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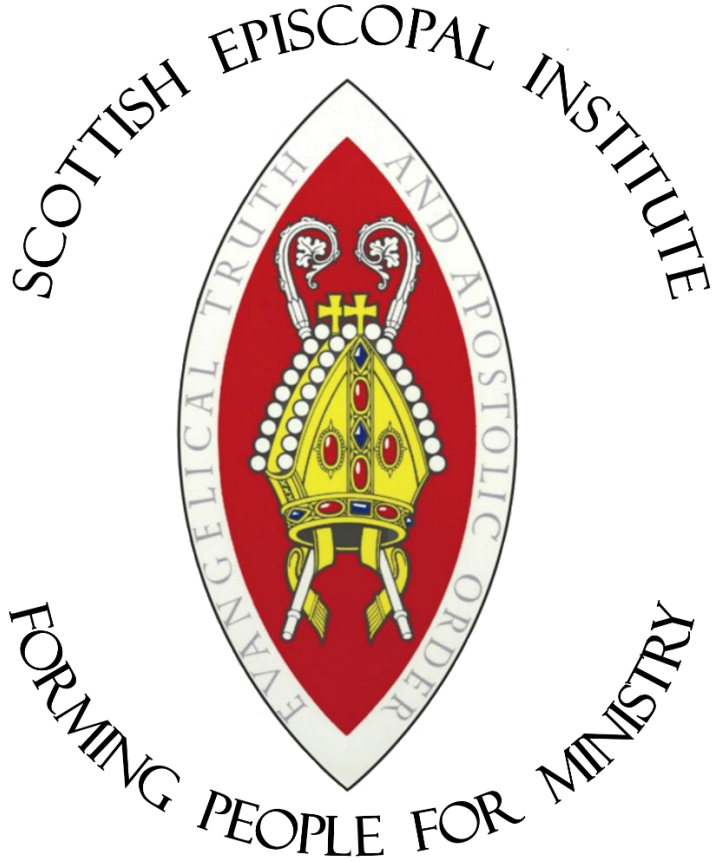

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ARTICLES

REVIEWS

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Editorial: The Future of Liturgy
Introduction

Bridget Nichols and David Jasper

The revision of our Anglican liturgy over the past seventy years or so, or perhaps here more specifically revision of the authorized liturgy of the Church of England within the broader liturgical life of the Anglican Communion, can be divided into three broad eras. The first culminated in the publication of the *Alternative Service Book* (ASB) in 1980. (In the Scottish Episcopal Church this was quickly followed by the 1982 eucharistic liturgy which is still essentially in use with minor revisions of language.) The second era we might describe as the era of *Common Worship*. The third era is just beginning, and it is within this last stage that we situate ourselves.[1]

After the débacle of 1928 and during the remaining years of the twentieth century, Anglican liturgical revision changed its perspective from that left-over from the nineteenth century, the revision of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, to a more broadly historical and ecumenical and indeed radical approach, the latter elements encouraged by the work of the Second Vatican Council. The process leading up to the publication of the ASB in 1980 began with the appointment of a Liturgical Commission by the Archbishops of the Church of England in 1955. It was a process that Geoffrey Cuming described as a 'reshaping' rather than a 'revision' and was essentially driven by historical and theological principles.[1] These principles are reflected in Jasper and Bradshaw's *Companion to the Alternative Service Book* (1986) which opens with an historical Introduction that begins with the ancient Jewish background to Christian worship and lays stress on looking back to the liturgy of the first Christian centuries, in particular the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* as 'a crucial source of information about the worship of the early Church'.[2]

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[1] G. J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy*. Second Edition (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 208-229. Cuming stresses the influence in the early stages, particularly in work on Holy Communion, of the distinguished liturgical scholars E. C. Ratcliff and A. H. Couratin, as well as the ecumenical work of the Joint Liturgical Group.

[2] R. C. D. Jasper and Paul F. Bradshaw, *A Companion to the Alternative Service Book* (London: SPCK, 1986), p. 4. More recent scholarship, not least by Bradshaw himself, has changed considerably our understanding of the *Apostolic Tradition*. See Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

The Liturgical Commission was then comprised very largely of scholars, mainly though not entirely, academic liturgists. Its Preface reflected its sense of a time of 'rapid social and intellectual changes', and a responsibility to renew and modernize the ancient and hallowed language of the Prayer Book in a recognition of the 'transience and imperfection' of all words. The ASB was authorized to stand alongside, not to replace the Prayer Book (though in practice it very largely did). It had a shelf life of merely twenty years, and was a work of solid scholarly, liturgical endeavour, reflective of its time and culture. This first era of recent liturgical revision looked back into history. It was a serious theological enterprise, and referred across to the public worship of other churches in a spirit of ecumenism.

2.

The ASB was not designed to be long-lived. By 2000 in the Church of England, this one (admittedly bulky) volume had begun to be replaced by the many volumes of *Common Worship* – a kind of return to the many service books that accompanied the worship and liturgy of the late medieval Church.[3] Its spirit was reflected in a small volume of essays edited by Michael Perham, then Rector of Oakdale in Poole, entitled *Towards Liturgy 2000: Preparing for the Revision of the Alternative Service Book* (1989). The atmosphere in 1989 was very different from that surrounding the papers preparatory to the ASB, even though many of the 1989 authors were involved in the ASB's preparation. It is worth noting that nearly half of them were parish priests, and all of them were men. This had not been entirely the case in the membership of the earlier, pre-1980, Liturgical Commission.

Rather than a somewhat dry, scholarly and academic perspective on history and the tradition, the new emphasis was on the integration of worship and liturgy into a contemporary culture. Bryan Spinks, reflecting on 'What Kind of Book?' should result from the revision of the ASB, was able to see a place for harnessing the best of developing scholarship to an approach that combined both the identity of a book and certain freedoms not possible at the time of writing.[4] Other contributors sounded a clear note of anxiety that the Church was 'losing touch' and becoming sidelined in society. As one remedy, Michael Perham in his essay, 'The Language of Worship', suggested that the language of worship should be 'modern English, not unlike the style

[3] The Sacramentary and Missal, the Breviary, the Processional, the Manual, the Pontifical, and so on.

[4] Bryan Spinks, 'What Kind of Book?', in Michael Perham (ed.) *Towards Liturgy 2000: Preparing for the Revision of the Alternative Service Book* (London: SPCK/Alcuin Club, 1989), pp. 7-13.

of the present book.'[5] (That was to assume that a certain educated register of the late 1980s was broadly representative of modern English, and that it would not change very much in the foreseeable future.) The nature of the language used in public worship is far more complex that that simple statement, of course, implied.

Among the immediate challenges for revisers was the matter of inclusive language. If the ASB had been solidly blind to issues of gender, new voices of 'inclusivity' like the American liturgist Gail Ramshaw, were now increasingly insistent and articulate. The consequences of this particular debate on 'gendered language' have subsequently too frequently been trivialized into the 'quick fix' as in the minimalist 2022 revisions of the Scottish 1982 liturgy, short circuiting more serious debates on 'inclusive' language.

Common Worship, as its various parts emerged, revealed a deep sense of the historical depth and antiquity of Christian worship. In both the baptismal and eucharistic liturgies there is a conscious return to fourth-century practice and even earlier, reflecting the influence of then very recent scholarship on the *Apostolic Tradition* and the ancient Eastern liturgies. A move away from a two-year lectionary to the Revised Common Lectionary, bore witness to continuing ecumenical discussion, especially with the Roman Catholic Church. It is worth mentioning one consequence: rejection of the ASB's thematic, lectionary-related collects in favour of collects that were clearly part of the gathering rite, and in a style very much in keeping with the collects of the BCP (in several cases adopting modified BCP texts). The first supplementary provision required by the General Synod was a set of alternative collects in a more contemporary idiom.

Nevertheless, it would still be true to say that the second era of liturgical revision was characterised by an obsession with the contemporary 'relevance' of liturgy in an increasingly secular society in which the Church itself too often suffers from delusions about its own relevance. As a result, and in its existential anxiety, we see the church abandon the proper demands of its theology and traditions. This has, arguably, been most evident in the production of supplementary resources to address particular occasions and circumstances, and to confront ongoing demands for liturgical material that is 'accessible', both stylistically and in its use of biblical and theological images and references (therefore 'culturally' might be a necessary qualifier). One prominent example is the set of *Additional Baptism Texts in Accessible Language*, issued in 2015.

The second 'era' of liturgical change, then, was concerned with placing the liturgy of the Church and its words for worship firmly in a contemporary

[5] Michael Perham, *Towards Liturgy 2000*, p. 67.

context in a society that was rapidly leaving the Church, a process accelerated by the ecclesiastical shutdown that occurred during the Covid pandemic. And so, to the third 'era', which is our concern in the essays in this issue of the SEI Journal.

3.

The perspective in this era must be primarily forward-looking and eschatological in a Church that lives by faith and in hope, speaking with a prophetic voice (which requires theological discipline) and in praise of the mystery of the God of our salvation. All that requires us to unpack many current assumptions, held to conscientiously or otherwise. The first might be to question whether the present practice of entrusting the process of 'revision' (if that is now the correct term) to synodically appointed 'committees' or 'commissions' is adequate or appropriate. All too often they simply end up talking to themselves. For there is in worship – whether corporate or individual – a counter-cultural element, or perhaps better a counter-current in society that seeks to articulate in praise and thanksgiving, in intercession and confession, a profound sense of what it is to be truly human in the contemporary world, in the spirit of the incarnation and salvation in Christ and in the society in which we all live. In pursuit of this, our essays are far more 'interdisciplinary' than has been generally the case in such discussions.[6] We need to listen attentively to the voices of philologists, anthropologists, pastoral practitioners and many others – alongside the scholarship of the historical and theologically educated liturgist, each stimulating and provoking the other.

Echoing Percy Dearmer, the eminent liturgist Bryan Spinks in his essay here reminds clergy and all who are entrusted with the task of training and educating them for ordination and Christian ministry, of the fundamental role of a theologically literate and spiritually sensitive and informed clergy. The language, voice and 'performance' of public worship cannot stand outside or ignore the complex and serious issues surrounding the language we use every day, issues of exclusion, issues in the changing patterns of human relationships within society, and so on. Finally, we need to be ever mindful of what Graham Ward here writes of as mystagogy, recalling that the mystery at the heart of all worship is only safeguarded by a thorough sense of ecclesiology – a theology of the Church - and deep

[6] It is worthy of note that the very recent *Cambridge Companion to Christian Liturgy* (2025), edited by Joris Geldhof, also emphasizes the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to liturgical study and practice.

theological engagement. It is a reminder to all bishops and clergy to take seriously their vocation as *teachers* of the faith.[7]

These essays are only a sketch and a beginning. We hope that they might provoke discussion and a serious desire to carry the conversation further as we look towards the future in our public worship and liturgy. We are under no delusions about the amount of careful work that is required and aware that what we offer in this issue is just a start. But we hope that it will be taken seriously, as the task before us demands.

[7] The Scottish Ordinal of 1984 specifically uses the term 'teach' at the ordination of a new bishop. The word does not appear in the ordination liturgy for priests and deacons.

What liturgical knowledge and formation do clergy need? Some personal reflections and suggestions.

Bryan D. Spinks

Bishop F. Percy Goddard Professor Emeritus of Liturgical Studies and Pastoral Theology at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music

Percy Dearmer is probably best known as the author of *The Parson's Handbook* (a modern version of which has just been published by Jared Cramer[1]) and for championing the so-called English Use, which was in fact a modern construal invented by the Roman Catholics, Fr. Daniel Rock and Augustine Pugin.[2] Less well known today is Dearmer's *The Art of Public Worship*, 1919, in which he attempted to combine his knowledge of liturgical studies, and the then shared experience of the Great War (which took the lives, directly of his son and, indirectly, of his wife), with his love of the religious arts, and the challenges of presiding and officiating at public worship. Some of the suggestions he made in this little book mark it out as being a work of its time. Given its harmful effects on health, no one today would suggest that smoking tobacco in church should be acceptable or desirable; the reference to people earning enough money to employ a servant reminds us of the famous *faux pas* made by the prosecution in the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial; and Dearmer's discussion on worship and 'The Mission Field' sounds patronizing in a way that it probably did not in 1919. However, some of his observations still resonate today, and validate the remark in Ecclesiastes, that there is nothing new under the sun. Dearmer wrote, 'For church-going has declined steadily and rapidly; this being a free and honest age, people no longer attend that which they do not like'.[3] Those words are as true today as they were in 1919. Other comments that Dearmer made have prompted me to offer my own reflections. They are based on 16 years of lecturing in liturgy in the Divinity Faculty at Cambridge University, and 26 years of teaching different liturgy courses at Yale Divinity School, Connecticut, USA, as well as my experience of being on the Church of England Liturgical Commission 1986-1996; and my

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[1] Jared C. Cramer, *The Twenty-First Century Parson's Handbook. A Guide for Anglican Liturgy and Parish Ministry in the Prayer Book Catholic Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2025.

[2] Bryan D. Spinks, 'The Intersection of "English Use" Liturgy and Social Justice: Snapshots of Augustus Pugin, Percy Dearmer, Conrad Noel and William Palmer Ladd', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 19.1 (2021), pp. 21-36.

[3] Percy Dearmer, *The Art of Public Worship* (London: Mowbray, 1919), p.2.

experiences as a regular celebrant of liturgy as Chaplain at Churchill College, Cambridge (an Independent Ecumenical Chapel) and in a variety of English parishes, as well as 27 years' experience of leading worship in small Episcopal parishes in Connecticut.

1.Knowledge of the 'science of liturgics'

Dearmer wrote: 'It recently occurred to the authorities in England that liturgics is a science, and that some show must be made of consulting experts (a favourite word just now); but it remains to be discovered that liturgics is also an art.'[4]

Liturgy is an academic subject, though in the United Kingdom it is rarely found in university theological faculties and departments. What do those training for ordination need to know about the science of liturgy, and how much academic knowledge do they need to have? Like all theology, the best answer is, 'as much as they can'. Christian groups may come together for Bible studies, prayer meetings, fund raisers, parish missions, and many other things, but the event that brings out the greatest number at any one time is Sunday public worship. As Karl Barth pointed out, 'In baptism and the Lord's Supper we are concerned in a uniquely dramatic way with the action of the community, and indeed with the action by which it establishes fellowship.' [5] Or, as *Sacrosanctum Concilium* expressed it in 1963, 'the liturgy is the peak towards which the Church's activity tends, just as it is also the fountain head from which all vitality flows.'[6] Public worship is the place where most lay people learn their theology and their prayer vocabulary. More importantly, it is here that people hope for/may expect an encounter with divine otherness. For clergy to underestimate the importance of public worship is a huge mistake. Some liturgical knowledge and some liturgical skills should thus be at the heart of ordained ministry. It is not something that comes through the laying on of hands at ordination, any more than does knowledge of biblical scholarship. Furthermore, simply reading scripture without knowledge does not make for a serious contribution to worship.[7]

When at Cambridge I offered two courses: on the Anaphora or Eucharistic Prayer, and a second on the Liturgical Movement. Both courses

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[4] Dearmer, *The Art of Public Worship*, p. 54

[5] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4:3 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956-1969), p. 901.

[6] *Sacrosanctum Concilium [The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy]*, December 4, 1963, paragraph 10. Sacrosanctum Concilium . Accessed 18.10.2025.

[7] Vaughan Roberts, *True Worship* (Bletchley, Milton Keynes: Authentic Media 2001,) and William Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship. All Life is for God's Glory* (Ripley, Derbyshire: 10 Publishing, 2021), supposedly representing 'conservative evangelicalism', are hardly serious contributions to current debate.

supplemented and deepened whatever was being taught in the Cambridge Theological Federation. More is better than less! At Yale Divinity School all Anglican seminarians had to take two courses. The first was 'Foundations of Christian Worship', which was 24 classes over one semester and different classes taught by all members of the liturgy faculty, and some by theological and music faculty. It covered theologies of worship, an outline of liturgical developments East and West, and the history of specific rites such as marriage and funerals, music in worship, as well as the World Council of Churches' document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, for an Ecumenical Theology of some of those rites.[8] A second full semester of 24 classes was devoted to the history and development of the Books of Common Payer, and for the contemporary section, the Episcopal book of 1979 was compared with a modern rite from another Anglican province. These two courses were regarded as *the minimum* for Anglicans, and the first course is a reminder that knowledge of worship in other churches is no bad thing, but an asset. The 'How to officiate at services' was a quite separate in-house formation, *in addition to* these proper academic courses.

Those who train to be General Practitioners of medicine are normally trained in the leading university medical faculties and the hospitals associated with them. They are trained (one hopes) in the best knowledge and practices of their times. When they begin in general practice, though, they are expected to keep abreast of the changes in their field. Even if some presenting conditions are beyond their own training and expertise, they are expected to know who to consult or to whom to make referrals. I have often told my students that if you saw your GP, and she/he said.' Your bodily humours are out of alignment, and I will bleed you with leeches', you would probably have serious questions about this person's competence. When training at St Chad's College Durham, we ordinands did a placement in the Godalming Deanery. We were invited to a Rural Deanery clergy Chapter meeting, and although not on the agenda, the elderly clerics began to complain about younger ordinands – us. When we were given an opportunity to ask questions, one of our number asked, 'When did any of you last do some serious theological reading?' After a long embarrassing silence, one cleric said, 'I try to read a novel a week'. We were all aghast – though I wonder how many of my cohort would themselves be able to give a better answer to the same question today.

The demands of clergy parish life, the cost of books, and the plethora of titles, means it is not easy to keep up with theological disciplines in quite the same way as a GP might in medicine, but at least clergy need to be

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[8] World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982)

equipped with the skills *of how and where to find the latest knowledge*, or *to whom to make referrals.* Seminaries and Theological colleges are in business to train clergy for ministry, and not primarily to produce Old and New Testament scholars, or even liturgical scholars, though hopefully a few will further pursue these academic theological disciplines. But the instructors need to be academically competent in their area. It used to be the case (and may be still) that in England, liturgy was often given to one of the staff who had the lightest load, in the belief that it was an easy discipline to read up on, and that it was more practical than a theological science. At Durham I was fortunate as an undergraduate to study with Arthur Couratin, on Reformation liturgy. For the postgraduate Diploma the lecturer in early liturgy was Fr Christopher Walsh from Ushaw, who had studied under Dom Bernard Botte, and who knew his stuff. The Prayer Book, however, was given to Robin Nixon, who clearly (and, to his credit, admitted it) knew nothing about the subject other than from experiential use and a few dates of different Prayer Books. I suspect this sad tale may resonate with others – a case of the blind leading the blind. If you are teaching a particular tradition, it is wise to know the history and theology of that tradition, so you know how you arrived at where the church is now, and are enabled to gain some insight as to where we might or might not want to go in the future.

Knowing other traditions broadens the possibilities. Instructors in liturgy should themselves have studied liturgy at an advanced level. To regard it as of minor importance is hardly the foundation to prepare a liturgically competent clergy. A church will reap what it sows.

Instructors not only need to be competent, but they also need to teach students how to find new material, and to stress the need for some humility when attempting to be an authority on liturgy. It is now such a widespread field that no one can master all its dimensions. The idea that once ordained, the new cleric now and forever hereafter knows all there is to know about liturgy gives rise to what Deamer called the forces of ignorance and stupidity. It is quite unfathomable to me that some Anglican instructors still recommend Gregory Dix's *The Shape of the Liturgy.* It was a masterpiece in 1945, but in 2025 it is now mostly wrong.[9] It is akin to telling a student to read Darwin's *On the Origin of Species,* and she/he will know everything about modern evolutionary theory. Even Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson's *The Eucharistic Liturgies* and my own

[9] Bryan D. Spinks, 'Mis-shapen. Gregory Dix and the Four Action Shape of the Liturgy', *Lutheran Quarterly* 4 (1990), pp. 161-177. Bryan D. Spinks, 'Gregory Dix and Reformation Liturgy', in Roberta Bayer (ed.), *Reformed and Catholic. Essays in Honor of Peter Toon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), pp. 90-99.

Do This in Remembrance of Me, are already beginning to be out of date.[10] New work published on the Barcelona Papyrus, and the anaphora of St Mark in the light of the Aksumite Collection from Ethiopia have posed new questions about anaphoral origins.[11] It is also still worrisome to find books and articles referring to Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition*, and to hear recommended Dix's or Botte's critical editions. Its authenticity was already being questioned by Jean Magne, and a complete reformulation was brought to fruition in the work of Paul Bradshaw, Maxwell Johnson and Ed Phillips.[12] It is clear that this composite Church order was not by Hippolytus; was not Roman in origin; and not c.215.[13] The recent publication by Nathan Chase and Maxwell Johnson, in the light of the Aksumite Collection, strongly points to Egypt as the place of origin of the composite Church Order.[14]

Does it matter? At one level, no one's salvation rests on it, and so it matters not one iota. However, when clergy solemnly state that the earliest anaphora is from Rome by bishop Hippolytus and dates from 215, and so has a self-evident authority to justify current texts or practices and to 'checkmate' other suggestions, then we have the GP applying leeches. I am reminded of my second vicar at St. Nicholas, Witham in Essex, Desmond Sherlock announced with great authority (his own) that he had no time for the new-fangled Good Friday liturgy, but he was sticking to the 'traditional Anglican Three Hour devotion', apparently completely ignorant of the fact that this latter was borrowed from a Jesuit tradition in South America in the late nineteenth century, and that therefore it was neither Anglican in origin nor traditional for Anglicans. What he meant – as many Anglican clergy seem to mean when they speak with great liturgical authority – is 'it is what I am used to, what I like, and what I want'! It is not that

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[10] Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies. Their Evolution and Interpretation,* SPCK, London 2012; Bryan D. Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me. The Eucharist from the Early Church to the Present Day* (London: SCM, 2013).

[11] Nathan P. Chase, *The Anaphoral Tradition in the 'Barcelona Papyrus'* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023); Valerio Polidori, *Alexandria Unveiled. An Exploration of the Most Ancient Recension of St Mark's Liturgy* (independently published, 2023).

[12] Jean Magne, *Tradition apostolique sur les charismes et Diataxeis des saints Apôtres* (Origines chrétiennes 1) (Paris: Jean Magne, 1975). Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition. A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

[13] Bryan D. Spinks, 'The Apostolic Tradition and Liturgical Revision', in Robert W. Pritchard (ed.), *Issues in Prayer Book Revision* (New York: Church Publishing, 2018), pp. 203-212.

[14] Nathan P. Chase and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Apostolic Tradition, Its origins, Development, and Liturgical Practices* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2025).

instructors/liturgy scholars have all the answers, but their knowledge and skills help to prevent liturgical myths controlling both liturgical revision and liturgical practice. Keeping abreast of the history of the liturgy is a precious corrective to personal dogma and bias.

As with all ordinations, Episcopal consecration too, does not automatically endow the recipient with liturgical knowledge. In revising the marriage service in preparation for *Common Worship*, some restorations/additional ceremonies were suggested to provide for and counter the growing demand for innovations in marriage services. These restorations/additional ceremonies were turned down by the House of Bishops, whose knowledge of marriage rites was purely experiential, and who seemed to believe that the core of the rite was the vows, which were in fact the last medieval addition to the rite. The bishops seemed to have no knowledge of, or interest in, restoring as an option the Cana Cup which many medieval rites provided, and which, like the Wedding Cup in the Eastern Orthodox rite, was not a substitute for communion but a ceremony in addition to the Eucharist.[15] Liturgical creativity by restoration was thwarted by episcopal ignorance. The current knowledge of the evolution of marriage rites has been summarized by Phillip Tovey in a Grove booklet, *Wedding Services. Learning from the Past to Shape the Present and the Future* (2025), and copies have been distributed to Church of England diocesan bishops.[16] I wonder if any bothered to read it, and whether those that did have understood its implications for future revision.

2. Liturgical Language

Ever since the appearance of the new vernacular services in the Roman Catholic Church, and Series 3 in the Church of England, criticism has been heaped on the language of the new modern English prayers. Dearmer wrote:

> The bishops have seldom troubled to consult good writers, and have acted as if they thought the art of prose composition was miraculously conferred upon them at their consecration. The results have been bad; in the world of literature (which is the most influential of all our finite worlds) a sense of contempt is engendered, similar to that existing in the world of music and of the fine arts; and although congregations here also are critical, ugliness and banality of

[15] For the evidence that the common cup was in addition to the eucharist, see Gabriel Radle, *Marriage in Byzantium, Christian Liturgical Rites from Betrothal to Consummation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

[16] Phillip Tovey, *Wedding Services: Learning from the Past to Shape the Present and the Future* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2025).

> phrase do produce a feeling of weariness and even suspicion of ecclesiastical fatuity.[17]

And with reference to a Commission appointed to revise an American Episcopal hymnal, he wrote:

> but all things are possible to official committees – the few men who are put on such bodies because of their personal competence are swamped by the bumbledom of the atmosphere.[18]

All too often blame for, and criticism of the new liturgical rites of the Church of England have been and are directed towards 'the Liturgical Commission'. My experience of the Liturgical Commission was that it had liturgical scholars as members, who were competent in theology in addition to liturgical history. However, being a liturgical scholar and/or a theologian neither endows a person with the gift of liturgical composition, nor with a sense of what is practical and possible, any more than does the idea that episcopal ordination bestows that gift. The Commission was balanced with practitioners, and, for a literary input, it had Baroness P.D. James. My recollection was that most members of the Commission were concerned with attempting to craft the best worship possible, and they did not try to reinvent the wheel.[19] The task was to prepare new rites and texts to replace the 1980 *Alternative Service Book*. Only two members of that Commission appeared to have decided that their main task was to fight party battles, and those two members had little formal training in academic liturgy, and both also lacked proven deep theological knowledge. Usually, their party disputes were headed off, though occasionally they managed to upset and change what the rest of the Commission was agreed upon. However, the work of the Commission then passed (according to customary procedure) to the House of Bishops and ultimately to Synod, where every member in both seemed to become a self-appointed liturgical authority, and where, particularly in Synod, party strife was intensified. A good many phrases were made ugly by the insistence of Synod members on inserting their pet theological words into the text. The texts then passed to a revision committee for a final text to be brought back before Synod. In that sort of process language tends to be made ugly in the interests of party shibboleths.

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[17] Dearmer, *The Art of Public Worship*, pp. 46-7.

[18] Dearmer, *The Art of Public Worship*, p. 50.

[19] Bryan D. Spinks, 'Reflections on the Making of The Church of England's *Common Worship 2000*', *Sewanee Theological Review* 61:1 (2017), pp. 105-126.

It is important to have the widest possible discussions on new liturgy – though this is best achieved after trials of the services are made, and where defects and difficulties of language, and of flow of the services, emerge from some empirical data rather than just private opinion. However, the procedure of Commission- House of Bishops- Synod- Revision Committee- Synod is almost certainly not the best process for acquiring good liturgical poetics. To my knowledge, apart from Phyllis James, no literary wordsmith was consulted, and to have had some input in the process from people with such skills might have been extremely helpful.[20] I am reminded of Gerard Fiennes' book*, I Tried to Run a Railway,* in which he discussed how the plans for running a good British Railways were thwarted by government policies which continually undermined what seemed obvious to those directly responsible for successfully operating that form of transport. The process of bringing good liturgy with good language to fruition and authorization needs a better way with less bumbledom.

3. 'Mission Field' and Language

When Dearmer was writing in 1919, with few exceptions, most Anglican Provinces were 'modified clones' of the Church of England, and they used the 1662 services with only minor modifications. That is no longer the case. A left-over from the colonial mentality is that sometimes it seems to be an unconscious assumption that Church of England linguistic concerns are the concerns of all English-speaking Provincial liturgies. Although there may be standard texts in English (Shakespeare?) that all English-speaking lands may appreciate, spoken English in the United States and in Australia is not the same as in England, and even in England there are regional community and cultural differences and nuances. This is especially important when it comes to the problem of inclusive language, where often English middle-class assumptions about such language are promoted as though they are an international concern. In Marquand Chapel at Yale Divinity School there was pressure to avoid masculine descriptors of God in worship services. When this was extended to 'Lord', a number of African Americans were outraged because calling God 'Lord' was extremely important for many in their community, and they perceived this as neo-colonialism or worse. Here, well-meaning but blinkered proponents of inclusive language caused offence by not thinking outside their own personal sensitivities. One person's inclusive language can be another person's exclusion from

[20] For more on language, see Marcus G. Halley, 'What Poetry might teach us about Prayer', *Sewanee Theological Review* 61 (2017), pp. 255-278; David Jasper, *A Ritual Poetics. The Language of the Liturgy* (London: SCM, 2018).

familiarity with God. It seems strange to me that it was, and perhaps still is, fashionable to refer to the divine Trinity as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer rather than Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This seems to be naively oblivious to the fact that the inclusive formula undermines the doctrine, since all three persons of the Trinity create, redeem and sustain. Furthermore, to my knowledge that formula was first used in an eighteenth-century Unitarian liturgy because the compilers knew it was not Trinitarian! It may be that the best way forward is to intermingle other descriptors of God to 'dilute' the dominance of masculine terms. New liturgical compositions in English need to tread a fine line.

4. The Art of Presiding at Worship.

Though Churches/Provinces succeed in drawing up and authorizing new liturgical texts, there seems little thought, time or money given to liturgical formation – the task of helping clergy to preside at services effectively with dignity and some decorum. Liturgy, in common with a music score or a play, is for performance, and not just a text on paper for private reading. Dearmer commented in 1919, 'This is not an age, unfortunately, in which people can be trusted to rely upon their own good taste, or on that tact which comes half from instinct and half from knowledge.'[21] His context was ceremonial, but it could equally apply to officiating at worship. Liturgics is an *academic subject*, but the performance of liturgy is an *art*.

In a recent book Barry Spurr has bemoaned the use of the microphone in liturgical worship.[22] Microphones are for amplification. But for some obscure reasons, many clergy seem to regard the microphone as an invitation to transform themselves into stand-up comedians or TV chat show hosts. Regardless of a microphone, too many clergy – in my experience, more so in the Evangelical tradition – adopt a condescending 'let's speak to the kindergarten' voice aimed at God and the congregation instead of *praying* the liturgy. In addition, far too many celebrants fail to trust the liturgy to speak for itself, but instead they decide to explain it all, often in a condescending manner. However, this has more to do with *clerical angst,* and *an unconscious assumption of what clerical training and being 'in persona Christi'* requires! Neither the parsonic voice of Alan Bennet's *Take a Pew*, nor the kindergarten voice are helpful. Theatre and liturgy are not synonymous, but they do overlap. The complexities of the development from monastic performance such as the *Quem quaeritis*,

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[21] Dearmer, *The Art of Public Worship*, p. 98

[22] Barry Spurr, *Language in the Liturgy. Past, Present, Future* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2025). Spurr's few helpful contributions are drowned by the flood of his unhelpful polemics.

where 'drama' is found in liturgy, to the *Ordo Representacionis Ade*, where liturgy is found in religious 'drama', have recently been discussed by Miroslav Kocur, confirming some close relationship.[23] Officiants at worship are not actors delivering lines of Shakespeare, but the tone and pitch of voice matter. In the eighteenth century the famous actor, David Garrick, wrote some notes to help clergy pray the texts of public worship. Roger Grainger's *The Drama of the Rite*, as well as the recent publication by Kevin Yell, both try to offer advice for clergy today.[24] How to take services, and how to officiate, without getting in the way of the liturgy and subverting the divine, is an art which follows on from a sound knowledge of the liturgy. Here, more coaching is necessary. A good book to ponder is Juliette Day's recent publication, *Hearing Our Prayers: An Exploration of Liturgical Listening*, and it reminds us that it is mostly lay people who are expected to do most of the hearing.[25] Do clergy know what it is like to be treated to an unrelenting comedy show, the effected parsonic voice, or the kindergarten teacher voice? This is not to imply that there can be no light or humorous moments in the liturgy, but some places (the sermon, notices) are more appropriate than others. I have witnessed one newly ordained celebrant getting confused in the Eucharistic Prayer, and then, bursting out laughing. There are better ways of covering confusion at this point in the liturgy. This was a Yale graduate, who had never taken a liturgy course because their denomination did not require it!

5. Music

Dearmer wrote: ' Because bad music has been popular, it is often supposed that the people prefer bad music; but the truth is that the people want certain kinds of music, and they will have those kinds, whether bad or good.'[26] In a time of shrinking church attendance, there is a lack of people willing to form a choir, and a dearth of those who can play the organ. In terms of hymns and choruses, and the settings for service, these are all dependent on what a congregation can or can't do well. Plenty of new hymns and choruses are written, but of these, as with most hymnody of the past, few survive for more than a generation. Sadly, at some churches, choruses are selected which the now 40+ and 50 + year olds liked years

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[23] Miroslav Kocur, *The Second Birth of Theatre. Performance of Anglo-Saxon Monks* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter lang, 2017).

[24] Roger Grainger, *The Drama of the Rite. Worship, Liturgy and Theatre Performance* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2009); Kevin G. Yell, *Keeping the Ink Wet. What the Theatre can teach the Church about Worship* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2025).

[25] Juliette Day, *Hearing Our Prayers. An Exploration of Liturgical Listening* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2024).

[26] Dearmer, *The Art of Public Worship*, p. 84.

ago, and which are badly written, have poor music, and which many young people find embarrassing. Barry Spurr in the book referred to earlier, picks out his Roman Catholic tradition, where people don't sing much anyway, and the liturgical music becomes a liturgical horror event. My own experience – now many years ago – at St Aldate's, Oxford, was that the movement from praise to worship (from the outer courts to the inner holy of holies in Pentecostal thought, where much of this genre began) was completely misunderstood, and praise and worship were juxtaposed in a jolting manner. I am not suggesting that music needs to be concert standard, or always 'solemn', but the flow of music needs to be properly grasped, and is often best left to musicians who know, or should know, their craft. At the very least clergy need to be aware of the flow of the liturgy, and of the need to explain that to the musicians so that neither party hinders the flow through ignorance and stupidity.

6. Liturgical sense?

Unfortunately, just as ordination does not endow a person with either liturgical knowledge, or the art of liturgy, so too it does not add the gift of liturgical sense. Although attributed to various liturgists, the dictum, 'The building always wins out', should be taken to heart. The liturgical space dictates what may or may not be done – or at least, it should do. Matthew Cheung Salisbury has reminded us that it is erroneous to speak of the use of Sarum, because we can only speak of the *uses* of Sarum. The ceremonies of the cathedral continued to develop, so there was not one static use, and Salisbury cathedral was, in any case, built to showcase and perfect ceremonies that had developed at Old Sarum, but no longer worked well there, because they were limited by the old space. No parish could replicate the use of the cathedral in terms of movement and space. The liturgical rites had to be adapted for small parish churches, and so they were changed. To follow some commonly received rubrics which make no allowance for a particular space is not the best way to celebrate liturgy. In re-ordered spaces, imagination and creativity seem to have been jettisoned in favour of rubrics or a style. As a teenager, I was an altar server at All Saints' Cressing, when an attempt to celebrate a High Mass according to Knott's *Ritual Notes* was a disaster, since the Victorian reordering of the sanctuary did not give sufficient space for such a performance. On the evangelical side, my experience at St Aldate's, Oxford was that the many overhead hanging TV monitors, which must have been costly to install, were used solely for showing the words of the songs, and any idea of iconography seemed to have been unexplored. In a time of images and icons (on computer and smartphone screens if not in churches), it seemed to me to be an example of lack of creativity and of common sense.

I am not suggesting that there is only one style, or that I have any claim to know the 'right' style. But more prayerful and engaging liturgy may come about if those who train people for ordination, and those who are ordained, equip themselves sufficiently to give the 'best performance' of the liturgies we have, or that we might have in the future, and be sufficiently knowledgeable to make viable suggestions, grounded in both the *science*, and *the art* of liturgy.

