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**LITURGICAL HERMENEUTICS :**

**Interpreting Liturgical Rites in Performance**

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Durham for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Bridget Nichols**

**School of English**

**University of Durham**

**1994**



## ABSTRACT

Name Bridget Nichols  
Thesis Title LITURGICAL HERMENEUTICS :  
Interpreting Liturgical Rites in  
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This thesis applies the resources of philosophical hermeneutics, especially as represented in the work of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer, to the project of interpreting liturgy as simultaneously text and performance. The result is a new field, defined as liturgical hermeneutics.

The research breaks away from attempts to find objective meaning in liturgy. Through readings of Church of England forms of the eucharist, baptism and burial it argues that meaning happens when worshippers appropriate the promise of the Kingdom of God which liturgical rites propose. Such acts of appropriation occur when worshippers find themselves in a threshold position with respect to the Kingdom. From here, they can make their own the promises enshrined in the biblical tradition and transmitted through liturgical action, by an act of faith. The result is a reconfiguration of the worshipper's subjectivity, or a new mode-of-being-in-the-world, conditioned by his or her claim to citizenship of the Kingdom.

The notion of liturgy as a practice raises the questions of intentionality and repeatability in ritual. I have pursued these topics with reference, initially, to J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts. The deficiencies in Austin's theory, especially as treated by Jacques Derrida, can be shown to address particular instances in liturgy. In the end, it has proved more profitable to use Derrida's own discussion of the written performative in order to demonstrate the way in which liturgical proposals are taken up by their recipients.

The techniques of analysis applied in the thesis show that liturgy shares the conventions of secular language. The last chapter extends this recognition to demonstrate that liturgy also has an investment in other concerns of secular life. With special reference to the discourses of ethics and politics, it proposes that liturgy itself is capable of standing as a paradigm for secular cultural practices.

### **Declaration**

All of the material contained in this thesis is the work of the author. No part of it has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

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Finally, none of this work would have been possible without generous financial assistance from the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand. I am deeply grateful to both institutions.

## A NOTE ON THE STANDARD TEXTS

When quoting from F.E. Brightman's *The English Rite*, I have preserved the individual spelling conventions of the 1549, 1552 and 1662 Prayer Books. I have not attempted to reproduce the variations in typography which Brightman uses to mark the changes that occurred with successive revisions of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Brightman calls the three versions he prints respectively '1549', '1552' and '1661'. This is historically correct, in that it was the Savoy Conference of 1661 which passed the measures that produced the changes in the 1662 Prayer Book. Nevertheless, since it is conventional to speak of '1662', I have used this title when quoting from the rites which Brightman labels '1661'.

In the cases of both the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Alternative Service Book 1980*, I have sometimes omitted italicised pronouns which mark occasions where number or gender may need to be changed according to the individuals participating in a rite. This is to reduce confusion in the reading process, especially where I have added my own emphases to the texts in question.

## ABBREVIATIONS

### Standard Liturgical Texts

- ER** F.E. Brightman *The English Rite* 2 vols London :  
Rivingtons, 1915
- BCP** *The Book of Common Prayer*
- ASB** *The Alternative Service Book 1980* Sevenoaks : Hodder  
& Stoughton, 1980

### Ricoeur

- RM** *The Rule of Metaphor* tr. Robert Czerny with Kathleen  
McLaughlin & John Costello London & Henley :  
Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978

**Specificity** "The Specificity of Religious Language"  
*Semeia* 4 (1975) 107-148

- HD** "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation"  
*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* tr. & ed. John  
B. Thompson Cambridge : Cambridge University Press,  
1981 ; repr. 1982 131-144

**What is a Text?** "What is a Text? Explanation and  
Understanding" *ibid.* 145-164

**MCPH** "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics"  
*ibid.* 165-181

**Appropriation** "Appropriation" *ibid.* 182-193

- TN** *Time and Narrative* 3 vols tr. Kathleen Blamey and  
David Pellauer Chicago & London : University of  
Chicago Press, 1984-1988

**PHBH** "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical  
Hermeneutics" *From Text to Action : Essays in  
Hermeneutics II* tr. Kathleen Blamey & John B.  
Thompson London : Athlone Press, 1991 89-101

### Gadamer

- TM** *Truth and Method* 2nd ed. rev. tr. Joel Weinsheimer &  
Donald G. Marshall London : Sheed & Ward, 1989

### Austin

**HDTW** *How To Do Things With Words* 2nd ed. J.O. Urmson &  
Marina Sbisa (eds.) Oxford & New York : Oxford  
University Press, 1976; 8th repr. 1992

Derrida

**SEC** "Signature Event Context" *Margins of Philosophy*  
tr. Alan Bass Chicago : University of Chicago  
Press, 1982 307-330

**Telepathy** "Telepathy" tr. Nicholas Royle *Oxford Literary*  
*Review* 10 (1988) 3-41

## CHAPTER ONE : AN INTRODUCTION TO LITURGICAL HERMENEUTICS

### 1.1 The Context of this Study

The question of what came first, liturgical texts or liturgical performances, looks suspiciously like a passport to a tediously circular discussion. One can imagine ferocious but unsatisfying debates. Would it have been possible, for example, to celebrate the eucharist in an Anglican Church after the Reformation without *The Book of Common Prayer* ? Could *The Book of Common Prayer* have appeared without precedents in a tradition of performative worship reaching back into the earliest moments of the Christian era ? This thesis proposes to reconsider the initial question by entering into a different, and somewhat more interesting circle. This is a hermeneutic circle, in which the relationship between the liturgical text and its performance ceases to be a competition for priority, and becomes mutually sustaining. The project thus devolves on the very simple point that liturgy must be recognised as simultaneously text and performance. The principles of interpreting liturgy which the thesis will develop, and which I shall call *liturgical hermeneutics*, strive to be faithful to this condition.

The distinctive duality in the nature of liturgy has engendered a clear division between theory and practice. On

the one hand, there are the professional liturgists who have traced the history and origins of rites, and whose findings continue to enrich the understanding of liturgical practice as it has developed over the course of centuries. On the other hand, there are countless Christians who have conducted their worship according to prescribed forms over the same period, and whose lives are directly affected as a result. Their awareness of the processes they engage in represents another potentially illuminating approach to ritual. As early as the fourth century, the Spanish nun Egeria wrote an account of her pilgrimage to Jerusalem which remains almost the sole source for reconstructing the Easter liturgy in use in Jerusalem at that time<sup>1</sup>.

Yet the scholarly tradition has not consistently placed the needs and responses of worshippers on a level of equality with the examination of the rites themselves. Such magisterial works as Geoffrey Cuming's *History of Anglican Liturgy*<sup>2</sup> and F.E. Brightman's comparative edition of the 1549, 1552 and 1662 *Books of Common Prayer* in *The English Rite* (to go no further back than 1915) are much more concerned with establishing texts and their origins than with applying their findings to the experience of worship.

---

1. J. Wilkinson (ed.) *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land* rev. ed. Jerusalem : Ariel Publishing House; Warminster : Aris & Phillips, 1981

2. Geoffrey Cuming *A History of Anglican Liturgy* 2nd ed. London : Macmillan, 1982

Fifty years ago, Dom Gregory Dix noted perceptively that "what most people seem chiefly to expect from liturgists and their works" is "archaeology for archaeology's sake"<sup>3</sup>. Dix sketched the invidious position of liturgists who, at the time of writing, were "treated by English churchmen with vague deference accompanied by complete practical disregard", while the reaction from "ecclesiastical authorities" was most often "kindness tempered with a good deal of suspicion"<sup>4</sup>. He was not, however, totally sympathetic to their cause :

. . . it must be admitted that the liturgists have largely had themselves to thank for the reverent disregard with which their labours are so generally treated. They persist in presenting their subject as a highly specialised branch of archaeology with chiefly aesthetic preoccupations, as though the liturgy had evolved of itself in a sort of ecclesiastical vacuum remote from the real life and needs of men and women.<sup>5</sup>

These observations appeared in a book whose public reception stood in marked contradiction to that of the typical works it describes. *The Shape of the Liturgy* was an immediate bestseller, as likely to be found on the shelves of the laity as in the libraries of working liturgists. Its success can be attributed in great measure to the fact that Dix acted upon his conviction that liturgy is rooted in the "real life and needs of men and women" :

3. Dom Gregory Dix *The Shape of the Liturgy* 2nd ed. London : Dacre Press, 1945 xiii (first publ. 1943)

4. *ibid* xiii

5. *ibid* xiii-xiv



The ordinary man knows very well that prayer and communion with God have their difficulties, but that these arise less from their own technique than from the nature of human life. Worship is a mysterious but also a very direct and commonplace human activity. It is meant for the plain man to do, to whom it is an intimate and sacred but none the less quite workaday affair.<sup>6</sup>

The book was unprecedented in another area too. Through his treatment of the eucharist, which is the great affirmation of the life of the worshipping community, Dix showed his eagerness to expand the possible approaches to liturgical study. This gave liturgy a status as a cultural practice, in addition to its place under the umbrella of theology, and asserted its claim to the kind of attention that other cultural practices were accustomed to receive :

The subject of the paper [which led to the writing of the book] - the structure of actions and prayers which forms the eucharist - has, of course, a permanent interest for christians. But it is beginning to be recognised that this has a much wider and deeper significance than its ecclesiastical or even than its purely devotional interest. It is only within recent years that the science of Comparative Religion has fully awakened to the value of the study of 'ritual patterns' for the appreciation of any given system of religious ideas and its necessary consequence in human living - a 'culture'. The analysis of such a pattern and the tracing of its evolution opens for the historian and the sociologist the most direct way to the sympathetic understanding 'from within' of the mind of those who practise that religion, and so to a right appreciation of the genius of their belief and the value of their ideas and ideals of human life.<sup>7</sup>

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6. *ibid* xiv

7. *ibid* ix

The direction in this assessment of the state of liturgical studies in the mid-twentieth century is clear. Dix shows how attention to Christian liturgy can open up wider issues in the larger study of religion and lead, finally, to an enhanced understanding of the cultural context in which religion is practised. Underlying his portrayal is the implication that what is required is a revised critical methodology, taking into account the essential role of worshippers, and finding significance in actual practice as well as in textual archaeology. When *The Shape of the Liturgy* was written, the prospect of extending the liturgical field to include insights from the disciplines of sociology, history, and Comparative Religion was already in advance of the growing enthusiasm for interdisciplinary studies. I see no reason to doubt that Dix would have extended the same welcome to the developments in speech act theory and literary theory which have occurred since his work was produced.

Dix's pioneering achievement, then, is to shift the ground of liturgical research. Instead of dwelling on considerations of the meaning of liturgy, he paves the way for an investigation of what it is that makes liturgy a meaningful practice.

## 1.2 Liturgy and the Question of Meaning

At the present time, scholars in fields such as anthropology and sociology are beginning to apply theories of language and, central to this thesis, textual hermeneutics, to their research into liturgy. Taking an exemplary case, I shall now go on to argue that this is a necessary and creative development, but that it remains at a provisional stage. It will be the aim of liturgical hermeneutics to show where a methodological claim for projects that seek ways of interpreting the performative aspects of worship might be staked.

Martin Stringer, a liturgist trained in anthropology, has opened up important areas for investigation in liturgy in an article on "Situating Meaning in the Liturgical Text"<sup>8</sup>. He wrestles with the broad problem of whether "meaning [is] to be found entirely within the texts of the liturgy", or whether "the 'meaning' of the rite [is] found primarily in the minds of those who attend[ ] it"<sup>9</sup>, and thus subject to individual variations. After mapping out the landscape of modern Anglican liturgical reform, he considers the interaction of "words and images, language and symbols"<sup>10</sup> in

8. Martin D. Stringer "Situating Meaning in the Liturgical Text" *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 73 (3) 1991 181-194

9. *ibid* 181

10. *ibid* 192

recently produced liturgical texts, and their effects on worshippers. His conclusion argues that to locate meaning exclusively within the performance of a given rite leads to the limitation of a religious language, which has to be "as 'understandable' as possible" in order to bear the full weight of responsibility for meaning. This, he rightly says, "raises further questions of power and authority"<sup>11</sup>.

Stringer traces some liturgical developments which have followed a report on worship in urban priority areas, commissioned by the General Synod of the Church of England, and published under the title of *Faith in the City* in 1985. *Faith in the City* urged that worship should be based firmly in the experience of the community. Especially in the case of urban priority areas, the Church of England Liturgical Commission recommended that liturgy should use language that is "'concrete and tangible rather than abstract and theoretical'". This led, finally, to recommendations for "strong visual imagery and clear, concrete, story-based language"<sup>12</sup>. Two publications from the Liturgical Commission emerged in response to the report : *Patterns for Worship* (1989) and *The Promise of His Glory* (1991). Of the two, *Patterns for Worship* was a direct reply to the Liturgical Commission's recommendations. Stringer cites these as examples of the danger inherent in creating liturgy to meet

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11. *ibid* 193

12. *ibid* 183 Stringer quotes from *Faith in the City* London: Church House Publishing, 1985 135

a perceived need. His assessment is that, in the end, this well-intentioned project amounted to imposing "particular meanings upon the rite." These meanings were pertinent to theologians, but made little contribution to the lives of most worshippers<sup>13</sup>.

He goes on to show how the problem of a firmly controlled linguistic 'meaning' is not necessarily resolved by resorting to the non-linguistic realm of symbol as a repository of liturgical meaning. For if people are encouraged to use the resources of imagery and symbolism "to draw their own meanings out of the rites and . . . to put their own meanings into the rite"<sup>14</sup> as an alternative to accepting imposed meanings, the following difficulty arises:

Symbols do not, of their nature, possess 'meaning', nor, as has been shown, can they easily have 'meaning' thrust upon them; rather, they appear to accumulate 'meaning'. Some of these meanings appear to stick and are communicated to other people while others remain entirely personal and individual. What the liturgists have to do is to enable the meanings to grow in the first place, to focus the attention of the worshipper on possible points for growth and, to some extent, to limit the range of possible meanings for any one symbol. This is not so much a task of building and constructing meaningful liturgies. It is more a task of enabling and encouraging, as well as of restraining and limiting, the potential meanings within an existing framework, and this is a task which I believe liturgists are just about learning to accept.<sup>15</sup>

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13. *ibid* 193

14. *ibid* 194

15. *ibid* 194

I will suggest that Stringer asks valid questions, and isolates weaknesses in some current liturgical thinking which could profitably be addressed. But I am hesitant about the forced dichotomy (he himself admits that this is an almost caricaturing exaggeration) between language and symbol as possible centres of meaning in liturgy. Crudely speaking, Stringer's two poles create an unbridgeable division between liturgical texts with predetermined theological meanings, and the presuppositions of worshippers engaging in liturgical performances.

This arises out of a view of meaning as a *thing*, whose supposed location in either the text or the performance consequently becomes a puzzle or even an embarrassment to the conscientious interpreter. That liturgy is both text and performance - a text which *happens* in performance - is a principle which his essay never makes absolutely clear. Furthermore, his methodological separation of these two aspects in treating language and symbol disguises the fact that it is an impossible assignment to establish the priority of one over the other. It is not his purpose to present liturgy as an irrevocably divided entity, but his suggestions for its interpretation hold out little hope for an approach that acknowledges its full breadth at any one time. As the argument makes clear, the discipline has not yet discovered a firm theoretical base for conducting its investigations.

### 1.3 General Hermeneutics as a Model for Liturgical Hermeneutics

The problem encountered so far lies in the anxiety over a starting point for finding meaning in liturgy. This has as much to do with asking the right questions, as with applying the most appropriate interpretative procedure. A hypostatized view of meaning offers two options : the meaning of liturgical rites is either embedded in the text, or it is dependent on what worshippers bring to the performance. The dilemma indicates an immediate need to establish a set of working principles which resists the structuralist temptation to find the meaning of liturgy in its concrete and objectifiable aspects.

This project offers its own resolution, for the business of locating liturgical meaning which Stringer opens to examination is a definitively hermeneutic situation. That is to say that its solution is not to be found in an objective way, either in the language of religious rites, or in the symbols attached to their performance. As has been demonstrated, part of the awkwardness can be removed by treating meaning provisionally as *event* rather than as *thing*. This points in the direction of a method of interpretation that is normative only in its account of the way that meaning *happens* in liturgy. It is precisely this

condition which makes the hermeneutical principles developed by Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer in their theories of textual interpretation a valuable foundation for discussing liturgy.

It is useful to retrace the route that hermeneutics has travelled from its Romantic form to its most recent developments, especially in the work of Ricoeur and Gadamer, as we move on to consider how the difficulty may be readdressed. Romantic hermeneutics based its project of interpretation on the premise that the present reader was able to understand the original author of a text better than he understood himself. This referred not to what was actually said, but to the detection of the author's unconscious meaning in producing the text. As Ricoeur puts it, "the emphasis was on the ability of the hearer or reader to transfer himself into the spiritual life of a speaker or writer" (MCPH 177). Gadamer terms the understanding that was presumed to result a relation of "con-geniality" (TM 189), indicating the special rapport between the individual author and the individual reader. This stress on individuality is crucial since, as Ricoeur points out, "Romantic hermeneutics lays primary emphasis on self-understanding" (HD 132).

Ricoeur and Gadamer have been careful to detach their philosophical hermeneutics from Romantic hermeneutics, which held to a belief in the universal bond between



individuals<sup>16</sup>. Thus Ricoeur issues three important challenges which become the foundation of his own hermeneutic practice.

Firstly, against the Romantic ambition of "[understanding] an author better than he understood himself", he shows that "direct congeniality of one soul with another" (Appropriation 191) cannot be assumed as an automatic condition of the act of interpretation. The hermeneutic process of *appropriation* depends, rather, on the text's ability to propose a world to the reader (e.g. HD 140). The reader subsequently makes the world of the text his or her own, and his or her subjectivity is modified by the effects of the proposed world. In Ricoeur's account, this process occurs across the distance created by writing. Thus, because writing distances the author from the reader, and even the author from the text, "there is no longer a situation common to the writer and the reader" (HD 141). This releases the interpreter from the obligation of excavating the authorial intentions "concealed *behind* the text" and sets him or her free "to explicate the type of being-in-the-world unfolded *in front of* the text" (HD 141). Now it is the "world horizons of the writer and the reader" which converge,

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16. In addition to this summary, Ricoeur's own detailed statement of his departure from Romantic hermeneutics is a valuable source. cf. *Interpretation Theory : Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* Fort Worth : Texas Christian University Press, 1976 (6th repr.) 75-76

mediated by the text, in the movement that Gadamer terms "the fusion of horizons" (Appropriation 192).

Secondly, Ricoeur refutes the view that the understanding of the text's "original audience[]" has any bearing on the "hermeneutical task". Away from the circumstances of its author, the text is also distanced from its first recipients and "can procure new readers for itself" (Appropriation 192). Gadamer addresses this distanciation from the point of view of the verbal nature of tradition. A "written tradition" allows language to be separated from utterance and "[i]n the form of writing, all tradition is contemporaneous with each present time" (TM 390).

Thirdly, the claim that interpretation is bounded by "the finite capacities of understanding of a present reader" is denied. The interpreting subject cannot dominate "the meaning of the text" (this in any case implies the falsely reified notion of meaning which I have noted in Stringer's discussion). What is to be appropriated is not an intention "behind the text", but the world proposed *by* the text, or better still, "the proposal of a mode of being-in-the-world, which the text discloses in front of itself by means of its non-ostensive references." The subject does not impose his or her own self-understanding on the text. On the contrary, "appropriation is the process by which the revelation of new modes of being - or, if you prefer Wittgenstein to

Heidegger, new 'forms of life' - gives the subject new capacities for knowing himself" (Appropriation 192).

We are now in a position to review the ways in which Ricoeur and Gadamer perceive the situation of the interpreter *vis-à-vis* the text. For Ricoeur, this is chiefly a matter of the text's proposal of a world. He insists that the distancing of speech by writing must always "separate[] the message from the speaker, from the initial situation and from its primary receiver" (PHBH 94). But this, in fact, has productive results, since it frees the text to "'decontextualise' itself in such a way that it can be 'recontextualised' in a new situation." It is in the "act of reading" that such recontextualisation is "accomplished" (HD 139).

For Gadamer, this situation is approached by means of the respective historical positions or "horizons" of reader and text. The reader's horizon comprises those "prejudices" (TM 306) that we bring to the act of understanding. These are not to be confused with "a fixed set of opinions and valuations." The horizon of the present is constantly being formed and revised as our prejudices are tested in "encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come" (TM 306)<sup>17</sup>.

17. Gadamer's notion of "prejudice" should be considered in the line of descent from those structures of pre-understanding which Heidegger includes in his analysis of

Gadamer sums up the implications of the distancing process underpinning hermeneutical understanding, showing how it becomes actively beneficial to the interpretative process :

The hermeneutical situation is not a regrettable distortion that affects the purity of understanding, but the condition of its possibility. Only because between the text and its interpreter there is no automatic accord can a hermeneutical experience make us share in the text. Only because a text has to be brought out of its alienness and assimilated is there anything for the person trying to understand it to say.  
(TM 472)

Meaning is therefore no longer to be construed through retrieving something behind the text, but is inherent in a certain practice of interpretation. This leads to a statement of the aims of 'general hermeneutics'. Both Ricoeur and Gadamer would agree that the subject is founded in the dialectic between understanding the text and self-understanding, leading to what Ricoeur calls "the

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Being. cf. Martin Heidegger *Being and Time* tr. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1962; 10th repr. 1992 (I.5 §§150ff.); cf. also Theodore Kisiel "The Happening of Tradition : The Hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger" *Hermeneutics and Praxis* ed. Robert Hollinger Notre Dame : University of Notre Dame Press, 1985 3-31 Gadamer's position is established against the Hegelian dialectic, in which the notion of a "reversal of consciousness" (TM 355) leads to total "self-knowledge that no longer has anything other than or alien to itself" (TM 355). Thus he says :

The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself.  
(TM 355)

*appropriation of meaning*" (Appropriation 184-185). The following formulation encapsulates what is to be desired from the act of appropriation :

[T]he interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself.  
(What is a Text? 158)

#### **1.4 The Hermeneutics of Subjectivity and the Hermeneutics of Faith**

The issue of 'self-understanding' has to be detached from the question of undue subjectivism in interpretation. For this reason, Ricoeur devotes a good deal of time to the *distanciation* of the text from the author's original intentions which writing produces. Distanciation makes way for a seminal distinction between what Ricoeur calls the "narcissistic ego" and the "self" (Appropriation 193). Where the former assumes a superior understanding of an author's work by subsequent receivers, the latter is open to the action of that work upon his or her subjectivity. Instead of "imposing upon the text our finite capacity of understanding", we are to "[expose] ourselves to the text and [receive] from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed" (HD 143).

The moment of understanding is thus not controlled by the preconceptions of the subject : rather, "the self is constituted by the 'matter' of the text" (HD 144). At the same time, such a response to the proposed world of the text gives a precise sense of Ricoeur's use of the word "appropriation", which "ceases to appear as a kind of possession, as a way of taking hold of . . . It implies instead a moment of dispossession of the narcissistic ego" (Appropriation 193) under the guidance of the text itself. This co-operation with the text's injunctions for its interpretation leads to "self-understanding". Ricoeur notes that his use of this term is designed "to contrast the *self* which emerges from the understanding of the text to the *ego* which claims to precede this understanding. It is the text, with its universal power of unveiling, which gives a *self* to the *ego*" (Appropriation 193).

### **1.5 The Hermeneutics of Faith and Liturgical Hermeneutics**

Even at this early stage, the transfer from the *ego* to the *self* has significant implications for liturgy. The whole Christian background to acts of liturgical worship is rooted in the seeming paradox of giving up one's identity in order to recover an identity in Christ. This is not so much a paradox, however, as a hermeneutic exchange. The impetus of liturgical action is towards the transformation of individuals, who discover a new identity as members of a

worshipping community engaged in a journey of faith. In the return movement, that community is continually reconfigured by responding to individual needs in the context of its own action. It is this reconfigured community that returns from worship to life in the secular world.

I will offer that the liturgical correlate of the process of distanciation and appropriation has to be considered in two hermeneutically related stages. The first of these is the tradition of *the Faith*, handed down through the medium of scriptural writing, and distancing the congregation of the present time from the the original producer of the biblical utterance. It is understood here as a credal position based on biblical evidence, and amplified by the Church's doctrinal pronouncements. These are summed up, for example, in the tenets of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. The Faith is assumed as the basis of agreement in all the forms of ritual I will be considering. The second stage finds the worshippers appropriating the proposals of the Faith in acts of *faith*. Unlike the Faith, faith evades confident definition. It belongs instead to each individual worshipper, and has its being in the individual's appropriation of the community's proclamation of the Faith.

My argument is that, for textual purposes, the liturgical process begins with an assumption of the Faith, but that it only comes to its fulfillment through an act of faith made

possible by performance. The liturgical action marks the crossing of the divide between the Faith and faith. Liturgy is therefore a discourse, or better, a practice, generated by the tension between faith and the Faith. This is a version of the hermeneutic circle to the extent that neither can properly be identified as the origin of the discourse. Liturgical hermeneutics exercises this tension most fruitfully in showing the way for faith to cross the threshold between itself and the Faith, and appropriate the world proposed in the rite. Hermeneutics can proclaim this as a possibility, but cannot force it into being. The final task - the *leap of faith* - always lies with the performers at each enactment.

### **1.6 The Play of Language and the Claim to Truth**

By its nature, the Faith is always proposed to liturgical communities through the medium of language. The worshippers put their subjectivity at risk by responding to the linguistic proposal of the Faith, in acts of faith which are also acts of language, through what Gadamer terms the "play of language" (TM 490). This adds a further dimension to the hermeneutic process which begins in the co-existence of text and performance. To determine what it is about play that makes it a useful model for thinking through this relationship, we have to return to the first part of *Truth*



and Method, in which Gadamer analyses play as "The Clue to Ontological Explanation".

In general terms, Gadamer's use of the concept of play [Spiel] is to be distinguished from the more restricted implications of its English translation. In his lexicon, play is not a form of idle amusement, but an actual mode of being. Hence he is able to say that

play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play. Play - indeed, play proper - also exists when the thematic horizon is not limited by any being-for-itself of subjectivity, and where there are no subjects who are behaving playfully.  
(TM 102)

Gadamer's inquiry thus moves away from "the player's subjective reflection" (TM 102), and becomes a consideration of play as a phenomenon which supervenes over the player's consciousness (TM 101-120). This means that play takes responsibility for perpetuating the motion of the game, and consequently liberates the player to make choices. Hence, instead of having to initiate the game, the player can choose whether to enter into *this* game or another. As a corollary to freedom, however, there is a condition of *risk*:

One can play only with serious possibilities. Obviously this means that one may become so engrossed in them that they outplay one, as it were, and prevail over one. The attraction that the game exercises over the player lies in this risk. One enjoys a freedom of decision which at the same time is irrevocably limited.

(TM 106)

Later on, Gadamer extends the notion of the risk in play from the literalistic illustration of the game to the field of language itself. This leads to an address to the 'play' of human subjectivity in the act of interpretation :

The interpreter's own horizon is decisive, yet not as a personal standpoint that he maintains or enforces, but more as an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk.  
(TM 388)

The same principle is implicit in Ricoeur's adoption of the concept of risk in play as a model for literary hermeneutics. Ricoeur posits a metamorphosis of both author and reader in the playful act of presentation. This is akin to "the mysterious metamorphosis" experienced by a theatre audience when the lights are extinguished and the curtain raised. However, the example from the genre of dramatic presentation will readily admit the general statement that :

it is always a question of entering into an alien work, of divesting oneself of the earlier 'me' in order to receive, as in play, the self conferred by the work itself.  
(Appropriation 190)

Gadamer illustrates the giving up of subjectivity for the duration of play with reference to children dressing up. The object is to be recognised as the adopted persona. If the player should be recognised merely as him- or herself, the

act of imitation, and hence the game, has failed (TM 113). The revelation issuing from a successful surrender of subjectivity, on the other hand, is a recognition of "more than is already familiar" (TM 114), for here what emerges is "the essence of the thing represented" (TM 115 my italics), or "the lasting and the true" (TM 111).

Gadamer's detailed exploration of play provides essential grounding for the final section of *Truth and Method*, which investigates "The Ontological Shift of Hermeneutics Guided by Language". Close to the end of this section, he reflects on understanding as "a genuine experience (*Erfahrung*) - i.e., an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth". Since language is the medium in which understanding takes place, and since "the phenomenon of language and understanding proves to be a universal model of being and knowledge in general", it becomes possible at last "to define exactly the meaning of the truth at play in understanding."

Once more asserting his departure from Romantic hermeneutics, Gadamer presents "the words that bring something into language [as] themselves a speculative event". This gives them their independence from the constraints of intentionality. Obviously, factors such as "situation and context" will help to "[determine]" an utterance, but this "pertains not to the speaker but to what

is spoken". The poetic instance is exemplary, for here "meaning [ ] has dissolved into and been embodied in the utterance". Gadamer calls this a "coming into language", and claims for the process a "quality of self-attestation" :

In using words what is given to the senses is not put at our disposal as an individual case of a universal; it is itself made present in what is said - just as the idea of the beautiful is present in what is beautiful.  
(TM 489)

This allows him to formulate the relationship of truth to the idea of play :

What we mean by truth here can best be defined again in terms of our concept of play. The weight of the things we encounter in understanding plays itself out in a linguistic event, a play of words where we, as learners - and when do we cease to be that ? - rise to the understanding of the world. Here it is worth recalling what we said about the nature of play, namely that the player's actions should not be considered subjective actions, since it is, rather, the game itself that plays, for it draws the players into itself and thus itself becomes the actual subjectum of the playing.  
(TM 489-490)

Gadamer's account of the emergence of what is true in play, and especially in the play of language, is attractive because it resists the double assumption that there is truth behind the performance, which the latter is capable of mediating, and that truth itself has some sort of concrete existence. Yet on closer inspection, its adherence to the category of 'truth' as a label for the event of

understanding that comes about in language bespeaks an allegiance to a constative view of acts of language. 'Truth' automatically raises the issue of its opposite, 'falsehood'. This in turn suggests further ramifications, most immediately, that if 'successful' acts of language provide access to 'truth', then by implication, there are 'unsuccessful' linguistic events which are failures and therefore, according to this standard, also false. Taken to its limit, this projection freezes the event of understanding and gives it the character of an objective statement.

Ricoeur advisedly uses language with less concrete implications than those which suggest themselves in Gadamer's discussion, to express the relationship between the concepts of "appropriation and revelation" (Appropriation 191) which would correspond to Gadamer's "recognition" of "the lasting and the true". This trend reaches its apotheosis in his study of the parables. Here, he shows how a "logic of superabundance" (Specificity 138) governs the shape of the parabolic narrative. What the protagonist finally receives, and what later audiences finally learn, is always *more* than could possibly have been expected.

It is essential to remember, though, that the context of Ricoeur's account is invariably an interpretative situation

that operates between text and reader, and in which an original message is mediated across the distance created by writing. Obviously, the extreme individualism implied by the reader and his or her self can be broadened to embrace a community, for example, the community that inherits an entire salvation history through the tradition of biblical canon (PHBH 92). Yet this does not account for the actual event of the written text in performance. Ricoeur's lucid projection of the reader's appropriation of a proposed world, revealed in front of the text, will not extend by simple analogy to the way in which a performance might propose a world, nor can it describe how an engaged performer is to appropriate such a world. This relates to a narrative bias that is always present in Ricoeur's hermeneutics. It is worked out exhaustively in the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* as the prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration of experience.

The danger in the apparent orderliness of the narrative form, is that it can give rise to facile assumptions about a seamless progression from the text's proposal of a world, through distanciation by writing, to appropriation. This process demands no risks. Ricoeur does not, of course, espouse such a crude reduction, and is constantly alert to the need for self-reflection and openness to the engagement with the text that enables appropriation to occur. Nevertheless, the text-reader relationship holds open the

possibility that the reader will assume that what the text proposes, and what he or she appropriates, is in fact the truth.

It is therefore necessary to state, as a provisional conclusion, that while the theories of the play of language, and of the appropriation of a text's proposed world by a reader in the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Gadamer are helpful as a general model for liturgical operation, they are not to be regarded as a standard for measuring liturgical success.

### **1.7 Some Practical Problems of Applying a General Hermeneutic Model to Liturgy**

It is curious that two recent exercises in liturgical interpretation have chosen precisely the elements of Ricoeur and Gadamer's work which seem most open to question as their founding principles. Joyce Zimmerman's *Liturgy as Language of Faith*<sup>18</sup> sets up an analysis of liturgical language according to the models of Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics and Roman Jakobson's semiotics of the text. Kieran Flanagan, in *Sociology and Liturgy*<sup>19</sup>, studies aspects of liturgy in performance, and devotes some time to Gadamer's theory of

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18. Joyce Ann Zimmerman *Liturgy as Language of Faith* Lanham & London : University Press of America, 1988

19. Kieran Flanagan *Sociology and Liturgy : Re-presentations of the Holy* London : Macmillan, 1991

play as a tool for determining the roles of liturgical participants.

