Introduction

The meeting for worship is the church becoming church.

—Gordon Lathrop[1]

SAMPLE

THE CRYSTAL CATHEDRAL: A CASE STUDY IN CONFUSED ECCLESIOLOGY

The Crystal Cathedral church—or rather, the Christian ministry housed in the Crystal Cathedral of Garden Grove, California—went bankrupt in 2010. The landmark sanctuary and campus, an architectural expression of Protestantism, modernism, and post-modern consumer capitalism, was ordered by the court to be sold. A bid from Chapman University to turn the campus into a center for medical education was appealing, but the church's board of directors supported a bid from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange County instead.[2] In the news reports published in the days following the court order, contemporary culture's confusion about "church" was on prominent display.

Bloomburg's BusinessWeek website asked in a headline: "Can Crystal Cathedral Survive without its church?"[3] A distraught congregant mourned

1. Lathrop, *Holy People,* 9.

2. Cruz, Vives, and Landsberg, "O.C. Catholic diocese." Interestingly, the *congregation* of the Crystal Cathedral church disagreed with its leadership. It did *not* support the Diocesan bid. It is unclear if this was an expression of anti-Catholicism or hope that the University agreement would allow them to stay in the building for a longer period of time.

3. Taxin, "Can Crystal Cathedral survive?"

© 2021 James Clarke and Co Ltd

what he considered "the death of the church."[4] Another protested in a letter to the editor of the *OC Register*: "with all due respect, there is only one Christ, and He created only one, true Church; two thousand years ago, still extant today: the Holy Catholic Church, which purchased the cathedral."[5] In a telling comment, one congregant complained: "The cathedral's administration . . . have really stripped us of our ministry." Meanwhile, Shelia Schuller Coleman, the congregation's executive pastor, seeking to clarify, said, "Crystal Cathedral church is not a building. A church is comprised of people who are dedicated to practicing through words and works."[6] In this collection of quotations, it is easy to see the common equivalences assumed among building, congregation, broader assemblies, and even the work of Christ in which the church participates and to which it points. William Dyrness, a professor at nearby Fuller Theological Seminary, noted that the sale of the building was such a challenge because the *identity* of the congregation at the Crystal Cathedral is closely tied to its building.[7] Its core ministry—that is to say, its vocation—is understood to be its worship life (or perhaps, one might argue, in the missional television broadcast of its worship life), and that worship life is tied to, if not dependent upon, a particular building.

Indeed, worship is at the center of the church's vocation. From that center, the church goes into the world to do works of healing, service, and mission. It is also at the center of the church's identity. The church is "called out" from the world to know itself in worship. However, when the Diocese of Orange County begins its worshipping life in this same building, some of the core identifying elements of what was understood to be "church" will be gone: no more TV cameras, stage-lighting, and jumbotron screens. These will be replaced with a prominent pulpit, a baptismal font, and a high altar—not to mention a tabernacle, crucifix, and a *cathedra*. There will be scripture reading, prayer, and sacred song, but likely no celebrity guests, or

4. Bharath, "Crystal Cathedral board." Given the comments about the church's "death," it is interesting to note that the likely place where the Crystal Cathedral congregation will end up worshipping in 2014 is the St. Callistus Catholic Church building—named after the patron saint of graveyard caretakers.

5. "Letters," *Orange County Register,* November 21, 2011.

6. Taxin, "Crystal Cathedral sees risky future." Curiously, Coleman does not articulate precisely *what* words and works people are dedicated to practicing. But we can assume she is speaking of the imitation of Christ in word and deed that is part of Christian discipleship.

7. Taxin, "Crystal Cathedral sees risky future."

© 2021 James Clarke and Co Ltd

live "angels" suspended from the ceiling. The glass panes and steel scaffolding will remain, but the worship itself will be quite different, the congregation different, its leaders different, its links to other Christian communities different, and its understanding of its mission dramatically altered. Where is "church" in all this? In such a confused situation, how might anyone offer to this congregation, or to its community, pastoral consolation, pastoral rebuke, pastoral wisdom?

