



Proceedings

**North American
Academy of Liturgy
Annual Meeting**

Valparaiso, Indiana
2-5 January 2025

Proceedings
of the
North American Academy of Liturgy

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Foreword

The 2025 Annual Meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy took place from 2-5 January on the campus of Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana...a hop, skip, and a drive from Chicago.

This year's meeting was pivotal. For the first time in decades, we gathered not at a downtown metropolitan conference-capable hotel but on the campus of a university. The change has been key to the Academy's survival into the future. Despite the new arrangement being not quite as metropolitan as we are used to, Valparaiso (both the university and the city) proved more than capable of hosting our meeting.

This year's Plenary Sessions unsettled, stirred, and challenged.

In his Vice-Presidential Address, James Farwell asked, "what we liturgical scholars can offer and can learn in the context of religious hybridity," persuasively questioning the adequacy of our notion of "assembly" and the boundaries of belonging and authentic participation: "We must think about...the sacramentality of other religious traditions."

We might also rethink the liturgical year, and the Mysteries celebrated therein. Since 2024, a global and ecumenical (even if not wholly representative) group of liturgical scholars, ecumenists, and church leaders has been gathering in Assisi to deliberate the if, why, and how of adding a Feast celebrating the Mystery of Creation to Western liturgical calendars, following the example and invitation of the Eastern churches, and in the face of our planetary environmental crisis. Many in our Academy—those whose presentations appear in Part 1, but also me and others—have been active in this movement, seeing an emergent and synergistic ecumenical opportunity and imperative in our historical moment. The questions are numerous, the hurdles high, and the opportunity immense.

Never to be surpassed, *Berakah* recipient Teresa Berger—and, indeed, the nature of the cosmos—requires of us an "epistemic transformation." What worships is a "multi-creaturely assembly of everything created." Occluded by the turn to Modernity, a retrieval and activation of this knowledge in liturgical studies is required in the face of "the reality of our life on a planet on life support."

We work hard while we are together, focussed most intensely in the work of our Seminars, documented in Part 2. Thanks to the Seminar Conveners for their lead-

ership. Eighteen Seminars met this year, with members attending both in-person and online. A new Practitioners Pre-meeting was also held for the first time.

This year also marks the second year of *Proceedings*' publication on our new Public Knowledge Project open-access platform—a transition I initiated and undertook as Editor with the permission and support of the Academy Committee over several years. The university setting along with the new platform seem to have energized our members and visitors toward publication in *Proceedings*, with seven peer-reviewed papers appearing this year in Part 3. Sincere thanks to the Editorial Advisory Board for its expert advice and to the authors for their engagement in the revision process.

The Academy Committee for 2025 was Kimberly Belcher (President), James Farwell (Vice-President), Christy Condyles (Secretary), Nathaniel Marx (Treasurer), Khalia Williams (Delegate for Seminars), Andrew Wymer (Delegate for Membership), and Glenn CJ Byer (Past-President). The AC was ably assisted in its work by Layla Karst as Webmaster, Anne McGowan as Archivist, and Courtney Murtagh as Meeting Manager. At our Business Meeting, Sarah Kathleen Johnson was elected Delegate for Seminars and Lester Ruth was elected Vice-President. We will gather again from 2-5 January in Atlanta, Georgia, most likely in and around the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

May the *communitas* that coalesced during our liminality endure for many decades to come.

Jason J. McFarland
Editor

Jason is Senior Lecturer in Liturgical Studies and Sacramental Theology at the Australian Catholic University (Sydney) and a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.



Part 1

Plenary Sessions

Introduction to the Vice-Presidential Address

Kimberly Hope Belcher

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

The Reverend Doctor James Farwell straddles many divides. Professionally, he is Professor of Theology and Liturgy at Virginia Theological Seminary and also the H. Boone Porter Professor of Liturgics at General Theological Seminary. (Those institutions are in different states, James!) James has been very active in the North American Academy of Liturgy, as well, a founding member of both the Critical Theories and the Comparative Liturgy seminar. He is currently bipedal in the ordinary way, being Vice President and President-elect, but is also doing the very heavy lifting of identifying a mode and location for our meeting next year.

A more profound type of bilocation, however, can be found in his scholarly work. He bridges Christian liturgical theology and Buddhist practice, liturgizing the approach of comparative theology. Beginning from the practice of his own Anglican Episcopalian tradition, James has gone forth into Soto Zen, exploring types of belonging that depend on multiple modalities of religious practice in one receptive human person. Methodologically, his work fuses liturgical theology, comparative theology, and autoethnography. As a result, his work speaks to the ways that practice becomes a condition for religious knowledge, and how one can nonetheless understand the knowledge gained by practice as a precondition for that practice. James's work respects a mysterious and timely binary he describes himself in his 2018 article, "On Whether Christians Should Participate in Buddhist Practice: A Critical Autobiographical Reflection."

On the one hand, "one can learn from religious traditions other than one's own—a belief I came to inhabit from many hours of conversation with my maternal grandmother who, quite out of step with her time, history, and formal education, read and appreciated Jewish, Christian, Vedanta, and Buddhist texts and passed that appreciation on to me; and (the second conviction) ... there is an integrity to religious traditions as practitioners experience them that deserves respect and resists any careless assemblage of various parts of several traditions into someone's preferential pastiche." James, we thank you for your service among us, and we look forward to hearing more in your paper, "Speaking to Religious Hybridity."

Vice-Presidential Address

Speaking to Religious Hybridity

Rev. James W. Farwell, Vice-President

James Farwell is Professor of Theology and Liturgy at Virginia Theological Seminary and the H. Boone Porter Professor of Liturgics at General Theological Seminary.

Good evening! It is an honor to speak to this auspicious group as your Vice-President and I am grateful to our President Kimberly Belcher for that very gracious introduction. I am honored by it. I am also amazed at the prescience of her focus on my article for the *Journal of Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology*.¹ It relates very much to what I want to reflect on tonight.

These Vice-Presidential addresses at our Annual Meetings seem to be a genre all their own. Not quite a theological lecture, but some theological rumination; an invitation to think about the work of this academy at this particular moment. So that is my modest goal. I will try to offer it while bearing in mind the widely ignored “presentation mantra” of the American Academy of Religion: “Be brief. Be witty. Be seated!” I won’t be entirely brief, and I’m unlikely to be very witty as I did not get my second cup of coffee until 6:30 this evening; but I will not go on forever and I will eventually sit down.

Several Vice-Presidential addresses of recent years have asked this Academy at one level or another to consider what our scholarship has to offer a North American world that is *globalizing* and *pluralizing*. I am going to raise a question in the same vein, but with respect to *one particular phenomenon* that arises from the increasing religious plurality of the west—well documented by scholars like Diane Eck, among many others.² The form of plurality to which I want to draw attention is a species of the *overall* complexity of our liturgical assemblies to which I also want to say a word. But to state where I am going right up front: I wonder what we liturgical scholars can offer and can learn in the context of religious hybridity.

When I say hybridity, I am thinking here not just of a unitary phenomenon but one that is itself appropriately, *hybrid*. A whole range of hybridity, actually.

1. James Farwell, “On Whether Christians Should Participate in Buddhist Practice: A Critical Autobiographical Reflection,” in *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 1:2 (2017): 242-256.
2. <https://pluralism.org/>

There is the basic *hybridity of religious consciousness* that is simply the awareness of the religious plurality around us. We engage our own practices with a particularly vivid awareness in the west, now, that others *practice differently*—an awareness that can reshape our experience of our own practices, intrigue us to explore, bring our practices into sharper relief, simply in our awareness that these practices of ours are not simply *given*.

There is also the hybridity of those who *engage in one tradition inescapably shaped by another*. Maybe they grew up in one tradition and now practice another. Maybe they are the children of an interreligious marriage—its own kind of hybridity.

There is then the hybridity of *those whose practice of one tradition is immeasurably deepened by the practices of another* ... who find that, say, Buddhist meditation has strengthened their capacity to attend to the Word of God through Scripture; or, say, that Sufi *dhikr* has deepened their practice of the Eucharist as remembrance.

And finally, some of those folks, more radically hybrid still, practice with the understanding *that they ARE both* Buddhist and Jew or Christian and Buddhist or Sufi and Christian.

These last two kinds of hybridity are of course what has come to be called (unfortunately, not succinctly) “multiple religious participation” and “multiple religious belonging.”

How can we both resource and learn from this range of religious hybridity that exists around us, within our congregations, and sometimes inside of us as individuals?

Allow me, for the moment, to offer a few vignettes ... incomplete, all inviting further commentary if we had the time, all drawn just from my own experience, but perhaps enough for now to bring various forms of hybridity to flesh and to prompt your recollection of your own examples.

There is the woman in an Episcopal parish who faithfully attends every Sunday Eucharist among the 8 or 10 who come to the early service. She comes forward at the Eucharistic invitation and receives the priest’s blessing. She does not receive communion. As her priest got to know her, she discovered that she is not a member. She is, in fact, not baptized. She grew up in Pakistan, the daughter of a Muslim Father and a Roman Catholic Christian mother. She comes quietly to church each week because listening to the Scriptures and the sermon in a Christian church help her wrestle with a faith that is a searching hybrid of both her home traditions.

There is the man on the west coast who is studiously, religiously in fact, atheist. It is his all-encompassing worldview, carefully thought through. Which is not to say that he does not see value in various religious traditions. He is convinced of the Buddhist doctrine that all of us as selves interdependent, co-originating—*pratitya samutpada*. He comes to church every week because he loves what the practice does for his community. He is, by the way, the church's largest financial contributor, far and away, and has been for years.

There is the active member of the Episcopal Church and a member of one of the Sufi orders. He finds in Sufi practice an antiphon, if you will, to Christian contemplative prayer. The man is a priest and pastor of a parish.

There is the woman who sits weekly, on Wednesdays, with the local Rinzai Buddhist sangha and comes Sunday to the Eucharist. She doesn't mix and match the two traditions. She doesn't pretend that their approach to *ultimate concern* is the same thing. To the contrary, living in the dialectic between the two helps keep her nimble and resistant to turning religion itself into idolatry. Her Buddhist practices steadies her. Her Christian practice gives her hope.

There is the yoga teacher who is a member of the parish vestry. He is a lifelong Episcopalian who spends his weekdays guiding yoga practice, who when he talks about his experience of the ceremonial actions of Christian liturgy, makes compelling reference to the exercise of the "subtle body" to which one attends in yoga.

There is also the monk who, by his own account, came to Christ through years of practicing Zen Buddhism. He now makes art with the Johannine logos co-inscribed in the *enso*—the brush-stroked, incomplete circle of Zen.

Consider the Jewish political scientist who does *vajraguru* practice with the Tibetan Buddhists. His next book is on Gandharan ethics, which is to say, the ethics of Aristotle in relation to Mahayana Buddhism.

I could go on. In a context of religious plurality, the "holy envy" of traditions not our own—as Krister Stendahl called it—takes many forms, sometimes more than mere envy. Those who have read the stories of Bede Griffiths or Abishiktananda, or of the westerners who went to study with the Japanese Dominican Shigetu Oshida, may think of them as fascinating anomalies, as stories on the margins that occur elsewhere.

They are standouts to be sure, but they are less and less anomalous, and their stories unfold not just across the world from us but right here, increasingly, in North America.

To those who think the rise of conscious religious hybridity in the west is a rather niche thing as a candidate for the attention of this academy, I commend the essays in *Many Yet One?: Multiple Religious Belonging*, put out by the World Council of Churches in 2016.³ John Thatamanil’s “Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs” is a particularly good essay in that book, and there are others. Around about 2018, some corner got turned, and studies of religious hybridity, including multiple religious participation and belonging in the west, truly exploded such that it is now difficult even to keep up with field. Because the varied phenomenon of hybrid religious practice and understanding has *itself* exploded—beyond our conventional ways of counting heads in the religious bodies represented in this room.

Of course *religious* hybridity is not the only one that figures into our liturgical contexts. We are all multiple, we all contain multitudes, we are all like Whitman. We are intersectional if you’d rather. We practice religiously in a context where culture and race and ethnicity and economy and gender and more come to bear. But I want to focus here on *religious* hybridity, because—well—it is my address, and it is a matter of personal interest! ... and because I think it matters for us to attend to this in our context.

Let me take a moment to set this phenomenon within the complexity of our liturgical assemblies with which we are already familiar. Because, I fear, our use of the term “assembly” so often in the singular may conceal as much as it reveals. In *Christian* theology post Vatican II, for example, we commonly think now of the assembly itself as the primary sign of the *missio Dei*, the sign of Christ, convened in a world itself marked by—just to give protestants equal time here—what Graham Hughes calls the diffused sacramentality of the creative Word of God; an assembly in which the condensed sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist sustain the assembly as it encounters the Holy Other. Fair enough, absolutely right, and absolutely central to our Christian liturgical and sacramental theology. But we also all know that no liturgical assembly is just one thing. If there are 100 people in the assembly in synagogue or church, 100 people at Friday prayers at the mosque, there are people in 100 different places—spiritually, developmentally, practically, pastorally, formationally. They come with different histories, different traumas. They have made different choices, and different happenings have befallen them. Some of them have been touched by religious traditions different from the ones they find themselves in now. I am not sure whether Jewish or Muslim communities think of their assemblies in quite the same singular way—my colleagues in those traditions can say—but I suspect, being composed of human beings, that Jewish assemblies and Muslim assemblies and others show some of the same complexity, even if they think of the assembly somewhat differently than in Christian sacramental theology. And in terms of religious complexity, certainly

3. Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, eds., *Many Yet One?: Multiple Religious Belonging* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2016).

there has been a long and rich dialogue between Jewish and Buddhist practitioners in the US; and certainly the controversy in some Islamic communities about Sufism is not *just* over the hermeneutical approach to the Quran but also over the openness of some Sufi schools to the Beloved being manifested in and beyond all religious traditions. I do wonder whether there is a way in Christian sacramental theology for us to expand our language around the sign-force of the assembly to take better theological account of its complex constitution. That is an address for another time. But the religious hybridity that interests me is simply another feature, a growing feature, of the assembly's complexity in the west.

There are some who question the stronger forms of hybridity like multiple religious participation or multiple religious belonging. Some theorists of religion, postcolonialists and critical modernists in particular, view the category of "religion" to be a fiction anyway, something imposed upon fluid forms of life by western imperialism, mostly by Christianity. Religions just are hybrid anyway, they say—what's the fuss? Some may challenge this kind of religious hybridity from the other end of concern, as so-called syncretism; or something that risks infidelity to one's own tradition. Despite our recent learning of how entangled the notion of syncretism is with racism—as we see in Ross Kane's work,⁴ for example—the challenge to how one can practice two religions at once does have some force, especially for the Abrahamic traditions.

There is a middle position that I operate from, one that sees these traditions marked by a bounded porosity,⁵ even as practitioners do experience them to be living and developing *wholes* that are different from one another in their totality, even if resonant in some ways, and borrowing from one another in some ways. It is from that position, whose defense I could offer some other time, from which I proceed here. We could leave this to the theologians of religion or to the systematicians, but in my experience, it is at the level of *practice* where the most interesting forms of this religious hybridity are lived. *The people in this room know something about practice, about the theologies of practice, about practices as formative, and formation for practice.* I'd love for more of us to bring to bear more of what we know on this experience of hybrid practice.

How could we begin, as liturgical scholars, to engage the whole range of religious hybridity in which our people are increasingly involved? Here are just a couple of reflections on our response as liturgists to liturgical hybridity. They are not so

4. Ross Kane, *Syncretism and Christian Tradition: Race and Revelation in the Study of Religious Mixture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

5. For this concept in use see Robert S. Heaney, "Public Theology and Public Missiology," in *Anglican Theological Review* 102:2 (Spring 2020): 201-212. See also Farwell, *op cit.*, 248-250.

much original as they are an invitation to revisit and rethink in the face of this significant shift in western religiosity.

For starters, there would be great benefit to all if we simply entered into more sustained reflection with our religious others about each other's liturgy, ritual, scripted prayer. Of course, interreligious dialogue focusing on doctrine has been going on for a long time. So has what Roman Catholics call the dialogue of experience, especially between monks of the east and the west. There, dialogue has often been about the contours of monastic life, and about meditation and mental prayer. But there sometimes liturgy pops up. It has to. Because the eastern monks sit in the stalls with the western monks in their offices, and the western monks sit in the room with the eastern monks as they do their meditation rituals. Sometimes it is ritual practice and sometimes ritual space and within it in which it occurs that becomes a point of mutual learning. I am thinking of a moment the second Gethsemani encounter. Amid the polite formalities of the meeting, Norman Zuketsu Fischer, an American Buddhist of Jewish lineage, looked up at the crucifix and asked his Roman Catholic hosts, "*Why do you find the iconography of the crucifix, with the figure of Jesus hanging off the cross, inspiring?*"

Sharon Salzberg who was also there, reported:

Norman's question, because it was so sincere (and one could feel that), broke open the dialogue. People started talking about suffering, about suffering that has nowhere to go, about suffering that doesn't have an easy fix or any fix at all. We started talking about love, about unfathomable love, about love being the only thing that could meet that depth of suffering. It turned into an extraordinary conversation.⁶

The same Norman Fischer who asked the question about the crucifix in the liturgical space was absolutely mystified at how the Christian monks could make of the psalms—passionate and violent and full of change and struggle as well as praise and thanksgiving—the center of their daily liturgical practice. He sat with them as they prayed, every day. He asked them how this practice *meant* for them. Their answers taught him so much that he found himself reading again the Psalms of his original faith and retranslating the Psalms through Zen eyes.⁷ It is a lovely book.

Fischer's experience with the psalms presses a point. No one knows better than the members of this academy how the meaning of liturgy is *in its doing*. Understanding the ritual is also important, and second-order reflection on its meaning is crucial to catechesis. But if its first meaning is in its doing, and we want to understand what is happening in the rituals of others, then it means we will need more often to be guests in the traditions of others, perhaps going beyond simple

6. <https://onbeing.org/blog/the-mysterious-junction-of-suffering-and-love/>

7. Norman Fischer, *Opening to You: Zen-Inspired Translations of the Psalms* (New York: Penguin Compass, 2003).

observation with the permission of our hosts. Each tradition will have their own constraints around what they can participate in and what they can invite others to participate in. Sometimes the guest learns from the host. Sometimes the host from the guest. Sometimes the hosting and guesting is changing and dynamic as I learned again from a forthcoming essay by our colleague Martha Moore-Keish on Christian Eucharist and Hindu Prasad.⁸

An ironic example of this dance of hybridity in practice and understanding and mutual learning: some Zen Buddhists in North America consider ritual a distraction, a leftover of East Asian religiosity. They *tolerate* the ritual aspects of a Buddhist meeting. This view is set so deep I was recently asked by a Buddhist roshi to offer a dharma talk—itself a liturgical act—in his sangha about ritual, what it does, and why one does it, and the fact that they were doing it, even if they thought they were “just meditating.” They received it well in this case. But the exchange arose from a Christian participating in Buddhist liturgy, teaching about liturgy from Christian and Jewish scholarship using Buddhist terms, for the sake of the Buddhist appreciating more deeply what they were doing in their own rites. The guest of the sangha, then for a time the host of the sangha. Of course, I happen to be a particular kind of hybrid Buddhist-Christian—more on that in a moment—which allowed me to take the role that I did.

Participating in the liturgical acts of others has always been controversial, even *verboden* for some for good reasons. It is not without risk, precisely because we take the rituals seriously. Great care and respect is always required to navigate the waters of participant observation in traditions not our own. But doing liturgy and talking about liturgy, we know, are not the same thing. If it is in liturgical action that the religious other enacts the horizons under which they live and discern and experience their lives. Is it not time for us to revisit the best practices, protocols, and a *theology* for such cross-participation for the sake of sharing what we know and learning what we don’t? For the sake of becoming ever more literate in the worlds that are enacted in the rituals of the other? This would also help us understand what sort of formation is happening among those who in our own congregations participate in more than one tradition. We might, in the process, receive light on the question I have heard Hindu scholar Anant Rambachan ask: “What is the meaning of my neighbor’s faith for my own?”

Secondly, might liturgists resource the drafting of liturgical materials that do not *ignore* the religious other whom we meet, nor treat them as objects of conversion, but acknowledge and pray *within our own liturgies* for the practitioners of other religious traditions? This liturgical act itself hybridizes our identity in relation to those for whom we pray. We become members of a cultural commons or deepen

8. Martha Moore-Keish, “Who Is Hosting Whom? Guest-host Relations in Eucharist and Prasad,” forthcoming.

our sense of it. And then at the very center of our own liturgies lives not only an awareness but a service to the other. What if we prayed for the health and vitality of other religious communities? Might the hybrid consciousness accompanying such liturgical acknowledgement of the religious other make us more open to the wonder of God's diverse revelation? This has been done—but most of our communities don't.

Speaking from my own tradition, it was in 1928 that the prayer for Jews and others as infidels disappeared from the American *Book of Common Prayer*. It has taken almost another 100 years for us—just this past summer in fact—to see a further revision of the Solemn Collects of Good Friday where Jews do not just disappear—which one could say is a slightly more benign form of the same attitude—but offers the following new form:

Let us pray for the Jewish people, who by the grace of their eternal covenant with God were delivered from bondage into freedom;
 For their continued faithfulness;
 For their flourishing in peace as witnesses to God's sustaining love;
 For their safety from all malice and harm;
 For their liberation from all forms of antisemitism and hatred;
 For the fullness of redemption for the sake of God's Name;
 That unity and concord may exist between Jews and Christians, in obedience to God's will.

We were not the first Anglican province to make this sort of change in our Good Friday Liturgy, but it is relatively recent for us all.

SimonMary Ahiokai, a Roman Catholic scholar, speaks in his writing of a town in midwestern Nigeria where the Roman Catholic parish offers prayers for the success and flourishing of their Muslim and indigenous religious neighbors. I find this deeply commendable. What benefits might be wrought by such prayers for one another, offered routinely, in the liturgies of our tradition? Ahiokai goes a bit farther still toward hybrid practice. Drawing from several Roman Catholic sources and the Jewish philosopher Levinas, for whom ethics arises from the claim that our neighbors lay on us *as other*, Ahiokai suggests “that texts of other religious traditions be constitutive elements of the Liturgy of the Word for all sacramental celebrations.” He argues that at their liturgical source and summit, Christians are practicing being for others, and there is no stronger way to do this than to invite the religious other into the very center of our practice.⁹

There are many questions to put to such a proposal. Beyond the theological ground from which he makes this argument, and speaking as a Christian acutely

9. SimonMary Ahiokai, “Making Way for Comparative Theology in the Liturgy of the Word: In Dialogue with James L. Fredericks,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 53:4 (Fall 2018): 499-519.

aware of my tradition's history, how would the texts of others be brought into a *Christian* liturgy of the Word without being just another Christian colonization of my neighbor's alterity?

Still, I find myself wondering, in response to Ahiokai's proposal, whether Christians could invite Muslims and Jews to practice Scriptural reasoning at the liturgy of the Word. "Scriptural reasoning" is that method for religious others to gather and read one another's Scriptures in one another's company, without the intention to convert or to argue, but simply to see and hear the shared texts differently. What would it be like, similarly for Muslims to invite Jews and Christians, or Jains or Sikhs, into a practice of Scriptural reasoning within the context of Salat, or adjacent to it? Might hearing from the sacred texts of other traditions right in the midst of practicing our own deepen our capacity for the fresh surprise of encountering God in the other? Might the guesting and hosting that arise there bring its own formation? Might our liturgical celebrations, to all our benefit, reflect the religious differences that mark our world not just as demographic fact but as *possible site of epiphany*?

Finally, of course there is the hybridity of dual religious practitioners. How do we resource them and learn from them? From those who participate conscientiously in more than one tradition, I can only offer my own experience *as* such a dual practitioner. This is not special pleading. I am perfectly happy to hear challenge to the coherence of this practice. I can raise them to myself. As Ruben Habito recently said, being both Christian and Buddhist—which he is—is a koan he has not yet solved.¹⁰ I, too, am such a koan. I simply tell my story because it is what I know from the inside about dual practice.

I can't tell the whole story here. Suffice to say my own hybridity was seeded in me by my grandmother, who was as much my caregiver through my school age and teen years as my parents were. Born and raised on a chicken farm in Kentucky, with an 8th grade education, she attended church with us on the Principal Feast days. Otherwise she spent her days in the garden, her nights caring for very sick children, and the rest of the time reading the gospels, the Psalms, the Bhagavadgita, the Upanishads, and the very peculiar writings of the Theosophical society. She read Pearl S. Buck and listened to Mahalia Jackson. She was a baptized Christian and a seeker before the term got popular.

It was her imprint on me, I now know, that made me able, years later, at a time of personal crisis, to say yes to an invitation to sit with the Soto Zen Buddhists in Atlanta—something I sort of stumbled into while reading Dogen's *Shobogenzo*

10. Habito is a Catholic, founding teacher of the Maria Kannon Zen Center, Dallas, and a prolific and thoughtful writer on Zen and Christian spirituality and practice. He made this remark at his retirement at the meeting of the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies in 2024.

with John Fenton at Emory University. I am still sitting 30 years later. I eventually took the Buddhist precepts on a research trip in Japan. Zen practice so reshaped something in me that needed reshaping, that I kept going.

What does that have to do with my topic? Just this: seven years after that first experience with Soto Zen practice, I wrote a dissertation under Don Saliers that involved a nondualist interpretation of suffering and salvation, of brokenness and wholeness, in the liturgies of the Sacred Triduum. Mind you, I don't think I used the term nondual in the book. I'm quite certain Don and I never had any conversations about Zen Buddhism. I had rather forgotten by then a couple of papers I'd given a few years earlier comparing Christianity and Buddhism in reference to a critique of modernity. And it was years after the book was published before I realized that the nondualism of my Buddhist practice is what allowed me to catch the nondualism at work in the liturgies centered on cross and resurrection. Not the same kind of nondualism. But it is indeed a nondualism and it took traveling an unfamiliar road to see what was right under my nose—to see it truly, but also to see it differently.

The moral of that story, I hope—since I am not nearly so special as to be unique—is that dual practitioners may actually be a resource to us in working out the liturgical meanings of our own tradition. We know that liturgical practice shapes us. Those in our congregations engaged in dual practice or dual belonging may have gifts with which to resource us in our own experience of liturgy and prayer and liturgical theology.

Maybe it all works like this because, Perry Schmidt-Leukel is right: that all of our religious traditions are composed of repertoire of patterns of practice and belief that replicate themselves both across the diversity of our religious traditions and also within them.¹¹ And that what constitutes the differences among these traditions would then be the way they arrange those patterns, which are major and minor themes, how often they appear, how they are assembled into wholes greater than sums of the parts. Maybe that's why we are returned more deeply to the wisdom of our own tradition by drinking from the wells of another.

Or, maybe we just see better when we look through the lens of difference.

Well, time to conclude. I hope that I have gotten you thinking about the challenge of resourcing and learning from the range of religious hybridity that emerges from our plural context, even if you don't think any of my ideas for facing that challenge make any sense. I don't know that I am right about these strategies, but I know I am right that the members of this academy cannot ignore this hybridity. I

11. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Theology: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2017).

think we must, in this environment, expand our theorizing of the liturgical act to account for this hybridity. If the world is sacramental, as Christians put it, then I think we must think about the sacramentality, or the revelatory quality, if you prefer, of other religious traditions, and figure out how to do so without reducing all the traditions to dim versions of our own.

A final note: I love this academy. I have good friends and colleagues here who have funded and enriched my thinking over the years. But I also think that we must rejoin the effort to make this academy as religiously diverse as possible. I know that is not a new conversation. But we are still very Christian, a little Jewish, and I don't know if the Muslim visitors we had a few years ago have stayed. But the diversity of this academy is a topic I hope we might revisit with fresh energy at some point this coming year.

Thank you again for the privilege of speaking to you and thank you for listening.

Presidential Plenary Exploring an Ecumenical Feast of Creation

The Case for Celebrating a Feast of Creation around the Equinox

Benjamin M. Stewart

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Discussions of an ecumenical Christian festival of the Creation have been animated by relatively diverse theological perspectives. For example: would the theological emphasis of the feast fall more on the Creator, or the creation itself. or on our current anthropogenic ecological crisis. That question of theological emphasis I read as still somewhat unsettled across the various parties to the conversation.

As liturgical scholars, it may be interesting to us that while these theological questions have been in some substantial churn, the question of the date of the potential festival has been—until recently for the most part without much question—mostly centered around the date of September 1.

In my remarks I want especially to get at the question of a date for the festival.

September 1 is the first day of the liturgical year in the Orthodox church (“Indiction Day”). Over time it accrued association with the creation of the cosmos: not just the beginning of the year, but The Beginning of creation, sometimes including some touchingly earnest “calculations” that the world was in fact created on September 1st 5,509 BC.

That connection between the beginning of the liturgical year and the beginning of creation led to an invitation in 1989 from Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios “to the entire Christian world” to mark September 1st as a day of prayer for the creation: “thanksgiving for the gift of creation,” and “petitions for its protection and salvation.” In response to that invitation, a number of joint statements from world communions have been issued on September 1. The day has had little liturgical expression, being more of a call for individual prayer and environmental action. And then especially in 2024 there has been a greater interest in a liturgical expression, perhaps even an ecumenical liturgical festival.

This leaves us currently with a more-or-less unofficial ‘season of creation’ stretching from September 1 to October 4. (There are even two quite different approaches found at “season of creation dot COM,” with the participation of a number of global church bodies and using the Revised Common Lectionary, or “season of creation dot ORG”, coordinated largely by the Uniting Church in Australia, with some partners in the United States, and using an alternate lectionary focused on different ecological themes).

The wisdom of having a distinct “season of creation” does not yet have a fully developed consensus. (I think our two main festival cycles of Christmas and Easter are underappreciated as seasons of creation.) But I am glad there is some wider space on the calendar in which a focused creational emphasis might find liturgical expression.

In talking about where on the calendar we might locate that liturgical focus, I want to start by talking about the example of John the Baptist, or John the Forerunner. John is often portrayed as pointing to Christ. One of the oldest festivals on the Christian calendar is the nativity of John the Baptist on June 24. As the sun sets on John’s June 24th nativity feast day, the final shadows at sunset on that day point across the landscape to a very specific place on the far horizon.

Those long shadows point to a very particular place, essentially unique to John’s day: the place on the far horizon where the sun will rise on Christmas morning.

These days connect like a global liturgical Stonehenge, the shadow revealing the hidden place of Christmas sunrise. (This effect is true anyplace on earth where you can see the sun on these days.)

This is not an accident. Many people today notice that Christmas and solstice are neighbors, but it is not popularly known that when the feast of the incarnation emerged December 25th was in fact the calendrically established date of the solstice. Likewise, John the Forerunner’s feast day originally marked in the northern hemisphere the longest day of the year, the other solstice, when—even bathed in maximum light—the church remembered, “John himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light,” and the Forerunner’s testimony that “He must increase, I must decrease.”

Just as Christmas draws on the solstice, Easter incorporates springtime, equinox, and full Moon—and draws on agrarian seasonal patterns that undergird Passover.

In his thesis originally titled *The Cosmic Elements of Christian Passover*, Anscar Chupungco writes,

for the ancient world nature was the locus of divine interventions and of human encounter with God. Nature and time were not only signs of God’s dealings with people; they

were symbols that embodied, manifested, and brought along ... salvation. In short, they enjoyed a sacramental quality and played a sacramental role. This is the theology upon which the early church's understanding and celebration of Easter were firmly built.¹

At first glance it appears—ironically!—that a September Feast of Creation would be less oriented by creation than Christmas and Easter. (Whatever charms it once held, the old tradition of calculating September 1 or any other fixed date as an annual “birthday of the cosmos” cannot bear the weight of science or theology anymore for most of us.) In comparing the feasts of Incarnation, Resurrection, and Creation, the lack of a cosmic orientation (like that enjoyed by Christmas and Easter) for a September 1 Feast of Creation immediately stands out.

However, September 1 appears to have an older connection with equinox. Alden Mosshammer has compiled evidence for a predecessor date for the beginning of the indictional year being September 23/24—their equinox.² (It was likely moved to September 1st in the fifth century to align with the empire's taxation schedule.) I think that what this current feast-proposal seeks to honor in the September 1 date is more fully—and originally—represented in the September equinox—which in a manner of speaking may be the “original” September 1.

The equinox is compelling for a few other reasons. It is the only time during the year when the earth's solar ‘location’ is essentially shared throughout the globe (northern and southern hemispheres alike). It is a moment of cosmic symmetry, a shared experience of God's glory in creation, and an image of the equity we seek in environmental justice.

With the March equinox already informing the feast of resurrection/new creation, there is compelling logic to a creation observance around the September equinox.

It is also interesting that the September equinox stands roughly midway between September 1 and October 4—nestled within weeks that some are already keeping as a season of creation.

One could imagine that at least some churches would keep something like a “day of prayer and action for the protection of the environment” on September 1, a Feast of Creation on the equinox or the Sunday after equinox, and St. Francis' Day on October 4, to constitute a strong season of creation.

Trying to schedule a date on the calendar to celebrate the goodness of creation can feel slightly silly—like trying to shoehorn the mystery of the cosmos onto

1. Anscar J. Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1992), 17.

2. Alden Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 20-24

Sched.com or iCal. But the question of imbuing our calendars with meaning is a liturgical vocation.

However, I can hear Ron Grimes encouraging us—especially in this crucial moment—not to cede our calendars to the imperial tax calendar:

The view that ritual is merely optional or only decorative is anomalous in human religious and cultural history. It is an attitude mostly recent and largely Western. The questions: Who is truly human? and What is truly natural? have often been answered: the truly human people are those most truly in tune with nature, and those most truly in tune with nature are those who dance this particular rhythm in this particular ritual dance. So the natural, the human, and the ritualistic are, in the final analysis, one.³

I think the question of a *date* for any festival of creation isn't "merely optional or only decorative" but is a key part of a way that we dance with the cosmos in this critical moment.

In establishing a creation observance related to a date significant to every place on earth—the September equinox—the church would practice the dance that joins the heavens and the earth. The date is available for us, already within the season of creation.

But, before a final affirmative word, a final caveat from a cartoon from *The New Yorker*. The earth, looking deeply, is answering the moon's concerned inquiry about "what happened." The earth answers, "What 'happened' was only having Earth Day once a year."

It is a good reminder that the original feast of creation in Christianity is weekly, on Sunday. Justin Martyr writes in his apology, describing the logic of scheduling the weekly feast, first and most expansively of the logic of the creation: "We 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."⁴

The urgency of establishing the date of any season or feast of creation is perhaps less pressing than a weekly day on which Christians might say, like Justin, even before naming resurrection, that we gather for a feast of creation.

3. Ronald Grimes, "Ritual" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (New York: Continuum, 2006).

4. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 67.

Presidential Plenary Exploring an Ecumenical Feast of Creation

Reflections on a Potential Feast of Creation: A Global Catholic Perspective

Audrey Seah

Audrey Seah is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts.

My remarks will first address the Catholic consultation in relation to the report from the ecumenical seminar in March;¹ then I will offer reflections from a global Catholic perspective.

At the ecumenical seminar in March, several Catholic groups participated as observers. These included representatives from the Dicastery for Divine Worship, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and Dicastery for promoting Christian Unity. Contributors to the systematic theology discussions included representatives from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the International Theological Commission. There were also representatives from various Bishops conferences in Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Amazon, Catholic institutions and networks, and Catholic scholars.²

While most delegates at the meeting expressed support for the addition of the liturgical feast in small group discussions, some asked for more discernment and wider consultations. How intra-Catholic conversations would continue in dialogue with the Dicastery for Divine Worship was not clear.³

Following the ecumenical seminar in March 2024, a Catholic consultation was

1. World Council of Churches, "A Liturgical Opportunity; an Ecumenical Kairos" (May 2024). <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Assisi%20seminar%20report%20-%20Feast%20of%20Creation%20v2%20%282%29.pdf>

2. World Council of Churches, "A Liturgical Opportunity; an Ecumenical Kairos," 26.

3. World Council of Churches, "A Liturgical Opportunity; an Ecumenical Kairos," 26.

held on December 6 and 7 in Assisi and via zoom.⁴ The gathering was intended to be a seminar to assess the feast's potential as "legitimate progress" in liturgical development following the directives of Sacrosanctum Concilium 23. Its stated goals were to 1) explore the history of creation day and institutions of "new feasts" in the past 100 years; 2) analyze creation as a trinitarian-Christological mystery; 3) envision the feast in practice (that is, its rank, name, date, readings, etc. . . .); 4) examine the feast's pastoral potential; 5) discern synodally if it would merit being inscribed into the general Roman calendar.

At the end of the second day, participants voted on two questions: 1) whether creation day should be elevated from its world day of prayer status to become a liturgical feast; 2) if yes, in what way? While votes were not unanimous, a majority—over 60% voted for the feast to be added to the universal calendar as a Sunday solemnity.

I noticed that the Catholic consultation departed from the desires expressed by delegates in the March report in two ways.

First, the brief from the Catholic consultation indicated that there is a desire to proceed with "a joint *institution* in 2025," to mark the centenary of Nicaea.⁵ While this was certainly discussed in March, the final report expressed that a 2025 goal is too ambitious. It proposed a compromise to sign a "joint *statement of intent*" in September 2025 instead, with possible implementation in 2026.⁶ The additional time will allow for ecumenical expansion and maximum participation. It did not seem that this was understood to be an option at the Catholic consultation.

Second, the March report urged more non-Western theological perspectives and participation with special attention to indigenous voices.⁷ The report noted that despite having representatives of the liturgical commission of the new Amazonian Catholic episcopal body (CEAMA) present in Assisi, their experience was not heard in the plenaries, beyond small group discussions. There was also no attention to the inculturation of the feast. This desire to diversify was not taken up by the Catholic consultation. The scientific committee at the Catholic consultation and the vast majority of speakers were from European and North American institutions.

4. "Catholic Seminar in Assisi—Feast of Creation—Concept Note." <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hWqtRq0LAXJYdscHg5JUMhnlz2yZVSf6GJhT9dZ6WA/edit?tab=t.0>. (accessed February 3, 2025); the full program is available here: "December Seminar, Assisi—Program (Detailed)." <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1abfnsMLzBe-rCKgTg2x170NZApW2WSzLeIkZNosChtM/edit?tab=t.0>. (accessed February 3, 2025)

5. "Catholic Seminar in Assisi—Feast of Creation—Concept Note," 1.

6. "Open Questions for Further Reflection—Expanded Version (Annex to the Assisi Report)" (2024), 6. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1g8ipNoqXYwv7dPuTags03dx7vU_sRMsf2g8oqW-w31c/edit?tab=t.0.

7. "Open Questions for Further Reflection—Expanded Version (Annex to the Assisi Report)," 4.

These observations lead me to the following reflections about the feast from a global Catholic perspective. I offer these comments here as invitations to, as Pope Francis says in *Fratelli Tutti*, “dream together,” especially with those who are not present.

I begin with “Time” as the beginning of a theology of creation and the foundation of the liturgical year which Teresa Berger brought to the forefront of the discussion in the Catholic consultation. We must dream here with those in the past and present, for the future. While creation, Christology, pneumatology, and trinitarian theologies were discussed, there was little said about eschatology. What might we at NAAL have to contribute to this conversation?

I echo the desire in the March report for more time to make this process to be more synodal and global. If, as suggested by Jos Moons and Robert Alvarez in one of the 2023 synod’s briefing papers, that liturgy is a way to experience a synodal church, then the synodal way must be reflected in the development of the liturgy for a eucharistic ecclesiology to take shape in the new feast.⁸ The process is as important as the outcome. A feast’s theological meaning and experiential impact are enhanced when the ethics of its historical process align with its theological intent and pastoral purpose. How might our knowledge of the historical development of the liturgy in different liturgical contexts—eucharistic and non-eucharistic (as may be needed in the Amazon)⁹—inform the current process?

Given today’s integral ecological crisis, where time (*chronos*) is commoditized in a global capitalist world, where those who cannot keep up are cast away, I also wonder if this feast is an opportunity to creatively interrupt our modern rhythms of life dictated by structures of sin. Could liturgical time, as a structural and theological remedy, bring us closer to *kairos*, not as a moment per se, but as found in the prologue of the Gospel of John, a theology that encompasses creation, Trinitarian theology and eschatology? How might we draw inspiration from disability communities, for instance, for decolonizing time in and through the liturgy, structurally, textually, and sensorially?

Lastly, Sunday is a theologically privileged day, but for many in the world, it is also a day that only the privileged enjoy. At the March gathering, Orthodox scholar Dr. Louk Adrianos concluded his presentation with the suggestion that “Happy Creation-mas” be the greeting for the feast of creation, similar to “Happy Christmas” for the Feast of the Nativity.¹⁰ Christmas is a solemnity, an octave, and a sea-

8. Jos Moons and Robert Alvarez, “Liturgy and Synodality: Theological Briefing Papers for the Synod 2023,” Synod Resources. <https://www.synodresources.org/258132/>. (accessed Feb 3, 2025)

9. Pope Francis, “‘Querida Amazonia’: Post-Synodal Exhortation to the People of God and to All Persons of Good Will” (2 February 2020). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html.

10. World Council of Churches, “A Liturgical Opportunity; an Ecumenical Kairos,” 11.

son. Its celebration is diffused and intertwined with daily life such that one who cannot attend Mass on Christmas day can nonetheless celebrate the incarnation with family at home or even at work. Could creation-mas be similar? What might creation-mas' liturgical landscapes and soundscapes look like all over the world?

Indeed, as was reiterated often during the consultation, we now find ourselves at *kairos* moment. But can we find time and space to enact a theology of *co*-creation towards a common celebration, with God and one another, especially the most vulnerable in the world?

Presidential Plenary Exploring an Ecumenical Feast of Creation

A Free Church Perspective and Attending to the Experience of Ordinary Worshipers

Sarah Kathleen Johnson

Sarah Kathleen Johnson is Assistant Professor of Liturgy and Pastoral Theology at the Saint Paul University in Ottawa.

I attended the March 2024 ecumenical conference in Assisi online in my capacity as the Mennonite Church Canada representative to the Consultation on Common Texts.¹ The positive energy around introducing the feast was palpable—even on Zoom, even at 5:00 am! Personally, as someone who serves as the Director of Anglican Studies at a Roman Catholic university, and whose tradition of origin and ordination is Mennonite, I am grateful for the ecumenical nature of this initiative and its potential to speak into my context, where “transformative leadership for the well-being of the planet” is one of three university priorities. In my brief time today, I will address the feast from two perspectives: a Free Church perspective, and from the perspective of ordinary worshipers.

A Free Church Perspective

How might Free Church traditions—such as Mennonites, Baptists, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals—relate to a potential Feast of Creation?² I must acknowledge upfront that Free Churches are likely to be *followers* rather than leaders in this ecumenical endeavor. This is certainly the case for Mennonite Church Canada and USA, where we face three challenges that are shared with many other Free Church traditions.

1. “A Liturgical Opportunity; An Ecumenical Kairos: An Emerging Consensus to Enhance the ‘Feast of Creation’ and Honour the Creator,” seminar report, Assisi, March 14-17, 2024, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/10rBHfy0GIJwvcyqxoS8kLmFhpqzyoQyW/view>.

2. In *Worship and Power*, an edited collection emerging from the Free Church Traditions meeting at the North American Academy of Liturgy, Andrew Wymer and I envision three defining characteristics of Free Churches: separation from civic intervention, local congregational autonomy, and individual voluntarism. Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Andrew Wymer, “Introduction: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions,” in *Worship and Power: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions*, ed. Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Andrew Wymer (Eugene: Cascade, 2023), 6-9.

First, there is *no centrally authorized liturgical calendar*. No one can determine which days and seasons a local congregation celebrates other than leaders in that local congregation. The implementation of the feast relies not on authorized bodies making decisions, but on good communication and robust resourcing directed toward local leaders, both lay and ordained.

Second, many Mennonite congregations and other Free Church communities have a *minimalist approach to the Christian year*. Most celebrate Christmas and Easter, and some mark other seasons and days. There are also certain communities that follow the Revised Common Lectionary (sometimes), which is one way that congregations may be invited into the celebration of this feast. However, in this minimalist context, the greater the weight given to the feast, and the celebration of the feast on Sunday, would be beneficial for its reception.

Third, many Mennonite congregations *mark a diversity of days in worship that are not related to the Christian year*: stewardship Sunday, Peace Sunday, Truth and Reconciliation Sunday, Christian camp Sunday, even Earth Day. These days can reflect important community connections and ethical commitments. In this context, the Italian distinction between *la Creazione* (God's act of creation of the cosmos)—Creation as theological mystery—and *il Creato* (the result of the act of creation)—Creation as the created universe—is important.³ Introducing a feast that is about telling God's story, that is about God's action, is distinct from marking a day that is primarily about caring for creation through human action. Focusing the feast on God's act of creation is an important corrective for Free Church traditions (such as my own) that may be eager to embrace an ethically oriented celebration. An emphasis on God's act of creation may also be a point of access for Free Churches that are unlikely to embrace a celebration seen to focus on social and ecological justice.

Despite these challenges, I hope efforts are made to engage Free Churches in celebrating a Feast of Creation, especially as Free Churches are growing and thriving in many regions of the world in a diversity of forms. I also hope that addressing the challenges associated with Free Churches might be an opportunity to enrich the experience of non-Free Church traditions. My hunch is that, even in traditions with a clear calendar focused on telling God's story, the distinction and connection between *la Creazione* and *il Creato* will be significant. Even in traditions that celebrate a fulsome Christian year, a Sunday celebration with greater weight would assist with widespread recognition. And even in traditions that can authorize a feast, good communication and robust resourcing would support its thoughtful and contextual reception.

3. "A Liturgical Opportunity; An Ecumenical Kairos," 15.

Attending to the Experience of Ordinary Worshipers

While we can designate a Feast of Creation as liturgists and church leaders, how might ordinary worshipers relate to a potential feast? Much of my research focuses on listening deeply to the lived experience of ordinary worshipers, especially those whose perspectives have rarely been considered in liturgical studies, including occasional religious practitioners,⁴ young people, and simply people in the pews. A striking pattern in this research is the *absence* of connection between ordinary lived experiences of Christian liturgy and attention to God as Creator or the call to care for a creation of which we are part. I will share two specific examples, first from the Anglican Diocese of Toronto and second from the binational Young People and Christian Worship project.

In focus groups, more than 500 active lay people in the Anglican Diocese of Toronto were invited to imagine their local parish and the diocese five years in the future as having new life, and to consider what changes are necessary to get there.⁵ In response, many people describe changes to the liturgical life of their local parishes. Practices of worship are central to their experience of being the church, and to their vision for the future of the church. In contrast, attention to creation is not, nor do participants make a connection between liturgy and creation.⁶

This absence is especially striking in the Anglican Church of Canada where, at the national level, “to steward and renew God’s creation” is one of five transformational aspirations.⁷ At the diocesan level, “creation care” is also a stated and resourced priority.⁸ Furthermore, in 2013 the Anglican Church of Canada baptismal covenant was revised to include a commitment “to safeguard the integrity of God’s creation, and respect, sustain and renew the life of the Earth,” which is now repeated multiple times annually.⁹ Despite these formal efforts, lay Anglicans in Toronto do not speak about creation when envisioning liturgical renewal in their parishes or a vibrant future for the church, for themselves and future generations.

4. Sarah Kathleen Johnson, *Occasional Religious Practice: Valuing a Very Ordinary Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025).

5. I was an adjunct member of the consulting team giving leadership to this visioning process. While I did not design the research process, I was responsible for qualitative coding and analysis of the data. Anglican Diocese of Toronto, “Cast the Net: A Strategic Visioning Process for the Diocese of Toronto” (2024), <https://www.toronto.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CastTheNet-Report-web.pdf>.

6. The code “relationship to creation” occurs only 7 times in the context of 4,695 coded segments. In contrast, “liturgy” occurs 198 times and “younger people,” the most frequent code, occurs 296 times.

7. Anglican Church of Canada, “A Changing Church. A Searching World. A Faithful God. Five Transformational Commitments for Our Church” (2023), <https://changingchurch.anglican.ca/>.

8. Anglican Diocese of Toronto, “Creation Care,” accessed April 11, 2025, <https://www.toronto.anglican.ca/diocesan-life/social-justice-advocacy/creation-care/?lang=en>.

9. Anglican Church of Canada, *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 159.

A second example: over the past year, Nelson Cowan, Emily Snider Andrews, and I have undertaken an ecumenical, binational, multisite, mixed-methods study of how teenagers and emerging adults experience Christian worship.¹⁰ Those of you who are part of the Contemporary and Alternative Worship Seminar and the Free Church Traditions Post-Meeting will hear more about this study during this meeting.¹¹ Among other data, the first phase of research included focus groups with 187 highly religious teenagers, and individual interviews with 69 highly religious emerging adults in six different geographic regions and Christian traditions.

We are in the very early stages of analyzing this data. However, in a simple word search of focus group and interview transcripts, “creation” is mentioned only 5 times and God is named as “Creator” just 4 times.¹² Comments on God “creating” or of the world as “created” are rare. “Climate” and “environment” are never mentioned in relation to the earth. Young people are *not* making a connection between their current liturgical experience and creation or God as Creator. When asked to envision “the best worship service ever” they also do not make this connection. This absence is especially striking in relation to the emphasis at the recent Catholic seminar on engaging young people through the Feast of Creation.¹³

These two examples show that active lay Anglicans in Toronto and highly religious young people across Canada and the United States do not connect their current liturgical experience, or their vision for liturgical renewal, to God as creator

10. The purpose of the Young People and Christian Worship (YPCW) study is to listen deeply to how teenagers and emerging adults (aged 13-29) experience public Christian worship in a range of liturgical expressions—Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical, and charismatic. This is a binational (Canada and the United States), multi-site, mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative), ecumenical study that incorporates social scientific and theological methods. The first phase of qualitative research took place during the summer of 2024 at six summer programs held on university campuses for high school students that are focused on Christian worship. Research included focus groups with high school students (185 participants), individual interviews with emerging adults (69 participants), a short survey (155 responses), and participant observation of worship services (29 days, 38 liturgies). Samford University Center for Worship and the Arts and Saint Paul University, “Young People and Christian Worship: Experiences, Stories and Values,” accessed April 11, 2025, <https://www.samford.edu/worship-arts/research>.

11. Nelson Cowan, Emily Snider Andrews, and Sarah Kathleen Johnson, “Understanding Young Worshipers through Mixed-Methods Research: Introducing the Young People and Christian Worship (YPCW) Study,” presentation in the Contemporary and Alternative Worship Seminar, North American Academy of Liturgy, Valparaiso, IN, January 4, 2025; Emily Snider Andrews and Sarah Kathleen Johnson, “Young People and Christian Worship: Free Church Connections,” presentation at the Free Church Traditions Post-Meeting, North American Academy of Liturgy, Valparaiso, IN, January 5, 2025.

12. These absences are notable in the context of more than 202,000 words of focus group and interview transcripts.

13. “The Feast of the Mystery of Creation in Christ: A Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Exploration from the Roman Catholic Perspective,” seminar report, Assisi, December 6-7, 2024, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/17pxJ9PPTJe1ukYS73xEYYNUGu0Djz26/view>, 30.

or attention to creation. Introducing a feast may be one way to begin to make this connection. However, we must also be cautious about this claim.

Feast of Creation as Germinal Ritual

Later today, I am sharing a paper coauthored with Joshua Zentner-Barrett in a joint meeting of the Liturgy and Cultures and Critical Theories and Liturgical Studies Seminars.¹⁴ In this paper, we develop a theology of *germinal ritual* drawing on the parables of Jesus, botanical science, ritual theory, and a qualitative study of a diffuse visual art installation in which ceramic feathers were distributed to every parish in the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa as a symbol of a commitment to truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.¹⁵

Germinal ritual is a way of thinking theologically about the relationship between liturgy and ethics. Germinal ritual describes ritual acts that are seeds—that are small beginnings; that are planted in different soils—that yield varied outcomes dependent on context; that grow as wheat among weeds—that coexist with contradictory rituals; and that grow in stages in secret—depending on human agency, while operating beyond human awareness and control. A theology of germinal ritual can help us avoid putting either too much or too little weight on these practices.

It may be helpful to consider a Feast of Creation as a germinal ritual. It is a small beginning for engaging the fullness of a theology of Creator God and the overwhelming reality of a climate in crisis. It will be received in different ways in different contexts—in some, flourishing, and in others, withering. It will coexist with contradictory and competing rituals—in liturgical structures that are anthropocentric and colonial. It will grow—or not—in ways that we cannot fully control or understand. How can we both recognize the limitations, and embrace the potential, of the unique opportunity to introduce an ecumenical Feast of Creation?

14. Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Joshua Zentner-Barrett, “Germinal Ritual: Can Liturgical Practices Seed Social Transformation?” presentation in the Critical Theories and Liturgical Studies Seminar and Liturgy and Cultures Seminar, North American Academy of Liturgy, Valparaiso, IN, January 3, 2025.

15. More context for this case study can be found in Sarah Kathleen Johnson, “Looking and Listening for Lived Theologies of Truth and Reconciliation: Learning from a Diffuse Art Installation in the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 40:2 (2024): 176-192.

Introduction of the *Berakah* Recipient

Nathan P. Chase

Nathan Chase (1990-2025) was Assistant Professor of Sacramental and Liturgical Theology at Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri. A lengthier biography appears with his article in Part 3.

It is an honor to introduce this year's Berakah recipient, Teresa Berger, and it is only fitting that I begin my introduction inviting all of creation to join us in this encomium of our esteemed colleague, from the star dust to bacteria, from the minerals that make up our planet to the elephants that wander the savanna, from the zeros and ones of code to the angelic choirs of heaven, from the wildflowers of the meadows to the creatures of the sea. However, I would be remiss to fail to announce this festal day particularly to the bees, since according to ancient custom, particularly in Germany, people would announce to the bees feast days and special celebrations. And so to the bees I say: "Bieneli, freuet euch! Teresas-Tag ist da! [Little bees, rejoice! Teresa's day is here.]"

I will never forget my first interaction with Teresa, which was while I was a graduate student working for Pray Tell blog. I had been tasked with reaching out to the contributors, and she was one of the first people on my list. By that point in time, I had read some of her work and also saw the @yale.edu pop up with her email. I was thoroughly intimidated. What should have been a quick-to-write email asking a simple question, took at least 30 minutes as I read and reread the email about 12 times. Her response came shortly after and, as has always been the case, was extremely kind and gracious. This is one of the hallmarks of Teresa, her kindness and graciousness, especially to younger scholars.

As I read more of Teresa's work, I started to think about the trajectory of her scholarship, the breadth of which is truly immense, spanning Methodist hymnody and Tractarianism, women and gender in worship and the construction of liturgical history, to more recently migration, cyberspace, and cosmic worship. Throughout each work, you can hear a prophetic voice, a voice concerned: for those on the margins of history and the church, for the voiceless, for practices and pieties deemed outside the so-called norm. For me, and likely many in this room, Teresa has always been a prophetic voice in a Church in need of such voices, and likewise on the cutting edge of scholarship in the academy.

Among her more recent books, *@Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* published in 2018 took up the way God moves among the pixels. It asks questions about digital mediation. Two years later what was a largely scholarly discussion about liturgy and digitality became an issue of dire pastoral need with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were all now wrestling theologically and pastorally with what Teresa had already engaged in *@Worship*.

Prophetic.

Her current work *Benedicite*, seeks to de-center humans in the story of creation, noting the way in which all of creation praises and worships the Creator. It is written in response to climate change and the humanmade collapse of our planet. Nearly every day we can read on the news the death of a glacier or the imminent collapse of the Atlantic Ocean currents or another tragic event for our planet.

Prophetic.

Of course, one cannot forget her earlier works, like *Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History*, which pushed the field, especially liturgical historians, to look for the voices of women in history and to see the gendered reality of our historical narratives.

Prophetic.

Throughout her work and her mentorship and in her personal interactions with her colleagues, Teresa has been a source of humor and joy, asking questions and proposing lines of inquiry that most could never conceive. It is her breadth of knowledge of the sources, both the well-known ones and the fragments from the voices often ignored or silenced by history, that makes her questions and comments so insightful.

Having been graced by pictures of gorgeous blooming flowers from her garden this past year, I think her garden perfectly symbolizes her and her work. I once remarked that while each of the individual pictures of the flowers she sent me in her garden were stunning, I imagined the experience of her garden *in toto* was a thing of true beauty. She replied, “I know that nothing will convince you that my garden isn’t this gorgeous place (and this [latest] photo won’t help) but overall it is a small, wild, mostly neglected place! I am just very attentive to the little beauties that do emerge there.”

Teresa, the breadth of your scholarship and work has not been small or neglected—though perhaps to some (though not me) a bit wild! In any event, your support of the voiceless, the marginalized, and the way you are providing a voice to the cosmos “groaning in labour pains until now” (Rom 8:22), you have been attentive to the little beauties—the little gems and quieted voices in history, the

fragments that others have passed over, and the paths that others have feared to go down. Altogether, you have created a beautiful garden, scholarly and otherwise, that sings in harmony with all of creation to God our Creator.

Thank you. Thank you for your work.

THE NORTH AMERICAN
ACADEMY OF LITURGY

Awards to

Teresa Berger

THE 2025 BERAKAH

*A transoceanic traversing brought you to a place
to take root and flourish,
reaching across ecumenical borders,
guiding us to look more closely
at worship held in women's hands.
Our own hands are raised higher
as you lead us, in holy Wisdom,
from ancient manuscript to unprobed digital vastness.*

*With grateful prayers we bless you, God, for the gift of Teresa.
We bless you, we thank you, Teresa, for imparting your gifts to us.*



Berakah Response

Liturgical Studies on a Planet in Peril: Reconceiving the “Cosmic” in Worship

Teresa Berger

Teresa Berger is Professor Emerita of Liturgical Studies and the Thomas E. Golden Jr. Professor Emerita of Catholic Theology at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

Thank you, Nathan, for your lovely introduction.¹ Thank you, North American Academy of Liturgy and especially NAAL President Kimberly Belcher, for this Berakah Award. Thank you, all of you, for being here. And a particular thank you to those colleagues who traveled across the Atlantic for this NAAL annual meeting.

I wish to acknowledge, before delving into this Berakah Address, that I have long considered after-dinner speeches to be a lofty form of academic torture. In case you share this view, I have embraced three strategies for tonight to help alleviate feelings of affliction. First, I aim to limit my time to no more than half an hour of speaking. Second, I will not read to you, since this would come too close to the performance of bedtime reading. Instead, I will speak more freely, from notes. Third, my accompanying PowerPoint is less focused on information, and instead aims to be a visual invitation. Many of the images you will see invite you to encounter members of my primary worshipping community. This primary worshipping community encompasses everything created within the Quinnipiac River Watershed, home of the Quinnipiac and other Algonquian-speaking peoples, a region now known as the State of Connecticut. Think of the images you will see on the screen as akin to a visual congregational roll call. Fittingly, this congregational roll of all creation as it surrounds me in my specific location begins with a photo of a praying mantis, one of my favorite fellow worshippers.

With that, I am already in the heart of my presentation tonight, which centers on the epistemic transformation required as we both worship and practice the schol-

1. I wish to acknowledge here what I did not think appropriate to acknowledge publicly at the Berakah Award dinner itself on January 4, 2025, namely, the immense gift that Nathan's Introduction was to me. I knew that Nathan had had to videotape his message in a hospital room (with all that that meant), and he was already visibly marked by the illness that would take his life only eight weeks after the Berakah Award night. I will forever treasure the fact that Nathan took on the labor of introducing me, and the deep thoughtfulness, profound generosity, and delightful wit with which he fulfilled this task.

arly labor of liturgical studies on a planet now clearly in peril. My particular focus, for this epistemic transformation, will be on the need to re-conceive the vision of who constitutes the worshipping assembly. To put the argument as succinctly as possible: We must widen our vision, as scholars of liturgy, beyond the ritual lives of human earthlings. Essentially, this will mean to reconceive worship within a vast, multi-creaturely assembly of everything called into being by the Creator who alone is God. This multi-creaturely assembly of everything created is the only true ground of a cosmic vision of worship—a vision that in liturgical studies has often been thought of primarily as a human-and-angelic endeavor.

How to get to such a reconception of what is “cosmic” in worship? How to render my claim intelligible, and legible within the knowledge protocols of liturgical studies? I begin the attempt at an answer with where liturgical studies has often begun, namely with a liturgical text. In this case, it is a text—and a theology of worship in it!—proclaimed whenever Eucharistic Prayer III is prayed at a Roman Catholic Mass today: “All you have created rightly gives you praise.”² The priest-presider addresses God with these words upon the conclusion of the *Sanctus*, which, as scholars of liturgy love to stress, situates the gathered assembly in a grand communion with heavenly powers, angelic hosts, and all the saints. Not infrequently, this claim is couched in the language of a cosmic dimension of worship. The prayerful affirmation that follows the *Sanctus* in Eucharistic Prayer III, however, vastly expands this (supposedly cosmic) communion beyond the heavenly and human realms, into a truly cosmic, that is, an all-encompassing vision: “*All* you have created rightly gives you praise.”³ In other words, everything created—“*omnis a te condita creatura*” (as the Latin original has it)—constitutes the primary and ultimate worshipping assembly. This is a challenging theology of worship indeed, challenging because if we follow its lead, any human gathering for worship must be envisioned within this larger assembly of everything created, that is, within the whole cosmos. Concretely this means, for example, that the *ecclesia orans*, the praying church, beloved subject of the 20th-century Liturgical Movement, must be reconceived as a part of, and indeed embedded in the primordial worship of God by all that exists. Worship here comes to be understood as a posture of all creation, and of human beings as creaturely kin with everything that is. Obviously, such a vision of worship puts pressure on what human worshippers—never mind scholars of liturgy!—typically think of as worship, or of what it means to “go to church.”

2. *The Roman Missal: English Translation according to the Third Typical Edition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 650. The (failed) 1998 English Missal translation rendered the Latin phrase as “all creation rightly gives you praise,” simply following the earlier translation of the 1975 edition of the Sacramentary for Mass. The 2011 English-language Missal with its decidedly Latinate style followed the original Latin text more closely. In the Spanish-language Missal for the U.S. Church, *Misal Romano, tercera edición*, the text reads “y con razón te alaban todas tus criaturas.”

3. Emphasis mine.

With this challenge before us, I want to do two things in the time that remains. First, I will offer some glimpses from within the (Catholic) liturgical tradition of this theme. Secondly, I will ponder why liturgical studies has not foregrounded this theme more strongly, or, to put this differently, why both our practices of worship and our scholarly field have been so deeply anthropocentric in modern times.

A clarification is necessary to begin with. The desire to unearth a cosmic, primordial view of worship certainly is called forth at least in part by contemporary realities, namely life and worship on a planet in peril. This peril is human-made, no less. In light of this reality, I consider it critically important today to re-center worship in a reality that did not emerge only when *Homo sapiens* evolved from hominid predecessors around 300,000 years ago. Such a narrow vision of worship as a dialogue primarily between God and human beings seems deeply troubling given the world we live in. Equally troubling is the fact that we, gathering as liturgical scholars and practitioners, do so in the United States of America, the biggest carbon polluter in history.⁴ This country pumps more crude oil than any other country in history. And it continues to be the largest perpetrator of greenhouse gas emissions, when measured per capita. Worst of all, ecological steps in the right direction over the previous four years are currently being undone, and that at a truly atrocious pace. As scholars of liturgy mostly based in the U.S., we cannot and must not greenwash the location in which we live and work, but rather name it, own it as a part of our social location, and lament. One way, as scholars, to name and own our location is to re-think, intentionally, the origin story of worship we tell today, and to begin again *in principio*, with the dawn of time, when the morning stars began to sing.⁵ And lo' and behold, as we seek to re-tell this origin story of worship, we encounter Christians of pre-modern centuries who knew this origin story quite well. It is our "modern" worldview that has forgotten much of this story.

Here are some glimpses of a genealogy of a vision of worship in communion with everything created. This vision is traceable in Jewish and Christian sources since earliest times. The conviction that everything created worships the Creator God is clearly present in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., in Gen 1, where the cosmos is imaged as sanctuary; in Gen 2, where the garden of Eden appears as a holy place; in Psalm 148 where all creatures form a double choir praising the Creator; and in the creation story embedded in Job 38). The same conviction also comes into sharp view in the New Testament in the hymns embedded in the book of Revelation (Rev 4-5). The vision of worship in communion with everything created is expressed at length and with particular power in a text found in the Greek additions to the book of Daniel (Dan 3:57-90). This text comes to be known in the Christian tradition

4. Details, for example, in this article in the *New York Times*: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/01/climate/us-biggest-carbon-polluter-in-history-will-it-walk-away-from-the-paris-climate-deal.html>.

5. See the third creation story of the Hebrew Bible, embedded in Job 38.

as a prominent liturgical text, the *Benedicite*. I here highlight the *Benedicite* in particular, not only because I cherish this text but also because not everybody may be familiar with its stunning invitation to praise. The text, after all, is relegated to the so-called Apocrypha in other than Catholic and Orthodox Bibles.

The *Benedicite* opens by calling on everything created, the “works of the Lord,” to bless the Creator God: *Benedicite, omnia opera Domini, Domino*—“Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord” (Dan 3:57).⁶ In the book of Daniel, this clarion call to worship issued to all creation does not emerge from within a sanctuary or even a beautiful garden, but rather from within a fiery furnace, human-built to devour and to destroy. It is hard not to see resonances here with the contemporary ecological crisis. Planet Earth, after all, is warming rapidly around the globe, and this global warming is fueled by human activity, above all by intensified carbon dioxide emissions. But back to the ancient text. Here is a quick look at the multi-creaturely round of worshippers called upon to praise God in the *Benedicite*’s congregational roll call:

The heavens; and the angels of the Lord
the waters that are above the heavens
sun and moon; and stars of heaven
every shower and dew; and all winds
fire and heat; cold and chill
dews and hoar frosts; frost and cold
ice and snow; nights and days
light and darkness; lightning and clouds
the earth
mountains and hills; everything growing from the earth
seas and rivers; fountains
whales and all that move in the waters; fowls of the air
beasts and cattle; human beings
Israel; priests of the Lord, servants of the Lord; spirits and souls of the just; holy men
of humble heart; Ananias, Azaria, and Misael.

I note that the *Benedicite*’s list of worshippers is clearly ordered. First come the elements above: angels, the heavens, waters above the heavens, powers, sun and moon, and stars of heaven. These are followed by elements that are weather-related and/or time-stamped, e.g., shower, dew, winds, fire and heat, nights and days, light and darkness. The third part of the list turns to all that is on Earth, while the fourth part calls specifically on human beings to find their place in this all-encompassing praise of the Creator. What Richard Bauckham has stressed about Psalm 148 applies to the *Benedicite* too: The fact that human beings are named at the end

6. Biblical references are from the *New American Bible*, Revised Edition (Charlotte, NC: St. Benedict Press, 2008).

of the invitation to praise suggests that there is a cosmic praise of God that human beings are called to enter into and to join.⁷

The knowledge of worship as a multi-creaturely endeavor flows quite naturally from the Jewish into the emerging Christian tradition. Thus, for example, both Psalm 148 and the psalm-like text in Dan 3 occupy places of prominence in early Christian liturgical patterns, in daily prayer as well as in sacramental practices. And witnesses to worship as a multi-creaturely endeavor continue well beyond the reception of biblical texts. Tertullian's *De Oratione*, a treatise on the Lord's Prayer, offers an example from the turn of the third century. At the end of his treatise, Tertullian writes in his succinct Latin: "*orat omnis creatura.*" That is, "all creatures pray," or, "the whole creation prays."⁸ Tertullian, in fact, lifts up the prayer life of animals in order to call his human audience into more consistent and deeper prayer. He emphasizes:

The whole creation prays. Cattle and wild beasts pray, and bend their knees, and in coming forth from their stalls and lairs look up to heaven, their mouth not idle, making the spirit move in their own fashion. Moreover the birds now arising are lifting themselves up to heaven and instead of hands are spreading out the cross of their wings, while saying something which may be supposed to be a prayer.⁹

The same conviction, without Tertullian's implicit shaming of human worshippers, appears in other early Christian texts, e.g., the so-called *Apostolic Tradition*, the Anaphora of St. James, and the baptismal *Catecheses* of Theodore of Mopsuestia. It is sounded again and again in hymnic texts, such as the *Phos Hilaron*. This ancient evening hymn culminates in an acknowledgement of the worship of everything created, although this often ends up lost in translation: "therefore, the cosmos glorifies You" (Διὸ ὁ κόσμος σὲ δοξάζει).¹⁰ To mention only one additional example from the early centuries, and it is a particularly lovable example to me, Ambrose of Milan claims in his *Hexameron* that even dragons give praise to the Lord.¹¹

7. See Richard Bauckham, "Being Human in the Community of Creation: A Biblical Perspective," in *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation*, ed. Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 15-47, here 44.

8. Tertullian, *De Oratione* 29. Latin text and English translation in Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Tract on the Prayer* (London: SPCK, 1953), 40f.

9. Tertullian, *De Oratione*, 29.

10. Translation mine. John Keble's well-known translation of the hymn into English, "Hail Gladdening Light," is problematic at that point. The "cosmos" is rendered as merely "all the world." The text is widely available; I quote it here from *The Heart in Pilgrimage: A Prayerbook for Catholic Christians*, ed. Eamon Duffy (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, rev. ed. 2014), 73.

11. See Ambrose of Milan, *Hexameron*, II.4.17. English text in St. Ambrose, *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, transl. John J. Savage, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 42 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985).

The theme of worship as a multi-creaturely endeavor continues to be present in the Christian tradition. It is best known of course from the life of St. Francis of Assisi, although the poverello deserves to be rescued from the exceptionalism that is regularly forced upon his creation-attuned spirituality. The attention given to St. Francis' creation-attuned spirituality also often occludes the doxological thrust of this spirituality. Take only the famous passage in Thomas of Celano's first *vita*, written a couple of years after Francis' death in 1226. Thomas of Celano narrates the story of Francis preaching to the birds. In this passage, however, Thomas records not only that Francis preached to the birds, but also that Francis encouraged all creation to praise the Creator. This is a key part of the story that often remains untold. Thomas of Celano writes:

Among many other things, he [Francis] said to them: "my brother birds, you should greatly praise your Creator, and love Him always." ... After the birds had listened so reverently to the word of God, he began to accuse himself of negligence because he had not preached to them before. From that day on, he carefully *exhorted all birds, all animals, all reptiles, and also insensible creatures, to praise and love the Creator.*¹²

The conviction that everything created praises God continues to sound even after the dawn of modernity, although the sites where this sound can be heard begin to contract. And with that contraction noted, I move to a brief look at our scholarly field, liturgical studies, which emerges precisely at the same time as this contraction becomes quite noticeable.

You might wonder, as I have done: Why has the understanding of worship as a multi-creaturely endeavor largely been occluded in modern times? Why did scholars and practitioners of liturgy in modern times so intently focused on worship as an encounter between God and "man," or, more recently: human beings? Why were all created others, also called into worship, buried under the weight of modern assumptions of who counts as a liturgical subject? Granted, in Catholic liturgy at least, the angels and archangels, and all the hosts and powers of heaven continue to be acknowledged as worshipping subjects,¹³ even if at a somewhat cloudy distance, conceptually. All other creaturely beings, however, with whom human earthlings cohabit on this planet—think only of the sparrow and the swallow that nest in God's temple (Psalm 84:4), or the bees that are hymned in the *Exsultet* in the Easter Vigil—were no longer registered as ritual subjects and active participants in worship. More broadly still, most other created elements known to bless the Creator in the *Benedicite*, such as the sun, moon, and stars, fire and heat, ice and snow, mountains and hills, were relegated to the realm of poetic extravagance.

12. Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis," in *The Saint*, vol.1: Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, ed. Regis J. Armstrong et al. (New York: New City Press, 1999), 171-308, here 234; emphasis mine.

13. This is true not least in several of the Prefaces in the current Roman Missal in their lead-up to the *Sanctus*. More on this in Joris Geldhof, "Fruit of the Earth, Work of Human Hands, Bread of Life: The Ordo Missae on Creation and the World," in *Full of Your Glory: Liturgy, Cosmos, Creation*, ed. Teresa Berger (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019), 245-265, here esp. 254-257.

My particular suspicion is that the 18th-century context in which the scholarly field of liturgical studies emerged shaped this field with a decisive loss from sight of the created universe as the work of the Creator, and therefore as everything created turning to the Creator in thanksgiving and praise. That loss had been on the horizon since early modernity, but for liturgical studies, this meant a focus on human beings as the central subjects of scholarly attention just as the field emerged as a scholarly subject in its own right. Liturgical studies, with its inception as a university-based discipline in the 18th century, clearly was shaped at a time of heightened focus on the human subject and its (supposed) autonomy. The scope of what mattered in worship shrunk at that point in time. Not only angels, arch-angels, and demons but also celestial luminaries, planets and stars, animals, and other life-forms receded into the background. Culturally, this was also a point in time when Enlightenment thinkers sought to delineate strict boundaries between rational faith and science on the one hand, and practices of popular piety and so-called “magic” on the other. Did thinking about liturgy too readily embrace its own identification with the side of rational faith, and with the anthropocentric focus that is its companion? Post-modernity and post-secularity have weakened the interpretive power of these quintessentially “modern” assumptions, but in liturgical studies at least, modern conceptions of the self and the world continue to hold sway. Now well into the 21st century, however, the “modern” subject, at least as a workable construct, is no more. Quintessentially modern construals of the self, and with them, images of a self that is stable, bounded, and self-determining are dated. Moreover, what happens to the perceiving human subject today when there are startling new revelations of perceiving subjects other than human ones?¹⁴ Think only of new insights in the last few months. We now know that elephants call family members by specific “names,” that is, sonic markers. And we have discovered that distressed plants send out ultrasonic lament signals that then make moths lay their eggs elsewhere than on the distressed plant. We also are increasingly aware of the limited perceptual powers of human beings. For example, human earthlings do not perceive electric fields that some other animals perceive. And we do not have 360-degree vision. The dragonflies with whom I co-habit in my bioregion do. Moreover, the sensory weaknesses of human perception shape our cognition throughout life. They also shape any construal of “facts,” since what human beings perceive as real is shaped by how we perceive and know in the first place. In light of all this, one may ask why contemporary theological and liturgical studies would not want to know, and would not want to re-think their own relentless and largely unquestioned privileging of the worshipping human subject?

Much more obviously needs to be said on that topic (and I hope that the book I am currently working on will do precisely that¹⁵), but for now, I conclude with three thoughts.

14. One book in particular has made waves in this regard: Ed Young, *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us* (New York: Random House, 2022).

15. The book-in-progress is simply entitled *Benedicite* for now. I hope to complete the manuscript early next year.

First, I simply wish to lift up the deep joy that comes with expanding notions of worship and of who counts in, as part of the worshipping assembly. I myself have certainly found both deep joy and joyful hope in immersing myself in the inter-creaturely worshipping community that surround me. I can only invite you into the experience of that larger communion, with the caveat that this is nothing that renders itself available in an instant. It requires much patience and attentiveness, dispossession of some key unwritten mantras of our field, and openness to sustained epistemic transformation. The concept of “guesting”¹⁶ helps along the path of such transformation, as I continue to ask: How do I experience myself as guest within the worship of all creation? And how do I myself guest the primordial worshippers, who have been at the labor of worship so much longer than I have?

A second point concerns the reality of our life on a planet on life support. We urgently must attend to the question of how to worship in the face of rapidly increasingly environmental devastation. And we must do so now. Scientists are unsure whether we have not already passed the tipping point for a sustainable future. Have we faced that reality in whatever we think of as “worship planning”? Surely, our capacity to lament within and for creation will have to grow exponentially, and at least as fast as melting glaciers and rising sea levels.

Finally, a note on the scholarly work of liturgical studies on a planet in peril. Liturgical studies may at first glance seem like the least practical, least effective, least decisive way imaginable to counteract ecological devastation, bleaching coral reefs, dying rain forests, disappearing species, drought, and noise pollution. However, upon second thought, what if at the heart of the created universe does indeed live the worship and praise of the Creator? And what if everything created finds its fulfillment in turning to this Creator God in worship? And what if such praise—even when emanating from a “mutilated world” (as Polish poet Adam Zagajewski¹⁷ has famously described it)—is precisely what will endure, beyond time? Then indeed, turning to worship, and the scholarly discipline of liturgical studies, centers everything else. And we of all human earthlings are the most blessed, because we dedicate ourselves to that knowledge. With that in mind, let us learn anew to say, with the three youth in the fiery furnace: *Benedicite, omnia opera Domini, Domino*.

16. See Kimberly Hope Belcher, who draws on Craig Satterlee’s reflections on “liturgical guesting,” in her “The Work of a Reconciling Academy: Apprenticing Ourselves to Our Broken Liturgies,” *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* (2024), online at <https://proceedings.naal-liturgy.org/index.php/naal/article/view/6/36>.

17. Adam Zagajewski, “Try to Praise the Mutilated World,” translated by Clare Cavanagh. Text available online at Poetry Foundation: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57095/try-to-praise-the-mutilated-world-56d23a3f28187>. Known as the 9/11 poem, “Try to Praise the Mutilated World” was initially published in *The New Yorker* post 9/11, but it was actually written before the events of that day.

President's Report

Kimberly Hope Belcher

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

Now for my report to the body gathered as the North American Academy of Liturgy at its annual meeting in Valparaiso, Indiana, and online, January 4, 2025.

We have important business this year, so I have to be brief, which is a mercy, since my heart is full. As you all know, I began thinking about the future of our academy working with the Emerging Scholars group; or rather, I began working with the Emerging Scholars group because I was thinking about the future of the academy. You see, I came to my first meeting in 2008 as a non-resident doctoral student with a toddler in tow, who couldn't afford the conference hotel. Your hospitality at that meeting was nonetheless overwhelming. It gave me the confidence to finish my struggling dissertation. This experience motivated me to figure out how to make *this* community's commitments to liturgical scholarship and practice more widely accessible, and to amplify a wider constituency's contributions as well. Bruce Morrill took me and spouse and baby Thomas (now in college) out to lunch in 2008, so obviously when he called to ask me to run for the Vice President's office, I had to agree.

You never do everything you hoped to do for an organization, but we have done so much together in the past few years. We weathered the financial storm of existing hotel contracts and maintained our relationships with one another during the pandemic. We updated the website and created webforms with a more streamlined way of communicating from the seminars to the academy committee and the whole membership. We moved our *Proceedings* journal to be open access and hosted on our website. We've done some remarkable fundraising, though this is mostly Michael Prendergast's work and, unexpectedly, Demetrio Yocum's. We've made progress on our goals for diversity and inclusion, though there is still much to do. We've met at a university in a financially sustainable way that lowers total costs for attendees, even though there is still more to do to make the academy meeting financially affordable for more students, contingent faculty, and pastoral ministers. In a few minutes, we are considering a proposal to update our membership process. Meanwhile, we've welcomed a *lot* of new members. Would everybody in the room or on Zoom that has been admitted to membership since 2020 raise your hand? Thanks to you newer members, and to all of you in this room, for sharing your gifts.

Thank you, North American Academy of Liturgy. Long may you flourish.



Part 2

Seminar Reports

The Advent Project

Convener: Suzanne W. Duchesne (dr.suzanne.w.duchesne@gmail.com) is Assistant Professor of Worship & Preaching and Director of Mast Chapel, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and an ordained Elder of the United Methodist Church.

Members in Attendance: Suzanne Wenonah Duchesne, Elise A. Feyerherm, Laura Moore, William Petersen

Visitors in Attendance: Victoria Larson

Description of Work: Our work this year included a paper by member William Petersen regarding the language and a theological conception of sovereignty within an Advent lens. In addition, members gave two presentations. The first from Laura Moore who provided Children's Resources for Expanded Advent and the second by Elise Feyerherm and Suzanne Wenonah Duchesne who shared experiences and strategies for introducing Expanded Advent within the seminary context. Our visitor Victoria Larson gave a third presentation regarding her work in Expanded Advent through, Barn Geese Worship.

Papers and Presentations:

- William Petersen: "The Advent of Deeper Understandings: A Christological Key to Participatory Sovereignty in the Divine Realm." This paper based was on the concept of "sovereignty" in the Divine Realm (Reign of God/Kingdom of Christ/Commonwealth of the Holy Spirit).
- Laura Moore: "Children's Resources for Expanded Advent."
- Elise Feyerherm and Suzanne Wenonah Duchesne: "Expanded Advent and the Seminary Context, Both Pedagogy and Praxis."
- Victoria Larson: "Extended Advent with Barn Geese Worship." This was a presentation sharing experiences creating and marketing extended Advent resources for mainline Protestant congregations mostly based in the US and Canada.

Other Work and Plans for the Future: Future plans include supplementing our website with a Google Page linked to the Facebook page, whereby we can provide updated documents from our past few years more readily.

This would include links to this year's presentation by Victoria Larson's Wild-goose website and Elise Feyerherm and Suzanne Wenonah Duchesne's presentation as strategies for introducing expanded advent to congregational and seminary

contexts. To continue providing resources for preaching and worship and children particularly Laura Moore's work.

For next year we anticipate exploring Hymnody and Expanded Advent: Joy to the world as a subversive advent hymn using possible resources such as the editions for the yearly lectionary cycles edited by Carl P. Daw Jr. and Thomas Pavlechko, *Liturgical Music for the Revised Common Lectionary Year* (New York: Church Publishing). We will expand upon hermeneutical considerations and homiletical lenses for preaching the Expanded Advent texts, consider how the calendar adapts to cultural conditions, and look at the emergence of the stress on Christmas as a holy day in Christian tradition. We also aim to explore other themes for Expanded Advent beyond the RCL, e.g., stories of annunciation from the Eastern church tradition, images, and topical sermon series. Another aim is to create a re-imagining of the Jesse tree for Expanding Advent and begin to develop and design Bible studies and group studies. In addition, Victoria Larson has been invited to come back at a future date to provide some insights from her dissertation about the Monastic understanding and conception of liturgical time relative to Advent.

Christian Initiation

Convener: Christina Ronzio (ciseminarnaal@gmail.com) is the Director of the National Liturgy Office (English Sector) of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the secretary to the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and the Sacraments.

Members in Attendance: Dennis Chriszt, Christina Condyles, Nicholas Denysenko, Lawrence Mick, David Pitt, Christina Ronzio, Vicky Tufano, Paul Turner, Stephen Wilbricht

Visitors in Attendance: Andreá Cummings, Byron DeAndre, Megan Effron, Justin Huyck, Kelli Joyce, Reed Miller, Christopher O'Brien, Jordan Sandrock

Description of Work: This year we spent time considering topics related to the recent release of the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Time was also dedicated to exploration of dissertation work by both members of the seminar and visitors as well as papers and works in progress for future publication.

Papers and Presentations:

- Christy Condyles: "Sacramental Personhood: Forming Christian Identity through the Sacraments of Initiation."
- Nicholas Denysenko: "Echoes of Nicaea: The Ministry of the Baptized in the Twenty-first Century."
- Kelli Joyce: "Christian Initiation and Liturgical Authority in Contemporary Episcopal Practice," taken from her dissertation work.
- Chris O'Brien: "Infant Communion in Roman Catholicism: Children and the Eucharist at the Council of Trent."
- Paul Turner: "Receiving the Baptized Candidate in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults."
- Stephen Wilbricht: "Baptism: The Foundation of a Synodal Church."
- *A Pastoral and Theological Commentary on the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Liturgy Training Publications, 2024): Introductory Essays.

Other Work and Plans for the Future: The seminar members discussed topics for exploration at the 2026 meeting, which could include: sacramental and liturgical elements of the Synod; the Holy Spirit and Christian initiation and how this relates to sacramental personhood, baptismal vows and ethical practices; conciliarity and Eastern Orthodox Christianity; Anglican Church of Canada's updated Christian initiation texts; creation and initiation; music and the rites of initiation.

Contemporary and Alternative Worship

Convener: The Rev. Nelson Cowan (ncowan@bu.edu) is director of the Center for Worship and the Arts at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

Members in Attendance: Adam Perez, Emily Snider Andrews, Glenn Stallsmith, Jim Marriot, Jonathan Ottaway, Lester Ruth, Nelson Cowan, Nicholas Zork, Noel Snyder, Sarah Kathleen Johnson

Visitors in Attendance: Anneli Loepp Thiessen, Clayton Faulkner, John Hermanson, Maren Haynes Marchesini, Sungguk Park

Description of Work: The members of and visitors to this seminar track historical and theological developments in contemporary worship (seeker services, praise-and-worship services, convergence worship, “blended” services, and alternative services and paradigms for worship). We research particular faith communities’ worship, as well as the general trends in worship and music styles, liturgical art, architecture, and seminary education for those preparing to become worship leaders in these worship settings, Protestant and Catholic.

Papers and Presentations:

- Nelson Cowan & Adam Perez, Short Communication: Introducing the Journal of *Praise & Worship* (JPW).
- Jim Marriot: “Inside-Out Liturgical Practices in LCMS Contexts.”
- Anneli Loepp Thiessen: “‘She shouldn’t be talking so much’: Women’s Musical Authority and the History of Contemporary Worship.”
- Lester Ruth: “A Eucharist That’s Truly Eucharistic: Emphasizing Corporate Praising as a Way to Elevate the Place of the Lord’s Supper in Pentecostal Congregations.”
- Alydia Smith: “What We Will Sing When We Sing a New Song: The Theological Framework of *Then Let Us Sing!*”
- Maren Haynes Marchesini & John Hermanson: “Are the Morning Stars Still Singing? Supporting New Hymnody in Bozeman, Montana.”
- Emily Snider Andrews, Nelson Cowan, and Sarah Kathleen Johnson: “Understanding Young Worshipers through Mixed Methods Research: Introducing the Young People and Christian Worship (YPCW) Study.”
- Glenn Stallsmith: “Congregational Intercessions and Contemporary Worship: A History of Incompatibility.”

- Jonathan Ottaway: “Dipping a Ladle in the Cauldron of Story: Assessing Worship Leadership as Gospel Narration.”
- Adam Perez: “An Update on CCLI for Future Research.”

Other Work and Plans for the Future: The 2026 meeting will be Nelson Cowan’s final year as convener and we will elect a new convener. We will also continue the rhythm of offering select papers for pre-reading. For 2026, we are considering a field trip for the Atlanta location and/or inviting prominent worship leaders in the area to speak with our group.

Critical Theories and Liturgical Studies

Convener: Sarah Kathleen Johnson is Assistant Professor of Liturgy and Pastoral Theology at Saint Paul University in Ottawa, Canada.

Members in Attendance: Tony Alonso, Kimberly Belcher, Stephanie Budway, Bryan Cones, Benjamin Durheim, Hansol Goo, Sarah Kathleen Johnson, Layla Karst, Richard McCarron, Tom McLean, Hyemin Na, Gabriel Pivarnik, Audrey Seah, Kristine Suna-Koro, Dave Turnbloom

Visitors in Attendance: Carl Bromley, Megan Effron, Chris Fahrenthold, Clayton Faulkner, Mirella Klomp, Benita Lim, Jordan Sandrock, Erik Sorensen, Marileen Steyn, Mykayla Turner, Byron D. Wratee, Joshua Zentner-Barrett

Description of Work: In 2025, the Critical Theories and Liturgical Studies seminar explored two themes—consumerism and trauma—in addition to welcoming work in progress. The first day focused on liturgy and consumerism with a panel on *Commodified Communion* by Antonio Alonso and a paper emerging from the SOIL project. The second day focused on liturgy and trauma with three papers at this intersection. It also included work in progress that coalesced around the theme of whether and how certain people and perspectives are marginalized in or through liturgical practices. The Critical Theories Seminar held a joint session with the Liturgy and Cultures Seminar that included two papers of interest to both groups. Several papers presented in the seminar incorporated qualitative theological methods.

Papers and Presentations:

Consumerism

- Marileen Steyn and Mirella Klomp: “Liturgies of Soil in a Consumption Culture: Challenging *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*.” Respondent: Bryan Cones.
- Book Discussion: Antonio Alonso, *Commodified Communion: Eucharist, Consumer Culture, and the Practice of Everyday Life* (Fordham University Press, 2021). Tony Alonso, Framing and Response.
- Gabriel Pivarnik, Chapter 1: The Resistance; Hansol Goo, Chapter 2: Listening for the Cry in a Consumer Culture; Tom McLean, Chapter 3: The Limits of Eucharistic Resistance.

Joint Session with Liturgy and Cultures

- Lorenzo Penalosa and Audrey Seah: “50 Years of the Misa Ng Bayang Pilipino.” Respondent: Ricky Manalo.

- Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Joshua Zentner-Barrett: “Germinal Ritual: Can Liturgical Practices Seed Social Transformation?” Respondent: Kai Ton Chau.

Trauma

- David Turnbloom: “Liturgy and Trauma.” Respondent: Mykayla Turner.
- Stephanie Budwey, “Trauma Informed Liturgy.”
- Kristine Suna-Koro: “Silence as Liturgical Space for Lament.”

Work in Progress

- Erik Sorensen: “Conflating Unity with Uniformity: Celebrating the Eucharist in the Context of Indigenous-Settler Reconciliation.” Respondent: Layla Karst.
- Benjamin Durheim: “Public Christianity and Hijacked Victimhood: Liturgical-Ethical Implications of a Socially Toxic Rhetoric.” Respondent: Hyemin Na.
- Layla Karst: “Knowing Her Place: Ritualizing Lay Catholic Eucharistic Preaching.”

Other Work and Plans for the Future: In addition to affirming a commitment to welcome work in progress, we identified two themes for 2026. First, we selected *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh (Duke University Press, 2018) as a common read (<https://www.dukeupress.edu/on-decoloniality>). Second, we identified *hospitality* as a theme to explore. We continue to welcome contributions in different forms including papers, short papers, and lightning talks.

Ecology and Liturgy

Convener: The Rev. Samuel Torvend, OblSB (torvensa@plu.edu) is Faculty Fellow in Humanities, Director of External Relations in the Center for Vocation, and Professor of Religion emeritus at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington.

Members in Attendance: Timothy Brunk, Lisa Dahill, Christopher Grundy, Mary McGann, Lawrence Mick, Gail Ramshaw, Susan Marie Smith, Benjamin Stewart, Samuel Torvend

Visitors in Attendance: Jill Maria Murdy, Mathew Verghese, Nancy Wright

Description of Work: Seminar members and visitors met in person and online to discuss papers that had been sent to them by the convener in early December. This is a standard practice of the seminar. In addition, members of the seminar offered reports on various projects and resources allied with the work of the seminar: Episcopal liturgical resources honoring God in Creation, a regional conference in the Pacific Northwest supporting a Year of Creation, the establishment of a sacred grove at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, and eco-liturgies celebrated at the Adrian Dominican Sisters Motherhouse in Adrian, Michigan. The semi-nar welcomed members of the Liturgical Language Seminar for a discussion of “Praying Green” with Gail Ramshaw. At the conclusion of the meeting, members discussed papers they hope to prepare for the 2026 meeting in Atlanta.

Papers and Presentations:

- Benjamin Stewart: “The Event of Creation and Anamnesis.”
- Timothy Brunk: “Liturgy, Ecology, and Consumerism: Liturgical Haecceity in the 21st Century.”
- Lisa Dahill: “Sacramental and Liturgical Eco-Theologies,” a chapter in the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook of Ecotheology*.
- Samuel Torvend: “Jesus in the Natural World,” a chapter in his forthcoming *Jesus in Nature: A Monastic Christology*.
- Gail Ramshaw: liturgical texts excerpted from her *Pray, Praise, and Give Thanks: Litanies, Laments, and Thanksgivings at Font and Table*.

Other Work and Plans for the Future: Members and visitors of the seminar hope to present the following at the Atlanta meeting:

- Timothy Brunk: a syllabus on Children, Liturgy, and Ecology.
- Christopher Grundy: a paper on the Sacred Grove at Eden Seminary.

- Nancy Wright: a paper on the white pine, a keystone species.
- Benjamin Stewart: a paper on the calendar.
- Lisa Dahill: a paper on interspecies communication.
- Samuel Torvend: a paper on reading the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture.

Environment and Art

Convener: Martin Rambusch (Martinr@rambusch.com) is an owner and project manager of Rambusch Decorating Company and an expert in the creation and conservation of built environment and artwork.

Members in Attendance: Daniel McCarthy, Martin Rambusch, Jan Robitscher

Visitors in Attendance: Jim Wetzstein

Description of Work: Two presentations were made. One by Jan Robitscher on the mosaics of St. Marks in Berkley and one by Daniel McCarthy on the Presbytery and locations of prominence within the worship space. Finally, a tour was given by James Wetzstein of the Chaple of the Resurrection.

Other Work and Plans for the Future: James Wetzstein will present his doctoral thesis on a mid-century wood sculpture. Daniel McCarthy will present his formal paper on historical liturgical arrangements. We will consider a location for a tour for 2026.

Feminist Studies in Liturgy

Convener: Chelsea Yarborough

This year the feminist/womanist working group took a pause to reconsider and imagine forward. This group has made incredible contributions to the academy and as a result, many of the methodologies that were previously housed solely in this group are spread throughout many working groups in the academy. As a result, this year we took a pause to reconsider what forward looks like as a working group and what other groups we can collaborate with in the future.

Formation in Liturgical Prayer

Convener: Rodica M. M. Stoiciu (rodicastoiciuphd@gmail.com) is currently an independent academic working with the VLCFF at the University of Dayton. She has taught at Mount St. Mary's University and the Washington Theological Union.

Members in Attendance: Stan Campbell, Bernadette Gasslein, Paul Janowiak, Anne McGuire, Roc O'Connor, Michael Pendergast, Margaret Schreiber, Rodica Stoiciu, Kyle Turner

Visitors in Attendance: None

Description of Work: The focus of the seminar this year was on liturgical prayer and the implementation of the Synod on Synodality. Seeding the conversation with an article from *America* on liturgical language and the Synod by Reese, we discussed how implementation of the Synod will require the use of prayer texts expressive of the ecclesial shifts of synodality and the need to make these texts accessible to the assembly. We chose to examine the collects of the 1998 Sacramentary as an example of readily available and accessible texts, especially the original ICEL prayers published as alternative collects. Discussion included the possible ways that these texts could find new life now in ways legitimate and constructive though not within the Eucharistic liturgy. This conversation was followed by a further discussion on formation for liturgical prayer, synodality and mystagogy. The vehicle for this conversation was a paper by Edward Foley, "Synodality through a Eucharistic Lens." Eucharistic liturgy is THE place where synodality is articulated as the central dimension of the Church and hence out of which the dynamics of hospitality, metanoia, participation, and mission occur. The discussion encompassed the need for a communion ecclesiology central to a reinvigorated eucharistic celebration and the primacy of liturgical formation as the grounding of and for the synodal Church.

Other Work and Plans for the Future: At this time the seminar plans to continue in the direction continued in this conversation, which was begun last year.

Homiletics

Convener: Timothy A. Leitzke (taleitzke@gmail.com) is the Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Valparaiso, Indiana.

Members in Attendance: Edward Foley, Jaewoong Jung, Timothy Leitzke, Andrew Wymer

Visitors in Attendance: Mina Choi, Lucas Christensen, Andrea Cummings, Megan Effron, Seyeom Kim, Victoria Larson, Sunguk Park

Description of Work: We shared the fruits of our research into decolonial modes of thinking and how those might inform our preaching. We also reviewed a visitor's dissertation proposal and provided constructive feedback for papers being prepared for publication.

Papers and Presentations:

- Timothy Leitzke: "How Can Preachers Use Luther in a Decolonial Multicultural Context?" This paper was part of the seminar focus on decoloniality, focused on coming to terms with Martin Luther's antisemitic legacy.
- Seyeom Kim: "Good News Preaching for the Church in the Margins: Preaching as Praxis for the Ecclesiological Gospel." This paper was a dissertation proposal, already accepted and now taking shape.
- Andrew Wymer: "Old Wine Skins and the Master's Tools: Decolonial Challenges and Possibilities." This paper was part of the seminar focus on decoloniality, focused on finding and formulating the questions we must ask.
- Edward Foley:
 - "Decolonialized Roman Catholic Homilizing in the U.S." This paper is part of the seminar focus on decoloniality, focused on using decoloniality as something toward which the Roman homily can aspire
 - "Multicultural Preaching Across Generations: A Proposal of Effective Preaching for Young Generations in the Great Dechurching." This paper was a proposal for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, seeking to form preaching to younger generations as preaching to all generations, focused on the church's teachings and not immediate cultural relevance.

Other Work and Plans for the Future: We will have open submissions next year, following a year of (some) thematic papers. Chapters and papers from Andrew Wymer, Seyeom Kim, and Mina Choi are scheduled already. All papers on homiletics, preaching, and the use of the Word in worship are welcome.

Issues in Medieval Liturgy

Convener and Chair: Daniel J. DiCenso (ddicenso@holycross.edu) is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Music at the College of the Holy Cross.

Members in Attendance: Daniel DiCenso, Margo Fassler, Barbara Haggh-Huglo, Christopher Hodkinson, Peter Jeffrey, Rebecca Maloy, Joanne Pierce, Samantha Slaubaugh, Kate Steiner, Michael Witzack, Anne Bagnall Yardley

Visitors in Attendance: Patrick Keyser, Victoria Larson, Lorenzo Penalosa, Theresa Rice

Description of Work: We had a wonderful exchange of ideas about papers and works in progress. We also had an important conversation with President Kim Belcher about keeping the NAAL accessible to graduate students, new scholars, etc., regarding in-person vs. online meetings and the cost of attendance, and the inclusivity and exclusivity of the banquet liturgy.

Papers and Presentations:

- Christopher Hodkinson: "A Hypothetical Reconstruction of a 7th Century Roman Mass." This paper presents a hypothetical reconstruction of the Mass of one of the Sundays after Pentecost as it might have existed in Rome in the seventh century, or at least prior to its Frankish reception and it offers an interpretation of the Mass formulary with reference to patristic exegesis. The paper suggests that the Masses of the post-Pentecost season may once have had the kind of coherent design that we find elsewhere in the temporal cycle.
- Michael Witzack: "The History of the Roman *Ordo Missae*." In this paper the author describes his ongoing project on the *Ordo Missae* and the *apologiae*, asking the question of how do the private prayers reflect the changing spirituality of the priest. He highlighted a recent edition of the prayers.
- Lorenzo Penalosa: "Theologies in the Prayers of Ordination of a Bishop: The Euchologion Barberini gr. 335 and the Veronese Sacramentary." This paper compares the theologies expressed in the prayers of ordination of a bishop in a Byzantine and Roman source. Through comparative analysis the paper reveals similarities and differences between the concept of ordination in the Byzantine and Roman traditions.
- Peter Jeffrey: "Work in Progress—edition and translation of *Ordo Romanus I*." Peter Jeffrey presents his work on editing and translating the *Ordo Romanus I* which exists in many sources. He offers two different possible formats for such an edition and led the seminar in a discussion on the merits of each.
- Rebecca Maloy: "Visigothic Liturgy on the Margins: Liturgical Texts in Visigothic Script Before the Tenth Century." This paper looks at liturgical

materials written into the margins of a set of early manuscripts in Visigothic script and examines their implications for the history of the Old Hispanic rite.

- Anne Bagnall Yardley: “The Fontevraud Liturgy in England: Evidence from Amesbury Priory.” This paper examines the known of the liturgy from its mother house. Using the summer breviary from Fontevraud Abbey as a point of comparison, the paper looks especially at the sequences of responsory chants for the Office of the Trinity, the Office of the Cross, and the Office of St. John Baptist in CUL Ee.6.16 from Amesbury priory.
- Samantha Slaubaugh: “Douceline’s Christmas Ecstasy at Hyeres.” This paper offers a close reading of the hagiographical account of Douceline, bringing liturgical expertise to bear on the interpretation of her rhapsodic experience. In particular the author focuses on the reference to the *Puer natus est* chant and other texts of the Christmas Mass.
- Kate Steiner: “Work in Progress—the Assumption Office at Worcester Cathedral.” This paper demonstrates the unique aspects of the Assumption Office in the Worcester antiphoner and the ways it shaped other Marian observances at Worcester cathedral. The author calls special attention to the responsory chant *Scandat thronum* and the use of its melody in a *Sanctus* in one of the Worcester Fragments.
- Daniel DiCenso: “Further Thoughts on Chant and Emotional Expression.” This paper offers an analysis of the different ways scholars do approach and could approach the question of emotional expression in the Franco-Roman chant tradition. Incorporating feedback from discussion at last year’s International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, the author takes into account how one might theorize emotional expression beyond text music relationships such as word-painting.
- Barbara Hagg-Huglo: “The Marian Office of the Order of the Golden Fleece Revisited.” This paper offers an update to the author’s 2007 article offering a wealth of archival material in support of a date of 1458 for the composition of this office. From its approval at the University of Leuven the author postulates that it was probably composed in northern Burgundian territory and possibly first sung at a meeting of the Order of the Golden Fleece in 1451.
- Margo Fassler: “Observations on some Cistercian Sequences.” This paper discusses the author’s work on Dominican and Franciscan sequences and presents a methodological approach to the study of sequentaries emphasizing the importance of identifying the geographical location and dating of each specific repertoire. The author then discusses her ongoing work on the Cistercian sequence repertoire.

Other Work and Plans for the Future: Call for papers, presentations, and works in progress for next year’s exchange. Continued concern about the accessibility of the academy, the high cost of attendance, and the inclusivity of all aspects of the meeting.

Liturgical Hermeneutics

Convener: E. Byron (Ron) Anderson (Ron.Anderson@garrett.edu) is the Styberg Professor of Worship and Associate Dean for Institutional and Education Assessment at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL.

Members in Attendance: Ron Anderson, John Baldovin (guest participant), Sangwoo Kim, Hwarang Moon, Melinda Quivik, Tom Schattauer, Michelle Whitlock

Visitors in Attendance: Lucas Christensen, Hansol Goo, Sungguk Park, Theresa Rice, Mykala Turner, Michael Wilke

Description of Work: The work of our first day focused on the question of an ecumenical liturgical hermeneutic, beginning with a session co-lead by John Baldovin and Tom Schattauer using the “On the Way to Full Communion: Thinking about Christian Unity from Liturgy” document produced by the NAAL “On the Way” seminar. A second session continued this conversation through a series of papers initially delivered at the 2023 congress of *Societas Liturgica*, which focused on liturgy and ecumenism. A final session on this theme was based a paper by Mykala Turner on liturgical space and local ecumenism. Our second day included three discussions—a chapter from Christine Gschwandtner’s *Reading Religious Ritual with Ricœur: Between Fragility and Hope*, a chapter by Melinda Quivik from work in progress on prophetic preaching, and the introduction to a collection of interviews with liturgical theologians developed by Hwarang Moon.

Papers and Presentations:

- “On the Way to Full Communion: Thinking about Christian Unity from Liturgy,” led by Tom Schattauer and John Baldovin. “On the Way” has been published in several venues, including *Liturgy* 39:3-4 (2024): 152-157.
- Three papers from the 2023 *Societas Liturgica* congress on Liturgy and Ecumenism, discussion led by Ron Anderson:
 - Ron Anderson: “‘Together Met, Together Bound’: Liturgy and Ecumenism,” *Studia Liturgica* 34 (2024): 6-20.
 - Ivana Noble: “Sharing of Liturgical, Theological, and Ecumenical Gifts: A Quest for a Method,” *Studia Liturgica* 34 (2024): 21-36.
 - Dorothea Sattler and Friederike Nüssel, “Receiving Each Other’s Gifts,” *Studia Liturgica* 34 (2024): 98-113.
- Mykala Turner: “Local Ecumenism and the Loss of Liturgical Space.”

- Christine Gschwandtner: “Liturgical Identity: Confession, Conversion, Community” in *Reading Religious Ritual with Ricœur: Between Fragility and Hope* (New York: Lexington Books, 2021), 155-176; discussion led by Michelle Whitlock.
- Melinda Quivik: “The Light in the Words.”
- Hwarang Moon: Introduction to *Worship in Conversation: Interviews with Liturgical Theologians* (forthcoming from Baylor).

Other Work and Plans for the Future: While we did not identify specific plans for next year, we may continue our discussion of an ecumenical liturgical hermeneutic, particularly looking at questions about the ecumenical liturgical movement in light of post-colonial critiques, continue our exploration of Gschwandtner’s *Reading Religious Ritual with Ricœur*, especially her chapter on imagination, and anticipate papers from several seminar members.

