Vice-Presidential Address

The Work of a Reconciling Academy: Apprenticing Ourselves to Our Broken Liturgies

Kimberly Hope Belcher, Vice-President

Kimberly Hope Belcher is Associate Professor of Theology (Liturgical Studies) at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana.

Introduction: Academy Worship[1]

As I thought about the role of the North American Academy of Liturgy in the changing cultural landscape of North America, I kept thinking of Ruth Langer's 2015 Berakah assessment of Academy liturgy as an imperfect exercise of inter-religious hospitality. "*All* of our liturgies were constructed to enhance in-group identity and to make communal boundaries very clear. This creates real challenges to one's presence, let alone participation, in the liturgy of a community not one's own. Yet, today, the likelihood that a guest will attend any given service is high. Does our contemporary call for liturgical hospitality mean that we must cease using ritual to define our communal identity?"[2]

Langer contextualizes Academy liturgy against contemporary North American civic religion, which permits an assumed neutral cosmology in everyday discussion. One can generally mention God, she argues, but not distinctive features of one religious tradition. The limitations of what I would call "pluralism by silence" are evident in her discussion of "Amazing Grace." The hymn, she notes, does not mention Jesus and only mentions God near the end of the song; "it is deeply embedded in western cultural vocabulary" and so can often pass without being noticed as an expression of Western quasi-secular cosmology. But "its understanding of how God manifests 'amazing grace' is deeply Christian…. dependent on the *very* Christian concept of original sin."[3] In fact, there is a deep, western European, post-Enlightenment anthropology embedded in the way we generally imagine religious neutrality, which takes significant learning from another to recognize.

This is evident also in the Academy's worship space. As Langer puts it, "an established, dedicated worship space … reflects, usually intensely, the specifics of its regular community."[4] In this context, "some will be guests more than others."[5] Despite their apparent neutrality, "Hotel ballrooms, on the other hand, are inherently challenged as liturgical spaces. However beautiful, the room begins as a barren boxy wasteland. This leaves possibilities for transformation up to the limits

of imagination—but also of budget and realism. Can we successfully transform a multipurpose space into one that helps us feel the presence of the Divine?"[6]

Hotel ballrooms are only apparently neutral, however; while some traditions have strategies for the transformation of secularized spaces, other traditions, as indigenous scholarship reminds us, have less portable norms for sacred space or time. In order to really welcome members of these traditions into our academy, we need to be able to hear their critiques of our internalized understanding of "neutrality." Lis Valle-Ruiz, for instance, has called attention to the ways that the perceived neutrality of the Eurocentric Christian tradition of preaching results in the reduction of indigenous spirituality to entertainment.[7] The studied immanence of a hotel ballroom risks reducing the cosmological symbols each of us needs for worship to trappings or decoration. We are all familiar with this concern about liturgy, but it is possible to overlook its colonialist character. Valle-Ruiz suggests a centuries-overdue exchange, not only of knowledge but of ways of coming to know, as the future of preaching: "The Europeans learn that embodying stories is sacred storytelling for the Amerindians. The Amerindians learn that embodying stories constitutes entertainment for the Europeans. All groups learn from one another."[8]

To "learn to hear through the other's ears"[9] is especially challenging when the ways of coming to know themselves are culturally embedded. This is why I am especially interested in rites that are themselves contested and intrinsically seem to demand interpretation. Langer suggests one way that the Academy, in gradually and imperfectly welcoming Jewish participants in a dominantly Christian assembly, has performed an exchange: "we have reached a different kind of balance. We do not express our full mutual hospitality through any one liturgy, but through the aggregate. The usually subtly Christian structure of the opening rite finds significant balance at our tables [at the banquet]. Our combination of prayers over wine and bread, and then a grace *after* the meal, is a Jewish structure. By combining these prayers with our gifts to others, we elevate our tables into altars."[10] I needed Langer's interpretation to understand these Academy liturgies as a balance, let alone to see them as an offering.

Craig Satterlee, in his reflection on the "good liturgical guesting" required of all us liturgical professionals, suggests that "learning to hear a hospitable word in academy worship is a place to start as we who are so often hosts give up that role and even surrender our sense of 'belonging,' and regard ourselves instead as guests of the Divine and the assembly."[11] For Satterlee, "good guests … check their egos and their expertise at the door. Good liturgical guests enter worship with humility. When I go to worship, I do my best to leave my 'sermon critic' behind and consciously cultivate my hunger to receive God's hospitable and life-giving word."[12]

It's no accident that each of these experiences, Langer's experience of flawed but elevating attempts at interreligious worship, Valle-Ruiz's alternate history of a decolonial indigenous-Christian encounter, and Satterlee's generous receptivity of

often ableist liturgical celebrations, requires the deft juggling of critical tools and an almost baffling charity. What possesses us, I want us to ask ourselves, to combine these? to become apprentices of broken liturgies—our own and also those of others? How does the work of our academy contribute to change, to inclusion of new perspectives, and to symbolic transformation?

Diagnosis: Ritual and Interpretation

I have spent the last few years thinking about the role of ritual in polarized and pluralistic contexts, contexts in which the very meaning of ethics and the kind of future we want to strive for is already contested. I am convinced that the polarization and fragmentation surrounding contested issues like race, politics, sexuality, and economics cannot be solved using rational discourse alone. It demands symbolic action (and will be symbolized whether we like it or not), but it also needs the scholarly and evaluative attention that is the expertise of this gathered community. It needs people who are willing to say, "that doesn't work," and then go right back into it a second time, trying to implement some changes, only to get it wrong once again.

