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Martin F. Connell

On the U.S. Aversion to Ritual Behavior and the Vocation of the Liturgical Theologian

The religiosity of the U.S. people is well established in social studies, to the delight of some and the embarrassment of others. Communities of worship of other religious traditions are being founded at a high rate these days, but for most of the nation's history the variety of Protestant Christian traditions made up the dominant religious culture, at least for the nation's first two centuries. Even though U.S. citizens go to church in much higher proportions than do citizens of any other nation in the Western world, the influence of the ritual behavior of church-going on those who attend seems to be negligible, at least by their confessions. The United States is, generally, a culture in which there is a high value on the freedom of the individual, on the one hand, and on national cohesion (particularly in times of war and strife), on the other hand, but there is little admission of the influence on shaping personal, social, and political values by social gatherings between the extremes of the lone individual and the nation of several hundred million.

This three-part essay reflects on the vocation of liturgical theologians in a culture in which there is a general antipathy toward the influence of religious rituals on personal formation and decision-making.¹ Part 1 considers a few foundational nineteenth-century authors of the American Renaissance for reflections on the aversion to Christian ritual behavior. Part 2 takes up the sermons of a few nineteenth-century revivalist preachers. Part 3 suggests five challenges to liturgical theologians who teach and think in the complex social and religious environment of the United States.

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¹This paper was presented originally in a Sacramental Theology group at the CTSA, in Cincinnati, Ohio in June 2003. I thank the convener of the group, Bruce Morrill, S.J., for his invitation and encouragement.

Martin F. Connell

Ralph Waldo Emerson. Just last year, on 25 May 2003, the United States marked the bicentennial of the birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson, a thinker and essayist whose life and work have shaped and continue to shape the core of U.S. culture and character. Son of a Congregationalist minister in New England, Emerson started out in formation to become a Unitarian minister, but he left the pursuit of ministry for a career as a writer and public speaker. He was an early prophet of individualism in the values of the new country, and over the past century and a half he has become an author whose work is deeply embedded in the U.S. literary canon.

One of the main keys to Emerson's theology was that the individual has access to divinity. The opening Latin epigraph of his famous essay "Self-Reliance" is *Ne te quaesiveris extra*,² or a work offered by him to readers "so that you not search outside yourself." The fragment's pronoun and verb form demonstrate that the "you" (*te*) is singular in the dictum, and the truth and divinity he prompts his compatriots to seek were, and indeed still are, discovered within their singular, unassociated selves. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Emerson holds such popular sway over Americans in their high-school and undergraduate years, for his nineteenth-century essays, like "Self-Reliance" (of 1841), are rallying cries for adolescent snubbing of parental oversight. Indeed, Emerson gave a persuasive voice to the adolescent nation's middle finger flipped eastward over the Atlantic Ocean toward the parental England, as well as to France and Italy,³ and to this day his work fuels teenagers as in angst they spring themselves from families of origin.

Although Emerson did not write much about liturgy, his philosophy of individualism has been formative in the constitution of the country, and there are a few relevant reflections from Emerson on the subject of attending church. He wrote, "We must go [to church] alone. I like the silent church before the service begins,

²Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States 1983) 257.

³Emerson, in fact, mentions the city of Rome and the Vatican a number of times in his essays, even though Catholics were relatively few in the States at the time, for his writings antedated by decades the waves of Catholic immigration to American shores.

better than any preaching.”⁴ Or, in another place, he says, “Men’s prayers are a disease of the will, . . . their creeds a disease of the intellect.” And, after teaching at a Benedictine university for a half-decade, I cannot ignore this poem from Emerson’s hand:

I like a church; I like a cowl;
I like a prophet of the soul;
And on my heart monastic aisles
Fall like sweet strains or pensive smiles:
Yet not for all his faith can see
Would I that cowléd churchman be.⁵

The poem does not explicitly express an aversion to ritual, but clearly for Emerson the supremacy of the individual and of the thoughts of an individual would cast into shadow the value put on communal ritual action, inside a monastery or not. If a person is not acting or thinking as an individual, according to Emerson throughout his corpus, then some trickery from outside must be having an adverse influence. The Emersonian individualistic *te* reigns supreme in the U.S. imagination as it was shaped by his work, and the influence of any group on the individual could lead to nothing but suspicion from Emerson’s vantage.⁶

