



AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF LITURGY

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AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF LITURGY

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Editorial

On 22 June 1977 I was present in Sydney Town Hall for the service of inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia. I suppose in a way it was a sort of “conversion” experience for I went in Methodist and came out Uniting. I mention this incident for the date. With a little arithmetic you can see why a conference held by the Uniting Church in 1998 could be called “Age 21”. The full title of the conference was “Age 21: times, seasons and cultures in worship”. It was held in Brisbane 22-29 January and the two main speakers were Professor Gail Ramshaw and Professor Gordon Lathrop. Their papers, “Images of God, For Us, Beyond Us” and “God’s Time and our Times: Christian Worship and Local Cultures in Dialogue” respectively, begin this issue.

In alternate years the Victoria Chapter of the Academy awards the Leatherland Exhibition to a young scholar for an essay submitted as part of the requirements for a degree or diploma at Melbourne College of Divinity or other institution. The Leatherland Exhibitioner for 1996 is the Reverend Ian Ferguson. His winning essay “Remembering the Body: human embodiment and liturgical practice” will be published in two parts. Part I is in this issue.

RWH
Strathmore Vicarage
Feast of the Ugandan Martyrs 1998

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Images of God, For Us, Beyond Us

Gail Ramshaw

Those of us who call on the deity in prayer are engaging in a remarkably difficult task: we are using words to address that which is beyond words. This is one assertion upon which many of the world's religions agree. Even in those religious traditions that are confident about their own words, perhaps even adamant about the use of specific traditional verbal formulas, some of their theologians or mystics will affirm that, well, of course, their words don't really name the Nameless One they address. If God is ultimate reality, it follows that human language will be unable to state that ultimate-ness in so many words.

Religions have different ways of dealing with the problem of addressing the Unnameable. Some traditions use adjectives to describe the One who is beyond naming. Some employ erotic poetry, borrowing from human ecstasy a speech pattern for addressing the divine. Many religious traditions have welcomed glossalalia as a vehicle for praise of the One beyond words. In some traditions, the language about God is kept secret, with only the holy few able to speak the holy words, the limited speech an indication that the name of the Holy One is not fit for normal mouths. Some religious traditions have taken refuge in long periods of silence, as if God might come to our ears, but not in the most profound way to our lips.

Christians, however, have recognised from the beginning that they need a communal speech for praise and prayer. All religion, classically understood, is communal, a corporate worldview about ultimate reality with its attendant rituals and ethics. But Christians have known that the communal nature of religion is not a minor aspect of resurrection faith, not an option, not an inconvenience we might try to circumvent, not a botheration that truly educated Christians can do without. The Christian church is in the first place a community around the spirit of the risen Christ. The women tell the men that the tomb is empty, and they all share a meal to celebrate. From the beginning, Christians knew they needed words – words such as He is risen, Welcome, Peace be with you, Take and eat – to convey the Spirit of Christ around the room.

The church has known periods of rigorous authoritarian prescription concerning the words of communal worship. Use these words,

declaimed the church's hierarchy, or the state's theocratic rulers, or we shall burn you alive. The boundaries of Christian speech were rigidly maintained, at least in the minds and within the careers of those in authority. It is easy for most of us to see the dangers of this church pattern, certainly its cruelty, its lack of self-awareness, the smallness of its religious vision. It was as if the first truth of religious language – that we cannot fully name God – was forgotten in the zeal to name God in the correct way, in the way of the ancestors, with the words that the big-shot bishops mandated.

But serving jail sentences over prayers wrongly worded is hardly the problem before most of the Christians in this room. Indeed, we all are aware that where national or international church bodies try to maintain rigid control over prayer speech, their efforts toward standardisation are simply being ignored. Our danger is the opposite: Hey, you can pray however you like. Whatever. Use any language and imagery you want. All religions have some truth in them, so why not import other prayers into the liturgy and try them out? And, at least in some instances, the worship committee carefully excludes any trained theologians from its deliberations, lest the tradition retain some of its persuasive power or learned objections obstruct the latest experimentation in prayer.

There is a middle way. We need no longer busy ourselves excommunicating people who use a different translation of the Lord's Prayer, but the option need not be to admit any speech, call God any name, print out any old prayer in our weekly bulletins. Christians live in a tradition of receiving God. It is not a narrow tradition. In fact, one of the joyous surprises in a serious study of church history is the discovery of how very wide and fascinating the tradition has been. But it is a way of words in action, and when the believers assemble on Sunday morning, they have a right to address God and one another in the language in which they are baptised and confirmed. The tradition continuously changes, moves a bit, or moves a great deal, but, one hopes, remains recognisably the living tradition of the women telling the men that the tomb is empty, and let's have a meal to celebrate. Like a tree of life, the tradition keeps growing, its trunk providing nutrients so that new branches can flourish. Thus we can affirm each week: "This is our God, for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice in the salvation of our God."

Church history shows that through the past 3000 years – 2000 of our Christian movement and 1000 of our Jewish ancestors in the faith –

there have been several significant shifts of religious language, and we all know that such a shift is currently underway. If we attend to the dates of the origins of specific psalms, we realise that as the Israelite people's cultural situation changed, as the people went from being nomadic tribal herders to being urban citizens of a kingdom, the language they used for God also changed. God went from being Shepherd to being King. After the exile, when God's action was seen less clearly, God was addressed more obliquely, as Holy One or Law-Giver, as if acknowledging that the Law had replaced the monarchy as a sign of the presence of God. But even when shepherds were few, the people continued to call God Shepherd. When kingship became extinct, God was still King. Here's the pattern: the people recalled the tradition of imagery for God and added to the old imagery new language from their current situation.

The same type of shift occurred several times in Christian history. For example, in the fourth and fifth centuries, the theological imagery of the Trinity reshaped the more ancient cultural language of the sonship of the king. Thus the image of fatherhood shifted to a more complex image of co-equality. Here is another illustration of this pattern: For much of the European medieval world, the primary image of God offered to the faithful was the divine Judge. But for some of the Reformers God was portrayed instead as a loving Father. In this our century of the women's movement and the decline of androcentrism, the father image is under serious attack. We ought not be surprised that such shifts in religious imagery occur. Our model from history would suggest that we work together on the new images, holding them before the tradition of the images within which we have been sustained in the past, and weave together the new with the old for a tradition that grows always more rich, more full, more nuanced, more profoundly Christian. It is important continuously to remind ourselves that the language of the communal weekly resurrection meal will not necessarily be the language that I, me, personally, Gail – fill in your own name – would choose. We who participate in the benefits of the First World nations live in a time of increasing individual choice. Meals are eaten alone, commuters drive to work alone, couples limit their families to an only child, and even I who watch very little television watch it on my own time, having taped the show at the time of its broadcast, so I can watch the show when it serves my individual schedule. Naturally we bring this desire, even this expectation for sovereign choice, with us to the liturgy

on Sunday morning. And those of us in this room, why, we have it a hundred times worse for we are those who care passionately about the language of our worship, bringing along each Sunday morning high expectation for personal gratification.

But Christian worship doesn't necessarily work that way. It is not a conversation in which each speak whatever each one chooses. Christians are a community animated by the Spirit of the risen Christ. That is what the Trinity is all about: that God is known not only as the transcendent Holy One, not only as the man Jesus once alive, then dead, then alive again, but also – coequally, the church fathers taught – as the Spirit in the community. The God I meet on a walk in the woods may be a most pleasant deity, but not very likely the Trinity. Receiving the Trinity requires that I meet the rest of the community and experience the Spirit of God in that community. “The body of Christ for you,” you know, doesn't mean “for you, Jane”. It means “for you all”. My culture tells me that the most important thing in my life is to encounter the I-who-I-am and that fulfilment rests in the embellishment of the I. My baptism, however, tells me that there is a I-who-I-are, and in, with and under that community we come to know the triune God who will save us. And from what are we saved? I suggest that what God saves us from is not some nasty afterlife, but from the puny present life of the self, the isolation in the self and the myth that self is enough.

So: God is beyond words, but religious traditions need words to share the God they experience together. Christians are, again, as before in history, finding new words for God to fit their cultural experience, but our task is made especially difficult because it is easier to practice benign acceptance than critical thought and because we expect to be personally pleased with each week's results. I would like to play out an example of our search for communal Christian language by focusing on images for God. We could, of course, focus on other religious speech: for example how do we name the human problem? How do we describe the being of Christ? What do we mean by “the resurrection”? What do we mean by “eternal life”? But you have asked me to think with you about images of God, and I will do so.

First, a word about images for God. The worship language of the Christian tradition has continued the Hebrew tradition of employing metaphors for God. Although many seminal theologians of our faith relied on the current philosophical language in their essays about the divine, such language rarely made it into the liturgy. The liturgical

naming of God was and remains largely metaphoric, for Christians agreed with our Jewish forebears that God's name – an odd verb issuing from the burning bush, a mysterious threeness outside and within the community – cannot be fully, finally stated. So we look to metaphors to give us our words for praise and prayer. Metaphors, as you recall from poetry class, are not accurate descriptions of what something is like. That is the task of science, to describe accurately. No: metaphors present an obviously inaccurate image and surprise us by a similarity which, at least when addressing God, is always more incorrect than correct. A metaphor says what is not, and in the saying somehow makes it so. A metaphor's strength comes only in the tension of saying something both wrong and right simultaneously. When the tension is gone, we call the metaphor dead. "She lost face," we say, forgetting the astounding metaphor that originally vibrated underneath those words.

But before I begin to consider images for God, I want to add one more point about Christian prayer. Christian prayer not only reveres the images of the past and continuously creates language from the present. It also tries to imagine a God beyond our culture, a God toward whom we in faith are heading, a Saviour whose justice and mercy will be known finally only at the end of time, a Spirit hauling us, willing or resistant, alive or dead, into a future we cannot now imagine and perhaps would not even choose. The tradition has called this hope by different names: "the resurrection of the dead, eternal life, heaven, the eschaton" are some of our words for Christian belief that the life of God is finally beyond even our highest imaginings. Thus any liturgy which speaks only in the language of our time, with no reaching beyond, is finally culture-captive and less Christian than it ought to be.

Now let me tell you about one of my favourite poems. During the first half of this century in Connecticut lived the great American poet Wallace Stevens. He was vice-president of an insurance company, and in his prime he walked to his executive office each morning and began the day by dictating a poem to his secretary that he had composed on his way to work. His poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" stands behind the way I would like to proceed on images for God. In Stevens' poem we are given thirteen short depictions of the blackbird: for example,

I was of three minds,
 Like a tree
 In which there are three blackbirds.

Or:

A man and a woman
 Are one.
 A man and a woman and a blackbird
 Are one.

Each successive image makes yet more complex the simple blackbird, until the reader senses not only the endless nuances in the blackbird, but moves beyond the blackbird into all that is. Not only the blackbird, but everything, has thirteen, or thirteen hundred, facets. So, with gratitude to Wallace Stevens, let us try this: "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Trinity."

I. God is Trinity

We see in the Christian imagery of Trinity a primary example of the church's pushing cultural language beyond itself toward the mystery of the divine. As all of us who have studied Old Testament theology know well the Jewish tradition called God Father only extremely rarely, and then only to connect God with the King, who according to the stereotypical religious language of the ancient world was the son of the deity. However, what many Christians, especially those screaming about how "Father" is Jesus' unique name for God, seem not to realise, is that the Greco-Roman world called Zeus/Jupiter Father all the time. Indeed, at the time of the origins of the Christian tradition, "Father" was the primary title given the head of the pantheon. This naming of the divine made epistemological sense to the pre-scientific Western world, which mistakenly assumed that procreative power rested solely in the male sperm. Life came from the father, thus God was Father.

