

# Holy Things: Foundations for Liturgical Theology

Gordon Lathrop

## I: The biblical pattern of the liturgy

Christian corporate worship has biblical foundations.

This is so, of course, in the most obvious ways: at the heart of the meeting the book called the Bible is read and then interpreted as having to do with us. Sometimes, as ceremonial preface to that reading, the book is carried about, even enthroned. Furthermore, the text of the Bible provides the source of the imagery and, often, the very form and quality of the language in prayers, chants, hymn texts, and sermons. Psalms are sung as if that ancient collection were for our singing. Snatches of old biblical letters are scattered throughout the service, as if we were addressed. Frequently images and texts drawn from the Bible adorn the room which provides a place for the meeting. The very actions of the gathering may seem like the Bible alive: an assembly gathers, as the people gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai; arms are upraised in prayer or blessing, as Moses raised his arms; the holy books are read, as Ezra read to the listening people; the people hold a meal, as the disciples did gathered together after the death of Jesus. To come into the meeting seems like coming into a world determined by the language of the Bible.

Already in the second century, the apologist Justin proposed that to a large degree the concern of the Sunday assembly was focused on what he called “the good things” or “the beautiful things” of the Bible. That ancient character of the Sunday assembly continues to mark the worship of diverse Christian churches to the present time. Christian corporate worship is biblical, full of the good things of the Bible. In fact, the whole history of worship among Christians might be regarded as a history of the way the book was understood and alive among the churches. Patterns of reading and preaching the parts of the book, of praying in the language of the book, of doing the signs of the book—these are the principal patterns of Christian worship.

But the biblical foundations of Christian liturgy are also more subtle than these obvious presences of the Bible. This is, after all, not an assembly of people among whom the cadences of biblical speech or the images of biblical stories should be simply assumed as directly applicable. Why are these images and this speech used here? What can it mean that ancient near-eastern idiom, brought through a history of translation, should be applied to this modern assembly?

*The Scripture in the assembly*

Take the public reading of biblical texts in Christian worship. What does it mean?

“Their story pens and sets us down,” says the seventeenth century poet, George Herbert,<sup>1</sup> about the current applicability of the story of the wilderness wanderings of Israel. Modern narrative theologians would say that by reading biblical texts as if they were ours we, who careen through the world seemingly without history, are given a history and something to remember.

But this interaction, this reading of old stories as of new realities, is a very complex undertaking. We are not Israelites. Nor are we early Jewish Christians. We do share with the biblical writers and characters, simply because we are human beings, both the sorrow and the hope which mark the human situation and which also come to expression in these texts. In fact, western culture still largely depends upon the biblical tradition for its primary store of images for human sorrow and hope. But the Sunday assembly means something different by its use of biblical images or its reading of old texts as the “word of God.” Or at least it means something *more* than the resonance that is there when, for example, a Viet Nam war movie is called “Apocalypse Now.”

Such a title stands in a great western literary tradition. Something interesting is seen when the helicopter gunships which still sear the American memory are set next to the riders of the apocalypse and the awful destruction of God’s judgment. But biblical apocalypses were meant to comfort the faithful in the midst of terror, even, by their strange symbols, to mediate that comfort. Surely, any modern American sensitive enough to catch the biblical overtones of such use of apocalyptic images to describe the destruction in our national past will also see that there is no comfort there, for any side in the conflict. There is only the evocation of a transcendent symbol to suggest the transcendent character of our own possibilities for evil. Indeed, the jingoistic comfort of more recent films is no comfort at all but simply our own rantings, our refusal to accept a history of failure and loss.

To be given a history called “apocalypse” is not yet to be given anything other than ourselves. Similar assertions might be made about other narrative allusions to the Bible when they are used to reveal something about our

own present situation. Truth about ourselves is already something! But the liturgy means to say yet more.

The liturgical intention has been that these texts speak to us now not just of ourselves and our history, but of grace, of God's action, of a new thing not yet imagined. The liturgical purpose is that something happen in the use of the texts, not that they simply function as archaic imagery for our current situation. George Herbert knew that the text might evoke in us our wanderings, "our sands and serpents, tents and shrouds; alas! our murmurings." But this liturgical poet also knew that such evocation was not yet the taste of grapes from the promised land. The Sunday texts do not intend to give us only a magnificent language for our need; they intend to offer the taste of those grapes. Such a taste is not merely our history. It is grace and the presence of God. The intention of the liturgy is to manifest the presence of God in this assembly, a merciful presence which is meant not just for this assembly but for the world.

Classically, the liturgy has made that intention clear by singing to God as if God were present, already wiping away all tears, already gathering the peoples into the new land, in the very reading of the old texts, even if those texts were accounts merely of human longing for that wonderful presence. "Return to the Lord your God," sings the liturgy during Lent, in the midst of the readings, welcoming the Gospel of God, "who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Indeed, every Sunday liturgy has the people sing psalms after the first reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, as if we were now gathered in the place of the psalms, in the temple, before God's face.<sup>2</sup> Psalms often bring our need to expression in lament, but they speak that need *to God*. God is sung to as if present in the texts. Thus texts are dealt with as if they do indeed accurately bring our need to expression and, at the same time, mediate to us an utterly new thing, beyond all texts, the stuff of "inexpressible expressions," as Paul calls it (2 Corinthians 12:4),<sup>3</sup> the very presence of grace. The old stories and our old condition of need, loss, and death correspond. But in the midst of that correspondence, indeed, in the terms of it, a new thing is spoken. The texts are transformed to speak now the presence of God's grace. In this way the texts are made to carry us into this very transformation: God's grace is present in our lives.

There is a deep sense of praise within the liturgy of the Christians which always moves the texts toward speaking a thing greater than they have contained. Ancient texts are used to speak a new grace: this is the liturgical pattern for the use of the Bible.

But here is the subtle truth: this pattern is itself biblical. The liturgical pattern is drawn from the Bible. So, for example, Isaiah (43:18-20) speaks God's invitation to the exiles to forget the old stories. The people should

know that God will do a new thing, one beyond the remembered but finally failed history of the exodus:

Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.  
Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

But then the only language available to speak the new thing is in fact language borrowed and transformed from the old story and its account of the way which God made through the sea and through the river:

I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, ... for  
I will give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people.

Old words are made to say a new thing. Especially in this way is Christian corporate worship biblical, not just that texts are read, but also in much of the actual pattern of their use, much of the manner in which texts are understood to mean something for us.

### *The Sacraments*

The most common way in which many Christians would identify corporate worship as biblical, however, is the assertion that in the gathering we do what the Bible tells us to do, the actions which Jesus instituted.

But the biblical character of the assembly when it does the actions that are called "sacraments" is also subtle. While two of the most central acts of the assembly, the washing of its new members and the weekly sharing of a simple meal, appear to be an acting out of biblical stories, on closer inspection one finds that the reality is much more complex.

In spite of all the ways in which some churches have tried to mime the "last supper" in their celebrations, this meal is marked by our presence, our food, and the history of our thanksgivings. That is as it should be. We are eating here. It is our own enacted meal, our ritual. But then, by the same transformation we noted in speaking of the readings, our meal is called the Lord's Supper. The intention of the liturgy is made clear by the setting of biblical texts at the core of our meal and by the use of biblical images and titles for what we do in the eating. We know where the food comes from. We know the people. We can trace the history of the ritual, a ritual that is dear to us and in its continuity an important metaphor for our hope for God, though nonetheless still our ritual. But this meal is called "the heavenly banquet," "the feast of the Lamb," "the service of the new Temple," "the pure offering rising in all the world" (Malachi 1:11).

Similarly, the presence of "Jordan water," of a bottle of water brought back from someone's trip to the "holy land" and poured into the font before a Baptism, does not make the washing in the church to be a pure biblical event. It is our water, our gathering, and so it ought to be. The transforming link cannot be made by tourists, though tourism too has a long history in the

church (and pilgrimage is its own metaphor of the human hope for the holy). Jordan water comes from this world, from a land right now full of agony and hope for more justice and salvation than seems available. It too is our water. And the history of cisterns, pools, fonts, and bowls, and the ritual around them, though it may seem obscure to us, is our history. We bring our children; we know the adult candidates; the water comes out of our lakes, our rivers, our pipes. But that washing into our assembly is much more. Interpreted by the biblical words and images which the liturgy uses, it is called "Baptism" and "entry into Christ." It is "the new exodus." It is Noah and Jonah surviving. It is Miriam singing by the sea. It is people come into the new land. It is the making of priests.

Then here is the subtle truth: this juxtaposition of our actions and symbols with biblical words to propose a new meaning is itself biblical. A remarkable example of that juxtaposition is found in the origin of the sacraments themselves. What is called the "institution" of the sacraments was not their creation *ex nihilo*. Contemporary New Testament studies and contemporary studies of the origins of Christian worship have made it clear that it is much too simple to say that Jesus made up Baptism or the Eucharist out of nothing.<sup>4</sup> Such an assertion in fact misses the richest possibilities of meaning in the "dominical" sacraments.

The washing which comes, in the New Testament, to be a washing "in the name of Jesus" or "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" has a prehistory. The New Testament itself manifests this by the presence of the baptism of John in all the gospels or by the little discussion in the Fourth Gospel about whether Jesus ever actually baptized himself (John 3:22 and 4:1-2) or by the final Matthaean understanding that Baptism is done at the command of the risen Lord (Matthew 28:19). Already in the Judaism of the time of the origins of Christianity there were washings for ritual purity, washings of the converts, washings in preparation for the day of God, John's baptism. Especially, there were washings in preparation for the day of God.<sup>5</sup> Archeological remains of old washing pits and accounts of gathering at the Jordan bear witness to an ancient popular hope that one could be washed into purity and so hasten the day of God or washed into Israel's classic identity (the people who crossed the sea and the Jordan and came into the land) and so hasten the end of Roman oppression.

But then those old Jewish washings were also their washings, a deeply moving symbolic language for their hopes. When archeologists today stir the dust in the old washing pits of Qumran or Masada they are stirring the remains of those hopes.

The juxtaposition of the name of Jesus to this complex of actions and meanings is itself a biblical event and is what we mean by "institution." To do this washing "in the name of Jesus," indeed to propose that Jesus' death was such a washing (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50) and that the community's

washing was identification with Jesus' death (Romans 6:3), was to propose an astonishingly new thing: in the community around this Christ was entrance into Israel's identity, into "purity," into the dawning of the liberating day of God.

What C. W. Dugmore said is right: "The history of Worship does not contain any *tabulae rasae*,"<sup>6</sup> fresh and empty tablets, even when that history is pressed to its New Testament origins. The material on the tablet, the old material out of which Christian liturgy is formed, needs to be seen with great sympathy. It corresponds exactly to the "old things" we still do with similar hopes for peace and justice and salvation, and that old material can give great depth and resonance to our ongoing practice. But then to do this old washing in the name of Jesus, at the bidding of the Risen One, in the presence and power and "name" of God as God is known in Jesus, is to find a new thing "said," a word of grace beyond words that transforms and destroys and saves our old practice.

The same assertion may be made of the meal. At table, observant Jews of the first century prayed over bread and cup. Insofar as the content of their prayers can be established, it is clear that they begged the coming of God's dominion. It may even be regarded as mildly seditious that in Caesar's Palestine every day saw Jews blessing God as the ruler of all things and the source of all food. The very table itself, the shared food, the shared cup, the participants, became a sign of the God who was proclaimed and expected and of Israel as the people of that God. The meal itself was a foretaste of that feast which God would spread. The oral tradition of the pattern of the daily meal came to be codified in the Mishnah of the second century, and it looks very familiar to anyone who knows the New Testament or the so-called Didache, a church order from primitive Christianity: blessing over bread, the meal itself, a lengthy blessing over the cup at the end of the meal.<sup>7</sup> The popular traditions interpreting such a meal continued: the fish meal, for example, might be the *coena pura*, perhaps even the taste already of Leviathan whom some hoped would be served up to the people at the great feast when at last chaos was conquered. Here again we are face to face with the moving history of ancient hopes in a terrorized time.

Then to set the remembrance of Jesus next to this table was similarly to say a new thing. This new thing was there in the stories of Jesus welcoming outsiders and the non-observant to the table. It was there in the tradition of his heightening the eschatological reference of shared eating. It was especially there in the tradition of the meal prayers as a proclamation and remembrance of him, of the meaning of his death, of his presence. To come into this community was to come to a table which was already the presence of God's feast made graciously and freely available to all in Christ.

But then a pattern is clear. Old words and actions are made to speak a new grace. Just as the rich hopes and symbols of people of the first century

became materials which were transformed into ways to speak of Christ, so our gatherings, actions and words, our hopes, are also drawn into the same transformation. Christian corporate worship is made up of chains of images: our gathering is held next to biblical stories, themselves read in reinterpretable chains,<sup>8</sup> and this whole rebirth of images is itself biblical.

Old words are made to speak the astonishingly new grace. The reflections of these three lectures arise from this subtle biblical character of Christian corporate worship. The conviction operative here is that the theology of the liturgy, what the communal acts and words of Christians mean to say about God, is, at least in its origin and intention, profoundly biblical. The deep structure of the liturgy is this very biblical pattern: the old is made to speak the new.

#### *A biblical example*

To see that pattern more clearly as it functions in the Bible, and, at the same time, to consider a text which is surprisingly important for the meaning of Christian worship, take the parable of the leaven (Matthew 13:33; cf. Luke 13:20f.):

The dominion of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened.

In a single sentence several ancient stories are evoked and, yet, by the introduction of a few new terms the traditional sense of these stories is radically transformed.<sup>9</sup> Three measures of flour is an ephah, somewhere around a bushel of flour. That is a lot of flour. It would make a lot of bread—enough for a celebration, enough for meeting God. Indeed, it is three measures or an ephah which Abraham causes to be prepared for the angels of God at Mamre, which Gideon brings to the Lord at Ophrah, which Hannah brings with Samuel to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, and which David brings to the holy army of Israel in their battle with the Philistines. This is no ordinary baking. Moreover, in the new temple which is described by the prophet Ezekiel, the cereal offerings will be an ephah of flour (Ezekiel 46:5-11), baked by the priests apart from the people (46:20).