Mystagogy

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Introduction

As more people became Christians in the late First and Second centuries C.E., an increasingly evident question was the nature of this community called 'Church' and its relation to Christ. In several letters, St Paul uses the metaphor of a body, of an extension of Christ's incarnate body into a unified Church. But even Paul recognised that there was no agreement either within a single Christian community (such as that at Corinth) or between the various communities dotted across several countries. Two needs arose. The first was internal: defining what faith in Christ understood to be true and teaching it (the development of catechism). The second was external, and this took two forms: polemics (like Irenaeus's *Against the Heretics*) and apologetics (like Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, Trypho being Jewish). This 'external work' examined differences, tried to make distinctions and give shape to some consensus about belief. Both the internal and the external theological engagement were acts of clarification of a Christian faith still seeking understanding. Both engagements were centred in Christian communities and, while specifically proclaiming salvation in Jesus Christ, they focussed on two fundamental aspects of community life: its initiation through baptism and its collective belonging through the eucharist. Theological reflection emerged, then, liturgically, and in what follows in this essay I treat the development of that liturgical theology in terms of what became known as mystagogy. While it could draw upon this earlier theological engagement and its use of Scripture, mystagogy could only emerge when the Scriptural canon was settled and the Church was a more structured organisation.

Definition

The word mystagogy is a compound term from *musterion* (concealed, even secret) and the verb *agô* to lead. That sense of leading, led to an association of mystagogy with *paideuô* to teach or educate. *Paideuô* described a child

(*pais*) being led by the hand to school by a servant. So pedagogy became profoundly linked to mystagogy, even when translated into Latin as manuduction (from *e-ducere* to lead out by the hand, *manus*). It was the Greek Patristic fathers who fostered mystagogics as explanations of what the liturgies signified and what they effected with respect to salvation. Since Christ was the complete revelation of all that was concealed in "times past" (Heb.1.1), then those called to followed him, in the wake of the Spirit, should understand what was hidden in God and Christ as the icon of the Godhead. It was teaching that followed upon being received into the Church. Since the heart of Christ's message was divine salvation from sin and ignorance, then true worship (*eusebeia*) was key to countering impiety and wickedness (*asebeia*). Mystagogy taught the hidden truth behind the liturgical practice that encouraged true worship. Liturgy was understood as transformative, conforming the Christian to Christ, and in this way newly baptised neophytes were instructed in the processes that would lead to the eschatological consummation of the Body of Christ. Liturgical activity was believed to be a participation in divine life. While there were particular symbolic activities that the teaching focussed on (the meaning of baptism and eucharist), the theological principle behind mystagogy was *theosis*, the deepening of a sanctification that began with immersion into the waters of baptism.

Cyril of Jerusalem is indicative. He opens his *Lectures on the Mysteries* with:

> I waited for the present season [Monday after Easter]; that finding you more open to the influence of my words from your present experience, I might lead you by the hand into the brighter and more fragrant meadow of the Paradise before us; especially as you have been made fit to receive the more sacred Mysteries, after having been found worthy of divine and life-giving Baptism. Since therefore it remains to set before you a table of more perfect instructions, let us now teach you these things exactly, that you may know the effect wrought upon you on that evening of your baptism.[1]

The word 'effect' ('the effect wrought upon you') is significant here. The Greek is *emphasis* from which we get our English word. In Greek it has the sense of both the meaning and the manifestation of something like an impression or image. Cyril seems to be pointing out what is divinely operative and being revealed in and through the liturgical act of baptism. Mystagogical teaching is emphatically concerned with 'making meaningful'

[1] Cyril of Jerusalem, 'Five Catechetical Lectures', trans. Edward Hamilton Gifford, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wade (eds), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.7 (Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers, 1994), p.144.

what is liturgically enacted, and the teaching is absolutely part of that economy of divine action: faith seeks understanding and the Spirit leads the faithful (through the bishop) into all truth.

Appealing to faith as a walk with the invisible, mystagogy sought to relate all the visible contingencies of life outside the Church to the efficacy of liturgy within the Church. In this way it concerned itself with the formation of the Christian soul through liturgical practice and a contemplation upon the divine redemption of all things. Formed in and through Christ, mediated by the Church as his Body, mystagogy understood itself as a work of both moral and spiritual transformation. Affections and dispositions were changed and an ethical community of witness established. The witness might be verbalised, but primarily it was part of the ongoing communication of Christ (as *Logos/Verbum*) lived out and fostering a common life rooted in God as Good, Just, True and Beautiful. As such, mystagogy was almost synonymous with theological reflection and intrinsically liturgical and pastoral.

Tradition

Handing down and handing on what had been received from Christ was paramount, which partly explains both the concerns (in Irenaeus, for example) with apostolic succession and the castigation of those who did not hold what was increasingly recognised as what the Church believed. In this spiritual pedagogy, the bishops and catechists were following a pattern set out by those earlier witnesses like St Paul. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (4.1) tells us: 'Let a man so account [*logizesthô*] us [Apollos, Cephas and himself as missionaries] as of the ministers of Christ [*hupêretas Christou*], and stewards of the mysteries [*oikonomous mustêriôn*] of God'. The verse captures a spiritual formation that begins with the relationship between *logizesthô* (to account, reckon, consider) under the jurisdiction of Christ as *Logos*. This 'consideration' has to be informed and led by a participation in what elsewhere Paul calls 'the mind of Christ': 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2.5).[2] Only in the context of that participation in the mind of Christ can the missionisers be recognised and understood as 'ministers of Christ [*hupêretas Christou*]' and 'stewards of

[2] See Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009): 'Paul uses the term *nous* in much the same way that Aristotle did in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the *nous* is more than the source of the thinking; it is closer to what we might call a 'mind-set' – that is, it involves a construal of reality that forms the basis for the prudence (*phronesis*) that guides specific decisions' (p.160). What is mediated by ministers and stewards is a divine and Spirit-filled mentality that can prudentially, that is, with discernment, 'take into account' [*logizesthô*].

the mysteries [*oikonomous mustêriôn*] of God'. Paul, Apollos or Cephas are of no account in themselves only as mediators between Christ and the people being ministered too. Grammatically, the two genitives that endstop the sentence – 'of Christ' and 'of God' – circle back to and encompass the entire Christological and Trinitarian participation that is central. There would be no mission, no message and no motivated transformation without Christ as initiator and perfecter of the whole process. Paul's two genitives not only indicate possession (ministers belonging to Christ, stewards belonging to God), but also the ecclesial agents of mediation between the Church and Christ and the Church and the mysteries of God. The Church, as both body (of Christ) and house (of God), is nurtured and built up in and through the mediating work of those who are both *hupêretas* (who assisted) and *oikonomous* (who superintended).

Both nouns name functions within an extension of family relationships composing domestic activity in the Graeco-Roman culture. They served and regulated the economy [*oikonomia*], here the divine governance of the Church, as mediators of the power and authority of the house owner [*oikeios*]. A variety of offices and operations characterised this economy, which Paul recrafts later in the letter to the church at Corinth in terms of spiritual gifts given to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12.8-11, 28: teachers, miracle-workers, prophets, discerners of spirits, etc). There is a difference in rank and service between *hupêretas* and *oikonomous*: the former attends upon the latter, as an adjutant serves a general. The *oikonomia* operates through service that mediates and executes the desires of the head, so that what is 'hidden' and not visible [*mustêriôn*] of Christ and of the Godhead not only circulates throughout the body, but in that circulation gives the body its form (or 'builds up', Eph.4.12). *Mustêriôn* here is not a privation, a not-knowing. Stewardship is a very practical, hands-on business, dealing with the material conditions of a household. So *mustêriôn* is not nescience. God gives all things in Christ. The revelation of divinity is full and complete, nothing is withheld. But because it transcends and exceeds creation, human beings can receive only that which is fitting for us as the creatures. From the great storehouse of God's grace, the stewards and household attendants bring out *what* can be received and teach the manner *in which* it can be received. In this way, as later theologians like Augustine and Anselm taught, faith seeks and leads to greater understanding.

The 'mysteries' are then to be communicated – mediation goes all the way down from Christ the Mediator between Creator and creation - but the communication is a mediation within a divine and Trinitarian economy. The operational sphere for this mediation is the Church and primarily its liturgical acts. This communication is not simply verbal; that is, through explicit teaching. It also emerges in orchestrated practices and the reading

of the Scriptures, relations between members of the Church (and their relations within all that is outside defining the contours of the Church), music, hymns and even the architecture of the place within which the church is situated. As such, the communication of the mysteries is not merely intellectual, but affective and spiritual. Each participates in a divine mediation that impacts materially and corporeally. The reception and dissemination of this communication, in-forms lives that are 'hidden [*krupto*] with Christ in God' (Col. 3.3). So this is an embodied soul-making in service to the whole, while distinctively each individual being saved plays a part. As such, the mysteries are revealed or made known and understood through the actions of all the members so that what is taught is written within or, to use a physiological metaphor coined by the English Reformer, Thomas Cranmer, 'inwardly digested'. All communication, then, within this economy, is governed by and orientated towards formation. Formation is the working out of salvation, and the end of formation is conformity with Christ. Both the Greek and Latin fathers distinguished between human beings made in the image of God (with Christ as the true and perfect image) and being fashioned in God's 'likeness' such that each life becomes an *imitatio Christi*.

These processes of enculturation were in analogical alignment with pedagogical practices (*paideia*) in the ancient world, as both Werner Jaeger and Pierre Hadot point out. In Hadot's important essay on 'Conversion', he proposes that for the ancient world (he is particularly considering Plato) 'all education is conversion. Every soul has the possibility of seeing in this light of the Good. But their gaze is originally misdirected, and the task of education will, therefore, be that of turning this gaze towards the good direction.'[3] The divine here (Plato's Good or the Stoic's Logos) is impersonal, and Hadot differentiates between the therapeutics of philosophical education and the more 'interruptive' model of *metanoia* in the revealed religion of the Christian faith. In fact, the term 'Christian paideia' was common among the Greek Fathers.[4] The Christian difference with respect to other therapeutics becomes even more acute when we consider that although the telos of such education was wisdom 'which does not bear solely upon objects of knowledge [*connaissance*], but upon life itself'.[5] The pursuit of Wisdom in Christianity had the distinct and historical form in Jesus the Christ as *Logos/Sophia/Sapientia*. Nevertheless, there are certain convergences

[3] Pierre Hadot, 'Conversion' in Matthew Sharpe (ed.), *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot: Philosophy as Practice*, trans. Matthew Sharpe and Federico Testa (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 93-104, p. 95.

[4] See Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

[5] Pierre Hadot, 'The Figure of the Sage in Greek and Roman Antiquity' in *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot*, pp.185-206, p.185.

manifest in *paideia* repurposed for divine service. While the therapeutic telos may be similar, the Godhead they served and participated in was ultimately unknowable and transcendent, while deeply involved in all the immanent materialities (places, people, and practices) of creation. Maximus the Confessor puts it well: Christ 'sets in movement in us an insatiable desire [*orexis*] for himself who is the Bread of Life, wisdom, knowledge, and justice.'[6] The wisdom, knowledge and justice are *mustêria* – exceeding all that can be creaturely grasped. Hence, for some like Maximus, *this* pedagogy was better named mystagogy; a spiritual regimen often pictured as journeying in a paradoxical ascent (*anagogê*) towards filial conformity with Christ. It is paradoxical, because it required a simultaneous kenotic descent in which the person is stripped of their delusory and sin-distorted notions of what constitutes self-knowledge and its perception of the world. There is an inevitable effacement necessary to cultivate a reception and reading of the world in which the visible manifests and dwells within the invisible. Sin certainly fosters ignorance, but its operation within desiring itself was understood as an ineliminable condition of being human and fundamental to the Christological *oikonomia* of salvation (*salus*, healing).

Mystagogics

As a genre, mystagogies emerged late in the fourth century (C.E.), following the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople that framed what the Church believed in terms of its creeds. The creeds were various and had slight differences, even after the Nicene Creed of 325 CE.[7] Mystagogics took the form of post-Easter homilies addressed to the catechumens having been received early on Easter morning into baptism and communion. They were reflections upon the meaning of sacramental life, particularly baptism and the eucharist. The sacraments were understood as the key focus for the 'mysteries of God'. So mystagogy was a second stage of instruction (following the teaching of the creedal beliefs of Christianity throughout Lent), but one in which all the Church participated. The heart of the teaching, theologically, was soteriological, and while some mystagogies situated the work of sanctification cosmologically (Maximus in the 6th and 7th centuries), some were orientated more to the historical dispensation of grace in the Hebrew covenant and the covenant in Christ (in their different ways Ambrose and

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[6] Maximus, *Commentary on the Our Father* in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p.118, *Patrologia Graeca* xc, 905CD.

[7] See John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, Part 1 (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004). Behr views the differences as continuing attempts to find a better and more precise language so that 'we find that very similar sounding formulae ae used to tell very different versions of the "Christian story"' (p.11).

Theodore of Mopsuestia), while others focussed on the ethical lives that followed from imitating Christ following incorporation into His body, the Church (Chrysostom).[8]

As reflections upon the sanctification that followed from the rites of inclusion and initiation, the focus of mystagogy was educating the Church in the Way of Jesus Christ. But the pedagogy was not information but process led. At heart, mystagogic reflection is orientated to transformation (often modelled in the homilies on Christ's own transfiguration). It circled through teachings of creation, being human, divine providence, pneumatology, interpretations of Scripture, and related all these theological *loci* to the sacraments and Christology; the Cross and the Resurrection. Later, with Maximus, they more explicitly encompassed the doctrine of the Trinitarian Godhead. The nature of participation in God was fundamental; a participation rooted not so much in metaphysics but Scripture read historically, typologically and allegorically. Followers of Christ learned how to read the world through learning how to read the Scriptures. Since people did not have copies of the Scriptures *per se*, then the reading and interpretation of the Scriptures in a liturgical setting was fundamental to this participation. Commentary, oral and written, and preaching worked upon shaping the understanding and behaviours of individual members of the congregation such that they recognised, by faith, their various incorporations and responsibilities – Christic, ecclesial and civic. The *lex orandi* not only conformed to but worked out the *lex credendi*: doctrine was to be lived. In this way, to be instructed and come to an understanding was a spiritual exercise. Thus mystagogies were totally unlike the secret initiation rites of the ancient mystery religions, whose secrecy kept their sociality apart from the world, though certain practices might sometimes have borrowed or imitated elements of initiation ceremonies from those secret societies: such as giving entrance to the eucharist only to the anointed and initiated and demanding that members did not reveal the details of the rites to those outside the church.[9]

The metaphysics of such participation rested upon *mimesis* or *imitatio*. If that notion became increasingly associated with a hermeneutical method of reading the Scriptures tropologically, it was also rooted in a theology of

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[8] For a fuller treatment of these distinct approaches to mystagogy see Enrico Mazza, *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1989).

[9] See my account of Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catechetical Lectures* and *Mystagogy* in *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 24-33. For a sociological approach to mystery religions see Georg Simmel, 'The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies', trans. Albion W. Small, *American Journal of Sociology* 11 (1906), pp. 441-498.

the incarnation: we can participate in the divine because the divine shared its own life with humanity's. As the Letter to the Colossians puts it: 'For you died, and your lives are now hidden with Christ in God' (Col 3.3). Both the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist were imitative performances of dying, being buried and rising again with Christ. In mystagogical writing, the nature, scope and implications of those symbolic participations, in which the rhythm of created life engaged with the descent and ascent of eternal life, were spelled out. But it would be a mistake to see the theology developed in these writings as 'second order' reflections upon 'first order' ecclesial practice.[10] Liturgical enactment (including the reading of Scripture), issuing from the incarnation of God in Christ, participates in the ongoing self-communication of the Godhead and the economy of grace: revelation. The homilies emerged from an understanding of *imitatio*. They were themselves believed to be revelatory on the basis of the Word indwelling and gathering all words into its Wisdom (as Irenaeus taught in his doctrine of recapitulation and, late, Augustine in *De trinitate*).

It is important to appreciate that mystagogy concerned a right reading of the world, transfiguring the ways in which we perceive. This reading issued liturgically from reflections on the Scriptures, the sacraments and the initiation into receiving them. We can see this with Cyril's reference to leading the neophytes 'by the hand into the brighter and more fragrant meadow of the Paradise before us'. Such reflections introduced Christians to the way in which the invisible sustained and manifested itself through the visible. They acted as inductions into the symbolic and analogical orders of creation. They reordered time (history, memory, birth, death, the eschatological future) and materiality (water, salt, oil, clothing, wine), stewarding a recognition of the Creator who was manifest in, through and beyond creation. As I said, they were not primarily concerned with teaching a metaphysics (although impacted by Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics), but more with practising a hermeneutics subjected to a pneumatology (being led into all truth by the Spirit). That hermeneutics read the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ in an interweave between Scripture and creation (its destiny and redemption). To participate in the liturgy was to be immersed into endlessly facetted refractions of divine appearance offered in signs and symbols. The sacraments were indicative of the sacramental world into which Christians were baptised. They were acts of presencing that focussed on the mediation of the crucified Creator within creation. And rather than being closed off from the life-experiences and sociality of things outside the Church (like the gatherings in mystery cults),

[10] This is a line of interpretation that Geoffrey Wainwright takes in his important book, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

a way of living and perceiving was fostered that led followers back down the nave and into the world: to serve, to testify, to bless, to sing, to suffer-with and steward. The divine speech-act through which all things came to be, was recapitulated and reiterated in Christ, endlessly generating more redemptive speech-acts that offered an excessive testimony (*afin de render à l'excès témoignage*).[11]

Those last French words are found at the conclusion of Jean-Luc Chrètien's exploration of this theme (and its theological corollaries) in the writing of St Augustine. In this book, he examines the ways in which the spoken word (*la parole*) is never an end in itself but rather resonates infinitely as it issues from and among human beings. What is voiced does not belong to itself: it makes present a haunting of the Word (*le Verbe*). In this monograph, Chrètien examines the way different acts of speaking necessarily efface, because they transcend, individual speakers who have learnt how to listen to, and are shot through with, so many other voices that are not their own. In silence and listening, Augustine shows how various speech-acts attend and respond to Christ's voice. Their infinite source of meaning in the Logos moves us towards the infinite telos of incorporation. We are led *through* Augustine's writing back to the resonance of *le Verbe*.[12]

Manuduction

This form of teaching in Augustine - through exercises of reading that *lead back* - illustrates the shift from classical pedagogy and Byzantine mystagogy to the Latin Church's attention to manuduction. If the Greek word *pedagogy* comes from the word for a child (*pais*) being led to school and Latin *manuduction* comes the Latin word for being led by the hand (*manus*), then we are back with Christ as the Way: the way we must walk and the way we must be led along by the hand. *Ductus* is the Latin word for 'route'. Manuduction relates directly to *traditio* as the 'handing over' of that which has been learnt and practised down generations of Christian reflection in and through pedagogy as a spiritual exercise.

Manuduction extended the theological education of the religious beyond the liturgies of baptism and the eucharist, though not beyond the liturgical itself. Theology was establishing itself as distinct from liturgical worship and its teaching. We are on the road to the *Summa.* The ordered reading of Scriptures, the *lectio divina*, and reflections upon it, fed into commentaries and homilies. In this way, the great mediaeval theological 'textbooks' emerged – the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Gratian's *Decretum*

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[11] Jean-Louis Chrètien, *Saint Augustin et les actes de parole* (Paris: PUF, 2002), p. 266.

[12] For a detailed study of how Augustine's Latin prose style effects this movement in *De musica* and *De trinitate*, see 'Consonance' in my *Another Kind of Normal: Ethical Life II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

and the *Glossa Ordinaria*. These writings brought the traditional pedagogy of the liberal arts into learning orientated towards ecclesial teaching. Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalion* in the twelfth century gives us an insight into the ways in which the liberal arts were incorporated and shaped his monumental piece of systematic theology, *De sacramentis*, as a compendium of Christian teaching.[13] If such teaching eventually separated catechesis from liturgy, theology from spiritual formation, then the title of Hugh of St Victor's *summa* is indicative that for nearly a thousand years Christian education, lay and clerical, remained intimately tied to sacramental teaching and liturgical practice. Indeed, it has been argued that, since participation is the theological keynote and the eucharist is the prime liturgical site for that participation, then manuduction was only an extension of eucharistic teaching. Both were formative operations in which conformity with Christ as the goal: 'the mutual indwelling of Christ and the church'.[14]

It is significant that Chrètien's analysis of the analogical and participatory association of *la parole* and *le Verbe* in St Augustine pertains to a worldview before the thirteenth century's stricter teaching on the seven sacraments, when sacraments were inseparable from sacramentality more generally and no *duplex ordo* between nature and grace was being championed; an *ordo* that that Orthodox Church has never accepted. Heresies are rarely new; only the terminology defining them. Gregory of Nyssa was already countering the nominalism evident in Eunomius's account of divine communication and human signification that rendered creation dumb and opaque. The worldview of the mystagogues was solidly realist, as was Augustine's (as Chrètien demonstrates through his close readings of Augustine). It was a world in which creation was a multidimensional act of signification that all members of the Church needed to read and be taught how to read aright[15]; just as communicants had to be instructed into how to communicate aright in the eucharistic liturgy. The world was densely textual and divine presence was intimately associated with the superabundance of meaning within such textuality. What emerged in the Latin West was a doctrine of analogy that held similarities between divine and human communication within a far great dissimilarity or *distêma*

[13] For a more detailed treatment of Hugh of St Victor's pedagogical method, see my *How the Light Gets In*: *Ethical Life I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 35-64 and Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[14] Peter M. Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction: Or Reading the Scripture Together on the Path to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), p.19. See also pp.13-15, 140-63 and '*Manger, Boire*' in Chrètien, *Saint Augustin et les actes de parole*, pp. 37-49. As Candler concludes in his 'Introduction', 'the Eucharist is the 'site' of all theological production, and moreover, pedagogy itself is Eucharistic' (p. 20).

[15] See '*Lire*' in Chrètien, *Saint Augustin et les actes de parole*, pp. 75-89.

between the created and the uncreated; while, in the East, doctrinal battles waged between iconophilia and iconoclasm, *homoiousians* and *homoousians*.[16]

Conclusion

Mystagogy was conceived as a theo-mimesis.[17] It was a developed form of liturgical theology. In fact, theology that concerned itself with the internal, ecclesial teaching of the faith (rather than external polemics and apologetics), was inseparable from liturgical and pastoral practice – for which the bishop was responsible. In its early formation, such theology was fashioning and defining an orthodoxy that was rooted in ecclesial orthopraxis. That theological work centred around the formations of the Creeds as the basis for catechesis and the sacraments. But, as the Christian tradition developed, particularly in the Roman Church's understanding of manuduction, then we have the emergence of more detailed accounts of the faith in what became the great mediaeval *Summae*. A shift was evident in the professionalisation of theologians that impacted the relationship between the Church's liturgical and pastoral ministry and theological reflection. This breach (with increasing attention to philosophy and Scriptural exegesis) has only grown. But, as can be seen from the way I have treated mystagogy in this essay, the extent to which its liturgical emphasis can be revamped in the future would depend much on the ability of the Church to counter the nominalism evident in our current cultural condition. For mystagogy is founded upon notions of participation, imitation and analogy, all of which are entirely dependent upon the profound relationship between Christ and creation.

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[16] See Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681-1071* (New York: St Vladimir's Press, 2007).

[17] The term can be found in Pseudo-Dionysius where he writes that Scripture reveals that 'divinely delivered and theo-mimetic regimens of life [*theoparadotous kai theomimêtous politeias*]' in *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3.3.4. Cited in Paul M. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 132. The term, used by several early theologians related to Alexandria (including Athanasius) is *theopoieô* or *theopoiesis*.

Liturgy and the Problem of Metaphors

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In one of his best-known early essays Jacques Derrida wrote of a metaphorical 'white mythology' within the language of philosophy and the 'wear and tear of metaphorical force in philosophical intercourse.'[1] He argues that not only is philosophical language deeply and inescapably metaphorical, but the 'ef-face-ment' suffered by metaphors over long use tend to render them 'dead' and then used and regarded as if they were 'literally' true.

More recently, Janet Martin Soskice has expanded this observation to a more general usage in ordinary language, referring to the 'ballast of dead metaphors'[2] that litter our everyday speech to the point when we no longer even notice that they are there: the 'arms' of chairs, the 'stems' of wine glasses, the 'legs' of tables, and so on. When metaphors become stuck in the language they are effectively 'dead' and no longer potent as metaphors, taking on a literalism that is difficult to efface. We may give this observation greater focus as we direct our attention to the language of prayer and liturgy in which metaphors, frequently drawn from ancient use in the Bible, play an important part in an environment of language in which theology and deeply engrained habits of devotion often tend to ignore wider constraints of culture and its effects upon language change. Let us take one obvious, and highly problematic, example of this from the Lord's Prayer: 'Our Father who art in heaven'. This gendered metaphor for God is seemingly impossible to eradicate (even supposing that is actually what we want to do) and the danger with 'dead metaphors' of this kind (often justified by its 'biblical' origins) is that they tend to take on a 'literalism' in our appropriation which becomes hard to dispose of and may become, to a degree at least and to many people, toxic. In addition, such 'dead metaphors' are extremely difficult to shift, precisely because they do take on the immovability of the literal. And

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[1] Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', *New Literary History* 6 (1974), pp. 5-74, p. 6. (The essay was first published in French in *Poetique* in 1971.)

[2] J. M. Soskice, *The Kindness of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 3.

it is not as if they are unchangeable: after all there are other biblical metaphors used for God and without the gendered and patriarchal significance of 'father' – Rock, Shepherd, Fortress, and so on.[3]

In the reflections which follow I certainly do not intend to offer any conclusions – but rather open some questions which clearly need to be addressed as part of the ground work for discussions regarding the nature of liturgical language and its revision or use in new liturgies within the church. In some ways they take further and develop some of the matter of my own book, *The Language of Liturgy* (2018), which I certainly do not disown, but from which I now, to a degree, distance myself. In that book I suggested that 'if liturgical language like its cousin, poetry, is to have the capacity of move us, it must employ the resources of image, metaphor and the careful tropes of rhetoric.'[4] That is indeed the case, but what I did not address was the toxic presence of the dead metaphors of liturgical and theological language and the difficulty of removing them.

And so, as we turn our minds to this matter, we need to consider first the difficult issue of 'interdisciplinarity' in the study, creation and practice of liturgy. It would seem that discussions of the nature of metaphor by philosophers, philosophers of religion, literary theorists and critics, historians and liturgists actually bear hardly any relationship to one another. They are conducted in steadfast isolation from one another. At one extreme the sometimes rather dry discussion of metaphor by the philosopher of religion Janet Martin Soskice in her early and important text *Metaphor and Religious Language* (1985) and, less so in her more recent *The Kindness of God* (2007), offers a crispness and precision which deftly eludes the rather careless and simplistic understanding of metaphor to be found in Gail Ramshaw's *Liturgical Language* (1996). Ramshaw, it would seem, is preoccupied with the question of 'metaphoric inclusivity'[5] long before any clear

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[3] For example: 'The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God without deceit.' (Deuteronomy 32:4). 'The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer.' (Psalm 18:2). (All quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.)

[4] David Jasper, *The Language of Liturgy: A Ritual poetics* (London: SCM Press, 2018), p. 10.

[5] Gail Ramshaw describes her goal of inclusivity thus: 'Liturgy includes the communal recital of the central metaphors of the faith, but liturgy is grounded in the assembly in a way that most poetry is not. The liturgy is the expression of all the people of God, and all those people need to have their voices heard.' *Liturgical Language: Keeping it Metaphoric, Making it Inclusive* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 10. This also raises issues about the nature of poetry which are not my concern in this essay.

philosophical or historical foundations for the notion of metaphor are laid. You have to know the nature of your materials before you start building with them.

Then the theologian Sallie McFague in her *Metaphorical Theology* (1982)[6] provides a somewhat rambling account of 'primary' and 'secondary' religious language which tends to muddle the two central terms of her argument – model and metaphor. In short, they appear to be more or less the same thing, except that 'a model is, in essence, a sustained a systematic metaphor'.[7] Are then McFague's models for God in this and in her subsequent book, *Models of God: theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (1987) simply deserts of that ballast of dead metaphors that form Derrida's white mythology?

Furthermore, there seems to be little clarity between theology and liturgy (and its language) in most discussions of liturgical language – often born of clerical ignorance, and despite many current works professing to be concerned with 'liturgical theology'. As Bryan Spinks points out in his essay in this collection, this is nothing new. At the end of the nineteenth century Percy Dearmer was writing of the 'lamentable confusion, lawlessness, and vulgarity which are conspicuous in the Church at this time'.[8] I am not suggesting that we do not possess a venerable tradition of studies in liturgical theology, but that there seems little connection between this and the 'coal face' of liturgical practice in the parish church and revision within the Anglican tradition.[9]

The following remarks are in no way comprehensive, but are by way of a brief series of exercises demonstrating some of the preliminary work needing to be done before discussions of, and then the use of metaphor in liturgy can be profitably engaged in.

1. *The Kingdom of Heaven*

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[6] McFague follows quite closely the earlier work of Ian Ramsey in his much-read *Religious Language* (1957) and *Models for Divine Activity* (1973).

[7] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

[8] Percy Dearmer, *The Parson's Handbook*. New Edition (London: Grant Richards, 1903), p. 1. It was first published in 1899.

[9] The list of books in the field is almost endless, going back in the Orthodox tradition to books like Alexander Schmemann's *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (1966), to the work of David Power, Catherine Pickstock, Nicholas Woltersorff and Terence Cuneo, among many others.

Sallie McFague in *Metaphorical Theology* suggests that the Kingdom of heaven is a 'root model' for Christian thought and liturgy. (As I have already suggested, I am not at all clear how McFague distinguishes between 'model' and 'metaphor'.) In the gospels and New Testament the parables of the kingdom, acting as metaphors, exemplars or models (McFague seems to use the three terms almost interchangeably) 'tease the imagination and prompt us to think about… life under the reign of God'.[10] But we need to pause a moment and explore more fully the nature of a 'metaphor' and how it functions, not least in a theological context. McFague draws from the influential, complex and multi-disciplinary work of Paul Ricoeur in *La Métaphore vive* (1975)[11] the rather simple (and highly questionable) principle that a metaphor both 'is' and 'is not', without any careful attention being given to the problem of the definition of metaphor and the many widely varying theories of it in the western tradition since Aristotle and Plato. Broadly, Soskice identifies these within the categories of substitution theories, emotive theories, incremental theories, interactive theories and interanimation theories. These can be seen within three broad categories: those that see metaphor as a decorative way of saying what otherwise could be said literally; those which emphasize the affective impact of metaphor; and those that see metaphor as saying something that could not otherwise be said.[12] This final category is probably the most relevant for liturgy.

Furthermore, with the classical tradition of rhetoric we need to make careful distinctions between metaphor and its close tropic relatives, synecdoche, metonymy, simile, catachresis and analogy, all of them figures of speech which work in slightly (though similar) different ways. Some – like metaphor and simile – certainly overlap, but distinctions remain important. Finally, metaphors have a life and like all living things can become 'dead metaphors' – as we have already seen they can get stuck and seem then to take on the qualities of the literal.[13] In theology and liturgy that can be highly dangerous, not least in the tendency to ossify language and make it resistant to change.

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[10] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 46.

[11] Translated into English as *The Rule of Metaphor* (1977).

[12] J. M. Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), Chapter III, 'Theories of Metaphor', pp. 24-53.

[13] See, George Steiner, 'The Long Life of Metaphor: An Approach to "The Shoah"' in Berel Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987) pp. 154-171.

But what of the Kingdom of God, an image (let's just stick with that word for the moment) that is everywhere in our liturgical prayers – 'For thine is the kingdom….'? In the anamnesis of the Great Thanksgiving of the 1982 liturgy of the Scottish Episcopal Church 'we look for the coming of his Kingdom'. Not least, we need to remember that this is a word that has a very complex history in translation. The Greek word *ἡ βασιλεία* is only roughly translated as 'kingdom', being more properly an abstract term meaning something like 'sovereignty' or 'kingly rule'. In a brief and dense essay in philosophical theology entitled 'Being "As Not": overturning the Ontological,' the philosopher Robert Scharlemann gives close attention to the phrase 'kingdom of heaven' (*ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν*)[14] with regard to how in this image, being and not being are closely intertwined.[15] As briefly as possible Scharlemann's argument, drawing upon the synoptic parables of the kingdom, is this:

i. The kingdom of heaven contains a negation of the concept or name 'kingdom'. To speak of the kingdom of heaven is to speak of a kingdom that does not exist as does the kingdom of Great Britain, or Denmark.
ii. As a phrase, therefore, it has a 'denominator' (kingdom) and an 'alienator' (of heaven).
iii. To begin a parable with reference to the kingdom of heaven is to begin by reference to something that appears only as the negation of kingdoms as we know them on earth – appears only in its otherness (indicated by the alienator).
iv. How does the kingdom of heaven appear as the 'not' of any actual kingdom? It appears as the *event* that is narrated in the parable (e.g. a man selling everything to buy the field containing treasure, the growing mustard seed or the sower sowing the seed.)
v. But the *event* is not itself the kingdom of heaven. 'Hence to say that the kingdom *is* the kingdom of heaven as the occurrence in that parable is to say that the kingdom of heaven is what it is as something that it is not.'[16] Thus, we

[14] See, for example, Matthew 3: 2. The 'parables of the kingdom' in Mark 4 use the term 'kingdom of God'. The difference is not important for the present argument.

[15] Robert P. Scharlemann, *Inscriptions and Reflections: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), pp. 54-65.

[16] ibid., p. 62.

> might say, – the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of heaven as what is not the kingdom of heaven.

Scharlemann's argument is an exploration into the relations between the ontological, the religious and the theological, in which 'one needs to take account of a certain overturning of the ontological and religious that is effected by the theological'.[17] And what has this to do with the language and structure of liturgical texts? There is no simple answer to that question, but since all three terms in the argument – the ontological, the religious and theology are deeply rooted within the metaphorical language of the liturgy – how we use that language responsibly needs to take into account careful philosophical explorations as to its 'meaning'. Thus – as we 'look for the coming of his Kingdom' – what precisely are we doing in the light of Scharlemann's argument concerning the Kingdom of heaven? Is it known, for example, only as *event* or as a negation of itself? Scharlemann concludes his reflection with a theological suggestion, that here we have a discussion 'that includes time and negation in the being of God and that opens thought to deity existing not as a transtemporal or metaphysical entity but as an actuality in life and history'. [18] Liturgists as well perhaps need to engage in careful theological thinking as a prelude to engaging with liturgy and worship – and what that implies.

2. Our Father, the Good Shepherd

At the very least we should now be much more wary of the metaphors and metaphorical language we are using in the liturgy. I am not simply talking about its cultural suitability or relevance – though careful and thoughtful reflection on its structure will open up such questions as well. And allow me to say from the beginning of this section that simply to look for alternative, perhaps less problematic, metaphorical solutions is not the way forward. To refer again to McFague's *Metaphorical Theology*, she concludes by suggesting the notion of 'God the Friend' as an alternative to the insufficiencies of parental models – father or mother.[19] My objection to this is not that the proposal simply seems weak, but, far worse than that, it suggests that McFague is the victim of a profoundly naive theological realism that actually renders

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[17] ibid., p. 54.

[18] ibid., p. 53.

[19] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, pp. 177-92.

more or less all metaphors drawn from the biblical tradition in liturgy finally unusable.

So let us look for some help not from abstruse philosophers but from novelists – creative writers who know a thing or two about taking naïve theological realists for the bores that they are. Bernice Reubens' delightful (and deeply serious) novel *Our Father* (1987) begins like this:

> Veronica Smiles was crossing the Sahara Desert, minding her own business, when she ran into God…. 'I think there'll be a sand-storm,' He said, and passed on His way…. Veronica looked after Him and thought he was very rude indeed. She got quickly back into her jeep, thought about offering Him a lift, but decided against it. If He was arranging a sand-storm, he could jolly well weather it.[20]

But Veronica cannot get rid of God so easily – and now you will have to read the novel. It is a kind of fictional version of the old classic theological text that we were all supposed to read in my days as a student, Gordon D. Kaufman's *God the Problem* (1972). The two books go quite well together, as it happens, as deconstructions of naive literalism in theological language.

And before we finally move on to the thorny and persistent metaphor of 'the Father', here is another fictional reminder that even seemingly benign biblical metaphors can produce their problems in different situations. The narrator of Howard Jacobson's novel *The Very Model of a Man* (1992) is a very disgruntled Cain. He begins with a familiar psalm of comfort:

> The Lord was our shepherd. We did not want. He fed us in green and fat pastures, gave us to drink from deep waters, made us to lie in a good fold. That which was lost, He sought; that which was broken, He bound up; that which was driven away, he brought again into the flock. Excellent, excellent, had we been sheep.[21]

With all metaphors you can please some of the people some of the time. Many can simply be very off putting. The important thing to remember

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[20] Bernice Reubens, *Our Father* (London: Abacus Books, 1988), pp. 1–3.

