of communion relationship, Mark stated that if his pastor wanted a more frequent communion, it would happen, because that's how their system of governance works.

Scott explained that for many years his church has had an eight o'clock service at which communion is served every Sunday. However, there has not been a strong attempt to connect the activity of communion to the preaching of the word. In fact, he stated that the communion event appears to be tacked on the end of the service, as if the service were exactly like the two later services, but with a song and scripture reading removed. However, he stated that while the sermon will not necessarily "point" to the table, because the primary differentiating element of this service from the others is the activity of communion, the teaching pastor will generally seek to connect the message with communion by mentioning in some way the "suffering of the Lord." Nonetheless, there is the sense that the two are not connected, and the preaching of the word is certainly preeminent.

Both Peter and Lanny expressed that they would be very comfortable with a weekly communion, should their church leadership seek to implement such frequency in their current context. Both indicated that they were not in a position to make that decision. They indicated an understanding and belief that the preached word and the celebration of communion do work together in the worship life of the believer. Peter is

very comfortable preaching for twenty to twenty-five minutes, and he believes that to be plenty of time to teach the word. This gives him plenty of time for a connected communion celebration. Lanny did celebrate communion on a weekly basis at his previous church, where he was the founding pastor, and he indicated that both he and his leadership believed that scripture, the pattern of worship from the early church, and the teachings of the reformation point to its significance in weekly worship.

In looking more deeply into the preaching styles of the interview subjects, it was clear that each participant had a different approach to his interaction with the scriptures during the preaching of the word. For instance, Lloyd and Peter viewed the time as primarily one of creating illustrations through stories which highlight truths that most church attendees view to be true, as a way of encouraging believers towards the righteousness that the Christian life embraces. However, Greg, Dan, Brad, Kevin, and Mark's pastor view their role as more expository in nature. They see their role as that of professionals who study and preach the scriptures, and their job is to discern the message from the passage of scripture being studied and relay that information to the congregation, not so much out of a desire to encourage but to teach the truth. In this pursuit, however, both Greg and Dan believe that one element of their preaching is pointing the congregation toward the table of the Lord. Greg said that part of what happens in the study of the word is that believers see how inadequate they are and how the Christian life is impossible without Christ. This inadequacy makes times of fellowship and fulfillment at the table of the Lord important and rewarding. Brad and Scott discuss this dynamic on the weeks that they celebrate communion., Kevin and Lloyd allude to a remembrance of the table through word, sign and architecture.

Greg and Dan direct their church service toward a culminating gathering at the Lord's table. Mark, Scott, and Lanny also desire this for their churches. Lloyd, Peter, Brad, and Kevin, while desiring that communion be celebrated and remembered as a liturgical activity at least a certain number of times per year, do not feel compelled to preach with the connectivity of word and sacrament in mind on a regular basis. Further, they do not feel that the stakeholders of the church have a theological view that dictates giving this a great deal of consideration. Therefore, they are content to focus on other issues in the church, since the current layout of worship is sufficient to the theological understanding of their congregants.

Historical/Theological Considerations Regarding the Sacrament of Communion Influencing Its Frequency

After discussing the level of connectivity between word and sacrament that each participant pursued within their current worship setting, the interviews focused on the interviewees' understanding of the theological underpinnings of communion. The researcher desired to know what theological tradition each church worship environment followed and how that was working for their current contexts.

Greg's understanding of the significance of communion developed in an interesting manner. At the church where he previously served as associate pastor, the senior pastor had insisted that communion was only a memorial. Greg recalled that the church leadership went to great lengths to declare that nothing special happened during the celebration of communion, and that "It's just a symbol." On one occasion, the elders expressed concern that they not appear "too Catholic" when they offered communion. Greg indicated that he was uncomfortable with this view. Through several years of discussion and scriptural exploration with the church's worship and arts director (who

had attended Robert Webber's school), Greg became convinced that the church's perspective missed "some of the mystery and yet, because it is a mystery, I can't fully explain it." He believes that "God has built this mystery into our normal Sunday rhythm as we meet with Christ in a unique way." Greg now ministers in a church body that celebrates communion every week, and he mentioned in the interview how amazed he is that the congregation members consistently tell him how they are thankful to better understand the significance of communion in their daily walk with Christ.

Brad indicated that his non-reformed friends refer to the celebration of communion as an "ordinance" and not as a "sacrament." He feels that, "When one hears the word ordinance, it takes a bit of the mystery, the luster, the take-your-breath-away-ness out of it." In other words, as an ordinance, the sense is that, "We have to do this, but there's no real mystical thing happening when we come to the table." It's more like a checklist. Brad believes that Calvin's "real presence" view is the biblical view. He believes that "something is happening here that the preaching of the word alone cannot provide." Brad believes that all of the tactile activity that occurs at the table matters. He mentioned that at one time, a number of blind people attended his church, and in preparing communion he would break the bread and make sure the sound of it was picked up by his lapel microphone so that they could also participate in the activity that was taking place. To Brad, this interactivity is integral to the communion experience.

To Kevin, one of the most important things about the celebration of communion is the words of institution. He believes that these words, with which the pastor expresses to the congregation what qualifies individuals to come forward and participate in communion, should be heard by believers and non-believers alike. It is powerful to say to

a non-believer, “You’re welcome to not come forward, and for your conscience and for the sake of what we’re doing here, refrain.” Kevin believes that while non-believers are welcome at the service, there is something in the “non-partaking” that is deeply evangelistic and attractive. The message becomes, “Put your faith in him, come and be nourished by what he’s promised.” To Kevin, this is an important proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ. Also, he sees communion as a very helpful way of teaching both Christians and non-Christians about confession, the importance of being at peace with others, and the importance of being at peace with Christ prior to sharing the intimacy of the table.

Mark’s context is a little different than the other interviewees in that he is not the senior pastor of his church. He thinks that his senior pastor “doesn’t have a highly developed theology of communion.” He believes that the senior pastor views communion as an element of worship and doesn’t have the level of urgency that Calvin felt about the functional importance of the sacrament in people’s lives. Further, because the New Testament doesn’t indicate how often to celebrate communion, it’s open for interpretation by church leadership, under consideration of the context of a given body of believers. Mark relayed that in his pre-hire interview, the senior pastor, viewing him as one of those “weekly communion guys,” asked him how strongly he felt about a frequent communion. Mark replied, “I don’t think it’s an obligation. I don’t think this rises to the level of an absolute commandment, so that you can say, ‘If the church isn’t doing this, they’re sinning, and they’re going to be disciplined by God.’” On the other hand, Mark also noted, “I think this is a matter of wisdom, and I think it’s really, really, really, really, really, really wise.” His pastor then asked, “Was that six really’s or seven?”