However, as for several centuries Christians used the imagery of God as Father and Christ as Son of God, theologians reflected that there is more to God than the old boring patriarchy. In fact, as our creeds affirm, in contrast to what we would expect from cultural patriarchy, the trinitarian theologians taught that the father and the son are equal, and that from the love between the two comes a third, the life of which is equal to the might and the mercy of the two. The church's affirmation of the Trinity employed imagery from the culture – and a wholly androcentric culture it was – but pushed the imagery further into

mystery. God is not the single man on top, but a threeness the future of whom is to be manifest in the community.

Now, I know that we could spend the rest of the week on this issue alone. But let me move on, because I think that consideration of other images of God will inform our mammoth contemporary task of speaking the Trinity. Some feminists suggest that we solve the problem of language for Christ by returning to a pre-Trinitarian monotheism, or perhaps even a pre-monotheistic pantheism. I suggest the opposite: that we delight in the Trinity and explore the mystery of threeness as our gospel in a world still battling cultural androcentrism and for persons imprisoned within the self.

II. God as Sovereign

Primary religions are those in which people practise the religion native to their landscape. The religion arose in and remains tied to the land, and the rituals of the religion fit the geography and weather of the homeland. A later historical manifestation of primary religion occurs when a people think of their group as a nation; then their tribal deity blesses not only the soil, but the society as well. Thus God is Sovereign. The book of 1 Samuel records Israel's bittersweet move from tribal groupings to nation state, and the language of the psalms reflects this cultural change by coming to identify God as the King above all kings. Christians have revelled in the language of God as king, and many of us, at least those of us who live outside monarchies, are heartily tired of the hundreds of hymns we know by heart that praise God as a king.

However, Christianity moves beyond the cultural idea of God as the ruler of our kinship group. Christianity is not in fact a primary religion, and the New Testament itself records the early Christian decision to understand the gospel as available to every people, every land, every tongue. Admittedly, church history demonstrates that this ideal was seldom achieved. But the idea was there from the beginning: God is bigger than the cultural ideal of my people's sovereign. Thus, for example, God is not necessarily on our side against the enemy. That God is other than the support for my culture meant that critical thought about the self and one's culture was a necessary outcome of hearing the gospel. That God is the benefactor of all people requires an altered metaphor, the cultural idea of sovereign being corrected by a promise of future life beyond our society's small imaginings.

III. God as Lover.

Some religions more than others, but many to some degree, use sexual imagery in their address to God. In Hinduism, sexual intercourse itself is used as a metaphor for the unity of the deity and the devotee. Hellenistic thought patterns, as we know, imagined the core of the human person to be a disembodied soul, and so in the church's imagery for God, body language became less explicit. Yet it is there, especially in the medieval mystics, those dozens of especially women who sought unity with a God that their culture tried to deny them, and Protestants know the imagery of lover in some of their traditional hymns. It interests me that in our time of incessant sexual conversation and expression, so little imagery of God as lover shows itself in new hymnody or experimental prayer forms.

But – there is always the but, the corrective, the move beyond our culture into the mystery of God – “lover” is an image that best celebrates the individual. I am in love with God, and God with me. The Christian church must say, ah, but there's the community. The love of God is not in the main “for me,” but for us all within the community. This poses a problem for our use of the image, because private sexual intimacy is seen as inadequate to suggest the community within the love of the Trinity.

IV. God as Shepherd

As a person nearly devoid of sentimentality, I find it difficult to understand why Psalm 23 has become so significant to as many Christians as it has. “Shepherd” presents us with an example of the Israelite appropriation and canonisation of images for God: first coined as expressive of the culture, later saved as a sign of the people's past experience of God. I recall in college, when I first began thinking about images for God in our culture, there was lots of talk about how could modern people, never having met a sheep, relate to the image of God as shepherd. Perhaps here in Australia this is not your problem. All I can say is: remember that Rachel was a shepherd.

V. God as Warrior

Another historically important image for God, arising in ancient times yet alive throughout Christian history, the image of God as leader of the armies presents us with endless conflicted discussion. Each committee compiling a new hymnal experiences the same quandary: one group of the faithful is horrified by the image of God as captain of Christian

soldiers and judges that the language encourages militarism, while another group responds with deep emotion to the imagery of God as commander of the armies and asserts that taking evil seriously requires the language of warfare in our sacred speech. Honouring the I-who-I-are would suggest that some Warrior imagery be retained: but how much? Who decides? How can we judge the danger inherent in the image? How are all the parts of the I-who-I-are made to feel included, both the pacifist and the general?

VI. God as Mother

Newly arising in the speech of Christians, “Mother” is one of oldest divine images, the language especially among those ancient peoples who did not understand the male role in procreation. A worldview opposite to patriarchy, it suggested that it was the mother who was mysteriously, perhaps even solely, capable of life. I am glad for some of the Mother imagery I now find in Christian speech, but I am alert to several problems. One is that some women now claim God as more like them than like males, merely borrowing the logic that far too many men used in the Christian past. Another difficulty arises when the nineteenth century idea of Separate Spheres gets projected into the skies, such that God, like a mother, is nice and loving to children, rather than, like a father, a not-nice disciplinarian. I also wonder at the level of infantilism underneath our last several centuries’ reverting to language of divine parenthood. Why do you suppose this is?

VII. God as Wisdom

“Wisdom” provides yet another example of the cultural alterations in religious speech. Many religions postulate wisdom to be a divine female. In many languages, the word “wisdom” reflects this idea by being of feminine gender. Admittedly, Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, was what many call a patriarchal woman, having had no mother, having emerged fully armed from the head of her father Zeus, and remembered as being generally on the side of the boys. But we see one version of her in the Hebrew Wisdom literature as perhaps a goddess, although more likely a poetic metaphor for the wisdom of God, highly praised by the androcentric authors who penned the poems. This Sophia gets lost, however, in Christianity, in the switch from Wisdom to Word, as both images – God is a wise woman, God is powerful word – become subsumed into Christ. But recently many feminists have revived Sophia as a central image for God, and Elizabeth

Johnson's tour-de-force is brilliantly trinitarian: God our Wisdom is Spirit, is Jesus, is Mother. I predict that this image will appear more often in our prayer, although I doubt that Wisdom will, or ought to, convey a female image for us. Indeed, with neither feminine gender in our speech nor a goddess in our hearts – at least for the Protestants among us – a female Wisdom resurrected in the late twentieth century is certainly a search in the past, not the present or the future, for an image of God.

VIII God as Light

As Christians in the north reconnect with the earth's natural cycles as the foundation of also the church's year of celebration, we realise that the image of God as light fits well, in the northern hemisphere, that is. I have just experienced this again, the shortening of the day, until in the fourth week of Advent the sun sets in the cold around 4:30 in the afternoon, and we need the promise that into the earth's darkness, into our culture's darkness, into my heart's darkness, will come the light of God. And to you in the southern hemisphere, I wish you well, as you find the way through your culture, beyond your culture, to incorporate the metaphor of God as light sensibly and wisely into your church's speech – remembering, of course, that God is also darkness.

IX. God as Rest? or God as Revolution?

Augustine, fleeing the emotional, moral and intellectual chaos of his culture, calls God his Rest. So did the ancient Jews, as they rejoiced in God's gift of weekly sabbath. But third world Christians, reacting against their continuing oppression by a culture of excess, know God as their Revolution. So also did Mary, in her song, praise God that the rich are sent away empty. We understand the cultural situations that find expression in these two so opposing images of God. Shall we use them both?

X. God as Friend

One can trace, especially in hymns composed over the last 150 years, the rise of God as Friend, edging out God as Judge. Yes, we know, some of us achingly, in our alienating, lonely culture, the need for a friend. But I need not prod you to see the limitations of a God who is no more than a friend of mine.

XI. God as Tree of Life

I love this image for God. More worldwide in ancient mythologies than even God as mother, the tree of life image was discarded by orthodox Jews as being too closely connected with the Canaanite veneration of Asherah. Even worship in a grove of trees was suspect as being idolatrous. But the tree of life imagery keeps showing up in Christianity, as a metaphor for the cross, as an image of paradise, as a simile for the Christian church. Indeed, many contemporary people, newly aware that God is seen also in the green of this created earth, respond well to the image of God as Tree of Life. Find it in newly composed hymns. Draw it in your churches. Enjoy its twelve fruits.

XII God as Rainbow Spirit

I have tried, in preparation for my visit to your land, to read about Aboriginal religion and its suggestions for Christian speech. You will not be surprised when I ask also of this native language, no more and no less than of vocabulary long entrenched in Christian mouths, that we think together how this imagery can reflect some of the mystery of the Trinity. That Rainbow Spirit was imaged as a serpent ties Aboriginal metaphor to many ancient religions, in which the creator spirit, usually spoken of as female, is drawn as a serpent, whose periodic shedding of her skin exemplifies the continuous renewal of life on the earth. Indeed, it is largely because of the sustained popularity of this divine imagery in the Canaanite world that the orthodox Israelites switched the serpent imagery from divine to demonic, and thus taught that the mythic serpent was not the goddess residing in the tree of life, but rather a devious created beast hiding out in the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

But Christians need no longer fear the metaphor of the serpent. Many of the enduring archetypal symbols realise their strength by working in both directions: we think of the water that washes and drowns, the virgin who bears, the grave that incubates life. The church might think of God as Rainbow Spirit in a way such as this: God as the creative Spirit of the earth, the ground of our being; God as the one who in his life and death showed us how to shed our skin; and God as the life of the continuing community, encircling the earth, and marking out the places of our common life as sacred. I don't know: it's just a suggestion. It is your task. I wish you well.

XIII. God as a Black Hole.

It seems always easier to find a divine image in the past, God as Mother or Tree of Life or Rainbow Spirit, than to find God newly in our culture, in our science, in our technology, in our worldview. A secular world that claims all truth to be factual, that denotes all information as a 0 or a 1, a culture prizing individuality and sanctioning obsolescence, this world will provide few images for the Trinity. But we must keep looking. I wonder if God can be a black hole, a celestial centre of power so intense, so irresistible, so encompassing, that in the end all that is will be drawn into its otherness.

Let this "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Trinity" be for you a prod for our task as Christians in the twenty-first century, a task no different from that for our ancestors in the faith. All those women and men came upon images of God, sometimes in their private dreams, sometimes in the community's library, sometimes in ecstasy, sometimes in scholarship, who knows where else! They offered the community these images, and the community, sometimes its leaders, sometimes its layfolk, pondered and selected, rejected and honoured, added and subtracted, saying, Yes, No, Yes, here we glimpse the Trinity, here is an image for faith. Of course we must speak our own culture's words, for the Christian faith proclaims God, not in an obsolete or alien speech, but incarnate through even the vocabulary of this and every culture. But our words must be the words of the I-who-I-am, and they must reach beyond even our grandest human imaginings to a Life that is divine. The poet Wallace Stevens honoured the blackbird as worthy of always yet more consideration. Let the church honour God no less.

God's Time and our Times: Christian Worship and Local Cultures in Dialogue

Gordon Lathrop

Why worship? That is, why should we gather together in an assembly to read the scriptures, hear biblical preaching, sing and pray, baptise and hold the holy supper? If we were to ask the question as a purely cultural question, why would any local community want to have such a meeting? Are not our local cultural symbols adequate to reinforce in us and pass on to our children what we need to live in our own places? For example, Christians eat many other meals, bathe in many other waters, tell many other stories, go to many other meetings. Why do they need eucharist and baptism, scripture and church?

In fact, however, our many cultural symbols are ambiguous in value. Certainly, we cannot live without the most basic of these symbols: words to communicate; patterns of economy and signals of identity; markers to enable work-sharing, food-distribution and child-rearing; myths and artefacts recording religious interactions. The symbols themselves are living records, sometimes of excruciating beauty, of the interaction between our people and the local earth. One can see this beauty concretely in the food set out for a festival, in any culture.

