

## OTTERBEIN'S EUCHARISTIC FAITH AND PRACTICE

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William Otterbein<sup>1</sup> immigrated from Germany to colonial Pennsylvania in 1752, becoming pastor of a German Reformed Church in Lancaster. In subsequent years he ministered in other German Reformed congregations in Pennsylvania and Maryland until assuming the pastorate of a semi-independent German Evangelical Reformed Church of Baltimore in 1774 where he served until his death in 1813.

Following undergraduate studies at Herborn University in the modern state of Hesse (southwestern Germany), in 1745, Otterbein enrolled in the theology department whose faculty is invigorated by Pietist thought and practice.<sup>2</sup> The two-century old *unparteiische* [ecumenical] *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Palatinate Liturgy* were the principal theological and liturgical texts. In 1748, he passed his qualifying exams in theology and became a tutor in the university. The following year he was ordained and assumed a village pastorate in addition to his teaching duties at the university. Four years later (1752), when mission executive Michael Schlatter visited the university recruiting pastors for colonial Pennsylvania, twenty-six year old William accepted a call as a missionary to German Americans.

The sources for Otterbein's theological understanding of the Lord's Supper are two: the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the well-known official doctrinal statement of the Reformed Church in Germany, and its little known companion service book, the *Palatinate Liturgy*, both published in 1563. Otterbein was nurtured on both books in his home, in his church and in his university. He continued to use both the catechism and the liturgy in all of his congregations in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

### Origin of the Otterbein's Catechism and Liturgy<sup>3</sup>

The Reformation came late to the Palatinate (a region in southwestern

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<sup>1</sup> Though baptized Philip William Otterbein, he preferred the name William. All of his surviving correspondence and documents from his pastorates in colonial America are signed W. or William Otterbein.

<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1584, the university became one of the most important educational institutions among Calvinists in Europe. It kept close ties to England and Scotland, the Huguenot academies in France, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Its faculty had a strong influence in the developing fields of theology, philosophy and law in early Baroque time.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller, more documented discussion see my essay "The Palatinate Liturgy and the Pennsylvania Germans" in *Pulpit, Table, and Song: Essays in Celebration of Howard G. Hageman*, eds., Heather Murray Elkins and Edward C. Zaragoza (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), Drew Studies in Liturgy, No. 1.

Germany) and its capital city Heidelberg—so late that some scholars refer to the movement as the second German Reformation. Luther's 1518 lectures on justification by faith at Heidelberg impressed few faculty and students. Prince Ludwig kept the province and his cathedral city Catholic until his death in 1544.

Within a year under a new prince (Federick II), there were signs of change. At mass the Sunday before Christmas, 1545, both the new prince and the preacher were startled when the congregation struck up a *Protestant* hymn: "*Es is das Heil uns kommen her.*"

Salvation unto us has come  
                   By God's free grace and favor;  
 Good works cannot avert our doom,  
                   They help and save us never.  
 Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,  
                   Who did for all the world atone.  
 Our only mediator.<sup>4</sup>

Henceforth Frederick ordered the mass to be celebrated in German and allowed priests to marry. Additional Protestant doctrine and practices were introduced when the next prince, Otto Henry, came to the throne in 1554. Henry's chief theological adviser was the moderate/ecumenical Lutheran statesman, Philipp Melancthon, who was trying to defuse the controversy that erupted after Luther's death between the high Lutherans and Calvinist sympathizers, searching for common ground.

By the time Frederick III succeeded Otto Henry in 1559 the Reformation was firmly established in the Palatinate, but the church was seriously divided as were many other "Lutheran" provinces in Germany. The bishop was a high Lutheran (*gnesio*-Lutheran), but Otto Henry had packed the university faculty with several prominent Reformed-leaning professors—dubbed *crypto*-Calvinists by the high Lutheran cabal. The court preacher was a middle-of-the-road Melancthonian. Matters came to a head later that year (1559) when, during a communion service in the Cathedral Church of the Holy Spirit Bishop Heshus snatched the cup from a young celebrant saying he was unworthy to administer because he was a "Zwinglian." Weary of such strife, Frederick dismissed both the contentious bishop and the young deacon, but sided with the Reformed sympathizers.

