

# A THEOLOGIAN'S CHALLENGE TO LITURGY

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**T**HIS PAPER has for purpose to issue a challenge. The challenge, strong indeed but nonetheless loving, leaps from a particular perspective. What does *theology* ask of liturgy? More precisely, what does the American theologian demand of the American liturgist? The challenge will limp on both its legs: the theology, for all its yearning to reflect what is most Catholic, cannot avoid being my theology; and the liturgy I enter so saucily is a luxuriant thicket where even the expert would do well to walk warily. This said, I shall focus on three aspects of the problem that strike me as basic, crucial, neglected: (1) reform, (2) theology, (3) America.

## REFORM

Since Vatican II, a handful of words have become key words within Catholicism. I am thinking, for example, of charism, collegiality, community, conscience, dissent, ecumenism, experience, freedom, identity, integrity, peace, people of God, reconciliation. These, and others, are crux words in two senses: (1) they are crucial words, critical words, and (2) they are dreadfully difficult to define. In consequence, they not only stimulate passion; they create confusion. Rarely has Catholic vocabulary been so arbitrary. It is Humpty Dumpty reincarnate: "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

There is one key word which, as I see it, rivals the rest in importance and tends to outstrip them in the looseness with which its meaning is invested. I mean the word "reform." It, too, is a crucial, critical word, and it is dreadfully difficult to define. Here I am not so much concerned that the ordinary, uncomplicated Christian, without pretensions to scholarship, abuses the word or uses it without precise meaning. I do not mind that new Savonarolas unfurl it as a shibboleth. I am far more disturbed because the genuine meaning of reform has escaped so many who use it from cathedrals of authority (e.g., bishops at Vatican II) and so many who use it from cathedras of learning (e.g., theologians, historians, and liturgists).

In a sense, the confusion is understandable. A word that was foreign to twentieth-century Catholicism, a word that bore 450 years of Protestant connotation, suddenly became part of our official and everyday vocabulary. And so it was understandable that we used it gingerly, that we kept from reform any Reformation ideology, that we interpreted reform in a

way that did no violence to inherited ideas of a Church reformable only in accidentals, on the outer edge of its existence. Few Catholics have grasped what John O'Malley expressed so strongly in one of the most significant articles ever published in *Theological Studies*:

... two distinguished historians of religious reform, Hubert Jedin and the late Delio Cantimori, have independently ventured the opinion that the perennial spirit of Catholic reform was accurately epitomized by a prior general of the Augustinian order, Giles of Viterbo (1469-1532), in his inaugural address at the Fifth Lateran Council: "Men must be changed by religion, not religion by men." What Vatican II's *aggiornamento* called for was precisely the opposite. It determined that religion should be changed by men, in order to meet the needs of men. Today, some years after the close of the Council, a minimalist interpretation of Vatican II's "accommodation to the times" no longer seems possible, no matter what the intentions of the Council fathers were. In the breadth of its applications and in the depth of its implications, *aggiornamento* was a revolution in the history of the idea of reform.<sup>1</sup>

O'Malley's research into the twenty general councils that preceded Vatican II reveals five concepts of reform, five reform procedures: "(1) reform by excision or suppression (keep what you have by removing threats to it); (2) reform by addition or accretion (keep what you have untouched, but add new things alongside it); (3) reform by revival (keep what you have by breathing new life into it); (4) reform by accommodation (keep what you have by making adjustments for differences in times and places); (5) reform by development (keep what you have, but let it expand and mature to its final perfection)."<sup>2</sup> Excision or suppression, addition or accretion, revival, accommodation, development—each of these reform concepts, each of these reform procedures, stems from, was conditioned by, a style of historical thinking, a philosophy of history. And one thing these philosophies of history have in common: "they are traditional or conservative as regards the past."<sup>3</sup> There is classicism or substantialism: an enduring substance voyages through history untouched by history, changed only in insignificant externals. There is providentialism: legitimate change is the work of God alone; man-made change is sacrilegious. There is primitivism: change is recognized, but

<sup>1</sup> John W. O'Malley, S.J., "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 32 (1971) 575-76. It should be increasingly clear that my reflections on reform are deeply indebted to O'Malley's provocative research; I move out from him only to apply that research to liturgical reform.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 595.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

change is decline and fall; the earlier is better; reform is return. There is evolutionism: authentic change is never by reversal, but by way of growth, organic development of what already exists.

