

## Theology and Practice of Calvin's Eucharistic Rite in Geneva

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In the history of Christian liturgy, Eucharistic rite was an important part, particularly in the worship service of the Middle Ages; Eucharistic rite and prayers are still very important parts of Christian worship service. For Calvin, too, the Eucharistic rite was an issue to be reformed according to his own Reformed theological conviction. This paper is to analyze Calvin's Eucharistic rite after he came to Geneva the second time. In order to appropriately understand Calvin's Eucharistic rite in Geneva, first of all, I will describe Calvin's Eucharistic rite and trace its historical and cultural background. Secondly, for the purpose of historical evaluation of his Genevan Eucharistic rite, I will analyze his understanding or the theology behind the rite. Thirdly, I will evaluate and comment on Calvin's Eucharistic rite in Geneva by looking into his own theological reflection on the rite,

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\* 논문접수일: 2011. 4. 30

논문수정일: 2011. 6. 1

게재확정일: 2011. 6. 13

its actual practice, and its contributions and limitations for theology and practical ministry.

## 1 Calvin's Eucharistic Rite in Geneva

Calvin's service of the Table was always a part of the Lord's Day service; the Lord's Supper was celebrated in two of the four Lord's Day services. On the Lord's Day, there were four worship services: a preaching service at dawn, a mid-morning service, a catechism service at noon, and a Sunday afternoon preaching service. The Lord's Supper was celebrated in the preaching service at dawn and in the mid-morning service. The Lord's Supper in the preaching service at dawn was generally for servants or others who "might have domestic duties the rest of the day."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the main Eucharistic rite was celebrated in the mid-morning service on the Lord's Day in Calvin's Geneva.

### 1.1 The Word and the Eucharistic Rite in Geneva

After coming back to Geneva, Calvin articulated and developed a new form of worship as a part of his Reformation. We can see the form of the Word and Eucharistic service of Geneva in 1542 in Calvin's work titled *The Form of Church Prayers and Hymns With the Manner of Administering the Sacraments and Consecrating Marriage According to the Custom of the Ancient Church*,<sup>2</sup> generally

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1 Cf. Calvin's Comment on Sunday Worship in Geneva; See John Calvin, *Writings on Pastoral Piety*, ed. Elsie McKee (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 98.

2 Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 197-210; Thompson edited original documents or forms of Western Liturgies mainly known as 'Prayer Books.'

known as *The Form of Church Prayers*. Historically, there is no doubt that Calvin used this form in his liturgy. The structure of the worship service with the Eucharist is as follows:

INVOCATION  
CONFESSION OF SIN  
SINGING A PSALM [by the Congregation]  
EXTEMPORE PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION  
LESSON AND SERMON  
EXHORTATIONS TO PRAYER

CELEBRATING THE LORD'S SUPPER

CONFESSION OF FAITH<sup>3</sup>  
SCRIPTURE AND EXHORTATION  
DISTRIBUTION  
THANKSGIVING  
CANTICLE OF SIMEON  
BLESSING [Number 6]<sup>4</sup>  
DISMISSAL

## 1.2 Characteristics and Historical Background of Calvin's Service of the Word and Eucharist

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3 After 1562, the Decalogue was sung before the Confession of Faith; before 1562 it was not sung.

4 Calvin followed Martin Luther by accepting this Aaronic blessing: Martin Luther said that "the customary benediction may be given ("May Almighty God bless you; the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost."); or else the one from Numbers 6, which the Lord himself appointed." Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," in *Luther's Works Vol 53 Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 30.

Several characteristics of this Reformed service of the Word and Eucharist are in practice the result of Calvin's ministerial experiences at Geneva and Strasbourg. First and foremost, a peculiar characteristic is simplicity in its structure. The main elements of the worship service including the Reformed Eucharistic rite are confession of sins and faith, singing a Psalm, preaching (or exhortation), the Institution narrative (including distribution), and exhortations to prayers. The Reformed rite omitted many elements of the Medieval Mass, such as the "Kyrie," "Gloria In Excelsis," "Reading the Epistles and Gospel," and "The Cannon" (the Roman Mass's Eucharistic prayer) as core parts of the Communion. The simplicity did not originate from Calvin. Basically, it was influenced by his intention to adhere to the original form of the Institution narrative; historically and practically, it was also influenced by Guillaume Farel, who prevailed upon Calvin to minister with him in Geneva in 1536. Reforming churches at Geneva together with Farel, Calvin articulated many aspects of ministry in Genevan churches in *Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva* in 1537.<sup>5</sup> The core contents of these articles are the frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper and the exercise of discipline. The structure of this document is almost the same as that of Farel's *La Maniere et fasson* (1524). The main characteristics of the *La Maniere* are simple and didactic. The structure of the service of the Word and Eucharist of *La Maniere* was very simple; it is like that of Zwinglian service of the Word with a simple Eucharistic rite.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, in addition to the simplicity of the structure of the service of the Word and Eucharist, the didactic aspect is a distinctive characteristic of the Reformed

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5 Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 188.