Liturgical Language

Convener: Jennifer Baker-Trinity (bakertrinityj@augsborgfortress.org) is Program Manager for Worship Resource Development, a joint position with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Augsburg Fortress Publishers. Augsburg Fortress is the publishing ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Members in Attendance: Jennifer Baker-Trinity, David Gambrell, Cheryl Lindsay, Gail Ramshaw, Martin Seltz

Visitors in Attendance: James Hart Brumm, Clayton Faulkner, Michael Wilke

Description of Work: Our seminar discussed the use of liturgical language through a paper about trinitarian imagery, a look at hymn translation, a wider discussion of metaphor, and the use of liturgical language at funerals. Overall, we continually examine questions around liturgical language in our worshiping assemblies, especially in work our members are doing in their denominations and congregations.

Papers and Presentations:

- Jennifer Baker-Trinity presented work in progress regarding a commission for new liturgical rite that is sensitive to those less connected to the church.
- Gail Ramshaw presented the chapter “The First Person, Figuratively Speaking” from her book *Mystery Manifest* (Fortress Press, January 2025). The seminar engaged in a discussion on how we address the first person of the Trinity in our liturgical speech was guided by questions prepared by David Gambrell.
- Martin Seltz presented “Translating Luther Hymns after 500 years,” and we discussed approaches to translating these historic texts.
- Visitor Michael Wilke presented a paper, “Non-Literal Language and Liturgy” that he prepared for his seminary studies.

Other Work and Plans for the Future: Our seminar had a robust joint seminar session with the Ecology and Liturgy Seminar. We looked at a compilation of liturgical texts, “Praying Green” by Gail Ramshaw, and considered how we pray, lament, and praise in ways that take seriously care of the Earth. We also chose a new convener, David Gambrell. As we look to future work, consideration of the proposed ecumenical “Feast of Creation” will merit discussion and new work in terms of language.

Liturgical Music

Convener: Carl Bear (editor@thehymnsociety.org) is Editor of *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song*.

Members and Visitors in Attendance: David Anderson, Carl Bear, Kim Belcher, Phillip Ganir, Alan Hommerding, Maren Haynes Marchesini, Jason McFarland, Mike McMahon, Anthony Ruff, Daniel Schlorff, Jonathan Tan, J. J. Wright, Victoria Zibell

Description of Work: The seminar engaged in discussion of papers, works in progress, and academic courses related to liturgical music. This included a joint session with Contemporary and Alternative Worship seminar.

Papers and Presentations:

- Phillip Ganir: “‘Think of How God Loves You’: James MacMillan’s Motet, Mystagogy, and Musicking as an Ethic for the Formation of the Child for Worship.”
- Maren Haynes Marchesini: “Are the Morning Stars Still Singing? Supporting New Hymnody in Bozeman, Montana.”
- Jason McFarland: “Brief Report on the Feast of Creation Seminar in Assisi and Discussion of Recommended Musical Texts or Settings.”
- Anthony Ruff: “Psalm Tones, from Gregorian to Contemporary: What Makes for a Good Psalm Tone?”
- Alydia Smith: “What We Will Sing When We Sing a New Song: The Theological Framework of *Then Let Us Sing!*”
- Jonathan Tan: “Discussion of *Handbook of Global Christian Song* (GIA, forthcoming).”
- J. J. Wright and Kimberly Belcher: “Introduction to and Experience of the ‘Rhythms of Faith’ Course at the University of Notre Dame.”
- Victoria Zibell: “A Mystagogical Study of Liturgical Texts Set to Music in Roman Catholic Liturgies.”

Other Work and Plans for the Future: The Seminar will continue its work of discussing recent and ongoing publications and projects related to liturgical music.

Liturgical Theology

Convener: Jan Schnell is Associate Professor of Liturgics at Wartburg Theological Seminary.

Members in Attendance: Julie Canlis, Cory Dixon, Doris Donnelly, Joris Geldhof, Kevin Irwin, Judith Kubicki, Benita Lim, Martha Moore-Keisch, Bruce Morrill, Neel Presa, Jan Schnell, Rhoda Schuler, Amy Schilfrin, Frank Senn, James Starke, Mark Taylor, David Williams, Andrew Wright

Visitors in Attendance: Clayton Faulkner, Marissa Sotos, Byron Wratee

Description of Work: Our seminar discussed two books: *Embodied Existence: our Common Life in God* (Pavol Bargar) and *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy: A General Treatise on the Theology of the Liturgy*, chapters 1, 11, and 21 (Cipriano Vagaggini). We also discussed five papers by seminar members.

Papers and Presentations:

- Joris Geldhof: "Systematic Heortology: A Proposal."
- Benita Lim: "The Eucharistic Theology of the Presbyterian Church of Singapore."
- Bruce Morrill: "Formation for and by the Liturgy: The Practical-Theological Challenge in Pope Francis's *Desiderio Desideravi*."
- Neal Presa: "We Believe: The Creed as Divine-Human Encounter: A Liturgical Reassessment."
- David Williams: "Toward a Transcultural Adventist Liturgical Theology."

Other Work and Plans for the Future: Looking ahead to the 2026 meeting, we decided to continue our pattern of reading two authors (one historic, one contemporary) and to adjust the pattern away from two full-length books and to one book and one article or chapter. We will continue discussing group members' works-in-progress. Four members (Julie Canlis and Mark Lloyd Taylor, Bruce Morrill, Amy Schilfrin) have expressed openness to offering papers in 2026. We are also interested in reflecting theologically on the NAAL Vice-Presidential addresses into the future. We will set aside time to discuss seminar work on a collaborative writing project.

Our historically-impactful author for 2026 will be: Marie Dominic Chenu (an essay).

Our contemporary author for 2026 will be: Bruce Morrill's *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue*.

Liturgy and Cultures

Convener: The Rev. Ruth A. Meyers (rmeyers@cdsp.edu) is Hodges-Haynes Professor of Liturgics at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, California, and a member of the Core Doctoral Faculty of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

Members in Attendance: Joseph Donella, Hansol Goo, Eunjoo Mary Kim, Don La Salle, Vincent (Ricky) Manalo, Nathaniel Marx, Ruth Meyers, Jonathan Tan, Julia Upton

Visitors in Attendance: Carl Bromley, Kai Ton Chau, Justin Huyck, Deborah Jungmi Kang, Lorenzo Penalosa, Brian Taberski

Description of Work: The 2025 meeting explored the intersection of liturgy and cultures, with a broad definition of cultures, including digital cultures, generational differences, multi-faith communities, and racial and ethnic differences. Participants offered updates on their work in progress: worship spaces shared by different faith communities; rites of re-interment; children's participation in the Roman Catholic Mass; development of a curriculum on cultural studies and worship; participation in live-streamed worship; worship in racially diverse congregations in the Episcopal Church; artificial intelligence; liturgy and authenticity; and the intersection of Korean shamanic *kut* and Christian worship. A joint session with the Critical Theories and Liturgical Studies seminar considered the *Misa Ng Bayang Pilipino* and a theory of "germinal ritual" using an ethnographic study of the truth and reconciliation process in a diocese of the Anglican Church of Canada.

Papers and Presentations:

- Julia Upton, RSM: "Still Learning ... Still Pondering." Theological implications of participation in live-streamed liturgies.
- Ruth A. Meyers: "Biblical and Theological Foundations for Worship in Multiracial Congregation." Developing foundational understandings for liturgical praxis in racially diverse congregations.
- Joint session with the Critical Theories and Liturgical Studies Seminar:
 - a) Lorenzo Penalosa and Audrey Seah: "50 years of the *Misa Ng Bayang Pilipino*: A *Status Quaestionis*." Analysis of the *Misa Ng Bayang* through the lens of principles and processes of liturgical inculturation as formulated by Anscar Chupungco.
 - b) Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Joshua Zentner-Barrett: "Germinal Ritual: Can Liturgical Practices Seed Social Transformation?" Developing a

theology of “germinal ritual” (“ritual acts that are small beginnings, that yield varied outcomes dependent on context, that coexist with contradictory rituals, and that depend on human agency while operating beyond human awareness”) by exploring parables of Jesus, ritual theory, and an art installation addressing the truth and reconciliation process in the Anglican Church of Canada.

- Vincent (Ricky) Manalo, CSP: “Artificial Intelligence and Liturgy: Eight Exploratory Trajectories.” Examining implications of artificial intelligence for liturgical praxis and theological inquiry.
- Nathaniel Marx: “Heartificial Liturgy: Artistry, Artifice, *Ars Celebrandi*.” Exploring questions of authenticity in liturgical celebration.
- Deborah Jungmi Kang: “Exploring the Intersection of Korean Shamanic *Kut* and Holy Communion.” Re-imagining Holy Communion as a ritual space for healing and liberation, releasing the *han* of people who are marginalized.

Other Work and Plans for the Future: At the 2026 meeting, seminar participants will present papers from their current research.

Modern History of Worship

Conveners: The Rev. Shawn Strout (sstrout@vts.edu) is Assistant Professor of Worship and Associate Dean of Chapel at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia.

Members in Attendance: Kent Burreson, Sarah Mount Elewoni, Timothy Gabrielli, Katharine Harmon, Jonathan Hehn, William Johnston, Kevin Moroney, Anthony Ruff, Shawn Strout

Visitors in Attendance: Hilary Bogert-Winkler, Carl Bromley, Matthew Cortese, Allan Ferguson, Patrick Geyser

Description of Work: The Modern History of Worship seminar welcomes papers exploring the liturgical history of the modern era (c. 1500-present) by considering its theological, socio-cultural, and practical/pastoral aspects. We are committed to dialogue and interaction between denominations. This year, the papers and presentations involved a range of topics. We discussed the spirituality of the liturgical movement. We also considered some of Martin Luther's writings on the sacraments and the history of liturgical reform among Presbyterian and Reformed traditions in the nineteenth century. We heard about Peter Faber and the praying of the liturgy of the hours. A contemporary paper on Marshall McLuhan and the practice of Eucharistic Adoration was presented. A paper on the influence of ritual theory on Gothic Revival architecture was given, as well as one on Anglican lectionary preaching through John Evelyn's diary.

Papers and Presentations:

- Katharine Harmon and Michael Witzak: "The Spirituality of the Liturgical Movement."
- Kent Burreson: Continuation of Luther's work on receiving the sacrament.
- Jonathan Hehn: "The Evangelical and Liturgical Movements among Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in the 'Long' Nineteenth Century."
- Timothy Gabrielli: "Marshall McLuhan and the Practice of Eucharistic Adoration."
- Matthew Cortese: "Omnia Verba Sacra: Praying the Liturgy of the Hours with St. Peter Faber."
- William Johnston: "C.S. Lewis and Liturgical Worship."
- Shawn Strout: "Separate and Sacred: A Ritual Critique of Gothic Revival Architecture."
- Hilary Bogart-Winkler: "Anglican Lectionary Preaching During the Interregnum: The Evidence from John Evelyn's Diary."

Other Work and Plans for the Future: We discussed plans for next year, including possibly reading an essay or book chapter jointly. Members also offered tentative plans for papers.

Problems in the Early History of Liturgy

Convener: Jim Sabak, OFM (jimsabak@gmail.com) is a Franciscan Friar of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Atlanta, Georgia) and Director of Worship for the Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina, and episcopal emcee for the bishop of Raleigh.

Members in Attendance: John Baldwin, Teresa Berger, Paul Bradshaw, Harald Buchinger, J. Glenn Byer, Nathan Chase, Charles Cosgrove, Rick Fabian, Maxwell Johnson, Ruth Langer, Lizette Larson-Miller, Clemens Leonhard, Anne McGowan, David Pitt, Nick Russo, Jim Sabak, Dominic Serra

Visitors in Attendance: Julie Canlis, Lucas Christensen, Paul Elhallal, Peter Keyser, Reed Miller, Alex Neroth van Vogelpoel, Jordan Sandrock

Description of Work: Our mission is to study issues in Christian and Jewish liturgical history through the early centuries of the Common Era.

Papers and Presentations:

- Teresa Berger: “Worship in Communion with Everything Created: Glimpses from the Early Christian Centuries.” In this paper (part of her new research project titled *Benedicite*), she argued that the topos of the worship of God by everything created is present across a diversity of early Christian ritual practices, in key liturgical elements such as daily prayer and the Eucharist. With this, Berger challenged the field of liturgical studies to move beyond its often unquestioned and undertheorized anthropocentricity.
- Harald Buchinger: “Christian Liturgy in Late Antique Jerusalem.” The chapter provides an introduction to the history, form and characteristics of the unique Jerusalem liturgy, to its sources and the respective bibliography. Beyond an overview of the well-researched celebrations, it also integrates overlooked aspects and phenomena that have only recently emerged, among others, from the Sinai “new finds.”
- Nathan Chase: “Furnaces, Candles, and Other Tricks: Christian Clergy as Baptismal ‘Magicians’.” This presentation begins by briefly summarizing the scriptural and non-scriptural accounts of the appearance of fire and light on the water during Jesus’ baptism. It then looks at liturgical, literary, and material sources from the fourth century to early medieval period, primarily in the West, that may indicate that the tricks and artifices so objectionable to the author of *De Rebaptismate* were actually embraced by Nicene Christians,

though the link to the debate that animated *De Rebaptismate* became largely forgotten.

- Charlie Cosgrove: “Purposes and Pleasures,” the final chapter of his forthcoming book, *A History of Christian Psalmody: From the Pauline Mission to the End of the Fifth Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press). The chapter treats various uses and enjoyments of psalmody in a variety of settings.
- Ruth Langer: “‘And I Will Remember the Land’—The Land in Jewish Liturgical Memory.” This paper argues that the focus of rabbinic Jewish liturgical memory is a complex of ideas that center around the loss of the Jerusalem Temple and its sacrifices in the Judean defeat by Rome and the consequent loss of political sovereignty, marked by theological (and for many, real) exile from the Land; the eschatological *memoria futuri* reverses these national tragedies. Because most Jewish liturgists asking about Jewish memory themselves participated in the modern liberal Jewish rejection of this complex of ideas, it has not been named in the literature. This has consequences for dating the emergence of the rabbinic system of verbal worship.
- Clemens Leonhard: “The Rabbinic Brakha over Bread, the Eucharist, and the Manna: Traces of Dialogue?” The paper discussed the background of the wording of ... God, “who brings forth bread from the land.” Suggesting that the blessing evokes the situation of Israel’s entry into the promised land in Joshua 5, the first celebration of Pesach therein, and the ensuing end of God’s gift of the manna, it asked whether the Rabbis had a Christian appropriation of the manna as a precursor of the Eucharist in mind when they formulated the blessing. In that case, the blessing would preserve traces of a rabbinic acknowledgement of Christian liturgies. Although the typology manna-Eucharist was only rarely hinted at in the epoch of the origins of the wording of the blessing, earlier Jewish, e.g., Philo of Alexandria, and later Christian sources (John 6 and prominently Origen [in Caesarea]) shared a metaphorical/allegorical interpretation of the manna as God’s Torah or, conversely, Jesus’ teaching. As Menachem Kister has observed, the Rabbis avoided the allegorical interpretation of the manna—perhaps conspicuously—although it was brought forward by Jewish scholars. In the discussion of the Seminar, it was objected that the evidence does not suffice to reconstruct a Christian-Jewish debate on this issue and that the assumption of an allusion to Ps 104:14 (together with Gen 3:17-19) explains the rabbinic form of the blessing.
- Nick Russo: “Oaths and Oath-taking among the Christians of Pontus: Revisiting Pliny.” In his letter to Trajan about his investigation of Christians in Pontus ca. 110-111CE, Pliny reports that the group met on a fixed day before dawn to sing a hymn to Christ and to take an oath to avoid certain crimes and immoral acts. Scholars have assumed that Pliny must have misunderstood what he gleaned from the Christians he interrogated and have variously interpreted this oath (*sacramentum*) as reference to the Eucharist, a baptismal vow, a ritual recitation of the Decalogue, or (indirectly) to the moral exhortations of a weekly service of the word. The paper noted the problems with

each of these interpretations and argued for the plain view first advanced by A. D. Nock: the Christians of Pontus took oaths during the course of their regular community gatherings. The paper further argued that this practice, evidently short-lived and localized, may have been adopted to address two needs: from within, to ritualize the moral formation of new members; from without, to respond to the widespread suspicion that Christians engaged in various crimes and immoral acts in the course of their clandestine meetings.

Other Work and Plans for the Future: The seminar will continue its mission into the future and will entertain a call for papers in September.

Queering Liturgy

Convener: Daniel Rodriguez Schlorff (daniel@schlorff.com) is Senior Minister of Third Congregational Church (Middletown, CT) and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at Hartford International University for Religion and Peace (formerly Hartford Seminary).

Members in Attendance: Stephanie Budwey, Bryan Cones, Don Lasalle, Michael McMahon, Jason McFarland, Daniel Rodriguez Schlorff, Lis Valle-Ruiz

Visitors in Attendance: Jill Maria Murdy, Jordan Sandrock, Matthew Ryan Sevier, Marissa Sotos, Matthew Webb

Description of Work: The work of this year's Queering Liturgy Seminar could be described as "Theme and Variations." The three presenters riffed off of established liturgies in order to create new knowledge, new accessibility, and new forms of worship.

Papers and Presentations:

- Lis Valle-Ruiz: "Sara Sofía Begins Her Journey ... and Other Stories."
- Jason McFarland: "Queered Liturgical Feast of Creation."
- Matthew Sevier: "Towards an Indecent Theology of Worship: Analysis of Liturgy in Honor of Maria Althaus-Reid."

Other Work and Plans for the Future: With a hiatus of the Feminist Studies in Liturgy Seminar, the Queering Liturgy Seminar has considered expanding its focus to include discussion of gender in liturgy as well as sexuality. Therefore, a possible name change for the seminar might be in order: Gender and Sexuality in Liturgy.

Practitioners Pre-Meeting

Co-Convener: Lisa M. Weaver is the Executive Minister at Riverside Church in New York City; Bryan Cones Pastor and Priest-in-Charge at Trinity Episcopal Church Highland Park and an honorary postdoctoral researcher in the University of Divinity at Pilgrim Theological College, Melbourne.

Members in Attendance: Jennifer Baker-Trinity, Carl Bear, Timothy Brunk, Bernadette Gasslein, Sarah Kathleen Johnson, Don LaSalle, Michael McMahon, Lawrence Mick, Daniel Schlorf, Vicky Tufano, Paul Turner, J. J. Wright

Visitors in Attendance: David Anderson, Justin Huyck, Meg Matuska, Marissa Sotos, Victoria Zibel

Description of Work: At the request of the academy's president, Kim Belcher, Lisa M. Weaver and Bryan Cones co-convened a pre-meeting "practitioners," a broad group of academy members and visitors, most of whose work is outside the college and university contexts. The group of about twenty included publishers, editors, musicians, denominational staff, and congregational clergy, among others, and represented a range of church affiliations. The purpose of the gathering was to surface the particular needs of practitioners and discuss ways they might serve and be better served by the academy.

The group began by sharing interests and concerns. Interests included the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on congregational worship, formation for both liturgical leaders and assemblies, addressing the ecological crisis through liturgy, engaging political polarization in prayer, and the participation of young adults and "occasional attenders" in worship. Most of these areas were also expressed as "concerns" to the extent that each reflects an area of focus that needs more attention. Among these concerns, those gathered noted the declining opportunities for the formation of those who prepare and lead liturgy across the churches, reflected in fewer programs that include liturgical scholars on their faculties.

While there was no desire to create a new seminar, the group expressed an interest in continuing to meet to explore ways to bridge the work presented in seminar conversations with various congregational contexts. Such projects might include development of resources that seek to translate more challenging forms of academic work into workable forms for congregational prayer. These might be used to fund prayer opportunities at academy meetings. The group also proposed developing resources for teaching liturgy, especially for those for whom liturgy is not their particular field of expertise.

The group agreed to reconvene at next year's academy meeting to follow up on this initial gathering, with Lisa and Bryan co-convening.



Part 3

Select Seminar Papers

Furnaces, Candles, and Other Tricks: Christian Clergy as Baptismal “Magicians”

Nathan P. Chase

Nathan Chase (1990-2025) was Assistant Professor of Sacramental and Liturgical Theology at Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri, and Co-editor of Pray Tell blog until his untimely death soon after this year's annual meeting. He studied at St. John's School of Theology and Seminary, the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, and the University of Notre Dame. He is recognized as an important scholar of early liturgical history and sources with an impressive output of monographs and peer-reviewed journal articles. He was a member of the Problems in the Early History of Liturgy Seminar.

Introduction

The third-century anonymous text *De Rebaptismate* from North Africa talks about the initiatory practice of a group of heretics who tried to denigrate the baptism of the Christian (proto-Nicene) church.¹ Rooted in Mt 3:11 and Lk 3:15, which holds that John the Baptist said that the one who comes after him, Jesus, would baptize with the “Holy Spirit and fire,” the writer of the text states:

And some of them try to argue that they only administer a sound and perfect, not as we, a mutilated and curtailed baptism, which they are in such wise said to designate, that immediately they have descended into the water, fire at once appears upon the water. Which if it can be effected by any trick, as several tricks of this kind are affirmed to be—of Anaxilaus—whether it is anything natural, by means of which this may happen, or whether they think that they behold this, or whether the work and magical poison of some malignant being can force fire from water; still they declare such as deceit and artifice to be a perfect baptism, which if faithful men have been forced to receive, there will assuredly be no doubt but that they have lost that which they had. (*De Rebaptismate* 16)²

1. Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 111–12; Robin Jensen, “‘With Pomp, Apparatus, Novelty, and Avarice’: Alternative Baptismal Practices in Roman Africa,” *Studia Patristica* 44 (2010): 81–82.

2. *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 5:676-677. Cyprianus, *Opera omnia*, edited by G. Hartel, CSEL 3.3 (Vienna 1871), 89.28-29

There are two things that appear to be influencing *De Rebaptismate*. The first is the tradition, well documented in scriptural and non-scriptural accounts, of the appearance of fire and/or light on the water during Jesus' baptism. The second is the idea that by some trick or artifice the community referenced by the author of *De Rebaptismate* is actually creating fire on the water during their rites of initiation.

This paper will begin by briefly summarizing the scriptural and non-scriptural accounts of the appearance of fire and light on the water during Jesus' baptism. It will then look at liturgical, literary, and material sources from the fourth century to early medieval period, primarily in the West, that may indicate that the tricks and artifices so objectionable to the author of *De Rebaptismate* were actually embraced by Nicene Christians, though the link to the debate that animated *De Rebaptismate* became largely forgotten.

Fire and Light in the Scriptural and Non-Scriptural Sources

Early scriptural and non-scriptural sources witness to a tradition where fire and/or light appeared on the water during Jesus' baptism, and these have been thoroughly studied by scholars.³ The appearance of fire on the water during Jesus' baptism appears in the Mandaean baptismal liturgy, Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho* 88.3), and in the *Sibylline Oracles* 7.81-84. It is also attested in *De Rebaptismate* as already seen above, where apparently it was part of a Christian sect that followed the *Preaching of Paul*. Additionally, as Gabriele Winkler has successfully argued, the tradition of fire appearing on the waters at Jesus baptism is older than that of the light tradition.⁴

The continuation of this fire tradition can be seen particularly in Syrian sources, most notably in the writings of "Ephrem, the Acts of John, Jacob of Serug, the Syrian baptismal *ordines*, [and] the Syrians' feast of Epiphany."⁵ To this we can also add the newly published Syriac baptismal service (Sinai, Syriac New Finds M47N, ff. 5r-9v).⁶ It also appears in an illumination from the canons table of the Gospel of Rabbula (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, cod. Plut. I, 56,

3. Kilian McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 106–10; Gabriele Winkler, "The Appearance of the Light at the Baptism of Jesus and the Origins of Epiphany: An Investigation of Greek, Syriac, Armenian, and Latin Sources," in *Between Memory and Hope: Readings on the Liturgical Year*, ed. Maxwell Johnson (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 291–348; Ferguson, *Baptism*, 110–11; Andrei Orlov, "Kavod on the River: Jesus's Baptism as Revelation of the Divine Glory," in *New Narratives for Old: The Historical Method of Reading Early Christian Theology: Essays in Honor of Michel René Barnes*, ed. Anthony Briggman and Ellen Scully, CUA Studies in Early Christianity 11 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 65–68.

4. Winkler, "Appearance of the Light," 299.

5. Winkler, 303. For the Syrian texts, see Winkler, 303–8.

6. Sebastian Brock, "An Early Syriac Baptismal Service (Sinai, Syriac New Finds M47N)," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 86 (2020): 432.

sixth century Syriac) that appears to show fire at Jesus’ baptism, though some have considered the fire a smudge (see Figure 1: Gospel of Rabbula, fol. 4v. Public Domain.).⁷

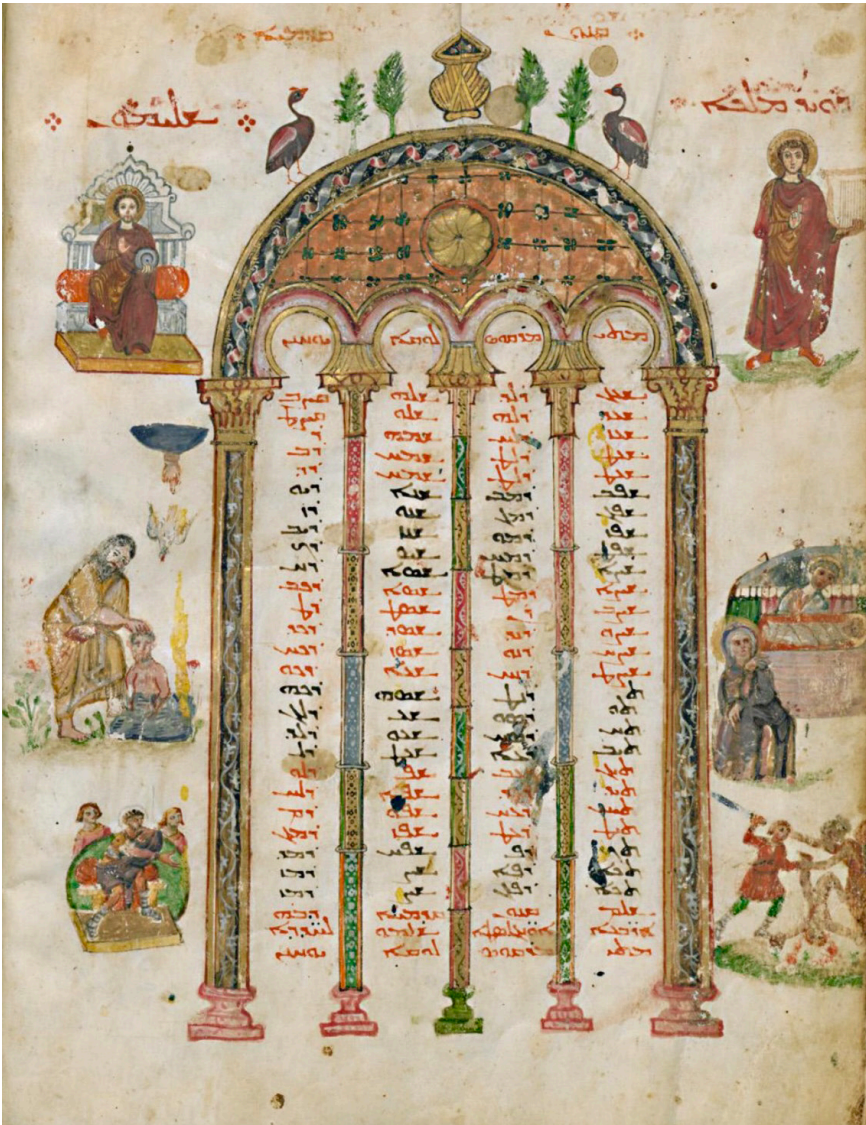


Figure 1: Gospel of Rabbula, fol. 4v. Public Domain.

7. Massimo Bernabò, ed., *Il Tetravangelo di Rabbula*. Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, plut. 1.56: *L'illustrazione del Nuovo Testamento nella Siria del VI secolo* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2008), fig. 20. For the interpretation of it as a drip of paint, see p. 89.

Outside of the Syrian sources, the fire tradition appears in the Egyptian tradition in the *Book of Jeu* (Bruce Codex, Bodleian Library, Oxford) from the fourth century:⁸

Jesus turned to the four corners of the world with his disciples and invoked this prayer, speaking thus, Hear me, my father, father of all fatherhoods, infinite light. Make my disciples worthy to receive the baptism of fire, and release them from their sins, and purify them from their transgressions... Make Zorokothora Melchisedek come secretly and bring the water of the baptism of fire of the virgin of the light, the judge... Yea, hear me, my father, father of all fatherhoods, infinite light. Let the virgin of the light come and baptize my disciples in the baptism of fire. Let her forgive their sins and purify their transgressions... So, my father, if you have forgiven their sins, and wiped out their transgressions, and made them be numbered in the kingdom of the light, you must give me a sign within the fire of this fragrant incense. And at that instant the sign that Jesus had mentioned happened in the fire, and Jesus baptized his disciples. And he gave to them from the offering and he sealed them on their foreheads with the seal of the virgin of the light, that which makes them be numbered within the kingdom of light. And the disciples rejoiced, for they had received the baptism of fire along with the seal that forgives sins, and because they had been numbered with the inheritance of the kingdom of light.⁹

The fire tradition also appears in Romanos the Melodist a sixth century Byzantine hymnographer.¹⁰

The tradition of a light or “a great/mighty light” appearing on the Jordan during Jesus’ baptism became another prominent tradition in the early Church. Winkler distinguishes between those sources that know of “a great/mighty light” and those that simply know of light, both of which appear rooted in Tatian’s *Diatessaron*. Those that simply know of “light” include Ephrem’s commentary on the *Diatessaron* (with the lacuna in the Syriac version supplied by the Armenian), Ephrem’s hymns, the Syrian Office of Epiphany, the Armenian Feast of Epiphany, and the Syriac *Acts of Thomas*.¹¹ Western sources like the *Pepysian Gospel Harmony* (a Middle English Gospel harmony based on an Old French one) and Byzantine sources like Romanos the Melodist also know of this tradition.¹²

Those texts that reference a great/mighty light include the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, the gospel harmony of Išo’dad of Merv (and by extension the gospel commentary of Dionysius bar Šalibi which relies on it), the *Agathangeli Historia*, and some of

8. Jensen, “‘With Pomp, Apparatus, Novelty, and Avarice’: Alternative Baptismal Practices in Roman Africa,” 81; Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith, eds., *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), #38.

9. Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 64–66.

10. Winkler, “Appearance of the Light,” 322–23.

11. Winkler, 317–21.

12. Winkler, 321–23.

the Maronite baptismal ordines.¹³ Epiphanius's *Panarion* 30.13.7 also knows of this tradition, quoting the *Gospel of the Ebionites*.¹⁴ Additionally, a reference to an "immense" or "great light" appears after Matt 3:15 in two manuscripts of the *Vetus Latina*, namely the *Codex Vercellensis* (MS *a* from the fourth century) and the *Codex Sangermanensis I* (MS *g*¹ from the sixth century).¹⁵ Other later Western texts not dependent on the *Codex Fuldensis*, the standard Latin copy of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, also include a reference to a great/mighty light. This includes the *Vita Beate Virginis Marie et Salvatoris Rhythmica* (13th century, southern Germany), the *Historia Scholastica* of Peter Comestor (1170, Paris) and *Vita Jesu Christi* of Ludolph of Saxony (d. 1378, Germany).¹⁶ Based on these unique witnesses, which speak of a great/mighty light, instead of simply a light as in Ephrem, Winkler argues "that different versions of Tatian's gospel harmony were in circulation: one form of the text referring to a 'mighty light' at the baptism of Jesus, and another version speaking of the manifestation of the 'light' at the Jordan."¹⁷

There are a few other texts from the West that may point to a knowledge of this fire and light tradition that have not been cited by scholars. The first set of texts appears in the writings of Ambrose of Milan. In *De Sacramentis* 1.6.22 (henceforth DS) Ambrose recounts the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites and connects it with baptism:

Moses held his rod, and led the people of the Hebrews at night in a pillar of light, and in the day in a pillar of cloud. What is the light but truth, since it sheds a full and open brightness? What is the pillar of light but Christ the Lord, who scattered the shadows of unbelief, and poured the light of truth and spiritual grace on human hearts? The pillar of cloud, on the other hand, is the Holy Spirit. The people was in the sea, and the pillar of light went on before; then the pillar of cloud followed, as if the shadowing of the Holy Spirit. Thou seest that by the Holy Spirit and by the water he has shown a type of baptism.¹⁸

Here it is clear that the light proceeds them through the water, while the Holy Spirit as the pillar of cloud follows them. Interestingly, the use of the "shadowing of the Holy Spirit" here parallels the Holy Spirit resting on Jesus in the waters of baptism, best preserved in the Syrian tradition as Winkler has again shown.¹⁹

13. Winkler, 308–15.

14. Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, eds., *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 212–13. Orlov argues this is the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, see Orlov, "Kavod on the River: Jesus's Baptism as Revelation of the Divine Glory," 66.

15. Winkler, "Appearance of the Light," 315.

16. Winkler, 315–17.

17. Winkler, 317.

18. Ambrose of Milan, "*On the Sacraments*" and "*On the Mysteries*," ed. J. H. Srawley, trans. T. Thompson (London: SPCK, 1950), 56. For the critical edition, see Ambrose of Milan, *Des sacraments. Des mystères Explication du symbole.*, ed. Bernard Botte, 2nd ed., Sources chrétiennes, 25 bis (Paris: les Éditions du Cerf, 2007).

19. Winkler, "Appearance of the Light," 323–38.

In other places in DS—and also *De Mysteriis* (henceforth DM)—Ambrose argues that the fire that came upon Elijah’s sacrifice in 1 Kings 18:38 was a prefiguring of baptism:

DS 2.4.11: Elijah called fire from heaven, and fire came down from heaven... Here is another kind of baptism.²⁰

DM 26: Is there still any reason why thou shouldst doubt, when the Father clearly calls to thee in the Gospel and says, This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased; when the Son calls, on whom the Holy Spirit showed himself as a dove: when the Holy Spirit also calls, who descended as a dove: when David calls, The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of majesty has thundered: the Lord is upon many waters: when the Scripture witnesses to thee that at the prayers of Jerubbaal fire descended from heaven, and again, on Elijah’s praying, fire was sent which consecrated the sacrifice?²¹

This is suggestive of a fire-baptism tradition that was known to Ambrose. Further support for this appears in Ambrose’s *De Helia et ieiunio* where, as William Harmless notes, “[Ambrose] set out the prophet Elijah as a model of true fasting and listed benefits Elijah enjoyed from his forty-day fast and that, by implication his hearers, especially the *competentes*, would also enjoy... ‘he drew down fire from heaven’ (just as the *competentes* would draw down the fire of the Spirit).”²² Here the key reference is to *De Helia et ieiunio* 2.2, which reads: “while fasting he drew down fire from heaven.”²³

Elsewhere Ambrose also deals with fire and Pentecost, which at first glance does not appear related to this tradition. In DS 2.5.15, Ambrose states that:

After the death of our Lord Jesus Christ the Apostles were in one place, and they were praying on the day of Pentecost. And suddenly there came a great sound as the Spirit were carried along with great violence, and there appeared divided tongues as fire. What does this mean, but the descent of the Holy Spirit, who wished to show himself to unbelievers in bodily form also; that in bodily form sign, spiritually sacrament? Therefore, there was given an evident proof of his coming. But to us now offered the privilege of faith. For in the beginning signs were shown for unbelievers; now in the fullness of the Church we must gather truth not faith.²⁴

A reference to Pentecost, however, is included alongside the fire-baptism tradition in DM 27:

20. Ambrose of Milan, “*On the Sacraments*” and “*On the Mysteries*,” 62.

21. Ambrose of Milan, 133.

22. William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014), 112.

23. Mary Joseph Aloysius Buck (ed.), *S. Ambrosii De Helia et ieiunio*, Patristic Studies 19 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1929), 46/47.

24. Ambrose of Milan, “*On the Sacraments*” and “*On the Mysteries*,” 64–65.

Do not consider the merits of persons, but the office of priests. And thou lookest at merits, consider the priest as Elijah; look at the merits of Peter, too, or of Paul, who received this mystery from the Lord Jesus, and handed on to us. Visible fire was sent to them, that they might believe; for us, who believe, one who invisible acts: to them for figure, to us for admonition. Believe, therefore, that invoked by the prayers of the priests the Lord Jesus is present who says, Where there are two or three, there am I also; how much more where the Church is, where his mysteries are, does he deign to bestow his presence!²⁵

This longer passage from DM 27 sheds light on Ambrose's statement in DS 2.5.15. In both DS 2.5.15 and DM 27, Ambrose seems to be arguing that while in former times the church could see fire—whether at Pentecost or at baptism—to-day the church has no need to physically see fire but can trust in God's promises. A similar argument that the church does not need to physically see the image of fire, like that seen with Elijah's burnt offering in 1 Kings 18:38, features also in Ambrose's treatment of the Eucharistic consecration in DM 52. In this way, Ambrose at first glance seems to want to preserve these images of baptism while also avoiding, like the author of *De Rebaptismate*, the idea that literal fire needs to come upon the waters.

Remnants of the fire tradition may also be seen in Augustine of Hippo and Isidore of Seville. The former talks about the newly baptized being formed like bread in the furnace through their chrismation and Isidore of Seville describes the font as a furnace. More on these witnesses below.

In any event, the traditions of fire and light (either simply a "light" or a "great/mighty light") coming upon the waters at Jesus' baptism were known throughout the East and West into the medieval period. While figures like the author of *De Rebaptismate* would seem to express a distain for those who tried to ensure that fire or light appeared during the initiatory rites, as we will see, later sources from the fourth century onward appear to have done just that. They used similar tricks and artifices to those outlined by the heretical community described by *De Rebaptismate* to make fire and light and other "magical" phenomena appear during baptism, even if these references were taken by most Christians as purely metaphorical.

The Baptismal Font as a Furnace

The first trick that appears to have been deployed by proto-Nicene and Nicene Christians was the heating of the water in baptismal fonts in order for the font to imitate a furnace. This likely was already an issue in the first two centuries of the church. *Didache* 7.2, for instance, speaks out against this practice, preferring baptisms be performed in a cold stream of water: "If you do not have running

25. Ambrose of Milan, 134.

water, however, baptize in another kind of water if you cannot do so in cold water, then do so in warm water.”²⁶ Kurt Niederwimmer argues that Arthur Vööbus was correct in his interpretation that “warm” water here means from a cistern and not water that was warmed, as some scholars have suggested.²⁷ This seems inaccurate and it is more likely, as Erik Peterson had earlier argued, that the issue was one of sectarian differences and practices, which are clearly attested by the third century.²⁸ This trick was for sure an issue by the third century as indicated in *De Rebaptismate*

From the fourth century onward, at the latest, it is likely that some Nicene churches heated the baptismal font in order to replicate the metaphor of the font as a furnace. This subterfuge would also make its way into the Eucharistic liturgy with the practice of adding warm water (*zeon*) to the wine.²⁹ While likely speaking in metaphorical terms, figures like Jacob of Serugh note that “the heat of [the Holy Spirit’s] power warms the waters; and his fire sets the waves on fire before [Christ] descends.”³⁰ In this way, the font serves as a furnace and may even parallel early conceptions of the font as womb, since the ancient saw the womb as being the place where the baby was “cooked.”³¹ In any event, this theology of the font as a furnace exerted a strong influence in Syria, in particular, but such a theology of the font and initiation as a whole appears in a few places in the Western tradition as well.

In several places, Augustine, for instance, likens the catechumens to bread and their initiation to the production of bread in the oven. In *Sermon 227*, Augustine says:

I mean, was that loaf made from one grain? Weren’t there many grains of wheat? But before they came into the loaf they were all separate; they were joined together

26. Cf. Kurt Niederwimmer and Harold W. Attridge, *The Didache: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 125–29, here 125.

27. Niederwimmer and Attridge, 128n20. See Arthur Vööbus, *Liturgical Traditions in the Didache*, Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile 16 (Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1968), 24.

28. Erik Peterson, “Über einige Probleme der Didache-Überlieferung,” in *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis: Studien und Untersuchungen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1959), 160–62. Other suggestions were that the warm water was for the sick, but Peterson rightly discounts this since they could simply have water poured over them.

29. Stefanos Alexopoulos and Maxwell E Johnson, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgies* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2021), 118–19.

30. For more, see McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan*, 108nn33–35.

31. A. E. Hanson, “Paidopoiia: metaphors for conception, abortion, and gestation in the Hippocratic Corpus,” *Clio medica* 27 (1995): 291–307. This will become even more pronounced in the medieval West, see Teresa Berger, “Mulier eucharistica: Tracing a Marian Eucharistic Motif,” in *Gemeinschaft im Danken: Grundfragen der Eucharistiefeier im ökumenischen Dialog*, edited by Stefan Böntert and FS Irmgard Pahl, 84–96, Studien zur Pastoralliturgie 40 (Regensburg: Pustet, 2015).

by means of water after a certain amount of pounding and crushing. Unless wheat is ground after all, and moistened with water, it can't possibly get into this shape which is called bread. In the same way you too were being ground and pounded, as it were, by the humiliation of fasting and the sacrament of exorcism. Then came baptism, and you were, in a manner of speaking, moistened with water in order to be shaped into bread. But it's not yet bread without fire to bake it. So what does fire represent? That's the chrism, the anointing. Oil, the fire-feeder, you see, is the sacrament of the Holy Spirit.³²

Unlike in Jacob of Serugh where the font itself is the furnace, in Augustine the baking of bread by fire is through the chrismation that occurs after the water bath. Nevertheless, what Augustine's metaphor does seem to suggest is a close connection between the initiatory rites and fire, and perhaps an older theology of the font as the oven/furnace in which the newly initiated were baked.

A theology much more similar to that of Jacob of Serugh appears in Isidore of Seville, who explicitly describes the font as a furnace in *Etymologiae* 15.4.9³³ and in *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*:

The font is the source of all glories. It has seven steps: three downwards for the three things which we renounce, three others upward for the three things which we confess: the seventh is also the fourth, like that of the son of man, extinguishing the furnace of fire [Dan. 3.15], a sure ground for the feet, a foundation for the water, in which dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily [Col. 2.9]. (*De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* Book 2 XXV[XXIV]:4)³⁴

This theology, as Christian McConnell notes, is rooted in Dan 3 and Col 2:9.³⁵ The former is of course the story of the three youths in the fiery furnace (Dan 3). The

32. *Sermon 227*: Hill, *The Works of St. Augustine Sermons 184-229Z* (III/6), 254. A similar explanation appears in *Sermon 229*: Hill, *The Works of St. Augustine Sermons 184-229Z* (III/6), 265; and 272: Hill, *The Works of St. Augustine Sermons 230-272B* (III/7), 301. Elsewhere Augustine likens the fire to temptations, see *Sermon 229A*. For an analysis of this metaphor, see Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 377–78 and 403.

33. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, lib. XV, Section vi “De Acdficiis Sacris,” *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*. Recog. brevisque adnotatione critica instruxit Wallace Martin Lindsay, 1–2 (Oxford 1910-1911 [SCBO]); *The “Etymologies” of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney (Cambridge: 3rd printing 2011), 310: “For the font (*fontes*) in spring-shrines in the place of the reborn, in which seven steps are made in the mystery of the Holy Spirit; there are three going down and three coming up: the seventh is the fourth step (i.e. the bottom of the waist-deep baptismal font), and that is like the Son of Man, the extinguisher of the furnace of fire, the sure place for the feet, the foundation of the water, in which the fullness of divinity dwells bodily.”

34. E. C. Whitaker and Maxwell E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 160. Henceforth DBL. Critical edition: Isidore of Seville. *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, edited by Christopher M. Lawson, CSEL 113 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989). See also Christian McConnell, “Baptism in Visigothic Spain: Origins, Development, and Interpretation” (PhD Diss., University of Notre Dame, 2005), 59–60.

35. McConnell notes Col. 1, but the scriptural reference is Col. 2:9, see McConnell, “Baptism in Visigothic Spain,” 59.

imagery of dying and rising and references to fire made Dan 3 especially conducive to the baptismal liturgy.³⁶

Turning to the extant material evidence of the fonts from Seville does not provide any material evidence that Isidore's font was heated; however, in other locations throughout the Christian world there is evidence for heated fonts. Heated fonts appear in both the East and the West at Aosta (II.8), Aquileia (II.10), Apollonia—East Basilica (IX.2), Apollonia—West Basilica (IX.3), Abū Mīnā—Western House Chapel (X.1.5), Kellia—QIsa 366 (X.1.20), Nea Anchialos in Thessaly (XV.42, XV.44), Galata (XVI.11), Philippi (XVII.72), and Vranje (XVIII.65).³⁷ While some have argued that these heated fonts may have been multi-use basins—for baptism or other types of purposes³⁸—it should not be ruled out that these heated fonts were meant as a sort of artifice used to mimic a theology of the font as a furnace, especially since many are found in warm climates. Even in places without explicit signs of hypocausts or other devices used to heat the water, it is not inconceivable that the water was heated elsewhere and brought into the baptistery.

Regardless of whether the fonts were heated or whether the water used was warm, the theology of the font as a furnace was also instantiated through visual and auditory means. Depictions of the youths in the fiery furnace, for example, appear at the cathedral in Faras in three different phases: Cat. #19 (8th cent.), #53 (c. 950), and #120 (c. 1075–1100).³⁹ For our purposes, the most significant depictions at Faras are #19 and #53. The former appears in the south aisle on the baptistery side, and the latter appears in the room leading into the baptistery. If after their baptism the newly baptized processed from the baptistery to the front of the church and then down the center aisle, then they would have passed the youths in the fiery furnace (cat. #19). More significantly, a later depiction of the youths in the fiery furnace (cat. #53) was directly across from the entrance to the baptistery, and so as the newly baptized came out of the baptistery into the church, the first

36. Robin Margaret Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 149, 154; Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 79–84; Nathan Chase, “Pruning the Prayers: Early Medieval Liturgical Adaptation in the Hispano-Mozarabic Easter Vigil,” *Archiv Für Liturgiewissenschaft* 60 (2018): 145.

37. The information on these fonts and their catalogue numbers are taken from Robin Jensen, Nathan Dennis, and Nathan Chase, eds., *Baptisteries of the Early Christian World* (Brill, forthcoming), Henceforth BECW.

38. Gabriel Radle has argued that some of these heated basins may not have been used for baptism but for the performance of charitable baths of the *diakonia*, see Gabriel Radle, “Liturgy and Charitable Ministration in Late Antiquity: Diakonia Prayers in the Earliest Euchologion Manuscripts,” *Ex Fonte—Journal of Ecumenical Studies in Liturgy* 2 (2023): 259–96, especially 277 and 280–88.

39. Stefan Jakobielski, Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka, and Magdalena Łaptaś, *Pachoras Faras: The Wall Painting from the Cathedrals of Aetios, Paulos and Petros* (Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2017). For more on the font, see BECW, X.2.6.

thing they would have seen is the image of the fiery furnace. There is even evidence, albeit from the eighth or tenth century, at Qaṣr al-Wizz (Phase 2 of Church) where the *Benedicite* (Dan 3:57-81) has been inscribed into the font.⁴⁰

The font as a furnace was also tied in many places sonically to the baptismal liturgy. Dan 3 with its canticle the *Benedicite* was the final reading at the Easter Vigil in many liturgical traditions in the medieval period.⁴¹ It appears in the Hispano-Mozarabic Rite (in both Tradition A and B), the Gallican Rite, the Roman Rite in the Gelasian sacramentary (but not the Gregorian), in the Byzantine Rite, the Hagiopolite tradition, and the Syrian Capitulare. It also appears at the Easter vigil at Verona at the end of the fourth century. Dan 3 does not appear in the Milanese Rite,⁴² the Syrian Lectionary of the Jacobite Patriarch Athanasius V, the Karšūnī lectionary,⁴³ or the Coptic Rite.⁴⁴ In most of these cases, Dan 3 appears as the final Old Testament reading, and in several traditions the reading from Dan 3 would mark the time when the newly baptized processed into the church.⁴⁵ In fact, as Clemens Leonhard notes, “ending the vigil with a reading from Daniel 3 may rather have musical than theological reasons,”⁴⁶ meaning that it was perhaps chosen less for the reading and more for the chanting of the canticle, the *Benedicite*. The *Benedicite* seems to have concluded the baptismal rites and may have been used for the entrance of the newly baptized into the church in a number of traditions.⁴⁷ The singing of this canticle would have added a sonic dimension to the Christian clergy’s initiatory trickeries.

40. John Barns, “A Text of the ‘Benedicite’ in Greek and Old Nubian from Kasr el-Wizz,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archeology* 60 (1974): 206-211; Artur Obluski, “The Monasteries and Monks of Nubia,” *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 36 (Warsaw: University of Warsaw / The Raphael Taubenschlag Foundation, 2019): 222-24.

41. Chase, “Pruning the Prayers,” 140-41.

42. The reading appears on Good Friday and the canticle at the Easter Vigil, see Friederike Maria Kulczak-Rudiger, “Jünglinge im Feuerofen,” *RAC* 19 (2001): 368.

43. Originally it appears that the reading was used in the Syrian tradition, see Kulczak-Rudiger, “Jünglinge im Feuerofen,” 367.

44. It appears that originally the reading was used in the Egyptian tradition, see Kulczak-Rudiger, “Jünglinge im Feuerofen,” 366. It should be noted, however, that in Egypt most baptisms did not occur at the Easter vigil, see Paul Bradshaw, “‘Diem Baptismo Sollemniorum’: Initiation and Easter in Christian Antiquity,” in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), 137-47.

45. Chase, “Pruning the Prayers,” 144.

46. Clemens Leonhard, *The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter: Open Questions in Current Research*, Studia Judaica, Bd. 35 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2012), 310n515.

47. Gabriel Bertonière, *The Historical Development of the Easter Vigil and Related Services in the Greek Church*, OCA 193 (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Studiorum Orientalium, 1972), 65-66 and 129-37, see especially 130n52. The same seems to be the case in the Hispano-Mozarabic tradition, see Chase, “Pruning the Prayers,” 143-49. However, the León Antiphonary, at least, gives the *Benedicite* as the final chant of the baptismal liturgy and the *Ecce grex* as the chant for the movement of the baptizands from the baptistery to the choir, see fol. 175 or Louis Brou and José Vives, eds., *Antifonario visigótico mozárabe de la Catedral de León*, Monumenta Hispaniae Sacra, Serie Liturgica 5.1 (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1959), 285.

Candles

Augusto Cosentino argues that one remnant of the fire tradition at Jesus’ baptism can be seen in the use of candles, in particular the paschal candle, in close relation to the baptismal font and liturgy.⁴⁸ The use of the paschal candle is first attested toward the end of the fourth century based on the witness of Jerome, and texts for its blessing appear from the fifth century onward.⁴⁹ Despite this, candles or lamps feature earlier than even the paschal candle in some sources. Cosentino notes, for instance, that lamps surrounded the font according to the *Acts of Thomas* 25-27, dated to the third century.⁵⁰

Greek	Syriac
And they sought after him that they also might henceforth receive the seal of the word, saying to him: “Seeing that our souls are at leisure and eager toward God, give us the seal; for we have heard you say that the God whom you preach knows his own sheep by his seal.” And the Apostle said unto them: “I also rejoice and entreat you to receive this seal, and to partake with me in this Eucharist and blessing of the Lord, and to be made perfect therein. For this is the Lord and God of all, even Jesus Christ, whom I preach, and he is the father of truth, in whom I have taught you to believe.” And he commanded them to bring Oil, that they might receive the seal by the oil. They brought the oil therefore, and lighted many lamps; for it was night. And the Apostle got up and sealed them. And the Lord was revealed unto them by a voice, saying: “Peace be to you, brothers.” And they heard his voice only, but his likeness they did not see, for they had not yet received the added sealing of the seal. And the Apostle took the oil and poured it upon their heads and anointed and chrismated them, and began to say:	And they begged of him that they might receive the sign, and said to him: “Our souls are turned to God to receive the sign for we have heard that all the sheep of that God whom you preach are known to him by the sign.” Judas said to them: “I too rejoice, and I ask of you to partake of the Eucharist and of the blessing of this Messiah whom I preach.” And the king gave orders that the bath should be closed for seven days, and that no man should bath in it. And when the seven days were done, on the eighth day the three of them entered into the bath by night that Judas might baptize them. And many lamps were lighted in the bath. And when they had entered into the bath-house, Judas went in before them. And our Lord appeared to them, and said to them: “Peace be with you, my brothers.” And they heard the voice only, but the form they did not see, whose it was, for until now they had not been baptized. And Judas went up and stood upon the edge of the cistern, and poured oil upon their heads, and said:

48. Augusto Cosentino, “Il fuoco sul Giordano, il cero pasquale e la columna del Battistero Lateranense,” in *L’edificio battesimale in Italia. Aspetti e problemi (atti dell’VIII congresso nazionale di archeologia cristiana: Genova, Sarzana, Albenga, Finale Ligure, Ventimiglia, 21-26 settembre 1998)* (Bordighera: Istituto internazionale di studi liguri, 2001), 527–32.

