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CONCORDIA SEMINARY

LITURGICAL THEOLOGY: SUBSTANCE AND SOURCE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY

BY
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MARCH 1999

Advisor

Reader

Reader

Liturgical Theology: Substance and Source

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Introduction

This study will demonstrate that three representative scholars of liturgical theology from three different traditions of the church place both the substance (material principle) and the source (formal principle) of Christian theology in the Christian worship experience.¹ These views will be contrasted with the Lutheran Confessions which posit that all of theology centers around justification by grace through faith and is derived from Scripture alone.

Chapter 1 will lay the groundwork by articulating a definition of liturgical theology. It will distinguish liturgical theology from theology of worship and theology from worship in order to form a basis for the rationale in choosing the three representative liturgical scholars, Alexander Schmemmann from the Orthodox tradition, Aidan Kavanagh from the Roman tradition, and Gordon Lathrop from the Lutheran tradition.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 will summarize the liturgical theology of these

¹The material principle of a theological system is that which is at the center, that which is most important, that upon which everything else stands. The formal principle of a theological system is the source from which teaching is derived and the standard by which it is judged.

three writers, relying primarily, though not exclusively, on a major work from each. The works which articulate their liturgical theology are Schmemmann's *The Eucharist* and *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, Kavanagh's *On Liturgical Theology* and Lathrop's *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*. This discussion will pay special attention to the connections each author makes between worship and how and what we believe about the Christian faith. The discussion will attempt to let each of the authors speak regarding the ability of worship to bring an authoritative word of Christian theology.

Chapter 5 will discuss the similarities and differences of the three scholars summarized in the previous chapters, demonstrating the thesis that these scholars place both the source (formal principle) and the substance (material principle) of Christian theology in the Christian worship experience.

A concluding chapter will state briefly the Lutheran position on the substance and source of Christian theology and provide pertinent passages from the Lutheran Confessions on the relationship between theology and worship.

Chapter 1

Liturgical Theology Defined

Christian worship has undergone rapid change throughout the 20th century. While a variety of factors have influenced this change, of great importance is the Liturgical Movement and the liturgical revolution within the Roman Catholic Church leading up to and following the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Though the Liturgical Movement had its roots in the nineteenth century, its suggestions for reform were not broadly accepted until well into the twentieth century.

As these reforms have become established in the worship life of the church, scholars within the church have sought to comment about their meaning and significance. The term *liturgical theology* often has been given to these discussions; however, the term also has been used more broadly to include anything to do with both theology and worship.

In recent years, the definitions have been refined. In particular, liturgical theology has been defined as a rather narrow enterprise within the broader discussion of worship and theology. The establishment of a narrow, precise definition of liturgical theology was one of the lifelong passions of Alexander Schmemmann, a theologian who studied and wrote within the Orthodox tradition. That definition was further refined and established by means of a detailed argument in David W. Fagerberg's *What is Liturgical*

*Theology: A Study in Methodology.*²

Fagerberg suggests that under the broad umbrella of what often is called liturgical theology are four common uses of the term. These four uses emphasize four different understandings of the relationship between liturgy and theology. Fagerberg labels the four approaches in this fashion: 1) theology of worship, 2) theology **from** worship, 3) liturgical theology, narrowly defined, and 4) the study and articulation of liturgical theology. To this might be added another category, typically labelled liturgics or liturgiology. These latter areas are usually part of the practical study of worship or the study of the historical development of worship and usually are related only tangentially to systematic theology. They are less theological and more practical, focusing on the rules and guidelines for conducting the liturgy.

The first approach, theology of worship, recognizes that worship is an essential and important aspect of the Christian faith. God has entered into human history in a saving fashion in the person of Jesus Christ; the salvific contact between God and His people continues in the church's worship. What happens in worship is used to explain and to illustrate the truths of the Christian faith. Though these theological truths are independent of the worship experience, the worship experience serves to validate and demonstrate them.

²David W. Fagerberg, *What Is Liturgical Theology? A Study in Methodology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

The second approach, theology **from** worship, stems from a closer relationship between theology and worship, but still holds that the truth of theology stands apart from the worship experience. This approach seeks to unify theology and liturgy by showing that the two are interdependent. Throughout the history of the Christian church, theology has influenced the growth and development of liturgy, and liturgy has influenced the growth and development of theology. According to this view liturgy is not viewed as the source for theology but as one of the several resources for discovering and articulating theology. Again, theology happens apart from the worship experience.

The third approach, liturgical theology narrowly defined, believes that liturgy or worship is the primary source for theology. It is not merely one source among equals, but the primary source for an authoritative word from God and about God. While other sources such as Scripture and tradition have generally been viewed as the sources for theology, according to liturgical theology, liturgy becomes the primary source because it is in the liturgy that these sources function most reliably and most genuinely as sources.

Liturgical theology is not an activity that begins with reflection, proceeds to a systematic refinement of that reflection, and then finally is articulated in words or books or lectures. Rather, theology is the activity of the worshiping community as it comes to understandings about God and itself on the basis of the worship experience.

Liturgy is the condition or the environment, not so much in which theological truths are articulated, but in which theological truths are experienced and in which they happen. In contrast to the traditional approach to theology which says that theology is an intellectual activity that does not rely primarily upon experience, but upon authoritative texts and is practiced usually in academic or educational settings, this approach says that the liturgical happening or rite is the ontological condition for genuine theology. In this environment, the goal is not that theological truths get clearly articulated. Rather, the goal is that theological truths are born.³

This view of the relationship between worship and theology, as understood by liturgical theology narrowly defined, is often summarized in the dictum attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, or the law of prayer establishes the law of faith.⁴ We will at this time resist the

³This view of worship as the primary source for theology rings strange in the ears of those accustomed to traditional theological method. Here, liturgy is not viewed as a resource for theology, but as its very source. The nuances of how this happens will be covered in detail as we articulate the liturgical theology of each of our subject authors.

⁴ Though generally articulated as above, it appears in various forms; Kavanagh prefers the form *lex supplicandi statuat legem credendi*.

While this dictum is cited often in the writings of liturgical theology to support the view that the liturgy is the primary source for theology, and while for the purposes of this study, we grant to the authors their understanding of the dictum, their point of view is by no means uncontested. Paul De Clerck argues that the phrase was drawn from the writings of Augustine of Hippo in his arguments against the Semi-Pelagians, and used again by his student Prosper of Aquitaine in the same setting and that the present use by liturgical theology is far removed from its original use and

temptation to a more detailed explanation of this narrow definition of liturgical theology, for that is what we hope to articulate on the basis of the writings of the three theologians under discussion.

The traditional view of theology suggests that believers have experiences in worship which must then be explained, categorized, systematized, and evaluated by academic theology. Even if simple believers wish to articulate their experience of Christian worship and connect it to their faith, they generally do so in an amateurish fashion.⁵ The Christian faith is

understanding. Augustine and Prosper of Aquitaine based this dictum on 2 Timothy 2:1-2 where Paul urges Timothy (and by extension the church of all time) to pray for the rulers, whether converted or not. Augustine argued against the Semi-Pelagians that this was an argument for the exclusivity of divine grace in conversion; if an unconverted man were able to come to faith by his own decision, there would be no need to pray for him. In the controversy about grace, Augustine was saying, "Tell me how you pray, and I will tell you what you believe."

De Clerck summarizes his argument thus:

To determine what the rule of faith is, it is necessary to refer to the content of the prayer of the church, to its formulation. . . .The liturgical formulations have value as a theological argument only insofar as they are founded on scripture and attested by tradition. . . .One may not appeal to this traditional adage to justify liturgical immobility, as if whatever expression of the prayer of the Church, or the first liturgical usage to come along, expressed in and of itself the faith of the Church. The liturgy is a "theological locus" to the degree that it is founded on scripture and gives of the living tradition its peculiar echo, which is poetic and symbolic, and existential much more than rational.

See Paul De Clerck, "*Lex orandi, lex credendi: The Original Sense and Historical Avatars of an Equivocal Adage*," translated from the French by Thomas Winger, *Studia Liturgica* 24/(no number given) (1994): 178-200.

⁵This is not to suggest that no theological transaction takes place when the Word is proclaimed or taught in the home or privately. It is only meant to suggest the truth that Christian faith is, by nature, communal.

more accurately expressed by the professionals.

By contrast, liturgical theology believes that the simple believers are stating theological truths and being formed by theological truths which are being transacted in the liturgy, whether they know it or not. In this way, theology becomes the realm inhabited not just by professionals, but by all the people of God as they participate in the liturgy.

Fagerberg's fourth category is an extension of the narrow definition of liturgical theology. This is the explanation and explication of meaning in the worship experience using the categories and assumptions of liturgical theology. This understanding recognizes the validity of the liturgy as the primary source for theology and seeks to explain what happens there. If liturgical theology is that theology which is found in the structure and experience of the rite of the church, then it happens in the worship setting and not on paper. This category is the reflection and observation, secondary in nature, of the liturgical experience. This is observation about liturgical theology, but not liturgical theology itself. Here we come to the important distinctions between primary and secondary theology. Primary theology is "theology being born, theology in the first instance."⁶ Primary theology is

⁶Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1984), 74. It appears that Kavanagh was the first to use these terms with respect to liturgical theology, though the concept was clearly articulated by Alexander Schmemmann years earlier but without the convenience of the terms. See Schmemmann, "Theology in Liturgy and Tradition," an essay first published in *Worship in Scripture and Tradition*, ed. Massey Hamilton Shepherd, Jr. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

theology experienced. Secondary theology is secondary and derivative. Secondary theology is the reflection on and the articulation of the experience of primary theology. Secondary theology is the written and spoken discourse that attempts to find words for what is experienced in primary theology. For the purposes of studying substance and source in liturgical theology, the distinction between liturgical theology itself and reflections and observations about liturgical theology are not important. What's important for this study are the assumptions, principles, and presuppositions upon which liturgical theology is founded. Each author under study would agree that their written works are secondary theology, written in reflection of the transaction of primary theology that takes place when the liturgy is celebrated.

As the specific field of liturgical theology – primary and secondary – has come into its own, many have contributed to the body of literature. However, three theologians have distinguished themselves through major works which seek to provide a complete treatment of liturgical theology. In the broad area of the relationship between the Christian faith and Christian worship, Alexander Schmemmann is universally recognized as one of the foundational thinkers. Schmemmann was born in 1921 into a Russian family living in Estonia.⁷ In his early childhood, his family emigrated to Paris,

⁷Biographical data for Alexander Schmemmann is from John Myendorff, "Postscript: A Life Worth Living," in *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 145-154.

France, where Schmemmann grew up in the close-knit ethnic world of the “Russian Paris” of the 1930s. He studied at the Theological Institute of Paris (St. Sergius) from 1940-1945. Upon his graduation, he became an instructor in church history at St. Sergius, first as a layman, then as a priest, following his ordination into the priesthood of the Russian Orthodox Church under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1946. Following an invitation by Fr. Georges Florovsky, Schmemmann left Paris to join the faculty of St. Vladimir’s Seminary in Crestwood, New York in 1951. He taught and held administrative positions there until his death in 1983. It was his self-proclaimed lifelong passion to address the issue of theology founded in the liturgy.

In the approach which I advocate by every line I ever wrote, the question addressed by liturgical theology to liturgy and to the entire liturgical tradition is not about liturgy but about ‘theology,’ i.e. about the faith of the Church as expressed, communicated, and preserved by the liturgy.⁸

In large part the contemporary discussion of liturgical theology, in fact, the very category liturgical theology itself, is based on the writings of Alexander Schmemmann.

Aidan Kavanagh has long contributed to the literature of liturgical theology, primarily through his work as one of the leading interpreters of the Vatican II reforms on the liturgy in the Roman Catholic Church. He was

⁸Alexander Schmemmann, “Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform,” *Liturgy and Tradition*, 40.

born in 1920 in Texas, the son of an engineer.⁹ He entered the Order of St. Benedict in 1951, taking his formal training at St. Meinrad's Seminary in St. Meinrad, Indiana. There he completed the requirements for his B.A. in 1957. He continued his education, receiving the S.T.L. Degree from the University of Ottawa in 1958, and the S.T.D. *maxima cum laude* from Theologische Fakultät Trier, in Trier, West Germany in 1963. Kavanagh was ordained into the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church in 1957. He spent his entire career teaching, serving on the faculty of St. Meinrad's Seminary from 1962-1966, University of Notre Dame from 1966-1974, and Yale University from 1974 until his retirement in 1994. Kavanagh also contributed to the field through editorships of leading worship journals, including *Worship* and *Studia Liturgica*.