[21] Howard Jacobson, *The Very Model of a Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 1.

is that they are metaphors (not 'just' metaphors) and metaphorical language is not literal.[22]

As we have already noted, God has many metaphorical names in the biblical tradition, most of them not gendered or anthropomorphic: Rock, Lamb, Fortress, Door, and so on. The problem is that it is the anthropomorphic ones which tend to predominate and endure – and especially, at least in the New Testament, the ineradicably patriarchal and dominant metaphors of Father and King. Here I can do little more than point in a perhaps rather different direction than that adopted by writers on the issue of liturgical language like Gail Ramshaw. At the heart of their thinking (as of McFague's) is a rather frantic and finally fruitless search for alternative metaphors for God that do not carry the same gendered, patriarchal and authoritarian baggage – we could try Mother, Spouse, Lover – and liturgy, incorrigibly and perhaps necessarily conservative – has not been entirely immune to such shifts even if, at the same time, liturgical practice has been generally impatient of them. But all metaphors have their own problems. Janet Martin Soskice calls our philosophical attention to the problem of metaphorical language in liturgical contexts:

> The philosophical embarrassment is that if we admit that Christians handle their models[23] as though they are explanatory, we seem obliged to provide an explanation of how the terms of our model refer, and, in view of the precarious and tentative nature of anything we say about God, this problem of reference seems great indeed.[24]

So, if the problem of metaphor, and that of God as 'father' in particular, will not conveniently simply go away, might we at least begin to think about it in a different (and hopefully more fruitful) way? I suggest that we might begin by recognizing that the term 'father' is itself not absolute but a *semantically dependent title*. That is technically, it is a relational term,[25] inasmuch as it is the birth of the child which alone gives rise to the father. This relationality is explored at some length by

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[22] This statement, I am aware, does raise many questions. Origen in the third century, wrote a commentary on the Song of Songs suggesting that it is 'literally' a song of divine love, but we need to be very careful about its 'metaphorical' application to sexual love. We more 'naturally' would put it the other way round.

[23] And also metaphors.

[24] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 117.

[25] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, p. 117.

Jean-Luc Marion in his important book *God Without Being* (1991)[26] in context of a discussion of the Trinity:

> Upon the Cross, the Father expires as much as the Word (Son) since they expire [sic] the same Spirit. The Trinity respires from being able to breathe among us.[27]

The first and obvious point is that we need to begin our task of reviewing the term 'father' with some careful Trinitarian theology. Once again hard theological thinking and liturgy are inseparable. That is at least a start for that might begin at least to dismantle the hierarchical structure and replace it with a relational one based on the complete mutuality of the Trinity in which each member gives 'birth' to the other.

But this, of course, does not provide a solution to the problem, except that it suggests that metaphors (and models) do not work properly as single terms which might or might not be replaced by something more suitable. In short – the attempt to avoid 'gendered' language in the manner adopted by the SEC in its 2022 revision of the 1982 Eucharistic liturgy is both lazy and serves no useful purpose as the gendered nature of language is rooted far more deeply than simply in the individual terms which are targeted for revision.[28] First – it pays no attention to the theological issues – the need to return to our Trinitarian theology (as Marion does), and second, it fails to see that all metaphors gain life by the careful use of *qualifiers*. (We have seen a sophisticated version of this in the attention given by Scharlemann to 'the kingdom of heaven'.) A step in the right direction, if only a small one, would be to qualify 'father' as 'loving father', for example, which at least sets us on the path of 'a story of the perichoretic outpouring of love and birth between the three [persons of the Trinity] who *are* only in relation to one another.'[29] So – our liturgical revisers need to spend some time on the term *perichoresis* – do a bit more theology. (I might suggest as I am writing this on Trinity Sunday that the revisioning of Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6) in Revelation 4-5, one of the Prayer Book readings for Holy Communion for today, actually manages to avoid

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[26] In French, *Dieu sans l'être: Hors texte* (1982).

[27] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 142-3.

[28] In fact, in the revisions of 2022 most of the problematic metaphors are left untouched, presumably because they are regarded not as metaphorical but 'literal'. Back to Derrida's 'white mythology'.

[29] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, p. 118.

giving direct titles *τῶ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῶ θρόνῳ* 'to the One who is seated in the throne,'[30] which neatly avoids gendered terms like Lord or King or, indeed, Father.)

3. Julian of Norwich and the image of God

This is, of course, only a step in the right direction, but as a very brief experiment let me suggest (once again drawing upon the work of Janet Martin Soskice) a re-reading of Julian of Norwich's late fourteenth century *Revelations of Divine Love* in a remodelling of the image of God in which the metaphors function *horizontally* rather than *vertically*.[31] I tried this experiment out, without the resources of theologically literate audience, on a group of layfolk in Glasgow and Galloway diocese last year and they came away demanding more of this kind of thing – 'Why has no-one ever talked about people like Julian of Norwich before?' Why, indeed? For this shift is of potential significance for liturgists struggling with hierarchical ('vertical') metaphors in worship.

The first thing to be said is that Julian's *Revelation* is, theologically, an extremely sophisticated work and looks back to such key Trinitarian texts as St. Augustine of Hippo's *De Trinitate*. There is no need to assume that Julian necessarily read Augustine (or indeed would have been able to read his Latin had she had the opportunity), though she may have absorbed it through the Augustinian friars who lived near her in Norwich, and they through such writings as those of Peter Lombard (c.1100-60)[32] – in short it was the orthodoxy of the time and *De Trinitate* the standard text on the Trinity in Julian's day. Second, if Augustine's text is abstract and speculative, Julian's is deeply personal and particular in its circumstances. But at the same time, neither text is quite what it seems. The standard reading of *De Trinitate* is that it trails off into a rather haphazard mess of fragments. The same is, to some extent, true of Dame Julian's work. Though there may be some truth in this, it seems possible to read Augustine's book also as a spiritual exercise[33] which relates the doctrine of the Trinity

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[30] NRSV

[31] See, Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, Chapter 7, 'The Kindness of God: Trinity and the Image of God in Julian of Norwich and Augustine', pp. 125-56.

[32] Peter Lombard's works were the standard theological textbooks of the Middle Ages before the writings of St Thomas Aquinas.

[33] An odd comparison might be made with Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817), whose rambling nature comprises a kind of exercise in reading rather than a 'telling'.

with the doctrine of the *imago dei* – human being made in the image of God.

I suggest that neither Augustine nor Julian descend into literary ramblings. Let me allow Soskice to put the case, eliding a great deal of the theological narrative which would here, perhaps, try my reader's patience unreasonably:

> Both [works] present an inward drama which the reader is invited to perform and re-create. Julian explains her intention at the outset, saying that she saw from her first showing that God 'clothes' us in himself and 'enfolds' us in his love. Her prose seeks to do the same, 'folding' the reader into its purposes…. Like *De Trinitate*, Julian's is a text which aims not just 'to tell about' something, but to recruit the reader as fellow traveller into the mystery of the love of God…[34]

Thus, what we are invited to enter into is not a patriarchal tyranny but the 'kindness' (or kinship) of God – the Trinity in whose image we are made (*imago Dei*). Gender is always present but has lost much of the toxicity that is drawn from its residence in 'male' and 'vertical' metaphors for God. Furthermore, in Julian, although there is a lower (sensual) and higher (spiritual) nature, there is no sense in which one is regarded as less significant or more important than the other. After all, does not God participate in both in the incarnation? As Julian puts it in chapter 52 of the *Revelation*, the energy and vigour of the 'lower part of our nature' springs from the higher and in God's sight, the same love pervades all.[35] In Julian, therefore, the question of the 'two natures' is ours, not Christ's (since, for her, he is wholly one) – but it remains a Christological question for this medieval woman, for you and for me. And it has clear bearing upon the language that we use in our worship and liturgy.

So – some final comments before I conclude. Before we begin too quickly in our defence of, opposition to, or simply pontificating about the liturgy in the parish church on Sunday morning or in the context of the diocesan or provincial liturgy committee, some solid theology and teaching is necessary, and that teaching must also be in its manner at least inter-disciplinary – that is, respectful of all contributing – theologians, philosophers, liturgists, historians, scholars of language

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[34] ibid., p. 131.

[35] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*. Trans. Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp. 151-7.

and linguistics. This is a daunting task. Second, some precise thinking *and reading* never comes amiss. Much of the time (and I certainly accuse myself) we are pretty careless readers, unwilling or unable to ask the necessary questions which might open up a text and its metaphors, grammar, and so on to our careful appropriation. *De Trinitate* and *The Revelations of Divine Love* are carefully constructed and highly 'toned' writings. They do not presuppose theological sophistication, but they do yield rich fruits of a 'theological' nature which brush away (to mix my metaphors!) many of our preoccupations and indeed prejudices. They invite us in as fellow travellers and are pretty good guides on the journey. They can change the nature of our religious language and its metaphors, and liturgy needs to take careful note of this replacing the old dead metaphors of the 'white mythology' with a living and vibrant metaphorical language that works for our own time and culture.

4. Brief Conclusion.

This has all been very preliminary and needs much more detailed working through. But I want to conclude with a few final reflections on metaphor and liturgical language.

First, a careful reading of Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* suggests a following of our Lord not set out as the Neoplatonic ascent of a ladder of perfection, but rather from her theological metaphors as a journey that is more nearly horizontal and that does not set the eternal over the temporal nor the Incarnation as just a kind of rescue operation. Julian eschews the 'impatient otherworldliness' [36] of Augustine and celebrates that physical nature which God has chosen to share with us. For Julian (as for Robert Scharlemann) God is perceived through metaphor as 'an actuality in life and history'.

The 'kindness' (kin-ness) of God also releases a much richer and more daring metaphorical vocabulary than we have recently used to in most of our twentieth century liturgies. Thus, for the Trinity, Julian writes, God, in relationship, 'Wanted the second person to become our Mother, our brother and our saviour. From this follows that as truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother.'[37]And such metaphors nourish the full richness of the Trinity – for Julian, *Christ* is also 'our Mother' continually 'in travail' to give birth to humankind in the

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[36] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, p. 150.

[37] Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 168. I would point readers to the essay by Lisa Isherwood published in the last volume of the SEI Journal which further explores Julian of Norwich's language for God.

fullness of its intended being. My point is that for Julian this is only possible because of her careful and very precise theology which releases a flexibility of metaphorical language not available to a text that is as stilted and indeed grammatically muddled[38] as the SEC 1982 liturgy.

The danger of such liturgical language as we find in the SEC liturgy is that it founders on the rocks of the dead metaphors, the 'white mythology' with which I began these reflections. The way forward is to begin at a much earlier, and much more interdisciplinary point than has normally been the practice (in my limited experience) of liturgical revision. It takes a lot of hard work at various levels. I have already written on why I will not use the proposed Eucharistic prayers for the Season of Creation because they start, without even apparently realising it, from a philosophical and theological point that lodges us at least in the eighteenth rather than the twenty-first century.[39] In short, they are intellectually lazy, out of date and practically useless in an age of vibrant reflection on ecological change and new cosmological thinking in the works of thinkers like Bruno Latour and Michel Serres.[40]

A final word on the matter of interdisciplinarity. In the academic world disciplines find it very hard to talk to one another. How often do you hear the remark, 'I am not a philosopher, and I don't understand such things.' The study and practice of liturgy is inherently interdisciplinary. It also thrives on a theology that is, in Bakhtin's sense, dialogical (NOT dialectical) and polyphonic, and that gives rise to a rich metaphorical language as a consequence. The fare that we deal with is too often very thin gruel. It is through the kindness of God – kinship not kingship – that we come to a rich language that is at once profoundly meaningful and mysterious – like love itself.

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[38] This grammatical muddle is perhaps a subject for another essay.

[39] This was in a lecture delivered to the teaching staff of the SEI in February 2025 at the Conforti Institute, Glasgow

[40] See, for example, Bruno Latour, *If We Lose the Earth, We Lose our Souls* (2024), Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (1985, English, 2016).

Inclining the heart: negotiating meaning over time

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1. Language change

'Liturgical events' have both outward and inward aspects. As Cosima Clara Gillhammer put it recently,

> Understanding its texts and allusions is only one aspect in a complex experience of liturgy, which can only be grasped if one is fully present in the ritual – the spaces within which it takes place, as well as the music, sounds, gestures, movements and visual cues that accompany it.[41]

What goes on inside the minds (or hearts) of celebrants or congregations – even if they are 'fully present' -- is not something that others can really perceive. Does every participant, on every occasion, have the same experience of engagement with the divine? How can we tell (an ancient debate, of course)? But the outward and visible signs of liturgy are available to the human senses: hearing and sight obviously, taste and touch often, and in a few traditions smell as well. All of these signs are of course vectors of meaning, a mode of communication, situated within a kind of dialogue with – it might be presumed -- God. In other words, liturgy is a language, though a complex and (in modern parlance) multi-modal one. Although the remainder of this paper, in line with my own academic specialism. focuses on the use of some English expressions, I am of the view that the issues I discuss could be profitably extended to cover other aspects of liturgical practice.

If liturgy is, as I suggest, a multi-modal form of language, then – if it is a living idiom, and not a dead one – it must necessarily be subject to change, the result of dynamic social interaction whereby usages (dialects, sociolects, different languages, in sum different practices)

[41] Cosima Clara Gillhammer, *Light on Darkness: the untold story of the liturgy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2025), p. 251.

come into contact. Catherine Pickstock has acknowledged the relevance of this issue for liturgical studies when she describes how '[t]he diversity of the quotidian tongue yields nothing but opacity, instability, and conflict, and as such could precipitate a communicative collapse'. [42] In response to such situations of communicative breakdown, meaning is renegotiated through what might be termed therapeutic processes. Michael Halliday has referred to human languages as 'dynamic open systems' that

> have the property that they are metastable: that is, they persist only through constant change, and thus change takes pace through interactive exchanges with their environment. In the course of such interaction, the system exports disorder, and in the process of exporting disorder, and so increasing the entropy of its environment, the system renews itself, gains information, imports or rather creates order and in this way continues to function.[43]

Such renegotiation results in a constant process of flux at individual and group level, only constrained by communicative needs that are themselves continually changing.[44]

These general characteristics of language have been known for a long time. Their specific application to liturgy has also been discussed before by linguists (as opposed to theologians), notably by David Crystal, who has a claim to be the founder of the sub-discipline known as *theolinguistics*. [45] Crystal, a distinguished linguist who

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[42] Catherine Pickstock, 'Liturgy and language: the sacred polis', in Paul Bradshaw and Bryan Spinks (eds), *Liturgy in Dialogue* (London: SPCK,1993), pp. 115-137, p. 125.

[43] Michael Halliday, 'Language and the order of nature', in Nigel Fabb and Alan Durant (eds), *The Linguistics of Writing* (Manchester: University Press, 1987), pp. 135-154, p. 139.

[44] See, for example, Jeremy J. Smith, *Sound Change and the History of English* (Oxford: University Press, 2009), chapter 1.

[45] The term, though, is not Crystal's; it was coined (as far as I know) by Jean-Pierre van Noppen, in a collection published in 1981 (see Jean-Pierre van Noppen (ed.), *Theolinguistics*, Studiereeks Tijdschrift Vrije Universiteit Brussel, new series 8 (Brussels: Vrije Universiteit, 1981). Crystal has continued to engage with theolinguistics, notably in a chapter with the significant title 'What happened to theolinguistics?', and an important foreword to Valerie Hobbs's introductory book on the topic (see David Crystal, 'Whatever happened to theolinguistics?', in Paul Chilton and Monika Kopytowska (eds), *Religion, Language, and the Human Mind* (Oxford: University Press, 2018), pp. 3-18; David

happens to be a Roman Catholic -- though making no claims to theological expertise – wrote a very sensible essay on the topic as long ago as 1969.[46] I would take from his conclusions on that occasion two comments that seem worth pondering on, viz.

> (1) It will never be possible to devise an adequate liturgical language until one has a very clear idea as to what the purpose of the liturgy is in the first place. Once one is agreed on the *kind* of language one would like to have (e.g. relatively formal, relatively colloquial), then it is possible to go ahead and work out some alternative versions. But until these more basic issues of liturgical appropriateness have been established, stylistic discussion will stay confused ….[47]
>
> (2) Language is very much a means to an end, and not an end in itself. It is just one aspect of the total cultural *Gestalt* within which the liturgical situation has to be defined; and in many ways it is the least important aspect. The study of language will never fill the gap created by doctrinal ignorance, for example. But some discussion of these matters is essential if liturgical language is to become a means of facilitating community worship, rather than being a barrier to it … One thing is clear: it will never be too late to begin talking about language in this way. Our attitudes towards language are in a continual state of change (as our familiarity with a text develops), and of course language itself is in a perpetual state of change.[48]

There is a good deal of interest in these statements, both of which underline the importance of linguistic function in relation to linguistic form. Crystal was writing at a time when dominant models of linguistic enquiry – Chomskyan generative linguistics – were focused not on how language worked in socio-cultural terms but on the mapping of formal features onto a putative universal language-faculty. Crystal

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Crystal, 'Foreword', in Valerie Hobbs, *An Introduction to Religious Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021),pp. xiv-xv). However, in neither of these later publications does Crystal discuss liturgy *per se*.

[46] David Crystal, 'Linguistics and liturgy', *The Church Quarterly* 2 (1969), pp. 23-30. *The Church Quarterly* (CQ) was a short-lived journal resulting from the merger in 1968 of the older *Church Quarterly Review*, which had been founded in 1875 for a primarily Anglican readership, with the Methodist *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*. CQ ceased publication in 1971.

[47] Crystal, 'Linguistics and Liturgy', p. 30.

[48] Crystal, 'Linguistics and Liturgy', p. 30.

however was prescient in pointing forward to pragmatic approaches to linguistics, which have now become much more common as the subject has been 'rehumanised'.[49]

But linguistic change – outside the comparatively rarefied world of academic linguists – has always been a source of discomfort for commentators. In 2004, for instance, the journalist John Humphrys published a book called *Lost for Words*, describing how 'texters … are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours eight hundred years ago. . . they must be stopped'.[50] In 1990 Philip Howard, the literary editor of *The Times*, complained that English grammar was 'becoming simpler and coarser'.[51] And such complaints are hardly new; in 1898 the distinguished theologian Ethelbert Bullinger announced that

> It is most instructive to observe the evidence afforded by many of these changes as to the constant effect of fallen human nature; which, in its use of words, is constantly lowering and degrading their meaning.[52]

Similar divergences of opinion can be detected in liturgical studies. Many professional theologians, including those with liturgical interests, are clearly alert to issues to do with change, as witnessed by such statements as these:

> The style of worship and its understanding by people has been in fact structured at every stage by that complex system of interdependent theological and cultural ideas that permeate and are permeated by the predominant Christian vision of the day.[53]

and

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[49] See John Joseph, *Language and Identity: national, ethnic, religious* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 226.
[50] John Humphrys, *Lost for Words: the mangling and manipulating of the English language* (London: Hodder, 2004).
[51] For these and other examples, see Jean Aitchison, *Language Change: Progress or Decay?,* fourth edition (Cambridge: University Press, 2013), pp. 4-6.
[52] Ethelbert Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898), p. 856.
[53] German Martinez, cited in Ruth Meyers, 'Liturgy and society: cultural influences on contemporary liturgical revision', in Paul Bradshaw and Bryan Spinks (eds), *Liturgy in Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 1993), pp. 154-175, 155-156.

> … liturgy must never again enter into a sort of ice-age. It changes with the culture.[54]

However, in the same collection of essays, Paul Bradshaw wrote that

> [i]n some instances … liturgical texts also became frozen in time and, as it were, canonized by their religious community, with the result that here too, like the Bible, an unchanging text was subject to changing interpretations.[55]

In identifying this issue, Bradshaw is clearly thinking of those who prefer their liturgy to be fixed at a particular point in time, as (for instance) advocated by the Prayer Book Society, who admire the 'beauty, poetry, and majesty of the Book of Common Prayer' (hence BCP) in its 1662 version.[56] But he also makes an interesting second point, to do with how an 'unchanging text' can be subjected to 'changing interpretations'. It must surely be accepted that present-day enthusiasts for the BCP – being present-day people – engage with its liturgies in ways that differ markedly from those who encountered it in 1662, or for that matter in 1559, 1552 or 1549.

After all, the audience who encountered Beethoven's Fifth Symphony for the first time, in a bitterly cold theatre in Vienna in 1808, seem to have been utterly confused by what they heard, since its musical language was unlike anything they had hitherto experienced; they were people of 1808, bringing to the event their own socio-cultural formations. We, people of 2025, hear it differently. I am as it happens an enthusiast myself for 'authentic' performances on 'original' instruments, but I acknowledge fully that with the best will in the world I cannot inhabit fully the mind of a member of that Viennese audience over two hundred years ago.[57] But my enjoyment of 'authentic' performances seems to me still a valid experience. I am reminded that --- like 'good liturgy' – a good performance 'is the natural ally of a hermeneutic that is alive both to the original sense of

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[54] Raymond George, 'Ronald Jasper: an appreciation', in Paul Bradshaw and Bryan Spinks (eds), *Liturgy in Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 1993), pp. 1-8, p. 7.
[55] Paul Bradshaw, 'Liturgy and "living literature"', in Paul Bradshaw and Bryan Spinks (eds), *Liturgy in Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 1993), pp. 138-153, p. 142.
[56] See https://www.pbs.org.uk/, last accessed 18 August 2025.
[57] See further Jeremy J. Smith, *Transforming Early English: the reinvention of Early English and Older Scots* (Cambridge: University Press, 2020), especially chapter 6.

texts and to the modern context in which they are being appropriated, and can fuse the two creatively'.[58]

Language change affects every level of language traditionally identified and through which meaning ('semantics') is expressed, i.e. the lexicon, grammar (i.e. morphology and syntax), and transmission. This last 'level', for most of human history and prehistory (and still for many languages), consisted solely of a language's sound-system. However, writing-systems of various kinds eventually emerged, beginning with symbolic usages in the early Neolithic but first attested in a recognisably 'modern' form in Mesopotamian cuneiform around 3000 BCE. Writing seems to have been developed in the first instance for practical purposes, as a means of recording transactions, but it rapidly gained other functions. When Ashurbanipal (d. 631 BCE) had buried, in the foundations of his palace at Nineveh, a set of clay cylinders describing his victories in cuneiform, it is clear that he had a very sophisticated notion of what the audience – if any – for that writing might be like.[59] Writing, in sum, 'fixes' language, enabling transmission over time and space in ways that – until the technological innovations at the end of the nineteenth century – speech could never do.

2. Inclining our hearts

Change can take place at all levels of language, and it is a truism of historical semantics that words change their meaning over time, as part of these more general processes of language change. *Cloud*, for instance, used five centuries ago to denote a *rock*, but its regular metaphorical deployment caused its core meaning to change. A *fowl* used to be any kind of bird, but now it refers to creatures of the barnyard or river. *Silly* used to be a synonym for *holy*, while *crafty*, now with the negative connotations we associate with *cunning* (another word that has changed its sense) used simply to mean *skilled*; the related word *craftsman* retains this older meaning-component. And *awfully* and *terribly* have for most present-day users of English has largely lost its connexion with *awe* and *terror*.

Awareness of such propensities in the evolving meaning of words should, one might suppose, enable us to be prepared for the alterity of the Early Modern English phraseology of the BCP. After all,

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[58] John Barton, *People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity*, third edition (London: SPCK, 2011) p. 77. Cited elsewhere in this issue by Bridget Nichols.

[59] See the essays collected in Gareth Brereton, *I am Ashurbanipal king of the world, king of Assyria* (London: Thames and Hudson/The British Museum, 2018).

we are aware that Shakespeare's language is not contemporary with our own; Macbeth's 'inkhorn phrase' *the multitudinous seas incarnadine* has connotations that are lost to a present-day audience without hard-won scholarly explication.[60] BCP and Shakespeare's plays are thus works of *genius* in the older sense of that word: even if the issues with which they engage have an ongoing resonance, they are located in a particular time and place, and are expressed in the language of the period. To illustrate some of the difficulties involved here I have chosen a lexeme that reappears at several points in the liturgy, viz. *incline*, along with a noun frequently collocated with it, viz. *heart*.

Key occasions in BCP where *incline* occurs are in the Communion service, in the responses of the congregation to the Ten Commandments (my emboldening here and below):

> Lord, have mercy upon us, and **incline** our hearts to keep this law

and in a post-offertory Collect:

> We beseech thee mercifully to **incline** thine ears to us that have made thee now our prayers and supplications unto thee

The usages deployed here derive, of course, from several passages in scripture, notably the Psalms (here cited in the King James and Geneva versions, with normalised spelling):

> 78.1: Give ear, O my people, to my law; **incline** your ears to the words of my mouth (KJV); Hear my doctrine, O my people: **incline** your ears unto the words of my mouth (Geneva)
> 116.2: Because [the Lord] hath **inclined** his ear unto me, therefore I will I call upon *him* as long as I live (KJV); For [the Lord] hath **inclined** his ear unto me, when I did call *upon him* in my days (Geneva)
> 119.36: **Incline** my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness (KJV and Geneva)
> 141.4: **Incline** not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties (KJV); **Incline** not mine heart to evil, that I should

[60] See Terttu Nevalainen, *Introduction to Early Modern English* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2006), p. 39, and references there cited.

> commit wicked works with them that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their delicates (Geneva)[61]

In all these instances *heart* and *ear* are the objects of the verb. It is also notable that of the nineteen instances of the lexeme *incline* recorded in the Bible, only three examples do not govern these nouns; and one of these three instances involve *hearing* (thus part of a semantic field also including *ear*), again from the Psalms:

> 40.1 I waited patiently for the Lord; and he **inclined** unto me, and heard my cry

The sense of *incline* in these instances relates to the following part of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) definition:[62]

> **II. Senses relating to tendency, disposition, or preference. II.7.a.** *transitive*. To dispose or induce to behave, think, feel, etc., in a particular way; *esp.* to instil in (a person, the heart, the mind, etc.) favour or sympathy for someone or something. Also: to influence, guide, or direct (a person, the heart, etc.). **II.7.a.i. c1350–** With preposition (esp. *to*) or infinitive.

OED does not consider this meaning to be obsolete, but it is noticeable that the last citation in II.7.a.i is from 1707. It is thus not surprising that *incline* has been replaced in 'modern-language' texts such as the Alternative Service Book (ASB) or the New English Bible (NEB). In the latter *incline* is replaced by such expressions as *listen to* (which incorporates *ears*), *dispose* or *turn*, whereas in ASB the equivalent phraseology becomes the congregation's *Amen, Lord have mercy*, and *write all these laws in our hearts*, spoken by the Minister.[63] *Incline*, it seems, is an acknowledged 'problem' word.

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[61] KJV deploys the lexeme *incline* elsewhere in Psalm 119, verse 112, but in this case Geneva offers a different verb: I have **inclined** mine heart to perform thy statutes always, *even unto* the end (KJV); I have **applied** mine heart to fulfill thy statutes always, *even* unto the end (Geneva).

[62] All citations from OED are derived from the online version, available by subscription at www.oed.com.

[63] See Romans 2.14-15: 'For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of law written in their **hearts**, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or excusing one another …'

Heart, by contrast, is generally retained, both in ASB (*write … in our hearts*) and in NEB, as demonstrated by the phraseology in the psalms just cited:

> 119.36: Dispose my **heart** toward thy[64] instruction and not toward ill-gotten gains
> 141.4: Turn not my **heart** to sinful thoughts nor to any pursuit of evil courses. The evildoers appal me; not for me the delights of their table.

It would seem therefore that *heart* was felt, by NEB's translators, to be a much more familiar term not needing replacement or further glossing.

However, closer examination suggests that there are early modern senses of *heart* that are perhaps opaque for present-day readers and listeners. In both cases just cited English *heart* translates Hebrew *leb*, usually glossed 'heart(s), mind'. The lexeme appears no fewer than 272 times in the BCPs of 1552 and 1559, 135 instances of which are in the text of the psalms there incorporated. 46 of these occurrences are in the phrase *my heart*; common patterns include 'my heart is [participle/adjective]', e.g. 'my heart is inditing' (Psalm 45), 'my heart is fixed' (Psalm 57) or 'my heart is joyful' (Psalm 13).[65]

Appreciating the power of these lexemes in these sixteenth-century contexts requires a degree of decoding. The great Alexander Cruden (1699-1770), in his entry for *heart* in his biblical concordance of 1737, offers a useful gloss:

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[64] NEB's deployment of archaic *thy* is an interesting – and characteristic – anomaly, aligning with the translators' attempts to strike a compromise between traditional language and that perceived as modern.

[65] *Joy* is a keyword for sixteenth-century Protestants. In his monograph *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (2013), Alec Ryrie has an entire chapter on *joy*, offering an authoritative breakdown of the meaning of the term for Protestants: '… while Protestants of all stripes wanted to insist that they could be joyful, they also wanted to make it very clear that they did not mean worldly joy' (2013: 78). Ryrie goes on to note a distinction made by Protestants between '[e]nduring joy – a settled inner peace in God' (2013: 80) and 'occasional' or 'fleeting joy': 'sudden, transporting ecstasy, the stab of delight which lifted believers, as it seemed, into the very presence of God' (2013: 83). See further Smith, 'Godly vocabulary in Early Modern English religious debate', in Ewa Jonsson and Tove Larsson (eds) *Voices Past and Present: studies of involved, speech-related and spoken texts, in honor of Merja Kytö* (Amsterdam: Benjamins), pp. 96-112 and (in more developed form) Smith forthcoming, *Lexicons of English Religion 1380-1850* (Cambridge: University Press) especially chapter 3.

> The word heart is used in Scripture as the seat of life or strength; hence it means mind, soul, spirit, or one's entire emotional nature and understanding. It is also used as the centre or inner part of a thing.[66]

A century before Cruden, the Calvinist bishop of Lincoln, Robert Sanderson (1587-1663), offered another relevant definition in one of his sermons:[67]

> The heart..is..very often in Scripture..taken more largely, so as to comprehend the whole soul, in all its faculties, as well the apprehensive as the appetitive; and consequently taketh in the thoughts, as well as the desires, of the soul.

This latter quotation occurs in the entry for OED, sv. *heart*, sense II.5.a:

> The bodily organ considered or imagined as the seat of feeling, understanding, and thought. .. In the most general sense: the mind (including the functions of feeling and volition as well as intellect).

Yet, as the citations from Cruden and Sanderson indicate, the OED definition seems not to capture the set of meanings that have accrued to the lexeme over the last five centuries, especially in theological contexts. The habit of *lectio divina* that had been customary in medieval monasteries, and after the Reformation spread into the wider (and growing) literate population, meant that the term was subject to intensive exploration. Early modern readers – including women as well as men -- were profoundly literate, theologically, in ways that to many in the agnostic western world of the early twenty-first century can seem alien. They 'read diligently' – as the Geneva Bible explicitly put it -- complex texts such as Revelation. They formed what Crawford Gribben has called

> … a critically-aware interpretative community … The Renaissance had reinvigorated the study of rhetoric, the means by which a text could be *en*coded with persuasive powers; but

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[66] Alexander Cruden, *Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Bible* (revised edition) (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1977), p. 290.

[67] Cited in OED, sv. *heart*, sense II.5.a: 'The bodily organ considered or imagined as the seat of feeling, understanding, and thought. .. In the most general sense: the mind (including the functions of feeling and volition as well as intellect).'

> with the Reformation, and the creation of a private and independent reader of Scripture, increasing emphasis came to be laid on the *de*coding of texts.[68]

An example of where such decoding could lead is offered by the poet and Anglican priest George Herbert (1593-1633), who had an imagined speaker query the various meanings of the word *heart* in his poem 'Mattens':

> My God, what is a heart.
> That thou shouldst it so eye, and wooe,
> Powring upon it all thy art,
> As if that thou hadst nothing els to do?[69]

Francesca Cioni has noted that understanding such passages in Herbert's verse requires a sophisticated grasp of contemporary medico-theology:

> Advances in anatomy existed alongside still-prevalent Aristotelian and Galenic ideas of human physiology in general, and the heart in particular; conceptions of it as a pump for humours and spirits, and the seat of 'vital heat' commingled with the understanding of its function in circulating blood. At the same time many characteristics of post-Reformation theology — the predestination of individual souls, the consequent need for constant self-scrutiny, the privileging of the Word in worship -- all made the heart the object of anxious study, and the prompt -- or means -- for a fundamental reassessment of the place of the individual within society, within the world, and in relationship with God.[70]

Such complex engagement with religious keywords is a commonplace habit of the period, and understanding this practice is I think crucial for understanding how texts such as BCP – or for that matter the numerous other devotional treatises published during this period – functioned in the cultures for which they were produced.

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[68] Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: literature and theology 1550-1682* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), p. 9.
[69] Helen Wilcox, Helen (ed.), *George Herbert: 100 poems* (Cambridge: University Press, 2016), p. 39.
[70] Francesca Cioni, *Materiality and Devotion in the Poetry of George Herbert* (Oxford: University Press, 2024), pp. 81-82.

I would add an extra point: it is worth reminding ourselves that the reading culture of the early modern period was primarily *intensive* rather than *extensive*, i.e. literate people read a few books a lot rather than – as is presently the case in much of western culture – reading a lot of books a little; and of course the book that was read most was the Bible. The result was memorisation of -- and the ability to retrieve from memory -- scriptural text in a way that to modern readers can seem quite astonishing.[71] I could cite numerous instances of such behaviour, but maybe one instance will suffice: a letter by the Early Modern Scottish Calvinist poet Elizabeth Melville (fl. 1599-1631), dated August 1625:

> **God resists the proud and gives grace to the humbill** etc.[72] **Watche and praye**[73] James ye wreit not to me and I knaw not qt to wreit to you. God hes usit many meins to warne and wakin to counsell and derect iff yt do not the turn qt can I say or do to you. Reid this letter I think ye knaw the handwreit be ernist wt god craue his derectioun. Ye knaw qt pains he hes tane upon you and qt danger he hes sauit you from and others also blissed be his name. also the death of your kynd and louing sister who wes heuylie trublit in mynd and body pryde wes the cheif thing yt trublit hir, and the greuing of hir deir mother as she callit me then bot efter a soir battell she gat a happie wictorie blissed be god nou she rests in the arms **all tears are wyppit away**.[74] ye knaw not hou soone god cals you to a tryall remember bygans and iff yt be forget luik for som other thing then ye haue yet felt I knaw ye pertein to him who will not los you. bewar to do against your consciens, **greue not yt sprite**, iff ye haue alreddy preas to repent and to com haim from your wanderings and he will be reddy to receue you.[75]

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[71] It is important to recognise that modern Western notions of the value of what is sometimes called 'brute memory' can be challenged; in Islamic culture, for instance, the ability to memorise the Qur'an has long been applauded as an important skill.

[72] From Epistle of James 4.6: '… God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.' (All citations for the Melville texts are from the Geneva bible, which Melville is known to have used.) I am grateful to Jamie Reid Baxter for this text of Melville's letter.

[73] From Matthew 26.41: 'Watch, and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is ready, but the flesh is weak.'

[74] From Revelation 21.4: 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, ….'

[75] A reference to Luke 15.11-32 (the parable of the Prodigal Son).

The references here – crammed into a short text – are to the Epistle of James 4.6, Matthew 26.41 and Revelation 21.4, culminating with an extended reference to Luke 15.11-32 (the parable of the prodigal son; Melville is writing to her own son, James). Such habitual and repeated reading of scripture meant – fairly obviously – alertness to biblical reference wherever it occurred. This, after all, had always been the goal of *lectio divina*.

3. Writing and speech

The appearance of BCP coincided with a major development in technological history: the invention of printing in the west. Printing seems to have succeeded as a supply-side innovation because it responded to an increasing demand for books that the older scribal systems could not meet, but – as with the appearance of the internet five centuries later – there were unforeseen consequences as the authorities attempted, with very varying degrees of success, to control the new medium. One method of control was through 'authorisation' – thus the 'Authorised Version' of the Bible – which meant that texts could be given an official imprimatur. In principle – though of course not necessarily in practice – authorisation meant that it was possible to produce numerous identical copies of a text, something that no scribe-based system could ever have done. And the increasing attempts at standardising the appearance of texts that had emerged in the medieval period – so-called *ordinatio* – could now be formalised to allow readers to find their ways around books in a much more structured way.