Zimmerman's structural-semiotic interest predisposes her to find objective meaning in the liturgical text. Treating liturgy as a "closed system of discourse" with its beginning and end connected by an "internal logic", she identifies the task of hermeneutics as being to "[uncover] this inner logic as a structure unique to that text". Her contention that the written form of the liturgical text grants it a distinctive "semantic autonomy" makes eminent sense. Yet a clear priority of the written text over the liturgical performance emerges from her analytical premises. Thus Zimmerman treats the celebration of a written liturgical rite as the text's means of imprinting its status as "event" on the course of history. Under these conditions, the performance has its principal function in "lending [the text] an historical dimension [which is] part and parcel of its meaning"<sup>20</sup>.

This surely misappropriates Ricoeur's theory of the text by implying strongly that liturgical texts carry an implicit and predetermined meaning, which is rendered explicit in performance. Viewed thus, the performance does not propose a world to the worshippers or, better still, allow the worshippers to assist in proposing the world of the rite. On the contrary, its purpose is to demonstrate that there is a

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20. op. cit 69



meaning to be extracted. Zimmerman derives a whole metaphor of liturgical interpretation from the primacy of the text :

The "reading" of a liturgical text is, in actuality, its celebration. From this, certain questions arise : Is the recovery of the meaning of a liturgical text a wholly subjective venture depending on its particular celebration by a local worshipping community ? Or is there an objectivity about its meaning that threads its way into each celebration, minimizing the conflict of interpretations ?<sup>21</sup>

Such a distortion shows how easily misappropriations might occur, and how little resistance Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics offers to an ideal of objective meaning. Part of the difficulty rests, of course, in the text-based nature of his hermeneutics. This makes it hard to avoid setting the issues of subjectivity and objectivity in liturgical interpretation in an either/or relationship.

Zimmerman does, in the end, move towards an interpretative project that aims to go beyond this early position, and to assert a hermeneutic connection between liturgy and faith. Her conclusion is that "the language of [Christian] praxis is the language of faith"<sup>22</sup>. Yet while this allows her to marry the terms of Jakobsonian semiotics to Ricoeur's theory of textual interpretation, it does not account for the way that faith might promote praxis, or how praxis might lead to faithful appropriations of the Faith. Just as seriously, it

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21. *ibid* 69

22. *ibid* 196

makes no provision for the connection to secular life which must necessarily be considered in any discussion of the liturgical participants' experience of worship. As long as the text has priority, questions like those Stringer has begun to raise, relating to the site of meaning in liturgy, will persist.

Flanagan has turned to the matter of how liturgy, and especially eucharistic liturgy, is performed in regular parish worship. His point of departure is the contribution that sociology can make to liturgy. As he describes it, attempts to explain "liturgical principles of enactment" by the resources of sociology "give[] rise to hermeneutic considerations"<sup>23</sup>. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should turn to Gadamer's discussion of play. But it is unfortunate that Gadamer's least successful illustrations, namely his remarks on the play of religious ritual, should form the basis for Flanagan's conclusions.

In the first section of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer gives the impression that in acts of worship, a spectator-actor relationship comes into being, on the analogy of the dramatic performance (TM 109, 110, 116). He makes some adjustments to the initial premise, and finally argues that the distinction between actor and spectator breaks down, because the play of ritual 'plays' the participant (TM 109-

23. *Sociology and Liturgy* 7

110). Nevertheless, this leaves room for misapplications of his example to arise.

Gadamer's theory of play is always vulnerable to misapplication if the complex ramifications of the concept of *Spiel* are not properly recognised. Flanagan's account, built as it is around the persona of the liturgical actor, has to superimpose a heightened subjectivity on the medial sense of play which is always at the root of Gadamer's work:

To some extent, this study provides a sociological insight into the plight of the liturgical actor endeavouring to purify his actions, lest they be presumptuous or conceited. The study stresses what the actor *intends* to conceive, even though he might not successfully realise his intention in a particular social transaction. This uncertainty amplifies conditions of deception, whether of the actor or his audience . . . .<sup>24</sup>

The literal instance of the dramatic element in ritual is closely compatible with Flanagan's concern with the pragmatics of performing liturgy, but it is certainly not Gadamer's last word on play. In one sense, the earlier discussion is to be seen as a preparation for the third part of *Truth and Method*, where the play of language itself becomes the central hermeneutic issue. It is possible to see from Flanagan's use of words like "intends" and "successfully" how the unsatisfactory aspects of this final part of Gadamer's work have filtered into his study. I would

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24. *ibid* 13

therefore agree with Flanagan that "[l]iturgy is a sociological rite capable of establishing and revealing the holy"<sup>25</sup>. Where I would differ from him, however, is in the matter of the way in which the holy is revealed. Flanagan is at all times anxious to reduce ambiguity, and to work against mistakes in performance. All of this supports his wish that "misunderstandings" in the "passage between the obvious and the unobvious" should be "minimise[d]"<sup>26</sup>. This pursues a fidelity to unitary, objective meaning. It forgets that understanding comes about through worship, and suggests instead that it is a single, constantly renewed act of meaning.

Likewise, Flanagan's optimism that doubts can be overcome in public ritual needs more searching analysis than it receives<sup>27</sup>. Certainly, the support of the liturgical community gives value to the whole enterprise of worship. But this does not guarantee a meaning for the rite. In fact, such a quest can only lead into the murky territory of a classification system which labels some performances 'successful', while it relegates others to the obscurity of 'failed' rites.

The rapid survey of Zimmerman and Flanagan's application of general hermeneutics to liturgy reinforces the founding

25. *ibid* 79

26. *ibid* 83

27. *ibid* 205

assertion of this project, namely that the liturgy calls for a special hermeneutics.

### **1.8 The Ground of Liturgical Understanding**

So far, the duality of the liturgical text and its performance has been explored through separate addresses to issues of language and issues of performance. That liturgy is an experience which is capable of incorporating whole communities suggests that there is a common basis of action that brings individuals together. This is not just a matter of agreeing on a shared liturgical text, for the matter is far more fundamental than that. We have now moved another step from the first advance, which took us from questions of the meaning of liturgy, to a concern with what makes liturgy a meaningful action. The next stage is to determine the ground or referent for meaningful action, as distinct from an endorsement of reified meaning.

David Tracy has expressed the notions of ground and referent under the broad concept of the 'limit' in religious language. Through his consideration of proverbs, proclamatory sayings and parables in the New Testament, he has identified in their language the "limits-to our everyday world", and also "some final limit-of dimension that seems

to ground all our experience"<sup>28</sup>. It is only by realising that there is something beyond our experience (a limit-to) that we become aware that ordinary language and knowledge are limited. Thus religious language and what is beyond it, religious experience and secular life, enter into a hermeneutic relationship :

The categories limit-language and limit-experience, therefore, seem useful, tentative, and admittedly revisionist formulations of the genuinely religious dimensions of both our common faith and our explicitly Christian faith. As such, the category may help free us from the reduction of religion to that revelational positivism called fundamentalism which proclaims intellectually untenable tenets as the meaning of a particular religion. That category may also free us from the too ready and too ideological denial by modern technological man of that "other" dimension to our lives. In fact there seem good reasons to suspect that no minor cause for the sometimes desperate thinness of much of our contemporary technological existence lies in our seeming inability to allow that other dimension in our lives. The liberation of our language and the liberation of our experience go hand in hand.<sup>29</sup>

Ricoeur treats the ground of religious language in a still more specific fashion, identifying it as the Kingdom of God. This is important as a way of focusing religious language, as well as giving a shape or location to the experience which takes place in worship :

I propose to say that the expression "Kingdom of God" is a limit-expression by virtue of which the different forms of discourse employed by religious

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28. David Tracy *Blessed Rage For Order* New York : Seabury Press, 1975 132

29. *ibid* 133

language are "modified" and, by that very fact converge upon an extreme point which becomes their point of encounter with the infinite.  
(Specificity 109)

Implicit in Ricoeur's choice of the Kingdom is the belief that the ground of religious discourse and the infinite are one and the same, and that encountering the Kingdom entails first of all assuming the Kingdom. We now enter an interpretative circle that denies any one point of origin for the practice of liturgy. The matter of whether worshippers continue to participate in liturgical action because they believe in the textually enshrined promise of the Kingdom, or whether they gain glimpses of the Kingdom as a consequence of their belief in the validity of the act of worship is not a case for decision, but for an act of faith. Liturgical hermeneutics is responsible not only for finding an adequate way of approaching this unique form of discourse, but also for seeking an ever more precise means of discussing liturgical faith.

In the essay "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics", Ricoeur lodges his treatment of faith in the hermeneutical "category" of appropriation. He states at once that

what in theological language is called "faith" is constituted, in the strongest sense of this term, by the new being that is the "thing" of the text.  
(PHBH 99)

He recognises possible objections to this apparent reification of faith :

This is not to say that faith is not authentically an act irreducible to all linguistic treatment; in this sense, it is indeed the limit of all hermeneutics, while at the same time standing as the nonhermeneutical origin of all interpretation. The endless movement of interpretation begins and ends in the risk of an answer neither engendered nor exhausted by any commentary.  
(PHBH 99)

In fact, all the features of faith that Ricoeur enumerates - its status as "ultimate care"; "feeling of absolute dependence"; "unconditional trust", are the means whereby "the thematics of faith eludes hermeneutics and attests to the fact that hermeneutics has neither the first nor the last word." At the same time, though, the linguistic function cannot be divorced from the consideration of that profession of faith which

remains inseparable from the structure of the narrative; not just any theology could be tied to the narrative form but only a theology that announces Yahweh as the great actant in the history of deliverance.  
(PHBH 92)

This also announces the promissory status of the Kingdom in the biblical tradition, which is just as important in the constitution of a liturgical faith. Central to the liturgical rites which subsequent chapters will investigate, it means accepting that one is the recipient of the promise



of the Kingdom. It also means, however, that the ability of the Kingdom to ground the discourse of which it is the promised end must be carefully assessed.

The arguments of negative theology, and perhaps especially those of Derrida (who has been co-opted into a theological position which he himself might deny), suggest how the whole project of positing God or the Kingdom of God as in some way the ground or the referent of all theological discourse might be redirected<sup>30</sup>. To note this debate all too briefly, I turn to Kevin Hart's study, *The Trespass of the Sign*. Hart shows, in his introductory chapter, how Derrida's analysis of the sign acts as a powerful critique of the metaphysical assumption that the sign is grounded in presence :

. . . the sign trespasses over its assigned limits, thereby blurring any qualitative distinction between the concept and the sign. And

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30. For an extended and rather complex account of Derrida's sense of the relation between his work and the project of negative theology, one should turn to the essay "How to Avoid Speaking : Denials" tr. Ken Frieden in *Languages of the Unsayable* ed. Sanford Budick & Wolfgang Iser New York : Columbia University Press, 1989 3-70. Here, Derrida insists that

what I write is not "negative theology." First of all, *in the measure* to which this belongs to the predicative or judicative space of discourse, to its strictly propositional form, and privileges not only the indestructible unity of the word but also the authority of the name - such axioms as a "deconstruction" must start by reconsidering (which I have tried to do since the first part of *Of Grammatology*). Next, *in the measure* to which "negative theology" seems to reserve, beyond all possible predication, beyond all negation, even beyond Being, some hyperessentiality, a being beyond Being." (7-8)

this 'trespass of the sign' . . . is one instance of the general mode of critique known today as 'deconstruction'. According to this critique, there is not a fall *from* full presence but, as it were, a fall *within* presence, an inability of 'presence' to fulfil its promise of being able to form a ground. Full presence, for Derrida, is not a prelapsarian ideal or an eschatological hope, but an illusory goal - the illusion being that there is in fact something outside the sign system which can escape its determinations.<sup>31</sup>

Confronted by Hart's exposition of the Derridean view of the sign, the experimental hypothesis requires adjustment. Since the Kingdom is always part of the liturgical sign system, albeit a privileged part, it cannot function as the ground of the discourse in which it figures so prominently. At the same time, by treating the Kingdom as an element in the sign system of liturgy in the conduct of worship, we can make it appear as an ongoing possibility. This view seems more constructive than a metaphysical conception of the Kingdom as a bright vision outside the liturgical process, where all the vehicles of worship converge. Yet the issue of the ground of liturgy remains unanswered : whether in fact it needs any ground at all on a conventional understanding. This question is determinative for liturgical hermeneutics.

Ricoeur's "biblical faith" offers a suggestive starting point by insisting upon the essential relationship of faith to language. This moves away from the sort of religious discourse grounded in a belief in God or the Kingdom, to a

31. Kevin Hart *The Trespass of the Sign : Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991 14 (first printed 1989)

position which, if anything, claims the scriptural assurance of the fulfilment of God's promises as its ground. It is only when the biblically promised "events of deliverance open and uncover the innermost possibility of my own freedom" that they "become for me the word of God. Such is the properly hermeneutical constitution of faith itself" (PHBH 99-100). Ricoeur's understanding of faith thus lies somewhere between Gadamer's notion of presence coming to presentation through play's transformation into structure and a Derridean denial of any ground at all for discourse.

In conclusion, I offer the following provisional account of liturgical hermeneutics. The hermeneutic enterprise is centrally concerned with the topics of self-understanding and experience as avenues that lead to the reconfiguration of the self. This is a process of constant revision, under the conditions of new experiences and the proposal of new worlds. It is hardly necessary to say that the reconfiguration of the self is not a matter of lightly trying on identities in the course of new experiences. On the contrary, it celebrates a profoundly playful seriousness in entering fully into each experience, bringing with it what it has gained previously, but meeting what is new with that faithful, intelligent openness which Ricoeur has called the "second naiveté"<sup>32</sup>.

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32. See for example Paul Ricoeur *The Symbolism of Evil* tr. Emerson Buchanan Boston : Beacon Press, 1969

### 1.9 A Programme for Analysis

The hermeneutics of liturgical faith has in common with Ricoeur's hermeneutics of biblical faith a centre in the process of appropriation of the world proposed - or, to use a stronger word, promised - by the liturgical event. But appropriation is not a process which stops with the recognition that this world is being made available. Rather, it makes the position of the worshipper one of greater awareness, and a correspondingly lesser degree of comfort than it had previously. For a new condition of responsibility now arises, demanding that the worshipper ask how he or she is to take up a place in, or inhabit, the proposed world. This entails positing a break or interruption in the relation between worshippers and their present ecclesiastical and secular attachments while this new position is under consideration. I will call the moment of suspension between the credal Faith in the promise of the Kingdom and the problem for faith of how to claim a stake in the Kingdom a threshold position. It defines a moment of risk, as the worshipper relinquishes all that he or she was before, in order to inhabit something that *is*, but not yet.

Analysis must steer a course between too rigorously prescriptive an account of this process, and a near-mystical opacity which refuses to give any helpful bearings to a

reader expected to follow its reasoning. In order to negotiate this difficulty, I have provided a glossary as a preface and companion to the treatment of liturgical rites in later chapters. This includes a small collection of terms which refer most urgently to the problems of liturgical hermeneutics. It is my hope, however, that the list might be open-ended, and that this thesis will only begin an investigation that will grow to need a more comprehensive descriptive vocabulary.

It must be emphasised at the outset that the glossary is not a list of definitions towards a speculative sequence of events in liturgical hermeneutics, to be illustrated by textual analysis of various liturgical rites. It is merely an aid to the reader in assessing the way that particular words are being used in unfamiliar contexts. The glossary is meant, therefore, to accompany each chapter, as and when it is required : it does not carry programmatic significance in the development of the argument<sup>33</sup>.

My selection of rites for detailed discussion reflects three situations in the experience of liturgical communities which seem to make exemplary demands on the faith of the participants. These are the eucharist, baptism of infants, and burial. Each of these rites takes place in the movement

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33. The model for a "mobile glossary" of this sort is to be found in Bill Readings' *Introducing Lyotard : Art and Politics* London & New York : Routledge, 1991

between the proclamation of the Faith through history and into the present, and the eschatological promise of the Kingdom which is appropriated in acts of faithful worship. Thus each of them will be approached as an innately hermeneutic situation that asks for an interpretative account of its procedures.

The next two chapters follow the eucharist in its *Book of Common Prayer* and *Alternative Service Book* forms. In Chapter Two, I explore the proposal of a world through the event of the eucharistic action of the 1549, 1552 and 1662 Prayer Books. A comparison of the differing patterns in these three versions shows how each one makes a distinctive proposal of the Kingdom. This occurs in a variety of ways, ranging from changes in the order of standard components, like confession and intercession, to non-textual changes which can only be gauged from the indications given in the rubrics for celebration. What emerges is that each of these forms finds its own way of offering the Kingdom. There is nothing arbitrary in their procedures. Each of them pursues a course which carefully places the prospective communicants in that relationship to the Kingdom which I have called a *threshold position*.

Chapter Three seeks those points in the ASB eucharistic rite from which worshippers can take up their stance towards the Kingdom. It argues that there is nothing intentional about

these threshold positions. They are to be understood as locations in which the worshippers find themselves under the guidance of the rite itself, as it 'happens' to them. This way of viewing liturgical participation is made more accessible with reference to an essay by Derrida which reflects on those accidents of communication. In particular, the essay considers what happens when individuals come to believe themselves to be definitively addressed by messages which then condition their future actions. This proves to be an apt analogy for the communication transmitted by repeated celebrations of the eucharist. It is always as a response to a personal invitation that congregations make their appropriation of the Kingdom that confronts them in the rite. The discussion shows that, while each celebration raises faith to language in order to guide the process of appropriation, no eucharist ever completes the process. In fact, completion would destroy the vital hermeneutic connection between sacred and secular life. The conclusion of the service is, therefore, an instruction to the community to return to the secular world renewed, changed, yet not separated from their everyday existence.

Chapter Four considers the role of the Bible in liturgy as the chief resource for giving a voice to faith. It moves outwards from the distinctively hermeneutic transaction within the biblical canon itself, which Ricoeur has made clear in his treatment of the relationship between the Old

and New Testaments. The discussion goes on to demonstrate how scriptural language can become part of the liturgical action. Thus its scope encompasses the eucharistic lectionary, as well as some of the biblically based prayers which show how the Faith can be appropriated in worship even before the community makes its own act of appropriation.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven think more carefully through the liturgical relationship between the individual and the community. In a comparative treatment of baptismal rites in the BCP and the ASB, Chapter Five considers the provisions made for proposing the Kingdom and making a means of appropriating it available. The difficulties it encounters could be summed up under the heading of the risk involved in making an act of faith. Where the BCP orders demand a considerable risk from the witnessing community, the ASB order attempts to control the risk by proposing certainty and security that can deplete the eschatological richness of the rite.

Chapter Six examines further efforts to control liturgical risks through the hermeneutics of appropriation in the BCP orders of burial. Death, it argues, precipitates the moment when real claims have to be made on the promise of the Kingdom. The BCP rites attempt to control this frightening leap by establishing a pre-determined appropriating community.



Chapter Seven argues that the funeral is not the time to impose restrictions on suitable inheritors of the Kingdom. Rather, burial is a rite of reconfiguration which must include the whole community. It is the great achievement of the ASB that its balanced liturgical address to the bereaved and the deceased makes such reconfiguration a genuine possibility.

The final chapter undertakes a double task. The first part of this is a review of the findings of the analyses conducted in earlier chapters. Thereafter, it turns to consider the potential of liturgy to be a model for other cultural practices. Liturgical hermeneutics must always assert its connection to the secular community, and this can only be fully achieved by enriching the worshipping lives and awareness of ordinary worshippers. To reiterate the practical sensitivity of Dom Gregory Dix :

Worship . . . is meant for the plain man to do, to whom it is an intimate and sacred but none the less quite workaday affair.<sup>34</sup>

### **1.10 A Summary of Aims**

Having determined a group of rites for study, there remains a chronological problem to be negotiated. Anglican liturgy

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34. *The Shape of the Liturgy* xiv

has been through successive major and minor revisions since the first *Book of Common Prayer* came into use in 1549. Indeed, the pattern continues, since the present *Alternative Service Book 1980* is licensed for use in worship until the year 2000, when revised versions of many of its services will replace existing forms. This demands close reflection on the nature of the exercise we are engaged in. By choosing to discuss only modern Anglican services (as contained in the ASB) we would lose the vital sense of continuity with a whole liturgical tradition. Any conclusions that emerged would inevitably suffer from a lack of depth and rootedness. If a purely historical route were to be adopted and, for example, the *Books of Common Prayer* of 1549, 1552 and 1662 became the focus of the project, the lively importance of any findings for congregations engaged in the practice of liturgy today would be hard to justify. In between these two poles lies a procession of slightly amended prayer books, and the much more influential proposed *Book of Common Prayer* of 1928, which was never authorised for use.

My solution is, if you like, the characteristically Anglican *via media*, which considers the event of liturgy through discussions of eucharistic, baptismal and burial rites from the *Books of Common Prayer* of 1549, 1552 and 1662, and from *The Alternative Service Book*. At times, this takes the form of comparative readings which try to draw out more or less happy ways of appropriating the Kingdom in the liturgical

process. On other occasions, I have treated a single version of a rite, where a careful and exhaustive unwrapping of its development has seemed to offer insights that would be obscured in comparative analysis.

In a group of rites which bear classification as 'rites of passage'<sup>35</sup>, the omission of an extended attention to marriage might seem a strange oversight. I have excluded marriage services from the development of my argument for two reasons. Firstly, the dictates of space militate against giving comprehensive treatment to a wide range of rites. Secondly, and far more significantly, marriage has less of the eschatological investment of its fellow rites of passage. The liturgy explicitly confines the bond that it creates to mortal life, with the following words appearing both in the BCP and (slightly modernised) in the ASB :

I, N. take thee N. to my wedded wife [husband], to have and to hold from this day forward . . . *till death us do part.*  
(ER II 805 : 1662 *my italics*)<sup>36</sup>

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35. This relies on the definitive classification of Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* tr. Monika B. Vizedom & Gabrielle L. Caffee London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960

36. Marriage is also tied very closely to ancillary secular social rituals, such as engagements, receptions, and even registry office ceremonies. In a recent study of death in modern American society, Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington make the observation that "[m]arriages are often solemnized in registry offices without the attentions of a religious specialist. But death demands a full religious service, with clergymen and congregation, even for those with only nominal church affiliations, or even none at all." *Celebrations of Death : The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* 2nd ed. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991 213

The fact that marriage is self-evidently grounded in the everyday realities of secular practice does, however, make it a valuable centre for some of the issues that arise from the topic of liturgical worship. The exemplary ethical and spiritual commitment that marriage partners seal liturgically is discussed in the final chapter, with reference to the ASB form of the marriage service.

At all times, I have had to be content with a notion of the 'ideal performance'. This assumes a rite which follows the provisions of the written liturgy closely, and does not fluctuate according to the whim of the priest or the congregation. Such an assumption does not, of course, exactly reflect the procedures carried on day by day in Anglican churches. Equally, it does not seek a platonic liturgy on which all other liturgical rites are modelled. Always, it must be emphasised that little profit will accrue from treating services as illustrative models for the methodological hypotheses of liturgical hermeneutics. For each one of the joyous discoveries that emerge as a form of worship unfolds, there are frustrations. It is not always clear, for example, how the eschatological promise is to be appropriated, or how the worshipping community is to understand itself as a result of its liturgical participation. The thesis aims to present bearings for finding and appropriating the world of the Kingdom through

the experience of the liturgy, and this demands a habit of attention to the words and the actions of rites which nevertheless does not make them ends in themselves.

Liturgical hermeneutics aims to show that worship is better, the better it understands itself, or the better its practitioners understand it. This - to take us back in a wide sweep to Stringer's article - is well beyond debates over "a language understood of the people", or even the demystification of language for liturgical use. On the contrary, liturgical hermeneutics strives to preserve the duality in each liturgical performance of an action meaningfully rendered, yet never exhausted in any one performance.

This project is offered as a way of finding and applying an interpretative vocabulary for liturgy outside of conventional historical and textual studies. But it is also written for all those churchgoers who will politely pass over its theoretical claims and turn instead to the sections of the whole which address their own liturgical practice. For ultimately, the appropriation of the proposed world of the Kingdom rests with the performer, and the most that this thesis might hope to achieve is to illuminate the promise from the Gospel of Matthew which repeatedly found its way into the texts of the Reformation Prayer Books :

Come ye blessed children of my father, receyve the  
Kingdome prepared for you from the beginning of  
the world.

(ER II 877 : 1552 & passim)

## GLOSSARY

**Appropriation** : defined by analogy with the process of appropriation that general hermeneutics identifies in the reader-text relationship. Here, the act of appropriating a proposed world occurs across distances created by writing and by historical time. The reader has to give up prejudices in relation to conceptions of the world and of personal identity and context in the encounter with the text, in order to receive an "enlarged self". This "enlarged self" is reconfigured under the influence of the proposed world of the text.

In liturgical hermeneutics, the proposed world is projected through the performance of a liturgical rite to participating worshippers. Here, **appropriation** describes a process in which the performers recognise the world proposed by the rite, and make claims upon it within and beyond the terms of the performance. The rite cannot impose temporal limits, because the liturgical relinquishing of an imperfect and prejudiced self may only be resolved in a world still to be inherited. This world, which the thesis understands consistently as the *Kingdom of God*, is the limit or referent of liturgical rites and their performance. Thus the liturgical definition has added an eschatological condition to the secular definition.

**The Faith** : the doctrinal statements enshrining the founding beliefs which underpin liturgical rites and their performance. In particular, these include scriptural texts used in liturgy, creeds, articles of faith, and their subsequent appearances in such formulations as baptismal vows and eucharistic prayers. It is important to recognise all these statements as components of the *promise* of salvation which binds humanity to God in a reciprocal relationship.

**Faith** : personal appropriation of the statements of the Faith in and beyond the context of liturgical action. Faith is demonstrated, for example, in the congregational response to baptismal vows, and the *agnus dei* preceding the administration of communion. It is both a vehicle which makes sense of ritual action, and the non-measurable result of ritual action, under the hermeneutic scheme adopted here. Above all, faith acts on the promise of salvation contained in the Faith (q.v. **risk**).

**Threshold** : a liturgical threshold is that meeting point in the experience or performance of liturgy between the world of mortal existence and the proposed world of the Kingdom. Consciousness of a threshold can be part of the construction of a rite. Thus, for example, the eucharist is orchestrated in such a way that the communicants are brought as it were face to face with the presence of God in the moment of



reception. The same consciousness can also be induced by experiences such as birth and death, where the eschatological claim to the inheritance of the Kingdom must be asserted. Both of these exemplary instances require that the worshippers act according to belief in the promissory statements that have led up to the pivotal action. For this reason, I will say that the threshold marks the gap between the Faith and faith which liturgy in performance has to cross.

**Threshold Position** : the position taken up with respect to the proposed world of the Kingdom from which an act of appropriation can be made. It differs from the **threshold** itself, in demanding that the worshipper examine his or her particular relationship to the Kingdom. This leads to the act of faith that crosses the divide between the Faith and faith. Given an **ideal liturgy** (q.v.), the development of the rite will place the worshipper in a threshold position and motivate the moment of appropriation.

**Risk** : there is no certainty about successful appropriations and successful crossings of liturgical thresholds, since these concepts cannot be defined as measurable quantities. Every crossing of the threshold between the certainties of this world and promises of the proposed world, therefore, also demands an initially untutored appropriation, in faith, of the terms of the Faith. Thus a *leap of faith* is involved

in making these promises one's own, in the absence of prior guarantees. A further risk lies in the extent of the commitment involved in each leap of faith. Especially in view of the promissory structure of liturgical understanding, the promiser may be led beyond any position which he or she is able to imagine in fulfilling his or her side of the reciprocal promise between God and humanity.

**Ideal Liturgy** : forms of ritual action in which the process of appropriating the Kingdom moves at the speed of the performance. This rules out propositional failures on the part of the rite, and failures of response to the proposed world on the part of the performers. Although the present study bases its performative projections on paradigmatic texts, these forms of service do not conform to the ideal pattern. One of the tasks of a liturgical hermeneutics is to provide terms for the hermeneutic process which occurs, even when rites and performers fall short of perfection.

**Liturgical Time** : the fusion of the horizons of mortal time (the temporality of everyday secular experience) and the time of the Kingdom of God (the temporality that ends all temporality) in the time of the liturgical performance.

## CHAPTER TWO : THE PROPOSAL OF A WORLD IN EUCHARISTIC TEXTS AND PERFORMANCES

### 2.1 A Programmatic Introduction

As a first exercise in the practice of liturgical hermeneutics, this chapter explores the ways in which the BCP communion rites of 1549, 1552 and 1662<sup>1</sup> propose the world of the Kingdom of God to the body of worshippers. These forms are an instructive paradigm for the direct negotiation between a *community* and its mode of worship. Together with Chapter Three's study of the ASB eucharistic order, they also provide terms for building an understanding of method that can be applied to the complementary concern, in subsequent chapters, with the liturgical treatment of the *individual* in baptism and burial.

### 2.2 The Physical Context of Liturgical Worship

The fundamental hermeneutic assumption in the case of both the community and the individual is that the Kingdom is at once the ground of liturgical action, and its eschatological destination. This manifests itself in its simplest form as a function of space and architecture, when the congregation presents itself to the possibility of the Kingdom by moving

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1. The terms "eucharist", "[holy] communion" and "mass" will be used as synonyms throughout the thesis.

out of the secular space, into the place set aside for worship.

Lawrence Cunningham has given this everyday occurrence extended treatment in a reflection on his own experience of entering his parish church<sup>2</sup>. Cunningham describes how the worshipper's response to the architectural arrangements and precisely focussed ecclesiastical symbolism of the church induces the sense that he or she is standing in the presence of God. The church Cunningham recalls made its intentions clear by labelling the arch at the entrance with the words, *Haec est porta coeli* (this is the gate of heaven). Even without such assistance, however, worshippers would sense quickly enough that everything around them was demanding an acknowledgement of the presence of God.

The literal, substantial aspects of ecclesiastical architecture have the capacity to posit God's presence because they demand a form of concentrated attention that temporarily displaces secular preoccupations<sup>3</sup>. By itself,

2. Lawrence S. Cunningham "Sacred Space and Sacred Time : Reflections on Contemporary Catholicism" *The Incarnate Imagination : Essays in Theology, The Arts and Social Sciences* ed. Ingrid H. Shafer Ohio : Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988 249-250

3. The rudimentary treatment it has received here only hints at the major contribution that the study of church architecture has to make to the understanding of liturgical worship. The following studies should be consulted : G.W.O. Addleshaw & F. Etchells *The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship* London : Faber & Faber, 1948; repr. 1950; Peter Hammond *Liturgy and Architecture* London : Barrie & Rockliff, 1960; Nigel Yates *Buildings, Faith and Worship* :

the act of entering a church might be read as a statement of liturgical intent, marking an interface between humanity and divinity, and suggesting how their meeting is to be negotiated. But as it stands the account is incomplete, for presence is reciprocal rather than unidirectional, and dynamic rather than static. If worshippers are to enter a liturgical situation as though entering the presence of God, God must, by the same token, be thought of as coming into presence as the rite unfolds. This sets the scene for the appeals that are made for divine participation inside the place of worship, through ritual language and action. The daily offices of Mattins and Evensong use psalms, prayers and readings to recall God's co-operation in human worship. The eucharist includes all these opportunities for reminding the congregation that their presence is answered by God's presence, but also adds the central action of giving and receiving which marks the offering, blessing and distribution of bread and wine.

### **2.3 A Comparison of the 1549, 1552 and 1662 Communion Rites**

With close attention to the structure of the BCP communion rites, I shall locate some possible positions of encounter with the Kingdom (the referent of all the liturgical acts which the thesis discusses) prepared for participants in the

rites. The analysis will follow the roles of text and performance in the process of proposing the Kingdom in a broadly comparative way. In a parallel reading of the 1549 and 1552 services, I will take account of the consequences of shifts in Reformation theological thought evidenced in textual changes from 1549 to 1552. These are to be identified in the placing of penitential, intercessory and offertory formulae, as well as in some eloquent omissions in the 1552 rite. The comparison goes beyond a simple structural exercise, however, to project the differences between the 1549 and 1552 worshippers' encounter with the Kingdom.

Few changes of a textual or sequential nature distinguish 1662 from 1552. The differences have to be sought in the provisions governing performance in the later service, and are crucial to any understanding of the mechanisms for proposing the Kingdom. Thus the final part of the analysis will give general consideration to the power of performance, incorporating both gesture and church furnishings, to bring about a certain proposal of the Kingdom and to direct its appropriation through liturgical action, before applying these criteria to the 1662 service.

The purpose of the chapter as a whole is not to suggest that one pattern is correct, while another is eccentric. Rather, the argument will be that all three rites are vehicles that

can direct their users towards a personal appropriation of the Kingdom. As Geoffrey Wainwright has written :

In the eucharist, man's dependence on the transcendent Creator for his life is made clear by the fact that we are there fed on the divine gifts of bread and wine : and in the final kingdom we shall continue to be entirely dependent on God for our preservation. In the eucharist, the divine gift is also more intimate than an external provision for physical needs; it is the Lord Himself who comes and bestows the gift of His own presence on His people, a presence so intimate that we may be said to feed on Christ : and to inaugurate the final kingdom the Lord Himself will come, and the life of that kingdom will consist in the permanent enjoyment of the inexhaustible gift of His presence. As the eucharist, so also the final kingdom which it promises : both are first and foremost a divine gift. But the divine gift is to be appropriated by men, to be received and actively displayed to the glory of God.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the worshippers' sense of the Kingdom is conditioned by its presentation in the rite, a point which Wainwright's non-comparative study does not need to state. I will contend, however, that by itself, the rite cannot guarantee the act of appropriation. It is here that renewed appeals must be made to the distinction between faith and the Faith. For I am considering three models for the interaction of more or less rigid documents of the Faith, and the faith of congregations who must find some way of making these tenets their own.

