

AMERICAN LITURGY: A THEOLOGICAL LOCUS

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THE REFORM of the Church's worship, planned during sessions of Vatican II, was structured as a process that was to unfold in two stages. The first stage was intended as a kind of "where are we?" moment, an exploration of self-identity for the Roman liturgy. This self-analysis was to assume the concrete shape of (a) reflecting on the heart-core of the Roman tradition of worship and (b) attempting to capture and express that heart by revising the liturgical service books of the Roman Church in accordance with these authentic traditional elements. In this sense it is fair to say that the first stage of the reform was aimed at producing a new library. It was to be a library of high importance and vast richness, precisely because it did enshrine so much of the Church's true and life-giving worship. But a library is for reading, and liturgy is more than reading, even a reading of such obvious value and such inspired Christian experience. Liturgy, like music, like a poem, does not exist on a printed page. It exists only when performed. Liturgy is something that people *do* together.

Liturgy is ritual event. The Fathers of Vatican II understood this very well and consequently proposed a second stage of liturgical renewal. When the reform of Roman service books was accomplished, the renewal of our public worship was to proceed in an even more challenging way. The new challenge was to make the tradition work for us in our own time, our own places, our own cultures.¹

The meaning of this new challenge is exciting and bold: the bishops propose to us that the Church, in all its diversified national communities with their national episcopal conferences, allow it to be inspired (not enslaved) by its centuries-old tradition of worship and yet, in our moment of time, develop that tradition according to the norms and principles that arise from the best values which particular cultures can and do offer. In short, the mandate of liturgical reform committed to world-wide national communities of believers challenges us to en flesh within our own cultural histories the Church's tradition of community prayer, the paschal mystery, lived and relived by the people of our own time. *Liturgia semper reformanda.*

¹ *Sacrosanctum concilium* 21-46, and the three Instructions which explain its implementation Cf B Fischer, "Liturgie und Volksfrommigkeit," *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 17 (1967) 129-43

TEN YEARS AFTER

Where are we now, ten years after the publication of Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy? What have we done with the mandate placed in our hands? Has the liturgy been reformed? Have we understood and accepted the challenge of renewal?

Many believe that the reform has already been brought to a successful completion. The publication of new service books (most of the new rituals have now appeared in a new form) confirms many Church members in this view. New rites in newly published books often have given the impression that the whole of the liturgical reform is now available for immediate practice. This point of view, however, is not easily reconciled either with the stated principles of the officially inspired program of a two-stage reform, or with the data which reflect the disquiet, restlessness, disappointment, and lack of satisfaction and fulfilment experienced in many worshiping communities today.² It is true that a familiar mistake has been to ask more of liturgy than liturgy can do, or was ever intended to do. Yet, there is no doubt that poverty-stricken Sunday rituals in parish after parish, community after community, throughout our land have made it more easily possible for estrangement from the Church to occur more and more frequently. People are searching elsewhere for fulfilment in their worship-life, and it must be asked honestly whether such poverty-stricken rituals are not often directly productive of disenchantment, disappointment, and, finally, disappearance.

A simple, clear reading of the mandate for liturgical reform proposed by Vatican II indicates at once that the reform is not finished. What has been accomplished during the past ten years, often with a high measure of success, is stage one: the service books have been reworked and purified, enriched, clarified, and simplified. What is upon us now is stage two, the cultural development of true worship in spirit and in truth and, for us, a profoundly American experience of liturgy.

These thoughts provided the context within which seventy-five American liturgists convened at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Arizona, on December 4, 1973, precisely the tenth anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. These American liturgists, representing several Christian churches, came together in a spirit of high anticipation and hope, at the same time exhibiting an extraordinary measure of expertise and competence. Never before had

² See my "Liturgical Reform: Product or Prayer?" *Worship* 47 (1973) 580-91. Cf. G. Wainwright, "The Risks and Possibilities of Liturgical Reform," *Studia liturgica* 8 (1971-72) 65-80.