Lloyd's view of the sacraments is that they are to:

...remind us that we've heard the word, but it's also to remind us that Christ walks along beside us, then we walk alongside him. And we can accomplish that on a given Sunday, for instance, you know your flock and therefore if you feel like that your flock is properly set up with that understanding you don't necessarily need to actually experience the sacrament on that given Sunday.

He believes that the sacrament of communion creates a tactile teaching moment where, in addition to the mind and ears being engaged by preaching, the senses (touch, smell, standing up, moving, holding, seeing, eating, and drinking) connect the sacrament with the words that the congregation has heard. Lloyd stated:

It is a tool that applies, and I think it is a God-given tool that applies that sort of – I use it to get a tactile encounter with the living Christ situated and connected with both our theology and our bodily senses. Whenever it is I position my body in some ways for certain activities - communion is a communal positioning of our body.

Lloyd's primary perspective on communion is that it creates an interactive, communing activity with Christ that drives home what believers have heard about Christ walking with them on a daily basis.

Peter stated,

Modernity has ruined the church in so many ways in that it basically helped feed the sense of control of understanding and of managing that I don't believe we really have. And so when you talk about Calvin being caught up in the mystery of what of what happens in both the preaching and in especially the sacraments, I couldn't agree more, to go and yeah the mystery is a whole lot greater than most of us think, and that's what young adults get when most of the rest of the church doesn't. It's like I don't know he is working invisibly right now. I can't tell you how, I just believe it's true.

Peter further relayed that preachers can be very arrogant in their view that if they offer a set of crisp and clear guidelines, then people will ultimately begin doing the right thing. So, it's up to them to embrace the responsibility for people's daily walk, and therefore they better be good at preaching because that's part of what accomplishes Christ's work

in people's lives. Peter insisted that it is "ridiculous" to believe that a set of guidelines are actually going to help people control their lives. Rather, he said, "It's about the sovereignty and providence of God being at work when I don't know it as well as it sometime and few times when I do know." Therefore, we "go in faith into all worship settings believing that he has just created this grace and peace from God, the Father and Holy Spirit."

Peter views this sense of control as foolish, asserting that this is why the activity of communion is baffling to pastors – because they are not in control. God is. This is a mystery, and pastors must trust that God knows what he is doing. This lack of control is difficult for people who view themselves as guides who control the direction of their flock. Peter further stated, "I would never want to go around limiting God about what he is able to do. We live in this highly visual age where, you know, one reason why young adults are so drawn to communion and the mystery of communion is that they are visual image people, and there is something that is intuitively drawn to...broken, blood, sacrifice." In other words, preaching can only relay such things, while communion is more capable of taking people there.

Dan's theological understanding of communion focuses on the activity of ascension. By that, he means that at the table, the believers ascend to where Christ is, not that Christ descends to where the believers are. Dan believes that this is what is meant by the "real presence." He shared, "Christology means that the physicality of Christ is in heaven and is not ubiquitous." He stated that Calvin and Knox were also extremely strong on that real presence of the physicality in heaven. Unfortunately, he says that Protestants, Anglicans, and the Eastern Orthodox focus more on Christ's presence on the

table, and the Catholics focus on Christ's presence in the elements. Believers have then brought Christ to the table, rather than ascending to where he is. However, he (Christ) is already with God in heaven, and Christians remain in the "now and the not yet," which is what actually takes place at the communion table. Dan says that, "By faith through the work of the holy spirit we ascend," to be with Christ. Therefore, according to Dan, what takes place in worship is that believers hear the audible word, the teaching of the morning, and then they fellowship with the Lord in communion, where Christ makes himself known.

Scott endured a very difficult time in his pastoral work. The company of the Lord became a much more tangible thing to him during the trial and the healing that followed. Scott views Calvin as very Catholic, and he believes that Calvin's view of the Lord's supper was "related to his understanding of union with Christ, which was related to his understanding of justification, and it was all of the cloth and so as with many great historical teachers, people draw out of it what they want, and it is hard to embrace the whole." Scott has embraced the way that the Lutheran, Calvinistic, and Anglican aspects of the reformation viewed the sacraments – which was with a high regard as a means of grace. He says that in his view, a minister of word and sacraments is really a minister of grace and scripture. He believes that the sacraments are "more than just a memorial, more than just, 'We do this in remembrance.'" He cautions, however, "It's not hocus-pocus; it's not a magic trick."

Scott says he is no longer satisfied with the way in which Presbyterian and reformed traditions practice the Lord's Supper. He is becoming a proponent of what Hans Boersma calls "heavenly participation." That is, much like the ascension that Dan

discussed, "...our participation in the heavenly realm that one day we could partake of fully and that the whole of our lives are sacramental, meaning that the physical not only in a sort of distant way symbolizes the spiritual, but the physical partakes of the spiritual and therefore becomes a living emblem of it and that difference is really significant."

Having founded a church that celebrated communion every Sunday, Lanny views communion in a similar way to Dan and Scott. He believes that believers experience the real presence of Christ at the table. Further, he views the modern conservatism toward communion in the Presbyterian world as inadequate, and he asserts that it is the result of the fact that the Protestants do not want to appear too Anglican or too Catholic, when in fact he believes that the Anglicans correctly handle the observation of communion.

Current Practices, Traditions, and Cultural Expectations Influencing Communion Frequency

In addition to the theological principles regarding the relationship between preaching and communion, the importance of communion generally, and historical evidence as to proper frequency, non-theological factors should also be considered when approaching the question of changing communion frequency. Culture plays an important part in the examination and potential formation of a church body's communion frequency norm. The researcher asked the subjects to reflect upon the organizational, cultural, geographical, and demographic factors which might inform the alteration of a church's communion observation.