6 Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 186-187.

service of the Word and Eucharist. When administering the Eucharist, the exhortation was a key part in the Reformed rite. The key concept of the exhortation is “fencing the Table” from the unworthy and encouraging the holiness of the faithful since Calvin assumed that the Communion is related to the integrity of the church:

I excommunicate all idolaters, blasphemers and despisers of God, all heretics and those who create private sects in order to break the unity of the Church, all perjurers, all who rebel against father or mother or superior, all who promote sedition or mutiny; brutal and disorderly persons, adulterers, lewd and lustful men, thieves, ravishers, greedy and grasping people, drunkards, gluttons, and all those who lead a scandalous and dissolute life. I warn them to abstain from this Holy Table, lest they defile and contaminate the holy food which our Lord Jesus Christ gives to none except they belong to His household of faith.<sup>7</sup>

This portion of the service was also influenced by Farel's *La Maniere*, which emphasized the excommunication of the unworthy and the holiness of life of the communicants. At the same time, with Farel, in *The Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva*, Calvin also stressed the exhortation of the Eucharist by allowing Communion only to the faithful. Thus, as Bard Thompson points out, the exercise of discipline was a crucial component in Calvin's reformation of the Eucharist.<sup>8</sup>

Third, in the Eucharist as well as in the service of the Word, the singing of a Psalm was an important part of the rite in Calvin's liturgical reform. Singing

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7 In the “Exhortation” for the Eucharist, *The Form of Church Prayers* (Thompson, 206)

8 Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 188.

together is crucial in the service of worship since it constitutes the active participation of the laity. In the Mass of the Middle Ages, attending the Mass was a passive experience: “the observers were instructed not even to try to listen but rather to watch and to say prayers during the Mass.”<sup>9</sup> However, in the Reformed service of worship, people could be actively involved in the service by singing together. In this respect, Reformed worship could be regarded as a transformation from the medieval pattern of seeing to the Reformed pattern of participation in terms of singing. The singing of the Psalm in the worship service at Geneva was intentionally originated as a result of Calvin’s experience at Strasbourg. When he was summoned to Strasbourg by Martin Bucer in 1538, “the parishes of the Strasbourg had enjoyed congregational singing since 1525.”<sup>10</sup> He was attracted to Strasbourg worship, especially to their singing the Psalm together. Later, in 1562, *The Genevan Psalter* was the result of Calvin’s promotion of singing a Psalm in the worship service. We can see the reason Calvin suggested the singing of a Psalm during Communion in his *Articles* (1537): “The psalms can incite us to lift up our hearts to God and move us to an ardour in invoking and exalting with praises the glory of his Name.”<sup>11</sup> Calvin assumed the Psalm has the same role as does Communion in that it calls our heart to be lifted up to God. In this way, his experience of shaping worship service at Strasbourg influenced Calvin’s articulation of the Genevan rites when he returned to the city in 1541.

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9 Robert Kingdon, “Worship in Geneva Before and After the Reformation,” in *Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Karen Maag and John Witvliet (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 50.

10 Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 189.

11 John Calvin, “Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva Proposed by the Ministers at the Council,” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 54.

Fourth, a peculiar characteristic of Calvin's Eucharistic rite is the change from the medieval Eucharistic prayer to the preaching of the Word. Calvin's Eucharistic prayer retains no clear part of the Canon that was essential in the medieval rite.<sup>12</sup> Reducing various Eucharistic prayers and the *Sanctus*, Calvin replaced them with a short illuminative prayer and a long exhortation of the Word. For Calvin, the role of the Word was essential for the efficacy of the Eucharist. Calvin intended to make the Communion service effective not by the priest's consecration and various prayers to God but by the Words of the Institution narrative and exhortation to the communicant: "that the right administering of the Sacrament cannot stand apart from the Word; For whatever benefit may come to us from the Supper requires the Word."<sup>13</sup> He assumed that the sacrament was not valid and effective until the Words of Institution were addressed to the congregation, so the elements of the Table were covered until the moment of proclaiming the Words of the Institution.<sup>14</sup> Calvin's stressing the role of the Word in the Eucharist seemed to be an attack on

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12 In the most Eucharist prayers among the Reformers (Luther, Zwingli, and Bucer) as well as Calvin, there was no clear part of the Canon; they retained only the preface or at least beginning of the preface:

Lord be with you.

**And with you spirit.**

Up with your hearts

**We have them with the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is fitting and right.** Cf. R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, ed., *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville: A Pueblo Book, 1990), 183, 192-193, 206.

13 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4. 17. 39.

14 In most Korean Presbyterian churches, the elements of the Table are likewise covered during the time of the preaching and exhortation; they are unveiled right after exhortation.

the medieval rite, which put the Word aside to stress the Eucharist.