there been an opportunity for a meeting at this level of professionalism among liturgists in America, and the members, when they gathered, were quite aware of the precious moment it could be for them and their communities. Many held academic doctoral degrees, others were directly concerned with the pastoral administration of the reform. Some were artists, others engaged in the apostolate of editorial and publishing work. There was no predetermined resolution or statement which directed their three-day meeting as a goal to be achieved or a task to be accomplished. Only one goal was before them: to express to each other, given their training, background, and experience, what they considered to be the most important, pivotal, and far-reaching opportunities, problems, and obstacles presented by the contemporary reform of worship. The experience was exhilarating and sparked hope on all sides. During the meeting, the participants listened to two major addresses as the context of their own encounters with one another. These addresses, by Walter J. Burghardt and Langdon Gilkey, appear in this volume. What follows here is a summary of the main lines of the discussions which took place among America's leading liturgists. The points made, the opinions offered, and the suggestions exchanged are themselves attempts by these men and women to grapple with the mystery of God as He shows Himself to us both within and outside our liturgical experience. As such, they are a manner of theological reflection, and help to direct our attention to the neglect of the liturgical event as a theological locus that we have exhibited for several centuries.

1) A capital realization, constantly underneath and often explicitly voiced during the discussions, revolved around these three questions: (a) What does it mean, in the America of today, to believe? How do Americans of today experience in their own history, now being lived, the presence of God? (b) How do Americans share an experience of belief with one another? Basic to this consideration is the question of community. If religious community may be, in a summary way, defined as shared faith-experience, then where are such communities of faith to be found in America? Where are people sharing this kind of religious experience today in our country? (c) What does it mean to *ritualize* in Christian liturgy such shared experience of belief with others in such a way that the ritual action gives adequate expression to this shared faith and molds the community in new outreaches and depths of this experience?

2) The experience of very many participants in the organized discussion groups of the conference was one of intense struggle: they grappled with the dimensions and shape of religious experience newly emerging in America. The emphasis here was truly on *struggle*. They were not sure

where true religious experience was to be found, where God was speaking, how to discern the motion and invitation of the Holy Spirit. In addition, they struggled with the very meaning of liturgy itself: they understood liturgy to be *ritual event*, the *symbol* of our lives together, the symbol of historical human experience lived in the presence of the Holy One, human lives that are conceived, touched, transformed, inspired by, and enfolded within the numinous reality of a God of mystery who shares the adventure with us of coming-to-be in the always new surprise of living together. They knew that this is what liturgy is supposed to be, but wondered how often it happened.

3) A profound influence in the discussion groups was an explicit awareness of diversity (pluralism) in these forms: (a) As one member put it, people in America appear to believe in different gods; what we are experiencing is not simply a cultural diversity within America but a diversity of faith itself. (b) A diversity of symbol: there is an active search under way for a range of symbols that are truly available for the pluralism of our experience and adequately mirror such diversity without losing touch with a twenty-century-long tradition. Some non-Roman members suggested that the contemporary meaninglessness of many symbols was an experience that could provide for Roman Catholics an opportunity to know in a lived way what it means to undergo the disintegration of a Church as one knows it.³ (c) The members acknowledged this experience of diversity to be an accepted if nonetheless threatening fact.

4) The ambiguity of such faith-experience and consequent ambiguity of ritual which symbolizes it produces the realization that there is not, and cannot ever be, "an American liturgy," because there will be as many liturgies as there are *shapes to faith*. Liturgy exists only in particular situations. Again the emphasis was upon the fact that liturgy only exists when people do it together.

5) Continual notice was given to the role and task, indeed the burden and service, asked of a celebrant-president in liturgical assemblies. Within the context of acknowledged diversities the celebrant, often untrained in the very skills needed for such a role, is required to assume a mode of leadership characterized by expectancy and anticipation as he stands before the faith-experience of his community members, hoping for a common expression of a common faith yet often distraught by the disintegration which pluralism produces. At the same time, there is required of him some measure of transparency of his own faith-life which

³ See Peter Fink, "Towards a Liturgical Theology," *Worship* 47 (1973) 601-9; also Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (London, 1966) pp. 9-27.

will respect and not domineer over or attempt to control the diversity of those celebrating with him, forcing them to make his experience theirs.

6) In his keynote address, Walter Burghardt asked the participants to confront the task of being at one and the same time continuous with the heart of a tradition and yet discontinuous with former historical expressions of that tradition. The key to this challenge is found in the distinction that may be drawn between tradition and history. Tradition, distilled from its manifold historical expressions, can never exist unless en fleshed in a moment of history; yet it is never to be identified absolutely with this or that historical moment. Today's task is to give new historical en fleshment to the faith of our fathers and our own faith, without simply repeating our fathers' way of living this faith.