Two serious lacunae here: one in the concepts of reform, the other in the style of historical thinking that conditions the concept. In the concepts of reform, in the reform procedures, that preceded Vatican II, the past always remains; continuity is kept; there is no break with the past. "What is notably absent . . . is reform by transformation or even by revolution, for both of these imply at least a partial rejection of the past in the hope of creating something new."<sup>4</sup> And yet, this is precisely what Vatican II did: it introduced transformational reform, revolutionary reform. It introduced the new. It forced on the Catholic mind the issue of discontinuity.

I am not claiming that the Council *formulated* the new concept of reform. It did not; in fact, the word "reform" is all but absent from the documents. And it is clear that the changes the Council urges are not seen as irruptions: they do not do violence to the authentic Catholic patrimony, do not involve a break with the stream of Catholic continuity. The Council did not ratify discontinuity, did not endorse transformational reform, the creatively new. Why, then, use Vatican II to support a new vision of reform? Several reasons—no one of them an apodictic proof, but all of them together a persuasive argument. I mention two.

1) *Aggiornamento* is accommodation—accommodation to the times. Not indeed at any price, but Vatican II inserted the Church into history, into Christendom, into the world.<sup>5</sup> Not a theory of accommodation (we were not ready for that), but "a greater alertness to historical and cultural differences than any previous council had shown. In its pervasiveness and implications *aggiornamento* marked a revolutionary shift in reform thinking as religion was changed by and for men in order to accommodate these new historical and cultural differences. In this respect Vatican II stands in marked discontinuity with the councils which preceded it. The fact that the Council fathers spoke of their experiences in terms of a new Pentecost suggests some awareness among them that the Council had radical implications."<sup>6</sup>

2) Several of the key documents—especially the Declaration on Religious Freedom and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World—reveal a fundamental shift in historical consciousness. A

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Cf. my article "The Meaning of Vatican II," *Perkins School of Theology Journal* 21, no. 3 (Spring 1967) 23–33.

<sup>6</sup> O'Malley, *art. cit.*, p. 589.

number of different styles of historical consciousness were operative at the Council, and the scholar who would try to reconcile these would have to be a hero and a magician. And the Council was not in a position to relate these styles of historical thinking to what is most characteristic of today's historical thinking. But, the point is, the Council was not only characterized by classicism, providentialism, primitivism, and evolutionism. It opened the door to a type of historical consciousness where something genuinely "new" is a possibility, where there is discontinuity with the past. This is what is characteristic of contemporary philosophy of history. In O'Malley's fine summary:

What modern historical method enables us to understand more clearly than was ever understood before . . . is that every person, event, and document of the past is the product of very specific and unrepeatable contingencies. These persons, events, and documents are thus contained within very definite historical limits. By refusing to consider them as products of providence or as inevitable links in a preordained chain of historical progress, decline, or development, we deprive them of all absolute character. We relativize them . . . .

What this means is that we are freed from the past. We are free to appropriate what we find helpful and to reject what we find harmful. We realize, perhaps to our dismay, that we cannot simply repeat the answers of the past, for the whole situation is different. The question is different. We are different.<sup>7</sup>

Further, the fact that the historian himself is *in* history, cannot step outside history, means that "Not only has the past been removed from some superplan, but it also is now subject to the discontinuity of insight which will be operative between one historian and another or between one generation and another."<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the great cultural repercussion of contemporary historical thinking is the realization that, if the past imposes no pattern upon us, we are free to try to create the future. Our freedom is, of course, limited. The fact still remains, however, that if we are freed from the past in the sense of not expecting it to tell us what to do, we are free to make our own decisions for the future. Indeed, we have no escape from such freedom, fraught as it is with dreadful burdens.<sup>9</sup>

What does this contemporary historical consciousness mean for reform? It does *not* mean that we jettison all other styles of historical thinking; it *does* mean that we purge Catholic reform thought of what is exaggerated in those styles: excessive emphasis on continuity. This implies that our Catholic past is not a mere matter of ever onward, ever upward. Discontinuity is a fact of our history, even if you are willing to go

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 597.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 598.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

only as far as Vatican II's cautious "quae minus accurate servata fuerint"—what Abbott-Gallagher translate simply as "deficiencies."<sup>10</sup> This means that the Church is constantly creating her future. A final paragraph from O'Malley:

Imagination and creativity must enter every reform if it is not to be utterly irrelevant and dreary beyond human endurance. As a matter of fact, creativity has been at the heart of every successful reform and renaissance, even when men sincerely believed that they were doing nothing else than transposing the past into the present. Creativity, which is radically opposed to slavish imitation, implies both utilization of the past and rejection of the past. The outcome of creativity, in any case, is something *new*.<sup>11</sup>