I began by thinking about liturgies of healing, unconsciously assuming that the ordinary state of things is a community in agreement about ethics and the future; the existence of a different state of things is an oddity and demands some kind of intervention. Work on social crisis tends to assume that normally, everyone who practices ritual together has the same cosmology and values. When there is a breach, a departure from the community consensus, rituals and discourse are used to minimize or repair the damage caused by the breach. Conversation among the community decides whether the problem remains, in which case the community may schism, or whether it has been resolved, in which case the community returns to a peaceful state.

Ritual and reconciliation in a state of crisis is quite a bit more complex than this. Sarah Kathleen Johnson's research on occasional practitioners and clergy, for instance, showed me that while clergy often expected those planning funerals to be in a state of crisis, those planning baptisms were often also in a state of crisis, which might not be noticed or expected by their ministers.[13] Some participants in a liturgy, then, might see it as a response to a breach or crisis, while others understand it as routine. The idea of "ritual strategies" allows us to be more flexible about understanding how ritualization functions in social settings, versus the more conventional category of rituals of affliction, which assumes either that everyone in a society would categorize a ritual the same way (emic) or that it is the researcher's expert judgment that determines what category a ritual falls into (etic). Catherine Bell's definition of rituals of affliction is still helpful in its breadth: "rituals of affliction attempt to rectify a state of affairs that has been disturbed or disordered: they heal, exorcise, protect, and purify,"[14] although more recent work, some of it by NAAL members, demonstrates that ritual strategies for affliction can be used to transmit and problematize a breach as well as in apotropaic or therapeutic ways.

Even in traditional societies, which depend on an enacted, shared cosmology, the fact that things are changing over time means there are discontinuities in that cosmology. Still more in our modern, pluralistic environment. Academy liturgies show us the ways that ritual and the symbolic world it projects can fail without resulting in schism. In fact, the experience of ritual failure can be a distinctive way of knowing and a way for a community to learn from one another. And the rituals we use to negotiate conflict about community values are not necessarily labeled rituals of reconciliation. Rather, disagreement about cosmology and values is manifested and negotiated by our whole ritual life in common, as well as discussions of that life.

Working in ecumenism made me especially suspicious of Turner's category of schism. After all, ecumenism began from a place of ritual schism which came to seem intolerable after centuries of division. I was intrigued by the way the 2016 Lutheran-Catholic Joint Commemoration of the Reformation in Lund, Sweden, both critiqued Christian complacency about division and encouraged ecumenists facing down decades of slow, no, or reverse ecclesial change.[15] As a Catholic theologian who longs for Christian unity, I expect to spend much of my life being wrenched by Christian division. This has given me a great interest in these liturgies that hesitantly express our in-between state, the fact that we have become dissatisfied with schism (which is a gift) but have not found a path to full communion. I wanted to explore liturgies that tentatively and symbolically name problems for which no adequate solutions have been found.

Here is a more complicated proposal about ritual negotiation of conflicts about value and meaning. Breach is not a break in a static community life; rather, community life, even when stable, contains bubbles of potential tension, stemming from individual and subgroup differences in values and experience and containing the seeds of social change. Authorities and affliction rites are used to try to "quiet" or manage the damage of the breach; in fact, a community feeling vulnerable often tries to double down on traditional authorities and their power. At the same time, members of the community including leaders may be invested in amplifying the schism, either because of their values commitments or as strategic negotiations or both.

Study of rituals of reconciliation usually address the part of the diagram that here I have labeled the "redress process." I instead want to focus on the part highlighted in yellow: the process of renegotiating meaning through an iterative cycle of ritualizing together, using either established or experimental rituals, and talking about them. Many in this academy have written about this cycle; in fact, in some ways this essay amounts to a sort of collage of liturgical studies work about ritual and contested values. My hope is that this permits a comparative look about the overlap of liturgical strategies for evaluating rituals responding to apparently very different scenarios.

In image 1, conventional ritual and discourse quiet the sense of breach or scandal of a departure from the expected order of things, using established words and acts. For instance, penance or pilgrimage might serve to address public scandal. If these are adequate, no negotiation of the structures of power results. For this reason, some agents will amplify the breach by protest rituals and other ritual and discourse critiquing the status quo. These are meant not to heal but to foment a social crisis, as Sharon Fennema argued in a seminar paper for Critical Theories in 2016.[16] This is comprehensible if we understand a social crisis not as the worst of all possible scenarios, but rather as an active process of negotiation of standards and cosmologies by a social group. In this way, as Victor Turner pointed out, the community's response to crisis manifests symbolic tensions that may have previously been unnoticed or well-managed: "A mounting crisis follows … seeming peace becomes overt conflict and covert antagonisms become visible."[17] Rituals of protest and other amplifying communication, then, manifest implicit fractures in cosmology and social expectations.

The bolder arrows in the diagram show the path necessary for social change. If amplifying communication outweighs the attempts of others to quiet the scandal, the community enters into a period of active negotiation and reconsideration of values. Rather than occasioning immediate exile from the social community, rites of lament, subversion, and "clowning" permit new interpretations and admit new voices.

I have modeled the negotiation process as a cycle including evaluation of the ongoing crisis. Liturgical action naturally gives rise to interpretation, which likewise informs not only the meaning but also the affect ascribed to further performances, a cycle summed up as *lex orandi, lex credendi.* I don't intend to get into the debates about the precise way this cycle ought to be regulated; I just want to highlight the interdependence of liturgical experience and its interpretation. The three assessments of particular liturgies by our members that I've already discussed fall into the diamond: they are evaluations of whether certain liturgies adequately diagnose the causes of inequity, whether groups of people are appropriately represented, what kinds of redress would need to be provided, and what the authors themselves and our scholarly community can do to redress the status quo.