Emily Dickinson. Born seven years and dead four years after Emerson was his Massachusetts literary peer Emily Dickinson (1810–1886), who had very different poetic, social, and even theological sensibilities. Yet Dickinson shares with Emerson the aversion to the communal, social aspect of church-going, which, I am arguing, rings deep and wide in the nation’s social and religious self-understanding. Though for different reasons, both Dickinson

⁴Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 272.

⁵Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Problem,” in *Collected Poems and Translations*, ed. Harold Bloom and Paul Kane (New York: Library of America 1994) 10. The poem was published in 1847, no doubt influenced by the conversion of his friend Orestes Brownson (1803–1876) to Roman Catholicism, in 1844.

⁶My colleague Dan McKanan offered critical feedback on this essay, particularly on the nineteenth-century literary and theological context. I thank Dan; on the theology of those working to free the slaves in the nineteenth century, see Dan’s *Identifying the Image of God: Radical Christians and Nonviolent Power in the Antebellum United States* (New York: Oxford University Press 2002).

and Emerson found the society of church goes fundamentally an interruption of one's relationship with God. Rather than standing as a medium of God's presence in the world, the church for Dickinson was an impediment to the experience of God's life and truth.

Of the nearly eighteen hundred poems in the collection of her work, only seven were published in her lifetime. But today her works, like Emerson's, are omnipresent in both academic and nonacademic bookstores, and after her death publishers have made up for the editorial slights she received during her lifetime. It is therefore not only Emerson's and Dickinson's early chronological place that contributes to their shaping of the culture as influentially as they do, but the ever-growing promulgation of their works and theologies.

Concerning worship, Dickinson has a number of poems about the sacraments, such as the well known poem #280, "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain."⁷ Poem #725 reveals that the sacrament is a meeting of only herself and God, without the context of a community of faith, indeed with no other human beings but herself:

What Thou dost — is Delight —
Bondage as Play — be sweet —
Imprisonment — Content —
And Sentence — Sacrament —
Just We two — meet —⁸

Indeed in poem #751 she identifies her individual soul as if it were itself the community of faith or the church building:

So I — the undivine abode
Of His Elect Content —
Conform my Soul — as 'twere a Church,
Unto her Sacrament —⁹

This essay is not trying to argue that Emily Dickinson was personally trying to undermine the influence of church-going or of rituals

⁷ For full text, see *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company 1960) 128–29.

⁸ Dickinson, *Complete Poems*, 355–56.

⁹ Dickinson, *Complete Poems*, 368.

on human existence, but, as a widely read and influential author of the U.S. literary tradition, Dickinson at least reflects the aversion to ritual characteristic of thought in her time and place and our time and place. Because she has been deservedly well anthologized and read in introduction-to-American-literature courses and in graduate literary seminars both, her work is influential on American identity.

As revealed in her correspondence and in the many critical studies of her life, Dickinson had reason to be suspicious of church-going. Her poems reflect a deep appreciation of the natural world, and for her the company of birds and bees, flowers and trees were far more revelatory than the company of her fellow Christians in Amherst, as poem #324 reflects:

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church —
I keep it, staying at Home —
With a Bobolink for a Chorister —
And an Orchard, for a Dome —

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice —
I just wear my Wings —
And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
Our little Sexton — sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman —
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at least —
I'm going, all along.¹⁰

Here the poet was criticizing the unsacramental qualities of Puritan Sabbath observance, which would have required that one shut out the natural world to connect with the divine, but perhaps in so criticizing the Puritan extreme that distanced the believer from nature, Emily Dickinson seems to have excised the necessarily social element of church-going. She preserved a key truth in an ecclesial sphere that had lost sight of it, but her consoling corrective lost sight of the social element of the mediation of the divine in human life.

¹⁰ Dickinson, *Complete Poems*, 153–54.

