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Participation in the Liturgy: the Subjective Dimension

by Kenneth Hull

Perhaps the single best known principle to emerge from Vatican II is the call for “full, conscious and active participation of the laity” in the liturgy. This phrase has been a touchstone for decades not only for the Roman church but also for Anglicans, Lutheran and other protestant denominations in the work of liturgical renewal across the church that followed the Second Vatican Council. The result has been a liturgical practice that more fully engages congregation members in reading scripture, leading prayer, administering communion, and other liturgical ministries. We have also become more aware of the importance of the bodily engagement of worshippers through such actions as exchanging the peace and the use of ample amounts of water in baptism. However despite these reformed practices, there is a widespread sense among liturgists that the expected renewal of the church’s worship has fallen far short of expectations.

I suggest that one shortcoming of the reforms of the last decades has been a too shallow and uninformed understanding of what constitutes ‘participation’. Fuller mental and physical engagement in the actions of liturgy is a good thing, but this does not by itself guarantee the deeper

subjective engagement that is essential if the liturgy is to have the transformative and formational effects we hope for. ‘Full’ participation is certainly one part of the goal. But the fullness of the human person goes beyond what is ‘conscious’. And ‘active’ participation seems to have been understood to mean primarily physically active. But a full and active participation must also include other human faculties, such as imagination, intuition, spirit. And liturgical participation in which mind and spirit, imagination and affect are actively engaged does not necessarily *look* ‘active’ to the outside observer. In the words of French Roman Catholic liturgical scholar Louis-Marie Chauvet, “active participation can be lived intensely in an inner way.... [I]nteriorization is one of the fundamental conditions of ecclesial participation in the liturgy.”¹ This interiorization is accomplished by the “personal, prayerful appropriation of what the *Ecclesia* is doing at any particular moment.”²

There have been earlier warnings by such liturgists as David Power and Mary Collins that we are overlooking some important dimensions of participation in the liturgy. In her essay “Contemplative participation,” Mary Collins argues that

the quality of lay participation the moment requires is contemplative, or mystical. I choose the term to press our understanding beyond what we have commonly understood by the call for full, conscious and active participation. Contemplatives are attentive to presence. They are present to the mystery within which all life is lived. They are alert to and wait for manifestations of the sacred within the mundane.³

The more contemplative participation in the liturgy that Collins calls for is not only needed; it responds to a widespread desire within our culture today for an encounter with the sacred, with the Divine Other. This type of participation depends at least in part on the character of the presiding, reading, praying, and song-leading found in our liturgical celebrations. It also requires forming congregations to be contemplative participants.

Other images of deeply engaged worship have been proposed by other writers. Methodist liturgical scholar Don E. Saliers has written prolifically about the experiential dimension of liturgical participation, notably in such books as *Worship Come to Its Senses* and *Worship and Spirituality*.⁴ Saliers coined the phrase “humanity at full stretch before God” to describe the disposition of Christian worshippers fully engaged in liturgical worship. ‘At full stretch’ is an image of a spiritual posture. To be at full stretch is to be fully present, open, extended beyond our everyday way of being. It implies gentle effort, as well as vulnerability and receptivity.

The posture of being ‘at full stretch’ is at odds with one of the key cultural values of our time, being ‘comfortable’. In contemporary culture, the statement, “I’m not comfortable with that” has become an unassailable defence against opinions, requests, and social situations that we don’t like. Saliers reminds us that full engagement with the liturgy requires that we extend ourselves beyond what we imagine the limits of our tastes and capacities to be.

Elsewhere, Saliers has explored the concept of synesthesia as a way of describing an essential element of liturgical engagement.⁵ Synesthesia is a cognitive phenomenon in which the stimulation of one of the five senses results in a sensation in one or more of the other senses, such as seeing a colour in response to hearing a sound, or hearing a noise as a result of a particular taste. Very few people experience full-blown synesthesia, but it seems that all of us are prone to synesthetic experiences in small and subtle ways.

The Bible is full of language that suggests synesthetic experience, such as “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” So is our everyday language when it comes to describing intense experiences, especially of beauty and transcendence. Colours are warm, harmonies are sweet, tastes are sharp. Saliers suggests that deep experiences of worship have a synesthetic component. ‘Full’ participation in this sense implies not just the involvement of ‘both sides of the brain’, as it were, but experiences in which our perceptions overflow their normal channels.