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4. Geoffrey Wainwright *Eucharist and Eschatology* London : Epworth Press, 1971 148.

## 2.4 Doctrinal Differences and their Liturgical Consequences

Historians of the English Reformation and historical liturgists have traced and retraced the steps leading to the telling changes in structure and content that mark the passage from the *First Book of Common Prayer of Edward VI* (1549) to its successor<sup>5</sup>. I am concerned here with the practical consequences in verbal and architectural terms of the alterations. These are most apparent in the fact that the *Second Book of Common Prayer of Edward VI* (1552) took care to avoid any suggestion, either in its wording or in the sequence of its development, that *consecration* of bread and wine was taking place. It also omitted all forms of prayer for the dead.

5. There is space for no more than the briefest account of some of the arguments for the changes distinguishing the 1549 communion rite from the 1552 version. Whether Archbishop Cranmer did indeed redraft 1549 to eliminate those vestiges of Roman Catholic doctrine which Stephen Gardiner, who was deprived of the Bishopric of Winchester in 1548, gleefully enumerated, or whether the 1552 version speaks straightforwardly of changes in Cranmer's own thinking and that of his liturgical colleagues, is a question that has not been resolved. In 1549, Cranmer published a "Defence of the True and Catholick Doctrine of the Sacrament". Gardiner replied to this in December 1550 with "An Explication and Assertion of the True Catholic Faith, Touching the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, with Confutation of a Book Written Against the Same", suggesting that Cranmer's position as professed in the "Defence" was not, in fact borne out by the 1549 eucharistic rite. Cranmer refuted the accusation in his answer to "A Crafty and Sophisticall Cavillation Devised by M. Stephen Gardiner" in 1551. It is widely accepted, though, that aspects of the 1549 service in which Gardiner had identified Romanising trends were carefully reviewed and strategically altered before the promulgation of the 1552 BCP.



The first of these issues can be addressed by referring to the exhortations to worthy reception in the communion rites of the 1549 and 1552/1662 Prayer Books. Their accounts of what the communicants are *doing* in the eucharist are useful indexes to the boundaries of the inquiry. The 1549 exhortation defines the eucharist in the following way :

And to thend that wee should alwaye remembre the excedyng love of oure maister, and onely savior Iesu Christe, thus dying for us, and the innumerable benefites, whiche (by his precious bloudshedyng) he hath obteigned to us, he hath lefte in those holy Misteries, as a pledge of his love, & a *continuell remembraunce of thesame his owne blessed body, & precious bloud, for us to fede upon spiritually,* to our endles comfort and consolacion.

(ER II 652 : 1549 my italics)

1552 presents this foundation for understanding :

And to thende that we should alwaye remembre the exceding greate love of oure maister, and onely Savioure Iesu Christ, thus dyinge for us, and the innumerable benefites (whiche by his precious bloudshedinge) he hath obteyned to us, he hath instituted and ordeyned holye misteries, as pledges of hys love and *continuell remembraunce of hys death,* to our greate and endles comferte.

(ER II 679-681 : 1552 my italics)

The two rites thus diverge according to their understanding of divine presence, or perhaps of divine absence, in the elements of bread and wine. With its view of each celebration of communion as a spiritual feeding on Christ, 1549 promotes an active participation and hence an active

appropriation of the benefits offered in the communion. Even though the 1549 doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the elements was quite other than a belief in rejected pre-Reformation notions of transubstantiation, it remained too problematic to be part of the 1552 communion service. This means that the *Second Prayer Book* determinedly suppresses any possible thought that Christ might be mysteriously present in the elements. The 1552 order treats the eucharist as a memorial, and not as an oblation or sacrifice. The Kingdom is absorbed through contemplation of Christ's death as an action done *for us*, and recollected, but not made contemporaneous, in the thought of the service.

The second major point of interpretational difference lies, as I have mentioned, in the 1552 version's denial of the efficacy of prayer for the dead, since their welfare was held to lie beyond the control of those who survived them. The consequences for the language of the communion rite will readily be guessed. No prayer for the dead (and this included thanksgiving for the life and example of the Virgin Mary, and all the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles and Martyrs) finds its way into the Prayer for the Church, nor is there any reference to the dead in the consecration prayer.

As for the shapes of the two services, there are further alterations to be noted in their respective understandings

of the offering of bread, wine and alms. Where in 1549 the offertory leads straight into the Prayer of Consecration, in 1552 the collection of alms leads into the Prayer for the Church. Thus the 1549 service fuses the human act to the narrative of Christ's self-offering, while the 1552 rite enforces a strict separation between the congregation's offering of intercession for themselves and for the larger ecclesial body, and the memorial of Christ's death.

Following rather than preceding the offertory in 1552, the three exhortations to worthy reception, to self-examination before communion, and against negligence in coming to the eucharist<sup>6</sup> reinforce the distinction between the act of preparing to receive the elements, and the memory of the self-offering of Jesus. The confession, absolution, comfortable words, *sursum corda*, proper preface and prayer of humble access follow the exhortations in 1552, and precede the consecration<sup>7</sup> and communion. In 1549, the Prayer

6. There is a great deal more to be said about the exhortations in their own right. Rowan Williams has commended their value as part of a penitential preparation for communion that affirms the life of the liturgical community in his essay "Imagining the Kingdom : some questions for Anglican worship today" (Bryan Spinks & Kenneth Stevenson eds. *The Identity of Anglican Worship* London : Mowbray, 1991 1-13 ). David Jasper addresses their power as instruments of the rhetorical control of the community in "What's a Nice Text like You Doing in a Place Like This? Archbishop Cranmer's Prayer Book of 1549" (David Jasper *Rhetoric, Power and Community : An exercise in reserve* London : Macmillan, 1993 72-88).

7. The question of whether there is in fact a consecration in 1552 is open to debate. I use the term here to denote a position in the canon, rather than to take up the theological argument.

for the Church stands after the *sursum corda*, proper preface, and *sanctus*, which announce the beginning of the action of consecration, and the actual consecration prayer. The administration of communion is deferred while the Lord's Prayer, confessional action, and prayer of humble access intervene. This leaves just the thanksgiving and blessing for the post-communion section. In the case of 1552, the communion is followed by the Lord's Prayer, either the prayer of oblation or the prayer of thanksgiving, the *gloria*, and the blessing.

## **2.5 Structural Divisions in Liturgy and their Hermeneutic Significance**

In a review of the arrangement of components in the 1549 and 1552 eucharistic rites, a number of clearly marked sectional divisions emerge. The spectrum of positions structurally present in the rite covers points of introduction, instruction, confession, offering, intercession, consecration, reception, and thanksgiving, differently arranged in each case. As the comparative table which follows will show, the 1549 and 1552/1662 eucharistic models are quite differently weighted. Thus, at the outset, assumptions can be made about the significance attached in each case to the various actions that constitute the whole eucharistic celebration. These assumptions begin to point beyond the structural markers in the action which I have

treated thus far, to the place of the worshippers in relation to acts of consecration and reception.

These positions are close to what the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep had in mind when he extended his theory of initiation practices as patterns of "separation, transition, and incorporation" to include comment on the eucharist :

It would be easy to show that the ritual of the Mass also constitutes a sequence of rites of separation, transition, and incorporation. The only theoretical distinction between initiation and the Mass is that the latter is an initiation which is periodically renewed.<sup>8</sup>

Although I do not follow an anthropological line, it is nonetheless helpful to keep Van Gennep's model in mind as an external way of marking for worshippers those places in the liturgical topography where they might begin to define their approach towards God, their worthiness or unworthiness as candidates for the Kingdom, their position as receivers in the face of enormous sacrifice, and their ability to give reciprocally. This would hold, whether the Kingdom were seen as emerging in a curiously retrospective way, where the eucharist operates as the memorial of the first coming, celebrated until the second coming, or whether it were regarded as always present before worshippers, just as Christ is always present in the gift of his body and blood.

8. Arnold Van Gennep *The Rites of Passage* tr. Monika B. Vizedom & Gabrielle L. Caffee London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960 96

Thus the advance is initially towards the effects of the dynamics of the rite on human subjectivity. Thereafter, it becomes possible to question the threshold positions, *vis-à-vis* the Kingdom, in which the worshippers find themselves as the rite develops.

A detailed scheme of the changes of order from 1549 to 1552 can be found in the accompanying table. Although the 1662 column duplicates the 1552 column, it is not otiose, since the table is intended to be read with a view to the way in which its illustration of structural issues can be projected onto hermeneutic issues. In a preliminary discussion, I have shown how the communion service proposes different aspects of God, and different ways for the liturgical community to perceive itself. In the transition from 1549 to 1552 this occurs through observable variations in the sequence of ritual events. For the second stage (1552-1662) the structural evidence must be amplified with reference to those performative aspects of liturgy which are not readily tabulated.

In all three cases, there is an additional imaginative component to be considered. For the arrangement of steps in each version 'imagines' a certain kind of community, implicated in particular temporal relationships. Already, I have noted that 1549 understands a communion of saints, which includes the dead and enlists the prayers of the

saints and angels. 1552 restricts its conception to the community of the faithful living, whose own hope of the Kingdom is not supported by faith that others have already attained it.

Furthermore, both situations address the complexities of liturgical time and real time. In the case of 1549, faith in Christ's sacramental presence, in the ministry of the angels, and in the prayers of the dead brings together the horizons of the mortal present, the historical past, and the eschatological future. For 1552, liturgical time is always present time, and thus always distanced from its historical horizon, though not necessarily in a way that makes appropriation of the proposed Kingdom easier.

COMPARISON OF THE 1549, 1552 & 1662 COMMUNION RITES<sup>9</sup>

<u>1549</u>	<u>1552</u>	<u>1662</u>
Lord's Prayer	Lord's Prayer	Lord's Prayer
Collect for Purity	Collect for Purity	Collect for Purity
<i>Kyrie eleison</i>	Ten Commandments with <i>Kyrie eleison</i>	
<i>Gloria</i>		
Salutation		
Collect of the day	Collect of the day	Collect for King
Collect for King	Collect for King	Collect of the day
Epistle	Epistle	Epistle
Gospel	Gospel	Gospel
Creed	Creed	Creed
Sermon/Homily	Sermon/Homily	Sermon/Homily
Exhortation(s)		
Offertory	Offertory	Offertory
	Prayer for Church	Prayer for Church
	Exhortations	Exhortations
	You that do truly	You that do truly
	Confession	Confession
	Absolution	Absolution
	Comfortable Words	Comfortable Words
<i>Sursum corda</i>	<i>Sursum corda</i>	<i>Sursum corda</i>
Proper Preface	Proper Preface	Proper Preface
<i>Sanctus</i>	<i>Sanctus</i>	<i>Sanctus</i>
<i>Benedictus</i>		
	Humble Access	Humble Access
Canon : Prayer for Church		
Consecration	Consecration	Consecration
Oblation		
Lord's Prayer		
Christ our Paschal Lamb		
You that do truly		
Confession		
Absolution		
Comfortable Words		
Humble Access		
Communion	Communion	Communion
<i>Agnus dei</i>		
Post-communion		
	Lord's Prayer	Lord's Prayer
	Oblation or	Oblation or
Thanksgiving	Thanksgiving	Thanksgiving
	<i>Gloria</i>	<i>Gloria</i>
Blessing	Blessing	Blessing

9. This table has been adapted from Geoffrey Cuming A *History of Anglican Liturgy* 2nd ed. London : Macmillan, 1982 80. The 1662 column has been added.



## 2.6 Introducing the Eucharistic Action

The interdependence of the separate moments of the communion service in projecting the hermeneutical potential of the whole is appropriately demonstrated from the collect that opens all three rites, the so-called Collect for Purity. It belongs to a genre of liturgical prayer that is conventionally used to open up the path to a further stage in liturgical action. The most common encounter with the collect-form is in the early section of the eucharist, where it adumbrates the themes of the epistle and gospel. Its structure accordingly reflects the exigencies of the inaugural task.

The collect always begins with an apostrophe to God. Next, it adds an attribute of the divine nature appropriate to the concerns of the prayer, in the form of an adjectival clause. This is followed by a petition dependent on the stated characteristic, and a statement of the desired result of God's specific intervention in the lives of the worshippers. Finally, the prayer is offered through a mediating agency, usually that of Christ.

What the whole construction looks forward to, is a reconfiguration of the faulty humanity of its users, towards that rigorously examined and enhanced subjectivity which is

born out of the process of appropriation. It has connotations of progress from an unsatisfactory condition to a new state of being which is emblematically completed within the parameters of liturgical time, but it also mirrors that journey towards the Kingdom which completes all time.

The Collect for Purity uses the conventional attribution to make clear the dauntingly omniscient nature of God :

Almightie GOD, unto whom all heartes bee open, and all desyres knowen, and from whom no secretes are hid: cleanse the thoughtes of our heartes, by the inspiracion of thy holye spirite: that we may perfectly love thee, and worthely magnifie thy holy name: Through Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(ER II 640 : 1549)

The terms of the prayer are, however, relying on a presumed, and strongly anthropomorphic, duality in the divine nature. They open fallible humanity's susceptibility to its own ambiguous power of imagination, to God's disciplinary inspection. Yet, at the same time, this is an invocation to a loving God, who looks indulgently on the private desires of human beings, and can be confided in with complete trust.

Mortal limitation thus becomes a virtue in the short-term as a means of access to communication with God, provided that it is never accorded a value or permanence above its role in creating a pathway for the exchange between God and

humanity. For God is not being posited as a reward for good behaviour lying outside the liturgical system of development from penitence to renewal. The collect makes its claim by presupposing a dynamic divine presence, who enters the system to enable those who are subject to its rules to grow away from their ignoble traits, and towards their aspirations as potential members of the Kingdom. This is to acknowledge God as an agent in the ritual process, entering the action on its own terms, rather than dominating it from beyond the act of worship.

The anticipated result of the petition reserves judgment on God's double potential for love and discipline. Instead, it turns its attention to the people, whose new state of being will enable them to love God "perfectly" and "worthely magnifie [his] holy name". Thus although the channel of communication has been opened, the aspect of God to which the congregation will respond in the rest of the service is not, as yet, rigidly determined.

In the case of 1549, God's role gathers definition as the ninefold *kyrie eleison* attributes the face of mercy to the divine presence. Immediately after this, the *gloria* adds majesty to the existing picture and completes a preliminary context, or mini-threshold, for the further interpretation of divine action in the eucharist of 1549. Reassured that mercy and grace are at hand to transform the act of worship

into a worthy offering, the members of the congregation are able to acclaim the exultantly glorious aspect of God. Moreover, the prospect of the whole heavenly order stands before them, as a foretaste of the Kingdom, in the opening words (from Luke's gospel) of the angels who announced Christ's birth :

Glory be to God on high.  
And in yearth peace, good will towardes men.  
(ER II 644 : 1549)

Love, mercy and glory therefore undergird the reception of the epistle and gospel, and support the move back to the realm of mortal need and earthly government indicated in the collects for the day and for the king. Since the daily collects change in accordance with the Church's calendar, they constitute far too large a subject for the present discussion. In the case of the collects for the king, however, their substance is a reminder that the earthly order is subsidiary to, and must always strive to emulate, the heavenly Kingdom, as the following extracts show :

Almightie God, whose kingdom is everlasting, and power infinite, have mercie upon the whole congregaciō, and so rule the heart of thy chosen servaūt Edward the sixt, our kyng and governour: that he (knowyng whose minister he is) maye above all thinges, seke thy honour & glory . . . .

Almightie and everlasting GOD, wee bee taught by thy holy worde, that the heartes of Kynges are in thy rule and governaunce, and that thou doest dispose, and turne them as it semeth best to thy godly wisdom . . . .  
(ER II 646 : 1549)

The 1552 order advances from the Collect for Purity to a full catalogue of the Ten Commandments. This addition is a perfectly logical corollary to the collect's petition that the thoughts of the congregation's hearts should be cleansed, for self-examination according to the Decalogue covers every aspect of human sin. At the same time, it displaces the merciful God of the *kyrie eleison* by stressing the legalistic side of the divine nature. If God is merciful, the congregational response to each commandment suggests that he exercises his mercy chiefly in encouraging obedience:

Lord have mercy upon us, and encline our heartes  
to kepe thys law.  
(ER II 641-645 : 1552)

Since there is no *gloria* to moderate the legalistic tone in the contemplation of heavenly glory at this juncture, a new interpretative context now surrounds the reception of the collect, epistle and gospel. With particular reference to the collects for the king, whose earthly polity aims to meet its heavenly counterpart, we might guess that emphasis would fall on their invocations of rule, authority, service and obedience. Thus the recitation of the divine law reinforces the earthly order in 1552, where in 1549 the earthly order is offered the heavenly order as its model. 1552 develops the theme of order and government as it moves through the

reading of scripture, the recitation of the Creed, the sermon or homily, and the offertory, to a lengthy exhortatory and confessional section. 1549 postpones the confession, and so allows the offertory a force which it designedly lacks in 1552.

### 2.7 Offering, Consecration and Reception

In the 1549 version the juxtaposition of the offertory and the subsequent action of laying bread and wine on the altar, with the *sursum corda* has the force of conflating the offering of the eucharistic elements with the self-offering of the people who are exhorted to "Lift up [their] heartes" (ER II 682 : 1549). The service persists in its incorporating pattern by including the Prayer for the Church in the canon of the mass, and retains prayer for the saints, and for the dead, so that the whole communion of saints stands recollected and presented :

. . . And especially we commend unto thy merciful goodnes, thys congregacion whiche is here assembled in thy name, to celebrate the commemoracion of the most glorious deathe of thy sonne: And here wee doe geve unto thee moste high prayse, & heartie thankes, for the wonderfull grace and vertue declared in all thy saintes . . .  
 . . . We commende unto thy mercie (O Lorde) all other thy servauntes, whiche are departed hence from us, with the signe of fayth, and nowe do reste in the slepe of peace: Graunte unto them, we besече thee, thy mercy, and everlasting peace, and that at the daye of the generall resurreccion, we and all they whiche bee of the misticall body of thy sonne, maye altogether bee set on his right hand, and heare that his most ioyful voice: Come

unto me, O ye that be blessed of my father, and  
 possesse the kingdome whiche is prepared for you,  
 from the begynning of the worlde . . . .  
 (ER II 688-690 : 1549)

In the space between the Prayer for the Church and the administration of the consecrated bread and wine, 1549 emphasises the majesty of Christ's atoning sacrifice, and its efficacy for all, the living and the dead. It incorporates all orders of creation when the eucharist is celebrated. Thus, at the close of the consecration prayer, the human response to God's love expressed in Christ asks for the mediation of the angels, so that "these our prayers and supplicacions [may], by the ministerye of thy holy Angels, [ ] be brought up into thy holy Tabernacle before the syght of thy divine maiestie" (ER II 694 1549). This is in sharp contrast to 1552, where the presentation of the elements and self-presentation are sternly divided by the Prayer for the "Churche militant here in earth" (ER II 663 : 1552), the confession, the absolution, and the comfortable words.

Where 1549 carries most of its substance from the start of the canon to the communion, 1552 is densest in the middle section (from the offertory, through the penitential prayers, to the Prayer of Humble Access) which prepares the congregation for the act of reception<sup>10</sup>. Viewed in the light

10. Colin Buchanan argues that the emphasis in 1549 falls in two places. In a subsidiary way, the stress is on consecration, followed by major emphasis on reception. Of

of 1552, the whole process of consecration in 1549 has seemingly gone on independently of the spiritual state of prospective communicants, for 1549 places confession, absolution and humble access after consecration, the Lord's prayer, and "Christ our paschal lābe".

It would be false, though, to take this as an indication of the primacy of the elements, with secondary consideration being given to the adequacy of the receivers. If the consecration is an all-embracing action which brings together the whole creation, then part of it is the act of consecrating the prospective communicants, and hence setting them aside for the holy action of receiving the consecrated elements. The order of events reflects the drama of reception, so that they receive forgiveness and then at once receive Christ, even though they are "not woorthie so muche as to gather up the cromes under [his] table" (ER II 700 1549). The impropriety of approaching God as a sinner almost at the very moment of reception has to include the risk of rejection. Yet the rite is not dealing with the logic of human behavioural conventions, but with the paradoxical logic of God<sup>11</sup>. The same generous transformative power which

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the 1552 rite, Buchanan says that "[i]t is far more internally consistent to read 1552 as having no consecration at all. The *only* possible action with the bread and wine is reception." *What Did Cranmer Think He Was Doing ?* 2nd ed. Bramcote, Notts : Grove Books, 1982 22

11. I shall return to this subject in later chapters. It would be hard to improve, however, on Ricoeur's exposition of both this subject and the notion of the extraordinary breaking through the ordinary (Specificity 115 & passim).



invests ordinary bread and wine with the significance of the presence of God can work upon humanity to make it worthy to accept this gift, so that, in the words of the Prayer of Humble Access :

[the people] may continually dwell in [Christ], and he in [them], that [their] sinful bodies may be made cleane by his body, and [their] souls washed throughe his moste precious bloud."  
(ER II 700 : 1549)

The administration, therefore, completes the consecration of the communicants *through* reception :

The body of our Lord Iesus Christ whiche was geven for thee, preserve thy bodye and soule unto everlasting lyfe.

The bloud of our Lord Iesus Christ whiche was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soule unto everlastynge lyfe.  
(ER II 700 : 1549)

## **2.8 Penitential Action**

The simple repetition of the words of confession has its own immediate effect in restoring the people to a state of readiness to receive communion. As the discussion of the moment of reception in 1549 reveals, however, the penitential formulae of eucharistic rites are always in volatile contact with the divine presence. They represent moments of disproportion and tension, temporarily disorientating the propriety which governs the relationship

between God and humanity, in order to reorient it under conditions of forgiveness<sup>12</sup>.

1549 seizes upon penitence as an interface with divine grace, even though this means that it has to work against sequential logic in order to reveal the apparently illogical nature of salvation. So the congregation begins its celebration in contemplation of a merciful God, and moves forward to praise and offering, and thence to a fully inclusive intercession which unites them with the whole communion of saints. Their self-oblation is a daring amalgamation of total dedication, humility, a sense of personal unworthiness, and a determined confidence in the nature of God which the earlier part of the service has affirmed :

. . . And here wee offre and present unto the (O Lord) oure selfe, oure soules, and bodyes, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee : humbly besechyng thee, that whosoever shalbee partakers of this holy Communion, maye woorthely receive the most precious body and bloude of thy sonne Iesus Christe : and bee fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and made one bodye with thy sonne Iesu Christ, that he maye dwell in them, and they in hym. *And although we be unworthy (through our manyfold synnes) to offre unto thee any Sacrifice : Yet we besече thee to accepte this our bounden duetie and service, and commaunde these our prayers and supplicacions, by the ministerye of thy holy Angels, to be brought up into thy holy Tabernacle before the syght of thy divine maiestie : not waying our merites, but pardoning our offences . . . .*  
(ER II 694 : 1549 my italics)

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12. See Ricoeur on "reorientation through disorientation" (Specificity 114 & 126).

This would hardly seem the appropriate time to remind God that those who make their offering and keep the memorial of Christ's death are unworthy. 1552, after all, places the general confession well before the consecration, as if to avoid precisely this problem :

Almighty God, father of our Lorde Iesus Christe, maker of all thinges, Iudge of al men, we knowledge and bewayle our manyfolde synnes and wickednes, whiche we from tyme to tyme most greuously have committed, by thought, woorde, and dede, agaynst thy devyne Maiestie : provokinge most iustley thy wrath and indignacion against us: we do earnestly repent, and be hartely sory for these our misdoynge : the remembraunce of them is grievouse unto us, the burthen of them is intollerable : have mercy upon us, have mercye upon us mooste mercyfull father, for thy sonne oure Lorde Iesus Christes sake : forgeve us all that is paste, and graunt that we may ever hereafter, serve and please thee, in newness of lyfe, to the honour and glorie of thy name. Through Iesus Christe oure Lorde. Amen.

The absolution that follows provides that necessary reassurance to penitents, clearing the way for their unclouded approach to the communion table :

Almightye God our heavenly father, who of his great mercy, hath promised forgevenesse of synnes to all them, whiche wyth hartie repentaunce and true faythe, turne unto him : have mercy upon you, pardon & deliver you fr̄ all your synnes, confirme and strengthe you in all goodnesse, and bring you to everlasting lyfe : through Iesus Christ our Lorde. Amen.

(ER II 681-683 : 1552)

Nevertheless, the risk in the 1549 service succeeds. For the acknowledgement of sin at the close of the prayer of consecration ("not waying our merites, but pardoning our offences") lends great comforting power to the priestly proclamation that 1552, with its aversion to sacrificial suggestion, omits :

Christ our Pascal lābe is offred up for us, once for al, whē he bare our sinnes on his body upō the crosse, for he is the very lambe of God, that taketh away the sinnes of the worlde: wherfore let us kepe a ioyfull and holy feast with the Lorde.  
(ER II 696 : 1549)

This operates as a direct answer to the hesitancy of the preceding self-offering : the congregation can now offer themselves knowing that their sins have been offered up once and for all, and that this all-sufficient sacrifice requires no answering immolation. At this point in the celebration, the priest, who has faced the altar throughout the earlier part of the service, turns to face the people and invites them to confess their sins. Here, confession occurs in the light of the knowledge that Christ is the atoning "Pascal lābe". As the priest turns from the eastward celebrating position to face the congregation, the people are both literally and figuratively confronted with their own unworthiness to receive the sacrament. The moment is therefore rich in dramatic tension, for this is a final

opportunity to lay claim to God's forgiveness before receiving the body and blood of Christ through faith.

The rapid emotional transitions and evocative ritual actions that characterise the 1549 penitential sequence are the antithesis of 1552's measured progress through the forms of intercession, exhortation and confession that prepare the congregation for the canon and the communion. The latter gives the appearance of a well-considered system of organisation. It reduces the 'confusion' of 1549's penultimate section, and leaves a clear progression from consecration to reception, uninterrupted by confessional or acclamatory utterances. There is a powerful appeal here to the claim of logic, since the preceding exhortations against negligence, to worthy reception, and notably (the exhortation that was always included) to self-examination presuppose penitence as a direct response to the need for thorough self-examination.

The close association of the confession and the 1552 eucharistic exhortations escapes the apparent sequential inconsistencies of 1549 more as a function of doctrinal thinking than through any instinct for tidy construction. We are to remember always that the eucharist in 1552 is a memorial and not a consecration in conception, and that it is going to terminate in a reception for which prospective communicants have to be ready. There is no other opportunity

for preparation before a reception which flows out of the last words of the canon.

### 2.9 The Prayer of Humble Access

The congregation's last self-examining statement before receiving communion in both 1549 and 1552 is the Prayer of Humble Access. In the later version, its immediacy is somewhat offset by the intervening consecration prayer. The 1549 rite increases its emphasis by holding it over to be recited just before the administration :

We doe not presume to come to this thy table (o mercifull lorde) trustinge in our owne righteousnes, but in thy manifold and great mercies: we be not woorthie so muche as to gather up the cromes under thy table, but thou art the same lorde whose propertie is alwayes to have mercie: Graunte us therefore (gracious lorde) so to eate the fleshe of thy dere sonne Iesus Christe, and to drinke his bloude, in these holy Misteries, that wee may continually dwell in him, and he in us, that oure sinful bodies may be made cleane by his body, and our souls washed throughe his moste precious bloud.  
(ER II 698-700 : 1549)

As I have noted, 1552 places this much earlier. Colin Buchanan rationalises its new position after the *sanctus* (as opposed to immediately before the administration of communion) thus :

Let us suppose that on a first draft [Cranmer] moved all the 1548<sup>13</sup> penitential material together to before the beginning of the canon. His difficulty then was the transition from humble access to 'The Lord be with you'. Humble access led nowhere; the canon started nowhere. But a slight glance of the eye would show that to omit the *last* item of the 1548 material (viz. humble access) and the *first* item of the old canon (viz. the salutation) would leave a fine transition. Now 'we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins' is to be followed by 'Lift up your hearts'. This not only is good in its liturgical flow - it also assisted Cranmer in his concern to emphasize the presence of Christ 'bodily' in heaven, and not here . . . . Another transition was set up, almost as if by accident. The Benedictus Qui Venit was removed from the end of the Sanctus, and whole biblical order of Isaiah 6 came to light. If we catch the vision of God and sing the angels' song, then, if Isaiah is to be believed, we immediately express our own unworthiness. What could be more natural than the location of humble access at this point ?<sup>14</sup>

Buchanan's case is to be commended for its exposition of system, even if it avoids the performative implication of the role of the prayer in 1552. For standing where it does, *before* the consecration prayer, with the congregation gathered round the communion table, it speaks poignantly of the gap between God and the human creation which is "not worthy so much as to gather up the crommes under [his] Table" (ER II 691 1552) that is spanned by Christ's death.

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13. As a first step towards the reform of the communion service which became part of the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*, Cranmer drew up a separate Order of Communion for use in 1548.

14. op. cit 27

Yet the 1549 location for the Prayer of Humble Access calls Buchanan's use of the word "natural" to describe its 1552 position into question, since a strong case can be made, by appeal to a different set of principles, for finding its position in 1549 equally natural. Now the prayer addresses the imminent event of reception which, no matter how often it is repeated, always finds the communicants confronting the baffling proximity and distance of God (in "Christ our Paschal Lābe") at the very moment of their most intimate approach to God's presence.

It seems vital to the thinking in each version, that the communicants should feel themselves to be powerfully re-created out of the abjection of their sinful natures, in order to participate in the communion. The jarring disequilibrium between human sin and the perfect and sufficient offering of Christ strikes at the heart of any sense of personal sufficiency on the part of the congregation. We have to be aware, though, that there are two methodological movements at work. For 1552, the problem is solved by making confession a preface to the narrative of Christ's atonement. For 1549, the act of penitence constituted by the confession, absolution and prayer of humble access is a striking case of that reorientation through disorientation which Ricoeur has isolated as the special property of powerful religious discourse (Specificity 114, 126). The audacity of presenting



undeserving humanity to the majesty of divine generosity is possible, and indeed necessary, for the paradoxical reason that it is impossible. Unthinkable as it is, it remains the only way in which the undeserving can receive the transforming benefits of sacramental reception.

### **2.10 Offering, Consecration and Reception : The Possibility of the Kingdom**

Offering, consecration and reception have entered our field of investigation so far as structural divisions that can help to mark threshold positions in eucharistic experience. Together with thanksgiving, they require extension now, from moments of anticipation and possibility in the course of the celebration, towards the strongly eschatological understanding of the eucharist.

The distinction between co-operative reception, which is also a kind of appropriation of the Kingdom, and passive acceptance is quite evident in the consecration prayers of the 1549 and 1552 rites. In 1549, God and humanity are seen to be working together to accomplish the eschatological possibility, even in the narrower terms of the isolated moment of consecration. Thus the epiclesis calls God into presence :

. . . Heare us (o mercifull father) we besech thee: and with thy holy spirite and worde

vouchsafe to blesse and sanctifie these thy gyftes, and creatures of bread and wyne, that they maye be unto us the bodye and bloud of thy moste derely beloved sonne Iesus Christe . . . .  
(ER II 692 : 1549)

This is to be compared with 1552's careful editing, which leaves us with the impression that humanity waits while God acts :

. . . Heare us O mercyfull father wee beeseche thee: and Graunte that wee, receyvng these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy sonne our savior Iesu Christes holy institucion, in remembraunce of his death and passiō, may be partakers of his most blessed body and bloud . . .  
(ER II 693 : 1552)

Where 1549 states that Christ broke the bread "when he had *blessed*, and geven thanks" (ER II 692 my italics), 1552 says more conservatively that "in the same night that he was betraied, [he] toke bread, and when he had geven thanks, he brake it" (ER II 693). This refusal to allow the divine presence *in* the eucharistic elements accounts for the ambiguity of the phrase "may be partakers of his most blessed body and bloud" with which 1552 replaces 1549's "that they maye be unto us the bodye and bloud of thy moste derely beloved sonne." The later version would allow both a present interpretation (thus implying the presence of Christ in the consecrated elements) or an eschatological interpretation (that we may be partakers of Christ's body and blood in the inheritance of the Kingdom). Again, the issue devolves largely upon differing conceptions of time.

If 1549 allows mortal time and eschatological time to meet under the conditions of liturgical time, 1552 keeps the two dimensions separate.