But beauty is not the only characteristic of our cultural practices. Our cultural symbols are also frequently inadequate to new situations, incapable of welcoming other people, unable to express a relationship to all the earth, and even murderous to their transgressors. Not every person is welcome to that beautiful festival food. The unclean, the outsiders, the women, the ritual transgressors frequently are not. And the ritual of a festival is often scripted in such a way that it obscures the forgotten ones or makes them willing participants in their own demise. In the Hindu festival of lights, for example, the gods that are again ritually defeated are the ancient gods of the Dalit, the now casteless and excluded people of society.¹ In the myth of the American Thanksgiving, the native peoples of North America have become peaceful suppliers of food to the newly arrived Europeans. Both practices

obscure the histories of exclusion, death and loss which have marked the interactions of the dominant culture with an aboriginal people. What is more, in order to live in new, global economies, with new global connections, we have sometimes supplanted old primary, communal cultures with partially elaborated global ones, themselves little able to give us a symbol system capable of holding human life in an orientation toward meaning. The whole world seems to have lined up at McDonald's.

The point of liturgical life is not to urge Christians to eat and drink only the eucharist. Unlike the medieval women who sought to limit their diet in such a way, proposing a radical holiness of withdrawal and contradiction to the regnant economy,² the celebration of the liturgy instead proposes a holiness in dialogue with both daily meals and cultural festivals. A healthy liturgical practice will strengthen the eucharistic meal of the assembly, making it beautiful, participative, honest about its sources, gracious, frequently using specifically treasured cultural idioms to do so, and thereby casting a light over all our meals, inviting us to see them as daily occasions for such thanksgiving, such grace, such honesty, such focussed practice. A simple thing: western Christians who have long since ceased to use candles and beautiful linens at their festive tables can still encounter them in the eucharist. They may well reconsider the candles and textiles – or some analogous method of the focussed table – again at home, reclaiming the idiom of their own culture. A more complex matter: many modern Christians, people of east and west, who have forgotten where their food comes from – forgotten the effort and the death involved in its harvesting – and who have started to take much of their food alone, on the run, can still encounter an honesty about the source of food and a presence of the meal-keeping community in the eucharist. They may be invited to think again about sources, about the importance of the common preparation of food, about the meal-community at home. A strong eucharistic practice needs to flow into a strong love of meals and strong truth about their practice.

At the same time, because of Jesus Christ, the eucharist is only the fragment of a meal, the beginning and ending of a meal, with the rest of the food given away. It is a meal which constantly presses for the inclusion of the least one, the outsider. It is a meal which cries out for signs of connection to the other assemblies. In the light of the eucharist, our cultural meals, as well, may become places of hospitality, places to

remember connections. The home of the western Christian, for example, may become again not only the place of the lit candle, but also, at least in deep intention, of the open door. In any case, Christians will find the eucharist calling all of our cultural methods of food distribution to justice, to honour and care for the sources of our food and to a lively sense that food is given by God that all may eat and live.

The double method of the liturgy, the establishing of the strong symbol and the breaking of that symbol in the gospel of Jesus Christ, can be proposed as a method for sorting and reasserting the symbols of our daily life as well. The very Christian meeting itself, its rhythms and patterns, its use of the biblical word, its practice and remembrance of baptism, can thus engage in dialogue with our other assemblies, the other narratives and fictions we live by, our other means of identity. We ought not, thereby, seek a sort of imperialism of the liturgical assembly. It is not that all of our cultural symbols must come into the meeting or undergo Christianisation or become bearers of the gospel. But the dialectic of the liturgy can illuminate the many ways in which we live by symbolic practices.

Culture's times

Take, for example, our time-keeping. We have come, in an earth of global connections, to realise the ways in which the measurement of time itself reflects local culture, local human interaction with the conditions of the land, and local symbolisation. Of course, time-keeping originates with events outside of human culture: the revolution of the earth around its own axis, the orbit of the earth around the sun, the orbit of the moon around the earth, and the response of tides, weather, vegetation and animal life to these changes. But human beings are part of that animal life, and they have interacted with these recurring events. So, the beginning of the day – at evening, at midnight, at dawn – has been culturally determined, with differing results. The number, names, uses and many meanings of the seasons depend upon local cultural interaction with the local conditions of the earth. And the numbers of the years and the number of years in an age have also been variously calculated. Human beings in ancient Mesopotamia noticed the phases of the moon and counted four, dividing the more-or-less 28-day lunar cycle thereby into four periods of seven days each. These same ancient sky-watchers noticed, then, the correspondence between this number – *seven* – and the number of visible wanderers in the sky,

the *planeta*, the sun, the moon, and the five visible planets. So ancient Mesopotamian culture created the week, and Roman (and then, Romano-German) culture embellished it, regarding each of the days as under the influence of one of the planets, understood as one of the gods known in the communal stories: Sun-day, Moon-day, Saturn-day, but also Tiu's-day, Woden's-day, Thor's-day, Freia's-day. Along the way, Jewish culture made the seven days into a symbolic reference to the God of Israel: the old Mesopotamian "unlucky day", unwise for any action, being radically reinterpreted into a rest-day in memorial of the rest of God at the creation or the rest of the slaves at their exodus from slavery. A similar interaction of observation and narration resulted in the months: the more-or-less twelve cycles of the moon found in a year were seen to correspond to twelve patterns of stars found in the sky. And, surrounding this time-keeping, there have been larger cultural tales of origin and of catastrophe: calculations of the beginning of all things and expectations of an end or, at least, a massive change, perhaps at the "millennium", itself determined by a culturally determined count.

Although we probably do not observe the old Jewish new-moon, many of us may still occasionally consult the ancient astronomy, now become a modern superstition, looking up a current horoscope in the newspaper. But there are different horoscopes, based on different patterns of stars discovered in the sky – say, the *Chinese* zodiac – and different cultural narrations. There are different sets of numbers used to calculate the number of hours in a day or years in an age. And there are different ways to speak of the surrounding, mythic time and its crises and changes. The peoples of meso-America, believing in a catastrophic succession of worlds, expected also the end of our world, the "fifth sun". Aboriginal people of Australia understand all things as arising out of the Dreamtime and falling back into it. The landscape itself is marked out with lines and features that originated in the Dreamtime and still enact the intersection of our days with that dreaming, so that, for the indigenous Australian, it remains difficult to separate "time" and "place".

But, in a deep sense, that inseparability of time and place is true for us all. The diverse systems of time are all rich in the meanings of *place*. In one way or another, they all represent the interplay between our own, human bodily time – sleeping and waking through the day, experiencing the menstrual cycle in a time-period roughly parallel to the cycle of the

moon, changing our activities through the year, being born, growing and dying through a series of years – and the conditions of the land in which we live, the nature of the seasons. The time-systems all carry for us, as we live *here*, cultural patterns of work and rest as well as occasions for communal expectation, festivity, remembrance, mourning and hope. They are astonishing, beautiful, cultural creations, encapsulating and expressing a particular human history in relationship to particular places on the earth, in the earth's particular place around the sun, in this galaxy, in this universe.

Of course, they also have their problems. Are the horoscopes right? Are my days determined by my birth date? Is the “child that is born on the sabbath day” always “bonny and bright and good and gay”? And what if I am sad when the time of the community or the time of the local earth calls for joy? Is the April of the northern hemisphere, for that reason, “the cruellest month”? Or, perhaps, given the massive, nostalgic pressure for a “perfect Christmas”, is December more cruel yet? And what of January's long sense of cold disappointment? But the problems are not simply present in northern and western psychological disharmonies. What if I refuse or cannot join the observance, in whatever culture it takes place? What if I do not have enough money or cannot meet the standards of ritual purity? What if, in the terms of the Hasidic Jews, I have lost the sacred place in the forest, important for any ritual in a time of threat to the people?³ Or what if, in the terms of the Aborigine, I do not know the place of my dreaming, the very source of my identity and my insertion into the time of my people? Am I then to be shunned, excluded? Is no festival possible for me? Have I lost all my connection to time and place? And, as a yet deeper and communal question, has the festival calendar revealed or obscured the real events of history in the community?

Adding to these problems is yet another complexity. To a very large degree, the system of time-keeping which originated in the Mesopotamian and then the Mediterranean cultures, the system which was further elaborated in Europe, has spread throughout the world. The spread has been the result, of course, of a combination of navigation, colonisation, trade and cultural exchange. The dominance of this system has been enhanced by the current need for global communication. In any case, now it is common for us to calculate our variations from Greenwich time with our Japanese-made watches. Other local systems are not gone, they are simply quieter, having

withdrawn into local festival observance or folk custom. Still, it is certainly true, for example, that the observance in the temperate zones of the southern hemisphere of festivals which originated out of longing for the light in the dark time – the winter solstice time – of the northern hemisphere or the observance of twenty-four-hour-days at all in the long Arctic or Antarctic night can begin to feel like travel in an isolated spaceship, with the “days” calculated according to the planet from which we originated, having little or no reference to the place where we actually are.

Still, the classic western system of time-keeping is itself in trouble. To the extent that this system involved a serious observance of local times of dark and local times of light and a serious awareness of the cycles of the heavenly bodies around us, our electric lights have pushed back its importance and we do not have much time to look at the sky. We do not have much *time*, we say, partly because of the commodification of time. “Time is money” or “my time is valuable”: here is the most serious of our current time-keeping systems, the system of consumer sales in which the past signifies outmoded goods, the future represents “growth opportunities”, and “our sales-agents are available twenty-four hours a day”. There are also related sub-systems of time. In the “leisure-time” which is, for many people, the only respite from the time-money equation, the primary times we know may be the times of our favourite programs on television. Or, for the adventurous young among us, respite may be found in the relative timelessness of the internet, what is called “real time” being a “window” through which we are in a simultaneous exchange of messages with others known only by their pseudonyms. The old ritual year is still around, but its festivals have very largely become occasions for individual and familial withdrawal from communal life, for the celebration of private relationships not public and communal engagement with the surrounding conditions of the earth.⁴ The technologies present underneath all of these developments have remarkable possibilities for good, but their effect upon our experience of time may well have not yet been sufficiently calculated. On the one hand, freedom from the natural cycles of time can be a freedom for life, an end of enslavement to drudgery, fear and the constant necessity to labour for survival. On the other hand, the general equation of time and money and its other side, the time of leisure, carry along a whole number of time-casualties or people with “time on their hands”: the unemployed, the retired, the

aged, the outmoded, the uninsured, the television-addicted, the people with massive, even unconquerable debt on their time-payments.⁵

The time of the assembly: holy time

Set in the midst of all of these experiences of time, the Christian liturgy has two major things to do. It must set out a strong recovery of the symbolisation of time, inviting us to see again the ways in which human beings know something of who they are and where they are by knowing what time it is. And characteristically, paradoxically, it must subvert the very symbolisation of time which it so strongly supports, doing so by the proclamation and celebration of God's time.

In the first of these tasks, the liturgy has powerful tools. The assembly meets once a week and so underscores the rhythm of the week, with the week's echo of the phases of the moon and the other *planeta* around us. The assembly's Sunday gathering for eucharist then may be surrounded by other, smaller gatherings for daily morning and evening prayer, marking with praise and prayer the cardinal points of the sun as it travels through each day. Or individual members of the assembly may adopt this daily practice, in one or another form, as an echo of their participation in the Christian assembly's interest in time. In any case, Sunday meeting and daily prayer make basic reference to the root categories of time, day and week, sunrise, sunset.