Diagnosis, Authority, and Power

Catholic rites of penance were modified and strengthened in the early modern period, responding on the one hand to the schisms in Western Christendom and on the other to the need to export books perceived as effective to numerous mission locations, where a shared vernacular could not be assumed. In these books, according to James Dallen, an "even greater emphasis was placed on complete confession and priestly judgment … steadily removing anything that might dilute the expression of ministerial power or hinder the experience of forgiveness thus received…. As seventeenth century Catholicism used confession to convert the baptized and Christianize a semi-pagan populace, it intensified the medieval

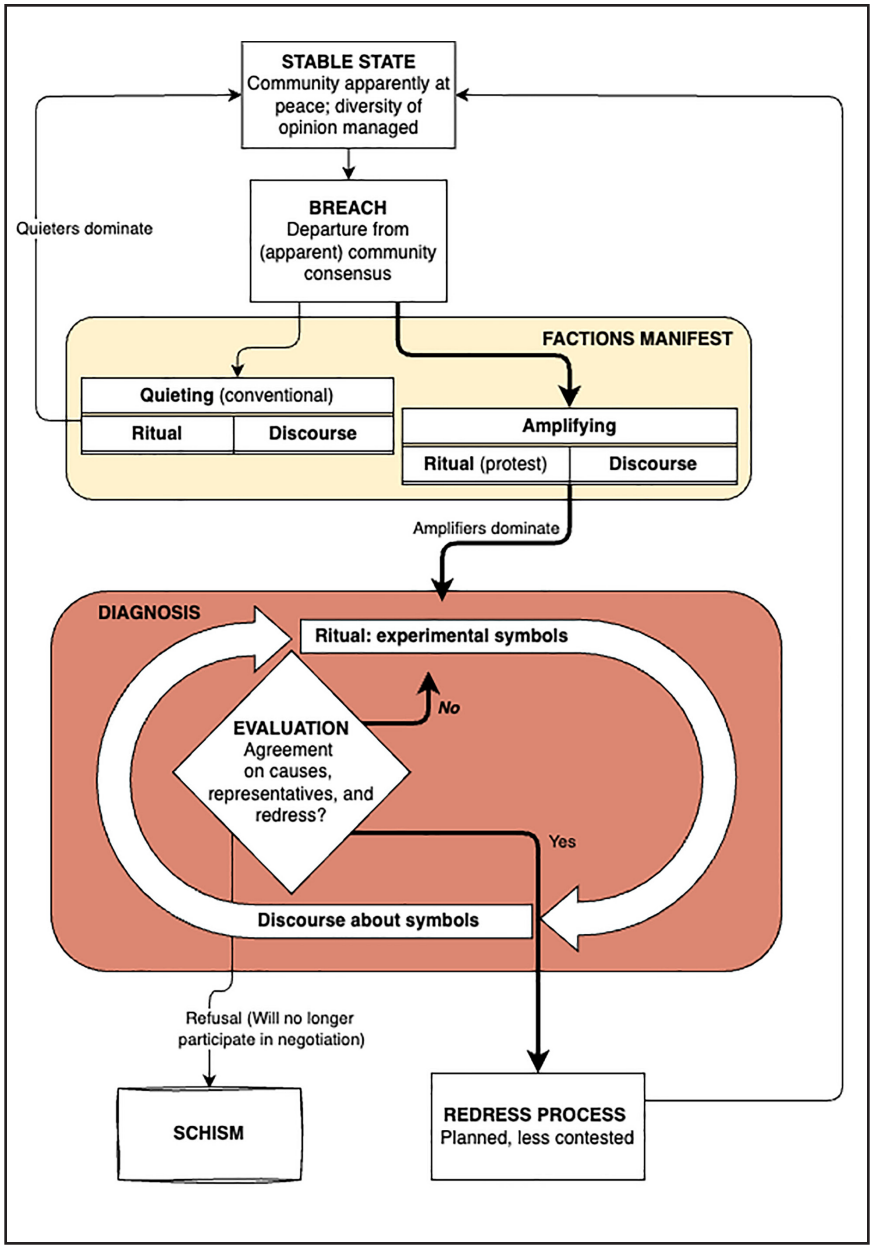

Image 1. Proposed diagram of the ritual process for negotiating crises of values. The stage of diagnosis depends on emerging or experimental ritual and iterative evaluation of that ritual by individuals and communities. Ritual in this diagram is considered as one important type of communication (other kinds are included under "discourse").

fixation on confession as a therapeutic and judicial means of purification from sin and liberation from guilt."[18] Of course, we must add the Christianization of indigenous populations in India, China, Japan, Africa, and the Western hemisphere to Dallen's purposes of these books.

The hierarchical expression of authority in penance that made sense in the 17th century, at least in Rome, is almost incomprehensible now. Bruce Morrill assigns to the 1960s the dissolution of the moral authority of the Catholic hierarchy:

> The stylized, truncated ritual of the confessional drifted away from individuals' exploration and formation of their consciences…. The use of ecclesiastical positivism to assert the authority of both the doctrinal teaching and disciplinary regulations and practices of the sacraments over a laity who largely either oppose or have become indifferent to this type of ecclesiastical power in relation to the contemporary complexities of social and personal life, ironically—tragically—ensures the deterioration of the sort of communal corporate life and mission, clergy and laity together, for a church that all agree should be a living, salvific sign of reconciliation and conversion among its members and to the world.[19]

Of course, the incoherence of this ritual was painfully amplified with the progressive and still unfolding exposure of the scope of the Catholic sex abuse crisis, when confession became a discordant symbol of members of the hierarchy who abdicated responsibility for widespread corruption.[20]

Yet even if it was amplified by the 1960s and the sex abuse crisis, disillusionment about penance reflects something more universal about ritual practice, which Teresa Berger named in her 2005 Societas Liturgica address. "Worship, after all, has embodied its own asymmetries of power, complicities with evil, and performances of brokenness."[21] It was this essay that inspired the subtitle of my address.