49. A. J. MacGregor, *Fire and Light in the Western Triduum: Their Use at Tenebrae and at the Paschal Vigil*, Alcuin Club Collection, no. 71 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 304–8; Thomas Forrest Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), ch. 3, especially 1 and 40–43; Cosentino, “Il fuoco sul Giordano, il cero pasquale e la columna del Battistero Lateranense,” 528.

50. Cosentino, “Il fuoco sul Giordano, il cero pasquale e la columna del Battistero Lateranense,” 530.

Come, holy Name of the Christ that is above every name. Come, power of the Most High, and the compassion that is perfect. Come, gift of the Most High. Come, compassionate mother. Come, communion of the male. Come, she who reveals the hidden mysteries. Come, mother of the seven houses, that your rest may be in the eighth house. Come, elder of the five members, mind, thought, reflection, consideration, reason; communicate with these young men. Come, Holy Spirit, and cleanse their reins and their heart, and give them the added seal, in the Name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. And when they were sealed, a youth appeared to them holding a lighted torch, so that their lamps became dim at the approach of that light. And he went forth and was no more seen by them. And the Apostle said unto the Lord: “Your light, O Lord, is not to be contained by us, and we are not able to bear it, for it is too great for our sight.” And when the dawn came it was morning, he broke bread and made them partakers of the Eucharist of the Christ.	“Come, holy name of the Messiah; come, power of grace from on high: come, perfect mercy; come, exalted gift; come, sharer of the blessing; come, revealer of hidden mysteries; come, mother of seven houses, whose rest was in the eighth house; come, messenger of reconciliation, and communicate with the minds of these youths; come Spirit of holiness, and purify their reins and their hearts.” And he baptized them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit of holiness. And when they had come up out of the water, a youth appeared to them, and he was holding a lighted taper; and the light of the lamps became pale through its light. And when they had departed, he became invisible to them; and the Apostle said: “We were not even able to bear Your light, because it is too great for our vision.” And when dawn came and was morning, he broke the Eucharist.
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In the Greek text, the caveat is made that lamps were lit “for it was night,” but this does not appear in the Syriac version, and even the Greek at the end of the baptismal scene makes it clear that the lamp light is theologically contrasted with the light of Christ. The appearance of a “great/mighty light” seems to be a motivation behind the text. The lit lamps and the lit torch appear to simulate a light shining over the baptismal font, allowing a certain form of visual trickery.

Further evidence contemporary with the *Acts of Thomas* for the early practice of using lamps or tapers to “trick” the baptizands and other liturgical participants may be seen at Dura-Europos. There, women with tapers process to the bridal chamber next to the baptismal font. This likely mirrors how the catechumens would enter the space and approach the font.⁵¹

It is not, however, just the Syrian tradition that appears to have engaged these artifices to make a great light or fire appear on the baptismal waters. Cosentino also points to the presence of four candles on the mosaic in the font at Kélibia

51. Michael Peppard, *The World’s Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), chapters 1 and 4.

phase 2 (VIII.42P2) dated to the sixth century (Figure 2: Font at Kélibia. Photo by Robin Jensen. Used with permission.).⁵² To this we should add that lit candles also appear in the mosaic font in Sidi Jdidi Basilica II (VIII.71) from the fifth/sixth century.⁵³ Cosentino also points to two other images:⁵⁴ 1) a fifth century ivory of the baptism of Jesus in the British Museum with two candles on either side of the image (Figure 3)⁵⁵ and 2) an image from the National Museum of Denmark dated to the end of the sixth century which has two candles and a censor under a ciborium, presumably over a font (Figure 4).⁵⁶ The presence of two candles in the ivory and mosaic, instead of a single paschal candle, would be consistent with the dipping of two candles into the baptismal font in some of the earliest liturgical sources that contain this practice.⁵⁷ This would eventually lead, in the medieval Western tradition, to the dipping of the single paschal candle into the font. The use of multiple candles around the font also appears in *Ordo Romanus* 28A⁵⁸ and also in the supplementary *Ordo baptisterii* of the *Gellone Sacramentary*, no. 2314.⁵⁹

Other Tricks

Cosentino points out one final trick that might have been used to mimic the fire and light tradition during baptism and that is the use of a column on which in-

52. Cf. Cosentino, “Il fuoco sul Giordano, il cero pasquale e la columna del Battistero Lateranense,” 530. For a recent study of the font at Kélibia, see François Baratte, Fathi Bejaoui, Noël Duval, Sarah Berraho, Isabelle Gui, Hélène Jacquest, eds., *Basiliques chrétiennes d’Afrique du Nord (inventaire et typologie) II* (Bordeaux: Ausonius Mémoires, 2014), #58 and pp. 165–9. For more, see BECW, VIII.42P2.

53. For a recent study of the font at Sidi Jdidi Basilica II, see Baratte et al., *Basiliques chrétiennes d’Afrique du Nord*, #70, 184–88. For more, see BECW, VIII.71.

54. Cosentino, “Il fuoco sul Giordano, il cero pasquale e la columna del Battistero Lateranense,” 530. Accession number 1856,0623.3. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0623-3.

55. Accession number 15137. <https://samlinger.natmus.dk/as/asset/28630>. Scholars have debated whether a font is depicted or not, see Cosentino, “Il fuoco sul Giordano, il cero pasquale e la columna del Battistero Lateranense,” 530; Elisabetta Neri, “Les gestes rituels de la liturgie baptismale occidentale. L’exemple d’Ambroise de Milan et d’Augustin d’Hippone,” in *Baptême et baptistères entre Antiquité tardive et Moyen Âge: actes du colloque international qui s’est tenu à Paris, à Sorbonne Université, les 12-13 novembre 2020*, ed. Béatrice Caseau-Chevallier and Lucia Maria Orlandi (Cinisello Balsamo, Milano: Silvana editoriale, 2023), 150. I agree with Neri that a font is depicted.

57. A. J. MacGregor, *Fire and Light in the Western Triduum: Their Use at Tenebrae and at the Paschal Vigil*, Alcuin Club Collection 71 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 476–79. For a general overview, see also Harald Buchinger, “Feuer und Licht in der Osterliturgie des Frühmittelalters: Zur nonverbalen Symbolik,” in *Il fuoco nell’alto Medioevo* (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo, 2013), 277–318. Buchinger argues that the use of two candles may have been adopted from general papal practice.

58. Michel Andrieu, ed., *Les “Ordines romani” du haut Moyen Âge*, Spicilegium sacrum lovaniense 24 (Louvain, 1951), 421–25.

59. A. Dumas and J. Deshusses, eds., *Liber sacramentorum Gellonensis*, CCSL 159 (Turnhout, 1981), 333.



Figure 2: Font at Kélibia. Photo by Robin Jensen. Used with permission.



Figure 3: Fifth Century Ivory © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.



Figure 4: Fifth Century Ivory © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

cense was burned, a features of the baptismal font in the Lateran baptistery (I.6).⁶⁰ According to the *Liber Pontificalis* I.34.13, a source that must always be taken with caution, Constantine supposedly donated a number of things to the Lateran baptistery, which the *Liber Pontificalis* describes as follows:

The holy font where Constantine Augustus was baptised lby the same bishop Silvesterl of stone of porphyry, overlaid on every side within and without and above and as far as the water with purest silver, 3009 lbs. In the centre of the font is a porphyry column, which bears a golden basin of purest gold, weighing 52 lbs., where lis a flame and wherel in the Easter season burns balsam, 200 lbs., and the wick is of asbestos. At the edge of the font lin the baptisteryl is a golden lamb pouring water, which weighs 30 lbs.; to the right of the lamb the Savior of purest silver, 5 feet in height, weighing 170 lbs., and to the left of the lamb John the Baptist, of silver, 5 feet in height, holding an inscribed scroll which bears these words: “Behold the Lamb of God, Behold, Who Taketh Away the Sins of the World,” weighing l125 lbs. or 100 lbs.;l 7 silver stags pouring water, weighing each 80 lbs.; a censer of purest gold set with 49 prases [e.g. precious stones], weighing 15 lbs.⁶¹

The evidence indicates that at the center of the font of the Lateran baptistery was a porphyry column that supported a bowl of incense that was lit.⁶² A similar practice may explain the column in the middle of the font at Sbeïtla/Sufetua—Basilica of Bellator, Chapel of Jucundus from the late fourth/fifth century (VIII.60, see Figure 5: Font at Sbeïtla. Photo by Robin Jensen. Used with permission.),⁶³ as well as the font at San Marcello in Rome (I.11) dated to the same period.⁶⁴ In these cases, the incense represents, in particular, the pillar of fire and cloud from the Old Testament, which first appear in Ex 13. This pillar of fire and cloud, as we have already seen above with Ambrose, are interpreted Christologically or

60. Cosentino, “Il fuoco sul Giordano, il cero pasquale e la columna del Battistero Lateranense,” 532–34. For recent studies of the Lateran baptistery, see Brandt and Federico Guidobaldi, “Il Battistero Lateranense: Nuovo interpretazione delle fasi strutturali,” *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 84 (2008): 189–282; Olof Brandt, “The Lateran Baptistery in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries: New Certainties and Unresolved Questions,” in *The Basilica of Saint John Lateran to 1600*, ed. Lex Bosman, Ian P. Haynes, and Paolo Liverani, British School at Rome Studies (Lateran Basilica (Conference), Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 221–38. For more, see BECW, I.6.

61. Louise Ropes Loomis, *The Book of the Popes (Liber pontificalis)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), 50–51. The text in || are variants within the manuscripts. For the critical edition, see Louis Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis: Texte, introduction et commentaire*, 2 vols (Paris, 1886/1892), I:174.

62. Cosentino, “Il fuoco sul Giordano, il cero pasquale e la columna del Battistero Lateranense,” 532–34.

63. For a recent study of the baptistery at Sbeïtla/Sufetua—Basilica of Bellator, Chapel of Jucundus, see Baratte et al., *Basiliques chrétiennes d’Afrique du Nord*, #147 pp. 383–86. For more, see BECW, VIII.60.

64. Silvana Episcopo, “Il battistero della basilica di S. Marcello a Roma: Fra tarda antichità e medioevo,” in *Tardo antico e alto medioevo: Filologia, storia, archeologia, arte*, edited by Marcello Rotili (Naples: Arte Tipografica. 2009), 267. For more, see BECW, I.11.

pneumatologically. As Bissera Pentcheva notes within the context of the shrine of Saint Simeon Stylites the Younger, “the perfume of burning incense indicated the descent of divine grace. Smell thus pushed beyond the borders of the visible, allowing the experience of the divine beyond the limit of ocular sight,”⁶⁵ or, put another way, “the intense olfactory experience makes the invisible Holy Spirit sentient and thus perceptible.”⁶⁶ The same would have been the case when used in these baptisteries.



Figure 5: Font at Sbeïtla. Photo by Robin Jensen. Used with permission.

In fact, while not mentioned by Cosentino, incense may have also been used in Ambrose’s baptismery according to references in DS 4.1.1-4 and DM 55:

DS 4.1.1-2 and 4: Now, there was in the second tabernacle the manna; there was also the rod of Aaron, which withered and afterwards blossomed again; there was likewise the censer. What is the purpose of this? It is that you may understand what is the second tabernacle, into which the priest introduced you, into which the high priest was accustomed to enter once in the year, that is, to the baptismery...In the second tabernacle is the censer also, which is wont to diffuse a sweet savour. So you also are now a sweet savour of Christ; no longer is there in you any stain of sins, any savor of ranker error.⁶⁷

65. Bissera Vladimirova Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 37.

66. Pentcheva, 41.

65. Pentcheva, 37.

66. Pentcheva, 41.

67. Ambrose of Milan, “*On the Sacraments*” and “*On the Mysteries*,” 80–81.

DM 55: With these sacraments, therefore, Christ feeds is Church; by them the soul's very being is strengthened. And seeing her continuous growth in grace, he rightly saith to her, How fair are thy breasts become, my sister, my spouse! How fair are they become from wine! And the smell of thy garments is better than all spaces. Thy lips, O my spouse, are a dropping honeycomb; milk and honey are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon. A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed...⁶⁸

Based on these references in Ambrose, alongside what is known about the Lateran baptistery and the mosaic of the censer over the font housed at the National Museum of Copenhagen, it seems very probable that incense wafted through Ambrose baptistery during the rites of initiation.

Incense was also clearly part of the rites of initiation described in the *Book of Jeu*: “you must give me a sign within the fire of this fragrant incense.” The *Book of Jeu*, in fact, makes explicit the link between fire and incense. This link should not be especially surprising given that the smoke generated by incense is generated through the burning of coal. In fact, Jacob of Serug says that “[Christ] the Coal of fire (Is 6:6) went down to wash in the [Jordan’s] streams, and the flames of its sanctifying power poured forth.”⁶⁹ Whether the incense containers were simply bowls on columns (like seems implied at the Lateran baptistery) or hung (which would also be possible⁷⁰) these would have functioned as olfactory artifice(s) replicating the pillar of fire and smoke.

Given these associations, it is perhaps not surprising, then, that censers would often contain depictions of the baptism of Christ on them.⁷¹ Nathan Dennis even observes that Germanos I of Constantinople in the seventh/eighth century writes that: “All together, therefore, give forth the sweet-smelling fragrance. Or again, the interior of the censer points to the font of holy baptism, taking into itself the coal of divine fire, the sweetness of the operation of the Holy Spirit, which is the adoption of divine grace through faith, and exuding a good odor.”⁷² Ultimately, Cosentino believes that the *Exultet* brings together the tradition of the paschal

68. Ambrose of Milan, 148.

69. Winkler, “Appearance of the Light,” 304.

70. See, for example, examples from Palestine in Ilse Richter-Siebels, “Die Palästinensischen Weihrauchgefäße Mit Reliefszenen Aus Dem Leben Christi” (PhD Diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 1990).

71. Richter-Siebels, 87–96; Nathan Dennis, “Vessels of Holy Fire: The Censer and the Womb of the Mother of God in Early Byzantine and Coptic Devotion,” in *Holy Smoke: Censers Across Cultures*, ed. Beate Fricke and Ittai Weinryb (Munich: Hirmer, 2023), 129–51.

72. Germanos, *On the Divine Liturgy*, 30. Text taken from Dennis, “Vessels of Holy Fire: The Censer and the Womb of the Mother of God in Early Byzantine and Coptic Devotion,” 134.

candle with the column supporting the bowl of incense.⁷³ Support for this can be found in the way the *Exultet*, at least in the Franco-Romano text, refers to the “column of light” which allowed the Israelites to pass through the Red Sea and similarly describes the paschal candle as a “column.”⁷⁴

It also should be acknowledged that incense could also lead to hallucinations. This was a critique leveled by Tertullian against the use of incense in Christian circles;⁷⁵ however, as Pentcheva notes, incense was used for just this purpose at the shrine of Saint Simeon Stylites the Younger, whereby “physically inebriated by the smoke of burning incense, some of the people present at the site felt their bodies transform at the descent of the Holy Spirit and saw epiphanies. Smell was both the trigger and the indicator of metamorphosis... The smell of smoke and fragrance signaled this metamorphosis of flesh.”⁷⁶ Baptism as a metamorphosis of the flesh and descent of the Holy Spirit would be an especially conducive time for the use of incense and perhaps even a perfect time to employ its hallucinogenic potential.

One final artifice not directly connected to the fire on water tradition, but which should be mentioned and has already been hinted at above, is the creation of fonts that imitated streams of running water. While it was not possible everywhere to baptize in running water in imitation of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan river, either because of the scarcity of water or because a river was not nearby, the creation of fonts with running water would be key to imitating Jesus’ baptism. A similar concern appears to be behind Didache 7.2, which, as already noted above, calls for baptisms to be performed preferably in a flowing stream of cold water, though other forms of water were also allowed.

With regard to flowing water, it is worth noting that a number of fonts in the early church had mechanisms that would allow the water to be “living” or flowing. It is hard to determine if pipes for inflow and outflow—seen frequently throughout the early Christian baptisteries—were used simply for filling and emptying the font or to create the illusion the running water of a stream, or both. In some cases, however, the early fonts do show elaborate water systems meant to ensure that the water was moving during the performance of the initiatory rites. We see this especially at Milan in its two baptisteries. In Santo Stefano alle fonti, Basilica Vetus/Santa

73. Cosentino, “Il fuoco sul Giordano, il cero pasquale e la columna del Battistero Lateranense,” 534–37. While it might be tempting to see the insertion of the incense grains into the paschal candle as further proof of this connection, the earliest testament to that practice appears in the 10th century, see MacGregor, *Fire and Light in the Western Triduum*, ch. 25.

74. See Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, 36, 37.

75. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 42 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 25–26.

76. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon*, 37.

Maria Maggiore (II.71P2) pipes allowed water to flow from above into the font.⁷⁷ Similarly, at San Giovanni alle fonti, Santa Tecla/Basilica Nova (II.70P2) there was an inflow canal as well as spouts around the font and a “floodway” that allowed water to be continuously moving in the font.⁷⁸ Similar devices were deployed at the baptistery of the Lateran basilica, where we know that silver deer/stags surrounded the font and water came out of their mouths as well as a golden lamb.⁷⁹

Fourth Century Christians as the New Magicians?

The third century author of *De Rebaptismate* rebuked strongly the “magical poisons” and other trickeries by which early so-called heretical groups diminished the efficacy of proto-Nicene baptism. It appears, however, that either proto-Nicene Christians were doing similar practices or by the fourth century they had embraced these magical theatrics in their own baptismal liturgies. Moreover, perhaps the age-old adage rings true here: “If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em.” This was not only the case with regard to baptism, but we can see this in the writings of figures like Shenoute of Atripe. In a sermon (Acephalous Work A14), Shenoute derided those who seek the healing waters and oils of magicians over (or in addition to) those of the church.⁸⁰ The issue was not the use of healing waters and oils, but that Christians were using the *wrong* healing waters and oils.

So had Christians from the fourth century onward, to paraphrase another popular expression, “become what they hated?” On face value that may seem to be the case; however, this seems to put forward too simplistic a narrative between so-called heretics and the “real” Christians (proto-Nicene or Nicene) and between ancient “magic” and Christian ritual. Perhaps here it is worth also noting an observation of Ernest Becker, who, referencing A. M. Hocart, noted: “magic is religion we don’t believe in, and religion is magic we believe in. *Voilà tout*.”⁸¹ It also grants

77. For a recent study of the baptistery of Santo Stefano alle fonti, Basilica Vetus/Santa Maria Maggiore, see S. Lusuardi Siena, E. Dellù, M.L. Delpiano, and E. Monti, “Lettura archeologica e prassi liturgica nei battisteri ambrosiani tra IV e VI secolo,” in *Ambrogio e la liturgia. Atti del settimo Dies Academicus, 4–5 aprile 2011*, ed. R. Passarella (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana; Bulzoni editore, 2011), 92–102, especially 92–93. See also Silvia Lusuardi Siena, Filippo Airoldi, and Elena Spalla, eds., *Milano: piazza Duomo prima del Duomo: la cattedrale di Santa Tecla perduta e ritrovata: archeologia del complesso episcopale milanese* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milano: Silvana editoriale, 2023), especially part 4. For more, see BECW, II.71P2.

78. For a recent study of the baptistery of San Giovanni alle fonti, Santa Tecla/Basilica Nova, see Lusuardi Siena, “Lettura archeologica e prassi liturgica,” 102–111, especially 107–109. See also Siena et al., *Milano: piazza Duomo prima del Duomo*, especially part 5. For more, see BECW, II.70P2.

79. See n. 62.

80. Translation taken from Korshi Dosoo, “Healing Traditions in Coptic Magical Texts,” *Trends in Classics* 13 (2021): 51–52. For more information, see Stephen Emmel, *Shenoute’s Literary Corpus*, 2 vols., Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium; Subsidia, vv. 599–600. t. 111–12 (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), II: 692–93.

81. Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 15.

too much truthfulness and righteousness to the apologetic rhetoric expounded by figures like the author of *De Rebaptismate*. In actual fact, the relationship between magical texts and the liturgy has always been a porous one, just as the ecclesial boundaries between the so-called heretics and “real” Christians was permeable.⁸² With regard to the relationship between magic and Christian ritual, Jacques van der Vliet notes that magic brought official liturgy in conversation with social life, “at the intersection of, on the one hand, the world of textually inarticulate social practices and, on the other, that of canonical Church discourse. The latter provides the hegemonic paradigm with which the written magical tradition maintains a dialectic relationship in terms of adaptation and borrowing, no less than differentiation.”⁸³

So, were Christian clergy magicians or at least engaged in magical practices? It appears the answer to both is yes, but not in the sense we would normally imagine. For the proto-Nicene and Nicene Christians who engaged in these so-called trickeries and used these supposed artifices, the intention was not deception but rather the more concrete expression of the church’s theology in its ritual experience. In a period where mystagogy—or reflection on the experience of the ritual celebration—was increasingly important,⁸⁴ why would they not make the ritual experience align more closely with the theology they were preaching? It only makes sense. If the font is a furnace, make it hot! If Jesus’ baptism with the appearance of fire and light on the water is the paradigm for our baptism, make fire and light appear in a font of flowing water! If baptism is transformative, use incense as a sign of metamorphosis! This is not trickery, but rather a real awareness of the importance of sensory experience and the need to cultivate concrete ritual applications for the theological metaphors developed for our liturgies.⁸⁵

82. Kimberly Hope Belcher, Nathan Chase, and Alexander Turpin, *One Baptism—One Church? A History and Theology of the Reception of Baptized Christians* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2024).

83. Jacques van der Vliet, “Tradition and Innovation: Writing Magic in Christian Egypt,” in *Rituals in Early Christianity: New Perspectives on Tradition and Transformation*, ed. Albert Geljon and Nienke Vos, VC, Supplements 164 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 277. See also Jacques van der Vliet, “Christian Spells and Manuals from Egypt,” in *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 331.

84. Georgia Frank, “‘Taste and See’: The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century,” *Church History* 70 (2001): 619–43.

85. In fact, it is worth noting that a turn to performance theory would not see these things as theatrical or trickeries but simply how ritual is done and how it is done well. For a helpful introduction to performance theory, see Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, “A Performative Approach to Ritual,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1981): 113–69. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1981)

Systematic Heortology: A Proposal

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Introduction: On the Infrastructure of Liturgical Studies

In their influential *Introduction to the Study of Liturgy*,¹ noted German scholars Benedikt Kranemann and Albert Gerhards develop and defend what one could call the majority position on the outline of the field of liturgical studies. It consists of three parts: historical research, outreach to the pastoral field, and theological reflection. Ideally, these three areas mutually and fluently interact, making liturgical studies a naturally interdisciplinary affair. In practice, however, this interdisciplinary conversation rarely happens, especially in the world of academic theology, quite ironically so. Scholars of the liturgy are mostly (trained as) historians and philologists, i.e. specialists of liturgical texts from the past, or practical theologians, increasingly employing approaches from the social sciences, ritual studies, ethnography, and anthropology. These developments, while not at all uninteresting in and of themselves, at best even promising for the future of the field, nevertheless impact the role of thorough theological thinking. Strange as it may seem, liturgical theology is pretty much the little brother of liturgical studies, with two older sisters, liturgical history and pastoral liturgy, who catch much more attention and have much more access to social events. This relative underrepresentation of liturgical theology is in a way as old as the field of liturgical studies itself. It can even be explained genealogically if one subscribes to Reinhard Meßner's contention that the *Mutterdisziplin* of *Liturgiewissenschaft* is *Kirchengeschichte*,² that the roots of liturgical studies lie in Church history.

Regarding the study of the liturgical year in particular, the above sketch of the outline of liturgical studies in general neatly applies. Scholarship dealing with liturgical feasts and seasons often bears a strong, sometimes even exclusive, historical

1. Benedikt Kranemann—Albert Gerhards, *Introduction to the Study of Liturgy*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017). The original German version of the book was published in 2007, with a third edition in 2013.

2. Reinhard Meßner, *Einführung in die Liturgiewissenschaft*, 2nd ed. (Paderborn et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009), 19.

mark. Questions about Christian feasts usually tend to exclusively look at their origins, thereby assuming that by studying their origins and by becoming increasingly aware of the complexity of these origins (with Jewish or pagan backgrounds, with New Testament references, with sociocultural and politico-economical contingencies playing a role, etc.), one immediately catches their full meaning.³ The two big sisters find each other easily: sister historical research does the hard work of studying the sources, textual and material, while sister pastoral liturgy does an equally hard job of explaining everything to the less educated. The smallest one of the family, theological reflection, is almost systematically forgotten.

These critical observations on the infrastructure of liturgical studies help explain where the proposal for a “systematic heortology” comes from. With a reference to the Greek word *heortè*, meaning feast, I am making a case for a heortology, by which I understand a theological account (*logos*) of (i) what a Christian feast is in general and (ii) what the meaning of particular Christian feasts could be. With the addition of the adjective “systematic,” I deliberately underline the connection with systematic theology. More than a subdiscipline or a specific area of expertise, I understand systematic theology to be a reflexive labor, tirelessly attempting to think through the truth, beauty, and goodness of whatever has been given together with God’s revelation and its human acceptance, the Christian faith. Systematic theology, thus understood, is not primarily about acquiring as much knowledge as possible about Christianity, its churches, texts, and traditions, i.e., about Christian things, but about broadening and deepening one’s insight into God’s subtle manifestation in world and history.

Practically, my proposal for a systematic heortology consists of five programmatic avenues for thought, each one implying thorough research and creative reflection. The question I would like to formulate an answer to, albeit an incomplete one at this stage, is what needs to be done to develop a systematic study of the liturgical year and its feasts, which is both intellectually plausible and culturally credible in today’s context. To do that properly, I think at least five things should be done, probably more (but the constraints of an academic paper prevent me from engaging a sixth or seventh one at once): (i) an open conversation with philosophies and other anthropological theories of feasts; (ii) a serious rehabilitation of the notion of mystery, guided by a rediscovery of commentaries on the liturgical year which saw the light of day in the context of the early 20th century Liturgical Movement; (iii) a renewed theological attention for the sanctoral cycle and the veneration of the saints; (iv) a thorough liturgical hermeneutics of the euchological material

3. Karl Adam, *Das Kirchenjahr mitfeiern: Seine Geschichte und seine Bedeutung nach der Liturgieerneuerung* (Freiburg—Basel—Wien: Herder, 1979); Matias Augé, *L’anno liturgico: È Cristo stesso presente nella sua Chiesa* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009); Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, *Das Kirchenjahr: Feste, Gedenk- und Feiertage in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 7th ed. (München: Beck, 2005); Robert Féry, *Jours de fêtes: Histoire des célébrations chrétiennes* (Paris: Seuil, 2008); Paul F. Bradshaw—Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (London—Collegeville: SPCK—Liturgical Press, 2011).

provided for individual feasts;⁴ and (v) an engagement with the visual arts, including not only icons, but also sculptures, stained glass windows, paintings, etc., in whose extraordinarily rich patrimony rest unique forms of theologizing which too often remain overlooked in liturgical theological scholarship.⁵

In what follows are presented these five pillars underpinning any future systematic heortology; each time, I will also indicate some unavoidable limitations.

A Fine Phenomenology of the Feast: Engaging Josef Pieper

A systematic heortology would greatly benefit from an interdisciplinary dialogue with philosophers and anthropologists who have reflected on what it means that the human being celebrates feasts. Looking at the emergence of cult and culture, which probably co-imply each other, where does the genesis of feasts lie? Can one say that the feasting human being is co-existent with *homo religiosus*? What does it say about humans' religiosity that they also celebrate feasts, and what does it say about feasts that most human beings are also susceptible to religion, or, as a renowned Dutch theologian put it, "incurably religious"?⁶ Are feasts related to the observation that the human being is *homo ludens*, the playing being, also needing rules for the games it plays? What is the connection between routine, the need for it, and the rhythms of time and life on the one hand, and the phenomenon of feasts and the incredible variety among them on the other hand? Is there at all something common to all feasts, or everything which is named a feast? Is it possible to imagine the human condition without feasts? How do feasts interact with human emotions, with the body, with the senses, with stories and storytelling, with fantasy and reason? How do feasts capture and express the collective memories of people and peoples? Who is in control of what is celebrated, and how are feasts manipulated?

Manifestly, the phenomenon of feasts raises many fascinating philosophical questions. A philosopher who devoted much time and energy to thinking about feasts is the German university professor Josef Pieper (°1904—†1997), to whose work I limit myself for deriving from it two fundamental and thought-provoking ideas about feasts which I think are indispensable for the design of a veritable systematic heortology.⁷

4. I am limiting myself to the Roman rite, but, *mutatis mutandis*, the exercise could be easily extended to other liturgical families.

5. Of course, it is impossible to do justice to all these elements in detail. Given the programmatic nature of the present contribution, the best that can be done is to give a specific example. The purpose of that one example is merely of a methodological nature: it shows how a systematic heortology is extended beyond the study of texts and reaches out to the (visual) arts. For its hermeneutical work of interpreting, thinking, and explaining, a systematic heortology not only reads but also looks.

6. Harry Kuitert (°1924—†2017) characterized human beings, even in the most secularized societies, as "ongeneeslijk religieus."

7. Josef Pieper, *Zustimmung zur Welt: Eine Theorie des Festes* (München: Kösel, 1963); Id., *Über das Phänomen des Festes* (Köln—Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963).

First, Pieper is convinced that feasting is something intrinsic to the human condition, but he does not limit that observation to something a cultural theorist or sociologist could come up with, too. According to Pieper, this is an insight with metaphysical weight. The act of feasting, he argues, is impossible without acknowledging the primal goodness of being. The very fact of being is not something simple or entirely neutral for him, but good. When feasting, humans assent, and cannot but assent, to that original goodness of being, confirm it, align with it, embrace it.

Second, Pieper rejects the supposition that the specificity of feasts can be explained through the contrast with ordinary work or quotidian life. Against the idea that feasting originates in the need for interruption because daily life cannot go on continuously, he argues that the celebration of a feast is rather to be considered as the elevation or point of culmination of all human activity and labor than as one peculiar type of activity set apart from all the rest.

It would lead us too far to further analyze these two clusters of thought, but with the first one, Pieper is reacting against contemporary existentialists, who were inclined to interpret human existence against the backdrop of an abyss of emptiness and pervading meaninglessness. The second one is directed against communist and other social constructivist theories that make sharp distinctions between different and independent spheres of life. I, for my part, think that Pieper's inspiration for an account of feasts which does neither buy into nihilism nor into a functionalist view on the human condition is tremendously important for a systematic heortology. Put differently, a systematic heortology would always imply at least an openness towards metaphysics. Solidly rooted in existential phenomenology and profoundly familiar with the tradition of Christian thinking, Pieper's work sets an example here worth pursuing. A metaphysical sensitivity accounts for a healthy realism, for which reality does not coincide with the visible.

A Theory of Mystery: Engaging Dom Columba Marmion

Closely related to such a metaphysics is a fundamental reflection on the concept of mystery, in which, philosophically speaking, elements of the visible and the invisible are dynamically intertwined. In fact, mystery is not primarily a concept that one tries to grasp but a reality that one attempts to participate in. Moreover, mystery in a Christian sense does not simply evoke something enigmatic for human cognition or, with a wink to Rowan Williams, the idea "that the world is full of 'sacredness';" it pertains to "the very specific conviction that the world is full of the life of a God whose nature is known in Christ and the Spirit."⁸ Therefore, an awareness of the

8. Rowan Williams, "Foreword," in Geoffrey Rowell—Christine Hall, eds., *The Gestures of God: Explorations in Sacramentality* (London—New York: Continuum, 2004), xiii. As a matter of fact, Williams here talks about sacramentality, not mystery. I think, however, that his statement neatly applies.

meaning of mystery does not require the mastery of the intellect (first), but a willingness and preparedness to engage oneself. The notion of mystery itself always contains a dimension of hospitality, and the appropriate response to the invitation offered is a happy and thankful reception. In the words of famous French theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet, it is a “don” (gift) inviting a “contre-don” (return-gift) of oneself.⁹ One can decide to refuse the invitation, be firm not to surrender or to accept it, but one can never deny having been and therefore always *being* invited.

A particularly meaningful theological elaboration of the idea of mystery as (primordially meant to be) something to participate in, to have communion with, and to share with others, is expressed by Dom Columba Marmion, a Belgian monk of Irish descent, abbot of Maredsous, and—very importantly with respect to the origins of the Liturgical Movement—the teacher of Dom Lambert Beauduin (°1873—†1960) as well as, so to speak, the discoverer of his exceptional theological talent. Marmion coined the deceptively simple phrase that Christ’s mysteries are “our” mysteries.

What makes the mysteries of Jesus ours is, above all, that the Eternal Father saw us when seeing His Son in each one of the mysteries Jesus lived, and that Christ accomplished them as head of the Church. Because of that, I will even say that the mysteries of Christ are more our mysteries than they are His.¹⁰

Marmion sounded these mysteries very deeply and used the liturgical year as a leading principle. Every feast it contains, including every Sunday throughout the year (*per annum*; somewhat awkwardly translated in English as “ordinary” time), is an invitation as well as an occasion for getting involved. What one gets involved in, is the Body of Christ. “Let us not forget,” says Marmion, “that Christ Jesus *wills* the holiness of His mystical body: all His mysteries come down to the firm establishment of that holiness.”¹¹ This call to holiness is universal, it is extended to all peoples and persons without distinction. By accepting it and living it out, one is adopted as one of God’s children. What Christ is by nature, God’s Son, everyone can become by adoption. It is probably a bit exaggerated, but somehow similar to famous patristic and medieval thinkers who received solemn nicknames such as *doctor gratiae* (Saint Augustine), *doctor angelicus* (Thomas Aquinas) or *doctor seraphicus* (Saint Bonaventure), one could consider blessed Columba Marmion the *doctor adoptionis*. To be adopted into the divine mysteries is the fulfillment of a Christian life.

9. Cf. Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), 108, 276–78, 283–86. Chauvet applies the concept of “return-gift” to the practical ethics which is involved in the Christian sacraments and also argues that the Jewish identity can be recognized in this structure of gift and return-gift.

10. Columba Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, trans. Alan Bancroft (Leominster: Gracewing, 2009), 18.

11. Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, 20.

Without going into the details, it is relevant to note that Marmion's reflections on Christ's mysteries and the liturgical year have to be situated in a Benedictine monastic context, where scholarly work went hand in hand with spiritual deepening, and where day and night were rhythmized by worship. The same privileged circumstances provided Dom Odo Casel (°1886—†1948) in the abbey of Maria Laach in the Rhineland, Germany, with everything he needed for his fine investigations into Christian antiquity and the early developments of liturgy. Casel realized that the Latin notions *mysterium* and *sacramentum* meant virtually the same, both in liturgical sources and in homilies and treatises by the church fathers. The (re)discovery of this almost full overlap of meaning arguably caused the greatest revolution in 20th century Catholic theology, precisely in the field of sacramental theology, with its close ties to the Liturgical Movement, as Joseph Ratzinger, not without some sense for exaggeration, suggested in an article dated 1966.¹²

The point I want to make here is that the full theological potential of the notion of mystery has not yet been exhausted and that the consequences of looking at the liturgical year through the lens of mystery is today as promising as it was when Casel conducted his research on ancient Greek and Latin sources and when Marmion held his spiritual conferences. The latter, moreover, are not to be put aside as mere spiritual nourishment or piety-enhancing literature; they constitute an example of systematic heortology in their own right. That being said, there are other stimulating commentaries on the liturgical year out there. They are usually considered merely spiritual and, or because, not academic enough, but this assessment rests on certain biases to which I don't subscribe. By way of example, one could refer here to Thomas Keating's *The Mystery of Christ: The Liturgy as Spiritual Experience*,¹³ Philip Pfatteicher's *Journey into the Heart of God: Living the Liturgical Year*,¹⁴ or Martin Connell's two-volume study with the intriguing title *Eternity Today: On the Liturgical Year*.¹⁵

12. Joseph Ratzinger, "Die sakramentale Begründung christlicher Existenz,;" Id., *Theologie der Liturgie: Die sakramentale Begründung christlicher Existenz*, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 11 (Freiburg—Basel—Wien: Herder, 2008), 197: "Die vielleicht fruchtbarste theologische Idee unseres Jahrhunderts, die Mysterientheologie Odo Casels, gehört dem Bereich der Sakramententheologie zu und man kann wohl ohne Übertreibung sagen, dass seit dem Ende der Väterzeit die Theologie der Sakramente keine solche Blüte erlebt hat, wie sie ihr in diesem Jahrhundert im Zusammenhang mit den Ideen Casels geschenkt wurde, die ihrerseits nur auf dem Hintergrund der Liturgischen Bewegung und ihrer Wiederentdeckung des altchristlichen Gottesdienstes zu begreifen sind."

13. Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ: The Liturgy as Spiritual Experience* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

14. Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Journey into the Heart of God: Living the Liturgical Year* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2013).

15. Martin Connell, *Eternity Today: On the Liturgical Year*, 2 vols. (New York—London: Continuum, 2006). The title of the first volume is *On God and Time, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Candlemas*, and of the second one *Sunday, Lent, The Three Days, The Easter Season, Ordinary Time*.

A Theology of the *Sanctorale*: Engaging the Communion of Saints

In that latter work, Connell writes: “The Liturgical year is the church’s temporal medium for assembling its people to celebrate as the communion of saints at prayer.”¹⁶ It is worth pausing and chewing a bit (ruminating as it were) on this statement, which is as dense as it is concise. I want to highlight three things. First, the notion of ‘temporal medium’ is striking. It suggests that time itself is a primary bearer of symbolic meaning, at least if one is willing to interpret the word ‘medium’ here not in an instrumentalist but in a more substantial way. Second, the use of the verb ‘to celebrate’ is central to what is conveyed in the statement. The liturgical year, essentially, *is* a celebration. Third, Connell’s statement stands out in that it undeniably puts a fierce ecclesiological emphasis. The idea is advanced that the gathered assembly is put in conjunction with the communion of saints, whereby this conjunction is not something artificial or fictitious. Rather, the act of conjunction happens smoothly, almost naturally, i.e., without there being an absolute separation between the living and the dead. It is indeed an old and trustworthy tradition to consider the ones baptized and called for Christian worship *saints*. Their vocation is to help sanctify world and history, time and space, “always and everywhere,” by virtue of having accepted—or indeed “adopted”—the invitation to participate in the paschal mystery.

In other words, what is supposed here is a realism of sorts, a realism which, in the words of David McCarthy, “turns to the seemingly insignificant rather than the exceptional; it turns to ordinary people, the passing of time, and the multitude of ordinary things in the world.”¹⁷ Yet, it is precisely in the ordinary that an openness for transcendence offers and manifests itself, so that a communion beyond the limits of lived space and time can be established. McCarthy appropriately calls this realism a “hagiographic realism,” which “has a sacramental character where participation in the wholeness of reality is transferred to specific things and events in time, transferred not primarily as thing or text but through living relationships.”¹⁸ This complex of living relations is the communion of saints, which indeed deserves substantial theological rehabilitation.

A very helpful suggestion to connect this rehabilitation of the communion of saints with the celebration of the liturgy comes from Cardinal Walter Kasper. In a long essay in which he discusses contemporary challenges for liturgical theology and in which he makes a noted plea for a “new liturgical culture,” he comments on the idea that the church constantly moves between calling together the community of the faithful (*congregatio fidelium*) and preparing them for the communion of

16. Connell, *Eternity Today*, vol. 1, 52.

17. David Matzko McCarthy, *Sharing God’s Good Company: A Theology of the Communion of Saints* (Grand Rapids—Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 46.

18. McCarthy, *Sharing God’s Good Company*, 45.

the saints (*communio sanctorum*).¹⁹ This constant move is the core of her very life; it is, as it were, the pulse of the heart of the Body of Christ. Kasper reminds his readers that the roots of this life lie in careful listening to the Word of God, which is to be understood not as a transfer of information but as communication. Through this *communication*, the *community* of the people sanctified by the sacraments of the Church is sustained by its being (called to be) a *communion* of saints. The common response or reaction to these elevated thoughts is, quite understandably, to turn immediately to the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, as Kasper actually does. My proposal, however, is to shift the attention to the liturgical year instead, which is as sacramental or indeed as “mysterial”—a word coined to establish a difference with ordinary interpretations of what is “mysterious”—than the sacraments themselves. A systematic heortology thus unleashes a renewed dealing with the sanctoral cycle. Most attention has always gone, and rightly so, to the temporal cycle, with its continuous sequence of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, a short period of ordinary time, Lent, the Triduum, the Easter season culminating in the solemnity of Pentecost, a long stretch of ordinary time, and Advent again. Evidently, because of the undisputed primacy of Christ, the temporal regime prevails over the sanctoral regime.²⁰ But it would be a serious mistake to neglect the *sanctorale*, for it contains so much truth, beauty, and goodness as well.

In other words, because of the central importance of the communion of saints, a systematic heortology would certainly not only engage the *proprium de tempore*, but also the *proprium de sanctis*, even with a special predilection. For it is “[t]he communion of saints [which] populates connections between the personal and the metaphysical, between now, people across time, and the future fullness of the kingdom of God,”²¹ as McCarthy eloquently puts it. A systematic heortology tirelessly explores the *sanctorale* to find the myriad ways in which these connections are made concrete and can be made into liturgical invitations for active participation in God’s mysteries.—In the next section I give an example of how that could work based on a detailed analysis of the sources.

19. Walter Kasper, “Aspekte einer Theologie der Liturgie: Liturgie angesichts der Krise der Moderne—für eine neue liturgische Kultur,” in Id., *Die Liturgie der Kirche*, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 10 (Freiburg—Basel—Wien: Herder, 2010), 58–64.

20. Such is made abundantly clear by the Roman Catholic Church’s *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, an often-understudied document that was nevertheless of tremendous importance for the implementation of the liturgical reforms in the wake of Vatican II. It was published in 1969. The basic inspiration for the norms here stipulated comes directly from *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, whose fifth chapter is entirely devoted to the liturgical year. What strikes one is that not only the Lord’s feasts but also the veneration of the saints is connected to the paschal mystery (cf. nr. 104), which thus functions as a kind of bridge between the different registers of the liturgical year.

21. McCarthy, *Sharing God’s Good Company*, 57.

A Subtle Hermeneutics of Liturgical Texts: Comparing the Feast of Saint Laurence (August 10) with the Memorial of Saint Martin of Tours (November 11)

To gain insight into how a systematic heortology might work in practice when it considers the sanctoral cycle and the veneration of the saints, it makes much sense to start with the feast of Saint Lawrence, celebrated on August 10 in the middle of the summer (in the northern hemisphere at least). A famous martyr, Saint Lawrence is tremendously important for the Romans, the city and church of Rome, and the Roman rite. The liturgy of his feast can count as a standard for comparing all the other saints, for it contains special material for all the components of a feast according to the Roman rite. Generally speaking, one can discern a law that says: the more specific euchological material a feast or memorial contains, the more important the saint. Saint Lawrence has unique material for almost every element, both in the register of the Eucharist and in the liturgy of the hours. Setting this standard sheds light on another very meaningful saint for the Roman rite, Saint Martin of Tours, arguably one of the most important saints of the European Middle Ages and the first non-martyr saint.²² It is on purpose that I select for the present reflections a saint from Rome and another one from Gaul, for, as liturgical historians know well, the history of the Roman rite shows many influences, not least among which are Gallican.

What, however, do the liturgical books say about Saint Lawrence and Saint Martin of Tours and what do the corresponding feasts look like? A systematic heortological approach would look not only at the missal for responding to these questions, which is the common reaction for many pastoral commentaries on the liturgical feasts (of the saints), but it would take into account *all* the liturgical books, including the breviary, the lectionary, and the martyrology. Let us start with the last one.

The Martyrology

The *editio typica* of the *Martyrologium Romanum* was published only in 2001, a second edition very soon followed in 2004.²³ There are 11 saints mentioned on November 11, including saints from Egypt, Brabant, Tuscany, Japan, Poland, Bulgaria as well as Theodore the Studite of Constantinople (°759—†826), not unknown among the guild of theologians. However, the slightly larger font leaves

22. It is a deliberate choice not to treat here the veneration for Mary, which has had a special status in the liturgy in general and the liturgical year in particular, with not just one but many feasts of diverse origins and meanings. A fitting survey of Marian feasts is offered by Katherine E. Harmon, *Mary and the Liturgical Year: A Pastoral Resource* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2023). This choice does not mean, of course, that a systematic heortological analysis of the liturgical material for Marian feasts, along the lines of what is done below, would not be a meaningful thing to do. However, already because of the size of such an undertaking, it clearly goes beyond the limits of the present contribution.

23. The *Martyrology* can be said to be the last fruit of the encompassing reforms of liturgical books in the aftermath of Vatican II.

no doubt that it is the commemoration of Saint Martin that prevails.²⁴ The brief biographical note of ten lines only (which is more than is common in the martyrology) mentions his descent from Pannonia, today in Hungary. It further says that his parents were pagans, that he joined the army and so ended up in Gaul. There he became a catechumen and was baptized. He left the army and withdrew near Ligugé as a hermit, during which time he was spiritually accompanied by Saint Hilary of Poitiers. Ordained a priest, he was then elected bishop of Tours and excelled by his exemplary ascetic life and pastoral zeal. He founded monasteries and parishes, preached the Gospel to the poor peasantry, and educated the clergy.

As usual, the martyrology does not give birth and death years of the saint, but it does mention that November 11 is actually not the day of Saint Martin's death but of his burial (*depositio*). However, we know from historical research that Martin lived in the fourth century; he was presumably born around 316 and probably died in 397, at the extraordinary age of around eighty-one. It is also known that even during his lifetime he enjoyed special recognition because of his holy way of life and that immediately after his death, by analogy with the apostles and the martyrs, he was venerated as a saint.²⁵ An official canonization as we know it today was inexistent in the first millennium, but for the historical development of the veneration of the saints, Martin of Tours occupies a peculiar place, since, as mentioned above, he is supposedly the first saint-not-martyr. With him starts a long series of so-called *confessores* (confessors or pastors, a distinctive category of saints) as well as a new practice and thinking concerning the saints. In any case, Martin of Tours became one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages.²⁶

A comparison with what the *Martyrologium Romanum* says about Saint Lawrence reveals many similarities in approach. The text mentions nine saints on August 10, including martyrs from Alexandria, Japan, France, and Spain, including religious from the Franciscans and Salesians, Polish priests who died in the concentration camp of Dachau, and a bishop from Scotland. There is no doubt, however, that the feast of Saint Lawrence prevails, as the text about him is put in a slightly bigger font.²⁷ Even if historical certainty has become important in the theology of the veneration of the saints (at least since the Council of Trent), and even if nothing is known with certainty about Saint Lawrence, this feast has stood the test of the ages. Readers of the martyrology learn that he was a deacon who wished to un-

24. *Martyrologium Romanum*, editio altera (Rome: Typis Vaticanis, 2004), 616–17.

25. His *vita* was written by Sulpicius Severus (363—ca. 420), a Christian author from Aquitaine, who had known Martin personally and became an admirer of him. He also knew Paulinus of Nola (ca. °354—†451), another church father who was instrumental in the earliest promotion of the veneration of the saints, in his case particularly Felix of Nola.

26. Olivier Guillot, *Saint Martin, apôtre des pauvres* (Paris: Fayard, 2008).

27. *Martyrologium Romanum*, 444–45.

dergo the same fate as his bishop, pope Xystus (Sixtus II),²⁸ that, according to Leo the Great, he was ordered to hand over the church's treasures to the authorities, but that, in response to that order, he came up with the poor of the city, that he was tortured for this brave gesture, died by flames, and that he was buried at the Campo Verano, which subsequently carries his name.²⁹

As the texts of the martyrology are usually read on the day before the celebration of a saint's feast, some essential information about who they were is supposed to be known on the day itself. Generally speaking, the liturgical books do not come back to any of the biographical details, certainly not extensively. It is important to realize that the liturgy of the Roman rite is extremely scarce, even reluctant so it seems, to give any concrete information about a saint's life. Rather, it emphasizes their significance and role in the communion of saints, their relationship with God, and their efforts for His Church. Neither do the liturgical books simply promote the lives of the saints as high-standing ethical examples; liturgy is neither moral teaching nor hagiography. Therefore, if there are any allusions to a saint's life, this is to be interpreted as a sign of their extraordinary significance. An explicit mention of their names is already a lot.

Moreover, one could derive from the liturgy a generalizable principle implying that the more specific euchological and scriptural material is provided for the hours and the mass on the day of their celebration, the more important a saint is. If we apply this principle to the feasts of Saint Lawrence and Saint Martin, one can infer that they truly are important saints. Painstaking attention to the liturgical weight of a saint is critically important from the perspective of systematic heortology, as it helps nuance the contributions of historical research, pastoral commentaries, hagiography, devotions, and spiritual interpretations. Basing ourselves only on the liturgical material provided for the *memoria* of Saint Martin and the *festum* of Saint Lawrence,³⁰ we can see that both of them are more important than other famous saints of the Roman rite, especially those who lived in modern times.

The Missal

When one looks at the mass forms, available in the Roman missals of 1570, 1962, and 2008—i.e., the first one promulgated in the immediate aftermath of the Coun-

28. There were severe persecutions under emperor Valerian in Rome in 258. According to tradition, the pope together with four deacons, among whom Lawrence, were killed.

29. The Basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura, one of the seven pilgrimage churches in Rome, is situated right next to the impressive cemetery of Campo Verano.

30. These are technical terms which refer to a different rank in the hierarchy of feasts. The highest rank is *sollemnitatis*, then there is *festum*, and finally *memoria*, which can be either obligatory or optional. In what follows, I forgo consistent use of the technical terms and mostly simply speak of feast.

cil of Trent,³¹ the last version of that one before the liturgical reforms issuing forth from Vatican II,³² and the one currently in use³³—one can observe some interesting tendencies. First, there is specific liturgical material provided for the feasts of both saints; there are no references to *communio* of either martyrs or confessors (which is not to say that it is theoretically excluded that this material shows correspondences with these *communio*). Second, one finds the names of the saints mentioned in the three orations or presidential prayers, at least in MR 2008, because in the past this was not the case.³⁴ Third, the feast of Saint Lawrence shows more continuity than the feast of Saint Martin. As far as the three orations on Saint Lawrence are concerned, one observes an entirely new collect, which no longer refers to the “flames of our vices” that were “overcome by the fire of his tortures,”³⁵ and moderate modifications to the prayer over the offerings and the prayer after communion. Concerning Saint Martin, one observes three completely new prayers in MR 2008 as compared to MR 1570, with an emphatic replacement of the *secreta* in MR 1962, whereby the latter has an entirely different text than in MR 1570. Strikingly, this text was again modified in MR 2008.³⁶

In sum, by and large, the two feasts presently show a great amount of correspondence at a structural level. In the past, however, this was different. Unlike the feast of Saint Martin, the feast of Saint Lawrence knew a vigil and an octave, which no longer exist today in the Roman rite. In the *Missale Romanum* of 1570, the ninth of August contains a mass form “in vigilia sancti Laurentii,” with specific euchological elements for all the individual components.³⁷ In addition, there was a rubric that said: “infra octavam sancti Laurentii fit idem officium quod in die:” during the octave, the same mass form is to be used as the one for the day (of the feast itself).³⁸

31. *Missale Romanum, editio princeps (1570)*, ed. Manlio Sodi—Achille Maria Triacca, Monumenta Liturgica Concilii Tridentini, vol. 2 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012). Henceforth MR 1570.

32. *Missale Romanum, editio typica 1962*, ed. Manlio Sodi—Alessandro Toniolo, Monumenta Liturgica Pia, vol. 1 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007). Henceforth MR 1962.

33. *Missale Romanum, editio typica tertia, reimpressio emendata* (Roma: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 2008). Henceforth MR 2008.

34. On this point, there is indeed a remarkable difference between the two saints if one compares the euchology of MR 1570 and MR 1962. Lawrence is mentioned in all the respective prayers; Martin, however, is neither mentioned in the *secreta* and *postcommunio* of MR 1570 nor in the *postcommunio* of MR 1962, but he is in the opening prayers of MR 1570 and MR 1962 as well as in the *secreta* of MR 1962.

