

## **Liturgy and Culture:**

### **Overcoming the Tensions**

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Recently a Danish film was shown in theaters around the country called "Babette's Feast." The setting of the film is a small village in a remote section of Denmark where the people belong to a strict religious sect. Their life, their food, and their religious practice reflect the austerity of the surrounding land. The leader and founder of the sect is a widower with two daughters, both of whom are attractive and gifted. The story is about their lives and the life of the little community.

The two daughters have suitors from outside of the community but decide to stay and help their father's small and aging flock. After their father dies the two women become the mainstay of the group, serving the community and leading the service of prayer. One daughter has a lovely voice and she leads and inspires the singing. The prayer services are simple and austere, like the daily fare.

When the two women are older, Babette arrives on their doorstep having fled the uprisings in France. Although Babette is obviously a woman of breeding, she asks to be their servant since she has no money and wishes to stay with them. She learns to cook the simple and commonplace food of the village, dried fish and ale-bread soup--which even to the viewer is most unappetizing.

As the years go by the villagers grow old and querulous. The two sisters wonder if they will be able to hold the community together. Past incidents, long-repressed and unforgiven are now in old age rising to the surface and threatening the life of the little community. The sisters grow concerned and decide to celebrate the anniversary of their father's death in the hope that it may renew the spirit of the community.

While the sisters are planning the memorial for the anniversary of their father's death, Babette, who has been

with them for seventeen years now, comes to them and asks them for a favor. She would like to prepare a dinner for the village in honor of their father's anniversary. The sisters protest but Babette reminds them that she has never asked for anything and that she had recently received a sum of money. The sisters reluctantly agree to the dinner and Babette leaves for a few days to procure what she needs for the feast.

She returns with a cartload of crates containing live animals, wine, dishes, and many unfamiliar delicacies. As the preparation for the feast goes on, the sisters grow more apprehensive. Their spartan life seems threatened by Babette's feast. They meet with the elders and discuss their dilemma. They do not wish to hurt Babette who has served them so faithfully, yet they wish to take no pleasure in the senses preferring to discipline both taste and tongue that it may praise God more purely. They decide they will go to the feast and eat the food but they will not enjoy it or find pleasure in it. They make a pact not to comment on the food or drink. It is to be as nothing to them.

The night for the feast arrives. The spartan dining room is transformed with linen and crystal and silver candlesticks. By a strange coincidence a former suitor of one of the sisters, now a general, returns to visit his aunt who is invited to the feast. He also comes.

The feast begins. First one course then another of fine gourmet foods and an appropriate wine with each course. The fearful little group remembers their pact and encourages one another in their effort to remain untouched by the feast. The general however, constantly comments on the food, utterly amazed by its elegance--only to have the conversation changed immediately. As the meal progresses faces soften and begin to glow in the candlelight. The wines begin to warm hearts. They begin to see and smell and taste the food, enjoying its life-giving pleasure. Enlivened by good spirit they reach back into their pasts recalling the incidents that divide them. By the time they reach coffee and cognac in the spartan sitting room around a piano with a familiar hymn being sung, reconciliations have occurred. Joy is reborn, life is cherished in one another.

By now the general has recognized a unique French dish only available at one of Paris' best restaurants where the chef, renowned for the cuisine, was a woman.

The sisters are sure Babette will leave after the feast because she won all that money and can afford to go home. But Babette informs them that she will remain with them for she has spent all the money on the feast. They had enjoyed the feast as nothing before but are astounded to think that it cost all she had.

I use this story of a feast as we begin to think together about liturgy and culture because one of the things I am certain of is that people are hungry. Not only the poor but even the affluent are hungry. We must be, we have such a fixation on food. *Time* and *Newsweek* and virtually every major newspaper in the country have carried major stories on food within the past few weeks. If it is not famine, it is nutrition; if not nutrition then the health threat of pesticides, hormones and other chemicals. Health experts tell us "you are what you eat" and we are beginning to believe them. And yet we will eat fast food and junk food, too little or too much food--until someone reminds us of the taste, the goodness, the power and the pleasure of good food and leisurely feasting.