In her essay, “An expedition to the pole,” Annie Dillard moves back and forth between accounts of early polar expeditions and a Roman Catholic liturgy she attended at a neighbourhood church. This well-known passage from that essay suggests another quality of deep liturgical engagement:

Why do we people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute?...On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke?...It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.⁶

The worshippers Dillard describes are oblivious to the potential for an encounter with God that their worship is intended to facilitate. They lack a sense of expectancy, of anything important taking place. And congregations who expect nothing from the liturgy are usually not disappointed.

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Cultivating a contemplative attention to the presence of the holy; extending and offering ourselves in openness and vulnerability; coming to Sunday worship with an expectation of encountering God; this is not an exhaustive list of the qualities that characterize vital liturgical engagement, but it is a beginning. I want to suggest a few concrete practices that might help congregations begin to move towards a deeper participation in the liturgy.

The greater active participation that has been fostered by the liturgical renewal of the recent decades has had its benefits, but it may also have worked to some extent against cultivating a more contemplative participation. Consider the Collect of the Day. The BAS rubric calls for the celebrant to say “Let us pray”, and an optional period of silence for prayer to follow. “The celebrant then sings or says the collect, after which the people respond, **Amen.**”

In an effort to more fully and actively engage worshippers, it has become a widespread practice to invite the congregation to say the words of the collect with the celebrant. This is more ‘active’ participation in a bodily sense, but is it ‘fuller’? More specifically, does this practice enhance or deepen the congregation’s prayer? Prayer is not just said; it is something meant, intended. Intention has a quality of depth. It is enhanced by mental focus, and imaginative participation in the meaning of the words. Deeply experienced prayer has a quality not unlike poetry. It needs to have a cognitive content, but it also needs to resonate with the non-rational aspects of ourselves. It is expression not only of intention but of desire, not only of that which we understand but that towards which we can only grope in faith, of both our intentions and the intention of the Spirit who seeks to pray within us with groans too deep for words.

At more than one celebration of the Eucharist I have attended, the presider has introduced the Collect of the Day with, “Let’s read the words of the collect together”-- not even “*Let’s pray the words of the collect together.*” But I question whether reading together, whether aloud or silently, is the best way to facilitate people’s deep participation in prayer. Closing the book, and listening to someone else speak the prayer, slowly,

phrase by phrase, may allow the praying congregation to respond to each thought both with understanding and with a whole-hearted assent to its meaning.

Try this: have someone read a collect to you phrase by phrase and see how long it takes you to fully ‘own’ the meaning and intention of each phrase. For me, it’s a matter of at least a couple of seconds per phrase. It also requires that the silence between the invitation to pray and the beginning of the prayer be long enough for me to orient myself towards God with a sense of attentiveness to God’s presence.

If the Divine Other is to be encountered in the liturgy, if the Holy Spirit—who is present at our worship whether we attend to her or not—is to be an active participant, space has to be made available for that encounter, that participation, to occur.

In many parishes the phrase “The Word of the Lord” after a reading has been replaced by “Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church” or some similar phrase. This is a welcome development, because it reminds us that we are reading the scriptures in public worship in order to hear what God wants to communicate to this community in this time and place, that God’s word is living and active, not just a historical record. At St Gregory of Nyssa in San Francisco, a short period of reflection on the reading is introduced by the ringing of a bell.

It seems odd, though, that we invite people to hear what the Spirit is saying *after* the reading is over. Hearing the Spirit speaking through the reading is not just a matter of intellectual reflection on what has already been heard, but of listening for the Spirit *through* the reading of the text. To introduce the reading with the invitation to hear what the Spirit is saying invites people to listen differently, to attend not only to what is being said, but to how the Spirit may be speaking to them through those words. It may also remind the reader that what is required of her or him is not just to read with clarity and understanding, but with a spiritual attentiveness that will help to create a pacing and inflection that draws the hearer into a similar relationship to the text. Do we really need to be told, “A Reading from the Book of X” at the beginning of the reading? If we are listening for the

Spirit through the reading and not *to* the reading as a historical and literary object, such identification is of only secondary interest. If it's important to me, I can see that in the bulletin. Or the reader can conclude the reading with the identification of the text, rather than beginning with it.