The gatherings of the assembly do yet more: they move through the year, taking the seasons seriously in the assembly's own programs of symbolisation. In the northern hemisphere, on the background of the dating of passover, Easter's celebration is set out in the light of the springtime sun – just after the vernal equinox – and in the light of the full moon – the “paschal moon” – like some ancient image of the cross with both sun and moon over either arm. The Christmas cycle then – *pascha* in winter – is anchored in the period of the winter solstice of the northern hemisphere. Other festivals and observances fall into place, some more obscurely, but all of them keeping the time: Advent as a quiet, truth-telling alternative to the world's Saturnalia of December; the seven days of the O-Antiphons counting through the actual time of the present winter solstice; the twelve days of Christmas uniting east and west in a full-hearted mid-winter rejoicing; the forty days of Lent, *lente*, as a springtime of the church amid the lengthening of days; the Annunciation at the spring equinox; the fifty days of *pascha* as a kind of Sunday to the year; the nativity of John the Baptist at mid-summer,

remembering the brightest of the world's lights which, nonetheless, must decrease as Jesus Christ increases (John 3:30); All Saints and the remembrance of eschatology in the time of harvest and the time of the dying vegetation. All of these observances need to be seen as ways of preaching the gospel into a concrete time of year in a concrete area of the earth. They are therefore, secondarily, ways in which we know what time it is.

But there is even more. The biblical stories which the assembly reads and sings and the hope for the future which the assembly awakens underscore the awareness that a *past* and a *future* surround our own present day. The liturgical narratives from the Bible know how to take particular historical events, the exodus, for example, and the crucifixion of Christ, and invest them with mythological force, since the faith says that these particular events embrace all times. These practices of the liturgy also have pedagogical force in our lives, showing us the character of keeping time. Human beings do not just live through time's cycles. They also live, with beginnings and endings, on time's line. Like trees, they know cycles, rings of growth; they also know seeds and seedlings and then the tree itself and then felling, falling, rotting. More: they also know powerful single moments which seem to embrace and let in all times. Past and future; remembrance and hope; days and nights; weeks, months, seasons and years: all of these have a deep, basic integrity in the practice of the assembly when that assembly makes use of its own great heritage.

It is not that the assembly should be our only clock. Nor could it be. It is certainly true that some Christians find refreshment in a temporary retreat to a monastic life regulated by the communal bell and the communal hours of prayer and work, the healthy monastery being a kind of intense, counter-cultural realisation of the assembly's vocation. And it is true that, far from being old-fashioned and romantic, the time of the liturgical year is strikingly realistic to the actual experience of the year, more so, for example, than the year invented by the greeting-card marketers. But we all, rightly, have many other clocks. Other communities to which we belong, besides the Christian assembly, have their own hours of work and rest and festivity: our familial daily schedule, our company work-week, our village organisation of hunting or harvesting, our school calendar, our neighbourhood or tribal or national festivals, our observances and anniversaries with those who are our most beloved ones, our participation in familial rites of passage,

and our own personal rhythms of time. These are the true bearers of culture, the ways we gather food and eat and live. These are the ways we reinforce in ourselves and pass on to our children the wisdom needed for living in the particular place that we inhabit.

But the observance of the assembly, its strengthened use of the symbols of time, can cast a light on all of our cultural time-keeping. Here is one answer to the question: why worship? Especially amid the temptations and the amnesia of consumer-time, the assembly can invite us to notice again the actual place where we live, to attend to its seasons, its relationship to terrestrial and to celestial events, and by that particular attention also to turn a new awareness toward the good earth itself. Our cultures all have means to exercise this attention, though many of these means have been neglected. The practice of the assembly, its observance of time for its own purposes, can encourage in us their recovery. The assembly can also invite us again to take all of history with great seriousness, on the model of the biblical history which is most narrated in the liturgy, and it can urge us to seek continually revisionist ways to tell more of the truth of history in our cultures. It can also urge us to pay attention to those personal moments of encounter with each other and with the earth which seem to let in all times, embracing us in meaning. And the assembly can help us recover a deep gratitude to those persons – nurses and fire-brigades and pilots and radio operators and more – who, for the sake of the community, live against the cycles of time. By the strength of its time-keeping symbols, the assembly can also help us to see how much delusion may be present in the virtual time of electronic entertainment, how much we need to keep time together: with a larger circle of other people than those who may join us around the screen of a television monitor. The focussed time-practices of the Christian liturgical assembly might encourage its participants, in each cultural setting to see the dawn again, to realise where we live, to treasure the festival, to know communal rhythms of joy and sorrow, to pay attention to history.

In order to do this well, however, the liturgical assembly needs to keep time in ways that accord with the city or the land that it inhabits, not just with the Mediterranean places of Christian origins. This insight makes clear not just the ongoing need for liturgical inculturation but also the need to avoid the widespread medieval custom of “anticipating” liturgical observances, as if the liturgy were an unanchored, unearthly law to be kept. In the west, for example, clerics – not the whole

assembly – were keeping the Easter Vigil on Saturday *morning* until the middle of the twentieth century. The liturgical movement has been partly about the recovery of the integrity of time symbolisation.

In fact, the assembly needs to know the local time in order to do its own work, standing on the good earth, before the face of the God who made all the time-keepers – the sun, the moon, the rotating earth, and the people upon the earth. The local culture of time needs to come along with those people who know that culture, as they come into the assembly, and it needs to come there in the ways that all cultural materials come, joining the palimpsest of cultures which make up the Christian liturgy. Of course, in the giving and sending of gifts between assemblies, the old patterns of keeping Sunday, observing the *pascha*, and marking the day ought not be lost. Especially Sunday assembly and morning and evening prayer have more-or-less universal applicability. Even in the southern hemisphere, the date of Easter, about which Christians now have new hope of finding agreement, may also be kept at the common time, for the sake of Christian unity and because of the festival's historic reference to events that occurred in Jerusalem at passover time in the first century. In the tropics and in the southern hemisphere, Christmas and its cycle might be kept in the common place for similar reasons, although the historical anchor of the feast is much more dubious and its direct pastoral response to the natural cycle much more important than is the paschal response to springtime. In the observance of these festivals juxtaposed to different seasons from those of their origin, however, the festivals themselves will be enriched if the local community does not forget what time it is locally. The whole Christian church, north and south, can be helped to see a new thing as, for example, the resurrection is proclaimed in the autumn and the incarnation celebrated in high summer. New hymns, new liturgical texts, new practices arising from these juxtapositions may also spread north, assisting a globalised church to know the gospel more clearly.

But Christians of the tropics and of the southern hemisphere also need to do a new thing. They might be attentive to ways, similar to the creation of Christmas, in which the assemblies in those places can proclaim the gospel in relationship to observances of the wet season and the dry, in relationship to summer beginning in December and winter beginning in June. Other agricultural festivals, other “new year’s days” from other time-systems, other festivals of nomadic peoples

born out of a more liquid and local experience of time await the same pastoral wisdom, the same variety of response that marked the Christian attention to the Mediterranean winter solstice. If new Christian festivals thereby arise, they will be born naturally, not designed by committees, as all authentic symbols come into being. They may also spread north, in the mutual gift-giving of the assemblies, as they articulate an insight into the gospel we newly learn to be indispensable. But we need to begin with saying that the strong use of local time-symbols is one of the practices of the liturgy.

The other major time-practice of the Christian assembly is the subversion of our time symbols. For the *purpose* of the assembly, after all, is not to be a custodian of time-systems, but to proclaim and celebrate the life-giving word of God. It does this in ways that take seriously the time of the world, the time of God's creation. But the assembly engages in this proclamation also as a word to all the time-casualties: to those excluded from festivals, not able to put in their time at work, not able to find the sacred place in the time of need, but also to those at the limits of their time, to the dying and the dead. Because we all are at the limits of our time, this word of God is for us all.

In the subversion of time the assembly also has powerful tools. All of the great Christian celebrations are *appointed* to begin just a little late, a little bit off time. The assembly meets after the week is over, after the sabbath, after the exact day of the equinox and the exact paschal moon, after the solstice. It does so in order to gather around Jesus Christ risen, the one who carries humanity beyond the possibilities of time. And it calls its primary meeting after a day that cannot be, yet *is* because of the resurrection, the "eighth day".⁶ The intention of this meeting is not so much to mark the week as to proclaim the resurrection, that event of the first day of the week, to all of our cycles of weeks. At each of the turnings of time – the turn of the week, the evening and morning of the day, the turn of the seasons – the classic Christian liturgy sets out signs, great and small of the transfiguration of time in the risen one, and juxtaposes those signs to the actual time. So the eucharist, the limited meal of unlimited life, marks every Sunday and thus every week. So the light of the risen Christ and the Magnificat, the song of the reversals God works for the overwhelmed and defeated ones, marks every evening, every declining day. So biblical texts are appointed to unfold the hope that lies in any calendar observance: the summer sun (of the northern hemisphere) is made to point to the greater Light

coming into the world, to which John only bears witness; the first day of spring is made to hear the word of the angel's Annunciation. The rolling year will not bring us, by sheer chronology, into these promises. Nonetheless, the promises are given to us in our times. Says the liturgy by its practices of subversion: the mercy of God in Jesus Christ proclaimed in the unity of the Holy Spirit is the sun which does not go down, the creator and holder of the stars, the deepest night of rest, the safe and healing dark, the brightest yet unburning day, the lover of the earth and the life-giver, the festival for the unclean and those who did not prepare, the place in the forest itself, the deepest place of our dreaming.

The point of such practices is subversion of the laws of time, transfiguration of the experience of time. The point is not to take us out of here, away from the times and the limits, the very world, in which we live. Nor is it to give us some mastery over time, as if we could use time for our own purposes.⁷ Rather, the liturgy – its bath, its scripture reading and preaching, its holy supper, set amid and juxtaposed to all of our times – proclaims the risen one who holds in his hand all seven of the stars which the world imagines as rulers of the days (Rev. 1:16). The liturgy should welcome the time-hurt ones into the centre of all time, where the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the assembly so that it may be gathered into Christ and so be brought, like God's own holy ones, before the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13, 18), who made and embraces and transcends all time. In the preaching of the liturgy and in its sacraments, the assembly should hear and know the one who stands in all the holy history that surrounds them and pulls them now out of death and beyond the rule of calendars, of "special days, and months, seasons, and years" (Gal. 4:10), and yet leaves them right here. Such is the nature of eschatology, as Christian faith knows it in the resurrection of Jesus Christ: the transfiguration of the limits of our time, not their removal; life in the risen one now, beyond the fear of death, beyond its determinative rule in our days; utter freedom, though all the constraints are still around us; an alternative vision of the world. Because of and in the presence of the holy Trinity, because of the resurrection, the Christian liturgy sings – to all who will hear – a song like that which W. H. Auden expected from the poet:

Follow, poet, follow right
 To the bottom of the night,
 With your unconstraining voice

Still persuade us to rejoice;
 With the farming of a verse
 Make a vineyard of the curse,
 Sing of human unsuccess
 In a rapture of distress;
 In the deserts of the heart
 Let the healing fountain start
 In the prison of his days
 Teach the free man how to praise.⁸

Christians who participate in this assembly practice of the subversion of time will not expect that all the time-keeping systems of their culture will become preachers of Christ, symbols of the resurrection. But they will experience the relativisation of our various systems of time-keeping. They will have a humbler awareness of the ways in which each such system, including the dominant western one, is not *God* nor *God's own time* but belongs to particular life upon God's beloved earth within God's universe of many times. They will be able to stand beside the many peoples hurt by time. They will have a place from which to engage in an ongoing socio-cultural dialogue about the uses and abuses of time-keeping for human life. And they will have a place where the distortions and tyrannies of time in their own lives may be healed.⁹ Here is a deeper, more central answer to the question: why worship?