To avoid the old disputes and to bring harmony to the church, in 1562 Frederick appointed a theological commission to draft a new confession of faith and a new liturgy for the Palatinate. He sought the counsel of Melancthon and hired two of his Reformed-leaning graduate students for the university in Heidelberg, notably Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar

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<sup>4</sup> Hymn 590, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006). Written by Paul Speratus about 1524, the chorale was transformed into a famous cantata by J. S. Bach (BWV 9) sometime between 1732 and 1735.

Olevianus. The two young faculty members dominated the drafting, with Ursinus chairing the catechism subcommittee and Olevianus chairing the liturgy subcommittee. The new liturgy and catechism were published in a single church order (*Kirchenordnung*, church order or book of discipline) in 1563 along with directives for swift implementation in the university and in the congregations. In the catechism, Calvinist doctrine is couched in moderate tones and predestination is not even mentioned. Like Luther's *Small Catechism*, the *Heidelberg Catechism* explains the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and tenets of the faith in a congenial question-and-answer style. It also shares with Luther's work an ability to present sophisticated theological concepts in a straightforward manner, a characteristic that undoubtedly has contributed to the staying power of both catechisms. The liturgy leaned toward a Calvinist versus a Lutheran understanding of the contentious matter of real presence.<sup>5</sup>

Matters came to a crisis three years later (in 1566) when Frederick was summoned to appear before the German Diet (legislative assembly) to answer for the publication of his catechism and liturgy. The enemies of Frederick looked upon the *Heidelberg Catechism* and liturgy as an infringement of German law, which permitted Protestantism only the Lutheran variety, as expressed in the *Augsburg Confession*. Frederick's passionate defense of his catechism and liturgy as truly biblical before his peers was persuasive. Fritz and his people were permitted to keep their new liturgy and catechism, although the Reformed Church did not have legal standing in Germany until the middle of the next century (1648) at the end of the Thirty Years' War.

The use of the liturgy and the catechism had been approved by the Synod of Holland for its missions among the Dutch and the Germans in colonial America. After the American Revolution, German Reformed congregations sought independence from Holland and organized themselves into The German Reformed Church in 1793. The new church continued their use.<sup>6</sup>

### Holy Communion in the *Heidelberg Catechism*

The *Catechism* teaches that sacraments

are visible, holy signs and seals<sup>7</sup> instituted by God in order that by their use he may the more fully disclose and seal to us the promise of the Gospel, namely, that because of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross he graciously grants us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.<sup>8</sup>

In regards to the Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, the *Catechism* reflects Calvin's understanding of the meal, seeing Christ's *spiritual real presence*

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<sup>5</sup> In 1618-1619 the Synod of Dort adopted the *Catechism*, and it remains an authorized doctrinal statement in most Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The *Catechism* was first translated into English by the German Reformed Church in America in 1849.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph H. Dubs, *History of the Reformed Church, German* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895), 268.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 4:11; Geneses 17:11; Deuteronomy 30:6.

<sup>8</sup> Question 66, *Heidelberg Catechism*, in *Creeds & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), II:441.

in the elements, a mediating position between Luther's eucharistic realism and Zwingli's memorialism (spiritual real presence, also called virtualism, is also the position of the Cranmer and of Wesley). The *Catechism* taught that the Lord's Supper was not only a meal of remembrance, but one in which believer's are spiritually fed and nourished by Christ through the elements: "... we come to share in [Christ's] true body and blood through the working of the Holy Spirit as surely as we receive with our mouth these holy tokens in remembrance of him."<sup>9</sup>

### The Shape of the *Palatinate Liturgy*<sup>10</sup>

The *Liturgy* effectively integrated the *Catechism* into the life of the people. Large portions of the *Catechism* were incorporated into the text of the liturgies themselves.

Under Prince Frederick's now kosher *kirchenordnung*, the churches of Heidelberg and the Palatinate "at least once a month in the towns, and once every two months in the villages, and on Christmas, Easter and Pentecost in both places" the church order directed the "Holy Lord's Supper" to be celebrated.

### Liturgy of Preparation

From the beginning Reformed churches developed a strong link between the Lord's Supper and church discipline. Concern about unworthy reception led to solemn preparatory services in the Palatinate, surrounding the table with an introspective, penitential ethos. Questions and answers 81 and 82 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* with supporting scriptures teach the importance of proper examination before sharing the in the Supper.