This newness, this openness to creative reform, which is only implicit in Vatican II, has been exploited explicitly since 1965. And one of the most explosive areas is discontinuity in doctrine. The issue is complex, perilous. Is there really room for creative reform in doctrine? I mean where the Church recognizes not only inadequacy but error, simply because there is a new insight which preserves the perennial truth in the former proposition, while correcting what is dated, even false? Here I mention only a few instances of discontinuity in doctrine. One is the age-old axiom "Outside the Church no salvation." The traditional understanding of this axiom, from the Fathers through medieval popes and councils down to the first half of this century, was harshly literal; its conception of "church" was far narrower than Vatican II's "The Church of Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church."<sup>12</sup> The advances in theology call for a fresh understanding of the Church, and what it means to be "outside" the Church, beyond what has been traditionally understood by those words.<sup>13</sup>

Second, the strong affirmation of Boniface VIII that national kings were subject to the emperor, and that the emperor's power came from the pope, would be termed by Pius XII in 1955 "a medieval conception, conditioned by the period." Boniface's epochal bull *Unam sanctam* (1302), affirming two swords, a spiritual and a temporal, in the service of the Church, and defining that for salvation every human creature must be subject to the Roman pontiff, is hardly acceptable today as binding on the Christian intelligence.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Decree on Ecumenism, no. 6 (*The Documents of Vatican II* [New York, 1966] p. 350).

<sup>11</sup> O'Malley, *art. cit.*, p. 600.

<sup>12</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 8.

<sup>13</sup> In this connection cf. the informative article by Avery Dulles, "The Church, the Churches, and the Catholic Church," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 33 (1972) 199-234.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum* (32nd ed.; Barcelona, 1963) nos. 873-75 (469); M.-D. Chenu, "Unam sanctam," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 10 (2nd ed.; Freiburg, 1965) 462.

Third, religious freedom. The ringing affirmation of Vatican II that "the right to religious freedom has its foundation" not in the Church, not in society or state, not even in objective truth, but "in the very dignity of the human person"<sup>15</sup> sounds a thrillingly new note in official documents. *Dignitatis humanae* is not simply continuous with Gregory XVI and Pius IX; the problem is discontinuity.<sup>16</sup>

Fourth, the decrees of the Biblical Commission in the early years of this century. In 1907 the *Motu Proprio Praeantia Scripturae* asserted that the decrees of the Biblical Commission, past and to come, were binding on Catholics in conscience:<sup>17</sup> the decisions were not debatable, whether on the authorship of Isaiah or on the historicity of Genesis 1-3. In 1948 a letter from the Secretary of the Commission to Cardinal Suhard in effect took back certain rigid provisions of earlier decrees in three significant areas.<sup>18</sup>

Most neuralgic, of course, is the issue of dogmatic impermanence. Sufficient for our purposes here is the summary given by Avery Dulles after a careful study of contemporary reassessment of dogma:

It is far from obvious that the dogmas of the Church, having been "revealed by God himself," cannot be revised by the Church, or that they are unconditionally "necessary for salvation," or that they can in no sense be subjected to compromise. Our findings suggest that the Catholic dogmas as presently formulated and understood may be significantly changed and that positive acceptance of all the dogmas may not be absolutely necessary for communion with the Roman Church.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, a splendidly appropriate paragraph in which Fr. Dulles says about reformulation of dogma what must be said about the reform of liturgy:

The reformulation of dogma . . . can never be a simple negation of that which was previously held. But the development can be jagged and discontinuous rather than logically homogeneous. When the gospel is transposed into a new linguistic-cultural framework, new things must be said in order that the full

<sup>15</sup> Declaration on Religious Freedom, no. 2.

<sup>16</sup> I am aware of, but cannot here enter into, the complex issue of doctrinal development raised by the ethical, political, and theological tenets affirmed in Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom. Has the Declaration done no more than discard transient, fugitive elements in the Church's tradition, or is it more faithful to history to affirm that Vatican II discarded the tradition? Catholic theology has not yet laid bare the type of "development" that moves from Gregory XVI's *Mirari vos* (1832), through Pius IX's *Quanta cura* and the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), to *Dignitatis humanae* (1965).

<sup>17</sup> *DS* 3505 (2113).

<sup>18</sup> *DS* 3862-64 (2302).