Only one is holy

This two-sided liturgical practice could be articulated in exactly the same terms in dialogue with many other "languages" of our cultures besides that of time. We have already briefly considered meal-keeping. We could also turn to the ways cultures mark *place* – their geographies – and the ways they pass on identity-determining *stories*, though each of these is also interwoven with the cultural practices of time-keeping. In both cases, the Christian liturgy is not a full culture, but a communal symbolic practice in dialogue with culture. The liturgy draws on geographies, ancient and modern, and yet it undercuts all geographies. The assembly turns toward the east and it also newly sings of galaxies in its hymnody. Yet Jesus Christ – and our baptism into the assembly of his name – is our holy place, our temple, the place of our dreaming. This place in God is here, in the land. Its orientations train us to walk new paths in God's beloved earth and give us a place from which to

engage in dialogue with all mapping systems. *And* the liturgy tells a great variety of stories, mostly biblical stories, still learning how to tell them with wider resonance in the many cultures where it dwells. Yet even while the assembly tells stories, it also undercuts the inevitability of narratives, the legalisms they reinforce, by its celebration of the reversals of trinitarian faith: Jesus Christ is always with the outsider or the unspoken ones of our narratives. The practice of the assembly can be a pedagogical force for the recovery of healthy stories and a healthy interest in location. Yet it can also be one force for resistance to the wounding power of cultural narratives, the untruth of boundaries, the massive distortion when land is regarded only as economic resource. But the practice of the assembly – the strong use of symbols yet the breaking of symbols; the focussed centre yet the open door – does not exist, in the first place, in order to be in dialogue with cultures. It exists in order to tell the truth about God. And the acts whereby the assembly bears witness to the truth of God are like beggars' hands out for mercy, for only one is holy. But holiness itself, God's holiness as it is known in Jesus Christ, is not purity and arrogant distance, but unity with all the needy world. The Christian faith trusts that the very signs at the heart of the assembly, the signs of word and meal and bath as these have been transformed in Christ, are gifts of God which communicate that holiness as an alternative vision of the world, a symbolic reorientation in all that is concretely real. The "word" which is proclaimed by these signs, the very word and voice of God – the presence of the holiness of God – places the "unconstraining voice" in the midst of all cultures, calling these patterns whereby we live our lives to a constant reorientation. The mission of the church, then, is not to supplant cultures, not to "lord it over" cultures, not to create its own culture. The mission is rather to be the assembly in each place, the focussed, open assembly in communion with all the other assemblies, and to set out the life-giving word in the midst of each culture, in loving and critical dialogue with that culture.

NOTES

This paper is an altered version of material which will appear as chapter 9 on the forthcoming book, *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

1. Marcus Felde, "The Church Year in the Context of Hindu Culture", in S. Anita Stauffer, ed., *Worship and Culture in Dialogue* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994), 210-212.
2. Carolyn Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987)
3. Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters* (New York: Random House, 1972), 167-168.
4. Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 426-427.
5. Marianne Sawicki, "How can Christian worship be contemporary?" in G. Lathrop, ed., *What is "contemporary" worship?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 23-25.
6. See *Holy Things*, 36-43, 68-79.
7. On the transfiguration of time and the refusal of "mastery" in the focal practices of the church, see Richard Gaillardetz "Liturgy in a Technological Age", *Worship* 71:5 (September 1997), 446.
8. "In Memory of W. B. Yeats", *Selected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (New York: Random House, 1958), 54.
9. On the liturgy as healing to the distortions of time, see Marianne Sawicki, *art. cit.*, 29-30.

Remembering the Body Human Embodiment and Liturgical Practice

Ian Ferguson

Part I

Introduction

A community gathers to celebrate the eucharist. They are few in number, around twenty people, with the majority over seventy. Two or three, who are quite frail, are helped to their seats – a man leads his blind wife to a place near the front. One woman sits almost under the lectern – she is more comfortable there than sitting back and using the awkward headset provided for her deafness. Most of the congregation stands for the first hymn. A family with two small children bustles in late. The children begin to play – they climb over pews, run down the isles, and are greeted with fond smiles. The congregation sits with eyes closed and heads bowed while the minister, a young woman, lights a candle and prays words of praise and confession. The sermon is heard in stillness and silence, broken only by the scratching of pencils from the children who lie on the floor colouring pictures in a book. During the passing of the peace the frail members of the congregation remain in their seats and everyone else comes to them. At the table, the minister breaks bread and says, “the bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ”. The people all form a circle to receive the elements, even those who find it difficult to stand.

Here, in so many ways, is an embodied event. The symbolic fabric of the ceremony is woven through with symbols of embodiment: bodies in their particularity are gathered together as the body of Christ; bodies hear the Word made flesh; bodies taste the body broken. Furthermore, the tenor of proceedings is shaped by the age and ability of the bodies present. There is no idealistic picture of human embodiment available here. The realities of embodied life are starkly present. The divine incarnation symbolised and celebrated in this ceremony is contextualised by the actuality of the “flesh” which does the celebrating.

I am concerned in this essay to “remember the body”¹; to focus on the fact that in any liturgical celebration human physicality is inescapable. What place and role does the body have in that religious ritual which has as its sphere of activity the realm of “spirit”? Is there a sense in which the whole person, including the body, is nourished by the “spiritual food” of the liturgy?

As an approach to such questions, I pursue a theology of embodiment. In the first part of the essay, I contrast the dualistic approach to the person, which has dominated church history, with the more holistic and relational anthropology discernible in Scripture. From the standpoint of the unity of body and soul, and the relationality of the person, I argue that, in theological terms, the body has its fulfilment in the body of Christ. I investigate the ways in which Christ’s body represents the fulfilment of human embodiment as the Image of God, and accomplishes the salvific transformation of the body.

In the second part of the essay, I discuss human embodiment in relation to the liturgy, with specific reference to the eucharist. I discuss four aspects of the eucharist in relation to the body: first, I pursue a model of “symbol” which facilitates an understanding of “embodied presence” in the sacrament; I then investigate the relationship between the body of Christ present in the sacrament and in the bodies of the community of believers; in the third place, I discuss the role of the eucharist in making the future of the body present; and finally, I look at the eucharist as embodied action within the context of the whole liturgy.

I opened with a scene describing the various bodies and some of the “embodied” behaviour which may constitute a worship event. The theological explorations of this essay arise out of and ultimately must return to the actuality of the gathered community in its celebration of the liturgy. In my experience, this so often has meant a faithful, ageing remnant whose bodies are tired. “Remembering the body” in such a context may be confronting; however, I wish to argue that to “forget” the body is to miss its centrality in the life, belief, identity and ritual practice of the church. This is brought out most powerfully when the community gathers around the table at which Christ is host and hears the words, “This is my body which is for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

Part I – A Theology of Embodiment

1 Body and Soul

For centuries, Christian anthropology has operated within a dualistic framework. The human person has been viewed as consisting of a material body and a spiritual soul which are distinguishable and separable. This basic paradigm derives primarily from Greek philosophy. Plato propounded a dualistic theory which has the soul as the true self, immaterial, immortal and divine. It is a “helpless prisoner chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars”.² The body is perceived entirely negatively: it distorts the truth through the physical senses, and is the prison and tomb of the soul.³ Freedom is possible only through the application of reason in philosophy. Aristotle differed somewhat from Plato. He saw a positive role for the body in providing information for the rational mind through the senses; however, he maintained the dualistic understanding of human existence continuing to affirm the immortality of the soul.

Platonic dualism came to be mirrored in modern thought by the Cartesian distinction between the mind as thinking subject – *res cogitans* – and the body as extended, non-thinking object – *res extensa*. The human person’s subjectivity consists in reflection – *cogito ergo sum* – and the body with its corporeality and sensory perception belongs to the realm of objective things. There is a “certain unity” between the subject – “I” – and the object – “my body”, however Descartes is able to say: “I am in very truth different from my body and can exist without it”.⁴ Ultimately the body is a machine owned, dominated and controlled by the thinking subject, the mind.

Descartes was following in the Augustinian tradition of Christian thought which saw the body as corruptible object and instrument to be subordinated to and controlled by the immortal soul as dominating subject.⁵ Augustine identified the soul with the image of God in humanity. As the immortal, invisible God is sovereign of the world so the immortal, invisible soul rules, dominates and possesses the body.⁶

Twentieth century Christians inherit a thoroughly negative view of the body. Dualistic assumptions have led to religious practice which focuses on the body as something to be overcome and ultimately transcended in blessed relief. This manifests particularly in repressive attitudes towards sexuality. It might also be argued that in certain traditions disdain for the body and materiality has led to a similar disdain for

sacramental practice in liturgy. The all pervading dualism in Christian approaches to embodiment prior to this century, while having its roots in ancient philosophical discourse, stands in stark contrast to the considerably more ancient view of the body represented in the bible.

2 The Body in Scripture

In the Old Testament, the human person is understood not as an assemblage of material and non-material/spiritual elements as in Hellenistic philosophical thought, but as the manifestation of history and relationships. Hebrew thought does not deal with the component parts of humanity but with the whole person. There is not a "self" distinct from the body, nor is there a mind/soul which thinks and feels in isolation from the physical body. Rather, the body is seen as consisting of emotional and mental organs. The heart, liver and kidneys, for example, may represent among other things grief, will, desire or conscience.⁷ The word "flesh" (*basar*) is frequently used to refer to the whole person or to humanity in general in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is one's responses and expressions to the world and to God which make up the flesh. The Old Testament mind has no concept of or word for the human body outside of the interactions and relationships which define the person. As Antoine Vergote puts it, in a Semitic context, the human "is not an individualised entity but an ensemble of diversely qualified relations".⁸ Just as Israel's identity is constituted and maintained in its covenantal relationship with God, so human bodily identity exists in the sphere of relationship.⁹

Old Testament creation theology gives no solace to dualistic assumptions. The first Genesis creation account emphasises the goodness of all that God makes: the refrain – "God saw that it was good" – echoes in response to every element of the created order without distinction. The earth in all its material reality "is the object and scene of the Creator's fertile and inventive love."¹⁰ While creation is other than God, in the Spirit, God "pervades" creation with creative and life giving power. God is present to the whole creation and no priority or superior value is given to one element over another. In particular, there is no sense in which humanity is divided with goodness or spirit confined to the soul and excluded from the body; nor, in the story of the fall (Gen 3), is there any indication of evil being confined to the body and excluded from the soul.

Human embodiment, particularly in its relational aspect, is emphasised in the Genesis creation accounts. God creates humanity as male and female (Gen 1:27). The highlighting of sexuality in this context indicates that embodied relationship is at the heart of humanity's existence. Similarly, in the second creation account (Gen 2:4b-3:24), the culmination of the creation of humanity with its stress on body (Gen 2:7, 21-2) is the union of man and woman in the archetypal human community (Gen 2:24).

In sum, the body in the Old Testament is representative of the whole person, and is constituted by relationality.

The influence of Hellenistic dualism may be discerned in some writings of the New Testament. Paul, for example, in his writing on sexuality draws on Platonic and Stoic ideals.¹¹ It is a distortion of Paul however (one frequently made by later theologians steeped in Platonism), to read his spirit/flesh dichotomy as Platonic dualism. The writings of Paul, particularly as regards his use of anthropological terms (eg. *sw'ma*, *savrx* and *pneu'ma*), stand firmly in the Semitic tradition and are influenced by his grounding in Hebrew Scripture. Paul uses such terms to refer to the whole person in relationship rather than to parts of the person.¹² In general, the New Testament, in continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures, understands the unity of the body/self: the body is the whole person without differentiation.

The word *sw'ma* in the Pauline corpus has a range of meaning. It may simply refer to the physical body without qualification or judgement (eg. Gal 6:17). More significantly, however, Paul uses *sw'ma* to mean the possibility of communication: "in this wider sense the *sw'ma* is that by which one is 'attached to' or 'in touch with' the world of persons and events, both to give and receive impressions".¹³ As such, *sw'ma*, like the majority of Paul's anthropological terms, refers to the whole person viewed from a particular perspective; in this instance, the perspective of communication and relationship. The *sw'ma* may be oriented in different relational directions (ie. towards or away from God), and depending on its orientation, it may be viewed in a positive or a negative light.