Imagine attending a production of *Hamlet*. The moment for Hamlet to deliver his famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be" arrives. Hamlet turns to the audience and says, "I will now perform Hamlet's famous soliloquy. In this speech, Hamlet considers whether or not to commit suicide, but in the end, decides not to. (Pause) 'Hamlet's Soliloquy, Act 2, beginning at line 43.' (Pause). "To be or not to be...". In some congregations the practice has established itself of introducing the readings with a three- or four-sentence long introduction whose supposed purpose is to provide context, but which in fact also often summarizes the content of the reading and concludes with a one-sentence interpretation. These introductions, unlike the readings themselves, are also printed in the bulletin. The effect of this is not unlike the Hamlet scenario I have described. It's not that a sentence explaining the context might not help our intellectual understanding of the passage being read. But an intellectual understanding of the reading is not our primary goal in reading the scripture publically in the liturgy.

Introductions to readings, even simple ones like "A Reading from the Book of X", create a frame within which we experience what follows. Frames create critical distance. They invite us to experience what follows as an object of intellectual consideration, rather than allowing us to enter into a direct relationship with it. When Hamlet walks on stage we want him to embody Hamlet's dilemma and anguish, not tell us about it. We want to encounter Hamlet through the words of the text, not an actor telling us *about* Hamlet, just as we want to encounter God speaking through the scriptures.

The principle of framing operates in many places in the liturgy. We'll consider one other: the opening words of the service. The reason that liturgists get so exercised about liturgies that begin with informal words of welcome rather than "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ..." is that this action

defines the whole character of the liturgy to follow. Compare the following two scenarios. I meet a co-worker I haven't seen in some time in the hallway at work. I say, "How are you, I heard you've been ill. By the way, did you receive the email I sent you last week?" Alternatively, I say, "Did you receive the email I sent you last week? By the way, how are you, I heard you've been ill." Although content of these two greetings is identical, the sequence alters their meaning. The statement that comes first conveys my primary concern. It creates a 'frame' within which what follows is heard.

Extending hospitality is important. But when the opening words of the liturgy are a welcome to the worshippers, the message is communicated that the liturgy is fundamentally a social event. When the liturgy begins with the apostolic greeting, the message conveyed is that we are gathered as God's people, united in the common purpose of worshipping God.

It takes effort and intention for most worshippers to enter the sacred space of worship. They may have their own practices, such as private prayer, or making the sign of the cross. If the service begins with a processional hymn, this sense of sacred space is reinforced by corporate action which creates an energy unlike what can be found in the everyday world. When the first words of the celebrant are a personal welcome, the creation of the sense of sacred time and space is undermined, if not destroyed. The message received may be, don't worry, nothing extraordinary is going to happen here. Those who come into the church longing for an encounter with God are reassured that that is unlikely to happen—this is a space just like any other.

I want to conclude by briefly sketching what might be called a 'spirituality for liturgy': a list of dispositions to be cultivated by presiders who desire to assist worshippers to encounter the divine in deeper and more transforming ways. By 'presider', I mean not only the celebrant or officiant leading the worship, but also readers, song-leaders, choir members, intercessors—anyone who plays a leadership role in the liturgy. The list makes no claim to comprehensiveness.

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1. Attentive receptivity. This is the contemplative disposition described by Mary Collins. Contemplatives “are alert to and wait for manifestations of the sacred within the mundane.” It is the quality sometimes also described as ‘mindfulness’ or ‘heartfulness’. It is an attentiveness not just of the mind or the senses, but of the whole person. It focusses on the present moment, not on the future or the past. It is not judgmental, but open and receptive. It is grounded in the recognition that the Spirit is present and active in every moment. If we believe that God is present in the assembled body, it is appropriate to cultivate and to model a receptive attentiveness to that presence.

2. Expectancy. This is similar to attentiveness, but has a character that is more dynamic than receptive. It desires and expects God to be actively present in the liturgy. It recognizes that worship is only possible at all by the virtue of the action of the Spirit in the hearts and minds of worshippers. It seeks to collaborate with the Spirit in worshipping God.

3. Transparency. In her classic text, *Spirituality and Personal Maturity*, Joann Wolski Conn provides a helpful distinction between pastoral counselling and spiritual direction. In pastoral counselling, the primary relationship is between the counsellee and the counsellor. God is present in the room, and may be one of the subjects of conversation. In spiritual direction, the primary relationship is between the directee and God. The director is present as a facilitator. The counselling relationship itself will often become part of the material processed by the counsellee. In spiritual direction, it is the relationship between the directee and God that is the focus of concern.