The ministry Robert A. Schuller birthed at the Crystal Cathedral is ecclesially liminal. The ministry is a part of the Reformed Church in America, the oldest Protestant denomination in the USA. It belongs to a broader RCA assembly—the California Classis—and its founding pastor was educated at one of the denomination's seminaries. But it is an outlier in many ways: its sunny Californian embrace of the "power of positive thinking," for example, is rather anomalous among its ecclesial kinfolk, dour Dutch Calvinists from the bustling east or the cloudy Midwest, comfortable—dare one say content—with the doctrine of total depravity. And its present leadership, in personnel and structure (commissioned pastors rather than ordained ministers guided by a self-selecting board of directors rather than an elected board of elders), raises eyebrows, if not disciplinary overtures, in many RCA circles. With its beginnings as a drive-in "community church" reaching out with a "message of encouragement and hope," its story is very familiar to the larger evangelical world of North American Protestantism, eager for the sake of the Gospel to appeal to popular culture through embrace and imitation of it. In this respect, it is, in many ways, a bellwether congregation—experiencing on a larger scale and a more public stage the same confusion about church and about worship that many Christian communities suffer.

METHODOLOGY

Ecclesiology. The theological discipline of ecclesiology—the study of "church"—is one of the places one turns to in order to sort these issues out. It has been a subject of considerable interest in the past century, owing perhaps to the increasing diversity in shapes and types of ministries, buildings, congregations, denominations, and other Christian-community affiliations.[8] Or maybe the diversity has been there all along, and in a world shrinking through easy travel and mass media, we are only now

8. See van Gelder, *Essence of the Church*, 15–20; and Gibbs, *ChurchNext*.

© 2021 James Clarke and Co Ltd

SAMPLE

becoming more aware of it.[9] In any case, the proliferation of 'church' has been matched by a proliferation of ecclesiologies and ecclesiologists. Short patristic treatments of the topic, such as those by Irenaeus and Cyril, as well as Reformation-era treatments by Calvin and Melanchthon, are now joined by major works by contemporary Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, and Baptist theologians—among others. Even among free-church evangelicals, who are more well known for para-churches, mega-churches and all sorts of other prefixed people of God, there are pastors and theologians addressing this important topic.[10] Alongside these voices are theologians with ecumenical hearts, who explore the language and images used in Scripture for the church. They also articulate synthesis models for understanding the mystery of the church.[11]

Liturgical Theology. Alongside this renewed interest in ecclesiology and driven by the same ecumenical winds, there has now emerged another theological sub-discipline, liturgical theology.[12] The ecclesiological recovery in the early twentieth century of the model of the church as the mystical body of Christ was a key influence in the emergence of the liturgical renewal movement, and the coinciding development of the academic discipline of liturgical theology.[13] Work in this field focuses on one aspect of the church's life: its public worship and the relationship of that worship to what the church professes to believe. A shorthand for this dynamic is sometimes articulated in Latin terms as the relationship between the church's *lex orandi* and its *lex credendi*—its prayer and its belief. Questions of priority and normativity emerge here: which comes first, practices of prayer or instructions about how and what to pray? Likewise, questions

9. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen suggests that the interest in ecclesiology is due to three factors: the emergence of the ecumenical movement, the growth of Christianity outside the west, and the rise of free-church congregations and communities across the globe. See Kärkkäinen, *Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 7–8.

10. Note that even a mass-market theologian like Rick Warren, Rev. Schuller's Southern California compatriot, has expanded his franchise in an ecclesiological direction. See Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*.

11. Dulles, *Models*, 2–3.

12. Interestingly, the relationship of liturgical theology and liturgiology—the much narrower study of liturgical rubrics—parallels the way the discipline of ecclesiology relates to the study of church buildings. See Irwin, "Liturgical Theology," 721–33; Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology,* 9–13; and White, *Cambridge Movement,* 48–49.