Nevertheless, what is compelling about the witness of Dickinson that distinguishes her from Emerson is that she does not distance herself from the biblical or liturgical traditions and symbols on which she was raised. Poem #324 was written two decades after Emerson's "Self-Reliance"; while both of them would have imagined for any human being a lively relationship with the creator quite apart from other people, for her this did not lead to a suspension of the Christian tradition, its language, symbols, stories, or metaphors. It did lead, however, to a definite and expressed disassociation from other believers, as apparent in poem #508:

I'm ceded — I've stopped being Theirs —
The name They dropped upon my face
With water, in the country church
Is finished using, now,
And They can put it with my Dolls,
My childhood, and the string of spools,
I've finished threading — too —

Baptized, before, without the choice,
But this time, consciously, of Grace —
Unto supremest name —
Called to my Full — ¹¹

For a single woman in the middle of the nineteenth century, cutting oneself off from the society of church-going was a courageous act. Much has been speculated about the belle of Amherst's reclusive enclosure in the family home, but, whatever the source of her desire for solitude, the religious tradition in which she was formed inculcated in her deep understanding of images drawn from the bible and from the rituals of the church. Her imagination was engaged by both throughout her days, but the ecclesial solitude of the faith tradition in her poems contributes to the American notion that one can have scriptures and sacraments without the community (or communities) of faith from which these were born. As a result, the poems of Emily Dickinson reflect the juxtaposition of deep religious tradition and the aversion to church society, a juxtaposition still deeply ingrained in the Christian experience of faith in the U.S. today.

¹¹ Dickinson, *Complete Poems*, 247.

Walt Whitman. Walt Whitman's lifespan (1819–1892) overlapped Emily Dickinson's much as hers had overlapped Emerson's, with Walt born about a decade and dead about a half-decade after Emily. He was the son of a father who was a Quaker carpenter and a mother who was the daughter of Dutch farmers. Whitman's influence on society and literary circles during his lifetime was markedly grander than Dickinson's, more influential and provocative than was her Amherst solitude. Yet Whitman's work, which was praised by Emerson, also reflects the ritual aversion that has been seen in the other two authors, perhaps even more so, at times revealing a near-disgust with religious ritual behaviors: "I think I could turn and live awhile with animals," he wrote in his "Song of Myself," "they are so placid and self-contain'd, . . . / They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God, . . . / Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago."¹² This poem, written nearly two decades after the most fruitful writing time of Dickinson, brings evidence of the aversion to ritual to the late nineteenth century, as he sings, with "Creeds . . . in abeyance, . . . I celebrate myself, and sing myself."¹³

Like Dickinson, nature was highly esteemed in his work, and many of his poems are hymns to elements of the cosmos, which can be apprehended merely from surveying their titles — such "From Pent-up Aching Rivers," "Facing West from California's Shores," "Roots and Leaves Themselves Alone," "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing," "Song of the Redwood-Tree," "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun," "Look Down Fair Moon," and, even with the title of his arresting elegy he wrote at the death of President Abraham Lincoln, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

Even though his poems bear literary qualities of nineteenth-century hymnody, the chorus of such hymns to nature from Whitman's pen would not have been a social gathering, nor a community. The chorus would have been the "solitary singer," the title of the biography of Whitman by Gay Wilson Allen.¹⁴ Liturgy,

¹² Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America 1982) 218.

¹³ Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 188.

¹⁴ Gay Wilson Allen, *The Solitary Singer: A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman* (New York: New York University Press 1955).

in Whitman's formula, would have been for the glorification of the individual self: "My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths, / Enclosing worship ancient and modern."¹⁵

As with Emerson, Whitman gave an expression to the departure from the stratified social life imported to the States from Europe, and the two saw the mannered life of rules, traditions, and conventions as an impediment to the blending of peoples needed for the realization of true democracy. Whitman's faith required only the turn to oneself, to the exclusion of others with whom one might mix:

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I
touch or am touch'd from,
The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer,
This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.
If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the
spread of my own body, or any part of it.