One of the non-theological factors that come to Greg's mind was a desire for efficiency. He stated that it was important to use time wisely, giving consideration to the working and social lifestyles of the congregants. His churches have been largely filled with affluent, middle to upper class individuals who place a high value on time. As a

result, he has approached the Sunday morning worship service with an effort to be punctual. Therefore, if the church has established the expectation of a specific length of service, any disruption of that expectation would cause dismay on the part of the congregants. He said that when his church celebrated a monthly communion, people approached communion Sunday with apprehension, as the worship service was going to take extra time. Therefore, instead of joyfully anticipating their time at the Lord's table, they felt anxious about the additional time that the communion required.

Greg relayed a story about another cultural apprehension about a more frequent communion, which became apparent during the calling of a pastor to his parents' church. The pastor called insisted upon having an hour each week to preach the sermon. Further, he insisted that no one call him throughout the course of the week, telling the congregation, "The way I love you is by rightly dividing the word of truth...and so I need all week to study so that I can rightly love you on Sunday." From Greg's perspective, this individual's mindset was too heavily weighted toward the belief that the primary, almost exclusive (in this case) role of the pastor was to accurately and lengthily preach the word each Sunday.

He also suggested two reasons this mindset could hinder an effort from the church leadership to seek a more frequent communion. The first reason is simply the length of time that the pastor has insisted upon using to preach each week. Making room for communion in such a lengthy service might be impossible. As Greg discussed this further, he elaborated that in general, the varied lengths of time that pastors require for preaching may be one of the most significant hindrances to the more frequent celebration of communion. He believes that a sermon shorter than twenty-five minutes might not

allow adequate time to properly exegete the text, but a sermon longer than thirty-five minutes might include data that is unnecessary. The second reason is that a pastor who lacks appreciation for the value of congregational interaction might not appreciate the interactive nature of the Lord's table celebration.

Brad shared his belief that congregants need to get out of the habit of calling the music on Sunday morning "worship," and then calling the sermon "preaching." He says "It's all worship. Secondly, people think that they are complimenting me when they are leaving, and they say something like, 'Brad, I come here for the preaching.' I say 'No, I'm happy you like the preaching, if that's what you're saying, but you come here for the worship. This is a whole deal. You need all of this.'" He believes that people need to find their voice in worship, and he says that this comes from singing, praying, or reading in unison...and participating at the table together. He implied that there is a time for the contemplative, but there is also time for engaging and participating with others. He noted that Presbyterian churches are filled with thinkers, and such stoic worshipers could stand to become more interactive. This interactivity in worship is not something easily embraced, so it could impact the contemplation of a more frequent communion.

Kevin communicated that he has a very interactive and evaluative leadership process. His leadership team talks at length about certain qualities that they want to become formulated into the lives of their members. Therefore, in constructing the worship services, they seek to have the elements be emulative of the things they want to teach their members. This is how they evaluate communion, including its frequency and interaction with the word of God. Kevin said, "They really think about this stuff – that's their place." He explained that if his church leadership came to the conclusion that the

members needed more time at the table for the word/sacrament of communion dynamic to operate more properly, then they would act upon that.

The intentionality of the leadership in Kevin's church highlighted the fact that many churches do not approach this level of evaluation. This lack of engaged consideration could be a detriment to the pursuit of the proper balance of preaching and communion. Kevin also addressed another interesting area regarding what he believes to be the incorrectness of the communion celebration. He asserted, "There should never just be communion without preaching. Communion should always have a manner of explanation. That is very anti Catholic idea, and I support it one hundred percent. People need to know what they're doing, or they take it wrongly. That's not a good situation." Thus, a cultural hindrance to the proper execution of communion could certainly be the lack of understanding with regard to the importance of the word of God, which should be preached to accompany its celebration.

According to Mark, one of the cultural hindrances to a more frequent communion is the common view that the sermon needs to be somewhere in the vicinity of thirty-five to forty minutes each week. Mark also pointed out that there is a threshold of roughly seventy five minutes for the accepted length of the worship service. When starting with those absolutes, a worship director has roughly thirty minutes within which to involve songs of worship, prayers, readings, announcements, and a potentially weekly time of communion. Mark elaborated that other potential forms are hindered by the absolute insistence on both the message time and the service time. For instance, he said that getting lay people involved in intercessory prayer would be difficult because of how tightly the time would need to be managed. This can be difficult to do with volunteers.

Mark already feels time pressure in his current service layout. The service time does need to be managed well, but it does not need to feel like the congregation is checking things off a list as the service crisply marches forward. Mark mentioned that the congregation members seem to have an internal clock. In other words, Mark says, “Just by sheer repetition, they have an internalized sense of what they’re used to. So anything that goes longer than that, if we would do intercessory prayer for six minutes, they would feel it.” Further, he continues, “Even if the total service was fine, people will say ‘Wow, it really felt kind of sluggish in that part of the service.’”

The researcher asked Mark, “What if the prayer that might have run a little long was really impacting? Would the time factor be given a little more grace?” He said that even if the prayer was zealously, passionately prayed people, would still feel an internal time pinch. He added that it is “heightened by the fact that when the sermon goes a little long, sometimes they will cut portions of the final Psalm. He said that this happens with enough regularity that people observe the senior pastor having to diminish parts of the service because of the time factor. When this happens, typically they have an ending song which will then be cut short, and they quickly get to the benediction, which is always the final element of the service. Additionally, due to the fact that the church conducts multiple services, the flow of the first service will often force the liturgist to cut back planned elements of the upcoming service.

There are two cultural factors that affect decisions regarding communion frequency in this type of church. The first is the general political disposition of the pastor, who tends to be the driver of the worship service perspective. According to Mark, if the pastor does not wish to consider holding more frequent communion services, it’s likely

not going to happen. The second cultural factor is pastoral insistence on a specific amount of time for the sermon, which can encroach on the allotted worship time. Without pastoral willingness to preach a shorter sermon, it will be difficult to frequently serve communion. In addition, the culturally accepted service length may inhibit allocation of time for frequent communion services. According to Mark, if the congregation as a whole has developed an internal “service time” clock, it will likely be difficult to convince them to add another element to the liturgy.