13. See Pecklers, *Unread Vision,* especially 29–34. Cf. also Johnson, "State of Liturgical Renewal," 1–3.

SAMPLE

© 2021 James Clarke and Co Ltd

of congruence are central to this discipline, as theologians ask whether a church's Eucharistic practices, for example, actually embody and reflect its doctrinal convictions about what happens at the table. There are varying approaches to these questions, but the fundamental task of liturgical theology is to reflect on worship and ask not only *what* do our liturgical actions mean but also *how* do they mean, and how we can understand worship as "the church's faith in motion."[14]

Liturgical Ecclesiology. At the intersection of these two disciplines is a relatively unplowed field in which there are a handful of committed teachers of the church exploring what is coming to be known as liturgical ecclesiology. In contrast to those who look first at scriptural, denominational, or sociological sources, "liturgical ecclesiologists" want to know what Christian *worship* can tell us about the church.[15] If indeed worship is at the heart of the church, then a theological exploration of worship and its normative sources should provide both insight and pastoral guidance for contemporary Christian communities, flailing about in accidental liturgical reform, seeking to articulate and live out some sense of what it means to be the people of God in a post-Christendom culture.

Though some scholars in this field do their work more self-consciously than others, there are a broad range of denominational traditions represented among those who are trying to look at church through liturgical spectacles. The most well-known such theologian, perhaps, is Gordon Lathrop, whose 2003 book, *Holy People* (a follow-up to his fundamental work in liturgical theology, *Holy Things*), quite explicitly gives the name "liturgical ecclesiology" to his "new attempt to say what Christian worship says of the church."[16] But others have come before and after, including: Geoffrey Wainwright, from the British Methodist tradition, whose *Doxology*—a systematic theology written from a liturgical perspective—has a significant section on ecclesiology and the marks of the church; Alexander Schmemann, the Orthodox scholar, who some consider the father of modern liturgical theology, whose writings on worship always have the church in view;[17] Simon Chan, an Assemblies of God/Pentecostal professor, whose

14. Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 10. See also the fine introductory chapter on the grammar of liturgy in Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima*, 2–38.

15. Of course, Christian worship has scriptural, denominational, sociological, and other sources in its own right.

16. Lathrop, *Holy People*, 9.

17. See, for instance, this representative comment: "[Worship] is inseparable from the Church and without it there is no Church. But this is because its purpose is to express,

© 2021 James Clarke and Co Ltd

SAMPLE

starting point for his liturgical theology is the "Church as a Worshipping Community;"[18] and the Roman Catholic priest Matthijs Ploeger, whose recent dissertation on comparative ecclesiologies looks explicitly at the doctrine of the church "from the angle of the liturgy."[19]

Almost all of these voices echo or appreciatively cite a single, influential, and yet often-overlooked theologian from the previous generation: Jean-Jacques von Allmen.[20] In this volume, it is my hope to begin to rectify this oversight by articulating a prototypical liturgical ecclesiology discerned in the writing of von Allmen and applying his insights to selected issues in the contemporary church.

JEAN-JACQUES VON ALLMEN

This book will explore the importance of Jean-Jacques von Allmen from four angles: historical, methodological, theological, and practical.

Historical. In the liturgical renewal movement of the twentieth century, von Allmen is often seen as the key figure from the Reformed tradition. He was a parish pastor in the Swiss village of Lucerne for seventeen years, and then professor of practical theology at the University of Neuchâtel from 1958 until his retiring in 1980 and his death in 1994. His theological work was always grounded in his experience of the local congregation at church and *as* church—a point to which we shall return repeatedly. A friend of Karl Barth, he worked tirelessly within his own confessional circle for liturgical reform. Yet he was broadly ecumenical in his sensibilities and appreciations. He helped found the Tantur Institute in Jerusalem, the scholarly journal *Studia Liturgica,* and he was one of the primary authors drafting the World Council of Church's key ecumenical achievement, the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* document. Perhaps he is best known for influential volumes on biblical theology (*A Companion to the Bible*), liturgical theology (*Worship: Its Theory and Practice, The Lord's Supper, Pastorale du Baptême*, *Prophétisme Sacramentel*) and homiletics (*Preaching & Congregation*). Though these works are widely admired and cited, they have

SAMPLE

form, or realize the Church—to be the source of that grace which always makes the Church the Church" (Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 29).