On one hand, Berger names "forms of brokenness that the liturgy itself performs, but cannot critically render visible when left to its own devices."[22] The liturgical performance can sanctify unholy power differentials, such as the "reconciliation" of the sins of indigenous people sacramentally administered by an all-white priesthood. Of course, these inequities may well have been visible to some of the subalterns in these environments, since they have a hermeneutic advantage that can be expressed if a platform is provided. The knowledge of subaltern members is the primary source of the tension that can lead to social change.[23] Evaluating that a particular ritual exercise has not adequately represented the damage (the bolded, italicized "No" in image 1), perpetuates a social crisis by disseminating and amplifying subalterns' judgement. So one of the strategies I will trace throughout the work of liturgical scholars using various methods and schools of thought is the critique of how liturgy reflects abusive power.

On the other hand, Berger cautions us against being uncritical of the way our scholarly location "brings with it its own knowledge protocols *and* its own occlusions, as well as a specific field jargon of what is good, e.g., 'mystery,' especially

the 'paschal mystery,' and what is not good, e.g., 'liturgical kitsch,' or 'the excesses of popular devotions.'"[24] Paradoxically, the very subalterns we often intend to defend when we critique our broken liturgies have often found nourishment in them—in their very kitsch, their excess, their shallow or deformed symbols. In this way we have to temper our critique when it runs the risk of silencing those whose voices we want to hear.

What we often find is that subaltern practitioners of the liturgy are strengthened (even when the liturgy itself is broken) by liturgies for diagnosis and redress. They reject aspects, and then, increasingly, proclaim their interpretations to add to the process of determining what redress is both necessary and possible. For example, enslaved Americans of African descent used "the hidden ubiquity of the life-sustaining melodies" as Lisa Weaver poetically calls the early spirituals, to nourish a sense of their own irreplaceable value before God in the face of a cosmology that combined Christianity with the message that Black people were less than human.[25] Despite this environment, Weaver reminds us, "the narratives we have reveal a remarkably sustained conviction on the part of the enslaved person that despite the body-, mind-, and soul-crushing reality of enslaved life, she was still a wife and daughter, he was still a father and brother. *They were still human.*" Moreover, in writing songs speaking a divine word, "The formerly enslaved person was testifying not only to being known, seen, and valued by God but also to the experience that God had tangibly partnered with them to create a new thing." Liturgists, of all people, know how participants are agents in creatively and selectively interpreting the meaning of public ritual. Even when we do liturgy the best we can, we get things wrong; even by getting liturgy wrong, we give people the tools they need to symbolically negotiate their situation.

Four Principles of Diagnosis

There are four principles of the practice and evaluation of ritual in this cycle. I want to finish this address by calling attention to a variety of contexts within which Academy members are apprenticing themselves to broken liturgies, demonstrating to us how our work as students of liturgy can make for a more reconciling world.

1. Creation of a space where we can be ourselves: cosmology

Part of the tension of both the NAAL worship and the challenges of symbolic practice in pluralism and polarization comes from our expectation that in liturgy, above any other environment, our various types of identity and belonging will find their surest context.

First, consider the alternative to worshipping as a pluralistic assembly. Siobhán Garrigan's treatment of (putative) reconciliation rites in eucharistic liturgies in Ireland (2001–2008) calls attention to the ways insulation from one another can result

in damaging ritual habits, even in instances where individual members of both estranged communities are in principle and consciously committed to reconciliation.

> Catholics raced through the reconciliation liturgy fast, by rote, and in almost inaudible voices. *Kyries* were never sung (as they often are in Roman Catholic Churches in other countries), nor *Glorias* at the conclusion of the penitential rite, suggesting this part of the rite to be thought of as holding a low value, and to be completed as quickly as possible…. the reconciliation aspect of worship seems of higher value in the common life of the community [for Protestants] than it was among Catholics. The language is very different too: it is of triumph.[26]

These attitudes about vertical reconciliation (with God), "one the performance of a web of denial of sorrow, the other the pursuit of righteous triumph,"[27] are at odds with a genuine reconciliation between Irish and British. The role of each with respect to God "maps quite closely onto the archetypal colonial self-understandings of each side in the Irish-British relationship…. [A] 'grievance-perpetuating myth', with each group forever self-cast as victim and the other victor … while human beings are ostensibly reconciled to God, any requirement for human beings to be reconciled to human beings is circumvented."[28] The puncture of this ritual insulation will be painful and perhaps even damaging, especially to vulnerable persons in each community. Yet the costs of not undergoing this process are ongoing estrangement and periodic violence.

At the same time, the negotiation of cosmological variation has all too often turned into the same pluralism-by-subtraction as ballroom-as-sacred-space. The veneer of neutrality often disguises the fact that the ultimate symbol—in the sense of the last one standing, because the only one permitted to traverse various cosmologies—is currency. Mark Roosien diagnoses this problem in his treatment of "disaster capitalism" and the conflict between 24/7 virtual time and liturgical time. The 24/7 clock of globalized capitalism prioritizes the extraction of resources, including from people, and funnels those resources upwards towards the already loaded even in the midst of a global pandemic. Roosien's identification of individualized sabbath practices as part of the problem, often marketed as the solution for Christians, strikes me as especially apt. In contrast, the experience of Orthodox liturgy, especially in its overweening demands for human attention at the high points of the liturgical year, inculcates a "liturgical temporality [that] rejects an extractive attitude toward time …" because "the liturgical 'now' is structured by remembrance of the past and hope for the future."[29] At the same time, Roosien recognizes the danger of the ecclesial solidarity in observance of time: "keeping steadfastly to a robust liturgical temporality, precisely because it can provide a rich context for group formation, is to encourage *exclusivism and triumphalism* within the community."[30]

Where and how can we find practices that "steadfastly" and "robustly" ground us, but that keep us open to one another? Our cosmological remembrance is often based on our sense of those who have gone before us. We might think of it as literally grounded in our dead, and practices at funerals or at burial places often

carry cosmological weight, as Lizette Larson-Miller has consistently reminded us.[31] Even in contemporary secularity, the memory of the dead plays a unique role in mediating a cosmological pluralism that transcends subtraction, and thereby allows for negotiation of conflicting values.