35. MR 1570, 528; MR 1962, 706.

36. For the study of more similarities and differences, see the annexed tables. For a more general discussion of changes in the sanctoral between the missals of 1570 and 1962, see my contribution “International Saints from the Roman Missal: A Liturgical Perspective,” in Eleonora Rai—Michela Catto (eds.), *From Europe to Overseas: Saints, Martyrs, Heroes and Soft Power in an Early Modern Global Perspective* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2025), 337–53.

37. MR 1570, 527–28.

38. MR 1570, 529.

The Breviary

In the liturgy of the hours, the feast of Saint Martin has a special antiphon for the invitatory, which does mention his name;³⁹ the feast of Saint Lawrence takes over the invitatory's antiphon from the common of one martyr—which is the usual thing to do in case there isn't anything specific provided. This is already an indication of the hypothesized importance of the feast of Saint Martin but does not necessarily imply that the feast of Saint Lawrence would be less important.

The importance of both feasts is unambiguously confirmed when one looks at the “hinges” of the liturgy of the hours, lauds and vespers. One observes that in both cases, the feasts of Saint Martin and Saint Lawrence not only have an antiphon for the canticles of Zechariah and Mary, i.e. the Benedictus and the Magnificat, which regularly happens on saints' feasts, but additionally for the three psalms provided for both hours. Most strikingly, exactly half of these antiphons additionally mention Lawrence and Martin *nominatim* (cf. table below). In the case of Saint Martin, the antiphon accompanying the canticle of Mary in the evening prayer is the most elaborate among them and, compared to other antiphons, a quite elaborate one indeed:

This blessed bishop loved Christ with all his strength and had no fear of earthly rulers; though he did not die a martyr's death, this holy confessor won the martyr's palm.⁴⁰

In translations of this antiphon in other vernacular languages, Saint Martin is even addressed directly, unlike the English which speaks about him in the third person singular. In the case of Saint Lawrence, the Magnificat antiphon is not particularly elaborate, but it does mention the saint's name:

Blessed Lawrence said: The night is not dark for me; all things shine as in the noonday light.⁴¹

Furthermore, lauds and vespers on Saint Martin and Saint Lawrence have a special concluding prayer (*oratio*) for the occasion, which is also used in the office of readings.⁴² On Saint Martin, the short readings only minimally deviate from

39. *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. IV: *Ordinary Time, Weeks 18-34* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), 1552: “Come, let us worship our God as we celebrate the feast the Saint Martin.”

40. *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. IV, 1556.

41. *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. IV, 1309.

42. “Father, by his life and death Martin of Tours offered you worship and praise. Renew in our hearts the power of your love, so that neither death nor life may separate us from you. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.” *Ibid.*, 1555. Correspondingly: “Father, you called Saint Lawrence to serve you by love and crowned his life with glorious martyrdom. Help us to be like him in loving you and doing your work. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.” *Ibid.*, 1308.

the regular schema of readings for “holy pastors.”⁴³ As to the short readings on Saint Lawrence both at lauds and at vespers, there is no difference between texts foreseen on the feasts of one martyr.⁴⁴

In the office of readings on Saint Lawrence, the second reading is taken from a sermon of Saint Augustine, in which the bishop of Hippo explicitly refers to Saint Lawrence and explains the meaning of martyrdom. He exhorts his listeners to take Saint Lawrence as an example, arguing that what he did comes so close to what Christ himself did.⁴⁵ On Saint Martin, an excerpt is read from a letter by Sulpicius Severus, the saint’s hagiographer. It recounts the story of his death at Candes,⁴⁶ where Martin, dying, would have expressed the hope that, once dead, he would be welcomed by Abraham in heaven. Words from this letter—“he neither feared to die nor refused to live”⁴⁷—are reiterated in the responsory of the office, and by the way also in the antiphons of lauds. Clearly, a systematic heortological study of the feast of Saint Martin, relying on a synchronic reading of the liturgical material, can lay bare an intriguing intertextuality, which in its turn sheds light on the major themes of the feast.

Table synthesizing the data from the Liturgy of the Hours

		Saint Lawrence	Saint Martin
Invitatory	Antiphon	c 1m	P
Office of readings	Psalm antiphons	c 1m	c 1p
	1st reading	P (Acts 6)	c 1p
	Responsory	P	c 1p
	2nd reading	P (Aug.)	P (Sulp. Sev.)
	Responsory	P + name	P
	Prayer	P (= lauds)	P (= lauds)

43. Whereas the common of one pastor has Hebrews 13:7-9a at lauds, on Saint Martin only Hebrews 13:7-8 is read. As to the short reading at vespers, Saint Martin’s feast takes over all the verses foreseen, i.e. 1 Peter 5:1-4, but they are printed separately.

44. They are 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 and 1 Peter 4:13-14, respectively. As in the case of Saint Martin, these texts are printed separately on the pages pertaining to the forms of the individual saint.

45. *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. IV, 1305–7.

46. This is a village in Western France at the confluence of the rivers Loire and Vienne, somewhere between Poitiers in the south and Angers in the north.

47. *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. IV, 1553.

Morning prayer (lauds)	Psalm antiphon 1	P	P + name
	Psalm antiphon 2	P	P + name
	Psalm antiphon 3	P + name	P + name
	Reading	= c1m	< c1p
	Responsory	P	= c1p
	Benedictus anti- phon	P	P
	Intercessions	c1m	c1p
	Prayer	P + name	P + name
Evening prayer II (vespers)	Psalm antiphon 1	P + name	P
	Psalm antiphon 2	P + name	P
	Psalm antiphon 3	P	P + name
	Reading	= c1m	= c1p
	Responsory	P	= c1p
	Magnificat anti- phon	P + name	P
	Intercessions	c1m	c1p
	Prayer	P (= lauds)	P (= lauds)

Explanation of the codes:

- c1m = from the common of one martyr (St. Lawrence)
- c1p = from the common of one confessor (St. Martin)
- P = proper

What, now, did this systematic-theological exercise, this analysis of the unique liturgical material of the feasts of Saint Lawrence and Saint Martin produce? I limit myself to two mutually building insights. First, there is not a single doubt that the feasts of both saints are significant feasts in the Roman rite, far more important than many other feasts of saints, even of more famous saints. The feasts demonstrate that liturgy, through its multifaceted euchology,⁴⁸ finds a uniquely distinctive way of adding its own emphases, complementary to historical research or pastoral perspectives on the veneration of the saints. Unfortunately, however, this unique contribution of liturgical sources is systematically neglected in mainstream theology. Second, faith in the communion of saints can be enriched powerfully by a thorough study of the *proprium de sanctis*. Through systematic-heortological detailed analyses, its ecclesiological, Christological, doxological, and eschatological dimensions can be

48. In addition, there are also para- and extra-liturgical elements, not to mention popular devotions and local customs, which could easily underline the importance of both feasts. All of this is not to deny that the importance of saints' feasts is always also dependent on historical contingencies and cultural factors. These, however, did not constitute the focus of the above analysis of liturgical sources. In this respect, it probably needs to be repeated that a systematic heortology should align itself with the outcomes of historical research and the critical insights gained through it.

further scrutinized and made fruitful for the life of the churches. Moreover, the work carried out here can—and should—be meaningfully repeated and extended based on a study of other, both similar and different, liturgical sources. One could think, e.g., of local martyrologies, breviaries, sacramentaries, and missals from the past. They would modify the conclusion that the communion of saints is built mainly on the worship practices of the ancient Roman church.

Reaching out to the Visual Arts: Engaging the Work of Frère Yves

A final building block for a systematic heortology that I want to touch on briefly is the constructive contribution that can be made by the visual arts. Indeed, theology, in my view, does not ‘happen’ merely through words, concepts, discourses, and theories, whether written down and transmitted through texts or not, but also through images and colors.⁴⁹ The history of painting and iconography offers an immense resource of images of the liturgical year’s major feasts, including Easter and Christmas, but also feasts such as the Exaltation of the Cross and the Transfiguration, thereby offering food for theological thought. In fact, a brilliant example of how this is concretely possible can be observed in the finely crafted paintings of Frère Yves, Pierre Vitry. Indeed, a not insignificant part of Frère Yves’ pictorial oeuvre concerns the liturgical year.⁵⁰ One could say—and I claim—that he designed a systematic heortology in image and color, and that in this way he not only captured the deep meaning of the Christian mysteries himself but that he captured them in such a way as to make others, children and adults, partakers of them.

Frère Yves Pitry (°1923—†2023) lived to be one hundred years old. He was a monk of the Benedictine abbey of Sainte Marie de la Pierre-qui-Vire, located in the forests of the Morvan in Burgundy, France, where he entered in 1946. His talent for drawing and aptitude for art were noticed and, among other things, he was enlisted in the abbey’s gigantic work of documenting Romanesque and Gothic art in various countries (France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, Germany, etc.) in series of dozens of books. The Abbey of La Pierre-qui-Vire is indeed known internationally for its *Zodiaque* editions. The thorough familiarity with early and medieval Christian art that Frère Yves gained in this way, together with his regular life as a monk, inspired him to reflect deeply on the meaning of Scripture and the liturgy.⁵¹ The repercussions of that repeated reading and rumination can be found in his paintings. Because his images abstract from context and detail, and thus

49. Theology equally ‘happens’ through sounds and tones, by the way, so a systematic heortology could also benefit greatly from an exchange with the music.

50. *L’année liturgique de frère Yves*, La Pierre-qui-Vire.

51. A very regrettable incident in the life of Frère Yves occurred in connection with the illustrations he had made for a children’s Bible in the mid-1950s. The reactions to his style by church officials hurt him deeply, which reportedly caused him to stay silent for many years. However, his community and superiors have always continued to support him, and in old age he has even been surprisingly productive, including an impressive twenty-piece work depicting the mysteries of the rosary commissioned by the monastic community of Sainte Odile in Alsace, France.

have something timeless in their deceptive simplicity, it is natural to compare Frère Yves' paintings to icons from the Byzantine tradition. These, too, as far as their depiction of the mysteries of Christ in the liturgical year is concerned, are characterized by a certain hieraticism and a rendition of what is written in Scripture and what tradition has handed down.

In the abbey where Brother Yves lived and where he is also buried, in the visitors center where they explain their life, prayer, and work, near the monastery store, his fellow brothers set up a whole room dedicated to his cycle on the liturgical year. This is not only a tribute, but also an invitation to initiation into the displayed mysteries themselves. For each mystery or feast, a brief explanation is given based on a quotation from the Bible. Anyone entering the space is immediately struck by the sobriety and the clarity of the colors with which Frère Yves works: vermillion, ochre, and blue, not coincidentally the primary colors, complemented by white for the figures. Wonderful, for example, are the ways in which Easter and the Resurrection are depicted, with the testimony of the women who intended to embalm Jesus' body but discovered the empty tomb; or the Last Supper or Maundy Thursday, with the emphatically empty chair of Judas having already left the premises; or the Assumption of Mary, eternally asleep without being tainted by the decay of the body; or Christmas, with the shepherds' visit of the newborn and the angels' song of praise. The point is: a systematic heortological analysis can be made of all these Christian feasts, the conclusion of which can be no other than that it can only support Frère Yves' imagery, and vice versa.

Conclusion: On a Desideratum of Liturgical Theology

To propose a program of systematic heortology amounts to formulating a major desideratum for contemporary liturgical theology. Instead of losing oneself in science-theoretical speculations, it is better to put one's hand on the plow. That is what was tried above. I have shown how liturgical theology, in the guise of a systematic heortology, can play a significant role in contemporary theology, combining serious and thorough academic work with prompts for spiritual deepening, constantly moving between the exteriority of celebrations, feasts, and texts and the interiority of the life of the mind, between tradition and community on the one hand and the human person on the other. In doing so, liturgical theology cannot fail to operate in an intrinsically interdisciplinary fashion, that is, through a vast multiplicity of unrelenting conversations with all manner of knowing and wisdom, from detailed textual investigations to an exchange with the arts, as indeed with its older sisters, history and pastoral liturgy. The program for a systematic heortology of the future will be able to play a role in untangling the deepest human knots, in better understanding and being able to explain what the Christian faith stands for, and in the study of Christian worship of course. The reason why this is so has to do with the fact that it does not reserve a small field of expertise or separate niche for itself, to the detriment of other disciplines, methods, and approaches, but because it works fundamentally, truly synthetically, *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* ...

Comparing euchological material from the Roman Missal

Die 10 augusti—S. LAURENTII MARTYRIS

	MR 1570	MR 1962	MR 2008
<i>Ant. ad introitum</i>	Confessio et pulchritudo in conspecto eius: sanctitas et magnificentia in sanctificatione eius. Psal. Cantate Domino canticum novum: cantate Domino, omnis terra. V. Gloria Patri.	Ps. 95, 6 Confessio et pulchritudo in conspecto eius: sanctitas et magnificentia in sanctificatione eius. Ps. ibid., 1 Cantate Domino canticum novum: cantate Domino, omnis terra. V. Gloria Patri.	Hic est beatus Laurentius, qui pro ope Ecclesiae semetipsum tradidit: propterea meruit martyrium passionem, ut laetus ascenderet ad Dominum Iesum Christum.
<i>Oratio/Collecta</i>	Da nobis, quaesumus, omnipotens Deus: vitiorum nostrorum flammam extinguere; qui beato Laurentio tribuisti tormentorum suorum incendia superare. Per Dominum.	Da nobis, quaesumus, omnipotens Deus: vitiorum nostrorum flammam extinguere; qui beato Laurentio tribuisti tormentorum suorum incendia superare. Per Dominum.	Deus, cuius caritas ardore beatus Laurentius servitio claruit fidelis et martyro gloriosus, fac nos amare quod amavit, et opere exercere quod docuit. Per Dominum.
<i>Ant. ad offertorium</i>	Confessio et pulchritudo in conspecto eius: sanctitas et magnificentia in sanctificatione eius.	Ps. 95, 6 Confessio et pulchritudo in conspecto eius: sanctitas et magnificentia in sanctificatione eius.	/
<i>Secreta/Super oblata</i>	Accipe, quaesumus domine, munera dignanter oblata: et, beati Laurentii suffragantibus meritis, ad nostrae salutis auxilium provenire concedere. Per Domnum nostrum.	Accipe, quaesumus, Domine, munera dignanter oblata: et, beati Laurentii suffragantibus meritis, ad nostrae salutis auxilium provenire concedere. Per Domnum nostrum.	Suscipe propitius, Domine, munera in beati Laurentii celebritate laetanter oblata, et ad nostrae salutis auxilium provenire concede.
<i>Ant. ad communionem</i>	Qui mihi ministrat, me sequatur: et ubi ego sum, illic et minister meus erit.	Io. 12, 26 Qui mihi ministrat, me sequatur: et ubi ego sum, illic et minister meus erit.	Cf. Io 12, 26 Qui mihi ministrat, me sequatur; et ubi ego sum, illic et minister meus erit.

<i>Postcommunio/Post communionem</i>	Sacro munere satiati, supplices te, Domine, deprecamur: ut, quod debitate servitutis celebramus officio, intercedente beato Laurentio martyre tuo, salvationis tuae sentiamus augmentum. Per Dominum nostrum Christum filium tuum.	Sacro munere satiati, supplices te, Domine, deprecamur: ut, quod debitate servitutis celebramus officio, intercedente beato Laurentio Martyre tuo, salvationis tuae sentiamus augmentum. Per Dominum.	Sacro munere satiati, supplices te, Domine, deprecamur, ut, quod in festivitate beati Laurentii debitae servitutis praestamus obsequium, salvationis tuae sentiamus augmentum. Per Christum.
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Die 11 novembris—S. Martini Ep.et Conf.

	MR 1570	MR 1962	MR 2008
<i>Ant. ad introitum</i>	Statuit ei Dominus testamentum pacis, et principem fecit eum: ut sit illi sacerdotii dignitas in aeternum. Ps. Memento, Domine, David: et omnis mansuetudinis eius. V. Gloria Patri et filio.	Eccli. 45, 30 Statuit ei Dominus testamentum pacis, et principem fecit eum: ut sit illi sacerdotii dignitas in aeternum. Ps. 131, 1 Memento, Domine, David: et omnis mansuetudinis eius. V. Gloria Patri.	Cf. 1 Sam 2, 35 Suscitabo mihi sacerdotem fidelem, qui iuxta cor meum et animam meam faciet, dicit Dominus.
<i>Oratio/Collecta</i>	Deus, qui conspicias, quia ex nulla nostra virtute subsistimus: concede propitius; ut, intercessione beai Martini Confessoris tui atque Pontificis, contra omnia adversa muniamur. Per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, Filium tuum.	Deus, qui conspicias, quia ex nulla nostra virtute subsistimus: concede propitius; ut, intercessione beai Martini Confessoris tui atque Pontificis, contra omnia adversa muniamur. Per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, Filium tuum: Qui tecum vivit et regnat in unitate.	Deus, qui in beato Martino episcopo sive per vitam sive per mortem magnificatus es, innova gratiae tuae mirabilia in cordibus nostris, ut neque mors neque vita separare nos possit a caritate tua. Per Dominum.
<i>Ant. ad offertorium</i>	Veritas mea et misericordia mea cum ipso: et in nomine meo exaltabitur cornu eius.	Ps. 88, 25 Veritas mea et misericordia mea cum ipso: et in nomine meo exaltabitur cornu eius.	/

<i>Secreta/Super oblata</i>	Da, misericors Deus: ut haec nos salutaris oblatio, et a propriis reatibus indesinenter expediat, et ab omnibus tueatur adversis. Per dominum nostrum Iesum Christum filium tuum.	Sanctifica, quaesumus, Domine Deus, haec munera, quae in solemnitate sancti Antistitis tui Martini offerimus: ut per ea vita nostra inter adversa et prospera ubique dirigatur. Per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, Filium tuum: Qui tecum vivit et regnat in unitate.	Sanctifica, quaesumus, Domine Deus, haec munera, quae in honorem sancti Martini offerimus, ut per ea vita nostra inter adversa et prospera semper dirigatur. Per Christum.
<i>Ant. ad communionem</i>	Beatus servus, quem, cum venerit dominus, invenerit vigilantem: amen dico vobis, super omnia bona sua constituet eum.	Mt. 24, 46-47 Beatus servus, quem, cum venerit dominus, invenerit vigilantem: amen dico vobis, super omnia bona sua constituet eum.	Cf. Mt 25, 40 Amen dico vobis, quamdiu fecistis uni ex his fratribus meis minimis, mihi fecistis, dicit Dominus.
<i>Postcommunio/Post communionem</i>	Praesta, quaesumus, Domine Deus noster: ut, quorum festivitate votiva sunt sacramenta, eorum intercessione salutaria nobis reddantur. Per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum.	Praesta, quaesumus, Domine Deus noster: ut, quorum festivitate votiva sunt sacramenta, eorum intercessione salutaria nobis reddantur. Per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, Filium tuum: Qui tecum vitit et regnat in unitate.	Da nobis, Domine, unitatis sacramento refectis, perfectam in omnibus cum tua voluntate concordiam, ut, sicut beatus Martinus totum se tibi subiecit, ita et nos esse veraciter gloriemur. Per Christum.

Artificial Intelligence and Liturgy: Eight Exploratory Trajectories

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Introduction

This paper explores eight trajectories for liturgical theologians and ministers to examine the profound implications of artificial intelligence (AI) for liturgical praxis and theological inquiry. While AI is not a new phenomenon, recent advancements—most notably the launch of ChatGPT 3.5 in November 2022—have brought its capabilities into sharper focus, reshaping the socio-cultural landscape and prompting urgent new questions for theology and worship.¹ The structure begins with AI's immediate practical implications for liturgical ministry and progresses toward broader anthropological, ecological, and theological considerations, inviting reflection from both practitioners and theorists.

Although prior scholarship has investigated the intersections of religion, media, and technology, the specific impact of recent AI developments on liturgical worship remains underexamined—especially as AI becomes increasingly integrated into daily life. While I write as a theologian rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition, the reflections here consider a broader spectrum of Christian worship practices and also gesture toward inter-religious contexts in which AI's role in shaping worship might be explored.

To ground this discussion, it is essential to establish a shared understanding of artificial intelligence and its relevance to liturgical studies. Broadly defined, AI is “technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity and autonomy.”² A subset of AI, known as generative AI, has gained particular attention for its ability

1. Only two months after its launch, ChatGPT 3.5 reached 100 million monthly active users, making it the fastest-growing consumer application in history. See Andrew R. Chow, “How ChatGPT Managed to Grow Faster Than TikTok or Instagram,” *Time* (Feb. 8, 2023): <https://time.com/6253615/chatgpt-fastest-growing>.

2. Eda Kavlakoglu and Cole Stryker, “What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?” (IBM: Aug. 9, 2024): <https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/artificial-intelligence>.

to produce text, images, music, and other creative outputs by analyzing patterns in existing data.

However, these opportunities are accompanied by challenges, as will become clearer as this paper progresses. Concerns about accuracy, hallucinations (false information generated by AI), copyright infringement, and the ethical implications of job displacement in creative roles demand careful and thoughtful consideration. Religious institutions, including the Vatican, The Southern Baptist Convention, and the United Methodist Church have issued statements on ethical AI, emphasizing the need for AI to align with principles of transparency, inclusion, and accountability to ensure that technological advancements respect human dignity and serve the common good.³ These principles are especially pertinent in liturgical contexts, where the integrity of sacred texts and their faithful transmission directly shape worship and community life.

Far from being merely a technological tool, AI represents a phenomenon that intersects profoundly with theological reflections on technology, ethics, and worship. By approaching AI as both a challenge and an opportunity for liturgical praxis, this paper seeks to open new pathways for reflection.

ONE: Generative AI, Text and Trans-Formation

Generative AI, a subset of artificial intelligence, refers to systems capable of seemingly “creating” new content by learning from vast datasets. However, some argue that these so-called “creations” since they are really amalgamations of existing data, recombined in innovative ways.⁴ Nevertheless, tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini exemplify this capability, generating human-like text for diverse applications. Historically, AI has evolved from simple computational models to sophisticated generative systems that mimic creative processes, raising important questions about their role in fields as varied as technology, education, and medicine.

The advent of generative AI tools has sparked significant interest in their potential to transform not only creative industries but also liturgical ministry, where

3. Religious institutions who have issued statements and reflections on the ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI), include: the Southern Baptist Convention released *Artificial Intelligence: An Evangelical Statement of Principles* in 2019, addressing the ethical challenges and opportunities presented by AI (<https://erlc.com/policy-content/artificial-intelligence-an-evangelical-statement-of-principles/>); and the Vatican’s recent *Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence* (Jan. 2025): https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dff_doc_20250128_antiqua-et-nova_en.html. For a summary of *Antiqua et Nova*, see my introduction, “Bringing the Church’s Wisdom to a Changing World,” in *Antiqua et Nova* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2025), vi–xv.

4. See Anil R. Doshi and Oliver P. Hauser, “Generative AI enhances individual creativity but reduces the collective diversity of novel content,” *Science Advances* 10:28 (July 12, 2024): https://www.science.org/doi/pdf/10.1126/sciadv.adn5290?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

text, scriptural proclamation, and preaching play vital roles.⁵ These tools present intriguing possibilities for praxis. They can assist in drafting prayers (e.g., the Prayers of the Faithful), homilies, rituals, and rites, enhancing efficiency while offering surprisingly creative suggestions. AI also serves as a powerful analytical tool, facilitating deeper engagement through tasks such as analyzing existing texts, performing scriptural exegesis, suggesting improvements, and tailoring content for specific liturgical communities. For example, AI tools can translate texts into over 100 languages, enabling broader accessibility for diverse worship practices and contexts.

For those engaged with liturgical formation, generative AI introduces significant questions. For instance, the ability to generate entire homilies within seconds prompts reflection on how this speed might affect the deeper spiritual and formational process traditionally involved in homiletic preparation. Preachers have long placed high value on sitting with the scriptural readings over an extended period, allowing the text to permeate their hearts and minds. This reflective practice not only enriches the homily but also deepens the preacher's spiritual maturity and strengthens their credibility as a witness to the homily's theme. As Robert Morneau suggests:

Before proclaiming and interpreting God's Word, preachers must never fail to spend sufficient time meditating on the Scriptures. *Lectio divina* is a proven discipline in preparing for the preaching ministry. This method employs the mind in discursive pondering, the heart in affective response, and offers an invitation to quiet the mind and heart so that the prayer of loving attention (contemplation) might be experienced. Preaching devoid of prayer might still impress the congregation with a show of intelligence and eloquence, but it will be lacking a Spirit-filled discourse.⁶

While these tools provide unprecedented access to new opportunities and resources, they also challenge all liturgical ministers to discern the boundaries between automation and authentic formation. The key may lie in viewing AI as a tool to support—rather than replace—these formational and spiritually enriching processes. For instance, the speed and efficiency of generating liturgical texts need not diminish the importance of time spent in prayerful reflection, especially if ministers approach AI-generated outputs as preliminary drafts rather than finished products. Ultimately, integrating generative AI into liturgical contexts requires both openness to innovation and vigilance to preserve the depth of spiritual formation. Striking this balance will ensure that AI enriches, rather than undermines, the art of liturgy.

5. Heidi A. Campbell and Pauline Hope Cheong, eds., *Thinking Tools on AI, Religion, and Culture* (Network for New Media, Religion & Digital Culture Studies, 2023): <https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/39897/1/Thinking%20Tools%20for%20AI%20Religion%20&%20Culture-FINAL.pdf>

6. Robert F. Morneau, "Preaching as a Spiritual Exercise," in *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching*, ed. Edward Foley, Catherine Vincie, and Richard Fragomeni (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 3-4.

TWO: Collaborative Creativity: AI-Generated Art in Worship Spaces

Generative AI has made significant strides in the world of art, pushing boundaries and redefining what it means to create. A striking example is Refik Anadol's *Unsupervised* installation at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City.⁷ Anadol's team created a spatial map of the museum's collection using advanced machine learning tools. By training a generative adversarial network (GAN) to navigate this map, the AI processes patterns and ideas, perpetually generating new visual forms that are displayed as high-resolution, ever-evolving animations. The result transforms the museum's lobby into a dynamic art space, where visitors encounter mesmerizing visuals that feel alive, constantly shifting in unpredictable ways.⁸ Anadol's work challenges traditional notions of creativity by blending human artistry with machine innovation, turning raw data into something deeply emotional and awe-inspiring.

A worship community could conceivably create an installation inspired by Anadol's *Unsupervised*, using generative AI to process the collective artwork and historical artifacts of their community, local church, or diocese. The result might be a morphing piece of art that evolves over time, reflecting the living history and spirituality of the community. Placed within a worship context, such artwork could evoke contemplation and wonder, serving as a visual representation of the dynamic relationship between tradition and innovation. How might such an approach enhance worship spaces while remaining theologically grounded and culturally resonant?

The tools behind such innovations, like DALL-E and MidJourney, are becoming increasingly accessible, raising intriguing possibilities for the integration of generative AI into liturgical art. These tools allow communities to visualize and embody theological themes in new ways, democratizing access to creative processes. However, these developments also come with ethical concerns, particularly regarding copyright infringement⁹ and the question of originality in AI-generated art, including whether AI-created and human-made art are evaluated by the same standards.¹⁰ Addressing these issues requires thoughtful dialogue about intellec-

7. Refik Anadol's *Unsupervised*: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5535>.

8. A YouTube video captures this experience: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Y384U-bOJo>.

9. See the U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. *Hearing on Oversight of Artificial Intelligence Tools and Implications for Federal Policies*. 118th Cong., 1st sess., May 16, 2023. <https://www.congress.gov/118/chrg/CHRG-118hrg53722/CHRG-118hrg53722.pdf>. See also Blake Brittain, "Tech Companies Face Tough AI Copyright Questions in 2025," Reuters, December 27, 2024. https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/tech-companies-face-tough-ai-copyright-questions-2025-2024-12-27/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

10. C. Blaine Horton, Jr., Michael W. White, and Sheena S. Iyengar, "Bias Against AI Art Can Enhance Perceptions of Human Creativity," *Scientific Reports* 13:19001 (2023): <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-45202-3#citeas>.

tual property and the theological significance of creative expression in worship contexts.

This also raises the question of the role of the liturgical artist: Could the accessibility of AI tools potentially diminish the need for skilled liturgical artists, as non-artists might use these technologies to produce art for worship spaces? While these tools enable individuals with little or no artistic training to create visually compelling pieces, the depth of theological reflection, cultural sensitivity, and spiritual insight traditionally brought by experienced liturgical artists remains vital. Rather than framing this as a conflict, it might be more productive to view AI as a collaborator, augmenting the creative process while still requiring the expertise of liturgical artists.¹¹

Ultimately, theological and liturgical scholarship could explore the themes that emerge from integrating generative AI tools and new installations into worship spaces. What theological narratives might arise from the interplay of evolving AI-generated art and architecture? How might these artworks shape communal prayer, reflection, and the understanding of creativity? By embracing AI as both a challenge and an opportunity, worship communities can reflect deeply on how these tools can serve—not replace—the human and spiritual dimensions of liturgical art.

THREE: AI Tools and the Future of Liturgical Music: Opportunities and Cautions

AI's impact on music mirrors its influence on art but diverges in its performative nature, particularly within worship contexts. Generative tools in music must navigate the theological and expressive interplay of sound, text, and participation that is essential to liturgy. These tools are proving invaluable for music directors, singers, and instrumentalists by streamlining the planning, preparation, and rehearsal processes for worship music.¹² Their capabilities include analyzing a community's extensive repertoire and offering curated suggestions for music that align with the liturgical calendar, scriptural readings, and pastoral needs; automating scheduling and rehearsal planning to maximize efficiency for choirs and musicians; and translating original lyrics into the diverse languages spoken within a parish, fostering inclusivity and deeper engagement in worship.

In the realm of worship music composition, AI tools like Suno, Stable Audio, and Worship.ai have the potential to revolutionize this ministry. They allow compos-

11. The debate over whether robots might replace humans in the field of sculpture is explored in: "Robots Sculpt Marble in Italy, Sparking Worries about Future of Art Form," *60 Minutes*, November 12, 2024: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VlkMuo2Zcs.

12. Antonella Di Giulio, "Artificial Intelligence in Ecclesiastical Music Planning: A Personal Exploration," *Musicaiq*, September 6, 2023, <https://musicaiq.com/2023/09/06/artificial-intelligence-in-ecclesiastical-music-planning-a-personal-exploration>

ers—or non-composers—to quickly generate new works and tailor arrangements to the needs of specific ensembles. Operating by analyzing input—such as thematic, textual, or stylistic descriptions or instructions—these tools utilize advanced machine learning models to produce songs that align with the given criteria.

As a demonstration, I used Suno to generate a song using a relatively short prompt: “Write a communion song for a Roman Catholic Mass for the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, using references to the gospel Matthew 2:1-12.” In less than a minute, the text, music, and recording were generated:

Title: Star-Lit Journey¹³

Verse

Strangers from a distant land,
Following a star so grand.
Gifts they brought to lay before
Child of light forevermore.

Chorus:

Gold for a king,
Incense in air,
Birth for life so rare.
Shepherds, kings, and angels sing,
Praise to the newborn King.

Verse Two:

Wise men travelled far and wide
To the humble place He’d hide.
Bethlehem a town so small—
There they found the King of all.

What is even more remarkable is that two musical versions and recordings were generated for the same set of lyrics, both performed by the same simulated male vocalist and AI-generated band in a country style.

The specifics of Suno’s training data have not been publicly disclosed, but it is likely built on a vast corpus of existing music, enabling the tool to learn patterns, structures, and styles across various genres. Not surprising, the use of copyrighted material in such datasets has drawn legal scrutiny. In June 2024, major record labels

13. Ricky Manalo, CSP, musical recordings generated using Suno.com (Dec. 20, 2024), unpublished digital recordings. For a video demonstration of *Star-Lit Journey*, see: “*Star-Lit Journey*,” YouTube video, 3:08, July 17, 2025, <https://youtu.be/UybtwMzc26I>. This video features one of the two musical versions created by Suno. For Suno’s copyright policy regarding AI-generated songs, see: <https://help.suno.com/en/articles/2746945>.

filed lawsuits against AI companies, including Suno, alleging unauthorized use of copyrighted recordings in their training.¹⁴ Despite these controversies, worship communities continue to explore and utilize these tools, demonstrating their potential.¹⁵

FOUR: AI, Culture and the Paradox of Accessibility

AI offers significant opportunities to enhance liturgies in multicultural contexts by bridging socio-cultural gaps. Its tools can support the planning and preparation of liturgical elements, such as translations, contextualized prayers, and culturally tailored resources. Additionally, AI-powered platforms can foster better intercultural communication and collaboration by breaking down language barriers and creating spaces for shared understanding. Training programs that utilize AI can prepare liturgical leaders and ministers to navigate cultural differences more effectively, ensuring that worship practices remain both authentic and meaningful across diverse communities.

By democratizing access to these tools, AI tools could empower socio-cultural groups, particularly those in underserved communities, enabling them to actively participate in global worship contexts. Further, this democratization amplifies their ability to share their unique cultural expressions, fostering inclusivity and enriching the global liturgical life. But while the democratization of AI could lead to more accessibility, significant challenges remain. Access to AI tools is often uneven, placing underserved communities at risk of exclusion.¹⁶ Biased algorithms, shaped by specific socio-economic contexts, can inadvertently prioritize homogenized liturgical expressions, sidelining unique cultural practices and traditions. Furthermore, AI's efficiency-driven approach could compromise the authenticity and depth of liturgical heritages, reducing rich traditions to functional outputs that fail to capture their spiritual and cultural significance. Without intentional

14. https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/music-labels-sue-ai-companies-suno-audio-us-copyright-infringement-2024-06-24/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

15. Using Perplexity.ai with the following: "Are there any composers currently using AI-generated songs for worship? If so, please provide the names of their churches or houses of worship, along with references to relevant articles." Nineteen articles and weblinks appeared, including guidelines such as "Composing Hymns and Worship Music with AI," *AI Church Assistant*, February 16, 2024, <https://www.aichurchassistant.com/composing-hymns-and-worship-music-with-ai/>, and reports on worship communities exploring this option, such as "Texas Church Experiments with AI-Generated Service, Uses ChatGPT for Worship, Sermon, and Original Song," *Fox News*, September 18, 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/texas-church-experiments-ai-generated-service-uses-chatgpt-worship-sermon-original-song>.

16. Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018); Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown, 2016), cited in *Encountering Artificial Intelligence: Ethical and Anthropological Investigations*, eds. Matthew J. Gaudet, Noreen Herzfeld, Paul Scherz, and Jordan J. Wales (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2024), https://dspt.edu/client_media/files/91230-encountering-artificial-intelligence-ethical-and-anthropological-investigations.pdf.

efforts to address these disparities, AI risks exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities rather than alleviating them.

While AI presents significant opportunities to enhance liturgies in multicultural contexts and global worship participation, the lack of access to AI tools is not necessarily detrimental. In some cases, non-accessibility to AI may encourage local worship communities to cultivate their own liturgical fluency, relying on the creativity, resources, and cultural wisdom present within their congregation. By working without the influence of generative AI tools, communities may deepen their connection to their oral traditions and develop liturgies that are more organically rooted in their unique cultural and spiritual identities. In this way, the absence of AI may serve as an invitation to rediscover the depth and richness of human creativity in worship, ensuring that the liturgy remains an organic reflection of the community it serves.

FIVE: AI and Ecological Liturgy: Responding to Environmental Challenges Through Worship

Having examined how AI is already reshaping key dimensions of liturgical practice—such as text generation, visual art, and music—we now begin a second arc of inquiry. The remaining trajectories move beyond immediate ministerial concerns to explore how AI intersects with broader cultural, ecological, and theological questions that shape the future of worship. This next section considers the environmental costs of AI and their implications for liturgical responses grounded in ecological ethics.

A pressing and increasingly critical concern is the ecological impact of AI technologies. Recent civic and religious contributions to ethical AI emphasize the need to address its environmental footprint. As Karen Hao reminds us, “Digital technologies do not just exist digitally. The ‘cloud’ does not in fact take the ethereal form its name invokes.”¹⁷ The United Nations’ *Governing AI for Humanity* (2024) underscores the ecological dimensions of global AI governance.¹⁸ Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church has articulated an ethical response to these challenges through its teachings on stewardship and the promotion of the common good. Pope Francis, in his address *The Common Good in the Digital Age* (2019),¹⁹ highlighted the inextricable link between technological progress and ethical responsibility, a concern deeply embedded in his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si’* (2015).²⁰

17. Karen Hao, *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman’s OpenAI* (New York: Penguin Press, 2025), 274.

18. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/governing_ai_for_humanity_final_report_en.pdf.

19. Pope Francis, *The Common Good in the Digital Age* (September 27, 2019): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/september/documents/papa-francesco_20190927_eradigitale.html.

20. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (May 24, 2015): https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf.

On October 24–25, 2024, the Builders AI Forum at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome gathered key stakeholders to explore how AI might align with the Church’s mission while addressing its broader ethical and environmental implications.²¹ Building on these discussions, the Vatican released *Antiqua et Nova* on January 14, 2025 which further refines the Church’s engagement with AI, offering a framework that integrates ethical, technological, and ecological perspectives. Taken together, these efforts signal a growing recognition of AI’s profound impact on creation and the urgent need for responsible action.

AI technologies come with significant ecological costs, including energy consumption, water use, and carbon emissions, all of which contribute to environmental imbalance. Below are some of the primary ecological concerns tied to AI systems:

- *High Energy Consumption:* Training large-scale AI models, such as GPT or other neural networks, requires massive computational resources, leading to energy demands that rival those of entire countries.²²
- *Water Usage for Cooling:* Data centers supporting AI operations consume vast amounts of water to cool their servers, exacerbating water scarcity in many regions.²³
- *Carbon Footprint:* The electricity powering AI systems often relies on non-renewable energy sources, contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions.²⁴
- *Resource Extraction:* AI development depends on rare earth elements and other materials whose extraction processes harm ecosystems and communities.²⁵
- *E-Waste Generation:* The rapid obsolescence of hardware designed for AI contributes to the growing problem of electronic waste, further stressing the planet’s resources.²⁶

21. The Builders AI Forum (October 24-25, 2024): <https://www.baif.ai>. The author of this paper invited to participate as a member of a panel entitled “What’s the Prophetic Vision for AI in the Church?”

22. Bill Tomlinson, Rebecca W. Black, Donald J. Patterson, and Andrew W. Torrance, “The carbon emissions of writing and illustrating are lower for AI than for humans,” *Scientific Reports* 14:3732 (2024): <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-024-54271-x>.

23. Auji Jeevan Birkesh, Rakhi Gupta, and Nashrah Gowalker, “Impact of Generative AI on Water Resources Used to Cool Data Centers,” *International Journal of Progressive Research in Engineering Management and Science* 4:11 (November 2024): 842–845, https://www.ijprems.com/uploaded-files/paper/issue_11_november_2024/36551/final/fin_ijprems1731517868.pdf.

24. Qiang Wang, Yuanfan Li, and Rongrong Li, “Ecological Footprints, Carbon Emissions, and Energy Transitions: The Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI),” *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 11:1043 (2024), <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-024-03520-5>.

25. “Critical Minerals: Roles for Artificial Intelligence in Supporting of FECM RDD&D Priorities” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Energy, Fossil Energy and Carbon Management, March 2023), <https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/ai-role-in-critical-minerals.pdf>.

26. Isabelle Dumé, “Generative AI Has an Electronic Waste Problem, Researchers Warn,” *Physics World*, December 13, 2014, <https://physicsworld.com/a/generative-ai-has-an-electronic-waste-problem-researchers-warn/>.

These examples highlight the environmental toll of AI, underscoring the urgency of developing sustainable practices that mitigate its ecological impact.

Fortunately, a rich tradition in liturgical scholarship has long addressed the intersection of liturgy and ecology, exploring how worship can serve as a meaningful response to these challenges.²⁷ Mary E. McGann explores the relationship between the Eucharist and these concerns by envisioning the sacrament as a profoundly ecological act that reflects creation's interdependence and integrity. In her 2020 work, *The Meal that Reconnects: Eucharistic Eating and the Global Food Crisis*, McGann critiques the anthropocentric focus of traditional worship and aligns with ecological theology by emphasizing that Eucharistic bread and wine—gifts of the Earth and human labor—symbolize the interconnectedness of all life.²⁸ She proposes liturgical practices such as outdoor Eucharistic celebrations, laments for environmental destruction, and engagement with local foodsheds to make visible the sacredness of creation. McGann further critiques the industrial food system and the disconnection of Eucharistic elements from their natural roots, advocating for sustainable, locally sourced bread and wine as sacramental signs of justice and care. For McGann, the Eucharist offers a transformative moral vision, challenging consumerist economies while inspiring communities to embody ecological justice, solidarity, and the healing of Earth through worship and daily life.

While McGann does not address artificial intelligence directly, her vision of ecological worship provides valuable insights for reflecting on how the Eucharist and other liturgical forms might engage the broader environmental impacts of AI systems. Her emphasis on interconnectedness, sustainability, and justice in worship challenges faith communities to consider how their practices can become more attuned to the ecological realities of our time. More studies and academic resources on the impact of AI and agriculture appear to be emerging as researchers increasingly examine the ways AI-driven technologies influence farming practic-

27. Some titles include: Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, "Food and Drink in Africa and the Christian Eucharist," *African Ecclesial Review* 22:6 (1980): 370–385; Monica K. Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1992); Lawrence E. Mick, *Liturgy and Ecology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997); Denis Edwards, "Celebrating Eucharist in a Time of Global Climate Change," *Pacifica* 19 (February 2006): 1–15; David N. Power, "The Eucharistic Table: In Communion with the Hungry," *Worship* 83: 5 (September 2009): 386–398; Timothy Hessel-Robinson, "Requiem for the Baiji: Liturgical Lamentation and Species Extinction," in *Spirit and Nature: The Study of Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Urgency*, ed. Timothy Hessel-Robinson and Ray Maria McNamara (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 176–200; Catherine Vincie, *Worship and the New Cosmology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014); and Anne and Jeffery Rowthorn, *God's Good Earth: Praise and Prayer for Creation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018).

28. Mary E. McGann, *The Meal that Reconnects: Eucharistic Eating and the Global Food Crisis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020).

es, resource allocation, and sustainability within food systems.²⁹ Liturgical theologians could contribute to this emerging field by exploring how worship practices might symbolically and practically address the ethical and ecological dimensions of AI's role in reshaping humanity's relationship with creation.

SIX: Robots in Our Midst: Embodied AI in Worship Contexts

One of the dominant fears gripping our collective consciousness today is the existential anxiety surrounding robots taking over our world. These embodied forms of AI are already among us. For instance, robots have long been integral to the manufacturing sector, automating assembly lines and revolutionizing production efficiency. More recently, robots have taken on culinary roles, such as cooking and flipping burgers in White Castle restaurants.³⁰ Additionally, autonomous robots are increasingly being used in healthcare, assisting in surgeries with precision or delivering medications in hospitals, transforming patient care in unprecedented ways. Could such robots be embraced within worship settings? What theological questions might arise about their role in relation to human personhood and religious ritual? How might the presence of robots challenge or reshape our understanding of faith and relationality?

Broadly speaking, robots are “all entities that are built by humans to perform tasks on their own.”³¹ In a narrower understanding, “the term robot refers to technical entities that meet six conditions: they (1) are powered by a (usually electrical) energy source; (2) can use sensors, i.e., technical apparatuses for sensing their environment, to ‘perceive’ their environment; (3) manipulate it using effectors, i.e., technical apparatuses for acting on their environment; (4) move; (5) signal; and (6) are controlled by algorithms.” It may surprise some to discover that robots are already being used in religious services. Two examples include:

- **Ganapati Bappachi Robotic Aarti:** This system of robotic arms performs liturgical movements in Hindu worship, such as ringing bells and waving candles in circular motions during the Aarti ritual in front of a Ganapati (Ganesha) statue.³²

29. Maaz Gardezi, Bhavna Joshi, Donna M. Rizzo, Mark Ryan, Edward Prutzel, Skye Brugler, and Ali Dadkhah, “Artificial Intelligence in Farming: Challenges and Opportunities for Building Trust,” *Agronomy Journal* 116:3 (April 5, 2023): 791–1642, <https://access.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/agj2.21353>; Rosana Oliveira and Rogério Diogne de Souza e Silva, “Artificial Intelligence in Agriculture: Benefits, Challenges, and Trends,” *Applied Sciences* 13:7405 (June 2023), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371804884_Artificial_Intelligence_in_Agriculture_Benefits_Challenges_and_Trends.

30. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vjf13h2f6o>.

31. Jonas Simmerlein and Max Tretter, “Robots in Religious Practices: A Review,” *Theology and Science* 22:2 (2024): 258.

32. Simmerlein and Tretter, 260: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHpt37U5eq0>.

- Pepper: This humanoid robot has been used in Buddhist funeral services in Japan, where it chants sutras, recites sermons, and provides live-streamed services for remote attendees.³³

There have been notable examples of robots functioning outside traditional Christian services, with the most famous being BlessU2. This robot was introduced at the 2017 World Reformation Exhibition in Germany to provide blessings in a Christian context. Equipped with interactive capabilities, BlessU2 offered personalized blessings by reciting biblical verses, raising its arms, and displaying animated facial expressions. It delivered these blessings audibly and in printed form, catering to a diverse audience in multiple languages.³⁴ Over the course of the exhibition, BlessU2 blessed more than 10,000 people, sparking discussions about the role of automation in religious rituals and the evolving relationship between faith and technology.³⁵

Robots such as these highlight how they are challenging traditional boundaries in worship by stepping into roles traditionally reserved for humans. While they can perform precise and repetitive rituals with efficiency, their integration raises questions about whether such rituals lose or gain meaning when performed by machines. Furthermore, their presence invites reflection on the evolving relationship between faith, embodiment, and technology, pushing communities to rethink what constitutes authentic worship.

I have yet to identify an example of robots being fully integrated into regular Christian worship services, as documented uses of robots in Christian contexts remain largely experimental, exhibitional, and limited to short-term pilots. However, digital technology has long played a significant role in Christian worship, serving as a tool to enhance liturgical practices and foster communal engagement.³⁶

As we reflect on the role of robots in worship services, it is crucial to examine not only their capabilities but also the philosophical and ethical frameworks that

33. Simmerlein and Tretter, 264: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVobokmWqe8>.

34. Demonstration of BlessU2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTK68l2BHtE>.

35. Ilona Nord and Charles Ess, *Robotics in Christian Religious Practice: Reflections on Initial Experiments in This Field*, accessed December 21, 2024, https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/232422/1/Robotics_in_Christian_Religious_Practice.pdf.

36. Anna Puzio, "Robot, Let Us Pray! Can and Should Robots Have Religious Functions? An Ethical Exploration of Religious Robots," *AI & Society* (December 11, 2023): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-023-01812-z>. Puzio writes, "Currently, within Christianity, a predominant technological skepticism prevails, resulting in the rejection of robotics." See Ricky Manalo, "At the Digital Banquet of the Lord: Part One: A Primer on Livestreamed Mass," *Pastoral Music*, online special edition, https://npm.org/wp-content/uploads/Ricky-Manalo_At-the-Digital-Banquet-of-the-Lord_Full.pdf; and "At the Digital Banquet of the Lord: Part Two: Principle Practices for Livestreamed Mass," *Pastoral Music* 45:1 (January 2021): 12–17; and Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerreiro, *Church After the Corona Pandemic: Consequences for Worship and Theology* (Berlin: Springer Nature, 2023).

shape our perceptions and interactions with them. Heidi Campbell's essay, "Evoking and Creating Theological Dialogue Around the AI-Nonhuman-Other for the Sake of Our Human-Technological Future," addresses this need by rethinking our relationship with technology, particularly AI, from a theological and ethical perspective.³⁷ Drawing on Martin Buber's framework of I-It and I-Thou relationships, Campbell critiques the prevalent tendency to "other" technology, framing it as an objectified "It" devoid of mutuality. She argues that this *I-It-ification* of technology contributes to detachment and moral outsourcing, where responsibility for ethical decisions is deflected to others, particularly corporations and cultural systems.

Campbell contextualizes her argument by tracing the values underpinning technological development—efficiency, individualism, and progress—to the Fordist industrial model. This model, championed by Henry Ford in the early 20th century, emphasized the standardization of products, the intensification of labor through highly specialized and repetitive tasks, and the use of assembly lines to maximize productivity. While these principles revolutionized manufacturing, they also embedded a cultural mindset that prioritizes control, optimization, and mechanization over relational and communal values. Campbell suggests that this industrial ethos has seeped into how society approaches technological advancements like AI and robotics, often favoring efficiency and mastery over ethics and relationships. To counter this, she calls for a reframing of technological discourse to transcend the binary of I-It and foster I-Thou relationships with technologists and corporations.

She proposes a new conceptual category: the "intermediary nonhuman other," which resists ideologically charged terms like "cyborg" or "transhumanism." This framework aims to encourage dialogue that moves beyond overly simplistic narratives portraying technology as either utopian or dystopian. Instead, Campbell emphasizes the need to ground these discussions in ethical accountability and mutual understanding. By focusing on the relational and cultural contexts in which AI is developed and used, she highlights the importance of holding corporations accountable for their innovations and fostering meaningful engagement between humans and the nonhuman entities they create.

SEVEN: Embodied Hybridity: The Integration of AI with Human Bodies

Building on the concept of AI robots in liturgical spaces, what if we take it a step deeper to explore how technology *integrated within our very bodies* might shape the way hybrid human-technological selves participate in worship? How

37. Heidi A. Campbell, "Evoking and Creating Theological Dialogue Around the AI-Nonhuman-Other for the Sake of Our Human-Technological Future," in *Thinking Tools on AI, Religion, & Culture*, eds. Heidi A. Campbell and Pauline Hope Cheong (Digital Religion Publications, 2023), 22-25; <https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/39897/1/Thinking%20Tools%20for%20AI%20Religion%20&%20Culture-FINAL.pdf>.

might this integration reshape our understanding of what it means to be human during liturgy? What challenges and opportunities could arise when hybrid human-technology beings engage in communal liturgical practices? Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity Is Nearer: When We Merge with AI* (2024) elaborates on his earlier predictions³⁸ about the transformative convergence of human intelligence and artificial intelligence, positing that exponential technological advancements will redefine human existence. Building on the Law of Accelerating Returns (LOAR), Kurzweil envisions breakthroughs such as nanorobots connecting human brains to the cloud, AI-driven cures for diseases, and the possibility of uploading consciousness to digital platforms by mid-century, all while addressing the profound ethical and societal challenges these changes will bring.

Kurzweil's vision, however, has not gone without critique. Philip Larrey contends that such transhumanist aspirations often reduce the human experience to computational processes, neglecting the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of what it means to be human.³⁹ Transhumanism is the philosophical and scientific movement that seeks to transcend the biological limitations of human beings through advanced technologies.⁴⁰ Drawing on Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics, Larrey critiques the concept of "uploading consciousness," arguing for the unity of body and soul as foundational to human dignity. These critiques are particularly relevant when considering the theological implications of merging human consciousness with AI.

While debates about uploading consciousness persist, the integration of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies *into* human bodies appears

38. Ray Kurzweil's recent work directly references his earlier book, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005). Other titles include *The Age of Intelligent Machines* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); *Fantastic Voyage: Live Long Enough to Live Forever*, co-authored with Terry Grossman (New York: Penguin, 2005); and *How to Create a Mind: The Secret of Human Thought Revealed* (New York: Viking, 2012).

39. Philip Larrey, *Artificial Humanity: An Essay on the Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence* (Rome, Italy: IF Press, 2019).

40. Larrey, 85 -106.

more plausible in the near future.⁴¹ Kurzweil envisions a world where immersive sensory experiences no longer require external devices, such as head-mounted displays, motion controllers, or smartphones, but instead, are seamlessly integrated into human biology. By the 2030s, he predicts nanotechnology will interface directly with the human nervous system, enhancing intelligence and creativity while expanding the boundaries of human interaction. These transformations hold profound implications for how worshippers might engage in liturgical spaces, both physically and virtually.