But read further in the tradition. The ephah of meal is prepared into loaves. Note: Gideon presented unleavened cakes for the holy burning; Abraham and Sarah had no time for rising bread; and according to the requirement of the Torah, the cereal offering should be unleavened. There is this command (Leviticus 2:4,11):

When you bring a cereal offering baked in the oven as an offering, it shall be unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers spread with oil. ... No cereal offering which you bring to the LORD shall be made with leaven....

And there is this “law of the cereal offering”(Leviticus 6:14-18):

The sons of Aaron shall offer it before the LORD, in front of the altar. And one shall take from it a handful of the fine flour of the cereal offering with its oil and all the frankincense which is on the cereal offering, and burn this as its memorial portion upon the altar, a pleasing odor to the LORD. And the rest of it Aaron and his sons shall eat; it shall be eaten unleavened in a holy place; in the court of the tent of meeting they shall eat it. It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their portion of my offerings by fire; it is a thing most holy, like the sin offering and the guilt offering. Every male among the children of Aaron may eat of it, as decreed for ever throughout your generations, from the LORD's offerings by fire; whoever touches them shall become holy.

But if the unleavened flour, the offered ephah, may be a most holy thing, when leavened it may also be a symbol of wickedness. Zechariah is shown an ephah measure as symbol of the iniquity of the people. This ephah is to be flown away to Shinar (Babylonia) and to be given its own house, a reverse image of the new and holy temple (Zechariah 5:5-10). This is its leaven:

Behold, the leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the ephah! And the angel said, "This is Wickedness."

But then the single sentence of the gospel tradition is clear. And it is astonishing. The one who welcomes the outsiders to table says this: the dominion of God is like leavened holy bread baked by a woman. No wonder the leaven is *hid*. And all the meal—enough for Abraham, enough for Gideon, enough for the new temple, enough for meeting God—is leavened. This dominion then is not what had been expected; it is not even where it had been expected. It comes with a radical grace to the outsiders and sinners.

Against the background of the old stories the single sentence of the parable is able to hold the whole meaning of Jesus. It does so by establishing a turn in the stories, a silence, a surprise, not by telling a wholly new story or by establishing wholly new religious institutions.<sup>10</sup> The dominion of God is to be an order and pattern of things which is far greater than and therefore deeply critical of ritual order of any kind. Ritual order always has its outsiders: its women, its leaven, its sinners. The dominion of God has no outsiders.

The woman's leavened holy bread is then a symbol for the dominion in the teaching of Jesus. It then becomes clear that, according to this word of Jesus, the place of the preparation of the holy bread, the people involved in this meeting with God, and the very place of the epiphany of God are all different than expected. But the bread is still bread for a festival, for a meeting with God. The structure of expectation in the old stories remains the same. Also in the teaching of Jesus there is the longing for the face of

God, for the true holy place of God, for the good bread, and for the holy festival. Ritual order, while criticized, provides the vocabulary for the proclamation of the gospel.

Time and again this is the pattern of biblical speech. Old structures are used to speak the new grace. The single sentence of our parable also reveals this deep biblical pattern.

Such is the structure of the liturgy. Old meal practices and old washing symbolism are shaped to speak of Jesus Christ. Old texts, old stories and songs are borrowed to speak of the world transformed. Our holy expectations and ritual practices are received but, if we will listen, they are made to point away from their own order toward the far larger order of grace, toward the outsider who is not yet included, toward the dominion not yet come.

There is a deep hunger and holy discontent within the liturgy of Christians which arises from the silence and the turn in the stories and opens toward the not-yet-manifest full grace of God.

But the single sentence of the parable reveals still more. It is not only that the structure of this biblical manner of speaking and the structure of the liturgy closely correspond. Details of the parable also point toward actual features in the history of the liturgy. Christians have used ordinary leavened bread for the meal which is the sign of the dominion.<sup>11</sup> In the earliest assemblies women played significant roles, functioning, as we now see, as presiders in the assembly and as apostles.<sup>12</sup> The gatherings were first of all in homes, in many ways quite hidden in the public world. Furthermore, the whole people was regarded as a company of priests. The place and the people are all different than might be expected. It is not so much that these things should be seen as new religious institutions, as that they point to the parabolic, world-upsetting, even anti-ritual character of Christian worship.

But prayer and bread, ritual and the hope for God are also present in the Christian assembly. The old structures are still used among Christians, even if radically transformed. We have no other words to use but words with a human history. Ritual words and actions with such a history hold and enable our hopes for order, salvation, and God. But then when the transformation occurs, when the reference of this human religious material is changed in Christian worship, the intention is to make clear that the new grace is for the very world that produced this religious language.

#### *Broken myth and broken ritual*

Such is the deepest character of both biblical speech and the patterns of Christian worship. Paul Tillich might gather these patterns of speech and worship under the heading of "broken myth."<sup>13</sup> In a broken myth the terms of the myth and the power of the myth to evoke our own experience of the world remain. But the coherent language of the myth is seen as insufficient and its power to hold and create as equivocal. The myth is both true and,

at the same time, wrong, capable of truth only by reference to a new thing, beyond its own terms. Such a “break” is present in the deep intention of the words and ritual practices of the liturgy: the old is maintained, yet, by means of juxtaposition and metaphor, the old is made to speak the new.

This use of a “break” is biblical. Recent scholarly attention has especially noted how the rhetoric of the parables of Jesus assumes a world determined by old religious speech—an overarching mythic language of common expectation and meaning—which is then turned on its head or broken in the revelatory language of the parable.<sup>14</sup> The parable of the leaven is a clear example of this rhetoric. But a more general reading of the biblical tradition can propose that this pattern of the parables is a particularly pungent example of a wider method in biblical speech. Indeed the most central texts of the biblical tradition make use of this pattern.

The examples can be multiplied. The “song of the sea” (Exodus 15:1-18), the poetic account of the salvation of the people and their establishment in the land, may very well be a reworking of Canaanite mythic material.<sup>15</sup> Now the conquest of the chaotic sea and the building of the sanctuary of the victor god, regular features of near-eastern cosmogonic myth, are required to speak of the historical escape of some slaves and of that people being made the “sanctuary” of God. The exodus event is thereby given the resonance of a creation story. Or, rather, the cosmogonic tale is broken. Its reference is radically changed, while the hope for new creation, the hope which engendered the tale, is saved. With this new use of myth the chain of the reworking and further breaking of the story is begun.<sup>16</sup> For the “song of the arm of the Lord” (Isaiah 51:9-11) may be a reworking of the first song, now applied to the return from exile, just as Psalm 74 may use the same materials to plead for deliverance (a new creation!) in the chaotic and needy time of the Seleucid occupation. Finally, at the end of the New Testament, in a book which gives rebirth to many of the primary images of the biblical tradition, we have this image: “the sea was no more” (Revelation 21:1).

A similar rhetorical pattern is used in the Gospel of Mark to speak the meaning of the death of Jesus. At first glance it seems as if conventional apocalyptic language of the time is adopted unbroken by the Gospel. “Elijah does come first to restore all things,” says the Markan Jesus, assenting to the language of the “scribes” (Mark 9:12). And, in a later passage, the disciples are urged to stay awake, to “watch” for the unexpected coming of the reign and day of God (Mark 13:32-37). But then in the very next chapters that language is broken. The crucial “watching” of the Gospel is the waiting with Jesus for betrayal and death (Mark 14:34-41). And Jesus’ cry to God from the cross is heard as the invocation of Elijah the restorer (Mark 15:34-36). For Mark the crucifixion is the very dawning of the day

of God, the unexpected day of restoration. The language of apocalyptic is used and broken.

It belongs to such a rhetorical pattern that John the Baptist should be identified as Elijah, the forerunner of the day of God, for his cruel death is seen as a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus (Mark 9:12-13) which is the very arrival of that day. It belongs to such a pattern that at the use of the cup, associated in Jewish table ritual with prayer for the dominion of God, Jesus vows (Mark 14:25):

Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

According to Mark, he does refuse wine before he is hanged (Mark 15:23), but then in a wonderfully ambiguous act, appropriate to the hidden arrival of the dominion of God, a bystander takes spoiled wine and, in the midst of Jesus' abandoned cry to God, which is the call for Elijah, "gives it to him to drink" (Mark 15:36). Is it wine? Does he drink it? For the reader of Mark those questions are the same as these: Does Elijah come? Is the cross the arrival of the day of God? Mark seems to say: Let the language of apocalyptic—and, given the use of the cup, the language of ritual—be broken to say, unexpectedly, graciously, yes.

But if the cross is the arrival of the day of God, where is that day now? How may we see it? What words are there for it? That the women flee from the tomb with no words (Mark 16:8) only casts us back on the words of the Gospel itself. That is also exactly where the the white-robed messenger sends us:

He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.

If we would see the risen one, we are sent to the words of Jesus and to Galilee, to the very place where, at the beginning of the book (Mark 1:14), Jesus appears and begins to gather those who believe. We are sent back to read the book again, and to find therein the knowledge of the resurrection already present in chapter 1:1 and then throughout in the so-called "messianic secret" (Mark 9:9). In Mark there is no "resurrection appearance" because the entire Gospel is a resurrection appearance. It is made up of pericopes broken open to speak the risen Christ into the present of the readers. The Gospel of Mark means to say the resurrection in a collection of the wrong words,<sup>17</sup> the only words available to say a thing which cannot be said.

The risen one and the day of God are seen in the midst of the community gathered around these words. Just as the book uses and breaks apocalyptic language, so the very language of the book itself now is broken to speak the continually new grace of God in the presence of Jesus Christ.

But then the second gospel's conception of what a gospel is sounds very like the conception alive when the people sing "Glory to you, O Lord"

before the reading of the book in the traditional liturgy: Jesus Christ risen is present in the book read and preached in the assembly.

There are other New Testament parallels to this Markan use of language as well as to the continuing Christian liturgical practice of reading a chain of scriptures followed by an acclaimed reading from the gospels. So Paul says that Christ was raised "in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:4). So the Fourth Gospel asserts that the early surprise or disbelief or need for evidence of the resurrection was because "they did not know the scripture" (John 20:9). The Johannine Jesus says that the scriptures "bear witness to me" (John 5:39). At the end the evangelist speaks of the way to read the Fourth Gospel itself: "these are written that you may believe" (John 20:31). So Luke reports that the risen Lord "opened to us the scriptures" (Luke 24:32).

In each case the biblical pattern of breaking mythical language is continued, until at last even the words of the Christian tradition, even the ritual practices of the community (the Byzantine court rituals for welcoming an emperor, for example, now adapted for welcoming a book with lights and incense and acclamations, the customary rites of the Gospel reading) are broken to speak unspeakable new grace, the resurrection and the day of God and the wiping away of tears, into the present situation.

The terms of the traditional language and the customary ritual are maintained and treasured, just as the terms of mythic language are maintained in parables or the "song of the sea." How could we do without them? How without myth could we assert that one story has meaning for us all? After all, as Herbert says: "A single deed is small renown." Besides, how could there be patterned communication and hope for order without ritual? That there is an assembly on a special day sheds a light on all our days. That we speak of a "city of God" mirrored in this assembly engenders hope for our cities. Yet these traditional languages are opened to new reference, required to say a new thing.

This rhetoric of the broken myth is already present in the simple New Testament title "Jesus Christ." This title, thought perhaps to originate as a liturgical formula of confession and praise, carries with it the whole tradition of kingship and anointing and messianic hope. Yet, in juxtaposing that tradition to a crucified first century man, the title "Christ" is given to one who is no king nor any messiah of ordinary expectation. The whole tradition is broken. We are reigned over by one who serves us, saved by one who dies, universally embraced by one made to be utterly little. Now the title Jesus Christ is a hermeneutical key to scripture and liturgy for Christians. If we may hear the surprise of this title we may begin to hear what new things, what new understandings of our world and ourselves, are being brought from the old texts and rites.

*The pattern of these good things*

Such is the deep pattern of the Bible and the subtle biblical pattern of the liturgy. It is the pattern in which we are enfolded in the liturgy.

When the teacher and lay theologian Justin wrote his defense of Christianity for the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius in the middle of the second century, he included this description of the presence of the Bible in the assembly:

The records of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read for as long as there is time. When the reader has concluded, the presider in a discourse admonishes and invites us into the pattern of these good things. (1 Apology 67:3b-4)

It may be that Justin meant to assert that the noble and good things of the readings were proposed in the presider's homily as matters to be imitated in the moral lives of the believers. He would thereby be defending the virtue of these Christian assemblies. Such may be indeed an exterior estimation of Christian preaching, an estimation available to a Roman official: the preacher tells us things to do, proposing to us models for imitation.

But what would the experience of the preaching be within the community? What would such imitation be if it really were mimesis of the content of the several readings? When the "memoirs of the apostles," as Justin calls the New Testament, are juxtaposed to the "writings of the prophets" a pattern emerges. It is the pattern of old words being caused to speak the new. That pattern is not so much things to do as an utterly new way to understand the world, and so an utterly new way to conceive and thus to live our lives.

Whatever he may have meant in writing the emperor, it seems fair in the present time to interpret Justin in another way. We are invited to understand our lives in the pattern (let "pattern" rather than "imitation" be the translation of *mimesis*) of these good things. Preaching then is to make available to us the old things of text and ritual as images and words which speak the truth of our world, our lives and our death, our alienation and our need, more deeply than had before occurred to us. Moreover, preaching is to cause a crisis in those words: the words are broken. They speak the unspeakable, the resurrection. The present grace of God is spoken in the terms of our old lives and we ourselves are saved. If the terms of myths or the terms of biblical speech are maintained in their new uses, so are the "terms" of ourselves—our lives, our hopes, our limits—along with them. But just as with the myths, our terms are not finally sufficient. They are even deeply wrong. Here, in the assembly and in preaching, a new thing is said, destroying and recreating ourselves and our world.