Such developments had implications for the role of writing as opposed to speech. For much of the medieval period, written texts were in some sense secondary to speech: *aides-memoires* for performance, which were open to modification for the particular contexts in which they were used, and were presented in forms that mapped onto speech (e.g. in the deployment of 'rhetorical' punctuation). Speech-likeness remains of course; Elspeth Jajdelska, drawing upon modern psychological as well as historical research, has argued that modern 'silent reading' entails the 'silent hearing' of an 'imagined writer's words'.[76] She thus challenges the traditional notion of silent reading as opposed to speech: silent reading may be considered to be interiorised speech.

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[76] Elspeth Jajdelska, *Silent Reading and the Birth of the Narrator* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) *passim*.

But the appearance of an authorised text – as BCP of course was – meant that reference-points, hitherto fluid, could, it was widely thought, potentially be fixed. This possibility fascinated many. In the eighteenth century, for instance, luminaries such as Jonathan Swift and (initially) Dr Samuel Johnson dreamed of 'fixing' the entire English language through a single reference-point: a dictionary, established and policed by an authoritarian 'academy' modelled on Cardinal Richelieu's Academie Francaise. This dictionary would record ('ascertain') and embellish ('make copious') the language's lexicon and thereby halt linguistic change. Of course, the effort was futile, as Johnson was later to admit: 'to enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strengths'.[77] BCP it seems was originally intended at the outset as a similarly fixed point of reference.

We might presume that liturgical language was at the outset to have been primarily an oral experience, open to the dynamic fluidities of the cultures in which it was situated. Medieval breviaries and pontificals, the great and often splendid manuscripts in which liturgy is recorded, would have been the product of a scribal culture, with all the opportunities for idiosyncrasy that scribal culture allowed (and indeed which was expected). And resonances of this speech-likeness remained when the liturgy was converted – as in BCP – into print. It is therefore no mystery that, almost since its creation, the BCP has been subjected to almost constant pressure for revision, as mapped comprehensively by inter alia Brian Cummings .[78] It was therefore a wise author of the BCP's 1662 preface who wrote as follows, in words that (I sense) are sometimes occluded in current debates:

> It hath been the wisdom of the Church of *England*, ever since the first compiling of her publick Liturgy, to keep the mean between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing, and of too much easiness in admitting any variation from it.[79]

Any approach to the liturgy – and liturgical practice -- has surely to acknowledge the facts of language change, which itself reflects

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[77] Cited in Whitney F. Bolton (ed.), *The English Language: essays by English and American men of letters 1490-1839* (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), pp. 107-123, 129-156.

[78] Brian Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer: a very short introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2018).

[79] Brian Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer: the texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: University Press, 2011), p. 209.

socio-cultural developments in 'the lives, purposes and aspirations of the human beings that language serves'.[80]

[80] Michael L. Samuels, *Linguistic Evolution* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), p. 181.

Great Expectations: Liturgy in the Age of Resources

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Introduction

Much has been written about liturgical change across the Roman Catholic and the Churches of the Reformation since the 1960s, chronicling both change within single Churches, and developments across the ecumenical spectrum. [1] Manuals and commentaries explaining decisions and offering guidance on how to use new liturgical material all play a role in building up a picture of the Churches at worship, but for obvious practical reasons, they depend on published sources issued and authorised by various ecclesial bodies. Monitoring the additional resources which have been commissioned in response to a large number of specific, yet disparate, needs and concerns is a more difficult task. Some of these concerns have arisen in reaction to the content of new authorised prayer books themselves; others have arisen out of national, global and intra-ecclesial events and crises. This article considers the expectations that are placed on the liturgies offered as the official forms of worship of the Churches – by those who draft them, those who encounter them in worship, and those who may seldom be in church, but nevertheless expect the Churches to be able to speak into often painful and intractable situations.

One set of working assumptions sees authorised liturgies as offering Christians an initial theological education, forming them in the Christian life, and providing a language that enables them to confront large matters in the context of public prayer. Church and world leadership, international relations, social justice, appropriate commemoration of events which have historically divided

[1] The influence of Roman Catholic liturgical work, and the attention paid to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Consultation on the Sacred Liturgy) – the first document of the Second Vatican Council – have been significant. This article draws mainly on the Churches of the Reformation and in particular, the Churches of the Anglican Communion, which have an autonomy in generating new material which is not possible under the Magisterium of Rome.

communities, and in recent times, institutional abuse and climate emergency, are regular themes. It is not unfair to say that this usually represents the view from above, genuinely enabling in its motivation, but not always gratefully received. Another set of assumptions, more likely to come from grass roots, is that public worship should be an activity which allows participants to recognise themselves in worship, taking account of emphases and circumstances that differ from one human life to another. Gender, sexuality, ethnicity, indigeneity, physical & intellectual capacity, neurodivergence, education, social class, old age, surviving or enduring domestic and sexual abuse, forms of relationship and configurations of family are items on a potentially expanding list.

Meeting these formidable and at times conflicting demands entails adjusting existing provision and adding to it with materials that address situations not envisaged by compilers of forms of worship even in comparatively recent history. It finds expression more and more in a style, register and idiom that sound unlike conventional liturgical prayer, partly because elements of testimony may have been incorporated, partly because people with specialist expertise and an accompanying technical vocabulary may be involved, and partly because there are no precedents for voicing many of the subjects of newly created prayers.

Critics of new composition enumerate its flaws and suggest that ways already exist to produce liturgical texts in an idiom that captures the imagination sufficiently to evoke reverence and wonder, exerts an affective force capable of giving reality to confession and intercession, is clear enough to be definite about what is being prayed for, is memorable enough to be committed to memory, and is both resonant and versatile enough to stand up to a variety of settings for public worship. Often, though, this critique refers backwards, to earlier models: it suggests few if any principles for composing in a contemporary style. Perhaps that is because there are no very clear criteria for how revision and additional provision (sometimes similar but not the same thing) are to proceed, nor, for various reasons, is there much appetite for establishing them. [2]

This article does not attempt to define criteria. Instead, it proceeds in two phases, beginning with a series of four examples of fairly recent liturgical provision in response to distinctive requests. In this phase, it observes features of composition but avoids the

[2] Bryan Spinks in another article in this issue raises the lack of attention to equipping people who can contribute to drawing the current reality of the Churches' life and the texture of the Churches' prayers closer together.

temptation to assess. The second phase plots a course away from the kinds of confident liturgical critique which greeted new liturgical projects in the twentieth century, towards an eirenic position, where the best instruments of judgement, for deciding what 'good' or 'bad' look like, may be found organically, in the workings of liturgical acts themselves and the willingness of participants to be addressed and invited to discover a depth of meaning that is renewed each time they gather. Aspirations like that often sound fatuous. The dialogue partners who will appear in due course give them grounding and dignity.

Responding to the Worshippers: Living in an Age of Resources

Through the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the production of resources for worship has accelerated. Material that takes account of the presence of children is a substantial part of this work, but it has its own integrity as a subject area and is not discussed here. The four examples that follow are all in one way or another responses to requests for ways of praying in a public or at least relatively formal setting that more closely meet the needs of participants.

Church of England Additional Collects, 2004

The set of Additional Collects produced by the Church of England following the publication of *Common Worship* (CW) in 2000 were composed in response to objections that the collects in the new provisions for worship were too formal and wordy.[3] Certainly, they were in a different style from those of the *Alternative Service Book 1980* (ASB), and closer to the collects of the BCP of 1662. They also represented a decision to reject the lectionary-related thematic collects of the ASB and return to the historic function of the collect as the opening prayer, associated with the gathering of the assembly. As local communities began to use them, there were objections to their comparatively complex syntax, and their use of many words to say relatively little. Critics added that they presented difficulties for children and people in 'non-book' contexts, or 'in missionary congregations where there is no background experience of the language of the BCP'. The General Synod of the Church of England

[3] Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Common Worship: Additional Collects* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004). Also available online at https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/common-material/collects-and-post-26 Accessed 24.8.2025.

'called on the House of Bishops to commission an alternative set of collects for Sundays and feast days 'in a worthy contemporary idiom'.[4]

Commenting on the texts that appeared in 2004, Donald Gray noted their brevity, simple syntax, often arresting themes and images, and 'accessible language'. Relative clauses appeared seldom and there were no vocatives (at least, not in the 'O God' form, though there were collects beginning, 'God'). He remained unsure that the collects had succeed in conveying '"the spirituality of the Anglican collect in a worthy, contemporary idiom complementing the approach of those already contained in Common Worship"'.[5] To date, no information about the use of these collects has been collected to indicate how widely they are used. Two examples, comparing the principal and alternative collects for the Second Sunday Before Lent, and the Second Sunday of Easter, give a very slight indication of the genre.

Second Sunday before Lent

Almighty God,
you have created the heavens and the earth
and made us in your own image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works
and your likeness in all your children;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things,
now and for ever.

(or)

Almighty God,
give us reverence for all creation
and respect for every person,
that we may mirror your likeness
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The first of these prayers loosely follows the traditional collect form of address to God, but its subject matter (the cosmos and humanity within it) and development are unlike anything to be found in the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 (BCP) which tends to serve as a

[4] Liturgical Commission of the Church of England, *Common Worship: Additional Collects* Report to the General Synod (GS 1493) 2003. p. 1.
[5] Donald Gray, 'The Anglican Collect' in Bridget Nichols (ed.) *The Collect in the Churches of the Reformation* (London: SCM, 2010), pp. 50-66, pp. 63-64.

benchmark. Human nature is celebrated rather than lamented over as weak and sinful, and the petition is an ethical one rather than a plea for amendment. The reason for this relates to the lectionary: the adoption of the three-year *Revised Common Lectionary* (RCL) by a number of Churches has been a unifying force. The Church of England, however, having abandoned the two-year Joint Liturgical Group lectionary used in the *Alternative Service Book* 1980 with the advent of CW in 2000, found it no longer had a Sunday thematically focused on creation. As the scale and speed of climate change grew, so did a sense that there were good reasons to assign 'creation' to a Sunday. The choice fell on the Second Sunday before Lent.[6] This prayer is economical, yet elegant, and the alternative collect could have retained the idea of God as creator and some sense of the wonder of creation itself. It would be impossible to take exception to 'reverence for creation' and 'respect for every person', but 'respect' especially is a word so overworked in public discourse that it has ceased to mean very much – though from another point of view, it may be precisely because it is overworked that it means something when it is heard in church. How the fulfilment of these cautious petitions would enable the petitioners 'to mirror [God's] likeness in Jesus Christ our Lord' is not clear.

Second Sunday of Easter
Almighty Father,
you have given your only Son to die for our sins
and to rise again for our justification:
grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness
that we may always serve you
in pureness of living and truth;
through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Risen Christ,
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:
open the doors of our hearts,

[6] As Churches worldwide agree to celebrate a common Feast of Creation, or God the Creator (the name is under discussion) in September, there may be a case for abandoning this exception in the Church of England calendar.

> that we may seek the good of others
> and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace,
> to the praise of God the Father.

In this example, the alternative collect offers a beautifully crafted programme for the Easter season, with allusion to the post-resurrection appearances that find Jesus appearing in locked rooms (John 20.19-23) and accompanying two of his followers as they walk out of Jerusalem (Luke 24.13-32). Both of these events are, in a way, acts of commissioning new disciples for a continuing career of proclamation. For contemporary Christians, the encouragement to see themselves as commissioned comes with the assurance that nothing is impossible – 'no door is locked, no entrance barred'. Walking the 'joyful road' of 'sacrifice and peace' is a courageous ambition, though it is easier to attach joy to peace than to sacrifice.

The alternative collects undoubtedly meet the requirement for directness and concentrate on a one or two ideas. They largely avoid the difficulty so well described by Louis-Marie Chauvet, of introducing turns of phrase made inscrutable not by words themselves, but by the combination of words in ways unfamiliar outside of 'church' discourse:

> It happens that words, even though they are part of the common language of people, are not understood by so-called 'average' Christians. This is probably less frequent than we think, because the language '*of*' the liturgy (I am not saying the language '*about*' the liturgy that has the complexity of its own method: 'doxology,' 'anamnesis,' etc.) is generally much more simple than that of theology. But, supposing that the words taken individually are understood, it is sometimes their interweaving in an expression which makes them inaudible or strange: 'He is seated at the right hand of the Father'; 'It is right and good.' Here, it is the failure of biblical or liturgical culture that is the issue. Misunderstandings (he 'descended to the realm of the dead') or obstacles ('women, be subject to your husbands') come from a cultural gap.[7]

Where the two prayers introduced above slide into the kind of 'church' diction that assumes considerable background knowledge, it is to their detriment. As Chauvet points out, the task of addressing cultural and

[7] Louis-Marie Chauvet, 'Are the Words of the Liturgy Worn Out? What Diagnosis? What Pastoral Approach? *Worship* 84.1 (2010), pp. 25-37, p. 27.

biblical-theological 'gaps' is a long-term project and involves much more than a narrow concentration on liturgical texts.

Additional Baptismal Texts in Accessible Language, 2015

Another reaction to the language and register of *Common Worship* took aim at the baptismal rite, first published in 1998. Following a motion to the General Synod from the Diocese of Liverpool in 2011, requesting material in language that could be readily understood, no matter what the demographic, educational or churchgoing experience of individuals might have been, alternative material was prepared and published in 2015. An introduction explained that the new texts were responding to a need for more 'accessible' language, once it had been recognised 'that the Decision and Prayer over the Water in *Common Worship: Christian Initiation* rites were particularly difficult for many'. The introduction reminds readers that

> the 'language' of faith includes not only words and actions but also a culture of understanding what the Church, the Bible, the Sacraments and prayer are for. In many parishes this language or culture of faith is not shared by many of those with a deep spiritual yearning and who ask for baptism because they want the very best for their children or for themselves.[8]

Candidates are invited to make the promises to reject sin and turn to Christ in these words, rather than the language of 'dying to sin and rising to new life with [Christ]'[9] :

> We all wander far from God and lose our way: Christ comes to find us and welcomes us home. In baptism we respond to his call.[10]

The commitments that follow are in a simple form and omit any mention of 'the devil and all rebellion against God', 'the deceit and corruption of evil', and 'the sins that separate us from God and

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[8] Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Christian Initiation: Additional Baptismal Texts in Accessible Language* (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), p.1.

[9] Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Common Worship: Baptism and Confirmation Services* (London: Church House Publishing, 2022), p. 76.

[10] Archbishops' Council of the Church of England *Common Worship: Baptism and Confirmation Services* (London: Church House Publishing, 2022), p. 17.

neighbour'[11]. Instead, the minister of baptism asks, 'Do you turn away from sin?', 'Do you reject evil?', 'Do your turn to Christ as Saviour?', 'Do you trust him as Lord?'.[12]

Early coverage in the national press seized the opportunity to ridicule the Church of England under sensationalist headings for avoiding mention of the devil.[13] There was less interest in the findings of an extended research project funded by the national Church on 'life events', and designed to discover what would encourage people to seek church baptisms and marriage ceremonies by talking directly to potential candidates. Aside from confirming that respondents were more comfortable talking about 'christenings' and 'weddings', the research discovered that in the case of baptism/ christening, parents of small children spoke repeatedly of a sense of divine protection conferred with the rite.[14]

There are two forms for blessing the water of baptism, both more concise than those in the 1998 CW provision. Instead of laying one example of water as sustaining and saving element upon another, they use just one or two main images as a focus. Moses who leads the people through the Red Sea to freedom, and Jesus who passes 'through the deep waters of death' appear in the first option, while the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan governs the second. Whether 'the deep waters of death' is really an 'accessible' image might be open to question, but in general, the prayers achieve the objectives of economy and directness.[15]

There are glimpses here, particularly in the introduction to the promises made at the Decision, of the reality recognised by Chauvet, who, in the article just quoted, suggests ways of 'decoding' the more

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[11] Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Common Worship: Baptism and Confirmation Services* (London: Church House Publishing, 2022), p. 76.
[12] Archbishops' Council of the Church of England *Common Worship: Baptism and Confirmation Services* (London: Church House Publishing, 2022), p. 17.
[13] Jonathan Petre 'Welby casts out "sin" from christenings: centuries-old rite rewritten in "language of Eastenders"' *Mail on Sunday* 4th January 2014, updated 5th January 2014 Welby casts out 'sin' from christenings: Centuries-old rite rewritten in 'language of EastEnders' for modern congregation | Daily Mail Online. Accessed 11.7.2025. Edward Malnick 'Church of England removes devil from christening service' *The Telegraph* 5th January 2014 Church of England removes devil from christening service. Accessed 11.7.2025.
[14] Sandra Millar, *Life Events: Mission and Ministry at Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals* (London: Church House Publishing, 2018); Sarah Lawrence, *A Rite on the Edge: The Language of Baptism and Christening in the Church of England* (London: SCM Press, 2019).
[15] Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Common Worship: Baptism and Confirmation Services* (London: Church House Publishing, 2022), p. 19.

complex content of the liturgy in a way that avoids simply replacing a profound enquiry with a reductive paraphrase. This is an important distinction in the context of his own experience in pastoral ministry in the Roman Catholic tradition: the freedom for national church bodies to authorise their own liturgical material is not open to a Church with one centrally regulated rite. He continues:

> For example, at the time of a celebration of baptisms (which often gathers several families who have become unfamiliar with our liturgies), there can be no question of explaining everything! But we can greatly help the participation of those present with some simple means. For example, for the renunciation, the lay person of the parish baptismal team begins by a decoding sentence like: 'Sin reigns wherever the law of the strongest and everyone for oneself reigns.' The priest then moves on immediately: 'You then, in order to live in the freedom of the children of God, do you reject this reign?' Same thing for what follows: 'Sin reigns where idols reign, like wanting more money or goods'; the priest then moves on immediately: 'You then, so as to live in the freedom of the children of God, do you reject this reign of idols?' The lay person says, for example, 'The Church believes in God as Father and Creator. It believes therefore that God made every human being in God's image and as a result God gives us every man and woman as brother and sister to love.' The priest continues with 'And you, do you believe in this God, Father and Creator?'[16]

These brief instances have emphasised the quest for accessibility in liturgical composition. The next example considers what can go wrong when a Church, for honourable reasons, tries to offer empathetic recognition to a particular constituency.

Safeguarding Prayers, 2018

As part of efforts to engage with survivors of clerical sexual abuse or abuse by individuals working under church authority, the Church of England's Liturgical Commission produced a collection of prayers in 2018, under the title, 'Towards a Safer Church'.[17] The prayers relied

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[16] Louis-Marie Chauvet, 'Are the Words of the Liturgy Worn Out? What Diagnosis? What Pastoral Approach? *Worship* 84.1 (2010), pp. 25-37, p. 36.
[17] Church of England, *Towards a Safer Church* 18.5.2018 https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/towards-a-safer-church-some-liturgical-resources-2018.pdf. Accessed 29.8.2025.

heavily on the vocabulary of brokenness, vulnerability and integrity, and included such arch phrases as 'the gloom of despair'. Reactions were unexpectedly angry, and survivors' groups protested at being represented in forms of prayer about which they had not been consulted.[18] Material produced by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales for a National Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse in 2024 demonstrates a much more restrained and careful approach, as it works through a process, considered from the perspective of all involved. There are prayers for those who have given testimony of abuse, a priest suspended during an investigation, the parish community, those investigating, those charged with passing judgement, and those falsely accused and returning to parish ministry. [19] They manage to be compassionate without passing judgement explicitly or implicitly, or imputing emotions to people which may not be a faithful account of their feelings and state of mind.

There are lessons to be learned from this. The energy of language should be deployed in a way that avoids florid or sentimental expression. Trying to imagine the feelings of the notional subjects of the resources that are drafted is no substitute for authentic accounts, and may even allow the needs of the drafting group to displace those of the supposed beneficiaries. At the same time, verbatim inclusions derived from personal testimonies must be used with great caution and respect. In the end, the real impact may come from what is not said, or what is said plainly and without attempts to create a heightened mood.

Church of Ireland Resources for Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Neonatal Death, 2020

The final example comes from the Church of Ireland, which in 2020 published a Service of Prayer and Naming and a Funeral Service to be used in the event of miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death.[20] Here, there was a clear case for including words not normally part of the liturgy of baptism. Pastoral guidance stresses the importance of

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[18] See blog posts by Janet Fife commenting on *Towards a Safer Church* after its launch by the Church of England on 18th May 2018. 'Towards a Safer Church' Part 1 by Janet Fife - Surviving Church (5.6.18); Towards a Safer Church A Critique Part 2 by Janet Fife - Surviving Church (7.6.18) accessed 29.8.2025.

[19] Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales National Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse 2024 DPSA24-Intercessions.pdf. Accessed 29.8.2025.

[20] Church of Ireland, *Resources for Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Neonatal Death* 2020 https://www.churchofireland.org/prayer-worship/book-of-common-prayer/miscarriage-stillbirth-and-neonatal-death. Accessed 10.9.2025.

naming the child formally, especially if a miscarriage has occurred before a funeral can legally be held and consequently the only record of the child's name may be on the certificate issued after the service of naming. The child is referred to by name wherever possible throughout these liturgies, often with the adjective 'little' attached. Perhaps because of the precisely limited purpose of the services, words which in other contexts might look sentimental are able to carry the dignity of pastoral attentiveness. Although it is invidious to quote selectively, these two prayers from the Service of Naming give some sense of the tone, balancing between the formal and the personal, the affective and the universal claims of Christian hope, that this material achieves:

> God of wisdom and all compassion,
> you love all that you have created.
> In the midst of our many questions and our lack of understanding
> we believe that little [*name*] is in your presence.
> We pray for the courage and strength to say "good-bye"
> before we had the opportunity to say "hello."
> We entrust … to your love and nurture forever.
> Help us to endure and wait for the day when we will be re-united after we too obtain the fullness of your promises in the age to come,
> through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
>
> *or*
>
> O God, creator of us all,
> give us the grace to honour and remember our baby N. ….
> Let our love for him/her show forth in our lives.
> Sustain our trust in your unfailing love
> for him/her and for all children, born and unborn,
> who rest in the sacred mystery of your love.
> May we know your comforting presence
> as we gather our strength to go forth from this moment into our lives.
> This we ask through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

These rites have the authority of pastoral encounter, growing out of the ministry of parish clergy and hospital chaplains who have listened carefully to bereaved parents in the course of drafting texts. That they

have been taken up by other ecclesial communities in and beyond Ireland suggests that they directly confront a need which is more easily addressed when a properly formed liturgical response – yet one that convincingly speaks in a personal voice – is available.[21]

This small selection of 'official' responses from Churches to crises and injustices, as well as to less sensational yet important matters – like being able to understand the words of public prayer – could be grouped provisionally under the heading of ecclesiastical problems seeking liturgical solutions. I venture that suggestion, because in each case, the impetus towards producing new material originates outside the strict forum of prayer books and the bodies (synods, bishops' conferences, liturgical committees) which normally decide when they should be revised. The additional collects point beyond mere impatience with a somewhat archaic style of prayer, to greater disengagement from Anglican identity associated with archetypal forms. The alternative baptismal texts make it possible for parents and sponsors to enter into serious promises and commitments usually made in the light of weighty statements about the ever-present threat of evil and sin, by framing them in the language of straying, seeking and welcoming. The safeguarding prayers record an attempt to address systemic wickedness and failure, against which more immediate measures than additional liturgical provision were needed. The material for miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death recognises personhood, and breaks a wider social silence that might settle around acute loss.

Towards Better Liturgy: How Do We Recognise It? What Do We Want It to Do?

Liturgical composition tends to evoke strong feelings at all levels. The media's reception of additional Church of England baptismal material has already been mentioned,[22] but there are other examples of a more forensic style of critique from liturgists and literary scholars and periods of revision on a large scale tend to encourage them.[23] Eric Milner-White's comments in a short study of the Occasional Prayers in the 1928 Prayer Book, which should have answered the need

[21] No statistics have been collected, but the healthcare chaplain who steered the project has received a good deal of correspondence from users of the resources in Ireland and further afield.

[22] See note 13 above.

[23] F.E. Brightman's excoriating remarks on the Prayer Book as Proposed in 1927 are a striking example. See 'The New Prayer Book Examined' *Church Quarterly Review* 104 (1927), pp. 219-252.

identified by a Royal Commission report in 1906 for much wider provision for the worship of the Church of England, are stern, but they operate at a level of precision that helps to form a clear picture of a prevailing idea of Anglican excellence c.1930. His introduction acknowledges that language usage in the first part of the 20th century had shifted away from 16th- and 17th-century practice:

> We are shy of ornament, we require a barer simplicity of construction than that employed by the free daring of a younger English. There are classes of words and phrases the use of which, despite Biblical precedent, merely apes the seventeenth-century tone – e.g., *thereof* and *therein* and the like; *sanctify*, *perfecting of the elect*, *enlightened with knowledge*, to take examples from new things in the 1928 Book. They stand in the same relation to the old Prayer Book as an undistinguished Gothic Revival church does to Salisbury Cathedral. Cold, stiff, ecclesiastical (in the bad sense), devotionally dead. To these is due the inferiority of the new prayers.[24]

Although Milner-White regards the newly composed prayers as poetically poor, his most serious criticism is that they 'reveal the greater wrong of poverty of ideas'. He cites 'the repetition of the same request in new prayer after new prayer', pointing out that an apparent obsession with 'praying against danger and temptation. Thus, for missionaries, "*defend them in all dangers and temptations*"; for industrial workers, "*shielded in all their temptations and dangers*"; for seafarers (where danger, indeed, must be stressed), "*preserve them both in body and soul: in all time of danger*".' He concludes that the 'cycle of expression in which the new prayers move' is a narrow one.[25]

Taste in styles of prayer has continued to change, and while clumsy composition and poverty of ideas have not vanished entirely, the points of critical reference have also changed. Liturgical scholars and others were once confident about expressing criticism and admiration of forms of public prayer, because they inhabited a world where literary culture and prayer book culture, and their respective standards of excellence, overlapped. But the voices have become progressively more reticent. Perhaps the late Colin Buchanan was the last person who regularly published opinions on the quality of new texts, and was quick to make fun of the kinds of prayers that skirted

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[24] Eric Milner-White, *The Occasional Prayers of the 1928 Book Reconsidered* (London: SPCK, 1930), pp. vii-viii.

[25] Milner-White, p. viii.

around issues or took refuge in what he perceived as circuitous or affected language.[26]

Liturgical criteria are now an increasingly delicate subject. Partly, that has to do with reluctance to make literary and stylistic judgements, especially when prayers relate to topics like climate change, the protection of the environment, or abuse. It would take considerable assurance to point out flaws, and considerable tact to suggest improvements, if the texts contained verbatim material from indigenous people in threatened environments, or testimony from survivors of abuse. Partly, though arguably less consciously, it has to do with a surrounding literary culture. Determining what makes a good poem or a good novel may not necessarily involve conventional stylistic elegance or regular rhythm. Often it is spare, minimalist writing, and explorations of intense and raw human experience in societies disrupted by war, climate change, migration, extremes of wealth and poverty, and organised crime that earn the praise of reviewers and win literary prizes.[27] Even if the current situation were less complex, the worlds of churchgoing and literary experience have drifted too far apart to judge one by the standards of the other.

Yet there may be clues in the drifting itself to guide efforts to produce liturgy that is the best of its kind, for the people who will use it, and for the times it will interpret. Words have never been the only consideration, but their inevitable dominance in assessments of liturgical provision based mainly on texts is now properly challenged by the claims of context, experience and identity. Rowan Williams has written of liturgical action as something that involves human beings in a material environment and demands new attitudes and approaches:

> . . . the service given to the Church of the future by committed liturgists and liturgiologists is not simply about liturgical scholarship in its narrower sense, but about the revitalization of

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[26] Colin Buchanan's *News of Liturgy* bulletin ran from 1975-2003 and often commented robustly on the liturgical scene in the Church of England. The whole archive is now available online: https://grovebooks.co.uk/news-of-liturgy/#:~:text=News%20of%20Liturgy%20was%20a,was%20edited%20by%20Colin%20Buchanan.
James Steven has written about the style of the bulletin in a paper included in collection of Buchanan's writings: 'Twenty-Nine Years of News of Liturgy: the late twentieth-century liturgical blog (1975-2003)' in Colin Buchanan, *An Evangelical Among the Anglican Liturgists* (London: SPCK, 2009), pp. 169-180.

[27] This is well illustrated by Elizabeth S. Dodd, whose study of the English lyric celebrates the voices of poets such as Blake, Keats and Geoffrey Hill, as well as rap artists: *The Lyric Voice in English Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2023).

> that liturgical theology which understands liturgy as the transformation of the time-taking body within the material world.'[28]

This has many implications, some of them already under discussion in initiatives to revise liturgical rites and provide new material to meet new needs: that bodies and their sensory capacity matter; that human worshippers share a world with other creatures and are shaped by it; and that the physical environment of worship is significant. Above all, it expresses a sense of liturgical formation that is not about what is *done to* people who participate in liturgy, but about liturgy that allows room to foster the relationships and discoveries that allow human beings to become fully themselves.

Alongside developing a concern for the material in time, liturgical provision needs to be able to talk about a transcendent dimension that remains profoundly earthed. Don Saliers in his foreword to a recent *Companion to Liturgical Theology* describes the ongoing endeavour, and perhaps the risk-taking which continues to be part of his engagement in liturgy, after a long professional career:

> As a pastor, musician, and teacher of theology, I confess to living simultaneously in several cultural worlds. At times these are never fully congruent with one another. This is the glory and the travail of doing serious liturgical work. My question, inherited from the likes of Alexander Schmemann, Johannes Metz, and Geoffrey Wainwright, remains: Can the eschatological promises and the kenotic beauty of faithful liturgy reach into all our human habitations? Can our prayers and our music and our fidelity to God enact what has been promised in scripture and tradition? Can the poetry and prophecy of shared liturgical life contain the 'deep down things' the poet Hopkins sang about? In my own work I continually confront the permanent tension between the 'is' of the world and 'ought to be' of God-with-us.[29]

The challenge to the power of prayer and music, poetry and prophecy uttered in the act of worship is striking, and hints at the possibility that they might not be up to the job of '[enacting] what has been promised

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[28] Rowan Williams, 'Introduction' to *God's Transforming Work: Celebrating Ten Years of Common Worship* (London: SPCK, 2011), pp. 1-13, p. 11.

[29] Don Saliers, 'Foreword' to *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Liturgical Theology*, ed. Porter C. Taylor and Khalia J. Williams (Hoboken, NJ & Bognor Regis, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2025), pp. xiv-xv.

in scripture and tradition'. Against that, the repurposing of a phrase from Gerard Manley Hopkins's sonnet, 'God's Grandeur', is an encouragement not to stop seeking the inexhaustible creativity and novelty of God-in-the-world.[30] Where the poet spoke of the 'dearest freshness' that lived 'deep down things', despite the trampling of the world by generations oblivious to the fact that it is 'charged with the grandeur of God', Saliers directs us to strive for profound possession of the hopes and promises framed in the words of the liturgy. Describing them as 'deep down things' seems curiously apt. The invitation to imagine beyond the limits of human life, by seeking its deepest significance, becomes the way to live human life as fully as possible.

The worship of the Church, in the broadest sense, must be judged by its pastoral, formational and imaginative commitment to offer those who participate the means to take time, to take hold of promises, and to live. How to do that is an ongoing question, and the fact that it concerns a living practice is both daunting and optimistic. On the one hand, there will not be tidy solutions. On the other hand, some of the necessary assistance is already present when the assembly gathers – as John Barton demonstrates in describing the encounter with Scripture in liturgy. He is frank in assessing contemporary practice: 'There is plenty of bad liturgy, plenty of complacent and uncritical use of the Bible, plenty that goes on in our churches to make the critical theologian despair'. But he continues:

> liturgy is not really the natural ally of the obscurantist. That is to misunderstand it as inherently what it sometimes becomes in practice, a self-indulgent repetition of meaningless rituals. Good liturgy is the natural ally of a hermeneutic that is alive both to the original sense of texts and to the modern context in which they are being appropriated, and can fuse the two creatively. Good liturgy does not merely comfort, but also hurts, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually.[31]

This is a picture of experience. It can only be known when it happens, when the familiar becomes strange, when a sudden convergence

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[30] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and prose* selected and edited by W.H. Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953, repr. 1981), p. 27. Also available through the Poetry Foundation at https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44395/gods-grandeur. Accessed 11.9.2025.

[31] John Barton, *People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* 3rd edn (London: SPCK, 2011), p. 77.

brings sharp understanding, when all defences against the probing power of word and action break down. If it were the aspiration of the top-down providers of liturgy, and the expectation of the bottom-up participants, there would be much to celebrate.

Liturgy as Experience

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Introduction

What is the future of liturgy? What makes a 'good' liturgy? These are pertinent questions for churches to consider, including the Scottish Episcopal Church. Despite, or perhaps because of, their importance, they are not easy questions to answer. In working towards a valuable response, I found myself asking a different question: what is a constructive approach to these questions? The first step, it seems to me, is to acknowledge that any answer will be coloured by the background of the person offering a response, including their biases and experiences. I found that this may in fact hold the key to approaching these challenging questions: the significance of experience. In this paper, I hope to show the deeply experiential nature of liturgy. Just as we can't answer 'what is a good liturgy' without being influenced by our experiences, neither can we truly *understand* liturgy without reference to experience of it (whether our own or another's).

This paper therefore makes the case for recognising liturgy as experience. This is done primarily through engagement with the work of key female liturgical studies scholars. As a feminist theologian, I turn to these particular scholars to highlight female voices making significant contributions to liturgical studies. There is also a review of the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) context, examining documents produced by the Liturgy and Doctrine Committees of the SEC. The liturgical studies scholarship and SEC papers are studied through the lens of five existentials of experience, described below. The regular appearance of these existentials in both fields builds the case for understanding liturgy as experience. By establishing the experiential nature of liturgy, this paper offers a secure foundation from which to approach the questions posed at the start: what makes a good liturgy and what is the future of liturgy.

The Existentials

Phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Max van Manen assert that there are four 'lifeworld existentials', or themes, of experience: '*lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived*

time (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality).'[1] According to van Manen these existentials are fundamental and 'probably pervade the lifeworlds of all human beings, regardless of their historical, cultural or social situatedness.'[2] During the course of my research, a fifth existential emerged: *lived faith* (spirituality). Although van Manen's theme of lived relation briefly mentions relation to a divine, in the context of liturgy, this aspect of human experience demanded attention as an existential in its own right.

It is not possible to offer an in-depth explanation of the existentials here. However, it is important to understand that the existentials represent subjective experience. For example, lived time refers to a personal experience of time, such as whether an event *feels* long or short, rather than to the clock time that passes. This paper accepts van Manen's proposal that his four existentials 'belong to the existential ground by way of which all human beings experience the world'.[3] With the addition of lived faith, therefore, the five existentials provide productive lenses through which to consider the experiential nature of liturgy.

Liturgical Studies

This section offers a snapshot of liturgical studies from the 1990s through to the 2020s. The key scholars I have engaged with are female. This is a deliberate selection, as indicated in the introduction, as part of my commitment to highlight the valuable contributions to theology from female voices. With the exception of Judith M. Kubicki and Teresa Berger, I have also sought to centre Anglican scholarship, for the closest ties with the SEC context. For simplicity, I engage with the authors' work in chronological order of publication.

Marjorie Procter-Smith wrote *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition* as a contribution to the feminist liturgical movement in the 1990s. This volume constitutes one of the foremost examples of feminist engagement with liturgical studies.[4]

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[1] Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, 2nd edn (New York: The Althouse Press, 1997), pp. 102, 101.
[2] van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience,* 2nd ed., p. 101.
[3] van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience,* 2nd ed., p. 102.
[4] See also: Marjorie Procter-Smith, *Praying with Our Eyes Open: Engendering Feminist Liturgical Prayer* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995); Janet H. Wootton, *Introducing a Practical Feminist Theology of Worship* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Gail Ramshaw, *Liturgical Language: Keeping It*

Although the majority of *In Her Own Rite* focuses on vital discussions of liturgy from a critical feminist perspective, Procter-Smith is mindful that any such evaluation of liturgy must be built on a solid concept of the function of liturgy. It is Procter-Smith's concept of the function of liturgy that will be the focus of this discussion

In describing areas of agreement between the liturgical movement and the feminist movement, as she sees them, Procter-Smith provides a description of her understanding of liturgy:

> Common ground lies, I am persuaded, in three areas: first, the conviction that liturgy is constitutive of a community's identity as well as its faith, and therefore must be the people's work in reality; second, that for a liturgical event to be the people's work in reality it must take seriously the daily lives of those people in social context; third, the conviction that liturgy is more than words and must be embodied in gesture, movement, and attentiveness to physical space.[5]

For Procter-Smith, liturgy defines identity as much as faith, and the wider context of those involved must be taken into consideration. Liturgy, Procter-Smith suggests, is also an embodied action which requires attention to the physical space. In this account of liturgy, Procter-Smith speaks directly to all five of the existentials. There are clear connections in her discussion to the lived faith, lived body, and lived space existentials. The lived time and lived relation existentials fall under the consideration of the daily lives of those people in social context. If we accept that the existentials are representative of the fundamentals of experience, Procter-Smith's concept of the function of liturgy is grounded in its experiential nature.