If we translate these models into the liturgical context, with the congregation replacing the counsellee/directee, and the presider replacing the counsellor/director, it seems obvious that liturgical worship should resemble the spiritual direction model much more than the counselling model. The congregation’s primary relationship in the liturgy should be with God, not the presider. The presider’s role is to lead, on behalf of the congregation, the congregation’s worship of God.

The quality needed to preside at the people’s worship in this way might be called transparency.

Transparency is not invisibility. The presider will always be present as an individual, with a distinctive personality. The goal is not the suppression or neutralization of the presider’s humanity and particularity. But neither does the presider make use of his or her personality to engage the congregation’s attention, evoke a response, create an experience.

A helpful analogy is the classical musician. Well-trained performers are taught that their primary allegiance is to the intentions of the composer as conveyed by the score and a knowledge of the style prevailing at the time and place the composer was working. There are performers who make use of the score as a vehicle for projecting their own personalities, and these performers are readily recognizable. But the individuality of performers trying to embody and express the intentions of the composer always inevitably comes through. Classical performers are trained to inhabit the musical personality of the composers whose music they perform, to allow those composers to ‘speak through’ them. This is similar to the transparency of the presider.

4. Embodiment/authenticity. When asked what the secret to good acting was, Groucho Marx famously replied, “Sincerity. Once you can fake that, you’ve got it made.” Although there are similarities between drama and liturgy, liturgy cannot successfully be ‘faked’—at least not in the long term. There needs to be an embodied authenticity to what the presider says and does. In leading prayers of thanksgiving or confession, intercessions or a song of praise, the presider inescapably models for the congregation the reality or unreality of the thanks or contrition, need or rejoicing being offered. Intellectual assent is not enough. Feeling alone is not enough. There needs to be an integrity of mind, heart, body and spirit in whatever the worship leader enacts. To lead a prayer of intercession without the expectation that the prayers are heard and answered is to teach the congregation that the prayers are empty. To lead a hymn of praise while preoccupied by the impending mortgage payment on the rectory cannot ring true to those being led. I am not speaking here of the half-hysterical emotings of some television evangelism. I am speaking of a simple, full, authentic embodiment of that which is being enacted liturgically. If the person leading a

prayer is actually addressing God in intention and imagination while doing so, the reality of God's presence to the leader communicates itself to the congregation. If not, that too is communicated.

Chauvet has written that a general rule for presiders should be, "Do not say what you do, but do what you say."⁷ In other words, don't explain what you are doing, but see to it that both your interior and exterior actions are consistent with what you are saying. "It seems clear to me...that many problems of 'participation' in the liturgy would be resolved by this fact alone – that the priest 'does what he says' or does it according to what is said, that is to say, he himself prays the Eucharistic Prayer, listens himself during the readings as 'Word of God,' rejoices with the assembly during the Alleluia, etc."⁸

5. Relinquishment. It is natural that those who plan and lead worship want to ensure that the result of their efforts conforms to their plans. To indulge this desire however is to risk sabotaging the whole point of the exercise—an encounter with the living God.

I sometimes feel that preparing for worship is like building an aqueduct. You do your best to anticipate the flow of the water through the twists and turns of the duct work and to ensure that the structure can bear the force of the water flowing through it. But once you open the tap, you need to go with the flow. Mishaps may occur, but the water will flow as it will. Alternatively, you can just open the tap a tiny bit so the trickle of water will not threaten the preparations you have made. Or you can leave the tap closed altogether and just admire the structure you have built.

The phrase 'the tyranny of excellence' has been used to describe one type of misdirected effort to control what happens in the liturgy. The impulse behind the tyranny of excellence can be admirable: the desire to offer God our best in worship. But that impulse is better expressed in relation to the preparation than to the execution of the liturgy. It is important that those who lead worship take their responsibilities seriously, and prepare thoroughly so that they can offer their best. But that is different from attempting to impose an objective standard of performance. The difference between lack of preparation and mishap or limited ability is clear, and communicates itself to the congregation.

Leonard Cohen's well-known lyric applies here: "There is a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in." It is often the unexpected, the unanticipated, the apparent mistake through which the Spirit seems to speak. One Sunday morning at my home congregation a pre-teenaged girl came to the lectern to read and as she read was overcome by nervousness and could not continue. We all froze momentarily, unsure what to do, how best to respond. Her father stepped out of the choir and stood next to her and completed the reading, one arm around his daughter's shoulder. It was a moving moment which spontaneously enacted a parable of the love of God for God's children. No-one who was present will soon forget it.