On Saturday afternoons *before* communion Sundays the required services were held. After preaching a sermon "on the true understanding of the sacrament," the minister left the pulpit and stood in front of the Table. Young persons wishing to be admitted to the sacrament were required to stand with the minister before the Table and recite the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer and to answer questions from the *Catechism* concerning the Lord's Supper. A general congregational examination then followed based on the three-fold structure of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (sin, redemption and duty) requiring the people's assent. The service concluded with an assur-

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<sup>9</sup> Question 79, Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Confessions of Faith* II: 444. For a full discussion of Christ's presence in the sacrament, see Bard Thompson, et al., *Essays on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1963), 112-114. For Calvin's understanding of the supper, see Killian McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1967), 60-264, and Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953).

<sup>10</sup> For full English text of the Palatinate Liturgy along with notes and commentary see Barbara Brown Zikmund, ed., *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997), II: *Reformation Roots*, document 22, 359-376. For original German text, see Wilhelm Niesel, ed. *Bekennnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag A.G.Zollikon-Zurich, 1938), 195-205.

ance of pardon, congregational repetition of the Lord's Prayer, and blessing. Those who wished private confession and absolution spoke to the minister who provided an opportunity, a practice Melancthon recommended.

### Liturgy of the Word

As in all Reformation liturgies, preaching was central. Architecturally the sacrament was celebrated around a table (not an altar), located close to the congregation. As the people gathered on communion Sundays, they would have seen a pewter cup and a common platter on the Holy Table. The minister opened the service with scripture sentences and began the prayer before the sermon, which is shaped by the order of the catechism (human misery, human redemption, human gratitude). The last paragraph borrows heavily from Calvin's collect for illumination (a similar prayer before the reading and preaching of God's word has been added to the UMC's modern Eucharistic rite). Then all prayed the Lord's Prayer. A Psalm would have been sung in German and a lection "on the Lord's death and on His Supper" would have been read and a sermon preached. The *Heidelberg Catechism* was supposed to shape all preaching. In every service the minister was expected to use the article of the catechism that was applicable to the topic of the sermon, which in turn was based on scripture.

According to a rubric at the head of the Lord's Supper portion of the liturgy, the sermon that day was to be brief and to set forth the "institution, order, reasons, profit and fruit [benefits] of the Holy Supper." Following the sermon the minister exhorted the people to a second confession. All prayed the classic prayer of the German Reformation from the 1536 Lutheran rite, though in the first person singular: "I, poor sinner, confess before thee, my God and Creator, that I, alas, have sinned against thee grievously and in manifold ways . . ." <sup>11</sup> Using the first person singular the minister pronounced pardon: "I proclaim [declare] at God's command that [you] are released in heaven from all [your] sins . . ." The Palatinate absolution was more than a statement of comfortable words. Following the tradition of Bucer and Melancthon, the minister, by the power of the keys, personally repeated the promise of the Gospel. Calvin, too, insisted that the confession deserved to be followed by absolution. In this respect the *Palatinate Liturgy* succeeded where Calvin failed, for the magistrates of Geneva refused to countenance an absolution.

The concluding prayers consist of intercessions from Calvin's rite, followed by the Lord's Prayer. Prayers for festivals and other special occasions could be substituted. An alternate prayer as printed in the liturgy is inspired by Calvin's paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. No provision was made anywhere in the rite for "free" prayer.

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<sup>11</sup> Zikmund, *Living Theological Heritage*, II: 361

## The Liturgy of the Table

Standing “by the table” the minister began the liturgy with a scriptural warrant by reciting the Pauline version of the words of institution (I Corinthians 11), followed by a lengthy fencing of the table (dismissal of unrepentant sinners) from Calvin’s liturgy. In the second part of the exhortation the promises of Christ in the gospels (“This *is* my body . . . This cup *is* the new covenant in my blood . . .”) and as repeated by the Apostle Paul (“The bread which we break *is* a sharing in the body of Christ; the cup over which we give thanks *is* a sharing in the blood of Christ”) are rehearsed in considerable detail. The words of institution are literally “preached” to use Calvin’s term. The Word, he said, must be added to the sacrament for the sake of its efficacy.