Teresa Berger's exploration of digitally mediated worship in *@Worship* provides a helpful lens for considering these possibilities.⁴² While Berger focuses on AR/VR technologies used primarily in online worship, her insights reveal how digital mediation challenges traditional distinctions between "real" and "virtual" presence. Connecting her work to Kurzweil's vision suggests a future where immersive technologies, integrated directly into our bodies, could transform our sense of physical church spaces. Imagine a Eucharistic celebration where worshippers can "see" hymn lyrics or sacred texts subtly projected within their field of vision without the need for external hymnals or projected screens. Liturgical art and lighting could dynamically adapt to the liturgical season, creating a fully immersive and contextually rich environment. Soundscapes could be tailored so that the presider's voice, the cantor's melody, and the resonant harmony of a virtual choir envelop each participant, creating an acoustically perfect experience—all while the worshippers remain physically present in the church. Such technology could profoundly enhance the sensory and spiritual dimensions of communal worship, offering new ways to encounter the sacred. This convergence of embodied and virtual participation would not only reconfigure traditional understandings of

41. Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are two distinct but related technologies that have gained significant attention in recent years. According to a comprehensive survey by Ronald T. Azuma, augmented reality is defined as a technology with three key characteristics: it combines real and virtual elements, it is interactive in real time, and it is registered in 3-D. AR allows users to see the real world with virtual objects superimposed upon or composited with it. Unlike virtual reality, which completely immerses a user in a synthetic environment, AR supplements reality rather than replacing it entirely. See Ronald T. Azuma, "A Survey of Augmented Reality," *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments* 6:4 (August 1997): 355–85, <https://www.cs.unc.edu/~azuma/ARpresence.pdf>.

Virtual reality (VR), on the other hand, is defined as "a computer-generated, three-dimensional virtual environment that users can interact with, typically accessed via a computer that is capable of projecting 3D information via a display, which can be isolated screens or a wearable display, e.g., a head-mounted display (HMD), along with user identification sensors." See Ayah Hamad and Bochen Jia, "How Virtual Reality Technology Has Changed Our Lives: An Overview of the Current and Potential Applications and Limitations," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19:11278 (September 8, 2022), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9517547/>. VR systems completely immerse users in a synthetic environment, blocking out the real world. They are characterized by the ability to explore and manipulate computer-generated environments, real-time interactivity, and immersion in a 3D world.

42. Teresa Berger, *@Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

presence and community but also raise profound theological and pastoral questions about how these hybrid selves interact within liturgical spaces.⁴³

EIGHT: AI, Posthumanism, and the Expanding Horizons of Sacramental Worship

At the beginning of this paper, I offered a definition of AI by IBM that primarily utilizes a technological and utilitarian perspective: “technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem-solving, decision-making, creativity, and autonomy.” This definition represents the dominant framework within computer science, engineering, and related applied fields, focusing on AI as a tool to enhance efficiency and simulate human cognitive functions. In this final trajectory, I turn to two theologians—Ilia Delio and Catherine Vincie—whose distinct but complementary perspectives expand the conversation toward posthumanism, sacramental theology, and cosmic relationality. I begin with Ilia Delio, who offers a more provocative and integrative perspective on AI by viewing it not merely as a technological tool, but as part of an evolutionary and theological process that reimagines human identity, relationality, and the cosmos itself.⁴⁴

Delio approaches AI from the intersection of science and theology, integrating evolutionary thought with spiritual and ethical reflection. Unlike technological definitions that emphasize human-like functions or utilitarian goals, Delio sees AI as part of the universe’s ongoing evolution toward greater complexity, relationality, and wholeness. Her perspective is deeply informed by posthumanism, which she describes as a transformative shift in human identity where boundaries between humans, machines, and the environment blur, emphasizing distributed consciousness and the deep relationality of existence. For Delio, posthumanism moves beyond the Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous individual to a vision of identity as fluid, relational, and co-creative. Within this framework, the inte-

43. An example of some hesitation regarding technological advancements in liturgical music can be drawn from the guidelines issued by the Committee on Divine Worship of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (2007), which states:

93. Recorded music lacks the authenticity provided by a living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy. While recorded music might be used advantageously outside the Liturgy as an aid in the teaching of new music, it should not, as a general norm, be used within the Liturgy.

94. Some exceptions to this principle should be noted. Recorded music may be used to accompany the community’s song during a procession outside and, when used carefully, in Masses with children. Occasionally, it might be used as an aid to prayer, for example, during long periods of silence in a communal celebration of reconciliation. However, recorded music should never become a substitute for the community’s singing.

Written in 2007, these guidelines were likely composed without anticipating the advent of AI tools. It may be time for an update.

44. Ilia Delio, *Re-enchanting the Earth: Why AI Needs Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020).

gration of humans and machines is not a disruption but a natural extension of the interconnected processes that define life and the cosmos.⁴⁵

Delio thus views AI as a natural progression of the universe's drive toward complexity and interconnectedness. Her vision reframes AI as a catalyst for redefining human identity and purpose. She envisions a "hyper-connected" posthuman being, where identity emerges through dynamic relationships with technology, nature, and others. This perspective emphasizes that intelligence and consciousness are not confined to individual autonomy but are distributed across networks of relationships. As a tool, AI could enhance humanity's capacity for this expanded relationality, provided it aligns with ethical and spiritual principles, fostering collective flourishing and ecological harmony. The final paragraph of her book encapsulates well the role of AI within this expansive framework:

Technology can improve our lives, but more so, it can move us toward new wholes if it is aligned with a center of compassionate love, a divine center within us and around us, an energy field of love upon which all religious personalities can ultimately converge. Can we create AI to deepen religious energies of love? Can AI mediate an ethics of compassion for planetary life? . . . Our most urgent task is to realize that the earth is holy, sacred, and lovable because it is porous, permeable, and open to the endless depth and horizon of life we call God. Posthuman life must become planetary life if we are to have a sustainable future. . . . It is time to awaken to a new second axial religion where super-intelligence can become super-love, not information but transformation for a new future together, a new rising in our midst.⁴⁶

While Delio does not address liturgical worship directly, her section on "religion as performance" hold significant implications.⁴⁷ She reimagines religion as a performative act rather than a static adherence to doctrines or dogmas. Critiquing the abstraction and lack of coherence in institutional religion, Delio argues that religion must align with modern understandings of physics, evolution, and relationality. Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of gender performance, Delio suggests that religion is not something one inherently "is" but something one becomes through repeated acts, rituals, and devotions. Practices such as lighting candles, reciting the rosary, or kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament are not merely symbolic but constitutive of religious identity and connection.⁴⁸

45. For an overview of posthumanism, see Ch. 6 of Delio, *Re-Enchanting the Earth*, 113-131.

46. Delio, 225.

47. Delio, 196-198.

48. Delio, 196-197. She writes: "Judith Butler's gender performance opened new doors of understanding gender as enactment and thus gender as art. 'Gender is performative,' she writes, 'a stylized repetition of acts, in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.' Her anti-essentialist position basically holds that one becomes a gendered person by acting as a gendered person. The same argument could be made for religion." Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1990), 137.

Delio emphasizes that performative religion is dynamic and creative, enabling individuals to construct meaning and enact values that promote life and unity. This act of performance is a feedback loop where values from ancient traditions, such as those found in the Gospels or mystical teachings, inform present actions, which in turn shape the self and community. In this framework, religion becomes an ongoing act of “doing God” or “doing Christ,” where divine presence is incarnated through acts of love, creativity, and transcendence. Such performative acts transform not just individuals but also the collective, fostering resilience and openness to future possibilities.

Building on Delio’s earlier works—*Christ in Evolution* (2008) and *The Emergent Christ* (2011)—Catherine Vincie develops a liturgical and sacramental theology in *Worship and the New Cosmology* (2014)⁴⁹ that is rooted in an ecological and evolutionary worldview. Vincie adopts Delio’s Christology, among others, to emphasize relationality, interconnectedness, and the sacramental nature of the cosmos as integral to liturgical praxis. In Chapter 6, she explores the profound implications of the new cosmology for sacramental theology and practice. She proposes four frameworks:⁵⁰

- *Cosmic Sacramentality*: Sacramentality must expand beyond traditional boundaries to encompass the vastness of the cosmos, including the immense scale, complexity, and age of the universe. Every aspect of creation reveals and embodies God’s care and communication, emphasizing that nothing lies outside God’s desire for revelation.
- *Materiality and Embodied Sacramentality*: Sacramentality demands a deeper acknowledgment of human materiality and the materiality of ritual objects. Humans, as embodied spirits, experience and interact with the world through their physicality, sharing a profound connection with all living forms and their environments.
- *Sacrament as Blessing and Response*: Sacraments are formed through the dynamic interaction of God’s blessing and humanity’s response. This process, rooted in the origins of the universe, extends to all creation, where every being holds the potential to respond sacramentally to God’s blessing.
- *Sacramentality and Ethics*: Sacramentality connects deeply with ethical responsibility, recognizing humanity’s shared origins and destiny in Christ with all creation. This relationship calls for solidarity with marginalized persons and the oppressed environment, urging action for liberation and the fullness of life.

49. Ilia Delio, *Christ in Evolution* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008); Ilia Delio, *The Emergent Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011); Catherine Vincie, *Worship and the New Cosmology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

50. Vincie, 85-88.

Vincie's sacramental theology resonates with Delio's focus on relationality and interconnectedness, expanding liturgical praxis to embody a deeper solidarity with creation. Both thinkers call for worship to move beyond individualism, envisioning it as a transformative act that aligns with the evolving universe and fosters a renewed commitment to ecological and cosmic harmony. While Vincie does not explicitly address AI, Delio's exploration of AI in *Re-Enchanting the Earth* as a catalyst for relationality and cosmic evolution could enrich Vincie's framework. AI, seen within this sacramental vision, becomes a tool to deepen humanity's interconnectedness with creation and foster the transformative, relational nature of worship in alignment with the universe's unfolding complexity.

Conclusion

The difficulty of writing about technology lies in its ever-accelerating pace, where today's innovations can become obsolete within months. Yet, given the exponential integration of artificial intelligence into mainstream practices—particularly in the United States, which leads the world in its development and adoption—this paper's exploration holds relevance for the present and offers a foundation for ongoing dialogue. AI is no longer a distant possibility but an increasingly pervasive reality, requiring liturgical theologians and pastoral ministers to address its implications with both urgency and foresight.

This paper charted a progression from the immediate to the expansive, beginning with AI's tangible impact on liturgical practices such as text generation, artistic innovation, and music composition. From these practical applications, the discussion broadened to consider AI's cultural and ecological dimensions, examining how it shapes human relationships with tradition, diversity, and the environment. Moving further, the focus turned to questions of embodiment and relationality, exploring the presence of robotics and hybrid human-technology identities within liturgical spaces. Finally, the exploration concluded with a theological and cosmic vision, framing AI not merely as a tool but as a transformative force within the evolving universe. This trajectory wove together the practical and the speculative, inviting a holistic engagement with AI that invites us to embrace new possibilities.

Artificial intelligence invites worship communities not only to address its ethical and practical implications but also to imagine its potential as a theological frontier. This frontier challenges us to balance ancient liturgical wisdom with innovative practices, ensuring that technology serves as a tool for human flourishing rather than an end in itself. This trajectory invites liturgical theologians and ministers to engage with AI critically and creatively, envisioning worship that embraces innovation while safeguarding its spiritual integrity. By doing so, worship communities can shape a future where the sacred and the digital intertwine meaningfully, upholding the dignity of liturgy and illuminating the divine mystery in ways both ancient and new.

Dipping a Ladle in the Cauldron of Story: Assessing Worship Leadership as Gospel Narration

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“Liturgy, as divine drama, tells again the old, old story...[it] demands words and images of wisdom and power, theologically significant body language, lights, colors, smells and food.”¹

The past forty years has witnessed the emergence of a body of literature that addresses the topic of evangelical worship. While this literature may be underdeveloped in contrast with other liturgical traditions, much development has occurred to provide liturgical guidance for evangelicals. In part, this was a byproduct of a renaissance within evangelical scholarship in the latter twentieth century.² As scholars increasingly sought to envision theology through an evangelical framework, some also began to contemplate the longstanding problem of evangelicalism’s “missing jewel.”³ Robb Redman, in particular, identifies the 1980s as the key moment in which a “worship awakening” occurred. For Redman, numerous

1. Andrew Walker, *Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission and Culture* (London: SPCK, 1996), 99.

2. Michael S. Hamilton, “Whoring After the Gods of Babylon?: Or Pining for the Fleshpots of Egypt?,” *Fides et Historia* 48:1 (2016): 121. Hamilton particularly pinpoints the period following the 1960s where a “commonwealth of Christian scholars” flourished who “rejected the values of the mainstream historical profession” and “concentrated on speaking to and for the church.” How quickly this commonwealth of scholars effected change within evangelicalism more broadly is uncertain. As late as 1994, Mark Noll would still famously lament that “the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.” Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 3. The ongoing development of evangelical theology since then has been far from linear. However, large strides forward have also occurred. In his preface to the 2022 edition of *Scandal*, while Noll still laments the aggressive anti-intellectualism of popular evangelicalism, he notes that evangelical institutions of higher learning enjoy an “extraordinary breadth of support” and carry out “solid scholarship.”

3. This description of worship in A.W. Tozer’s 1961 booklet, *The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church*, has become a popular description.

developments—the publication of Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer’s book, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*, the emergence of Robert Webber as a leading evangelical voice, and the expansion of institutions like the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship—indicate a definitive turning point in evangelical worship.⁴ At the same time, the emergence of Contemporary Praise and Worship gave an additional urgency to this new literature. Effecting a radical and bottom-up liturgical transformation across a broad ecumenical spectrum, Contemporary Praise and Worship sparked intense debate and dialogue about the practice and theology of evangelical worship.

Within this growing body of literature, the topic of worship leadership or liturgical presidency has remained underexplored. Little within the literature has reflected about what effective or theologically coherent worship leadership means. While some guidance exists within mainline and Catholic contexts,⁵ much of this literature does not translate easily or naturally into evangelical contexts. The language deployed within these resources of eucharistic communities, baptized infants, vestments, mystery, symbol, and rite place their potentially helpful wisdom at a far remove from the worship that is familiar and meaningful to evangelicals. Furthermore, many of these resources assume the presence of a fixed liturgical text that the presider’s role is to embody. By contrast, the vast majority of evangelical worship has followed its broader Free Church heritage by exercising freedom from fixed liturgical forms.⁶ Such an approach to worship necessitates its own distinctive approach to worship leadership.

This paper proposes to offer one possible framework through which to assess

4. Robb Redman, “Worship Wars or Worship Awakening?” *Liturgy* 19:4 (2004): 40–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/04580630490490512>.

5. For instance, European Assembly of National Liturgy Secretaries, *Leading the Prayer of God’s People: Liturgical Presiding for Priests and Laity*, 1991; William Seth Adams, *Shaped by Images: One Who Presides* (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1995); Kimberly Bracken Long, *The Worshiping Body: The Art of Leading Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009); Simon Reynolds, *Table Manners: Liturgical Leadership for the Mission of the Church* (SCM Press, 2014).

6. Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Andrew Wymer, “Introduction: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions,” in *Worship and Power: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions*, eds. Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Andrew Wymer (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2023), 6–9.

evangelical worship leadership.⁷ Noting the emphasis that evangelical scholars have placed on worship's essential function to *narrate* the Christian gospel, this paper envisions the worship practitioner⁸ as a gospel narrator. In this approach, the art of leading worship well has similarities to storytelling. If this description holds true, then reflection upon good storytelling may be suggestive for evangelical worship leadership. This paper offers one potential answer to what it means to tell a good story and draws out several implications for evangelical worship leadership. I draw upon the literary theory of one of the most influential and popular storytellers of the twentieth century—J.R.R. Tolkien—to consider what his approach to storytelling might suggest to evangelical worship practitioners. Specifically, Tolkien's description of the storyteller's craft as creating an immersive and textured fictional realm that holds not only the attention, but the belief, of the reader will be extended to consider how this can shape a basic rubric for evangelical worship leading.

Recovering Worship's Story: The Focus of Evangelical Worship Literature

Before exploring Tolkien's theory of storytelling, it will be helpful to demonstrate why the concept of the worship practitioner as a storyteller may be a helpful and organic development in relation to the existing body of evangelical worship literature. Across the most influential recent works that have sought to resource

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7. To speak of evangelical worship necessitates some kind of description of this tradition. Evangelicalism can be challenging to define as it not only transcends denominational boundaries but "it is also in a constant state of evolution as it takes on new theological and cultural commitments, develops new ecclesial offshoots, and moves across cultural, social, and national boundaries." Jonathan Ottaway, "The Faith Once for All Delivered: Liturgical Theology, Scripture, and the Evangelical Free Church Tradition," *Studia Liturgica* 51:1 (2021): 107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0039320720978923>. In her book *Evangelical Worship: An American Mosaic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), Melanie Ross's inductive definition of evangelicalism provides a helpful starting place for understanding the tradition. Although her "mosaic" of evangelical worship might suggest no coherent center to the tradition, she concludes by drawing those fragments together into a unified whole. She defines evangelicalism as "a theological culture that must continually negotiate the paradoxes of continuity and change, consensus and contestation, and sameness and difference" (pp. 227–28). Such a definition of evangelicalism recognizes both its "essentially contested concept" (p. 242) while also refuting the claim that it has no coherent theological core. Instead, building on Kevin Vanhoozer's image of evangelicalism as a securely tethered boat, anchored (but not rigidly fixed) by its Trinitarian and crucicentric emphasis (p. 240), Ross notes that across the broad diversity of evangelical churches in her mosaic, each would intuitively understand themselves as participating in an eschatological culture who are "being slain and made alive, dislocated and re-established, grounded yet subverted by the shock of the gospel" (p. 242). This provides the broad parameter within which this essay will consider evangelical worship.
8. Because terms like presider, president, or liturgist are less commonly recognized in evangelical contexts, the term I will use throughout this paper to describe those who lead evangelical worship will be worship practitioner. This term is intentionally broad and ambiguous in order to be inclusive of a broad number of stakeholders—pastors, creative directors, and worship leaders or musicians—who often collaborate in the structure, content, and leadership of evangelical worship.

evangelical worship, there has been a common emphasis on recovering the Christian story that worship does. These writers—in this section I consider the contributions of Robert Webber, Bryan Chappell, and Constance Cherry—have overwhelmingly pursued the recovery of the content and structure of the gospel in Christian worship.

Robert Webber has been one of the most longstanding and prominent voices in evangelical worship. Webber's many books, including *Worship: Old and New* (1982, rev. 1994), *Worship Is A Verb* (1985, rev. 1992), *Celebrating Our Faith* (1986, republished as *Liturgical Evangelism* in 1992), *Blended Worship* (1996), *Planning Blended Worship* (1998), and *Ancient-Future Worship* (published posthumously in 2008), alongside the development of the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies, has produced a generation of adherents to his vision of "Ancient-Future" faith. Across his long ministry, Webber's fundamental concern was to counter the congregational passivity, the absence of substantive content, and the lack of mystery that he witnessed in evangelical worship.⁹ Webber's oeuvre encouraged a return to historical Christianity, a recovery of God's narrative in the church, the active participation of the congregation, and a new approach to experientialism.¹⁰

The core prescriptive idea that underpinned many of Webber's articulations of worship renewal is that worship should narrate the Christian story. For instance, in *Worship Is A Verb*, the first verb that Webber uses to describe worship is "celebrate": biblical worship *celebrates* the once-and-for-all Christ-event by telling and acting out the story, and, in the process making it real for the contemporary congregation.¹¹ In *Blended Worship*, Webber counters what he perceives to be a pervasive goal-driven orientation to worship by emphasizing worship's "event-oriented" nature. Worship repeatedly rehearses the events of God's saving deeds, in turn inspiring praise for God's faithfulness.¹² This repeated rehearsal not only provides the essential story that worship narrates but also the structure through which the story is narrated—the fourfold order of worship centered on word and table.¹³ At the end of his career, Webber's commitment to worship as gospel-narration remained undimmed. In *Ancient-Future Worship*, Webber argued that "Worship...is rooted in the gospel. And when worship fails to proclaim, sing, and enact at the Table the Good News that God not only saves sinners but also narrates the whole world...not only has worship lost its way, but *the fullness of the*

9. Robert Webber, *Worship Is a Verb* (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 12–17.

10. Jonathan A. Powers, "Robert Webber: Preserving Traditional Worship Through Contemporary Styles" in *Essays on the History of Contemporary Praise and Worship*, ed. Lester Ruth (Pickwick Publications, 2020), 109.

11. Webber, *Worship Is A Verb*, 34.

12. Robert Webber, *Blended Worship: Achieving Substance and Relevance in Worship* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 36–40.

13. Webber, *Blended Worship*, 40–48.

gospel, the story which worship does, has been lost” [emphasis added].¹⁴ Webber’s concern has become the clarion cry echoed by the evangelical writers who have followed in his wake.

From the outset of Bryan Chapell’s book, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice*, Chapell demonstrates his affinity with Webber’s convictions. The very first words of the book proclaim, “Structures tell stories.”¹⁵ For Chapell, the content and shape of Christian worship should tell the story of the gospel: “The worship of the church communicates the gospel. And, the gospel shapes the worship of the church.”¹⁶ Chapell begins the book by providing an overview of various historical and ecumenical structures of worship, particularly describing their component elements and what they mean. Through this, Chapell hopes that his reader will “learn how the church has used worship to fulfill gospel purposes through the ages so that we can intelligently design worship services that will fulfill gospel purposes today.”¹⁷ Ultimately, Chapell argues that there has been a broad consensus in scripture and across Christian tradition that worship functions to ‘re-present’ the Christian gospel through a sequence of adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition, instruction, charge, and blessing.¹⁸ Through the latter half of the book, Chappell provides a constructive account of these components (with examples) so that gospel-centered congregations can put them into practice.

In one of the most popular contemporary textbooks on worship, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*,¹⁹ Constance Cherry’s guiding understanding of worship is likewise rooted in worship’s function to re-present the Christian gospel. Cherry teaches that worship follows a dialogical pattern of God’s speaking—revealing himself as the one who has covenanted and redeemed the church through Jesus Christ—which leads to the church’s response of praise and faith.²⁰ Like Webber, Cherry’s defi-

14. Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 40.

15. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 15.

16. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 100.

17. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 19.

18. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 97–99. This description attempts to harmonize the Eucharistic services with later Protestant sermon-centered services. Chapell argues that the “Liturgy of the Upper Room” (the Lord’s Supper) is a reinforcement of this essential story that has already been communicated through the structure of the “Liturgy of the Word” (p. 99).

19. The popularity of this book is demonstrated by Baker Academic’s publication of a second edition in 2021, eleven years after its initial publication. Cherry has also published two follow up books in this series, *The Special Service Worship Architect: Blueprints for Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms, Holy Communion, and Other Occasions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), and *The Music Architect: Blueprints for Engaging Worshipers in Song* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

20. Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 13–46.

dition not only defines the content of the service but its foundational structure as well. Cherry describes four load-bearing walls of worship—gathering, word, table (or alternative response) and sending—which facilitate the dialogical encounter of worship. While Cherry is not as prescriptive as Chapell about the exact sequence of worship, Cherry sees each load-bearing wall as an embodiment of one facet of the gospel story. Together, all four facets embody the story of how God interacts with people. To these foundations and walls, Cherry finally adds windows—prayer, music, and the liturgical calendar—which illuminates the service and allows the covenant community to both look out and be looked in upon.

Webber, Chappell, and Cherry each articulate a slightly different vision of what it means for Christian worship to narrate the gospel story. Chappell is the most didactic of these authors in his embrace of a set liturgical structure (albeit, not set liturgical texts) that narrates the core gospel message. Cherry's approach is looser. While her four load-bearing walls are a normative structure for Christian worship, Cherry describes many liturgical actions as possibly contributing toward the structure of each movement in worship. Webber's approach to worship's gospel narration is the broadest. While Webber believed that Word and Table formed the core structure of Christian worship, his emphasis (especially in books like *Ancient-Future Worship*) was focused on the more general recovery of the content of "God's story"—a story which "encompasses all of human existence and all world history from creation to re-creation."²¹ Despite these distinctives, the fundamental concern has been for evangelicals to incorporate the gospel story as the core structure of worship. This has been a cause that has been widely adopted across many evangelical contexts as numerous authors, theologians, and practitioners have promoted a vision for the liturgical assembly's function to proclaim and incorporate the congregation into the Christian gospel.²²

Telling Worship's Story Well: A New Focus for Evangelical Worship Literature

In this emerging gospel-centered consensus, the overwhelming emphasis has been on teaching evangelical practitioners to *plan* theologically cohesive structures which fulsomely narrate the Christian gospel. If Webber, Chapell, and Cherry are united in their sense that Christian worship fundamentally tells the story of God's saving activity, all three have focused on the necessity for worship to re-present the critical content of that story in its right sequence. Because worship embodies a story, the main concern is that worship embodies the right story or contains the right content.

21. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship*, 107.

22. See Emily Snider Andrews, "The Power of Claiming Biblical Authority: We Practice Biblical Worship: A Southern Baptist Vision of Liturgical Authority" in *Worship and Power*, 132–50.

While this literature has been a helpful corrective for a liturgical tradition that has long been critiqued for its overly evangelistic ethos and predisposition to pragmatism,²³ it leaves an important gap in the formation of worship practitioners. There are other critical, if hard-to-define, factors that contribute towards the congregation's full and active participation in the worship service as well as to the edification, exhortation, and comfort that they derive from it. These factors that primarily implicate the leadership of the service have been overlooked. How should practitioners lead this gospel content well? How do leaders facilitate the congregation's comprehension of the major movements of the story? How do their words support the congregation's holistic participation in the story? What should the tone(s) of Christian worship be and how should this tone correspond to the content of the service? How should practitioners embody prayer? (This is a particularly key question within a tradition that emphasizes extemporaneous prayer.) How should practitioners think about visual or architectural elements in worship and how they correspond with worship's content?²⁴

If worship is the narration of the gospel story, then not only is the story's content critical but so is its dialogue, characterization, tone, and ornamental details. The existing literature has defined the content of the story of worship but has offered little guidance about these other factors. While evangelicals contest that the theological content of worship is key, these other factors should not be overlooked. The success or failure of a story can still rise or fall on how the story is told. In planning and leading worship, the practitioner should aim to winsomely communicate the gospel story so that hearers might be open to receiving the gospel's transformative power, so the deep mystery of God's love for us in Jesus Christ may stir up holy affection, and so that the ramifications of the gospel call upon the church may be grasped anew. Put simply, if Christian worship narrates the gospel, then the practitioner is its narrator. This calls for further reflection on what it means for a worship practitioner to narrate the gospel story well.

I turn to the novelist, J.R.R. Tolkien, as a helpful interlocutor for the question of what it means to tell a story well. Tolkien is particularly well-suited to answering this question both as a scholar who provided critical reflection on literature and as, himself, one of the preeminent storytellers of the twentieth century whose popularity was unrivalled. Even before the films of *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR)

23. For instance, see the critique of James White in "The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church," *Reformed Journal* 36:6 (1986): 11-16.

24. Some initial work has been done in Lester Ruth, ed., *Flow: The Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020). This book used Justin Martyr's account of early Christian worship to suggest that ante-Nicene Christian worship—particularly in its extemporaneity of prayer and open-endedness of time—has some surprising similarities with Pentecostal liturgical practice. In turn, these provide practical guidance for enriching mainline Contemporary Worship. However, in providing this concrete guidance, *Flow* was not focused upon constructing a broader framework for robust liturgical leadership.

launched his books to new heights, Tolkien had sold nearly 200 million copies of his writings.²⁵ Moreover, Tolkien's books have had a special popularity among Christian audiences. Even though the religious nature of Tolkien's books was implicit rather than explicit,²⁶ Tolkien's fiction is likely familiar to a wide array of evangelical readers who can relate sympathetically to his fictional project. Accordingly, Tolkien's account of storytelling offers a constructive framework that is suggestive for the evangelical worship practitioner who desires for worship to narrate the gospel story compellingly.

J.R.R. Tolkien and Storytelling as Sub-creation

The most important window into Tolkien's approach to storytelling was set forth in his essay, "On Fairy-Stories." This essay was first delivered orally at the 12th Annual Andrew Lang lecture at St. Andrews University on March 8, 1939 (eighteen months after the initial publication of *The Hobbit* and while Tolkien was forming the early episodes of *LOTR*).²⁷ Although the text of this lecture is not extant, Tolkien would go on to publish the essay in considerably revised and expanded forms.²⁸ Because "On Fairy-Stories" represents Tolkien's "definitive statement about his art...and the concept that lies behind it,"²⁹ this essay will be summarized in detail as the primary window into how Tolkien understood good storytelling.

In "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien sought to counter two main issues in the contemporary reception of fairy-stories. The first issue was the widespread and popular misconception of fairy stories as being stories about *fairies*—"supernatural beings of diminutive size, in popular belief supposed to have magical powers and to have great influence for good or evil over the affairs of man."³⁰ (This popular understanding of fairy stories persists to this day.) Such a definition sentimentalized the fairy story, demoting it to rank alongside other supernatural stories like traveler's tales, dream stories, and beast fables. For Tolkien, the definition of a fairy-story lies properly, not in the nature of fairies, but in the nature of *Faërie*—"the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country."³¹ This fictional realm's

25. T. A. Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), xxiv.

26. "The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world." J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 172.

27. Paul E. Michelson, "J.R.R. Tolkien on Faërie and Faërie-Stories," *Linguaculture* 10:2 (2019): 82. <https://doi.org/10.47743/lincu-2019-2-0147>.

28. Michelson, "Faërie-Stories," 82. In this essay, I will refer exclusively to the version published in *Tree and Leaf* in 1965 (pp. 3–84).

29. Verlyn Flieger, "'On Fairy Stories,'" The Tolkien Estate, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://www.tolkienestate.com/scholarship/verlyn-flieger-on-fairy-stories/>.

30. J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 4. Tolkien charges that such an understanding of fairies is historically based on a misquotation of the country (p. 8).

31. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 10.

magic imparts its own “particular mood and power”³² that, for Tolkien, was the essence of the fairy story. Stories that touch upon *Faërie* may be highly diverse in purpose and genre, but they are united in the influence they receive from that country.

The second, arguably more intractable, problem that Tolkien sought to counter was that the study of English literature had become overly focused of questions of literary origin and influence. For Tolkien, this focus had also contributed to the diminished stature of fairy stories. In Tolkien’s scholarly context, myths held a higher status because they were deemed to be closest to the true source material—the natural phenomena—of which the myth was an allegory.³³ Myths that had passed into canon were assumed to be “some sort of adumbration of what was once either fact, or felt to be fact, or desired to be fact.”³⁴ By contrast, fairy stories were disregarded as localized retellings of these higher ancient myths, the result of a “dwindling down”³⁵ process as myths became attached to real places, people, and events.

This historical narrative of myth-to-fairy-story diminution and its corollary fascination with uncovering the underlying *Ur*-text was, for Tolkien, wrong-headed. Fundamentally, this approach undermined the role of the storyteller within the story. Even in ancient tales where natural phenomena are most easily perceivable in relation to the myth—Tolkien uses the example of the myths surrounding the Norse god, Thor—it was a problematic assumption to view the natural phenomenon of thunder as the *Ur*-text. After all, Tolkien notes, Thor has a human personality that is distinct from his thunderiness (even if his personality is influenced by it). Even in a myth with such a clear association to natural phenomena, Tolkien asked why the human character of Thor, and the natural phenomena of thunder could not plausibly emerge separately, or even, simultaneously.³⁶

This point prepared the groundwork for the most significant contribution that Tolkien made in “On Fairy-Stories” (especially as it relates to our question of good storytelling). Tolkien was concerned that the fascination with literary origins limited scholars’ ability to describe literature *as* literature. For Tolkien, the chain of a myth’s historical transmission was irrelevant to the power that a good story has. Far more significant was the way in which human authors reinvented myths and tales, telling them anew in creative and potent ways: “It is precisely the coloring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable individual details of a story, and above all

32. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 10.

33. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 23.

34. R Reilly, “J. Tolkien and the Fairy Story,” in *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings*, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 132.

35. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 23.

36. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 24–25.

the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot, that really count.”³⁷ It is the story *as a story* that was Tolkien’s concern.

Instead of envisioning the historical transmission of story as an original myth devolving into countless lower derivatives, Tolkien posited a new analogy for literary development: “the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story.”³⁸ This Cauldron of Story is the common body of plot devices, characters, figures, ideas, and facts from history from which all stories—whether myth or fairy-story—are drawn. This Cauldron has always been boiling. New details and elements are constantly being added to simmer alongside the other ingredients. They wait for the Cook—the storyteller—to draw his or her ladle through the Soup.³⁹ In this analogy, myth and fairy-story are not distinct genres that can be separated into ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ categories. Instead, they are co-equal participants in a living tradition that is constantly evolving through processes of invention, inheritance, and diffusion.⁴⁰

If, as Tolkien argues, all story is derived from a common but constantly evolving inheritance, this places a new emphasis on the storyteller’s role in fashioning their tale from the ever-simmering Cauldron. It is here that Tolkien introduces the now-famous concept of the storyteller’s art as “sub-creation.”⁴¹ As Tolkien explained,

He [the storyteller] makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is “true”: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable.⁴²

This concept of sub-creation or secondary world provides a foundational definition of good storytelling. A successful storyteller (a sub-creator) is one who crafts an immersive, plausible, and internally coherent literary world. Such a storyteller opens a door for their reader into “Other Time” and beckons them through to “stand outside our own time, outside Time itself maybe.”⁴³

For Tolkien, this key marker of a good story—the fashioning of an immersive and convincing world that holds its readers enthralled—was primarily the product of

37. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 18–19.

38. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 26–27. Elsewhere in the essay, Tolkien uses a similar analogy of the “Tree of Tales” (pp. 19, 56).

39. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 30.

40. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 20–21.

41. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 22–23. See also, 37, 47–48, 53–54, 70, and 72.

42. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 36.

43. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 32.

the author's presentation of the story. In fashioning a narrative, a good storyteller will shape the tone and quality of their work to produce "the inner consistency of reality."⁴⁴ This inner consistency is critical if the storyteller is to create a Secondary World that can command belief:

Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say 'the green sun.' Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough...To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labor and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft.⁴⁵

A careful attention to maintaining the fabric of details that is critical for creating a coherent and compelling sub-creation was the storyteller's art.

In his own works of fiction, Tolkien embodied his literary theory in the creation of a vivid, immersive, all-encompassing Secondary World. Not only did Tolkien create the vast realm of Middle Earth that has its own mythology, history, and cultures, but in the fine details of his writing, Tolkien assiduously reinforced the inner consistency of its reality. Each of his characters has their own psychology along with moral, spiritual, and religious values that are both tailored to the individual and to their cultural experience.⁴⁶ Tolkien also used his philological expertise to fastidiously craft language and dialogue that revealed and reinforced the distinctive viewpoints, social positions, and historical experiences of the characters as they had taken shape throughout the long ages of Middle Earth. For instance, in *LOTR*, the great age of the immortal elf, Elrond, is encoded in his use of archaic words and sentence-structures; the stubborn, secretive nature of Tolkien's dwarvish peoples is embodied in Glóin's taciturn, abrupt, and oblique sentences; meanwhile, the duplicitous wizard, Saruman, talks like a modern politician using abstract platitudes that conceal, rather than disclose, his true meaning.⁴⁷ These lexical and grammatical choices not only add texture and depth to the characters and cultures of Middle Earth but also convey the plot of the story as well. As Tom Shippey has argued, the way in which Tolkien's characters speak is just as relevant for the narrative as the content of their words: "The continuous variations of language...tell us almost subliminally how reliable characters are, how old they are, how self-assured they are, how mistaken they are, what kind of person they are. All this is as vital as the

44. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 46–48, 70.

45. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 48–49.

46. C. Adderley, "Meeting Morgan Le Fay: J.R.R. Tolkien's Theory of Subcreation and the Secondary World of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* 22:4 (2000): 49.

47. Shippey, *Tolkien*, 68–77. For a further discussion of the distinctive phrases and words that Tolkien used and even invented to help delineate different characters and cultures, see T. A. Shippey, "History in Words: Tolkien's Ruling Passion," in *Lord of the Rings 1954–2004: Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Blackwelder*, ed. Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006), 25–40.

direct information conveyed.”⁴⁸ Tolkien’s ability to craft works of such immense scope while also ensuring that the minute details maintained the reality of that Secondary World is often viewed as the source of his unprecedented success.

In sum, Tolkien understood good storytelling as the art of painstakingly crafting words which, in their tone and quality, invites the reader’s belief in the world of the story. One of the storyteller’s chief concerns is to maintain the fabric and coherence of their sub-creation, creating the “inner consistency of reality.” This is not just a case of having a compelling plot; instead, the smallest details need to participate in the overall trajectory, forming a cohesive literary canvas upon which the plot unfolds. Ultimately, the storyteller works a kind of magic upon the reader, holding them in thrall to “Other Time.”

Connecting Sub-creation and Christian Worship

At one level, connecting Tolkien’s storytelling to Christian worship is straightforward. After all, Tolkien’s concept of the storyteller’s craft as sub-creation is implicitly theological. Tolkien’s argument drew heavily on a strand of nineteenth century Christian reflection, developed by figures like Samuel Taylor Coleridge and George MacDonald, which emphasized human creativity as a facet of the *Imago Dei*. In contrast to Enlightenment empiricism that viewed humans as passive storehouses of sensory data, the countermarching argument of Coleridge and MacDonald was that humans consciously and deliberately engage in their own creative activity. This creative activity is not a free-wheeling endeavor though. Because human creativity is bestowed by a creator, human creativity ought to reflect their creator’s creativity.⁴⁹ Especially for MacDonald, this particularly meant that if God’s creativity had involved logic and coherence, so too should human creativity.⁵⁰ In Tolkien’s own development of this argument in “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien places this theological idea at the heart of storytelling. As Mark Wolf explains, to sub-create is to ‘create under’, “using the pre-existing concepts found in God’s creation, finding new combinations of them that explore the realm of possibilities.”⁵¹

However, before considering how Tolkien’s theory of sub-creation can construct a framework for worship leadership, it will be helpful to draw out some distinctives between Tolkien’s account of storytelling and Christian worship.

48. Shippey, *Tolkien*, 76.

49. Mark J.P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 20–21.

50. “Obeying law, the maker works like his creator; not obeying law, he is such a fool as heaps a pile of stones and calls it a church.” George MacDonald, *The Light Princess, and Other Fairy Tales* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893), vi.

51. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds*, 23–24.

The most significant distinction is in the nature of the story that Christian worship tells. Tolkien's storyteller freely creates a Secondary World out of the concepts present in God's creation. In this creative endeavor, the storyteller has only a limited obligation to truth. In maintaining the inner consistency of reality, the storyteller's primary responsibility is to convey what is true within the Secondary World. The truth of that Secondary World is only true in a broader sense if the story "faithfully reproduces the traditional turn toward joy which ties it to the gospel narrative of the Primary World."⁵² This is a broader parameter for truth than exists in Christian worship (especially for evangelicals). Christian worship does not invite Secondary Belief in a Secondary World. It does not even invite Primary Belief in the Primary World. Instead, worship reveals, manifests, and participates in the eschatological age to come that is ultimately true—really real. In its narration of the gospel story, Christian worship beckons the congregation into a *super-primary* reality.⁵³ This places an additional responsibility on Christian worship that limits the scope of the practitioner's creativity. While, as Melanie Ross argue, the magnitude of God's revelation, especially in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, can never be constrained by one rendering, it is also closed and unsubstitutable.⁵⁴ There is scope for creativity in Christian worship but within fixed parameters.

Christian worship also serves a different end than Tolkien saw for fiction. For Tolkien, the primary functions of fairy stories were recovery (unfamiliarizing the familiar so that we might see things as we were meant to see them), escape (experiencing freedom from the primary world to reflect upon more permanent and fundamental things), and consolation (the "piercing glimpse of joy" that accompanies the miraculous, good catastrophe that comes at the end of all true fairy-stories).⁵⁵ While Christian worship may certainly facilitate these ends, Christian worship is not exhausted by them either. Worship's deeper ontology as a narration of the gospel and the manifestation of the church⁵⁶ gives it a much broader remit in what it seeks to accomplish.

Even with these distinctions in view, Tolkien's understanding of good storytelling can offer a framework through which evangelicals can assess worship leadership. Although worship participates and embodies a different kind of story than the fairy story, similarities in the broader task of storytelling can be suggestive for Christian worship. The suggestions that I develop are broad and do not attempt to classify exact activities, postures, or words for evangelical practitioners. After all,

52. John W. Houghton, "Neues Testament Und Marchen: Tolkien, Fairy Stories, and the Gospel," *Journal of Tolkien Research* 4:1 (2017): 9.

53. John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 90.

54. Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical?: Defying a Dichotomy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 121–23.

55. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 60–70.

56. Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 46.

evangelicalism is a broad ecumenical tradition with a high variety of practices and theological commitments about worship. Furthermore, these suggestions do not exhaust the possibilities of what could be said about leading well. Instead, building upon my argument that the evangelical liturgist is a storyteller, I pull a few threads from my reading of Tolkien to develop a rubric for evangelical leadership.

Towards an Evangelical Rubric for Liturgical Leadership

At a foundational level, the evangelical practitioner's role as a storyteller should provide the most fundamental orientation for leading worship. Worship practitioners often play many theological and sociological roles within the community's worshipping life, especially when they are the pastor. They are simultaneously shepherd, prophet, host, and moderator all at the same time. (These roles are sometimes more and sometimes less compatible with one another.) Envisioning the worship practitioner as a storyteller provides a guiding ethos that underpins all the other roles they fulfill. As a storyteller, the worship practitioner's activity should be oriented toward opening the door into the eschatological "Other Time" of God's mighty acts of salvation. The worship practitioner does more than merely announce and lead individual components of the worship story. They connect those moments to the broader narrative that is being enacted so that the congregation can both perceive that narrative and remain fully engaged with it. Their words maintain the fabric of the gospel story that is being enacted in worship.

This orientation provides particularly practical guidance for how practitioners guide the congregation through the acts of worship, especially through the use of transitional words. These 'in-between' words can be an invaluable source of direction, instruction, invitation, and exhortation. Reframing the entire context of the service as the narration of the gospel (whose narration takes place over the arc of the worship service) helps to give an undergirding sense of what practitioners should aim to achieve through these words. Practically, it suggests that certain kinds of transitional words—for instance, overly self-referential statements that foreground the leader rather than the story, or instructional comments that merely tell the congregation what is happening next—are unhelpful.⁵⁷ Instead, compel-

57. Self-referential statements in worship leadership are not without their place. Even Tolkien inserts himself as narrator into the story in ways that suspend the reader's sense of inhabiting a secondary world. For example, at the outset of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien describes Gandalf thus, "If you had heard only a quarter of what I [Tolkien himself] have heard about him, and I have heard only very little of all there is to hear, you would be prepared for any sort of remarkable tale." J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2013), 5. This form of narrative intrusion on the story is repeated throughout *The Hobbit* although it never feels unwelcome. This is because Tolkien deploys this technique tactically to connect the unfamiliar world of Middle Earth to the experience of his adolescent readers. The familiarity that such comments create serves a deeper purpose of helping the reader understand and navigate this secondary world. In the same way, self-referential comments can be a helpful technique in the liturgist's storehouse as long as it is ultimately oriented toward inviting the congregation into the story of worship.

ling transitional comments will assist the congregation to perceive the story, will provide commentary upon the story (making worship's meaning accessible), or will invite the congregation to participate in the story. Such an orientation for the practitioner's task provides an assessment rubric for all the elements in the worship service—does this contribute toward or detract from the gospel narrative that is being told?

Additionally, the worship practitioner's role as a storyteller is suggestive for how they approach the relationship between the content and the style of worship. In Tolkien's writing, plot and characterization never exist separately but are interwoven with each other. As I described above, the color, characterization, linguistic choices, and tone of the prose and dialogue are integral to conveying the content of the story. Such an observation provides a helpful corrective to the evangelical worship literature surveyed in this paper. This body of literature, in response to the rise of Contemporary Worship and its emphasis on the medium *as* the message,⁵⁸ has reasserted the centrality of worship's message over the medium. To lead worship well though requires a broader focus than just the bare content of worship's story. It must also consider the ways in which the specific words and manner of the story's delivery also convey the gospel. Content and delivery are not distinct. The medium may not have the same status as the message but that does not mean that it is unimportant.

The importance of the interrelationship of content and style especially implicates how corporate prayer is led in evangelical worship services. The longstanding evangelical practice of extemporaneous prayer and its corollary suspicion of 'rote' texted prayers⁵⁹ demonstrates how word choices (common parlance, biblical allusions, theological terms), structure (tightly organized or redundant), or tone (passionate, dignified, fervent) is integral to the congregation's sense of the action that is taking place in worship. Worship practitioners need to reflect on how their congregation's perception of authentic prayer should impact the delivery, wording, and structure of how they lead corporate prayer. A written prayer that is read in a monotone voice may have rich and deep theological content, but it will fail to communicate to the congregation that they are corporately addressing their needs and concerns to a holy God who is yet intimately concerned for the cry of his creatures. Evangelical worship needs a more robust conceptual framework through which to assess how the mode and delivery of a prayer is an integral part of the prayer itself or how the music of congregational song does its own distinct work as prayer or praise.

58. See Lester Ruth and Lim Swee Hong, *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship: Understanding the Ideas That Reshaped the Protestant Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 217–23, for a description of the influence of Marshall McLuhan's dictum, "The medium is the message" over evangelical worship.

59. As one example of this longstanding trend in evangelical worship, Lester Ruth describes the practice of extemporaneous prayer among early American Methodists in *A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), 88–89.

Finally, the worship practitioner as a storyteller suggests an essential formation that is helpful for good worship leadership. For a practitioner to be able to narrate the Christian story within evangelical worship presupposes that the practitioner is deeply shaped by, and immersed within, that gospel. The success of Tolkien's Middle Earth was founded upon his painstaking effort in creating an immersive Secondary World of unparalleled scale. By the time of the publication of *LOTR*, Tolkien had spent decades developing the (often unpublished) mythology, legends, and languages that provided the narrative context for the book.⁶⁰ It is the sense of this vast Secondary World behind *The Hobbit* and *LOTR* that gives these books their epic scope and deep pathos.

For evangelical worship practitioners to become successful storytellers necessitates a similar development of a robust and rich understanding of the Christian gospel. Practitioners need a deeply rooted sense of the “revelational mystery” at the heart of the Christian gospel.⁶¹ This understanding of the gospel needs to be theologically rigorous, extending beyond the simple message of personal salvation and embracing the cosmic scope of the gospel message from creation to new creation.⁶² This understanding not only needs breadth but also depth as the practitioner leads from their own personal experience of the ongoing grace of God extended to them. When evangelical practitioners have deeply internalized this understanding of the gospel, they will be better positioned to both tell and embody that story within the worship service. While the worship service can never cover the full scope of what the gospel means, practitioners must lead out of their sense that there is a vast cosmos of meaning that sits behind what is enacted within the worship service. Within the worship service, the evangelical practitioner helps the church to participate in realities that are too deep and numerous to name but which will be unfolded throughout the long ages of eternity.

60. Indeed, Tolkien once described how the languages of Middle Earth were the foundation of his novels. “The ‘stories’ were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse.” Tolkien, *Letters*, 219.

61. Daniel Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 48–51. For Castelo, a “revelational mystery” (as distinct from an “investigative mystery”) is a mystery that becomes deeper as it is disclosed. “Christians behold a self-disclosing God, and within such moments of disclosure God is apprehended as One who defies categorization and definition” (p. 48).

62. “Worship gathers to sing, tell, and enact God’s story of the world from its beginning to its end.” Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship*, 40.

A Theological Comparison of the Prayers of Ordination of a Bishop in the *Euchologion Barberini* and the *Sacramentarium Veronense*

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For several centuries in the West, the episcopacy was not considered a part of Holy Orders.¹ Scholastic theology from the late Middle Ages until the 1940s emphasized that in the Roman Catholic tradition, the sacrament of Orders culminated in the presbyterate,² while a bishop was considered to be a presbyter who was *consecrated* and given additional powers. Although current liturgical books are clear that the episcopacy is conferred through ordination,³ many today still refer to episcopal *consecration*, which is perceived to be a more “traditional” term. This paper will seek to answer the question of what the process for the “making” of a bishop entails, and investigate the bishop’s functions, relationship to other Orders, and relationship to the Church, using the method of comparative liturgy—specifically,

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1. For instance, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) enumerates the seven Orders: priest (presbyter), deacon, subdeacon, acolyte, exorcist, lector, and doorkeeper. The bishop is not included on this list. “Concilium Tridentinum,” session 23, ch. 2, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:742.
 2. In his *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas Aquinas states, “[T]he episcopate is not an Order.” He argues that each of the seven Orders, culminating in the priesthood [presbyterate], is directed to the Eucharist. In contrast, in the celebration of Mass, “the bishop has not a higher power than the priest [presbyter].” *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 40, a. 5, 3 vols., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1948), 3:2704. In 1947, Pope Pius XII clarified that the episcopacy is an Order. See Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 40 (1948): 5–7.
 3. The very titles of the post-Vatican II ordination books testify to this. See *De ordinatione diaconi, presbyteri et episcopi*, editio typica (Vatican City: Typis Poliglottis Vaticanis, 1968); *De ordinatione episcopi, presbyterorum et diaconorum*, editio typica altera (Vatican City: Typis Poliglottis Vaticanis, 1990).

by comparing and contrasting some of the most ancient prayers of ordination of a bishop in the Byzantine and Roman traditions.

In these rites, the *Euchologion Barberini* and the *Sacramentarium Veronense* are among the oldest extant liturgical books. They both feature prayer texts and rubrical instructions for carrying out sacramental celebrations, such as ordinations. While several studies have examined the ordination prayers of a bishop in one or both of these sources,⁴ a direct comparison between them has not been done. This paper aims to fill that gap. The first part will introduce these sources. The second will enumerate the prayer texts and elements in the respective episcopal ordination rites. The third will compare their anamnestic sections, while the fourth will juxtapose their epicletic sections. The final part will consider certain theological issues, drawing out some sacramental and ecclesiological conclusions.

Presentation of Sources

As its name suggests, the *Euchologion Barberini* is an example of an euchologion—a codex that contains euchological texts (from the Greek word εὐχή, which means prayer) and often also rubrics.⁵ It is a patriarchal book as evidenced by its internal references to the coronation of the emperor and prayers to be said by a patriarch. Stefano Parenti and Elena Velkovska date its manuscript (cod. Barberini gr. 336) to the second half of the eighth century. They assert that the majority of the euchologion's content is Constantinopolitan due to its reference to the emperor, but the end of the manuscript curiously includes a Latin prayer for the blessing of milk and honey (fol. 279v). Hence, Parenti and Velkovska believe that it was copied and used in an Italian Byzantine monastery in southern Italy.⁶

4. For instance, see Pierre-Marie Gy, "Ancient Ordination Prayers," *Studia Liturgica* 13:2–4 (1979): 70–93; "La théologie des prières anciennes pour l'ordination des évêques et des prêtres," *Review des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 58:4 (October 1974): 599–617; Paul F. Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination: Their History and Theology*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013); James F. Puglisi, *Epistemological Principles and Roman Catholic Rites*, vol. 1, *The Process of Admission to Ordained Ministry: A Comparative Study*, trans. Michael S. Driscoll and Mary Misrahi (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996); John Klentos, "Byzantine Ordination Prayers: From Text to Theology," in *Studia Liturgica Diversa: Essays in Honor of Paul F. Bradshaw*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips (Portland: Pastoral Press, 2004), 163–161; Antonio Santantoni, "Ordination and Ministries in the West," in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, vol. 4, *Sacraments and Sacramentals*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungco, trans. David Cotter (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000); Stefano Parenti, "Ordinations in the East," in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, vol. 4, *Sacraments and Sacramentals*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungco, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000) 205–16; Stefano Parenti and Elena Velkovska, "Introduzione," in *L'Euchologio Barberini gr. 336*, Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae. Subsidia 80, 2nd ed. (Rome: Centro Liturgico Vincenziano-Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000), xxiii–xxxii.

5. According to Elena Velkovska, the Byzantine euchologion corresponds to the Roman sacramentary. "Byzantine Liturgical Books" in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, vol. 1, *Introduction to the Liturgy*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungco, trans. Edward Hagman (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 228.

6. Parenti and Velkovska, "Introduzione," 21, 27.

The manuscript, a part of the *Barberini* collection, was donated by the Florentine senator Carlo Strozzi (1587-1670) to the Vatican Library, where it remains today. In 1647, the French Dominican, Jacques Goar, employed it in his *Euchologion sive rituale graecorum*, the first textual presentation and study of this euchologion. According to Job Getcha, this edition was influential until the 1800s, when further examinations showed its deficiencies.⁷ Today, the diplomatic editions and translations of Parenti and Velkovska⁸ stand as the most reliable editions of the euchologion. This paper will cite the text and formula numbers from their second edition.