Food is significant to us for survival, for strength, for status, for celebration, for the sheer poetry of sight and taste and texture. There is a close relationship between food and worship. It is a traditional one with a long history that crosses geographic and religious boundaries. But it is especially clear in the Christian tradition which maintains that people are hungry, hungry for God, hungry for a religious experience--for an epiphany. Liturgy is about epiphany.

In the liturgy God is preparing a feast. Here the people are fed, here they can recognize their hunger, here they encounter God and know religious experience as a part of life. Here God speaks to us, heals us, forgives us, feeds us, and sends us to the neighbors with food from the

table (an image of God the Mother). As pastors, musicians, liturgists, educators, our work is to remind everyone of their hunger in a culture which attempts to forget it.

Evidence for this hunger is becoming more abundant. We see it in the popularity of the New Age phenomenon, in the rise of religious publications, Christian rock groups, broadcasting and media, in the number of people making retreats and seeking spiritual direction.

Yes, people are hungry for religious experience, but one of the strange, and paradoxical things about real hunger is that after a period of time one no longer *feels* hungry. This is true about the contemporary hunger for religious experience as well.

Even as we plan our liturgical feast, we know we have problems. Some aren't hungry. Some refuse to eat. Some refuse to come. It seems that, despite the liturgical renewal of the 1970s and 1980s, liturgy still has serious problems. We see it in our churches on a Sunday morning. We hear it as we talk with the young. Even the literature reflects the problem.

Recently an editor of a liturgical publication wrote

Some of us may even have to admit that on some level and to some extent we have given up on the liturgy, preferring to search and guide others elsewhere for the power and grace to sustain our lives.<sup>1</sup>

This raises a serious question about the place of liturgy in our lives and communities.

The problem we face is not new. Twenty years ago similar questions were being asked. Romano Guardini, a German theologian and educator asked, "Would it not be

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1. Barbara Schmich, "The Liturgical Act," *Assembly* 12 (Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy, April 1986) 321.

better to admit that man [and woman] in this industrial and scientific age, with its new sociological structure, is no longer capable of a liturgical act?"<sup>2</sup> For Guardini the heart of the liturgy was the "liturgical act." He called for a liturgical education which would move beyond words and enable people to see that an action can incorporate an "epiphany". For example, Guardini suggested that rather than organizing a procession better, pastors should teach people "how the act of walking can become a religious act, a retinue for the Lord progressing through his land, so that an epiphany can take place."<sup>3</sup> In Guardini's<sup>4</sup> terms, the liturgy was to be an "epiphany" in our lives.

Two considerations emerge from Guardini's question. First, that the "liturgical act" itself is at the heart of the problem, that is, the ability of Christians to perform and enter the action and there to encounter the meaning and grace of the outward action, gesture, or sign. The second consideration is that much of modern culture militates against acquiring a liturgical sense. I would like to look at this latter point more closely.

#### *Liturgy and Culture*

The relationship between religion and culture is one of the most difficult relationships to grasp. It is not a simple relationship. While much of modern culture militates against acquiring a "sense of liturgy," at the same time, it offers a new critical consciousness that can free us from bondage to flawed religious expressions. David Power captures the dilemma in a marvelous image when he writes

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2. Romano Guardini, "Letter from Romano Guardini," *Assembly 12* (Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy, April 1986) 324.

3. Guardini 322-323.

4. Guardini 322-323.

As a new consciousness of the human and of the cosmic emerges within our culture, we are engaged in some kind of night battle with liturgical traditions, some struggle with the gods that emerge from dark realms within our minds and claim our fidelity. It is the engagement with life that we need to bring to worship, the readiness to be challenged to self-understanding by an affirmation of the holy that gives perspective to the appropriation of new social and inner experience. There is an extraordinary power of revelation latent in the rituals and the symbols and the poetry of liturgical traditions, for those who would do battle with them, wrestling with God as Jacob wrestled, so that only those who are wounded can give testimony to the existence of angels. Too hieratic a consciousness can still the voice of angels, prevent the engagement with life from being brought to the breaking of the bread, and deny the knowledge bred in the marrow bone.<sup>5</sup>

Power notes the revelatory possibilities of traditional liturgical forms as one wrestles with them in the face of modern cultural demands, yet he speaks of "appropriation of new social and inner experience," undoubtedly implying acceptance of certain cultural phenomena. This introduces real complexity. Let's look at the negative impact of culture first.

