

Worship as Mystagogy

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God is the Great Mystagogue. That is inevitable because God is the Primal Mystery. Therefore the Basic Mystagogy is God's Self-revelation in time. And, when moved by God's "inciting and quickening Spirit," we worship, we exert a Personal Mystagogy.

Some of you have always known about Mystery, Mystagogues, and Mystagogy, and the relationship of worship to that triad.

Born great.

Some of you have looked up all the terms since the subject of this Institute was announced and are now casually using them in ordinary conversation.

Achieved greatness.

Some of you have never given a thought to the terms, have never felt deprived, and are here in various stages of interest in Mystery, Mystagogue, Mystagogy and worship.

Ready for greatness to be thrust upon you.

Definitions from Fourth Century Baptism

Webster's *Unabridged Dictionary* defines "mystagogue" as "an interpreter of religious mysteries or one who initiates others into them." "Mystagogy," then, is "the art of explaining or interpreting mysteries"--and one might well add "the art of initiating into religious mysteries."

We usually come at the meaning of "mystagogy" and "mystagogue" through a consideration of "the symbolic rite of passage which is the liturgy of Christian Initiation." That definition as well as the following material is

culled and paraphrased from Hugh M. Riley's book, *Christian Initiation*.¹ His book

investigates the mystagogical interpretation of the liturgy of baptism in the later part of the fourth century as it is found in the *Mystagogical Catecheses* attributed to St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in the *De Sacramentis* and *De Mysteriis* of St. Ambrose of Milan, in the *Baptismal Instructions* of St. John Chrysostom, and in the *Baptismal Homilies* of Theodore of Mopsuestia. These writings reflect a period which is considered a classical age of the catechumenate and the liturgy of baptism.

It should obviously be noticed that these "dramatic liturgies of initiation which characterized the baptismal rites of the late fourth century" are quite different from the rites of the earlier years when many who were to be saved were also added to the Church through baptism, and different as well from rites in subsequent years and rites in the contemporary churches. What is not being advocated, therefore, in considering mystagogy is a particular set of ceremonies or modes of instruction. What is of current value is not those rites nor their mystagogy, but the basic premises that sacraments and proclamation convey the working Word of God, that ritual and ceremonial accompanying the working Word of God are helpful for the development of faith and the conveying of knowledge and understanding, and that the explication of sacrament, ritual, and ceremonial are valuable for achieving initiation into the Christian Mystery, God and God's saving action, and an understanding of what has happened in our initiation. In addition, such a consideration underscores the fact that Christian mystagogy in all its forms is "a pastoral function," "a task which is never completed, but must be creatively renewed."² It is a

1. Hugh M. Riley, *Christian Initiation* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press and Consortium Press, 1974) 8.

2. Riley 2.

task for all who do shepherding of the flocks of God. It is a personal task for every one whom the blowing Spirit lists among the reborn.

The specific assignment of this presentation is to develop how the very doing of our worshiping is itself a mystagogy, and how our doing of the Church's liturgy involves each of us as a mystagogue and results in an effective mystagogy for ourselves and for others worshiping alongside us.

Go over the ground once again with Riley as he explains the mystagogy of the fourth century.

"Those who undertake a journey need a guide. Those who conduct candidates through the mysteries of Holy Baptism and the rites accompanying it are the mystagogues, the guides." The instruction which is imparted to help the candidates understand the meaning of what is said and what is done in the liturgy of their initiation into the Christian life is called 'Mystagogy,' instruction in the meaning of the mysteries."³

But, of course, the greater Mystery is behind the rites--that is Holy Baptism itself. Paraphrasing from Riley again: Baptism introduces the candidates into a whole new world which is God's world, even as it does not remove them from the world in which they live. Rather than rupturing their relationship to this world, this liturgy of Baptism initiates catechumens into a deeper understanding of their own world, and a way of viewing it at a level heretofore inaccessible to them. Having heard the divine call through the preaching of the Good News, and responding to this call in the act of faith, the candidates are to be initiated through the medium of word and symbolic action into the depth and scope of the hitherto invisible mystery of God's salvific plan for the world and their position in this plan, their response to this revelation. This initiation and its rites will give them a new orientation and provide a new meaning to their

3. Riley 1-2.

own lives, in their relationship to themselves and to others, to their whole environment, to history and to God. The candidates, therefore, in what they say and do and in what is said and done to them, are enlightened to discover the meaning of salvation history.⁴ That makes clear that the initiation of baptism is participation in the cosmic creative and redeeming action of God.