7) Concerned attention was given to the increasingly dangerous divorce in America between dogmatics and liturgy, systematic theology and liturgy, and (already far advanced) catechetics and liturgy. If *lex orandi est lex credendi*, how is it possible to show that authentic worship in America today is truly the locus of the Church's faith, today and every day?

8) The members determined to associate themselves permanently in a national academy of American liturgists that would be a forum for the prayerful and critical reflection on the liturgical scene in America that is so much needed. They determined that such an academy, ecumenical in membership, would not duplicate the work or goals of other groups engaged in the American liturgical apostolate. They saw themselves as an association aimed primarily at the mutual enrichment of its members by the sharing of their expertise, which experience would inevitably overflow (in ways that only the future could teach) in terms of service for the rest of the Church. In this regard they were particularly and explicitly clear on their conviction that the liturgical data brought forward in the exercise of their own science must always and unavoidably be related to the anthropological, psychological, and sociological data acquired and constantly being produced by the efforts of other scientists on the American scene. En fleshment would be an arduous and delicate process.

9) One concrete ritual, initiation, was the topic of discussion in one of the group encounters. Because of its subject, exhibiting in a particular way the dimensions of liturgy as *sacramentum fidei*, the conclusions of this discussion group may stand as touchstone for the attitudes manifested throughout the whole assembly. Quite special notice was taken of the vast cultural shift which has produced the contemporary ecclesiological problem, which in turn has forced us to ask the question: "How do persons *become* Church today in the initiation liturgy?" The following,

representing the unanimous conclusions of that discussion group, are the results of their exchanges:

CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Preamble. In Christ's death and resurrection, the new age of life and forgiveness has been inaugurated. By the Spirit, the powers of the age to come are accessible. Christ and the people in him are the first fruits of a world restored to the intention of the Creator. The breaking of the order, the joining of the new, the glory of a world redeemed, the transformation of life, the creation of a covenant people, and the calling to the life of faith are all celebrated in the central paschal observance of the Church.

The rites of Christian initiation are best understood against this background: to express and enact the great paschal mystery in which the Church's life is rooted. There are acts by which the Church shapes its common life responsibly and joyfully. The rites of initiation bring an individual, by a death and resurrection, into the life of Christ and his body. These rites stand at the beginning of Christian life; they signify, at the start, the whole of the enduring, personal relation to God and are a pledge of eternal life.

1. The rite of Christian initiation should normally consist of the unified sacramental event in which the three now separated moments (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist) are integrated. The full rite is to be used at any age when a person is initiated. As an act of the church, the rite of initiation is most properly celebrated in the midst of the congregation.
2. Within the economy of the sacraments, adult initiation should be the practical norm. The Church's understanding of baptism is most fully demonstrated when an adult is baptized.
3. Infant baptism derives from the adult form. It places specific responsibilities upon the adult community. When parents and the congregation accept these continuing responsibilities, the celebration of infant baptism proclaims the initiative of God's love.
4. The entire Easter season from Lent to Pentecost is derived from the public practice of adult baptism. The meaning of baptism is best demonstrated when it is celebrated within the context of the Church's dramatic shaping of time, whose climax is in the Easter season.
5. For children of responsible Christian parents, two different patterns of initiation might well coexist: the celebration of the full rite of initiation (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist) shortly after birth, to be followed by catechesis appropriate to succeeding stages of development; or enrollment of the infant as a catechumen, with initiation to be celebrated at a later age after catechesis.
6. Catechumenate. The development of viable and visible catechumenate structures on a parish, interparish, or diocesan basis is essential to the renewal of the sacraments of initiation. We urge that everywhere this thoroughly restored and fully celebrated rite be implemented and adapted and that the simpler

forms of the new ritual be reserved for extreme exceptions. We offer the following guidelines:

Guidelines for the catechumenate:

- A. The catechumenate is formation in faith, faith-sharing, prayer, and ministry: it nourishes and supports the candidates in turning away from sin and darkness and toward the mystery of Christ.
- B. The catechumens should be helped to identify their own experiences as religious, to relate their own moral struggles to their transformation in Christ.
- C. Ritual elements and symbols of their own culture need to be searched out and developed. Care should be taken that signs are of transformation in Christ.
- D. The message of the catechumenate is to be kept simple, clear, concrete, scriptural, and direct; our response is costly; we learn with the community that we are loved by God, that we are really incorporated into Christ, his dying, his rising.
- E. The catechumenate requires:
 - i. Leaders competent in liturgy, catechetics, and the problems and questions of current living, and at ease in sharing personal faith, trust, prayer, joy, and love.
 - ii. Small group processes in which catechumens and Christians who have joined Christ in suffering can interact.
 - iii. Sponsors who are part of the local church community and are able to share personal religious experience on a one-to-one basis.
- F. The whole community should know the catechumens, fast and pray with them, witness their progress, and enter the same process of renewal culminating in the paschal celebration of penance and the Easter-vigil renewal of baptism and celebration of Eucharist.
7. Penance is a process culminated by a rite of reconciliation. Each year at Lent and Easter the whole initiated community re-enters the conversion process, hears the Word of God with renewed attention, waits in mutual prayer and support, and finally renews its dying and rising in the sacrament of reconciliation.
8. What is said here about the sacraments of initiation is based on overriding theological principles. The sacraments form a continuum; the manner and time of celebrating one sacrament dictates the practice of others.

Mary Collins, in her incisive and subtle commentary on the Scottsdale conference of American liturgists, suggests that, while the meeting was hugely inspiring and bespoke much promise for the future, there is not much profit in overlooking precisely how elusive and exactly how difficult it might be to respond with accuracy and even with courage to the call for liturgical discontinuity. If liturgy, as *sacramentum fidei*, celebrates God's presence for us in full continuity with the whole of the Christian experience, rooted in the Jesus-event of history, and at the

same time is a secularized (i.e., temporal, as Panikkar employs the term) ritual of today, how is it possible to establish criteria according to which such secularized liturgies are expressions of a faith that belongs both to us and, in reality, to our fathers as well?⁴

There is a way. What is needed is the rediscovery of an authentic *pastoral theology* that will take as its double starting-point both the situation of the American religious experience today and the event of liturgy as something that American believers do together in assembly, making the sign there of God's presence with them and for them.

PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND LITURGICAL RENEWAL

For the most part, pastoral theology has meant two things for Christian churches until the beginnings of its recent revitalization. It meant, first, a checklist of practical hints and suggestions for the exercise of ministry. It was a practical vade mecum of approaches and plans of action considered best suited for the problems and needs the minister could reasonably expect to encounter. Thus this brand of theology was not a theology at all; it was a handy "how-to" kit. This earlier form of pastoral theology meant, secondly, that it was designated as a discipline or area reserved entirely for professional ministers of religion (that is, for the most part, the ordained ministry). Its focus upon the pastoral activity of the Church was directed most properly to the ranks of ordained ministers, with the result that the pastoral activity of the remainder of the Church was not given attention.

Contemporary theologians, however, have taken a more studied view of the meaning and the function of pastoral theology. Karl Rahner explains it this way: "Pastoral theology deals with the action of the Church. It is pastoral because it engages concrete circumstances; it is theological because it reflects systematically on the nature of the Church and analyses the circumstances which confront the Church today."⁵ He writes further that pastoral theology should be described as "theological reflection on the self-realizing activity of the Church whereby God communicates salvation to the world, and the forms this activity takes and should take in view both of the unchanging nature of the Church and

⁴Raimundo Panikkar, "Secularization and Worship," in his *Worship and Secularization* (Bussum, Holland, 1970) pp. 28-71. As he explains, the secular means "the temporal world, the temporal aspect of reality," and so he concludes that "The temporal is being seen today as positive and in a way sacred. The secular man does not need to be anti-religious and even anti-sacred; the secular man is he who stands for the positive and in a way sacred value of time and the temporal reality" (pp. 32-33). See M. Collins, "Liturgy in America: The Scottsdale Conference," *Worship* 48 (1974) 66-80.