Lloyd mentioned a cultural concern that was not discussed very much in the literature review. One of the things that makes communion so significant is the historical nature of what Christ accomplished in those moments with his disciples. Lloyd highlighted that when he preaches, he assumes that the congregation includes individuals that have no understanding of history – biblical or otherwise. Currently, he allocates approximately twenty minutes of his sermon to creating the historical context of the passage about which he is preaching. Therefore, this need to include historical information in the sermon, as well as the congregants’ lack of historical understanding about communion, impact the potential for a more frequent communion. However, since he considers it his job to create this historical understanding, he doesn’t rule out the possibility that his church may change its current frequency of communion, even though at present, the congregants are content with their order of worship.

Lloyd relayed that another reason for infrequent communion is tradition; this was his childhood experience, and he’s become comfortable with it. However, he did mention that at one time his church had a third service early in the morning where weekly communion was served. He said that about a quarter of his congregants are former

Catholics, and they really missed a regular communion. He explained, “They [former Catholics] love the teaching, they love all the other stuff, but they miss that [communion.]” However, he said it turned out not to be a very successful service in terms of attendance, so it was eventually abandoned. As with the other subjects, Lloyd relayed that one of the cultural hindrances to a more frequent communion is simply the time it would take in his context. He shared, “It always stretches the service time out a bit,” in his context generally a full ten to twelve minutes. “And that is significant,” he added.

Finally, Lloyd discussed the tactile nature of communion. From a cultural perspective, he believes that people generally associate a certain kind of emotiveness with communion, and that makes it special to them. He made the point that the best meal a person had ever eaten was of a higher quality than the meals that the person generally ate each day. Lloyd feels that communion is that way from a cultural perspective. He believes that if communion were more frequent, it would lose the emotive expression that people have come to expect. Therefore, people would lose their initial enthusiasm for it. Nonetheless, he mentioned that the interview had reminded him to revisit certain aspects of communion, such as the standing shoulder to shoulder with other believers and the evaluation of whether the overall cultural benefits of communion are being given their proper due.

Peter agreed with Mark that sermon length could be a hindrance to frequent communion. However, his congregation expects a sermon to last twenty to twenty five minutes. His church’s worship and arts director is the most tenured senior staff member, and the congregants have an extremely high regard for the music, which is done very well in this church. Therefore, from a time perspective, the negotiation of a more frequent

communion would require limiting the music rather than shortening the sermon. Further, given the high standing of the worship and arts pastor, such a change would be difficult.

Peter's primary practical point regarding communion was his belief that the church has suffered by trying to make worship service elements such as communion too readily relate-able to their cultural perspective. He believes that there should be something significantly different about Christians worshipping together. Even to non-believers know that the world is flawed. Therefore, Peter believes that what should be offered or portrayed in Christian worship services should be different from what is experienced in the rest of the world. In the evaluation of communion, believers should not be asking how it might be more palatable and culturally relate-able. Rather, they should be celebrating it and letting the mystery stand on its own. Peter asked, "Why would we seek to offer the world something innately nonspiritual because we are trying to change the culture instead of holding on to who we are and what we are about?" He continued, "So how would that look in a reformed Presbyterian mindset, if we are trying to hold on to the element of survival of our historical world? How would you think that might look to engage our culture with those things while not sacrificing those things?"

Peter also mentioned, "Webber said he feels like worship music has become a sacrament, and I think that's bull. I think that's not true. I think that's an unfair remark. I believe in contemporary music." Like Lloyd, he feels that contemporary worship brings a tactile, inviting element to the service that could also be taking place at the table, however he thinks it is unfair to argue that it replaces communion. The extent to which contemporary music replaces communion is the decision of the pastor or worship leader of the church. Peter believes, "We should be cutting back our worship set, and people

should be preaching twenty-five minutes,” noting that this would allow plenty of time for the regular celebration of communion.

Dan noted that in the PCA, a lot of the new church planters are serving weekly communion. From a cultural and practical perspective, his view is that these younger church planters desire to connect the younger generation with historic roots. He relates, “They’re dealing with the generation that’s looking for rootedness and, you know, not possessing a sense of the past and so on. They struggle to figure out how to do it, because we still live in an age which is anti-ritual.” Dan asserts that this lack of connection with the past is a positive factor which may impact the involvement of communion on a more regular basis. Dan further reflected, “...the truth of the matter is, the most resistance that I find to introduction of liturgical structures whether it’s saying the Creed or a weekly communion or congregational responses, and so on is not among the young. It’s among older people who feel like something that they broke out of is being imposed upon them afresh.”

This is similar to Mark’s view that the established congregation has settled into the way they like things, and when the routine is changed, their internal time clocks kick in and they are not happy. David believes that the older generation rebelled long ago against what it viewed as rote and lifeless traditionalism, establishing what is in place now. However, they do not understand that what they established seems rote and lifeless now to the younger generation. He says, “...and now here come young guys, and they’re going, ‘Ho, ho, ho, wait a minute, maybe we threw...out the wrong stuff with the bath water.’”

Another cultural and practical concern that came up during Dan's interview was how many churches have not connected the dots between what they do and why they do it. For instance, churches teach children the Lord's Prayer and the various creeds, and they celebrate communion, but often they do not take the time to really make sure that children understand the significance of these prayers and activities. When those children grow to adulthood, they still don't fully understand the significance, therefore they don't grasp the importance of continuing to teach or experience it. What's really needed is a genuine focus on connecting the dots, making sure that Christians of all ages understand the reasons behind these activities.

Lack of connectedness within the worship services is another cultural issue that Dan highlighted. He mentioned that at his church, it is very important that the prayer offered, the scripture read, and the message preached all flow into communion as part of an overall theme. Many churches spend an hour and fifteen minutes on a number of elements that are not connected in any way, so it feels like checking the elements off a list of things that are necessary for an official worship service. Dan asserted that if the elements were actually connected, it would feel much different. Dan also sensed cultural disconnectedness as a result of a lack of understanding regarding the "real presence" of Jesus, as discussed in the previous section on his theology of the Eucharist. If the culture had a genuine understanding of the actual ascending that occurs at the table, then frequently celebrating communion would be much more appealing.

Within his congregational circles, Scott senses that the most common cultural response to a more frequent communion discussion would involve diminishing the perceived specialness of the sacrament. Additionally, Scott noted that people really do

tend to function out of “their own grid, their own assumptions” of what they believe to be right. Therefore, any discussion about changing communion frequency will encounter that mixed bag of thought, according to Scott.