We know that contemporary life continually challenges the human hunger for religious experience, but I would like to draw attention to four aspects affecting the worshipping community: time, activism, individualism, and work. Moreover, these are issues that an explicit education for liturgy can and must address.

"Time is money," is a truism of our culture. Recently a National Public Radio commentator remarked that *time* is the new commodity, that very likely the wars of the future

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5. David Power, "Liturgical Praxis: A New Consciousness at the Eye of Worship," *Worship* 61 (July 1987) 290.

would be fought over time. We certainly are a time-conscious nation. We have clocks everywhere, even in the shower. We wear clocks on our person. How many times during a Sunday worship do you hear the chimes of someone's digital watch go off? Moreover, the time we are conscious of is the present. Our current fixation with the digital clock is interesting. It has no sense of past or future as a watch with a face does; no sense of where we have come from or where we are going. What does this say to a people called to an eschatological consciousness? How does one enter the mysteries of a liturgical year when one lives in the nanosecond?

Because we have no sense of infinite time, we have only the now and it is not enough for our infinite aspirations. Thus we must do more and do it faster; *activism*, then, becomes our second problem. We live at a terrible pace, always in a hurry, thinking we can save some time, pile it up. Even Americans returning from living abroad catch their breath as they re-enter the speed at which we live. Our life is frenzied and stressful and most Americans admit it. As the ad honestly states, we don't even have time for the pain.

Our lifestyle is filled with activity. Even children move from activity to activity without having time to think, to daydream. One has no time to think about what is happening. Our night dreams become the nightmares of the subconscious trying to tell us about our unexamined lives. An exaggerated activism seems to dominate every aspect of life.<sup>6</sup> And yet the liturgical act is a contemplative action.<sup>6</sup>

It is no secret that we have lost sight of the mystery in life. Our time-saving devices indicate the extent to which we have also bought into the "problem solving ethos of technology." As Jennifer Glen reminds us, the essence of technology is control, while the liturgy requires not mastery but "contemplative surrender." Contemplation

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6. Jennifer Glen, "Twenty Years Later: A Reflection on the Liturgical Act," *Assembly* 12, 325.

calls for "the surrender of all control before the Mystery made visible in Jesus Christ 'in whom we live and move and have our being.'" <sup>7</sup>

Activism and the need for control infiltrate our liturgy in subtle ways. Our concern with ritual or music, jostling books, searching for pages, all such activities can keep "God at bay" <sup>8</sup> fending off the encounter we know can transform us and convert us. Pastors, musicians, all of us are masters of this ploy. Yet the liturgical act, Guardini assures us, occurs only when the actions involved become prayer. <sup>9</sup>

Another dominant American characteristic we all recognize is *individualism*. Many cultural observers have noted this phenomenon, raising a variety of questions about its contributions to the overall well-being of society. Most recently Robert Bellah and his associates have placed this reality before the American public for consideration.

The liturgical act is essentially a communal act. But, as Guardini noted, most people think that liturgy is a "private act" <sup>10</sup> surrounded by ceremony which is considered a distraction. We must recall his plea that "liturgical education become communal formation in the skills required for contemplative action." <sup>11</sup> It is important to remember that liturgy does not consist of many individuals praying in common. The Christian is not an "I" before God but rather a "we." Liturgy is the public worship of the whole Christ, head and members. This communal act calls us to transcend our individuality, to express a prayer that is not merely our prayer, to find redemption deep within our

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7. Glen 326.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Guardini 323.

10. *Ibid.* 322.