The 1549 canon includes the self-oblation of the communicants who, in addition to "[celebrating], and [making] here before [God's] divine Maiestie, with these [his] holy giftes, the memoriall whiche [his] sonne hath willed [them] to make", go on to offer themselves :

. . . And here wee offre and present unto the (O Lord) oure selfe, oure soules, and bodyes, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee: humbly besechyng thee, that whosoever shalbee partakers of this holy Communion, maye woorthely receive the most precious body and bloude of thy sonne Iesus Christe: and bee fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and made one bodye with thy sonne Iesu Christ, that he maye dwell in them, and they in hym. . . .  
(ER II 694 : 1549)

The canon of 1552 stops at the end of the institution narrative and proceeds at once to the administration of the elements. Only after the communion is there an opportunity - and then in an optional prayer - for the people to offer themselves to God. Colin Buchanan discusses the swift passage from Christ's injunction to eat and drink "in remembrance of me" (ER II 693 : 1552) to literal eating and drinking as a telling instance of the influence of performance on the logic of liturgical composition :

Why merely say we eat and drink, when in fact what we are supposed to do is actually to eat and drink? The question is unanswerable. So the eating and drinking itself got moved to follow the narrative - and that is the key to the whole reconstruction. Because the communicants were near the table there was an actual continuity of action between saying ' . . . Do this . . . in remembrance of me' and administering the elements . . . . There is no need to look for any doctrinal motivation whatsoever in that change - the liturgical exactness of the words needed in the new position for the administration is ample reason in itself.<sup>15</sup>

Once again, I am not wholly convinced by Buchanan's argument. While it makes perfect positional sense, it omits to mention that the 1552 administration is a convenient way of ensuring that no self-oblation, or anything else not directly related to the "*memorial* of [Christ's] death and passion", creeps into the consecration prayer. 1552 effects the separation by moving the prayers of oblation or thanksgiving to the post-communion position, whereas 1549 includes the oblation in the canon, as we have seen, and has only the thanksgiving prayer after the communion.

While the prayer of oblation retains the concept of self-offering, albeit not in conjunction with the prayer over the elements, the prayer of thanksgiving, less contentiously, stresses only reception. Their optional status in the 1552 communion service means that, in order to be "very membres incorporate in [God's] misticall body, whiche is the blessed companie of all faythfull people", the liturgical community

15. op. cit 22

need not necessarily have offered themselves as a "reasonable, holy and lively Sacrifice" (ER II 707 : 1552), Likewise, the fact that they are "also heyres throughe hope, of [his] everlastyng kyngdome . . . ." (ER II 709 : 1552) can be attached to the fulfilment of the command at the beginning of the 1552 canon "to continue a perpetuall memorye of that [Christ's] precyous death, untyll hys commynge agayne" (ER II 693 : 1552). Instead of marking a threshold of possibility, giving access to heaven via the "ministrye of [God's] holy Angels" (ER II 694 : 1549), then, the 1552 thanksgiving tends towards a closure of association, a limit beyond which worshippers may not go in their anticipation of the revelation of the Kingdom.

### **2.11 Liturgical Contexts and the Question of Presence**

Beginning as a wholly literal account of structure and sequence in the eucharistic rite, this chapter has arrived at the point where it has to confront the problem of distinguishing the presence of God in the liturgical action from the presence of God in bread and wine. This reveals how the hermeneutic method of interpreting liturgy is generated by the rite at the same time that it is applied to the rite. In this example, the eucharist has become a paradigm of the hermeneutic approach to the presence of God in performative liturgy. The 1549 picture provides a means for the congregation to co-operate with God at each celebration in

bringing the Kingdom to fruition. At the same time, it frames the anticipation of the prospect of heaven in the context of spiritual nourishment, sustaining the worshippers into eternal life. 1552 complies with the command to remember Christ's death until his second coming in the administration of bread and wine. Yet, by avoiding any hint of his presence in these elements, it effectively resists the overlap of mortal experience with the eschatological vision inside of liturgical time.

The difference, in the movement from 1549 to 1552, is marked in one way by a ritual presentation of the Faith that raises the faith of the worshippers to a self-conscious level. In the background of 1549 and 1552, there are rubrics to maintain the self-conscious concern with presence that the rites subsequently mediate to the communicants. The specifications for the kind of bread to be used at the communion service, and the manner of distribution, in the 1549 rubrics explicitly encourage faith in Christ's presence in the elements :

For avoyding of all matters and occasion of discencion, it is mete that the bread prepared for the Comunion, be made through all this realme, after one sorte and fashion: that is to say, unleavened, and rounde, as it was afore, but without all maner of printe, and some thing more larger and thicker then it was, so that it may be aptly devided in divers pieces: and every one shalbe devided in two pieces, at the leaste, or more, by the discrecion of the minister, and so distributed. *And men must not thinke lesse to be received in parte, then in the whole , but in eche*

*of them the whole body of our savioure Iesu Christe.*

(ER II 716 : 1549 my italics)

The rubrical provisions against the superstitious abuse of consecrated bread amplify the notion of divine presence :

it is thought convenient the people commonly receive the Sacrament of Christes body, in their mouthes, at the Priestes hand.

(ER II 1549 718)

There is no room for this kind of belief in 1552, where the rubric insists that :

. . . to take awaye the supersticion, whiche any person hathe, or myghte have in the bread and wyne, it shall suffyse that the bread bee suche, as is usuall to bee eaten at the Table, wyth other meates, but the beste and pureste wheate bread, that conveniently maye be gotten.

(ER II 717 : 1552)

This is reinforced by the provision for any bread and wine left over after communion :

And yf any of the bread or wine remayne, the Curate shal have it to hys owne use.

(ER II 717 : 1552)

At face value, all these instructions are safeguards of reverence and common sense. Under the conditions of a hermeneutic reading, though, they express additional anxieties. 1552 resolutely keeps its face turned away from the illogical logic of religious language that allows the

extraordinary to break through the ordinary, by stressing the everyday nature of the bread. 1549 moves to the opposite extreme by refusing to recognise the ordinary origins of the extraordinary. In 1552, 'empty' signs take on exaggerated significance because their non-symbolic nature is so vigorously asserted. 1549's explicit claim of significance for the very smallest fragments of consecrated bread arguably blurs the borderlines of sacred and secular. What seems to be at work is a fragile structure of language and symbol that cannot close itself, and sometimes cannot agree with itself, no matter how much effort is made towards this end. Thus, in the case of 1552, the analysis has shown how attempts to exclude a form of presence in the elements run aground on the claims on presence that are doctrinally and performatively necessary to the administration of communion.

Recollection of the theoretical questions of sign and presence, which I sketched briefly in Chapter One, suggests that the problem is as pertinent to current concerns as it was in 1552. On a Derridean reading such as Kevin Hart's<sup>16</sup>, one would have to say that 1552 tries to keep Christ as a living presence outside of the eucharistic sign system of bread and wine, yet cannot succeed totally in this project. The theology of the eucharist as the memorial of Christ's death is one approach to solving the problem, since it

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16. Kevin Hart *The Trespass of the Sign* 14-15. See discussion in Chapter One.



recalls the saving results of the passion without admitting any form of the divine presence in the consecrated elements. In this way, it evades the dilemma of defining exactly what it is that communicants are *receiving* when they participate in the eucharistic celebration, by transferring the debate to what they are *doing* (i.e. remembering Christ's death).

Yet it is precisely this doctrinal bias that makes 1552 vulnerable to the claim of presence : we are simply dealing with a different reconstruction or imagining of presence from that encountered in 1549. As Hart shows, signs "trespass" over their allotted boundaries when their ultimate referents are somehow drafted into service within the sign system<sup>17</sup>. I suggest that 1552 unavoidably transgresses the theologically imposed rules of its sign-system in its conditions of performance. It may rigidly deny any change in the elements, but by presenting them dramatically to the communicants as if Christ himself were present ("Doe this in remembrance of me"), it reduces the distinction between memory and presence to infinitesimal proportions.

## **2.12 1552 to 1662 : The Performative Context**

In the BCP communion rites, and especially 1552, a seemingly easily controlled semiotics of presence is continually in

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17. loc. cit

tension with a more volatile semantics of presence, since the same signs may not necessarily be appropriated in identical ways<sup>18</sup>. The performative deployment of signs becomes increasingly important as a tool of interpretation in the development from 1552 to 1662, because the two rites are architecturally identical. There are a few crucial textual changes which demonstrate the changes in the theological grounds of the eucharist. Thus to begin, we can point to the reintroduction of prayer for the dead at the end of the prayer for the Church Militant, though not, of course, on the lavish scale of 1549 :

. . . And we also bless thy holy name, for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear, beseeching thee to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of thy heavenly kyngdom . . . .  
(ER II 665 : 1662)

Likewise, the words of administration retain the unwieldy double formula of the 1559 Elizabethan Prayer Book, which asserts not only reception, but what it is that is being received :

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18. In this connection, the discussion between Ricoeur and Derrida which took place in Montreal in 1971 is instructive. Ricoeur accused Derrida of being involved exclusively in a semiology, and never offering a semantics. He stated the perceived deficiency in Derrida's work as the total absence of "a theory of meaning." The discussion is printed as an appendix to Leonard Lawlor's extended comparison of the two thinkers in *Imagination and Chance : The Differences Between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida* Albany : State University of New York Press, 1992. See esp. 138

The body of our Lord Iesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soule unto everlasting life : take and eat this in remembrance that Christ dyed for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.

The blood of our Lord Iesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soule unto everlasting life : drinke this in remembrance that Christs blood was shed for thee, and be thankfull.  
(ER II 701 : 1662)

Nevertheless, the structural replication argues that, for the most part, 1662 accepts 1552's procedures for proposing the Kingdom to the congregation.

As Colin Buchanan's depiction of the transition from the 1552 communion service to that of 1662 shows, performance - or at least putative performance, deduced from rubrics - is a vital element in assessing the operation of the 1662 eucharistic liturgy. Where the offertory, consecration, and distribution are concerned, it would be hard to improve on Buchanan's incisive summary of the few alterations in the Restoration service :

Although 1662 . . . kept Cranmer's text (as opposed to rubrics) almost unchanged, yet the seventeenth century was finally rivetted onto that text. The opening rubrics were surprisingly left unchanged, but thereafter the Laudian picture emerged. After the offertory, bread and wine were to be placed on the the table. Before the 'Prayer of Consecration' (so dubbed) the priest has to 'order' the bread and wine. In the narrative of institution there are five indented rubrics (. . .), including a 'fraction'. The narrative is followed by 'Amen', sealing the division between consecration and reception. After the administration comes provision for supplementary consecration, and for the covering of consecrated

remains (but the curate can take home any unconsecrated).

What are we to say to these things ? In wording (and thus in explicit doctrine), the service stands where it stood in 1552. And yet the 'feel' of it is subtly changed. The priest functions 'up there'. The consecration is a priestly event. The consecrated elements have a special character independently of reception . . . .<sup>19</sup>

The indication of Buchanan's assessment is that real change is to be sought not in the text, but in the directions for performance. Factors such as the migration of the altar back to the east wall from its 1552 position in the midst of the congregation, the manual actions attached to blessing the bread and wine, and the reverent disposition of any residue allow the 1662 service to transgress the boundaries of its verbal architecture. Although the 1552 orientation towards a legalistic God is preserved in the Ten Commandments, the process of a consecration which occurs beyond the worshippers reminds them of their anticipation of the Kingdom, while the words of administration convince them that their action has been a true participation in the body of Christ, in preparation for his coming again. In this light, the terminal *gloria* in 1662 truly can affirm the glory that has manifested itself in the eucharistic celebration, whereas the 1552 *gloria*, in the same position, has less of a sense of the heavenly mystery to endorse its acclamation.

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19. *ibid* 31

### 2.13 Proposing and Appropriating the Kingdom

Buchanan's description of the role of 'props', principally the remote altar with its linen cloth in 1662, really demands fresh consideration of the conventional ways of thinking about embarking upon liturgical activity, and anticipates the concern of liturgical hermeneutics with the threshold positions that locate the worshippers with respect to the proposal and appropriation of the Kingdom.

Reflection on the differences that characterise the 1549, 1552 and 1662 communion orders gives a clear indication of the distinct world that each communion rite proposes. A conclusion of this kind might appear, at first, to be incompatible with the stated contention that liturgical rites characteristically both propose the Kingdom, and take it as their referent. In reply, I will say that the concepts of a *referent* and a *proposed world* have their own integrities, both in secular and in liturgical discourse.

As Ricoeur has shown in his discussion of Frege's categories of 'sense' and 'reference', there need not be a unique reference for every sense, since different articulations might convey different senses of the same entity or concept (RM 217-218). In company with all branches of hermeneutics, liturgical hermeneutics is committed to resisting narrowly representational claims that demand a one-to-one

correspondence between the proposed world and the mechanism of proposal.

The chapter has argued that the business of appropriating the proposed world of a liturgical text starts from its structure, as this is revealed through performance, an assumption that is consistent with the broadest terms of hermeneutics. Ricoeur gives a preliminary definition of "[h]ermeneutics" as "simply the theory that regulates the transition from the structure of the work to the world of the work" in his study of "Metaphor and Reference" (RM 220). To some extent, this is the premise I have used in showing how the organisation of components in a liturgical rite can contribute to proposing a world, without setting restrictions on what that world should be. However, Ricoeur insists that this is only a "first approximation" to the whole question of reference in discourse. The next step is to go beyond "the restriction of reference to scientific statements." Hence, in a "second formulation", Ricoeur argues that :

the literary work through the structure proper to it displays a world only under the condition that the reference of descriptive discourse is suspended. Or to put it another way, discourse in the literary work sets out its denotation as a second-level denotation, by means of the suspension of the first-level denotation of discourse.  
(RM 221)

With this as a guide, we can say of 1549 and 1552 that both orders propose the Kingdom, although each presents it uniquely. But there remains a further step if the worshippers' experience is to be properly accounted for. Liturgy in action does not allow the luxury of distancing by writing that is fundamental to Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics. The actual words of the rite and its sacramental signs have an active role in providing the worshippers with the means for imagining, and laying claim to the Kingdom. Therefore, under the performative conditions attached to liturgical texts, the "first-level denotation of discourse" remains important, even where we accord primary importance to the "second-level denotation" or proposed world. Mark Searle has written :

Sacraments, like metaphors, are successful to the degree that they succeed in pointing beyond their literal meaning, yet also like metaphor they cannot dispense with that literal meaning. Bread has to be bread in the usually accepted sense of the term (. . .) for it to be an adequate sacramental sign.<sup>20</sup>

Any other conclusion would deny the real importance of the differences between 1549 and 1552<sup>21</sup>.

20. Mark Searle "Liturgy as Metaphor" *Worship* 55 (1981) 107

21. David Jasper's reading of the 1549 communion rite in *Rhetoric, Power and Community* takes the first-level structures of the work through a process of acute rhetorical scrutiny. This produces an account of 1549 as a manipulative, oppressive, and sinister document. While I do not agree entirely with Jasper's conclusions, his demonstration of the power of the liturgical text as it is performed to influence the worshipper must remain a central consideration in liturgical interpretation.

This returns the debate to the whole issue of the relationship between liturgical texts and their performances, and between rites in action, and the texts that furnish their patterns. Liturgical hermeneutics is able to add to this discussion, the conviction that the worshippers bring an initial *faith* in the world being proposed to their participation. In the presence of faith, the world of the rite is expressed both in the "first-" and in the "second-level denotation" of the liturgical act. The structural and linguistic modes of proposal confront the people at the first level with the official statements of the Faith. But through this first level of presentation, the worshippers reach the second level which is their projected inheritance. The liturgical rite proposes a way of *appropriating* the world of the Kingdom, which is only valid if the participants believe in the Kingdom. This makes it all the more urgent that the structures of the liturgical work should stand up to scrutiny, even when their literal and immediate implications are hard to reconcile with the God we "guess" at, as a first step in the interpretative task.

#### **2.14 Faith, Doctrine and Risk**

The findings of this comparison of the 1549, 1552 and 1662 communion orders argue that, despite obvious structural



impediments, each order makes available a proposal of the Kingdom, which can be followed and appropriated through the development of the rite. In fact, the difficulties in the rites themselves are perhaps more important to the hermeneutic investigation of the structure and language of liturgy than those instances which lead self-evidently to the promise of the Kingdom. This contention rests on the premise that it is through such difficulties that the hermeneutic relationship between faith and doctrine - or faith and the Faith - emerges. Furthermore, it shows the difference between having faith in the rite, and having faith in the Kingdom. For if worshippers were to invest their faith in a single textual form their participation would be meaningless.

Liturgical hermeneutics can only describe the risk of undertaking acts of worship within doctrinal limits, in order to attain the proposed world of the Kingdom. As Mark Searle has said of those who hand themselves over to the discipline of liturgy :

[J]ust as metaphor can only operate as metaphor for those who recognize its metaphorical character, so liturgy can only act as a disclosure of God to those who surrender their claim to know beforehand what it means and who will allow its literal meaning to serve each time afresh as the starting point for the discovery of further meaning.<sup>22</sup>

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22. op. cit 116-117

**CHAPTER THREE : THRESHOLD POSITIONS IN  
THE EUCHARISTIC RITE OF THE ALTERNATIVE SERVICE BOOK 1980**

**3.1 Introduction**

The comparative treatment of the three Prayer Book communion rites has shown how different versions of a liturgy in performance can gather the life and needs of a whole community towards the focus of their shared inheritance, under the form of an established practice of worship. I have argued that, while the precise mode of presentation of the Faith in each case directly affects the way in which the Kingdom is proposed, this need not impose undue restrictions on the faith of the addressees of the proposal. Renewed personal faith is certainly a desirable result of well-designed liturgy, but the obverse of this is the principle that even liturgy designed to enforce a particular doctrinal position can be sustained by its grounding in the faith of its practitioners.

In this chapter, I shall pursue the hermeneutic relationship between faith and the Faith to a further stage. This builds, in part, on the assumption that the faith of individuals is both prior to public statements of the Faith, and reappropriated through participation in the liturgical actions where such statements occur. It will be a founding premise of the investigation that, through the cognitive



propositions of the Faith, worshippers find themselves placed in the prospect of the Kingdom in what I have defined as *threshold positions*. From these positions, the individuals who make up the congregation are empowered to make their personal appropriation, in faith, of the promises set out in the rite. The action of the community, in repeatedly proclaiming the Faith they hold in common, therefore centres the repeated presenting of self by individual members of a congregation on the presence of God anticipated in faith.

In developing this theme through the study of a single instance, the ASB Rite A eucharist, some of the paradoxes of the liturgical phenomenon which have so far only been implicit assume a more prominent position. Hence the assumptions hitherto confined to the general background of liturgical hermeneutics - that rites are simultaneously text and action ; that performers of liturgy are not properly distinguishable from the action they engage in ; that the finite nature of each performance nevertheless points to an eschatological prospect beyond itself - can be shown to be centred paradigmatically in the act of worship.

As a preamble to tracing the movement of the Rite A eucharist through its successive stages, the discussion will address the engagement of the participants in the rite, with special reference to the issue of the creative development

of individual subjectivity through liturgical performance<sup>1</sup>. This leads into the textual discussion, where I shall argue that, as the rite moves closer to the consecration and communion, so it promotes an increasing dimension of intimacy between the human worshipper and the God who is present in the act of worship. Drawing on the notion of the 'written performative', the discussion will suggest that this concept offers a valuable way of accounting for the individual communicant's conviction that he or she is responding to a personal call to participate in the rite.

The final part of the chapter reflects on what has been revealed through its projection of performance, with particular attention to the elusive issue of meaning in liturgical rites. Taking its bearings from Paul de Man's concern with the materiality of language, and Heidegger's account of the place of truth in the work of art, it will contend that to tie liturgy to fixed claims of truth and meaning would amount to denying the power of liturgy to interpret existence afresh at each celebration. If the delicate balance between the institutionalised proclamation of the Faith, and the worshippers' ongoing discovery of the faith that underwrites institutionalised practice is to be

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1. The question of the reconfiguration of subjectivity through the appropriation of the promise of the Kingdom is central to all liturgical hermeneutic considerations. I return to the topic in greater detail in Chapter Seven, where it will be the focus of a reading of the ASB funeral service.

maintained, all judgements on liturgical meaning must remain provisional.

### **3.2 Subjectivity and Human Potential in Liturgy**

At its commencement, the liturgical rite opens up a space, where the participants' faithful response to a perceived call to worship (e.g. in performing the eucharist, or baptising a child) meets the capacity of the rite to make a suitable structure available, and through this, to proclaim the Kingdom. Gadamer has described this kind of space as a "field of play", setting out its relationship to the "game", as part of his complex notion of play [*Spiel*]. The "field of play" is defined from inside its own boundaries, by the "structure that determines the movement of the game from within." It is not dictated by its encounters with the external factors that touch its boundaries (TM 107). Viewed as a "field of play", the rite offers a recognisable set of structures, with the power to propose a world. These structures act upon the faith of an interpretative community that engages in the action which defines the field, namely, proclaiming the Faith.

Gadamer's theory of play maintains consistently that it is the game which plays the players, where play is understood in a middle voice sense. He deals in some depth with the special instance of the 'play' of human subjectivity, in

order to show that engaging seriously in play is a commitment that carries with it dangers and risks :

Thus we say of someone that he plays with possibilities or with plans. What we mean is clear. He still has not committed himself to the possibilities as to serious aims. He still has the freedom to decide one way or the other, for one or the other possibility. On the other hand, this freedom is not without danger. Rather, the game itself is a risk for the player. One can play only with serious possibilities. Obviously this means that one may become so engrossed in them that they outplay one, as it were, and prevail over one. The attraction that the game exercises on the player lies in this risk. One enjoys a freedom of decision which at the same time is endangered and irrevocably limited.

(TM 106)

This applies, of course, to conventional games, such as "jig-saw puzzles." It has more important implications in the case of serious play, where subjectivity itself is at stake as one commits oneself to the possibilities of a course of action. Liturgical rites, which demand significant commitments and carry proportionately significant risks, are subject to Gadamer's uncompromising distinction between serious and casual play :

If, for the sake of enjoying his own freedom of decision, someone avoids making pressing decisions or plays with possibilities that he is not seriously envisaging and which, therefore, offer no risk that he will choose them and thereby limit himself, we say he is only "playing with life" (verspielt).

(TM 106)

Gadamer's treatment of play in the first section of *Truth and Method* ("The Question of Truth as it Emerges in the Experience of Art") provides what Ricoeur has hailed as an excellent understanding of the "power of the text to open a dimension of reality." This, Ricoeur says, is thanks to the aesthetic work's mimetic capacity to redescribe experience through fiction. He criticises Gadamer, however, for failing to pursue the issue of experience. Since the "hermeneutics of tradition" does not press the "relation between fiction and redescription" further, it unavoidably ignores the "critical theme" that is crucial in Heidegger's analysis of being, and fundamental in both Ricoeur's and Gadamer's philosophical development. Ricoeur urges readers to "[r]ecall how Heidegger conjoins understanding to the notion of 'the projection of my ownmost possibilities'" (HCI 93). "[T]his signifies that the mode of being of the world opened up by the text is the mode of the possible, or better of the power-to-be". Ricoeur goes on to show that this is the "centre of the subversive force of the imaginary", which uses the present situation to reveal something better. In the ideological framework to which Ricoeur refers particularly, the subversive consequences of recognising one's power-to-be through the poetic imagination will reverberate against the established order, and challenge it with replacement by an alternative order<sup>2</sup>.

2. This chapter will not pursue the ideological implications of Ricoeur's critique, the ideas of which are expanded in his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* ed. G.H. Taylor New

### 3.3 Eucharistic Language and Threshold Concepts

The working hypothesis of this reading of the ASB eucharistic order is that the performance of the rite is instrumental in placing the congregation in a *threshold position* with respect to the Kingdom. From this vantage point, they can exercise their "power-to-be" its members, and hence beneficiaries of the divine promise. The discussion follows the experience of the *individual* who presents him- or herself to the rite as a member of the worshipping community, with the project of determining how the rite can discover the individual's potential to be recreated in worship. This entails considering how a certain experience of subjectivity is temporarily laid aside, in preparation for its renewal in an enhanced form in the process of appropriation.

As in the case of the BCP communion services, a structural method related to eucharistic language in its role as a *threshold language* offers an accessible route towards the hermeneutic concerns of the ASB rite. There are, of course, other features of liturgical performance which have equally

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York: Columbia University Press, 1986, as well as in an interview with Richard Kearney, published as "The Creativity of Language" in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1984 15-36. Its interest is in that Heideggerian "power-to-be" which is not properly addressed in Gadamer's hermeneutical approach to the question of truth in art.



important structural claims, preeminently music and physical gesture. Raymond Warren's contribution to David Jasper and Ronald Jasper's *Language and the Worship of the Church*, for instance, gives an exemplary and detailed account of the ways in which music can assist in developing emphases in liturgical action<sup>3</sup>. Lack of expertise is only one reason for omitting any consideration of these elements in worship. The trend in the methodology which this thesis establishes, with its reliance on Ricoeur, Gadamer, and in due course, Derrida and Austin, is towards issues of language. This dictates the scope of its considerations.

As a threshold language, liturgical language performs two functions. In a purely pragmatic way, it separates the world from the Church by adapting the language of ordinary secular exchange to a recognisable, but also recognisably different liturgical purpose. In an eschatological way, it both separates and unites the liturgical community and the Kingdom of God by its traits of repeatability and futurity. Worshipping communities perform the eucharist regularly as an act of remembrance, until Christ's coming again, but all their hopes and all the promises of the rite are

3. Raymond Warren "Music and the Liturgy" in David Jasper & R.C.D. Jasper (eds.) *Language and the Worship of the Church* London : Macmillan, 1990 196-211. Warren demonstrates how music can underline patterns in liturgical development, reinforce liturgical structure, obscure liturgical structure, and provide appropriate structural divisions between the various stages in the action. The intricacies of the possibilities which he raises deserve the kind of sustained attention which my study is unable to provide.

grammatically invested with a future value. In practice, it is almost impossible to isolate the two processes. Any analysis that begins with an emphasis on the one will find itself caught up in the other.

David Tracy takes up the complex topic of religious language with emphasis on its eschatological capacity. He justifies his use of the term "limit-language" to describe religious language by saying that such language is unique in having "what one might call that final 'oddness' of bringing ordinary language forms (proverbs, sayings, parables) to the limit of language by such strategies as intensification and transgression"<sup>4</sup>. By "going to the limit of language"<sup>5</sup>, it becomes "a 'limit' dimension to this world, this experience, this language"<sup>6</sup>. Tracy makes it plain that his understanding looks towards a referent beyond the limits of mortal experience :

Only a limit-language can and does appropriately disclose that final realm of meaningfulness to our lives, that 'other' trusting faithful dimension to our existence, which may adequately allow the explicit acknowledgement that the whole of our existence is other than a 'getting and spending,' other than absurd, other even than the real, the 'everyday' world. That other dimension may be perceived fleetingly but with some immediacy in limit-situations. Its presence may be mediated by reflection upon the meaning of the limit-questions of scientific and moral activity. At these moments, we may see ourselves turning to the limit-languages of religion in order to see how

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4. David Tracy *Blessed Rage for Order* 132.

5. *ibid* 125

6. *ibid* 126 ; 131 See also Ricoeur's "The Specificity of Religious Language".

they try to represent that 'other', that limit-dimension of our lives.<sup>7</sup>

There is a healthy vein of common sense which runs through Tracy's account in his insistence that human knowledge, language and experience are limited. The function of a limit-language, he maintains, is to show that there is a such a limit, but that this does not justify misappropriations of religion :

With the category 'limit' one may reject both supernaturalist trading in the extraordinary-ordinary 'world of religion' and all too easy, too lazily liberal claims that the 'real' meaning of religion is an ethical, or an aesthetic, or a pseudo-scientific one.<sup>8</sup>

Tracy's thought nevertheless remains open to the charge that it is unduly preoccupied with the way in which consciousness of limits conditions mortal life. Surely this is not far removed from Heidegger's secular notion of being-towards-death, and in that case, ethical, aesthetic and scientific questions are liable to supercede the eschatological imperatives which Tracy is anxious to address. It is here, therefore, that the understanding of 'threshold' should be properly distinguished from the particular kind of existential view which informs Heidegger's position. In acts of worship, the existential possibility is defined with respect to the referent of the Kingdom, promised to each

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7. *ibid* 132

8. *ibid* 133

believer as the inheritance of salvation. A threshold position in liturgical experience does not limit human action within the confines of this world. On the contrary, it is the vantage point from which worshippers can take up their stance towards the Kingdom. This effectively switches the poles, so that the thresholds of mortal experience are considered in the light of their implications for eternal life.

### 3.4 Opening the Liturgical Space

The eucharistic structure focuses the secular world and the Kingdom of God, bringing them sharply into being for the duration of the rite which I have called liturgical time. This occurs not only through devices as obvious as intercessions that include the concerns of the world in the parochial concerns of the gathered congregation, but even through simple, everyday formulae like the greetings which start the service :

The Lord be with you    or    The Lord is here.  
**and also with you.            His Spirit is with us.**  
 (ASB 119)

The force of the utterance is twofold. Firstly, it opens up the space of performance by differentiating the sacred from the secular in human action. This owes much to the semi-archaic formality of the words. Secondly, it joins the

mortal sphere to the divine presence, drawing the congregation into a dialogic situation which will characterise the whole celebration.

Two Roman Catholic writers have offered insights into this form of greeting that are equally valuable for the Anglican order. Mark Searle finds that the greeting and the dismissal, although they are considered "'secondary' parts of the Mass", are "crucial for defining the identity of the assembly and the nature of its common undertaking"<sup>9</sup>. For Thomas Krosnicki, there is no doubt about what the "common undertaking" or the "identity of the assembly" entails :

This greeting and the congregation's response express the mystery of the gathered Church . . . . The function of the greeting in this context is not one of welcome or casual recognition as "Good morning" is when said as one meets another on the street. Rather, the specific function of the liturgical greeting is to mutually declare, affirm, and confess that the community has taken on a dimension bigger than itself. The eucharistic assembly is not simply a sociological grouping of individuals as at a purely nonreligious affair. The act of gathering to worship is not the result of purely human initiative; it is the result of grace calling individuals to become the ecclesial body. Having been gathered to worship, it has become Church, engaged in a cultic act with the active presence of Christ in its midst.<sup>10</sup>

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9. Mark Searle "Semper Reformanda : The Opening and Closing Rites of the Mass" *Shaping English Liturgy* ed. Peter C. Finn & James M. Schellmann Washington D.C. : The Pastoral Press, 1990 89

10. Thomas A. Krosnicki "Grace and Peace : Greeting the Assembly" *Shaping English Liturgy* 103-104

The significance of the impulse towards the encounter with Christ is emphasised by the repetition of the greeting at the beginning of the eucharistic prayer. This can be taken to indicate a new beginning as it positions the congregation on the edge of the mystery of consecration at the centre of the service.

These two points mark successive stages in the journey of worshippers to the heart of the eucharist. On the first occasion, they are called out of the world, into the Church. That initial commitment propels them onwards to further commitments and affirmations, so that the worldly allegiances of their existence undergo reconfiguration in the structure of the eucharist. The second time that the greeting is used, they have undergone part of the reconfiguration process in the preparatory actions of penitence, teaching, intercession, and the mutual exchange of the peace. Gradually, they have been schooled into readiness for much closer access to the presence of God than the crossing of the boundary between the world and the Church presupposes. There is now a second divide to cross, between life as a member of the Church community, and life lived in the being of Christ, as the Prayer of Humble Access envisages it :

. . . Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,  
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son  
Jesus Christ  
and to drink his blood,

that we may evermore dwell in him  
and he in us. Amen.  
(ASB 128)

### 3.5 The Ministry of the Word

Between these threshold positions, there is a sequence leading from the Collect for Purity, through the confession, absolution, *kyrie eleison*, *gloria*, collect, Old and New Testament lessons, gospel, sermon<sup>11</sup>, creed, intercessions and peace, to the offertory. These have to be evaluated individually, as well as being seen as part of the preparation for the eucharistic presence of Christ.

The Collect for Purity and confession make the initial act of commitment to the life that will be proposed to the community within the space of the performance. Their courageous presentation of human fallibility to divine inspection sustains the duality of the mortal and divine spheres in a way that exemplifies the ever-present risk in liturgical action. They rely completely on faith that God will be merciful, even though the rite has still to confirm this faith in the reciprocal promises of the Faith.

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11. In High Church practice, the greeting formula is also used to introduce the gospel and the sermon. This is a way of fixing attention on the presence of God, which is revealed through the four gospels in the incarnate Jesus, and interpreted in exegesis.

The multiple individualities in the congregation meet God in a gesture of total exposure in the Collect for Purity :

Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden :  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name :  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(ASB 119)

Although the collect's declared purpose of loving God "perfectly", and "worthily [magnifying] [his] holy name", has the confident ring of a Q.E.D. proof, it is not offering certainty in exchange for commitment. As I demonstrated in the case of the Prayer Book placing of the same collect, God is being invited into the liturgical action as the one who takes control. The prayer therefore places all the securities of comfortable self-knowledge in suspension, as the people await the indeterminable changes of the Holy Spirit. From this arises the question of how exactly God can engage in the action to which the community calls him. Two options are possible. The ASB rubric usually follows the Collect for Purity with the confession and absolution, but there is an alternative position for it between the intercessions and the peace. I will refer to these orders as model I and model II respectively.