Fifth, the structure and content of the service of the Eucharist shows Calvin's pattern to be the Word and the Table rather than the consecration of the Host; the Eucharist is effected not by the priest's consecration but by the Word (Scripture and exhortation). Calvin did not follow the pattern of the Medieval Mass in terms of the consecration. According to the order of the Genevan Eucharist above, Calvin just read the Institution narrative and exhorted communicants to take the bread and cup so that they could be lifted up to heaven by the work of the Holy Spirit: "let us lift our spirits and hearts on high where Jesus Christ is in the glory of His Father, whence we expect Him at our redemption."<sup>15</sup> Calvin's focus was not on the nature of the Eucharist, but on the manner of the effect: the Eucharist is a sign of the sacred reality but it does not affect communicants by the priest's consecration but by the Holy Spirit through the Word and exhortation.

Sixth, in addition to the form and structure of the Eucharist, the frequency of Communion also should be taken into account in Calvin's Eucharistic service. *The Form of Prayers* (1542) has this affix in its title: *According to the Custom of the Ancient Church*. Calvin intended to follow the pattern of the ancient church with the warrant of Scripture: weekly observance and a simple pattern. *The Form of Prayers* was produced based on his previous ministerial experiences at Geneva and Strasbourg. His experience with Bucer at Strasbourg decisively influenced his theology and concretely affected the service of the Eucharist. When Calvin had ministered at Strasbourg, Bucer "had labored to restore the weekly observance of the primitive Eucharist and the sacrament was celebrated every Sunday in the cathedral and once a month in the parishes."<sup>16</sup> With all these ministerial

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15 In the "Exhortation" for the Eucharist, *The Form of Church Prayers* (Thompson, 207).



experiences as well as his theological conviction, Calvin attacked the extreme positions regarding the frequency of the Eucharist, that is, the Medieval Catholic and the Zwinglian practice. Medieval Catholic practice, though the Mass was conducted frequently, only required people to communicate at least once a year. Zwingli's practice at Zurich was to administer the Eucharist only two or three times per year. So when the Genevan Council rejected Calvin's suggestion of communicating every week, he was disappointed at their decision to administer the sacrament only four times per year.

## 2 The Faith and Theology of Calvin's Service of the Word and the Eucharist in Geneva

The description of Calvin's service of the Word and the Eucharist at Geneva and its historical background given in the previous section show that the form and content of his rite resulted mainly from his various ministerial experiences. When he submitted *The Form of Prayers* (1542) during his second ministry at Geneva, he also introduced his faith and theological understanding of the Word and the Eucharist by writing *The Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of Our Lord Jesus Christ*<sup>17</sup> in 1541. Thus, in order to understand Calvin's faith and theology of the Word and the Eucharist at Geneva, *The Short Treatise* is probably the first

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16 Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 190.

17 There are two English editions of "The Short Treatise": One is in John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises*, vol. 2, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); another in Calvin: *Theological Treatises*. I refer to the version in Beveridge, *Tracts and Treatises*. The content of this *Tract and Treatises* was based on the common confession of faith on the Eucharist which was made with Bucer when Calvin ministered together with him at Strasbourg in 1537. Cf. Calvin: *Theological Treatises*, 171-177.

reference we should consider. Moreover, to *The Form of Prayers* (1542), Calvin attached a short “Essay on the Lord’s Supper,”<sup>18</sup> which can also be a useful guide for understanding Calvin’s faith and theology on the Word and the Eucharist. In addition to these documents, we can also find Calvin’s clear understanding of the Word and the Eucharist in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* book 4, chapter 17. For the purpose of discerning Calvin’s theological understanding of the Genevan Eucharistic rite in the early 1540s, I rely on Calvin’s thought in *The Short Treatise on the Holy Supper* (1541) and *Essay on the Lord’s Supper* (1542), taking into account his Institutes when helpful. In *The Short Treatise*, Calvin discusses five points regarding his reformation of the service of the Word and the Eucharist at Geneva: (1) the reason for the Institution of the Holy Supper, (2) the benefits of the Holy Supper, (3) the right use of the Sacraments, (4) errors corrupting the sacrament, and (5) the debates on the sacrament.

First, for Calvin, the main reason and purpose of the Eucharist is to reveal the greatness of God and lead people to live in holiness as individuals and as a community. As a rite, the Holy Supper, for Calvin, is a sign and seal to give people the assurance of their true spiritual nourishment.<sup>19</sup> The people who have been renewed need spiritual food for the soul; in order to maintain the soul, they need spiritual food, “the most [essential] and precious diet.”<sup>20</sup> This crucial spiritual food is Jesus Christ; “Jesus Christ is the only food by which our souls are nourished.”<sup>21</sup> Human responses to taking this spiritual food through the Supper<sup>22</sup> include

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18 John Calvin, *Calvin’s Ecclesiastical Advice*, trans. Mary Beatty and Benjamin W. Farley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 165-170.