<sup>19</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (New York, 1971) p. 164.

gospel may be heard and in order that distortions be avoided. As noted above, to say the old things in a new cultural situation might well result in a deformation of the revelation.<sup>20</sup>

What has been said about reform in general, and about reform in doctrine, must be said about reform in liturgy. Indeed the liturgy must be open to reform in the five ways that were acceptable before Vatican II: excision or suppression, addition or accretion, revival, accommodation, organic development. But such reform will result in changes rather than in change. The critical question is: Are liturgists (is the liturgy) open to creative reform, to transformational reform, to revolutionary reform? The answer will be no if the reform spirit of liturgists allows men to be changed by the liturgy, but not the liturgy by men. The answer will be no if their style of historical consciousness is limited to classicism, providentialism, primitivism, and evolutionism. The answer will be no if they accept a minimalist exegesis of *aggiornamento*, of "accommodation to the times." The answer will be no if discontinuity with the past is anathema to them, if the new must emerge logically or organically from the old.

In this connection it is my conviction that *Sacrosanctum concilium* is indeed, as C. J. McNaspy said, a "magnificent text."<sup>21</sup> It distinguishes "unchangeable elements divinely instituted" from "elements subject to change," elements which "ought to be changed . . . if features have by chance crept in which are less harmonious with the intimate nature of the liturgy, or if existing elements have grown less functional."<sup>22</sup> It links "sound tradition" and "legitimate progress."<sup>23</sup> The liturgy should be open to the adaptation that comes from the genius and traditions of different peoples.<sup>24</sup> "The liturgical year is to be revised so that the traditional customs and discipline of the sacred seasons can be preserved or restored to meet the conditions of modern times."<sup>25</sup> Particular musical traditions, especially in mission lands, are to be given "a suitable place."<sup>26</sup> "The art of our own days, coming from every race and region, shall also be given free scope in the Church."<sup>27</sup> The "materials and form of sacred furnishings and vestments" may be adapted "to the needs and customs of different regions."<sup>28</sup>

All this is splendid, because it encourages accommodation. Here is a

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>21</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II* (n. 10 above) p. 133.

<sup>22</sup> Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 21 (*Documents*, p. 146).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 23 (*Documents*, p. 146).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 37-40, 65 (*Documents*, pp. 151-52, 159).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 107 (*Documents*, p. 169).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 123 (*Documents*, p. 175).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 119 (*Documents*, pp. 172-73).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 128 (*Documents*, p. 176).

form of *aggiornamento*. But a profound lack in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy is the absence of a theology of reform based on a style of historical consciousness that not only respects continuity but expects discontinuity. Here, I submit, lies a basic challenge to the theologian of the liturgy. Worship confronts him with a problem like the problem with which doctrine confronts me: a sacred past and a unique present. Liturgists will tinker with the liturgy, will be little more than rubricists, will be dangerous conservators or innovators, if they do not develop a reform theology based on historical thinking. More accurately, whether they like it or not, at this moment liturgists do have styles of historical thinking (perhaps unreflective); these styles of historical thinking affect their theology of reform (perhaps unreflective); this reform theology dictates what they are ready or willing to change in today's liturgy, how far they are willing to go, where they believe they must say "Thus far and no further."

The point is, liturgists are men and women with uncommon power. But one of the perils of power lies in ignorance. I dare, therefore, to urge on liturgists a profound self-examination. What is your style of historical consciousness? Does it allow for discontinuity with the past? If so, what limits can you set on liturgical breaks with the past?

#### LITURGY AND THEOLOGY

This leads somewhat naturally into my second main point: liturgy and theology. Better still, the liturgist as theologian. Despite the remarkable progress stimulated by the liturgical movement earlier in our century, despite the impressive research of centers like Maria Laach and scholars like Odo Casel, a dangerous chasm still yawns between liturgy and theology. In our context here, I am not so much concerned over the damage done to theology by its neglect of the Church's liturgical experience, by its failure to take seriously the age-old adage *Lex orandi—lex credendi*. I agonize much more over the converse tragedy, over the hurt to liturgy when too few liturgists are profound theologians. Liturgists have not set themselves sufficiently to the task which Alexander Schmemmann saw as dictated by the liturgical movement:

... in its inner development, it ... pointed up the need for a strictly theological analysis of the data of the liturgical experience and tradition of the Church. It became clear that without such theological 'reflection' the liturgical revival was threatened either by an excessive submission to the 'demands of the day,' to the radical nature of certain 'missionary' and 'pastoral' movements quite prepared to drop old forms without a second thought or, on the other hand, by a peculiar



archeologism which considers the restoration of worship in its 'primitive purity' as the panacea for all contemporary ills.<sup>29</sup>

Liturgy is a powerful action. It is *sacramentum fidei*: sacrament of Christian belief. As sacrament, it has a twin function: *exprimit* and *causat*. Liturgy gives expression to the faith experience of the Christian people, and liturgy molds that experience.