2. Empathy: Imagining that the other is like ourselves—but not too much like

It is a common instinct that at a funeral, the cosmological projection of the rite ought to be determined, as far as possible, by the values of the deceased, and where our documentation and imagination fails us, by their closest connections. If there is a hermeneutic privilege accorded to the marginalized in the interpretation of liturgical practice, there is also a kind of privilege to the dead. We are all content to be liturgical guests of the deceased and their close kin, to bracket our cosmological commitments for their benefit.

There are many sources of this mercy, no doubt, but one is that in death we are confronting our deep fears, and that spurs us to a radical guesting, of the sort that Satterlee outlines for us. Bryan Cones describes the impact of an embodied practice of remembrance for George Floyd on a mostly white urban assembly in Chicago.

> The presider [instructed] those gathered to kneel on the pavement and hold a nearly nine-minute silence to recall George Floyd's suffocation. While I have experienced such silences in Christian liturgy, the 'sacred space' created by contact with asphalt and the press of people gave it a profound anamnetic character, both 'embodied and empathetic' … While it echoed one particular 'crucifixion', it refracted those terrible minutes in a way that made present countless others; it further proposed a vicarious identification with the victims among those, such as myself, who had never experienced [racism's] direct effects.[32]

At the George Floyd Global Memorial in Minneapolis and online you can find many both ritual and discursive suggestions that George Floyd is a symbolic representative of not only African Americans but of Americans, in a way that may shift forever—and may it!—the symbolic understanding of "American" within U.S. culture.[33]

On the other end of the U.S. political spectrum, I admire how thoughtfully and empathetically Benjamin Durheim unpacks the ritualized tension between political presumption and Christian hope in rural American church life. Presumption takes the place of hope when a community believes "that the exclusive set of worthy Christian hopes is housed in a particular approach to politics, and to challenge that agenda or its divine mandate is to step outside 'true' Christianity."[34] In Durheim's analysis, one of the causes of presumption is a culture of silence, where those who have not collapsed hope into a particular political outcome feel unable to speak or are punished for doing so.

Speaking about rural funerals as a privileged location where hope confronts presumption, Durheim witnesses about the way that personal death reflects the broader deaths threatening rural moral communities:

> The one who has died leaves behind stories, experiences, and artifacts that become part of the lore connected to the land, the most recent pieces of tradition layered upon those defining narratives that came before. Sometimes this legacy is of a continuing and thriving family farm or other enterprise, and many times it is of a farm or enterprise truncated, sold, or lost. In all these cases though, the funeral liturgy—even by being a gathering before God of surviving family and friends—speaks hope for the continuation and/or re-imagining of a family legacy into its next form. This is temporal hope for healing, consolation, and strength to endure, but it is also resurrection hope.[35]

This interconnected legacy of people and place, paradoxically, is like to indigenous hermeneutics of sacred space in ways we can obscure if we are focused only on political identity.

If Cones articulates how one embodied action can open us to an embodied knowledge that is not part of our particular vulnerability, Durheim shows how the challenge of an authentically Christian hope demands we become vulnerable to worldviews and experiences that are not our own.

> Tragedy and death are not realities that only affect particular human bodies. Communities carry tragedy, ways of life can die, and loss can be cultural as much as it can be personal. None of this is to say that the pain of such tribulation can be mitigated by a dose of hope—recall that hope is not an anesthetic—rather, this is to say that Christian hope is resurrection hope. It looks to the future neither as fantasy nor as reducible to human control, but instead as the new creation that has already begun and is not yet complete. This involves a twofold embodiment of vulnerability: first, vulnerability with regard to tragedy and death wrought by a world conditioned by finitude and sin, and second, vulnerability with regard to the eternal good toward which all temporal goods of Christian hope are ordered.[36]

Vulnerability to tragedy and death tends to open us to be good guests at least in the worldview of the deceased. But vulnerability towards, or at least humility about our knowledge of, the ultimate end, can also permit an openness to the ways of knowing of those who are different from us. Perhaps we are good guests of the dead in part because drawing near to death reveals more clearly how much we do not know about the ultimate we worship. It is not only that I am willing to entertain the idea that your community, like mine, might know a bit about God. It is that I know that I need to hear about God from you—not only for your sake but for ours.

Of course, ideally, we would not be only aware that we need each other when we are near death—or we would always be aware that we are near enough to death to need one another.

3. Creation of a “third space”

As I hinted in the first half of my presentation, I have become interested in the ways our discipline itself provides a “third space” where, in times of crisis or of cosmological diversity, we can evaluate the adequacy of our liturgies to our core

concepts and vice versa. Kristine Suna-Koro has written about the importance of a third space, of a hybrid world where the messaging is not under the complete control of imperial power.[37] Suna-Koro has proposed the practice of lament as a third space that specifically speaks to the experiences of displaced migrants: "counter-hegemonic liturgical practice that can empower Christians to name and subvert the polarizing imaginaries of dehumanization, resentment, and hostility into which the uprooted victims of forced migration are increasingly inscribed."[38] Of course this lament may be embodied, like Cones kneeling, as easily as verbal.