It is not just reading and preaching which propose this pattern. So do the sacramental actions. So do the metaphoric chains of liturgical poetry.

So does ritual action set next to ritual word. The preaching means only to bring to explicit speech the intention of the whole complex. All the juxtapositions of the liturgy call us to trust in the biblical pattern, reinterpreting our world from and living out of this: God is the one who brings something out of nothing, life out of death, the new out of the old. Thus all the liturgy “invites us into the pattern of these good things.”

But it is not yet clear enough to say “all the liturgy.” It remains for us to be more explicit about the structures of ritual action and speech which make up Christian liturgical assembly. We need to define “the liturgy” more carefully in order to speak with clarity about its meaning as it proposes to us this biblical pattern. And that will be matter for tomorrow and the second lecture.

### Notes

1. “The Bunch of Grapes,” in John N. Wall, Jr., ed., *George Herbert* (New York: Paulist, 1981) 250-251. The entire text of the poem is this:

Joy, I did lock thee up: but some bad man  
 Hath let thee out again:  
 And now, methinks, I am where I began  
 Sev'n years ago: one vogue and vein,  
 One air of thoughts usurps my brain.  
 I did toward Canaan draw; but now I am  
 Brought back to the Red Sea, the sea of shame.  
 For as the Jews of old by God's command  
 Travel'd, and saw no town,  
 So now each Christian hath his journeys spann'd:  
 Their story pens and sets us down.  
 A single deed is small renown.  
 God's works are wide, and let in future times;  
 His ancient justice overflows our crimes.  
 Then have we too our guardian fires and clouds;  
 Our Scripture-dew drops fast:  
 We have our sands and serpents, tents and shrouds;  
 Alas! our murmuring come not last.  
 But where's the cluster? where's the taste  
 Of mine inheritance? Lord, if I must borrow,  
 Let me as well take up their joy, as sorrow.  
 But can he want the grape, who hath the wine?  
 I have their fruit and more.  
 Blessed be God, who prosper'd Noah's vine,  
 And made it bring forth grapes' good store.  
 But much more him I must adore,  
 Who of the Law's sour juice sweet wine did make,  
 Ev'n God himself, being pressed for my sake.

2. Cf. Gail Ramshaw, *Christ in Sacred Speech* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 75: “Some of our liturgical texts and actions imply a sacred space which is left unnamed. These implied metaphors are significant for our full appreciation of Christian liturgy.”

3. Or “unspeakable speeches,” *arreta hremata*.

4. A fine statement of the meaning of “institution” in contemporary liturgical studies is in David N. Power, “Unripe Grapes: the critical function of liturgical theology,” *Worship* 52 (1978): 395-397.

5. For an old but still useful study of the baptisms of “heterodox” Judaism see Joseph Thomas, *Le mouvement baptiste* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1935).

6. C. W. Dugmore, *The Influence of the Synagogue upon the Divine Office* (London: Oxford, 1944) vii.
7. Thomas J. Talley, "From Berakah to Eucharistia: a Reopening Question," *Worship* 50 (1976): 115-137.
8. Cf. Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1949) 13-14; Gordon Lathrop, "A Rebirth of Images: on the use of the Bible in the Liturgy," *Worship* 58 (1984): 291-304.
9. A similar interpretation of the leaven parable is found in Robert W. Funk, *Jesus as Precursor* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 51-72.
10. Cf. John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval* (Niles, Illinois: Argus, 1975).
11. Unleavened bread may very well have been taken into western Christian use as part of the clerical renewal in the carolingian period. It was to be the "pure sacrificial bread" which should correspond to the newly pure "priesthood," the Leviticus images being applied to the church's Eucharist. Unleavened bread was never used in the East. The western defense of the practice by appealing to "what Jesus did" seems to have been the fruit of much later polemics between West and East. For these reflections I am indebted to an unpublished paper of Joan Halmo.
12. So we ought now read, for example, Romans 16:1,3-5,7 ("Junias" is probably "Junia"!).
13. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1957) 52-54.
14. Scholarly work related to the Parables group of the Society of Biblical Literature has been marked by this interest in the rhetoric of world reversal. See Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, and Funk, *Jesus as Precursor*.
15. F. M. Cross, "The Song of the Sea and Canaanite Myth," in H. Braun, et. al., *God and Christ, Journal for Theology and Church* 5 (New York: Harper, 1968) 1-25.
16. Cross, 19-20.
17. Cf. Austin Farrer, *The Glass of Vision* (Westminster: Dacre, 1948) 145: "to include that encounter within his gospel is a thing he cannot do: every sentence in the gospel points a finger towards it, but the poem ends with finality at the words 'for they were afraid.' The rest cannot be written." Of course, even the word resurrection is the wrong word. Meaning the resuscitation, the "standing again," of the dead, the idea comes into Jewish use as a hope for the eschatological reward to those who were killed as martyrs during the period of the Greek occupation of Palestine. It may be that very hope which echoes in Matthew 27:52-53. But the Christian community, in speaking of the encounter with Jesus Christ risen, means far more than can be contained in this word. Though this word points toward what is meant, it too must be broken, juxtaposed to other words and stories and rites, in order to speak the content of faith.

## II: The *Ordo* of Christian Worship

The pattern of the Bible in Christian worship is the pattern of the *ordo*, that ritual ordering and “shape of the liturgy”<sup>1</sup> which has united Christians throughout the ages. To inquire into the structure of the *ordo* is to inquire about the way “meaning” occurs in Christian worship. My thesis here is this: the deep structure of biblical language, the use of the old to say the new by means of juxtaposition, is evoked and replicated in the *ordo* or shape of the liturgy itself.

That there is a pattern in liturgical worship is a common theme in much of the twentieth century scholarship dealing with the data of the Christian assembly. Anton Baumstark proposed that structures of worship were the surest ground for comparing different liturgical traditions.<sup>2</sup> Gregory Dix exercised a powerful influence on current thought about Christian worship by rooting the “shape of the liturgy” in New Testament texts and in the patterns of the Jewish meal and of the synagogue service. Alexander Schmemmann sought, as the first task of liturgical theology, to find the core structure which holds together all the church’s liturgical life, to find the *ordo* behind the unwritten rubrics as well as the written typicon.<sup>3</sup>

But concern about pattern in worship is not solely a twentieth century matter. One even finds in some ancient texts a modern sounding interest in the significance of the pattern. It is arguable that the greatest monuments of liturgical documentary history are not principally the collections of authorized or model texts for the words of the liturgy. They are rather the descriptions of patterned actions, the models and designs of an event. The earliest available full description of the Christian Sunday assembly, the mid-second century text of Justin we have mentioned above, was the description of a pattern together with an account of the meaning of both Sunday and assembly.<sup>4</sup> Only one word of liturgical text occurs in Justin’s entire description: the Hebrew word *amen*. So also, the third century theologian and church leader, Hippolytus of Rome, wrote a book which, like many subsequent “church orders” of the East or the *ordines romani* and *Kirchenordnungen* of the West, included some model texts within the primary account of an order of actions within an order of days.<sup>5</sup> And when Martin Luther finally and reluctantly yielded to the pressure that he should provide counsel on liturgical reform, what he provided was not the edited full text of a missal, as if that would then henceforth be the required liturgical text. Such a missal could have been provided, as is evidenced by the detailed liturgical text published by Luther’s more radical contemporary, Thomas Müntzer. But Luther went another and older way. His two major liturgical writings are narrative descriptions of the received design of the gathering and evaluations of the resources of the tradition for doing that received

design.<sup>6</sup> At least according to the witness of these texts there is a pattern, an *ordo* of Christian worship.

But what is that *ordo*? What follows is another late 20th century attempt to describe the pattern of Christian liturgy and to propose some ways in which that pattern yields *meaning* to its participants.

Christians meet for worship on Sunday. Christians pray, together or singly, on all the days of the week at morning and evening, perhaps also at noon and night. They pray in praise and intercession. In their Sunday meeting Christians gather around the scriptures. They also hold a meal. These are the root elements of an *ordo*, of a pattern of ritual within a pattern of days. They are elements widely, if not universally, observed in the churches. But how are these elements an *ordo*? How do they determine the structure and meaning of Christian worship?

The earliest evidence for Christian worship presents us with evidence of a "liturgical dualism," with a "participation in the old cult and at the same time the presence...of the new."<sup>7</sup> Christians observed the week as a ritual unit, and yet, when the sabbath was over they gathered in an assembly which was both like and unlike the sabbath gathering. Christians held a meeting focused around scripture and interpretation and prayer, as was customary to what we know of the synagogue (see for example Luke 4:16-20). But then they held a meal, an act more appropriate to a smaller circle or to the home.

But note: the new was not drawn from other sources than the old. The particular characteristics of Christian gatherings were not new inventions but rearrangements and new relationships within old material. The first day seems to be a new day of meeting, but the day is still determined by the old cycle of the week: it is after the sabbath. It is new to find "synaxis," the assembly around scripture and prayer, juxtaposed to a meal. But the shape of the meal itself has the deep roots in the patterns of Jewish meals which we have already discussed. It is also new that the "memoirs of the apostles" or even "the writings of the prophets," if these are taken to be not Moses but the books called prophetic today, should be read as the central scriptures. But the phenomenon of gathering around the reading of scriptures is not new at all.

We do not know how widespread among Christian groups of the first two centuries any of these practices were. But we do know that this liturgical dualism, this saying of Christian meaning with Hebrew and Jewish images, came to determine the shape of Christian worship.

*The ordo: seven days and the eighth day*

Take Sunday for example. At the core of the Christian *ordo* is the week and the weekly recurring Sunday. Christians meet on Sunday. Christians mark the passage of days through the week with prayer. This structure has

become a common and presupposed ecumenical inheritance. But what does it mean? How does the structure work?

When the Christian community marks the cardinal points of the sun—its rising, its zenith, its setting, its nadir—with communal or personal prayer, it engages in an ancient discipline, received in outline from the Jewish reinterpretation of the universal human experience of time. The passage of the day, morning with its light and possibilities and night with its fears and comforts, is made to witness to God. The basic marking points of our experience of time become places to stand, open toward God as creator of time.

Such a structure is already found in the Hebrew scriptures. The sun has been seen among human groups since the earliest times as that power beyond our world holding our world together. To do a ritual at the cardinal points of the sun is, willy-nilly, to be inserted into that old human sense of the power of the sun. But to *pray* according to the motions of the sun, that is to do not just any ritual but to use the sun's passages as occasions to remember God's deeds with praise and to beseech God's mercy. To pray at the cardinal points of the sun is to say what the Hebrew scriptures say: that the God whose deeds the community tells and for whose mercy the community hopes created the sun and the moon, all the time-keepers, the great lights, indeed, all of the world itself. Ancient human experience of time and the world is juxtaposed to the biblical assertion: this all is gift. Neither the earth nor the sun is the center. God is. By the gift of God all of time is good, all the world is good. At the same time, all of time and the world bear witness.

Thus to pray at sunrise is to be inserted into the saving effect of that old biblical juxtaposition. My experience of the boundary of another day can summon into this moment all of my life. It can gather me again into the community whose tradition of prayer I keep. It can insert me again into all the qualities and circumstances and material reality of the newly visible world. The prayer at dawn is our community and the world come to expression. But the hope so expressed is not a hope in the community itself, nor in the visible things of the world, nor in the sun. Since we stand in prayer, remembering God's deeds and beseeching God's mercy, all of these things are seen as witnesses to God. The prayer at dawn is *creation* come to expression. Hope is resident in the promise of God's faithful mercy and not in the things of the world nor in ourselves nor, one should note, in flight from the things of the world and from ourselves. In prayer at dawn the community and the world and my own history are one before God.

Such an exercise is a ritual reinsertion into the biblical faith. A similar claim can be made for prayer at the other major turning points of the sun.

But Jewish prayer is also made to mark the week. The Hebrew use of the week may be yet another example of early biblical juxtaposition and

reinterpretation. Perhaps the Israelite sabbath converts and reuses the old Babylonian practice of the “unlucky day.” Perhaps the ancient idea that each of the seven visible “planets” must exercise influence upon the earth led to this larger organization of time. This is, after all, an idea still resonant in our “Sun-day,” “Moon-day,” and “Saturn-day,” as well as, more distantly, in the names which probably come from “Tiu’s-day,” “Woden’s-day,” “Thor’s-day,” and “Frigga’s-day” (Mars’, Mercury’s, Jupiter’s and Venus’ days in the Romance languages). But for the first chapter of Genesis both the week and the planets are the creation of God. The story of creation makes every week a memorial and witness to that creation. The end of each week is now the sabbath, the day which witnesses both to the God beyond creation, to God’s rest (Exodus 20:8-11), and to the community’s rescue from slavery, to human rest beyond all authorities and powers (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Classic Jewish prayer not only marks the day but also makes each day flow toward and out of the sabbath. If the human experience of days and of groups of days was anciently conceived as mirroring the structure of things in the universe itself, then prayer through the week takes that experience and that universe, and by the juxtaposition of the sabbath it opens these toward God.

Christians have received this structure of prayer through the week from the Jews. Perhaps the Christian tradition did not receive details of daily prayer or the content of communal prayer services from Jewish practice. Judaism at the time of Christian origins was marked by a rich and an as yet unordered diversity of practice. But both that diverse Judaism and earliest Christianity had in common the practice of praying at fixed times through the day and through the week.<sup>8</sup> We do not know the extent to which such prayer was communal among the Christians. We do know that the cardinal points of the sun and the structure of the week were taken over. We do know that at various times since the beginning congregations and communities and monastic groups have taken on the discipline of marking the fixed times with group prayer.

Already in receiving such fixed times Christianity received a ritual pattern of juxtaposition which corresponds to the biblical faith, a pattern very like the pattern of biblical speech which we have already explored. Christians heighten the tension of the biblical juxtaposition by profoundly criticizing the observance of “days and months, seasons and years” (Galatians 4:10; *cf.* Colossians 2:16) as if that were to submit to the “elemental powers of the universe.” But Christians too are found praying at dawn or evening or through the night. Christians too mark the days of the week, invited now to observe the day “in honor of the Lord” (Romans 14:6). The juxtaposition is seen powerfully in the invitation made in the Pauline communities to see the festivals, new moons and sabbaths as “only a shadow

of what is to come” (Colossians 2:17). The body which casts this shadow is Christ.