And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is.¹⁶

Walt Whitman did not excise the content of the Christian faith or of the bible from his work, but his theology was one in which the life of Jesus Christ was portrayed as of no greater holiness or heroism than the life of any individual. Divinity for Whitman was to be discovered by one's own thoughts, feelings, and body more than by Christianity's bible or the church's rituals. One can feel in his writing again and again a certain restraint in not contradicting too harshly the foundations of Christianity, yet it is clear that the true religious authority — over one's feelings, thoughts, body, and society — was the self-determined individual apart from any religious faith.

For each of these nineteenth-century literary figures, it is difficult to know how much their thought contributed to an aversion to church-going society and its rites in the United States or merely reflected an aversion already deeply instilled. The combined influence of these figures, however, is not as indeterminable, for each of them, with different social connections while alive and different

¹⁵ Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 236.

¹⁶ Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 211, 244.

readerships after their deaths, has significantly contributed to the education of U.S. citizens. Few high-school or college students would graduate without some exposure to one of the three, and many students would have some reading from each.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY PREACHING IN THE U.S.

The authors above would mediate, respectively, an ebullient individualism, a solitary's sacramentalism, and a corporal christology from the experience of one's own body. They both express and perhaps shape the philosophy undergirding a suspicion of religious rituals in the cultures in which they lived and wrote. This philosophy was not completely new when it was expressed in the literature of the U.S. Renaissance. The sixteenth-century reformers of Christianity — countering the Roman Catholic tradition into which they themselves had been baptized as infants and, for many, ordained as young men — indicted any theology that predicated grace on human action rather than on God's generosity, and much of Roman Catholic piety and preaching did just that. Contradicting the Roman Catholic *status theologiae*, the reformers of northern Europe taught rightly that grace is a free, unearned gift.

This theological fundament was not new even in the sixteenth century, for it had been taught and its advocates killed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as is known of pre-Reformation reformers like Wycliffe and Hus. But a powerful new ingredient of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century was the invention of the printing press. The Gutenberg medium for promulgating ideas and images enabled theological teachings to be read by individuals apart from a community of faith, for those who could read, or to be heard by *illiterati* in the street, taught by their non-ordained but reading friends.

As described by Fritz West in his *Scripture and Memory*, the change for faith of the communications invention was significant for the experience of church and faith, which could now be separated: “[W]ith the invention of [the printing press], language suddenly has an existence distinct from the community. . . . [L]anguage can [now] exist apart from the community. . . . With memory now located primarily in books and only secondarily in community, the relationship between memory and community becomes further

attenuated; knowledge is acquired and maintained through individual endeavor rather than communal participation."¹⁷

In this way the Christian faith of an individual came to have an existence apart from a local community simply because it *could* have such an existence for the first time in Christian history. For centuries liturgical texts were written in fonts large enough to be read and sung by a community, and both scriptural and liturgical texts not only shaped one's mind and heart but one's body as well, or, more accurately, as one's flesh wedded to the one body of the community. But once scripture and worship were able to be separated from the church that produced them, religion could forge its way ahead as a private pursuit.

The immigration to the new world by pilgrims, as sobering history or romantic narratives at Thanksgiving remind us year after year, was comprised of those who came to this land in the seventeenth century for religious reasons, either because they fled from England because they had been persecuted for their beliefs, or because they were seeking religious freedom from the dominant tradition of Britain. Either fleeing or pushed, they arrived for fundamentally religious reasons, and it is not unlikely that the religiosity of the population is still tied to some extent to the fervor and price of these religious origins and the aversions of their formerly northern European Protestant adherents.

Another formative change for U.S. religious traditions that came from the reformers was the primacy ceded to the scriptures with the rites of Christian worship in a derivative place, as the reformers highlighted the relationship of the individual believer and the sacred text. Though Luther and Calvin could not themselves have imagined the influence of the word apart from worship, their emphasis on the word so paved the way for the centrality of the individual in the life of faith that the church was no longer necessary as *the* mediator of the word of God. Then, once inculturated into the western shores of the Atlantic Ocean, the Christian faith was shaped in new directions by the new contexts of wide open or densely sylvan spaces and by huge, sparsely populated expanses. The circuit riders and preachers of the nineteenth century called

¹⁷Fritz West, *Scripture and Memory: The Ecumenical Hermeneutic of the Three-Year Lectionaries* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1997) 45.

for personal conversion and decision-making even if the person had never before had contact with a community of faith or a church.