*Exprimit*: liturgy expresses, ritualizes, the faith experience of the Christian people. Here the liturgical theologian confronts a complex challenge. Does this liturgy express the experience of this people—better, the experiences of these peoples? Here we need the social scientists: to research and interpret the hopes and fears, the beliefs and doubts and agnosticisms, yes the atheisms, of our people. Today's parish is a microcosm: into it flood more styles of life than the cultures that streamed into ancient Alexandria. But liturgical theology is more than social science. Given the data, I am compelled to ask: Is this what our liturgy in fact ritualizes? And if it does, how Christian is this ritual? Can there be the same anointing of the sick in America, where life expectancy is 70, and in Burma or Burundi, where you are old at 35? Dare Christians "christen" a destroyer in our time? Do we bless the flag in '74 with the same ritual as in '41? Does the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed express the living faith of today's Christian, or is it a spiritless, joyless set of outmoded words that safeguard orthodoxy and silence doxology? The individual questions are legion; the basic issues are two: a fact (does this liturgy express this experience?) and its validity (how Catholic is that expression?).

The dimensions of this problem, its dangers, were brought home to me in a recent article by Brian Wicker:

[The liturgical] revival [among organized Christians] had a good side—in that it stimulated mature and scholarly thought about the fundamentals of Christianity and an understanding of the depths to which secularization had gone. But it had a bad side too—the side that made it possible in some places for the Christian liturgy inside the church and the fascist liturgy outside it to coexist, or even at times to cooperate with each other. The liturgical revival was, in its origins, a conservative or even reactionary movement, liable at times to delusions of grandeur. This gave it a certain sympathy for the trappings of fascism and made the essential atheism of the latter harder to nail down. It is perhaps not surprising that those Christians most opposed to Hitler were often those least touched by the new liturgical ideas—either intellectual protestants like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or simple tridentine-formed peasant-Catholics like Franz Jägerstätter. Neither is

<sup>29</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, tr. Asheleigh E. Moorhouse (London, 1966) pp. 12-13. See also Raimundo Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1973) p. 16.

it surprising that many post-fascist secular theologies of Europe and America (including those developed under Catholic auspices) have today turned away from liturgy as a source of inspiration or hope, or have even given it up as a bad job altogether.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed the liturgy expresses experience! Wicker's sobering observation suggests as well the other side of the coin. Liturgy not merely interprets what already exists: *exprimit*. It is the task of liturgy to mold the Christian experience of faith: *causat*.

Here, above all, the Church challenges the theological competence of liturgists—specifically, their theology of liturgical reform. For they must wed into one two crucial qualities: fidelity to what is abidingly Catholic, and freedom to create new forms. In two words, continuity and discontinuity. In this connection, the theology on which they operate is critical. Know it or not, like it or not, each liturgist's worship structure stems from a theological model, a way of looking at the sacraments.

In consequence, I would ask each liturgist: what is your sacramental theology? Do you see the sacraments, with Schillebeeckx, as "the earthly prolongation of Christ's glorified bodiliness," so that "the Church's sacraments are not things but encounters of men on earth with the glorified man Jesus by way of a visible form"?<sup>31</sup> And if you do so see the sacraments, are you prepared to accept the phenomenology that underlies such encounter, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, Buytendijk, and Binswanger? Or is "encounter" only an exciting word that means just what you choose it to mean, a cool catchword for a gossamer contact with Jesus in the breaking of the bread? Or, with Joseph M. Powers, are Christian symbols the answer to the question, what is man?<sup>32</sup> Is the Christian symbol system the outgrowth of the human experience of the first witnesses of the risen Lord, the experience of what they and we could be and would be in the power of the Spirit? And if you do see the sacraments as a humanizing experience, are you prepared to define the human in terms of spirit experienced as openness to the world, as liberation to become something not quite definable, as being for others?

Put another way, what do you stress in the Eucharist? The sacrifice of Christ? A memorial of the Christ event? A meal? An eschatological pledge? Or an umbrella enveloping all these?

<sup>30</sup> Brian Wicker, "Ritual and Culture: Some Dimensions of the Problem Today," in James D. Shaughnessy, ed., *The Roots of Ritual* (Grand Rapids, 1973) p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York, 1963) p. 44.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Joseph M. Powers, *Spirit and Sacrament: The Humanizing Experience* (New York, 1973).