Procter-Smith focuses on two specific aspects of liturgy which she describes as 'foundational to [Christian] liturgical events': 'memory and imagination.'[6] Procter-Smith approaches liturgical memory through the term *anamnesis*. Without offering a direct translation of *anamnesis*, Procter-Smith describes how Christian *anamnesis* relates to '[t]he Hebrew concept of "memorial" or

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Metaphoric, Making It Inclusive, American Essays in Liturgy (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996); Teresa Berger, *Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History: Lifting a Veil on Liturgy's Past* (Farnham & Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

[5] Marjorie Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), p. 30.

[6] Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite*, p. 10.

"remembrance".'[7] For Procter-Smith, *anamnesis* 'has its locus in liturgical action':

> Liturgical anamnesis involves not only remembering with the mind but also remembering with the body (individual and collective). More than the repetition of words, liturgical anamnesis involves the use of the body in gesture and movement. This characteristic reminds us of divine activity embodied in history, the Word made flesh. It also brings, experientially and dramatically, divine activity into the present, not only in time but in space. The human body and human community then are seen as the locus for this activity.[8]

Procter-Smith's discussion of *anamnesis* fully resonates with the existentials of experience. Once again all five of the existentials can be found, with lived body, lived time, and lived space located easily and less direct reference to both lived relation (human community) and lived faith (divine activity). At each turn thus far, Procter-Smith's understanding of liturgy appears to be thoroughly experiential.

Turning to imagination, Procter-Smith understands liturgy as 'a deeply imaginative act'.[9] Approaching liturgy and liturgical acts as imaginative is a way to release liturgical experiences from a more dogmatic reading:

> Our ability to perceive these realities is often named "faith," but faith has also come to mean adherence to certain prescribed rational doctrines rationally apprehended. By using the term "imagination" to describe our participation in the reality presented in the liturgy, we are free to move beyond the discursive mode.[10]

Further to this, Procter-Smith continues:

> Imagination … makes possible a sense of paradox and multivalence which is necessary for authentic liturgical celebration; that is to say, it makes symbols possible. It keeps liturgical forms and symbols flexible; that is, it allows liturgy to be the work of the Spirit. And it brings together the verbal, the

[7] Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite*, p. 41.
[8] Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite*, p. 41.
[9] Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite*, p. 54.
[10] Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite*, p. 54.

> physical, and the emotional life of worshipers in a common vision; that is, it makes community possible.'[11]

By bringing imagination into the frame, Procter-Smith draws the whole experience of liturgy together. Liturgy is more than the faith, or beliefs, expressed, and it is not a static notion. Liturgy should be flexible enough to allow the Spirit to act; the Spirit does not stand still. Liturgy is more than simply a text; it involves all of the existentials of experience. For Procter-Smith, imagination is key to capturing this experiential nature of liturgy.

Jumping forward from Procter-Smith's 1995 study, we come to Judith M. Kubicki's *The Presence of Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, published in 2006. *The Presence of Christ* offers a valuable stepping stone to liturgical scholarship produced in the 2010s. In Kubicki's own framing, her approach continues a turn in sacramental theology which developed in the latter part of the twentieth century. Kubicki references key scholars Edward Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner as part of this turn in sacramental theology. According to Kubicki, the turn moved 'the former abstract discussions of principles regarding the sacraments, [giving] way to a new focus on the liturgical action itself.'[12] This shift in sacramental theology saw experience come into focus. Kubicki asserts that Schillebeeckx and Rahner, along with others who followed in their footsteps,

> opened the field of inquiry concerning sacramental liturgy to the profound range and depth of human experience, including those embodied, symbolic ways in which we meet God through our relating with one another.[13]

These scholars began a move toward greater recognition of an essential aspect of liturgy: experience.

Kubicki carries on this experiential approach in her study of sacramental theology. She 'considers how the human experience of gathering for worship provides the liturgical assembly with the possibility of perceiving Christ's presence in its midst.'[14] Informative for this article is Kubicki's focus on 'symbolizing activity' within the experience of liturgy. The symbols Kubicki investigates include

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[11] Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite*, p. 55.

[12] Judith M. Kubicki, *The Presence of Christ in the Gathered Assembly* (London & New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2006), p. 3 Kubicki writes from a Roman Catholic liturgical context.

[13] Kubicki, *Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, p. 3.

[14] Kubicki, *Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, p. 3.

'architecture, gestures and postures'.[15] She also finds that 'symbols negotiate identity and relationships'.[16] Kubicki considers these symbols as 'critical' to 'the Church's responsibility to celebrate the liturgy well.'[17] Although using different terminology, she argues for the importance of the existentials in understanding how to conduct a good liturgy. At this stage in her theologising on symbols and symbolising activity, Kubicki engages with lived space, lived body, lived relation, and lived faith. This is seen through the references to architecture and gestures and postures which draw on lived space and lived body whilst her discussion of relationships and identity concern experiences of lived relation and lived faith.

Despite a prominence of body and space in Kubicki's work thus far, she finds 'that, in so many ways, the liturgy is more time-centered than space-centered.'[18] She expands on this:

> Because Christianity believes that God is active in human history, the dimension of time permeates all aspects of the Christian assembly's liturgical prayer … [The] Eucharist, with its anamnetic and eschatological character, is deeply rooted in the temporal dimension.[19]

Not only is time central to liturgy in an overtly theological manner, as suggested by the above, but Kubicki also finds the *experience* of liturgically lived time fundamental:

> [Patricia Rumsey] is speaking of time as sacramental. This is, in fact, time's key role in the liturgy. When the assembly gathers for liturgical prayer they are, in one sense, disengaging from measured time (*chronos*) … and entering into an experience of eternity manifested in the present moment (*kairos*).[20]

Building on the work of Rumsey, Kubicki distinguishes between clock time and the subjective time experienced in liturgy. Time plays a particular role in liturgy, both through theological concepts such as anamnesis and eschatology, but also in the lived time experience of the assembly who gathers. For Kubicki, it is the *lived* time which is

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[15] Kubicki, *Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, p. 3.
[16] Kubicki, *Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, p. 3.
[17] Kubicki, *Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, p. 7.
[18] Kubicki, *Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, p. 104.
[19] Kubicki, *Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, p. 104.
[20] Kubicki, *Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, p. 111; with reference to: Patricia M. Rumsey, 'The Different Concepts of Sacred Time Underlying the Liturgy of the Hours', *Worship*, 78 (2004), pp. 290–95.

'time's key role in the liturgy.' The experience of time in the liturgy is essential.

As suggested by Kubicki's work, time plays a particular role in liturgical theology. I offer a brief interruption of our chronological study to consider liturgical time in more detail. Joris Geldhof describes the significance of time for liturgy:

> when one uses the concept "Church," it is not just the institution which is implied, but always and necessarily both the assembly of the faithful (*congregation fidelium*) and the communion of saints (*communio sanctorum*). The liturgy is celebrated by those people who are gathered by God at a certain time and place and who have, in doing so, been put in conjunction with the universal Church. The universality of this community has to be understood in a geographical as well as temporal sense: it crosses through the times and spaces with which we are familiar.[21]

Celebrations of the liturgy are understood to include the entirety of the church, all those present and all those who have gone before. This is made particularly clear in the introduction to the Sanctus & Benedictus, taken from Eucharistic Prayer I in the 2022 revision of the *Scottish Liturgy 1982*:

> we offer you our praise,
> with angels and archangels
> and the whole company of heaven
> singing the hymn of your unending glory[22]

An alternative is offered in Eucharistic Prayer VII: 'One day we will be with you in heaven, but already we laugh with the saints and angels, and sing their joyful song.'[23] Both versions refer to a wider community – often described as the 'communion of saints', as depicted by Geldhof above. These introductory prayers emphasise the theological notion that members of the church from across time

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[21] Joris Geldhof, 'Liturgical Theology', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, March 2015), p. 2, doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.14.

[22] Scottish Episcopal Church, *Scottish Liturgy 1982 (Revised 2022) with Alternative Eucharistic Prayers*, 2022, p. 8. Scottish Liturgy 1982 with Alternative Eucharistic Prayers - The Scottish Episcopal Church.

[23] SEC, 'Scottish Liturgy 1982, (2022)', p. 26.

join with the celebrations of the present.[24] This drawing together across time is an important element of liturgical theology.

The concept of liturgical time encompasses more than the time of individual liturgical events. The liturgical seasons are another important feature of liturgical time. Benjamin Gordon-Taylor discusses the significance of the seasons for the church. By connecting the church year to the culture around it, the seasons represent the 'Christian conviction that God shares the life of humanity.'[25] Beyond this, Gordon-Taylor argues:

> The sacramental action of God is upon the whole of creation, and the activity of God is disclosed not merely in Christian cultic settings but also in what Karl Rahner attractively calls "the liturgy of the world", with which the liturgy of the Church is inextricably and deliberately linked.[26]

The liturgical seasons act as a reminder to worshippers of the presence of God in their daily lives, beyond the Sunday service. Embracing Rahner's 'liturgy of the world', the liturgical seasons bring the experience of liturgically lived time out of the church building into the surrounding culture.

Returning to the chronological discussion, Teresa Berger's *Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History: Lifting a Veil on Liturgy's Past* (2011), offers a feminist historical approach to the significance of liturgical experiences as embodied. Berger looks at historical liturgical practice through the lens of gender – which pointedly considers genders beyond the traditional male-female binary.[27] Berger calls attention to shifts in historical analysis that led to a broader understanding of liturgy, beyond the texts:

> [l]iturgy's past is no longer understood as accessible primarily through the study of liturgical texts. Instead, there has been a deepened appreciation of liturgy as a multi-textured practice, in which not only words but also space, images, acoustics, material culture, bodies, voices, and instruments play a role.

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[24] For more on the Sanctus and its particular role in liturgical lived time, see, for example: Bryan D. Spinks, *The Sanctus in the Eucharistic Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[25] Benjamin Gordon-Taylor, 'Time', in *The Study of Liturgy and Worship: An Alcuin Guide*, ed. by Juliette Day and Benjamin Gordon-Taylor (London: SPCK, 2013), pp. 113–22, p. 118.

[26] Gordon-Taylor, 'Time', p. 118.

[27] Berger, *Gender Differences*, p. xiii.

> Writing a history of worship thus involves the study of practices rather than an analysis of liturgical texts only.[28]

In recent decades liturgical studies have engaged more deeply with the non-textual elements of liturgical experience. Despite this seemingly contemporary trend, Berger insists that '[e]ven the most traditional liturgical historiography, with its keen focus on official texts, ultimately sought to be not a history of texts alone, but a history of liturgical life. Official liturgical texts simply seemed the best way to enter the worship life of the past.'[29] Berger's particular approach to the study of historical liturgy enables her to move the balance away from texts alone:

> Once liturgical history is read as (also) a history of gender differences, an image of liturgy's past emerges that is somewhat at variance with previous histories. The emphasis shifts to lived liturgical life, to every gendered body present or absent from the gathered assembly, to bodily propriety, posture, and place, to gendered embodiment and liturgical role, and to liturgy as part of a larger world whose particular gender arrangements influence, shape, conflict with, or control what takes place in the sanctuary.

By focusing on the presence of gendered people at liturgical enactments, Berger's study encompasses a wide spectrum of the existentials. Central to Berger's consideration here is lived body. However, her description of the influence of societal gender arrangements also draws on the experience of lived relation.

In her study of the history of liturgy, Berger finds that one significant change in practice came in the third century: 'material evidence emerges of Christians modifying household spaces not as temporary sacred spaces but as spaces permanently set apart, in the house, for worship … [bringing] a clearer separation between domestic and sanctuary space, which until then had been performed by time set apart, rather than as space set apart.'[30] Worship was made distinct from domestic life by either particular time or space. In both scenarios, the lived time and live space existentials would have been affected. The liturgy was marked as sacred, at least in part, by how it was experienced through these existentials.

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[28] Berger, *Gender Differences*, p. 15.
[29] Berger, *Gender Differences*, p. 161.
[30] Berger, *Gender Differences*, p. 50.

Lived faith becomes the focus in Berger's discussion of what she describes as 'a shorthand version of a Patristic axiom, *lex orandi, lex credendi*' which can be translated variously as: '[t]he law of praying is the law of believing. Or, worship shapes faith. Or, as you pray, so you believe.'[31] This axiom began to have influence, Berger explains, 'during the second half of the twentieth century [when] theologians from quite different ecclesial traditions began to reclaim liturgy as a fundamental site for understanding and interpreting the Christian faith.'[32] Considering the *lex orandi* from her particular scholarly perspective, Berger finds the recourse to liturgy and liturgical tradition as a place of theology problematic. Berger's issue is not with the idea of looking at liturgy for theology in and of itself, but the manner in which those theological conversations are conducted: 'Theologians who base their appeal to liturgical tradition on a (seemingly) genderless history cannot help but reproduce the weaknesses and misrepresentations of this problematic construal of the past.'[33]

Theological thought which is influenced by historical tradition (and an argument could certainly be made that *all* theological thought is in some respect influenced by historical tradition), must bear in mind that historical tradition is not without fault. Berger does not wish to reject the idea of the *lex orandi* outright. She finds that 'with recent work on a theology of tradition, understood as a set of practices rather than a list of presuppositions to be repeated, liturgy is a key site for this construal of tradition.'[34] Despite her reservations of the *lex orandi*, Berger finds that if liturgy is recognised as something more than simply a set of texts, it may be one of the central locations for understanding the Christian faith, and therefore theology. In Berger's work, the significance of the lived body experience of liturgy speaks for itself.

Juliette Day's *Reading the Liturgy: An Exploration of Texts in Christian Worship* (2014) might not, at first glance, seem an obvious choice in a discussion about liturgy as experience. Berger's work has confirmed liturgy as more than a set of texts. However, the significance of engagement with the texts during a liturgical event cannot be denied. As such, the words certainly play a role in the

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[31] Berger, *Gender Differences*, p. 168.
[32] Berger, *Gender Differences*, p. 168.
[33] Berger, *Gender Differences*, p. 168.
[34] Berger, *Gender Differences*, pp. 169–70.

experience of liturgy. Day's description below draws attention to liturgically lived faith:

> Liturgical texts are composed on the basis of theological presuppositions about God, about humanity, about the ordering of creation, about the relationship between people, and between people and God. Exclamations like "Lord have mercy" are not just requests made in hope and are not commands, but are pre-filled requests made in the knowledge of a merciful God derived from promises in the gospels and validated by the experience of worshippers or the community.[35]

The texts used in liturgy hold within them beliefs, and as the texts are used liturgically, they *are* the lived faith of those who read them. As Day explains, '[l]iturgical language is not just about God, but it is addressed to God and brings those who use it into the presence of God such that God may speak through the liturgy.'[36] Liturgical texts not only present beliefs (in the manner of the *lex orandi*), but also play a role in the experience of God. As well as being vital to the worshippers' experience of God in liturgical events, Day says of liturgical language: '[t]he language we use in public prayer, enables us to a variable extent, to articulate our experience of God; it provides us with vocabulary for "God-talk".'[37] This interpretation resonates with the *lex orandi* understanding of liturgy. The liturgical language provides the vocabulary for worshippers to speak of their faith. In this manner, the lived faith of worshippers is shaped by the texts of the liturgy.

One avenue through which Day explores liturgical texts is as a particular form of J. L. Austin's 'speech-acts'. According to Austin, 'speech-acts', or instances of the spoken word, fall into three 'families': 'the locutionary act … which has a *meaning*; the illocutionary act which has a certain *force* in saying something; the perlocutionary act which is *the achieving of* certain *effects* by saying something.'[38] It is the illocutionary act which interests Day, the 'force' of such acts, as the performance of words:

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[35] Juliette Day, *Reading the Liturgy: An Exploration of Texts in Christian Worship* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), p. 106.
[36] Day, *Reading the Liturgy*, p. 106.
[37] Day, *Reading the Liturgy*, p. 106.
[38] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 121, 150.

> These illocutionary acts presuppose certain attitudes between the speaker(s) and the addressee – trust, veneration, gratitude – which come into effect at the very moment when they are spoken. The use of "performative" is significant, the liturgical words do not describe an action or an attitude, but constitute the action itself.[39]

Understanding liturgical texts, or words, as illocutionary suggests a distinct, active relationship between the liturgy and the lived faith of those who take part in the liturgy. The liturgical texts *become* the lived faith of worshippers as they are performed. In describing the work of Jean 'Ladrière, Day turns the focus to experience of lived relation in the liturgy: '[he] noted that the effect of liturgical language as "an institution" disposes souls to welcome that which it suggests and thereby institutes a community. When "we" is used in liturgical text it brings into existence a community which did not exist before it was uttered.'[40] Day, through Ladrière, suggests that the liturgical event *is* an experience of lived relation. When the congregation utter 'we' as directed by the texts, they experience a liturgical relationship with each other, becoming a community. It may seem obvious that the liturgical community would not exist without the liturgy. However, it is worth reflecting on in order to show the impact of the performance of the words. The experience of lived relation is directly affected by the liturgical words.

Despite her clear focus on texts, Day also references 'the ritual context' which 'facilitat[es] meaning-making' and is made up of 'physical movement and gesture, the space, music, etc. [which] combine with the text to produce the realities of which the text speaks'.[41] Even within a study of liturgical texts, the lived body and lived space existentials are implicitly mentioned. Day's *Reading the Liturgy* has drawn attention not only to the experience of lived faith, but also to three other existentials: lived relation, lived space, and lived body. Liturgy, even when studied through a textual lens, appears to be fundamentally experiential.

Cally Hammond published *The Sound of Liturgy: How Words Work in Worship* in 2015, just a year after Day's *Reading the Liturgy*. While in some respect both scholars concentrate on the text,

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[39] Day, *Reading the Liturgy*, p. 107.
[40] Day, *Reading the Liturgy*, p. 108.
[41] Day, *Reading the Liturgy*, p. 146.

Hammond's focus on *words*, emphasises the embodied nature of liturgy. Accordingly, Chapter 1 of Hammond's work is 'Posture'; Hammond explains that posture, 'which is shorthand for the disposition of the body in public prayer works as the foundation on which the sounds proper to good liturgy are built.'[42] A good liturgy depends upon the sounds, the spoken words, according to Hammond. Such sounds necessarily require 'physical objects and entities for [their] creation, existence and perception.'[43] Hammond's exploration of liturgical posture highlights the importance of the lived body in liturgy.

Although approaching the topic from a different angle than Day, Hammond also discusses the importance of performance for liturgy:

> [t]he whole of Scripture, like the fixed parts of the eucharistic liturgy, was composed or formed in a context of spoken "performance", rather than silent reading. This matters here because, just as in the case of Scripture, so too in the case of liturgy, the meaning of the text subsists most clearly in its *performance* – and that not as a one-off event but as an anaphora, an event repeated, over and over, according to pattern and custom.[44]

Hammond identifies performance as the conduit for meaning of the text, a finding that resonates with Day's liturgical illocutionary acts. Both scholars studied liturgical text and found that the performative action is what gives the liturgy meaning. The performing body, therefore, enables the experience of faith in the liturgy. Hammond's work shows that the experience of lived faith in the liturgy requires the lived body.

The liturgical text also gains meaning through its repetition, according to Hammond. Her argument is two-pronged: first, '[t]he repetitive nature of the liturgy provides enough predictability and sameness to allow congregants to feel "safe" letting go of the relentless practical, everyday activity of their minds and bodies; and second, 'repetition is everything to do with the inculcation of meaning … In church, repetition is the key to absorbing the "fact" of God.'[45] Through repetition of its words and actions, the liturgy

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[42] Cally Hammond, *The Sound of the Liturgy: How Words Work in Worship* (London: SPCK, 2015), p. 5.
[43] Hammond, *Sound of the Liturgy*, p. 53.
[44] Hammond, *Sound of the Liturgy*, p. 67.
[45] Hammond, *Sound of the Liturgy*, pp. 67, 67–68.

becomes familiar in the minds and bodies of worshippers. Hammond finds that this familiarity allows for worshippers to experience a calmness of mind and body. In this calmness then, the words of the liturgy, through their repetitive performance, become integrated into the congregants' experience and knowledge of God. Hammond's argument for the importance of repetition again highlights the lived body and lived faith experiences in liturgical events.

Nicola Slee, in her *Fragments for Fractured Times: What Feminist Practical Theology Brings to the Table* (2020), approaches liturgy and prayer through a predictable feminist, practical lens. Without explicit reference to the concept, Slee's reflections on prayer resonate with the *lex orandi*:

> To put it simply, it matters how we talk about and to God, in public worship and in personal prayer; how we depict or narrate or gesture towards God in verbal, visual, spatial and physical discourse. Prayer is a fundamental ecclesial practice which both forms and reflects the thinking and behaviour of the church as well as the life of the individual believer.[46]

It is to be expected – or hoped, at the very least – that prayer, including prayer of a public, liturgical nature, has an impact on the beliefs, and therefore lived faith, of those who pray. In discussing this connection, Slee emphasises the importance of how God is framed in prayer, but not only the words used; she refers to the impact of a whole range of lived experiences: verbal, visual, spatial, and physical. The lived faith of worshippers, shaped by the liturgy, is tied up in their lived body and lived space experiences.

Despite the hope of a connection between prayer and pray-er, Slee draws attention to the complex situation: '[o]ne of the reasons why the relationship between prayer and … the individual is not a straightforward one is because the relationship is always working within the wider dynamic of ecclesial and social reality'.[47] All praying happens in a wider context 'which may contradict as well as confirm, the experiences and longings of the individual.'[48] This influential context includes the lived relation experiences of worshippers, both in and out of church. The wider world offers a plethora of potential contradictions, and confirmations, to experiences of liturgy, and these experiences have an impact on the liturgically lived faith.

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[46] Nicola Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times: What Feminist Practical Theology Brings to the Table* (London: SCM Press, 2020), p. 48.
[47] Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times*, p. 48.
[48] Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times*, p. 48.

In a chapter which turns specifically to liturgy, Slee focuses on liturgical space:

> If people of faith are formed by their embodied practices as much as, if not more than, by teaching and doctrine, and if public prayer and ritual represent one major form of such embodied practice, then paying attention to the formational aspects of space is a vital task for liturgical studies as well as for practical theology.[49]

Slee's attention is firmly on the significance of the lived body and lived space experiences of liturgy. She critiques the 'hierarchical, phallic and dominating architecture of church buildings' suggesting that such spaces 'are hardly subtle symbols of male potency, pride and will to control.'[50] Although not all churches are built in this patriarchal fashion, Slee draws attention to the lived space existential and its importance for liturgical events. Is it possible to walk into a space with the intention of worship and not be impacted by the surroundings, positively or negatively?

Building on the work of Procter-Smith, Slee highlights a key point:

> It is necessary … to consider the ways in which the various forms of discourse – verbal, visual, spatial and potentially others (aural is one discourse Procter-Smith does not consider) – interact. Do they support and reinforce each other, or are they in conflict and contradiction?[51]

Slee illustrates the significance of the different existentials of experience and their interactions with one another. Such evidence of the existentials in liturgical events reinforces liturgy as deeply experiential. Not only that, but the existentials offer a guide for reflecting on the whole of the liturgical experience.

Scottish Episcopal Context

Bishop Mark Strange, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, writes that 'the Church must constantly be attentive to the Liturgy and the manner and forms in which it is celebrated'.[52]

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[49] Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times*, p. 60.
[50] Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times*, p. 64.
[51] Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times*, p. 62.
[52] Mark Strange, 'Preface on Behalf of the College of Bishops', *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* 3.4 (2019), p. 5.

One natural starting point to understand liturgy from the perspective of the SEC is the SEC webpage entitled 'What is Liturgy?'. On the website, the SEC define liturgy as 'the structured and shared worship that Christians engage in when they are together'. [53] That worship is understood by the SEC to be more than just the texts:

> Liturgy uses every part of us: our ears to hear, our voices to read and speak and sing, our bodies to stand, sit and kneel and to move to the altar for Communion. We pray with our bodies; through movement and song the power of God's Word becomes part of us.[54]

This description readily honours the place of bodies in worship. In the capacity of the website as an official forum of the SEC, there is an awareness of the importance of embodied worship, and therefore the lived body existential. It is noteworthy that this portrayal of embodied liturgy does not include 'our eyes to see', neglecting the influence of lived space on the worship experience. Despite this, there are resonances with the scholarship discussed in the Liturgical Studies section, particularly Hammond. God's Word is understood to become part of the worshipper through praying with the body. The deep connection between the lived body and lived faith existentials is once again demonstrated.

The SEC website also addresses the 'communion of saints', as described by Geldhof above, 'Liturgy can help Christians to feel themselves part of a community linked across the world and through the centuries in worshipping God and gaining a renewed sense of themselves and their place in God's world.[55] As discussed through Kubicki's work, this worshipping community which exists as one across the centuries expresses a particular experience of liturgically lived time, and the formation of a community speaks to liturgically lived relation. The SEC website also references the liturgical seasons: '[y]ear upon year, the journey through this cycle can deepen our understanding of Christ and our calling as his disciples.' [56] This resonates with the study of Gordon-Taylor's chapter on 'Time' which found that the experience of lived liturgical time can be felt through the cycle of the church's seasons.

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[53] 'What Is Liturgy?', The Scottish Episcopal Church, n.d. <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/who-we-are/publications/liturgies/what-is-liturgy/> Accessed 3 April 2025.
[54] 'What Is Liturgy?'
[55] 'What Is Liturgy?'
[56] 'What Is Liturgy?'

Beyond the website, with its limited discussion of liturgy, there are few means for assessing the SEC's understanding of liturgy. The Code of Canons, 'a code for the regulation of [the SEC's] affairs including the conduct of Divine Worship', does not include details on the theology or experience of liturgy.[57] Two papers produced by official Church committees will be examined in order to gain some insight into the SEC's approach to liturgy: a Grosvenor Essay article, produced by the Doctrine Committee, and a piece co-produced by The Liturgy Committee and The Doctrine Committee. Although these papers do not represent the official position of the Church, they show something of the discussions occurring on official Church Committees. As with the liturgical studies scholarship, these documents will be considered in chronological order.

In a corrective to the SEC website, which neglected to include the visual aspect of liturgy, the Doctrine Committee's second Grosvenor Essay (2005) includes a short chapter entitled 'Image and Liturgy or "The Look of the Liturgy"'.[58] The authors argue that 'the Eucharistic liturgy is just as much seen as heard. It is as much about the visual as the audible, and what people see and *how* they see it during the course of the liturgy are of profound importance.'[59] By providing examples of different practices of performing the same 'liturgical action', the authors illustrate how the style and method of performance influences the theological position conveyed, and therefore the liturgical experience. For instance, the authors describe how the same action of lifting of the host at the Eucharist, either with the celebrant facing towards or away from the congregation, *feels* different depending on the positional choice. Even though the liturgical action is the same, the visual and theological messages experienced are distinct.[60] Every visual decision in a liturgical event has the potential to impact the experience of the worshippers in multiple ways. A visual decision, such as turning away or towards the congregation, influences not only the visible, lived space experience, but also the theological, lived faith experience.

The extensive effect of visual choices appears to be confirmed by what the authors describe as 'very strong feelings … and conflict

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[57] General Synod of SEC, *Code of Canons 2025* (Scottish Episcopal Church, 2025), p. 1 <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Code-of-Canons-2025.pdf>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
[58] SEC Doctrine Committee, *Theology and the Power of the Image*, Grosvenor Essay 2 (Edinburgh: Scottish Episcopal Church, 2005), pp. 23–26.
[59] SEC Doctrine Committee, *Theology and the Power of the Image*, p. 23.
[60] SEC Doctrine Committee, *Theology and the Power of the Image*, pp. 23–24.

generated' by proposals to change visual aspects of the liturgy. The authors suggest '[i]t is, therefore, possible to argue that how the liturgy looks is a more visceral experience for most people than which particular rite is used.'[61] They contend that any changes to the visual presentation of the liturgy incites a stronger response from worshippers than changes to the texts. This places significant weight on the liturgical experience of lived space, with a direct connection to experiences of lived faith, as previously discussed.

The second Grosvenor Essay also addresses another key element of lived liturgical space: the architectural environment. The situation in the Scottish Episcopal Church is described:

> Many, if not most, of the churches of the Scottish Episcopal Church are nineteenth century gothic revival structures, often with soaring pointed arches and far-away altars … suggesting reverence as the appropriate stance before the God whose being is beyond our grasp … Liturgies celebrated in line with such architecture are likely to reinforce that message very strongly indeed.[62]

The authors are attentive to the spiritual impact of the architecture, in a similar vein as Slee. Both Slee and the Grosvenor Essay authors are concerned about how the architecture has a formational impact on worshippers' experience of God, of lived faith.

The portrait above of gothic churches with far-away altars does not paint the full picture of the SEC context. Although SEC churches are built in the grandiose style described, the Grosvenor Essay authors also call attention to the size of the buildings which tend to be physically quite small. The authors propose that the small size balances with the reverent structure, an altar might be fixed to the far wall but is perfectly within sight. In smaller churches, '[n]othing is very far away from the congregation', which the authors suggest creates a level of familiarity.[63] According to the authors, architectural and arrangement decisions send 'powerful messages … about how the liturgy is best approached and understood.'[64] Although the grand style of the architecture evokes a sense of a high and mighty God who is beyond human understanding, the small size of the building brings in a sense of knowability, a closeness with Christ. The authors are acutely aware of how the SEC architectural settings present a specific

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[61] SEC Doctrine Committee, *Theology and the Power of the Image*, p. 24.
[62] SEC Doctrine Committee, *Theology and the Power of the Image*, p. 25.
[63] SEC Doctrine Committee, *Theology and the Power of the Image*, p. 25.
[64] SEC Doctrine Committee, *Theology and the Power of the Image*, p. 26.

context for liturgical experiences of the lived space existential.

The second SEC text studied was co-produced by The Liturgy Committee and The Doctrine Committee in 2017: *Lent, Holy Week and Easter: A commentary on the new rites authorised for experimental use in the Scottish Episcopal Church*. Although principally focused on the seasons of Lent, Holy Week, and Easter, the text also provides insights into the wider SEC approach to liturgy. The commentary's authors describe how one aspect of the task of writing the new rites was 'developing a theological view or vision through the liturgy.'[65] The authors' understanding of the undertaking shows concern for liturgical experiences: '[t]he task was one of discerning the [historical liturgical] tradition and adopting (and adapting) it in such a way that we allow it to speak to us, and happen both to us and for us.'[66] The tradition and its theologies, encountered in the liturgy, is to be experienced by the worshippers in such a way that they are impacted by it. This experience of the tradition and theology, through the liturgy, 'happening both to us and for us' directly shapes their lived faith experience.

The Doctrine and Liturgy Committees, through this commentary, show awareness of the broad nature of liturgical experience. They ask: 'To what extent is [liturgy] revealing or showing or manifesting the oneness of the body of Christ?' In responding to their own question, the Committees state that '[t]he believer does not just believe, but "sees" – that is, perceives spiritually, intellectually, and physically.'[67] The recognition of physical 'seeing' as a believer segues the commentary's discussion into a consideration of 'the liturgically engaged human body'.[68] The authors are concerned to avoid a dualism between mind and body, asserting:

> [a] person has meaning in relation to the other and in relation to the world. Worship always takes place within special coordinates and that space and the action performed within it [are] not an expression of an "inner reality". The external is just

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[65] The Liturgy Committee and The Doctrine Committee, *Lent, Holy Week and Easter: A Commentary on the New Rites Authorised for Experimental Use in the Scottish Episcopal Church* (The Scottish Episcopal Church, 2017), p. 3.
[66] The Liturgy Committee and The Doctrine Committee, *Lent, Holy Week and Easter*, p. 3.
[67] The Liturgy Committee and The Doctrine Committee, *Lent, Holy Week and Easter*, p. 4.
[68] *The Liturgy Committee and The Doctrine Committee, Lent, Holy Week and Easter*, p. 4.

> as real as the internal. And we must always be mindful that liturgy takes place in this context.[69]

This clearly demonstrates the significance of the lived body existential for liturgical experience. Concern for relation to the other both furthers the emphasis on embodied existence as well as drawing the lived relation existential into experience of liturgy. Once again the SEC authors highlight the importance of the lived space existential for liturgy noting the 'special coordinates' in which worship takes place.

In their reflections on the inclusivity of liturgy, the commentary's authors suggest that '[i]nviting people with disabilities to take visible roles in worship – and as worship planners too – is an important sign of love and value in the community.'[70] Concern for liturgical inclusion leads to concern for a wider sense of feeling loved and valued by the community. How worshippers feel within the community will impact their lived relation experience of the liturgy.

Conclusion

This article is an endeavour to lay the groundwork for approaching consideration of the future of liturgy and what makes a good liturgy. By way of an examination of liturgical studies, I have hoped to show the core nature of liturgy as experiential. In order to do so, the existentials of experience offered by Max van Manen – lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relation – with the addition of a lived faith existential, provided a lens for the study. The analysis of liturgical studies' focus on female liturgical scholarship, not only brought women's theology to the fore, but also offered helpful glimpses of the development of liturgical studies from the 1990s to the 2020s. The scholars were chosen not simply because they are women, but also because of the expanse of liturgical studies covered through their work – imagination, memory, embodiment, time, relationships and identity, space, and liturgy as performance, each significant topics in the discipline. There was evidence of the five existentials of experience throughout, demonstrating the experiential nature of liturgy.

This article has also looked at the SEC context and what has been said from within the Church on liturgy. Although little has been published from an official SEC perspective, the works produced by

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[69] The Liturgy Committee and The Doctrine Committee, *Lent, Holy Week and Easter*, pp. 4–5.

[70] The Liturgy Committee and The Doctrine Committee, *Lent, Holy Week and Easter*, p. 6.

the Liturgy and Doctrine Committees provided useful insights. The SEC authors were cognizant of the importance of elements external to the text for liturgical worship. There was emphasis on the consequence of the surroundings (lived space) and embodiment (lived body) in SEC liturgical performances. Liturgical (lived) time also received particular attention on the SEC website. The liturgy was shown to be written to have a theological impact on worshippers (lived faith), and the importance of the community (lived relation) for experiences of liturgy was mentioned. All five of the experience existentials were apparent in SEC discussions of liturgy.

What is the future of liturgy? What makes a good liturgy? This exploration of liturgy, both with an academic approach and through the eyes of the Scottish Episcopal Church, offers liturgy's experiential nature as a starting point for considering these questions. In any approach to the questions, all of the characteristics of liturgical experience should be included. The five existentials are offered as a way to encapsulate the breadth of liturgical experience.

At Work with Our Prayers

+ Robert A. Gillies

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This essay had its first outing as an ordination sermon for a priest. Subsequent iterations gave it further life, first, as part of a retreat address for clergy and then as, an induction address at the start of a rector's ministry. On each occasion it was well received so far as I was able to discern. Given the context for each of these (an ordination, a clergy retreat and an induction) its focus was upon the ministry of the priest. That was its limitation. Even if the focus was correctly restricted to priestly ministry and even if appropriate for each specific occasion, what I offered left out of account much else that needed inclusion had time and the remit permitted. In this essay my aim is to remedy that deficiency. Here is what I intend.

In those three iterations I spoke of the ministry of the priest at the altar, in the pulpit and on the pavement. The limitation of what I said then, and which I am now admitting as a deficiency, is clear. There is more to worship, Christian life and ministry than who or what the priest is and what he or she is about. At the altar, in the pulpit and on the pavement (my shorthand way of describing Christian life and ministry outside the church building) a whole fabric and network of intermeshed relationships involving clergy and lay people are involved. This thought and with that in mind takes me back to my time as a curate and a personal reminiscence.