19 Calvin “Short Treatise” (Beveridge, 2: 167); cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.1-2.

20 Calvin, “Short Treatise” (Beveridge, 2:165-66).

21 Calvin, “Short Treatise” (Beveridge, 2:165-66)

glorifying God more fully, exhorting ourselves to holiness and innocence, and practicing the church's union and brotherly charity.<sup>23</sup> Calvin understood three aspects of Christian faith and life to be the purpose of the Eucharistic rite: to glorify God, to make a person a true innocent being, and to love one's neighbor as commanded. Thus, Calvin placed a "thanksgiving" component of the service right after the distribution in order for recipients to recognize and confess God's greatness. He also emphasized self-examination to exhort people to practice holiness. Furthermore, he required that the unworthy abstain from taking the bread and cup.

Second, Calvin clearly articulated the way the Lord Supper is profitable to people. The goal of administering the Word and the Eucharist is Jesus Christ to whom we cannot be united in our natural condition; "It [the Supper] directs and leads us to certify that whatever iniquity there may be in us, the Lord nevertheless recognizes and accepts us as righteous."<sup>24</sup> Calvin held as a premise a deep gulf between God and human beings.<sup>25</sup> According to the *Summary of the Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments*,<sup>26</sup> written together with Bucer at Strasbourg in 1537, Calvin also presupposed two ministers: an external minister (the pastor) and an internal minister (the Holy Spirit). He used the two functions of the ministers to explain the effect of the Word and the Eucharist upon

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22 Calvin regards "the taking spiritual food" as "the process of union with Christ." So, one of the fruits of the Lord's Supper is union with Christ. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.2.

23 Calvin, "Short Treatise" (Beveridge, 2:167).

24 Calvin, "Short Treatise" (Beveridge, 2:168).

25 Calvin, "Short Treatise" (Beveridge, 2:168).

26 John Calvin, "Summary of Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments," in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 171-177.

us. The external minister preaches the Word and administers the Eucharist; people listen to the Word, and see, touch, and taste the bread and wine, the visible signs of the sacred reality.<sup>27</sup> Externally, the Word and the administration of the Eucharist should be done together since “the right administration of the Sacrament cannot stand apart from the Word; for whatever benefits may come to us from the Supper requires the Word”;<sup>28</sup> so the administration of the Eucharist can only be effected when the Word is simultaneously proclaimed. However, those external works are not everything needed to induce the effects of the Holy Supper on us. In order to make the Word and the Eucharist effective, the Holy Spirit, the internal minister, should be at the center of the process.

When the Word is proclaimed and the Eucharist administered, the Holy Spirit works through them creating faith in us and feeding our spirits; the proper body and blood of Jesus Christ can be received only by faith and our spirits need the spiritual nourishment.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Calvin connected the visible signs of the bread and wine to the sacred reality (the body and blood of Jesus Christ) through the proclamation of the Word externally and the Holy Spirit and faith, a result of the working of the Holy Spirit in human beings internally. How, then, can we know that the Holy Spirit is working in the Word and the Eucharist as the internal minister? This question is tricky because union with Christ through the Eucharist, for Calvin, is beyond human understanding: it is a mystery. However, the working of the Holy Spirit is spiritual and at the same time it is real; so we can know the working of the Spirit in the Word and the Eucharist through its external benefits:

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27 Calvin, “Short Treatise” (Beveridge, 2:171); Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.10.

28 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.39.

29 Calvin, “Short Treatise” (Beveridge, 2:171-73).

expressing the goodness of God and living a holy life and demonstrating mutual love.<sup>30</sup>

Third, Calvin had a concern for the legitimate use of the Word and the Eucharist. He had two main concerns regarding their appropriate use: self-examination of the communicants and frequency of the rite. Most of all, self-examination reflects his ecclesiology; Christians are the body of Christ, a body that has Christ as its Head and is composed of many various organs. So, participation in the service of the Word and the Eucharist moves in two directions: to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the neighbors as community. In this regard, self-examination for the Lord's Supper does not mean just a self-reflection; it is an expression of faith to show hunger for the Lord and to show charity and love toward all.<sup>31</sup> Calvin presented two aspects of self-examination: true repentance in ourselves and true faith in the Lord.<sup>32</sup> This begins with dissatisfaction with our whole life which produces anxiety and fear to God, and it brings out a desire for and love of righteousness.<sup>33</sup> It can be summed up like this: self-examination should be carried out with (1) dissatisfaction toward *ourselves*, (2) eagerness toward *God*, and (3) desire to show love toward *our neighbor*. The Holy Supper should be offered to those who have self-dissatisfaction, trust in God, and a desire to grow in love.<sup>34</sup>

Fourth, right after explaining the legitimate use of the Lord's Supper, Calvin

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30 Calvin, "Short Treatise" (Beveridge, 2:173-74); Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.38.