11. Glen 328.



human solidarity, and to discover our true self in Christ not apart from it.<sup>12</sup>

This is difficult for many contemporary Christians because community has come to be interpreted as a group of like-minded individuals rather than the mixed congregations that typically characterized the story of the People of God. Christians "look for community," unaware that a faith-community is not a voluntary association but rather a group gathered by invocation. It is becoming more and more evident that we need an explicit liturgical education that leaves behind our "glorification of individual experience" and our compulsive activity and allows for the experience of the liturgical act with its contemplative surrender and communal dimension.<sup>13</sup>

A final contemporary reality which challenges worship today is the reality of the human *work* situation in the western world. Our definition of liturgy as "the work of the people" connects it with contemporary understandings of work. Moreover, prayer and work have historically been connected in the Christian tradition--*laborare est orare*, to work is to pray. One writer describes this as the "antiphony of worship and work."<sup>14</sup>

Revelation, Freud, and Jackie Onassis confirm that to be human is to work. Yet unemployment and meaningless labor afflict large portions of the work force. In a recent article, "On Robots, Yuppies and the Meaning of Work in America," the author describes two extremes in the American experience of work: Taylorism and narcissism. He concluded that neither robot-like factory work nor

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12. Mark Searle, "Liturgical Prayer: A Forgotten Act," a lecture given at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 28 September 1985.

13. Schmich 328.

14. Kenneth Carter, "Of Human Toil, Daily Bread and Common Life," *Books and Religion*, (October 1986) 7.

Yuppie-style work provide real autonomy or meaning for the worker.<sup>15</sup>

Kenneth Carter, commenting on this phenomenon, proposes that we recall the "more limited and realistic understanding of work" present in the Judeo-Christian traditions rather than investing work with life's total meaning. In reality, work is often just that--work! Meaning and fulfillment are more often found in relationships. Carter reminds us, however, that because one's work or calling (*kaleo*) contributes to the community (*ekklesia*), the absence of work often leads to alienation from community and thus is not insignificant.<sup>16</sup>

Work, meaning, and community are obviously important elements of human life; they are vital elements of liturgy as well. Marjorie Procter-Smith makes some insightful connections in her article, "Worship, the World and Work." She reminds us that the concepts of *ekklesia* and *leitourgia* originate in the civil domain and challenge us to let the "overtones of corporate and public activity" resound for us as they did for the early communities. Although liturgy is first and foremost a service ordered to God, this added dimension does not negate the original one of service to the *whole nation*.<sup>17</sup>

Second she reminds us that the work of the community (*leitourgia*) is precisely that, the community's work.

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15. Paul Scotchmer, "On Human Robots, Yuppies and the Meaning of Work in America," *New Oxford Review* 54 (July 1987) 9-10. Note: Taylorism refers to time and motion management which reduce human action to machine-like efficiency. Narcissism refers to self-fulfillment and self-gratification as the primary motivating force and goal.

16. Carter 7.

17. Marjorie Procter-Smith, "Worship, the World and Work," *Liturgy* 6 (Spring 1987) 61.

Models of liturgy where the community is primarily passive must go. To accept such is to deny its democratic origins.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, *leitourgia* is complex and demanding. It must reflect the work of its members who are struggling with oppression of various kinds; ageism, sexism, racism, and poverty. It must recognize its own complicity in oppressive social structures including the Church itself, if its liturgies of conversion and repentance are to achieve their realization. Such *leitourgia* will of necessity bring the community to take up its mission to the world.

Until human work is understood in its proper relationship to life and meaning it will not be able to contribute to liturgy whose essence, in one sense, is work. Until members sense the participatory and egalitarian roots of liturgy it is unlikely that liturgy will ever get connected to mission.

These four issues, time, activism, individualism, and work offer serious challenges to the liturgical act and bear out the image of struggle that David Powers uses. But the struggle with liturgy and culture also includes a struggle with the truth that culture reveals about liturgy.