I was a curate in two congregations respectively for three and then four years. In the second I worked alongside a retired priest who pictured 'liturgy' as 'the people of God at work with their prayers'. I don't remember him ever outlining what he meant by that portrayal, but it was a pithy enough perspective for me to remember some forty-three years later. Furthermore, if one thinks around its wording one can see that it refers both to the gathered community at worship (the people of God gathering together to say – work at – their prayers) and also to the dispersed people of God 'at work with their prayers' out in the world – i.e. on the pavement (to use my phraseology). There may be more resonances but these two will be sufficient for our purposes.

What I am leading up to is the perspective that liturgy – 'the people of God at work with their prayers' – is a communal activity. It takes place

when the community of the faithful gather together. It continues when the community disperses, each person from it remaining bonded to others continuing through times of personal private prayer, shared community action and evangelistic comportment. In other words, liturgy in its fullest sense (communal worship, community action and evangelistic comportment) is 'the prayer of the church' doing what it should and needs to do.

From this perspective I am deliberately distancing myself from those who view the worship that takes place in church as a means of outreach or evangelism, perhaps even the principal means of each. True enough, people may come to faith from encounter with, or attendance at, liturgy when enacted with associated ritual. And that is perfectly fair. But liturgy is not evangelism even if evangelistic outreach is a providential outcome. Liturgy is, to repeat myself, 'the people of God at work with their prayers'! So how might this definition, drawn from my retired priest-colleague all those years ago, be given some substance? I will suggest three complementary considerations, each a part of the whole.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Both priest and people gather together around or at a table to take part in an action where bread and wine are offered to God and blessed with words and actions accompanying. The bread is symbolically broken or torn and then shared amongst those so gathered. The setting might be very simple and unadorned. It might be highly elaborate and, one might say, theatrical. Music might be present both as accompaniment to any singing or perhaps to offer atmosphere. There might also be corporate silence.

For both priest and people in this setting the words that are uttered – at least in the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions – are set. Some are said by the priest alone; some by everyone. All are enjoined to participate together through personal and private (or quiet) prayer. Actions normally add to what is spoken or sung. These might vary according to local custom and development – personal signing of the cross; standing, kneeling or sitting; maybe arms upraised or head bowed; walking forward or staying seated as the bread and wine are distributed … and so on.

The occasion requires, as it always has, that someone 'preside' at the liturgy of the sacrament on behalf of the community. This is the priest. He or she does so not to usurp or minimise what the 'people of God at work with their prayers' do but simply to be a focus of what each person is doing before God in this liturgical action.

In that sense the priest is a representative of the people at the altar and thus may be understood as *icon populi.* What does this mean? A detour into the Old Testament will help.

In the Jerusalem Temple of old the Aaronic priest wore a heavy cloak. On that cloak were emblems or medals each one representing one of the twelve tribes of Israel. As the weight of that cloak came to rest on the priest's shoulders, because of the symbolic power of those medals, the weight of all the twelve tribes was seen to come upon him. As a representative of the people he (and in those times it was 'he'), through this powerful image, carried all the hopes, anticipations, fears and failings and so on of the people to God when he approached the altar set, as it was, in the Jerusalem Temple's innermost sanctuary, the holy of holies. He was their representative before God.

As the high priest walked through the gathered people and on into the Jerusalem Temple, so he took with him all that the people are, all that the people have been, and all that the people hope to be, literally and symbolically carried in his vestment with its medals upon his shoulders. To reprise this in other words, as the high priest put that vestment over his shoulders so he would feel its weight. Its weight – symbolically the weight of all the sins, failures, hopes, dreams and more of the people, would impress itself upon the high priest.

In our time we engage that self-same symbolism. As the priest walks through the people towards the Lord's table, the altar, so he or she carries, literally and symbolically, the whole weight of the people of God as *icon populi* – as an image of the whole gathered community present and at work with their prayers.

The setting for this, as already noted, will vary from the very plain to the very ornate. But whatever it is the symbolism is the same: priest and people together before the altar of the Lord sharing bread and wine in the manner prescribed and designated for that to take place.

The mistake to make in all this is to see the priest as someone set apart from the community of faithful worshippers doing something 'for them'. What I am saying is that the priest stands for the people and must in what he or she does be a window towards God. In this sense I consider the priest to be *icon Christi.* The priest must not be the focus but must be a window through whose individual and shared words, actions and inner intentions the prayer of the church 'leans towards' God. What do I mean by this?

I am borrowing the term 'leans towards' somewhat loosely from modern commercial-speak. The phrase, and the way I am applying it, refers to that intentional orientation towards what might on one hand be worshippers' hopes, aspirations, fears and even perhaps dreams. One could imagine those suffering from illness hoping for recovery or release, those anticipating new relationships forming, perhaps the fear of redundancy

from work. And those dreaming, even if mistakenly, for some utopian event to come their way or more generally dreaming of and willing world peace.

On the other hand, it is not difficult to imagine worshippers deeply vexed in their soul leaning towards God perhaps because of personal sin, inner turmoil or struggle when any of this might be forefront in their minds. Such deportment might also include anger against God for the prolonged illness of a cherished relative, despair at prayers seemingly unanswered or tears at the failure of a marriage. In any of these situations we might think back to and reflect upon the Old Testament pictures of Jacob wrestling with God (Gen 32.22-32), of Abraham's presumed distress at the near sacrifice of his son, Isaac, and what we can take to be Job's anger at the unjust treatment to which he was subjected. In all these, space exists between God and worshippers as they lean towards God seeking God to hold them as they do so. In that leaning towards God there may be joyous realisation, tearful distress, surprised release, continued and ongoing doubt, despair and perplexed ambiguity. As a priest I have seen all of these from the altar and at the communion rail. Angela Tilby in a searching piece in the *Church Times* (25th April 2025) wrote this:

> … the Christian spiritual tradition suggests that it is normal for individuals to experience a succession of 'dark nights', which echo the struggles expressed in the metaphysical poetry of John Donne and George Herbert. Secular responsibilities, private passions, depression, trauma, and woundedness are part of any authentic relationship with God.

These and more are what people bring to God 'at the altar'. These are what, symbolically, the priest takes to the altar when he or she presides amongst the community gathered and at work with their prayers. In this sense the priest is *icon Christi* taking the worshippers beyond what is forefront for each of them to the Christ who is the One towards whom and upon whom they lean and who they can reasonably expect to meet their yearning.

It will be recognised that the symbolism I am invoking here is the traditional layout of an Anglican church. Whilst that is so it does not have to be. The symbolism and language I have used above in picturing the people of God at work with their prayers can be deployed in any setting – a few people sitting in a circle around the bread and wine of communion, under a tree on a remote African hillside, or wherever. All this now connects with and leads me to consider the community of faithful believers at work with their prayers in the liturgy of the word. A passing summary will help us transition.

At the altar roles are secure. Words are given, prescribed and required. By their careful recitation and performance of the actions that go with them, both those of the priest and the gathered faithful, duty before God is being enacted. What is less secure is that which is in the heart, soul and mind of the worshipper. This consideration brings us to the gathered people of God, at work with their prayers, in the liturgy of the word.

The Liturgy of the Word

In the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions the Liturgy of the Word includes the opening greeting, collect for purity, general confession, kyrie, gloria, creed, sermon, intercessions and the sharing of the peace and very often hymnody. Within this part of worship some items are notionally 'fixed' or 'given' even if not entirely so. The kyrie, for example, has a relatively fixed form with variation being occasioned perhaps by the musical setting that might accompany it or if it is linked with the confession. Likewise the gloria and also the creed. Whilst in liturgy books they may have the appearance of fixed forms, local entrepreneurial preferences may bring about variation in form or alteration of the given text.

Thus we have notionally fixed forms that are patient of change. Greatest variation of all comes in the sermon and, more often than not, in the intercessions. In contrast to the worshipping community at the altar in the liturgy of the sacrament where words and actions are prescribed and expected, in the liturgy of the word those giving the sermon (or other similar form of address) and those leading the intercessions, have occasion for free personal composition (except, of course, where a controlling priest forbids variation!). Simultaneously, those attending to the liturgy of the word through experiencing (a better description than 'listening to') the sermon or praying along with the intercession have the capacity to be enraged, enlivened, motivated or, not uncommonly, switched off by what is being offered.

In what I am describing the personality of those taking part in the liturgy of the word comes through and takes centre-stage. Or at least, this is where the preacher or intercessor's personality is most likely to be evident. The risk is that this is where the ego on the part of the one speaking can assume a pre-eminence over what is required – namely participation in a sharing of priest and people together at work with their prayers (in the intercessions) and through their attentiveness and attention to what is spoken in the sermon. What might this look like in real time and space?

In the sermon things can go wrong. I have had hostile interjection whilst preaching and I have had individuals walk out in protest. I have

observed a whole congregation grow fidgety when, in the pulpit, I was failing them. I have seen congregations 'switch off'.
In the intercessions dreams of fancy can predominate over those necessary items that need to be prayed for and about. Likewise God can find Himself[1] being told what God already knows and having it explained to Him – as if God needed it to be explained. Furthermore intercessions can be hijacked by the individual(s) leading them to advance whatever particular cause the leader personally advocates.

All this, and more, is possible because the preacher and the intercessor have the privilege of being able to give their own voice through personal composition to the word of God in sermon and by intercession. There is no prescribed and set form of words for the sermon. The preacher, in most settings, is free to compose their own original piece.

Although set forms of intercession can be provided there is no obligation to adhere to them (though local clergy might insist that set forms are followed). It is a wonderful and fine privilege to be able to prepare this personal composition and those doing so must acknowledge the responsibility upon them as their own very human words seek to share that which is acceptable to God.

In the sermon this is done by interpretation and application of the words of holy scripture. It is done by explaining great themes in the Christian life: prayer, incarnation and resurrection, salvation and forgiveness, ethical duties and church teaching, encouragement of personal holiness, social care, mission, evangelism and so much more.

In the intercessions this is done by enfolding tragedy and triumph, woe and worry, hoping and yearning in a context of led corporate prayer. The prayer may be formal and stylised, personally prepared and individualistic, it may be extempore. Likewise it may be lengthy or brief, sketchy or florid. Words, nuances of phraseology and visual actions if used when preaching will be such as ideally arise from the speaker's walk with God amongst God's people.
My feeling is that preachers and intercessors should be daring in a very old-fashioned way and prepare their own material and not draw it from the web or slavishly present verbatim the result of searching an AI app. With all the risks of what could go wrong, the sermon and the prayers of intercession should arise, in my view, from the Scriptures that ground the faith which holds us now as well as the 'earnest looking forward' toward which God calls His people 'at work with their prayers'. Complementary to this, the content of preaching and intercession should also arise from

[1] I intend no gender bias here toward God. In their capitalised forms the pronouns, He, Him, Himself are unique ways of speaking of God. Likewise, their capitalised female forms. What I detest is the supremely ugly word, 'Godself'.

experiences that develop from the lived context, whether locally or more broadly from the world beyond, with all it concerns and joys.

Because of the humanly articulated variation in both preaching and intercession there is, I suggest, risk. And it is because of risk, that worshippers are vulnerable.

So then, what if the words, nuances and actions are not those God would have wished? The prayer of the faithful worshipper must always be that 'the words of [one's] mouth and the meditation of [one's] heart are acceptable in the sight of God, [one's] strength and redeemer'. If they are not a fatal weakness opens up. Words, nuances and actions must lift people to God; when they do that truly will be the worship of the church – 'people at work with their prayers'.

And a final thought, before moving into my next section, about that which is perhaps most variable in the liturgy of the word: the sharing of the peace. I need say little else other than to remark that this is the key moment to share God's Peace with those whom you most dislike, or who have wronged you most, or whom you have wronged or who are most disadvantaged within the worshipping community. This is the moment when true reconciliation can be shared. The passing token of a handshake or embrace can form a deeply significant, performative and effective symbol of that reconciliation. Conversely, and viewed from an opposite perspective, unwanted touch and a potentially manipulative embrace could signal so much that is wrong. In fact, it could be abusive. Unlike that part of worship in the liturgy of the sacrament 'at the altar', here in the sharing of God's peace, in the liturgy of the word and viewed from a perspective of negativity, there arises the potential for significant and obvious risk.

In what I am now unfolding it should be coming clear that risk of misadventure enlarges as we move from the liturgy of the sacrament, through the liturgy of the word to the living of that liturgy 'on the pavement', so to speak. Again, what do I mean by this?

At the end of the communion service in most, if not all, modern-day church services the priest, or one of the service leaders, announces the 'dismissal'. Its form might vary but generally it follows something like this: 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord' with the congregation's response following, 'In the Name of Christ. Amen', or sometimes 'Thanks be to God'.

Whilst the worshipping community is thus 'dismissed' the very words, just cited, imply at the very least that each person goes his or her way embodying in their day-to-day interactions, actually living, what they have just done in the liturgy 'at work with their prayers'. It is here, upon – or within - what I am calling 'the pavement' that personal life can go seriously wrong. I will now develop this under the sub-title, 'liturgy on the pavement' and picking up the catch-phrase from my priest-colleague those

years ago, rephrase it to read, 'the people at work with their prayers on the pavement'. It will be obvious that by 'pavement' I am speaking metaphorically of the person's workaday life, their home setting, the context where they meet with others for whatever purpose and when they are on their own with curtains closed and, furthermore, in those damaging circumstances conceivably entertaining demons who should not be there.

Liturgy lived on the Pavement

The person out in public amongst the general public: this is where the faithful believer is at his or her most vulnerable. Here is where temptation is strongest. Here is where the greatest likelihood of falling is to be found. Here is where things are most likely to go wrong if they are to go wrong. Jealousy and envy, pride and wrong ambition, desire and corruption … the list could go on …

Here, out on the street, on the pavement, in public, is where the grace of God must be known and be lived and where the 'people of God must remain at work with their prayers'. Here is where God's protection must surround and be known to surround the 'person at work with their prayers'. God's guiding must always be the leading focus.

Positively, it is here, with and amongst the people, that the worshipper has that wonderful privilege and joy of bringing into their everyday circumstances all that was prayed and praised in the liturgy of the sacrament and in the liturgy of the word.

Beyond the often very solid walls that define the space where gathered worship takes place the 'people of God at work with their prayers' are called to make the reality of Christ in sacrament and in liturgical word a real presence in every breath that they breathe and in everything that they do. Something of this was eloquently captured in an essay celebrating the 80th anniversary of publication of Dom Gregory Dix' epochal *The Shape of the Liturgy* in the *Church Times* (9th May 2025). In this essay Rod Garner cited Dix's insistence of the 'sacramental nature' of the church as a 'living organism – a mystical and divine creation, with Christ the Living Bread made real in the eucharist and the lives of worshippers'. This puts in exquisite language all that I am saying about the 'people of God at work with their prayers' in the liturgy of the sacrament, in the liturgy of the word and in liturgy when enacted 'on the pavement'.

It is in the liturgy when enacted on the pavement that evangelistic endeavour becomes most evidently real. The call from God and one's responsive prayer is that everyone who one meets and sees discovers, through oneself, the living Christ.

There can be nothing less than this. If there is one will be at risk; one's own preferences and pleasures will come before and supplant God's

desire. By so doing one risks undermining the very basis upon which one is a faithful believer.

There is a clear link between all three aspects of liturgy as I am presenting it here. There is no bifurcation between altar, word and pavement. One cannot be a faithful believer in one area without being faithful in all three. This is what I was referring to earlier when I spoke of 'duty'. Duty, when seen this way, is a sacred calling for every believer. It is a calling that recognises that even when things go wrong, or have gone wrong, in one's life God's prevenient grace can and does put things right. Let me return now also to something I alluded to earlier namely, that which is 'acceptable to God'.

I am grateful to one of the other authors in this sequence of essays for reminding me of that which is 'acceptable to God'. The word 'acceptable' would appear to have changed since the translation of Psalm 19.14 in the *Authorised Version* of the Bible. It reads, 'Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.'

That which is acceptable to God is a 'broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart' (Psalm 51); a personal and communal yearning, a 'leaning towards God' in which acknowledgment of failure and an earnest desire to be put right. In short, an acknowledgment of failure and fault that petitions God to show mercy and make good that which is flawed. This is done 'at work with one's prayers' in the liturgy of the sacrament, in the liturgy of the word and is lived on the pavement. All of this is a far cry from the careless undergraduate whose essay was deemed 'acceptable', meaning that it only just scraped over the pass mark and did so through the generosity of the examiner when in reality that essay might only have been barely passable. Where we fail before God, and fail we will, God accepts our contrition and directs us aright. A poignant poem will serve as my conclusion:

Early Communion
Checking times the day before by brushing
blown snow off a leaning board, I guessed
that eight o'clock would chime
on a handful of us, and the priest.
The service was according to the book,
the only variables being
my random fist of coins scooped into a bag
and the winter jasmine above the holy table.
For the rest we knelt where it advised us to,
ungainly but meaning it, trusting to the words set

(on paper difficult to separate)
that what we did was acceptable.[2]

In this delightful poem David Scott doesn't lead us from worship into everyday life; he offers the obverse. He leads the reader from 'the pavement' (to use my terminology) to words on an ancient church notice board and, having cleaned it of snow, becomes the worshipper taking the everyday back into worship. In that place, uncomfortably on his knees at work with his prayers, we find the offering complete. In worship all that we have we give back to God. And God, from His side, will thus return us, in due course, to the world having given everything for us commending us to do likewise, just as He has done. Nothing less.

[2] David Scott, 'Early Communion', *A Quiet Gathering,* Bloodaxe Books, London, 1984.

The Future of Liturgy?

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The title of this article is deliberately ambiguous. Are we predicting how something will evolve or develop, or, indeed, asking if there is a future given the steep and consistent statistical decline in church attendance[1]? Even if there are exceptions, euphemistically called green shoots and signs of revival, decline remains the dominant narrative, and this has been interrogated by conflicting voices. One rather polemical study has attributed this decline to the use of contemporary language in worship,[2] but there are multiple causes for this decline, and it eludes a single and sufficient sociological and cultural explanation. In any case, the broader question is beyond the remit of this article, which is more sharply focused on why liturgical worship does not seem to work for increasing numbers of people today.

In raising this issue, however, the aim of this article is not to set out an agenda to improve the quality and experience of worship in the Church today, however tempting that might be.[3] There is no quick fix to the problem. We could try to produce a snapshot of our present predicament, but that would not necessarily help us to see how a future for the church, as traditionally conceived in contemporary Western societies, might be secured. The approach I want to take is a more modest one, and that is to try and articulate the questions that suggest themselves when we look at the present predicament of church decline through a re-reading of the liturgical theologian Romano Guardini (1885-1968). Guardini was a prolific writer, and two of his most influential works were published following the two greatest periods of social upheaval in the 20th century and therefore may well speak to us as our world today is beset by uncertainty and multiple crises.

But notice this. Even in these opening paragraphs we have swiftly moved from the term liturgy to that of worship as if they were equivalent

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[1] Whatever the causes of disaffection, the statistics are alarming. 72% of the population of England and Wales claimed to have a Christian affiliation and this was reduced to 46% in the 2021/2 Census.

[2] Barry Spurr, *Language in the Liturgy: Past, Present, Future* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2025).

[3] One clear lacuna is the inadequate liturgical study and formation offered by most theological colleges and courses.

and interchangeable terms. Both terms do have wide connotations, but as we define each term with a greater precision, distinctions between worship, as the activity of the worshipping community, and liturgy, as the structural forms and purpose of worship,[4] begin to emerge. But first, what are the reasons for this apparent disconnect between increasing numbers of people and the Church's liturgy?

Here the issues cluster around several questions, and each of these in turn raises further questions. By way of examples, we could consider two of these clusters. The first revolves around the question of the language of worship. Is it sufficiently inclusive, or are the pronouns and imagery too masculine? Is the language too conceptual, too arcane, and not sufficiently accessible? These are real and serious questions, but behind them is a deeper challenge of recognising that the language of our corporate prayer and public worship is a kind of scaffolding, a framework in which we seek to position ourselves alongside others in an open, resonant, and hospitable worshipping space that calls us out of ourselves, to that which is beyond and above us. For in the liturgy, we are not talking to each other but using words to address that which eludes even our best language. As such, our words for worship require a particular register, and need to be evocative, sonorous, and expressive.[5]

So, what is the problem here? To draw an analogy from communications, perhaps we have restricted our view of the language of worship and focused too narrowly on the envelope rather than on the message. That is to say, we have been more concerned with the *how* rather than with what may transpire in the very act of communication, of what is communicated, and more significantly, by whom. Analogies have their limits, but we could press this a little further and speak of 'delivery' (the performance of the liturgy), the 'sender' (the worshipping assembly), and the 'receiver' the one to whom the corporate prayer and praise is addressed – the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Seen in this way, a more nuanced model of communication seems to suggest itself, first that worship is primarily *response*, for every act of praise presupposes that which elicits the praise, and that is reflected in the very dialogical structure

[4] See Benjamin Gordon-Taylor ,'Liturgy' in *The Study of Liturgy and Worship: An Alcuin Guide*, edited by Juliette Day and Benjamin Gordon-Taylor (London: SPCK, 2013), pp.12-20, and Christopher Irvine and Anders Bergquist, 'Thinking about the Liturgy' *Anaphora* 5.2 (2011), pp. 45-56.

[5] For a full analysis of the workings of liturgical language see Cally Hammond, *How Words Work in Worship* (London: SPCK, 2015), and Juliet Day, *Hearing Our Prayers: An Exploration of Liturgical Listening* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press Academic, 2024).

of the liturgy.[6] This dialogical structure is obviously evident in the versicles and responses, the series of exchanges spoken or sung between the officiant and the congregation, but at a deeper structural level it is reflected in the building blocks of Word or story and response, such as the scripture reading and the singing of the Song of Mary, the Magnificat in the service of Evening Prayer. This dialogical structure reflects how the communication is two-way and flows in both directions. Although in this case, God's initiative is logically prior; it is what the 1662 Book of Common Prayer styles as 'prevenient grace', and one thing we cannot do is compel grace.[7] Furthermore, the response that is made can potentially shift the ground on which the responder responds[8] if they are questioned, challenged, and inspired. For as with any human conversation, there can come a moment of recognition when the interlocutor exclaims: 'I see', and that shifts the situation between the speaker and the interlocutor.[9]

The question then is whether we are sufficiently attuned to hear and respond to the Word, which as the German Reformer Martin Luther insisted, is conveyed by the spoken words of Scripture in the biblical readings, as well as in silent interstices of worship.[10] And here, T.S. Eliot's warning: 'where shall the word be heard? Not here, there is not enough silence'[11] needs to be heeded as we audit our contemporary acts of worship.

The repeated return to moments of silence in the liturgy reminds us that in worship we are, again and again, brought to the edge of language, to the ineffable.[12] Mentioning silence, alongside words said and sung, underlines the fact that there are multiple languages in liturgical worship, and another

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[6] Romano Guardini *The Art of Praying: Principles and Methods of Christian Prayer* (New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1957).

[7] Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p.169.

[8] As one liturgical scholar puts it, 'It is not a game of ping-pong' Philippe Harmoncourt 'Te Deum Laudamus' in *The Meaning of the Liturgy*, edited by Angelus A. Haussling (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), p. 82

[9] The biblical paradigm for this is the exchange between the stranger and the two disciples on the road of Emmaus narrated in Luke 24.13-32.

[10] One may recall, for instance, the silence that may follow a bible reading, the silence after receiving Communion, or the convention of pausing at the colon in each verse of the Psalmody as suggested in *Common Worship: Daily Prayer*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), p. 648.

[11] T.S.Eliot *Ash Wednesday* V.

[12] The word 'holy' is repeated in the Sanctus: *'Holy, holy, holy',* not because we cannot think of an equivalent word, but because in the nearer presence of God we are brought to the limits of language, to the ineffable.

one is the handling of symbols and symbolic actions.[13] As the cliche goes, these may well speak louder than words, and further they should be seen alongside a range of ritual gestures, postures, and the movement of the embodied worshipper in the worshipping assembly.[14] It is, if the reader will excuse the pun, a rite performance.

And this brings us to the second cluster of questions that revolve around the performance of worship, which has as much to do with the art of presiding at worship as it does with the worship itself being engaging. In part this may have something to do with being confident that the rite (the Order of Service) can speak without the so-called 'leader' adding an explanatory commentary as the service progresses, and it certainly touches on how individual worshippers, as well as ministers, place themselves before the divine reality that is invoked and responded to in worship. And here it may be instructive to recall what Peter Brook wrote a good many years ago in *The Empty Space*. The function of the actor, he said, was to make the invisible visible and this could only be achieved if the actor was relaxed, open, and attuned in a way that allowed the invisible to reach the audience.[15] Such attentive performance and participation recognises that ritual takes place in the subjunctive mood, and it is precisely for this reason that it has long been recognised that certain dispositions are required of the worshipper, such as being 'still, silent, and recollected.'[16] And so it is that both performance and performativity, the intended result of the performance, place challenges for both worship leaders and congregations.

Pressing the analogy between worship and theatre even further,[17]we could say that the actor/priest and the audience/congregation depend upon each other for a successful performance. As every actor knows, the delivery of a script on stage may be perfect, but a successful performance depends on how it is received and responded to by the audience. In short, the role of the audience/congregation is vital for a successful performance, even if it appears to the observer that the congregation's part in an act of worship appears to be largely passive.

Analogies have their limits, and it is instructive to acknowledge that one connotation of theatre is 'theatrical', that is, of 'putting on a show', a spectacle, of being somewhat contrived and of generating a sensation (an emotional high). This has a direct and immediate appeal in a culture that

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[13] See Christopher Irvine (ed.), *The Use of Symbols in Worship*, Chapter 1 'The Language of Symbols' (London: SPCK, 2007).
[14] See Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* (St Louis, MO: Pio Decimo Press, 1956).
[15] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (Harmondsworth: Penquin, 1968), p. 47.
[16] Cited by Harmoncourt (1994), p. 92.
[17] Christopher Irvine, 'Celebrating the Eucharist: A Rite Performance' in *Theology* Volume XCVII No 778, (1994), pp. 256-265.

sees personal experience as the arbiter of what is authentically true and meaningful. And for this reason, it may be wise to draw a distinction between theatre and drama. Drama is more than entertainment, and more specifically is about action and interaction, of what may happen as a result of what is said and done on stage or in the sanctuary.[18] In part this depends on whether the intention behind the performance is effectively delivered and received at the time of the performance, and crucially, the condition, if we may describe it as such, of the audience or congregation. Here the issue is whether the audience or congregation is sufficiently receptive to the drama, to what Guardini suggestively described in a worshipping context as the 'wondrous playfulness of the liturgy.' This is a serious playfulness, a 'holy theatre', and is some distance from the kind of 'religious entertainment', that alas, worship can so easily slide into because of an overriding concern to engage and hold the attention of the congregation. Such anxiety may well drive the worship leader to constantly make changes, and to use gimmicks to entertain, or worse, to play to the gallery and to say, like the populist politician, what we think people want to hear rather than voicing the strange words of God.

Both the slide towards entertainment in some places, and an undue emphasis placed on teaching (effectively a conservative rehearsal of certainties to the exclusion of the other elements of a liturgical act of worship) in others, may well be reasons why some people are less inclined to attend church and may even be the reason why some have stopped going altogether. However, one may suspect that for most of the population it simply does not occur to them to attend church on a Sunday, not necessarily because Christian beliefs are viewed as being implausible, but because of the assumption that one has to subscribe to fixed tenets of faith before participating in worship. The fear here is of being hypocritical. But again, there is much to unravel here. First, one could reiterate that Christian believing is something that is shared and inherited and is necessarily bound up with ritual practice. The so-called Nicene Creed, for instance, is a constitutive part of the service of Holy Communion, and it is the rite, the playing out of the ritual that is the most formative element of religious identity. Taking part, in other words, takes precedence over whatever an individual can confidently say they believe at any given time, condition, or set of circumstances. Further, the faith is the faith of the Church, and this faith can carry the individual worshipper, who for whatever reason at any time may feel unsure, or even agnostic. There is nothing hypocritical about attending church when one is unsure, puzzled,

[18] A classic exploration of this in relation to liturgical worship was presented by Odo Casel in *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, edited by Burkhard Neunheuser OSB (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1962).

or perplexed, for even the most trusting person can say, 'Lord, I believe, help thou my *un*belief.' What may matter most is turning up and crossing the threshold. After all, the word 'orthodoxy' literally means 'right praise' and not a kind of doctrinal correctness or certitude. Believing is first a matter of trust and comes to be shaped by worship. So, what may be perceived as being a barrier to participating in liturgical life could in fact be something of an invitation. For in Lewis Carroll's words, it's not a question of believing six impossible things before breakfast, but the question: 'will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you join the dance?'

However, we should not be too hasty in reaching solutions, for difficulties may well remain for those who enter the building on a Sunday morning. For even if the place is not intimidating and the worshipping community is welcoming, the way the service is conducted can be the greatest hindrance to our participating in the act of worship. The liturgical formation of the clergy today is woefully inadequate, but the underlying problem is wider than simply knowing how to do things better. Something more is required than worship leaders sharpening up their act and turning up the volume of the worship band, or even, at the other end of the spectrum, of diligently following the rubrics and worshipping 'properly'. Louis Weil, who was a sure and wise guide in matters of worship, argued that worship has to be authentic, and authentic in the sense of not 'coming from us' but coming from that which is apart from us and above us, of what used to be styled as being *extra nos*,[19] that is, an embodiment of faith and what the theologian calls grace. The real problem is that worship can all too easily become our show, and even if it has the right shape, it may lack the essential form.

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, when liturgical revision was at fever pitch level, liturgists were preoccupied with the shape of the liturgy,[20] and as we learn from artistic discourse, shape and form are not equivalent terms. The 'form' denotes an inner meaning and dynamic, a dimension of depth, and in artistic terms this was the genius of Barbara Hepworth's pierced sculptures. Regarding our worship, even if it has the right shape, there is the further dimension of meaning, and something critical is missing if we have, as Eliot put it, 'Shape without form, shade without colour, / Paralysed force, gesture without motion.'[21]

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[19] Louis Weil, *Liturgical Sense: the Logic of Rite* (New York: Seabury Books, 2013), p. 37.
[20] This point is amply illustrated by the following book titles: Gregory Dix's influential *Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Rivington,1945), Kenneth Stevenson (ed.), *Liturgy Reshaped* (London: SPCK, 1982 and Christopher Irvine (ed.), *They Shaped our Worship: essays on Anglican Liturgists* (London: SPCK, 1998).
[21] T.S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men* (1925).

These words may sound rather damning but are offered in the same positive frame of mind that Guardini had when he wrote that often quoted 'Open Letter' to the principal organiser of the Third German Liturgical Congress, Monsignor Wagner, in 1964. In this Letter, Guardini claimed that there was much to relearn, to retrieve from what had been lost in a social world where the individual was supreme, the sense of the corporate diminished, and where subjectivity overrode what is objectively given.[22] A pessimistic reading of this Letter would suggest that (Western) Christianity had lost the capacity to enter fully into the liturgical experience, but there are strong positive hints that the situation may not be final. Indeed, we are not yet in the endgame, and being alert to Guardini's proposals, I would venture to say that the situation could be improved in two primary ways: first, through a greater sensitivity to symbolic actions in the liturgy[23] and by refraining from explaining the symbol as the symbolic action occurs in the context of worship; secondly, by capitalising on the recovery of the sense of human embodiment,[24] of the embodied worshipper called to take their part in the corporate offering of prayer and praise. Such an agenda, if that is what it is, is entirely valid and may well resonate with us as we lament the poor quality of worship in so many of our churches today.

However, if we are to retrieve what I describe as a capacity to participate in the liturgy, in both its active and contemplative modes, perhaps something more is required, a kind of liturgical *metanoia* or conversion, a radical shift in attitude and disposition in how we engage and equally allow ourselves to be engaged in the multifarious work of worship, the *opus dei* as Benedict of Nursia aptly named it in his *Rule* for monks. What such a liturgical conversion might look like can only be sketched here in outline, and if there were value in these suggestions they would need to be expanded and elucidated in a more systematic way.

The first would require a more contemplative approach to worship,[25] recognising that it is the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables us to pray and to utter that primal word of Christ's prayer: 'Abba, Father'. For there can be

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[22] A rhetorical account of the emergence and centrality of the individual and individual subjectivity is spelt out by Romano Guardini in *The End of the Modern World* (Washington: Regency Gateway, 1998/2024), pp.39-40.

[23] Pope Francis Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi* (2022) §§ 27, 44. Apostolic Letter Desiderio desideravi, on the liturgical formation of the People of God (29 June 2022).

[24] See 'Romano Guardini: An Open Letter' in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for students of Christian worship* edited by Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (London: SPCK, 2007), pp. 4 & 6.

[25] This sharply contrasts with some recent trends of activism, such as the instrumentalist view of worship as a tool for mission or teaching, and of thinking that worshippers constantly need to do something and to say everything in an act of worship.

no prayer, no true worship, unless it is animated by the Holy Spirit, unless, that is, we inbreathe that Spirit of God who prompts us to praise in response to the very gift and pulse of life itself: 'Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord' (Psalm 150).

The Spirit has been vividly described as the engine of prayer,[26] a description that recalls George Herbert's poem *Prayer* (I). Here, multiple metaphors are deployed to depict the act of prayer, suggesting that a broad range of vivid analogies can be applied to prayer. The example I have in mind turns to the world of visual art, specifically the sculpture of Barbara Hepworth which I have seen again recently in both St Ives and in the Hepworth Gallery in Wakefield. Hepworth, like many of her generation, was fascinated with 'form,' and the term occurs in the names of the sculptures she carved throughout her artistic career. She worked closely with the grain or veining of the natural materials which she carved and carved directly to reveal the form of the subject. Further, all art, she once explained, was praise, and the piece of her sculpture I have in mind is *Spring* (1966), a pierced sculpture with strings, cast from an elm wood sculpture. The tight strings across the void contrast with the curved lines of the sculpture's elliptical shape. This basic egg-shape has the mythical connotation of the beginning or origin of things, and the pierced hole suggests the very depth of being, the interiority of the soul. As such it may recall the imaginative way in which the early Christian writer Cassiodorus (486-580) poetically imagined the crucifixion. He saw the wood of the lyre as the wood of the cross, and the body of Christ on the cross as the taut strings, through which the harmony of heaven and earth was restored, sounding the music of that love and joy which is echoed in the expression of Christian praise. In a similar way, the refined form of *Spring* may also recall the Aeolian harp, an instrument that produced a sound when the gentle breeze moved through and across its strings. In this case, we may see an analogue for the Christian at prayer and praise, with the body and soul of the Christian as being 'the harp of the Spirit'.

Again, in theological key, we could say that when the Spirit cries out: '*Abba, Father*' we are gently brought, as Rowan Williams says with such erudite precision, to the place where Christ is, and thereby allow Christ to 'take place' and happen in us.[27] This cannot happen automatically as it is conditional, and the condition is that the would-be worshipper is sufficiently open, attentive, and responsive to the Spirit when they pray in company with others. And when the Spirit is given, something may indeed happen in and through us, thus literally making our worship a per-

[26] George Guiver CR, 'Our Picture of God' *CR Review*, July 2025, p. 9.
[27] Rowan Williams, *God With Us: The Meaning of the Cross and Resurrection – Then and Now* (London: SPCK, 2017).

formance, something formed (not by us) but 'per', that is, *through* us. What is formed in us is Christlikeness,[28] and this is not a kind of self-technology but is for the sake of others and for the wider world.[29] In this more contemplative mode our worship is directed to God; it is open to God, and in our longing for God comes to express what we wish for others and for our world: 'your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. And perhaps it is for this reason that we do not need to constantly reinvent or refresh our forms of worship, but to return, and return repeatedly to the liturgy[30] until, as St Paul says, Christ is 'formed in us.' (Galatians 4.19).

And alongside this sense of Christ being the end and goal of our common prayer, we could postulate that Christ is also its beginning, that is, the first as well as the last word of prayer. In this respect an intriguing observation was once made by Gabriel Hebert, a celebrated 20th-century pioneer of liturgical renewal, who observed that the opening versicle of Mattins in the monastic office, appropriated in subsequent authorised versions of Morning Prayer, was *Domine labia mea aperies,* which literally translated is: 'Lord, you will open my lips.' The point Hebert drew from this is that the opening of lips, 'is not the lips of the individual worshipper, but the lips of the Christ who now begins to praise God by the members of [his Body] the Church.'[31] And so it is from what we may call the Godward perspective that our prayer can be seen as the work of both the Holy Spirit and Christ in us, as we join with that company of voices offering praise to the triune God as God's 'Secretaries of praise'.