Platonic or Cartesian dualism are cultural importations which are in fact contrary to the dominant stream of biblical understanding. A Christian theology of embodiment that has a Scriptural foundation must emphasise unity and relationality. The body in Scripture is a

dynamic entity always “coming into being” in the give and take of relationship: as we relate to one another and the world, the dimensions of our being, inner and outer, flesh and spirit, body and soul, all of which are an indivisible unity, interact to become the embodied presence of each of us in the world.

3 The Unity of Body and Soul

In the light of the foregoing discussion, to speak of the body is to speak of more than just the material part of the self. When one considers the body one inevitably considers the whole person. The mind, soul and body, the internal and external dimensions of humanity, are inseparable. The inner self, the thinking and feeling aspect of the person, penetrates the body, is shaped by the experience of the body, and is expressed in the body. The distinction between the thinking subject and objective body is a false distinction – hence Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel’s phrase “I am my body”.¹⁴

Jürgen Moltmann speaks of the soul and body as the *Gestalt* – the configuration or total pattern – of the human person. The Gestalt of body and soul is “a *perichoretic* relationship of mutual interpenetration and differentiated unity”.¹⁵ As such, body and soul are in a relationship which has the perichoretic unity of the Triune God as its archetype. Such a model allows one to draw a distinction between the inner experience of a person and his/her outer manifestation without separating the two. By their “mutual interpenetration” body and soul exist only in reference to one another. To speak of the body without reference to the inner person, the soul, is thus impossible. Body and soul as Gestalt are one – they are a relational unity.¹⁶

The body is always changing: it grows and it ages – on a molecular level it is continually shifting. It can also be said, however, that the body is constantly “coming into being” not just in a molecular sense but in its relationality. This is the case since the body is inseparably linked to the soul and to the development of human personhood. Even as the body “decays” in old age, the person is developing in his/her wholeness – he/she is still being shaped through the relational medium of the body. To say that the body is constantly coming into being is to say that a person is constantly being shaped by relationship – relationship both with the world around and the world inside. Inasmuch as “I am my body”, my body comes into being as I come into being as a person.

4 The Body in Relation to the Last Things

The body comes into being through relationship and is thus oriented towards the future. The future towards which the body is ultimately oriented is God's future, the new creation following the last things. In Pauline thought, while the body itself is not dualistic, it stands at the centre of the great cosmic dualism which comes into being with Adam and is healed in Christ.¹⁷ The dualism in Paul is not between body and soul, or flesh and spirit in the Platonic sense, but between Adam and Christ, the Old Age and the New Age, sin and righteousness, law and grace, Death and Life. The body may be grounded in the Age of Adam, enslaved to sin and thus oriented to death ("the body of sin" Rom 6.6; "this body of death" Rom 7.24), or it may participate in Christ's body through the Spirit, and be oriented towards righteousness and life. Fundamentally, the body may be oriented towards or away from God. For Paul, the body as we know it is "mortal" (qnhta; swvmata Rom 8:11) or "natural/psychic" (sw`ma yucikovn 1Cor 15:44); ie. the body which exists under the conditions of the present age. Ultimately, the body is destined for resurrection and thus transformation. The transformed body of the resurrection is the "spiritual body" (sw`ma pneumatikovn 1Cor 15:44), a body adapted to the conditions of the new age of the Spirit. However, it is a body in continuity with the body as we know it now: "the transformation will occur to the same earthly body that we are here: something different will not be produced in its place."¹⁸ In the Pauline sense, the spiritual body is the possibility of communication and relationship in the realm of the Spirit following the eschatological fulfilment of all things. The spiritual body, while in continuity with the "mortal" body, is a future promise for the believer ("the one who raised Christ *will* give life to your mortal bodies also", Rom 8.11¹⁹).

Acknowledging the centrality of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology in biblical anthropology allows the reinstatement of "the resurrection of the body" over "the immortality of the soul" as the hope of the future for the Christian. The separation of body and soul is no longer tenable in the light of the insights of contemporary anthropology and biblical studies. This means the "so called 'life after death' can no longer be thought of as immortality of the soul, but only as another mode of existence of the *whole* man"; such is "the content of the picture of a resurrection of the dead".²⁰ As Moltmann puts it: "I shall live *wholly* here, and die *wholly*, and rise *wholly* there."²¹

For Paul, since our bodies are yet to be transformed, there is an inevitable moral dimension to human embodiment (Rom 6:12-13). We must live under the conditions of the New Age as inaugurated by Christ, made present in the Spirit, and opened to us by our baptism, but we must do so as bodies which exist under the conditions of the passing Age, the conditions of corruption. Human embodiment, Paul teaches, is for the glorification of God – “glorify God in your body” (1Cor 6:20). We are to live neither despising the body with excessive asceticism, nor indulging the body as though the end were already fully present. It is the Holy Spirit which empowers us to live the present in the light of the future (Rom 8:1-17). The Holy Spirit is the eschatological Spirit (cf Acts 2:17). Just as in the second Genesis creation account humanity has the breath of life breathed into its body which is created from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7; cf Ezekiel 37:9-10), so the Holy Spirit is the “breath of life” of the new creation (cf John 20:22). It is the breath of the body of Christ which enables us to live in our bodies as though they were “spiritual bodies”.

For Paul, human embodiment has as its goal the full realisation of its original designation as the image of God. It is this that Jesus achieves. He *is* the image of God and it is our calling to be transformed according to his image. In the transformation and glorification of the body at the resurrection, the image of God will be finally and fully realised in our embodiment, just as it was and continues to be in the body of Christ. It is then that we will “bear the image of the man of heaven” rather than that of the “man of dust” (1Cor 15:49).²²

5 Sin, Salvation and Embodiment

In Christian terms, the reality of sin means that for humanity the designation to be the image of God can only be understood in light of the eschatological orientation of creation. In the present, humanity is simultaneously the image of God and the “slave of Sin” (Rom 6:17). While it is as embodied beings that humans are in the image of God, it is also in embodiment that the image of God is compromised and salvation is accomplished.

Sin is a fact of human embodiment, not something external such as “a bad example, evil influence, seductive atmosphere”²³; it is part of the nature of human existence which is embodied existence. Since it is the embodied community of humanity which glorifies God and reflects God’s image, loss of communion or broken relationship represents a

failure to give glory where it is due. Sin exists in the loss of that which gives glory to God – communion, relationality, holistic and relational embodiment. This is manifest in the subjection of body to soul, women to men, and nature to humanity; however, it has its basic expression in the breakdown of relationship between humanity and God. Human alienation, whether body from soul, man from woman, individual from society, or humanity from the world, compromises the image of God and is thus fundamentally alienation from God.

Since sin is a dimension of the whole person, body and soul, salvation must include the body. If salvation is purely “spiritual” or non-material, involving the soul and setting aside the body, then the fundamental aspect of the creation of humanity – the *imago Dei* – must also be set aside. Relationality is at the heart of what it is to be in the image of God, and the body is the relational medium. To be saved apart from the body, therefore, would mean the loss both of the means of relationship and the possibility of reflecting the image of God.²⁴ In Pauline terms, salvation is the “redemption of the body” (Rom 8:23). It is the full realisation of the *imago Dei* through participation in the body of Christ risen, the true image of God (Rom 8:29). Christ “the last Adam” (1Cor 15:45) fulfils the image and glory of God compromised in the fall of the first Adam.

The redemption of the body is a future event that has already happened. In the incarnation of Christ, human embodiment is fully embraced by God. In taking on humanity in Christ, God takes on the body, relationality, interdependence and suffering; God becomes a part of the world and the world becomes a part of God.²⁵ Christ’s ministry draws humanity back into relationship with God in a bodily sense. The healing miracles in the gospels are signs of this: the salvation Christ brings is synonymous with the physical healing he accomplishes – note, for example, the use of the verb to save, σωζω, in the story of Jairus’ daughter and the haemorrhaging woman (Mark 5.23, 28, 34). In these stories, Jesus restores life, physical wholeness, and relationships – social, religious and personal – and in so doing, restores humanity’s relationship with God.

In Christ incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended, human embodiment enters the divine sphere. The body in its physicality, its capacity for suffering, its sexuality, and its relationality, becomes one with God and in that becoming is transformed and glorified. It is transformed into the heavenly body, the spiritual body, the body in full and constant

communion with God; it reaches the fulfilment of its creation as the image of God. This is the eschatological goal of all human embodiment.²⁶

6 Embodiment as Promise and Practice

This theological model envisages the body in terms of its future. The human body as we experience it now exists in a process of becoming. Just as our bodies/selves are “coming in to being” in communion with one another and the world, so the person of Christ reveals to us that our bodies are evolving in relationship with God. In theological terms, we are becoming what we are: we are the image of God, and in Christ we are drawn towards the fullness of that original designation.

The resurrection of Christ and the fullness of his relationship with the Father, the source of all being, are present realities: realities which reveal to us the future of the body, but which also have a direct influence on our present embodiment. The risen body of Jesus points to two things: not only has the totality of Jesus’ person entered into communion with God in the “divine dimension”, but in that being-with-God, Jesus is with us in a new way.²⁷ In his risen body Jesus carries the material reality of the world into communion with God but at the same time maintains communion with our existence in material reality. Jesus is not separated from us in his transformation from physical body to spiritual body, but rather, enters a new relationship with both the Father and with humanity – a relationship sealed in the sending of the Holy Spirit and made real for us in the sacraments.

Through the Spirit, the risen Christ is incarnate in Word, Sacrament, and community.²⁸ We enter into fellowship with Christ’s body in the embodied community of the new creation. We live towards the future of the body, therefore, not by aspiring to a transcendent spiritual ideal but by engaging with Christ in community in the present – by hearing the Word, sharing the sacraments, and living the baptismal life of discipleship. The future of the body comes to realisation through the present relationships which shape our humanity.

The eschatological orientation of the body does not mean that our bodies are somehow “wrong”, fixed in a static state of sinfulness awaiting a future change of condition. Rather, in being oriented to the future our embodiment in the present is dynamic, always moving towards and being shaped by that future through relationship with Christ. This places upon us a moral imperative. The unity of the body/

self – the body and soul – is not necessarily an experienced unity. In many ways, we live the dualism of body and soul – this is a sign of our brokenness. Our lives tend to emphasise a division between the inner and outer: physical, mental and spiritual health are generally dealt with in separate spheres of life. The path of sanctification which leads from our justification to our future glorification is one of conforming our bodies to Christ's body. Inevitably, this process will involve integrative work: work directed towards unity, wholeness and harmonisation of the different aspects of humanity in the body.