For there remains one more juxtaposition, one more link in the chain of images, and for Christianity it is the all-important link. After the sabbath is over Christians meet on what they call “the eighth day.” The gathering is certainly on a “fixed day,”<sup>9</sup> one of the days of the week. It is in fact the first day of the week. Christians have also called it the “Lord’s day.” But it is not so much the day which is significant, which is the “Lord’s.” It is the meeting itself. Christians originally did not establish a new sabbath, their own holy day and their own structuring of the week. Through Christian history the day of meeting has certainly been dealt with that way, as if the observance of the day were a new religious institution. But at the origin, when the first day was another work day, and in continuing intention, it is not so. There is the old week and, juxtaposed to it, there is the meeting. It is as if the meeting were after the week, beyond the week, free of the week, an opening to a thing the week cannot contain. It is, as is the resurrection, “when the sabbath was past” (Mark 16:1).

The week is an ancient human creation, a summing up of human religious experience. By the biblical word and by that word exercised in prayer and in the sabbath, the week is reinterpreted to be the bearer of the faith of Israel. Christians receive that whole complex, and to it they juxtapose an assembly.

This assembly is inextricably related to Christian identity. When certain Christians of North Africa in the early fourth century were accused of illegally gathering, they made a confession which contributed to their martyrdom: “We cannot be without the *dominicum*.”<sup>10</sup> *Dominicum* is “the thing of the Lord,” perhaps the day of the Lord, the supper of the Lord. They meant not “we cannot do without the day,” but we cannot be Christians or even live in any real sense without the assembly and its content. The assembly to which they cleaved was the Lord’s assembly, held after the week, on the first day.

The meeting is called a meeting on the eighth day because it opens toward what is impossible in the continuous succession of days, what cannot be reached simply by more days like the days and the seven day weeks we have known. In the meeting on the first day there is an opening toward the day beyond days, toward the last day of God. It is the eighth day because Christians have met “eight days later” (John 20:26) down through the ages. That meeting has always meant for them the encounter with the risen one and so with the end of death and the endless cycles of loss. To encounter Christ risen is to encounter God’s spirit and God’s mercy, things that have been promised for the last day when God’s dwelling is to be with humankind and tears are to be wiped away. Christians believe the eighth day meeting

is already the dawning of that day. The eighth day is the beginning of a new creation.

The meeting is called a meeting on the “Lord’s day” because the content of the meeting is, as Christians believe, the encounter with the risen Lord in the interpretation of scriptures and in the keeping of the “Lord’s supper.” In the word “Lord” there is enclosed the Christian hermeneutical explosion. The word is the old circumlocution for the divine name. It was also in the time of Christian origins the current title of emperors and kings. But now it is used of one who is no emperor but the crucified victim of imperial rule. Christians believe that in his giving and serving, the very opposite of what one expects from emperors and gods, is the presence of the divine name. He is risen and so is he Lord. That is to say, God has made his death to be our life and his presence here in the gathering is God’s own presence. The meeting is the meaning of the Lord’s day.

But this meeting does not fly away from the world. It is held in the cycle of days, on a fixed day. It follows and begins every week. It presupposes all that we have said about the day and the week made to be witnesses to God. Just as prayer at morning may gather up our experience—our shared humanity and our material world—holding it before God as creator and giver, so the Sunday meeting gathers up the week as an image of ourselves in the universe hoping for God and speaks to that whole the unutterable grace of God.<sup>11</sup>

The observance of the week and the meeting of the eighth day: this juxtaposition, understood in the manner of the biblical rhetoric which uses the old to speak the new, which both destroys and saves the old in speaking the new, is the *ordo* of the church. It provides a patterning for Christian ritual, and at the same time it bears the deepest faith of the church and forms us in that faith.

But then every part of this *ordo*, the week set next to the meeting, may come to bear witness to the *ordo*’s whole meaning. It is not that henceforth the week is “old” and the Sunday meeting is “new.” In fact, in Christian experience it is often the observance of the weekly meeting which inserts us again into the possibility of marking the days and the week. Sunday makes us aware of the week. For many Christians the Sunday meeting gives a beginning and an encounter with grace that makes the week possible. Sunday communal prayer wakens the possibility that we might pray through the week. Sunday becomes a concrete way in which we are grafted into Israel and Israel’s prayer.

Furthermore, each moment of the week may bear something of the meaning of the Sunday meeting. Christians may pray in the community at sunrise or sunset or night. They may pray in family or alone, perhaps only reciting the community’s prayer, the “Lord’s prayer,” or perhaps doing as little as simply opening their hands as a sign of the hope for grace. They

may pray at meals, assimilating the old marks of the passage of the day to the meals through the day. But in any of these situations the new word may be spoken. The sunrise now may be seen also as witness to the resurrection. The lights of evening may recall the light of Christ which gathers us together into shelter in God. The night can be occasion for the word of the one who in the midst of all darkness was sustained by God so that now “the night itself is as bright as day.”<sup>12</sup> So also, at morning we may sing with Zacharias (Luke 1:68-79, the canticle of Lauds) of the coming mighty one. At evening we may sing with Mary (Luke 1:46-55, the canticle of Vespers) of the one who gathers the poor. At night we may sing with Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:29-32, the canticle of Compline) of the Light which has been put into our hands. We are always thereby singing the new song of the “Lord.”

Similarly, when daily prayers are meal prayers they recall through the course of the week the Sunday meal which shapes Christian faith. “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed,” some Christians pray at meals, recalling the story of the Sunday resurrection appearance at Emmaus and through that story being reinserted in the ancient Jewish blessing of God: “Blessed be God who is our bread. May all the world be clothed and fed.” The daily meal, recalling the Sunday meal, reestablishes for us the sense of creation.

Sabbath observance has not been characteristic of most Christians. But the image of sabbath, the hope for entrance into full rest, is not gone. It recurs again and again, reinterpreted as the image for what occurs when one hears the word in the assembly (Hebrews 3:7-4:13), when one comes to the presence of wisdom that is the presence of Jesus (Matthew 11:28). Nor is the marking of the course of the week gone. In fact, in ongoing Christian tradition the Sunday focus on Christ’s resurrection spills out into the other days, being echoed in “station days” of mid-week assembly. Later in history, Sunday is prepared for by days of devotion and fasting in the week. And one could argue that it is the Sunday meeting which is mirrored by the death-and-resurrection character of assembly on the martyr’s memorial days.

At the same time, the Sunday meeting itself also evokes the “old.” This “eighth day” is on the first day. Christians have delighted in remembering that the Genesis account makes the first day the time of the creation of light. In encountering Christ in the meeting we meet the beginning of the world as well as its “last day.” We see the light brighter than the world’s light, and so we may love all lights. We meet God who is before the world’s beginning, and so we may love all things, together with them finding our center in God.

This Lord’s day is on the Sun’s-day, the old principal day of the planetary round. Christians have taken that as occasion to remember that a new “sun of righteousness” has risen, beyond this sun, brighter in darkness than this sun, saving this sun and its world. By the statement of the “new”

the old is saved. Here is the intention of this *ordo*: the Sunday meeting, trusting in that which is beyond the possibilities of the world, makes possible full and gracious life within the good limits of the world.

The Sunday assembly and the cycle of the week: this is the first mark of the basic Christian *ordo*. It is the *juxtaposition* between elements which is the *ordo*, the structure or design, the norm of Christian worship.<sup>13</sup> Lutherans *confess* that every Sunday is an occasion for the celebration of Mass (Apol. A.C. 24), and Sunday is legitimately part of the confession of the Church. The juxtaposition of Sunday to the week exactly corresponds to the pattern of biblical meaning which we explored above, only now this pattern finds expression in the actual way in which ritual is scheduled. The schedule is deeply related to the meaning of Christian assembly. The schedule is part of the pattern of Christian faith itself.

The diverse ways in which this deep pattern has been worked out in Christian communities do not detract from the significance of the *ordo*. Daily recitation of morning and evening prayer or of the Lucan canticles, for example, is not constitutive of Christian faith. The Sunday meeting, juxtaposed to our experience of all things in time, is.

One could imagine a time in the future when the human community had long since set aside the traditional week with its roots in an outmoded astronomy. One could also imagine a time when human beings were established in other environments in the universe, with other kinds of time-keeping. Then the seven days and the eighth day meeting might not survive. But Christians would have to be careful in abandoning this *ordo*. New patterns for the week, like a decimal scheme, do not necessarily reflect our sense that we are rooted here, in this earth, near this sun and these planets. They may rather evidence an idealist mental scheme, overly centered on the human mind and human technology. No, for us the history of Israel's witness in interaction with this earth's myths could not be simply abandoned. Besides, whatever pattern of meeting was adopted would have to be a pattern of juxtaposition. It would have to gather up all the universe as it is suggested in the experience of time-keeping in this place (or time-keeping in some new planet or space platform with its newly developing myths). Yet the pattern of meeting would then have to propose to us that surprising grace beyond the universe which holds us and all things in life.

#### *The Ordo: Word and Sacrament*

The tensions present in the scheduling of the meeting, in the apposition of meeting and week, are also present in the order of the meeting itself. The juxtapositions which correspond to Christian faith are also found in the flow and structure of the assembly. The synagogue-like *synaxis*, the "word-service" of the assembly, is set next to a communal meal. That is the simple outline of events in the gathering. Furthermore, each of the two major parts

of this outline is itself marked by those juxtapositions we have already discussed in the last chapter.

It can be argued that this outline also represents the basic Christian liturgical dualism.<sup>14</sup> The gathering for scripture, interpretation, and prayer is very much like what can be reconstructed of the synagogue service of the time of Christian origins. At least it is marked by many of the same elements: it is a local assembly on a fixed day; it has its own leadership, its own “elders”; it is focused around the reading of scriptures and their interpretation; and it includes prayers, called “the prayer” or “standing prayers” in the later synagogue tradition. Justin says: “Then we all stand together and send up prayer” (1 Apology 67). Set next to this word-gathering, at least by the mid-second century of our era, is a little meal. It is not a full supper, but the bread from the beginning and the cup from the conclusion of the Jewish meal of the time of Christian origins. The Gospel tradition makes clear that this Christian continuation of meal-keeping has deep roots in the many layers of the Jesus tradition. To eat this meal in the community is to continue what began in the life of Jesus who came eating and drinking, held meals with sinners, spoke of the dominion of God as a wedding feast, and interpreted his own death as a meal. For the community the meal is the very presence of Jesus himself. Word-service and the meal of the Jesus tradition: here again is the liturgical dualism.

We do not know the exact history of the origins of the synaxis among Christians. Nor do we know what would have been regarded as the “scriptures” to be read in the very earliest of these assemblies. We do know that the Pauline letters assume public reading in the communities to which they are addressed as well as in neighboring gatherings (*cf.* 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16), and that they have been surrounded with indications of liturgical words and acts, as if they belonged within a ritual context.<sup>15</sup> We know that scholars have widely assumed that the original intention of the passion narratives was for communal reading. We know that the first day meeting reported in Acts 20:7-11 begins with Paul’s speech, therefore with a kind of “word service.” Indeed, the accounts of the book of Acts seem to propose that the churches often are like synagogues or originate in synagogues.

Furthermore, we do not know how this synaxis came to be joined to a meal. One theory is that while the earliest tradition of the churches is everywhere full of shared meals, these full meals increasingly came under both internal criticism, for drunkenness and loss of focus (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Jude 12), and exterior attack. The famous letter of Pliny gives evidence that by about the year 110 the Roman authorities in Asia Minor had banned the evening meals of the Christians as dangerous and immoral “clubs.”<sup>16</sup> But then the already extant Sunday morning gatherings would have drawn to themselves a new addition, the bread and wine rituals that

had formerly framed the full meal.<sup>17</sup> One could move to Sunday morning that part of the meal which was transferable. Indeed, it was the very part of the meal which bore the primary weight of Christian meaning. The result would have been the classic structure of the Christian meeting: word and table.

Whether or not such an account of liturgical history is true, by the mid-second century in Rome the shape of the Christian assembly is reported, in Justin's defense of Christianity addressed to the Roman emperor, as being determined by thanksgiving over a little simple food and as being marked by the two-fold form. Justin writes, near the end of his apology:

Those who have the means help all those who are in want, and we always meet together. And over all that we take to eat we bless the Maker of all things through God's Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. And on the day named after the sun all, whether they live in the city or the countryside, are gathered together in one place. Then the records of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read for as long as there is time. When the reader has concluded, the presider in a discourse admonishes and invites us into the pattern of these good things. Then we all stand together and offer prayer. And, as we said before, when we have concluded the prayer, bread is set out to eat, together with wine and water. The presider likewise offers up prayer and thanksgiving, as much as he can, and the people shout assent saying the amen. There is a distribution of the things over which thanks have been said and each person participates, and these things are sent by the deacons to those who are not present. Those who are prosperous and who desire to do so, give what they wish, according to each one's own choice, and the collection is deposited with the presider. He aids orphans and widows, those who are in want through disease or through another cause, those who are in prison, and foreigners who are sojourning here. In short, the presider is a guardian to all those who are in need. We all hold this meeting together on the day of the sun since it is the first day, on which day God, having transformed darkness and matter, made the world. On the same day Jesus Christ our savior rose from the dead. For on the day before the day of Kronos they crucified him, and on the day after the day of Kronos, which is the day of the sun, he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them these things which we have presented also to you for your consideration.<sup>18</sup>

Among the many remarkable features of this text one notes that the Sunday assembly is presented as the most focused instance of the Christian community's devotion both to thanksgiving at meals and to care for the poor.