Indeed circuit-rider turned urban revivalist Sam Jones (1847–1906) — known by some as the “Moody of the South,” referring to the still more popular preacher Dwight L. Moody — was passionate for the salvation of those who attended his revivals, as evident in sermons such as this, on “How to be Saved,” in which he exhorted the masses: “I might advise a man to be baptized in the name of the Trinity, and, brethren, this is a rite commanded by God; yet a man who has been baptized may go down to hell, unsaved at last . . . I might advise a man to take the sacrament of the Lord’s-supper. This is one of the sacraments of the Church of God, and I am sorry for any man who lies down to die with the consciousness, ‘These hands have never handled the cup of my Lord, and have never tasted of the bread which is emblematic of the broken body of the Son of God.’ Yet I see how a man may take communion regularly, may partake of the sacrament once a month, and die and be lost at last.”¹⁸

In Sam Jones’ revivals the believers were encouraged to certitude about their salvation by making personal confessions of faith rather than by participating in the rites or fellowship of any church. Such a confession was an individual act rather than a social one, just as Jones describes a conversion later in that same sermon: “But now here’s a trembling, ruined man who cries out, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ And the answer in the twinkling of an eye comes ringing down through his soul: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’ Thank God for an answer as quick as heaven can give it to all who ask in sincerity and truth what they must do to be saved.”¹⁹

Not too much later, but surely late enough to have already felt the influence of the huddled masses of impoverished Roman Catholic immigrants, the famous religious orator Billy Sunday (1862–1935) demonstrated the way to salvation: “Jesus said: ‘Come

¹⁸From Edwin S. Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America*, volume 2, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1982–1983) 289–90; source for Gaustad: *Sam Jones’ Own Book: A Series of Sermons* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe 1886) 131–33.

¹⁹Gaustad, *A Documentary History*, volume 2, 132–33.

to me, not to the Church; to me, not to a creed; to me, not to a preacher; to me, not to an evangelist; to me, not to a priest; to me, not to a pope; 'Come to me and I will give you rest.' Faith in Jesus Christ saves you, not faith in the Church."²⁰ How one was to recognize and sustain one's "faith in Jesus Christ" apart from the church might be a puzzle from our point-of-view, after the reform of theology and ecclesiology at Vatican II. But Billy Sunday's exhortations and popularity were shaped in the context of Prohibition, a movement that was seen as successful to the degree that it moved individuals to heroic changes of lifestyle based on stalwart changes of heart and in the personal decisions accompanying them.

In the religious fervor of the very Christian nineteenth century, the influence of and formation from church all but disappeared in religious rhetoric. No communal realization, manifestation, or incarnation of God's presence was needed to move a person to conversion, for God was present in the person without a church, its worship, or its ministers. It was a kind of fundamentalism that took as authoritative the scriptural canons and theological convictions. Though the bible and the creeds were themselves hard-won fruits of church life in late antiquity, that realization was lost in the piety of nineteenth-century preachers and believers.

Perhaps the Christian imagination had come to decide that one could never trust the vagaries of human beings and feelings, even when among those with whom one shared religious convictions. Trusting in the immutable texts apart from the church's mutable human beings who populated it seems to have been characteristic of U.S. Christian piety of many kinds; for Protestants, this is most apparent today in the fundamentalism concerning the bible, even when contrary to the most quotidian of scientific reasoning. For Catholics, it is most apparent in the fervor for returning to the Missal of Pius V (1570), as if this missal had been left by Jesus in the first century rather than formulated by an ecclesial commission after the Council of Trent (1545–1563). The U.S. faith tradition still reflects Billy Sunday's pithy summary: "Faith in Jesus Christ saves you, not faith in the Church."

²⁰ Also from Edwin S. Gaustand (as above) 290–91; source: William T. Ellis, *"Billy" Sunday: The Man and the Message* (Philadelphia: L.T. Meyers 1914) 148–49.