Gordon Lathrop received his B.A. degree from Occidental College in 1961 and his B.D. degree from Luther Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1966, and Th.Drs. from the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands in 1969. Following his education, he served as a parish pastor in Wisconsin and campus pastor at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. He entered academic service as professor at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa and currently serves as Professor of Liturgy and Chaplain at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He has

⁹Biographical data for Aidan Kavanagh is from Hal May, ed. *Contemporary Authors* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1985), 112:270.

conducted lectureships around the world and has served as president of the North American Academy of Liturgy.¹⁰

The spectrum of writers could be wider, but the study has been limited to representatives within the sacramental wing of the Christian church. Each of the theologians represents a different tradition within sacramental Christianity. Schmemmann comes from the Orthodox tradition, Kavanagh comes from the Roman Catholic tradition, and Lathrop comes from the Lutheran tradition. While Fagerberg's work could lead to distinctions in these writers between primary or secondary liturgical theology, all three authors would agree on the definition and essential nature of liturgical theology, namely, that the liturgical experience is the ontological condition for theology.

¹⁰Biographical information from facsimile of summary *curriculum vitae* from the Office of Public Information at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Chapter 2

The Liturgical Theology of Alexander Schmemmann

First, we examine the liturgical theology of Father Alexander Schmemmann. Schmemmann's liturgical theology is, by Fagerberg's definition, a noteworthy example of liturgical theology because Schmemmann does liturgical theology by letting it flow from the liturgy and from the assembly gathered for worship. The gathered assembly is the source for his entire theological enterprise. In his major work, *The Eucharist*, his methodology takes each section of the Orthodox liturgy and explains it as a part of the whole; while he does explain each part, he is not so much interested the meaning of each isolated section, but that each part is understood in its place as part of the whole and how each as part of the whole contributes to the goal of the liturgy, the transaction of the kingdom of God.

Western theology, says Schmemmann, tends to take a rather technical approach to understanding the importance of the liturgy. Western theology asks pragmatic questions : What do the individual parts of the liturgy mean? What can we hope will happen as a result of celebrating the liturgy? Schmemmann, however, avoids this compartmentalized approach to a discussion of the liturgy and takes what he argues is a more theological approach to the liturgy, asking a theological question: What is accomplished

in the liturgy? This question is of greatest urgency and utmost importance.¹¹

Schmemmann's answer is multi-faceted and complex. In the conducting of the liturgy, the church as the New Creation is constituted. The worship experience constitutes the kingdom of God. By these synonymous statements, Schmemmann gives the liturgy a first-order importance for the Christian faith. The people of God gathered regularly for worship are engaged in an activity that is not only important, but, in fact, constitutive of the Christian church. In the liturgy God accomplishes what he wishes for the good of his people. In the entire liturgy and its celebration, the church is the vehicle for delivering God's gift for the fulfillment of the divine good. God works in and through the celebration of the liturgy to transform individual Christians, and, more importantly, to transform the church.

The liturgy, in a sense, manufactures the church. The kingdom of God is not an ethereal or theoretical construction, but a real entity, brought into being and built by the celebration of the liturgy. Even the boundaries of time and space¹² are dissolved as the earthly church is made to be gathered around the heavenly table of the kingdom of God.¹³

¹¹Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, trans. Paul Kachur (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 161.

¹²The unique understanding of space and time in Schmemmann's liturgical theology will be discussed below.

¹³Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 217.

The liturgy is not celebrated simply as a matter of custom or tradition or aesthetic beauty. The liturgy – and the eucharist, which is by definition the heart of the celebration of the liturgy – is at the very center of the Christian faith. In fact, in Schmemmann’s usage, the liturgy and the eucharist are synonymous. Everything that is taught, everything that is done, everything that is a part of the church has its source in the liturgy and the eucharist. “Everything that pertains to the eucharist pertains to the church, and everything that pertains to the church pertains to the eucharist.”¹⁴

The liturgy is the place where the truth of a gracious Father is revealed. The essence of the Christian faith is to know the Father; just as the eucharist delivers to the church communion with the Father, the liturgy delivers fellowship and communion with the Father.¹⁵ This epiphany of truth is not revealed primarily in documents, but in the experience of the church at worship. The liturgy is not texts, nor is it rubrics. The liturgy is primarily action and experience. The liturgy is the location where the faith and the mind and the experience of the church have their living focus and expression.

Of course, faith is prior to the liturgy. Liturgy happens because God has given the gift of faith to individual Christians. The liturgy fulfills and

¹⁴Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 215.

¹⁵Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 181.

expresses this faith and bears witness to this faith. The liturgy thus becomes the true and adequate expression and norm of this faith.¹⁶ The essence of the liturgy, or the *lex orandi*, is the church's faith. In the liturgy, we can find what the church believes and what constitutes her faith. This does not imply a reduction of faith to the liturgy. The church's worship is the full and adequate expression of that which the church believes.

If the liturgy is the central actualizing event of the Christian faith and if the church at worship is where the kingdom of God is made to be, then the elucidation of this act becomes very important for Christian theology, Schmemmann argues. The task and purpose of liturgical theology is to elucidate the meaning of worship, clarifying and explaining the connection between the act of worship and the church.¹⁷ Liturgical theology is first of all, and above all, the attempt to grasp Christian theology as it is revealed in and through the liturgy.

This definition of liturgical theology stands in sharp contrast to what might be termed liturgics or the study of the liturgy. However, Schmemmann is concerned neither with rubrics, nor with the technical aspects of conducting of the liturgy, nor ultimately with the historical development of Christian

¹⁶Alexander Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform," 39.

¹⁷Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh E. Moorhouse (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 16.

worship. He is not interested in the study of the liturgy as a discipline in itself. He is not interested in dissecting the liturgy, discovering the historical roots of each part, and then articulating their meaning. Liturgical theology is not a separate discipline in theology that stands outside worship and studies it like a biologist might study the structure of a cell. The liturgical theologian is interested in understanding and articulating how the church both expresses and fulfills herself in the act of worship.

Schmemmann has established an intimate relationship between liturgy and theology. Liturgical theology, as he has said, is the systematic study of the *lex orandi* for the purpose of clarifying its meaning. Schmemmann now takes this notion even further by stating that the liturgy has to be the basic source for theological thinking.

The liturgy is, he says, the *locus theologicus par excellence*.¹⁸ For the Orthodox, at least, the *lex orandi* is the *sui generis* hermeneutical foundation of theology.¹⁹ If theology is, as Schmemmann says, the search for a reliable and authoritative word from and about God, then we must go to the liturgy to find this word. The liturgy is the "ontological condition for theology."²⁰

¹⁸Schmemmann, "Theology and Liturgical Tradition," 11.

¹⁹Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform," 44.

²⁰Schmemmann, "Theology and Liturgical Tradition," 18.

Liturgy is not the object of theological discussion, nor is it the source of theological data; it is not a theological resource. It is the place where the enterprise of theology happens because it is the fountain from which theology flows.

Schmemmann acknowledges that positing the liturgy as the source for theology sounds innovative to the ear of the western theologian. For centuries, the western way of doing theology has been to locate the source of theology in specific data, mostly texts. Thus, theology has been cut off from one of its most vital, most natural roots, that is, from the liturgical tradition.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, in the aftermath of the embrace of the Christian faith by Constantine and the resulting popularization of Christianity, there came to be two ways of doing theology. The one, which Schmemmann labels the patristic way, understood that there was an organic relationship between theological thought and liturgical experience. This relationship is expressed in the dictum, *lex orandi est lex credendi*. Here, the liturgical tradition and liturgical life are the natural milieu for theology.²¹

In contrast to the patristic way of doing theology is what he calls the scholastic way of doing theology. Here resides a completely different understanding of the relationship between liturgy and theology. Scholastic theology has established its own categories of theological thought, independent of the *lex orandi*. Scholastic theology searches for consistent

²¹Schmemmann, "Theology and Liturgical Tradition," 12.

categories and concepts and then organizes what it finds into a dogmatic system. The study of theology is divorced completely from the *lex orandi* experience, and in fact, worship and liturgy become mere objects of theological study and reflection, rather than source for theology.

Schmemmann illustrates the difference between worship as object of theology (the scholastic way) and worship as source for theology (the patristic way) with the issue of the real presence of Christ in the elements of the eucharist. Under the scholastic way of doing theology, theologians addressed questions about Christ's presence in the sacrament apart from worship and focused on such matters as what happens to the elements, when it happens, and how it might be reasonably explained. This approach led to such terms and concepts as transubstantiation, consubstantiation, symbolic presence, etc. This discussion centered on the validity and modality of a rite.

The patristic way of doing theology, by contrast, does not undertake such discussions apart from the liturgy. The patristic methodology asks instead: what happens to the church when the eucharist is celebrated? The liturgy itself becomes the location for the constructive work that happens in the eucharist and it becomes the framework for the response of the people.

The supposition that liturgy is the source for theology has enjoyed a resurgence in the last few decades, primarily as a result of the Liturgical Movement. The Liturgical Movement was not in the beginning a theological movement. It's task was not to elucidate systematically the meaning of the

liturgy. It was directed instead at the practical revival of the worship life of the church. However, one of its effects was to bring into the theological discussion the view of liturgical theology that the liturgy is to be the primary source for Christian theology.²²

Given what appears to be a rather revolutionary understanding of the relationship between worship and theology, how does the theologian address the question of authority? More to the point, to which authority does the theologian appeal for Christian theology? Liturgy? Scripture? Tradition? Systematic theology? The question, Schmemmann would argue, is not one of authority, but of the proper ontological condition for theology. Where can people actually find God doing what he does and accomplishing what he wants done? Only in the church are the sources of theology actually functioning as sources for Christian theology. Remember, the celebration of the liturgy is the concrete expression of the church. So, while the Scriptures and the tradition of the church are certainly sources for theology, by their very nature they do not serve most properly as sources outside the activity of

²²Schmemmann writes, "All theology, indeed, ought to be 'liturgical,' yet not in the sense of having liturgy as its unique object of study, but in that of having its ultimate term of reference in the faith of the Church as manifested and communicated in the liturgy." See "Liturgy and Theology," in *Liturgy and Tradition*, 61.

Kavanagh writes, "I think that the liturgical act, so far from being related to secondary theological endeavor as matter has been said to be related to form, is in fact the primary and foundational theological act from which all subsequent theological activity arises." See Aidan Kavanagh, "Response: Primary Theology and Liturgical Act," *Worship*, 57/4 (July, 1983): 321-322.

worship.

What place then does Scripture hold in worship? If liturgy is the primary source for theology, is Scripture unimportant, secondary? To the contrary. Schmemmann holds that the liturgy is the essential location for the proclamation of the Word of God. The link between Scripture and worship is not a formal link that can be reduced to philosophical or theological categories. Instead, the link is a living, dynamic link. The liturgy is the setting for the reading and hearing of the Scriptures in the Holy Spirit. As the church worships, the church is given knowledge of the Scriptures.²³ The regular, frequent, and extravagant reading of Scripture is essential for maintaining the genuine meaning of the *lex orandi*.

Schmemmann is quick to add that there is an important organic connection between the eucharist and the Word. In the sacrament, the church receives the Word made flesh, the One who also abides with us in the words of Holy Scripture. The mission of the church is precisely to announce this good news. Schmemmann says both Word and eucharist must be present. "In separation from the Word, the sacrament is in danger of being perceived as magic, and without the sacrament, the Word is in danger of being 'reduced' to 'doctrine'."²⁴

²³Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 78.

²⁴Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 68.

Recall once again Schmemmann's premise that the liturgy is constitutive of the kingdom of God. We now have an additional perspective from which to see the central role of worship. This relationship between Scripture and liturgy constitutes a dynamic view of the purpose of worship. In contrast to a pedagogical or sanctifying or entertaining or missional understanding of the purpose of worship, the purpose of worship in the church is to actualize the kingdom of God. The unique function of the liturgy is to "make the Church what she is, the witness and participant of the saving event of Christ, of the new life in the Holy Spirit, of the presence in this world of the Kingdom to come."²⁵

Such a vigorous understanding of worship means that for Schmemmann the worship experience is inherently corporate. In the liturgy, what is private is brought into the unity of the body whose head is Christ. As individual Christians come together, they are not coming so much for individual sanctification, nor to meet individual needs, nor to have some inherent problem or weakness fixed; they are coming together in order that, together with their fellow pilgrims, they might constitute the church. When the church in worship is made to be the church, then what is taking place is fulfilled at the same time it is revealed.