Creation of a third space is actually not as difficult as it might sound. Nor is it as easy as we might want. It is simply ritualizing together through the tension involved in cosmological and values conflict, and also articulating that conflict, saying "no, we don't yet have everyone at the table, this doesn't feel quite right, what if we did this other thing instead." In short, by progressing empathetically and with attention to diverse cosmologies through the cycle of symbolic experimentation seen in red in Image 1, we create a third space.

In our evaluations we must simply describe, as honestly as we can manage, the liturgy that is done, and be honest about the ways this challenges our perspectives. Within the contexts of value conflict, historical and ethnographic approaches to liturgy both bring to the table individuals and communities who might not otherwise make it into the insulated, academic negotiations of practice and its value. Both historical and ethnographic liturgy have built in guardrails to prevent me from assuming the cultural or temporal other is totally unlike me; both also hinder me from making the other too much like myself. Rather, the third space of liturgical studies schools me in cosmological encounter. Here I meet others who, like me, find transcendence in liturgy, but in practices that I find unfamiliar or distasteful. I also meet those who are deeply unlike me but find transcendence in practices that move me too. Not coincidentally, a good liturgical historian or ethnographer would meet Valle-Ruiz's standards for cultural encounter perfectly.

Roosien has written about the way that earthquakes in ancient Constantinople and their commemorations in Byzantine liturgy often interpreted disaster as the result of widespread sinfulness and led to political reevaluation. Scholars today would be critical of Christians who attribute natural disaster to an angry God punishing our sins, but we might be fine with interpreting them as the natural consequence of ecological damage—that is sinful. Rites following natural disaster, ancient and modern, help remind us that participants in liturgy are not victims and perpetrators, but experience a wide array of perspectives on and existential connections to crisis. This in itself is hybridity. Earthquake commemorations are an interesting model of liturgical reflection on human sinfulness that recognizes the way structural patterns of sin can be recognized in collective patterns of lament and remembrance.[39]

Emerging ethnographic techniques literally bring new voices to the table. Nelson Cowan uses liturgical biography to pull the distinctive interiority as well as the ex-

ternal practices of Hillsong into the discursive light of liturgical theology: "A single act of worship is a complex nexus of negotiations in real time with real bodies who participate in the liturgy. These bodies carry with them complex histories, liturgical formation[s], all in tandem with biological and psychosocial nuances…. *Meaning* itself is fraught with complexity."[40] Cowan's work reminds us that the evaluative and interpretive work involved in both maintaining and changing liturgical meaning is done by individuals, often unheard. Phoebe, one of his biography subjects, reflected on the role of individuals evaluating and questioning pastoral interpretation: "I disagree all the time with all kind of pastors that I respect…. [T]hey are reading the scripture through a filter of something that happened in their life…. So you have to take that and you have to bring it back to the Word and say, 'does that speak to me? Does that feel [like] what God is saying to me through His word?'"[41]

In the collaborative ethnography of Andrew Wymer, Kristen Daley-Mosier, and community activists in Flint, Michigan, author Monica Villarreal imagines the power of a third space created in the water crisis when the hard work of repair opens up to the healing offered by God in Isaiah 58: "In considering the redevelopment of Flint and the many historical injustices, what does it mean to be the water in the spring of hope—in a place that was parched, in a place with contaminated water, in a place that was deserted, in a place that has no water and to be the one who is the restorer?"[42] Bringing these voices into liturgical studies makes it possible to close the gap between our expert evaluation and the primary practitioners who are often silenced by their distance from academia.

When I think of what a third space looks like in liturgical studies, I remember a specific moment in Rebecca Spurrier's *Disabled Church.*

> Miriam tells me she was a mess when she first came to the church. She wasn't sure what she was living for. She feels that she is being cared for here. She gestures to the left side of her body. I imitate the gesture, as an inquiry, wondering if she means it to specify something. She repeats the gesture, touching her side this time, to show me.
>
> "I don't feel a lot, but I feel it right here along the side. It didn't take a lot. I thought it would, but it didn't. I don't know what it took, but it happened. I hope I don't lose it."[43]

The moment when Spurrier repeats a gesture she does not understand, for Miriam and again for all of us who are reading, is a third space. Rather than interpreting or overwriting Miriam's embodied knowledge, Spurrier recounts it, prompting her voice for our discussion. Metaphorically, this is what I want us to do with our broken liturgies, repeat them interrogatively and open them up for discussion.

Sometimes the third space is a literal space. In his essay on the tension between the way the Hispano-Mozarabic "Rite has supported the identity of the Mozarab community[,] … been coopted for nationalist visions," and yet remained at "the margins of social and ecclesial reality" in contemporary Spain,[44] Nathan Chase describes the way the Mozarabic Chapel in the Toledo Cathedral serves as a "ritu-

al ambassador" that connects the Mozarabic parishes that are the real community maintaining this historic Rite to the wider world, both of Spain and of global Catholicism.[45] Mozarabic identity has historically been defined by membership in one of the Mozarabic parishes, and those parishes are tight-knit, economically and socially committed to the survival of their liturgy, and are startled to have a visitor. The dynamic vitality of these parishes is exemplified for Chase by the congregational acclamations that are a part of their liturgical heritage but also by the fact that the assembly gathers in the front rows and responds during the homily: "The priest would mention people directly, some would raise their hands and ask questions, and he would also call on people to say something. At one point in the liturgy, a few people peeked into the church. After they left, a member of the congregation shut the church's doors."[46] This model of preaching in a hidden church in Toledo breaks down many of the paradigms of preaching that Valle-Ruiz critiques. But the insular tightness of Mozarabic churches is only sustainable because of the way the Mozarabic Chapel functions as a third space. The chapel clearly subordinates it to the dominant Roman Rite, as well as posing assertions about history and broader Spanish identity that remain troubling. Yet the celebrations there, nearly all clerics and non-Mozarabic visitors, create a third space that awkwardly maintains a confusing and contested relationship between these three contexts for interpreting the Mozarabic Rite—or I may say, four, adding liturgical scholars to the contexts for the production of meaning.