This is not to suggest that theological reflection exhausts liturgical theology; it does not. I resonate to Peter Fink's insistence that unless the declarative language of reflection shifts into the evocative mode of prayer, "the theological model can become destructive of the worship event which it is meant to serve."<sup>33</sup> I am even willing to call liturgy *theologia prima*, since it involves the whole person and not merely the mind, a total relation, an exchange of persons.<sup>34</sup> Theory must submit to an exacting criterion: "the ability of the praying church to recognize in its worship the richness of the theological models."<sup>35</sup> And still it is true that if the Christian community is genuinely to worship God in spirit and in truth, sacramental theory is indispensable. There must be ceaseless interplay of ritual and reflection. All of which summons the liturgist to further self-examination. What sort of theology— theology of sacraments, theology of church—dictates his worship? How current is it, how antiquated? Is it fixed, frozen, or is it free to the future, open to the new, the creative, the discontinuous?

Intimately allied with a liturgist's sacramental theology is his theology of prayer. John Gallen's thesis is well known: "What the contemporary reform of the church's liturgy needs most in this moment of its history is the discovery of liturgy as prayer."<sup>36</sup> Concretely, prayer in community. My limited experience of parish prayer can be caricatured as follows: a number of individuals (ten or a thousand), unknown to one another, uncaring of one another, come in out of the cold and, in quavering song and stilted prose, petition an absent God to become really present, so that they may receive Him bodily and return each to his or her isolated home convinced that they have been nourished spiritually.

Here is a theology of prayer, fed to some extent by the liturgy itself. But in this approach to prayer three crucial Christian realities are not grasped. (1) Those who come in out of the cold already constitute a community of faith: they come to worship because they believe. "Before men can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion."<sup>37</sup> As Gallen puts it:

Liturgy presupposes that religious experience is already in process before the celebration in the ritual event. . . . Before there is any question of ritual action,

<sup>33</sup> Peter E. Fink, "Towards a Liturgical Theology," *Worship* 47 (1973) 606.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. David Power, "Two Expressions of Faith: Worship and Theology," in Herman Schmidt and David Power, eds., *Liturgical Experience of Faith* (Concilium 82; New York, 1973) p. 98.

<sup>35</sup> Fink, *art. cit.*, p. 607.

<sup>36</sup> John Gallen, "Liturgical Reform: Product or Prayer?" *Worship* 47 (1973) 587.

<sup>37</sup> Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 9 (*Documents*, p. 142).

there must *be* something to ritualize, to celebrate. Otherwise, the ritual is false, the liturgy is a pretence. Christian liturgy always has been and will always be for *believers*. It presumes and builds upon religious experience which is deepened and enlarged in the liturgical celebration.<sup>38</sup>

2) Once this believing community comes in out of the cold, its function is not to make God present. He *is* there—and not only tented at the side. He does indeed become sacramentally present: His flesh for food, His blood as drink. But not out of the blue, out of nowhere. He is already there, if only because two or three are gathered in His name. He is there in the Word proclaimed. He is there in the hearts of those who believe, is turned to those who have turned to Him.

3) Most important for my immediate concern: the community prayer does not originate within the community, within the believer. Liturgical prayer, like all prayer, is a response. The God of mystery touches man with His presence. The initiative comes from God—not present coldly, abstractly, distantly, but laying hold of me, laying hold of this believing community, at the very core of our being. Prayer is our response to this kind of presence, to the thrilling action of God within us.

But the critical question remains: what manner of prayer is the liturgical response? The answer any given liturgist gives determines the ritual he structures. My projected ritual, for example, might clash significantly with his, because for me prayer is fundamentally and ultimately “sacrifice of praise.” I do not downgrade conversion, petition, thanksgiving. I claim that all three are subsumed ritually in a glorious doxology: Glory to God. . . . In the liturgy I celebrate God. I do not minimize man. I simply argue that liturgy will be a humanizing experience to the extent that, in playing before God, man becomes increasingly image of God. To become human is to praise God.

A liturgist may disagree; but if he does, I shall give glory to God. Not because he disagrees, but because his disagreement will reveal or force from him a theology of prayer, of liturgical prayer. The liturgy will not corrupt if a liturgist challenges my approach to prayer. It may well corrupt if he has no theology of prayer, if that theology is perverse, or if (as Jerome said about ignorance of Scripture) he does not even know what he does not know.