For example, our culture has a heightened awareness of human rights. As a result there is a keen awareness of injustice within social structures. Barbara Schmich believes that some people are not able to enter a liturgical act because "they have been deeply wounded by the sins of the Church which can be manifested in the liturgy." Such sins include domination, intimidation, and exclusion, sins feminists and other marginalized people have long recognized.<sup>19</sup> At a liturgical meeting held in Boston, Msgr. John Egan summed it up saying,

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18. *Ibid.*

19. Schmich 328.

No one today can claim to be seriously interested in liturgy and manage to ignore these new questions: Justice is on the agenda of liturgists as never before, and the language of critical praxis is beginning to invade the traditional vocabulary of liturgical studies.<sup>20</sup>

Second, the critical consciousness of this era also contributes to the effort of renewing liturgy and renewing community. Mark Searle is one who explicitly advocates the need for a "critical liturgy." Using Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, he constructs a two stage process through which liturgy is critically reflected upon and comes to "serve as the focus of the Church's continuing transformation."<sup>21</sup>

In summary, the relationship of liturgy and culture is complex. On the one hand, culture makes the liturgical act well nigh impossible. On the other, culture offers liturgy a means of transformation. It seems we must win the night battle, struggle to raise the consciousness of Christians regarding their own hunger, and explicitly advocate liturgical education before we prepare the feast. This points to a need for liturgical education and raises the question of how liturgy is related to religious education.

#### *Liturgy and Religious Education*

Liturgy has often been called one of the greatest teachers of the truths we believe. Prosper of Aquitaine coined the now famous *lex orandi, lex credendi* in the fifth century and its refrain has echoed down through the ages to the twentieth century. This relationship between

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20. Msgr. John Egan, "Liturgy and Justice: An Unfinished Agenda," a paper presented at the Liturgical Association at Boston College, June 1983. See *Origins* 22 (September 1983) 253.

21. Mark Searle, "The Pedagogical Function of Liturgy," *Worship* 55 (1981) 349.

liturgy and religious education is familiar to Christians who recall the early practice of the Church in the catechumenate. Liturgy was intrinsically linked with the formation, education, and sanctification of the catechumen. However, by the sixth century the catechumenate died out and that intrinsic relationship between liturgy and education was gradually severed.

Two contemporary developments, however, contribute to the renewal of that vital relationship. First, the renewal of the Rite of Initiation is recalling the practice of the early Church and emphasizing the role of the community and the liturgy in the formation of new Christians. Second, society-at-large has rediscovered the social and educational value of ritual, symbol, and custom. Ethnic festivals, patriotic symbols, and national celebrations have taken on a new significance. In the last few years we have witnessed a Fourth of July celebration centered on the renovated Statue of Liberty and the celebration of our Constitution.

Within religious circles interest in ritual and liturgical practice has increased and crossed denominational lines. Religious educators from Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic traditions have a new interest in ritual behavior as it relates to education. There is a growing sense among theorists that liturgy shapes and renews our experience as believers.

Recently, two religious education theorists identified what they termed "a quiet revolution" taking place "in every faith group and denomination." Robert L. Browning and Roy A. Reed, in a timely ecumenical study of *The Sacraments in Religious Education and Liturgy*, stated "the breezes of change are blowing in respect to our understanding of the place and power of sacraments (in religious education)."<sup>22</sup>

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22. Robert L. Browning and Roy A. Reed, *The Sacraments in Religious Education and Liturgy* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1985) 3.

Almost anyone with an overview of the literature from 1975 to the present would agree that there is substance to their claim. Books and articles regularly explored the role of symbol, story, imagination, ritual, and tradition in relation to religious identity and behavior. More recently some writers have turned their attention to the notion of mystery and religious experience. Craig Dykstra neatly captured some of those thoughts when he wrote

Religious education presupposes and depends upon people's experience of mystery. Because this experience takes place in fellowship, religious education also presupposes and depends upon communities whose ways of being make the experience of mystery possible.<sup>23</sup>

Browning and Reed develop the mystery theme in their work. They focus on sacrament as "*mysterion-sacramentum*," that is, emerging from "biblical substance" (*mysterion*) and "ecclesial strategy" (*sacramentum*). They concentrate on the reality of mystery saying