Scott also believes that a misunderstanding about the nature of communion is also one of the cultural difficulties. He explains,

So communion doesn't make you a Christian, the Eucharist doesn't make us a church, it's just the symbol of what is already there. I think the linear, logical way of trying to understand what symbolic presence means is very difficult for westerners and so I think the effect has been to really dumb down the significance of the word supper.

Further, he relates,

The joke is that the Catholics spent thousands and thousands of pages defining what communion is and Protestants spend thousands and thousands of pages defining what communion is not, and the orthodox say it's a great mystery and in some ways that's – we are afraid of mystery, we are afraid of what we cannot comprehend and explain logically.

Scott goes on to say that if people can't explain something, they typically become fearful of it. He says that like the Christian's relationship with Christ, what happens at the table is a mystery.

At the end of his interview, Scott said that there are simply too many words in Christian worship services. He believes that the church over-verbalizes the gospel and tries too hard to present Jesus to modern culture in a rational manner. This hinders what God is seeking to do in the supernatural realm. Like Peter, Scott believe that there is a different vocabulary that exists within worship, and that language is not the same vernacular that people speak in their everyday lives. He asserts that this is not a bad thing, because worship is a completely unique phenomenon, and that is the attraction. People do not come to church seeking the same experience that they can get in other areas of

culture. He agrees with Dan that this uniqueness must be preserved in order to interest people in Christ and the ways of God.

Summary of Findings

Each of the research subjects agreed that there should be an interactive relationship between the preaching of the word, which all agreed to be the preeminent activity of a worship service, and the celebration of communion. However, not all of the subjects believe that the preaching of the word must point to the Lord's table each week. Each of them seems to believe that on those Sundays when communion is served, it is thematically helpful to conclude the service at the table. For some, this act of pointing to the table should happen each week, and that is the proper word/communion interaction. For others, it is sufficient to have a reminder of the table symbolically in the room as the word is being preached and other activities in worship are taking place. These interviewees believe that this is a proper interaction, and their less frequent communion seems sufficient.

With regard to the meaning of communion, all of the subjects recognized the tactile nature of the "meal together and with Christ" portrayal, and each agreed on the symbolism that takes place. Further, each agreed that what actually takes place at the table is a mystery. However, only a few of the subjects felt strongly enough to articulate a belief in a "real presence" and an "ascension" that they believe to be taking place at the table.

From interviewing the subjects, the most apparent cultural hindrances to the frequency of communion seem to be the length of the sermon, the cultural comfort level with the status quo, and the belief that if communion were more frequent, it would not be

special. Further, a church stakeholder exploring the possibility of a more frequent communion must consider the fact that in most situations, the pastor makes the decisions in this regard. Further, church leaders tend to defer to the pastor in theological discussions such as this, because they do not consider themselves to be as theologically educated or equipped as the pastor to make such decisions.

There are many places where the literature interacts well with the interview findings. Further, much of the data from the literature review and the interviews points to many areas where the exploration of a more frequent communion might be encouraging. This is what the researcher will highlight in chapter five.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to provide a greater historical and cultural perspective as to the optimum word / communion balance within Reformed Evangelical Presbyterian churches for a stakeholder contemplating these concerns within their church environment. The literature examined in chapter two and the interview subjects examined in chapter four have provided insight in a number of areas. The first area is how the theology of preaching has influenced decisions regarding which worship elements should be present at weekly worship gatherings. The second area is what theological views on the sacrament of communion influence the decisions regarding the frequency of its observation. The final area is which practices (denominational, church governance, and cultural) influence the evaluation of the current preaching of the word and the frequency of communion. This chapter will note some similarities in the data obtained from the literature and the research subjects, as well as point out some differences. The researcher will also make some observations.

Discussion of Findings

In accumulating the data, the following broad conclusions have been drawn by the researcher. First, individual church leadership tends to accept the traditionally established parameters of the consistency of communion without recognizing a need to become more generally informed about it. That is, instead of studying what actually takes place at the communion table, established definitions or expectations are simply accepted. Second,

there is a general disregard within conservative reformed Presbyterian churches for the value of history and historical precedence that is in keeping with the diminishing regard for history and historical precedence in society.

Third, the surrendering of weekly preaching / teaching time is personal. There are many different points of view with regard to the proper time it should take to properly unpack a scriptural passage. These views vary from pastor to pastor, from church to church, and from denomination to denomination. Generally, sermon length appears to depend upon the pastor's personal preaching style and willingness to exercise control over the established sermon length expectations. Further, this personal perspective is accompanied by the pastor's understanding of the value of more interactive, tactile teaching methodology. This perspective is also accompanied by a willingness or unwillingness to assess the value of those mysteries that we cannot understand with our cognitive ability.

Fourth, educational information and contemporary data regarding effective communication are generally disregarded in exchange for the personal preferences of the pastor, the church's leadership, and key stakeholders within a congregation. This perspective can diminish pastoral effectiveness at communication. In addition, there is a worship service construction perspective that must be the starting point for all discussions involving the potential for a more frequent communion.

Fifth, American culture competes for people's time and attention in such a way that the hour spent in worship on Sunday carries with it an established and implied efficiency of conduction. In other words, the demographic makeup and other cultural factors of a church establish a normative worship service timeframe that becomes a

weekly expectation. Thereafter, the worship planners must consider the internal clock of the congregation members. American culture did not always offer so much distraction to those who would worship on Sunday morning. However, modern Sunday church-going culture has been invaded by numerous other events in the lives of church attendees. Children's soccer games, professional football, and other activities such as shopping, theater, studying, and catching up on work compete for the time of church attending individuals. This makes the perceived need for efficiency of worship that much more acute.

Sixth, believers have strong personal preferences with regard to worship elements. Some people greatly value music and find it to be the most important part of weekly worship. Others prefer personal prayer, established written prayers, or creeds. Still others prefer the spoken didactic elements of the service, such as teaching and preaching, the greeting, the benediction, or announcements, over the more emotive elements of the worship service. Individuals contemplating a more frequent communion would be wise to take these broad preferences into account.