In model I, the penitential sequence placed after the Collect for Purity invokes God's initiative by an act of human initiative. The celebrant or minister "invites the congregation to confess their sins in these or other suitable words" :

. . . Let us confess our sins, in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all men.

This still leaves the decision to the people. Again, the risk of self-exposure and incalculable change has to be weighed against the confessed unsatisfactory condition of the present :

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,  
 we have sinned against you and against our  
 fellow men,  
 in thought and word and deed,  
 through negligence, through weakness,  
 through our own deliberate fault.  
 We are truly sorry  
 and repent of all our sins.  
 For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who  
 died for us,  
 forgive us all that is past;  
 and grant that we may serve you in newness  
 of life  
 to the glory of your name. Amen.  
 (ASB 120-121)

Poetics conspires to make this admission a matter of carefully crafted, highly conscious self-examination. The monosyllabic vehicles of sin - "thought and word and deed" - are painfully and evenly weighted by the co-ordinating "and", while the polysyllabic general categories of sin

achieve their emphasis through triple anaphora ("through . . . through . . . through") and asyndeton. These words are clearly not intended to trip lightly off the tongue, and by the time that the congregation professes itself "truly sorry", it has had time to consider what it is sorry for. So the present becomes a threshold between "all that is past" and that undefined "newness of life" which David Frost dismisses as weak<sup>12</sup>, but which indeed conveys the risk of committing oneself to God's mercy. Without the security of explicit guarantees of salvation given in advance of their confession, the people embark on a process of change over which they have no control.

The absolution methodically answers the dilemma by touching all the temporal boundaries of liturgical experience. It subsumes the present state of the congregation under its expression of divine mercy, forgives past sins, confirms all that is wholesome, and looks forward to the life to come :

Almighty God,  
 who forgives all who truly repent,  
 have mercy upon you,  
 pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
 confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
 and keep you in life eternal;  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  
 (ASB 121)

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12. In a comparison of the usual confession in the ASB with one of its alternative forms, Frost remarks, "Asked to explain 'newness of life', I should be hard put to it to say anything but pious platitudes." David L. Frost *The Language of Series 3 Bramcote*, Notts : Grove Books, 1973; repr. 1973  
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The same analytical and prosodical points could be made in the case of model II, but by delaying the penitential formula until after the intercession, model II qualitatively changes its force. Now, instead of preparing the congregation for the whole eucharistic development, the confession and forgiveness of sin look directly towards the idea of worthy reception of communion. Where model I follows the confession with the angelic song of the *gloria*, and so places the congregation on the threshold of heaven as they begin their eucharistic worship, model II directs the congregation into their own human act of reconciliation as they exchange the peace, after receiving absolution and thus restoring their relationship with God.

The collect for the day mediates between this opening process of exposure to the judgment, mercy and love of God, (intensified in model I) and the instructional intentions of the "Ministry of the Word" (lessons, gospel, sermon, creed and intercession), introducing a new linguistic threshold in the process. This section does not divide the language of the liturgy from the language of the world, but actually translates human spiritual needs into the language of prayer, inspired by the language of the Bible as it is imported into the liturgy. Thus the Ministry of the Word creates a place where the language of prayer meets biblical language in all its variety, and where the language of

exposition can be confirmed in the language of doctrinal belief<sup>13</sup>. In the 'limited' space, or "field of play", of the eucharist, the effect of the translation is to enforce the external authority of the biblical utterance. The congregation is invited to assent in acclaiming scriptural authority at the end of the Old and New Testament lessons :

President This is the word of the Lord.  
 All **Thanks be to God**  
 (ASB 122)

After the gospel, there is a further act of endorsement :

This is the Gospel of Christ.  
**Praise to Christ our Lord.**  
 (ASB 123)

These responses are not merely simple acceptances of the extended biblical interpolations in the liturgy on the terms in which they are proposed : they also link the worshippers directly with a tradition of devotion that unites the Church of the present with the origins of its faith, and the proclamation of its hope. Ricoeur has said of the transmission of biblical texts that they become fully available to us in the exchange between speech and writing. He concludes from his "reflection on the hermeneutical situation of Christianity . . . that the relation between speech and writing is constitutive of what we term

13. The question of the place of biblical language in the language of the liturgy will be taken up at length in Chapter Four.

proclamation, kerygma, preaching" (PHBH 94). This leads to the statement that :

[w]hat appears to be primary is the series speech-writing-speech, or else writing-speech-writing, in which at times speech mediates between two writings . . . and at times writing mediates between two forms of speech . . . . This chain is the condition of the possibility of tradition as such, in the fundamental sense of the transmission of a message . . . . Thanks to writing, speech comes all the way to us, reaching us by means of its "sense" and by the "thing" that is at issue in it, and no longer through the "voice" of its utterer.

(PHBH 94-95)

He is, of course, dealing with the recording of original speech as text, and the reanimation of the text in reading. The reading of the Bible in the liturgical situation brings this process to its utmost possibility, adding to its force the advantageous conditions of faith, belief and thematic selection, so that one reading reverberates against another in the compass of a chosen theme. This is subsequently given the opportunity for endorsement and expansion by the sermon, while its fundamental tenets are affirmed in the creed, signifying the congregation's adoption of the historical biblical tradition as its own.

Accepting the tradition carries the further responsibility of implementing the code of practice which its message represents in Christian belief. The placing of the intercession straight after the creed is therefore a

judicious way of focusing this general code on a set of special concerns. The most frequently used form of intercession opens with an expression that unites the sacred and the secular in the presence of God :

Let us pray for the Church and for the world, and  
let us thank God for his goodness.  
(ASB 125)

The ASB does, however, offer two alternative set intercessions, introduced respectively as follows :

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ  
Jesus, and for all men according to their needs.  
(ASB 166)

In the power of the Spirit and in union with  
Christ, let us pray to the Father.  
(ASB 167)

All three invitations conduct the congregation through a process of prayer that embraces the widest conception of the Church, as they consider how they may best "serve Christ in one another", ask for God's blessing on secular human government, recollect their own needs and those of a wider world, and call to mind the dead and the Communion of Saints. The form of the initial invitation does, however, have significant bearing on the way in which the subsequent intercessions are understood. In the first two, the emphasis is human-centred. God presides as creator ("let us thank God for his goodness") and saviour ("the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus") over the human order whose interests will be

addressed. The ordinary concerns of human life, such as sickness and death within the community, good government of Church and State, and events in contemporary history, have been drawn into the eucharistic centre, to be reconsidered under conditions of faith in the saving power of Jesus. In the third form, the poles are reversed, so that the intercessions become a *praying to*, rather than a *praying for*. Even though the content of the prayers follows the pattern of the other two possibilities, the severely earthbound conditions of reception now take on a greater dimension of openness to the action of God in human life.

In all its forms, the intercession promotes conditions for reconciliation. It is logically followed by the peace as the visible sign of the unity of the Church as the Body of Christ in model I, and the confession, absolution and peace as signs of humanity's reconciliation with God in model II. The suggested introductions to the exchange of the peace reveal it as an interim summary of a project that has tried to unite worshippers, and to promote the interests of their shared life within the Church :

Christ is our peace.  
 He has reconciled us to God  
 in one body by the cross.  
 We meet in his name and share his peace.

or

We are the Body of Christ.  
 In the one Spirit we were all baptized into  
 one body.

Let us then pursue all that makes for peace  
and builds up our common life.  
(ASB 128)

The peace also brings the congregation to a threshold of expectation where, as the earthly body of Christ, they are ready to receive his heavenly body in the communion. There is a profound responsibility built into the people's confident claim to be "the body of Christ", for it marks their undertaking to be the presence of Christ in the world through their participation in the communion. The symbolic offering of material possessions in the offertory which follows the peace is consequently only the first stage of the process. By the end of the eucharist, the people will find themselves required, like Christ, to offer their "souls and bodies" to the divine purpose, and hence "to be a living sacrifice" (ASB 145).

### **3.6 The Offertory**

The placing of bread and wine on the altar is enigmatically covered in the ASB by the instruction that :

The president may praise God for his gifts in appropriate words to which all respond

**Blessed be God for ever.**

(ASB 129)

Usually, the "appropriate words" take the following form, although they are not printed in the ASB text :



Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.  
Through your goodness we have this bread to offer,  
which earth has given and human hands have made.  
For us it becomes the bread of life.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.  
Through your goodness we have this wine to offer,  
fruit of the vine and work of human hands. For us  
it becomes the cup of salvation.<sup>14</sup>

The offertory words are a celebration of the power of the extraordinary to manifest itself in the ordinary. They stress the partnership of God and humanity in using the gifts of creation to sustain physical life, before making further claims upon the bread and wine. This is a way of doubling meaning. The value of the ordinary does not depreciate by comparison with its extension as "the bread of life" and "the cup of salvation". On the contrary, the ordinary takes on greater importance as the necessary vehicle which allows the extraordinary to appear. In yet another way, the human component stands as a reminder that eternal salvation comes through an *incarnate* God, who chose ordinary human form in order to redeem humanity. Here, the dramatic temporal threshold should not be ignored, for each eucharistic celebration is, in a certain sense, a last

14. I have quoted from the South African eucharistic rite which, in common with a number of other modern Anglican rites, uses these words (originally from the Roman Catholic missal). *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989 : Church of the Province of South Africa* London : Collins; Cape Town : David Philip, 1989 116. The concealment of the priestly words in the ASB perhaps reflects the theological uncertainty over whether saying these words actually accomplishes consecration *before* the prayer of consecration itself has been said.

supper. At the literal level, this statement rests on the commemorative aspect of the rite. At the level of congregational experience, which has been the controlling interest throughout this exploration, every eucharist is a final earthly meal taken on the brink of eternity, a last opportunity for preparation before taking up a place in the Kingdom.

### **3.7 The Eucharist as Written Performative**

It is helpful to pause here to review the nature of the event that we have been considering. What has emerged so far is a gradual, and carefully controlled metamorphosis of a congregation who have presented themselves in faith, in the presence of God. Having welcomed them initially as worshippers, the organisation of the eucharistic rite has called them to be penitents, disciples, intercessors and reconcilers, thus weaving ordinary life into the liturgical order. It will continue by making them receivers of Christ's body, returning them finally to their secular lives charged with the weight of their liturgical experience.

To recapitulate some of the arguments I offered earlier more specifically, the rite presents the community with a mode of being that has in mind their citizenship of the Kingdom. It assumes a body of believers, and to that extent, it has what Ricoeur would call a kerygmatic function (PHBH).

Nevertheless, it is not designed, or, if one prefers an anthropomorphic formulation, it does not intend to make the congregation into a too rigidly defined or quite predetermined entity, imprisoned by the duty of reproducing the text accurately in performance. Likewise, the congregation comes to the act of worship without knowing in advance the exact nature of the transformation it expects to undergo.

There is consequently a powerful element of chance about the whole liturgical event. The rite happens to the people only because they choose to participate in it. In its written form, it always has the capacity to happen. But the nature of the community to whom it will happen cannot be totally assumed prior to the event. By the same token, the people must be open to the possible results of their worship. They must be ready to risk the course of action that might follow from their initial voluntary cooperation. For this reason, I propose that the eucharist shares elements of the concept of the written performative, which receives extended treatment in Jacques Derrida's essay, "Telepathy", and in J. Hillis Miller's response to Derrida<sup>15</sup>.

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15. J. Hillis Miller "Thomas Hardy, Jacques Derrida, and the 'Dislocation of Souls'" *Tropes, Parables, Performatives : Essays on Twentieth-Century Literature* New York & London : Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990 135-145

Essentially, as Miller puts it, Derrida's essay "speculates on the performative power a letter (in the epistolary sense) may have in order to bring into existence the appropriate recipient"<sup>16</sup>. The scenario does not

[put] forward the hypothesis of a letter which would be the external occasion, in some sense, of an encounter between two identifiable subjects - and who would already be determined. No, but of a letter which after the event seems to have been launched towards some unknown addressee at the moment of its writing, an addressee unknown to himself or herself if one can say that, and who is determined . . . on receipt of the letter; this then is quite another thing than the transfer [transfert] of a message. Its content and its end no longer precede it.  
(Telepathy 5)

The chance recipient of the letter responds, nevertheless, as if he or she had been the intended addressee, even coming to believe that he or she is uniquely destined to receive it:

So then, you identify yourself and you commit your life to the program of the letter . . . . The program says nothing, it neither announces nor states anything, not the slightest content, it doesn't even present itself as a program. One cannot even say that it 'looks like' a program . . . but, without seeming to, *it works*, it programs. . . . So you say: it is I, uniquely I who am able to receive this letter. Not that it has been reserved for me, on the contrary, but I receive as a present the chance to which this card delivers itself. It falls to me . . . . And I choose that it should choose me by chance, I wish to cross its path, I want to be there, I can and I want - its path or its transfer.  
(Telepathy 5-6)

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16. *ibid* 136

Miller glosses this by pointing out that

it is not necessary for a letter that brings a new self into existence in me to contain detailed instructions about what that self should be. The performative power of the letter works best if it remains a sketch . . . .<sup>17</sup>

There are important connections to be made between this and the eucharist. These assist the interpretation of the eucharistic action, and can be extended to other forms of liturgy. Chief amongst them are the notions of 'crossing the path' of a communication, and 'following its programme'. The eucharist is obviously not the *radically chancy* event of Derrida's letter, but it is a written performative in this sense : once the crossing has been made, the self-determining power of the *individuals* who initially present themselves at the ritual event gives way to the surrender of self-determination that characterises a *congregation* whose actions occur according to the creative drive of the rite. The further the congregation proceeds in the action, the greater are the commitments they find themselves making in the dialogic responses, which, like the "program" of Derrida's letter, do not seem to be overtly dictating any pattern of behaviour.

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17. *ibid* 143

Determination or intention is thus transmuted into invitation and response, as the worshippers become more and more convinced that the rite is addressed to them, as chosen subjects. Ironically, in taking this chance, they resist any sense that their role is a matter of chance. At this point, the risk and the act of faith become one, and the community proceeds in the conviction that the Kingdom has indeed been prepared for them "from the beginning of the world."

Finally (adding a stage which Derrida's model does not make explicit, if it includes such a stage at all), the liturgical written performative calls repeatedly on the *sender* of the communication. This is the development I am concerned to make apparent in the course of tracing the eucharist through the consecration to the dismissal.

### **3.8 The Written Performative in Practice**

In the course of the eucharistic prayer<sup>18</sup> the congregational engagement already demanded by the initial apostrophe, with its accompanying risks, will be qualitatively deepened. To

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18. I will take as a paradigm the third eucharistic prayer. This is based on two considerations. Firstly, to treat all four eucharistic prayers would be both time-consuming and distracting, given the terms of the present exercise. Secondly, the third prayer appeals across a wide range of churchmanship and thus affords the broadest scope within the restrictions I have imposed. The conclusions to be drawn, since they are primarily based on issues of performance, can be applied to the first, third or fourth prayers, with little if any adjustment in thinking.

indicate that the next stage of the rite is both a continuation of what has gone before, and an entirely fresh start, the prayer opens with the repetition of the very first greeting :

The Lord be with you      or      The Lord is here.  
**And also with you.**                      **His spirit is with us.**

This direct address secures the people's trusting co-operation with the priest, in the presence of God, in an action whose implications will only become clear as the prayer makes further demands on them. The first of these demands asks the congregation for a special act of dedication to God :

Lift up your hearts.  
**We lift them to the Lord.**

This is followed by the natural response of thankful hearts, given that the prayer is as much a prayer of thanksgiving as a prayer of consecration :

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**It is right to give him thanks and praise.**  
 (ASB 136)

In a simple, narrative way, a self-generating process is now in motion. If it is "right to give [God] thanks and praise", this surely demands a reason. In reply, the community receives the rich excess of the history of salvation. Viewed

under the conditions of the written performative, however, the historical account becomes unavoidably personal. The skill of the narrative lies in embedding the ordinariness of the people in the extraordinary incarnated life of Christ,

Who was sent by [God], in [his] great goodness,  
 to be *our Saviour*;  
 by the power of the Holy Spirit he took flesh  
 and, as [God's] Son, born of the blessed Virgin,  
 was seen on earth  
 and *went about among us*;

He opened wide his arms *for us* on the cross;  
 he put an end to death by *dying for us*  
 and revealed the resurrection by rising to  
 new life;  
 so he fulfilled [God's] will *and won for [him] a*  
*holy people.*  
 (ASB 136 my italics)

Again, at a simple level, this gives abundant reason for that human praise which the *sursum corda* asks of the people. Yet for a congregation overwhelmingly convinced that they, and no other body, are being drawn into the unfolding events of the rite as a "holy people", consecrated to the worship of God, the need to respond to the divine imperative is urgent. Hence the lone voice of the priest is joined by the people in the angelic acclamation of the *sanctus*, recorded in Isaiah 6 :

Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
 God of power and might,  
 heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
 Hosanna in the highest.  
 (ASB 136)



The earthly order escapes from time here, into the actual presence of God. This is the special achievement of a threshold language that translates the language of heaven into human speech, and in doing so, enables the human order to join the heavenly order. Almost simultaneously, the congregation crosses a threshold in mortal history. Now it finds itself united with the crowd who hailed Christ's entry into Jerusalem in the words of the *benedictus* :

Blessed is he who comes in the name of  
the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
(ASB 137)

Up to this point in the eucharistic prayer, the direction of the performative impulse has been towards the community. They have responded, in turn, with their own appropriation of utterances that consolidate their stake in the historical event of salvation, and hence their claim on the Kingdom. The flow of performative energy is reversed in God's direction as the priest speaks the words of the epiclesis over the elements :

grant that, by the power of your Holy Spirit,  
and according to your holy will,  
these your gifts of bread and wine  
may be to us the body and blood of our Lord  
Jesus Christ  
(ASB 137)

The invocation of a trinitarian presence (God, acting through the Holy Spirit, to enable the elements to be in a

mysterious way the body and blood of Christ) is a written performative within a written performative. Here, the worshippers take the initiative, and offer God a pathway into their act of worship. It also marks a moment of discovery, for the rite has reached that point where the need for God's active presence is suddenly revealed.

Strictly speaking, the invocation of a trinitarian presence is not a written performative in the way that the concept has been applied to the worshippers' reception of the eucharistic prayer. It would be ludicrous to suggest that God accidentally crosses the path of congregations involved in celebrations of communion, and responds in the conviction that he is the exclusive addressee of the action. It would be more accurate to see the epiclesis as a mutation of the written performative, in which the element of conviction comes from the worshippers' faith that God *will* act, although the action itself always waits upon a human invitation.

The epiclesis achieves specificity without sacrificing mystery. Its request is at once precise in asking that the elements consecrated "by the power of [the] Holy Spirit . . . may be to us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ", and yet completely open to the form such presence might take. This characteristic will emerge more distinctly in the

Institution Narrative, which describes how Jesus initiated the eucharist at the Last Supper :

. . . in the same night that he was betrayed,  
 [he] took bread and gave [God] thanks;  
 he broke it and gave it to his disciples,  
 saying,  
 Take, eat; this is my body which is given  
 for you;  
 do this in remembrance of me.  
 In the same way, after supper  
 he took the cup and gave [God] thanks;  
 he gave it to them, saying,  
 Drink this, all of you;  
 this is my blood of the new covenant,  
 which is shed for you and for many for the  
 forgiveness of sins.  
 Do this, as often as you drink it,  
 in remembrance of me.  
 (ASB 137)

Clearly, the passage chronicles an event that took place only once. Yet when the celebrant touches the bread and wine as he repeats the words "he . . . took bread", and "he took the cup", these actions become mysteriously contemporary, without being exactly mimetic. The less happy side of this escape from time means that the faithful receivers become as unavoidably identified with Judas's act of betrayal, as with the disciples who gathered at the very first eucharist. This stands as a stern reminder that their capacity to fail to appropriate the Kingdom is always present beside their ability to take up a position which makes appropriation possible. The reason for this lies in the nature of the eucharist itself. Each celebration is distant in history from the inaugural event, but at the same time, the induced

proximity of the performance grants it a special kind of immediacy, as though it were happening for the first time. On these terms, the performance can never be simply a commemorative eating and drinking. The congregation of the present simultaneously knows too little and too much to exempt themselves from the eucharist's complexity. The act of memory must therefore reflect the many layers of the eucharistic action, which stretches out from the present towards the saving events of the past, and their eschatological consequences for the future.

This turning point is rather clumsily marked in the acclamation that divides the Institution Narrative from the final part of the prayer. The words may be introduced by a priestly invitation, for example, "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith" (ASB 117), with the people saying :

**Christ has died:**  
**Christ has risen:**  
**Christ will come again.**  
 (ASB 137)

The whole section seems to stand awkwardly between direct biblical narrative and the projection of its consequences through communion and into the Kingdom. Vocalising the mystery of faith which underlies all liturgical performance is surely a redundant action, since its concerns are perfectly formulated in the subsequent projection of the consequences of Christ's death and passion :

And so, Father, calling to mind his death on  
the cross,  
his perfect sacrifice made once for the sins  
of all men,  
rejoicing at his mighty resurrection and  
glorious ascension,  
and looking for his coming in glory,  
we celebrate this memorial of our redemption;  
(ASB 137)

The last duty of those whom the eucharistic prayer addresses (or who believe themselves to be its object of address) is to fix their eyes on eternity, and to accept their finite opportunity for praise and thanksgiving as a means for clarifying, and adding substance to their view across the threshold of the Kingdom where, eventually, they will be "[gathered] into one" to "praise and glorify [God] for ever" (ASB 138). If a congregational acclamation has any role at all, it must be at the end of the eucharistic prayer, where the whole course of Salvation History across and beyond time is finally affirmed.

### **3.9 Reconstructing the Sender**

Between the close of the eucharistic prayer and communion there is an interlude of intensified recognition. We might even think of it as a recollection in meditation after the triumphant prospect of the heavenly Kingdom. Again, this is a type of written performative only in a peculiar sense, namely that the people ask God to be present in a particular

and image-laden aspect. This phase of the rite asks for some of the most difficult assents in the entire service, for here the language of narrative (as, for example, in the Institution and Salvation Narratives) comes to an end, and a language of pure image takes its place. Using an incantatory pattern of multiple anaphora, the *agnus dei* not only calls for recognition of the sacrificial presence of Jesus : it actually makes the twin aspects of Jesus - the defenceless sacrificial victim, and the glorified Lamb of the apocalyptic vision - resonate upon the consciousness of the communicants, and calls upon them to remember the majestic and vulnerable origins of forgiveness and mercy, which are the attributes of these images :

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of  
the world:  
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of  
the world:  
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of  
the world:  
grant us peace.

or

Jesus, Lamb of God: have mercy on us.  
Jesus, bearer of our sins: have mercy on us.  
Jesus, redeemer of the world: give us  
your peace.  
(ASB 142-143)

On the analogy of Derrida's essay, I will call this a reciprocal act of telecommunication, whereby the receivers

of the written performative reconstruct, and give a face to, its original sender. It is also a renewed invitation to God to be present in his gentlest and most redemptive being, and is therefore linked to the opening Collect for Purity.

The words of invitation can ask the people to

Draw near with faith. Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ which he gave for you, and his blood which he shed for you.  
(ASB 143)

because they are assured of the love, forgiveness and redeeming generosity of the presence they approach. This confidence is reinforced in the words of administration :

The body of Christ keep you in eternal life.  
The blood of Christ keep you in eternal life.  
(ASB 143)

It is as if the threshold of presence has finally been crossed in the present moment. The community is face to face with a presence to which its faith has given not only a particular title (the Lamb of God), bearing the special capacity to bear and forgive sin, and to bring peace, but also body and blood. Faith therefore comes to sustain presence, just as presence sustains faith.

### 3.10 Recrossing the Threshold : The Post-Communion

The language of the *agnus dei*, the invitation to communion and the words of administration - quite uninterpretable outside of the liturgical context - has to be translated out of the realm of mystery and image to a point where it becomes readable once again in the language of the world to which the congregation must return. The final section of the rite takes on this responsibility, directing its energies towards thanksgiving for what has been received, and reconnection with the ordinary existence which the congregation has left for the duration of the eucharist. The form of service offers two ways of recalling all this, and planning the community's response to recrossing the threshold between the Church and the world. One of these is embodied in the congregational prayer :

Almighty God,  
 we thank you for feeding us  
 with the body and blood of your Son  
 Jesus Christ.  
 Through him we offer you our souls and bodies  
 to be a living sacrifice.  
 Send us out  
 in the power of your Spirit  
 to live and work  
 to your praise and glory. Amen.  
 (ASB 145)

This form derives its force from a set of strong, simple images. The visual and tactile suggestions of the "body and



blood of . . . Jesus Christ", and of the congregation as "a living sacrifice" cut through the mediation of bread and wine, and go to the very heart of eucharistic understanding or recognition. If the idea of a "living sacrifice" were to produce a momentary shudder (though one suspects that congregations are not sufficiently shockable for this), it would be an entirely appropriate reaction to the magnitude, but also the audacity, of a gesture which brings the people as close as they will ever come to taking Christ's identity upon themselves. The imperative "Send us out", claiming its authority from "the power of [God's] Spirit", conveys a great surge of desire to carry the eucharistic experience out into the world.

Alternatively, the priest may say the following prayer :

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so we and all your children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(ASB 144)

To some eyes, this prayer would appear too precariously balanced, too dispersed in its reference, to be liturgically useful. Its primary biblical source lies in the story of the

Prodigal Son, whose defection stands for all human lapses from loyalty to God ("when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home"). This creates a curious superimposition of images, for in merging the identity of the communicants in the being of Christ, the language induces a reciprocal event, in which Christ becomes the Prodigal Son. Looked at yet again, the initial poetic blasphemy becomes a virtue, for it throws the meaning of the Incarnation into bold relief. In taking on human nature, Christ also takes on human sin, challenging the boundaries separating humanity and divinity, sin and forgiveness. Finally, through this sacrificial action, the parable itself is redeemed by its counter-possibility, in which Jesus comes to represent the 'good' elder brother. By actively participating in extending welcome to the returning reprobate, who stands for all forgiven sinners, the elder brother in this revised version joins his father in welcoming the prodigal across the threshold, and reinstating him at home.

Under these conditions, the metaphor of "the gate of glory" bursts its boundaries as a simple metaphor for the Kingdom, and converges on the reality of faith - that last threshold position to be negotiated before the eschatological possibility of the Kingdom becomes actual. Full eucharistic participation is the threshold of heaven thrown open by the Resurrection, and the figure of our eschatological hope. But

it is not to be found without pain, as allusions to drinking the cup which Christ drank, and sharing in his suffering body reveal. The rewards of freedom both now and in eternity are reassuringly overlaid on these darker reminders, but are also disturbingly resonant with their echoes. Yet such ambiguity is wholly consistent with the experience of recognition of the eucharist. The congregation leaves having faced its sin, found forgiveness in the love and mercy of God, and looked beyond death to the life of the Kingdom. In becoming Christ's body through the consecrating moment of the eucharist their nature becomes for that space of time indistinguishable from that of Christ, and so at the climax of recognition, the worshippers ask God to recognise them in the glorious and the tortured being of his Son.

After such a climactic confrontation, the peace and blessing come as a decrescendo towards a reassuring, if illusory conclusion :

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. Amen.  
(ASB 145)

In reality, the last words of the eucharist terminate nothing. Rather, they hand over to the departing

congregation a share of God's presence that will accompany the instruction to

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
(ASB 145)

These last words will not, however, answer the question, "Until the next celebration of the eucharist ? Until his coming again?"

### **3.11 Conclusion**

Any hope of a concrete, tangible meaning that can be extracted from the performance of the eucharist must be disappointed in a reading like this. The whole notion of a linguistically expressed liturgical threshold is that it is only positional, placing worshippers where they can glimpse the proposed world of the Kingdom. Presented in this way, the liturgical process begins to sound increasingly insecure, though this is not necessarily a reason to appeal to a transcendent order that eliminates all risks from the commitment demanded by ritualised practice. Going to the rite with the conviction that it is an assured 'place' of revelation is putting the cart before the horse. On the contrary, it is only in taking the risk of going into a situation that can offer no worldly certainties, i.e. engaging in an intrinsically meaningless activity, that worshippers can hope to discover a meaningful aspect to

their practice of devotion. The focus of worship provides a potential point of departure for revealing meaning, only because it does not swallow up individual experience and needs in a pre-packaged version of the experience of community.

This revelatory process also furnishes a perspective on the status of the question of 'truth' in liturgy that finally escapes the frustrating questions of meaning which have arisen previously. Conceptually, we have now moved closer to the Heideggerian position (as part of the exploration of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*) which proposes that 'truth' is *Dasein's* disclosure of its "ownmost potentiality-for-Being"<sup>19</sup>. The etymology of the Greek word for truth, *alētheia*, makes the concept clear : it involves that which is not hidden, or that which is uncovered. "Being-true as Being-uncovering, is a way of Being for *Dasein* . . . . Uncovering is a way of Being for Being-in-the-world"<sup>20</sup>. Truth, considered as what has already been uncovered, is always the secondary sense of the word.

The essay on "The Origin of the Work of Art" makes a complex and suggestive case for the way that truth comes into being in the aesthetic creation. Heidegger presents truth as both founding the art work, and "leaping into being" from it, in

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19. Martin Heidegger *Being and Time* 264 (I.6 §221)

20. *ibid* 263 (I.6 §220)

a way that can shed light on the processes of revelation in the liturgical rite. In the first part of the essay, Heidegger deals with questions arising out of the nature of truth. These include inquiries into how truth can be set into work ; why it sometimes must be set into work in order to be as truth ; why this setting-into-work should take the form of art ; why art itself exists. All of these questions are connected to the premise that truth is an unconcealedness, and that the art-work is a medium for its revelation. With special attention to the art of poetry, the second part of the essay considers the use of *language* as a revelatory art-form :

Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings to their being from out of their being.<sup>21</sup>

This raises being to its potential to be, but it is not the origin of the truth of being. Art only discovers what lies in the foundations of art itself :

Art is the setting-into-work of truth. In this proposition an essential ambiguity is hidden, in which truth is at once the subject and the object of the setting. But subject and object are unsuitable names here. They keep us from thinking precisely this ambiguous nature, a task that no longer belongs to this consideration . . . . Art lets truth originate. Art, founding, preserving,

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21. Martin Heidegger "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* tr. Albert Hofstadter New York : Harper & Row, 1971; repr. 1975 73

is the spring that leaps to the truth of what is,  
in the work.<sup>22</sup>

To return to the specific matter of the eucharist, this proposal for the disclosure of truth through art seems to offer an important model for describing the disclosure of faith through worship. It has been the argument throughout this chapter that faith, like 'truth', is an ambiguous quantity. A vital precondition of all worship, it is also discovered and enhanced through worship. The unresolved state of the question at the end of the eucharist only marks the fact that the worshipping community has travelled full circle in its hermeneutical journey from faith to language, and back to faith.

If the Heideggerian analogy preserves traces of nostalgia for a form of reified meaning in language itself, even though it acknowledges language as primarily a means of disclosure, Marc Redfield's treatment of the notion of "linguistic materiality", especially as it is treated in the thought of Paul de Man, is a useful extension<sup>23</sup>. De Man's address to those structures in language which are taken to be patterns of signification discovers an impasse. Redfield quotes Jonathan Culler, who states that "this predicament shows that 'to perceive the signifier at all is to confer on

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22. *ibid* 77

23. Martin Stringer's approach to the question, which I noted in Chapter One, is helpfully amplified by de Man's point.

some patterns but not on others the status of meaningful articulations'"<sup>24</sup>. He shows how, in this very randomness, de Man identifies the "trope of language", which can be expressed by the claim that "language posits and language means (since it articulates), but language cannot posit meaning; it can only reiterate (or reflect) it in its reconfirmed falsehood [*The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 117-118]"<sup>25</sup>. Lest we fall into the trap of thinking that the conventional categories of 'truth' and 'falsehood' are at issue, Redfield explains this statement by referring to Cynthia Chase, who says that

"[t]he process of signification, which has a material element, is made to serve as an example and guarantee of the phenomenality of experience" ["Giving a Face" 105]; however [he continues], it does *not* mean that this material element is present to itself and to us as an empirical fact . . . . What we "actually get" is a necessary precondition of experience that is not only impossible to "experience" but is also impossible *tout court*, insofar as the determined is being derived from the possibility of the random.<sup>26</sup>

Read against the passages from "The Origin of the Work of Art", Redfield's analysis makes a clear case for revaluing the role of performative language. Some adjustments are necessary before his findings can be applied closely to the the liturgical situation. Principally, 'falsehood' is too strong a word to use for acts of worship. Instead, I offer

24. Marc W. Redfield "Humanizing de Man" *diacritics* 19 (2) 1989 35-53 44

25. *ibid* 44

26. *ibid* 45



'provisionality' as a concept which more aptly describes the threshold which is also the subject of our inquiry. The provisionality of the liturgical threshold state will not become certainty by conferring meaningful status on every ritual action, so that, for example, the performance of the eucharist will always produce a hidden truth, which is empirically known to be there. Activities conducted in faith, in the prospect of the Kingdom, can posit, but not guarantee, the forms of disclosure that will emerge in performance.