31 Calvin, "Short Treatise" (Beveridge, 2:177).

32 Calvin, "Short Treatise" (Beveridge, 2:175).

33 Calvin, "Short Treatise" (Beveridge, 2:175).

34 Calvin, "Essay on the Lord's Supper," from "The Form of Prayers," 1542 and 1545 in *Calvin's Ecclesiastical Advice*, 165. "The Supper ought only to be offered to those who are willing and able to live in the Lord, who have him living in them, and who desire that his life be increased and made greater in them."

continued to attack the errors corrupting the sacrament of the medieval Mass. Calvin attacks two main targets: the medieval understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrifice and transubstantiation as the meaning of the presence of Christ. While criticizing the illegitimate use of the medieval Mass, Calvin articulated his own theology of the Eucharist. First of all, the Supper should not be accepted as a sacrifice “by which we obtain the forgiveness of our sins before God”<sup>35</sup> as the medieval Catholic Mass understood; that is “a blasphemy which is impossible to bear.”<sup>36</sup> The sacrifice was accomplished by Jesus Christ so there is no more need of sacrifice or of its application according to an Old Testament meaning of the Mass.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, understanding the Supper as a sacrifice produces another problem: the distortion of the function of the bread and wine. Calvin clearly understood that the bread and wine is material to be eaten; it is not a sacrificial office. Also, for him, the grace which is given as the result of the Supper is not in the sacrament but upon the people.<sup>38</sup> Based on this understanding, Calvin repudiated the idea of transubstantiation, which means that after its consecration the substance of bread is changed into the body of Christ and that of wine into his blood; this change is not of the material, but of the substance. The basis for Calvin’s attack on this theory comes from the Scripture and the primitive church: “this falsehood has no foundation in the Scripture, and no countenance from the Primitive Church, and what is more, cannot be reconciled or consist with the word of God.”<sup>39</sup> In the

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35 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:182).

36 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:182).

37 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:184).

38 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:184-85).

39 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:185).

Supper, according to Calvin's understanding, the materials do not change; they remain as a visible sign of the sacred reality. So it seemed to Calvin that "Jesus Christ is contained under these signs, and that there we must seek him is a mere phantom."<sup>40</sup> To repeat, Calvin's focus is not on the change of the material but on people's experience of God's grace through the visible signs. The materials as visible signs point people to the sacred reality: Jesus Christ who is in heaven. The practice of the Lord's Supper is "to exhort the people to raise their hearts on high."<sup>41</sup> In Calvin's understanding, this was the experience of the early church, and yet the medieval church distorted this so that it became a sacrificial adoration. In the process of the Lord Supper, the experience is a mystery to the people; at the same time, though, it should be understandable because the sacrament is not just an unavailing ceremony but a virtual celebration. Therefore, the Word should accompany this rite, explaining its meaning for true understanding.

Fifth, the last theological concern in *The Short Treatise on the Holy Supper* is Calvin's contemporary theological debate on the Supper; this debate was not about the rite itself, rather about the presence of God in the bread and cup. Calvin tried to overcome the controversy between two theological figures: Luther and Zwingli. Luther's basic understanding of the presence is that the "bread [is] the body of Christ, inasmuch as it [is] united with him."<sup>42</sup> This has been understood as "consubstantiation," based on the ubiquity and omnipotence of the Lord Christ.

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40 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:187).

41 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:188).

42 Martin Luther convinced that "there will surely be no objection to [the] saying, 'under the bread,' or 'in the bread is Christ's body,' or, 'Christ's body is truly in the Supper.'" Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper," in *Luther's Works Vol. 37 Word and Sacrament III*, ed. Robert Fischer (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 166; Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:195).

Zwingli understood the Supper as a memorial meal, without any concept of Christ's real presence in the elements; Christ's presence was rather in the church, his body. Calvin, having the idea that Jesus Christ is in heaven and still fully human, agreed to Zwingli's attacking the Roman Catholic's carnal presence in the Sacrament; and he regarded Luther's view as an abuse and deceit which implied "an execrable idolatry in that Jesus Christ was worshipped as enclosed in the bread."<sup>43</sup> To Calvin, the positions of Luther and Zwingli each had its own problem or limitation. Luther did not show that he did not intend "to establish such a local presence as the Papist's dream," and also he did not protest that "he did not mean to have the sacrament adored instead of God."<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, while "touching the local presence of Jesus Christ within the sacrament, and the perverse adoration consequent upon it,"<sup>45</sup> Zwingli did not understand the role and meaning of the signs that point us to the sacred reality. Both of them, according to Calvin, "did not deny the truth, [but] they did not teach it so clearly as they ought to have done."<sup>46</sup> Calvin clearly presented his own theological understanding of the presence of the Lord and union with Christ in the sacrament: we must lift our heart up to heaven where Christ resides in order to exclude all carnal illusions, and we must accept that God's spiritual and mystical power of the Holy Spirit can make the sacrament effective in order to sustain the efficacy of the holy ordinance. Thus, Calvin did not give up his basic presumptions in terms of the Eucharist: the Lord Jesus Christ is in heaven and the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit is at the

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43 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:195).