This may all be very well, but how are we to see our worship from a human point of view? Here I believe there is one overriding sense of worship as *liturgical* worship and that is the sense of *joining in.* Liturgical worship is both a global and a cosmic happening before our service begins, and when it does, we are joining something that is ongoing. And this can be seen at different levels. First, worship is a global phenomenon – for at any one time, and in one place or another in the world, Christians are

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[28] Christopher Irvine, *The Art of God: the making of Christians and the meaning of worship* (London: SPCK, 2005).

[29] On this point one might profitably reflect on the repeated use of 'for' and 'on behalf of' in the Roman Canon of the Mass, on the title of the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann early work *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (1963), and the significance of intercessory prayer as a key component of liturgical worship.

[30] Speaking of what he learnt in the monastery, a former Mirfield novice said: 'liturgy is about working your way through Psalm 119 and when you've finished, starting it all over again.' Liturgy is a rehearsal, and yet what might seem to be cyclical is actually like a coil in that when we return, we are not where we were before.

[31] Gabriel Hebert SSM, *The Throne of David* (London: Faber, 1941), p. 253.

worshipping God: 'the voice of prayer is never silent'.[32] This prayer voices the needs of the wider world and is summed up in the Lord's Prayer, that is, the model Christian prayer which significantly is cast in the first person plural: '*Our* Father'. For prayer is essentially corporate, as Pope Francis insisted in the strongest possible terms: 'the liturgy does not say "I" but "We".[33] Further, because it is a shared exercise, our participation does not depend on how we are feeling, wherever we are and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Indeed, even at those times when our sense of God's presence is not especially strong, we can still utter a prayer as long as we have breath and speech.[34] Rather like a relay race, the baton passes on from person to person, from community to community, around the globe, and stretches back and forward in time, as we are drawn in and add our prayer and praise in speech, silence, and song.

From the global we can turn to what I have called the cosmic, and that is the sense of liturgical worship as a joining in the eternal worship of heaven, in company with all the saints[35] and angels, a point that becomes explicit at that climactic moment of praise in the Eucharistic Prayer, the *Sanctus*, introduced by the words: 'Therefore, with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.' A great deal of medieval liturgical poetry was full of references to the angels, conveying a sense that worshippers shared the worship of heaven. John Blakesley gives a superb example of this in the *Kyrie* trope, the *Rex Splendens*:

> 'The Choirs of Cherubim unceasingly proclaim your glory;
> The noble Seraphim respond with hymns of praise.
> The nine angelic orders worship you in their beauty;
> the Church throughout the world unites to sing to you;
> the sun, moon, and stars, the earth and sea all serve you,
> O Christ the King, enthroned on high.'[36]

The mythological language of ranks of angels joining heaven and earth may not appeal to a modern sensibility, but this need not necessarily detract from our having a sense of cosmic praise. Here, Samantha Harvey's novel,

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[32] John Ellerton 'The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended', *The New English Hymnal* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1986), No 252.
[33] Pope Francis Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi* (29 June, 2022) 19
[34] We may recall that Jesus's most forthright prayer was offered on the cross when God seemed utterly distant, even absent.
[35] The *Sanctorale*, the Calendar of Saints is a liturgical unit that reminds us that our worship on earth is joined to the heavenly liturgy of the saints. *Celebrating Common Prayer* (London: Mowbray, 1992), p. 682.
[36] John Blakesley, '*With Angels and Archangels*': *Sharing the worship of heaven Bible, Poetry and Devotion in the Middle Ages* (Leominster: Gracewing 2024), p. 152.

Orbital could be as inspiring for some as the description of heavenly worship in the Book of Revelation, as the model of liturgical worship is for others. What counts here is a sense of something happening above, beyond, and around us, as we join in worship.

In a more environmentally aware age, facing an unprecedented climate crisis due to human activity, there is a further dimension to the overriding sense of *joining in*, and that is the sense of Creation praising its creator,[37] awakening awe and wonder in the worshipper, and hopefully, strengthening our commitment to care responsibly for creation too.[38]

Various strands of scriptural writing across the different biblical genres combine to suggest a sense that every creature and the whole of creation worships its Creator.[39] Many of these passages, such as Isaiah 55.12, which speaks of the trees clapping their hands and the mountains and hills breaking forth into singing, and Psalm 96.11-12 with its depiction of earth, sky and sea rejoicing before God, are indisputably metaphorical. But this way of writing continues through biblical literature and becomes more pressing in the Book of Revelation. Here the visionary writer sees the fulfilment of God's ultimate purposes as the time when 'every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them' will sing praise to the Lamb (Revelation 5.13). In anticipation of this eschatological 'new heaven and a new earth' it seems that creation can even now praise the Creator (Psalm 69.36), and that in some sense the worshipping community has a role in orchestrating this praise (Psalm 148).[40] Furthermore, a point that emerges from the structure of Psalm 148, following as it does the sequence of the creation hymn in Genesis 1, is that humanity is neither the first, nor indeed the most prominent voice in this praise, but one that *joins in* what is the ongoing cosmic symphony of praise. This sense of the primacy of creation's praise becomes explicit in an ancient Song of Praise, the so-called *Te Deum Laudamus*, a canticle which acknowledges that 'all creation worships you, the Father everlasting', and

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[37] Christopher Irvine, 'Liturgy and Creation' in *The T&T Clark Handbook for the Doctrine of Creation*, edited by Jason Goroncy (London: T&T Publishing, 2024).

[38] A couple of decades before the ecological crisis loomed large, Romano Guardini spoke of
how modern man was disconnected from the world of nature and insisted that humankind needed to take greater responsibility for the care of creation. See Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 2024), p. 71, and pp.133-134.

[39] Richard Bauckham argues that the whole of creation, animate and inanimate worships God by its very being. See Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2002), p. 176.

[40] See also *The Benedicite,* the canticle drawn from The Song of the Three in Daniel.

says that it is on this basis that the whole Church, both living and departed, blesses the triune Creator God 'day by day'.

The kind of radical rethink of worship that I have sketched out here highlights worship as a divine work and brings to the fore a sense of our 'joining in', of something that is ongoing in the wider sphere of being. These liturgical perspectives extend the hinterland and horizon of our worship and may significantly increase our capacity to engage in and be engaged by what Guardini called 'the liturgical act'. In playing our part in this liturgical act, however, we do not approach God empty-handed, but come with natural symbols of bread, wine, water, and oil, and with the crafted words in our Prayer Books, and it is the finding of the right words and the most fitting way to stage them that pose equal challenges. But that requires at least another two articles.

Is this my body? Performing the Eucharist; from immanence to transcendence[1]

The Revd Dr Chris Taylor

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In any performance – using the word solely as the vehicle for plays, music, dance and liturgy, not to describe how well the new Porsche runs, nor how badly Rangers are doing – there is nothing to stop a performer or audience member disrupting the show at any time and in any way, by adding words or movement, leaving the performance area, interrupting physically or verbally, or simply forgetting what comes next. This gives every performance its unique excitement and danger. The opposite is also true. Ten thousand hours of rehearsal, of learning and practising words or music can lead to unknown places and states of transcendence undreamed of. Ask any experienced actor or musician.

For most of my life I have had food on my table, a roof over my head, and an income because of my involvement in performance. Coming to theology from the theatre, the balance and tension between the two has been a constant source of excitement and illumination – particularly because of the consistent move within theology to resist the influence and importance performance can (and does) have on Eucharistic (and all other) liturgies and worship. Theology acknowledges performance as analogous to what happens in the Eucharist. It may provide valuable comparisons, metaphors and possibly allegories, but the Eucharist is not allowed to be a performance, nor theatre. This dichotomy is well expressed in e.g.: *Theatrical Theology*.[2] But what happens if we apply a Hermeneutic of Performance to Eucharistic Liturgy? If we go back to Gregory Dix's dictum that the whole church participates in the Eucharist and follow this through wholly in terms of performance?[3]

The Eucharist, every Eucharist, is a memorial, a commemoration, a calling-to-mind, a re-enactment of an event which occurred on one

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[1] In this article CW refers to the Church of England, Common Worship Eucharistic Prayer B, SL refers to the Scottish Liturgy. I am more familiar with the former.

[2] Trevor Hart & Wesley Van der Lugt (eds) *Theatrical Theology* (Eugene, OR. Cascade Books 2014). There are others.

[3] See e.g. Eleanor Charman quoting Gregory Dix in Eleanor Charman, Alasdair Coles, Kelvin Holdsworth and Stephen Mark Holmes, 'Real Presence? Theological Reflection on Online Eucharists', *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* 5.4 (2021), pp. 67-103, p. 68.

occasion, in one place, with one group of people, within a particular time frame and using particular objects. Words and actions are essential elements in the Eucharist. All this is documented in the synoptic gospels. When all of these elements are combined; when a priest presides at the Eucharist with a congregation who 'hear' or 'attend', do we have a theatrical performance, with characters and an audience? And if not, why not?

In the 1549 Holy Communion liturgy Cranmer confirms that Jesus' crucifixion and sacrifice for the world was made unique 'by his one oblation of himself once offered'. Cranmer's use of these words and his insistence on the singularity of the event of Jesus' death, prefigure Peter Brook's distinction between 'repetition' and 'representation' in the theatre: 'Repetition denies the living' while 'representation denies time.' The Last Supper happens once. Jesus is crucified once. The Eucharist as representation, as Brook says, 'takes yesterday's action and makes it live again in every one of its aspects – including its immediacy'.[4] Cranmer's liturgy and subsequent variations maintain the uniqueness of Jesus' actions and makes the Anglican Eucharist theatrical.

Every eucharistic celebration is a representation of a single, sublime event in the life of Jesus and the disciples. The Last Supper has a narrative; it has characters and conforms to the principles of performance referred to above. At its centre is change and it may have outcomes which are not incorporated into its re-enactment. The Eucharist has a script in which Jesus' words at the Last Supper (Matthew 26, Mark 12, Luke 22) are usually central.[5] It uses objects appropriate to their settings which need bear no relation to those of the Last Supper. It assigns roles where individuals in some way 'become' Jesus or disciples. All of these give every Eucharist a theatricality in common with the performance of any play.

The Eucharist is an event of heightened emotions, which includes fear and uncertainty. These are reflected in Jesus' announcement of his imminent betrayal. In the synoptic gospels the disciples share a valedictory meal before Jesus' death. Luke includes the request, plea or instruction 'Do this in remembrance of me.' The fear preceding the Last Supper brings an instability, with Jesus at the centre of what appears tragic, but leads to glory. By the time of the Last Supper, Jesus is pursued by the legal authorities and it stands alongside other great tragedies as a pivotal moment in its central character's journey. Jesus spends his last days in antagonistic stand-offs with Jewish authorities, and meetings away from

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[4] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 157.

[5] Ancient eucharistic prayers which omit the 'Words of Institution' entirely, e.g. the Prayer of Addai and Mari, are a reminder that these words have not always been considered essential.

the city. Awaiting arrest and execution Jesus is at his most vulnerable, isolated, sharing a final meal with his disciples. Now, as the central act of Christian worship, in the Eucharist the church shares its humanity with Jesus, encounters God and is offered hope. As the re-enactment of a single event, the Eucharist becomes, simultaneously worship and performance. In performance everyone participates, performers and audience. And if the Eucharist is a performance, then performers and audience must include God and Jesus.

Can this be possible, and if possible, acceptable? Tertullian's, Oliver Cromwell's and plenty of others' legacy of hostility to the theatre and performance has never fully gone away. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Kevin Vanhoozer, Sam Wells[6] (*inter alia*) have all sought to redress this antipathy and explored drama and performance sympathetically, but always keep God as either supreme director or object of worship, so outside any actual performance. Once we allow the Eucharist to be performance, we must allow everyone involved to be performers and audience and we must follow Stanislavsky's rule 'there are no small parts, only small actors'. Everyone participating in the Eucharist is equally important, valuable and powerful. This includes God and Jesus. As the heart of Christian life and worship, the Eucharist, as performance, puts us on equal terms with God and Jesus.

The Eucharist is intensely physical and cannot be made otherwise. It shares the physicality of people involved in events in real time and space, as does any performance, and a hermeneutic of performance applied to eucharistic liturgies explores this. Most recent Anglican eucharistic liturgies divide themselves into two sections or acts, Word and Sacrament, often differentiated by movement at the Offertory.[7]

Trippingly off the tongue. Performing the Liturgy if the Word

God is an active participant in The Liturgy of the Word. The Collect for Purity, Confession and Absolution are examples of what Keir Elam calls 'character-to-character transaction',[8] requiring God's action to 'cleanse our hearts' and 'forgive us all that is past,' now. With scripture readings, models

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[6] In e.g.: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988); Kevin Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding* (Louisville, KT: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), Samuel Wells, *Improvisation, The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

[7] Some attempt to avoid the sense of clearly differentiated sections is evident in the prayer books which use a different style of section heading, e.g., the Church of Ireland's 2004 Prayer Book speaks of 'Hearing and Receiving the Word of God' and 'Celebrating at the Lord's Table', in preference to 'Liturgy of the Word' and 'Liturgy of the Sacrament'.

[8] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, (London: Routledge, 1980), p.121.

of God as character or priest-as-proxy are possible, though not transactional. The Sermon allows a third model as God's prophetic voice is heard through an authorised minister. A model of God active in worship becomes attractive if the opening words are: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' This establishes a relationship with the Trinitarian God as the only starting point for Eucharistic worship. But it instantly raises the tension between the theological and the theatrical. Is the priest speaking as the conduit through which God communicates: George Herbert's 'the Parson in God's Stead'[9] or taking on the role of God, fulfilling what John MacQuarrie calls a human 'destiny to become God-like'?[10] Theologically we may, cautiously perhaps, assume the former; dramatically the question is less sure, and once the possibility of a 'Brechtian' approach, discussed below, emerges, uncertainties accumulate. Eucharistic liturgy has dialogue, often difficult:

Priest	The Lord be with you;
All	**And also with you**.

may be imperative, so instructing the Lord; or may be an appeal: 'may the Lord be with you'; or *be* may be archaic, standing for 'is,' depending on how the words are spoken; or it may function as a subjunctive ('May the Lord be with you'). The two lines set the context for the event. Whichever interpretation a priest and congregation adopt acknowledges the presence of the Lord, as God. The response 'and also with you' emancipates the congregation, enabling them to recognise and affirm God's presence. The priest here stands alongside theatrical 'messengers' – particularly those from a known but unseen character whose message may have a profound influence on worshippers' lives. Becoming the messenger risks elevating the priest's role to control and filter any source of divine grace and blessing, making the congregational response little more than a formality. A more inclusive hermeneutic, based on Geoffrey Wainwrght's 'God is present in all sacramental action…', maintains the theatrical reality of God as performer and the theological reality of God actively transforming 'those who consent to the values of his kingdom'.[11] It serves also, in theory, to limit opportunities for clerical or ecclesial control over doctrine being imposed by a priest. Alongside God and Jesus, 'our own participation in the

[9] George Herbert, *The Priest to the Temple*, ed. R. Blythe, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), p. 21.
[10] John MacQuarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1966), p. 507.
[11] Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 83.

sacrament is an essential element in the action, so that this action is not just something that operates on us in a purely objective way'.[12]

The distinction between God and Jesus and understanding their presence continues to determine how the Liturgy of the Word functions (and is critical in the Liturgy of the Sacrament). In the Prayers of Penitence, it matters who is saying the Summary of the Law – Jesus himself or the priest. Unlike the reported account of God's gift of his son which invites confession: 'God so loved the world…', the Summary is Jesus speaking a monologue. Jesus' presence maintains the immediacy of listening, speaking and acting, and builds readiness for making present the event of the Last Supper. God's and Jesus' own participation open the way to Confession, Absolution and the *Gloria in Excelsis* become what Robert Alter calls a 'one sided dialogue'[13] where all present are able to acknowledge each other.

The shared participation and dialogues in the Liturgy of the Word are carried into the scripture readings by direct address either to the congregation: 'This is the word of the Lord'; 'Hear the Gospel…', or to Jesus: 'Glory to you O Lord' and 'Praise to you O Christ.' The readings are what Alter calls 'contrastive dialogue', which is 'the exchange between one voice' – God's voice in scripture – 'and a group speaking in a collective voice',[14] – the congregation's response. This dialogue continues with the Creed as a response to the sermon and leads to intercession as, properly, another dialogue where 'the world in its deepest reality' is 'offered to God' (Justin Martyr *First Apology*), building on the example given by Jesus himself, 'our advocate in heaven'. All of these dialogues demand rehearsal and endorse Wainwright's assertion that congregations need 'skilled liturgists'.
A hermeneutic of performance which has God and Jesus present and active throughout the Eucharist, raises acute questions around the participation of 'invisible' characters, principally God and Jesus, and their perception by other participants. It may also identify different ways of encountering them. An analogy may help such identification.

Is all our company present? Performing the Sacrament

In Aristophanes' supreme comedy, *The Frogs*,[15] Dionysus, god of wine and the theatre, visits Hades to find a poet to save Athens from the disastrous Peloponnesian war. All the good poets are dead, and politicians are of no

[12] ibid., p. 470.
[13] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 84.
[14] ibid., p. 72.
[15] Aristophanes, *The Wasps, The Poet and the Women, The Frogs*, trans. D. Barrett (London: Penguin, 1964).

use whatsoever. Euripides or Aeschylus will compete to return to Athens. Pluto the God of Hades, controls the second half of the play although he may not be present (or visible) throughout. His contribution to the dialogue towards the end of the play raises issues. The first is when to bring him on stage. The original problem may be one of economics; for Aristophanes, in the 5th Century BCE, with just three actors (and chorus) available, Pluto, a major character, can only appear when there are two other actors on stage. Most of Act 2 involves Dionysus, Aeschylus and Euripides. Only after Euripides has been defeated in the poetry contest can Pluto come on stage.

Different approaches indicate the flexibility of stage conditions and in modern productions there is a perceived need to have Pluto visible for the second half of the play. He may not speak until within a few minutes of the finale, but without Pluto there would be no play, and for Christian theology, Pluto stands as a powerful metaphor for God in worship, and especially God in the Eucharist. God may not always be seen – but the action can only continue with his permission. In *The Frogs* the protagonist and instigator of most of the action is the divine Dionysus, son of immortal Zeus and the human Semele. Unlike Pluto, he is fully human (and fallible) so mirroring the priest's role in the Eucharist. But at the play's climax, following the comic *agon* between Aeschylus and Euripides, it is Pluto who invites the other participants to join in a valedictory sharing of wine then gives his blessing to those returning to worldly reality.

It is possible to present *The Frogs* without the physical appearance of Pluto on stage at any time. As he has some twenty lines only, a disembodied voice makes casting easier and with careful pointing of lines creates a strong awareness of Pluto's presence. It also stands as a potential instantiation of the model of priest-as-proxy where the supreme God is not seen, but his presence and actions are communicated by a minister. But an unseen Pluto weakens the dialogue between Dionysus and Pluto, where Dionysus' decision may save Athens:

Dionysus	You know I like them so much I don't know how to judge between them. I don't want to make an enemy of either…	
Pluto	In that case you've been rather wasting your time down here, haven't you?	
Dionysus	Well supposing I do make a choice?	
Pluto	You can take one of them back with you…	
Dionysus	Bless you.	(ll. 1412-1420)

This scene stands as an equivalent to the Eucharistic Prayer, where Jesus' decision and action will transform the world. The physical presence of those involved in creating change intensifies the participation and proximity of both actors and audience. From their shared and intimate involvement in the performance all can be made aware that the transformation latent within the play must be carried from the theatrical reality of Hades to the quotidian and war-torn reality of Athens. The language between the two gods indicates Dionysus' acceptance of Pluto's superiority and Pluto's intention to allow Dionysus freedom of choice. It incorporates mutual blessings – Dionysus of Pluto and Pluto of all the characters. Pluto's final invitation, '…kindly step inside my palace… where I propose to offer you the hospitality the occasion demands…', although framed in comic terms, becomes a Eucharistic celebration between gods and mortals, uniting them as they seek to transform their world. Pluto's valediction 'Good-bye then Aeschylus, off you go with your sound advice and save the City for us…' (Go in peace to love and serve the Lord…) reinforces divine and human soteriological concerns. A hermeneutical model of God-on-stage encountered in worship is reflected in a play where gods allow enduring and transformational changes beyond the constraints of theatrical time and space. Performance provides the means to travel from immanence to transcendence and back. But the changes are not guaranteed. Performers cannot be forced to follow a script or rehearsed moves. An audience can leave at any time. A priest can omit – or forget – whole sections of liturgy. People can leave a service, for any number of reasons. All performance deals with 'uncertain presences'.[16]

In performing the Eucharist, God and Jesus are characters of *uncertain presence,* not always visible, but indispensable. The processes of interpreting and portraying characters share commonalities across the theatre and Eucharistic liturgy. Imitation (*mimesis*) is central in both Aristotle's *Poetics* and Justin Martyr's *First Apology*. Aristotle gives imitation as the foundational activity for the whole of drama. 'Epic poetry and the composition of tragedy as well as comedy…are all (taken together) imitations.'[17] In the *First Apology* Justin sees imitation as central to the good end of Christian worship. At the weekly celebration of word and sacrament 'the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation (*mimesis*) of these things'[18] Imitation, for Aristotle is a normal part of growing up and

[16] Daniel Swift, *Shakespeare's Common Prayers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p. 181.
[17] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. M. Heath (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 3.
[18] Justin Martyr, *First Apology: Anti-Nicene Fathers.* Vol 1., ed. A. Donaldson, J. Roberts & C.A. Cleveland; trans. M. Dods & G. Reith, rev. K. Knight (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 2009), Ch. 67.

leads to 'delight and understanding of tragedy'. For Justin it is essential, and dangerous, to the Christian community: 'From what has been already said, you can understand how the devils, in imitation of what was said by Moses, asserted that Proserpine was the daughter of Jupiter and instigated the people to set up an image of her under the name of Kore.'[19] Imitation causes events which involve and affect participants and spectators, and rightly used, leads to understanding despite its associated risks.

Imitation allows the creation of realities rather than 'imaginary worlds which remain explicitly remote.' 'Dramatic worlds… are presented to the audience as "hypothetically actual" constructs since they are "seen" in progress "here and now" … the dramatic world is assumed by the spectator before he knows anything about it.'[20] The same applies to celebrations of the Eucharist. For Wainwright, this reality is the world in which 'the mental, verbal and dramatic signs of Christian worship are kinetic expressions of the constant purpose of God on its way to achievement among his responding creation'[21]. The correspondence of audience and worshippers in 'hypothetically actual' performances is indicated by Wainwright's judicious use of '*responding* creation' in relation to worship so that performance can enable the creation of different realities.

In The Liturgy of the Sacrament Jesus is the principal performer, his presence must be real and must be accounted for. Here, God does not act alongside a congregation so in keeping with the earliest theological practice, Anglican Eucharistic Prayers derive from Jewish origins and are addressed directly to God, as Father and Creator. The (Church of England) optional opening dialogue between priest and people:

> The Lord is here
> **His spirit is with us.**

establishes the conditions for dialogues, monologues or choruses directed to God, about, or by, Jesus. God's role is analogous to Pluto's as the source of power and control, and object of worship. So far, so good. As performance, the problem which arises in all Eucharistic prayers is how to bring Jesus into the performance as anything other than another referent when he is the leading character whose actions and sacrifice save humanity and are to be imitated in the re-enactment of the Liturgy. One model which can provide a solution to the problem is Brecht's theory of epic theatre which he approaches in 'The Street Scene'. This is a short essay exploring a

[19] ibid, Ch. 64.
[20] Elam, *Semiotics*, 1980, p. 111.
[21] Wainwright *Doxology*, 1984, p. 86.

non-naturalistic way of actors telling different characters' stories. By telling them, the actors, or 'demonstrators' become each character in turn. We see the actors taking on roles, but we are also invited to become part of the story by the actor/demonstrator out of role as the storyteller. [22]

The conditions for a Brechtian hermeneutic of performance in relation to the Liturgy of the Sacrament are set in the first six lines of the great majority of eucharistic prayers.

> The Lord be with you
> **And also with you**
>
> Lift up your hearts
> **We lift them to the lord**
>
> Let us give thanks to the Lord our God
> **It is right to give thanks and praise**

In this dialogue the President takes control of the performance, gives instructions and determines its content, separating him/herself from the other participants, and becomes the Brechtian 'demonstrator' describing and acting out events to onlookers. This 'alienation' or separation continues until 'Let *us* give thanks…' when a dialectic cooperation similar to that of the Liturgy of the Word is found. The President, as 'demonstrator' of any character in the narrative, is able to tell the 'spectators' (or audience, or congregation) what is happening, where it is happening, or more significantly, who is making events happen. The President interposes him/herself between God and congregation.

Following the opening dialogue, the eucharistic prayer becomes the demonstrator's narrative or a 'clear description and reporting… [with]… choruses'.[23] It is directed to God as thanksgiving and explanation of past events, suggesting that Jesus 'who was sent by you in your great goodness to be our Saviour' or 'made his home among us' is not yet present as a character. With such words as 'he lived on earth, and went about among us' or, 'he opened wide his arms for us on the cross' (CW) or, 'who burst from the tomb' (SL) the president establishes our new relationship with Jesus, but Brecht reminds us that the 'event has taken place'. The Eucharist is a re-enactment and through imitation, the president-demonstrator makes

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[22] 'The Street Scene' is in, e.g., E. Bentley (ed.), *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968). Its ideas have become axiomatic in much modern theatre.

[23] Bentley, *Theory of the Modern Stage*, 1968, p. 85.

the past present, the invisible visible and brings Jesus into the performance.

The *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* as a (Brechtian) chorus allows the congregation (audience) to respond to the president's demonstration of their holiness by reasserting God's supremacy. In the *Sanctus*, all have become part of 'the company of heaven' and fellow performers with the president. The *Benedictus* acknowledges the presence and status of Jesus who now enters the performance. (In CW, it is only after the acceptance of Jesus' presence that the president-demonstrator may engage with God, present as object of worship, to authorise divine power from the Holy Spirit, present as a character, to make holy the bread and wine in the first *epiclesis*).

Jesus' entrance as a character comes about through a change of tense. The president's earlier words which demonstrate the events of Jesus' life are in a past tense. The Sanctus and Benedictus are in the present tense, incorporating all participants into the events. Through the Eucharist, linguistic devices isolate and unite the president and participants and blur distinctions between 'performers' and 'audiences' or Priest and people.

The eucharistic prayer reverts to the past tense as it reaches its climax. By representing specific details of Jesus' actions, it responds sympathetically to a Brechtian analysis. The focus reverts to the demonstrator-spectator polarity of the earlier biographical narrative. The detailed actions and words enable the president-demonstrator to represent the *character* or *subject* – Jesus – by imitating his actions and allowing us to draw conclusions about him. A hermeneutic of performance, adopting Brechtian theatricality, allows Jesus to become physical, visible, and palpable in the Eucharist, and means that 'the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a personal presence... [and] all personal presence is embodied presence'.[24]

Jesus, a man, is now alone with the disciples for the Eucharistic climax and able to speak the words given him by Luke, so, in Brookian fashion, defying time and making yesterday's action live again. This hermeneutic eases another almost intractable theological problem. If this is Jesus present with us, there is no need to have any concern over the nature, substance, accidents or any other quality of the Eucharistic bread and wine. All those present take part in an event initiated and led by Jesus, who shares bread and wine he has blessed with the participants. Brecht's explication of epic theatre illuminates this possibility – 'the performance's origins lie in an incident that can be judged one way or another, that may

[24] MacQuarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 1977, p. 479.

repeat itself in different forms and is not finished but is bound to have consequences.'[25]

The Eucharist as 'an incident that can be judged' by its spectators-as-participants is democratised. The congregation is on equal terms with all other performers and is required to assess, comment, or respond to the shared action. An embodied Jesus, represented through the actions of the president enables this process of democratisation to take place as the congregation see and hear Jesus, as one of them, repeating the words and actions of the Last Supper. They also know that the man Jesus is simultaneously divine through the same process of demonstration that takes place at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer: 'By the power of the Holy spirit he took flesh…' (CW). A hermeneutic of performance unites all those who participate in any Eucharistic celebration. The congregation enters a relationship with Jesus knowing that his actions can change the world. This democratisation further unites demonstrator and spectator, or president and congregation, in that there is no requirement for any 'priestly' quality for the demonstrator to function effectively. Performance and participation in the Eucharist may be changed or enhanced by the president's/demonstrator's acting skills: 'the Theatre's demonstrator, the actor, must apply a technique…' but, with true Brechtian ambivalence, these skills are not deemed essential: 'The Street demonstrator can carry out a successful demonstration with no greater abilities than, in effect, anybody has.'[26] In the Eucharist, Priest and people become ostensibly one community of disciples to whom comes the embodied Jesus.

In eucharistic performance, Jesus meets his fellow men and women on equal terms. In this new reality he, with his disciples, transcend any differences given by ordination or acting skills. Rather, all share a reality where the embodied Jesus confronts and threatens the structures, society and culture in which he operates.

The performed Eucharist as a threat to theology

The first threat the embodied Jesus poses is to the Trinitarian basis of the Eucharist. The appearance of Jesus at the Last Supper, blessing and sharing bread and wine with the instruction to continue the practice, makes him, as a man, indispensable to the existence of the Eucharist and its future re-enactment. In CW1 Prayer B, Jesus' appearance and action are introduced after the first *epiclesis*, in which the First Person of the Trinity is asked to 'grant that . . . these gifts of bread and wine may be to us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ'. By his words, quoted immediately

[25] Bentley, *Theory of the Modern Stage*, 1968, p. 95.
[26] Ibid., p. 92.

afterwards as part of a short narrative of the Last Supper, Jesus authenticates whatever holiness is provisionally imparted to bread and wine by the power of the Holy Spirit. The implication for a theatrical reading is that the words of the *epiclesis* are preparatory to those of the embodied Jesus conducting the Eucharist. Jesus is visible and his words: 'this *is* my body… this *is* my blood' confirm the congregation's prayer that 'by the power of the Holy Spirit these gifts *may* be to us the body and blood' (my italics). In SL, it is God whose action is sought send the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine and the congregation. So the Spirit may be understood less as a character, and rather as the breath, or controlled and trained breathing, which is the foundation of all performance:

> Hear us, most merciful Father,
> and send your Holy Spirit upon us
> and upon this bread and this wine,
> that, overshadowed by your Spirit's life-giving power,
> they may be the Body and Blood of your Son,
> and we may be kindled with the fire of your love
> and renewed for the service of your Kingdom.[27]

Such an interpretation cannot be sustained, as to do so would maintain an unbridgeable and theologically unacceptable gap between the persons of the Holy Trinity. The second CW *epiclesis* seeks to extend Eucharistic efficacy beyond any single 'memorial of our redemption' at the Last Supper into the wider world of space and time by 'gathering all who share' into 'the company of all the saints' to 'praise and glorify you for ever.' The single SL *epiclesis* restricts such efficacy to 'us'. But neither can happen solely through the action of Jesus at the centre of the Eucharist. It requires the action of the Holy Spirit to bring the faithful into the Communion of Saints, and then, in the SL liturgy, the action of God to receive and reciprocate glory, and it is God rather than the spirit who is asked to 'help us… to live and work…' The sharing of bread and wine followed by blessing and commitment to 'Go in peace' becomes an enactment of a bigger event than the Last Supper fixed in one place and time as it seeks to universalise the Eucharist.

It is at this point that the inevitable rupture between theatre and theology happens. The universalisation ascribed to the Eucharist is impossible under a hermeneutic of performance. Even for Brecht, seeking to extend the reach and effect of epic theatre from the artificiality of the

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[27] Scottish Episcopal Church, *Scottish Liturgy 1982 (revised 2022) with alternative Eucharistic Prayers* Scottish-Liturgy-1982-revision-2022-with-covers.docx. Accessed 4.11.2025.

playhouse, the constraints of each performance fix its theatrical realities into a particular space and time. In the final section of the eucharistic prayer, God is alongside Jesus as a character participating in the re-enactment and to whom the president-demonstrator recounts what has happened: 'And so Father, calling to mind… his perfect sacrifice, made once' (CW). This narration simultaneously reminds worshippers, and makes clear to God, their necessary gratitude for Jesus' soteriological actions. Notwithstanding the uniqueness of every performance, including eucharistic celebrations, where all characters are potentially equal, God's presence must not be diminished by an over-emphasis on Jesus' power to determine events. A direct address re-establishes God's presence, lessening the risk of God's continually being up-staged by the embodied Jesus. The association of 'all [we] who share this one bread and this one cup' with the 'company of the saints' praising and glorifying God, in the second CW *epiclesis* further foregrounds God, present at all celebrations of the Eucharist. We and 'so great a cloud of witnesses' make the Eucharist part of a single continuous mystery transcending worldly time, space, theatricality and performance. In the Scottish liturgy, it is God who consecrates bread and wine further emphasising God's central place in the Eucharist. Conversely, as performance, sharing the meal remains a re-enactment creating the reality of the Last Supper as a memorial of an alienated and enclosed group establishing its own identity, while the final blessing and commitment to going in peace marks a transition from eucharistic to quotidian realities, stressing the liminality of the event and accepting all the vicissitudes such a journey may encompass.

A temporal shift between the reality of the *past-made-present* at the Last Supper and the *now* of the Administration calls into question the extent to which the final section of the Eucharist is part of Brook's *representation* 'in remembrance of me' where people enter the reality of the Last Supper with Jesus, or rather share in a meal *repeating* a past event which is not actually experienced. Is it theatrical or theological? Sharing bread and wine may be closer to an *agape* open to all as the conclusion to the Eucharist uniting its participants in the *now*, therefore distinct from the imitation – *mimesis* – of Jesus' actions, reflecting a possible distinction seen between chapters 9 and 10 of the *Didache* where Eucharist is followed by Agape. If this is the case, the rupture between performance and theological hermeneutics is complete. An *agape* cannot require performers and audience; all become as one in the presence of the Trinitarian God who blesses and empowers all those gathered to worship. The *Didache* trumps the Theatre. Almost.

The breach between the prayer of consecration as an enacted reality and the administration of bread and wine as shared memorial, which forms

the climax of the Eucharist may not yet be complete. Jesus' instructions establish his control of the eucharistic event. The 1662 BCP words at the Administration echo Jesus' words: 'The body … which was given for thee… The blood… which was shed for thee…' with the additional instruction to eat and drink 'in remembrance that he died for thee…'. A Brechtian reading can allow the Priest/demonstrator to continue to represent Jesus here. In CW and SL the words omit the BCP anamnesis with the risk for participants that sharing becomes distribution at odds with Jesus' own emphasis on remembrance. The form sharing takes also influences its meaning. Queuing up becomes controlled distribution, kneeling at a barrier, standing in a circle or remaining in one place together is closer to sharing. If the real presence is in the bread and wine, theologically there need be no issues in such questions since the manner of reception cannot change the state of the bread and wine, and presence of Christ. If the embodied Jesus offers bread and wine, blessed, but otherwise unchanged, sharing them is of supreme importance to the disciples. It unites them with Jesus as fellow beings moving from immanence to transcendence as one body, together, at the climax of the Eucharist. If the final act of the Eucharist moves away from this enacted reality of the Last Supper, its resolution marks a break between this reality where past is made present for all participants including God, over against a united congregational act of worship offered to God.

The related risk – to theology – is that a hermeneutic allowing an enacted event up to, and including the final sharing and dismissal, keeps power and control in the hands of Jesus, who may operate as an individual independent of God or any ecclesiastical authority. How the Eucharist is re-enacted by all involved will affect its interpretation and continue to make each celebration a unique event. The setting apart of ordained and trained leaders and their skill and ability in presentation, communication of intention or interpretation, the familiarity or strangeness of participants and the time of day or season will all shape the understanding of, and response to, the Eucharist. But as performers along with God, Jesus with his disciples have independence of action whenever they re-enact the unique eucharistic event. With independence come the possibilities of individual glory, salvation, error, weakness and the opportunity to make right or wrong, good or bad choices. It allows for disruption and transgression: 'my blood is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins', Jesus tells us, in direct contravention of Jewish law. Yet, for those alongside him, this independent, vulnerable and embodied Jesus may be more attractive and accessible than the Jesus who is present only in bread and wine.