Sometimes the third space is production of new critical questions about meaning. Theresa Rice, a doctoral student who gave permission for me to use this class reflection, in Fall 2020 wrote an evaluation of the use of Psalm 137 in the Georgetown University "Liturgy of Remembrance, Contrition, and Hope" on April 18, 2017.[47] I want to acknowledge that Georgetown's work on the redress of the damage done by slavery is an inspiration and an invitation to many institutions to invest in a similar evaluation of their role in history. Yet, precisely because they did ritualize around this process of redress, the liturgy made the deformation of our symbols and the need for further work very visible. As Rice put it: "can you know the magnitude of the sin of slavery without having the body and the memory and the inheritance of those men and women and children [the descendants of enslaved people]?" Rice argues the goal of such liturgies is the creation of a new, communal memory: the liturgy's most effective work was in "the comparison of memory, the sharing of memory, and the creation of a new memory in which the pain of the past (and present!) comes to be more fully realized in people who had previously taken no share in it."

What is the outcome, if we manage to stay in the third space of an unsatisfying liturgical-discursive cycle, questioning and renegotiating our symbolic systems while maintaining—perhaps obstinately—our critical questions and evaluative strategies?

4. The assertion of a solidarity beyond the present crisis

If we stay in the third space of discomfort, iterative evaluation, dubious improvement, and new voices brought to the space of liturgical studies, at minimum, we know we will learn a great deal. Each round of ritual practice and evaluation of that practice brings us new tools for representation. We exercise a critical, though limited, lens on each liturgical iteration. At the same time, we subject our critique to respect for others at the table with their at times very different visions. We hope and we humbly remember that we do not know even if what we hope for is worthy of hope.

Garrigan argues that our "liturgical theology of reconciliation … privileges too much the status of the individual victim and too little the social and corporate aspects of our human frailty."[48] Garrigan, like the other liturgical scholars I've quoted here, argues against the production of a single meaning for corporate worship as the goal of either liturgy or liturgical theology in service of reconciliation.

> I may not be able to hug [Ian] Paisley, but (and here is the alongside view) in Christian worship, I can stand in a room and say prayers with him, say a confession with him, offer him a sign of peace (a hand shake and a, 'peace be with you'), and break bread with him. And all of that liturgical conspiring might lead me, in time, to being able to embrace him. But—and this is where the notion of hybridity can qualify the symbol of embrace for the Irish context—I do not think embrace is the goal…. I think the liturgical gestures on their own are strong enough to count as reconciliation…. [T]hey enact the seven times seventy-seven method of forgiveness: not a single moment of arrival at a new state but a perennially-repeated set of actions that articulate the jointness of previously estranged agents.[49]

In fact, where cosmology is helpful is in highlighting how fragmentary and limited human experience and agency is: "what seemed to allow those victims who could do so to 'embrace' was in all cases their sense that they were both part of the same (externally imposed) problem, and in many cases an accompanying compassion for the perpetrator predicated on the understanding that he had suffered too, had had his life ruined too, in this specific, systemic, historic situation which had also harmed them. Forgiveness thus seemed to arise from awareness of a sort of imagined solidarity in the face of a mutual horror."[50] For Garrigan in the Irish case, this horror is the colonial system, which was a deforming structure so grandiose that it has explanatory power over both suffering and evil deeds. For ancient Christians, the world, the devil, and God's zeal for justice provided a similar cosmological frame.

Cosmological explanations are key in the process of coming to consensus, but not in the sense that the participants need to agree on the cosmology. In some sense, it may be enough, especially early in the process, that the cosmological projections of pluralistic liturgy sometimes (often) fail and that the failure can become part of the discourse without abandoning the project of ritualizing together. Moreover, doing ritual together in a crisis of values does not require that we determine ahead of time

how and what to say. The symbolic service of ritual includes the willingness to say and do something wrong in order to discover in doing it what is wrong with it.

Conclusion

This is "all I know right now." Thanks for listening to my evolving understanding of the role of ritual in negotiating changing values in a pluralistic context. From our worship together as an Academy, we know that pluralistic worship does not have to mean the suppression of all our ultimate symbols, that it can be imperfectly sustained by broken liturgies without proselytism, that it can come about through the balance of structures in a community with an ongoing commitment to gather or who are unified by respect for the dead, by an ongoing crisis, or by charity and good guesting.

From our scholarship we know that the negotiation of new values requires gathering people who have a new perspective on the debate, symbolizing and disputing different causes of crisis, and evaluating proposed narratives of past and future. This requires symbolic work. It is not so much that contemporary fragmentation and negotiation of values demands a new set of liturgies for reconciliation, though emerging rituals for reconciliation (often coming from inexpert practitioners) are one part of the production and transmission of new sets of values. Rather, ritual performance as a way of knowing demands a cycle of interpretation, which this academy is especially adept at providing: it demands the persuasive critique of how existing ritual performances reflect human finitude and sin, as well as the transformative abandonment of perfectionism about such performances. In other words, it means committing to iteratively improving the justice and truth of our liturgies, as well as to honoring and learning from the kitschy ways they teach us and our community members. I do think it requires being as critical of neutrality by subtraction or of activism by silence as we have been of the wrong word or phrase. Most of all it requires us, towards our communities as towards one another, to listen.