There is a greater mystery behind all this rite and ceremony, behind this sacrament as well. That Mystery is God.

Behind Holy Baptism and its rites--the Mystery itself. J. D. Crichton in *The Church's Worship* and in his "A Theology of Worship" in *The Study of Liturgy* divides the Mystery in three parts.⁵

"There is first the mystery of God dwelling in light inaccessible and hidden from human gaze from before the beginning of time."

The second aspect of the Mystery: "There is the mystery of Christ which is the mystery that *is* Christ who is the manifestation of God, the only-begotten of the Father whose glory John and the other apostles witnessed. The mystery of Christ is not just the fact of his taking flesh and becoming one with us. It is an active thing. He came at the fulness of time and summed up the long history of salvation that had gone before him. Indeed, by his life and teaching he showed what was the meaning of that history, embodying as he did God's redeeming love and eventually making it possible for us to respond to God's love which is poured out upon us by Christ in his Church. It is the expression in deeds, and above all in his

4. Riley 1.

5. J. D. Crichton, *The Church's Worship* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964) 24, and "A Theology of Worship" *The Study of Liturgy* ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Arnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 11-16.

sacrificial death, of God's love towards all people. Mystery at this second level is essentially an *event*, something God did, or a series of events; in the concrete, the history of salvation as it is set forth in the Old Testament, in the life of Christ, and finally in the Church. The truth that is contained in this teaching is that God has intervened in our history and that through this intervention we are saved."

The third level at which the mystery exists, says Crichton, is the liturgy. And that will include the rite and the ceremonies, but it will accent both the proclamation and *its* activating of the Word, in print read and in speech said, as well as the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion, the activating of the Word in the eating and drinking in the fellowship of men and women made saints. Crichton spells out how when we participate in this mystery that is the liturgy "we are renewed by the passion and death of Christ, the work of redemption." While he reminds readers in *The Study of Liturgy* that not everyone is agreed about this "mystery-theory of the liturgy"⁶ the conclusion he reaches is that "the liturgical celebration makes present the redeeming mystery of Christ."⁷ Lest we read only "sacrament" into this explanation of the liturgy, note as well that the mystery which is the liturgy also "has the function of revealing God's redeeming purpose, his love for all the world, that mystery hidden for ages but revealed by Christ and preached by the apostles." He notes as well that "the liturgy is always celebrated in the power of the Holy Spirit. The ascension is the bridge between the paschal mystery of Christ and the giving of the Spirit. And now we, in the time of the Spirit, look *back* to Christ in his redeeming work, but look *to* Christ as he now is and is with us always in the Holy Spirit, and look *forward* to the *eschaton*, in anticipation of the Second Coming."⁸ "Christ