ON THE VOCATION OF LITURGICAL THEOLOGIANS
IN THE U.S.

The foregoing investigation on the American suspicion of ritual experience eventually might have led to the general Christian culture of the U.S. in which there is thought to be possible a flourishing theology without community or there is imagined to exist a U.S. Christ without a U.S. church, a “personal Lord and Savior.”²¹ From this one can consider how the Roman Catholic tradition in the States might pose a counter to its culture and how liturgical theologians can be bold in their indictments of individualism, not toward the end of converting individuals who are not Christians, but, with the narrative theology and symbolic traditions of the church at hand, to pose alternatives to the extremes of individualism and nationalism, thereby opening up possibilities for healthier choices of life for Christian citizens. But let me first confess an un-American religious prejudice.

Although most theologians tend to put priority on thought and belief over behavior, I — baptized at ten days’ old into a Roman Catholic parish in the city where the country declared its independence, and having participated in a worshiping community ever since — have always found communal acts of physical bodies more deeply and efficaciously formative than any cognitive or spiritual convictions and conversions. In spite of *Sacrosanctum Concilium’s* refreshing prompt toward the renewal of the liturgy, its oft-cited paragraph 14 veers, from my point of view, toward the errantly cerebral in this regard, when it proclaims that “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy.”

God’s life in the sacraments is effective even when not as “conscious” as the council fathers envisioned it as a corrective to the uninformed and non-participating assemblies before Vatican II.

²¹ It is lamentable that some Roman Catholic dioceses and parishes have adopted the rhetoric of “personal Lord and Savior” as one of the goals for formation for the sacrament of confirmation, celebrated for many youths in their teenage years. This is unrecognizable language in the Catholic tradition, adopted, no doubt, without critical thought from evangelical theology. To this Roman Catholic author, the terms “personal” and “Lord and Savior” seem to have no point of contact or intersection.

But I am not convinced that the baptized infant asleep in her father's arms during Mass is formed any less into the body of Christ than the ordained priest or bishop who preaches and presides at the table. So too concerning last-pew, preoccupied, and silent parishioners who dart out of the assembly after communion, as I was reared to do. With my personal prejudice expressed, I offer below five theses on the vocation of the liturgical theologian in a culture constituted by the extremes of individualism and tribal nationalism. The theses are related to one another, but not comprehensive.

1. Pastoral theology rises from an informed appreciation of theology in a local church and its life.

In spite of the constant refrain of *lex orandi lex credendi* since the Second Vatican Council, there has been little attention given by theologians to putting words on the reality and experience of God's presence in the lived actions of the church at prayer. When most theologians think of "pastoral theology," they think of an exercise in bringing textbook theology down to the pews, of making Thomas Aquinas or Martin Luther, Karl Rahner or Edward Schillebeeckx, Catherine LaCugna or Elizabeth Johnson accessible to the folks. Yet God's presence is realized more in the flesh of the assembly in the pews rather than in the crania of theologians; theology can be read in the community at worship and in the experiences that flow from the sacraments.²²

Over a century ago Friedrich Schleiermacher taught of theology as a "positive science," meaning that the discipline is not merely empirical or speculative or theoretical in character but would draw directly from actual historical experience within a given set of social relationships to serve a definite practical function. This is a naming of things as they are experienced by real people in a community of faith rather than bringing knowledge from historical, liturgical, and systematic theology down to pastoral life. Liturgical theologians are called to be media of this upward theology.

²² My colleague Kathleen Cahalan offered critical feedback on this essay, particularly on the emergence, history, and traditions of practical theology. See her recent *Formed in the Image of Christ: The Sacramental-Moral Theology of Bernard Häring, C.Ss.R.* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2004).