#### AMERICAN LITURGY

My third point has its springboard in my earlier affirmation: liturgy should express the faith experience of a people. The problem is, which people? On the one hand, the Christian people; in our context, the Catholic people. For in some genuine sense Catholic belief, “the faith,” is

<sup>38</sup> John Gallen, “The Necessity of Ritual,” *The Way*, October 1973, p. 280.

one belief, one faith; it is not what any given believer makes it to be, the sheer product of his or her experience. And so there is a certain universality to faith. My faith is the faith of Peter and Paul, of Athanasius and Augustine, of Thomas Aquinas and Julian of Norwich, of Martin de Porres and John Carroll, of Teilhard and Paul VI. And this one faith should find ritual expression in corporate worship.

On the other hand, the Catholic mass is not mass-produced, an indistinguishable herd of believers. The way the apostles experienced their faith is hardly the way I experience faith; the European experience differs from the American, the black from the white. And so there is a certain particularity to faith, to the experience of faith. And this particularity of faith experience should find ritual expression in corporate worship.

Let me illustrate the American liturgical problem from the American theological experience.<sup>39</sup> Catholic theology in the United States is still derivative. Not totally derivative, but largely so. It stems in large measure from outside. The names that shape our thinking, that frame the questions and produce the answers, are in the first instance foreign: Rahner (already supplemented by Metz—and soon it will be Bruno Schüller), Schillebeeckx and Schoonenberg, Bultmann and Moltmann, Bonhoeffer and Teilhard, Häring and Janssens and van der Marck, Rondet and Lyonnet—yes, Lonergan and Dewart. And where the influences are not Continental or Canadian, they derive ever so often from outside the Catholic tradition.

Oh I know, we cannot do theology in a vacuum; we must be open to whole worlds of ideas. Too often, however, these other worlds are simply translated verbally into our world; rarely do we confront them with our Catholic past or filter them through our American experience; they dominate our thinking instead of stimulating it; they *are* our theology, not part of theology's history. The ultimate Catholic argument used to be *definitur in Concilio Tridentino*; today it is more likely to be "as Karl Rahner says so well."

Our pressing theological need is the type of thing John Courtney Murray did so well in the area of religious freedom: to take for inspiration a critical American experience, face it with the totality of Catholic tradition, and come up with that paradox of all living theology: something at once genuinely Christian and radically new. Murray could do this because he had a prophetic conviction, born of his experience here and now, that the essential definition of man as "rational animal" is not enough to define him existentially in our time. In this new era, he

<sup>39</sup> Cf. my "Towards an American Theology," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 159 (1968) 183-84.

insisted, at this point in the evolution of man and society, you cannot define a human being adequately unless you bring in the dimension of freedom. And so he fought, with ultimate success, to have the Church declare unequivocally that religious freedom is a human right, that this right is rooted not in state or religion or even in objective truth, but in the very dignity of the human person. And so he sought, without success, to have the Congress acknowledge the right of discretionary armed service, recognize the legitimacy of selective conscientious objection. Murray's theology of freedom got a hearing, was heard in our land, because it was at once profoundly Catholic and passionately American.

Something analogous is demanded of the American liturgist. But the dimensions of such a task are staggering. To speak of "*the* American experience" is to hide behind glib rhetoric. Is there some univocal faith experience unique to America that demands to be ritualized, proclaimed, choreographed? I doubt it. The faith experience of white middle-class Archie Bunker is not the faith experience of black theologian James Cone when he thunders:

There is no use for a God who loves whites the *same* as blacks. We have had too much of white love, the love that tells blacks to turn the other cheek and go the second mile. What we need is the divine love as expressed in Black Power which is the power of black people to destroy their oppressors, here and now, by any means at their disposal.<sup>40</sup>

The problem of American experience, therefore of American liturgy, is too complex for any individual to package and sell a solution. I shall simply suggest several issues that demand profound research and reflection if liturgical reform is to be radical, transformative, discontinuous—yes, American.

1) *Liturgy and culture*. An American liturgy should express an American culture. But "American culture" is an elusive, mercurial concept, confusingly complex. And understandably so; for, as Aidan Kavanagh puts it, "cultures . . . do not exist of themselves, nor do they come from nowhere. Cultures are value-complexes created by real people, in real historical circumstances, for real human purposes, and they emerge through patterns of human activity that are sustained by social structures created by those same people."<sup>41</sup> Many a parish is an amalgam of cultures. And when I look at American youth (not indeed all), I sense a new culture: they do not look at the world the way I do, do not use words the way I do, do not quite think the way I do, do not dream

<sup>40</sup> James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, 1970) p. 132.

<sup>41</sup> Aidan Kavanagh, "The Role of Ritual in Personal Development," in *The Roots of Ritual* (n. 30 above) p. 147.

my dreams or sing my songs. Can all this be expressed in symbols that speak to them, symbols wherein *they* speak? American liturgists ought to be able to express what is distinctively American far better than a Roman Congregation. In point of fact, are they doing so?