The ineffable mystery remains mystery; it never ceases to be mystery, but its celebration, articulation and realization become in the life of the church occasions of affirmation and experience: sacraments.<sup>24</sup>

Browning and Reed see sacraments as "powerful communicators of the good news" particularly as this relates to the life issues Christians face. Inherent in the sacramental celebration, they maintain, is the "drama of decision." Ultimately, the sacrament is a "Kingdom-action which leads from the sanctuary of worship out into the

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23. Craig Dykstra, "Mystery and Manners: The Task of Religious Education," *Religious Education* 79 (Winter 1984) 64. See also his recent article, "The Formative Power of the Congregation," *Religious Education* 82 (Fall 1987) 531.

24. *Ibid.* 33.

world with renewed vision and commitment." Christians themselves become "acting symbols" of the meanings contained in their celebrations. But all of this is essentially conditioned by the mystery which "remains mystery."<sup>25</sup>

Other writers focus on the need for a sacramental imagination as one faces the ultimate mystery, God. For Christians such a religious imagination is essential if one is to see in the entire universe, "the presence of God in Christ."<sup>26</sup> Patrick Collins notes that imagination is not making pictures in our heads, but rather a power enabling us to get deeply into the Real.<sup>27</sup> It puts one in touch with the deeper meanings of experience. This appears to be the key understanding: imagination goes hand-in-hand with religious experience and religious education depends upon religious experience.

Underlying the concern with mystery, sacrament, imagination, and symbol is a profound interest in religious experience. This interest is particularly evident in Edward Robinson's *The Original Vision: A Study of the Religious Experiences of Childhood*. Although Robinson does not put restrictive parameters around the notion of religious experience, he acknowledges that religious experience involves a transcendent dimension, an awareness of a

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25. *Ibid.* 63-133.

26. Jack L. Seymour, Robert O'Gorman, Charles Foster, *The Church in the Education of the Public* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984) 136.

27. Patrick Collins, *More Than Meets the Eye: Ritual and Parish Liturgy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) 23.

"something-more-than-situation."<sup>28</sup> For Robinson experience will always be central to the *raison d'etre* of religious education.<sup>29</sup> He calls religious educators to recognize their task clearly, that is, "to be committed to conveying what it means to see experience in a spiritual perspective."<sup>30</sup> Imagination is a vital part of this process for in the freedom to imagine "being other than we are" is the power of transcendence.<sup>31</sup> In speaking of contemporary liturgy, Robinson laments that the "language of mystery" is too often replaced with "small talk of the supermarket." Such language, he notes, can neither express nor satisfy

that spiritual hunger, that capacity in all human beings for conceiving the inconceivable, for believing the unbelievable, which is what drives them to worship in the first place.<sup>32</sup>

Robinson, it appears, would advocate a liturgy which would challenge the imagination, enrich the spirit, and foster a freedom to participate at a real depth.<sup>33</sup>

In summary, current trends in religious education point to the hunger for religious experience as a *sine qua non* of religious education. This experience, rooted in the imagination and in its ability to transcend the obvious,

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28. Edward Robinson, *The Original Vision: A Study of the Religious Experience of Childhood* (New York: Seabury, 1983) 145.

29. Edward Robinson, "The Experience of Transfiguration," *Religious Education* 80 (Spring 1985) 247.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Edward Robinson, "Professionalism and Religious Imagination," *Religious Education* 77 (1982) 630.

32. *Ibid.* 640-641.

33. *Ibid.*



opens the door to a spiritual outlook on all reality and to a sacramental perspective which can serve as a paradigm for all of life. A sacramental perspective lies at the heart of liturgy; thus it seems that the liturgical component of our Christian life needs to be reappropriated by educators for the community.

While the theorists are making progress, in the realm of educational practice there is little evidence that educators know how to integrate liturgy and education. More frequently than not, the educational program focuses on knowledge of Jesus, the Bible or doctrine, on human experience and developmental norms for life and faith, and on informal, personal prayer forms isolated from the community-at-worship. If there is some participation in communal worship, it is often experienced as something tacked on to the educational program with little relevance to its ultimate purpose or present theme.