I also recall the first time we sang the Caribbean "Halle, halle, halle" after the reading of the gospel. Unexpectedly, the congregation took it and ran with it. Someone started clapping, the whole congregation followed, and the singing continued far beyond the three repetitions I had planned for. But I could see the anxiety—not to say panic—in the young celebrant's eyes. The moment the singing finished he stepped in with an improvised segue that seemed to shut down the energy that had been generated and return us to the prosaic. He perceived this spontaneous movement as a threat to be contained rather than a gift to be embraced.

Relinquishment is an enactment of trust, a confidence that our own efforts and actions are only one part of the liturgy, that we come before God not only to give but also to receive. I am reminded of the Hippocratic Oath: "First, do no harm." Before intervening medically, the physician needs to assess whether his or her planned action may be worse than doing nothing. Similarly, we need to consider whether our words and actions as presiders facilitate or create obstacles to the relationship between God and God's people.

ENDNOTES

1. Louis-Marie Chauvet, "Are the words of the liturgy worn out? What diagnosis? What pastoral approach?," *Worship* 84:1 (January 2010), 30.
2. Ibid.
3. Mary Collins, *Contemplative Participation: Sacrosanctum Concilium: Twenty-five Years Later* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 82.

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4. *Worship Come to Its Senses* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); *Worship and Spirituality*, 2nd ed. (Akron: OSL Publications, 1996).

5. Don E. Saliers, *Music and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), Ch. 1, "Sound, synaesthesia, and spirituality."

6. Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), 52-3.

7. Chauvet, op. cit., 34.

8. *Ibid.*, 35.

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Liturgical Participation: the example of St Gregory of Nyssa

Those of us who have been privileged to share in worship at the Church of St Gregory of Nyssa in San Francisco find ourselves deeply challenged to reconsider the shape of the liturgy. Above all else, St Gregory's has exemplified the recognition that liturgy is something we come together to *do*, not to watch.

Some of the characteristics of this liturgy are:

- The presider is always in the midst of the people, never off at a distance or over against the people in an opposing space. When the presider moves to a different place, it is because the whole congregation is moving there.
- The congregation uses the worship space the way we use our homes: people move from one space to another, reassembling in each for the particular activity for which it is designed. Specifically, people (including clergy and choir) assemble around a Reading Desk to hear the Word proclaimed, and then reassemble around a Table to celebrate the Eucharist.
- The responsibility for making sense of scripture readings is given, in the first instance, to the

whole congregation: a prolonged silence for reflection follows each reading; members of the congregation are invited, after the sermon, to respond by describing experiences of their own that exemplify what they have been hearing.

- The leader of the Prayers of the People stands in the midst of the people, recognizing in turn each person who speaks up to ask for prayer for some particular concern.
- Processions are ceremonial movements of all the people together: a solemn parade at the time of the Preparation of the Gifts, from the location of gathering around the Reading Desk to the place they will gather around the Table; and then, a joyful circle dance around the Table after Communion.
- A cantor leads the people in singing; as a rule, the only musical instruments are human voices. The members of the choir, who have been dispersed amongst the congregation to support congregational singing, group themselves together within the larger grouping of people around the Table when the time comes to sing an anthem.
- A number of Ministers of Communion move throughout the crowd gathered around the Table but it is up to the people to ensure that everyone is served.

Let me hasten to say, this is not the only way to enact the liturgy. But a liturgy that is merely recited is a different animal from a liturgy that is enacted. "I hear, and I forget; I see, and I remember; I do, and I understand."

Although there are some aspects of the St Gregory's practice that are open to question (I have challenged one of them in these pages myself), I am convinced that the features just described constitute a fundamental challenge to our inherited liturgical practice. If the Lord's people gather on the Lord's Day only to sit in pews facing one direction, they have not really gathered as a community. And if they only leave those pews to get into a confectionary line-up for Communion, they are acting out something hopelessly remote from the priestly service to which they were called.

Our near total absorption in words printed in books is really a way of avoiding the invitation, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

It has been common to reduce the issue of participation to an argument about *vocal* participation, especially by those who will remind us that hearing is one of the most important forms of participation. Indeed it is; but **persuading people to listen to scripture readings is difficult if the readings follow one another like a blizzard.** I remember the first time I began a sermon by asking people what they heard in the readings. After the service, someone spoke to me about this disturbing invitation; he said, “You should have warned us ahead of time, and we would have listened to the readings.”