Not the bread and wine but the *people* are to be consecrated. Therefore a “Prayer of Approach” (paralleling Methodism’s traditional Anglican/Wesleyan “Prayer of Humble Access”), introduces the administration. In a genuine *epiclesis* the minister invokes the presence and power of the Holy Spirit:

Merciful God and Father, . . . act upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit in this Supper, at which we keep the glorious memorial of the bitter death of thy dear son Jesus Christ, that with true faith we may ever more yield ourselves to Him, and that through the power of the Holy Spirit our weary and contrite hearts *may be fed and quickened* [empowered] *by His true body and blood* . . .<sup>12</sup>

The people join in the “Our Father” and ask to be confirmed through the Supper “in the universal and undoubted Christian faith” which they confess using the words of the Apostles’ Creed.

Immediately before the distribution, paraphrasing the *sursum corda* in such a way as to concisely review the Calvinist doctrine of the supper, the minister continues:

That we may now be fed with Christ, the true bread of heaven, let us not cleave with our hearts to this external bread and wine, but lift up our hearts and faith into heaven, where Jesus Christ is our intercessor [*fürsprecher*, advocate] at the right hand of his heavenly father . . . and *doubt not* that through the action of the Holy Spirit, our souls shall be fed and nourished with His body and blood, as truly as we receive the holy bread and cup in remembrance of Him.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the earthly signs of God’s “coming down” to his people—plain bread and real wine—become vehicles to transport them above all things earthly and visible.

Then the minister breaks the bread and places it on a platter. Lutherans rejected the fraction (*brodbrechen*); Calvinists insisted upon it as a symbolic denial of Christ’s physical /corporeal presence in the sacrament. The min-

<sup>12</sup> Zikmund, *Living Theological Heritage* II: 371. I feel this is language that both Charles and John Wesley would have relished.

<sup>13</sup> Zikmund, *Living Theological Heritage* II: 371.

ister then pours wine into a large cup.<sup>14</sup> The communicants left their pews and walked to the table where they remained standing, unlike the Lutherans who knelt before the table and the Dutch who sat around it. The minister delivered a piece of bread to each communicant using words of delivery similar to those found in The United Methodist Church's modern rite: "The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ." While giving the cup to each, the minister said, "The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the Blood of Christ."

During the communion of the people some churches sang psalms and hymns, a practice popularized by Bucer through his Strasbourg Liturgy. In other churches a minister (or lay reader) read portions of scripture "helpful to the remembrance of Christ's death," such as John 14-18 and Isaiah 53 as specified in the rubrics.

When all had communed the minister prayed a thanksgiving. Two texts are given. The first thanksgiving is a skillful interweaving of Psalm 103 and Romans 5.

Dearly beloved, as the Lord hath now fed our souls at His Table, let us praise His name with thanksgiving, each one saying in his heart: Bless the Lord, O my soul... The Lord is merciful, patient, and of great goodness. He doth not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our offence . . . . Wherefore God sheweth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us . . . .<sup>15</sup>

I have been unable to identify the source of the second thanksgiving, although there are similarities in form to the concluding prayer of Cranmer's 1549 Anglican rite:

Almighty, merciful God and Father, we give thee most hearty thanks that of thine infinite mercy, thou hast given us thine only-begotten Son to be our Mediator, the sacrifice for our sin, and the food and drink of eternal life, granting us true faith that we may become partakers of these thy benefits and has bidden thy dear Son Jesus Christ to institute His Holy Supper to strengthen us in the same . . . .

With the words "Praise ye the Lord with your song" the minister announced a concluding psalm. The minister then pronounced a blessing as had been customary at the end of the mass since the late middle ages. Reformed rites like this one specified the Aaronic blessing ("The Lord bless you and keep you . . .," Numbers 6:24-26) while Anglican/Wesleyan rites preferred the blessing from Philippians 4:7 ("And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus"). The people placed alms for the poor in a basin or basket at the door as they went out in peace connecting liturgy and justice. (Wesley retained the 1662 rubric requiring a collection for the poor at communion in his 1784 revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* for the American church, *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*.)

The liturgy consists almost exclusively of texts spoken by the presiding

<sup>14</sup> Several German-silver (pewter) cups (chalices) belonging to Otterbein survive and may be found in the Methodist Archives at Drew.