This unity of the individual parts making up the whole is also seen in the liturgy. We have said that liturgical theology is not an enterprise that

²⁵Alexander Schmemmann, "Liturgy and Theology," 56.

dissects and analyzes the liturgy as a biology class dissects and analyzes a frog. The liturgy is experienced as a unity and it must be studied and discussed as a unity. Because the very nature of the liturgy is unity, it defies being pulled apart so that each section can be studied or talked about in isolation. Understanding the meaning of the parts does not lead to an understanding of the whole. The liturgy cannot be dismembered and analyzed on the basis of *a priori* criteria outside the eucharist.

Rather, liturgical theology must use for its basis the *lex orandi*, or the rule of prayer, in all its integrity and wholeness. All the parts of the eucharist are subordinated to one another and together make up a whole that is never complete with any part missing or ignored. In the connecting of the many parts, the eucharist is accomplished. There is an essential interdependence of the elements of the liturgy.²⁶ The worshiper, from the very beginning to the end of the liturgy knows that he is participating in a single task, in one sacred reality.

The divine liturgy is a single, though multi-faceted sacrament, in which all its parts, their sequence and structure, their coordination with each other, the necessity of each for all and all for each, manifests to us the divine meaning of what has been and what is being accomplished.²⁷

The setting, the sequence, the order, and the structure open to us the meaning

²⁶Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 216.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 160-161.

and content of the sacrament in which the church is made to be the body of Christ.

Above, Schmemmann suggested that one of the reasons the liturgy is so important is that in the liturgy the church is constituted as the kingdom of God. It will deepen our understanding of his liturgical theology to know more precisely what he means. The kingdom of God, Schmemmann has said, is the content, the goal, and the meaning of the Christian faith. Part of the obstacle to our understanding is that often, Christians think of the kingdom of God as something only to come in the future.

However, Schmemmann suggests, the kingdom of God is not only a future eventuality, but a present reality. Part of the uniqueness of the first Christian community was that it saw itself as the presence here and now of the future *parousia*, of the present, real-life, touchable, experiential epiphany of the world to come when time is brought to an end. It did not see itself as a mere illustration or shadow or anti-type of the kingdom to come.²⁸

Over time this understanding of the church as the reality of the kingdom of God came to be understood in a purely symbolic form. The church became a mere *illustration* of the kingdom of God rather than the *manifestation* of the kingdom of God.

In this connection, the eucharist becomes central for church and for theology, for in the eucharist, the church is transformed into the present

²⁸Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 43.

reality of the kingdom of God. "The meaning of the eucharist is contained in the entry of the Church into the kingdom of God."²⁹ The eucharist is literally the sacrament of the kingdom, for in the eucharist, the church ascends and enters into the heavenly sanctuary and is made one with the eschatological kingdom of God.

Could we say this entrance into the kingdom of God is merely symbolic? Surprisingly yes, says Schmemmann, though we must understand his unique definition of symbolic. Worship, it is commonly held, is full of symbol. Indeed, the worship of the Byzantine Orthodox tradition from which Fr. Schmemmann comes is rich in symbolism.

The popular understanding of symbol assumes that what is seen and heard and experienced represents or signifies something else. A symbol is an illustration whose purpose is pedagogic or educational; the relationship of the symbol and the thing symbolized is such that the symbol is nothing more than an illustration of the reality. With a symbol, nothing happens, nothing is accomplished, there is no reality; there is only the suggestion of the reality of the thing pointed to.

However, Schmemmann rejects this popular definition of symbol which contrapositions symbol and reality in worship. While he often uses the term symbol to describe the relationship of worship to the Christian faith, he defines symbol quite differently. Symbol manifests and delivers the mystery

²⁹Ibid., 50.

of Christ and his saving ministry. This mystery of Christ is both the content of the faith and the saving power communicated in and through the church.³⁰

The symbol is the way that this mystery is manifested in the church. It is the mode of presence and the way the mystery of Christ is actualized in the church. The symbol is thus the reality of the very thing that it symbolizes. The symbol and its accompanying reality are not linked logically or analogically by cause and effect, but epiphanically. One reality manifests and communicates the other. As something in the liturgy symbolizes some aspect of the mystery of Christ, the content and power of Christ is delivered. The liturgy is symbol, not in the sense that it is illustrative of this or that event or person, but in such a way that it delivers the reality of the mystery of saving grace. It is not illustrative, but dynamic. The symbol does not so much resemble the reality that it symbolizes, but participates in and therefore communicates it in reality.

Schmemmann also holds a unique understanding of time and space with respect to worship and the *lex orandi*. The center of the Christian proclamation is that the Messiah has come. The present age of the Christian church is the new age and brings with it a new way of relating to God that comes through Christ's death and resurrection. That which in the Old Age

³⁰Alexander Schmemmann, "Symbols and Symbolism in the Byzantine Liturgy: Liturgical Symbols and Their Theological Interpretation" in *Liturgy and Tradition*, 122.

constituted the center of time has now come and the end has already begun. The messianic kingdom is actualized. The new messianic kingdom becomes real in the assembly of the church when believers come together to have communion in the Lord's body.³¹ What is actualized in the eucharist is an event from the past. But because the new age has already begun, the event is taking place now and is taking place eternally.

A popular understanding of the Christian Sabbath holds that the Sabbath has been moved from the last day of the week to the first day of the week. But for the early church Sabbath is the 8th day, the first day of the new creation. The Lord's Day is the day on which the church not only remembers the past, but also remembers, indeed enters into, the future, the last and great day.³²

This means that as the liturgy is served on earth, it is also accomplished in heaven. The past is transformed by the Holy Spirit into that which it is: the real, present, reality of redemption. It is real, but a reality not of this world, not taking place within fallen and splintered time, but in the assembled new time.

The coming of Christ, His life, His death and resurrection from the dead, His ascension to heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit, have brought about the Lord's Day; the *Yom Yahweh* announced by the

³¹Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 72.

³²Alexander Schmemmann, "Liturgy and Eschatology" in *Liturgy and Tradition*, 97.

prophets has inaugurated the new *aeon* of the Kingdom of God. Those who believe in Christ, while they still live in the old aeon, in what the New Testament calls "this world," already belong to the new aeon; for, united to Christ and anointed with the Holy Spirit, they have in them the new and eternal life and the power to overcome sin and death. The mode of the presence in this world of the "world to come," of the Kingdom of God, is the Church – the community of those united to Christ and in Him to one another. And the act by which the Church fulfills that presence, actualizes herself as the new people of God and the Body of Christ, is "the breaking of the bread," the Eucharist by which she ascends to Christ's table in His Kingdom.³³

Closely related to this understanding of time is a unique view of remembrance. According to Schmemmann, the depth of sin is that people have forgotten God. Salvation consists of the restoration of memory as a life-creating power. To remember God's saving acts is to overcome time and the destruction of life and the reign of death that it all entails.³⁴ The Christian faith consists in the memory of God's saving acts in Christ, because the One whom we remember lives; everything he has accomplished he has given to us and eternally gives to us. So it is not the past that the church remembers; the church remembers Christ himself. In the memory of Christ himself is the church's entry into his victory over time and over the partition of time into past, present, and future. In Christ, we have entered the everlasting present.

Therefore, remembrance is the very substance of the life of the church,

³³Schmemmann, "Symbols and Symbolism in the Byzantine Liturgy," 125-126.

³⁴Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 127.

and this remembrance is realized above all in the worship life of the church. When the church celebrates the liturgy, she is entering the new time of the new creation. In the memory of Christ, in the celebration of the eucharist, the church is transformed by Him into life and is given the gift of life. The church recalls both the past and the future as living in us in the present. This eternal present has transformed our lives and makes our life into life with God.³⁵

Schmemmann's understanding of the space of worship is similar to his understanding of time. The typical western understanding of the eucharist is that Christ comes down to his church, makes himself present and gives himself, his body and blood, in the bread and wine of the eucharist. However, for Schmemmann, the eucharist is not accomplished on earth, but in heaven. The church ascends to heaven at the beginning of the liturgy. While the liturgy is served on earth, it is accomplished in heaven. While it is served in the time and space of this world, it is accomplished in heaven, in the time of the new creation, in the time of the Holy Spirit. And what is accomplished in heaven is already accomplished, already given. What happens on the altar, then, is not a repetition, not a re-presentation of the mystery of salvation accomplished long ago. Rather it is a continuation of the new life which has been accomplished once, but is given to us again and

³⁵Ibid., 129.

again through eternity.³⁶

While the purpose of the liturgy is to constitute the kingdom of God, the effect of this *lex orandi* is not exclusively for the benefit of the church. Schmemmann's liturgical theology emphasizes that what is done in worship is also done for the sake of the world. When Christians are gathered corporately and are transformed, the world eventually is transformed also.³⁷ The entry into the eucharist, or as he says, this ascent into the heavenly sanctuary, is accomplished for the sake of the world. This idea is articulated through a series of paradoxical affirmations.

This exodus from the world is accomplished in the name of the world, for the sake of its salvation. For we are flesh of the flesh and blood of the blood of this world. We are a part of it, and only by us and through us does it ascend to its Creator, Savior and Lord, to its goal and fulfillment. We separate ourselves from the world in order to bring it, in order to lift it up to the kingdom, to make it once again the way to God and participation in His eternal kingdom. In this is the task of the Church; for this she was left in the world, as part of it, as a symbol of its salvation. And this symbol we fulfill, we "make real" in the Eucharist.³⁸

While the church worships apart from the world, it worships for the sake of the world. While the church worships as a collection of many, it worships as one body of Christ. While there is a strain of the importance of personal

³⁶Ibid., 221.

³⁷Ibid., 166.

³⁸Ibid., 53.

salvation, more significant is the communal worship for the sake of the world's salvation.

Let us summarize. The gathered assembly at worship is the location where theology is most appropriately done. In the worship experience the kingdom of God is constituted. In the celebration of the liturgy, one can most truly find the church and what the church believes. As the church celebrates the liturgy, with its twin gifts of Scripture and sacrament, she brings both the past and the future into an everlasting present reality. As the church celebrates the liturgy, she bridges the boundaries of earth and heaven, serving here on earth what is accomplished in heaven. As the church celebrates the liturgy, she remembers Christ and the mystery of Christ is brought to fulfillment in her midst. This celebration is not solely for the benefit of the church but has an effect on the world as the kingdom of God is brought into the midst of the world.

Chapter 3

The Liturgical Theology of Aidan Kavanagh

For Father Aidan Kavanagh worship and liturgy hold a primary importance in the life of the church. As we turn our attention to Kavanagh's liturgical theology, we must first lay the groundwork, that is, his understanding of the importance of worship for the Christian church and the relationship of Christian worship and Christian faith.

According to Kavanaugh, the liturgy is fundamental to and constitutive of the church. The body of Christ is constituted and formed through the liturgy. If there is no salvation apart from Christ, and there is no communion with Christ apart from His corporate presence in the church, then it is true that in the worship act, especially the eucharist, the church both reveals and realizes herself in Christ.³⁹ Worship is the sole means by which human beings are transformed into the kingdom.

Worship expresses the relationship of God with his people and lies at the very heart and core of God's relationship with his people in Christ mediated through the Spirit. This relationship is manifested as the presence of God in the midst of His corporately gathered people. Worship is Christ's

³⁹Aidan Kavanagh, "How Rite Develops: Some Laws Intrinsic to Liturgical Evolution," *Worship* 41/6 (June-July 1967): 338.

corporate real presence in this world. This presence expresses and actualizes for God's people what Christ has done for them. The liturgy – the corporate gathering of the body of Christ, celebrating the eucharist according to the church's usual order – is the fundamental way that the church stands before the Father.⁴⁰

Kavanagh has asserted here a strong and direct connection between the church and the liturgy; the church is both the object and the agent of every liturgical act. When the church is at worship, the church is most herself. So the liturgy is not one ecclesial work among others, but is the "bread and butter" of what the church does.⁴¹ The liturgy is possessed by the church; by the same token, the church must obey the liturgy if she is to remain truly the church. Worship, then, is central rather than peripheral to the people of God. Liturgy and church are "coterminous in origin and very nearly convertible as terms."⁴² There can't be church without liturgy. A Christian church does not merely use a liturgy, it is the liturgy by which it worships.⁴³

Kavanagh also asserts a strong relationship between the liturgy and

⁴⁰Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1982), 7.

⁴¹Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1984), 8.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 97.