But that does not touch the even more basic issue of *acted* participation. The worst liturgical violation of the priestly calling of the baptized probably takes place at the Great Thanksgiving in the Eucharist when the physical arrangements seem to indicate that this prayer is the business of the presider alone — as if the only role of the people were eating and drinking. Correcting this abuse, however, requires some careful distinctions.

The ‘Lord’s Supper’ is not the only holy meal people share, and I for one would not want to deny that any family meal shared in thanksgiving and joy is a sharing in the body of Christ. What distinguishes ‘The Lord’s Supper’, however, is the ordered observance of the Lord’s command with the explicit intent of assuming the church’s responsibility to bear witness to the death and rising of the Lord. “We remember the Lord’s death until he comes,” and in so doing we remember who we are: the church. The tradition of the church has provided us with a frail but vital symbol of the church’s sacramental authenticity across time and space, namely, holy orders. It is, however, the holy order of the church that those in ‘holy orders’ are given the responsibility to sustain. The result of such ‘holy order’, such clarity of witness, is that the church thereby constitutes the world’s living memory of Christ, sustaining the hope that one day, every gathering around food and drink will

nourish a people, body and soul, with the body and blood of Christ.

Thus we continue the practice of giving to the bishop (or presbyter) who presides at the Altar the function of voicing the people’s praises: a sign of the holy order that distinguishes this meal from other meals, precisely so that it may continue to imbue all meals with the potential for holiness.

But none of that implies that the people have no role in the Great Thanksgiving. Indeed, the opening dialogue is the presider’s invitation to everyone present to “lift up your hearts . . . let us give thanks . . .” How, then, can the people participate in this prayer? First, the people can assemble around the Altar as soon as the deacon goes to begin preparing the gifts. (Being left behind in an adjoining room is a powerful message of exclusion.) Second, as they stand with the presider in prayer, the people can be encouraged to join in the same gesture of prayer, ‘lifting holy hands.’ Third, the presider can refrain from any uncalled for gestures that may be seen to imply that holy orders are about special, magical powers. (Note that the contemporary eucharistic rite in neither the *Book of Alternative Services* nor *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* provides any rubrics directing manual gestures of the sort found in the mediaeval mass.) Fourth, the people can join in singing the *Sanctus* and the other acclamations that punctuate the prayer. If practices like these become the norm, there will be no doubt remaining that the people are participating in the Great Thanksgiving.

Of course, the major obstacles in all of this are the buildings we have inherited which prohibit so much of authentic liturgy. Functionally, our buildings have a greater resemblance to factories with their bolted down machinery than to shelters for a pilgrim people. But because of our inaction on these critical matters we have largely forfeited the transformed human consciousness that should have been our legacy as a gospel people. We have treated our buildings as more sacred than our people, forgetting that for centuries the design of our church buildings has been held hostage to romantic ideals that are hostile to the gospel of the kingdom and the message of the cross. It is time for us to stand up to this architectural tyranny and reclaim our inheritance as “living stones, a

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spiritual house, a holy priesthood“ (1 Peter 2.5). It is time for us to *do* what Jesus asked us to do, and not just recite words *about* it.

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Book Review – Truly Present: Practicing Prayer in the Liturgy

Lisa E. Dahill

Augsburg Fortress, ISBN 0-8066-5147-4

In so many ways, prayer and praying have been the focus of the most dramatic changes in our regular and faithful liturgical lives. In two or three short generations, the weekly (or daily) life of the church has moved from one marked by words like ‘shall’ or ‘must’ to one characterized by gentler terms like ‘may’ or ‘can’. Even the very idea that liturgy is *prayer* is a marked shift from several centuries where liturgy was *form* and rote immutability. We now use language like *praying the liturgy* where once we *did* liturgy or, *listened* to liturgy. There is a helpful and welcome notion of the liturgy being that which all of the gathered faithful offer together. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the part of the liturgy, normally following homily and affirmation, and preceding confession and reconciliation, which we call, variously, The Prayers of the People, The Prayers of the Faithful, The Prayers of the Church.