In Paul Ricoeur's words :

. . . biblical faith cannot be separated from the movement of interpretation that raises it to the level of language. The "ultimate care" would remain mute if it did not receive the power of speech from an endlessly renewed interpretation of the signs and symbols that have, so to speak, educated and formed this care throughout the centuries. The feeling of absolute dependence would remain a weak and inarticulated feeling if it were not the response to the proposal of a new being that opened for me new possibilities of existing and acting. Unconditional trust would be empty if it were not based upon the continually renewed interpretation of the sign-events reported by Scripture . . . . These events of deliverance open and uncover the innermost possibility of my own freedom and thus become for me the word of God. Such is the properly hermeneutical constitution of faith itself. Such is, as well, the primary theological consequence of the indissociable correlation we have discovered between the world of the text and appropriation.  
(PHBH 99-100)

Faith in a merciful, redemptive God comes to language each time the worshipping community meets, and the liturgical text awaits the action of faith to invest it with life in performance, even as its development supports that faith. From one point of view, this would seem to resemble what is sometimes genuinely, sometimes rather sentimentally, called a 'simple faith'. But the clear echo, in Ricoeur's description of faith as the "ultimate care", of Heidegger's analysis of care as the Being of *Dasein*<sup>27</sup> should act as a reminder that the being of a liturgical faith is never simple, or separated from the question in which the totality of one's being is at stake. No language is sufficient to embody faith for all time, nor can faith ever cease in its search for a voice.

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27. *Being and Time* I.6

## CHAPTER FOUR : THE BIBLE IN LITURGY

### 4.1 Introduction

Liturgy is able to make faith articulate because liturgical language is itself dependent on the language of the Faith. In communicating credal statements and biblical teaching to worshippers, liturgy provides an authoritative resource from which its practitioners can make their own claims of faith.

Chapter Four investigates the various forms in which liturgical participants meet the Bible. Continuing the exploration of the ASB Rite A eucharist, it concentrates on those aspects of biblical reference which Chapter Three described as the hermeneutic movement from faith to language, and back to faith. The inquiry begins with the implications of the direct transfer of extended biblical passages into the rite in the form of the eucharistic lectionary. Thereafter, it turns its attention to other ways of using the Bible to endorse ritual action. These include prayers which depend on scriptural allusions, quotations which have to be reassessed in the new context of the eucharist, and sermons which interpret scripture<sup>1</sup>.

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1. These modes of biblical incorporation in liturgy are briefly but usefully covered by Martin Kitchen's essay, "The Bible in Worship" in *The Identity of Anglican Worship* ed. Bryan Spinks & Kenneth Stevenson London : Mowbray, 1991 36-48. My analysis will be concerned with prayers and

The purpose of the present argument is twofold. In the first place, it sets out to reject simplistic notions of receiving the Bible directly through liturgy, and so recapturing the experience of its first readers. In the second place, it seeks terms for the complex appropriation of biblical promises that forms part of the deep structure of the rite.

#### 4.2 Initial Theoretical Considerations

In his work on the biblical canon, Ricoeur identifies a number of "forms of discourse" in the books of the Old and New Testaments, each presenting a different face of God. Intensive study of their interaction, he suggests,

would perhaps reveal that all the forms of discourse together constitute a circular system and that the theological content of each of them receives its meaning from the total constellation of forms of discourse. Religious language then appears as a polyphonic<sup>2</sup> language maintained by the circularity of the forms.

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quotations, since the question of sermons is not readily incorporated into a study such as this.

2. The concept of "polyphony" recalls the work of Mikhail Bakhtin on the theory of the novel. Ricoeur refers to this in *Time and Narrative II*, showing how "the polyphonic novel stretches to the breaking point the capacity of extension belonging to the mimesis of action" (TN II, 97), by bringing different voices into the same time scheme. While the Bakhtinian usage of "polyphony" and "heteroglossia" as criteria for analysing the novel as other than monologic provides a structural analogue for the different voices at play in liturgy, extension of his principles leads to a Marxist sense of literature as the product of a particular social structure. The different languages involved in the product each carry what Michael Holquist has called "a set

(PHBH 92)

He shows that this hypothesis, whether or not it is universally verifiable, is especially apt for a closed system such as the biblical canon, which "is a limited space for interpretation, and where the theological meanings are correlative to *forms of discourse*" (PHBH 92). This chapter will argue that when the biblical closed system meets the liturgical rite, the existing polyphonic relationship becomes subject to greater pressure. For the liturgical rite is itself a closed system, comprising a variety of religio-literary genres that includes prayer, psalmody, prose narrative, prophecy, exegetical and homiletic forms, and credal statements.

This doubly pressurised situation raises a significant problem of contemporaneity. As if it were not complicated enough to assess the ways in which the components of the biblical canon relate to each other across vast distances in time, they must be considered, in liturgy, as standing in relation to congregations who are hearing them in the immediacy of liturgical time. Altered social and cultural circumstances mean that the texts do not speak to later audiences with the identical force they carried in their

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of distinctive values and presuppositions" (*Dialogism : Bakhtin and His World* London : Routledge, 1990 68). Our hermeneutical interest in interpreting the world proposed by, or in front of, the text or performance departs substantially from this view.

original setting, so that their continuing role as a resource of faith has to be assessed by criteria other than the straightforwardly historical.

One way of representing what is really a rather elusive association between liturgical faith and biblical language is Ricoeur's depiction of the transmission of biblical material in terms of the relationship between speech and writing. Ricoeur claims fundamental status for the speech-writing pair in "the initial hermeneutical situation of Christian preaching", where speech is tied "to an earlier writing that it interprets". This is especially true of the hermeneutical connection between the Old and New Testaments. Here, the written proclamation "that Jesus is the Christ" is subsequently fulfilled in action. Later written exegetical material becomes not only an interpretation of earlier writings, but "a new writing" :

the letters to the Romans become letters to all of Christianity; Mark, followed by Matthew and Luke, then by John, wrote a gospel; new documents were added to this; and, one day, the Church closed the Canon, constituting in a completed and closed written text the corpus of witnesses. . . . A hermeneutical situation was thus created which was not immediately recognized as such . . . .  
(PHBH 94)

This "hermeneutical situation" linking speech and writing produces, in its turn, "what we term proclamation, kerygma,

preaching" (PHBH 94)<sup>3</sup>. Ricoeur sees this as the "condition of possibility of tradition as such, in the fundamental sense of the transmission of a message". Writing assists this process by allowing for the

*distanciation* that separates the message from the speaker, from the initial situation and from its primary receiver. Thanks to writing, speech comes all the way to us, reaching us by means of its "sense" and by the "thing" that is at issue in it, and no longer through the "voice" of the utterer. (PHBH 94-95)

Ricoeur's hermeneutics always depends on the interpretative situation of text and reader. In the present case, by shifting the focus to the text, and away from the original subject who produced it, he shows how we can escape from the simplistic view that biblical texts speak to us in exactly the same way that they addressed their first audiences. Presenting the shift as a function of the reading process, he makes a statement that will have crucial repercussions in liturgical hermeneutics :

the text must be able, from the sociological as well as the psychological point of view, to 'decontextualise' itself in such a way that it can be 'recontextualised' in a new situation - as accomplished, precisely, by the act of reading. (HD 139)

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3. Martin Kitchen comments that "it is the task of the sermon to elucidate the meaning of the biblical text in the context of the liturgical text." op. cit 44

For the moment, and keeping in mind the valuable notion of recontextualisation by decontextualisation, I shall return to Derrida's essay "Telepathy", with its account of the written performative. As I noted in Chapter Three, Derrida's scenario in "Telepathy" presents the written performative as programming or impelling the future course of action of the person who has accepted its proposal, along with the risks that this entails. The liturgical application demanded that this picture be stretched to allow for the addressee's reciprocal need to call upon, and even reconstruct, the sender of the communication. This permits a profitable expansion of Ricoeur's view, so that it is not only the text that is seen to be recontextualised in new situations : the receiver of the text is also recontextualised by following the programme that the encounter with the text sets in motion, and meeting the *sender* (God) under constantly renewed conditions.

In a very immediate sense, the encounter with biblical material in the context of worship is also a programme for action in the situation in which the meeting takes place. Ricoeur's work points in particular to the biblical canon, which is the emblem of the Church's control over the nature of the biblical texts that are available to readers and hearers (PHBH 94). This notion of careful selection invalidates any lingering sense of a naive primary receiver, who might come across any text at any time. The canon places



the encounter firmly within the dimension of liturgical time, although the event of communication will always extend beyond liturgical time, to affect the life of the individual in situations outside of the practice of worship.

### **4.3 The Eucharistic Lectionary**

With these considerations in mind, the first of the categories of biblical encounter in liturgy, i.e., direct transcription of whole passages of scripture as Old and New Testament lessons and gospel readings, can be introduced.

The *Books of Common Prayer* included a table of readings which covered one calendar year, and was to be repeated annually. When the processes of liturgical reform that produced *The Alternative Service Book* were set in motion, the BCP lectionary was extensively revised and the General Synod of the Church of England authorised a new table of readings for Holy Communion on 9th July, 1978<sup>4</sup>. Although the

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4. The approved lectionary was originally drawn up by the Joint Liturgical Group (JLG), an advisory body representing eight major denominational groups in Britain, and appeared as *The Calendar and Lectionary* ed. R.C.D. Jasper Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1967. The proposals were adopted for experimental use by the Church of England in 1972, almost as they stood. Subsequently, both the calendar and the lectionary underwent "considerable amendment" before the General Synod of the Church of England sanctioned them for use in 1978. For a brief account of the procedures, see E.C. Whitaker "The 1978 Lectionary" in *The Ministry of the Word* ed. G.J. Cuming London : Bible Reading Fellowship; Oxford, New York, Toronto & Melbourne : Oxford University Press, 1979 xi-xv.

resultant lectionary brings biblical texts into relationship, with one another under certain thematic classifications, the committee involved in its genesis has been at pains to avoid the charge of extreme prescriptivism. E.C. Whitaker stresses, in his contribution to Geoffrey Cuming's handbook to the 1978 lectionary, that

[i]t is important to recognize that the choice of readings has not been *dictated* by a *pre-determined* list of themes. Of course, in the main seasons of the Church's year the readings *choose themselves*, and follow themes which are indicated by the seasons. But for the Sundays after Pentecost, the procedure when the lectionary was originally framed was first to single out the passages of scripture which most *deserved* to be read, and only then to arrange them in *coherent* groups.<sup>5</sup>

The language of Whitaker's defence suggests a great deal of tension between opposition to imposing a firmly thematic control on the lectionary on the one hand, and allowing the chosen readings to speak for themselves on the other. In this rather self-contradictory account it is possible to see the lectionary as a potential instrument for controlling the liturgical appropriation of the Faith from the outside, by manipulating the instructional material to fit a particular theological mould. Equally, one could argue that its founding principles leave room for freedom and independence, even though agreement and consensus in a single Faith are its desired results.

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5. *ibid* xiv-xv my italics

Arbitrary choice would be as damaging as severe constraints, and premature condemnation of the lectionary must necessarily indulge in naive denials of the fundamentally authoritative nature of much of the material that is included in the liturgical text. Believers have a certain inbuilt allegiance to scriptural authority and tend, by and large, to treat it as beyond question. Hence to pretend that it confronts them at the eucharist innocent of any preconceived aura of establishment, weight, or power would be disingenuous. They are, in fact, half-persuaded before they ever assimilate the biblical text into their liturgical experience. The process of incorporating the Bible in the liturgy thus anticipates congregations who are simultaneously receptive, and capable of independent judgment, a position which the JLG acknowledged in drawing up the lectionary :

The Joint Liturgical Group emphasized that 'the thematic titles provided are no more than *indications* of emphasis. They must not be allowed to give false rigidity to the hearing of scripture or to the preaching of the Word of God. The lections are, on the whole, rich in material. They may say different things to different people, and it is right that they should do so.'<sup>6</sup>

This is reflected to some extent in the pattern of responses to the set readings. After the Old and New Testament lessons, the reader says, "This is the word of the Lord"; after the gospel the words "This is the gospel of Christ"

6. *ibid* xv

are spoken, with the people answering, "Praise to Christ our Lord." Yet these formulae are not without their difficulties, given that a thinking congregation will sometimes wish to challenge episodes which are clearly not "the word of the Lord". The issue is one of authority. As Geoffrey Cuming notes :

Changing views in modern scholarship about the authority of the Bible raise particular problems for the practice of reading portions of Scripture aloud in the services, particularly when the reading is followed by the formula 'This is the word of the Lord'.<sup>7</sup>

In order to come to terms with the dilemma, at least as far as the readings were concerned, the Joint Liturgical Group redirected their attention towards the internal authority holding different voices together within the rite. The result of the inquiry was to determine what E.C. Whitaker calls a "controlling reading" within each set of Old Testament, New Testament and Gospel, "[setting] the themes which give coherence to each group of three readings"<sup>8</sup>.

At one level this might be thought of as an attempt to cloak a sinister desire to dominate the thinking of the liturgical community by pretending that the imported passages are free from all forms of discipline or prior interpretation. It is more constructive, however, to view the lectionary as

7. Geoffrey Cuming "This is the Word of the Lord" in *The Ministry of the Word* xix

8. "The 1978 Lectionary" *ibid* xiv

standing in a hermeneutic relationship to the rest of the eucharistic liturgy, on the analogy of Ricoeur's sense of the hermeneutic relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Thus, for example, the collect comes before the readings and the gospel, and might be assumed to govern their effect upon the congregation. Yet the collect itself is built upon the dominant themes in the readings themselves. It is conditioned by what is to come, at the same time that it initiates a mode of thinking that prepares the worshippers for scriptural instruction. Following this, the fruitful dialogue between the readings awaits the enriching engagement with aspects of the rite such as credal professions, or the breaking of bread (to name only the most obvious examples). The expositional force of the sermon, and the echo of themes raised in the readings in hymns, make further contributions to thickening the texture of the total act of worship.

The topics which arise out of this survey of the issues involved in the liturgical appropriation of the Bible can all be related to the problem of making an original utterance contemporary. Later in the chapter, I will pursue questions of the intention behind the use of biblical language in liturgy, its capacity to be repeated, and the context in which biblically based utterances occur, with more rigorous attention to J.L. Austin's theory of speech

acts<sup>9</sup>. For the moment, all these aspects of the liturgical act can be considered under the general heading of the force of the scripturally derived utterance.

Each time a passage from the Bible is incorporated as a reading within an act of worship, or referred to in a prayer, a double movement takes place. The new situation draws, first of all, on the force of the borrowed utterance in its original position to give power to its reference. This calls upon the whole range of background knowledge of biblical contexts which participants in liturgy are presumed to bring with them. In the next stage of the movement, the original force undergoes a transformation brought about by its new relationships with other utterances which might resonate with it typologically, thematically, or even by the seeming inappropriateness of the enforced proximity.

It is important to note as a working principle that this view of the force of liturgical utterances endorses Austin's claim that it is its force in a particular context, and not

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9. Speech act theory itself has been scrupulous in its avoidance of the topic of liturgy, although liturgists have frequently applied speech act principles in their work. Except for instances which can be described in terms similar to those used for secular speech acts (e.g. the act of baptism, or the exchange of marriage vows) this promising field receives no attention from Austin in *How To Do Things With Words*, or from John Searle in *Speech Acts*. For a summary of liturgical applications of the theory, see Joyce Ann Zimmerman *Liturgy as Language of Faith* 20 n.59

the intention of the original speaker, which determines the speech act<sup>10</sup>.

#### **4.4 Putting the Principles into Practice**

As a way of showing how the lectionary provides for the Bible to be quoted and appropriated in liturgy, it is useful to work in detail from a small sample of texts. The discussion of principles in action will therefore be temporally confined to the period of the Church's year between Easter and Pentecost, and further limited to the lectionary set for the Sunday eucharist in this season. I shall be considering the ways in which passages from the lectionary for Sundays within the same liturgical season engage in dialogue with each other and, more specifically, how on a single Sunday the readings might find their place in the dynamics of the eucharistic celebration.

*The Alternative Service Book's* lectionary provides two sets of readings (Old Testament, New Testament and Gospel) to be used at the eucharist in alternate years, designated Year 1 and Year 2. The ASB's table of themes gives a pair of tags which suggest the rationale behind the choice of readings, and influence their reception in the eucharistic context.

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10. Austin reneges on this position to some extent, as Derrida shows in "Signature Event Context".

Thus the following guidance is given for the Sundays known as Easter 1 - 5 :

1st Sunday after Easter	The Upper Room / The Bread of Life
2nd Sunday after Easter	The Emmaus Road / The Good Shepherd
3rd Sunday after Easter	The Lakeside / The Resurrection
4th Sunday after Easter	The Charge to Peter / The Way, the Truth, the Life
5th Sunday after Easter	Going to the Father

(ASB 1092)

The first cycle (Year 1) traces Jesus's post-resurrection appearances to the disciples, leading towards the Ascension which will close the Easter season and make way for the season of Pentecost. The second cycle (Year 2) takes a rather more abstractly thematic approach to the post-Resurrection Jesus, through his enigmatic words to the disciples before his death. Here, he is revealed in the gospel readings by attributes or mystical images - the Bread of Life ; the Good Shepherd ; the Resurrection and the Life; the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In all the instances from John's gospel which make up the Year 2 cycle, the disciples fail to understand what Jesus's words indicate. There is a



different kind of endemic misunderstanding in the Year 1 cycle, where the disciples are baffled to the point of non-recognition by the sight of the risen Christ. There is a further consideration of coherence, in that the three readings set for each Sunday have a mutually supportive effect. This might be the result of typological connection between the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel, or of explicit exposition in the New Testament lesson, to name two possibilities.

Thus narrative, epistle and prophecy gain their unity by an internal commensurability of theme, although an external combining authority has determined the lectionary. Three functions have been performed in making the connection, showing how scripture is fulfilled, and using each passage to illuminate the others. The result is one of complementarity, but not of completeness, since the lectionary can illustrate a theme selectively, but not represent its biblical evidence in totality. In fact, different compilers might not even agree on the choice of evidence, or the perception of intertextual relationships which this presupposes. The lectionary's recommendations for daily use in the Church's year bespeak a healthy incompleteness in the further sense that a good deal of the work of interpretation is always left for the congregation, as I suggested earlier.

Finally, both gospels have their central interests digested in the condensed thought of the collect. For example, the Easter 1 collect isolates both the effect of the Christ's presence among the frightened disciples gathered in the Upper Room "for fear of the Jews" (Year 1), and the theme of feeding to eternal life which the Year 2 gospel expounds :

Almighty Father,  
 who in your great mercy made glad the disciples  
 with the sight of the risen Lord :  
 give us such knowledge of his presence with us,  
 that we may be strengthened and sustained  
 by his risen life  
 and serve you continually in righteousness and  
 truth;  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
 (ASB 602)

Reviewing the Year 1 and Year 2 cycles, then, we are able to make the following statements :

1. The gospels in the Year 1 cycle draw on the historical language or voice of biblical narrative tradition, isolating episodes of Jesus's appearance between Easter and the Ascension.
2. The Year 2 cycle's gospels draw on the thematic and somewhat mystical language of the Kingdom to which Jesus is the way.

3. The supporting Old and New Testament passages build up the controlling idea of the gospel in each case, while the collect achieves a masterly summary of both cycles' key ideas.

With these axioms in mind, we can go on to consider the integration of the lectionary material into the context of the eucharist. While the collect suggests a framework for reception, this still has to be understood within the greater assumptions of eucharistic practice. In the latter, we are dealing primarily with a reciprocal relationship between presence and faith : the faith of the congregation in the presence of God, and the assurance of presence as an adjunct to or even an origin of faith. The thematic preoccupations of the readings can be woven into this existing dialogue, as well as forming their own independently coherent address. In effect, a relationship of mediation has developed, which will be illustrated through a detailed study of a particular Sunday within the Easter period. For this purpose, I shall use the set readings for the eucharist on the third Sunday after Easter (Easter 3).

#### **4.5 Year 1 : The Lakeside**

The three readings in this cycle work together to build up a picture of messianic salvation. Representing three different temporal perspectives, they examine the implications of

Christ's coming as an event still to be accomplished, an occurrence within the present time of human experience, and a retrospective reflection on the event as a ground for the faith of those who come afterwards.

In the Old Testament reading from Isaiah 61:1-7, the prophetic vision encompasses the liberation of a subject people, and their restoration to prosperity in their own land. Although Isaiah refers in an immediate sense to his own time, we are to remember that the history of Israel is always finally linked to the coming of the Messiah. His message of "good news to the humble", comfort for "the broken-hearted", "liberty to captives / and release to those in prison" as part of "a year of the Lord's favour" is thus both immediate and the proleptic assurance that the hope of the new Jerusalem will be realised.

In the New Testament lesson from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:1-11), we are dealing retrospectively with the resurrection, through facts attested by witnesses: "that Christ died for our sins . . . that he was buried; that he was raised to life on the third day" and that he appeared successively to many of his disciples, finally appearing to Paul himself. The personal circumstances of the Corinthian Church and Paul's own life are rhetorically swept aside, however. What remains important for the audience at the time the epistle was written is that "[t]his is what we

all proclaim, and this is what you believed" (ASB 614). It is the same first person plural form of address that grants the passage significance for the modern liturgical community. Especially in the post-Easter period, reminders of the oft-repeated statements of belief in the resurrection of Jesus strike with forceful immediacy alongside the creed and the acclamation of Christ's death, resurrection and coming again in the eucharist<sup>11</sup>.

Lastly, the gospel (John 21:1-14) recounts the narrative event of Jesus's lakeside appearance to the disciples, a few days after the resurrection. The disciples' failure to recognise Jesus at first is vividly drawn. Nowhere is it more successful than in its portrait of Peter, impulsively scrambling into his clothes in order to plunge into the water to meet his Lord, before the fishing boat has come ashore. The story goes on to affirm the corporeal reality of the resurrected Jesus, who cooks breakfast on the shore.

This represents a welding together of prophecy, attestation, and narrative. The persuasive force of the first two

11. As Geoffrey Cuming points out :

Certainly the epistles were written for reading aloud; again, probably during worship. Their use of the second person plural and the imperative makes them particularly suitable for the purpose; and the same is true of the Old Testament prophecies. Long narratives are less suited to reading at the eucharist under modern conditions. . . . Consequently, the great majority of the Old Testament lessons are taken from the prophets.

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readings is used to maximum effect, in order to support the rhetorically weaker form of the narrative in the gospel. Yet reciprocally, by providing tangible proof of the event of the resurrection, the gospel focuses and clarifies the prospective and retrospective presentations of the Old and New Testament readings.

#### **4.6 Year 2 : The Resurrection and the Life**

The Year 2 cycle for Easter 3 concentrates explicitly, in the Old Testament reading and the gospel, on miraculous raising from the dead. In the Old Testament lesson (1 Kings 17:17-end), we learn of the widow of Zarephath who regularly offered hospitality to the prophet Elijah. When her only son died at a time which coincided with one of Elijah's visits, she berated the prophet : "'Man of God, why did you do this to me ? Did you come here to remind God of my sins and so cause my son's death ?'" Elijah carried the body upstairs, prayed, then stretched himself out three times on the boy. God heard his prayers and restored the boy to life. This incident confirmed the widow's faith in Elijah as prophet, and in the God he served.

The New Testament reading (Colossians 3:1-11) takes up the theme of death and resurrection with the didactic purpose of urging its audience to fix its aims on God, and hence to "put to death those parts of [them] which belong to the

earth." It is in dying to mortal preoccupations, and living the life exemplified by Christ, that they will assume the "new nature, which is constantly renewed in the image of its Creator and brought to know God."

The gospel (John 11:17-27) records the death and raising of Lazarus. It turns on a dramatic misunderstanding between Jesus and Lazarus's sister Martha, who is naturally distraught and confronts Jesus with the words, "'If you had been here, sir, my brother would not have died.'" Jesus assures her that Lazarus will rise again, a promise that she interprets eschatologically : "'I know that he will rise again,' said Martha, 'at the resurrection on the last day.'" Jesus then asks her to affirm her belief that the faithful will live even though they die. The passage does not include the actual restoration of Lazarus, perhaps to emphasise the fact that the whole event turns on faith, so that Martha's acclamation, "'I now believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world'", has climactic force.

The obvious *typological* connection between Elijah's restoring of the widow's son, and Jesus's raising of Lazarus creates a powerful case for faith. Both narratives begin in combative situations. Elijah accuses God of deserting the widow who has shown him kindness, while Martha tells Jesus that, had he been present, Lazarus would not have died. If

the two accounts share the experience of believers who cannot reconcile personal misfortune or bereavement with their fidelity to God, their miraculous resolutions also offer the hope that God does not desert the faithful, even in the bleakest and harshest despair. Particularly in Martha's case, the vivid dialogue :

Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and I am life . . . Do you believe this?' 'Lord, I do,' she answered; 'I now believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world.'

stands out as a commitment, born out of a leap of faith across the apparently unremitting evidence of a vindictive God, that is a pattern for all worshippers.

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, manages to encompass both death and resurrection, and faith, by transmuting them into a *metaphor* for sin and righteousness. This last development is not a conclusion which would automatically issue from the passages from I Kings or the gospel of John. Paul has to work the idea of resurrection as the vindication of faith around to the didactic point of living a life that is morally consistent with faith in Jesus, and a preparation for the Kingdom. At the same time, it is through faith that his audience will find the resources to live a metaphorically risen life. This is closely aligned with the two narratives, albeit in a curious way. For Paul exploits the paradox of dying to the securities of this world, in



order to make a leap of faith towards the Kingdom that has not yet come.

Both groups of readings devolve upon the fulfilment of a promise. In the Year 1 cycle, the gospel narrative's instance of the acknowledgement of the resurrection finds corroboration and extension in the epistle ("My brothers, I must remind you of the gospel that I preached to you, the gospel which you received, on which you have taken your stand, and which is now bringing you salvation" ASB 614), while the prospect of the "everlasting joy" of the resurrection is already embodied in the vision of Isaiah. The Year 2 set considers what the promise of eternal life means in the present context. Especially in Martha's case, the gospel account urges that God's promise be appropriated now, while Paul shows the Corinthian church what effects such appropriation should have on their lives in the future.

#### **4.7 Preliminary Appropriation in the Collect**

The collect expresses the essence of both cycles with economical skill. Most importantly, it performs an adjustment from 'real' time to liturgical time, from history to promise, showing how the futurity of the promise and the pastness of the historical event can be appropriated into the present with implications for eternal life. This means a fairly bold assumption in the opening lines that the

congregation has associated the event of resurrection with its own salvation :

Almighty God,  
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection  
and the life of all who put their trust in him:

The extrapolation, which deals with the death of sin and the life of righteousness, is made possible by reference to an assumed wider knowledge of the biblical context. But it is the Year 2 readings which tie the collect directly to its context in the example of Easter 3. For here, the miracles of raising the dead to life, seized on by Paul and metaphorically extended, can be pursued as a thematic intention :

raise us, we pray, from the death of sin  
to the life of righteousness;  
that we may seek the things which are above,  
where he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
(ASB 612-613)

The middle section of the collect then undertakes to appropriate that recognition in the transforming chiasmus :

raise us from the death of sin  
to the life of righteousness

which understands a complete change in the here and now, a kind of contraction of the experience of Lazarus or the widow's son, but with a reduplicative effect. The death

Christ promises to raise us from at the end of time is also the metaphor of our present sinful condition, and since Christ's all-atoning death avails for that condition, we can attach to the idea of eternal life a "life of righteousness" in the present that prefigures the final experience.

In this way, attention is redirected from history to the practical implementation of the promise embedded in history, since it is only by actively "[seeking] the things which are above" that we will attain to eternal life, and it is only in living "the life of righteousness" that we will choose to institute the search, and make our own what we receive from the tradition.

There is a secondary aspect of the collect's prehistory that has to be taken into account, namely its original in the funeral office of *The Book of Common Prayer*<sup>12</sup>. By adopting

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12. O Mercyfull God, the father of oure Lorde Iesus Christe, who is the resurrection and the lyfe, in whome whosoever beleveth shall lyve thoughe he dye. And whosoever lyveth and beleveth in hym, shall not dye eternally, who also taughte us (by hys holy Apostle Paule) not to be sory, as men without hope, for them that slepe in hym : We mekely beseche thee (O Father) to rayse us from the death of synne, unto the lyfe of ryghteousnes, that when we shal depart this lyfe, we may rest in him, as our hope is this our brother doth, and that at the general resurrection in the last day, we may be founde acceptable in thy syghte, and receyve that blessing which thy welbeloved sonne shall then pronounce, to al that love and feare thee, saying. Come ye blessed children of my father, receyve the kingdome prepared for you, from the beginning of the world. Graunt this we beseche thee O mercyfull father, throughe Iesus Chryste our mediatour & redemer.

(ER II 877 : 1552)

the funeral collect as part of the Easter cycle, the ASB revisers have simultaneously isolated two important strands. In the first place, Easter is centrally concerned with the movement from death to a resurrected life, and in the second place, much of the theology of Christian burial is tied up in this paschal belief. Where the collect diverges from the BCP form ("that we may seek the things which are above") is the point where funeral theology has to project the congregation towards the time "when we shal depart this lyfe." In the Easter cycle, our new resurrected life now empowers us to seek the joys which await believers at the end of time.

#### **4.8 Prayer and Biblical Quotation**

The detailed review of the Easter 3 readings gives some indication of the growth of the creative dialogue between the historical past and the living present, towards a promissory focus that escapes temporal constraints. The collect epitomises the loosening of boundaries in the transmission of the Faith under the conditions of faithful reception, by remaining textually very closely linked to the readings set for a particular Sunday, at the same time that it shows how their assurances can be appropriated by the worshipping community.

The initial remarks on the collect's use of biblical sources do, however, introduce principles which can be applied to other more freely ranging forms of liturgical prayer. As a particular example of biblically based composition, the ASB's alternative Prayer of Humble Access offers a rewarding case study :

Most merciful Lord,	1
your love compels us to come in.	
Our hands were unclean,	
our hearts were unprepared;	
we were not fit	5
even to eat the crumbs from under your table.	
But you, Lord, are the God of our salvation,	
and share your bread with sinners.	
So cleanse and feed us	10
with the precious body and blood of your Son,	
that he may live in us and we in him;	
and that we, with the whole company of Christ,	
may sit and eat in your kingdom. Amen.	
(ASB 170)	

The prayer should be traced initially to the Prayer of Humble Access of *The Book of Common Prayer*<sup>13</sup> (the version which is adapted in diluted form for the usual Prayer of Humble Access in ASB Rite A). Comparison will show how the tone of the BCP version has been altered in the language of

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13. We doe not presume to come to thys thy table (O mercifull Lorde) trustynge in our owne ryghteousnesse, but in thy manifolde and greate mercies : we bee not worthy so much as to gather up the crommes under thy Table, but thou art the same Lorde, whose propertie is alwayes to have mercye : graunte us therefore (gracious Lorde) so to eat the fleshe of thy dere sonne Iesus Christ, and to drink his bloud, that our synful bodyes may be made cleane by his body, and our soules washed through his most precious bloude, and that we may evermore dwell in hym, and he in us. Amen.

(ER II 691 : 1552)

the ASB, so that a general positivity replaces hesitation and self-abasement. Thus the parenthetical "(O mercifull Lorde)" becomes the assertive opening invocation of the ASB prayer, and the negative "we do not presume" gives way to the implied divine imperative of "your love compels us to come in". From a prosodic point of view, however, this positive certainty is belied by the baldness of the first five lines. The reader who is familiar with the BCP model instinctively feels the hiatus at the end of the first line, where an adjectival clause ('whose love') might smooth the transition to the matter-of-factness of "Your love compels us to come in". Again, there is a discernible gap between the end of line 2, where a concessive conjunction ('although our hands were unclean') would furnish some connecting logic between the two observations. Lines 4-5, with their abrupt monosyllables, and savage dental consonants ("not"; "fit"; "to"; "eat"; "table") seem to cast the petitioners so low that nothing can raise them up. In the ASB, however, the present tense of the BCP's "we bee not worthy . . ." has been altered to the past tense of "we were not fit", to reflect that the words are spoken in the assurance that God has already healed and saved us<sup>14</sup>. What remains, therefore, is for the community to claim the healing which is theirs.

14. The ASB's past tense is a prominent reason for eucharistic celebrants to avoid using this prayer. Theologically, it seems to dispose of the necessity for divine forgiveness and cleansing in the very act of asking for these things. While the prayer that is normally used is 'flatter' in tone, it does not present the same contradictions.

The ASB recognises their sin, but instead of presenting the filth of the sinful body, it shows Jesus, the friend of tax-gatherers and sinners, cleansing them as though preparing them to join a feast.

Already, then, the accent has changed from near-unbelief that God could forgive, to dawning realisation that the congregation's unworthiness is behind them, transfigured through the love of God. The modern prayer pivots beautifully on its central line (line 7 of 13), "But you, Lord, are the God of our salvation." This enables them to put their former lives aside in the light of this knowledge, and to concentrate on preparing themselves for the life to come.