⁴³*Ibid.*

faith. The worship and the faith of Christians converge, meet, entwine and meld in the liturgical act.⁴⁴ The substance of the Christian faith, which is also the substance of worship, is the existential reality of a series of relationships: the relationship of God in Christ, the relationship of God with His holy people, the relationship of those holy people with one another, and the relationship of those holy people with holy things.⁴⁵

Kavanagh argues a dynamic relationship between liturgy and faith. The liturgy of the church doesn't merely reflect the church's faith, but transacts it. What results from a liturgical act is an ecclesial transaction with reality, the transaction of the relationship between God and His people.⁴⁶ In other words, the liturgy of a church is that church's faith in motion.

Surely, the church at worship is present to God, but more than that. In worship, God is also present to the church. This presence is not merely symbolic nor is it historical recollection; God's presence is a real presence through which he actually graces and changes the world. This presence is true and real, not because the assembly conjures up God, but because the initiative lies with God and he has promised to be there.

This relationship between church and worship and between faith and

⁴⁴Ibid., 100.

⁴⁵Ibid., 123.

⁴⁶Ibid., 88.

worship is best summarized for Kavanagh in the ancient dictum, *lex supplicandi legem statuat credendi*, or the law of worship founds the law of believing. Kavanagh employs this original version of the dictum and regards it as more authoritative than the more popular version which is usually stated *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

The word *statuat* and its position in the dictum are supremely important. This is not a reversible proposition. In fact, the tag form (*lex orandi, lex credendi*) is not precise and has the disadvantage that the terms of the formula can be reversed. To express the true nature of the relationship between theology and worship, the dictum must remain fixed. The law of worshipping founds, establishes, constitutes the law of believing. This is not “reversible any more than a house supports a foundation.”⁴⁷ The fundamental truth contained in this dictum is that the way and the what of Christian belief is constituted and supported by how Christians petition God for their human needs in and through worship and liturgy.⁴⁸ Surely the law of belief shapes and influences the law of worship, but it is still true that the latter constitutes or founds the former.

Part of liturgy’s dynamic character is that it is also action. In his explanation of liturgy as action, he quotes Alexander Schmemmann, that

⁴⁷Aidan Kavanagh, “Response: Primary Theology and Liturgical Act,” *Worship* 57/6 (July 1983): 323.

⁴⁸Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 134.

"*leitourgia* in Greek is an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals – a whole greater than the sum of its parts."⁴⁹

Liturgy as action contrasts with the view that liturgy is merely a text that is read or spoken. For thousands of years, Kavanagh says, Christians (and Jews before them) expressed their religious existence, not in books, but in participation in assemblies which met regularly for the worship of the living God.⁵⁰ Liturgy is never merely text, but something that the people do. The rites must continually be transferred from the printed texts into the lives of the churches.

Liturgy as action is more than meaning. Liturgy as action works on people in a cumulative fashion. Each act of the liturgy has its effect, building on the past act of liturgy and of past liturgies. When the liturgy is working, the assembly does not have the upper hand, but liturgy does. The liturgy thinks and speaks for the assembly, and becomes the assembly's instrument of expression.⁵¹

According to Kavanagh, this forming function is the basis for the

⁴⁹Aidan Kavanagh, "Liturgy and Unity in the Light of Vatican II," *Una Sancta* 23/1 (1966): 36.

⁵⁰Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 55-56.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 87.

relationship of liturgy and theology. Worship contains a dialectical process in which the worshipping assembly is transformed. Kavanagh asserts that the liturgy is an ecclesial transaction with reality. Let's examine for a moment the components of that transaction. In the act of worship, the assembly is pushed, pulled, tugged on, stretched, and changed by the action of the liturgy. In response to the change, the assembly makes adjustments, becoming different from what it was before the act happened. In these constant adjustments to the divinely initiated forces of the liturgy the act of theology lies.

It is in the constant adjustment to such change that an assembly increments its own awareness of its distinctive nature, that it shakes out and tests its own public and private norms of life and faith, that it works out its sustained response to the phenomenon of its own existence under God in the real world, a world whose Source is the same as that of the assembly itself. It is all this which is the ecclesial society's fundamental and most important business. It is where church order, mission, morals, ministry, and theology are born.⁵²

The liturgy as action is words taken from the page and put into peoples' lives; consequently, the liturgy is something that has meaning and impacts the people of God beyond the superficial. Liturgy provides us with a way of knowing what can be known with reason, yes, but it also takes us to that which goes beyond reason. The liturgy is about ultimate things rather than short-term survival. The liturgy builds the faith of the people of God and gives them an awareness of that faith in a manner that eludes rational

⁵²Ibid., 88.

explanation.⁵³

Part of this has to do with the fact that liturgy is perceived and celebrated with more than one sense. It is an artistic enterprise. It is festive.⁵⁴ Because it is done, it is also seen. And because we are what we see, taste, smell, and touch, the liturgy forms its participants on the deepest level.⁵⁵ Meaning in the liturgy is discovered in the steady build-up of associations triggered by sight, sound, smell, and gesture.⁵⁶ As such, liturgy is not drama, nor does it strive for dramatic effect. It is not an imitation or mime of anything, not even the life of Christ. It is not a series of independent, but related tableaux; rather, it is "a symphony of sights, sounds, gestures, and movements whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts."⁵⁷

Liturgy is a transaction of death and life. What most profoundly afflicts humanity is death. The two foremost activities of Christian worship, baptism and Eucharist, both are about the death of Christ, who trampled death and

⁵³Aidan Kavanagh, "Relevance and Change in the Liturgy," *Worship* 45/2 (February, 1971): 66.

⁵⁴Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 138-139.

⁵⁵Aidan Kavanagh, "Seeing Liturgically," in *Time and Community: Essays in Honor of Thomas J. Talley*, ed. Neil J. Alexander (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1990), 274.

⁵⁶Kavanagh, "Relevance and Change in the Liturgy," 66.

⁵⁷Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite*, 29.

who now invites his followers to pass with him through death to life. As a transaction of death and life, the liturgy properly contains a certain discomfort.

The goal of liturgy is clearly not itself. Liturgy is the means by which the faithful people of God have a sure and certain access to God's saving presence. Worship is a corporate life of faithful communion with all God's people and all God's holy things.

In addition, the celebration of the liturgy is not even for the sake of the assembly itself. Its object is the assembly's ministry to the world. The people of God are not at the liturgy for themselves, but they transact death and life publicly for the sake of the world.⁵⁸ The liturgy is the way the church addresses a fallen world in hopes of it becoming a redeemed world.

If liturgy is not done for its own sake, or even for the sake of the people participating, neither is it done for ulterior purposes. It is not education, it is not propaganda, and it is not utilitarian. To see the liturgy as a vehicle for cultural relevance or to assert that it must accomplish something to be valid is to drain from the liturgy its sense of real celebration.

The liturgy is thoroughly sacramental. It is not unworldly, but uses the objects, sights, sounds, smells, and people of this world. It is not an escape from the world, nor a denial of the goodness of the world. Christian worship happens for the sake of the world. Consequently, liturgy is not to be adapted

⁵⁸Ibid., 45.

to culture, but culture is to be adapted to and changed by liturgy and Christian worship.

This understanding of the relationship between liturgy and culture lies behind Kavanagh's assertion that liturgy by nature is conservative and resistant to change.⁵⁹ While liturgy does change over time to reflect to some degree a changing world and a changing people, liturgy is a complex act in which many people participate in many different ways. It becomes a foundation which binds and unifies people.

Liturgy also has an order and procedure. Tradition and good order are qualities of good, faithful, liturgical worship. It is not, as some are apt to say, informal. Part of the task of liturgical theology is to seek that evangelical form and order which is most salutary for worship.

Having laid this foundation of Kavanagh's understanding of liturgy and its importance, we can now turn to his understanding of liturgical theology. The modern world generally thinks of theology as something that happens in the hallowed halls of academia. As a product of academia, theology follows academic procedures and is done for academic or bureaucratic ends.

Kavanagh suggests this academic structure wasn't a factor for the first half of Christianity's existence. Early church theology was done in pastoral settings: in the churches, in the pulpits, in the midst of the catechumens; as

⁵⁹Ibid., 35.

the people of God were taught the Christian faith, they experienced Christian worship. Early church theology was something done by the servants of the community, the pastors and bishops. It was done live in the church, in the midst of God's people. It was a task that was profoundly pastoral in ambience, purpose, and execution.

The character of theology changed, however, with the onset of Scholasticism. The location of theology became the medieval universities. Theology withdrew from the pulpits and liturgy and into the classrooms and studies of the professors.

From this distinction between the pastoral, liturgical setting of theology and the academic, university setting of theology comes the framework for the distinction that liturgical theology makes between primary and secondary theology. Primary theology derives from the discourse which takes place among the people of God within the liturgy. It is drawn from the structures, the symbolisms, the internal grammar, and the native coherence of the liturgy.⁶⁰ This stands in contrast to the systematic, scholastic way of doing theology, which analyzes and interprets content apart from the assembly's experience of God. Primary theology is a critical and reflective act that rises out of the worship experience. It is, according to liturgical theology, the

⁶⁰Aidan Kavanagh, "Liturgical and Creedal Studies" in *A Century of Church History: The Legacy of Philip Schaff*, ed. Henry W. Bunker Swann (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 230.

primary theological act of a community of faith. Worship, as such, creates the ontological condition for theology.⁶¹ From here, in the experience of the assembly gathered for worship in the real presence of God in Christ, flows the proper understanding of the Word of God, in other words, proper theology. God's real presence in the midst of His people gathered at His invitation affects people, graces them, changes them. His presence is not theological or theoretical; it is real and thus forms the fountain from which theology flows.

Earlier, we asserted the dictum, *lex supplicandi legem statuat credendi*. One implication of this dictum is that worship is what gives rise to theological reflection. The liturgical act is the primary and foundational theological act from which all subsequent theological activity rises.⁶² This theological activity is not a program, not an ethic, not a political theory, not an ideology, but a description of a summons into the world renovated according to God's presence.⁶³ In other words, theology as it springs from the worship experience defies being put into the pigeon-hole of any other activity or any other discipline. Though it may be related to programs or ethics or politics or ideologies, it is none of the above. It is transforming interaction

⁶¹Aidan Kavanagh, "Liturgy and Ecclesial Consciousness: A Dialectic of Change," *Studia Liturgica* 15/1 (1982-1983): 14.

⁶²Kavanagh, "Response: Primary Theology and Liturgical Act," 321-322.

⁶³Kavanagh, "Liturgy and Ecclesial Consciousness," 11.

with God.

So, the liturgy and the accompanying liturgical tradition of worship are not merely one source of theology among many sources of theology; they are the dynamic condition from which theological reflection is done. What emerges from the assembly's liturgical act is not a species of theology, but theology itself.⁶⁴

How does this theology actually happen? According to Kavanagh, theology is not the first fruit of the worship experience. The first fruit of the worship experience is change in the lives of those who participate. When this change is detected, reflected upon, and adjustments made, that is the theological act. This is theology being born, *theologia prima*.⁶⁵ The worshiping assembly never comes away from the worship experience unchanged. The assembly's continuing adjustment to the experience of being in God's presence is not merely a theological datum, but is primary theology itself.

Kavanagh puts this process into a dialectical form. Thesis is the assembly as it enters into the worship act. Antithesis is the changed condition that results as the assembly comes away from this particular encounter with God. Synthesis is the adjustment in faith and works that comes as a result of

⁶⁴Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 75.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 73-74.

that encounter. The adjustment is sometimes great, sometimes small; it is sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious. The adjustment is exactly what comprises critical and reflective theology. The adjustment which the assembly undertakes in response to the God-induced change it suffers in liturgical events is a dynamic, critical, reflective, and sustained act of theology.⁶⁶

It is not merely that this liturgical act is the source for theology. It is the transaction of theology and must be the source of all other theology; all other theology is secondary theology. This self-wrought change in the assembly's life of faith constitutes the condition for doing all other forms of theology and for understanding the Word of God. The articulation of secondary theology is possible only because theology happens "primarily" as the people of God are gathered for worship and undergo the God-induced changes embodied in the celebration of the liturgy.

The church and the very enterprise of theology suffer when the liturgical event serves not as the source of theology but as one of the *loci* of theological reflection. In the scholastic and reformation traditions, theology determines liturgical text and form rather than the other way around. Dogmas are established on the basis of texts and worship becomes an expression of and is servant to the texts. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* is reversed, and the law of belief now establishes the law of prayer. Orthodoxy is no

⁶⁶Ibid., 77.

longer correct worship, but correct doctrine. Orthodoxy as right worship becomes *orthopistis* or *orthodidascalia*.⁶⁷ Right worship ceases to be the ontological condition of theology and instead becomes a *locus theologicus* in service to correct belief and teaching.