6. Crichton 15.

7. Crichton 26.

8. Crichton 16, 18.

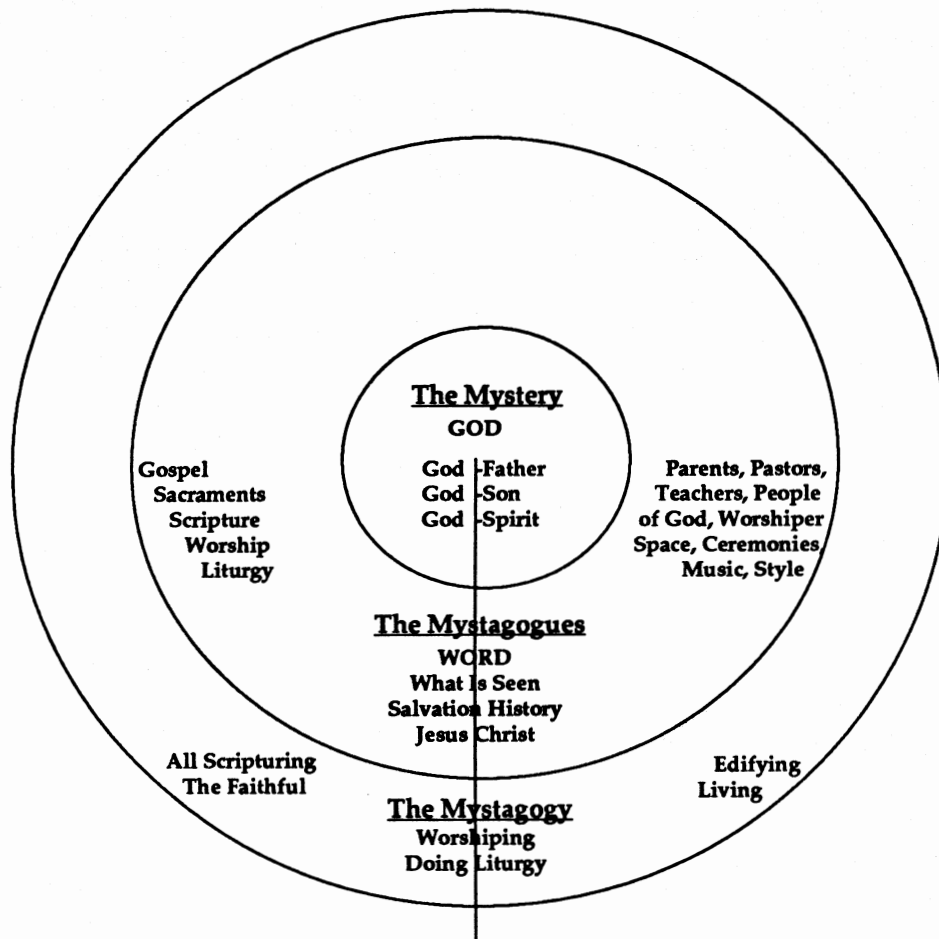
has come, Christ comes, and Christ will come again."

Because all this has been taught to us and has been given to us to teach, because all this has been done for us and because God's love looks for other initiates to whom all this saving action may be applied, "Mystagogy is a pastoral function. It is a task which is never completed, but must be creatively renewed." That makes reasonable the Institute's present concentration on this ancient term, this guidance-into-the-mystery called Mystagogy. All of us seek all the time to find ways and words for sensitive and intelligible exposition of the words and actions of the liturgy, principles which will help us fulfill our responsibility to provide a mystagogy of the present worshiping and liturgizing of the people of God. The specific focus of our search is, first, on the act of worship itself in which the worshiper is the mystagogue, as well as the pupil for that mystagogy, and, second, on the doing of the liturgy by the people of God as it is presided over by the pastor, in which the worshipers participate along with the presider and assisting ministers whose mystagogy is for self and for others.

First, return to the assertion that God, who alone can reveal God, must be the Great Mystagogue, and that, therefore, the Basic Mystagogy is God's self-revelation in time, and finally that the act of worship is each Christian's personal mystagogy even as it is response to the mystagogy of God.

It would be a help at this stage to see the relationships among these terms laid out in visual form to indicate the parameters of the subject as this presentation asks you to consider them.

Worship as Mystagogy



One expert in words gives the advice in his column, "Avoid the word *parameter* unless you are writing a mathematical or scientific treatise." He does cite the definition in Webster's *New World Dictionary*: "Parameter: a quantity or constant whose value varies with the circumstances of its application." ("A variable constant," he notes.) But the definition then provides an illustration. "A quantity or constant whose value varies with the circumstances of its application, as the radius line of a group of concentric circles, which varies with the circle under consideration."