⁵Karl Rahner, *Theology of Pastoral Action*. tr. W. J. O'Hara (New York, 1968) p. 25.

also of the situation in which the Church and the world find themselves at any time.”⁶ In this view, pastoral theology is clearly a genuine theology, since it is a science of organized and systematized reflection on the data gathered from the aspects of man’s religious experience, the encounter that takes place between God and men and women.

Such a pastoral theology, moreover, takes into account the entire community of believers, the whole Church, and is not limited to the activity of ordained ministry. Its principal area of study is the consideration of precisely the way in which the contemporary situation of concrete circumstances conditions the process of self-realization in which the Church is engaged. It wants to know how the now of man’s life influences and is the context of this self-realizing activity. René Latourelle writes:

While dogmatic theology treats of the Church in her essential being, that is as a mystery and an institution at once visible and invisible, human and divine, pastoral theology is a methodological reflection on her being in motion, that is, upon the mystery of the building up of the Body of Christ, which is the Church, in her present, concretely realized form, and upon the conditions of this realization, and on the way in which the contemporary state of the world affects the actual accomplishment of the Church’s salvific mission.⁷

Such an understanding of pastoral theology opens the way to dealing with the perplexing problem of establishing meaningful norms and criteria that will guide the creation of culturally secularized liturgies in America. Starting with the proposition of the Church’s preaching that liturgy is *sacramentum fidei*, the sacrament of the community’s faith-experience, pastoral theology will be concerned, first, to study and articulate the dimensions of *fides*. In other words, it will be concerned with the shape and the substance of the American religious experience (in this country), seeking to understand and express precisely in what ways the unfolding of this experience in community is conditioned, whether positively or negatively, by its situs within American culture. Secondly, pastoral theology will study the ritual event, the *sacramentum* which symbolizes the religious experience of the community. *Sacramentum* as the symbol of faith is itself a moment of faith, and pastoral theology will be anxious to know how successfully the shape of the symbol gives expression to, as well as makes possible the enlargement of, the community’s faith.⁸

⁶ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, ed. Cornelius Ernst, tr. Richard Strachan (New York, 1965) p. 338. Cf. Karl Rahner and Heinz Schuster, “Preface,” *Concilium* 3 (1965) 3.

⁷ René Latourelle, *Theology: Science of Salvation*, tr. M. Dominic (New York, 1968) p. 4.

⁸ See the remarks of John S. Dunne, *Time and Myth* (Garden City, N.Y., 1973); also those of Robert E. Neale, *In Praise of Play* (New York, 1969) esp. pp. 126-63.

Evidently, such an undertaking, whose focus of study is the double object of (1) the contemporary faith-life of Americans who have not only a history which can inspire them but a present moment in which they live, and (2) the ritualizing action in which a contemporary community attempts to symbolize God's presence for them, cannot be accomplished unless an explicit presupposition of the inquiry forces the enterprise to be in continual and obvious dialogue with the psychological, anthropological, and sociological data afforded by the culture (and cultural diversities) of our people. To speak of the enfleshment of any liturgical tradition within the contemporary culture of a people is to speak of the concrete and intrinsic possibilities that are available to particular communities of men and women as they are, where they are, when they are. A properly understood pastoral theology might be an enormously valuable tool to aid such a process of enfleshment, exactly because its whole interest is to reach within the *hodie*, the culturally shaped now of our lives with God, and bring that faith to proper and inspiring articulation.

A final point. When the liturgical action of an American community is properly regarded as a moment of their shared faith, its *sacramentum*, American liturgy is given the opportunity to serve as a true *locus theologicus*, the point of departure for careful elaboration of this faith-moment in terms of both pastoral and systematic theology. The task of these theologies is to interpret and show how an American *lex orandi* is an authentic instance of the Church's *lex credendi* and how it does in fact, whenever it is authentic, do its own part in determining the *lex credendi*. This would be, of course, not only an exciting theological undertaking. It is also a far cry from an understanding of the international liturgical reform as simply a way of "adapting" the Roman service books, in an extrinsic manner, to various countries throughout the world. An adapted liturgy is not radically true to a people's experience. Only when men and women know God's real presence in their lives and struggle together, from their histories and within the dynamics of their present encounter, to sign His presence in the gestures, the words, the sounds, the meals that are their own, can there be liturgy as *sacramentum fidei*.