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# Worship Reforming Tradition

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against clergy burnout and escalating, run-away conflicts in the congregation. Perhaps the classic “survival manual” is Rabbi Friedman’s *Generation to Generation—Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (1985), in which yet another relational triangle is expounded in the three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock: the families within the congregation, the congregation itself as a family, and the pastor’s own family.

I gladly welcome Randall’s book into the company of those who say that the level of debilitating stress in pastoral ministry may be more the result of how we view and interpret the dynamics of ministry than of what we actually do or fail to do in our ministry. *The Eternal Triangle* offers a perspective that, in my opinion, rings true in our own experience as it focuses on the emotional process rather than the content of what makes ministry not only a joy but a pain.

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### **Worship Reforming Tradition**

Thomas Talley

Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1990

ix + 155 pp. \$14.50

Talley is an Episcopalian who, until his recent retirement, taught liturgy at General Theological Seminary in New York City. These are essays published elsewhere between 1979–1987. Some began as public addresses, and these benefit especially from Talley’s conversational style. However, he never sacrifices scholarly precision. Historical in nature, the essays show the broad range of Talley’s liturgical interests. He unpacks a wide variety of historical issues and problems for the reader.

His theme, “worship reforming tradition”, betrays Talley’s general thesis throughout the book: that liturgy and worship over the centuries have interacted with our traditions to influence, change, and adapt them. His topics include baptism and ordination; sources of the eucharistic prayer; healing; the liturgy of reconciliation; history and eschatology in the primitive Easter celebration; the origins of Lent and All Saints; and the liturgical year.

Sometimes essays like these, in addition to being “historical”, can also be written off as “history”. Not so Talley’s collection here. His research is current enough that nothing comes through as outdated. Talley is on the frontier of liturgical research, and most of us have a long way to go to catch up with him!

He provides many fascinating nuggets within his essays, some of which indicate what history at its best can teach us. For example (69f), he describes the development of the “confessional booth”, under Charles Borromeo in Milan between 1560–1584, as a practical device to protect and

separate celibate priests from confrontations with emotionally vulnerable women. According to Talley, the confessional was "... a contrivance which effectively protected penitents from intimate contact with their confessors.... This, of course, put an end to the imposition of the confessor's hand." Talley discreetly avoids making the application of the principle to our own times!

Elsewhere (78-79), he provides evidence to argue that in the early church it was unlikely that the model of the Paschal Vigil was that of an all-night liturgy ending at sunrise, but simply a modest imitation of the Passover celebration of the Jews. This proposal provides us with a rather different valence for the planning of the Vigil, and relieves any pressure to make it a long and arduous endurance test lasting from sunset until dawn.

Talley also provides historical evidence for a pattern of initiation (102ff) other than the standard Roman pattern of preparation during Lent for baptism at the Vigil. He points out that in Alexandria, the pattern was different. There, preparation began at the Baptism of Jesus, and concluded with Holy Baptism on Palm Sunday. He points out that even today in some parts of the eastern church, baptism is forbidden between Palm Sunday and Pentecost.

Talley also challenges the notion (132-133) that Christmas was invented in Rome by Constantine to displace the ancient pagan festival of the sun (*Sol Invictus*). This, he says, is simply a twelfth century fabrication. He argues that Constantine was too busy in Constantinople to bother with affairs in Rome; that Christmas was celebrated in North Africa before Constantine's time. And he suggests that December 25 became associated with the nativity of Jesus because it is nine months after the historical date of the Passion, March 25th, which also became identified with the Annunciation.

The essay, "Healing: Sacrament or Charism?" is the best brief treatment this reader has seen on the topic of rites of healing, the use of oil, the relation of sickness to sin, and the meaning of dying within the context of illness.

Often the study of history and its details can confound our easy oversimplification of liturgical history. This is certainly true here. However Talley, unlike some writers on the history of liturgy, rather than dropping a mess of historical detail in our laps and abandoning us to pick at it as best we can, takes the time to sort through the details and assemble for us a new synthesis.

This book is recommended reading, especially if you are prepared to have some of your views stretched and challenged by historical argument.

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## **Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized**

William H. Willimon

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992

xi + 124 pp.

“How many of our sermons speak as if no one in particular has gathered here, as if we are an audience of disinterested listeners, as if nothing like life or death were at stake in our speech? Such speaking is an affront to the dignity of the baptized. The baptized gather here on Sunday because they have been called, summoned.... *I* certainly did not call them. If *I* were calling a church, I doubt that I would have called *this* church. I am, I have noted over the years, a good deal more discriminating than God” (ix-x). So Willimon catapults himself into his prime question: “What difference does it make to our preaching that all of us there are either preparing for baptism or else trying to figure out what happened when we were baptized?” (3).

Holding a high doctrine of baptism as initiation into the church, and holding to a high doctrine of the church as the called-and-incorporated-by-baptism communion of God, Willimon vigorously makes a case for preaching as distinctive discourse arising from both those realities. “We preach either under the promise of baptism, ‘Come forth, be washed, and you shall be odd,’ or the mandate of baptism, ‘You are washed, you are ordained, you are odd.’ Do we preachers appreciate the baptismal, liturgical quality of our speech?” (3). Because preachers speak within the distinctive community they “talk funny” (6). He accuses the church (especially liberal, mainline Protestantism—he himself is United Methodist) of trying desperately to use every language but its own. “In conservative contexts, gospel speech is traded for dogmatic assertion and moralism, gospel self-help psychologies and narcotic mantras. In more liberal speech, talk tiptoes around the outrage of Christian discourse and ends up as innocuous, though urbane, affirmation of the ruling order. Unable to preach Christ and him crucified, we preach humanity and it improved” (9). But the church, by virtue of baptism, is called to be a counter-reality in the world. “We preach, like John or Jesus, among the family, bringing to speech that which has happened in our baptism” (75). More, the church, by virtue of baptism, is called to create a new world: “Christian speakers do not just massage the world as we find it. We create a new world” (86), in which our hearers, the church, can live.