Seventh, paramount among those interviewed as well as obvious within the literature review is a strong intent by vocational ministers and theologians that the body of Christ worship in a complete and impacting way. Therefore as the power of the gospel is on display in our weekly services it is important to recognize that while a complete examination of worship elements is warranted, the frequency of communion, length of sermons, intensity of music, eloquence or delivery of prayer are important transforming aids and means of grace. However, the driving power of transformation and the ultimate

display of grace is the power of God at work in the gospel. We will examine each of these now in more detail

Church Leaders Generally Accept Tradition Without Question

Because church leadership generally accepts the traditional activity surrounding communion afforded it by previous generations, the real construction, significance, and impact of the Lord's Table may not be fully appreciated by church leadership. Thus a more frequent observation might not be properly evaluated. Calvin and Nevin believed that there is a real supernatural presence of Christ among us in a way that is unexplainable and yet collaborative with the preached word of God. This view is exemplified by a belief in the "real presence" of Christ at the communion table. Zwingli taught that through the communion celebration, we corporately "remember" Christ, but there is nothing supernatural that takes place. This is known as the "memorial view" of communion. Another perspective is that communion is a symbolic sacrifice. That view holds that the officials lead the congregation through an observation of the body and blood of Christ being sacrificed for the world, although they do not believe this to be a real-time and place sacrifice. This is known as the "sacrificial view" of communion. The Catholic tradition holds that the Eucharist is an "actual" sacrifice for the world continuing in the mass by the actual Jesus, who is present in flesh and blood. The Catholic understanding of the Eucharist falls outside the scope of this research. However, the other three views of what takes place at the communion table can be found broadly within Reformed Presbyterian churches, and are therefore important to understand, because they influence communion significance and frequency of observation.

In describing the actual outworking of the “real presence” understanding at the communion table, Paul Molnar expresses that the meaning of Eucharist is “our human living of our knowledge of faith.” We are not intended to remain “idle or theoretical.”¹⁰⁵ Rather, we are to take action. Molnar teaches that in worship, the church “confesses and lives its actual relationship with God himself,” and “in this specific human form, the Church actually lives its conversion to God himself.” Thus, “the Lord’s Supper then is our human living of our knowledge of faith,” and “in recognizing God’s actual presence, the church recognizes at once that the divine presence to which it responds in the Lord’s Supper is not something different or more profound than the divine presence encountered in scripture, preaching or in its ethical behavior.”¹⁰⁶ In supporting this view of the sacrament of communion, ministers should therefore be more than simply preachers or teachers. Rather they should also lead the body into actual engagement with Christ, in community with other believers. Calvin “referred to this experience as participation in Christ, communication in Christ, communion with Christ, union with Christ and mystical union.”¹⁰⁷ So, while not fully understanding how, the believer may actively enjoy the present company of Christ at the table in community with other believers, while meditating upon the previously given word conveyed in the sermon.

Generally, pastors are valued based on their ability to convey the word of God to their congregation during their sermons. However, part of their value should be measured by their ability to adequately usher the congregation into presence of the Lord at the

¹⁰⁵ Paul D. Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord’s Supper* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 255.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas J. Davis, *This Is My Body* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 105.

communion table. If the celebration of communion participates with the word of God in teaching and growing believers, then church leaders should not simply accept the established definitions and expectations surrounding the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Rather, they should remain up-to-date on the impact it may have on the lives of the congregants. The proper celebration of communion should be evaluated with the same intensity as the effectiveness of the pastor's teaching, the music minister's musical leadership, and the ability of the church staff to meet the member care needs of the congregation.

Disregard for the Value of History and Historical Precedent

In some ways, it is understandable that congregants and church leadership do not regularly re-examine the value of communion. Part of the reason for that is because regard for the important role of historical precedent has greatly diminished in our culture. One recurring theme in the interviews was that the leadership of the church generally trusts the pastor to make proper decisions with regard to the frequency of communion, among other matters in worship service construction. This is largely because they do not consider themselves to be authoritatively educated on matters involving theology.

Additionally, many pastors and worship directors do not have a great understanding of the history of Christian worship, and thus, by extension, the history of debates revolving around the Lord's Supper. Therefore, they will default to their denominational norm or their individual church's established norm. An example of this arose during Greg's interview. He recalled an objection that was voiced at his prior church to the more frequent observation of communion – they did not want to appear too Catholic. A greater understanding of history would reveal that this desire to not “appear

too Catholic” was a consistent theme which has influenced the direction of Protestant churches since the Reformation. Armed with more historical data, those objecting church leaders could understand that much of what took place during and following the Reformation was a reaction to the misuses of certain worship elements by the Catholic Church during that period in history. However, in many areas this reaction became an overreaction, as a number of important activities (including communion) were not evaluated on the merits or the place of importance that they held during the time of the disciples of Jesus and the church fathers. Rather, the reformers drew away from the observation so as not to be too closely aligned with the Catholic church.

Further, even though many Protestant churches point to Calvin as their standard bearer with regard to the foundation on which their modern theology is built, they are not familiar with his views on communion. The literature reveals that Calvin supported the observation of communion whenever the church met together. There appeared to be no debate about this in the literature. Given his close historical proximity to the Reformation, it should matter to modern leaders that even at the time that the Protestant church sought to distance itself from Catholicism, one of its most important theologians strongly advocated for a frequent communion. It is notable that Calvin, the ever rational lawyer who was capable of explaining things in a rational manner, was unable to explain the mysterious activity that takes place when Christians share the table of the Lord with one another.

If pastors and church leaders study past the time of Calvin, they will learn that the Anglican and Reformed Churches had similar instances in history where they did not want to appear to be too much like one another. However, during the time of Thomas

Cranmer, one of the leaders of the English reformation, communion was observed even as the Protestant / Catholic debate raged back and forth. Interestingly, the Anglican church and the Episcopal church which followed it in the United States have both adhered to a weekly observance of communion. Given the liberal, drifting theology of the Episcopal church in America, it is possible that church leaders in conservative Reformed Presbyterian churches may be seeking to differentiate their church theology from both the Catholic Church and the Episcopal church, which they believe to have lost its way.

Anyone considering a more frequent observation of communion in their church should be aware of the lessons learned from these historical debates. It is not hard to understand the origin of the disagreement. The researcher was unable to find much literature that contained a genuine, studied dialogue focused on the proper balance of the preaching of the word and the observation of the Lord's Supper, or on the manner in which communion participates in the process of conveying the word of God to individuals. However, history recounts numerous times when the purpose and frequency of communion were improperly used as a theologically differentiating factor in a larger divide. A renewed study of the proper balance of preaching and communion should take this historical data into account.