There are those among us who lament the practice of various churches to have offered new worship books with fixed forms and set litanies; their introduction has, in some ways, simply changed us from a long and inclusive prayer said by the priest, to another equally fixed form said by members of the assembly. Workshops are offered and clergy go to great lengths to encourage members of congregations to offer their *own* prayers, reflecting local cares and concerns, while also praying for God’s world, God’s church, and God’s mission. Rubrics and suggestions in varieties of worship books are intended to point those praying to

particular rhythms and shapes, while leaving to one’s own choice the specifics of prayer in the gathered community. A number of very helpful books have been created both by individuals and by churches to assist those leading the prayers of the faithful in specific, seasonally appropriate, and scripturally influenced. Equipping the laity to offer prayers which are sensitive and locally located, while also recognizing that when we pray we *are* the church, praying as part of the universal body, is an important and focussed ministry, into which helpful and creative writing is always valued.

Lisa Dahill, a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Assistant Professor of Worship and Christian Spirituality at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Ohio, has added richly to this body of work in her short but very useful book. She writes compellingly about contemplative prayer at the outset of the book, and then moves through the influence of the Word in the ways in which we pray, the use of singing and music in corporate prayer and ways in which we respond to prayer in Christian mission and, finally, in a wonderful concluding chapter, encourages us to see the Body of Christ as both eucharist *and* vocation.

Chapters are short enough to be easily digested, and each concludes with a series of questions headed by: *For reflection, discussion, journaling, or spiritual direction*. This easily read and enjoyable work can be used effectively by an individual, by a small group, or by a liturgical team, planning and learning about praying together. There is a comprehensive bibliography for those who want to ‘go deeper’.

Dahill writes:

It is simultaneously the simplest and most difficult thing on earth to pay attention to God in Jesus Christ.

Amen! many of us would echo. Dahill helps us on that difficult and tremendously rewarding path.

Peter Wall, Hamilton, ON

Peter is the Dean of Christ’s Church (Anglican) Cathedral in Hamilton, Ontario and a member of the Liturgy Canada executive.

Book Review—At Heaven’s Gate

Book Review - At Heaven’s Gate: Reflections on Leading Worship

Richard Giles

Canterbury Press, Norwich 2010, 152 pages

Richard Giles became known to North American Christians with the publication of his two previous books, *Re-Pitching the Tent* (1999) and *Creating Uncommon Worship* (2004), both published by Liturgical Press. These were handsome coffee table books, written when he was Dean of the (Anglican) Cathedral in Philadelphia, with wonderful photographs, in black and white and in colour. His most recent work is this one, much more modest in size and splendour, but no less far-reaching in its ambitions. He signals his intention here by the subtitle of this volume: *Reflections on Leading Worship*. It’s a book that belongs in every parish library.

I admire and affirm almost everything Giles presents here. He is generous to traditions other than Anglican. His language is resolutely inclusive, alternating paragraphs with masculine and feminine pronouns when speaking of worship leadership. His insistence that Christian worship should be perceived as a journey, modeling the journey of daily Christian discipleship, is a good one. (He contends that we should strive to provide separate spaces for confession, for the Word, and for the Meal, even if within a single room.) He argues that the assembly itself should be understood as the chief choir in all worship, the vocal specialists we have come to think of as choir primarily supporting the people. He argues for the entire assembly assuming the *orans* posture at all prayer, and for the propriety of standing, not kneeling, at reception of Bread and Cup. Most tellingly, he maintains that worship is the indisputable and indispensable vehicle for Christian formation: what we do has the power to shape us.

I find very little to dispute in Giles’ accounting. He is more sympathetic than I would be to the place of high technology in Christian worship – electronic projections, for example. His proposal that at the Readings, Lectors be vested by the Presider with the Presider’s stole seems to me to be counter-

productive to his stated intention: that of reducing the perceived distance between clergy and people. (That the Lector is to receive authority to read from the Presider seems awkward, if not theologically suspect, to me.)

Most troubling of all, to me, was Giles’ own example in Philadelphia, where in his otherwise splendid re-ordering of his Cathedral’s interior, he presumed to paint over a previous generation’s testimony of faith in wall murals that many local architects described as an unrivaled example of Victorian piety, leaving blank white walls. Granted that Victorian piety may not be your particular cup of tea, nevertheless, Giles’ treatment of the building he inherited seems to me, at the least, to disrespect Grandpa and Grandma’s faith, and could even be described as an act of cultural vandalism.

Ah, well: in matters of faith as everywhere in Christian experience, nobody’s perfect.

Paul Bosch, Waterloo, ON

Paul Bosch is a retired pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Emeritus Dean of the Chapel at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Waterloo, ON, and a member of the Executive of Liturgy Canada.