Visualize the subject this way. Place your dinner plate before you as you sit at table. Put your dinner knife, pointing down, pointing south, as a radius line from the center of that dinner plate circle. Place your salad plate on top of that with the salad fork as a radius line, pointing down, due south, from the center of that plate. Now, on top of those two circular plates, put your smaller dessert plate with the dessert spoon as a radius line from the center pointing down, pointing south. There is really only one radius line for the entire set of concentric circles, but it will vary both in length and in form and function depending upon which circle is under consideration.

It will become clear that on the diagram the divisions of The Mystery are handled differently from the previous discussion. The Mystery which is God is center and source of all the rest and the origin of the radius line which energizes both the Mystagogues and the Mystagogy, which are the areas of the other two circles. The radius line indicates that The Mystery which is God is the power which fills all salvation history, all the action and words of Christ, and all the action of worship and of our doing of the liturgy. It will also be evident that the fourth century's ceremonies of Baptism and its mystagogy do not concern us more than to provide the terms. The focus is now our worship and our doing of the liturgy and our mystagogy which aids the neophyte today through the initiation and understanding of the believer into the action of worship and the doing of the liturgy.

The center circle is *The Mystery*. Reading down the radius line, see *God* as the Primal Mystery--God-Father, God-Son, God-Spirit. The radius line is the indication that God reaches out, extends. "In the beginning God created" "And God said, 'Let us make'" Even those fundamental aspects of God revealed to us make clear that God is the Great Mystagogue, the guide to the meaning of God; but first of all God is *The Mystery*, source and center of all that is.

The second circle then is *The Mystagogues*, the initiators and interpreters. Since we know God only as God reveals God-ness in meaning and might, and know God only as God reveals *The Mystery* to our minds and shows the meaning through actions in our history, we place *Word* on the radius line. The Word of God is a summary term for God in action, for God doing God's things.

"What is Seen" includes all the visual aids God has provided for our realizing of *The Mystery*. "By faith we understand that the world was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear." (Hebrews 11:3) All that we see in the created world serves as mystagogy. The earth is full of the grandeur of God.

"Salvation History" might sum up all that God revealed and accomplished for us and for our salvation. Before God had the last Word in speaking to us through the Son, all the mighty deeds recorded in the Old Testament, and all the unrecorded involvement of God in the long histories of peoples in extra-biblical realms and with peoples known to us only through archeological digs, would be included in this term.

God's clearest and most triumphant word is *Jesus Christ*, that Name above all names summing up all his saying, his living, his dying, his rising, his continuing presence. "Those who have seen me have seen the Father," our Lord said, and later added, "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed." Merely to call Jesus Christ mystagogue is to prompt thanks that, though much is hidden from the wise and the prudent, all that is necessary for forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation has been revealed to babes.

The shape of the radius changes from the Person of our Lord to the power of his *Gospel* and then to the presentation of that same saving power in the *Sacraments*. These are listed to the left of the radius line and that only because of the limited space in the area of the circle.

With a further change in character, the mystagogue effect includes the act of *worship* itself and the broad range of the elements of the *liturgy*. These two terms, the focus of this presentation, appear both here and in the final circle, as both mystagogues and as the sources of specific mystagogy.

There are more items in a complete catalog of the teaching elements of the faith. A further grouping includes the persons who are directly or indirectly active in the work of mystagogy. They are listed to the right of the radius line but are to be seen as a part of that force which radiates from The Mystery. *Parents* take the initial place, at least in the abstract if not always in the concrete as individuals. *Pastors, Teachers* and, in broad fact, all the *People of God* take part as mystagogues in the work of mystagogy. *The Worshiper* is both the initiated and the further initiator of mystagogy in the very act of offering worship. That is the thesis to be developed as we proceed.

Finally, there are varied inanimate items which serve to convey the awareness and understanding of the Mystery --among them might be listed *Space, Ceremonies, Music, and Presidential Style*. The listing could no doubt be expanded.