Sanctification is an activity directed towards the healing of dualism; the healing of division and alienation in communion with Christ. In sanctification, the embodied person is engaged in a dynamic process of becoming what he/she is: "*being human*", says Moltmann, "means *becoming human*".²⁹ The body is directed towards and drawn by its future. It is "coming into being" in its relationships. There is a constant relational drive and moral imperative on the body. This means the unity of the person in the body, the unity which is an overcoming of the brokenness of our dualistic lives, cannot be a static state of being. Ultimately, the goal of embodiment is transformation in the new creation. "Eternal life is the final healing of this life into the completed wholeness for which it is destined"³⁰ – the present body is to be "lived" in the light of this expectation. Thus, "the unity and relationality of the body is both eschatological promise and moral task".³¹

NOTES

- 1 The concept of "remembrance" in liturgical theology is rich and complex. I discuss it in detail in Part II, section 3.
- 2 Plato, *Phaedo* 82e.
- 3 Plato puns between body sw'ma and tomb sh'ma, *Gorgias* 493a.
- 4 Descartes, 6th Meditation, cited by J. Moltmann, *God in Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), p. 250.
- 5 Descartes believed the most important questions to discuss from a philosophical point of view were "God and the soul". So also Augustine had as his focus God and the soul. "With this the Pauline theme 'God and the body' (1Cor 6) is moved out of the centre of theology." Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 352, note 11.
- 6 See Moltmann on Augustine, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

- 7 It is possible to say “my kidneys (*kilyoth* – NEB “my inward parts”, NRSV “my heart”) instruct me” (Ps 16:7).
- 8 Vergote, “The Body as Understood in Contemporary Thought and Biblical Categories”, *Philosophy Today*, 35 (1991), p. 96; see also Nelson, *Embodiment* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978): in pre-Christian Hebrew life “feelings about the individual body and about the social body do appear to be closely tied together” (p 47).
- 9 “. . . the anthropology of the Old Testament does not deal so much in definitions as in narratives. These do not establish what the person is by way of definitions. They present him in the relationships in which he lives.” Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
- 10 *ibid*, p.245.
- 11 “When he interpreted marriage as a regrettable concession to human weakness, an unavoidable remedy for the highly sexed, a lesser of the evils but still an evil – Paul was a Hellenist.” Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- 12 R. Bultmann: for Paul a human “does not have a sw`ma, but rather is sw`ma”, (*Theology of the New Testament*, London: SCM, 1952, 1. p. 192).
- 13 Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1996), p. 191; cf Käsemann: For Paul, “as body, man exists in relationship to others, in subjection because of the world, in the jurisdiction of the Creator, in the hope of the Resurrection, in the possibility of concrete obedience and self-surrender.” “The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper” *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964), p. 133.
- 14 E. Moltmann-Wendel, *I Am My Body* (London: SCM, 1994).
- 15 Moltmann *op. cit.* p. 258ff.
- 16 Karl Barth also maintains the unity of the body and soul. However in his schema, body and soul are an ordered unity. There is a hierarchy of soul over body: “The human being is the ruling soul of his body, or he is not a human being” (*Church Dogmatics* III/2, p. 425). The human person as “soul of his body” is wholly and simultaneously both body and soul in “ineffaceable difference, inseparable unity and *indestructible order*.” (p. 325 – emphasis added).
- 17 cf Käsemann: “Human existence is for him (Paul) no longer autonomous, it is determined by its involvement in its universe; it is both the object and the arena of the strife between heavenly and earthly powers.” *op. cit.*, p.117.
- 18 W. Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man* (London: SCM, 1968), p. 76. Also Fee: “The transformed body, therefore, is not composed of ‘spirit’; it is a *body* adapted to the eschatological existence that is under the ultimate

domination of the Spirit.” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, p. 786). Also Kasper: the Spiritual Body of the resurrection is a body characterised and entirely directed by the Spirit of God. The *pneuma* is not “the stuff, the substance, of which this body is made, but the dimension in which the body is: it is in the divine dimension.” (*Jesus the Christ*, NY: Paulist, 1976, p. 151).

19 Note the future tense; however, cf Col 2:11-12

20 Pannenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-8

21 Moltmann *The Coming of God* (London: SCM, 1996), p. 67.

22 Since Karl Barth, the image of God has been interpreted from the perspective of relationality: God “wills and creates man as a partner who is capable of entering into covenant-relationship with Himself.” (Barth *Dogmatics* III/1, p. 185). This approach emphasises the fact that humanity is created as the image of God with specific reference to their capacity for relationship, ie. “male and female he created them”. It is as sexually differentiated bodies rather than as sexless souls that humanity is to be God’s image. Only in as much as they *embody* a holistic community of interdependence with one another and the rest of creation do humans show out the image of God (cf Moltmann *God in Creation* p. 221; note, however, that the functional or representative interpretation is favoured over the relational by many OT scholars, cf Jónsson *The Image of God*).

23 Kasper, *op. cit.*, p. 203

24 Cf J. Zizioulas: “for salvation to become possible . . . eros and the body, should *not* be destroyed (a flight from these elements would entail for man a privation of those means by which he expresses himself . . . as a person)”, (*Being as Communion*, NY: St Vladimir’s, 1985, pp. 52-3).

25 Kasper, *op. cit.*, p. 152

26 “The god-likeness that belongs to creation in the beginning becomes God-sonship and daughterhood in the messianic fellowship with the Son, and out of the two springs the transfiguration of human beings in the glory of the new creation.” Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 229.

27 Kasper: “The Resurrection corporeality means . . . that the risen Lord is still in contact with the world and with us indeed as the one who is now with God; he is therefore with us in a divine way and that means a totally new way” (*op. cit.*, 151).

28 This theme will be more fully developed in Part II.

29 Moltmann: “In the messianic light of the gospel, the human being’s likeness to God appears as a historical process with an eschatological termination [justification – sanctification – glorification]; it is not a static

condition. *Being* human means *becoming* human in this process. Here too, the image of God is the whole person, the embodied person, the person in his community with other people, because in the messianic fellowship of Jesus, people become whole, embodied and social human beings, whom death no longer divides into soul and body, and whom death no longer divides from God and from one another. They already live, here and now, in the process of resurrection, and in this process experience themselves as accepted and promised, wholly, bodily and socially. In history, the messianic becoming-human of the human being remains incomplete and uncompletable. It is only the eschatological annihilation of death, the redemption of the body on a new earth and under a new heaven, which will consummate the 'becoming' process of human beings, thereby fulfilling their creaturely destiny." (*God in Creation*, p. 227)

30 Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p.71.

31 Keenan, "Christian Perspectives on the Human Body", *Theological Studies*, 55, June 1994, p. 333; cf Moltmann "likeness to God is both gift and charge, indicative and imperative. It is charge and hope, imperative and promise." *God in Creation*, p. 227.



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News & Information

Societas Liturgica Congress XVI

Turku Finland

11-16 August, 1997

This paper seeks to give a summary of the Sixteenth Congress of Societas Liturgica, an international ecumenical assembly of Liturgists that gathered in Turku, Finland, 11-16 August 1997. Of the two hundred and fifteen participants eight were Australians, along with diverse people from Europe, Asia, the Americas and Africa. The subject of the Congress was "Liturgy and Music".

This paper will be in three parts: a synopsis of the papers and liturgies, a summary of the two formal responses made at the end of the conference, and finally a personal response from the perspective of Australian Catholics from the Archdiocese of Adelaide.

Synopsis of the Conference

1. Addresses

In her opening address, the president, Irmgard Pahl, spoke of the abundance of music in people's lives, both for passive consumption and active performance. The question of how people express themselves in music, or even how they can be manipulated by music, is an important one which has implications in the liturgical context. "How is it possible that the ineffable takes on form, in this case acoustical form?" she asks. In fact, the questions which would engage the Congress participants throughout the week, were stated by the president in the following way: "What expression do we find *today* for our relationship to God? How do we encounter the Divinity, our God, in our holy celebrations *today*? With what song on our lips?" These questions were indeed addressed during the four key addresses and numerous shorter presentations and workshops.

The first of the key addresses of the Congress – "The Anthropological and Liturgical-Theological foundations of Liturgical Worship" (*Anthropologische und liturgiethnologische Grundlagen der gottesdienstlichen Musik*) – was presented by Philipp Hamoncourt. His theology of celebration was from a Catholic perspective, and one of the

interesting points he raised was the medieval distinction between “chant” and “music” which highlights the understanding that to speak included singing, and that Mass celebrated without singing was simply inconceivable. Another interesting note was that the earliest Church Councils expressed the Creeds through singing, since whatever is sung reveals what is believed and how life is lived. The final portion of Hamancourt’s paper dealt with song and music as liturgical rite, the difference between the actual text and the purpose of the ritual, and the role of the assembly as prime “singer”. A point made consistently throughout Hamancourt’s presentation – the influence of the cultural context on the realisation of the liturgical rite – was concretised in succeeding presentations that consciously turned to the liturgies of the East, an area often neglected by Western Churches. Dimitrije Stefanovic’s “The Theological Dimension of Liturgical Music from an Orthodox Perspective” and Poulouse Maniyattu’s “Music in the Hindu Tradition of Worship and its Influence on the Christian Liturgical Music of India,” spoke of the obvious significance of music in the Orthodox tradition and the central role that music has for the liturgy in the process of inculturation in India.

Challenging questions for the West about the use of Rock, Pop and Techno were addressed in the papers, “Liturgical Music and Electronic Technology: Contemporary Soundings” (Don Saliers) and “Secular Music in the Liturgy: Are there any rules?” (Virgil C. Funk.) One obvious issue concerned the criteria for judging the suitability of such music for liturgical use. Indeed, are there any reliable criteria that can be used for making appropriate judgements? Does the incorporation of these forms of music make good liturgical sense, or is it a case of “cheap familiarity”? Both Saliers and Funk referred to the changing perceptions of what we hear, and the qualities of those sounds. Technology has made available a myriad of sounds in a single instrument, and the “cultural ear” of any given community determines the extent to which these sounds express for this community the mystery and praise of God.

The Reformation phenomenon of vernacular hymnody and how it might more readily integrate into the liturgical action without a total “hymnification” of the liturgy in those traditions was the subject of papers by Alexander Volker and Karen Westerfield Tucker. Volker’s “The Tradition of Hymns and Hymnals in the German-Speaking World” presented the German language perspective, and Westerfield Tucker’s “Congregational Song as Liturgical Ordo and Proper: The case of

English-language Hymns and Hymnals” spoke to the experience of the Methodist tradition. The French perspective was explored in Claude Duchesneau’s “Liturgical Song and Song Collections for the Liturgy in the Francophone World” It was apparent from the papers that there is now more emphasis by the Europeans on an experiential rather than historical approach in their theology of celebration

The treasury of our liturgical music tradition was explored with reference to both Gregorian and the classic orchestral Masses. The current awakening of interest in Gregorian music was highlighted in “The Gregorian Chant and its Significance for Today’s Liturgical Singing” (*Der gregorianische Choral und seine Bedeutung für den heutigen Liturgiegesang*) by Godehard Joppich. The paradox is that this re-emergence comes not from within the liturgy but from the entertainment music scene. The classical style of music is certainly part of our liturgical music treasury but at times can also be in conflict with the principle of active participation and the requirement that each member of the worshipping community carry out fully the role (and only that role) which is assigned them. How, then, can this repertoire do justice to our modern understanding of the liturgy? Virgil Funk, in “Popular Culture and Liturgical Music” spoke of the spectrum of responses to this question in the United States, growing out of both theoretical and practical positions. Other presenters embraced these questions from differing cultural perspectives: Kaj-Eric Gustafsson in “Folk Music in the Liturgy – Breach of Style or Possibility?” (*Volkmusik in Gottesdienst – Stilbruch oder Möglichkeit?*); Didier Rimaud in “The Collaboration of a poet with Composers from Contemporary Catholic Music in the French Language” (*La collaboration d’un poète avec des compositeurs pour la liturgie catholique en langue française.*)

All of the above-mentioned papers will be published in *Studia Liturgica*, the journal of Societas Liturgica within the next year.

Along with these formal papers were various “Case Studies” and “Short Communications” as well as two extended Study Groups – one on Medieval Gregorian Music and the second on Orthodox Liturgy. Of popular interest among these were presentations by Thomas Kane on “The Dancing Church of the South Pacific” that included video material of the episcopal ordination of Australian Dominican, Cyril O’Grady, in the Solomon Islands. Julia Upton, a Sister of Mercy from New York, challenged us to seek out music which will both “bear the Mystery” and “bare the Mystery.” Fred Graham presented the new Canadian United

Church Hymnal, "Voices United" that is a welcome contribution in multicultural music for worship. Interesting too, were the contributions of young theologians Valdis Teraudkalns on "The Church Music tradition in Latvia" and Carl Petter Opsahl of Norway whose presentation "Looking for Liturgy in Rock Music" provided an insight into the somewhat novel question of the influence of liturgy on rock music. There was much, much more that ranged from the esoteric to the historic, from the theological to the practical. Added to this, of course, was the dialogue and discussion that enriched meals and session breaks, which many of us would say are the real "meat" of such a gathering.