Importance of Personal Preference

The literature review and the interviews also revealed that much of the debate regarding the frequency of communion reflects personal preferences. These personal preferences also involve so many other worship elements that communion frequency is a relatively insignificant debate when compared to the overall discussion. The literature review and the interviews indicated that in conservative reformed circles, there is a very

high regard for the preaching of the word of God. Historically, however, this has been viewed as that time in the worship service where the church's pastor delivers a sermon in lecture format. The research showed that many church leaders and pastors prefer this format. For instance, Mark revealed that in his church setting, any discussion of worship elements, order, and time frame begins and ends with the pastor delivering a forty minute message in lecture format.

However, the word of God can be taught in many formats, and there is no mandatory time frame for the effective conveyance of the word of God. The literature revealed that some pastors believe a scripture passage cannot be properly covered in fewer than forty minutes. This is interesting, when one considers that the average adult can only focus on such a lesson for twenty minutes. The fact that personal preference interferes with a rational discussion of worship elements, and by extension the frequency of communion, should be well understood by those pursuing such a discussion within their church. Four of the individuals interviewed for this study had strong personal preferences about the positioning of the sermon. Interestingly, these strong personal preferences are held by pastors who understand worship and communion history. This may mean that personal preference has a stronger influence on modern congregations than historical accuracy. Indeed, it is also possible that strong personal preferences dictated the formation of historical tradition. While individuals could change their minds or succumb at some point to data about the receipt of effective communication, changing an individual's preference is nonetheless likely to be a difficult task.

Communication style preferences will also play a large part in the pursuit of a more frequent communion. Pastors have a comfort level with their own preaching style.

Some communication styles (such as those of Greg, Lloyd, and Peter) may lend themselves to an easy transition into frequent communion. For instance, Greg mentioned his view that the sermon should naturally lead the congregation to the table each week. Lloyd articulated a strong belief in the more tactile contribution that even symbols of communion can have. Others may find such a regular transition to be a cumbersome and unwelcome compromise of their preferred manner of closing a sermon. For instance, John McArthur draws a very straight line between preaching in lecture form (and a specific time allocation) and the celebration of communion. It appears to the researcher that McArthur and others do not necessarily view the two activities as connected events. Rather, they see one as an intellectual teaching activity and the other as a feeling, emotive experience.

In addition to the personal preferences of the pastor, strong personal preferences held by other key church stakeholders and congregants are evident in the pattern of worship that ultimately becomes established in a congregation. This indicates the stakeholders' personal preferences taken as a whole, as churches often have people who tend to act, think, and believe alike. Therefore, for instance, preferred norms may include the use of a particular worship style (such as music from an organ versus a praise band), a particular preaching style (such as an aggressive, loud preaching style or a subdued intellectual teaching style), or even a specific manner of observing communion (such as intinction or common cup). The individual desiring to increase communion frequency at their church should consider Long's observation of the current distance between the preaching of the word and the celebration of communion, remembering that this distance

is likely the result comfort/apathy or established preference.¹⁰⁸ A church may be fully aware of the weight allocated to both the preaching event and the communion observance, and they may prefer to maintain the status quo regardless of rational advocacy to study the matter.

Disregard for Contemporary Data on Effective Communication Methodology

The fourth point that should be conveyed to the individual seeking a discussion or study in their church about a more frequent communion is less clear. This point was more observed from the readings, the activity of research, and the interview subjects, and it involves the general activity of professional communication. We must remember that pastors and other church leaders (such as worship leaders and youth pastors) are by nature professional communicators. While most pastors learn the basics of preaching during seminary homiletics classes, there appear to be few resources to aid pastors in the ongoing development of their communication skills. The researcher was very surprised not to find books or manuals about how to deliver an effective twenty-five minute message. Nor did he find data captured by faith-based research organizations or publishers about the optimum sermon length and other related topics. As the literature review revealed, no church wants congregants to disengage from their ongoing study of God's word, for "...once someone disengages, they start to process the preached information in a different way: 'this is irrelevant; church is irrelevant; God is irrelevant; the Bible is irrelevant.'"¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Long, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Mead, "The Danger of Disengagement," Biblical Preaching.net, <http://biblicalpreaching.net/2009/03/10/the-danger-of-disengagement/> (accessed September 25, 2013).

Aware of this danger, Andy Stanley warned about such disengagement. He relayed that once a congregant has lost interest, it is very difficult to keep them communicatively walking with the teacher. So, the stakes are very high! The literature, which came primarily from secular and educational sources, as well as the interview subjects acknowledge that there is a threshold at which the listener can stop processing or actively listening to a presentation in lecture format – such as a sermon. However, it does not appear from the literature or the interviews that most pastors take this data into consideration when they plan their weekly sermon. This seems odd. It is as though pastors either believe that human anatomical limits cease to be relevant when they are preaching, or they believe themselves to be the exception to the data. In other words, they may respect the data, yet believe their own communicative skills to be substantially stronger than those of the average communicator, allowing them to hold their listeners' attention for longer than normal. Twenty minutes is generally regarded in corporate and education circles as the threshold for the attention span of American adults during a lecture. If this is the case, how can a forty minute sermon be justified by a person who communicates with an audience in a lecture format on a weekly basis? It may be justifiable if other interactive activities are included during the sermon, such as accompanying videos or question-and-answer sections. However, since the sermon is typically the most lengthy element in a worship service, the data shows that the average attention span for a lecture is twenty minutes, and lack of time is one of the most often quoted reasons not to have a weekly communion, this area should be open to scrutiny. If pastors would take their cue from Haddon Robinson, one of the most respected homiletics instructors in the world, and limit their sermons to twenty-five or thirty

minutes, there would be plenty of time for a more frequent communion in most worship environments.

Importance of Effective Communication

The tactile nature of communion celebration was noted by the literature and the interview subjects. We live in a world that spoon feeds media to us in numerous ways and from numerous sources. News, instruction, and entertainment on television, video, radio, email webcasts, blogs, and numerous forms of social media all aggressively deliver their messages to us. Interactivity, where the person to whom a message is communicated actually becomes part of the communication process, has become the exception in light of this communication onslaught. In an interactive environment, the recipient of the message is recognized by and involved in the lesson. This need for interactivity has contributed to the development of social media. Highly effective communication involves all parties. Likewise, participation in communion, where the congregant has to get up out of their chair, walk to the table, receive elements from another human being, and participate in an activity with their fellow congregants is a highly interactive and tactile activity. Pastors seeking to communicate Christ with their congregants in an effective way should note the intensity of this form of communication.