A hermeneutic of performance, especially when employing a Brechtian lens, imparts an inevitable humanising power to the Eucharist

and distorts its theological perspective. This human and embodied power of all performers is fixed for as long as the Eucharist is re-enacted or performed – 'do this' – in remembrance of Jesus. This leaves a question, usually unasked, but worth further exploration. Which 'Jesus' is most approachable, or attractive, or recognisable? The Jesus we encounter in bread and wine or the embodied Jesus who shares time, food and drink and, in his own words, offers forgiveness and a better life? A hermeneutic of performance forces two questions. Does it matter if Jesus is human and fallible? And which Jesus leads us through immanence to transcendence and brings us closer to God? These two questions and the ways in which they juxtapose God and humanity should inform all who are privileged enough to participate and become performers in the Eucharist.

Liturgy and change

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Introduction

It is perhaps important just to offer a few words by way of introduction. Over the last several years I have become more curious about liturgical questions. Whilst I have a lifelong and oftentimes critical relationship with forms of Christian liturgy, and opinions about it, I am not a liturgical scholar. I am, if anything, a feminist theologian with a background in biblical studies.

What needs changing in the liturgy – is there too much focus on words?

Discussion about liturgy today, seems often to coalesce around text – what words we should we say, write, read or otherwise use in church services – though we know that much more than words is involved. In the early 1980s when the Church of England commissioned a report on 'Urban Priority Areas' (UPAs), the resulting report[1] concluded that the Church was failing the predominantly working-class communities in the UPAs,[2] and one reason they gave was the wordy, text-based nature of the newly adopted, '1,300 page Alternative Service Book'[3] (ASB). The Commission felt this was 'a symptom of the gulf between the Church and ordinary people in the UPAs'.[4] These were people who preferred fewer words and shorter services. Liturgy 'expressed in a form that derives from educated and relatively well-to-do circles in the Church',[5] had a tendency to stifle 'more informal and spontaneous acts of worship and witness',[6] that could better

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[1] *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation*. *The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas* (London: Church House Publishing, 1985).

[2] ibid., p. xv: 'It is our considered view that the nation is confronted by *a grave and fundamental injustice* in the UPAs. The facts are officially recognised but the situation continues to deteriorate and requires urgent action. No adequate response is being made by government, nation or Church. There is barely even widespread public discussion'. (italics in original)

[3] ibid., p. 136.

[4] ibid., pp. 136-7.

[5] ibid., p. 66.

[6] ibid., p. 137.

represent 'the incarnational or "embodied" character of our religion'.[7] Working class cultures were uncomfortable with the linguistic formality as well as the regulation of attendance at church meetings.[8] According to the Commission, informality and spontaneity was something that seemed to have greater appeal and value in these contexts[9] making reference to how sharing individual stories about how God had changed people's lives,[10] or joining in events like 'the Way of the Cross acted out through the streets of the East End, Armley, Euston, Notting Hill, Cardiff and Bradford' provided more genuine encouragement.[11] UPA Christians wanted 'beautiful service[s]',[12] but they also wanted a Church life that spoke to their own circumstances in 'non-technical and highly accessible language'.[13]

However, the fact of the matter is, that from the sixteenth century onwards, liturgical discussions in the Anglican Church did not prioritise informality and spontaneity, whilst words, though not the only things at issue,[14] were undoubtedly front and centre. Thomas Cranmer's Preface to the 1549 Prayer Book, envisioned the kind of words, in English 'as [people] mighte understande and have profite by hearyng the same', rather than having to listen to a service in Latin 'whiche they understoode not'.[15] Nevertheless it is clear that he viewed textual standardization or uniformity as a good, and precisely as a remedy for the 'great diversitie in saying and synging' that, according to him, had characterised the liturgical climate of the English Churches prior to this date.[16] A key aim of producing this first Prayer Book, was to bring together 'the whole realme',[17] in conformity with a set, authorised text. As Jeremy Smith's article in this collection suggests, the issue of providing liturgical and scriptural authorisation was key at the time, no doubt responding to the zeitgeist of political and theological uncertainty. As the Church of England insisted on

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[7] ibid., p. 68.
[8] ibid., p. 66.
[9] ibid., p. 137.
[10] ibid., p. 136.
[11] ibid., p. 137.
[12] ibid., p. 136.
[13] ibid., p. 66.
[14] In the 'Vestiarian Controversy' of the 1560s some clergy with puritan sympathies objected to forms of liturgical dress as 'popish'. See W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford, 2014; online edn, Oxford Academic, 18 Dec, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199681525.003.0002, accessed 17 Oct. 2025.) And of course there have been on-going debates since the publication of the BCP about where the priest should stand in relation to the altar.
[15] Brian Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 4.
[16] ibid., p. 5.
[17] ibid.

the uniformity of its liturgical order and the spiritual unity of the realm, these assertions were sometimes belied by the political and theological divisions playing out around it.[18] Nevertheless, this idea remained important. Anthony Sparrow, removed from his parish in 1647 for his public use of the banned *Book of Common Prayer* (and later reinstated at the restoration of the monarchy in 1660), published, anonymously, a commentary on the *BCP* in 1655, entitled *Rationale upon the book of Common Prayer of the Church of England*. In this commentary, he defends the BCP's authority, bound up – literally – within a fixed liturgical text, by claiming for it the power to support 'poor soules' who did not have the capacity themselves, to 'extemporise' or express a proper understanding of divine realities.[19] He celebrates the unifying force of this textual uniformity across the ages, drawing on the resources of patristic theology to claim, '[h]ow admirable a thing Unity – Unity in time, form etc. is'.[20] In other words, for Sparrow, the reality of a unified Church is indeed achieved through this performance of uniformity or 'common prayer', in despite of everything that was taking place around him.

This Prayer Book thus marked a quite dramatic liturgical watershed for the Church of England. And the spirit of liturgical authorization and uniformity under which it came into being, appears to have persisted for several hundreds of years, or indeed, until the liturgical changes represented by the ASB (1980) began to emerge in the 1950s and 60s. Whilst the ASB represented a significant degree of continuity with the previous Prayer Book (and its succession of authorised editions from 1549 onwards), in allowing for authorised alternatives, it dipped its toes into the possibility of new, more contextualised interpretations and a new liturgical poetics. A single set of words offered the assurance – or at least, the appearance – of close/closed belonging. It could be said to perform[21] certain kinds of ecclesial unity, pastoral solidarity or embodiment. But it also excluded alternatives, beyond authorised revisions. So the

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[18] See Brian Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[19] Anthony Sparrow, *Rationale upon the book of Common Prayer of the Church of England,* (London, 1657), Preface. The pages of the Preface are not numbered.

[20] Sparrow, ibid., Preface.

[21] The idea of words as having 'performative' effects – or being able to make things happen – can be traced back to discussions in Plato (*Cratylus*) and Aristotle (*Rhetoric* & *Poetics*) and makes its appearance in Augustine and Aquinas in relation to Biblical themes, e.g. of God's word in creation and Jesus as Word. It is particularly associated in modern philosophy and linguistics with the work of J. L. Austin's theory of performative utterances (*How to do Things with Words* (1962)), taken up in John Searle's later work on illocutionary acts and their felicity conditions (contexts in which such acts are successful) (*Speech Acts* (1969)).

introduction of the ASB was also a tentative challenge to that principle of exclusion. The 1980s was a time when new forms of communication – vectors of new and yet more challenging diversity – were rapidly expanding beyond the scope of the printed word. It could be said that publication of the ASB was thus a recognition of how exponentially more difficult the Church of England (and other Anglican Churches) was finding it, through the uniformity of words alone, to claim unity beyond the 'realm' of its own voluntary (and diminishing) membership.

Or are the people just no longer able to engage with symbols and symbolic action*?*

But by the twenty-first century, under the profound impact of philosophical changes taking place over the previous three centuries,[22] there is widespread acceptance that liturgical words, like scriptural words, need critical contextualisation, interpretation and unpacking, not the least within a framework of symbols that have broader cultural implications as well as more specific doctrinal applicability (as David Jasper in this issue of the SEI Journal discusses in relation to metaphors such as 'Father' and 'King' as potentially 'dead' within contemporary liturgical contexts[23]). Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that there is still some push-back against the idea that traditional liturgical symbols and liturgical language are necessarily susceptible to the impacts of changing cultural circumstances. Rhodora Beaton's recent review of documents published in 2022, by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)[24] and by the late Pope Francis,[25] indicates there are still those who insist that the symbolic framework of the liturgy facilitates human engagement with the divine across all ages. This implies, of course, that we are bound to continue using these symbols and this framework. This was something the Anglican authors of *Faith in the City* in the 1980s had expressed doubts about, mildly chastising the Church for failing to accommodate the

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[22] See on this, Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2007).

[23] See above, pp. 39-41.

[24] USCCB, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*, 25 (Washington DC: USCCB, 2022). https://www.usccb.org/resources/7-703%20The%20Mystery%20of%20Eucharist,%20for%20RE-UPLOAD,%20JANUARY%202022.pdf.

[25] Francis, *Desiderio Desideravi* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2022), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html. Accessed September 29, 2025.

linguistic patterns and more spontaneous cultures of people in UPAs, or to provide better liturgical alternatives to the previously authorised BCP. In contrast, Pope Francis turned his critical attention to the failures, not of the Church's liturgy, but of 'some modern people'.[26] In his Apostolic Letter, *Desiderio Desideravi*, Francis goes so far as to say he thinks that these people have '…lost the capacity to engage with symbolic action, which is an essential trait of the liturgical act'.[27] He doesn't blame people as individuals, but emphasises the dangers and limitations of a broader 'spiritual worldliness'.[28] This is the tougher barrier, preventing people from understanding or engaging with sacramental signs ('space, time, gestures, words, objects, vestments, song, music…' [29] are all included here) that, rightly approached, would enable them to move through the abstractions of language into the concreteness of God's presence and self-revelation, participating in 'the totality of the faithful united in Christ'.[30] According to Francis, the Liturgy, as gift[31] offers the world a powerful 'antidote' to the 'poisons' of this spiritual worldliness.[32] So, rather than taking issue with words that hinder spontaneity, worship or witness, he calls on people to double-down on their participation in the Church's authorised liturgy, and 'to live completely the liturgical action'.[33] He calls on them to open themselves again and again, to the wonder and astonishment of the sacramental mystery here presented[34] and in this way made accessible to those dressed, as he puts it, 'in the wedding garment of faith'.[35] In other words, in his view, the Church's liturgy – as a ritual encompassing words and more, but invoking a mystery beyond all of these – is not the problem.

Beaton does not deny that traditional liturgies may mediate this mystery even for some modern people, but she takes issue with Francis's claim that the Churches are not flourishing liturgically in the modern world,[36] because there is widespread incapacity to engage in symbolic action. She casts doubt on his repeated references to the poison and toxicity of the modern world, contesting his general case and pointing to the many instances in which, 'individuals and communities turn to

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[26] ibid., p. 27.
[27] ibid.
[28] ibid., pp. 17ff.
[29] ibid., p. 23.
[30] ibid., p. 19.
[31] ibid., p. 15.
[32] ibid., pp. 17-20.
[33] ibid., p. 27.
[34] ibid., p. 25.
[35] ibid., p. 5.
[36] Rhodora E. Beaton, 'Liturgy, Symbol, and Culture: Finding a Way in the Twenty-First Century', *Worship* 98 (2024) pp. 204-223, p. 204.

symbolic expression to articulate profound human experience'.[37] '[S]pontaneously and communally' created shrines are common expressions of witness, mourning and remembrance. She echoes the many feminist and liberationist theologians and activists, who point to the yearning and longing of those at the margins of society to have their voices heard, rather than being drowned out by the powerful – including institutions like the Churches.[38] She makes the case that symbols and symbolic actions emerging from the margins do cut through with profound purpose.[39] And, indeed, there are countless examples of this, from 'taking the knee' as a gesture of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, to the murals of 'Families Belong Together' protesting the actions of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).[40] Parents caught up in the Uvalde school shooting 'played audio recordings of their murdered children's voice outside of the Texas governor's mansion'.[41] Flowers and candles are frequently placed in public places after a violent death such as the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer in South London, or of three little girls, stabbed to death at a Taylor Swift dance class in Southport, Liverpool. At Grenfell Tower on the Lancaster West Estate in North Kensington, where 72 people died in a fire, the burned-out shell has been covered by tarpaulins picturing a gigantic green heart, and displaying a short message, 'Grenfell: Forever in our Hearts'. It has become the visible focus of a campaign for local authority accountability but it is also a way of registering the simple grief of so many people who lost family members and friends in the disaster. All of this speaks to an enduring capacity to engage with symbolic action, when the matter is individually or collectively close to our hearts.

Taking the argument further, Beaton draws attention to the way in which the documents she reviews prioritise what the Church (in this case, the Roman Catholic Church) has to offer *to* the world from an unassailable

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[37] ibid., p. 211.

[38] See for example, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn (eds), *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 2010); Craig L. Nessan, 'Liberation Theologies in America' in *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Religion*, published on line 19 December 2017 https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.493

[39] Beaton, 'Liturgy, Symbol, and Culture', p. 211.

[40] https://www.domesticworkers.org/programs-and-campaigns/developing-policy-solutions/families-belong-together/ A specific example was the creation by 'Families belong together' of a mural of immigrants swept up by ICE taken to the arraignment in June 2025 of Kilar Abrego Garcia, a legal immigrant to the USA, who was seized on 12 March 2025, and deported to El Salvador without any form of due process. He was eventually returned to the USA but at the date of writing, remains in prison.

[41] Beaton, 'Liturgy, Symbol, and Culture', p. 211.

standpoint, whilst downplaying its relationship *with and within* the world. She notes recurring references to the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965),[42] in which driving theme is the importance of the church engaging with what is happening in the contemporary world and working alongside it. But the words of Pope Francis and the American bishops appear here to make less of 'the kind of "cooperation" and help that the church can receive from the world'[43] than they do about the failure of people fully to open their hearts to what the Church has prioritised in a liturgical sense. For Beaton, the evidence casts doubt on Pope Francis's claims.[44] Churches have to accept some of the blame for the failure of key symbols to work in the language and cultures of this current liturgical context. The desire to consolidate a community through liturgical uniformity – that necessarily excludes – is understandable and there is historical precedent as we have seen also in the Anglican tradition. But if that unity, achieved through sometimes egregious exclusion, simply renders anything outside the narrowly authored boundaries of the Church's liturgy a lethal impediment to the sacramental mystery, there is real danger of isolating the mystery from people's hearts and lives. Beaton references the doctrine of the real presence that lies at the heart of the eucharistic liturgy,[45] and it is a key point at issue for both Francis and the USBCC in the texts she reviews. She acknowledges that many lay Catholics will have a very different understanding of these sacramental words and actions from that of the Pope or his bishops, no matter how complete the Church's authority in matters of liturgical tradition and interpretation may be in theory.

Nevertheless it is hard to disagree with her view that lay Christians are able to recognise how symbols and symbolic actions work in the world today, to understand when forms of symbolic activity are occurring and thus, potentially, to understand when different, unregulated symbols or symbolic actions are at work, shifting people from the abstractions of language and into a deeper reality.[46] Thus symbolic actions can be, we might say, tokens of a real and present demand, perhaps, that we open our hearts to our neighbours when they need help. It is perhaps the kind of

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[42] https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

[43] ibid., p. 40.

[44] *Desiderio Desideravi*, p. 27.

[45] Roman Catholic teaching says that the words of the eucharistic institution bring about a change in the elements of bread and wine that become the body and blood of Christ. See Beaton, 'Liturgy, Symbol, and Culture', p. 205.

[46] Beaton, 'Liturgy, Symbol, and Culture', p. 208.

symbolic engagement that informed the actions of, Szymon Niemiec, a priest in the Polish Free Reformed Church, when he organised and led Poland's first Gay Pride march in 2001,[47] in the face of opposition from, amongst others, the Roman Catholic Church. Similarly, the Chilean artist, Ian Pierce (Artes Ekeko), features some obvious invocations of the Holy Family in his murals under the banner of the 'Families Belong Together' movement, and against the backdrop of the US administration's brutal campaigns against immigrants and their families.[48]

But liturgical words and symbolic actions still require theological and ethical attentiveness

If 'spiritual worldliness' has not stopped us engaging with symbolic action – that essential trait of the liturgical act, according to Pope Francis – then liturgy can surely function outside regulated tradition, scripture and ecclesial authority (that some describe as 'the magisterium'). This is a sticking point for those who set the greatest store on the unassailable authority of the Church as the exclusive representation of the Spirit at work in the world or pathway to ultimate salvation. But liberation theologies of all kinds from the middle of the twentieth century onwards have continually challenged the Churches' understanding of its authority and power. And Beaton is surely right to suggest that critical attention to issues of power in those Churches remains vital, because there is a darker side to our capacity for symbolic action. Indeed, '[a] certain wariness about the capacity of [Christian, liturgical] symbols to cause harm is nothing new'.[49] Symbolic engagements remain a key mechanism for conveying meanings and values across all social life,[50] and not exclusively within the Churches. We have argued, following Beaton, that contemporary Christians retain a lively capacity for symbolic engagements that have the potential to enter them into the experience of God's presence in the contemporary world, outwith the formal boundaries of church liturgies. But, as Beaton is careful to state, symbolic engagement can also, and apparently quite easily, become associated with values and assumptions that do not look or feel very Christian. Bryan Massingdale's work on racial justice in the Catholic Church concludes that without critical attention, 'the insidious symbolic systems of racism and violence … can infect Christian cultures and even

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[47] https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct1k00)

[48] *https://muralarts.org/artworks/families-belong-together/*

[49] Beaton, 'Liturgy, Symbol, and Culture', p. 212.

[50] Bryan Massingdale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2010), p. 15.

sacramental symbols'.[51] So, it is nothing new to say that the work of liturgical scholars, priests and practitioners, in setting up (or sustaining) symbolic engagements through ritualised words and actions, needs continually to be subject to theological and ethical critique in every new context. Liturgical activities are not immune from the manipulations of bad actors or malevolent ideologies and liturgy as a ritual of words betokening something more than words, far from being a universal antidote to the poison of spiritual worldliness, may itself be susceptible to the poisonous symbolism of racism.[52] It cannot be claimed that the Church's liturgy is simply immune from this or similar 'infections', or denied that the Church's liturgy, has sometimes 'fail[ed] to direct sufficient "ethical attention inward"'.[53] Examples from the Churches' past and present colonial entanglements are all too easily available. Katie Grimes describes how the symbolic elements of a sacramental baptismal liturgy were brutally imposed on helpless slaves for the purposes of control and dehumanisation, both expressing and effecting 'values of violence and segregation that are contrary to the values of Christ and of the early church'.[54] Thus,

> …[w]hile sprinkling holy water on shackled African captives …. priests assigned them a Portuguese name. Performed en masse, baptism stripped Africans of their social identities as well as their individuality, helping to consolidate them into a single racial type.[55]

Perhaps we could say, in sum at this point, that the authors of *Faith in the City* had grasped something important: that it is not that modern people have lost '… the capacity to engage with symbolic action, as an essential trait of the liturgical act',[56] but that liturgical practitioners and scholars need the theological and spiritual agility to continue articulating an ethical theology, without losing sight of how 'modern people' and modern cultures are also themselves exploring and attempting to create symbolic actions and engagements that channel a reality beyond words. The authors of *Faith in the City* perceived perhaps – as was possibly also the intention of the encyclical *Gaudium et Spes* – that these modern people were not always getting it wrong. In other words, it would be better if leaders in liturgy

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[51] Beaton, 'Liturgy, Symbol, and Culture', p. 217.
[52] ibid., p. 217.
[53] ibid., p. 215.
[54] ibid., p. 213.
[55] Katie Grimes, *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), pp. 190-91.
[56] *Desiderio Desideravi*, p. 27.

could develop a rational understanding of the network of symbols 'embedded in cultural contexts',[57] rather than simply dismissing them out of hand as spiritually poisonous because they were not lodged in texts from a previous age. And this might, in fact, make it easier for people to acknowledge the far from negligible liturgical resources we have inherited from those texts. As Massingdale puts it:

> …[o]ne of the most powerful contributions the Christian community can make toward the goals of racial justice is to celebrate the sacrament of baptism regularly, publicly, and well. For when the community reverently washes the body, lathers it in oil and lovingly swaddles it in new garments, it communicates a belief about the reverence of life regardless of color on a level that cannot be addressed by legislation or social policy (as necessary as these are).[58]

Excursus – heritage and change: Profound complexity but also opportunity

So this brings us to a place where formal church liturgy appears no longer to be able to demonstrate the sort of unity through uniformity that Anthony Sparrow commended in the seventeenth century. Though its resources, it might be said, remain rich and deep, its key symbols have come under criticism for not reflecting what is sufficiently recognisable or concerning to modern people – for not really being in touch with where people's hearts lie. Yet engagement in symbolic action, if the former Pope is correct, is a fundamental constituent of the liturgical and, as has been argued here, this is something 'modern people' understand and employ effectively in many contemporary circumstances. Yet the cautionary suggestion has also been made that liturgy or symbolic action more generally, cannot guarantee revelation and encounter on the level of the mystical account of Moses and the burning bush.[59] And in truth, without care, these ancient symbols can be hijacked to express and foster values actually opposed to the Christian Gospel. That is to say, a framework of symbols that can span broader cultural implications as well as more specific doctrinal applicability presents challenges and dangers and requires us to tread carefully through issues of faith, theological teaching, a

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[57] Beaton, 'Liturgy, Symbol, and Culture', p. 218.

[58] Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, pp. 123-124.

[59] Exodus 3:1-6. See on the significance of this narrative in relation to God's self-revelation in Janet Martin Soskice, 'The Gift of the Name: Moses and the Burning Bush', in *Modern Theology* 79.2 (1998), pp. 231-246 https://www.jstor.org/stable/23580117.

proper evaluation of existing liturgical tradition and an ethics attentive to where the hearts of 'modern people' lie. But this is not to say this challenging situation fails to offer opportunities as well.

In this excursus, a comparison is made between those questions posed and matters raised in relation to our Christian liturgical legacy and similar conversations taking place in respect to another form of cultural legacy. The purpose is to explore how some of the same discussions to do with authenticity, non-innocence and the articulation of what lies closest to our hearts yet beyond our limited human understanding, are at work across different contexts. The comparison, hopefully, presents some insights for those of us mulling over the shortcomings of our existing church liturgies and trying to decide where to go next.

Recently, I visited (for the fourth or fifth time this year) the Burrell Collection, Glasgow City Council's premier museum. The collection of Sir William Burrell (and his wife, Constance, Lady Burrell) a wealthy 20th-century shipbuilder, was gifted to Glasgow City in 1944. First of all, then, there are interesting issues in play here about how we approach a significant heritage – whether a Christian liturgical tradition or Glasgow's more limited imperial/conservational legacy. As 'modern people' we may recognise that some things do not come to us innocently – because their acquisition has been achieved by unwarranted violence or through the persuasions of wealth in contexts of poverty. A wresting of objects, lives, meanings and memories into museums or galleries without consent, means that privileged visitors, however respectful, must be open to the uncomfortable idea that they are implicated in violence, exploitation or theft. In relation to the liturgy, some might argue that a similar violent wresting of meanings and memories has also been implicated in its composition and practice, particularly in the ways in which it has subordinated and discounted women and the feminine. Considerations of cultural and actual violence have certainly turned some 'modern people' away from museums, as people have also left the Churches because they have detected forms of violence there too. But others – I would include myself – continue to feel the pull exerted by both these forms of heritage, at an emotional as well as an intellectual level. They are willing to open themselves to the sometimes shaming or subversive as well as the positively creative possibilities of the encounters they facilitate. In relation to a museum heritage some people take on themselves the task of doing their own research into artefacts or offering to become guides where they may face public interrogation about the moral complexity of the museum project and their own complicity in that. They may take up a political position, defending the need for funding or for acts of restitution. They may donate their own money or simply visit with open and hopeful hearts and

minds. We could certainly pitch this in theological and liturgical terms as a series of actions indicating both repentance and thanksgiving.

The Burrell Collection includes several objects with a liturgical origin, mostly in terms of their historical placement in churches and cathedrals. In the North Gallery, there are two sixteenth-century representations of St Anne with Jesus and Mary (Figs 1&2), attributed to locations in middle and southern Germany.

Fig. 1. St Anne, Mary and Jesus, about 1510-1520. Wood, polychromy. Probably made in middle Germany.

Fig. 2. St Anne with daughter Mary and grandson Jesus, about 1500-1520. Wood. Made in Southern Germany.

They both appear to have been attached to walls or other flattened surfaces at one time. Removed, (however gently or otherwise) from their original settings, now preserved from the weathering/legitimating touch of pilgrims or worshippers, behind glass and situated amidst an eclectic range of statues and carvings – mostly of the human form, but with the occasional roaring or springing lion – they present visitors and, presumably also curators, with a puzzle. What are they doing in purpose-built galleries that, strangely enough in this case, resemble the sacred spaces of certain church buildings in their architectural ambitions and hushed solemnity. It seems as if we are all hoping for some form of encounter. But what and how?

Fig. 3. The Burrell Collection, Pollok Park, Glasgow.

Another aspect of similarity between these multi-layered and complex – liturgical and imperial/conservational – legacies in the twenty-first century, is the desire on the part of those in charge, to draw people in, to demonstrate their relevance, their impact and, in different ways, their own material and financial stewardship. A largely liberal and middle-class cadre remains in overall charge of the museum's work, supported mostly by public money. These political and ideological placements are evident in conscientious efforts at outreach and inclusion, including the Burrell's many visitor-friendly amenities, events and gatherings, arranged and advertised under banners celebrating, for example, the Burrell's support of Glasgow's Pride Week.

Fig. 4. The Burrell Collection, Pollok Park, Glasgow.

Across the city there are other collections struggling to do something similar but without the cash. These too, wealthy and lively as well as poor and struggling, appear to be institutions looking to clarify a purpose, convinced of the priceless significance of what they hold in charge yet uncertain how to persuade an often uninformed and sometimes indifferent public to provide them with the sums of money that are required to maintain the buildings, not to speak of the broader project. Many of the concerns of the churches are mirrored here.

As you might expect in a museum that has no specifically Christian or Church foundation and sponsorship, the staging of Christian liturgical objects and references is not prioritised over other exhibits. [60] So, by way of signage in relation to the two representations of St Anne cited above (Figs 1 & 2), there is the merest indication that the tradition – these St Annes are not biblical characters – indicates how she wanted a child but could not conceive. She was then told of her pregnancy by an angel, thus becoming the saint in the Catholic Church to whom women turned in childlessness, pregnancy and birth. The historical researcher or student of the bible might identify a whole range of other significant aspects to the works: the biblical trope of the infertile women chosen by God to bear patriarchs and prophets; the fact that St Anne traditions mirror the account of the annunciation to Mary in Luke's Gospel; the connection between Mary's

[60] It should be said, however, that it is conscious of its wealth of religious artifacts and materials embracing a wide range of religious faiths and traditions.

parents and the dogma of her immaculate conception;[61] traditions of iconography, craftsmanship and patronage in Germany in the early sixteenth century. Most visitors, not already schooled in church, biblical or art historical knowledge, would not be able to grasp the multiple layers of meaning or fit these exhibits into a tradition. And, for some, no doubt, this will raise the question of whether this is 'the right' sort of experience or whether it has become impossibly hybrid, confusing an art critic and historian and a consumer of cultural artefacts with the proper attributes of a devout worshipper. But then, this hybridity isn't confined to museums. Arguably, it is comparable with many people's experiences in churches, in which so much about the liturgy (words and movements, music, architecture, statuary) is skimmed over and understanding assumed or disregarded. Without knowledge of a host of disciplines including liturgy, mystical theology and church and art history, are any of us having 'the right' sort of experience? One of the two representations of St Anne (Fig. 1), seems particularly bemusing. A figure of dignified but careworn, grandmotherly introspection, on whose forearm, the large and lively Christ child appears to be balanced (Fig. 5), reaches down with her other hand towards her child-scaled daughter, Mary, whose swelling belly might well scandalise some modern visitors if they are unfamiliar with any biblical framing (Fig. 6).

Fig. 5. St Anne, Mary and Jesus, about 1510-1520. Wood, polychromy. Probably made in middle Germany (detail).

[61] This narrative of Mary's 'immaculate conception', signalled by an angelic annunciation in traditional narratives, sets Mary apart from any taint of 'original sin' from the beginning, and intensifies the teaching of Jesus' own sinlessness. The dogma was defined in 1854 by Pope Pius IX.

Fig. 6. St Anne, Mary and Jesus, about 1510-1520. Wood, polychromy. Probably made in middle Germany (detail).

These features, unexplained and unexplored, might well puzzle and confuse, much as the still very male-dominated language of richly historical liturgies undoubtedly mystifies many modern people and repels some of them.

One response to the question of whether this is 'the right' liturgical experience, is, of course, to deny that it is: these features or artefacts are meaningless without full contextualisation – perhaps most especially in theological and liturgical terms. Museum figures with minimal explanation have a very limited capacity indeed in such (profane?) spaces, to draw the observer into an experience of divine self-revelation – or what might be described as a 'burning bush' moment. Nonetheless, 'modern people' with that robust and healthy capacity for symbolic engagement, can and undoubtedly do still connect with these figures: as a focus of pilgrimage for those who visit often, as the emotional identification of St Anne as a woman in a world, that is still very difficult to negotiate as a child-bearer, as a focus for wonderment and mystery that is meaningful because of some other association close to individuals or to the wider community. And of course, the loving care of the artist and the beauty of their work is there for all who visit this (free) museum to see. Are there no grounds then, for saying that these works can still draw us in; allow us to move from abstract representation into a deeper reality, even if framing them within an existing or historical liturgy would no doubt, offer a different pathway?

Although the museum has changed the meaning of St Anne, as it was when she arrived in Church in Germany in the early sixteenth century, it has not been able to deprive her of all meaning or beauty. It has not made it impossible for her to function as a conduit for wonderment or the incoming of the new, or if you like to look at it that way, a God whose form we cannot imprison within our own limitations. On the other hand, maybe the theological and liturgical possibilities of the moment might be more fully exploited. Apprehensions of ethical complexity alongside the pleasurable appreciation of beauty and meaning are rich contexts for drawing closer to what lies in the hearts of individuals and communities – whether in churches or museums.

Similarly, in a church, liturgical historians and practitioners might want to take visitors and worshippers on a journey, to explain the pathways of liturgical origins and inspiration as well as of change, reform and review, pathways that might even open some of them up afresh, to that profound experience of the wonder and astonishment of the sacramental mystery indicated by Pope Francis and his bishops. They might also want to usher worshippers gently towards the kind of critical ethical work that shows them the non-innocence of certain linguistic and ritual features and their rootedness in very partisan forms of ideology: the masculine terms of liturgical speech and imagery, betokening the Church's enduringly patriarchal structures, for example. Yet this does not necessarily remove the capacity for a particular liturgical order to connect with worshippers, or even to become for them the means to receive the bread of life or the cup of their salvation.[62]

Inconclusive Conclusions

When the Commission that produced, *Faith in the City* set out its report on the state of a Church aiming to reach wider congregations and to make the Gospel more present to people, through forms of worship, perhaps, with fewer words and more spontaneity and feeling, it was signalling the need for change. It saw there was a disparity between ways of practising the liturgy familiar to the Commission's membership, and how this was being received in the UPAs, though it could not necessarily grasp the whole extent and character of this disparity. It was also clear that the Commission continued to believe that liturgy had a role to play in providing resources with which to approach deeper divine realities. Some more recent Roman Catholic publications have expressed pessimism about the abilities of 'modern people' for engagement in symbolic understanding and action

[62] See, *Scottish Liturgy, 1982, Revised (2022), with Alternative Eucharistic Prayers*. Prayer of Offering, second alternative. Scottish Liturgy 1982 with Alternative Eucharistic Prayers - The Scottish Episcopal Church.

especially in relation to the theological nuances of the existing eucharistic liturgy. But identifying a lively capacity for symbolic action and understanding amongst Christians and non-Christians alike, Rhodora Beaton and others provide support for the idea that this offers contemporary liturgical scholars and practitioners new opportunities for (theologically) informing and, (ethically) critiquing those symbolic engagements, but also for exploring and learning from their insights into where modern people's hearts lie – what matters and what speaks to them. Perhaps this might also help to energise the Churches, offering reassurance that people are not so vulnerable to forms of spiritual worldliness, on the whole, that they fail to understand both the importance of continually articulating our longings afresh, and the recognition that some realities will continually exceed our limited human capacity to describe.

Joris Geldhof, Edited. *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Liturgy*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN. 978-1-009-18664-3. P. xi, 425. Pbk. £29.00

Reviewed by David Jasper

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We are in an age when we see almost daily additions to large and learned volumes which are designated as 'companions' or 'handbooks' and which accompany a wide variety of subjects and disciplines. In the *Cambridge Companion to Christian Liturgy* we have one more, and it is a welcome publication, a substantial introduction mainly to the liturgy of the Christian west in its historical, theological and pastoral aspects, with, in addition, useful discussions of the artistic and ecclesiological dimensions of liturgy and worship. But its limitations do beg questions as to the real purpose and value of such 'compendium' books. The history of western liturgy (with only one chapter out of six devoted to the liturgy of eastern Christianity) is complex in many and various ways and one hundred pages can only, at best, offer a descriptive outline with here relatively about current liturgical practice and revision in our own century.

Yet there are real strengths in this collection of essays as they offer a welcome approach to the subject to student, scholar and practitioner. The editor, Joris Geldhof, widely respected for his scholarship and writing on liturgy, theology and secularism, makes clear in his Introduction that liturgy lies at 'the deepest core of the Christian religion' (p. 1), and it demands a profoundly *theological* understanding at its centre, while at the same time this cannot be dissociated from a complex *interdisciplinary* approach that gives due attention to a wide range of fields including performance, philology, cultural studies, anthropology and so on. The study of liturgy is rooted in history and the practice of Christian worship since the earliest days of the church, yet it is also deeply pastoral and 'embodied', as the essays by Bridget Nichols and Samuel Govaerts in particular make clear.

This complexity is well introduced in the order and structure of these twenty-two essays. Part I, entitled 'Liturgy Throughout the Ages', can at best only be introductory to such a vast field, though each essay is scholarly

and provides useful further reading. It seems a pity that Katherine E. Harmon's contribution on the Liturgical Movement essentially stops at the Second Vatican Council and with only the briefest of references to the burgeoning ecumenical co-operation in liturgical revision in the years that followed in the wake of the Council. It seems a pity also that having situated the Movement within the wider context of Romanticism (p. 103), no mention at all is made in the essay of the contribution of the Tractarians and Anglican liturgical debate in the middle years of the nineteenth century. Part II is entitled 'The Celebration of the Liturgy' and deals with the eucharist and sacraments as well as the liturgy of the hours and the liturgical year. In these essays the strong Roman Catholic and western emphasis of the collection is most evident, not exclusively so, but still very clearly. Thus, the suggestions for further reading at the end of the essay on the eucharist by Patrick Prétot are almost exclusively from Roman Catholic sources. Part III engages with 'Liturgy and the Arts' with essays on liturgical music, architecture and icons and images. Part IV is entitled 'Liturgy and the Life of the Churches', addressing the 'embodied' nature of liturgy in an essay by Bridget Nichols, spirituality, the pastoral ministry and the proclamation of the word. At the end of this section there are essays on ecumenism and world religions, the latter again almost exclusively Roman catholic in its perspective. The final section of the book, Part V, is entitled 'The Study of Liturgy', touching upon issues in liturgical textuality, this with an historical approach, ritual and finally liturgical theology, here briefly introducing such important scholars as Alexander Schmemann, Aidan Kavanagh and the Lutheran Gordon Lathrop. Its final note mentions the 'retrieval' of mystagogy, the 'initiation into the Christian faith through the ritual mysteries' (p. 402), a welcome subject upon which to conclude the book.

Despite its limitations, this new *Companion to Christian Liturgy* makes a welcome and accessible addition to liturgical resources for students, scholars and liturgical practitioners. It is to be hoped that it might assist in establishing a solid basis in liturgical history, theology and pastoral practice, while encouraging an interdisciplinary approach to the subject. It deserves a wide readership.