Critics of this position have argued that it allows no absolute certainty for any doctrinal conclusion, including any conclusion drawn from the worship of the church. Kavanagh would agree with this conclusion, but would not see it as criticism. He suggests that the liturgy is neither structured nor does it operate in such a way as to provide doctrinal conclusions. This is not a significant issue for Kavanagh; he suggests that dogmatic certainty is not an important agenda for theology.

What then, according to liturgical theology, is the relationship between Scripture and liturgy? Kavanagh bases the relationship between Scripture and liturgy on a particular understanding of rite. Liturgical theology has to begin and end with an accurate perception of what a liturgy is in itself and of how a liturgy functions within the larger context of rite.

We must take a brief side trip now, to understand the importance of ritual. Ritual, first of all, is a system of symbols. Symbols stand in distinction from and in contrast to signs. Symbols allow many people to use them in

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 82.

different ways; they have a wide range of meaning.⁶⁸ Signs, on the other hand, are very concrete, very specific, and very limited in meaning. Rite and ritual are very intimately tied to liturgy and incorporate symbols rather than signs. Rite is a liturgical act which is the convergence, meeting, entwining, and melding of Christian worship and belief.⁶⁹ Rite is what allows each individual worshiper to make internal his religious experience and religious tradition.⁷⁰ Rite is a larger category which includes the different parts of the liturgical service; rite involves creeds, prayers, and worship; not any one of these things, nor even all of them together are rite.

Often, there is a problem that issues from a fundamental misunderstanding of rite in the worship practice of the Christian church. Rite is articulated as merely a list of parts. By contrast, liturgical theology seeks to grasp the whole and to discern what it does to an assembly. Rite is a whole style of Christian living formed in the many particularities of worship.⁷¹

Ritual is for the community. Sociologists have suggested that rituals,

⁶⁸Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite*, 5.

⁶⁹Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 100.

⁷⁰Aidan Kavanagh, "How Rite Develops: Some Laws Intrinsic to Liturgical Evolution," *Worship* 41/6 (June-July 1967): 342.

⁷¹Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 100.

and specifically, worship as a ritual pattern, are a matter of social life and death for a community.⁷² Ritual is an act of real people; it emerges from their life together and solidifies their life together. Ritual raises to a level of public consciousness and participation the central values essential for the continued survival of the group.⁷³

Because ritual is practiced by real people in the midst of real life experiences, it can never come alive unless the people have a confidence in that ritual experience. Ritual is not a theoretical proposition as much as it is that which connects real people to their core faith and values. The people and their participation in ritual make the ritual life; nothing else can. Ritual as such functions as a perpetuating vehicle. Ritual patterns give continuity to the groups they serve. Each individual in the group can gain a sense of identity as a part of the group through his participation in the ritual of the group.

Kavanagh asserts that in the western church of our day, typically, Scripture is taken more seriously than rite. Part of that, according to Kavanagh, is due to the sharp criticism of rite in the controversies of the Reformation and in the emphasis on the intellect during the Renaissance. Scripture became more authoritative than rite because with the advent of the

⁷²Aidan Kavanagh, "Religious Life and Worship," *Worship* 44/4 (April 1970): 194.

⁷³Kavanagh, "Religious Life and Worship," 65.

printing press, text became the location of the truth. Truth was found, not in the action, but in the text.⁷⁴ As this sense of rite and symbol began to break down in the western church, orthodoxy modulated from a sense of right worship into a literate effort at remaining doctrinally correct.

Kavanagh, however, would suggest that Scripture and liturgy are far from competing endeavors; they should not be viewed as competing locations of truth. Rather they must be complementary within the context of worship.⁷⁵ Scripture and liturgy are each part and parcel of rite. Scripture cannot function simply as text; it must be a component of liturgy in comprising rite.

Both the Scriptures and the liturgy are not so much about God as they are of God. In the act of liturgical worship Christians authentically interpret the Word of God. The worshiping assembly is the usual and regular way in which the assembly communicates the truths of their Christian faith and life in Christ.

The truth of the Word is manifested to God's people in various ways. The liturgical act coordinates these expressions. The worshiping assembly is the place where the Word is accessible to the assembly on a regular basis as in no other place and no other means.

⁷⁴Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 106.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 111.

Both liturgy and Scripture are called divine by Christians. They are not called such because God is the author of either of them, but because liturgy and Word have God's presence at their core every time they are enacted or employed. Both together are the foundational form the grace of God takes when it works itself out within the midst of the Christian community.⁷⁶

The church has accepted the Scriptures as normative for the teaching of the church. But Kavanagh suggests that the liturgy also is normative. However, even as it performs a normative function, it also is subject to its own restraints and defining boundaries. The liturgy is guided by the canons of Holy Scripture, of baptismal faith, of eucharistic faith, and of canonical laws.⁷⁷

The structure of liturgy is important, not just for understanding liturgy, but also for understanding what it does and how it performs its theological function. Liturgy has surface structures which are immediately recognizable and which vary. These are often nothing more than outlines for services, accompanying rubrics, and the texts. However, one cannot generalize about liturgical meaning based on these surface structures.

The church must look to the deep structures of various liturgies to find

⁷⁶Ibid., 122.

⁷⁷Ibid., 170-171.

what is held in common. One of the tasks of liturgical theology is to seek these deeper structures. These structures must be discerned before questions of meaning can be asked because it is upon these deep structures that meaning lies. Superficial matters such as texts and rubrics have come from the deeper structures, and from the deeper structures comes the meaning.

The patterns and structures of Christians assembled for liturgical worship mirror the broader patterns and structures of human social behavior. In what can only be described as a profound paradox, Kavanagh asserts that these patterns and structures of human behavior that are evident in the patterns and structures of liturgy are renovated and renewed through liturgy.⁷⁸ The liturgy is a complex mode of divine and human communication. Its very purpose is to undercut and overthrow the structures and patterns which it imitates from human social behavior. When left to themselves, human structures become inflexible and oppressive. But the ritual within the liturgy exists to renovate these social structures.

Let us summarize liturgy and liturgical theology according to Aidan Kavanagh. Worship constitutes the church and expresses the relationship that God has with His people through Jesus Christ. As such, worship is the central activity of the people of God. Liturgy transacts the substance of the Christian faith. In worship God is present with his people. Worship actually constitutes the substance of the Christian faith and becomes the expression of

⁷⁸Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite*, 40.

the gathered assembly. This transaction is at the heart of the relationship between worship and theology. Worship embodies a transactional process which changes the worshipping assembly. The goal of liturgy is to lead people to God's saving presence.

Theology has a primarily pastoral rather than academic function.

When theology is true to its pastoral roots, the source of theology is not the classroom or academia, but the people of God gathered at worship. Liturgy is the dynamic seedbed from which true Christian theology germinates and grows. Liturgy delivers the truths of God given in Scripture and rite. These truths are carried in the deeper structures of liturgy, structures which liturgical theology seeks to uncover.

Chapter 4

The Liturgical Theology of Gordon Lathrop

We turn our attention now to a discussion of the liturgical theology of Gordon Lathrop. Lathrop's major work, *Holy Things*, articulates his liturgical theology. It is organized differently, and uses different foci than the previous two works under consideration. In fact, Lathrop organizes his work around the distinctions between primary theology and secondary theology that we have spoken about at length above.

According to Lathrop liturgical theology asks questions about the meaning of the gathering in Christian churches. It asks questions about how the Christian meeting in all its signs and words says something authentic and reliable about God. Liturgical theology seeks to discover the how and the what of this authentic and reliable word about God delivered and experienced in Christian worship. The reliable word about God delivered and experienced in worship is the primary theology; the reflection about how that happens and what is said is secondary theology. The hope is that as worship says something authentic and reliable about God it will also say something true about ourselves and about our world as these are understood before God.⁷⁹

⁷⁹Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 3.

In our day, sociologists have stated the need for public symbols to help modern humanity find meaning in a chaotic and complex world. In the midst of all these needs and all this chaos, liturgical theology seeks to give the bearing for that public and to give them personal hope. Liturgical theology, then, is not primarily an academic, theological, scholarly activity, but is a pastoral activity. We need liturgical theology, Lathrop suggests, "if its explanations of the assembly intend to make life-orienting symbols newly available to us and to the circumstances of our time."⁸⁰

Lathrop argues that liturgical theology is an act of critical classicism. As such, it recognizes the value of the tradition as it has been passed on through the history of the Christian church. It goes beyond the tradition to exert a reforming edge so that the liturgy might say an old thing in a constantly changing situation. In exercising this critical classicism, one of Lathrop's favorite literary devices is juxtaposition. Throughout his work is the juxtaposition of ancient texts and traditions with modern people and predicaments. In this forcing together of opposites, liturgical theology willingly accepts traditional patterns of worship and ancient symbols from worship in the belief that these classics bear authority among us. These ancient aspects of worship, the language and the actions, are among the richest resources for our time and our need.

Liturgical theology insists that the meaning of the liturgy resides in the

⁸⁰Ibid., 4.

liturgy itself. While one may dissect and analyze the liturgy, studying its various parts, what the liturgy says authentically is to be known from participating in the liturgy itself. Most properly, the liturgy is not something whose meaning is articulated by looking at it from the outside in; rather, the liturgy invites us to participate in it, and in the participation to find the meaning. This communal meaning of the liturgy is derived and exercised by the gathering itself.⁸¹ In other words, what happens in the worship experience and what it means is not determined by academics who might reflect upon the same, but by the people of God as they experience this word from God and about God. Liturgical theology seeks to illumine the experience of the assembly itself. This is primary liturgical theology.

Liturgical theology can also be a written discipline, sharing the insights and reflections of those who share in the assembly. It can be a guide for greater understanding for those who participate in the liturgy, an elucidation of the symbolic language of ritual, a guide to the classic reasons for the way the liturgy is ordered. This written discipline Lathrop labels secondary liturgical theology. This is not the participation in the liturgy, but the written reflections and guides that help to explain, elucidate, and deepen the appreciation and experience of the liturgy.

Furthermore, the task of this secondary liturgical theology is to articulate the faith as it comes to expression in these assemblies. Liturgical

⁸¹Ibid., 5.

theology gives concrete expression to what the Christian church means and what it believes most deeply.⁸²

Liturgical theology must also be engaged in the work of liturgical criticism. Liturgical criticism is analogous to certain types of literary criticism. Some literary criticism serves the purpose of seeking to make a primary work accessible, illuminating its structures and its cultural situation. So, liturgical criticism seeks to serve the people who participate in Christian worship by elucidating, explaining, deepening the understanding of the biblical rhetoric and structures of the ordo of Christian worship.⁸³ This type of liturgical criticism properly asks evaluative questions of local worshiping assemblies, helping the local assembly to articulate the meaning of its *lex orandi*, and helping the assembly to discern its identity as it is manifested by its worship life.

While there are many who articulate what the Christian faith means, the gathering of the people of God around Font, Word, and Table, most appropriately carries the authority to say what the Christian faith is and means.⁸⁴ Theologians, preachers, church authorities all seek to speak authoritatively the meaning of the Christian faith, but the worshiping

⁸²Ibid., 8.

⁸³Ibid., 161.

⁸⁴Ibid., 9.

assembly is the concrete form of the voice of the church. The most basic sense of "church" is embodied in these gatherings around washings, texts, and meals. The universal church is the linkage of all these gatherings, and from these gatherings comes the deep, biblically grounded expression of the catholic faith. When the meaning of these assemblies is interpreted, the meaning of the church and the church's faith is interpreted. The assembly itself is the authoritative voice to interpret the Christian faith.

Doesn't this again lead us to suggest that the Bible is unimportant? Clearly not, according to Lathrop. Throughout church history the Bible has served as the primary source for the dogma which the church believes. But liturgical theology's approach to the Scriptures says that they provide images and language which speak to us something new from God and about God, something beyond texts. In effect, they provide the raw material for the transaction of theology that takes place in the worshiping assembly.

The Bible marks and determines Christian worship. But it's not merely a matter of the Bible being read in the gathering. The more formative influence is the way the Bible provides the imagery, the form, and the language of the prayers and hymns, even the very stories which form the community. In this sense, the Bible orients the community to the world and provides a benchmark for interpreting the events of faith and life. The intention of these stories in the liturgy is that something happens to the community and to the individual through the use of the Bible in worship.