Indeed, the two seem to be closely related. Perhaps the collection for those in need, which may well have included gifts of food, was a remnant from the time of the full meal, now transferred to the morning meeting. In that case the meal would not only have been stopped, partly by the kind of critique we find in Paul, but transformed. Instead of ignoring the poor while religiously eating to the full (1 Corinthians 11:21-22), the community now, at least according to its ideals, receives the ritual part of the meal and gives most of the food away.

We may say that the structure and meaning of Justin's meeting is something like this: On Sunday, which for Christians is the day of God's creation and the day of the radical salvation of all things by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the people assemble. The day named after Kronos is past and a brighter sun now shines. Having gathered together, the community is formed into faith in the creation of God and trust in the salvation present in Christ, the meaning of Sunday, by the scriptures which are read and preached. That faith is then the grounds of the communal prayers for the churches and "for all others in every place" (1 Apology 65). It is also what is expressed in the thanksgiving over the food which is set out. Indeed, thanksgiving to God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is the deep meaning of the entire assembly. The people participate in that thanksgiving both by their amen and by their eating and drinking. Members of the community who are absent are also drawn into this thanksgiving. This thanksgiving, which is none other than the faith that God made and redeemed the world, yields a revolutionary new view of all that is. The community gives away food. The community challenges the injustice of the emperor.

By this view the meanings of Sunday, of the assembly, of "these good things" in the scriptures, of the prayers, of the great thanksgiving, and of the food are all one. The scriptures yield the pattern of being in Christ before God. The preaching makes that pattern evident, inviting the community into it. In the meal one eats and drinks the presence of Christ and so is gathered into God. The thanksgiving brings this meaning of the meal to expression. And the subsequent actions of the people assert that this meaning is the truth of the world.

This meaning comes to expression in a meeting which now clearly involves a two-fold communal action. One could outline the event like this:

- gathering in one place
- reading of scriptures by a reader
- homily by the presider
- standing prayers
- setting out of the food of the Eucharist
- great thanksgiving by the presider, and the *amen*

–distribution of the food of the thanksgiving, and sending to the absent by the deacons

–and, sometime in the course of the meeting, a collection for the poor deposited with the presider.

This is an immensely useful outline. For one thing it presents the essential schema of Christian liturgical action which can be followed in both eastern and western liturgical developments throughout the centuries. It further provides even the contemporary Christian with an interpretive guide with which to perceive more clearly the flow of events in a modern liturgical assembly.

But such an outline may obscure two simple things: In Justin’s text the assembly is not a succession of independent events, but a communal meeting around two poles. And these two poles interact toward a single meaning, the theme of thanksgiving with which he characterizes the whole event.

One could better say that the community meets around the scriptures and the ritual meal. Gathering, hearing the reading and preaching, praying—these belong to a simple description of the flow of a meeting around the scriptures, a synaxis. Setting the table, giving thanks, eating and drinking and including the others—these belong to a simple description of a ritual meal. The outline might better be presented quite simply as:

–word—gathering, reading, interpreting and praying as a synagogue-like gathering

–and meal—setting out food, thanksgiving, distribution, sending to the absent and concern for the poor as a single communal action juxtaposed to the synaxis.<sup>19</sup>

For Justin the *ordo* for the meeting on the day after Kronos’s day is word and meal in apposition. For him the entire complex has come to mean what he believes that the meal means: being in Christ before God; thanksgiving to God through Christ in a community enlivened by the Spirit.

An earlier passage in the same *Apology* (1 *Apology* 65) makes it clear that we are dealing with a juxtaposition when the meal ritual is set next to the synaxis. For Justin a Baptism can also be followed by the ritual which, after prayers and the kiss of peace, begins with the setting out of bread and the mixed cup. It seems as if the meal ritual functions like a floating rite, shrunken from the old full meal. But in Justin’s text there is no day indicated for this baptismal ritual. The *ordo* for Sunday, however, is now the meal conjoined with the word. Though Christians may have gathered to eat together on other days, the communal meal was the great characteristic of the Lord’s day even when it was still a full meal. “On the day of the Lord come together, break bread and hold thanksgiving,” says the Didache of the late first or early second century, having described a thanksgiving, a “Eucharist” which was a full meal framed by prayers over bread and wine (Didache

14:1 and 9:1–10:7). For Justin the thanksgiving of the Lord's day is the old meal frame set beside and giving its theme to the synaxis.

But one should not too quickly think that this juxtaposition of word and meal ritual is a product of the second century, when the meal was reduced to its ritual frame alone and was therefore portable. There is evidence in the New Testament itself that the juxtaposition is a first century one. The Luke-Acts writings suggest that a conjoining of word and table was already the shape of the Christian assembly in the Lucan churches. Thus the church at Troas gathers in the evening for a long address by Paul and for "the breaking of bread." The whole event is identified in this way: "on the first day of the week when we were gathered together to break bread..." but the gathering clearly involves preaching as well as a meal (Acts 20:7-11).<sup>20</sup> So also the Lukan narrative of the primal Christian first day includes the account of a meeting with the risen Lord in the scriptures interpreted, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets," and in the meal ritual of the bread (Luke 24:13-32). It seems likely that the Emmaus story, among its other meanings, served to represent the meaning of the ordinary Sunday practice in the Lukan communities. Each of these communities also gathered to hear with burning hearts the scriptures "opened," the old texts read and interpreted of the death and resurrection of Christ. Just as with the synagogue of Nazareth, they heard "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Each of these communities also broke bread, knowing the Lord to be risen, recognizing him in this meal ritual set next to what they had heard of the scriptures.

Even if it is only for the Lukan communities that evidence is available for a Sunday meeting structure like this, a contemporary inquiry into the meaning of this Sunday pattern can find parallels also in other parts of the New Testament tradition. Mark is a collection of pericopes which, in the wrong words, constantly points toward the encounter with the risen one. It is "a passion story with a long preface."<sup>21</sup> The Sunday meeting replicates that pattern. It is an assembly around pericopes, whether from Mark or from other texts. But these texts are then juxtaposed to the meal which speaks the Lord's death and is the encounter with the resurrection. Each pericope is thereby required to point toward the passion and toward the resurrection. Each pericope is required to function like Mark's wrong words.

Similarly, John is constructed as a recurring interchange of "sign" and "discourse" in the so-called "Book of Signs" (John 2–12), both sign and speech meaning the same thing yet always pointing toward the not yet arrived hour of Jesus' glory.<sup>22</sup> Then the "Book of Glory," the Johannine passion account, is made up of one great discourse (John 13–17) and one great sign (John 18–20), also meaning one thing: Jesus' going away and his coming again, the cross and the resurrection. The Sunday meeting repli-

cates this pattern. It too is discourse and sign. The meal stands for the great sign of the death and resurrection. It is the servant Lord washing feet as a slave, signifying death made into love. It is the risen Lord in the midst of the community, showing his hands and his side, breathing out the Holy Spirit, forgiving, sending (thus the primal Sunday meeting in John 20:19-29). Thus, by its juxtaposition to the meal, the synaxis is formed into a discourse which means, in words, exactly the same thing as the great sign: "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (John 5:39). The texts for the Sunday gathering are required to yearn toward and bear witness to the "hour" of Christ, to become old language used to witness to the new, just like all the Book of Signs.

Such an understanding of the Sunday *ordo* ought not be misused. It is not that the synaxis is fulfilled in the meal, as if this last were a new and better religious institution. It is not that the literal and historical sense of the texts is ignored. It is not that the synagogue, the forms and imagery and texts of which are borrowed in the synaxis, is rejected in the Christian use. It is not that the texts are old and the meal is new. *The Christian ordo is the juxtaposition.* The word service and the meal, as we have seen, are both made up of juxtapositions. All texts and all rituals are the wrong words. All have to be broken to speak the Christian faith, the resurrection, the encounter with God in the crucified Jesus. The gospels of the New Testament are themselves examples of this breaking, this speaking the truth in the wrong words. The Sunday *ordo* is like the gospels.

The use of texts to say the same thing the meal says is the Sunday business of the church. The meal set next to the texts deepens and focuses the "breaking" which should occur in the Christian word service. Thus the meal of Christ calls the community to read all texts according to the hermeneutic of Sunday, according to the spirit of the risen Lord which enlivens the community. The religious meanings of ancient scriptures are found to have surprising new referents when we are restored to thanksgiving to God for creation through the gift of a crucified man. Then the scriptures too are the way we encounter him. "For me the ancient scriptures are Jesus Christ, the sacred scriptures are his cross and death, his resurrection and the faith which is through him," says Ignatius of Antioch (Philadelphians 8:2).<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the texts call the community to eat the meal of thanksgiving with wider meaning than it had thought possible. In the meal we stand before that God to whom the texts witness. Here is the manna, the lamb, the temple meals, the feast for all nations upon the mountain. But here, in the meal of Christ, is also more than simply the meal stories of the scriptures. Here is the survival from the flood, the assembly of the people of God, the dwelling place of God, the beginning of the wiping away of tears. Then the

meal is eating the meaning of the scriptures, as if we were eating the scroll given Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:8–3:3).

The *ordo* for the Sunday meeting is word service and meal. This two-fold pattern of the assembly has been called by a variety of names in the Christian East and West. But it has been universal. Even when the *ordo* has decayed, as in the loss of preaching or of the vernacular reading of the scriptures among Roman Catholics and the Orthodox, or in the disappearance of the weekly meal among western Protestants, the resultant liturgical practice has often been accompanied by a memory that the full two-fold action was the classic Christian norm for Sunday. For Lutherans, Mass on Sunday and the two-fold character (Word and Sacrament) of the assembly called “church” have *confessional* status.

The nineteenth century Lutheran liturgical reformer Wilhelm Löhe identified the flow of the Sunday service as following the profile of a double-peaked mountain, a kind of Horeb-Sinai.<sup>24</sup> According to Löhe, the action ascends through confiteor, introit, kyrie, gloria, collect and readings to the first peak of the preaching. Then, through prayers and the thanksgiving the assembly comes to the second peak of the communion. For Löhe the second peak is higher than the first, leading the congregation more fully into God’s presence and mercy. We can recognize in this description the same two-fold *ordo* we have traced, although we might not agree with the language of “ascent.” We can even recognize the long survival of the pattern we found in Justin, although “gathering” has come to be lengthily ritualized with confiteor, entrance song, kyrie, gloria and the prayer of the day.

But we might rather suggest that each of the “peaks” of Löhe is in fact itself double-peaked. The word service of Christians is both scripture reading and preaching, juxtaposed, in a lively balance, speaking together. The preaching is on the texts. It is the texts made oral, made available to us, today, full of Christ in our hearing. At the same time the texts give weight and breadth to the preaching, bringing to this preaching of Christ all the biblical history and the ancient apostolic authority. The texts always mean more than the preaching can say. When either reading or preaching is diminished the meaning of the gathering is diminished.

Similarly, the meal is both the thanksgiving and the eating and drinking. The thanksgiving prayer gives words to what happens in communion. The eating and drinking is the thing over which the prayer gives thanks, yet the eating and drinking is always more than the prayer can say. These two, praying and receiving the food, are already regarded as a single thing in the Jewish meal practice from which the Christian supper is made. To eat or to drink the food of the thanksgiving is, as much as the *amen*, to assent to the prayer, to make the act of receiving food bear witness to the God named in the prayer. At the same time, to give thanks is of course to share the food. Community, the food, and the prayer all come to be a single thing. For

Christians this singleness bears a special meaning: We are in Christ before God. Here is witness to the mercy of God and to creation restored.

Then each of these ritual foci, texts-with-preaching and thanksgiving-before-eating, are set in a simple and self-evident frame: In the first case, the focus is preceded by gathering together and followed by praying. In the second, setting out the food precedes and sending food to the others follows.

The *ordo* of the Sunday assembly is the setting of these two double-faceted foci side by side. Thus scripture is read in chains and it then yields preaching. Then that whole complex, scripture with preaching, is set next to the meal ritual, and the resultant complex, word-table, is called “breaking of bread” or “eucharist” or “holy communion.” In whatever way it came about, this *ordo* has now become a model of the Christian faith itself. Scripture and the meal in their juxtapositions speak of creation and of the risen Christ.

#### *Ancient things and the new hope*

These are abiding and basic characteristics of Christian worship: Christians meet on Sunday while maintaining a lively sense of the week. The Sunday meeting is marked by both word and meal.

So there is a significant pattern discoverable in the texts and practices of Christian worship. There is a design, an *ordo*, and it is one that is most especially marked by juxtaposition as a tool of meaning. This may be so because all human ritual grows by means of new embroidery on old patterns, the new use of old ritual signs, so that “juxtaposition” is the inevitable result. It may also be so that Christianity is especially drawn to that human ritual practice which embraces ambiguity as the most profound way for the community to encounter truth. The paradoxical appositions of liturgy, then, rather than the unambiguous and more direct communications of other rituals which we might call “ceremonies”<sup>25</sup> ought to be the preferred medium. But, however they were formed, these juxtapositions of the *ordo* have thrived because of the very particular Christian interest in speaking of God by speaking of Christ. One text next to another text, the texts next to the meal, the meeting next to the week: all these patterns are turned to this christological end. In the synaxis, the expected religious meanings of the texts are turned upside down when they are applied to this Christ and to those who are with him. In the Eucharist, the old hope for God which the texts engender is newly enlivened, and now from the depths of human need, by this bread which speaks of the death of Christ. The various paradoxical pairs which have been so necessary to Christians in order to speak faithfully of God—human and divine, letter and spirit, now and not yet, hidden and revealed, immanent and transcendent—correspond, in conceptual language, to the ways the liturgy presents the faith.

One could go on describing how these primary juxtapositions work themselves out in ways small and great throughout the developed design of the liturgy. Thanksgiving intertwined with lament, fasts set next to feasts, psalter collects or the *Gloria Patri* set next to sung psalms, the “prophecies” set next to Baptism at the Easter Vigil, the victorious entry set next to the reading of the passion on the Sunday before Easter, the mature pattern of the three-reading lectionary: each of these juxtapositions functions in much the same way and for much the same purpose. One could explore especially the ways that baptismal practice sets the washing next to the synaxis and the meal.