The other source we will consider in this paper is the Roman *Sacramentarium Veronense*. Despite this prevalent label, it is technically not a sacramentary. Rather, it is a collection of *libelli* or leaflets with prayers for various sacramental rites. In fact, Cyrille Vogel states that it is “too haphazardly put together” to be considered a true liturgical book,⁹ and Enrico Palazzo describes it as having “the earmark of a careless compilation.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, it can provide us some information about certain euchological texts used in the past. Following Antoine Chavasse’s assessment, the current scholarly consensus is that the contents of the *Veronense* date to the reign of Pope Vigilius (537-555) or earlier. Roman *libelli* kept in the Lateran archives during this time period were then copied and adapted for presbyteral use in *tituli*.¹¹ The prototype of this compilation has since been lost, but the surviving manuscript (Verona, Biblioteca capitulare, Cod. 85 [olim 80]) was most likely produced in the early 600s outside Rome, probably in Verona, where the codex is

7. Job Getcha, “The Liturgical Books,” in *The Typikon Decoded: An Explanation of Byzantine Liturgical Practices*, trans. Paul Meyendorff, The Orthodox Liturgy Series 3 (Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), 48.

8. *L’Eucologio Barberini gr. 336*, eds. Stefano Parenti and Elena Velkovska, Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae. Subsidia 80, 1st ed. (Rome: Centro Liturgico Vincenziano-Edizioni Liturgiche, 1995); *L’Eucologio Barberini gr. 336*, eds. Stefano Parenti and Elena Velkovska, Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae, Subsidia 80, 2nd ed. (Rome: Centro Liturgico Vincenziano-Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000). Hereafter *Bar* with the formula number; *Evchologij Barberini 336*, eds. Stefano Parenti and Elena Velkovska, 3rd ed. (Omsk: Sergey Golovanov, 2011).

9. Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, trans. and rev. William Storey and Niels Rasmussen (Portland: Pastoral Press, 1986), 39.

10. Enrico Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books from the Beginning to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 40.

11. John Baldovin defines a *titulus* as a private residence located within the city of Rome that was converted to a church. These churches featured a plaque (“titulus”) with the original owner’s name. See John F. Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 228 (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta della Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1987), 108.

currently kept.¹² Nevertheless, the Roman origin of this source is clear, as all the saints commemorated in it, especially Sts. Peter and Paul and St. Lawrence, were important figures and patrons in Rome.¹³

As mentioned earlier, the *Veronense* is technically not a sacramentary. Although it contains euchological texts, it is more a collection of booklets for various liturgical celebrations.¹⁴ It is also a victim of another misnomer—a faulty attribution to Pope Leo I (440–461) made by Giuseppe Bianchini, who printed its first edition in 1735 under the name *Codex sacramentorum vetus Romanae ecclesiae a sancto Leone papa I confectus*. As Palazzo explains, in 1749, Joseph Assemani would correct this misattribution by publishing his own edition under the title, *Sacramentarium Veronense*, identifying the work instead with the city where the manuscript is located rather than to Pope Leo.¹⁵ In the 1950s and 1960s, Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, Leo Eizenhöfer, and Petrus Siffrin produced two editions of the *Veronense*.¹⁶ This paper will cite the text and formula numbers from their second edition.

Prayer Texts and Elements of Episcopal Ordination

Now let us enumerate the euchological texts and other elements featured in these sources. In Barberini gr. 336, the rite of ordination of a bishop can be found under the label “Χειροτονία ἐπισκόπων” (formularies 157 and 158), derived from the noun “χείρ” or hand, since the rite involves the imposition of hand(s). Regarding structure, liturgical scholars have proposed varying number of elements that make up a Byzantine ordination: Paul Bradshaw identifies seven units,¹⁷ Stefanos

12. Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 38; Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books*, 39; Cassian Folsom, “Liturgical Books of the Roman Rite,” in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, vol. 1, *Introduction to the Liturgy*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungco (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 246–47. In a more recent publication, Folsom explains the importance of Verona as “an important city center, located at the intersection of important roads” as a likely explanation for the *Veronense* being copied there. Cassian Folsom, *Liturgical Books of the Roman Rite*, vol. 1, *Books for the Mass*, Ecclesia Orans. Studi e Ricerche 7 (Naples: Editrice Domenicana Italiana, 2023), 42.

13. Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books*, 40.

14. Rather than “sacramentary,” Adrien Nocent prefers the title “Liturgical collection of Verona” (“*Raccolta liturgica di Verona*”), which he finds more precise. See Adrien Nocent, “Storia dei libri liturgici romani,” in *Anamnesis*, vol. 2, *La Liturgia. Panoramico storico generale*, ed. Salvatore Marsili (Genoa: Casa Editrice Marietti, 1978), 149.

15. Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books*, 39.

16. *Sacramentarium Veronense* (Cod. Bibl. Capit. Veron. LXXXV [80]), 1st ed., eds. Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, Leo Eizenhöfer, and Petrus Siffrin, *Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta. Series Maior. Fontes 1* (Rome: Herder, 1956); *Sacramentarium Veronense* (Cod. Bibl. Capit. Veron. LXXXV [80]), 2nd ed., eds. Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, Leo Eizenhöfer, and Petrus Siffrin, *Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta. Series Maior. Fontes 1* (1966; repr. Rome: Herder, 1994). Hereafter *Ve* with the formula number.

17. (1) Proclamation of election and people’s assent; (2) bidding for the people to pray for the ordinand; (3) the people’s prayer; (4) signing of the cross on the ordinand’s forehead; (5) prayer while laying on of hand; (6) exchange of peace; and (7) celebration of the Eucharist. Paul F. Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination: Their History and Theology*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 83.

Alexopoulos and Maxwell Johnson six,¹⁸ John Klentos four,¹⁹ and Pierre-Marie Gy two.²⁰ Although there are various ways of identifying the structure, it is undeniable that other than the rubrics, there are four prayer texts listed:

1. the “Divine grace” prayer (Ἡ θεία χάρις) (157, no. 3)
2. the first ordination prayer: “Sovereign Lord” (Δέσποτα κύριε) (157, no. 8).
3. a litany described as a “prayer of the deacon” (εὐχή τοῦ διακόνου) (158, nos. 1-12)
4. the second ordination prayer: “Lord our God” (Κύριε ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν) (158, no. 14)

The “Divine Grace” prayer, read from a scroll (χάρτης), expresses God’s initiative in choosing the person for ministry. It is a prayer that appears in all three levels of orders (episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate) and, as Gy explains, is common among most Eastern rites of ordination.²¹ Bernard Botte once pointed to this prayer as the sacramental “form” of ordination, but the current consensus disputes this claim, instead identifying this as the proclamation of election and/or bidding for the people to pray for the ordinand.²²

The first (“Sovereign Lord”) and second (“Lord our God”) ordination prayers are both consecratory formulas with anamnestic and epicletic sections. Together with the “Divine grace” formula, I will focus on these two prayers in my examination of the Barberini text and will not examine the litany, which, according to Klentos, is more like the Great *Synapte* or litany of the Divine Liturgy rather than an ordination prayer.²³ Interestingly, the Byzantine rite is not alone in featuring more than one prayer of ordination.²⁴ Gy accounts for such multiplication of prayers to the “confluence of different liturgical traditions” and the Eastern inclination “to

18. Alexopoulos and Johnson provide a list similar to Bradshaw’s, except that they combine the bidding and the people’s prayer into one unit. Stefanos Alexopoulos and Maxwell Johnson, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgies* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2022), 251.

19. (1) The “Divine grace” prayer; (2) the first ordination prayer; (3) a litany “almost identical to the Great Synapte”; and (4) the second ordination prayer. John Klentos, “Byzantine Ordination Prayers,” 154–55.

20. (1) The election or choice for the commission and (2) the ordination or commission itself. Gy, “Ancient Ordination Prayers,” 78.

21. Gy, “Ancient Ordination Prayers,” 74. He argues that this prayer is of Antiochene or Hagiopolite origin. See also, “La théologie des prières anciennes pour l’ordination,” 601. Bradshaw states that other Eastern rites had their own bidding prayers before they adopted the Byzantine “Divine grace” prayer. *Rites of Ordination*, 88.

22. Gy, “Ancient Ordination Prayers,” 77-78; Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 85; Alexopoulos and Johnson, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgies*, 253.

23. Klentos, “Byzantine Ordination Prayers,” 155.

24. Bradshaw reports the number of ordination prayers in various liturgical traditions: The Byzantine rite has two, the oldest Armenian rites had two, the East Syrian rite has two (one even before the bidding), and the Georgian rite has three. Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 93.

express things abundantly, and to multiply epicleses.”²⁵ Meanwhile, the litany is prayed while the second prayer of ordination is being recited by the main celebrant.

Regarding the people involved, the *Euchologion Barberini* lists the archbishop (ἀρχιεπίσκοπος) as the principal ordaining minister. The identity and diocese of this archbishop was not specified. We can surmise that in its original context, this archbishop referred to the Ecumenical Patriarch, who served as the ἀρχιεπίσκοπος of Constantinople, although it was not his sole prerogative to ordain bishops, as other metropolitans also had the power to do so. The presence of other bishops was also called for in the rite,²⁶ since they were supposed to touch the Book of Gospels as it was laid on the head and neck of the ordinand (157, no. 6). Another bishop then prayed the litany while the archbishop silently recited the second ordination prayer (158, no. 1). Moreover, the first ordination prayer mentions the involvement “of fellow bishops” (“συνεπισκόπων”) (157, no. 8). As for the ordinand himself, a “presbyter” (πρεσβύτερος) is mentioned in the “Divine grace” formula (157, no. 3) and does not address the issue of a deacon being ordained a bishop *per saltum*.

Regarding time and place, Barberini gr. 336 only mentions these aspects in relation to the Divine Liturgy. The ordination of a bishop takes place after the singing of the Trisagion at the entrance (“μετὰ τὸ τρισάγιον”) and on a step in front of the altar (“εἰς τὴν κρηπίδα ἔμπροσθεν τῆς ἁγίας τραπέζης”) (157, no. 2). The implication of the placement of ordination so early in the liturgy suggests that the new bishop would preside at the Eucharist, though this is not explicitly expressed in the rite featured in the *Euchologion Barberini*, as it only states that after the ordination rites, “τελεῖται λοιπὸν πᾶσα ἡ λειτουργία” (158, no. 17).

Meanwhile, in the *Veronense*, the “Consecratio episcoporum” (section 28) involves six Mass formulas:

1. an opening collect (“Exaudi, domine”) (942)
2. the prayer over the gifts (“Suscipe, domine”) (943)
3. the “Hanc igitur” insertion during the Canon (944)
4. the first preparatory prayer (“Adesto”) (945)
5. the second preparatory prayer (“Propitiare”) (946)
6. the prayer of ordination (“Deus honorum omnium”) (947).

This paper will focus on the last of these, which is the consecratory formula with a structure akin to an anaphora, with anamnestic and epicletic sections.

25. Gy, “Ancient Ordination Prayers,” 78.

26. This seems to be in conformity to canon 4 of the First Council of Nicaea (325), which ordered that the ordination of a bishop should take place with bishops from the province, with at least three bishops present. See “Concilium Nicaenum I,” can. 4 (Tanner, 1:7).

Unlike in the Barberini text, the formulary in the *Veronense* is completely devoid of rubrics; one would have to consult an *ordo* for a description of how the rite was supposed to be carried out. Because of the absence of directives, the sacramentary does not specify the time and place of the ordination, except that it is in the context of Mass. In fact, even the placement of the ordination prayer is misleading, since it is listed after the “Hanc igitur” insertion and two preparatory prayers, giving the impression that prayer of ordination is recited near the end of the liturgy, whereas medieval ordines stipulated that the ordination of a bishop take place after the reading of the epistle and before the Gospel.²⁷ The theological significance of this timing is not clear, and as James Puglisi notes, the *Veronense* text does not even state that the new bishop would preside at the rest of the Eucharist.²⁸

Regarding the people involved, the Roman consecration formula (*Ve* 947) does not identify the main celebrant of the sacrament, though presumably, it was a bishop. On the other hand, the euchological text is clear that priests—referred to in this case as *sacerdos* rather than *presbyters*—are being ordained bishops. The epiclesis of the consecratory prayer asks God to complete “in sacerdotibus tuis mysterii tui summam” Similar to the Byzantine text, this mention of priests suggests that ordination takes place only one order at a time, though other medieval sources such as *Ordo* 34 seemed to allow for *per saltum* ordinations.²⁹ Concerning gestures, the prayer of ordination employs three images that evoke actions: the vesting of mystical robe (“mystico amictu uestiri”), a heavenly anointing (“caelestis unguentum”) and the granting of the episcopal chair (“Tribuas eis cathedram episcopalem”). However, these images do not necessarily involve *physical* gestures. In fact, as we shall see later, the prayer text takes great pains in emphasizing the *spiritual* nature of these symbols when applied to the bishop, as opposed to the external symbolism of Old Testament priesthood.³⁰

27. For example, the mid-eighth century *Ordo* 34 states that the ordination of a bishop takes place on a Sunday (“die dominica”), during Mass after the reading (from chapter three of the First Letter of St. Paul to Timothy) and the singing of the gradual. See “Ordo XXXIV, 32, 36-37,” in *Les Ordines Romani du haut Moyen Âge*, vol. 3, *Les Textes (Ordines XIV-XXXIV)*, ed. Michel Andrieu, Études et Documents 24 (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1951), 611–12. Hereafter *OR* 34.

28. Puglisi, *Epistemological Principles*, 1:114.

29. Although this issue is not addressed in the *Veronense*, which we are examining, Santantoni points to the questioning, “Quo honore fungitur?” in *Ordo* 34 as proof that *per saltum* ordinations of deacons to the episcopate did take place. “Ordination and Ministries in the West,” 219. See also *OR* 34, nos. 22 and 27.

30. Regarding the Old Testament image of Aaron’s vesting and anointing invoked in the prayer of ordination, Puglisi writes: “[W]ithout being the reality, [the typological reference] indicated symbolically (or prophetically) the realization of the divine plan of salvation in the institution of the new priesthood.” Puglisi, *Epistemological Principles*, vol. 1, 111. Likewise, Santantoni sees the symbol of the cathedra as metonymy for episcopal authority more than as a literal throne. See “Ordination and Ministries in the West,” 222.

Anamnesis

Now let us compare the anamnestic portions of these prayers of ordination of a bishop. In particular, we will discuss two important questions: How do these prayers address God? And what typological images from Scripture are employed in these prayers?

Addressing and Describing God

As mentioned earlier, the *Euchologion Barberini* involves two ordination prayers after the “Divine grace” formula. The first prayer (*Bar* 157, no. 8.) addresses God as “Δέσποτα κύριε ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν”—the one who established the hierarchy of ranks and orders (“ὁ νομοθετήσας... βαθμῶν καὶ ταγμάτων τάξιν”). The second prayer addresses God in a more generic way: “Κύριε ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν.” In this case, “Κύριος” refers to Christ, the true shepherd, whom the bishop must imitate. In contrast, the *Veronense* features only one consecratory prayer (*Ve* 947). It addresses the Lord as “Deus honorum omnium, deus omnium dignitatum quae gloriae tuae sacratis famulantur ordinibus.”³¹ We can thus see a common theme here: Both sources acknowledge God as the source of ranks and orders. The former employs the Greek terms “βαθμός,” “τάγματα,” and “τάξις,” while the latter uses the Latin words “honor,” “dignitas,” and “ordo.”

Use of Biblical Images

The first Byzantine prayer (*Bar* 157, no. 8) recounts God establishing orders through his Apostle Paul. More specifically, the hierarchy of ranks and orders listed are: “πρῶτον ἀποστόλους, δεύτερον προφήτας, τρίτον διδασκάλους”—almost a direct quote from 1 Corinthians 12:28. It also makes an Old Testament reference to the triple *munera* of prophet, king, and priest. The second Byzantine prayer (*Bar* 158, no. 14), then, exclusively employs New Testament imagery, most of which are Christological. As a consequence of being an imitator of Christ, the bishop is also exhorted to give his own life for God’s flock, be a guide to the blind, light to those in darkness, correction to the ignorant, and a lamp in the world (“τιθέντα τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων σου, ὁδηγὸν τυφλῶν, φῶς τῶν ἐν σκότει, παιδευτὴν

31. Anscar Chupungco provides succinct definitions of these Latin terms borrowed from Roman imperial culture: *Dignitas* “denoted the worth or value of a public office as well as the importance of its holder.” *Honor* “is the respect and esteem given by the people to those who hold public office” as well as “consequence of being promoted to a clerical dignity.” *Gradus* “or rank indicated the various steps a person had to ascend in the course of a public career.” *Ordo*, “which belonged not to the religious vocabulary of ancient Rome but to its civil institutions, designated the clergy as a group distinct from the faithful.” “The Early Cultural Setting of Ordination Rites,” in *Worship: Progress and Tradition* (Beltsville: Pastoral Press, 1995), 45–47.

ἀφρόνων, φωστῆρα ἐν κόσμῳ”).³² The second prayer also makes a reference to the Christ’s judgment seat (“τῷ βήματί σου”) and giving people their great reward (“τὸν μέγαν μισθὸν λήψηται ὃν ἡτοίμασας”)—a reference to the eschatological judgment scene and the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25.

In contrast, the Roman text (*Ve* 947) exclusively alludes to Old Testament imageries—specifically from Exodus and Leviticus. It recounts God speaking to Moses with familiarity (“*deus qui Mosen famulum tuum, secreti familiaris adfatu*”) and speaks about God commanding Aaron to wear a mystical robe at his ordination (“*electum Aharon mystico amictu uestiri inter sacra iussisti*”). Here, there is a clear sense that Old Testament images were mere figures (“*enigmata figurarum*”) of what was to come.³³ Disappointingly, there are no obvious references to the New Testament in this prayer—this seems to be a common trait among the three consecratory prayers (for the bishop, presbyter, and deacon) in the *Veronense*.

Epiclesis

Now let us compare the epicletic sections. In particular, we will examine (1) what is being asked for the ordained, and (2) the functions of the bishop.

What is Being Asked for the Ordinand

In Barberini gr. 336, the epiclesis of the first ordination prayer (157, no. 8) features the main imperative verb “ἐνίσχυσον”—“strengthen”—with the new bishop being the direct object. It entreats God to grant the ordinand a blameless high priesthood (“ἀνεπίληπτον αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀρχιερεωσύνην ἀπόδειξον”) and adorn him with all sanctity (“καὶ πάσῃ σεμνότητι κατακοσμῶν”), so that he may be worthy (“ἄξιος”) to carry out his ministry of prayer and thus be heard by God. The formula attributes this strengthening to two different causes: (1) through human action symbolized by the imposition of the hands of the archbishop (self-proclaimed as a sinner) and of all the bishops and those present “liturgizing” together (“διὰ τῆς χειρὸς ἐμοῦ τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ καὶ τῶν συμπαρόντων λειτουργῶν καὶ συνεπισκόπων”) and (2) through the coming, power, and grace of the Holy Spirit (“τῇ ἐπιφοιτήσει καὶ δυνάμει καὶ χάριτι τοῦ ἁγίου σου πνεύματος”).

32. Two strong references that stand out here are those from John 10:15 and Romans 2:19-20. According to Paul Bradshaw, these are also present in the ordination prayers of other Eastern traditions. He finds it “inconceivable” that they all came to make this reference independently, especially since these passages are not explicitly related to ordination or ministry. Thus, he posits the possibility of a common source: a nucleus “as old as some of the patristic sources and was in established use before the divisions that took place in the Eastern churches during the fifth century.” Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 94-95.

33. For instance, the prayer states: “*Illius namque sacerdotii anterioris habitus nostrae mentis ornatus est, et pontificalem gloriam non iam nobis honor commendat uestium, sed splendor animorum: quia et illa, quae tunc carnalibus blandiebantur obtutibus, ea potius quae in ipsis erant intellegenda poscebant.*” *Ve* 947.

The second prayer (158, no. 14) employs the imperative “ποίησον”—“make” the ordinand an imitator of Christ “the true shepherd... guide of the blind light for those in darkness, corrector for the ignorant, lamp in the world.” Unlike the first prayer, this formula does not invoke the Holy Spirit and instead addresses Christ.³⁴ It cautions that holiness is not automatically given upon ordination; rather, only the successful imitation of Christ can lead to positive divine judgment—standing without shame before Christ’s tribunal (“παραστῇ τῷ βήματί σου ἀκατασχύντως”)—and receiving the great reward (“τὸν μέγαν μισθὸν λήψεται”) for proclaiming the Gospel.

Meanwhile, the ordination prayer in the *Veronense* (no. 947) features the imperative “conple”—“fill” or “complete”—“in sacerdotibus tuis mysterii tui summam.” Curiously, the Holy Spirit is mentioned only in the dependent clause expressing result: “Hoc, domine, copiosae in eorum caput influat, hoc in oris subiecta decurrat, hoc in totius corporis extrema descendat, ut tui spiritus uirtus et interiora horum repleat et exteriora circumtegat.” Puglisi questions the pneumatic character of this epiclesis since this prayer does not actually ask for the gifts of the Holy Spirit; instead, these are requested as a result of the heavenly anointing.³⁵ Rather than attributing the effectiveness of sacrament to the action of the Holy Spirit, this prayer instead asks God for the celestial unction to flow and cover the ordinands, which would then allow the Spirit to act.

Five other petitions flow from the central request of the epiclesis: The first calls for “constantia fidei, puritas dilectionis, [et] sinceritas pacis” to abound in the ordinands. The second requests God to grant the episcopal throne to the new bishops (“Tribuas eis cathedram episcopalem”).³⁶ The third asks God to be their “auctoritas,” “potestas,” and “firmitas.”³⁷ The fourth bids God to multiply blessing and grace on them (“Multiplices super eos benedictionem et gratiam tuam”). The fifth supplicates for the ordinands to be devoted through God’s grace (“tua gratia possint esse deuoti”).

34. Bradshaw sees the lack of pneumatic reference in this prayer as possibly being proof of its antiquity. See *Ordination Rites*, 52.

35. Puglisi, *Epistemological Principles*, 1:107.

36. Regarding the episcopal throne in the *Veronense*, Puglisi writes, this symbol “can evoke the image of authority and power... [and] also suggest the image of a pastor.” Chupungco adds the interpretation of the episcopal chair as expressing “the episcopal office of preaching.” *Epistemological Principles*, 1:109; Chupungco, “The Early Cultural Setting of Ordination Rites,” 52.

37. In both the first and third petitions mentioned in this paragraph, we see examples of the Roman tendency to multiply terms, usually employing three. Another example of this can be found in the Roman anaphora, which mentions “haec dona, haec munera, haec sancta sacrificia illibata” as well as “hostiam puram, hostiam sanctam, hostiam immaculatam.” See Eizenhöfer and Pahl’s edition of this Eucharistic Prayer: “Canon Missae,” in *Prex Eucharistica. Textus e Variis Liturgiis Antiquioribus Selecti*, eds. Anton Hänggi and Irmgard Pahl, 2nd ed. (Fribourg Suisse: Éditions Universitaires, 1968), 424–38.

Functions of the Bishop

The first ordination prayer in *Barberini* (157, no. 8) surprisingly relates only one function of the bishop: to pray for the salvation of God's people ("αἰτεῖν σε τὰ πρὸς σωτηρίαν τοῦ λαοῦ"). On the other hand, the second prayer (158, no. 14) mentions three broad roles: First, the ordinand is called to be an imitator of Christ, including its theological consequences. Second, the ordinand is expected to form souls in this life ("καταρτίσας τὰς ψυχὰς τὰς ἐμπιστευθείας αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τῆς παρούσης ζωῆς")—a condition for him to be able stand without shame before Christ's eschatological judgment. Third, he is entrusted with the task of proclaiming the Gospel³⁸—another function that serves as a condition for receiving his great reward ("τὸν μέγαν μισθὸν λήψηται ὃν ἡτοίμασας τοῖς ἀθλήσασιν ὑπὲρ τοῦ κηρύγματος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου σου").

The consecratory prayer in the *Veronense* (no. 947) lists two functions: First, the bishop is tasked to rule the church and the entire people ("ad regendam aeclesiam tuam et plebem uniuersam")—a charge connected to the symbol of the episcopal chair. Second, he is given the responsibility of always asking for God's mercy, presumably for the people entrusted to him ("ut ad exorandam semper misericordiam tuam"). Hence, we can see that these two roles present a very limited description of the life and ministry of a bishop. An attempt would be made to fill in this lacuna in the text through a Gallican insertion appearing in the mid-eighth century *Sacramentarium Gelasianum Vetus* and would be reproduced in later me-

38. This seems to be a point of convergence between the Byzantine and Roman rites: the association of the Gospel with the bishop. In both traditions, the Book of the Gospels is opened and placed over the head (and shoulders) of the ordinand during prayer(s) of ordination. Moreover, it seems significant that in both rites as described in the Barberini text and in *Ordo* 34, the ordination of a bishop took place *before* the proclamation of the Gospel. See "Ordo 34," in *Les Ordines Romani du haut Moyen Age*, 5 vols., ed. Michel Andrieu, Études et Documents 24 (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1951), 3:601–13. In the post-Vatican II reformed liturgies, however, all celebrations of sacraments and sacramentals were moved to after the Liturgy of the Word, reflecting a different idea that sacraments come as a response to God's Word and initiative.

dieval pontificals.³⁹ This lengthy addition contains richer Scriptural references, especially from the New Testament, and was perhaps an attempt to theologically enrich the Roman ordination prayer. It refers to other aspects of episcopal ministry, such as evangelization, reconciliation, and preaching.

Theological Conclusions

Now that we have examined and compared the anamnestic and epicletic sections of the prayers of the ordination of a bishop in the *Euchologion Barberini* and the *Veronese Sacramentary*, we will conclude this paper by discussing four theological points: (1) Who appoints the person to be ordained a bishop; (2) what the bishop's relationship is with other orders of ministry; (3) how the bishop is related to the Church; and (4) why this comparative study of ancient Byzantine and Roman rites of ordination matters.

Who Appoints the Person to be Ordained

The Byzantine rite of ordination in the Barberini codex makes it clear that it is God who chooses. The bidding formula (*Bar* 157, no. 3) before the two ordination prayers ascribes to “divine grace” (“ἡ θεία χάρις”) the prerogative of appointing (“προχειρίζεται”) the ordinand. Meanwhile, the first ordination prayer (157, no. 8) credits some capacity to human participation, identifying in particular the laying on of hand by the archbishop and by other bishops present (“διὰ τῆς χειρὸς ἐμοῦ τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ καὶ τῶν συμπαρόντων λειτουργῶν καὶ συνεπισκόπων”). John Klentos affirms the first prayer's attribution to a later theological development, stating that in the more ancient bidding prayer, it is clear that God's grace not only chooses but also heals and supplies.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, despite the apparent conflict between

39. “XCVIII. Orationes de episcopis ordinandis,” nos 769–770, in *Liber sacramentorum Romanae Ecclesiae ordinis anni circuli* (Cod. Vat. Reg. Lat. 316 / Paris Bibl. Nat. 7193, 41/56) (*Sacramentarium Gelasianum*), eds. Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, Leo Eizenhöfer, and Petrus Siffrin, RED. Series Maior. Fontes 4 (Rome: Herder, 1960), 120–21: “Sint speciosi munere tuo pedes horum ad euangelizandum pacem, ad euangelizandum bona tua. Da eis, domine, ministerium reconciliacionis in uerbo et in factis et in uirtutes signorum et prodigiorum. Sit sermo eorum et praedicatio non in persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae uerbis, sed in ostensione spiritus et uirtutis. Da eis, domine, clauis regni caelorum; utantur ne[c] gloriatur potestatem, quam tribues in aedificacionem, non in destructionem. Quodcumque ligauerint super terram, sint ligata et in caelis; et quodcumque soluerint super terram, sint soluta et in caelis. Quorum retenerint peccata, detenta sint; et quorum demiserint, tu demittas. Qui benedixerit [eis], sit benedictus; et qui maledixerit eis, maledictionibus repleatur. Sint fideles serui prudentes, quos constituas tu, domine, super familiam tuam, ut dent illis cibum in tempore necessario, ut exhibeant omnem hominem perfectum. Sint sollicitudinem impigri, sint spiritum feruentes. Odiant superbiam, diligant ueritatem, nec eam umquam deserant, aut lassitudinem aut timore superati. Non ponant lucem ad tenebras nec tenebris lucem, non dicant malum bonum nec bonum malum. Sint sapientibus [et insipientibus] debitores et fructum de profectu omnium consequantur.” Hereafter *GeV* with the formula number. For the ordination prayer in the tenth century *Pontificale Romano-Germanicum*, see “LXIII. Ordinatio episcopi,” no. 35, in *Le Pontifical romano-germanique du dixième siècle*, vol. 1, *Le Texte* (nn. I–XCVIII), ed. Cyrille Vogel. Studi e Testi 226 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1963), 218–19.

40. Klentos, “Byzantine Ordination Prayers,” 157–58.

these two elements (divine election and ecclesiastical approbation), Stefanos Alexopoulos and Maxwell Johnson explain that God's will is discerned and manifested through the election as there is "no dichotomy between action 'from below' and 'from above.'"⁴¹

Similarly, the Roman prayer for the ordination of a bishop (*Ve* 947) points to God as the one who has chosen the servants to be ordained. The epiclesis of this formula uses the verb "deligo," that denotes choice or selection,⁴² in the statement "his famulis tuis, quos ad summi sacerdotii ministerium deligisti." In the *Veronese Sacramentary*, there is also no conflict between divine election and human involvement. In fact, one of the preparatory formulas before the ordination prayer itself (*Ve* 945) implores God for harmony between the actions of our service and divine blessing.

The Bishop's Relationship to Other Orders

It is remarkable that all three prayers of ordination (the two Byzantine and one Roman formulas) provide a consistent description of the bishop as being a high priest: in Greek "ἀρχιερεύς" and in Latin "summus sacerdos." The first Byzantine prayer (*Bar*, 157, no. 8) articulates that the ordinand has been elected to undertake the Gospel and the high-priestly dignity ("ὕπεισελθεῖν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ καὶ τῇ ἀρχιερατικῇ ἀξίᾳ"). It also asks God to grant him a blameless high priesthood ("ἀνεπίληπτον αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀρχιερεωσύνην ἀπόδειξον"). The second Byzantine prayer (*Bar* 158, no. 14) acknowledges that the ordinand has been made a "steward of high priestly grace" ("οἰκονόμον τῆς ἀρχιερατικῆς χάριτος"). In the same way, the epiclesis from the Roman formula (*Ve* 947) recognizes that God has chosen the ordinands for the ministry of high priesthood ("ad summi sacerdotii ministerium") and in turn petitions God to complete in these priests the heights of God's mystery ("mysterii tui summam"). Interestingly, in later sacramentaries such as the *Gelasianum Vetus*, the word "mysterii" would be changed to "ministerii," thus describing the episcopate as the "summa" of ministry.⁴³ Although these texts do not directly address the bishop's relationship with presbyters and deacons, the use of the label "high priest" suggest that the bishop is above these other orders.

41. Alexopoulos and Johnson, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgies*, 252.

42. In the *Gelasianum Vetus*, the word used in the ordination prayer is changed to "elegisti" from the verb "eligo," adding a greater sense of election. *GeV* 769.

43. For instance, see *GeV*, 769. Chupungco reflects on the word "summa" in the Roman ordination epiclesis, stating that it denotes the "highest point," alluding to heights (connected again to grade and rank) more than to plenitude or completeness. Chupungco, "The Early Cultural Setting of Ordination Rites," 49. Benjamin Gordon-Taylor laments this fact, stating that mystery is supposed to express the "moreness" of God, yet the "summam mysterii" here is limited to rank. Benjamin Gordon-Taylor, "Mystery and Revelation in Ordination Rites: Towards a Liturgical Theology of Ordination," *Studia Liturgica* 22:1 (2003): 124.

The Bishop's Relationship to the Church

There is a strong intercessory character in the bishop's relationship to the Church in all three ordination formulas. The first Byzantine prayer (*Bar* 157, no. 8) states that one of the bishop's functions is to pray for the salvation of the people ("αἰτεῖν σε τὰ πρὸς σωτηρίαν τοῦ λαοῦ"). The second prayer (*Bar* 158, no. 14) expresses the bishop's role of offering sacrifice and oblation for all of God's people ("εἰς τὸ ἀναφέρειν σοι θυσίαν καὶ προσφορὰν ὑπὲρ παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ σου"). The Roman prayer (*Ve* 947) likewise confirms the bishop's responsibility of imploring God's mercy always ("ut ad exorandam semper misericordiam tuam").

These consecratory formulas also delineate other ways the bishop relates to the people under his care. As mentioned earlier, the second prayer in the Barberini text (158, no. 14) describes him as a "steward of the high priestly grace" ("οἰκονόμον τῆς ἀρχιερατικῆς χάριτος") and declares the bishop's task of forming souls entrusted to him in this present life ("καταρτίσας τὰς ψυχὰς τὰς ἐμπιστευθείας αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τῆς παρουσίας ζωῆς"). It concludes by pointing to the reward awaiting him for preaching the Gospel ("ὑπὲρ τοῦ κηρύγματος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου σου"). Meanwhile, the consecratory formula in the *Codex Veronensis* (no. 947) implies that the bishop ought to serve the Church with "constancy of faith, purity of love, and sincerity of peace."⁴⁴ It articulates the bishop's duty to rule the Church and the entire people ("ad regendam aeclesiam tuam et plebem uniuersam") as symbolized by the episcopal chair granted to him, though Anscar Chupungco interprets the cathedra as a symbol for the ministry of preaching, not just of ruling.⁴⁵

Why This Issue Matters

This comparative analysis has sought to articulate the theology of the episcopate expressed in the prayers of ordination of a bishop in the oldest surviving Byzantine and Roman euchological collections. In Barberini gr. 336, the word "χειροτονία" describes the ordination of a bishop, presbyter, and deacon.⁴⁶ Indeed, the rites of ordination for these three orders have the same structure even though the ordinations themselves occur at different points in the Liturgy. In contrast, the *Veronense* employs the term "consecratio" concerning the "making" of a bishop—a reference to the long anaphora-like formula featured in the rite. This word is also used for the ordination of a presbyter (*Ve* 952-954). Meanwhile, the heading for diaconal ordination is "Benedictio super diaconos" (*Ve* 948-951). Thus, the use of the terms "consecratio" and "benedictio" does not deny that these rites involve an ordination. In fact, Santantoni claims that initially these three terms were used interchangeably.⁴⁷ Overall, "ordina-

44. Puglisi notes that these qualities requested of God taken from the Pastoral Epistles are virtues needed not for the bishop's personal benefit but for service. Puglisi, *Epistemological Principles*, vol. 1, 113.

45. Chupungco, "The Early Cultural Setting of Ordination Rites," 52.

46. It also applies this term to the subdeacon (ὑποδιακόνος) in *Bar*, 165, but this is a topic for another day.

47. Santantoni, "Ordination and Ministries," 221n16.

tion” seems to be a more precise and appropriate term for the “making” of a bishop, since it brings unity to the sacrament received by the deacon, the presbyter, and the bishop and emphasizes the episcopacy as the culmination of Orders. While a bishop is *consecrated*, he is not merely a presbyter who is set apart or empowered to do more.

In this comparative study, the two ordination prayers from the *Euchologion Barberini* reflect a richer and more varied theology of the episcopacy compared to the one in the *Veronense*. The Byzantine prayers allude to both the Old and the New Testaments, while the Roman prayer focuses exclusively on the Old. The Byzantine prayers also paint a more multifaceted picture of the bishop’s functions and relation to the Church. It is no wonder that in the post-conciliar *Pontificale Romanum*, the ordination prayer from the *Veronense* was replaced by the one from the *Traditio Apostolica*.⁴⁸ Ultimately, the ordination of a bishop is an important moment in the life of the People of God. I hope this modest study has shown a glimpse of the depth of the theology expressed in the ordination prayers.

48. Annibale Bugnini recounts that prayer of ordination of a bishop based on the *Veronense* was considered by *Coetus* 20 of the Consilium to be “completely inadequate for expressing the teaching on the episcopate given by the Second Vatican Council,” and hence was replaced by the consecration formula from the *Traditio Apostolica*. Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1946-1975*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 713.

Conflating Unity with Uniformity: Celebrating the Eucharist in the Context of Indigenous-Settler Reconciliation

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Introduction

Catholic sacramental theology proposes that each Eucharist has a reconciliatory effect regardless of the ministers and context of any given celebration.¹ At least, this is the theological ideal for each celebration of the Lord's Supper. However, since the earliest accounts of the Eucharistic meal this ideal communion has not always been enacted in ways that conform to this ideal.² So, what happens when the Eucharist, which is proposed as a ritual of healing and reconciliation, becomes a reenactment of harm or sinful social patterns? In recent years, many scholars have been highlighting this reality of broken and damaged liturgical celebrations. In an article in *Worship*, Tony Alonso invites liturgical scholars to develop more nuanced and truthful accounts of how the celebration of the Eucharist is complicit in the logic of sin.³ As a partial response to Alonso's invitation, this article hopes to contribute to this endeavour by examining the Eucharistic celebrations in the Canadian context of Indigenous-Settler reconciliation.

In the Canadian context, Indigenous-Settler reconciliation is an ever-present social reality. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which concluded in 2014, outlined the multigenerational impacts of colonialism and, in particular, the Indian Residential School System (IRSS) on the Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The TRC final report labelled the IRSS and its underlying policies and atti-

1. David Coffey, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, Lex Orandi Series (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 63–72.

2. See Paul's admonition to the Corinthian community: 1 Cor 11:17–33

3. Tony Alonso, "Damaged Goods," *Worship* 97 (April 2023): 124–25.

tudes as cultural genocide.⁴ This final report also clearly identified the role of various Christian churches in this cultural genocide through the running of these Residential Schools. The immense and ongoing damage caused by the IRSS and other colonial projects has slowly prompted various Christian communities to embark on journeys of reconciliation. The Catholic Church, which ran the majority of the Residential Schools and has the longest history of missionary outreach to the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island, is struggling to engage deeply with this reconciliation process. In this long colonial history, but specifically in the IRSS, Catholic liturgy, including the Eucharist, was utilized as a means of colonizing the students of these schools.⁵ Therefore, it is important to reflect on the Catholic Church's current Eucharistic rituals to see how they may be contributing to or hindering the journey of reconciliation.

In this article, I will propose that one of the ways that the Eucharist is being prevented from fulfilling its reconciliatory potential is by conflating the unity with the uniformity of the ritual participants. This claim will be demonstrated through a visual ethnographic study of two rituals that occurred during Pope Francis' 2022 penitential pilgrimage to Canada. This visit was organized as a response to the TRC's Call to Action #58, which requested that the Pope come to Canada and "issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools."⁶ Rituals associated with this visit were selected because they represent specific opportunities to ritualize the reconciliation that was being sought in both Indigenous and Settler contexts. The specific rituals of the Papal Mass of Reconciliation at the Shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré and the Papal Apology at Maskwacis will be discussed later in the paper. Before discussing the rituals themselves, it is helpful to introduce the theoretical tools that will be used to analyze them.

Theory

To engage deeply with these rituals, I will use theoretical frameworks from ethnography and theology. My ethnographic approach is inspired by Kimberly Belcher's use of Victor Turner's stages of social drama to study the Lund Lutheran-Catholic liturgy.⁷ Several scholars, such as Cas Wepener working in the South

4. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, ed., *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 1.

5. Sarah Kathleen Johnson, "On Our Knees: Christian Ritual in Residential Schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 47:1 (March 1, 2018): 3–24.

6. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (Winnipeg, 2015), <https://nctr.ca/reports2.php>.

7. Kimberly Hope Belcher, "Ritual Techniques in Affliction Rites and the Lutheran-Catholic Eumenical Liturgy of Lund, 2016," *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* 38 (October 24, 2022): 22–41.

African context, have utilized these stages of social drama to reflect on the intersections of social and ecclesial reconciliation processes.⁸

In his article “Damaged Goods,” which I pointed to in the introduction, Alonso helpfully summarizes three approaches to analyzing how our Eucharistic celebrations are corrupted. One approach is the work of Lauren Winner, who identifies how our celebrations suffer from intrinsic and characteristic damage.⁹ This type of damage will become evident in the Eucharistic ritual examined in this article.

I will also draw upon the work of Susan Reynolds, who, through her qualitative study of a multiethnic congregation in Boston, describes an ecclesiology of solidarity that challenges a whitewashed sense of communion that she describes as ecclesial colorblindness.¹⁰ This tendency towards colourblindness will also become evident in the Eucharistic liturgy, which this article studies. Winner’s and Reynold’s theological perspectives help to describe the dynamics of the rituals observed for this study.

Social Drama of Reconciliation

Based on his work with the Ndembu people in Zambia, anthropologist Victor Turner suggests that there is an observable pattern for negotiating social disunity. He suggests four stages of this social drama: breach, crisis, recovery, reintegration, or schism.¹¹ He proposes that these stages can be observed in all societies and groups.

Cas Wepener and then Kimberly Belcher both adapted this framework and applied it to Christian rituals of reconciliation. Wepener developed a series of typologies that related to and expanded on Turner’s stages, and in turn, Belcher suggested a couple of modifications to Wepener’s typologies.¹² For the sake of simplicity, this article will rely on Belcher’s proposed stages of breach, crisis and diagnosis, redress/therapeutic, acceptance and forgiveness, binding or schism, and common external mission.¹³ The parallels between Belcher’s and Turner’s stages can be seen in Table 1.

8. Cas Wepener, *From Fast to Feast: A Ritual-Liturgical Exploration of Reconciliation in South African Cultural Contexts*, Liturgia Condenda 19 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2009).

9. Lauren F. Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

10. Susan Bigelow Reynolds, *People Get Ready: Ritual, Solidarity, and Lived Ecclesiology in Catholic Roxbury*, Catholic Practice in the Americas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022).

11. Victor W. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, Performance Studies Series 1 (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 69–70.

12. Wepener, *From Fast to Feast*, 211.

13. Belcher, “Ritual Techniques in Affliction Rites and the Lutheran-Catholic Ecumenical Liturgy of Lund, 2016,” 24.

Table 1—Stages of Ritual Reconciliation

Turner— Stages of Social Drama	Breach	Crisis	Redress		Reintegration or schism	
Belcher Stages	Breach	Crisis and Diagnostics	Redress Therapeutic	Acceptance and Forgiveness	Binding or Schism	Common External Mission

A breach occurs when a socially held norm has been transgressed. This becomes a crisis as members of society take differing sides. Redress focuses on the healing of the breach. At a certain point, acceptance and forgiveness can be expressed once sufficient redressive actions have been taken. In some cases, this leads to the reforming or binding of the group. However, a more permanent schism can occur if the norms cannot be healed. In the process of rearticulating its identity, the group might look for some common external mission to reinforce its collective agency and identity.¹⁴

Following Wepener, Belcher suggests that each stage can be observed in rituals as a whole and in individual actions within each ritual. Both authors also suggest that different participants might experience each ritual or ritual action as belonging to a different stage.¹⁵ Different participants joining the rituals with differing embodiments will interpret the ritual actions in various manners.

Belcher describes the dynamic nature of this process in this manner: “At every stage of the process, ritual both reveals and changes the existing landscape: individuals enter each ritual with ideologies and goals, and ritual aids the formation and reformation of goals and the sorting and resorting of individuals into groups committed to these goals.”¹⁶ This process is not necessarily linear. Different stages might occur concurrently, in differing orders or repetitively. Rituals or actions within each ritual help to mediate the tensions of this social process.

Characteristic Damage

In her book, *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, Lauren Winner describes how even closely held Christian practices, such as the Eucharist, have been deformed through the effects of sin. Sin is pervasive, and there is nothing that can escape its influence. She argues that the damages to these practices are not arbitrary in nature and that, instead, they correspond to the practices in a manner that is intrinsic

14. Belcher, 25–26.
15. Belcher, 23–24.
16. Belcher, 24.

to the character of the practice itself.¹⁷ This has the effect of Christian practices inflicting harm in a manner antithetical to the practice itself.

Winner described this damage caused by sin as deformation because it relates to the form of the practice or thing in question.¹⁸ A practice's form will often dictate the deformation caused by sin. In her chapter on the Eucharist, Winner describes how supersessionism became a characteristic damage of Eucharistic celebrations through a "[...] slippage between Jews' "carnal" bodies and the body of Christ [...]."¹⁹ This deformation has fueled centuries of violence against the Jewish people. However, this does not mean that the celebration of the Eucharist is without hope or that it has wholly succumbed to deformation. The Eucharistic celebration is a gift from God and has redemptive effects; however, even from its inception, it has been marked by sin.²⁰ This deformation does not render the celebration of the Eucharist futile. Instead, it calls the participant of the Eucharistic celebration to a more profound commitment to renewal and reformation.

Reynolds—Ecclesial Colorblindness

From her qualitative study of a Boston parish, Susan Reynolds develops a critique of the communion ecclesiology that has developed following the Second Vatican Council. She suggests that communion ecclesiology has not adequately addressed issues of power and authority and has not fully addressed the realities of difference within the Church community.²¹ These limitations lead to ecclesial colorblindness, which Reynolds defines in this way:

Ecclesial colorblindness, then, posits the suspension of racial difference as a precondition for Christian unity. Ecclesial colorblindness views Christian identity as an alternative to racial and ethnic identity, dismissing the possibility of discrimination in the church with an insistence that all are one in Christ.²²

This dynamic conflates unity, a positive attribute of a Christian community, with an enforced uniformity that erases identity. One of the fundamental Eucharistic dynamics is the unity of the people partaking in this celebration.²³ Christians are called to strive to live united as members of the Body of Christ. However, this unity should not erase differences or identities. This desire for unity becomes deformed into uniformity when pressure is exerted to minimize or denigrate per-

17. Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, 3.

18. Winner, 5.

19. Winner, 34.

20. Winner, 55.

21. Reynolds, *People Get Ready*, 61.

22. Reynolds, 60–61.

23. For a more developed discussion of identity and the Eucharist, see Kevin Irwin's discussion of the "The Church's Eucharist." Kevin W. Irwin, *Models of the Eucharist* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 72.

ceived differences. It is easy to see how this dynamic that Reynolds identifies as ecclesial colorblindness parallels the dynamics of colonialism, especially in the IRSS. These Residential Schools were designed to remove the Indigenous identity of the pupils who were forced to attend them.²⁴

As an alternative to communion ecclesiology, Reynolds proposes a solidarity ecclesiology as a means to “negotiate difference at the local level.”²⁵ This solidarity, drawn as a virtue from Vatican II, focuses on relationship and dialogue as central tenets for embracing difference. Solidarity embraces difference as a positive and avoids the pitfalls of ecclesial colorblindness. Solidarity ecclesiology pushes back on the sense that unity is only comfortable when it is expressed as uniformity.²⁶ This distinction will be critical for understanding some of the dynamics observed in the papal mass at Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré.

Visual Ethnography of Papal Ritual

During the papal penitential pilgrimage to Canada, the Pope visited Maskwacis First Nation, Edmonton, Lac Ste. Anne, Quebec City, Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré and Iqaluit. In each of these locations, the Pope participated in various rituals, some of which took the form of Catholic liturgies (Edmonton, Lac Sainte-Anne, Quebec City, Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré). In other places, the rituals were guided by Indigenous ceremonial patterns (Maskwacis, Iqaluit). These various rituals provide a unique opportunity to study how public rituals participate in the broader process of social reconciliation.

This article will use the papal reconciliation mass at the Shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré as a case study. This article will also analyze the gathering at Maskwacis First Nation in Alberta, where the Pope read the text of his formal apology, as a foil that helps to highlight the intrinsic damage of the Eucharist at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. The Maskwacis event was the first major public ritual of the visit. Indigenous patterns of ceremony greatly influenced the structure of the event.

Methodology

This article is based on observations of one set of video recordings for the selected rituals. My observations of these recordings were made several years after the rituals themselves, so it is difficult to consider them participant observations in a traditional sense. My use of recordings of rituals as a source of ethnographic data draws heavily on Kimberly Belcher’s study of the Lund Lutheran-Catho-

24. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 1–3.

25. Reynolds, *People Get Ready*, 34.

26. Reynolds, 58; Brett C. Hoover, *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S. Catholicism* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 187.

lic liturgy.²⁷ Like Belcher's observations of the Lund liturgy, my observations of these papal rituals are mediated by the videographers, producers and editors who produced the initial broadcasts.

All of the Pope's public events were broadcast live during his visit on several television channels and also online via various platforms. While many people gathered at each of these events, even more people would have participated in them through the live stream or broadcast. For example, the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré mass was simultaneously broadcast on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City so that more people could participate in the event.²⁸ Therefore, my observations of the recorded rituals align with how a majority of people would have originally experienced these rituals, participating virtually. Many of the recordings of these events are available on various YouTube channels and in the archives of different television channels.

In addition to these video sources, I have also included textual sources in my analysis. These included the published statement of apology that the Pope read at Maskwacis, the Pope's homily in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré and the liturgical misal that the Vatican published for the papal visit. These textual sources correspond to the words spoken during these rituals.

Reflexivity

As I embark on this ethnographic study, it is important to situate myself with regard to the subject matter and events that I am studying. I am a Jesuit priest, which means I belong to a religious order that ran one of the residential schools in Canada. I have worked at various points and locations with Indigenous peoples in the field of reconciliation.

I also have second-hand experience of these papal rituals. I have been privileged to spend time speaking with several participants about their experience of both of the rituals that are considered in this article. Their stories and perspectives are not mine to share. For that reason, I am bracketing, as much as possible, the second-hand information that I have received from participants of these rituals.

My personal engagement in this issue means that I am emotionally invested in the project of reconciliation project between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Therefore, I am approaching this study with the conviction that more needs to be done to further the reconciliation process in this context.

27. Belcher, "Ritual Techniques in Affliction Rites and the Lutheran-Catholic Ecumenical Liturgy of Lund, 2016."

28. Pope Francis references these people gathered on the Plains of Abraham in his homily during the liturgy. Pope Francis, "Homily at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré" (National Shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, July 28, 2022), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2022/documents/20220728-omelia-beaupre-canada.html>.

Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré²⁹

The Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré ritual was labelled as a Holy Mass for Reconciliation.³⁰ In its structure, it closely followed the typical format of a Catholic Eucharistic liturgy. The video coverage began by showing people gathering on the lawns and courtyards in front of the church, an imposing neo-gothic structure. Inside, the church was full of people. Following the entrance procession, some of the bishops were seated in the sanctuary choir stalls, and others, with the priests, sat in the front rows of the nave on both sides (Figure 1). The Pope was wheeled into the sanctuary from behind the high altar and took his place at the presider's chair, centred in the sanctuary behind the freestanding altar. The Pope was flanked by masters of ceremony, deacons and two bishops.

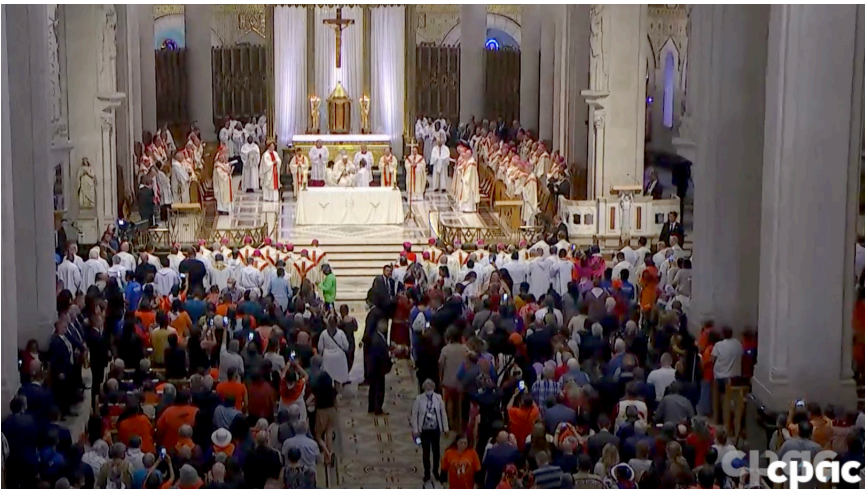


Figure 1: Clergy at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré mass.³¹ Used with permission.