44 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:196).

45 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:196).

46 Calvin, *Short Treatise* (Beveridge, 2:196).



center of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a sign that leads and points us to the sacred reality, Jesus Christ who is in heaven through the secret power of the Holy Spirit, which is a spiritual and real experience when we take the bread and cup with the Word.

### 3 Evaluation of Calvin's Eucharistic Rite and Theology

Calvin succeeded in expressing his faith regarding the Eucharist in the Genevan rite; yet, he did not build up and practice the Eucharistic service in such a way as to give it the central place in the rite at Geneva.

#### 3.1 Success in Theological Reflection

His success certainly depends on the definition and form of the Eucharist. First, to briefly summarize Calvin's Eucharistic understanding, the Eucharist can be defined as a spiritual banquet, "wherein Christ attests himself to be the life-giving bread, upon which our souls feed unto true and blessed immortality."<sup>47</sup> Calvin was convinced of two presuppositions with regard to the Eucharistic efficacy: (1) Jesus Christ is now in the heaven after ascending from the earth: "while our whole mediator is everywhere, He is always present in a special manner; yet so that while He is wholly present, not everything which is in Him is present because, as has been said, in His flesh He will remain in heaven till He comes in judgment."<sup>48</sup> (2) The communicants experience the real presence of God through the Eucharistic

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<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.1.

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.30; "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man, who is in heaven" (John 3:13)

rite. According to these two premises, Calvin argued that Jesus Christ does not descend from heaven; rather we are lifted up to him through the mystical power of the Holy Spirit, which means the Reformed *Sursum Corda*. In this respect, Ronald Wallace argued well that “Communion with Him is an event in which the soul of man is made to transcend supernaturally the limits of earthly existence.”<sup>49</sup> Brian Gerrish clearly summarizes this point: “the Spirit is the chain that links us to Christ, the channel through which Christ is conveyed to us. Thus, we do not drag Christ down from heaven; rather, he pulls us up to himself, and that is how we enjoy his presence.”<sup>50</sup> So the place and role of the Holy Spirit is crucial to the form of the Eucharistic rite. Moreover, people do not just commemorate Jesus Christ but experience his real presence at the Table. The experience of Jesus Christ through Communion is not something imagined or an act of simple memorization; it is a real experience. In this experience, the Holy Spirit is also at the center. The working of the Holy Spirit in and through the Communion Table is beyond our rational understanding; it is mysterious but at the same time it is realistic. Because of this mysterious aspect, Calvin’s interpretation of the Eucharistic presence of the Lord Jesus Christ can be called a sacramental presence. This is not an abstract reflection on the Eucharist but comes from his own experience of the mystery:

Now if anyone asks me how, I will not be ashamed to admit that the mystery is too sublime for my intelligence to grasp or my words to declare: to speak more plainly, I *experience rather than understand it*. Here then, without any arguing, I embrace the

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49 Ronald Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 227.

50 Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude, The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 175.

truth of God in which I may safely rest content. Christ proclaims that his flesh is the food, his blood the drink, of my soul. I offer him my soul to be fed with such food. In his sacred supper he bids me take, eat, and drink his body and blood under the symbols of bread and wine: I have no doubt that he truly proffers them and that I receive them.<sup>51</sup>

This spiritual and realistic experience of the presence of Christ through the Eucharist involves three important elements of Calvin's understanding: the Holy Spirit, the Word, and the materials. The Holy Spirit is at the center of the manner of administering the Eucharistic rite. However, the working of the Holy Spirit does not happen all by itself: as Calvin argued in *The Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, in Communion, the Holy Spirit works in the communicant along with the proclaiming of the Word. Without the Word, there is no efficacy of the Table. At the center of this process is the Holy Spirit. So in his rite, the part of the illumination prayer for the grace of the Holy Spirit is exactly appropriate for his theological understanding of the spiritual presence: by the Holy Spirit our souls can be lifted up to heaven.

Moreover, in addition to reading the Institution Scripture, the minister's exhortation also demonstrates Calvin's view that the Eucharist is efficacious only through the clear understanding of the communicants by the proclaiming of the meaning of the Word and its promises. The Word is "not simply information about God; it is the instrument through which union with Christ is effected and his grace is imparted."<sup>52</sup> This exhortation includes not only the meaning and promises of Scripture; it also presents the communicants' attitudes and lives to God and

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51 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.32; italics added.