The professional communicators in churches – pastors, worship leaders, and others – need to seriously consider the data about which forms of communication are most effective. These individuals also need to continually sharpen their communicative skills rather than relying on what they learned in seminary. An effectively constructed twenty-five minute message is likely to have a greater impact than a poorly constructed forty-minute message. However, creation of such an impacting message is a craft that

should be continually developed. Further, church communicators should consider other ways of communicating the word of God. The weekly communication and tactile participation of the Lord's supper is one of these communicative activities. Not only is it an activity that the Lord asked us to do, it is also an activity with a highly communicative element about the nature of Christ. The fact that sermon length would dissuade a congregation from this activity just doesn't make sense. The individual asking their congregation to consider a more frequent communion should be prepared to challenge their church's weekly communicators to become better informed about professional communication.

Time and Efficiency

The final broad finding involves matters of time and efficiency. Unlike eastern cultures, Westerners (including those living in the United States) are obsessed with time and efficiency. In business, this is often a good thing. However, although Sunday has historically been considered to be a day of rest, in recent years it has become the last remaining weekly space that non-church marketers, media creators, and activity makers have to exploit. The literature review revealed that families are "spending more time in organized activities than in earlier decades."¹¹⁰ Sunday mornings and afternoons are part of this equation.

There also appears to be a demographic component, such that churches located in rural areas with fewer activities competing for their time are less likely to experience pressure to have services end at a specific time. The researcher found that those churches

¹¹⁰ Lareau, Weininger, and Velez.

located in urban areas with many community activities have to consider those activities when determining worship service elements and activities, as well as beginning and ending times. For instance, the researcher's church in metro Kansas City has a noticeable drop in attendance at the 10:45 service during the fall football season if the city's professional football team plays a noon game. Typically, the church has declined to alter the service on those days, so the typical noon ending of this service is established in the congregants' minds. A case could be made for regarding this phenomenon and shortening the service a bit to allow people to go home and watch the beginning of the game. However, this would set a precedent for modifying the church's activities to defer to a non-church respecting culture. Likely, the best alternative would be to verbally acknowledge the situation while pressing on to accomplish what is most important – the worship service. Regardless, for the individual giving consideration to establishing a dialogue about frequent communion, these situations should at least be regarded.

Both Greg and Mark pointed out that time efficiency is important within worship services. Worship planners should work with those involved in the Sunday service to keep elements within established time frames. So, for instance, if a certain prayer is intended to last two minutes, the individual leading the prayer should rehearse to ensure that it will take up no more than the time allocated. If a testimony is to be given or church activities are to be announced, those participating must rehearse in order to adhere to the established time frame. As each element is approached with the some attention to time, the service can be made to flow as one fully connected experience. Since most services last between sixty and seventy-five minutes, there is not a great deal of room for error.

Therefore, all who are involved in the worship service must be committed to seeing the big picture of the whole service, rather than focusing solely on their portion of it.

If a worship service is planned properly with a commitment to efficiency, and time frames are followed in such a way that the congregation learns to trust the worship plan, the congregants' internal clocks will adjust. However, if multiple elements within the service take longer than the congregants expect, trust between the worship planners and the congregation will be lost.

If individuals seeking to dialogue within their churches are able to participate at a level whereby the efficient allocation of time for the service can be maintained, this will bode well for a discussion about increasing communion frequency. If, however, the church does not have this type of commitment to the efficiency of important service elements, the leaders will perceive that the addition of a more frequent communion will add yet another element to a service in which time is already out of control.

The Primacy of the Power of the Gospel to Transform

It is important to note that both within the literature as well as within the data gained from the interview subjects is a clear intent to see the gospel of Christ be most fully on display. The heart of our discussion has involved which elements and in what venues that might most effectively take place. And, the ongoing evaluation of worship order, communion frequency, sermon length, etc. are important but that they are transformation aids and means of grace is important to remember. Therefore, it is important to the ongoing dialog that participants respectfully regard the contexts from which other participants to the discussion come when it comes to worship elements, their frequency, positioning and length. With that in mind, as the discussion continues it will

remain productive as the ultimate transformative nature of the gospel and its power to work within any liturgy remain as paramount as it has clearly been within the contemplations and liturgical formulations of the participating authors and subjects to this specific discussion.

Conclusion

Depending on numerous factors such as their position in the church, perceived credibility, and collaborative spirit, individuals seeking to explore the possibility of a more frequent communion at their church have a great deal of work to do. However, based upon the literature review and interviews, this research can provide a reasonable starting point in understanding the issues that will arise during the process. The research questions focusing on the historical foundations upon which the collaborative nature of the preaching of the word and the celebration of the Lord's supper, as well as what actually takes place at the Lord's table, will give the individual stakeholder a foundational historical understanding. Further, the research questions focusing on current understandings regarding frequency of communion will give the individual stakeholder information about the diversity of observation taking place within several different churches and denominations. The research questions focusing on cultural factors will further offer the individual a contextual understanding that can be applied to their current setting, as well as providing some ideas for strategic plans and direction for initiating and inviting dialogue with church leadership.

Along with the foundational information, the individual stakeholder seeking to explore the possibility of a more frequent communion will gain an understanding of the practical issues that will arise during the process. Their attentiveness to the areas of the

church's customary stance; the pastor's personal style; pastoral, leadership and congregational preferences; inattentiveness to continued learning about effective communication methods; and time and efficiency considerations will arm the individual with the forethought that they will need to lead the desired discussion effectively within both a theologically and culturally practical framework.

Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher believes that this study suggests the need for further study in two significant areas. While there is a reasonable amount of literature focused upon communication time and effectiveness within lecture settings there is a lack of such data focused specifically within the church setting. Most of the available data is used to extrapolate or suggest similar dynamics within the sermon or message activity to that of a college or other attended lecture. However, it would be helpful to study the sermon time and effectiveness as well as the messaging dynamic specifically as it currently relates to its effectiveness within the current culture. Additionally, the extent to which pastors are open to improving overall worship construction and/or communication style, time preferences mid-career or as a function of continuing education is an additional area that would aid the examination of the topic at hand.

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