Next Issue of Liturgy Canada

The next issue will feature a critical assessment of the Easter Vigil, by Yme Woensdregt (BC member of Liturgy Canada Executive). Yme explores some of the acute challenges in the way the rite uses scripture; we can look forward to an important discussion of the issues he raises.

Our current plan is to publish a condensed version of this article in our print copy and the full version online, providing all readers to opportunity to wade in on the conversation. This will be, in effect, our first step in the conversion to an online publication, an opportunity to experiment with the technology of open dialogue. As our mission statement says, “Our ministry is to provide resources on our liturgical life which focus the debate, inform our practice and evaluate our experience.”

What's next for Liturgy Canada?

Liturgy Canada is changing. What began more than two decades ago as the 'Hoskin Group' was a response to the challenge of learning how to use the newly published (Anglican) *Book of Alternative Services*. But the issues raised by that book revealed our need for ongoing conversation and reflection on the nature of the liturgy and our participation in it. We have tried since then to sustain that conversation and reflection by means of this publication. But published journals are migrating to the internet, for economic reasons — not only to save on postage but to reach new readers and enable genuine and timely dialogue. That is what we are about to do: our newsletter will soon be published online (including past issues), with the added feature of open forums in which our supporting members can participate. In the meantime we shall have to develop new methods of funding our operations.

Meanwhile, Liturgy Canada now includes both Anglicans and Lutherans; many of us are dual-rite Christians (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* as well as the *Book of Alternative Services*). But the liturgical issues faced by our churches are no longer just a matter of how to use these books. The internet provides access to liturgical resources worldwide. And the rapid collapse of Christendom-era patterns of worship has radically sharpened the questions we face about the nature of the liturgy and our participation in it. Liturgy Canada has therefore been developing local workshops and conferences to strengthen and enrich our liturgical life. (See the following notice, *Rediscovering Liturgy in a Post-Christendom Culture*.)

Liturgy Canada is changing because our churches are changing. We are counting on the input of our members to guide us through these changes; your suggestions and feedback will be invaluable. Because we will depend on email to notify you when a new issue of Liturgy Canada is published online, we ask you to provide us with your email address. Please send us an email at liturgycan@gmail.com (an address set up specifically to manage this transition) and include your reactions to this announcement as well as suggestions for making Liturgy Canada more useful for your ministry in the Church.

Rediscovering Liturgy in a Post-Christendom Culture: *an emerging strategy*

Our first one-day liturgical conference, called *Rediscovering Liturgy*, took place last autumn in Waterloo at Renison College, and 70 people — mostly parish teams — participated. All indications are that we should do this again; so two more conferences have are planned for this autumn: one in the Toronto area, on Saturday, October 20, from 10 am to 4 pm; the other in Waterloo, on Saturday, November 3, from 10 am to 4 pm. At the Waterloo event we expect some previous participants will be 'coming back for more'; in Toronto, participants will likely all be coming for a first experience. Mark your calendar now; details will follow soon.

These conferences provide practical formation in all liturgical ministries, including greeters, readers, prayer leaders, communion ministers, presiders, etc. This is not a 'how it should be done' kind of event. Rather, we spend time considering the nature of what we do in worship and why we do it, learning some of the unexplored lessons from our authorized rites but looking beyond them as well. We look at different ways to bring integrity and new life to the different elements of the liturgy. We are a pilgrim people, and our liturgy is a work in progress.



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Liturgy Canada is a society of women and men committed to the ongoing renewal of the Church in worship and mission. Our ministry is to provide resources on our liturgical life which focus the debate, inform our practice and evaluate our experience.

We always welcome comments about our articles or what is happening in your parish. If you have been touched, stimulated, informed, angered, inspired, confused or otherwise affected by this issue, we would love to help you share your work with others. Your responses are most welcome!

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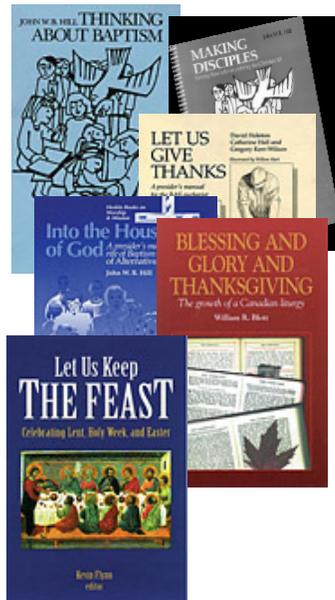
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