The texts speak of the people of God and their history, but also of God's action in their history and in their hopes.

According to Lathrop, the liturgical hope is that these texts will speak to the people of God a new thing, a thing not yet imagined. There is an irony embodied in this juxtaposition of old texts that spoke originally to an ancient people which now speak to God's people in a new way of a new thing. The texts always move towards "speaking a greater thing than they have contained."⁸⁵

The sacraments in Christian worship also have a biblical basis. The gathering of God's people does what the Bible tells it to do; it does the actions that Jesus instituted. The sacraments, however, are much more than a simple, historical reenactment of biblical stories. Old words and old actions are made to speak an "astonishingly new grace."⁸⁶ They become the actual means by which God works his grace to a people in the present, using words and actions from history.

Words and actions with such a history hold and enable our hopes for order, salvation, and God. The repetition and stylization of human ritual enable us to repeat these hopes and enter into them more deeply. . . .the intention is to make clear that the new grace is for the very world that produced this religious language.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Ibid., 19.

⁸⁶Ibid., 24.

⁸⁷Ibid., 27.

As he attempts to explore the meaning of Christian worship, to articulate his liturgical theology, Lathrop inquires about the *ordo*, or the structure, scheduling, and patterns of Christian worship. His presupposition is that “meaning occurs through structure, by one thing set next to another.”⁸⁸ In the various aspects of the *ordo* of the *lex orandi*, the meaning of Christian worship is discerned. He gives two examples of juxtapositions of schedule in Christian worship: the day on which worship is conducted and the joining together of word and table in the same unit of worship. He gives more examples of other juxtapositions in the actual experience of worship: praise and beseeching, teaching and washing, and the pattern of the Christian church year. These juxtapositions point to the root structure of Christian worship; in them there is a pattern which serves to speak to the church of God’s grace. “These structural phenomena can be interpreted as evidencing a pattern of ritual broken in order to speak of God’s grace. The principal instrument of the breaking is juxtaposition.”⁸⁹ These patterns draw us to a third thing, and that is faith. Christian meaning is the result of the workings of these juxtapositions. “What the people grasp in the liturgy, what they become part of, is a palpable order and pattern, an order of service. Habits of

⁸⁸Ibid., 33.

⁸⁹Ibid., 80.

mind and heart are then formed in that pattern."⁹⁰

For Christian worship, things are required: people, people doing something, and some objects that are used for the ritual actions. Liturgical theology helps to elucidate the meaning that is carried by the things. That material things are needed is evidence that in the Christian faith and for Christian worship, the spiritual is intimately bound up with the material. Things which are used in Christian worship help to focus the gathering.

The action of the liturgy begins with things, with people gathered around material objects. These things speak truly of God and suggest a meaning for all things. The central things, the sacred objects of the *ordo* are the word addressed to the assembly, the wine and the bread, and the water for the initiatory bath.⁹¹

The things must be made complete, fulfilled with words. The things are nothing without the words given by God. In another juxtaposition, the things are put together with the words to deliver the gifts of God, the grace of God. In this delivery of gift through the juxtaposition of word and things, the assembly, gathered in the name of Jesus, is transformed by Jesus. The actions are not celebrated simply because they are nice symbols, but because Jesus tells us to. The words will do what they say when the words and the things are

⁹⁰Ibid., 82.

⁹¹Ibid., 91.

put together.

A related juxtaposition is that the things and actions of Christian worship are made holy by the presence of Jesus Christ. Baptism finds its roots in an old eschatological washing. But Jesus Christ comes to the practice and so there is a sacrament. The Lord's Supper is rooted in an old ritual meal; Jesus Christ comes to the ritual and becomes the reference of the meal and so there is a sacrament. Holy words are read; Jesus Christ comes to the reading of the words and so the words also become an eating and drinking of Christ.⁹²

How do people have access to the gifts that are given through the word and the thing? The ancient invitation reads, "Holy things for holy people." Inherent in this dictum, says Lathrop, is both an invitation and a warning. In the midst of these holy things, God invites his people to come and receive his goodness. Yet, the implication is that these things are only for the holy ones, only for the initiated. Thus how one gains access to the holy things becomes an important aspect of their meaning.

To gain this access, persons require formation. Formation does not imply ownership or the taming of the elements of the liturgy, but holds in tension the juxtaposition of invitation and warning. Formation, which includes teaching the faith, must also teach worship. Teaching happens in formal settings, but it must also be an attitude that permeates the entire local assembly.

⁹²Ibid., 165.

The invitation embodies the deepest tension to which all the juxtapositions of the liturgy correspond and to which they all point. The tension is that we are not holy, but that the words of the liturgy invite us to Christ who gave himself for us on the cross and who linked us to that death in baptism, and who continues to give himself to us in the word and in the meal. These gifts are embodied in the “holy things” dialogues of the liturgy; in the speaking of the dialogue, the assembly does theology, it speaks a word about God.

The intention of the experienced dialectic of the *ordo*, of one thing placed next to another thing, is to place us in the presence of Christ by the power of the Spirit, and so before the face of the one, eternal God. Indeed, entrance, reconciliation, access to the holy things of God made available to those who are not holy, are what the whole meeting is about.⁹³

Another key to understanding the meaning of Christian worship is the notion of sacrifice. The ritual and language of sacrifice have been part of religion almost since the beginning of time, and Christianity has appropriated this language. However, sacrifice is not really what happens in Christian worship. “Christian worship is baptism next to word next to meal – these simply are not sacrifice.”⁹⁴ Even Christ’s death, historically speaking, was not sacrifice. Rejecting the notion that the use of sacrifice language is merely a spiritualization of the language, Lathrop asserts that it is better to simply say

⁹³Ibid., 138.

⁹⁴Ibid., 141.

that sacrifice is the wrong word for Christian worship.

The Christian assembly then takes this wrongness, heightens it, uses it as a figure of speech, and then inquires as to what truth about God is proposed by calling the action of the assembly sacrifice when it is not. Typically, sacrifice as a religious word and religious concept refers to the holy bond that a person creates with God when that person makes a sacrifice. The ancient religious exchange is established whereby one gives to God and so creates an obligation for God to give good things in return for the sacrifice.

In Christian worship, however, what is offered is not some gift to God in which the one giving obligates God, but rather food for the community, for the absent and the poor, for those outside the circle of the gathered assembly. The whole ritual is a giving of thanks to God through Christ.

The paradoxical nature of sacrifice as gift to the ritual participant is most profound when it comes to the eucharist. Here, "the Christian doing of eucharist is the pure offering simply because Jesus Christ gave it and because the people, now forgiven, have been made a priesthood to receive it. Indeed, receiving this gift is what it means to offer this sacrifice."⁹⁵ The eucharist is a sacrifice radically different from the sacrifices of paganism or ancient Judaism. It is simply receiving the tradition of Jesus at a meal, a form of a thanksgiving prayer, the words for the eating and drinking. The whole community has now been "clothed in the garments of forgiveness and mercy, and has been

⁹⁵Ibid., 150-151.

made, as a community, into priests. What they do as a community is called sacrifice."⁹⁶

In a backwards sort of way, the sacrifice which is given is actually received; sacrifice and priesthood are the wrong words but they are the words which we use because Jesus Christ has taught us to use them. Rather than food given, food is received; rather than food given to God, it is received with thanksgiving and shared. In the food, which itself can be called Eucharistia, 'thanksgiving,' we receive the gift that places us before God, the saving body and blood of Christ the crucified. In eating the food we eat the meaning of the prayer. In praying 'the prayer of the word which is from Christ' we find the food 'thanksgivingized.' The prayer over food is given us by Jesus Christ, takes place through Christ. The whole, prayer and food together, is gift. Through it we receive what human beings need: food, love, and the restoration of creation. We do not give anything to the gods or to God. Rather, we receive what we ourselves need – to stand before God as we share our food, with a wider horizon around us than we could have given ourselves.⁹⁷

The Christian liturgy does not compel God.⁹⁸ The business of the liturgy is to receive and proclaim God's great and merciful gifts. By using better and more appropriate signs, being better prepared, having greater skills and gifts, we do not make grace bigger. In striving for excellence, we make the signs more fitting for the significance they carry. In doing so, we let the central things of worship stand forth in greater clarity.

In addition, if the signs are larger, presented with greater clarity, if the

⁹⁶Ibid., 151.

⁹⁷Ibid., 153.

⁹⁸Ibid., 163.

proclamation is done more dynamically, all this is still of no use if the significance is not made clear. The people of the assembly need to be drawn, body and mind, into the deepest meaning of the liturgy. The significance is more than a simple one-to-one correspondence, "this means that." The fullness of the meaning of the signs is to be accentuated, not for the sake of being clever, or for mere aesthetics, but in order to present the meaning of Jesus Christ to human need.

Lathrop's repeated point has been that the ordo of Christian worship establishes the strongest possible signs at the center of the meeting and yet breaks those signs to the meaning of the mercy of God, making the ritual circle permeable and accessible to as wide a group as possible.⁹⁹

Let us summarize. Liturgical theology asks questions about the meaning of Christian worship. It asks how worship can say something reliable and authentic about God. Liturgical theology recognizes the value of tradition even as it seeks to push old patterns and symbols to say something continually new. Authority in the Christian faith is in the gathering of God's people around Word, Font, and Table. For this gathering, the order of what happens as well as the place of the gathering within human time are important for assigning meaning. The requirements for Christian worship are people, people doing something, and objects. These requirements are put together with words, made holy by the presence of Jesus Christ. In the notion

⁹⁹Ibid., 209.

of Christian sacrifice, the church calls something sacrifice which is really no sacrifice at all and it becomes a gift for the gathering and for the world.

Chapter 5

The Source and Substance of Christian Theology:

A Comparative Discussion from Liturgical Theology

We began by formulating a working definition of liturgical theology as a theological enterprise. By means of a comparison and contrast we attempted to draw a distinction between liturgical theology and other enterprises which connect Christian worship and Christian theology. With these definitions and distinctions as a backdrop, we provided a summary of the liturgical theology of three major contributors to this field.

We now turn to a comparison of these expressions of liturgical theology. While there are many issues and questions which we might compare, we will confine ourselves to the specific question at hand. What do Schmemmann, Kavanagh, and Lathrop say about the substance and source of Christian theology?

Perhaps the easier of the two question concerns the source of Christian theology. As we have seen in the writings of these authors, the liturgy, or the Christian worship experience, is the primary source of genuine, first-order Christian theology. They agree that ideally the liturgy is not to be merely one source among many, but at the very least the most important source among several sources and the most appropriate location for the people of God to be engaged in the theological enterprise, which is to discern an authoritative word from God about God. They would also agree that as the source of

theology becomes further removed from the worshiping assembly, it becomes less an authoritative word of theology.

To summarize Schmemmann's view, the essence of the liturgy, or the *lex orandi*, is "ultimately nothing else but the Church's faith itself or, better to say, the manifestation, communication, and fulfillment of that faith."¹⁰⁰ In the liturgy is the full epiphany or manifestation of what the church believes, of what constitutes her faith. Thus, the liturgy is the very source of theology.

If theology, as the Orthodox Church maintains, is not a mere sequence of more or less individual interpretations of this or that "doctrine" in the light and thought forms of this or that "culture" and "situation," but the attempt to express Truth itself, to find words adequate to the mind and experience of the Church, then it must of necessity have its source where faith, the mind, and the experience of the Church have their living focus and expression, where faith in both essential meanings of that word, as Truth revealed and given, and as Truth accepted and "lived," has its epiphany, and that is precisely the function of the *leitourgia*."¹⁰¹

Schmemmann even goes so far as to call the liturgy the *sui generis* hermeneutical foundation of the faith of the Christian church.¹⁰²

Kavanagh would agree and state it more emphatically. In defense of the dictum of Prosper of Aquitaine, *lex orandi statuat legem credendi*, he emphasizes that liturgy must be the source of what can be said about God in

¹⁰⁰Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform," 38.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 40.

¹⁰²Ibid., 44.

the context of the Christian faith. Kavanagh explicitly refers to the liturgical act as primary theology; in other words, liturgy is the primary source from which theological statements can be made. "A liturgical act is a theological act of the most all-encompassing, integral, and foundational kind."¹⁰³

Lathrop also places the source of the Christian faith in the liturgical gathering. The gathering of the community of Jesus Christ around his Word and sacraments is the most reliable source for what really matters in the Christian faith. This is where the gifts are offered most reliably, and this is the most appropriate fountain from which flows the articulation of the Christian faith. In the assembly is the very pattern and font of the Christian faith. Theology is not primarily academic, but pastoral. As a pastoral activity, its source is in the worshiping gathering.