2. Liturgical theologians express the link between the symbols of the liturgy and common human experience.

The foundations of the Roman Catholic sacraments are not separate from the anthropological core of life. Humans wash and moisten with oil; eat and drink; order according to skills, training and natural talents; touch the sick and dying; commit themselves to lifelong intimate relationships and, yes, reproduce. Yet too little preaching in the liturgy makes a connection between human life outside the church and the rites of the assembly performed in the sacraments. With this, preachers ignore the gift and witness that the sacramental tradition might be to the culture outside of Christianity in the U.S. Liturgical theologians — informed about the tradition and sensitive to God’s presence in the world — can contribute in this regard by appreciating and teaching the intimate connection between life at worship and life outside the community of faith. The culture holds religion to be so private that the link between church life and society is often broken, yet when awake and attentive to God’s presence in the world liturgical theologians can demonstrate that there is a fundamental connection between life and liturgy.

On this point, one can look back, with sadness and encouragement, to the prescient words of Dickinson and Whitman over a century ago. Emily Dickinson forsook church society at least in part because it too starkly divorced the divine she found in the beauty of the natural world from the divine promulgated in church. Her poems are wondrously filled with paeans to God’s presence in trees and flowers, natural sights and sounds. Walt Whitman was even more iconoclastically prophetic, particularly regarding God’s presence in human flesh. Though most of our assemblies are filled with people married in the church and though the sacramental tradition founds God’s presence in marriage on the sexual intimacy of spouses, does the assembly ever hear from the pulpit any encouragement toward marital intimacy? Has *Humanae Vitae* so stultified the church that it can no longer encourage the carnal celebration of the presence of God in the most common (and perhaps most fun) vocation of the church?

Paul Ricoeur writes of the “[hermeneutical] inquiry into the imaginative potential of myth, symbol, and story to add to our efforts to exist with integrity. Religious traditions use ontologically

potent language and imagery to illuminate all that ultimately concerns human beings — our questions about life's meaning, our confrontation with death, our struggles to be at home in the universe. Our individual and corporate worlds are underdeveloped and impoverished because we no longer have a public symbolic language that speaks both to the brokenness and the intimations of transcendence in our lives."²³ Theologians of the liturgy can read the presence of God in communal life and bring the message to expression for the community of faith.

3. Liturgical theologians can voice the antithesis that Catholic experience is to the supreme individualism of religious experience in the U.S.

The separation of church and state is a wonderful character of the American experience, but the separation was to give breadth to the religious experience so that humanity would be free to associate with those of like traditions. Yet greater freedom has led to heightened individualism, and religious communities have gradually become less demonstrably public, have themselves succumbed to the culture domination. Traditions and communities that had earlier communicated values to citizens have stopped having influence from the weakness of those called to be preachers and prophets.

Human relationships that had been nurtured by family and faith in centuries past have lost that support from live persons, so people are wedded to the television and computer as distracting panaceas in the face of lives that are troubled or hard, as most are. People gravitate toward religious programming on TV more than they do toward the real people who share their faith. (Real people cannot be turned on and off by remote control.) Liturgical theologians, reading the signs of the times, can help people appreciate again the communal nature of religious experience; they can teach that other human beings — formed by worship and the sacraments, with their symbols and narratives — do not contaminate human life. God is mediated in the sensory exchange of two or more gathered in the name of Christ, not in an electronic exchange of any magnitude.

²³ Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress 1995) 15.

The ability of the Catholic tradition to speak with authority on such social issues is not strong because, to non-Catholics and even to some Catholics, the church is experienced as an influence on public life primarily in terms of condemnations and enigmatic social circumscriptions. The non-Catholic population is hard-pressed to hold up and heed as prophetic a church that ignores the gifts of women; a church that, ignoring the sense of its people, cannot see pro-life as a position for a life span rather than a position for each sex act; a church that gives no healthy social path for homosexuals except ordination to the priesthood. These are grave impediments to its message, but, in spite of these weaknesses, Catholic social experience in worship can also bear the good news of God's life mediated supremely in human social experience.

4. The sacraments celebrate the fundamental role of the senses in Catholic life.

Many non-Catholic Americans would be surprised to discover that at the heart of Catholic life is a radical and inventive dependence on sensory experience as the mediating *sine qua non* of sacramental life. This experience is the common phenomenological denominator of the life of the baptized gathered for Sunday worship. As time goes by, as mentioned above, Americans experience one another less often as persons in the flesh. The "best friends" of many of our compatriots are media celebrities who do not even know of the existence of their viewers, the other half of the friendship. The internet and cell phones have frightened us into maintaining our human contacts without any "con-tact" at all, without any "shared touch."

