

Can You Tell Me? Forms and the Lord's Supper

Question: *Should we not have a shorter form for the Lord's Supper especially since several churches are celebrating the Lord's Supper more frequently? Do we need such a long form?*

Answer: The question reflects the impatience of many contemporary Reformed Christians with the lengthy and sober celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion that has been part of our tradition for so many years. Some even wonder whether the churches should not return to the ways of the early church and celebrate it each Lord's Day.

But before any change is decided on, we should carefully reflect on the matter.

The sacrament is essential to the church's well-being. It is a dramatic, impressive, solemn pledge that God washes His people's sins away and nourishes them with Christ's benefits. It crowns the benefits of the covenant of grace. In the celebration heaven and earth come near. The past, the present, and the future of redemptive history meet each other. Consequently, a correct understanding of its significance is very important. All kinds of misconceptions and superstitious notions have found their way into churches through erroneous conceptions and usage regarding the sacrament.

Why do we use the form? Although it is not a confession in the strictest sense of the word, for centuries the Reformed churches confessed with it, what can save the sinner and what glorifies God. As early as (1586) the Dutch Reformed Synod of Gravenhage declared that the form for the Lord's Supper should be read after the sermon and congregational prayer. With the form then, the congregation confesses what, according to her conviction, the Lord has revealed about Holy Communion. It also has a teaching function. It has been an instrument of the Lord to instruct, generation upon generation, in the wonderful significance of Holy Communion. In *The New Revised Church Order Commentary*, Martin Monsma describes it as "thoroughly Scriptural in teachings and approaches. It is aglow with an intimate evangelical warmth. It lifts the contrite believer in the presence of the holy God who abundantly pardons in Christ His Son and our only Savior, and there causes him to taste fellowship sweet."

Because the Lord's Supper celebration should be a very meaningful and even a highlight event in the experience of the congregation, the form should be carefully and properly read. Monsma suggests that "it is better to abbreviate the sermon so that there will be sufficient time for the proper celebration of the Lord's Supper, than to lengthen the sermon to almost normal duration at the expense of the sacrament." He also argues that to celebrate the Lord's Supper very frequently might detract somewhat from its sacredness and effectiveness. Yet if any church should decide to celebrate Holy Communion bi-monthly he would not object. The Church Order reading certainly leaves room for more frequent and special administrations.

In conclusion, although we may celebrate the Lord's Supper more frequently than in the past, the long form should still be used in the morning service. I used an abbreviated

version of the form in the second service as only a few members would partake then of Holy Communion. It also gave me an opportunity to preach the applicatory sermon.

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February 2005