<sup>15</sup> Zikmund, *Living Theological Heritage* II: 372-373.

ordained minister, with few unison prayers thus facilitating its use without full-text service books for the congregation. Unlike its companion catechism, the liturgy is cerebral, long-winded and verbose, and appears to this latter-day Methodist to be less emotionally moving and eloquent than Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*, which is to say that the German Reformed had a better catechism, but Methodists had a better liturgy.

### Music in the Liturgy

The Palatinate liturgical commission followed Lutheran precedent by considering the practice of congregational singing essential, but in selecting what was proper to be sung, followed Calvin and specified Psalms only. Lutheran hymnals from the 1520s routinely mixed hymns with psalms. Not till the latter half of the seventeenth century did the German Reformed Church relax the exclusive use of Psalms and produce hymns equal to the best Lutheran hymns—notably hymns by Joachim Neander, Frederick Lampe and Gerhard Tersteegen.<sup>16</sup>

### The Use of the Liturgy by the Pennsylvania's German Reformed

Germans began to settle in English America in significant numbers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The great majority came to Pennsylvania, where by 1750 they numbered approximately 100,000, constituting one-third to one-half of the colony's population. Two groups predominated, the *church* Germans—Lutheran, Reformed, Moravian and Roman Catholic—and the *sect* Germans—Mennonites, Amish and Dunkards (Baptists). The church Germans were short of ordained clergy; for the Lutheran and Reformed, liturgical books and hymnals were also scarce. But there is no reason to doubt the tradition that the Palatinate Liturgy was used for German Reformed celebrations of the Lord's Supper in colonial America. The liturgy, though not published in America until 1798, did not demand a large number of copies for congregational use, and German Reformed hymnals containing significant liturgical materials were published beginning in 1752 and steadily thereafter in revised editions. The Liturgy continued to be the primary form of worship of German Reformed congregations well into the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

As in Germany, the singing of Psalms and hymns in public worship, and especially at communion, became common practice in Pennsylvania. The earliest piece of German Reformed liturgical literature printed in America was a 1752 hymnal published by Christopher Sauer in Germantown (Philadelphia), *Kern alter und neuer in 700. Bestehender, Geistreicher Lieder*

<sup>16</sup> The *United Methodist Hymnal* 1989 contains five hymns by Neander and one by Tersteegen. See index of composers, authors and sources.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Brown Zikmund, ed., *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997), II: *Reformation Roots*, 359-360.

(*A Collection of the Finest Old and New Spiritual Songs*).<sup>18</sup> In the absence of ordained ministers lay leaders (often the community's school teacher) read the Palatinate liturgy of the Word and a published sermon accompanied by songs on Sundays and holy days and also conducted funerals, but congregations had to live without Baptism or the Lord's Supper.

By the 1790s, the German Reformed Church in America had solved the problem of clergy recruitment and support and in 1798 published the *Palatinate Liturgy*. The sixty-page service book *Kirchen-Formularien der Evangelisch-Reformirten Gemeinen* contained no order for ordinary Sunday services, but did provide forms for Baptism, preparation for communion, and Holy Communion, as well as services for excommunication and restoration, marriage, and ordination.<sup>19</sup> Curiously, the liturgy book does not contain a rite for burial of the dead. Together with the revised hymnbook published in the previous year, the newly independent American church now had the liturgical books it needed.

Otterbein arrived in New York in July, 1752, and traveled to Philadelphia where he joined the Pennsylvania Coetus (synod/conference) of the Reformed Church, and was assigned to the church in Lancaster, the largest city west of Philadelphia with 500 homes and 2,000 families. Otterbein invigorated his demoralized congregation, who had been without a pastor for several years, led them to build a new stone church (1753) and adopt and publish a brief church discipline (1757), a major section of which was devoted to communion discipline:

To the end that all disorder may be prevented, and that each member may be more fully known, each one, without exception, who desires to receive the Lord's Supper, shall, previous to the preparation service, upon a day appointed, for that purpose, personally appear before the minister, that an interview may be held.<sup>20</sup>

All communicants were of course expected to attend the Preparatory service.