But the two patterns we have discussed here are sufficient to indicate the root structure of Christian worship as it is very widely experienced in the churches. Here our principal concern has been to demonstrate that this structure can be interpreted as a pattern of ritual broken in order to speak of God’s grace. The principal instrument of the breaking is juxtaposition. By this breaking the ritual itself comes to be like the biblical rhetoric we explored in the first lecture. For us the primary key to the meaning of the assembly is the correspondence between the essential structures of that assembly and that pattern in biblical speech whereby old words are made to speak the new.

But “broken ritual” cannot leave us neutral and unmoved. We are involved in the ritual, and the breaking necessarily involves breaking open ourselves and our lives to new meaning. The meaning of the assembly is first of all resident in the experienced dialectic of the liturgy itself.<sup>26</sup> Let the week and the course of its days stand for ourselves and our lives. To this *thesis* the juxtaposition of the meeting is *antithesis*. And our life under grace, “in the pattern of these good things,” with the radically new conception of God which results, is the ongoing *synthesis*. The same dynamic is present, as we have seen, in the use of texts which draw in ourselves and our experience. It is at work in the meal which is our food and our lives expressed at table. The crisis which occurs then is meant to speak of the meaning of Christ and of the world made new in Christ. The crisis is meant to save us, to draw us into God.

In the second century Ignatius of Antioch wrote of the *ordo* of Christian worship:

Those who walked in the ancient things came to a newness of hope, no longer sabbatizing, but living according to the Lord’s day, on which day also our life dawned through him and his death, ... through which mystery we received faith. (to the Magnesians 9:1)

All of the holy things of our gathering can be “the ancient things.” They can stand for us and for our way of walking, our need for words and order and food. But when they are absolutized they can also be used for religious pride and achievement, for what Ignatius calls “sabbatizing,” while the god that

they thereby proclaim is only a mirror of ourselves. Broken open, they become chosen vessels to speak of grace. Through Jesus' death and the life which is through him they form us in faith. They call us to live a new hope.

The way the liturgy "means" is, as John Ciardi says of a poem, inseparable from what the liturgy is. The liturgy, too, can be said to be "one part against another across a silence."<sup>27</sup> We are drawn into that countermotion and are part of the meaning which it yields.

But what if these juxtapositions are not really clear in our assemblies? What if the actions of the assembly diminish or obscure the basic Christian symbols and their interaction? What if Christian liturgical practice is so absolutized as to create its own outsiders and its own ranks of the observant? The definition of the *ordo* which is operative here requires that we ask these questions. The very dialectical character of Christian worship inevitably draws reflection on assembly and liturgy into the exercise of criticism. And that is a subject for the next lecture.

## Notes

1. See Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (New York: Seabury, 1983) for one twentieth century inquiry into the origin and meaning of "shape" in Christian worship.

2. Anton Baumstark, *Liturgie Comparée* (Paris: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1953); English translation: *Comparative Liturgy* (London: Mowbray, 1958).

3. The typicon is the book of the eastern church which contains, like the later printed "*ordos*" of the West, the ordering of the eucharist and of the liturgy of the hours throughout the church year. Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975) 20 and 32.

4. Justin Martyr, 1 Apology 67. The Greek text of chapters 65, 66, and 67, from which the translations included in these lectures have been made, is accessible in Anton Hänggi and Irmgard Pahl, *Præx Eucharistica, Spicilegium Friburgense* 12 (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1968) 68-72.

5. Reconstructions of Greek and Latin texts of Hippolytus's church order are available in Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome* (London: SPCK, 1968). The best translation and student text remains Geoffrey Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students* (Bramcote: Grove, 1976).

6. See Ulrich Leupold, ed., *Luther's Works* 53, *Liturgy and Hymns* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965) 19-40, 61-90. The Latin text of the *Formula missæ et communionis* is available in WA 12, 205-220. The German text of the *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung Gottes diensts* is found in WA 19, 72-113.

7. Schmemmann, 47-51. But cf. the critique of Paul Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church* (New York: Oxford, 1982) 39, who argues that the observance of fixed times of prayer was the expression of eschatological expectation, not the contradiction of it. Still, the expectation of the parousia at morning, noon, evening and night does create an interesting and meaningful tension between expectation and present time which may be expressed in the term "dualism."

8. Cf. Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986) 11. See also Bradshaw, 23-71. Writing at the end of the second century, Tertullian is concerned that both Christian prayer while facing the sunrise and the Christian gathering on Sunday are misunderstood as sun worship (Apol. 16:9-12).

9. So Pliny the Younger, in the second century, quotes his interrogated Christian informants in a letter to the emperor Trajan: "*stato die ante lucem convenire.*" The text is in Willy Rordorf, *Sabbat und Sonntag in der Alten Kirche* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972) 79.

10. "*sine dominico non possumus,*" was the answer of Emeritus, in whose house the gathering was held. Text in Rordorf, 109.

11. See Schmemmann, 63-64.

12. Psalm 139:12, quoted especially in the *laus cerei*, the praise sung at the lighting of the candle in the paschal vigil.

13. Cf. Schmemann, 47 and 51. This idea, an idea quite independent of any estimates of the historical veracity of Acts 2 or of certain readings of liturgical history, is the great debt we owe to Schmemann's *Introduction*.

14. Schmemann, 51-52.

15. Cf. "amen" in Romans 16:8, 1 Corinthians 16:24, Galatians 6:18; "maranatha" in 1 Corinthians 16:22; the holy kiss in 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:26; the benedictions in 1 Corinthians 16:23, 2 Corinthians 13:14, Galatians 6:18, Ephesians 6:23-24, Philippians 4:23, 1 Thessalonians 5:23,28, 2 Thessalonians 3:18; and the prayer formulas with which most of the letters begin.

16. Rordorf, 79.

17. In the early third century Tertullian is still quite aware of the change which has taken place in the church's tradition of the meal. In arguing for the importance of custom and tradition in Christian life he includes this among his examples: "We take also, in the congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be taken by all alike." *De Corona* 3.

18. 1 Apology 67. See above, note 4.

19. Unlike the assertions of Gregory Dix, the thanksgiving over bread, in both Jewish and Christian use, is not "four actions" but a single act of thanksgiving. Taking and eating the bread belong to the thanksgiving. Breaking the bread is necessary in order to share in eating a single loaf. Nonetheless, with this caution, there is a certain helpfulness in Dix's description of how the "seven actions" of the meal's frame became the "four actions" of the eucharistic ritual with its one prayer over both bread and cup (Dix, 48-102). But the resultant prayer with its eating and drinking is also a single act.

20. It is possible to imagine that the death and raising of Eutychus, which separates the discourse from the meal at Troas (Acts 20:9-10), was understood as a type of baptism. Similarly, the baptism of the eunuch in Acts 8:26-39 follows the reading and christocentric interpretation of scripture. This latter story may also have been a type of the community's ritual practice, in this case the juxtaposition of the word and the bath.

21. The gospels are "Passionsgeschichten mit ausführlicher Einleitung." Martin Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1953) 60; English translation: *The so-called historical Jesus and the historic, biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964) 80.

22. Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

23. Ignatius may mean to appeal to the events of Christ (and the faith which is through him) as higher authority than the "archives," by which he clearly means the "Old Testament." Then the event of Christ is the only "text" that matters. But since he does quote from the scriptures as authority—"It is written," he says—it seems more likely that he means to say, in his characteristically rich way, that Christ is the meaning and content of the ancient scriptures. For the argument in which this assertion is situated see William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 207-209.

24. This discussion of the pattern of the service is found in the preface to the first edition (1844) of the *Agende für christliche Gemeinden des lutherischen Bekenntnisses* which was primarily intended for immigrant congregations in America. See Wilhelm Löhe, *Gesammelte Werke* 7,1 (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 1953), 13-15. Thus Löhe too deals with the liturgy as a patterned action, expounding its meaning by interpreting the shape of the event. For our purposes it is all the more interesting that he begins the interpretation with this sentence: "You have a week behind you, a new one lies ahead, between the two is the day of *communio*, Sunday." Löhe writes about the *ordo*.

25. Cf. Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982) 41-45.

26. Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984) 76. Such a dialectic might also be called a "chain of polysemous meaning." Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982) 220-233, explores the dialectic, the movement into new meanings which also retain the old, involved in reading the Bible. Although he does not consider communal and ritual reading, his re-application of the medieval four-fold method of exegesis is helpful in a consideration of the effect which the context of the liturgy has on the meaning of a text.

27. John Ciardi, *How Does a Poem Mean?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959) 995.

### III: Liturgical Criticism and Local Liturgy

Our task these three days has been what might be called “liturgical criticism.” Just as literary criticism is writing which seeks to make a literary work available, illuminating its structures and its cultural situation, so these lectures have sought to serve the liturgy with reflections on biblical rhetoric and the structures of the *ordo*. The Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye has called criticism “the conscious organizing of a cultural tradition.”<sup>1</sup> Liturgical criticism can adapt that definition, for the *ordo* of Christian worship has given us a way to organize consciously the specific cultural tradition which is the liturgy. It is this organizing character of liturgical criticism in which we are engaged when we use the *ordo* to collate liturgical data and to articulate liturgical meaning.

But how do we authentically criticize a local liturgy? How do we avoid the danger of simply serving our own taste? When we participate in a Christian assembly, how do we understand and evaluate it? In what direction do we encourage its renewal? There is an answer to these questions. In fact, we may also turn the conscious organization of the liturgical tradition toward actual help for local meetings. Liturgical criticism may become critical help for the actual assembly. In the process, the principles of liturgical criticism will themselves become clearer. Indeed, since Christian liturgy only exists in local communities—ritual books being not the liturgy itself but only helps for maintaining the great tradition in actual assemblies—the local meeting is the proper focus for liturgical criticism. We have seen the outlines of the *ordo* by looking at and organizing the remains of local meetings, especially from New Testament communities and from that Roman meeting which Justin describes. The *ordo* is itself the pattern of a local community’s liturgical action. Books of rubrics are best understood when they are seen as intending to draw local communities into the ancient *ordo*.

Liturgical criticism thus may use the *ordo* especially as a guide in collating local liturgical data, in articulating local liturgical meaning, and in encouraging reform in the local assembly. But, to repeat, this *ordo* is itself a series of juxtapositions. It is symbolic, ritual, and mythic material used to speak the new grace of God. To evaluate a specific liturgical assembly we may ask whether those juxtapositions are present as the central business of this gathering. Does this community meet on Sunday with a sense of lively counterpoint to the whole week? Are the scriptures read at the center of the meeting as if they were the book of life itself? By one text set next to another and by the whole broken open in preaching is the synaxis made to speak of God’s grace in Christ? Is the meal held? Is it seen to be the eating and drinking of the meaning of the scriptures? Is this word and meal

understood as taking place in a hungry city and a hungry world? Are the prayers both thanksgiving and lament? Is the bath seen as the way one enters this assembly? These are questions which the *ordo* raises. They are not simply matters of taste. They are questions of Christian identity.

### *Leviticus and Amos*

When turned toward help for a local assembly liturgical criticism will inquire about ritual meaning and symbolic strength. The organizing and collating work will be attentive to how bread, wine, water, fire, and oil are used, to the sense of holy place and time for this particular people, to traditions of sacred words. Anthropology, social history, and inquiries into the contemporary rebirth of human symbols will be useful cognate studies for such an inquiry. Liturgical criticism will ask whether the assembly is symbolically strong.

But liturgical criticism will also ask whether these symbols have been sufficiently brought under tension and broken. The *ordo* proposes a ritual as strong as the powerful rites for cleansing a leper in Leviticus 14. But it also adopts in its dialectic a critique as strong as that of Amos: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies" (Amos 5:21). To turn the sacred rites and the sacred words toward the creator of all is necessarily to turn them toward a larger circle of meaning than what might be present in an intimate gathering of purely personal significance. To turn the symbols and rites toward the crucified Jesus is necessarily to turn them toward suffering humanity outside of the assembly's circle. Liturgical criticism will ask whether the assembly, by the presence of the elements of its classical constitution, is open to the chaos and the hope for order and justice in the world.

Liturgical criticism, in its explanations of the liturgy and its proposals for local change, will try to hold Leviticus and Amos together. That is difficult to do. Those who love Leviticus are easily inclined to absolutize the rituals and evangelize for their importance. In a chaotic time, it is easy for ritual order to seem to be enough, for contradictory experiences to be excluded or suppressed. On the other hand, those who love Amos may think that they are called to be absolutely rid of feasts and solemn assemblies, only to substitute in their place the narrower references of their own rhetoric. In a time of massive injustice, it is easy to think that liturgy has nothing to do with real human need. Our liturgical criticism wants to find a Leviticus which has interiorized the crisis of Amos, wants to find symbols made to speak God's word for the poor, wants to find bread for a holy epiphany that has been baked by outsiders and sinners.

By these canons, the factory worker who said, "It just doesn't seem holy in church anymore," was a liturgical critic. So was George Herbert, who, in an age of royal ceremonial splendor, could say to God: "All Solomon's sea

of brass and world of stone is not so dear to thee as one good groan.”<sup>2</sup> They are liturgical critics not because they are “criticizing” in the common sense of complaining, but because they are seeking to organize their experience of the assembly toward meaning. That meaning requires holiness to be set in apposition to ordinary life. It also requires human suffering to be juxtaposed to ritual beauty. It requires both the symbols and the crisis in the symbols. Liturgical criticism is the conscious organization of the liturgical tradition which knows that this crisis is essential to liturgical meaning. When addressed to the task of local reform liturgical criticism calls for the holy symbols and for the christological crisis for the sake of this liturgical meaning.

To perceive the meaning of the liturgy does not require that one read a book of liturgical theology. But it does require that one experience the juxtapositions of the liturgy in all their strength. Any participant in the assembly should, on some level, be drawn into the experience of meeting set next to week, of texts set next to the bath and next to the table, of thanksgiving intertwined with lament, and of the whole made to speak of Christ in the midst of the world’s need. The symbols and rituals should be strong enough to evoke and hold the experience of the participants in the liturgy. The crisis of the symbols should speak salvation and call for faith among those participants. The interactions of the *ordo* make the participants themselves part of the meaning proposed by the meeting.