2. Liturgies

Most of the liturgies of the Congress were held in the nearby 13th century church of St. Maaria. The opening liturgy, in the Lutheran tradition, was a "Swedish Folk Mass"— which title is somewhat misleading in that it was not "folk" in the normal sense of the word as applied to music, but a newly-composed Mass based on folk tunes of Sweden. (Swedish is the second language of Finland.) It was a "polylogue" of chant and song between presider, ministers, cantor, choir and congregation. The local Lutheran bishop, John Volkstrom, preached. Opportunity to experience the Kerala liturgy of South India was provided on one occasion at Evening Prayer. A visit to the Orthodox Church of Saint Alexander in Turku was the venue for another Evening Prayer. A surprise to the Australian participants was that in this Orthodox service both modern Finnish and English were used, with a minimum amount of the ancient Slavic chant. The Congress Eucharist, in the Roman Catholic Tradition, was held in an ancient Abbey church at Naantali, following a day which had begun in the Turku Cathedral with Morning Prayer and a rather long ceremony during which the draft of the new service Book for the Church of Finland was presented while Congress participants took on the role of "Rent a Crowd."!! It was just as well these services of the morning were separated from the Congress Eucharist by a visit to Turku Castle and a boat trip through the islands off the coast of western Finland, as the Eucharist was a disappointingly formal, turgid, drawn-out affair that used translations too much (not necessarily something to be done with multi-lingual congregations), and did not know how to end. (Not all academics are practitioners of liturgy, it would seem!). Morning Prayer, on the other hand, was an agreeable mix of plainchant, hymnody and psalmody, the latter being led by a talented five-part *a capella* group.

Formal Responses

Two formal responses were provided at the end of the conference by Albert Gerhards (Germany) and Ed Foley (USA).

Albert Gerhards spoke of the deeper awareness that the congress raised about music being constitutive of Liturgy. (That the Roman Catholic Mass at times seeks to exist without music raises significant questions). Evangelisation happens through Music and Liturgy together. He expressed the wish that *Societas* explore further the several dimensions of music within the liturgy and the forms that this music takes – such as acclamations, songs and responses. He suggested that there is a need to look at comparative religion more in this regard. The exploration could include seeing music and sound as “text” in itself, rather than just as an accompaniment to words. This could lead to new paradigms of liturgy. He spoke also of the tension created by art being “autonomous” in the West but integral to liturgy in other cultures, and suggested that further study in this area would be beneficial. How do we include art in modern liturgy so that it is truly integral? We need to be aware of one another’s attempts in this regard.

Albert Gerhards concluded his response by presenting a “dream list” for future Congresses:

- the hope that, as music is integral to liturgy, *Societas* would establish an official choir that would be part of all Congresses;
- that we would always allow time for reflection on the musical dimension of liturgy when we gather; and
- that *Societas* co-opt more expert musicians in order to meet the challenges outlined in his response.

Ed Foley’s response addressed the three areas of Method, Culture and Theology. He remarked that anthropological considerations need to be encouraged and that ethno-musicology is a field of study which can provide a methodology for our examination of music in ritual. He regretted the fact that although actual practice was critiqued, the method for doing this was unclear. Since actual practice is the key, our method needs to take musical practice seriously and put praxis in mutual and critical dialogue with theory. We need to take the liturgical event seriously as we consider, critique and engage in a search for methodological competency.

Our cultural practices reveal who we are. One of the positives of the Congress was the culture-specific presentations coming from different

areas of the globe. However, often the presumption is that underlying principles and presuppositions in our own particular culture are operative elsewhere. This is not necessarily so, since the concept of music itself is not always easily transferred across cultures. (For example, “rap” music is poetry, not music.) There is no generic word for music. No translations are possible; there are few music universals. We need, therefore, to be aware of our “cultural maps.”

For true liturgical music we need to know our social structure of morality, our social, political and theological contexts. He challenged us with quotations from Nathan Mitchell in this regard: “Glory to God in the lowest”. “God loves the poor but hates their art!”, and “God loves Mozart more than Randy Travers.”

We need to create theologies not only *about* music but *of* music. Different sense perceptions give rise to different epistemologies. We must take sound seriously as a theological source, and create “sound” theology. God is heard; Jesus is *Verbum Dei*. The musical moment has theological force. Our liturgies make demands on music and music makes demands on liturgy. Liturgy is not about books and texts, but about the dynamism of enacted worship, created by these mutual demands. There is a call today for liturgy to be vibrant, to vibrate with the lives of the worshippers. Liturgy is a dynamic act of vocalised wisdom. We need to allow the musical impulse of the Holy One to find voice as we “sing a new Church into being.”

Comments followed these reports and the cultural diversity of the Congress participants became clearly apparent in the ensuing discussion. People were more aware of the ecumenical nature of the task and of praxis as the starting point. (In Australia, praxis as a starting point is a long-time tradition. For the French this was a revelation; their emphasis has always been historical.) The reports by Albert Gerhards and Ed Foley approached the Congress from quite different perspectives, but each captured something of what the Congress had offered, and each put before us challenges arising from this.

Personal Response

One’s own personal context always influences the way one hears material presented at any conference. This *Societas Liturgica* Congress was no exception. The issues which emerged from the Congress as particularly relevant to the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide could be grouped under the following headings: Inculturation, criteria for judging

good liturgical music, repertoire and the use of the “treasury of Church music” that is our tradition and inheritance, liturgical roles, consideration of the whole Liturgical event, and the development of musical forms congruent with the liturgical event.

In Australia, the task of adapting the liturgy for a multicultural community is a confronting and difficult one. Many of our Sunday liturgies reflect an Anglo-Celtic background, and yet closer study would reveal that the congregation is composed of people from many cultural traditions. We need to continue searching for ways to include customs and traditions from other cultures in such a way that the resultant liturgy is both authentically Australian and truly inclusive.

Whether or not particular music is suitable for use in liturgy is linked to the question of inculturation. While everyone would agree that the music of the liturgy needs to be beautiful, the concept of “beauty” is always culturally conditioned and there are therefore no absolute criteria for making a judgement. Who, then, can tell what is beautiful? Perhaps the task becomes easier when we consider criteria other than beauty? As Julie Upton reminded us, good liturgical music is capable of both “bearing” and “baring” the Mystery. In other words, does this particular music both enable us to encounter the sacred and enhance the action of the ritual? Music that does exactly that in one context might be totally unsuitable in another. This is why it is impossible to suggest that there can be a “universal” liturgical music repertoire that is appropriate in all circumstances. And that brings us to the question of how the “treasury of church music” fits into our contemporary liturgies. We read in the Gospel of Matthew, that “every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” (Mt. 13:52) We too need to be selective about what we use from the past, ensuring that our present practice is built upon our rich tradition, but not being afraid to add material to the treasury which will in turn be passed on to those who follow us. We need to be aware that not all music from the past – regardless of its musical merit – is appropriate for today. (Orchestral Masses, for example, have their place, but are not the norm, and nor should they be since they are not necessarily in keeping with the spirit of the renewals of Vatican Council II.) Some of the music we use is, by its very nature, transient, and will pass into and out of use quite quickly. This is to be expected, since of all the liturgical music that is composed only a small portion becomes part of the ongoing “treasury.”

Contemporary composers of liturgical music are becoming more aware of their need to be liturgically literate and this is being reflected in many recent works. In order for the music to complement fully the liturgical function there is a need for poets, musicians and liturgists to collaborate – or more than that, to *co-relate*.

The possibility of a common repertoire within a language group was raised at the Congress. Indeed, the French are working towards this very thing. While it would be impossible (and undesirable) to insist that all parishes used the same music, there are certainly advantages in a core of works being known by all. This is particularly so with regard to settings of the Ordinary of the Mass and with the dialogues between priest and congregation. The advent of the new Sacramentary should provide an opportunity for a movement in this direction, since it includes an extensive range of settings in plainchant style which could be taken up by parishes. In fact, the advent of the new Sacramentary may well be the moment to retrieve in the English-speaking world the practice of cantillation, and a reassessment of our whole approach to singing of liturgy.

The Congress clearly exposed the need for the development of responsorial/dialogical forms of liturgical music, (as opposed to the strophic, “four-square” hymn) since these forms more closely match the dynamic of the liturgical action, and more clearly identify the roles of the assembly, the presider and the choir.

Consideration of all the above-named issues and a sincere effort to work on resolving them in our own particular context will, we hope, result in a far more integrated *liturgical event*. The Congress was a great forum for raising the issues and providing glimpses of how they are being dealt with in various parts of the world. It was encouraging to see members of different Christian traditions working so closely together, sharing their love of liturgy and the ways in which music brings communities into contact with the great mystery of God. We will conclude our Report on the Sixteenth Congress of Societas Liturgica with an admonition from Ed Foley as he responded to the gathering: “Let us listen one another into speech, and hear each other into the deepest things in life before God.”

*Anthony Kain
Jenny O'Brien*

Book Review

Songs For A Hopeful Church: Words for Inclusive Worship

*Elizabeth J Smith, Acorn Press, Melbourne
1997vi+82pp. ISBN 0 908284 28 4*

Elizabeth Smith's latest collection, *Songs for a Hopeful Church* contains a number of her previously published hymns (46 in all) and 18 new items. Already a number of these hymns have found their way into parish hymnody in Anglican and Uniting Church circles, and some have been used at synods and diocesan or presbytery occasions.

Many of the hymns have been written to meet parish or school needs – a saint's day celebration, a hymn to help a congregation be more outgoing or to develop a stronger sense of community, for ordinations and commissionings, to encourage bible study, and so on. As Elizabeth points out in her useful notes at the back, many hymns grew out of parish discussion groups or studies – surely a healthy thing.

This reviewer had previously a rather negative reaction to Elizabeth's hymns, having experienced them on diocesan occasions. They seemed to be "on about what we are on about", expressed in rhyming couplets which can sound rather flat when sung in a plodding way to a traditional hymn tune. At an ordination we sang:

The deacons show us Jesus
who came to wash our feet (from no.44)

This sounds pedestrian (pardon the pun) – especially when sung to Ellacombe (as recommended), a complacent and churchy tune. Yet the very next two lines say something important:

They serve Christ at the edges
where church and world must meet.

A careful look at this collection reveals some well crafted and arresting hymns which very often rise above the common-place and stress quite powerfully the inclusivity of gospel and church. The words are clear and accessible and the theology very much centred in an emphasis on the people of God – called, baptised, equipped, and sent out to witness

and to serve. The hymns deliberately strike a hopeful note – a good antidote for our usual self deprecation:

When Christians live in mutual trust,
the weak are healed, the strong rejoice.
In company we face each test,
made one in Christ by call and choice. (No.55)

The recommended tune in this case is Niagara, a strong tune which suits the words and the mood of the hymn.

The author only suggests tunes and sometimes a better tune can be found. If a less familiar tune is used there is less danger of the flatness and churchiness mentioned above. For instance No.53 'We thank you God for common prayer' sounds very dull sung to Melcombe but comes alive if sung to a more challenging tune like Bow Brickhill. Some would claim that use of a well known tune is the only way to gain currency for a new hymn, but it is a pity to spoil a thoughtful or challenging set of words with a humdrum or overused tune.

Scriptural allusions abound in this collection and many of these hymns will fit our liturgical and parish needs. Subject and scriptural indexes are provided to help hymn choosers. There is one inaccuracy – it wasn't Martha who anointed Jesus' feet, but her sister. 'When Jesus went to Bethany' (no.56) probably therefore has a misprint in verse 2. Liturgists and worship committees should look carefully at this book – it will be a very useful resource for us. A plea, however, to writers of hymn words : please indicate the metre to help us in our search for a suitable tune.

Owen Dowling

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