Analysis of this sort only peels back the upper layer of the prayer, and it is worth exploring it more thoroughly to reveal its rich use of biblical quotation and allusion. As always, we have to be aware of the subtle mutations of context which each quotation entails, marking the point where the original word can become the worshippers' distinctive utterance, and hence a way towards the reconfiguration of their own subjectivity.

To move systematically through the prayer, 11.1-2 can be referred negatively to Luke 13:24-46, where Jesus warns his hearers that salvation is not a certainty :

". . . for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the householder has risen up and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door saying, 'Lord, open to us.' He will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.'"<sup>15</sup>

In the context of the prayer, however, the fear of God's refusal gives way to the insistence of his welcome, read in the light of the salvation he has already won for believers. None of the predictable excuses for staying away from him - neither physical unpreparedness, nor other engagements - is adequate. We are reminded in the first instance of Jesus's words to the Pharisees (Luke 11:37-41 ; Mark 7:1-6), in which he warns them that adherence to the custom of external cleanliness cannot be a substitute for a clean and generous spirit. In a looser sense, we are also to recall the parable of the rich man whose invited guests made last-minute excuses for not arriving at his banquet as previously agreed. The angry host then sent for the poor, the maimed and the outcast, and denied his invited guests entry. The hospitality of God is not to be lightly refused, and in this light, the second line ("*Your love compels us to come in*") reads almost oxymoronically as a statement of the dual identity of the God who gently nurtures, and the God who disciplines and demands obedience.

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15. All references will be taken from *The Bible : Revised Standard Version* London : British & Foreign Bible Society 39th repr. 1979 unless otherwise stated.



The first part of the prayer ends with the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matthew 15:21-28 ; Mark 7:24-30) who appealed to Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus replied :

"Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." And he said to her, "For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter."  
(Mark 7:24-30)

In both the ASB and the BCP the prayer creates a powerfully conflated image which makes its utterers at once the dogs, or gentile pariahs, or (stretching the metaphor to its limits) those beyond the reach of divine mercy, even though they are importunate enough to appeal to this mercy. The prayer suggests that as the reward of the Syro-Phoenician woman's faith and persistence was healing, so also we gain access to salvation if we are brave enough to claim it in the stark consciousness of our sin. After all, the God to whom we appeal is the Jesus who was castigated by the Pharisees for eating with tax-gatherers and sinners (Luke 5:27-33 ; 15:1-2; Matthew 9:9-13), and the Jesus who promised that he was the bread of life and that unless we ate his flesh and drank his blood we would have no life (John 6:45-59).

Finally, the image of the divine banquet gently refuses believers the right to be modestly self-effacing any longer.

If they have approached God like those characters in another feast parable, who took the lowest place, they have now been sought out by their host and invited to an honoured place at the table (Luke 14:7-11). There is a further strange confusion here, since the "God of our salvation" is presented as waiting on us in his Kingdom so that we may "sit and eat". Is this a challenge to the whole accepted order of hierarchy, and part of the divine comedy of redemption? Surely the prayer is calling attention to the dispute among the disciples over who held precedence amongst them :

And [Jesus] said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves."

(Luke 22:24-27)

The prayer is both modern (composed in the 1970s), and original in the significant sense that it does much more than simply adapt a BCP form to contemporary usage. As I shall go on to demonstrate, it is accountable to the paraliturgical tradition of English devotional poetry which, together with the post-Reformation liturgical tradition, is the heritage of contemporary liturgy in English. This is a particularly apt example of the complicated allegiances I have sketched since, as well as being heavily reliant on

scriptural references, the prayer clearly echoes an identifiable member of the literary canon, i.e., George Herbert's "Love III" :

Love bade me welcome : yet my soul drew back,  
 Guilty of dust and sin.  
 But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
 From my first entrance in,  
 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
 If I lacked anything;

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here :  
 Love said, You shall be he.  
 I the unkind, the ungrateful ? Ah my dear,  
 I cannot look on thee.  
 Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
 Who made the eyes but I ?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them : let my shame  
 Go where it doeth deserve.  
 And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame ?  
 My dear, then I will serve.  
 You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat :  
 So I did sit and eat.<sup>16</sup>

A brief survey of some of the issues of the poem adds another dimension to the prayer's portrayal of God's loving control over the congregation. Love, the personification of God in the poem, does not resort to methods as overt as the word "compels" in the prayer implies (1.2). Instead, each one of the speaker's reasons for refusing Love's invitation is gently trumped by hidden advantages. The adhesions of mortality, "dust and sin", present no difficulties, for Love is content to make the speaker worthy despite his failings. When the speaker objects again that he cannot look on Love,

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16. Louis L. Martz (ed) *George Herbert and Henry Vaughan*  
 Oxford & New York : Oxford University Press, 1986 171-172

Love claims power over his choice to look or not to look as the creator's right : "Who made the eyes but I ?"

Here, in the curious homophonic identity of "eye" and "I", the verse begins to play havoc with the speaker's sense of self. "I cannot look on thee" is also "[eye] cannot look on thee", a general statement that applies to all humanity faced with the majesty of God. Love responds with the question, "who made the eyes but I ?", which is also "who made the eyes [I's] but I [eye] ?" This shares the psalmist's recognition that the mere gaze of God brings creation into being and that, should he turn away for a moment, it would return to nothing (ps. 104). It also undermines the notion of independent subjectivity, for this too is ultimately God's possession and God's creation. Humanity's relation to self arguably has more to do with destroying the object of God's love than defending its integrity before God ("Truth, Lord, but I have marred them"). The speaker cannot even demand the right to his own "shame", since Love has been there before him, to bear "the blame". Nor is he allowed to choose the path of service, for Love is determined that he will "sit down . . . and taste [his] meat."

The whole process enacts the speaker's conquest by Love. While he fought for independence, refusing to approach in the knowledge of his own sin, he retained a measure of

control over his own life. Accepting Love's invitation means forfeiting all reason not to accept it and this is, perhaps, very close indeed to the meaning of humble access.

Yet the effect of importing a devotional poem into a liturgical context cannot be quite so easily explained, as the account of the poem itself suggests. In the transfer from the poem to the prayer, one of the most notable features is the shifting pattern of irony. Irony is not a favoured device in liturgical composition, and the prayer briskly edits out the teasing dialogue between God and the speaker, to turn at once to the chief issue, only implied in the play of the poem : "Your love *compels* us to come in". Instead of irony, the prayer invokes the miraculously commonplace aspect of God, who is "the God of our salvation" and who "share[s] [his] bread with sinners." Finally, the prayer looks forward to the positive possibility of sitting and eating in God's Kingdom : this is not a trick played on a reluctant guest, but a real promise.

The prayer's ironies are all in the underlying tissue of its biblical content, and the worshipper has to return to the original narratives of the Syro-Phoenician woman, and of the feasts, as well as the account of Jesus with his disciples, in search of the odd situations created by relationships of race, status and hospitality, and their ironic solutions.

The biblical and secular background to the alternative Prayer of Humble Access is not merely part of its literary archaeology. As is evident by now, each allusion or echo brings with it something of the force it carries in its original context. The intriguing power of quotation has been expertly treated by William Flesch<sup>17</sup>. His illustration of the ways in which poems, or prosodical structures, quote other prosodical structures produces two scenarios :

In one the prosody makes into poetry, or works to its own form, words that come from a different prosodical context, or from none at all. The converse movement . . . tends to occlude the prosody to which it nevertheless conforms, so that prosody is made to imitate the stuttering, stammering, hesitant anacoluthons of ordinary speech.<sup>18</sup>

The prayer lies interestingly between Flesch's categories, because it represents both possibilities. Its astute adaptation of biblical narrative allows flashes of memory to be triggered by single words. Beginning with its immediate forbear in the BCP, it turns the whole approach of the earlier form upside down. This retains the sense of awestruck humility that must accompany the eucharistic meeting with God, yet brings a new confidence in the promise of salvation. Hence the biblical echoes, and preeminently the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman, can be reread in a spirit of greater assurance.

17. William Flesch "Quoting Poetry" *Critical Inquiry* 18(1) 1991 42-63

18. *ibid* 50

Comparison with Herbert's poem has shown something of the urgency of the ASB prayer. The prosodic elegance which is masked by the extreme simplicity of the poem's dialogue between Love and the speaker becomes a breathless, staccato address to God in the prayer, dispensing with the circuitous formalities of the diffident guest, and imploring God's mercy in making his guests ready to join the feast.

Although Flesch argues for distinct differences in the results of the two modes of quoting poetry, he goes on to link his apparently opposed examples in the following way:

. . . in both these cases what counts is the fact that clashing prosodical contexts are being brought into conformity. The authoritative priority of the quoted words is made to mesh with the prosodical authority of the quoting poem; that is to say that an authority of content (since the quotation must be accurate) is made to coincide with an authority of prosodical form (since the quoting poem must scan and rhyme).<sup>19</sup>

The prayer takes its authority to direct the people's faithful preparation for communion by clever digestion of dispersed biblical reference *and* from its deliberate avoidance of the poetic intricacy of "Love III". Its success in collecting a number of scriptural instances, and assembling them within a single structure, towards a particular purpose, shows how a body of important background

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19. *ibid* 50

material can be brought into liturgical performance without making an unwieldy intrusion in the rite. In David Frost's words :

Unlike a collect, such a prayer must stand ceaseless repetition; its surface simplicity must conceal further depths. One might preach a Communion sermon on the prayer alone; and unless formal liturgy is to have this possibility of extended meaning, it is hard to see what justification there is for a minister to repeat a form of words, rather than be turned loose to the inspirational guidance of the Spirit as it moves him<sup>20</sup>.

This has considerable relevance to the general question of what makes liturgical rites repeatable, and how original utterances can be brought to bear again and again on the lives of worshippers.

#### **4.9 Conventions of Repetition and Quotation**

Ricoeur's account of the oscillation between speech and writing in the biblical situation is concerned with the *transmission* of traditional material, and its liberating effect upon the subjective imagination. Liturgical conditions demand that we add to this a consideration of the *convention* of repeating a given text, which is the very basis of liturgical practice. 'Convention' here entails a great deal more than simply re-reading a text, and thus re-presenting it to a reader, or even to a community of



readers. As well as keeping a tradition alive, and validating it at each renewed celebration, liturgical repetition always implies that something is effected by the words that constitute the rite (e.g. couples are married; the unbaptised are baptised; the dead are committed to the keeping of God in burial; eucharistic elements are consecrated).

A claim of this order places liturgy in the category of performative speech acts, classically formulated in J.L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words*. For the moment I shall be bracketing the act of faith that informs such events as consecration and baptism. The topic will be resumed at the conclusion of the chapter.

Austin shows that performative speech acts succeed where a given set of conventions for their utterance "in certain circumstances" exists. The basic criterion for successful speech acts is that correct conditions for the act in question must be in operation. This means that the procedure must be performed by the "appropriate" people in the "appropriate" circumstances, both "correctly" and "completely" (HDTW, 14-15). Austin lists a number of ways in which these conventions can be breached, making the speech act a failure. The efficacy of each performance, it seems, should be measured against the state of readiness of the participants, the suitability of the setting to the act

intended, the accuracy and completeness of the performance, and its further consequences in the lives of the performers. At the same time, although the performer of the act may not sincerely intend to carry out the undertaking that the verbal formulation describes, this absence of genuine intention does not affect the status of the performative act. Thus, for example, it is perfectly valid to promise to do something which lies within one's capabilities, whether or not the promise is subsequently fulfilled.

There is, however, a more serious hazard than occasional insincerity, according to Austin. This is the phenomenon which he terms a "parasitic" use of language. Such a usage mimics, but does not seriously intend, the action conveyed by the speech act in "ordinary circumstances" :

I mean, for example, the following : a performative utterance will, for example be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in a soliloquy . . . . Language in such circumstances is in special ways - intelligibly - used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use - ways which fall under the doctrine of the etiologies of language. All this we are excluding from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances.  
(HDTW 22)

It is this restriction on quoting original performatives in Austin's analysis that Derrida singles out for special treatment in the essay "Signature Event Context". As I shall

show, the implications of Derrida's critique for the performance of liturgy are considerable. Derrida points out that Austin's account of speech acts performed "in ordinary circumstances" (HTDW 21-22) does not deal with the issue of what makes certain conventional formulae repeatable. Commenting on Austin's prescriptions for the conventionality of the circumstances in which the speech act might be performed, Derrida says :

. . . in this specific place Austin seems to consider only the conventionality that forms the *circumstance* of the statement, its contextual surroundings, and not a certain intrinsic conventionality of that which constitutes locution itself, that is, everything that might quickly be summarized under the problematic heading of the "arbitrariness of the sign"; which extends, aggravates, and radicalizes the difficulty.  
(SEC 323-324)

This convicts Austin of evading the question of *how* an utterance can be repeated by concentrating on the question of *where* and *when* it can be repeated. But there is a more serious restriction than that in his theory which, if applied to liturgical speech acts, would render them insincere by definition. Quoting Austin's rule that performative utterances produced on the stage or interpolated into poetry are instances of language behaving in a way that is "parasitic upon its normal use" (SEC

325)<sup>21</sup>, Derrida goes on to show that *all* performatives are inherently subject to Austin's exclusions :

For, finally, is not what Austin excludes as anomalous, exceptional, "non-serious", that is *citation* (on the stage, in a poem, or in a soliloquy) the determined modification of a general citationality - or rather a general iterability - without which there would not even be a "successful" performative? Such that - a paradoxical, but inevitable consequence - a successful performative is necessarily an "impure" performative, to use the word that Austin will employ later on when he recognizes that there is no "pure" performative.  
(SEC 325)

The negative implication in Austin's proposals, Derrida argues, is that language would never venture upon locutionary acts which threatened its essential purity (as defined by the criteria for successful performatives that I noted earlier). The logical consequence of this, which Derrida implies rather than states, is an impossible model of language. We would have to endow language itself with the capacity for producing intentions before we considered its intentional use by speakers. In the end, utterance would be so over-determined that the whole notion of appropriation would be severely compromised. On the other hand, taking the risk of iteration creates a "positive possibility", leading

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21. cf. also John Searle (*Speech Acts* Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1969 57) who begins his analysis of the making of promises by insisting on "[n]ormal input and output conditions". *Inter alia*, he notes "that this condition excludes *both* impediments to communication such as deafness and also parasitic forms of communication such as telling jokes or acting in a play."

to the revaluation of the whole process of "citationality or iterability" (SEC 326) and the role of intention. Now, because of the necessary impurity of the necessarily parasitic linguistic act, intention can no longer control a whole context. In fact, there can be no "exhaustively determinable contexts" (SEC 327).

Brief reflection on Austin's conditions for successful performatives will undoubtedly expose a number of potential pitfalls for liturgy. This is because liturgy is surely that strange paradox of the exemplary impure performative. It wrests passages of scripture and traditional prayers from their original contexts and places them in new and in some senses dramatic situations, where criteria of intention and sincerity cannot be assumed, or even tested. The utterances may, in the end, have to generate an intention and a sincerity which was not present in the worshipping community at the start of the rite, and which is certainly different from the original intention behind the extracts they repeat. If we pursue the Derridean line, we will have to think of *iterability* as an intrinsic part of the matter that finds its way into repeated acts of worship, and not simply a function of repeating certain utterances in a prescribed order and under suitable conditions. "Ritual is not an eventuality, but, as iterability, is a structural characteristic of every mark" (SEC 324)<sup>22</sup>.

22. The topic is taken up at more length in Chapter Eight.

In an even more intense way than Derrida's sketch suggests, liturgy embodies a ritual within a ritual. This includes, but also goes beyond the recontextualisation of the graphically transmitted text as Ricoeur proposes it (HD 139). The act of repetition, which is always parasitical, can never predict its results in advance, and so never falls totally under liturgical control. As Jonathan Culler explains in an investigation of attitudes to convention and meaning in the work of Austin and Derrida :

Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless.

This is true in two senses. First, any given context is always open to further description. There is no limit to what might be included in a given context, to what might be shown to be relevant to the interpretation of a particular speech act. This structural openness of context is essential to all disciplines: the scientist discovers that factors previously disregarded are relevant to the behavior of particular objects; the historian brings new or reinterpreted data to bear on a particular event; the critic relates a particular passage or text to contexts that make it appear in a new light . . . .

Context is also unmasterable in a second sense: any attempt to codify context can always be grafted onto the context it sought to describe, yielding a new context which escapes the previous formulation.<sup>23</sup>

This has further implications for questions of intentionality. Again, Culler remarks that :

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23. Jonathan Culler "Convention and Meaning : Derrida and Austin" *New Literary History* 13 (1981-1982) 24-25

intention is perhaps best thought of as a product . . . . Intentions are not a delimited content but open sets of discursive possibilities - what one will say in response to questions about an act.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4.10 Appropriating the Biblical Text Liturgically

The course of this investigation has moved through two main modes of biblical incorporation in liturgy. Working from the eucharistic lectionary, I have suggested how a congregation might receive an utterance originally addressed to a different audience. In a derived way, the prayers that make up liturgical texts use scriptural reference to address the present need of the worshippers. Direct biblical transcription provides a number of ways for liturgical participants to make their own act of appropriation. Thus, to recall an earlier example, in the Year 2 gospel for Easter 3, Jesus's question to Martha :

'I am the resurrection and I am life. If a man has faith in me, even though he die, he shall come to life ; and no one who is alive and has faith shall ever die. *Do you believe this ?*'  
(ASB 616 my italics)

becomes an address to all those present, and Martha's reply, "Lord, I do . . . I now believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world", is available to them as the desirable response, should they choose to identify with it.

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24. *ibid* 28

The epistles and prophecies expand the personal reference to promote identification with the needs and aspirations of an earlier audience or community. Both forms are, after all, specifically directed, and the quotation of Paul's letters to the early Churches, or Isaiah's warnings to the people of Jerusalem, is effectively an interposition of the worshipping community between them and their original intended addressees.

There is a third case which I have not introduced up to this point. This corresponds closely to what Ricoeur describes as recontextualisation by decontextualisation, except that the process will be understood as occurring in performance as well as in the reading and writing process.

Instead of weaving biblical reference into a new composition, this kind of usage gives actual biblical words to worshippers as vehicles for their own act of devotion. We have seen how the *sanctus*, *benedictus* and *gloria* in the eucharistic situation connect the liturgical community to the whole of creation, from the angels to their own ancestors. In these instances, the biblical words are all taken from contexts of praise and acclamation<sup>25</sup>, and

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25. The *gloria* can be found in Luke's account of the song of the angels who heralded the birth of Christ; the words of the *sanctus* come from Isaiah 6, where the prophet records his vision of the glory of God; the *benedictus* adopts the



consequently have a natural association with one another. This does not exclude the possibility of an 'unnatural' association, however, as the dramatic example of one of the ASB's additional pre-communion invitatory sentences will illustrate :

President    Jesus is the Lamb of God  
                   who takes away the sins of the world.  
                   Happy are those who are called to his  
                   supper.

All            **Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,  
                   but only say the word, and I shall be  
                   healed.**

(ASB 172)

The president's initial invitation refers to the account of the marriage feast of the Lamb in the Book of Revelation, which the writer is asked to record :

Then the angel said to me, 'Write this : "Happy are those who are invited to the wedding-supper of the Lamb !"' And he added, 'These are the very words of God.'  
 (Rev 19:9-10)<sup>26</sup>

As well as defining the celebratory nature of the eucharistic feast, this utterance connects the present action to the eschatological promise of redemption and salvation, reminding the participants that what they do now is the prefiguration of eternal life.

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crowd's acclamation of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem shortly before his crucifixion.

26. *New English Bible* London : Oxford University Press & Cambridge University Press, 1970

The congregational response leans on the story of the Roman centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant, lying sick at home (Luke 7:1-10 ; Matthew 8:5-13). While Jesus was on his way to the house, the centurion came to meet him and said :

"Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. But only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another 'Come,' and he does it." When Jesus heard him, he marvelled, and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Matthew. 8:8-11).

The incident contains its own contradictions, for while it presents the centurion as someone who understands the workings of authority, he is nonetheless a Roman official and in no sense answerable to the authority that he recognises in Jesus. Yet having crossed Jesus's path (to use the terms of "Telepathy") he chooses to be answerable, and hence to take the risk of allowing Jesus to act.

Jesus in turn points to the man's actions as an unparalleled example of faith, and it is on the terms of faith that we are invited to make the words our own. First of all, we become houses - albeit unfit to receive the indwelling presence of God. This is a *topos* of Christian teaching, and indeed Paul reminds the Corinthians that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19-20). Yet

because we are also God's servants, we can identify with the unseen protagonist in the story - the sick servant whose physical weakness is an analogue of our spiritual frailty. Faith should therefore be enough so that we believe in God's forgiveness and healing merely by receiving his word.

Viewed side by side, the pair reveal various aspects of divine authority. The triadic polyphony of the versicle makes the writer of Revelation both a receiver of authoritative utterance, and an active participant in mediating authority to an audience which includes himself. The authority-question in the episode of the centurion is even more interesting, for here we see a man who recognises Jesus as a man of authority because he himself holds authority. But at the same time, this recognition is just a starting point for acknowledging the otherness of Jesus's authority since, in the final analysis, giving orders is not the same thing as performing a healing miracle over a distance.

For our purposes, the versicle and response illustrate a *ne plus ultra* in the hermeneutical treatment of liturgy. The versicle presents an event of reception and appropriation of "the very words of God" into the scribe's composition. In other words, the act of writing is a double quotation, incorporating the authoritative word of the angel who transmits the authoritative word of God. In contrast to

this, the response comes out of an act of interception. But it also forbids the final act of appropriation by the liturgical community. "Happy are those who are called to his supper" makes it clear that the worshippers must wait for their invitation to the most intimate encounter in the eucharistic celebration. Here, the action of the centurion, who goes to meet Jesus precisely in order to tell him not to come to his house, is a perfectly apposite response. The healing of the servant comes about as the result of a non-meeting, or interrupted relationship, with a power whose otherness makes one hesitate to confront it. Divine grace is not a fore-ordained right, and like those who expect the inauguration of the Kingdom, and the centurion in a definable historical period, the congregations who use these words must wait to be called and healed, even though there is nothing to ground their expectancy but faith :

" . . . only say *the word*, and I shall be healed."

Yet individual readings of both components avoid the subject of their crucial status as a complementary parts of a whole. The collocation of the versicle and response demands that two disparate contexts be harmoniously rebalanced in the tissue of the liturgy. What we discover in this last reading exercise, is how the original power of the biblical words gains new focus, once installed in a new relationship. The independent relevance of each piece to issues of promise and

faith takes on authority from the act of liturgical composition, as much as from the biblical source.

The task that is left for the assembled congregation goes beyond confirming that these two distinct speech acts can function powerfully as a single unit in the practice of worship. As both the narrative and the apocalyptic vision illustrate, there are times when faith overrides logic, and when language seems to make no sense in a particular situation. It is this absence of a middle ground of rationality that is at the heart of all liturgical understanding. For liturgical hermeneutics is not a way of rationalising faith, but a celebration of that deeply ethical faith which allows the being of the other, even when it is least like ourselves.

**CHAPTER FIVE : CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF THE KINGDOM IN  
BAPTISM**

**5.1 Introduction : Identity in Community**

Baptism provides opportunities for an explicit liturgical response to individuality and difference which we would not expect to find in the eucharist or in the daily offices. Each celebration of baptism calls upon the Church as a body to desire the rebirth of the baptismal candidate in Christ, and thereafter to welcome him or her as a new member of the body. In the rite, the candidate receives marks that signify his or her death to mortal and worldly concerns. At the same time, the newly baptised is empowered to claim eternal life in the Kingdom, through the promises that are woven into the baptismal liturgy. This is the eschatological expectation which he or she shares with the community at large.

In this chapter, I am concerned with the process of decontextualisation that dislodges the individual's roots in unregenerate mortality, and transplants them into the new context of membership of the Kingdom. The approach will be a comparative one, which draws on the ASB and BCP rites for the public baptism of infants, showing how each one deals with the topics of the individual, the status of the promise in baptism, and the construction of a baptismal identity within the worshipping community.

Both the BCP and the ASB forms of service demonstrate the responsibility of the community towards the child by placing the event of baptism within the context of the public worshipping life of the Church. Since 1549 the Church has expressed its wish that baptism should be administered in the context of the congregational devotion of morning or evening prayer. The ASB rubrics add the eucharist to the daily offices as a time when a number of people can gather for the baptism<sup>1</sup>.

The first of the notes to the ASB service states that :

Holy Baptism is normally administered by the parish priest in the course of public worship on Sunday; but it may be administered at other times, and he may delegate its administration to other lawful ministers . . . .  
(ASB 241)<sup>2</sup>

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1. The custom of receiving communion every Sunday is a relatively recent phenomenon in Anglicanism. Over a very long period, one would have been far more likely to find large congregations at mattins or evensong than at holy communion. This accounts for the BCP rubrics' restriction of public baptism to the times of the two daily offices. The ASB envisages baptism within the eucharist as its first choice, since it is here where the modern congregation is most likely to be found in significant numbers.

2. The ASB baptism rite occurs in three main optional forms: baptism is either to be combined with confirmation in the celebration of the eucharist (223-238), or to be combined with confirmation at morning or evening prayer (239), or to be performed on its own, preferably, but not necessarily at the eucharist (240-249). In the first and second cases, some of the priest's introduction to the service may be omitted.

The BCP rubrics are more emphatic in their insistence that baptism should only occur on Sundays and holy days, to ensure the presence of the maximum number of worshippers. This serves the dual purpose of providing witnesses for the baptism of a new member into "Christ's Church", and reminding each of the witnesses "of his own profession, made to God in his baptism" (ER II 725 : 1662).

It would be easy, given the concern that baptism should be publicly attested, to frame the investigation of the rite as a crude polarity, with the baptismal candidate standing outside the number of the baptised, and remaining alienated from them until he or she is admitted into the body of the community. This view has to be amplified in two respects. Firstly, the child is recognised as different in the specific sense that he or she is outside the *worshipping* community. Baptism contains that community's desire for the symbolic incorporation of the unbaptised child as one of their number, under the conventional sacramental signs by which the Church demonstrates its appropriation of the biblical promise of salvation. Secondly, the worshippers are reminded that they are all separated from God by the fact of their sinful nature. This condition is not to be overcome simply by assimilating differences of status. Instead, the acts of inclusion, penitence, and promise in the service stand as a reminder that baptism is only the beginning of the entire liturgical autobiography of each individual. The



process it initiates continues until death, in emulation of the example of Christ. Thus, as the members of the community undertake the obligations which make it possible for the child to live as an individual according to the rules laid down for the life of the whole body, their own individual lives within that body are opened to examination and revision.

In the BCP understanding, baptism brings into focus everything that is inimical to the expectation of the Kingdom in liturgical experience, as a prelude to redefining the worshipping community as an entity within the larger secular community. This principle breaks down in the transition to the ASB because, as I shall show, the modern service enacts an inversion that renders the baptised congregation barely distinguishable from the secular world.

So far, then, the discussion has opened up two spaces : a community where the act of baptising and receiving the child into the Church is witnessed, and the Kingdom of God, which is also the reference point for the whole baptismal procedure. Reduced to its simplest terms, baptism is an event which takes place in the human community but draws its meaning from a point well beyond this community's understanding. Baptism therefore operates across the breach between the Church on earth and the heavenly Kingdom.

## 5.2 Radicalism and Relativism

In a study of early Christian baptism which illustrates some of the issues related to gender and social roles in biblical texts, Sheila Briggs gives this summary of the Pauline view of baptism, the view which has been inherited in subsequent liturgical thought :

Early Christians believed that [baptism] effectuated what it symbolized; it altered not only the cognitive state of the believer but made him or her an essentially new being. The language of baptism is radical for it does not simply displace or relativize existing social identities, but erases them.<sup>3</sup>

Taking up these terms in the context of the present debate, I will suggest that the BCP offers a *radical* language of baptism, while the ASB offers a *relativizing* language of baptism. The BCP promises demand the total renunciation of an existing mode of human life, and a total commitment to a new way of life. Such promises demand that the worshipping community take the risk of action on the basis of their belief in an order which is yet to come into being, namely the Kingdom of God. The ASB undertakings are relative because, although they acknowledge the Kingdom as their referent, they are modelled on the secular social unit of

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3. Sheila Briggs "'Buried with Christ' : The Politics of Identity and the Poverty of Interpretation" in Regina Schwartz (ed.) *The Book and the Text* Oxford : Blackwell, 1990 276-303 293

the earthly family. A condition of self-referentiality consequently governs their operation.

In both situations, the whole matter of making promises is fraught with difficulties. While the BCP meets the demand that a promise should refer to an object or state of affairs that is possible, but which has not yet come into being<sup>4</sup>, it sets the price of achieving the promised inheritance of the Kingdom almost impossibly high. Thus the BCP order of service makes an initially insoluble proposal, presenting the urgent need for baptism as something beyond human capacity to supply :

Dearly beloved, forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin, and that our Saviour Christ sayth, none can enter into the Kingdom of God except he be regenerate, and born anew of water and of the holy Ghost : I beseech you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Iesus Christ, that of his bounteous mercy he will grant to this Child that thing which by nature *he* cannot have, that *he* may be baptized with water, and the holy Ghost, and received into Christs holy Church, and be made a lively member of the same.  
(ER II 727 : 1662)

As its point of departure, the address to the congregation writes off the unbaptised individual's value in the eyes of the Church. Humanity, in this view, does not have inherent value. Its worth is a later development, conferred by divine grace and recognition. The act of baptism will redefine the

4. The topics of the liturgical promise, and its relationship to its referent, will be treated in greater depth later in this chapter.

candidate's natural attachment to the sinful secular world, according to the standards of the Faith.

At the opposite extreme, the ASB frames its references to the Kingdom so securely within the *familial* metaphor of the Church, that the promise it conveys cannot be said to offer anything essentially different from the existing situation of the community. Where the BCP begins by proclaiming a baptismal theology which rests on foundations of negation and impossibility, the ASB offers a revisionary reading which avoids the abrasive "conceived and born in sin", and instead associates baptism with that creative human love which shares in the divine creation :

God is the creator of all things, and by the birth of children he gives to parents a share in the work and joy of creation. But we who are born of earthly parents need to be born again. For in the Gospel Jesus tells us that unless a man has been born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. And so God gives us the way to a second birth, a new creation and life in union with him. Baptism is the sign and seal of this new birth.  
(ASB 244)

Even at this early stage of the rite, the ASB form has not so much moderated the stringent terms of the BCP, as betrayed a source of discomfort which will affect its whole development. The episode in John's gospel (3:1-8) which records Jesus's interview with one of the Pharisees, and provides the image of rebirth for this explanation, makes the distinction between being "born of the flesh", and being

"born of the spirit". The BCP's equation of "flesh" with "sin" is undeniably harsh. It nevertheless escapes the vagueness of the phrase "earthly parents", and provides an explicit reason for rebirth to the Kingdom through "water and the holy Ghoste".

The remaining section of this explanatory passage in the ASB concentrates on Jesus's command that his disciples should make disciples and baptize the nations. But despite its recognition that repentance is a precondition of baptism, it continues to resist the need to address the obvious impediment to a renewed life, namely, original sin :

In St Matthew's gospel we read of the risen Christ commanding his followers to make disciples of all nations and to baptize men everywhere; and in the Acts of the Apostles we read of St Peter preaching in these words : 'Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and your children and to all that are afar off, everyone whom the Lord calls to him.'

In obedience to this same command we ourselves were baptized and now bring *these children* to baptism.

(ASB 244)

The ASB's dilemma is, in general, that it cannot bring itself to deal with human relationships in the language of fallenness and sin. The first conclusion to be drawn from the evidence I have considered up to this point, is that the modern order uses positive images in an effort to avoid the cultural taboos of sex and death, and hence to conform as

far as possible to a secular system of values. The second and more interesting aspect of the problem relates to the whole basis of reference on which the ASB constructs the significance of baptism<sup>5</sup>. Its cautious and rather coy celebration of procreative sexuality as God's permission to parents to take "a share in the work and joy of creation" comes to be the root metaphor for its vision of the Church on earth, as subsequent analysis will illustrate. For this reason, it cannot relegate sexuality to the distant past of unregenerate humanity.

As one might foresee, these principles impose a serious restriction on the range of its promises later on. The founding tenet of baptism as the BCP understands it, is that the rite enshrines a decision to turn away from the

5. Anyone who has encountered the marriage service will recognised the difficulties in the modern rite's dealings with human sexuality. The introduction is at best circumlocutionary in setting out the Church's understanding of marriage :

. . . The Scriptures teach us that marriage is a gift of God in creation and a means of his grace, a holy mystery in which man and woman become one flesh. It is God's purpose that, as husband and wife give themselves to each other in love throughout their lives, they shall be united in that love as Christ is united with his Church. Marriage is given, that husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together in need and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy. It is given, that with delight and tenderness they may know each other in love, and, through the joy of their bodily union, may strengthen the union of their hearts and lives. It is given, that they may have children and be blessed in caring for them and bringing them up in accordance with God's will, to his praise and glory . . . .  
(ASB 288)

distractions of mortal life and to live as a citizen of the Kingdom. This notion cannot continue to inform the rite, where mortal life is constantly being affirmed as an image of the Kingdom.