The sacraments encourage members of the church to wash, anoint, eat and drink, touch and make love to one another, as they are committed to one another by word and sacrament in the church. The rites demand that Christians be present to one another not as bodies of Christ, but as one bread and one body, as one cup and one blood of Christ, a presence made possible only "when two or three," not one, "gather in my name" (Matt 18:20). In our culture, the church seems to be the promulgator of an anti-body theology because it is so exclusive of women, yet the liturgical tradition is in truth a contradiction to the direction of social life in the U.S., which moves away from the body and toward communions without flesh.

Martin F. Connell

5. Liturgical theologians can voice a theology of the Holy Spirit and a candid phenomenology of sacramental life.

In the reform of the rites after Vatican II, the church was comprehensive in filling the name of the third person of the Trinity into its books of rites. Yet the words "Holy Spirit" themselves do not stir up the experience of the word-made-flesh in the power of the Spirit. Even now, forty years after Vatican II, pneumatology in the life of the local church and in the academy is weak. As in the Lukan infancy narrative, when the angel tells Mary that it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that she will conceive (1:35), that she will bear the word of God made flesh in her own flesh, so in worship is it the role of the Spirit to knit together the flesh of the church as the body of Christ celebrating the sacraments.

A healthy pneumatology would draw from the phenomena of church life manifest in ecclesial, human, and sensory relationships and actions. A Trinitarian theology that would recognize the generative power of the Spirit would be more than simply making sure that the "Holy Spirit" is mentioned wherever in our prayer books the Father and the Son are mentioned. The Holy Spirit manifests the Father's gifts, calls believers to community by baptism, and knits together the individuals at Sunday liturgy so that, with the bread and the wine, they become the body and blood of Christ. This is an epiclesis not simply because the Spirit is mentioned but because by this act Christ becomes flesh and blood in the rites and life of the local community of faith.

In addition to the gospel testimony of Luke about the Holy Spirit in the incarnation, there is this testimony on the lips of Peter at the first Pentecost. Standing with the eleven disciples, Peter addressed the crowd, quoting the prophet Joel in these words: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18). The Spirit is indeed the animator of the flesh, falling "upon all flesh," says Joel, says the apostle Peter, and says Luke, the evangelist of the Holy Spirit. Liturgical theologians can trust that the Spirit is at work and simply read in the life of the carnal community for a contemporary pneumatology of the local church.

The reform of the liturgy was an unimaginable success. But the fruit of the liturgy can be more widely and deeply appreciated if theologians find that God is ever present when the baptized gather and if they can read this experience in light of the tradition, naming God as the church experiences the divine in the humanity of its prayer life. Without ignoring the church's failings and its under-appreciation of God's presence in its midst, theologians can examine the critical issues to move the church forward in its purpose, which is a ceaseless and incarnate act of thanksgiving to the source of all good things, including the good thing that is the liturgy itself in the life of the church.

John M. Huels

Canonical Observations on *Redemptionis Sacramentum*

In Spring 2004, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDWDS) released on the Internet an instruction on eucharistic abuses, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS). Simultaneously, the prefect of the CDWDS, Cardinal Francis Arinze, issued a press release introducing the document and explaining its origins and the reasons for it, as well as presenting a brief overview of the text.¹ RS is a text of law in the broad sense of

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¹ Instruction on Certain Matters to Be Observed or to Be Avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist, 25 March 2004; Vatican English version in *Origins* 33 (2004) 801, 803–22. Together with the official Latin version, the CDWDS posted on its website its own versions of the text in the major vernacular languages of the church. The printed Latin version is not available at the time of this writing. The official date of the Instruction, as is traditional, coincides with an important feast but, as usual, the actual date of the document's release was later, as evidenced by Arinze's press release, dated April 23 (*Origins* 33 [2004] 822–24). His comments provide a context for the Instruction, but they lack any juridic force.

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