Continue now to follow the radiating line outwards from The Mystery. It reaches the third circle, that of *The Mystagogy*.

Begin at the left of the radius line. "All Scripture" might be the first item, the phrasing reflecting II Timothy 3:16's description of its profitability, but here the various ways in which the scriptures are read, proclaimed, taught, and studied would be included as the active sense of mystagogy is reflected--can we try *All Scripturing*?

The use of other materials which reflect the scripture or which help to make it accessible would be included as another item--for instance, creeds and confessions, catechisms, sermons, devotional writings . . . but in order to list them as mystagogy some gerund form reflecting their action would be needed--try *Edifying*, listed on the right of the radius. *The Faithful* and *Living* indicate that the people of God in their very existence reflect The Mystery as the Church and both identify The Mystery and involve others in it through their living out of the faith. The words sum up all that Christians do to be mutual examples to the flock and witnesses to all the world.

Finally place on the radial line the two activities which are the specific subjects of this presentation: *Worshipping*, considered as the actual vocative relationship with the Most High God, and *Doing Our Liturgy* which might convey the participation of the Church in a certain place engaged in its corporate pattern of appropriating the Word, responding in praise, interacting in fellowship, and preparing for witness in the world. All the inanimate items listed as aspects of The Mystagogy listed previously, things like Space, Ceremonies, Music, and Style, would be included in the comprehensive term *Doing Liturgy*.

Now abide, then, these three--The Mystery, The Mystagogues, and The Mystagogy. The greatest of these is the energy and activity of God, the Primal Mystery, the Ur-Mystagogue. The vitality of all mystagogy stems from The Mystery and that divine force vibrates along the entire radius, varying in form as the mode and circumstances of its application change. It is God, The Mystery, who is both the source and the object of worship and the liturgy, the Creator of the worshiper and the One who is worshiped, the Regenerating and Renewing Power which is released in the doing of the liturgy, and the Three-in-One who is the recipient of worship's response. Worship and the Doing of Our Liturgy appear as modes of The Mystagogue's activity and also as sources of the initiating and interpreting work of Mystagogy. The specific act of worship, filled with the power and grace of The Mystery, is before us--to consider worship itself as a mystagogy, an initiator and an interpreter. When together we do our liturgy we see it before us for consideration as an action which itself

releases the power of The Mystery and is itself a mystagogy.

A further analysis of the charcter of worship and of the doing of the liturgy as mystagogy can now take place with an awareness of their relationship to all which precedes them and surrounds them of The Mystery.

Worship's Source and Action

John Williams defines worship as "the all-pervading recognition of the absolute worth of God."⁹ Because "recognition" seems to suggest a more cerebral and possibly passive state, that description might be slightly altered to "Worship is the all-pervading acknowledgement of the absolute worth of God."

When comes worship? It is the first response of faith, and faith's continuing response.

Whence comes faith? "Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him"--so the writer to Hebrews (11:6). Such a belief could be assumed by the fourth century mystagogues in most of those who accepted the role of catechumens. Faith that is more than the description of a person one step advanced from an agnostic, faith that knows God-in-Christ and grasps the grace and love which forgives and accepts the sinner, faith which knows the new relationship to be that of God as parent and the believer as child, faith which at least begins to grasp the absolute worth of God and to bow before the awareness that the glory of God is love, such a faith arises from adoption.

We cannot by our own reason or strength believe in God nor come to God's family. The Holy Spirit must call us by the Gospel. Back to the Mystery. By that most primary and most effective mystagogue, The Word, God's own specific action, adoption--even more, a new birth into the

9. John Williams, *Worship and the Modern Child* (London: National Society, S. P. C. K., 1957) 37.

family of God--has taken place. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God," and, to paraphrase I John 3:1, everyone who is a child loves the parent. And when such a child says so to God, that is worship. Love, awe-full love, addressed to God, is the moving force of worship. When God is acknowledged with that loving awe, that is worship. It is an all-pervading recognition which expresses itself as an all-pervading acknowledgement--to God--of the absolute worth of God.