The appropriate question is this: what does the Christian faith mean, and how does the church express what it believes most deeply? Certainly there are many voices that seek to articulate the meaning of the Christian faith. But the most concrete voice is the worshiping assembly, for this is where the church is most like the church.

An important distinction might be drawn here between Lathrop and the two other theologians under study. Lathrop is less assertive of worship as the exclusive source of true Christian theology; rather, of many sources for theology, including theologians, apologists, preachers, and church authorities,

¹⁰³Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 98.

the assembly is the most concrete and reliable form of these various voices, and as such holds priority.

All three of our theologians place a great emphasis on the dictum of Prosper of Aquitaine *lex orandi, lex credendi*. For each of them, this dictum properly summarizes the relationship between liturgy and theology. While only Kavanagh makes an explicit point of stating the irreversibility of the dictum, they would all agree that to reverse it would be to lose worship as the source of theology.

Standing behind these assertions of the liturgical gathering as the primary source for theology is the belief that the assembly gathers at the invitation and command of Christ himself. He is the reason for the gathering; he is the giver behind all of the gifts offered in the assembly. The Christian assembly gathers because Christ says to gather. The Christian assembly proclaims the Word because it believes that Christ comes therein. The Christian assembly washes with water because it believes that the one being baptized is baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. The Christian assembly distributes Christ's meal because it believes that the bread and wine are His body and His blood.

Sources which traditionally have served as the fountain of Christian theology, namely, Scripture and tradition, are said to be sources only as they are appropriated by Christian worship. To remove Scripture and tradition from worship is to render them incomplete and handicapped as sources for

theology. Again, according to Schmemmann in the historical flow of the Orthodox Church, Scripture is interpreted by the church, and the Fathers are witnesses of the catholic faith of the church. This interpretation by the church happens precisely as the church is gathered for *leitourgia*.¹⁰⁴

As we have seen, Kavanagh takes a rather dim view of Scripture as text. The Scriptures held a liveliness in the context of worship before the advent of the printing press. With the advent of the printing press, the Scriptures lost importance and efficacy when they were devalued from a living dynamic message from God and about God to a static text. Scripture cannot be the authority or the source for the Christian faith, because, as Kavanagh sees it, the Christian faith is not a summary of doctrines – it is not *orthopistia* or *orthodidascalia*; the Christian faith is right worship, or *orthodoxia*. The Christian faith is an encounter with God that happens in the context of worship, and while the faith can be expressed in statements of doctrine, this is not the primary task of theology, nor is it the way the faith ought to be experienced most ideally.

Even the matter of certainty is too much to expect. While scholastic theology has been concerned with the certainty of doctrinal pronouncements, doctrinal pronouncements do not bring the experience of the Christian faith. Furthermore, the liturgy is not meant to bring certainty.

¹⁰⁴Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform," 44.

Given the human nature of liturgical engagement, even under grace, one is free to doubt that a kind of essentialist epistemology which must speak in terms of absolute certainty rather than in terms of plausibility and functional certainties can avoid warping one's grasp of what liturgy really is and how it actually functions.¹⁰⁵

So while liturgy as the source of Christian theology may not be able to provide the certainty that academic theology seeks to provide, that fact should not lead us to the conclusion that liturgy is defective as the source of theology. Rather, Kavanagh begins with the assumption that certainty is neither required nor desired.

For Lathrop, the Bible is important for worship. While the Bible may be authority for the Christian faith apart from worship when it is used by dogmaticians, when it is proclaimed by preachers, when it is used by social critics, and poets, and bishops, the Bible most clearly and properly exhibits its authority when it is used in the gathering. "The Bible is the assembly's book."¹⁰⁶ While the substance of the Christian faith may be expressed in the great doctrines of the church, the dogmas are of less value and unfortunately float away from their appropriate connection and become detached from their purpose apart from the worshiping assembly.

The more difficult of the two questions concerns the substance of Christian theology, and how this material principle relates to Christian

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 125.

¹⁰⁶Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 9.

worship. Schmemmann is certainly within the mainstream of historic Christianity in his understanding the central tenets of the Gospel.

Into this fallen world, Christ condescended in his becoming man. In it [this world] he proclaimed that the Kingdom of God which is to come, salvation from sin and death, "the beginning of another life new and eternal," had drawn near. And he not only proclaimed it, but through his voluntary suffering, crucifixion and resurrection, he realized this victory in himself and granted it to us.¹⁰⁷

Schmemmann asserts that the manner of appropriation of this gift is thoroughly within the Orthodox understanding of salvation. Rather than a juridical pronouncement, justification consists in the gradual appropriation of the divine. This participation in the divine is made possible through Christ's death and resurrection. The goal and essence of Christian life is the appropriation of the Spirit; this appropriation takes place as the members of the body of Christ ascend in the eucharist to the kingdom of God.

We do not repeat, we do not represent, we ascend into the mystery of salvation and new life which has been accomplished once, but granted to us "always, now and forever and unto ages of ages." And in this heavenly, eternal and otherworldly eucharist Christ does not come down to us, rather we ascend to Him.¹⁰⁸

Again, Christ "offered this life in sacrifice 'on behalf of all and for all,' in order that we might become communicants of his own life, the new life of the new creation, and that we might manifest him as his body."¹⁰⁹ The

¹⁰⁷Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 219.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 225.

church fulfills all this in the eucharist through the Holy Spirit.

If the essence of the Christian faith is this participation in the divine, made possible through Christ's death and resurrection, then worship occupies an absolutely central position. Participation in Christ can come only through the sacraments, and the sacraments are only accessible through Christian worship. So although Christian worship is not technically the substance of the Christian faith, that central substance is not accessible except in worship.

Again, while the matter of discerning the source of the Christian faith in Kavanagh's liturgical theology may have been a rather straightforward matter, discovering the substance of the Christian faith is much less so. Clearly, for Kavanagh, the act of worship is wholly central to the Christian faith. This is true to a great degree because worship is the location of communion with Christ. This communion with Christ begins to take us to the center of the Christian faith.

Communion with Christ initiates a conversion process. From baptism onward, Christians must be formed. They must be set into a process of passage from what they have been to what they must become. "This transition which brings with it a progressive change of outlook and morals should become evident together with its social consequences."¹¹⁰ Catechesis becomes conversion therapy. The goal and purpose of the Christian life is to be "grabbed" by grace and to work along with God in one's own rehabilitation.

¹¹⁰Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 158.

This individual process happens also on a cosmic scale. "The Church itself is . . . the world being conceived under grace and brought to term by faith and death in Christ – a world which is actively cooperating with God in its own rehabilitation."¹¹¹

Near the end of his work, Kavanagh takes the reader to the "dark center of the Christian faith"¹¹² without ever clearly articulating the dark center. What we see, he says, is not the mystery of the Christian faith itself, but where the mystery lies. What we find at this dark center is the "presence of a Holy One who must mask itself in Word and flesh and sacrament and sense out of respect for our weakness if we are to be able to sit at table with it as `friends.'"¹¹³ The substance of the Christian faith appears to be to come into God's presence and to be converted, and to enter into a life-long process of becoming more like God in a moral sense.

Worship becomes an integral part of this substance of the Christian faith, because in worship we come into this Presence in such a way that we are in fact converted. Liturgy transacts this ongoing conversion process. Liturgy brings us into contact with this "power which summons every human being to the assembly by the grace of conversion, the power which

¹¹¹Ibid., 168.

¹¹²Ibid., 169.

¹¹³Ibid., 169.

judges every member of the assembly by the same grace to renew and deepen his or her slate of conversion week in and week out.”¹¹⁴ The liturgy brings us to the location of a life and a ritual of change.

The proper emphasis on liturgy as constitutive of the Christian faith is consistent with “the early church’s stress on faith not so much as an intellectual assent to doctrinal propositions, but as a way of living in the graced commonality of an actual assembly at worship before the living God.”¹¹⁵

What would Gordon Lathrop say is the central substance of the Christian faith? In the introduction to *Holy Things*, he speaks about the liturgy being able to deliver what the Christian church means, and what it believes most deeply, but he doesn’t specifically articulate what that might be. While he believes it too difficult to reduce the meaning of the Christian faith to written dogmas, while he suggests that the Christian faith cannot be written in a book or in theological pronouncements, while he states that the Christian faith is always larger than any elucidation of it, the meaning of the Christian faith is Christological. He articulates the core substance of the Christian faith more precisely in a small pamphlet on the essentials of Christian worship. He writes that the gathering is about the grace of God in

¹¹⁴Ibid., 165.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 91.

Jesus Christ.

Word, table and bath occur at the heart of a participating community so that all people may freely encounter God's mercy in Christ, that they may come to faith again and again, that they may be formed into a community of faith, that they may be brought to the possibility of love for God's world.¹¹⁶

The meaning of the Christian faith is experienced primarily and most reliably in Christian worship. His book, *Holy Things*, attempts to push people to participation in the assembly that they might find there a reliable word from God, about God, and about our world. "Read the book [the Bible]. Then go to the gathering and with the community, be a theologian. *There*, together with the others, speak the meaning of God for our world."¹¹⁷

In *Holy Things* a clear statement of the substance of the Christian faith comes as Lathrop comments on the words from Cyril of Jerusalem from which the title of the work is derived, "Holy things for the holy people." This prayer, this appropriation of the good things of God, is possible only because of Christ.

We are the place God chooses to give away life to the dead, home to the homeless, holiness to the unclean. As Paul said, "God, for our sake made him to be sin who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.: This exchange is something much deeper than Jesus 'bearing our sins'. . . Jesus, rather, *becomes* sin, absolute alienation from God. God is found, loving and giving life, where God

¹¹⁶Gordon Lathrop, *What Are the Essentials of Christian Worship?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 22.

¹¹⁷Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 5.

cannot be.¹¹⁸

At the heart of the Christian faith is the gift of forgiveness and mercy. "The whole people has been clothed in the garments of forgiveness and mercy, and has been made, as a community, into priests."¹¹⁹

Already the connection to worship has become apparent. Worship is the setting in which the mercy and forgiveness is delivered. "Worship is about God's mercy and a meal for us to eat and to give away."¹²⁰ "The Christian liturgical business is to receive and proclaim God's great and merciful gift."¹²¹ "The liturgy wishes to call us to God and especially to God's grace known in Jesus."¹²²

A distinction might be drawn here between Lathrop and the other two authors. While Lathrop would agree with the priority of the liturgy as the location where the gifts and benefits of God are delivered, there is not the assertion that the liturgy is the exclusive delivery point. Both Schmemmann and Kavanagh push strongly in that direction, that apart from the liturgy the

¹¹⁸Ibid., 133.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 151.

¹²⁰Ibid., 156.

¹²¹Ibid., 169.

¹²²Ibid., 210.

gifts of becoming part of the divine (Schmemmann) and of the life-long process of conversion (Kavanagh) are not available.

Chapter 6

Liturgical Theology's View of the Source and Substance of Christian

Theology:

A Lutheran Critique

A comparison of liturgical theology with the central themes of Lutheran theology reveals difficulties apparent from the outset. Liturgical theology and Lutheran theology begin with different definitions of theology, different definitions of the purpose of worship, and more pertinent to our study, different understandings of the source and substance of theology.

In this chapter our purpose is to let Lutheran theology, and especially the Lutheran Confessions cast a critical light on the assertions of liturgical theology regarding the source and substance of the Christian faith. We have allowed three writers on liturgical theology to provide their answers. Now, in summary fashion, we answer the questions from Lutheran theology and let the two positions dialogue.

From the time of Martin Luther, the Lutheran position has been that Scripture is the authority for all doctrine in the church. In the controversy with Carlstadt, Luther stated very sharply that the Spirit works only through the Word; it is precisely the externality of the Word which protects faith from all the factors which might destroy its certainty.¹²³

¹²³Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 185.