Notes

1. I am grateful for helpful feedback on this essay, especially from Nathan P. Chase, Anna Petrin, and the members of the Critical Theories and Liturgical Studies seminar.
2. Ruth Langer, "The Blessings and Challenges of Interreligious Prayer," *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* (2015): 30.
3. Langer, 31.
4. Langer, 32.
5. Langer, 32.
6. Langer, 32.
7. Lis Valle-Ruiz, "Performing Cultural Memory Through Preaching," *Liturgy* 35, no. 3 (2020): esp. p. 6, https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2020.1796434.
8. Valle-Ruiz, 7.
9. Langer, 32.
10. Langer, 32–33.
11. Craig Alan Satterlee, "Speaking a Hospitable Word in Worship: Becoming Good Liturgical

Guests," *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* (2012): 16.

12. Satterlee, 19.
13. Sarah Kathleen Johnson, Occasional Religious Practice (New York: Oxford, forthcoming); see also Johnson, "Poured Out: A Kenotic Approach to Initiating Children at a Distance from the Church," *Studia Liturgica* 49, no. 2 (2019): 175-194.
14. Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 115.
15. Dirk G. Lange, "Five Hundred Years of Reformation: A Joint Commemoration," *Word and World* 36, no. 2 (2016): 156–64; for a recording of the liturgy, see "Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration, 2016," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plkK6zNHP_0; for further analysis see Kimberly Hope Belcher, "Ritual Techniques in Affliction Rites and the Lutheran-Catholic Ecumenical Liturgy of Lund, 2016," *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* 38 (2022): 22–41, https://doi.org/10.21827/YRLS.38.22-41.
16. Now published as Sharon R. Fennema, "The Forgetfulness of Gentrification and the Pilgrimage of Protest: Re-Membering the Body of Christ," *Review & Expositor* 115, no. 3 (August 1, 2018): 378–85, https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637318791551. The amplifying character is less central in the published version than it was in the seminar paper.
17. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ, 2008), 70.
18. James Dallen, "Church Authority and the Sacrament Of Penance: The Synod of Bishops," *Worship* 58, no. 3 (1984): 196.
19. Bruce T. Morrill, "Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion? Differing Views of Power—Ecclesial, Sacramental, Anthropological—among Hierarchy and Laity," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 3 (September 2014): 607–608, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563914538728.
20. See also Bruce Morrill, "Sacramental Clericalism: Enabler of Abuse, Obstacle to Healing," in *Accountability, Healing, and Trust,* eds. Kimberly Hope Belcher and David Clairmont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2024).
21. Teresa Berger, "Breaking Bread in a Broken World: Liturgy and Cartographies of the Real," *Studia Liturgica* 36, no. 1 (2006): 79, https://doi.org/10.1177/003932070603600105.
22. Berger, 78.
23. On liturgy and subalterns, see Kristine Suna-Koro, *In Counterpoint: Diaspora, Postcoloniality, and Sacramental Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017).
24. Berger, 80.
25. Lisa Weaver, "Songs on the Slave Plantation," *Comment Magazine,* 6 October 2022, https://comment.org/songs-on-the-slave-plantation/.
26. Siobhan Garrigan, *The Real Peace Process: Worship, Politics and the End of Sectarianism,* 1st edition (London; Oakville, CT: Routledge, 2010), 49–50.
27. Garrigan, 50.
28. Garrigan, 50.
29. Mark Roosien, "Time for Solidarity: Liturgical Time in Disaster Capitalism," *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 12, no. 5: (2021): 332, p. 6, emphasis added, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050332.
30. Roosien, 5.
31. See, e.g., Lizette Larson-Miller, "'In Procession Before the World': Spectacles of Faith Outside the Walls of the Church," *Studia Liturgica* 52, no. 2 (2022): 193–205, https://doi.org/10.1177/00393207221111561; Lizette Larson-Miller, "Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox Approaches to Death," in *Death and Religion in a Changing World* (London: Routledge, 2006), 93–121.
32. Bryan Cones, "Essential Workers, Essential Services? Leitourgia in Light of Lockdown," *Religions* 12, no. 2 (February 2021): 101, p. 5, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020101.
33. See Kimberly Hope Belcher, "Remembering the Dead, Reconciling the Living: George Floyd and All Souls' Day," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 10, no. 3 (2024).
34. Benjamin Durheim, "Anger and Hope in Rural American Liturgy," *Religions* 13, no. 7 (July 2022): 590, p. 11, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13070590.
35. Durheim, 13.
36. Durheim, 9.

37. Kristine Suna-Koro, *In Counterpoint.*
38. Kristine Suna-Koro, "Liturgy and Lament: Postcolonial Reflections from the Midst of a Global Refugee Crisis," *Liturgy* 34, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 34, https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2019.1604032.
39. Mark Roosien, *Ritual and Earthquakes in Constantinople: Liturgy, Ecology, and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).
40. Nelson Cowan, "Liturgical Biography as Liturgical Theology: Co-Constructing Theology at Hillsong Church, New York City" (PhD Dissertation, Boston, Boston University, 2019), 6. Square brackets and emphasis in original.
41. Cowan, 187. Square brackets in original.
42. Kristen Daley Mosier et al., "'Water Brought Us Together': A Baptismal Ethic from Flint," *Religions* 13, no. 8 (August 2022): 716, p. 5, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13080716.
43. Rebecca F. Spurrier, *The Disabled Church: Human Difference and the Art of Communal Worship,* 1st edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 135.
44. Nathan P. Chase, "Crisis, Liturgy, and Communal Identity: The Celebration of the Hispano-Mozarabic Rite in Toledo, Spain as a Case Study," *Religions* 13, no. 3 (March 2022): 216, pp. 16, 9, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030216.
45. Chase, 18.
46. Chase, 15.
47. Georgetown University "Liturgy of Remembrance, Contrition, and Hope" April 18, 2017 (YouTube) https://www.youtube.com/live/tO4Xsz36kTU?si=LL_hZgmHIQBrjzAe.
48. Garrigan, 51.
49. Garrigan, 55.
50. Garrigan, 41.