Most of us accept by "the faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not always seen," that such faith is created when the water of Holy Baptism washes over the head of the child at the font. We more easily comprehend faith as a response to sight and personal conversation with the Son of God in flesh, like that experienced by Thomas or by the villagers alerted to Jesus' presence by the woman running back from the well. They said, after seeing and hearing the Word in flesh, "We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:42) But now that the privilege of seeing the Word in flesh has been withdrawn until Christ comes again in glory with all the holy angels, faith comes, we confess, both by the Word of God in water and by the Word of God in words. We hold that the total transformation of the person has happened through this Word in water in infant baptism, as it were, in the heart of God, *in spe*, in hope on our part--a hope which the faithfulness of God keeps from shaming us.

Obviously it is no convincing illustration, but consider how the Great Mikado's decree was regarded. His edict was that "All who flirted, leered or winked, Unless connubially linked, Should forthwith be beheaded." When the Mikado said that, it was as good as done. At least that was the explanation when the Mikado's own son, disguised as a second trombone, playing wandering minstrel, who was said to have been beheaded, was revealed as still alive. God is faithful and the promises of "a washing of regeneration" rest upon that revealed faithfulness and the loving acceptance by God and not on our observation or proof.

Faith comes as well by the Word of God in words, by hearing the Word in the words of others, perhaps of holy

men who wrote as they were moved by the Spirit, or of holy ministers who speak with the same Spirit's accompaniment. And in both the "converted" child as it grows up, and in the "converted" adult, that hearing of the Word can be "self-said"--it can be the Word in words recollected, by the Word in words sounding quite a different Word because of the changing acoustics of the various spaces we occupy as life moves us along. Under different conditions on our "journey of faith," in different circumstances of our "adventure" in wilderness and in a return to the promised land, we hear new meanings in the Word recalled and pondered.

That first water-created relationship with God, or that first Word-in-words created entrance into the relationship of a child of God, might be described with the term "*faith formation*." The growth in the intensity with which we grasp God's hand and the increasing sureness with which we follow in the footsteps of our Lord, might be called "*faithfulness formation*."

All that hearing of the Word, the hearing that is believing, comes by the Word of God. That our words can be the agency for the acting Word of God so that hearing can result in divine adoption, new birth into the family of God, ought (one would think) prepare us for the teaching that water, not simple water only, but water used by the command and instruction of our Lord, connected to his Word, that such water baptism is to be for God another mystagogue, an initiator into the mystery of faith, which is entry into The Mystery of God. It is a washing of regeneration and a renewal in the Holy Spirit. Faith is always worked by God; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any of us make a claim to distinction. The ability to hear, the ability to believe--the gift of faith--is the result of the Word, which is The Mystery's Mystagogue. The Word of God is God's Mystagogy, whether it comes to us in words, in print, in water, in bread and wine, or in relationships.

Worship, then? It is faith's first response. In the infant it is not audible or visible to our eye or ear--and why should it be?--it is addressed to the God who alone is to be worshiped and glorified. In the mature, it is the Word-compelled acknowledgement, the all-pervading

recognition, of the worth of God: "My Lord and my God!" God first says, "I Am!" God next says, "He is! He is my Beloved Son. Hear Him." God says third, "We are! We will make our abode in you." And worship, like Lazarus, comes fourth, "My Lord, and my God!" The worshiper's first response, "You are! *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus! Dominus Deus Sabaoth!*" The worshiper's second response, "He is! We believe and are sure that you are the Christ the Son of the Living God." The worshiper's third response, "She does! Another Counselor, the Spirit of truth, with us forever, dwelling with us and in us." (John 14:16) Worship--the first response of faith, the cry of "My God," with a comma, in the vocative, pure adoration with the indication given by the following comma that more is to be said. The follow-up is confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. I John 1:8 fills in: If we say we have no sin--untrue. If we confess our sin, our true Father forgives. St. Paul: "always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father." (Ephesians 5:20) And I John again: "This is the confidence we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him." (I John 5:14-15)

Worship, then, is made possible by God's being mystagogue, by God's own mystagogy. How is it in its very expression also mystagogy?