In 1774, Otterbein accepted a call to a new Reformed Church in Baltimore, which was organized three years earlier when the parent congregation split over the new evangelical measures. Here Otterbein's program for church renewal blossomed. He began semi-annual conferences among evangelical pastors in several Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania locations, chiefly Reformed. Ten years later (1784) the congregation opened a handsome brick

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<sup>18</sup> *Kern alter und neuer, in 700. bestehender geistreicher lieder, wecche sowol bey dem offentli-chen Gottesdienste in denen Reformirten kirchen des hessisch-hanauisch-pfaltzisch-pensilvanischen und mehren andern angrantzenden landen . . .* (Germantau [Philadelphia]: Christoph Saur, 1752). Sauer published four editions, a second in 1763, a third in 1772 and a fourth in 1750. The hymnal was first published in Marburg in 1746 and again in 1750.

<sup>19</sup> *Kirchen-formularien der Evangelisch-Reformirten Gemeinen* (Germantau [Philadelphia]: Michael Billmeyer, 1798), 60.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur C. Core, ed., *Philip William Otterbein: Pastor, Ecumenist* (Dayton, OH: Board of Publication, The Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1968), 109.

church and school house.<sup>21</sup>

The following year (1785) Pastor Otterbein published *Constitution and Ordinances of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Baltimore*, which welcomed persons from all denominations, but required members to attend Sunday worship, to prepare for Holy Communion, to join small groups (class meetings) for prayer and Bible study. Rule six pertains to communion discipline:

Persons expressing a desire to commune with us at the Lord's Table, although they have not been members of our church, shall be admitted by the consent of the Vestry, provided that nothing justly can be alleged of their walk in life, and more especially when it is know that they are seeking their salvation. After the preparation sermon, such persons may declare themselves openly before the assembly; also, that they are ready to submit to all wholesome discipline; and thus they are received into the church.

The church established a German day school and the rules required the pastor to catechize the young weekly using the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Here too sacramental discipline was central:

The more mature in years, who have obtained knowledge of the great truths of the Gospel, should be impressed with the importance of striving, through divine grace, to become worthy recipients of the Holy Sacrament.<sup>22</sup>

### Otterbein was an Ecumenist Before His Time

The 1785 Baltimore church discipline also exhibits Otterbein's deep conviction on the Lord's Supper as a means of Christian unity. Who shall come to the Lord's Table? Rule seven daringly states:

Forasmuch as the difference of people and denominations end in Christ,—(Romans 10:12; Colossians 3:11)—and availeth nothing in him, but a new creature—(Galatians 6:13-16)—it becomes our duty, according to the Gospel, to commune with and admit to the Lord's Table, professors to whatever order or sort of the Christian church they belong.

This was a clear declaration that there is one Christ, one church, and one table. It was also a clear call for an open and united celebration of the Supper of the Lord.

Since partaking of the sacrament was a sign and seal of the rebirth whereby believers become visible to one another, Otterbein believed there was no theological justification of limiting communion to members of his own congregation. Since, the essentials of Christian unity were not denominational affiliation but the new birth experience, all Christians who truly and earnestly repented of their sins were welcome at his table. Also, since the Lord's Supper was seen as sign of God's grace already accomplished in the life of the communicant, before an individual communed they were to ex-

<sup>21</sup> The restored buildings still house Old Otterbein United Methodist Church in the historic Baltimore's inner harbor area, since 1968 one of the UMC's heritage landmarks.

<sup>22</sup> Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe and Jean Miller Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America*, Volume 2, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 88-89, 1785b, rule 6 and 9.

amine themselves to see if they were in the faith and worthy recipients of the meal.

Otterbein was not primarily concerned with organization and polity; his own association with the Reformed Church was permanent, even while working with his new evangelical partners from other denominations. While he met in occasional conferences with these ministers in the new movement which would become the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, and was designated one of their "bishops" after the conference in 1800, Otterbein refused to ordain any of the almost 100 men he helped send out until almost his dying day. Then, on October 2, 1813, he ordained Christopher Newcomer, Joseph Hoffman and Frederick Schaffer. By this act, he perpetuated the movement which in his last year he described by saying to Newcomer, "The Lord has been pleased graciously to satisfy me that the work will abide [i.e. continue]."

Otterbein never lost interest in the new movement (The United Brethren in Christ) which he helped to create. To it he gave supervision, ordained its ministers and, with Martin Boehm, exercised episcopal supervision after 1800. Yet he never severed his connection with the Reformed Church and was until his death highly regarded by his Reformed colleagues.