52 Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 76.

neighbors as well as to themselves. By exhorting people to examine themselves, Calvin practiced “fencing the Table” from unworthy people: those who do not have faith in God, who do not repent of their sins, who do not live out their faith in the world.

Last, on the thanksgiving part of the service, *The Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper* gives no clear explanation. However, showing a grateful heart to God also reflects Calvin’s theological understanding of the Eucharist in that the gratitude is a natural human response to the grace of God’s spiritual feeding through the Holy banquet. Based on Calvin’s theological pattern, we can say that Calvin intentionally placed the thanksgiving part right after the distribution as a human response to God’s grace in the Eucharist. According to the structure of *The Institutes*, human knowledge and attitude toward God and the world are an indication of the knowledge of God. The key aspect of the human attitude toward God, that is a key part of piety, is gratitude. So the thanksgiving in the Eucharist can be understood as a representation of Calvin’s piety or the “sum of goodness,” as Gerrish argued in his book on the Eucharistic theology of John Calvin.<sup>53</sup> Thus, there can be little doubt that Calvin succeeded in shaping the rite based on his own theological convictions about the Eucharist; the simple, Holy Spirit-centered Eucharistic rite certainly represents Calvin’s faith and understanding of Holy Communion.

### 3.2 Yielding to the Decision of the Genevan Consistory in terms of

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53 Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 14-20. The thesis of Gerrish’s understanding of Calvin’s Eucharistic theology is that “Calvin opens up the theme of grace and gratitude that brings his teaching on the Lord’s Supper into harmony with other parts of the whole. In itself, the meal is a gift of God, but it is also an invitation to give thanks.”

## Historical Practice

Our evaluation should also take into account the actual practice in the historical context. Calvin articulated the simple pattern of the Reformed Eucharistic rite at Geneva according to his theological convictions. When it came to the practice of the rite, Calvin had in mind that the sacrament should have the central place in the Christian Church: “wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.”<sup>54</sup> He regarded the preaching of the Word and the observance of the sacrament as “distinguishing marks of the church.”<sup>55</sup> Because of this faith, Calvin developed the pattern of the service of the Word and the sacrament in his liturgy: the Lord’s Supper cannot exist apart from the Word.<sup>56</sup> When reforming the medieval Mass, Calvin did not want to destroy the Eucharistic rite, rather he intended to appropriately develop the Eucharistic rite by adding the explanation of the meaning of Holy Communion for the communicant. In this respect, in practice, its frequency was crucial to Calvin’s service of the Word and Eucharist. Calvin disliked the Romanists requirement to take the Host once a year; he suggested the church partake of the Lords Supper “frequently.”

What did he mean by the word “frequently”? Unfortunately, The Short Treatise, makes no clear emphasis on the frequent administration of the Lord’s Supper, although he suggested the frequent use of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>57</sup> His main concern

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<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.9.

<sup>55</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.10.

<sup>56</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.39. This implies the reverse as well in that the Lord’s Supper can be understood as a visible sign of the Word in Calvin.

<sup>57</sup> Calvin, “Short Treatise” (Beveridge, 2:185).

in *The Short Treatise* was to explain the meaning, the manner, and legitimate use of the Lord's Supper while attacking the inappropriate use and understanding of Romanists and integrating the views of his two contemporaries, Lutherans and Zwinglians. However, we can easily see what Calvin means by "frequently" taking the Lord's Supper in *The Form of Church Prayers and Hymns ... According to the Custom of the Ancient Church* and in the section of *The Institutes*: "[A]ll this Mass of ceremonies being abandoned, the sacrament might be celebrated in the most becoming manner, if it were dispensed to the Church very frequently, at least once a week."<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, he even called the custom of communion once a year "an invention of the devil."<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, in the practice of the Eucharistic rites at Geneva, Calvin did not succeed in making the Eucharist hold as the central place in worship by celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently. When he ministered the first time at Geneva, right before leaving for Strasbourg, in *The Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva proposed by the Ministers at the Council* (January 16, 1537), he suggested that the church require that "the Communion of the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ be held every Sunday at least as a rule."<sup>60</sup> However, when he returned and began to minister again at Geneva in 1541, Calvin "in practice was forced to adapt himself to the capacity of the people more than he could have wished,"<sup>61</sup> so he "agreed to a celebration four times a year, viz.

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58 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.16.43.

59 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.16.45.

60 John Calvin, "Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva Proposed by the Ministers at the Council (January 16, 1537)," in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 49.

61 Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, 252-253.

Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and the first Sunday of September.”<sup>62</sup> In this regard, Yngve Brilioth's criticism of Calvin's Eucharistic practice is accurate: “In the Calvinistic church the sacrament never came to take the central place which Calvin himself desired that it should have. ... The Genevan rite came into being more under the pressure of external circumstances than as the creative expression of a clearly defined view.”<sup>63</sup> Regarding the practice of the service, his criticism is right, but I do not agree with all of Brilioth's negative evaluation of Calvin's practice at Geneva, which regards Calvin's Genevan Eucharistic ministry as a total failure in all parts.<sup>64</sup> Even though he did not succeed in practicing the Eucharist frequently, the clear and simple pattern of the service of the Word and the Eucharist was a successful aspect in that he manifested his theological understanding of the Communion rite as he desired. As a result, we can understand that even though he really intended to celebrate Communion every week, historically he did not practice that frequency at Geneva. The remaining question for Reformed churches when it comes to the frequency of the Supper is whether they should follow his intention (every week) or his practice (four times per year).

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62 Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, 253.

63 Yngve Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice: Evangelical and Catholic*, trans. A. G. Herbert (London: SPCK, 1953), 176.

64 Yngve Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice: Evangelical and Catholic*, 177-79.

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This paper analyzes Calvin's Eucharistic rite after he came to Geneva the second time. The goal of this paper is to appropriately understand Calvin's intention and practice of the Eucharist. In order to accomplish this goal, this paper first describes Calvin's Eucharistic rite and traces its historical and cultural background. Secondly, this paper analyzes his understanding or the theology behind the rite. Thirdly, this paper evaluates and comments on Calvin's Eucharistic rite in Geneva by looking into his own theological reflection on the rite, its actual practice, and its contributions and limitations for theology and practical ministry.

Calvin articulated the simple pattern of the Reformed Eucharistic rite at Geneva according to his theological conviction: the Lord's Supper cannot exist apart from the Word. Moreover, Calvin regarded the preaching of the Word and the observance of the sacrament as "distinguishing marks of the church." With having this conviction, when reforming the medieval Mass, Calvin did not want to destroy the Eucharistic rite, rather he intended to appropriately develop the Eucharistic rite by adding the explanation of the meaning of Holy Communion for the communicant. In this respect, in practice, its frequency was crucial to Calvin's service of the Word and Eucharist. Even though he did not succeed in practicing the Eucharist frequently, the clear and simple pattern of the service of the Word and the Eucharist was a successful aspect in that he manifested his theological understanding of the Communion rite as he desired. As a result, we can understand that even though he really intended to celebrate Communion every week, historically he did not practice that frequency at Geneva. The remaining question for Reformed churches when it comes to the frequency of the Supper is whether they should follow his intention (every week) or his practice (four times per year).

*Key Words:* Calvin, Worship, Eucharist, the Holy Spirit, Presence of Christ

## 칼빈의 제네바 성찬예식의 신학과 실천

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기독교 예배에서 성찬예식은 초대 교회 이후로 매우 중요한 위치를 차지해 왔다. 이 논문은 종교개혁가 칼빈이 예배의 중요한 부분인 성찬에 대해서 어떻게 이해하고 실천했는지를 살펴본다. 종교개혁의 한 부분으로서 칼빈은 중세의 성찬 의식 자체를 폐기하지 않았고, 오히려 자신의 개혁주의 신학에 대한 이해를 가지고 예배에서 성찬의 이해와 실천 방식을 새롭게 제시했다. 칼빈이 실천한 성찬의식은 자기 스스로 개발한 것이 아니라, 성경과 초대교회의 원리에 근거해서, 자신과 동시에의 부처와 파렐의 영향을 받아 경험한 것을 바탕으로, 이후 개혁주의 교회들의 모델로 개발된 것이다.

칼빈의 성찬 이해를 위해서 이 논문은 종전의 논쟁, 즉 그리스도의 임재와 관련한 교리적 이해가 아닌, 칼빈이 실천한 성찬 예식의 내용과 그 의식에 담긴 신학을 예배학적으로 살펴본다. 즉, 칼빈이 제네바에서 실천한 의식을 구체적으로 기술하고, 그 실천에 담긴 특징을 역사적으로 살펴봄과, 그러한 실천에 담긴 신학을 이끌어낸다. 칼빈은 성경에 근거해서 중세의 복잡한 성찬기도들을 폐기하고 성경과 함께 기능하는 이해하기 쉬운 방식으로 예식을 단순화시켰다. 이 과정에서 '떡과 잔' 보다는 성령을 통해서 주어지는 성찬 의식의 효력을 강조했다. 그리고, 성찬 의식 자체에 머무르지 않고, 성찬이 지닌 하나님과 이웃에 대한 태도의 중요성을 강조했다. 현대 개혁주의교회는 칼빈이 원래 의도했던 성찬과 말씀의 균형잡힌 실천을 매주 실현할 것인지, 역사적으로 실천된 방식을 따를 것인지 결정해야 한다. 그리고 더 나아가 그가 제시한 개혁주의적 성찬 원리 곧 말씀과 성령 그리고 삶을 통합하는 성찬의식의 실천을 더욱 개발해야하는 과제를 지닌다.

주제어: 칼빈, 예배, 성찬, 성령, 그리스도의 임재