Worship as Mystagogy

Evelyn Underhill's answer is, "One who deliberately kneels is rewarded by an increase of worshiping love."¹⁰

"Deliberately"--we who believe that we cannot believe, by our own will believe as well that to will does become present with us when the Word of God has made us worshipers. Of course, we cannot always do it. (Romans 8:18) But when we do not do what we want, it is no longer I that

10. Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982) 26.

does not want to do it. And it is true, and amazing grace, that we delight in God in our inmost selves. We can deliberately kneel, deliberately say, "My God!" We worship, and yet not we, but the Word within works with us. This is synergism and we are to make the most of it. For when we deliberately worship we are rewarded by an increase of worshiping love. Worship is a mystagogue, and our worshiping confirms our initiation into the Mystery and further interprets our new life.

Analyze the specific mystagogy of worshiping in four categories.

When we worship we teach ourselves that God *is*, that God is for us, that we are God's own. When we deliberately kneel, our body, our self, asks, "Why are you kneeling?" And our inmost self replies, "Because God is all that I believe God is, that God has done all that I believe God has done, that God is for me and wants me to come before him." Nor is this a mere psychological self-persuasion. What our inmost self is saying is the Word of God. When we say *what* God does, God *does* what God does--that is the Word in words, and is God in action whether our words are uttered or only thought. Our worshiping's primary mystagogy is that God *is*.

Our worshiping also makes us ready for the hearing of the Word, ready to be moved again, to be moved more. This is the Samuel effect. As long as he responded, "Yes, Eli" to the Word of God, he remained a child, he thought as a child. But when he said, "Yes, Lord" he became a prophet of God. "Speak, Lord, your servant hears"--that readiness is what we initiate each time we say, "O God!" It is the "deliberately kneeling" sort of "O God" that is the effective mystagogy, of course, but even the kneeling by habit or the "O God" of protest or anger initiates the conversation between child and parent and makes possible the Word's having free course and further accomplishing what God wills. Our worshiping's second mystagogy increases in us the Samuel readiness--"your servant hears"--and makes us grow toward the prophet's stature.

Our worshiping also is the beginning of our doing. If we know what God would have us do, if we know how God would have us be, and if in our consciousness we hear God

say so, then our "O God" is the first step in our doing, in our improving. If God's Word reaches us to move us along in our being or prod us into doing and we do not respond, we merely illustrate that grace is resistible. Even if we complainingly protest--"O God!"--we are in dialogue and the Word can work persuasion. If we express our fear, our reluctance, our hesitating willingness or our enthusiastic agreement--"I go, Sir!"--we are taking another step in holy living. Worshiping's mystagogy releases the power of the Spirit that makes us both to will and to do. Of course we can--and do--say, "I go, Sir" and don't go; but that merely illustrates what we always know, that there is a will within that is contrary to our inmost self's willing. Our "O God," instead of expressing adoration and willingness, may have to go back to square one of the "O God" of confession--but even then its mystagogy has started us off again on the way of God, even our sanctification.

As a fourth illustration, think how our worshiping is itself a mystagogy of proclamation. We say "O God", and that address is followed in our minds by "the antecedent reason"--which is the Word of God we preach to ourselves. "O God, whose nature it is always to have mercy" "O God, from whom comes every good and every perfect gift" "O God, through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit I pray" The complete explanation of three articles of the Creed are self-preached, and the Word is released by our worshiping. Of course, we may not listen to what we preach, not practice what we preach, not turn from Eli to God, prefer to be on our own than with God. But no doubt many catechumens nodded off during Cyril's mystagogical sermons--which probably only made him work harder on his preaching. And since worshiping is a self-help mystagogy, we who are mystagogues for our Lord should urge it and practice it.