There is certainly a meaning proposed to us even when the juxtapositions are lost. But it may not be a Christian meaning. When, for example, all prayer becomes thanksgiving alone, our experience of loss and failure may be shut out, and the social critical character of the assembly may disappear. Thanksgiving alone, especially in the mouths of wealthier peoples in the world, can function as an unbroken affirmation of the status quo, needing no Christ except as a name for ourselves. There is a need for Amos. On the other hand, when all prayer is lament, it may mirror only ourselves and our refusal of faith. Lament alone, which is not even present in the great lament psalms of the scripture, can be blind to God’s victory present in the world in the cross of Christ. Leviticus could help. Furthermore, when the rituals are done with great care but there is no functional understanding of the rituals broken, the meaning may simply be a compulsive exclusion of all that is outside of the ritual. Indeed, when the word is cut loose from the meal and the preaching from the texts or when the Sunday meeting no longer functions as an “eighth day,” there is a very great danger that the meaning which is proposed to our need will be one that has too quickly closed in on itself. What Jesus Christ means will not be nearly large enough. We may lose the gentle balance between the reliable word and the taste and sight which is beyond words. We may lose the critical balance between

the peaceful order of this ritual circle which we make and the gracious order of all things which only God can give.

### *Signs*

“The word comes to the element and so there is a sacrament.”<sup>3</sup> Such is the great western Christian dictum on the sacraments. But from the point of view of the *ordo*, the “element” is not just bread or water. It is the Jewish tradition of washing continued as a ritual in Christian circles. It is the rite of the bread at the beginning of the meal continued now as the Sunday event of Christians. The holy things of Christians are not static, but come to their meaning in action, as they are used. To this “element” now comes not just the word of the priest (indeed, in this sense, the word of the priest is also part of the “element”), but the whole juxtaposition of the Word of God, of Jesus Christ. To the meal there is juxtaposed the whole word service as well as the proclaimed Word of Christ in the meal rite itself. To the bath there is juxtaposed the readings and the reception to the table as well as the Triune Name. We might say analogically, to the synaxis there is juxtaposed the meal of Christ’s gift. These juxtapositions point toward and mediate the deepest juxtaposition: Jesus Christ comes to the practice and the hopes of the old eschatological washing. So there is a sacrament. Jesus Christ comes to the ritual and the religious reference of the meal. So there is a sacrament. Jesus Christ comes to the reading of the holy words. So the words, too, are an eating and drinking of Christ.

Therefore this western definition also proposes the *ordo* to us. The task of the local sacramental assembly is to let the element stand forth in the greatest clarity. Then, by the juxtapositions of the word, the assembly is to enact the complex event which points toward and mediates Jesus Christ. The task of the assembly is to gather around the scriptures. Then by the proximate juxtaposition of preaching and the great juxtaposition of the meal, the assembly is to find in both the scriptures and the meal the encounter with the risen Christ. The elements thus “broken” bear us sacramentally into the grace of God, before the merciful face of God, into the world seen as created by God.

To describe this task more carefully we may borrow one of the ways Luther handed on this western Augustinian tradition. In three sermons or treatises of 1519 Luther proposed that a sacrament was composed of three things: sign, significance, and faith. For the sake of the “wholeness and integrity of the sign” he argued for immersion in Baptism. That the sign not be given in part, “poorly and unfittingly” indicating the significance of the sacrament, he argued for communion from both the bread and the cup in the Eucharist. At the same time, he called for great clarity in the Church regarding the significance of the sacraments. Baptism means dying and rising with Christ. The supper means being formed together as one with

Christ and all his holy ones, all his needy and wretched ones. Penance means grace and free forgiveness of sins. The whole, signs and significance, constitute the sacraments, the “holy signs.” These are for us “a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher” into life. Faith gets on board. Faith crosses over.<sup>4</sup>

We cannot create faith. But local Christian assemblies can recover the “wholeness and integrity” of the signs. What is more, we can together see that the significance of the signs is continually communicated in great clarity. Sign and significance can be set together in continual dialectic. We can do this so that the doorway and boat and stretcher might be available, so that people may come into life. We can do this so that the liturgy not impede the spirit of Christ. The old Augustinian and Lutheran three-fold hermeneutics of the sacraments was itself a reflection on the meaning and structure of the liturgy. As such it might become for us an agenda for local reform. In fact it is the same agenda we have already been considering. Recovery of the full signs and of clarity about significance is another way to say recovery of the *ordo*.

There follow very concrete questions for our assemblies. Luther’s own proposals for wholeness and integrity in the signs are not yet outdated. Baptismal immersion is certainly not universally practiced. Neither is “communion in both kinds,” the whole community eating from one loaf and drinking from one cup. On the contrary, the great central signs have in many local places been shrivelled nearly to disappearance.<sup>5</sup> This shrivelling may be the result of the abiding conviction that true religion is resident in disembodied ideas, or of the current devotion to efficiency, or of the widespread sense of religious individualism, or of the misunderstanding and loss of public meaning which have plagued modern liturgy. In any case, it is destructive of the *ordo*. So we may ask: is there clearly a washing in this community? Is the font significant, a pool, a washing-pit? Does water flow there? And does the community both eat and drink? Is there one loaf, one cup? For many communities these remain important, even revolutionary questions. As all matters of liturgical practice these questions are to be approached with wisdom and love, but they must be raised.

But the list of questions about the signs is even longer. Helped by modern liturgical and biblical studies to see more clearly the materials out of which the *ordo*, the pattern of juxtapositions, has been made, we can ask about the strength of those materials in our midst. Believing that the “elements” of the sacraments are ritual actions, we can ask about ritual clarity and ritual flow. Understanding that these rituals are communal actions, we can ask about the participation of the whole assembly. Convinced that the Word also may bear to us the presence of Christ, we may ask about the sign character of the synaxis. Let the signs be integral and

whole. Let the signs be at the center of our assembly. From that call a whole catalogue of further questions might help us to think about local reform.

*Concerning the Sunday meeting as sign:* Is the Sunday meeting clearly people around the two events of word and table? There is an order to the assembly, even when the group calls itself “non-liturgical”; is the order this ancient one of scripture and meal? Is that what a visitor would say was going on? Is that what the children would play if they played this meeting? Does what happens in the meeting flow into and out of the major centers of scripture-and-preaching and thanksgiving-over-eating-and-drinking? Are any secondary rituals like the collection, the acts of confession and forgiveness, or the peace, made to assist and serve these central foci?

*Concerning the assembly itself as sign:* Does the community participate in the Sunday meeting? Do the people understand the event as their own? Does the presider in the meeting, by word and by bearing, with dignity and gravity and focus, invite a community to gather around the central signs? Is the presider’s work, indeed, *presiding* in a participating assembly? Are there a variety of other ministries—lectors and cantors and leaders of prayer—or does the event seem like it is only clergy marching around and telling other people what to do? On the other hand, while using a variety of ministers and while encouraging a sense of participation, does the meeting avoid having the whole group do or speak what one person should do or speak for all? Do the presider and the other leaders have legitimately weighty roles? Do the movements of the gathering, the processions or the entrances, help to focus attention on the poles of the gathering: people around word and table?

*Concerning the sign of the synaxis:* Are the scriptures read with clarity and care? Does the book of the scriptures itself become a holy sign, carried and read as if it were the book of life? Is the place where the readings are done visible and important? Does the music of the synaxis support and enthrone the readings, graciously gathering the people into the scriptures? Is the preaching on the readings? Is it understood and enacted as part of the flow of the liturgy? Does the event evidently follow the old outline: gathering, scripture reading, preaching, intercessions?

*Concerning the sign of the Eucharist:* Does the Eucharist seem to be a communal meal, an abstracted and focused meal, a holy meal, but a meal? Does the place of the meal enable a sense of the community gathered around the food? Is the food set out in visible and beautiful clarity? Is it recognizable as food, a loaf of bread and a cup of wine? Is the great prayer proclaimed with peaceful integrity and grace? Is the prayer said for the community, over the communal meal? Is it words for the eating and drinking? Is the prayer a thanksgiving for all the deeds of God and an earnest beseeching for God’s coming to all the world? Is all the community welcome to eat and drink, and is the distribution of this food done with hospitality for

each person and care for the food? Are both people and food regarded with reverence? Does the music of the Eucharist gather people into the eating and drinking?

*Concerning the sign of Baptism:* Is entrance to this assembly through the bath? Is the whole process of entry itself a ritual process, flowing toward the bath and so into the community? When Baptism is held does it take place in the presence and with the participation of the assembly? When Baptism is not held is it remembered by the presence of the water? Are the candidates washed? Is the place of washing significant? Is there a pool of water? Is the washing seen as a great event, a birth into the new age and into the community of the new age? Are the attendant acts of the washing— anointing, clothing, illuminating, leading into the assembly, and welcoming to the table—done largely and graciously? Are they seen as acts that follow upon a great washing?

*Concerning the sign of prayer in the assembly:* Does the assembly pray? Is the sense of the prayer the biblical sense of thanksgiving and beseeching? Do the two great prayers, the thanksgiving of the table and the communal intercessions of the synaxis, stand out with great importance, carrying the flow of the meeting? Are the prayers of the presider seen as collects, as bringing to expression the action of the community at certain critical turns? For example, is the “prayer of the day” seen as the “station collect of the entrance,” summing up and concluding the various movements and songs which mark the community’s gathering?

*Concerning the secondary signs of environment and art:* Does the space of the assembly clearly indicate what is important? Is it a room for people around word and table, come together through the bath? Is the environment hospitable and holy, welcoming and focused? Is it a space for communal action, for “the public business of death and life,”<sup>6</sup> or is it rather a space for private thought in response to lecture or to religious art or to priestly ceremony? Are the visual arts, if they are used here, transparent to the central signs of the gathering or are they opaque, calling attention to themselves? Does fire, used in the gathering, serve to focus attention on the central things, candles surrounding the readings or the thanksgiving over the food? Is the ritual clothing seen to be the community’s festal garments, worn now by some people of our number who wear the garments for us all? Is the clothing full and beautiful, inviting us all to conceive of the human being who hears this Word or eats at this table as full of new grace and dignity?

*Concerning daily prayer as sign:* Has the Sunday assembly reintroduced the participants to the practice of marking the passage of the week with prayer? Has the strength of the signs suggested prayer at each person’s ordinary daily table or at the cardinal points of the sun? Has the strength of Sunday itself suggested the communal and individual recovery of festal

time? Does the Sunday meeting lose significance by a multiplication of daily Eucharists? Can the parish which has enough people to do daily Eucharist consider rather a communal celebration of daily morning or evening prayer?

Obviously, these questions need to be asked in ways adapted to each local setting. They need to be asked with wisdom, with attention to each local community's history. But these questions, or an even longer list of questions which are very much like them, are not just matters of personal taste. They can be asked in all local assemblies. To answer them affirmatively one need not have a wealthy or a western European congregation. In fact, wealth has often been used to obscure the central signs. One need not choose for any given tradition of music or art or architecture or clothing, although those examples of the arts which have best served the purposes of the assembly will be looked at closely. But one does need a conviction that the signs matter. One does need an assembly working with intention on the fullness and integrity of the signs.

None of these things compel God. There is the distinction we must make. It is not the business of a Christian assembly to compel God. The Christian liturgical business is to receive and proclaim God's great and merciful gift, to make available the ford, the bridge, the ship, the stretcher. The signs—and we ourselves—are the elements for the sacraments, the words for the proclamation. Better words in the sermon and a shared loaf in the Eucharist do not make the grace larger. But they are more fitting signs of the significance they carry. They communicate more clearly to us and to the people of the present world. They gather us with greater focus. We cannot and do not need to compel grace. That is not Christianity. But for the sake of the wholeness and integrity of the sign, we can procure the bread and do the biblical and linguistic study. We can let the central things stand forth in greater clarity.

### *Significance*

And we can make the *significance* of the signs clearer. For a formal recovery of larger signs is not yet enough. Without a recovery of significance, the insistence on strong signs can be absolutely the opposite of the spirit of the liturgy, of the restored *ordo*. A congregation which applies the concern for clearer signs in a rigid manner, without love, has lost the thing signified. No, we need the signs, need them with an aching need for drink in a thirsty time. We cannot ask about the significance unless the signs are strong. But we need the significance. We need to be drawn, body and mind, into the deepest meaning of the liturgy. The agenda for liturgical reform, like the liturgy which such reform seeks to serve and from which it learns, is a dialectical matter.

The principal means of this significance in the liturgical assembly itself is the presence of the *ordo's* juxtapositions. It is certainly true that cateche-

sis in the parish—and in the preaching—can point toward the meaning of the signs. But such teaching can never be on the basis of one sign corresponding to one meaning: this means that. The meaning of the signs as they bring us into Christ must be seen to be richer than that, if that meaning is to reflect the liturgy itself. The liturgical means of pointing toward the significance of the signs is rather the means of juxtaposition. There follows from this conviction yet a further list of questions. They are inquiries into the strength of the juxtapositions in the local assembly. They are encouragements for setting one strong sign next to another that their ancient Christian meaning may shine forth.

*Concerning the significance of the Sunday meeting:* Is Sunday important because of the meeting, because of the grace which transfigures the week but which the week could never deliver? Is the meeting set next to the week? This is to ask, is the content of Sunday always Jesus Christ risen? Does Sunday cast its new light upon the community's view of the whole world?

*Concerning the significance of the assembly's participation in the meeting:* Does the presider preach and another person lead the prayers? Are a variety of voices heard in the assembly, one voice next to another, and not only a single authoritative voice? Are they the voices of men and women, young and old, rich and poor? Is it clear thereby that the assembly is in Christ, the assembly is the Body of Christ? Do the structures of power in the assembly at least begin to re-order the structures of power in the world? Is there yielding and love and service?