18. Chan, *Liturgical Theology*.

19. Matthijs Ploeger, *Celebrating Church,* 3.

20. Lathrop, in particular, tips his hat to von Allmen in his methodological introduction to *Holy People*.

© 2021 James Clarke and Co Ltd

yet to be engaged or studied in any depth by subsequent generations of liturgical theologians.[21]

Methodological. Jean-Jacques von Allmen would not have recognized himself as a liturgical theologian (the term was not yet in use). He certainly would not have considered himself a pioneer in a theological sub-specialty named "Liturgical Ecclesiology."[22] Yet his work in both subject matter and methodological approach points clearly in this direction. For instance, a key passage in his primary volume on worship makes the following assertion—at once liturgical and ecclesiological:

> The study of dogmatic texts, of confessions of faith, of ecclesiastical disciplines, of the history of Christianity, of personal piety, important and essential as this is if one is to know the Church, is something that comes later: it is in the sphere of worship, the sphere par excellence where the life of the Church comes into being, that the fact of the Church first emerges. It is there that it gives proof of itself, there where it is focused, and where we are led when we truly seek it, and it is from that point that it goes out into the world to exercise its mission.[23]

21. For instance, Dwight Vogel's *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology* excerpts a chapter of von Allmen's *Worship*, and Arlo Duba (writing in an introduction) identifies von Allmen as the "premier liturgical theologian in and for the Reformed tradition" (Vogel, *Primary Sources,* 127). Likewise, Tom Long writes that von Allmen's *Preaching and Congregation* is "a high-water mark in Reformed homiletics" (Long, "Distance We Have Traveled," 11). Ron Byars's volume in the *Interpretation* series on *Sacraments in Biblical Perspective* opens with von Allmen's articulation of the challenge the sacraments pose to churches "influenced by long exposure to the Enlightenment" (Byars, *Sacraments,* 1). Apart from frequent comments like these, about a dozen articles deal directly with J.-J. von Allmen. There are no major works on von Allmen's liturgical theology, though a festschrift was published in his honor (see Congar, *Communio Sanctorum*). In addition, a number of studies have set von Allmen's thought alongside other theologians' as a point of comparison. Nicholas Wolterstorff, for example, chooses von Allmen and Schmemann as his two primary interlocutors in his book of liturgical theology (Wolterstorff, *God We Worship*). See also Old, *Holy Communion,* 835–56. A handful of dissertations also deal with von Allmen, including: Agnew, *Concept of Sacrifice;* Cuminetti, *Element "cattolici"*; Barot and Prosperi, *Il movimento ecumenico*; Townsend, *Sacramentality of Preaching*; and Ploeger, *Celebrating Church.*

22. He considered himself as working within the field of "practical theology"—a field which has undergone significant transformation in the past decades. For more on these developments, see Anderson, *Shape of Practical Theology*; and Maddox, "Practical Theology," 159–69.

23. von Allmen, *Worship*, 43–44.

© 2021 James Clarke and Co Ltd

If one wishes to learn about the church, argues von Allmen, one must look first to the church *at* church. That is to say, if one wishes to do ecclesiology, the starting point is the worshipping congregation by God's grace undertaking the work of the people: gathering to hear the Word preached, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, to initiate by water new members into the life of the Holy Spirit, and to be sent into the world. The church at worship is the manifestation—the epiphany, the revelation—of the church.

Theological. This theological assertion is one of three central themes that appear in nearly all of von Allmen's writings. Alongside them is his understanding of the church's worship as the recapitulation of the history of salvation. And third, his sense that the church in relation to the world is both promise and threat.[24] These are generative ideas that can lead the curious inquirer in many directions: What is the mechanism by which the church comes to know itself at worship? What is the relationship of the church to Christ and the salvation that comes through him? How does the church's mission find expression within its worship life? What does the church's present life have to do with God's past and God's future? What are the liturgical signs of the church's most fundamental ecclesiological characteristics: its unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity?