Doing Our Liturgy as Mystagogy

Since the definition of worship is specifically response, since many think of the corporate service of the people of God when they hear the word "worship," and since Martin Luther said that the best worship is to believe the Gospel, something should be said about The Liturgy as a Mystagogue and the Doing of Our Liturgy as mystagogy.

Geoffrey Wainwright in *Doxology* gives frightening examples of how the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*--the rule of prayer should be a norm for belief--has resulted in major shifts from the scriptural norm in the affirming of beliefs.¹¹ Assuming a translation of the Latin words which would say, "The rule of faith should be the norm of prayer," this discussion would think of the western catholic liturgy as it is reflected in *Lutheran Book of Worship* as a proper representation of what is taught and truly believed among the Christians of the *Augsburg Confession*. In any case, no dogmatic argument need be involved when The Liturgy is named as a mystagogue. An evangelism which principally consists of "inviting people to church" would seem to verify our common understanding that The Liturgy does indeed serve as an initiator into and an interpreter of the faith.

The first element of The Liturgy which has not been stressed under the term "worship" is the receiving of the Word in words and in the body and blood of our Lord given in the eaten bread and swallowed wine. The fact that the Word in water and the Word in speech or in print was developed as the creative force resulting in worship has illustrated how faith depends upon what God gives. And God's repeated giving, week after week, in the words of Scripture lessons and of the sermon and the sacramental Word of Holy Communion is fundamental for viewing The Liturgy as Mystagogue.

Doing Our Liturgy speaks of our receiving the mystagogy, that spoken and sacramental Word. We deliberately catch what God does to us by the Word we hear, just as we deliberately determine to and then do walk to the altar table to eat and to drink the Word in the elements. Thus we catch the impetus to faith and life God provides in that sacrament. And with the same investment of effort on our part we catch the impetus of the Word spoken in sermon and read from scripture. There are various

11. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 218f.

mystagogues doing their mystagogical work as The Liturgy proceeds, but our doing of the liturgy becomes our mystagogy for ourselves when we set ourselves, by an act of our consecrated wills, to catch the thrust of the Word in words and when we come, when all things are ready, to receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All that has been said of the self-mystagogy of worship applies to our giving faith's first response to the Word of God within the frame of The Liturgy. It is important to add that a comprehension of what we are saying and an awareness of where in The Liturgy we are to say it, and a deliberate participation in praying it, are essential if The Liturgy is to be a mystagogue enabling us to worship and be strengthened by its mystagogy.

The Liturgy is the western Church's "agreed embodiment of worship,"¹² to use Underhill's definition of ritual. Implicit then is the corporate character of the doing of the liturgy. What is not implicit is the actual sharing within the congregation, the interacting among the people of God who gather to do their receiving of the Word and responding in worship. It would be possible--it has been done--that people gather in one place simply to make the preaching of the Word and the distribution of the sacrament efficient and economical. Doing Our Liturgy as a phrase includes "our" rather than "the" to stress that we are together and what we do we do together because we are one body. If we are to deliberately share, we must receive the mystagogy of the corporateness of The Liturgy and, by our sharing with others the faith and the Word, make this also a part of our self-mystagogy.

In all coming together, in all our living with God and with one another, there is always the compulsion of the mission under which the Church exists, namely to go, to live for others. The Liturgy, lection after frequent lection, releases the Word which informs us and empowers us for such living. Doing Our Liturgy is a mystagogue for us in making our mission known, and we employ the

12. Underhill, *Worship* 32.

mystagogy of Doing Our Liturgy when we do what is "our bounden duty" outside the building, when our liturgy is continued in the lives of the world's people around us.

That, at least, attempts to say it--how The Mystery of God employs the many Mystagogues who bring the Word to bear on our lives, and how in our worshiping and in the doing of our liturgy we release a self-applied mystagogy. What remains are all the description and details of how we are to employ the how-to mystagogy of worshiping for ourselves and how the parish and parson's mystagogy should initiate and energize all the believers to the work of worship, the labor of liturgizing, that they all might be in mystagogy.

Happier are we as we do that.