The *Augsburg Confession* states in the preface that this confession is preached and taught “on the basis of divine and holy Scripture.” After stating those articles which they perceived would be held in common, the *Augsburg Confession* summarizes that these articles teach nothing that is “contrary to the Holy Scriptures or what is common to the Christian church.”¹²⁴

The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* agrees. In Article XII, as the *Apology* discusses the authority of the bishops and the pope, it states that both the tradition of the church and present and future teachers of the church must be judged according to the Holy Scriptures. (Ap. XII, 66)

This understanding of the authority of Scripture is an all-encompassing one. All human thought, emotion, and activity are subject to Scripture. Especially worship and liturgy must be captive to Scripture. Luther writes in the *Smalcald Articles* that “The Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel.” (II, ii, 15, 2)

The *Formula of Concord*, before any of its articles of Christian doctrine, states that the Scriptures are the reliable and authentic source for being able to say anything about God or as having come from God. “The primary requirement for basic and permanent concord within the church is a summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved, in which the

¹²⁴All references to the Lutheran Confessions are from this edition: *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 48.

summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word of God." (FC, Sol. Decl., Rule and Norm, 1) It goes on, "We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated." (FC, Sol. Decl., Rule and Norm, 2-3)

In the dialogue between the Lutheran Confessions and liturgical theology on the question of the source of Christian theology, it may be that we can get no farther than an impasse. When a Lutheran theologian makes the claim that Scripture is the sole source and norm of Christian doctrine, he has made precisely the assertion that liturgical theology deems unacceptable. In fact, he has made the assertion that articulation of the faith has passed from the assembly to the classroom, from the liturgical experience to the printed page, an unfortunate happening to which liturgical theology attributes the breakdown of both liturgy and theology.

This is a fundamental disagreement. The Lutheran Confessions see the source of the Christian faith as lying completely outside of human experience, embodied in the divinely inspired Word of God given to us in the pages of Holy Scripture. This Word is delivered, among other places, in the gathered assembly. What the assembly does is formed and informed by Scripture, but Scripture is the larger and more reliable authority. In fact, in

the end, Scripture is the only authority for the Christian faith. Worship stands under Scripture and is normed by it. Liturgical theology, on the other hand, is disposed to see Scripture under the authority of worship, and interpreted by the experience of the assembly gathered for worship. This amounts to a subjective interpretation of Scripture, a theology from below and subject to the tradition of the church, rather than a theology from above.

We might all agree that both the liturgy and Scripture are of divine origin, although Lutheran theology does not put liturgy on the same plane with the Scripture. Indeed, it would be difficult to place prayers and ceremonial actions invented by humans at the same level of authority as the revealed Word of God. Kavanagh suggests that both the Scriptures and the liturgy are not so much about God as they are of God. In the act of liturgical worship Christians authentically interpret the Word of God.¹²⁵ Lathrop agrees as he places the authority for theology in the gathering. The gathering, he says, carries the authority to say what the Christian faith is and means.¹²⁶

But who decides whether, in fact, the gathering is authentically interpreting the Word of God? When the Word stands within the gathering and under the authority of the gathering, the Word of God itself cannot be the measuring stick. Tradition is discounted as the measuring stick. Surely it

¹²⁵See above, 43.

¹²⁶See above, 48.

can't be that each assembly, or worse, each Christian, decides whether the Word of God is being authentically interpreted. There must, finally, be one authority that is objective and stands outside the experience of individual Christians or of Christian communities. Lutheran theology insists that this authority must be the Scriptures.

In taking this look at Scripture, we again encounter a fundamental difference in the understanding of Scripture as divine. Kavanagh suggests that to call both the liturgy and the Scriptures divine is not to suggest that they are authored by God. Rather, they are divine in the sense that God is present at their core every time they are enacted.

We are again left with a slippery understanding of the divine element, especially of Scripture. From where comes the certainty that God is, in fact, present when the Scriptures or liturgy is employed? Is it based merely on the fact that the Christian community is gathering? Is there nothing more here than the promise that "where two or three are gathered in my name I am with them?" Yes, this is enough to insure God's presence; his promise is enough. But unless the Word is considered divine, that God is indeed their author, there can be no certainty of an authentic and reliable Word about God.

It is likely that Kavanagh would agree with the premise that there can be no certainty. "Absolute certainty is a rather large order to expect of any

conclusion, doctrinal or otherwise, drawn from anywhere.”¹²⁷ That premise is not troubling to Kavanagh because certainty is neither required nor desired.

A people’s liturgy, like the people themselves, does not wait upon absolute certainty. It, like them, takes risks, even faith risks, because plausibility, unlike absolute certainty, is rife with risk. Standing before the living God is a risky business. People dare to do so not because they are irrational but because they have found it plausible that they, like others before them, might do so without actually being incinerated.¹²⁸

Whatever the source of theology – Scripture, tradition, or as Kavanagh has argued, worship – the best we can hope for is plausibility. “The liturgy is neither structured nor does it operate in such a way as to provide doctrinal conclusions.”¹²⁹

Whatever doctrinal conclusions might be gathered are to a great degree subjective.

Doctrinal conclusions are selective and may well tell one more about the theologian, and about the state of theological discourse at the time the conclusions are taken, than about the liturgy itself. The process is tactical; for this reason alone it is dubious that a strategic “absolute certainty,” which would have to be and remain valid in all circumstances thereafter, could attach to such conclusions.¹³⁰

We are finally left with very little certainty, if what we are searching for is a reliable and authentic Word from God and about God.

¹²⁷Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 125.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 126.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

Classical Lutheran theology would agree with liturgical theology to the extent that theology must bear a close and clear connection to worship. In *The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* Edmund Schlink asserts that there is no reason for dogmatics apart from preaching and the administration of the sacraments.¹³¹ Theology exists for the sake of what happens in worship; theology exists for the preaching and the administration of the sacraments. It is no idle academic exercise, and its practice belongs to and is done not primarily for the academic discussion, but so that the body of Christ might be edified.

The question might be stated as a question of which is prior, worship or Scripture. According to liturgical theology, the experience of Christian worship or liturgy is prior. In worship, as the liturgy makes use of Scripture as source, as the liturgy proclaims the gospel, theology is transacted, for the assembly is given a reliable and authoritative word about God.

The Lutheran Confessions, on the other hand, place the gospel and Scripture as prior to the worship experience. The gospel and Scripture deliver to the body of Christ a reliable Word from God and about God. This Word delivers and constitutes a new relationship between God and people. The gospel and Scripture are the fountain from which worship flows, not the other way around.

¹³¹Edmund Schlink, *The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 28.

This is not to downplay the importance of worship. The relationship between theology and worship is that theology exists for the sake of worship. Theology exists so that the gospel might rightly be proclaimed and that the sacraments might properly be administered. We would agree with liturgical theology that theology must be primarily a pastoral activity, rather than primarily an academic activity. A consonant understanding is articulated in Article XXIV of the *Augsburg Confession*, on the Mass: "The chief purpose of all the ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ." (AC, XXIV, 3) The *Apology*, Article XXIV also states, "The purpose of observing the ceremonies is that men may learn the Scriptures and that those who have been touched by the Word may receive faith and fear and so may pray." (Ap. XXIV, 3) Again, Schlink states that "we take our first steps in theology by hearing the Church's proclamation."¹³²

What, then, is the substance of Christian theology? From the beginning, Lutheran theology has emphasized the centrality of Christ. Luther writes in His Large Catechism, "We could never come to the point of realizing the Father's kindness and mercy except through the Lord Christ who is a mirror of the Father's heart." (LC, 2, 65) This understanding can be traced to the earliest days of Luther's evangelical theology. In 1518, he wrote in the *Heidelberg Disputation*, ". . .true theology and recognition of God are in the

¹³²Schlink, *The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, 33.

crucified Christ. . ."¹³³

In Christ, we believe, justification comes to the sinner. In contrast to the medieval church and to scholasticism, Lutheran theology made the doctrine of justification the central point and the reference point for all of theology.¹³⁴ The *Smalcald Articles* go so far as to state that justification is the article on which the church stands or falls. The clear summary of the Lutheran understanding of justification is in the *Augsburg Confession*, Article IV, "We cannot obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us." (AC, IV, 1)

Article V goes on to state the next logical step in our relationship with God. In order for this gospel message of justification to have its effect, there must be means. That people might receive this gift, God provided the gospel and the sacraments. These means again point to Christ as the source of the sinner's justification. "The Gospel, which is delivered in the words of scripture, accomplishes its task only by pointing to Christ. Christ is the

¹³³Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American ed., vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 53.

¹³⁴Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 50.

content of the revelation with which faith, as faith, is concerned.”¹³⁵

It is clear from both Articles IV and V that the forgiveness of sins is the chief benefit of this justification. Faith is bound to receiving of the forgiveness of sins and forgiveness of sins is bound to the person and work of Christ.

Certainly, worship and liturgy must be an important factor in discussing the forgiveness of sins, if for no other reason than this: for most Christians, worship is the primary location where this forgiveness of sins is offered and proclaimed, and where the sacraments are celebrated. Luther recognized the importance of the worship setting when he wrote that the gospel must not only be written; on the contrary, it must be proclaimed with the physical voice.¹³⁶ It would not be fair to Luther to make this proclamation an *ex operato* proclamation. Rather the proclamation in worship is effective because Christ is being proclaimed. As Christ is proclaimed the forgiveness of sins is offered. Faith receives it.

Strangely enough, there is little talk in any of the three authors under consideration of forgiveness of sins. The benefit of worship, according to liturgical theology, especially the liturgical theology of Schmemmann and Kavanagh, is that the church is constituted, and the kingdom of God is

¹³⁵Ibid., 72.

¹³⁶WA, 8, 31

realized. In worship, the body of Christ is brought to participate in the divine, or in worship, the body of Christ is pushed along the process of conversion.

The Lutheran Confessions see the issue differently. Whether we talk about the proclamation of the Word or the delivery of the sacraments, the goal is that Christ is proclaimed; as Christ is proclaimed, the forgiveness of sins is offered, and this gift is received by grace through faith.

In Kavanagh's dialectic of change in the context of worship, we see another major departure between Lutheran theology and liturgical theology. Remember, Kavanagh believes that good liturgy pushes the participant to the point of discomfort with the *status quo ante*. In reflection upon this *status quo*, change is made. This change is the actualization of theology, but it must also be the growth in faith for the individual Christian. This appears to be little more than a psychic change or a change of behavior.

We assert, however, that forgiveness is no mere psychic change. It is the wholly new order of a relationship with God based on an individual receiving the gift of forgiveness offered through Christ. Justification is an objective Word of God spoken to the sinner. Faith cannot have one's own psyche or behavior as its basis and content. That is not faith. Faith must have Christ as both its content and object; in Him is the basis of the certainty of a relationship with God. This is the substance of the Christian faith, as Lutheran theology understands it.

Kavanagh states that whatever else the substance of Christian theology

may be, “on the deepest foundational level it is not words or concepts but the existential reality of a relationship – communion with God in Christ, and, therein, with all God’s holy people and holy things.”¹³⁷

Certainly, the Lutheran Confessions could agree with such a statement. But Lutheran theology confesses more specifically that this relationship is made possible through the forgiveness of sins received by grace through faith, and not, as Kavanagh suggests, through the worship experience.

Liturgical Theology’s Contribution

While the present study has been somewhat critical of liturgical theology from the standpoint of the Lutheran Confessions, liturgical theology has much to offer the Christian church. In an age where worship is becoming increasingly entertainment-oriented, liturgical theology calls the church to a seriousness about its worship life and to reflect on how best the worship experience can lead the people of God to a transaction with the God of grace. Liturgical theology rightly points the church to the importance of rite and ritual for forming the people of God.

Liturgical theology can also offer a helpful corrective to the reformation churches. Churches coming from the reformation tradition historically have placed a great deal of emphasis on right doctrine and often on the worship experience as a primarily didactic experience. As we have

¹³⁷Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 123.

stated above, "The chief purpose of all the ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ." (AC, XXIV, 3)

Liturgical theology reminds us of the balance. Worship is more than merely didactic. It is the risen and ascended Christ transacting his grace in the lives of his people. This understanding is not foreign to Lutheran theology. We have always believed that the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments are dynamic actions; they are words which do what they say. But this understanding is vulnerable to being pushed into the background in favor of a didactic approach to worship.

In the end, however, worship cannot bear the weight of being master over the source and substance of the Christian faith. Worship does articulate theology to the degree that it is founded on Scripture and delivers the truth of God's revelation in the word and in the Word become flesh. The liturgy is the expression – poetic, symbolic, existential – of Christian theology, and it may be the most frequent contact the people of God have with the articulation of theology. The liturgy will have its own unique manner of expressing the Christian faith. But its purpose is to express and celebrate the faith, to serve as the primary delivery point for the gifts of God, not to serve as their authority. As all other matters in the Christian faith, worship, too, must be the servant and not the lord of the gospel, of justification by grace through faith, a teaching derived from Scripture alone.

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