2) *Liturgy and the secular*. Liturgy, worship, has traditionally operated within a sphere called the "sacred," and the "sacred" could quite easily be distinguished from the "secular." In fact, the two concepts were seen as quite incompatible: the sacred and the secular were natural enemies. Today, in what is increasingly called a "secular age," many a Christian thinker is echoing the thesis of Raimundo Panikkar: "only worship can prevent secularization from becoming inhuman, and only secularization can save worship from being meaningless."<sup>42</sup> But for this thesis to be valid, as Panikkar saw, the two concepts, "worship" and the "secular," have to be "dynamically transformed."<sup>43</sup> Unless liturgists set themselves to this reassessment, unless their theology comes to see "the sacred quality of secularism" emerging in our time,<sup>44</sup> the liturgy of today will not express the human of today.

3) *Liturgy and music*. Here is a concrete, disquieting example of the sacred-secular impasse. I am deeply disturbed (in the best sense) by Patrick W. Collins' address to the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions' Convention at Oklahoma City on October 10 of last year. It was titled "Music in Worship—1973."<sup>45</sup> Fr. Collins developed vividly the tensions that exist between liturgist and musician. He challenged four unquestioned assumptions in the chapter on music in *Sacrosanctum concilium*: (1) there is a common, univocal understanding of what expresses the sacred and what is merely secular; (2) some music is by nature sacred, other music is inherently secular; (3) active participation is to be achieved chiefly through greater involvement in "doing" the liturgy; (4) a revitalized liturgy rests primarily on the work of liturgists, theologians, historians, canonists, and musicians. Among many provocative observations, I found three especially pertinent. (1) The Music Committee of the Federation was "unwilling [between 1969 and 1972] to tackle theologically the relationship between the sacred and the secular as it applies to music in worship." Why? In part, because they felt inadequate to the task; in part, because "the question was not yet sufficiently mature to admit a decision in an official document." (2) The Music Committee was convinced that an issue still worth exploring is "just what the liturgical experience is. We assumed that we all knew how

<sup>42</sup> Panikkar, *op. cit.* (n. 29 above) p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> In this paragraph I am using and quoting from Fr. Collins' manuscript.

to pray. Yet recent experience also calls this assumption into question.” (3) “The ultimate context for raising questions about worship must be the worshipping community itself.” Only through dialogue between the experts and the communities “can we discover the right questions and use our rich resources to reach appropriate answers.” For a creative American worship, liturgical theologian, Church musician, and worshiping community must learn to collaborate, to listen.

... a vital issue like that of worship in a secular age cannot ultimately be ‘planned’ or postulated by any conscious, rational method: we have to leave room for the Spirit, allowing for growth and inspiration, both of which resist any manipulation even by the best intentioned mind. The domain of freedom has to be really free and no amount of philosophical or theological speculation, although necessary, is sufficient to explain or to dictate a spontaneous and vital human situation.<sup>46</sup>

4) *Liturgy and ambiguity*. Important in the search for a living American liturgy is Robert W. Hovda’s recent warning against a liturgical language that holds “no subtlety, no ambiguity, no possibility of authentic common use in a church composed of many different kinds of people and cultures and experiences and milieus.”<sup>47</sup> He went on to say:

*Living Worship* is not arguing against our obvious constant need of words and terms and even of their refinements and definitions. We argue only that the Christian life happens at deeper levels and that all the symbols we must use (including language) in celebration, in sharing and in mission, must serve that deeper life of faith. Language is a servant not a master, a creature not an idol. Therefore, language and words (*especially* in matters of God and mystery and faith) must be ambiguous and modest enough to adapt to the animation by the Spirit of human lives that change—human lives that change all the time. They change in accord with the progress and the evolution of the race. They change by acquiring knowledge, expanding experience, gaining wisdom. They change through a collegial sharing in a community of faith. They change by virtue of the fact that their ambience is a constantly changing world.<sup>48</sup>

Much more could be said: about American symbols, American dance, American festivity. . . . But enough! A keynoter should stop when he has sounded the tone. I have sounded three—each, I believe, a serious challenge to the liturgist: (1) How transformative is your reform? (2) How theological is your reflection? (3) How responsive is your ritual?

<sup>46</sup> Panikkar, *op. cit.* (n. 29 above) pp. 2-3.

<sup>47</sup> Robert W. Hovda, “Ten Years after the Liturgy Constitution: A Promise Is a Promise Is a Promise,” *Living Worship* 9, no. 9 (November 1973) 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*