The Pope, in this liturgy, was entirely surrounded by the clergy. To the point that even the first few pews in the nave, where the congregation typically sits, were taken up by members of the clergy. The video recording presented a visual white bubble of isolation around the sanctuary. This wall of clergy provides a visual representation of the ongoing breach or crisis. It presents a divide between the

29. The CPAC video archive was chosen as the source for this analysis. CPAC is a not-for-profit channel that covers major governmental and political events in Canada, similar to CSPAN in the United States. *2022 Papal Visit—Pope Francis Performs Mass in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Quebec* (Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Quebec, 2022), <https://www.cpac.ca/cpac-special/episode/2022-papal-visit—pope-francis-performs-mass-in-sainte-anne-de-beaupre-quebec?id=166216af-a891-401c-bcd0-3efcd357c965>.

30. See: The Holy See, *Viaggio Apostolico Di Sua Santità Francesco in Canada* (Vatican, 2022), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2022/outside/documents/canada-2022.html>.

31. CPAC, *2022 Papal Visit—Pope Francis Performs Mass in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Quebec*.

hierarchical Catholic Church, represented by the vested clergy and the lay faithful seated behind them. The lay participants were predominantly Indigenous Peoples, many of whom were wearing different forms of traditional regalia.

As the introductory rites began, the video footage briefly caught a banner held by two Indigenous women stretched out in front of the sanctuary (Figure 2). The banner read “Rescind the Doctrine.”³² While this silent protest unfolded, the Pope began the liturgy, speaking in French. While not planned, this protest at the beginning of the liturgy demonstrates how the different parties interpret this ritual. It also shows that at least some of the ritual participants felt that aspects of the crisis still needed public naming and that sufficient redress had not been undertaken.



Figure 2: The silent protest at the beginning of the liturgy.³³ Used with permission.

The biblical readings for the mass were all done in French, with the exception of the first reading being introduced and concluded by the lector in an Indigenous language. The Pope read his homily in Spanish, and a priest translated it into French. In contrast to everything spoken from the beginning of the mass, the prayers of the faithful were prayed by several Indigenous people in Indigenous languages, in addition to French and English. Likewise, a Francophone choir had performed all of the music up to this point. However, three Indigenous women sang the offertory song that accompanied several Indigenous People while they brought up the offertory gifts to the Pope.

This inclusion of Indigenous participants as readers, gift bearers, and singers might be interpreted as acts of redress—of giving prominence and space to Indigenous Peoples whose culture and way of life have been attacked by the Catholic

32. This referred to the Doctrine of Discovery, a widely held policy during European colonial expansion that allowed nations to claim land as their own without regarding the rights of the Indigenous inhabitants. This policy continues to have lasting impacts on Indigenous land claims and control over their own territory.

33. CPAC, 2022 Papal Visit—Pope Francis Performs Mass in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Quebec.

Church for several hundred years. However, the presence of the large Franco-phone choir and other non-Indigenous lay ministers functioned to mute this inclusion as a ritual act of redress.

The Pope's homily made the intended audience of the liturgy apparent. He stated, "Allow me to accompany you as a Church in pondering these questions that arise from hearts filled with pain: Why did all this happen? How could this happen in the community of those who follow Jesus?"³⁴ This message makes it clear that this mass is a ritual of the Catholic Church for Catholics, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. The focus of these ritual actions is on the members of the Catholic Church. This emphasis on Catholic identity, in some manner, superseded the Indigenous or non-Indigenous identities of the participants. It presumed that the participants identified as Catholics first and Indigenous or non-Indigenous as secondary. This assumed uniformity of identity was also reinforced by the lack of direct mention of Indigenous Survivors who were present as a part of the congregation.

Cardinal Cyprien Lacroix, the Archbishop of Quebec City, and two other bishops presided at the altar for the Eucharist while the Pope looked on from the presider's chair. Following communion, the pope prayed the closing prayer, taken from the Roman Missal's Masses for Reconciliation. This prayer expresses a common external mission, the final stage of ritual reconciliation identified by Belcher.

May the Sacrament of your Son, which we have received, increase our strength, we pray, O Lord, that from this mystery of unity we may drink deeply of love's power and everywhere promote your peace. Through Christ our Lord.³⁵

This prayer suggests that this ritual is focused on recognizing God as the source of reconciliation and sharing that peace with others. The prayers focused on the Church being the conduit of reconciliation. In his homily, the Pope makes this common mission clear. He states, "Reconciled with God, with others and with ourselves, may we ourselves become instruments of reconciliation and peace within our societies."³⁶ These prayer texts, along with the message in the Pope's homily, ritually enact a call for a shared common mission. The texts point towards an assumed shared common identity of membership in the Catholic Church. This emphasis on common external mission appeared in stark contrast to the act of protest at the beginning of the mass. There was a performative disconnect between the experience of the presiders and the congregation.

34. Pope Francis, "Homily at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré."

35. This prayer was prayed in French during the liturgy. For the French version see the Missal published by the Vatican for the papal visit. The English cited here is the official English translation of the same prayer. The Holy See, *Viaggio Apostolico Di Sua Santità Francesco in Canada*.

36. Pope Francis, "Homily at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré."

Maskwacis Event³⁷

The ritual opened with the pope being pushed down a rural road in his wheelchair, surrounded by security personnel and men in suits. Notably, this entourage includes very few clergy, starkly contrasting to the Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré liturgy. The Pope first paused for a moment of silent prayer at a graveyard associated with a former Residential School (Figure 3).



Figure 3: The Pope praying at the cemetery.³⁸ Used with permission.

The opening actions of the Maskwacis ritual enact the crisis and its consequences. By stopping and praying at the graveyard, the Pope's actions are silently acknowledging the history and harm of the Catholic Church's participation in the colonial project. The visual image of the Pope sitting alone in his wheelchair in front of the graves creates a poignant symbol of the impacts of the crisis. These actions are reinforced later by the words of the Pope's apology, which acknowledged the harm caused by residential schools and colonialism.

Next, the pope was greeted by four chiefs dressed in traditional regalia from the local Indigenous communities. The Pope handed each of these chiefs a red box of tobacco, a customary gift when visiting an Indigenous community. The procession then moved towards the outdoor circular powwow structure. The Pope was brought to a dais and seated in the middle of the four chiefs (Figure 4).

37. CPAC, *Pope Francis Delivers Apology During Visit to Former Residential School* (Maskwacis, Alberta, 2022), <https://www.cpac.ca/cpac-special/episode/pope-francis-delivers-apology-during-visit-to-former-residential-school?id=c648fd30-5ce5-451c-b399-1f4ee02f5065>.

38. CPAC, *Pope Francis Delivers Apology During Visit to Former Residential School*.



Figure 4: The Pope seated with Indigenous Chiefs.³⁹ Used with permission.

The Pope's gifts of tobacco to the local Indigenous chiefs mark the Indigenous communities as the hosts of this ritual. The Pope is a guest at this ritual. The image of the Pope seated between the Indigenous chiefs on the dais also reinforces the Pope's role as a guest. He is the centre of attention, but his ecclesial retinue does not surround him.

Once the pope was settled, the grand entrance portion of the ceremony began. This included a procession accompanied by Indigenous drumming and singing (Figure 5). Many representatives from various Indigenous, Inuit, and Metis nations were in the procession, and a red banner bearing the names of the children who died in residential schools was also carried in it.



Figure 5: The Eagle Staff Entrance.⁴⁰ Used with permission.

39. CPAC, *Pope Francis Delivers Apology During Visit to Former Residential School*.

40. CPAC, *Pope Francis Delivers Apology During Visit to Former Residential School*.

The grand entrance of the Eagle Staffs and Indigenous, Metis and Inuit representatives encapsulate both crisis and redress stages. A grand entrance often marks the beginning of Indigenous ceremonies and gatherings. Many of these ceremonies were banned by the government and ridiculed by members of the Catholic Church. From this historical perspective, the grand entrance can be interpreted as an act of defiance. The announcer embodies this by speaking in an Indigenous language. He also explicitly acknowledges the resilience of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada as he introduces the victory song. This entrance, with its expressions of Indigenous culture, points towards redress and healing stages. The recovery of Indigenous customs and traditions has been a central part of the healing journey of many Indigenous peoples.⁴¹ However, the presence of the banner with the names of the children killed in residential schools is a clear visual reminder of the harms and abuses caused by the Catholic Church, and that breach is still present in that same ritual action.

Following the grand entrance, the Pope was welcomed by Chief Wilton Littlechild, a former commissioner of the TRC and member of the Ermineskin First Nation. The Pope responded to these remarks by reading his statement of apology. The Pope's apology may be interpreted as an enactment of redress. It is a response to the request made by the TRC, which had identified this action as an important step in the process of healing and reconciliation. The video coverage of the event showed that people in the crowd were emotionally moved by the Pope's apology. Applause was heard at several points, acknowledging their agreement with the Pope's message of repentance.

Following the apology, the pope exchanged gifts with various Indigenous representatives. Of particular note was the gift of Chief Littlechild, who placed a war bonnet on the Pope's head while the crowd applauded (Figure 6). Earlier in the event, the announcer described the war bonnet as symbolizing leadership. This gift could be interpreted as an act of acceptance of the Pope's apology and potentially an act of forgiveness. This particular gift stirred up much controversy following the event.⁴² Many people felt that the Pope had not done enough in the way of redress to warrant the gift of a war bonnet. This discrepancy points to the fact that different people interpret different actions in various manners, and each person does not find themselves in the same place of the social drama of reconciliation.

41. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 9.

42. Niigaan Sinclair-Papal Visit: Catholic Church and the Four Steps of Reconciliation (Full Video) (Vancouver, 2024), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JShjKJT8vc>.



Figure 6: The Pope receives a war bonnet from Chief Littlechild.⁴³ Used with permission.

Then, the Pope donned an orange stole to lead the Our Father in English and offer a blessing (Figure 7). The choice of an orange stole can also be interpreted as an act of redress. This orange stole is atypical because it is not a liturgical colour utilized by the Catholic Church. However, it is a colour that Indigenous Peoples have adopted to raise awareness about the harms of the Residential Schools.⁴⁴ Selecting this colour of the stole is a public acknowledgment of the harms of the Residential Schools and that acknowledging this harm is more important than following Catholic Church customs.



Figure 7: Pope wearing an orange stole.⁴⁵ Used with permission.

43. CPAC, *Pope Francis Delivers Apology During Visit to Former Residential School*.

44. For a history of the use of orange shirts as public acts of awareness raising see: John Boyko, "Orange Shirt Day," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, September 28, 2021, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/orange-shirt-day>.

45. CPAC, *Pope Francis Delivers Apology During Visit to Former Residential School*.

Discussion

The analysis shows that the Maskwacis ritual facilitated a greater expression of different stages of ritual reconciliation. In contrast, the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré ritual focused primarily on the final stage of the process, a common external mission. The differences between these two rituals point to the complexity of this reconciliation process and the limitations of its ritual expression at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. Even as a ritual specifically focused on reconciliation, its intrinsic dynamics could not embody the same variety of stages and expressions as the Maskwacis ritual.

As it was ritually expressed in the mass at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, the institutional Catholic Church sees itself predominantly in the ritual stage of a common external mission. The ritual actions and texts seemed to assume that all of the participants had a uniform experience of the stages of ritual reconciliation and that the binding stage of the social reconciliation process has occurred. This perspective seems to suggest that those present in this ritual identified sufficiently with the church to desire a common mission of reconciliation. However, the protest during the liturgy quickly dispels this assumption. The protest makes it evident that at least some of the Indigenous Peoples present were not living in the same stage of social reconciliation.

It may have been the case for some of these participants that the liturgy was experienced in the breach or crisis stages. From a breach perspective, the liturgy could be legitimately interpreted as a perpetuation of ecclesial power. The division of the clergy from the laity was delineated by the rows of clerics dressed in white. From this perspective, the people representing the perpetrating institution visually controlled the space (Figure 1). The lack of reference to Indigenous Survivors of the IRSS may have further compounded this sense of breach or crisis. This omission may reinforce narratives of the Catholic Church's lack of care or concern for the Survivors and, therefore, deepen the sense of ongoing breach.

The omission of any reference to the presence of Indigenous Survivors, the focus on a common mission of reconciliation, and the dominant placement of clergy all point to a Eucharistic liturgy that suffered under characteristic damage. This damage stunts the liturgy's capacity to embrace various stages of ritual reconciliation. The impacts of this damage inhibit the reconciliatory nature of the Eucharistic celebration. This damage is not identical to the deformation of supersessionism that Winner outlines in her book. This is a different deformation that is also intrinsic to celebrating the Eucharist. The deformation that is being surfaced here is the conflation of unity with uniformity that Reynolds described by the term ecclesial colorblindness. The narrowed vision created by this intrinsic damage sees that unity is only possible if there is a uniformity of expression and experience.

The damage inflicted on the unity of the gathered congregation in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré was made explicit when the ritual texts and actions did not leave

space for a diversity of experiences of reconciliation. The ritual embodied a united Catholic identity through its assumption of uniform experience and relationship to the ecclesial structure. This imposed uniformity continues to perpetuate dynamics of colonialism that were evident in the IRSS.⁴⁶ The ritual texts' focus on the Catholic Church's common mission to be an agent of reconciliation presumes that all members of the Church, or at least those present, are uniformly at that stage of the social reconciliation process. From this perspective, any possibility of schism is overlooked. It assumes that the congregation is uniformly identified with the ecclesial body. The presence of the protest action dispels this myth. There were members of the congregation who did not identify with the ecclesial body in a uniform manner. These individuals, who may even identify as Catholic, did not experience uniformity with the hierarchical structure that is supposed to represent this body. Indeed, many Survivors greatly mistrust the hierarchy and institution of the Church, while still identifying as Catholic.

The lack of reference to Indigenous Survivors of residential schools also points to the distortion of uniformity. Without being privy to the planning of this event and working within the limits set by the visual ethnographic method, it is impossible to know if this omission was an intentional decision on the part of the organizers of the mass or not. However, the lack of reference to Survivors may be interpreted as avoiding potential divisions within the congregation. The impact of avoiding references to Survivors makes the congregation feel more uniform than it might actually be. Acknowledging the presence of Survivors would have made the potential unhealed divisions explicit in the liturgy. This absence avoided the Survivor and perpetrator dichotomy. The clergy, regardless of their personal relationship to the Residential Schools, represent the institution that perpetrated this injustice. By avoiding acknowledging Survivors, it also avoids the implication of the Catholic Church as the perpetrator.

This deformation becomes even more evident when the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré mass is placed beside the ritual in Maskwacis. The unity, however tenuous, that was established in the Maskwacis ritual did not presume uniformity. It did not assume that the ritual participants were experiencing the ritual actions in the same manner. The gift of the war bonnet demonstrates the varied interpretations and stages present in that ceremony. The unity of that ritual was a unity of journeying, recognizing the real possibility of schism but being committed to repairing the breach. The greater variety of stages of ritual reconciliation that the ritual was able

46. It is possible to see the link between this intrinsic damage and broader patterns of coloniality, especially as it was experienced in the IRSS. For an exploration of ritual and liturgy in the residential school system see: Sarah Kathleen Johnson, "On Our Knees: Christian Ritual in Residential Schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada." Additionally, Claudio Carvalhaes outlines the deep connection between coloniality and 'oneness.' See: Cláudio Carvalhaes, "Liturgy and Postcolonialism: An Introduction," in *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One Is Holy*, ed. Cláudio Carvalhaes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), 1–20.

to hold is indicative of a unity that was not uniform. In this manner, the Maskwacis ritual is a helpful foil because it uncovers the subtle deformation that occurs when the desire for unity is expressed as uniformity.

The Eucharist is a sacrament of unity and reconciliation. However, this unity can be deformed into uniformity, which does not permit difference. In this context, uniformity presumes and enforces a common perception of the reconciliation process. It assumes that the group's internal reconciliation has already occurred and denies any real possibility of schism. This is intrinsic to the Eucharist's nature because it is a deformation of the desire for unity and reconciliation.

This deformation of unity into uniformity is not unique to this one Eucharistic celebration that was the subject of this article. The fact that Reynolds identifies this pattern operating in the realm of ecclesiology points to the prominent presence of this deformation in the Catholic Church. It is unsurprising to see echoes of this deformation that is ritually enacted in the Eucharist, at the source and summit of Catholic life, in other relational dynamics in the Church. This points to the deep relationship between what the church celebrates liturgically and its patterns of organization.

Reynold's proposal of an ecclesiology of solidarity can also find liturgical expressions. A clear example of this solidarity is the orange stole that the Pope utilized in Maskwacis (Figure 7). This non-traditional stole bends the liturgical norms, walking them away from the strict uniformity of approved liturgical colours. The orange stole is a visual symbol of solidarity with an Indigenous movement to remember the impacts of the IRSS.⁴⁷ Solidarity is lived through local relationships and, in the case of liturgy, is attentive to what stages of ritual reconciliation are operative in the community. A liturgy that embodies solidarity makes space for diverse expressions of the stages and holds these expressions together in tension.

Solidarity as a corrective to uniformity suggests that greater attention needs to be paid to who has agency to determine the form of the ritualization. Each of the rituals studied in this article embodied different approaches to sharing agency. The question of who has the agency to make decisions about the rituals points to where the power is being held. In Maskwacis, the Pope actively participated as a guest. The gathered participants expressed their agency in a variety of ways, by dancing, singing, by applause and by the gift giving to the Pope. In Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, it appeared like the institutional church was exercising its agency in the planning of the mass. However, it should not be assumed that the Indigenous participants lacked agency or participated in only a passive manner. Various Indigenous peoples actively participated in the liturgy through their reading, praying

47. This stole was gifted to the Pope by a member of the delegation that went to Rome in the lead up to the Papal visit. This deepens its symbolic solidarity with the community.

and singing. They fit their participation into roles that were outlined and dictated by the ritual organizers. Given the limitation of the roles, they still exercised their agency by their choice to participate. It also should not be assumed that the congregation was completely powerless, their agency may have been expressed as mental consent or dissent to the ritual.⁴⁸ The uniformity of the ritual suggests that Indigenous voices were not given equal agency in the planning of the mass. Solidarity requires attentiveness to shared agency especially in contexts of reconciliation especially in these situations where the abuse of power has been so damaging.

As a way of concluding this article, it may be possible to envision how the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré liturgy may have addressed this intrinsic deformation. By giving prominence to Indigenous survivors, either a place in the sanctuary or, at the very least, in the front pews, it would have demonstrated the diversity of experiences coinciding in the same ritual. Their prominence would have been a clear sign that their experience is important and that it is possible to hold multiple stages of the ritual reconciliation within the same ritual. Decentering the clergy and centring Survivors could have been an important means of acknowledging how the hierarchy's power needs to make room for voices that challenge the myth of uniformity. Also, by framing the desire for a common external mission as an aspiration desire and not a foregone conclusion would have permitted greater flexibility and greater unity amongst the participants. By expressing a common external mission as a future hope, the Church hierarchy would be articulating a desire to walk through the stages of reconciliation in solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples.

Through identifying and outlining how the intrinsic damage of conflating unity and uniformity was expressed in one Eucharistic liturgy, I hope that this pattern has become more clearly recognized so that it can be readily identified and avoided in other Eucharistic celebrations. It is only by reflecting deeply on what we are celebrating that we can confront the logics of sin that influence our liturgies. We can strive to help our celebrations conform more and more to their goal of being rituals of reconciliation.

48. For a more detailed discussion of power and consent to ritual participation see: Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 207–8.

Negotiating Liturgical Space Through Receptive Ecumenism

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Introduction

Each Christian tradition—not to mention each of the local congregations within a single tradition—maintains a unique and evolving relationship with liturgical space. Even when unacknowledged or downplayed, liturgical space shapes the identity of a worshipping community, often through the mediating force of liturgical action.¹ The space can determine what happens and what holds meaning in worship, which then shapes what congregants believe about God and themselves.² Running against this current, congregants might alter their liturgical space in ways that enable a particular action and thus reinforce a particular belief.

Establishing a link between liturgical space and identity (Figure 1) has led some scholars to take an additional step of exploring what happens when extraneous circumstances alter or exacerbate this relationship (Figure 2). For instance, what happens when a congregation closes its doors for financial reasons and must then grieve the loss of their liturgical space?³ How do congregations adapt to sharing

1. Hansol Goo uses the example of Catholic immigrant communities obtaining their own liturgical space to argue that “a physical building augments the community’s self-understanding” and increases their sense of autonomy. See Hansol Goo, “From Division to Encounter: Spatial Considerations for Hospitality in Shared Parishes,” *Liturgy* 39:3–4 (2024): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2024.2369024>.

2. Note that in establishing this relationship between liturgical space and identity, which is subject to constructions of power and authority in any given context, I am taking what Jeanne Halgren Kilde calls a “socio-historical” approach to studying liturgical space. For an overview of this approach and examples of how it has appeared in scholarly discourse up to the time of her writing in 2013, see Jeanne Halgren Kilde, “Approaching Religious Space: An Overview of Theories, Methods, and Challenges in Religious Studies,” *Religion & Theology* 20:3–4 (September 2013): 188–93, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15743012-12341258>.

3. See, for instance, Henk de Roest, “‘Losing a Common Space to Connect’: An Inquiry into Inside Perspectives on Church Closure Using Visual Methods,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17:2 (2013): 292–313, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2013-0018>; Jennifer Clark, “‘This Special Shell’: The Church Building and the Embodiment of Memory,” *Journal of Religious History* 31:1 (2007): 59–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9809.2007.00545.x>.

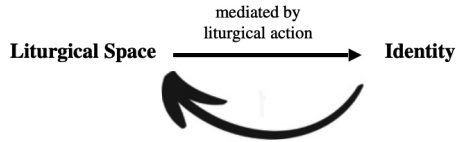


Figure 1. Relationship between liturgical space and identity.



Figure 2. Relationship between liturgical space and identity altered by extraneous circumstances.

space with other communities, Christian or non-Christian, so that more than one identity is represented in the space? In other words, liturgical space can change over time, often through unconventional circumstances that facilitate encounters with more or less authoritative people and perspectives. Building upon these examples, this paper marks the first step of an ongoing qualitative study of “ecumenical shared ministries” as an understudied crisis of liturgical space. An ecumenical shared ministry refers to two or more congregations merging resources while retaining their distinct denominational affiliations, resulting in “receptive ecumenism” at the local level.⁴ Receptive ecumenism is often imagined as “a dialogue that prioritizes an ecumenical exchange of gifts over the weighing of different doctrinal positions.”⁵ However, it entails more than abstract *conversation* between two Christian traditions; it requires a willingness to *change* in tangible ways that deepen one’s own sense of denominational identity while also fostering a shared sense of identity that transcends denominational labels.⁶ For the purposes

4. See Sandra Beardsall, Mitzi J. Budde, and William P. McDonald, *Daring to Share: Multi-Denominational Congregations in the United States and Canada* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2018). Note that I use “ecumenical shared ministries” instead of “multi-denominational congregations” in the remaining sections of this paper, since the former term is more frequently heard in the Canadian context of my chosen case studies. See Beardsall, Budde, and McDonald, 3.

5. Kimberly Hope Belcher, *Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism: From Thanksgiving to Communion* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 2.

6. Paul D. Murray summarizes the effectual character of receptive ecumenism in a singular question: “What, in any given situation, can one’s own tradition appropriately learn with integrity from other traditions?” Paul D. Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7:4 (November 2007): 288, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742250701725785>. For her part, Belcher takes a “ritual-praxical” approach to receptive ecumenism, prioritizing “pastoral needs” and their tangible expression in worship instead of “systematic curiosity about the interrelationship between disparate theological claims.” I follow her approach in this paper, even as we both acknowledge that “ritual differences are often more challenging to reconcile than scholarly language.” See Belcher, *Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism*, 2.

of this paper, receptive ecumenism manifests as making decisions about liturgical space that are informed by ecumenical relationships.⁷

The formation of an ecumenical shared ministry is an exemplary case of enacting receptive ecumenism in a way that implicates liturgical space. This paper therefore moves from a review of existing scholarship on the relationship between liturgical space and identity, culminating with Hansol Goo's study of negotiating liturgical space in "shared parishes," to an analysis of how two different ecumenical shared ministries in Canada have negotiated liturgical space according to their websites.⁸ First, taking Pinawa Christian Fellowship in Pinawa, Manitoba as an example, I consider how ecumenical shared ministries may downplay the significance of liturgical space for the sake of minimizing conflict as they build a shared sense of identity. Second, I consider how the Church of St. Paul in Barriere, British Columbia has sought ways to honour multiple identities in a space that formerly represented only one of its three participating denominations. I argue that there are merits and drawbacks to each approach in terms of how well they equip these communities to enact receptive ecumenism by receiving the best of each other's traditions.

Liturgical Space in Crisis: COVID-19, Congregational Closures, and Shared Parishes

As a site of liturgical action, liturgical space becomes a marker and shaper of identity for any worshipping community.⁹ The COVID-19 pandemic has offered opportunities to further explore this phenomenon, since it forced many congregations to relocate to an online space for weekly services instead of the physical building where they would typically gather. For instance, reasoning that "the sudden loss of access to churches must have made many reflect on the place of such buildings in their life of faith," Andrew Village and Leslie J. Francis distributed a quantitative survey to facilitate and record these reflections, among others, from

7. In this way, I follow the logic of E. Byron (Ron) Anderson, who believes that receptive ecumenism should materialize as worshipping together on a regular basis, presumably in a shared space. See E. Byron (Ron) Anderson, "'Together Met, Together Bound': Liturgy and Ecumenism," *Studia Liturgica* 54:1 (March 2024): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00393207231225978>.

8. Note that in consulting the websites of two ecumenical shared ministries, I follow the work of other scholars who have employed this same analytical method to ask and answer questions of ecclesial identity at the local level. See, for instance, Lynne M. Baab, "The Future Church: Identity and Persuasion on Congregational Websites" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2007); Philipp Bartholomä, "Digital Expressions of Church: The Online Identity of Free Churches as a Mirror of Their Missional Mentality," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 47:1 (January 2023): 41–56.

9. Consider, for instance, how many Mennonite places of worship are distinguished from other church buildings on the basis of their "architectural humility," whereas Anglican scholar William Whyte's "theology of architecture" recognizes architecture as a "tool for spiritual development." See John L. Ruth, *The Earth Is the Lord's: A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 39 (Herald Press, 2001), 549; William Whyte, "The Ethics of the Empty Church: Anglicanism's Need for a Theology of Architecture," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 13:2 (November 2015): 172–88, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355315000108>.

over 6000 congregants across different branches of the Church of England, as well as some Roman Catholic and Free Church participants.¹⁰ Village and Francis report a diverse range of responses to the sections of the survey that asked participants to rank the value of church buildings for Christian identity and witness. Further, they argue that the responses correlate with denominational affiliation:

[With] a high score indicating someone who attached strong significance to the importance of church buildings for faith...differences among Christian faith traditional groups were slightly more pronounced, and in directions that reflected historical and theological traditions. Thus, Roman- and Anglo- Catholics scored the highest, Free Church and Anglican Evangelicals the lowest, and Broad-Church Anglicans in between the other traditions.¹¹

On one hand, their findings suggest a modest affirmation of church buildings overall, regardless of Christian tradition. On the other hand, there is enough *range* in the level of agreement with each building-related statement on the survey to suggest that the iconoclastic debates of the Reformation era continue to foster differences between traditions.¹² These differences are relatively inconsequential as long as Christians continue to worship in denomination-specific buildings, but as recent scholarship reveals, congregations increasingly cannot afford this luxury.

COVID-19 is one example of a crisis of liturgical space, but it is far from anomalous. Many Christian traditions in the West are experiencing significant decline, fostering a sense of “redundancy” and resulting in congregational mergers and closures.¹³ For these congregations, the loss or adaptation of liturgical *space* as a container of individual and communal memories threatens their sense of identity. Focusing on congregational closures within the Uniting Church in Australia, Jennifer Clark explains that

if the church building existed to prompt religious memory, internally for the believer and externally for the community, the lived history of the church, as the ongoing relationship between the congregation and the building, between people and place, creates another memory platform—congregational memory...The essence of congregational identity is an association of individuals with each other in a known place, usually a particular church building. Outside the building a congregation is without physical definition. Memory connects the building with the congregation over time and through generations.¹⁴

10. Andrew Village and Leslie J. Francis, “Churches and Faith: Attitude Towards Church Buildings During the 2020 Covid-19 Lockdown Among Churchgoers in England,” *Ecclesial Practices* 8 (December 2021): 217, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22144471-bja10025>.

11. Village and Francis, 227–28.

12. The controversies of the Reformation era also perpetuate divisive perspectives on liturgical space *within* denominations if one takes Village and Francis’ approach of accounting for the differences between “Anglo-Catholics,” “Broad Church Anglicans,” and “Anglican Evangelicals.” See Village and Francis, 230.

13. See Denise Bonnette, *Redundancy, Community and Heritage in the Modern Church of England, 1945–2000: Closing the Church Door* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023).

14. Clark, “‘This Special Shell,’” 62–63.

In the context of a congregational closure, perspectives on liturgical space, which are mediated by the convergence of diverse “religious, congregational, personal, and community memor[ies]” in each individual, must rise to the surface instead of remaining unspoken, which can incite conflict.¹⁵ Much of what defined the congregation in the past is called into question when they look towards the future, sparking a defensive and panic-like reaction that may set congregants at odds with each other instead of bringing them into closer communion.

Clark’s research on the loss of liturgical space may be transferable to instances of sharing liturgical space. After all, if conflict is an inevitable outcome of a building closure involving a *single* congregation, it seems unlikely that *multiple* congregations could worship in the same building in a way that promotes “unity and peace in societies broken apart by polarization.”¹⁶ Indeed, Hansol Goo’s study of shared Catholic parishes in the United States reveals how “space and spatiality [can] emerge as central impediments to unity” because “communities that share [a] parish must negotiate space and time in a precarious act of balancing authority, power, and agency.”¹⁷ For instance, she describes a parish where majority-Hispanic and Korean Catholic communities worship at different times and in different buildings on the same property. In taking this approach, both congregations can claim autonomy over their worship spaces and authentically express themselves. They can avoid power struggles that come with negotiating some of the finer points of shared space, such as “decoration, arrangement of the furnishings and audio equipment in the worship space, or display of the community’s devotional statues and images.”¹⁸ At the same time, Goo laments that in the case of a shared Catholic parish, “members of each community are insulated within their ethnic group and do not interact with others outside of their group. Like oil and water, ethnically distinct communities within the same parish do not mix and they exist in parallel worlds that do not cross.”¹⁹

To be sure, Goo does not describe sharing liturgical space as an exclusively divisive ordeal. She also believes that liturgical space “contains the possibility for

15. Clark, 69.

16. Richard S. Vosko expresses this hope for single congregations negotiating the relationship between clergy and laity in a given liturgical space, but it is also a desirable aim for multiple congregations sharing the same space. See Richard S. Vosko, *Art and Architecture for Congregational Worship: The Search for a Common Ground* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2019), 3.

17. Goo, “From Division to Encounter,” 96.

18. Goo, 94.

19. Goo, 94. One could make the same assessment of shared space in ecumenical or interfaith contexts, such as the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center (used by both Catholic and Protestant communities) in Maryland or multifaith chapels on university campuses. See Catherine R. Osborne, “‘So That One Day We May Be One’: The Interfaith Center at Columbia, Maryland,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 35: 3 (2017): 75–104; Jeanne Halgren Kilde, “Creating the Multifaith Chapel, 1938–1955: Architecture and the Changing Understanding of ‘Religion,’” *Religions* 15:3 (February 2024): 275, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030275>.

unity between two disjointed parties.” She views space as an essential and underutilized resource for encountering God and others:

Space is essential for liturgy because space facilitates the sensorial experience of liturgy, which is a theological and anthropological phenomenon concerned with the purpose of life and the eschatological end for human beings. More than a mere architectural background for liturgy, parish space is an existential space in which the theological truths of liturgy are realized as concrete experience for the individual and for the worshipping community.²⁰

In other words, Goo affirms as one of the central arguments of this paper that liturgical space, as a site of liturgical action, shapes what congregants believe about God and each other. Goo then follows this argument to its logical conclusion by suggesting that as liturgical space changes over time to suit the liturgical needs of “all communities that worship there,” especially on occasions when everyone worships together, such as a joint liturgy for a major feast day like Christmas or Easter, congregants can experience “mutual growth and enrichment in understanding each other.”²¹ Over time, rather than separating congregants into discrete rooms or identities that never overlap, sharing liturgical space facilitates encounters with difference and thus becomes an exercise in receptive ecumenism. How might these reflections inform a study of ecumenical shared ministries with members who worship together not just on special occasions, but on a *regular* basis while representing different denominations and, by extension, different perspectives on liturgical space?

Negotiating Liturgical Space: Lessons from Ecumenical Shared Ministries

By worshipping as one community not solely for Christmas and Easter, but each and every week, ecumenical shared ministries are realizing a mode of ecumenism that E. Byron (Ron) Anderson calls “believing and praying together”:

If we believe...that our liturgical practices form us in belief and understanding, even as they have the potential to “deform” us, then we should also be able to believe that regular practices of common worship, the inhabiting of shared liturgical patterns and practices...can lead us to and help us embody common beliefs.²²

20. Goo, “From Division to Encounter,” 97. Horst Schwebel also grapples with the inevitable infringement of anthropological concerns upon theological thinking, concluding that “theological debate on the subject of church and world, parish, worship, and so on, needs—for love’s sake—to be complemented by an anthropological debate in which the relationship of humanity to space is given the status and treatment it deserves.” See Horst Schwebel, “Liturgical Space and Human Experience, Exemplified by the Issue of the ‘Multi-Purpose’ Church Building,” *Studia Liturgica* 24:1 (March 1, 1994): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003932079402400102>.

21. Goo, 96.

22. Anderson, 17.

Without eliminating differences or prescribing uniformity across traditions, Anderson takes a cue from Kimberly Hope Belcher and other proponents of receptive ecumenism to explain how believing and praying together should not dilute, but rather enrich each tradition: “We receive each other’s traditions as part of a shared heritage...[This] requires not that we be indifferent to one another but that we be more generous and big-hearted with one another. Such generosity enables us to see the good in each other’s practices.”²³ Within this description of receptive ecumenism, there is an affirmation of each tradition that fosters a willingness to refine one’s own identity through encountering other identities, much like how Goo believes that shared liturgical space can serve as a site of hospitable encounter with God and other humans. One must also ask, however, if this receptive engagement with each other’s traditions is as straightforward as it sounds. Congregations make enormous ecumenical strides when they commit to regularly worshipping together, but each of them brings a unique set of memories rooted in tangible realities (like a building, for instance), which can become something to defend rather than share at the risk of losing their sense of identity.²⁴ Division looms large even as congregations commit to the work of encountering each other. What strategies do congregations thus employ to reduce conflict and promote receptive ecumenism, and what are the merits and drawbacks of their efforts?

Downplaying Liturgical Space: Pinawa Christian Fellowship

When a congregational closure results in the loss of a building, Clark notes how it is common for leaders to dilute liturgical space of its meaning:

In order to advocate closure[,] church authorities must distance themselves from the building and deny the importance of place in theological terms, arguing that Christianity does not invest significance in the building itself...The true theological meaning of the ‘church’ is the people.²⁵

This rhetoric works to trivialize the building and the memories that it holds for congregants so that their vision of a collective future can take shape without being challenged by individual perspectives on the past.²⁶ On one hand, as Clark acknowledges, this approach to handling the loss of liturgical space is a “substantive theological position.”²⁷ After all, “congregations see themselves as belonging to a national church [or] to the wider community of believers, the people of God, that is, the church in a theological sense, geographically and physically boundary

23. Anderson, 18–19. See also Belcher, *Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism*.

24. Clark, “This Special Shell,” 70.

25. Clark, 71–72.

26. Henk de Roest takes note of the same rhetoric in his work with a Dutch congregation on the verge of closure: “The aim of church authorities...is to loosen the ties foe congregation, individuals, or community has to a specific church building.” See de Roest, ““Losing a Common Space to Connect,”” 311.

27. Clark, 72.

free.”²⁸ On the other hand, this approach is dismissive and avoidant of the reality that “the essence of congregational identity is an association of individuals with each other in a known place, usually a particular church building.”²⁹ In the case of Pinawa Christian Fellowship (PCF), a longstanding ecumenical shared ministry located just northeast of Winnipeg, Manitoba, the merits of this approach outweigh the drawbacks. PCF formed in 1963 through a union of Christians with no single denominational affiliation when the town of Pinawa was itself beginning to form.³⁰ Today, the congregation maintains formal ties to Anglican, Mennonite, Presbyterian, and United denominations in Canada while worshipping in a Lutheran building.³¹

Unlike the situation of many other ecumenical shared ministries of choosing between existing buildings that have served as longstanding places of worship for different proportions of congregants, PCF experienced no strain in this regard because there were no churches in Pinawa before its own inception. Christians of various traditions were moving to the region for the first time, thus requiring them to leave all attachments to physical buildings behind and begin anew with an ecumenical mindset. Upon visiting the community’s website, then, one detects a note of pride in the statement that “the PCF has served the community of Pinawa for nearly sixty years now without a church building. We have invested in people and community rather than in property, renting space for all our needs.”³² The rationale for renting a building instead of claiming ownership to their own space is more or less identical to the expression that “the ‘church’ is the people.”³³ Moreover, choosing to worship in a space that is familiar to no one, beginning with an elementary school and then transitioning to a Lutheran building, has a neutralizing effect so that no members of the ecumenical shared ministry may cite an advantage over the others.³⁴ Everyone worships on equal footing so that everyone, at least in theory, equally contributes to the development of a shared identity.

PCF’s approach to negotiating liturgical space is a deliberate choice that stands in contrast to other options, such as the construction of a new building with a spatial design that could integrate all of the memories and values that congregants might bring from their respective denominations. However, PCF has not remained as steadfast on this point as what a surface-level analysis of their website might

28. Clark, 63.

29. Clark, 63.

30. “Our Story,” The Pinawa Christian Fellowship: Called Together, accessed December 9, 2024, https://pinawa.church/?page_id=52.

31. “Our Story.”

32. “Our Story.”

33. Clark, “This Special Shell,” 72.

34. See Sim Stroes-Gascoyne, ed., *Called Together: 50 Years of the Pinawa Christian Fellowship; 1963–2013* (Pinawa Christian Fellowship, 2013), 3–4, https://pinawa.church/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CalledTogether50YearsofthePinawaChristianFellowship_.pdf.

suggest. Taking a closer look at a document tracing the history of their first 50 years together evinces an *evolving* relationship to liturgical space over the years. Beginning with an excerpt from a 1984 church document, it seems that PCF first

firmly rejected the proposed construction of a church building; theological conviction about the church's existence as the 'gathering together' of believers is strong and deep-running. Free from the millstones of buildings and property, the PCF has always been both self-sufficient and an active contributor to the mission treasuries of our denominations.³⁵

The tides shifted by the 1992, when

a PCF General Meeting voted overwhelmingly to buy a lot of land across from the Pinawa Shopping Centre parking lot...A Building Committee was established to investigate church buildings. One option which received serious attention was to purchase an available building and have it moved to Pinawa, but this did not come to pass... The committee also visited several nearby church buildings to get ideas on current construction concepts, etc. A designer was contracted to design a building.³⁶

Cross-referencing these accounts with the minutes of a congregational meeting in 2023 reveals that PCF never acted upon the intention to construct a building, instead transitioning to renting Pinawa Lutheran Church for their weekly liturgies. Moreover, their meeting minutes reflect a shift away from the firmly theological impetus for renting a building in favour of a more economic rationale: "[The] cost of [the] Lutheran Church is the most favourable and falls within our budget."³⁷ At various times over the years, then, PCF has struggled to hold competing priorities relating to liturgical space in a balance, and at every stage, they have ultimately opted to downplay the material aspects of their shared liturgical life.

If we recall the role of liturgical space in shaping identity, PCF's indifference to where they choose to worship may reduce the level of threat posed by receptive ecumenism. If the liturgical space does not belong to any members of the worshipping community, it no longer plays such a central role in differentiating the denominations represented within it. Where identities are less visibly distinct, receptive ecumenism is a far less risky endeavour because congregants see themselves as already converging rather than needing to traverse a significant distance to receive the gifts of each other's traditions. At the same time, to deny that liturgical space holds meaning is to upset the container that holds so much of a congregation's identity, especially in view of Goo's contention that "space is *not* neutral; it is charged with meaning...Through spatiality one can tangibly encounter the

35. Stroes-Gascoyne, 13.

36. Stroes-Gascoyne, 13.

37. Pinawa Christian Fellowship, "Special Congregational Meeting: To Discuss a Rental Agreement with Pinawa Lutheran Church," June 18, 2023, accessed December 9, 2024, 1, <https://pinawa.church/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2023-June-18-General-Meeting-MINUTES.pdf>.

reality of the other, making the existence and knowledge of the other concretely present.”³⁸ As much as PCF celebrates richer encounters with diverse people and traditions as a product of deemphasizing liturgical space, has this ecumenical shared ministry undermined its own intentions by reducing what each tradition can offer to a non-material space?

Honouring Liturgical Space: Church of St. Paul

There is much to both affirm and question when considering how PCF engages with liturgical space. On one hand, PCF takes an approach that makes receptive ecumenism as reciprocal as possible. By encouraging an attitude of indifference towards liturgical space, this ecumenical shared ministry ensures that liturgical space does not become a source of conflict that could lead one tradition to assert dominance over the others, especially if they began a process of choosing between buildings or developing a spatial design for a newly shared space. On the other hand, PCF arguably cheapens receptive ecumenism when congregants fail to receive the full scope of each other’s traditions through their shared worship. The Church of St. Paul (COSP), on the other hand, has taken a somewhat opposite approach to negotiating liturgical space and thus warrants a comparative analysis.

Located in the municipality of Barriere in British Columbia, COSP brought together Anglican, Lutheran, and United congregations as an ecumenical shared ministry in 2010.³⁹ Unlike PCF, each of these congregations worshipped in their own building for many years before COSP formed. Further, instead of seeking a relatively neutral space to begin their life together, COSP made the decision to worship in a building that was formerly owned by one of their participating congregations: Barriere United Church. Their website alludes to the complexities of transitioning into this shared space while knowing that congregants would retain different degrees of attachment to it and other buildings. In fact, COSP dedicates an entire page of their website to honouring the Anglican building known as “Church of the Redeemer” that was lost in the process of amalgamation.⁴⁰ Contrary to the assertion that “the ‘church’ is the people,” this webpage refers to the now-secularized building with reverence.⁴¹ It recounts the initial steps taken to construct the building, and it features both exterior and interior shots of the space. It further notes that

38. Goo, “From Division to Encounter,” 96. Emphasis added.

39. See “Church of St. Paul, Barriere,” North Thompson Ecumenical Shared Ministry: Church of St. Paul (Barriere) and Trinity Shared Ministry (Clearwater), accessed December 9, 2024, <https://norththompsonpc.ca/st-paul-barriere/>.

40. See “Church of the Redeemer,” North Thompson Ecumenical Shared Ministry: Church of St. Paul (Barriere) and Trinity Shared Ministry (Clearwater), accessed December 9, 2024, <https://norththompsonpc.ca/st-paul-barriere/church-of-the-redeemer/>.

41. Clark, “This Special Shell,” 72.

when the decision to form an Ecumenical Shared Ministry was made, it was also decided that the Barriere United Church would become its home and the Church of the Redeemer would be sold. However, there are reminders of the Church of the Redeemer in the Church of St Paul. Many items, including the pews, communion table, and hangings were moved and are in use each week. As well, the stained glass windows were removed, framed and lit, and hung in the sanctuary of the Church of St Paul.⁴²

This approach to negotiating liturgical space is markedly different from what PCF describes, and it comes closer to what Goo recommends when she writes of “re-configuring the worship space to accommodate culturally diverse ritual practices.”⁴³ Still, there are both merits and drawbacks that come with this recognition of lost or adapted liturgical space. On one hand, COSP explicitly affirms “the indispensability of space in practicing hospitality” and demonstrating how different identities can visibly coexist and even complement each other in a shared space.⁴⁴ There is a clear effort to honour remnants of a building that meant so much to the Anglican members of the community while worshipping in a liturgical space that elicits memories for those who affiliate with the United Church of Canada. There is an opportunity for each participating congregation to exercise autonomy in the liturgical space, making their own unique contribution in service to an ecumenical agenda. Congregants offer something from their own tradition, and for the ecumenical shared ministry to then succeed in the long term, each of them likewise demonstrates a willingness to receive from others.

While COSP seems to dive headfirst into the riches of receptive ecumenism by celebrating the different liturgical spaces that shaped their congregants up to the point of forming an ecumenical shared ministry, there are also complications that come with this decision. Most significantly, COSP gathers in a space with a history for some, but not all, congregants, thus setting a select group at a liturgical advantage. Former members of Barriere United Church have been making decisions for decades in the space where COSP now worships, and those decisions presumably reflect and reinforce their identity more so than Anglican or Lutheran perspectives despite their current ecumenical situation. It is difficult to undo the force of an existing identity in a space, even if there is evidence on the COSP website of making room for Anglican identity through visual reminders of the Church of the Redeemer building. While Goo optimistically suggests that “the members of all sharing communities could make the worship space a common home that

42. “Church of the Redeemer.”

43. Goo, “From Division to Encounter,” 99. It is also similar to de Roest’s promising work with a Dutch congregation on the verge of closure. De Roest explains how he assisted the congregation with marking the loss of their building by inviting members to reflect on photos of the space that held meaning for them. See de Roest, ““Losing a Common Space to Connect,”” 299–302. For a more fulsome description of conducting qualitative research through visual means, see Sarah Dunlop, *Doing Theology with Photographs* (London: T&T Clark, 2024).

44. Goo, “From Division to Encounter,” 98.

belongs to all by relying on the power of space to physically facilitate the diverse cultural expressions of each sharing community,” a liturgical space does not necessarily distribute power to everyone in equal measure.⁴⁵

When ecumenical shared ministries take the approach of adapting a space that is familiar to one congregation for use by all of the participating congregations, they inevitably find themselves managing power discrepancies. Moreover, as soon as ecumenical shared ministries acknowledge the value of liturgical space for their representative traditions, they must manage the *discrepancies* in the value assigned to liturgical space from one tradition to the next. Much like how Village and Francis conclude that attachment to church buildings depends in part on one’s denominational affiliation, we see in the example of COSP that the link between liturgical space and identity is explicit enough in the Anglican tradition to warrant a service of “deconsecration” for Church of the Redeemer and a reintegration of some salvaged materials into their worship.⁴⁶ In contrast, there is no description on the website of what elements of the liturgical space uniquely represent the United Church of Canada, although the building itself was originally designed for United Church of Canada use. Furthermore, the Lutheran constituency receives no mention whatsoever on the website in relation to liturgical space.⁴⁷ What sort of invisible assumptions about the authority of each tradition form through the visual recognition of some of them more than others? To return to Anderson once again, who references a larger discourse on liturgy’s formative capacities, “our liturgical practices form us in belief and understanding, even as they have the potential to ‘deform’ us.”⁴⁸ Even when receptive ecumenism is sincerely attempted between two or more traditions, it is difficult to guarantee an *equal* reception of each other’s gifts. In the case of COSP, an implicit hierarchy begins to form within the community, assigning the highest degree of “liturgical authority” to the United congregants to whom the building originally belonged, while second and third degrees of authority respectively extend to the Anglican and Lutheran

45. Goo, 99.

46. “Church of the Redeemer.”

47. In a supplementary conversation with a COSP congregant, I learned that this lack of visual reminders of the Lutheran tradition is not necessarily reflective of the value that Lutherans assign to liturgical space. Rather, when the ecumenical shared ministry formed, there were several Lutherans in the immediate area who wished to join because there had never been a building near enough to them worship both in their preferred tradition *and* in their preferred local setting; hence, there were no windows, pews, or other materials to bring with them when they became members of COSP. Leslie Stirling, interview by Mykayla Turner, June 16, 2025.

48. Anderson, “‘Together Met, Together Bound,’” 17. For further discussion of liturgical (de)formation, see also James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Lauren F. Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Antonio (Tony) Eduardo Alonso, “Damaged Goods,” *Worship* 97 (April 2023): 108–26.

members who claim progressively less ownership over the space.⁴⁹ It seems, then, that Goo's opening assertion that shared parishes "experience much tension and division due to an inevitable imbalance in power and authority" is also true in the case of ecumenical shared ministries, even while it exists alongside the hope of identities flourishing and complementing each other in a shared space.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Anderson steadfastly advocates for ecumenism as an attainable, worthwhile aim of Christian worship that is perhaps best achieved at the local level.⁵¹ Similarly, Sandra Beardsall, Mitzi J. Budde, and William P. McDonald observe that the worship of ecumenical shared ministries "often *becomes* the [most] beloved aspect" of the initiative.⁵² They also note that "mutability" is an asset of worship; as much as "those entering into a shared ministry agreement need to know their traditions will be honored and their worship will reflect their faith and commitments," worship also serves as an opportunity for denominational identities to converge or refine each other.⁵³ Sometimes, there are opportunities for such creative thinking in the process of negotiating liturgical space, such as how COSP has found ways to honour the memories of the Anglicans who lost their beloved Church of the Redeemer building even as they expanded their community in ecumenical directions. At other times, as Beardsall and her colleagues also acknowledge, ecumenical shared ministries may negotiate liturgical space within strict economic limits, perhaps failing to account for how their decisions might breed conflict, overlook opportunities for ecumenical exchange, or ascribe more power to one tradition than another.⁵⁴ In this paper, I have presented two case studies as contrasting examples of negotiating liturgical space that, taken together, underscore the complexity of such a task. By conducting a preliminary analysis of PCF and COSP's websites and setting my findings in dialogue with the work of Goo and others who study the intricacies of losing or sharing liturgical space, I have demonstrated how liturgical space is most fraught when it is negotiated in an ecumenical context, since each tradition maintains a unique and identity-forming relationship to liturgical space.⁵⁵

49. For further conversation on liturgical authority (which is notably "not limited to human beings" and might therefore refer to a liturgical *space* with more or less connection to human beings depending on their history of engagement with that space), see Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Andrew Wymer, "Introduction," in *Worship and Power: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions*, Worship and Witness (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2023), 22–25.

50. Goo, "From Division to Encounter," 93.

51. Anderson, "'Together Met, Together Bound,'" 20.

52. Beardsall et al., *Daring to Share*, 98. Emphasis in original.

53. Beardsall et al., 99.

54. See Beardsall et al., 99.

55. De Roest similarly observes that a congregation's "psychological needs" in relation to a church building cannot easily be dismissed, even when making a strong theological case for the "placeless" character of Christianity. See de Roest, "'Losing a Common Space to Connect,'" 311.

It is not realistic or even desirable for members of ecumenical shared ministries to reconcile all that distinguishes them from each other. When it comes to negotiating liturgical space, then, it seems more fruitful to engage in receptive ecumenism, which involves receiving each other's tangible contributions to the space and allowing those contributions to inflect the varied identities that come together in worship each week. While PCF takes the approach of downplaying the significance of liturgical space so that receptive ecumenism feels like a less burdensome task, COSP takes every layer of liturgical meaning into account. COSP is perhaps more likely to experience worship as "an occasion to receive the gifts of other traditions at their most profound," but doing so comes at the risk of inadvertently letting one tradition speak louder through the space than the others.⁵⁶ When comparing PCF and COSP, then, it would be inaccurate to assert that one of their approaches is better than the other. Moreover, when discerning between these approaches, an ecumenical shared ministry's decision is often mediated by their economic circumstances, which can fluctuate over the years, as in the case of PCF. The result is an ongoing negotiation of liturgical space for most ecumenical shared ministries that cannot be summarized on a webpage. This phenomenon therefore demands further research using qualitative methods, which is an ongoing task of mine. What might such work reveal? Perhaps PCF's economic constraints will lift enough in the future to facilitate the purchase of their own building, which might cause their perspective on the relationship between liturgical space and identity to shift. Perhaps COSP will extend their adaptation of a formerly United Church of Canada building to better represent their Lutheran members. With these possibilities in mind, scholars and practitioners alike must resist the temptation to imagine church buildings as static structures.⁵⁷ It is far more fruitful, and certainly truer to the diverse experiences of the people who worship in these buildings, to study liturgical space as a dynamic force that shifts identity in any number of directions, the best of which leads to an ecumenical destination.

56. Beardsall et al., *Daring to Share*, 99.

57. Goo likewise resists this temptation by drawing examples of early Christian communities renovating their liturgical spaces to support her argument. See Goo, "From Division to Encounter," 98.