Practical. These are precisely the sorts of ecclesiological questions that one might profitably ask von Allmen. And the answers that emerge will have particular resonance in today's world, as many of the impinging crises of von Allmen's day have only grown more acute in the intervening years: the challenge of ecumenism and a church that professes unity, yet seems ever more divided; the church's diverse and rapidly changing worship practices, a sense that many of these practices are profoundly detrimental to Christian formation, and a helplessness in seeking normative standards of theological and liturgical excellence; an ecclesiological shallowness in the evangelical church, confessed and highlighted in, for instance, the "Chicago Call" in 1977.[25]

Furthermore, a liturgical ecclesiology derived from von Allmen may have the capability to speak directly to practical ministry problems that appear where the evangelical and the reformed streams flow together in

24. These are not entirely original theological themes—Ireneus takes a rather convincing turn on recapitulation, for instance—but von Allmen makes these three central to all of his writings about worship, sacraments, preaching, and church. See Bürki, "Jean-Jacques von Allmen dans le Mouvement Liturgique," 52–61.

25. See Webber, *Common Roots,* Appendix I. See also "Chicago Call," and Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 9–17.

© 2021 James Clarke and Co Ltd

SAMPLE

the riverbed of North American Protestantism—problems like those that plagued the Crystal Cathedral about the church's identity. And perhaps more significantly, they may speak helpfully into conversations surrounding a wider cluster of problems that we will address in the last section of this book—such as questions about infant vs. believer baptism, the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, and the meaning of church membership; questions about who may fruitfully be invited to and receive God's grace at the Eucharist; questions about the structure of worship and the salvation story it invites people to witness to in worship; questions about worship space and its capacity to open congregations to God's transformative activity; questions about the church's missional vocation in and to the world; and questions in homiletics about the turn to the listener, embodied proclamation, and the relationship between word, table, and font. Jean-Jacques von Allmen's confessional location and ecumenical experience makes him perhaps uniquely suited to bridge present gaps between mainline liturgical traditions and word-centered evangelical traditions.

We will see that the liturgical ecclesiology that emerges from von Allmen's thought exhibits Reformed sensibilities, has deep roots in both Scripture and the broader Christian tradition, reflects rich ecumenical conversations as well as day-to-day work in and commitment to local congregations, and provides fuel for important practical thinking about the church's place and work in the world.

Summary. The purpose of this book, then, is to do what we have been describing: to examine the sacramental, homiletical, and liturgical writings of Jean-Jacques von Allmen in order to discern and reconstruct a "liturgical ecclesiology" there—i.e., an articulation of the way in which the church's worship, sacraments, and preaching shape the church's identity. I will argue that von Allmen was a pioneering theologian working this new field, doing liturgical theology *as* ecclesiology. To do so, I will employ a classic ecclesiological lens—the Nicene marks—and look through it to gain focus in my study of von Allmen's writings on worship, preaching, and the sacraments. This theological analysis will then provide us with tools for practical and pastoral thinking about the church's place and work in the world today. The tools will also help us to discern where von Allmen's contributions to conversations in liturgical theology and in ecclesiology are especially helpful, and where they may need further development or correction by the next generation of scholars.

© 2021 James Clarke and Co Ltd

SAMPLE

The Path Ahead. A first chapter on method will locate the present study within the academic conversations and respective disciplines of ecclesiology and liturgical theology. It will offer a definition of "liturgical ecclesiology" and characterize von Allmen as a prototypical theologian working this new field. This technical chapter will be more interesting and meaningful for scholars in the field; others may wish to begin with the second chapter, a brief biographical sketch of von Allmen's life and work. This biographical chapter will contextualize the constructive theology which follows. The third and fourth chapters will first examine von Allmen's liturgical theology through the three key themes previously mentioned, and then through the Nicene lens of the church's identifying characteristics: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The fifth chapter turns to what Lathrop would call "pastoral" liturgical ecclesiology—theology with an eye on *reforming* practices through both description and prescription, seeking congruence between the church's *credendi* and *orandi*. A brief section on liturgical and homiletical implications will then apply the results of this interchange to some contemporary problems.

SAMPLE

© 2021 James Clarke and Co Ltd