Although most educators consider worship services important to the Christian life they are frequently unsure why they are important as long as a personal relationship with God remains intact. Educators frequently have enough sociological awareness to see reasons for community ritual, but with the culturally heightened value of individualism those reasons cease to be compelling. What is lacking, it seems, is a liturgical vision which includes liturgy as a vital and integral component of Christian life and mission.

The previous discussions on liturgy and culture and liturgy and religious education raise many issues for us. So where are we? We know we have a problem involving liturgical worship. We know it calls for a more explicit and systematic liturgical education in the face of pervasive cultural challenges. We also know that religious educators typically have insufficient awareness of the integral connection between liturgy and religious education. The question becomes where can we find models of the relationship between liturgy and religious education to guide us as we construct our own. Until recently, other than beginning from scratch or returning to the third century, there was little available. I recently completed a study of a set of religion textbooks, written in the United States in the 1930s, that rooted its entire

program in the liturgy in an era when catechisms prevailed. I concluded that it had a liturgical vision which contained several relevant elements for the questions we face today.

### *The Christ Life Series*

The *Christ Life Series* was written for elementary students by religious educators and liturgical experts. It was part of a larger plan which was to include high school and college texts. The vision of the series was shaped in large measure by the theology of the liturgical movement, which was fundamentally a reform movement focused on the very core of the Church's life--God's relationship with humanity as this is "mediated" in the sacramental life of the Church.<sup>34</sup> Biblical and patristic studies focused attention on Christ and shaped an emerging theology of Church. The theology of the series can best be described as Christocentric, biblical, and ecclesial.

The series' approach provided a comprehensive and systematic introduction to the liturgical life of the Church. Students were helped to see the connections between God's saving acts in history and Christ's action in the liturgy. Christian beliefs (doctrine) became lived realities of past, present and future through the liturgical year.

The series was rooted in a baptismal spirituality. It helped students to understand the significance of community, to understand the nature of symbol, and to grasp their own relationship to the mystery of salvation.

The liturgical year provided a meaningful context for studying Christian beliefs in an experiential way. It also served as a strong historicizing agent by recalling historical roots, shaping present consciousness, and providing new light upon the future goal.

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34. Ernest Koenker, *The Liturgical Renaissance in the Roman Catholic Church* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954) 6.

Liturgical experience involves the student on several levels. First, there is the *sensory* level of word, sign, and gesture. The authors recognized the importance of these basic elements and introduced students to them in a careful and deliberate manner. They understood that color, sound, movement, touch, taste, and smell flood the senses and invoke images, memories, and feelings out of which come insights, judgments, and decisions.<sup>35</sup> Second, there is the *socio-historical* level which brings the collective wisdom of a community to bear upon its life.<sup>36</sup> The liturgy provided a strong communal experience which recalled the Christian community's story and destiny. Students were reminded of their origins, of their goal, and of their relationship to others in Christ. They became aware that their lives were integrally connected to the lives of so many others. Liturgical celebration with its memorials helped them to understand that the present community was united, even now, to a long line of struggling and dedicated believers. They were all part of an on-going history of salvation. Third, there is the *mystical* level of experience where the community encounters the mystery of God in history. The series sought to sensitize students to the transcendent possibilities inherent in their own call. They were invited to move "from the immediate world to a mediated world."<sup>37</sup> This brought about a different quality of self-consciousness which is open to a whole new world of meaning.<sup>38</sup>

From the foregoing it is evident that the series understood the essential nature of the liturgical act as both

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35. Christopher Kiesling, "Symposium on Liturgy as a Formative Experience," *Studies in Formative Spirituality* 3 (November 1982) 381.

36. Cf. Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Education for Continuity and Change* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983).

37. Dermot Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981) 14.

38. Lane 12.

*communal and contemplative*. It fostered the attitudes and taught the skills which enabled children to have an initial experience of church as the whole Christ engaged in worship and in mission. Students understood that liturgy was not a private, inward act, but rather one in which the whole Church along with the communion of saints worshipped God.