*Concerning the significance of the synaxis:* Are the readings read in chains, one text following another, in such a way that the surprising new word of grace is heard? Thus, is a good lectionary used, and is it used with understanding of the Sunday or paschal hermeneutic which is at its root? Is there room for all of us in the texts? Is a translation read which is faithful to the original languages, felicitous in its use of a beautiful public vernacular language, and inclusive in its refusal of sexism and racism? Are the images of the texts made available—by being juxtaposed to responsory music and acclamations or to hymns or to icons and images in the church, in any case to preaching—to interpret the cross of Christ, his resurrection, and the faith which is through him? Does the sermon say what the shared cup says? Does it use the terms of all the texts to speak Jesus Christ for this community that they might come into life? Is the sermon full of the grace and mercy which is in Christ? Does it thereby cast a new light upon the world? Are the prayers really intercessions? Do they set situations of chaos, injustice, and need throughout the world next to the grace which has been proclaimed in scripture and preaching?

*Concerning the significance of the Eucharist:* Is the meal held? Is a strong and focused meal rite set next to a strong synaxis? Does the eating and drinking indicate the meaning of the texts, drawing the whole to speak

Jesus Christ for the life of the world? Does the great prayer proclaim Christ at the heart of thanksgiving and beseeching? Does this life-meal proclaim the death of Christ? Does this death-meal give life to the community? Does this community meal open towards needs beyond this circle?<sup>7</sup> Is the thanksgiving food sent to the absent? Is the collection which is taken to set this table largely given to the poor?

*Concerning the significance of Baptism:* Does the bath proclaim Jesus Christ as the dawning of the new age into which we are washed? Is it therefore clear—in prayers and texts and preaching, and by the reception of outsiders and the poor and children—that this act is not the formation of a ritual and religious elite who are distinguished from everybody else? Are the baptized a society of beggars, confessing themselves to be like everybody else in our common need for mercy and life and God? Is this assembly continually being formed into such a society of witness to grace?

*Concerning the significance of prayer in the assembly:* Are the prayers in the name of Jesus? Is lament gathered into the cross? Is this a place of the remembrance of unconsolated suffering in the world? Does thanksgiving receive the gift of life and grace in the risen Christ?

*Concerning the significance of time and daily prayer:* Does prayer at the cardinal points of the sun remember Jesus Christ? Has the community heard Paul's critique of festivals and sabbaths? Does the sense of festal time avoid the dangers of cultic observance as if now, on our feast day, the crucifixion or the resurrection or the gift of the Spirit will occur, by our appointment? Is each festival used to proclaim the whole mystery of Christ that people may live? Is every hour, every day redeemed by Christ?

The list might be longer yet, more surprising. But the questions of juxtaposition can and must be asked in every local Christian assembly. Just as the *ordo* is a catholic and ecumenical heritage, so also that liturgical criticism which serves the *ordo*, which seeks to help the clarity of both signs and significance, is an ecumenical task. Although the renewal of liturgical texts is an important task, it should be clear that for local assemblies the renewal of the *ordo*, of sign and significance, is a far more basic undertaking, uniting congregations which use very different sacramentaries or hymnals or liturgical books or no books at all. In fact, only if Sunday and week, word and table, thanksgiving and lament clearly speak Jesus Christ for the life of the world do the books come into their proper use.

The fullness of the central signs is to be accentuated not for their own sake, but in order to communicate the meaning of Jesus Christ to present human need. Assembly, Sunday, bath, Word, meal, prayers, and ministries are called upon to “speak and drive Christ.”<sup>8</sup> Word and sign in the assembly thereby cast a new light on the world, suggest meanings where there had been only meaninglessness, propose justice, and relativize structures which threaten full human life before God. They do this surely, graciously, without

recruiting us for any ideology. The deepest concern of liturgical renewal is this recovery of meaning in a thirsty time. The liturgy is about this world, now, before God. The recovery in local assemblies of the full signs and the clear presence of the significance of the signs is for the sake of our communication of Christian meaning.

But the faith of the church runs even deeper. On, in, and under this communication of the local church, God is present. When the Word comes to the element there is a Sacrament. God is there in grace. We may say, with Chrysostom,<sup>9</sup> that this sacramental “consecration,” this making of Sacraments which bear God, has occurred once for all. When Jesus Christ, the Word, came among the reading and remembrance of scriptures, among washings and meal rituals which hoped for God, the “sacraments” and the patterns of Christian worship were made. Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection and the faith which is through him, juxtaposed to these pre-existent rituals, is the institution and consecration of Sacraments. He was baptized; he read the scriptures; he ate with sinners. His death was a baptism and the meaning of Baptisms. Risen, he opens to us all the scriptures. He is known as risen in the bread. His death was a cup which he gives us to drink. The patterns of the liturgy root in Jesus Christ.

Then the juxtapositions in the assembly—word-service next to meal, preaching next to scripture, the name of Christ next to the thanksgiving rite of the meal, the assembly speaking Christ next to the assembly doing these ancient rites—are consecratory in only a secondary sense. They represent and proclaim Christ coming among and breaking to new meaning the stuff of religious hope. They make this word-gathering and this bread-ritual here in this place available to bear the presence of Jesus Christ. Just as the Sunday meeting replicates the pattern of the gospel books, it also corresponds, in its juxtapositions, to the institution of Sacraments. The presider speaking words which bless a font or consecrate the bread is best understood as being consecratory in a yet tertiary sense: this action sums up and symbolizes the whole community doing the juxtapositions of the *ordo*; this action makes concrete the name of Christ set next to the old ritual. Thus the action of the presider recapitulates the structure of the *ordo*, and the *ordo* proclaims the institution and consecration of Christ. Jesus Christ is already, once for all, juxtaposed to bath and word, meal and assembly prayer. It is because of the cross and resurrection that these things have already been made to gather us into Christ before God in the power of the Spirit. The task of local renewal is continually to make that clear, to make strong signs and the juxtapositions of the *ordo* available to the wind of God, water of God. Faith will board the sailing ship. Faith will drink.

### *The remedial norm of the liturgy*

The recovery of the *ordo*, of Leviticus and Amos, sign and significance, and the confidence that this *ordo* bears the meaning of Christ, will contradict several very strong influences which have had their way with Christian worship in recent decades. Early in the twentieth century liturgical movement, the American pioneer of the movement, Virgil Michel, translated an Italian work which identified several “deviations from the liturgical spirit”:<sup>10</sup> religious individualism, religion of the mind, religious pragmatism, religious formalism, cultic dilettantism, and religion as entertainment. The same list could be used today. Certainly the *ordo* does not long survive in clarity where I can find my own way to God, where true religion avoids mere matter, where all religion is simply a fancy way of talking about how I behave, where the correct external rite is all that matters, where the sheer beauty of worship is the most important and most God-filled value, or where the techniques of crowd-pleasing show are used. We could also intensify the list. In the age of television, Michel’s concern about the modes of entertainment resounds even more loudly. Many large parishes find themselves profoundly albeit unconsciously affected by the techniques of the television entertainer, and the alienating distance of broadcasting inserts itself in the room that might be focused around the strong and communicating sign. Furthermore, religious formalism sometimes goes masked as “liturgical renewal.” But we can also add to the list, having our own, new problems. In the atmosphere of the small group, when the intimate circle huddles together, despairing of any larger meanings or connections, the liturgy’s connection to the world is at risk. On the other hand, in the use of theology as revolutionary ideology, the liturgy’s critical juxtaposition of Christ to all absolutes will not long survive.

It is not the business of liturgical criticism rigorously to assault these alternatives. It is simply the task of such criticism to help make the liturgy itself available in local communities. Caronti and Michel speak of “the liturgy as a remedial norm,”<sup>11</sup> as an inviting contradiction to these deviations. We might say, gently, that insofar as the deviations remain Christian and insofar as they influence the assembly, they represent a loss of the juxtapositions of the *ordo*. The individualism, idealism, pragmatism, and entertainment-worship which Caronti and Michel discuss have all lost the strong centrality of the signs. The formalism and dilettantism of their list represent a loss of the critical breaking of the signs. Our “intimism” and “revolutionism” come close to losing both. Then let Leviticus and Amos come to the fore. Let the signs be restored in their clarity. Let them draw us into a richly focused community. And let the significance stand forth in the critical juxtapositions of the *ordo*. Let these juxtapositions draw us into Christ and so into God and God’s world. The liturgy itself is more engaging,

more striking, more interesting than any of these common Christian deviations, if only it is allowed full sway.

The liturgy offers us a way through false alternatives in the present. It is neither a retreat into the group and a refusal of social critical action nor a conversion of the faith into a social program. It is neither “groupthink” nor individualism. It is neither pure biblical criticism nor biblical fundamentalism. It does not gather us around a lecture on the critical interpretation of a biblical book nor on the convictions of biblical inerrancy. Rather, it speaks to us the biblical word.

The avoidance of this last pair of alternatives is especially important. Throughout our discussion of liturgical criticism we have spoken of the Bible as if it were a single thing. That is not because contemporary liturgical studies are unaware of the diversity of sources and histories which have come to make up the texts of the canon. The current ecumenical lectionary, for example, is acutely attentive to the plurality of gospels and to the differences between them, allowing each one to come in turn to clearer voice. But the canon is a list of books that may be read in the assembly. That there is a single book called the Bible has come from the liturgy. For the liturgy each of the gospels, and with them each of the other individual texts in all their unique, critically established history, is present like one of the beasts around the throne, burns like one of the seven lampstands around the one who died and is alive forevermore. That the texts are required to speak Christ in the assembly is, for the Christian, the unity of the Bible. Diverse texts, different voices, are all brought to this single task. This very juxtaposition, so characteristic of the liturgy as well as to the fact of the church hearing four gospels, proposes to us a lively way through the false alternatives of criticism and fundamentalism.

Ronald Grimes has spoken instructively—originally in a lecture at this Institute—on the distinction between liturgy and ceremony,<sup>12</sup> and his reflection may help us see this liveliness of liturgy. Both liturgy and ceremony are necessary rituals in human life. But, unlike liturgy, ceremony expresses a value unambiguously, without any expression of its contrary. A graduation is a ceremony. In it the ranks and privileges of scholarly achievement are celebrated and conferred. In the structure of our society such conferral, such maintenance of the status-roles, is useful. But, unless a rare critical spirit is allowed, there is in graduation ceremonies no structure for the remembrance of the contrary of these privileges. There is no breaking of their univocity. There is no reflection on class and wealth and on the poverty that has no education. There is no sense that this education may, in important matters, be rank ignorance. Similarly, a military parade is a ceremony. So also, in too many cases, is a wedding.

But the Christian liturgy embraces contraries: life and death, thanksgiving and beseeching, this community and the wide world, the order

expressed here and the disorder and chaos we call by name, the strength of these signs and the insignificance of ritual, one text next to another text which is in a very different voice. In Christian use this ambiguity is not simply a general devotion to contrary principles as a way to truth. For the Christian, in fact, the balance is in favor of life and thanksgiving and the hope for order, but only in such a way that all things are remembered, all sorrows comforted, all wounds assuaged. The mystery of God is the mystery of life conjoined with death for the sake of life.<sup>13</sup> The name of this mystery revealed among us is Jesus Christ. The contraries of the liturgy in the juxtapositions of the ordo are for the sake of speaking that mystery that humanity might live.

## Notes

1. Frye, *The Great Code*, xviii.
2. "Sion" in Wall, ed., *George Herbert*, 226.
3. "Accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum." Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium*, tractatus 80:4, *Opera 8, Corpus Christianorum 36* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954) 529. See the discussion in Robert Jenson, *Visible Words* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 1-11.
4. Immersion is "umb der gentze und volkomenheyt willen des zeychens," WA 2, 742. Communion in both kinds would avoid the "ubel und unfuglich" manifestation of the significance of the sign of holy communion, WA 2, 743. The sacraments are holy signs: "Darumb heysst es eyn sacrament eyn heylig zeichen," WA 2, 715. These signs are for us "eyn furt eyn bruck eyn thur eyn schiff und tragbar," WA 2, 753. The three treatises are "The sacrament of penance," "The holy and blessed sacrament of baptism," and "The blessed sacrament of the holy and true body of Christ, and the brotherhoods," in *Luther's Works 35*, 9-73.
5. Robert Hovda, *Strong, Loving and Wise: presiding in liturgy* (Washington: Liturgical Conference, 1976) 81.
6. Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite* (New York: Pueblo, 1982) 21.
7. For Luther the significance of this sacrament is "fellowship of all the saints," *Luther's Works 35*, 50. Cf. 54: "When you have partaken of this sacrament, therefore, or desire to partake of it, you must in turn share the misfortunes of the fellowship. ... You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in his holy word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing."
8. Cf. Luther, "Preface to James and Jude," in *Luther's Works 35*, 396.
9. "Christ himself prepares this table and blesses it. No human being, but only Christ himself who was crucified for us, can make of the bread and wine set before us the body and blood of Christ. The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest, but by God's power and grace through the words that he speaks, 'This is my body,' the elements set before us in the Supper are blessed. Just as the words, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,' were spoken only once but are ever efficacious in nature and make things grow and multiply, so this word was indeed spoken only once, but it is efficacious until this day, and until his return it brings about that his true body and blood are present in the church's Supper." *De proditione Judae 1,6*, quoted in Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, VII, 76, in Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959) 583. Greek text in Migne PG 49, 380.
10. Emmanuele Caronti and Virgil Michel, trans., *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Popular Liturgical Library, 1,2 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1932) 91-98. The book was originally published by Abbot Caronti as *La Pietà Liturgica* and was translated by Michel as an early and important contribution to the American renewal. See Paul Marx, *Virgil Michel and the Liturgical Movement* (St. Paul: Liturgical Press, 1957) 28, 114.
11. Caronti and Michel, 99-110.
12. Grimes, 41-45.
13. For Eberhard Jüngel, God is love, and love is the event which "vereinigt Leben und Tod zugunsten des Lebens." *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977) 446.