Two major contributions which the series makes to our considerations today are (1) a vision of religious education in which liturgy is an integral element and not merely a supplementary consideration, and (2) a carefully developed theological framework for an explicit liturgical education.

In analyzing the theological approach of the series, four elements seem particularly relevant to our discussion and may be helpful to Christian communities as they plan for a more explicit liturgical education.

First, the series contains an eschatological orientation which brings a *new awareness of time*. The liturgy recalls the saving events of the past and calls the Kingdom out of the future; both are made present through sacrament and symbol. By connecting present to past and to future, liturgy restores a historical consciousness rooted in God's time. Moreover, because this is communicated through symbol and story it calls forth a more contemplative dimension of the person.

Second, the series develops a sense of *symbol* and a sense of *sacrament*. A sense of symbol opens up reality to a meaning beyond the immediate sense experience. Symbolic representations are interpretations of reality that are condensed and focused and call one to ponder or to contemplate. They require a certain "experiential participation" on the part of the subject.<sup>39</sup> Through participation in the symbol the human person comes in touch with a

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39. Cf. Susan Ross, "The Aesthetic and the Sacramental in Worship," *Worship* 59 (January 1985) 2-17.

different world of meaning, a new possibility, and therefore a critique of the existing one.

Third, the series depends on a deep understanding of one's baptism. Baptism is a richly complex sacrament of salvation and among its blessings is a call to *community*, a community thankful for grace. This community is community-in-Christ. In this context Christians become aware that they are related to all others in Christ and that they are dependent on Jesus Christ as head. This leads to an ecclesial awareness that Christianity is communal in its essence, that God calls a people to be the leaven of the Kingdom.

Finally, the series calls Christians to act, i.e., *work*. Liturgy is not a show, it is an action whereby Christians join with Christ in his eternal act of worship. Through word, song, bread and cup, Christians indicate their willingness to participate in the mystery of redemption. This is their call in baptism--to repent, to give thanks, to proclaim the Good News in word and deed. Liturgy provides a condensed and grace-filled experience of this as well as a launch into mission in the world.

In summary the *Christ Life Series* offers some relevant data to our contemporary issues with its explicit address of time, symbol, community, and work. Some of these may need to be modified or nuanced for today. Nevertheless, they provide us with a starting point--one already tested--as we attempt to construct religious education programs in which liturgy is an integral and explicit component.

#### *Liturgical Education: A Feast For Today*

Put very simply, our task as pastor, liturgist, educator, is to witness to a feeding, nurturing, feasting God, or if you will, to the Motherhood of God. For years some traditions have spoken of "Mother Church" precisely because that aspect of God is so necessary. The image is fruitful. What adult does not go back to their mother's house for dinner or to visit. Important things happen when we go home for dinner.

--We slow down: what we do is not what is important to a mother; it is who we are.  
--We smell favorite foods of our childhood: we get in touch with our hunger.  
--We hear about the family: we are educated for community.  
--We remember events from our lives and the values we were taught: we are educated for justice, renewed in faith, even as we bring an adult critical consciousness to it.  
--Our mother's house is filled with pictures and memorabilia: we are surrounded with symbols.

Going home for dinner is an important event. It is always a celebration of something, a feast of sorts. It is not unlike Babette's feast, it is not unlike the liturgy.

These considerations of liturgy and culture, liturgy and religious education, and liturgy today all point to one conclusion. In all of our efforts to renew liturgy and community, whether they be educational or pastoral, we must be explicit, systematic, and assertive, which I think in contemporary times translates--prophetic. In facing the very real and pervasive hunger for the religious experience of God, we are facing a real crisis. It is not unlike the world food crisis. We have the food. It is a matter of distribution and absorption. Similarly our crisis calls for swift action and a comprehensive plan of liturgical education.

We must help today's believer to understand the nature of liturgy. We must help them develop a critical consciousness of their culture. We must help them to experience the realm of the symbolic through which we encounter the mystery of God in history. Then they will be fed. And they will praise God with hearts hungry for God, hands eager to serve and voices filled with thankfulness for the feast we share as the People of God.