### **5.3 Risk, Threshold and Metaphor**

The broad comparison of the baptismal principles of the ASB and the BCP is by no means an attempt to challenge the validity of the contemporary rite. The fact that the ASB service finds alternatives to the BCP's logically impossible demand for death and rebirth, and its equally impossible insistence on rejecting the world in preparation for the Kingdom, is not in itself something to be depreciated. Any approach should therefore begin by acknowledging all that is healthy, desirable, and liturgically effective in the ASB's endorsement of creative human love as the pattern of rebirth. Especially in situations where children are brought to baptism from backgrounds with no regular practice of worship, any chance of winning their parents into the liturgical community would be lost by denigrating the parental relationship. Equally, children who are baptized at an age where they can understand a good deal of the language of the service might be disturbed by repeated references to death.

However, the hermeneutical criticism of the ASB form unavoidably includes one crucial normative judgment. As with all liturgical action, the rite is accountable to readings which ask how successfully it enables its users to appropriate the promise of salvation.

These concerns are most clearly illustrated from the use of controlling metaphors in baptismal liturgy as vehicles for crossing, or not crossing the threshold of the Kingdom. I shall therefore be pursuing the representations of the Kingdom in the texts of the BCP and ASB rites which have already been briefly introduced.

Nothing less than faith could tolerate the contradictions between earthly life and the heavenly inheritance that ring out in the uncompromising phrases of the BCP's post-baptismal thanksgiving :

We yeild thee hearty thanks, most mercifull Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this Infant with thy holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own Childe by Adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church.

*And humbly we beseech thee to grant that he being dead unto sin, and living unto righteousness, and being buried with Christ in his death, may crucifie the old man; and utterly abolish the whole body of sin, And that as he is made partaker of the death of thy Son, he may also be partaker of his Resurrection, so that finally with the residue of thy holy Church, he may be an inheritour of thine everlasting Kingdom, through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

(ER II 745 : 1662 my italics)



In almost every promissory utterance in the BCP baptism services, there is an explicit accompanying instruction to the congregation to take the Kingdom of God as the referent of the promise. The metaphors always place the Kingdom ahead, as something to be sought, a gate to be passed through, or a place where the candidate will be received. Thus, as a group, they could be classified as threshold metaphors. The pattern is established in the initial address, where the child's need of baptism is identified with his or her participation in original sin, for

. . . none can enter into the Kingdom of God  
 excepte he be regenerate, and born anew of water  
 and the holy Ghost  
 (ER II 727 : 1662)

After the Flood Prayer, God's promise of a merciful hearing to all who turn to him is invoked for the child and subsequently for the whole congregation :

. . . Receive him, O Lord, as thou hast promised  
 by thy welbeloved son, saying, aske, and ye shall  
 have ; seek, and ye shall finde ; knock, and it  
 shall be opened unto you : so give now unto us  
 that aske ; let us that seek finde ; open the Gate  
 unto us that knock ; that this Infant may inioy  
 the everlasting benediction of thy heavenly  
 washing, and may come to the eternall kingdom  
 which thou hast promised by Christ our Lord. Amen.  
 (ER II 729-731 : 1662)

The "exhortation upon the words of the Gospell" urges the people to claim the meaning of Jesus's gesture towards the children for the child they have brought to baptism :

. . . Doubt ye not therefore, but earnestly believe, that he will likewise favourably receive this present Infant, that he will embrace him with the Arms of his mercy, that he will give unto him the blessing of eternal life, and make him partaker of his everlasting kingdom . . . .  
(ER II 733 : 1662)

and the godparents are reminded of the duty of belief by the priest as he prepares to conduct them through the promises :

Dearly beloved, ye have brought this Child here to be baptized ; ye have prayed that our Lord Iesus Christ would vouchsafe to receive him, to release him of his sins, to sanctifie him with the holy Ghost, to give him the kingdom of heaven and everlasting life . . . .  
(ER II 735 : 1662)

The 1549 rite includes the petition at the font :

Whosoever shall confesse the, o lord : recognise him also in thy kingdome. Amen.  
(ER II 738 : 1549)

and the Thanksgiving which enters the service for the first time in 1552 substantially adopts it, in the prayer that :

. . . as [the candidate] is made partaker of the death of thy Son, he may also be partaker of his Resurrection, so that finally with the residue of thy holy Church, he may be an inheritour of thine everlasting Kingdom, through Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(ER II 745 : 1662)

The ASB, on the other hand, most frequently refers its promises to the Church, or worshipping community, conceived

of as the 'family of God'. This stresses the material certainties of life in a secure and known situation, safe from the taint of original sin. Only afterwards does it deal with the candidate's inheritance of the Kingdom. A context of this kind, shored up by internal safety devices, eliminates all risk from liturgical action. It effectively closes the spatio-temporal distance between life on earth, and eternal life, so that the compass of the metaphor shrinks, and its vital connotations of journeying towards a destination are lost. It is for this reason that I would argue that the ASB rite fails to perceive baptism's determinative threshold position between mortal life and the life of the Kingdom by failing to take a leap of faith.

Especially if baptism is being administered without confirmation, the service begins with the following explanation :

Children who are too young to profess the Christian faith are baptized on the understanding that they are brought up as Christians within the family of the Church.

As they grow up, they need the help and encouragement of that family, so that they learn to be faithful in public worship and private prayer . . . .  
(ASB 243)

Then follows a direct address to the child, if he or she is old enough to understand :

N, when you are baptized, you become a member of a new family. God takes you for his own child, and all Christian people will be your brothers and sisters.  
(ASB 243)

After the selected biblical passages have been read, the congregation is invited to pray for the children :

Heavenly Father, in your love  
you have called us to know you,  
led us to trust you,  
and bound our life with yours.  
Surround these children with your love ;  
protect them from evil ;  
fill them with your Holy Spirit ;  
and receive them into the family of your Church ;  
that they may walk with us in the way of Christ  
and grow in the knowledge of your love. Amen.  
(ASB 244-245)

The blessing of the water continues the familial image, as the priest asks :

. . . Send your Holy Spirit upon [your servants] to bring them to new life in the family of your Church, and raise them with Christ to full and eternal life."  
(ASB 234)

Finally, the priest and congregation welcome the child as a new member of the Church :

Priest	God has received you by baptism into his Church.
All	<b>We welcome you into the Lord's Family. We are members together of the body of Christ; we are children of the same heavenly Father; we are inheritors together of the kingdom of God. We welcome you.</b>

(ASB 248)

The emphasis in the ASB on the earthly family points to the potential benefits of a sheltering community of belief as the environment where an understanding of the Kingdom may be cultivated. Just as children, in ideal circumstances, are nurtured towards adulthood by their parents, the baptized members of the Church are expected to assume a nurturing role in the life of infants brought for baptism. Yet, as is especially evident in the welcome to the newly baptized, the service gives no indication of how the leap from membership of the "Lord's family" to the inheritance of the Kingdom is to be made. Whereas the BCP's idea of a holy and universal Church is capable of spanning the dimensions of time and space, provided that it is understood within the assumptions of liturgical time, the ASB's image of the family fails to carry the worshipping community across the threshold of the Kingdom. This is because it is vested in a material identity which must be disorientated before it can give birth to an authentic identity, independent of the individual's biological and sociological attachments.

#### **5.4 Crossing the Threshold**

The BCP forms enact the transition from citizenship of the secular world to citizenship of the Kingdom by stressing the death and resurrection motif of baptism. This, of course,

entails a new perception of time, so that life and death, sin and righteousness, mortality and eternity, become contemporaneous. As the final exhortation to the godparents phrases it, the whole congregation is engaged in the ongoing process of "[dying] from synne, and [rising] agayne unto righteousnesse, continually mortyfyinge all [their] evyll and corrupte affections . . ." (ER II 745-747 : 1662).

The ASB is somewhat reluctant, as I have mentioned, to explore the implications of the death of Christ so fully. This gives rise to a substantially different mode of appropriating baptismal faith. The BCP portrays baptism as the sign of a greater inheritance, achieved, paradoxically, through the deaths of both the benefactor and the heir. The ASB represents it principally as an action which happens within the family of the Church, in order to make the unbaptized a member of that living human family. Given this emphasis, liturgical time is not clearly demarcated from earthly temporality.

When the sacrament is administered with confirmation, the following account of the act of appropriation accompanies it:

Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered death on the cross and rose again from the dead for the salvation of mankind. *Baptism is the outward sign by which we receive for ourselves what he has done for us : we are united with him in his death ; we are granted*

the forgiveness of sins ; we are raised with  
Christ to new life in the Spirit.  
(ASB 229 *my italics*)

Where the encircling context is the eucharist, the  
instructions provide that :

if the child is old enough to understand, the  
priest speaks to him in these or similar words.

*N, when you are baptized, you become a member of a  
new family. God takes you for his own child, and  
all Christian people will be your brothers and  
sisters.*  
(ASB 243 *my italics*)

The third instance of an internal definition of baptismal  
appropriation has already been noted, and leans on the  
sharing of creation between God and humanity, with the need  
for new birth into the Kingdom. "Baptism is the sign and  
seal of this new birth" (ASB 244).

The BCP replaces the temporal certainties of the earthly  
community with all the severity of the Pauline view of  
baptism. The prayers that are said immediately before the  
child is dipped in the water (1549), or has water poured  
over his or her head (1552 & 1662) ask :

that the olde Adam in these chyldren may be so  
buried, that the newe man maye by raysed up in  
them.

and that :

al carnal affections may dye in them, and [ ] al  
thinges belonginge to the spirite, may live &  
groe in them.  
(ER II 739 : 1552)

Despite the ruthless note in these formulae, they have a clear role in the internal logic of the rite. Both examples place the event of death as a necessary step towards new life. The first petition conveys this through a final clause which makes death the cause of resurrection. The second works through antithesis, on the premise that life under the authority of the Holy Spirit cannot exist in the presence of its opposite ("carnal affections"). The prayers do not, however, indicate processes that can be fully accomplished in the sacramental administration of water. Baptism is not so much an event, as a commitment, "a solemn vow, Promise and profession" (ER II 745 : 1662). The BCP only presents a beginning, the threshold of a process whose outcome cannot be securely predicted. Thus the priest introduces the 1552 and 1662 post-baptismal thanksgiving as a prayer that the children he has baptized

maye leade the rest of theyr lyfe accordinge to  
this beginninge.  
(ER II 743 : 1552)

### **5.5 Baptism and the Promise**

The inquiry into the metaphorical underpinning of a baptismal understanding is an indispensable background to



the sacramental action under the sign of water. It is also necessary as a context for the performative liturgical speech act at the centre of the rite, which is the making of promises on behalf of the candidate by his or her parents or godparents.

At the level of a basic definition, promises are normally taken to be meaningfully exchanged between two parties. The work of speech act theorists, and especially J.L. Austin, shows how a set of internal conventions must be assumed in order for the promise to be validly contracted. In particular, the act of promising presupposes sincerity on the promiser's part, matched by trust from the promisee's side that it will be fulfilled. Also, certain conditions of possibility must obtain, so that the promiser does not promise something he or she is incapable of producing.

Austin's position has undergone modification in the work of other speech act theorists, notably John Searle. He adds to Austin's internal conditions for valid promises what Anthony Thiselton calls "extra-linguistic factors involved in the logic of promise"<sup>6</sup>. These include such external considerations as the circumstances in which the promise is given, and the intention of the promiser and the receiver of

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6. A.C. Thiselton *New Horizons in Hermeneutics : The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* London : Harper Collins, 1992 297

the promise. Thiselton's account of Searle's principles is particularly relevant to this discussion :

Promise is typical of the force of many biblical texts. We cannot ignore the wishes and purposes of the speaker and the hearer in the promised commissive-transaction. In his book *Intentionality* . . . [Searle] insists, convincingly, that, provided that we do not view it primarily as a "mental act" the notion of the *purposive directedness of the author's intention against a background network of behavioural and contextual factors* is not only logically viable, but also logically essential for accounts of meaning that are balanced and comprehensive. Whether we are speaking of intention or of promise, the logic of the concept and its practical operation in life presuppose some reference to the wishes of the speaker, and in the case of the promise, both the speaker and the hearer.<sup>7</sup>

The analysis of the promise can subsequently be extended to a further position, beyond the pragmatic considerations of "behavioural and contextual factors", to engage with the larger question of the bonds that constitute relationships between the givers and receivers of promises even before they engage in explicit commitments. It is this more rigorous inquiry that informs Ricoeur's exposition of the promise as part of his treatment of the historical present in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*.

Ricoeur adds to the conventional obligations imposed on the promiser (both intra- and extra-linguistically) in the present an "ethical dimension" (TN III 234). When he shifts

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7. *ibid* 297

his attention from the "present" to the "historical present", the "analysis of promises on the ethical plane" moves likewise to the "political plane". Ricoeur concludes that the political plane is logically prior to the ethical plane

through consideration of the public space into which the promise is inscribed, where the transposition from one plane to another is facilitated by consideration of the dialogical character of promises . . . . Indeed, there is nothing solipsistic about promises. I do not confine myself to binding just myself in making a promise. I always promise something to someone. If this someone is not the beneficiary of my promise, at least he or she is its witness. Even before the act by which I commit myself, therefore, there is a pact that binds me to other people.  
(TN III 234)

He continues this analysis in a way that draws together the questions of individual intention and ethical interpersonal commitment, and the antecedent bonds which make them possible :

The rule of fidelity in virtue of which one ought to keep one's promises thus precedes any individual promise made in the ethical order . . . . So there is a circular relation between the personal responsibility of the speakers who commit themselves through promises, the dialogical dimension of the pact of fidelity in virtue of which one ought to keep one's promises, and the cosmo-political dimension of the public space engendered by the tacit or virtual social contract.  
(TN III 234-235)

In the baptismal situation, the responsibility of faithful godparents to the child they represent occupies a complex position. It is answerable to the ethical obligation that places the child under the care of his or her parents, and of the community. Equally, the parents and the community stand within that pre-existent political bond which shapes the ethical bond. However, the worshipping community is also accountable to the bond of faith in the promises of a faithful God, and the common profession of the Faith, which is the foundation of every promise made on the child's behalf.

The heritage of the Faith, which, in the case of the baptismal promise, demands to be appropriated in faith, is not just a further condition to be added to the notions of speech conventions which obtain in a political community located in the historical present, and bound by a "virtual social contract". If the promises made on behalf of the infants are to be taken as valid, then the hermeneutical transaction between faith and the Faith must always be prior to any subsequent ethical or political obligation, even though such obligations may well be the occasions which call upon the Faith, in faith. Thus they, too, enter into the hermeneutic circle. Ricoeur gives a splendidly lucid description of the promissory status of the Faith in an interview with Richard Kearney :

. . . the biblical stories or episodes are not simply added to each other or juxtaposed with each other, but constitute a cumulative and organic development. For example, the promise made to Abraham that his people would have a salvific relation with God is an inexhaustible promise . . . ; as such it opens up a history in which this promise can be repeated and reinterpreted over and over again . . . . So that the biblical narrative of this 'not yet realized' promise creates a cumulative history of repetition.<sup>8</sup>

This historical background is therefore the basis of faith for a commitment in the future : the "inexhaustible promise" that Ricoeur describes is the sole ground, but also the totally sufficient ground, for the promise of eternal salvation and the Kingdom still to come. To refer again to his interview with Kearney, "[t]he *future* projects of every religion are intimately related to the ways in which it remembers itself"<sup>9</sup>.

### **5.6 Baptismal Promises and the Faith**

In the BCP orders of baptism, promising is an explicitly reciprocal concept, whereby the biblical assurance of the inheritance of the Kingdom is mediated to the community, while the candidate (through his or her godparents) promises to renounce sin, the world and the devil (all those things in opposition to the Kingdom) and to profess allegiance to Christ. This reciprocity emerges from an early stage in the

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8. Richard Kearney *Dialogues With Contemporary Continental Thinkers* Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1984 26

9. *ibid* 27

rite, beginning with the Flood Prayer's typological exposition of God's acts of salvation through the instrument of water. In the prayer before the gospel, invoking God's mercy for the child, a familiar biblical text (Luke 11:5-10) becomes the foundation of the congregation's faith :

. . . Receive him, O Lord, as thou hast *promised* by thy welbeloved son, saying, aske, and ye shall have ; seek, and ye shall finde ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you : so give now unto us that aske ; let us that seek find ; open the Gate unto us that knock ; that this Infant may inioy the everlasting benediction of thy heavenly washing, and may come to the eternall Kingdom which thou hast *promised* by Christ our Lord. Amen.

(ER II 729-731 : 1662 my italics)<sup>10</sup>

In the ASB scheme, there is a great deal more emphasis on extended biblical reference than in the BCP, where a technique of biblical allusion invariably replaces readings from scripture. The ASB Old Testament readings all fit into a typology of baptism, setting out in literal, narrative terms the role of water in the history of salvation, (e.g. the Flood, the parting of the Red Sea, and the curing of Naaman the leper in the River Jordan). In one instance (Jeremiah 31:31-34) there is a prefiguration of the baptismal covenant in the covenant between God and Israel and Judah.

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10. Significantly, *The Alternative Service Book* does not use the word 'promise' at all, except for one instance in the rite for the renewal of baptismal vows.

The New Testament passages offer a number of Pauline interpretations of baptism, an account of an actual baptism from Acts, and Peter's address to the life lived in Christ by his people, who are a "royal priesthood". The choice of gospels introduces the themes of vocation, repentance, rebirth, the injunction to baptize, Jesus's baptism by John, and the eschatological promise to the disciples.

It must be remembered, however, that a maximum of three of the recommended readings can be used, and what I have said elsewhere about selectivity in the interpolation of scripture into liturgy continues to apply. For this reason the BCP, though seemingly poorer in biblical material, achieves a much fuller representation of the salvific pact between God and humanity. At times, its technique of reference makes great demands on the attention and memory of worshippers, perhaps nowhere more impressively than in the Flood Prayer. Not only does the prayer set out the whole course of salvation by water in a single composition : it goes on to make its historical instances types of the baptism instituted by Christ. Finally, retaining a nautical metaphor in 1552 and 1662, it turns to the present and future salvation of the children to be baptized, and once more takes up the ark that saved Noah as a type of the sheltering universal Church :

Almightie & everlastinge God, which of thy great mercy diddest save Noe & his familie in the Arke,

from perishing by water: & also dyddest safely leade the chyldren of Israel thy people through the redde Sea: *figuring thereby* thy holy Baptisme, & by the Baptisme of thy welbeloved sonne Iesus Christe, diddeste sanctifye the floud Iordane & all other waters, to the misticall washing awaye of sinne: We beseche thee for thy infinite mercies, that thou wylt mercifully loke upo these children, sanctifie them & washe them with thy holy ghost, that they beyng delivered from thy wrath, maye be receyved into the Arke of Christes Church, and beyng stedfast in fayth, ioyeful through hope, & rooted in charitie, may so passe the waves of thys troublesome world, that finally they may come to the land of everlastinge lyfe, there to reygne wyth thee, worlde wythout ende: through Iesus Christe our Lord. Amen.  
(ER II 727-729 : 1552 my italics)<sup>11</sup>

There is only one full scriptural passage in the BCP orders of service. This is the account of Jesus blessing the children (Mark 10:13 ff)<sup>12</sup>. The episode is not merely offered to the congregation as a way of expanding their view of the panorama of salvation history, for the subsequent

11. Even in the three year period between 1549 and 1552, the fierce God to whom sinful humanity has no natural access has been tempered considerably. In part, this is evidence of a more sophisticated poetics in the revised version of the service. The cumbersome references to Pharaoh and his army drowning in the Red Sea, and to the whole of humanity (except for Noah and his family) succumbing to the Flood, undeniably make the 1549 text rather ponderous. It remains significant that 1552 refines the earlier composition by reducing the catalogue to salvific instances alone.

12. The Marcan narrative has been deliberately excluded from the ASB's baptismal lectionary for the telling reason that it "is now generally recognized as not referring to baptism" (R.C.D. Jasper & P.F. Bradshaw *A Companion to The Alternative Service Book* London : SPCK, 1986 ; 3rd repr. 1989 349-350). Recourse to the BCP's "brief exhortation upon the words of the gospel" shows that the rationale behind the choice of this passage is precisely that it is not about baptism but, far more importantly, about the Kingdom. Stephen Sykes condemns this omission in the ASB as "pedantry of the first order" ("Baptisme doth represente unto us oure profession" in *Thomas Cranmer* ed. Margot Johnson Durham : Turnstone Ventures, 1990 132).



exhortation is an injunction to a leap of faith, with crucial implications for the divine promise to humanity. Having heard how Jesus rebuked "those who would have kept [the children] from him" before he went on to bless them, the worshipping community is asked to appropriate the story in faith, not just for themselves, but for the children they have presented to Christ :

Doubt ye not therefore, but earnestly believe, that he will likewise favourably receive this present Infant, that he will embrace him with the arms of his mercy, that he will give unto him the blessing of eternal life, and make him partaker of his everlasting kingdom . . . .  
(ER II 733 : 1662)

Thus Jesus's call to the children is mapped onto the concept of favourable reception, his embrace becomes a sign of his general enfolding mercy, and his blessing a sign of the blessing of eternal life. With the developing assurance that grows from the frightening opening address, "none can entre into the Kyngdome of God (excepte he be regenerate, and borne a new of water and the holye Ghoste:)", to the promise of Christ's favourable reception, any need to construct an image of the Kingdom as a secure and comfortable earthly home as an insurance against the force of evil falls away. If believers will wait, the same Jesus who says, "No man can enter into the Kingdom of God excepte he be regenerate and borne anew of water and of the holy Ghost" (ER II 727 : 1662) becomes the Jesus who makes that movement possible.

### 5.7 Making Baptismal Promises

The promises required of the parents and godparents combine simple utterances with complex background assumptions. As the BCP's exhortation to the godparents (who will make promises on behalf of the child) make clear, the ethico-political obligation which is the overt reason for bringing the child to be baptized depends on a prior commitment of faith. This, in turn, arises out of the scriptural promises of Christ. Nor does the promise end there, for the child enters the relationship through the ethical obligation, which demands that Christ's promise be rewarded with an answering act of commitment. It is out of that response to Christ that the child's own faith will grow :

Dearly beloved, ye have brought this Child here to be baptized ; ye have prayed that our Lord Iesus Christ would vouchsafe to receive him, to release him of his sins, to sanctifie him with the holy Ghost, to give him the kingdom of heaven and everlasting life. Ye have heard also that our Lord Iesus Christ hath *promised* in his Gospel, to grant all these things that ye have prayed for : which *promise* he for his part will most surely keep and perform : Wherefore after this *promise* made by Christ, this Infant must also faithfully for his part *promise* by you that are his sureties (until he come of age to take it upon himself) that he will renounce the devil and all his works, and constantly believe Gods holy word, and obediently keep his Commandments.

(ER II 735 : 1662 my italics)

Although in the terms of the exhortation it is the godparents who are committed to the promissory relationship, the act of promising almost seems to assume that they are transparent, or that they are ventriloquists for the inarticulate child. The 1549 rubrics do not even mention the godparents, and instruct the priest to "demaunde of the child . . . these questions folowyng" (ER II 734 : 1549). 1552 includes the godparents in the rubric, but still directs the questions to the child. Only in 1662 is the phrase "in the name of this child" added to suggest the godparents' mediating role.

The confusion reflects the difficulty of dealing with baptism as the experience of the individual *in community*. While, on a given occasion, the efficacy of the rite is being claimed for a particular child, it must also put "every man present . . . in remembrance of his own profession, made to God in his Baptism" (ER II 725 : 1662). In this way, neither the liturgical body nor the candidate is allowed a purely passive role in the procedure.

The promises themselves fall into two consecutive units : a triple renunciation of

the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all the covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh.  
(ER II 735-7 : 1662)

and a profession of faith in the form of the Apostles' Creed, now rewritten as a set of interrogatives.

Both components expect the promisers to take considerable risks. They reject the physical stabilities of a mortal world (however delusory these might be), and open up the Faith itself to question as they demand a carefully itemised appropriation of each of the claims of the Creed. The congregation is thus comprehensively divested of all its certainties before the priest offers the ambivalently terrifying and reassuring pre-baptismal prayers :

O mercifull God, grant that the old Adam in this Child may be so buried, that the new man may be raised up in him. Amen.

Grant that all carnall affections may die in him, and that all things belonging to the spirit may live and grow in him. Amen.

Grant that he may have power and strength, to have victory, and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh. Amen.

(ER II 739 : 1662)

Only towards the end of this sequence does the tone change, and prayers for rewards in heaven and the grace of God replace the stern images of dying to a former existence.

The ASB's instructions to parents and godparents reverse the order which gives the child priority over the congregation, in their anxiety not to commit him or her to a profession of faith beyond the understanding of an infant. Instead, the candidate is entrusted to a worshipping body which will

provide the support of their own reaffirmed faith. There is a tendency here to an exclusively ethico-political emphasis, so that the child disappears from the process, despite the phrasing of the address that prefaces the "Decision" and the affirmations :

Those who bring children to be baptized must affirm their allegiance to Christ and their rejection of all that is evil.  
It is your duty to bring up these children to fight against evil and to follow Christ.

Therefore I ask these questions which you must answer for yourselves *and* for these children.  
(ASB 245)

or

Those of you who have come for baptism must affirm your allegiance to Christ and your rejection of all that is evil.

(Those parents and godparents who present children for baptism must bring them up to fight against evil and to follow Christ.)

. . . .

Therefore I ask these questions

(Parents and godparents must answer *both* for themselves *and* for these children.)  
(ASB 229 *my italics*)

The words of the Decision (the counterpart of the BCP's renunciations) are sufficiently general to support the idea of a worshipping community that chooses not to be as convincingly severed from its secular attachments as the BCP would have it :

Do you turn to Christ ?  
**Answer I turn to Christ.**

Do you repent of your sins ?  
**Answer I repent of my sins.**

Do you renounce evil ?  
**Answer I renounce evil.**  
 (ASB 229-230; 245)

Purely on the basis of a verbal comparison with the BCP service, these promises do not wager the great renunciations and risks of their predecessor. Yet their content cannot be lightly dismissed. This glances at the problem of linguistic complexity which has dogged the business of liturgical reform, a matter which may become clearer for present purposes once we have considered the ASB's choice of an echoic style of rote-learning for its baptismal profession of the Faith.

The profession follows the blessing of the water, and begins with the priestly invitation :

You have brought these children to baptism. You must now declare before God and his Church the Christian faith into which they are to be baptized, and in which you will help them to grow. You must answer for yourselves and for these children  
 (ASB 246-247)

The parents and godparents reply in this form :

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,  
 who made the world ?

**I believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in his son Jesus Christ,  
who redeemed mankind ?

**I believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in his Holy Spirit,  
who gives life to the people of God ?

**I believe and trust in him.**

(ASB 232; 242)

The priest sums up the congregational profession with  
following proclamation, which the community endorses :

This is the faith of the Church  
**All This is our faith.**  
**We believe and trust in one God,**  
**Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

(ASB 247)

Significantly, the affirmations are based on the 1662 and Revised Catechisms, which were originally designed to prepare *children* for Confirmation. The ASB falters, I would argue, over the issue of growing up in the Faith. It is, after all, the godparents who are making these undertakings. If they are to be considered as responsible guides for a new member of the liturgical community, there is a strong case for arguing that they should be treated as sophisticated believers, rather than as children learning the articles of the Faith at the simplest level.

### 5.8 Administering the Sacrament<sup>13</sup>

There is no mistaking what is about to happen at the font in the BCP form. As the pre-baptismal prayers for the child convey, the child is going to die, be resurrected, and ultimately be made responsible for his or her promises :

O mercifull God, grant that the old Adam in this Child may be so buried, that the new man may be raised up in him. Amen

Grant that all carnall affections may die in him, and that all things belonging to the spirit may live and grow in him. Amen.

Grant that he may have power and strength, to have victory, and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh. Amen.

(ER II 739 : 1662)

This is immediately followed by the prayer over the water, setting the element aside as the medium of grace, cleansing, forgiveness and election :

13. The question of signs and symbols in ritual is most often treated by anthropologists and historians of religion. A general study can be found in John Skorupski *Symbol and Theory* Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1976 (cf. Chapter 8 "Symbols and Symbolic Action" 116-124). Raymond Firth discusses eucharistic symbolism in *Symbols : Public and Private* London : George Allen & Unwin, 1973 (cf. Chapter 12 "Symbol and Substance" 403-428). Mircea Eliade addresses baptism in *The Sacred and The Profane* tr. Willard R. Trask San Diego, New York & London : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959. He relates the Christian sacrament closely to "universally disseminated aquatic symbolism", commenting that "[e]mersion" always "repeats the cosmogonic act of formal manifestation; immersion is equivalent to a dissolution of forms. This is why the symbolism of the water implies both death and rebirth" (130). The best bibliographic resource is William G. Doty *Mythography* Alabama : University of Alabama Press, 1986 (cf. entry on "Studies of Ritual" 269-270).



Almighty everliving God, whose most dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of our sins, did shed out of his most precious side, both water and blood, and gave *commandment to his Disciples, that they should go teach all Nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the holy Ghost*: Regard we beseech thee, the supplications of thy Congregation, sanctifie this Water to the mysticall washing away of sin: and grant that this Child now to be baptized therein, may receive the fulness of thy grace, and ever remain in the number of thy faithfull and elect children, through Iesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(ER II 741 : 1662 my italics)

The baptism itself is then performed in direct response to the divine command<sup>14</sup>.

The ASB detaches the outward sign from its firm base in the dominical injunction by interposing the congregational profession of the Faith between the blessing of the water and the baptismal action. An ambiguous situation arises out of this route towards the application of baptismal water, which repeats the by now established pattern of treating baptism as an experience which the entire community undergoes, so that the understanding of the sacrament is powerfully reappropriated by the people.

Once more, one must question the merits and constrictions of giving a high value to human community. The advantage would

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14. Compare the logic of the 1552 and 1662 orders of Holy Communion, where the dominical words, "Do this as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me", are followed immediately by the administration of communion.

seem to lie in the totality of supportive involvement which the people are able to contribute to welcoming their new member. But counterbalancing this, the congregational voice always has the potential to displace the primacy of God's reception of the child, as the second person plural pronouns confirm.

The same tension between the illuminating force of a symbol, and its usurpation by fundamentally secular thinking, emerges still more strongly in the second outward and visible baptismal sign, which is the signing of the child with the cross. By tracing the sign back to its 1549 position, it is possible to show a trend away from the individual, and towards the claims of the community.

The 1549 text places the action near the beginning of the service, after the Flood Prayer, and retains the Sarum rite's custom of signing the child with the cross on the forehead *and* on the breast :

N. Receyve the signe of the holy Crosse, both in thy forehead, and in thy breste, in token that thou shalt not bee ashamed to confesse *thy fayth in Christ crucified*, and manfully to fyght under his banner agaynst sinne, the worlde, and the devill, and to continewe his faythful soldiour and servaunt unto thy lyfes ende. Amen.  
(ER II 728 : 1549 my italics)

In 1552 and 1662, the signing follows the words of baptism, and undergoes some small, but significant changes :

*We receyve this Child into the congregation of Christ's flock, and do signe him with the signe of the cross, in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his Banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithfull souldier, and servant unto his lives end. Amen.*

(ER II 741-743 : 1662 my italics)

The changes of language and position mark the fact that the signing has undergone certain key conceptual shifts. In 1549 the sign of the cross is exclusively bestowed upon the child, who receives it and on that basis makes a personal appropriation of the Faith that will enable him or her to live the life of faith until death. The same action in 1552 and 1662 marks the community's reception of the child as one of their number. The force of the sign has shifted from being a call to witness to a personal faith ("thy faith in Christ crucified"), to standing as a badge of membership of a body which professes a common Faith ("the faith of Christ crucified").

In the ASB service the signing may take place either at an early stage, or immediately after the baptism. In their commentary on the rite, Jasper and Bradshaw stress that the modern view does not see naming and signing with the cross as "essential elements of the baptism itself", although the Catechism associates naming closely with baptism :

The signing is accompanied by a statement of its significance : it is a sign of lifelong commitment to fight against evil and to proclaim the faith of Christ crucified - an operation in which the whole Church is engaged. This is now indicated by the fact that the statement is no longer said by the priest alone, as it was from 1549 to 1928, but is now said by priest and congregation<sup>15</sup>.

Thus the ASB uses the following formula, beginning with the priest's statement :

I sign you with the Cross, the sign of Christ.  
Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified.

The congregation endorses the signing, saying :

Fight valiantly under the banner of Christ against sin, the world, and the devil, and continue his faithful soldiers and servants to the end of your lives.  
(ASB 230 ; 245)

### **5.9 Liturgical Signs and Speech Acts**

In its latest form, the causal connection between sign and injunction ("in token that") has lapsed, with consequences that have to be assessed. For the three examples show a progressive movement away from taking the signing with the cross as a serious and necessary step towards the life of the Kingdom. Personal faith gives way to a communal credal

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15. R.C.D. Jasper & Paul F. Bradshaw *A Companion to The Alternative Service Book* 353

position between 1549 and 1552, while the ASB detaches the sign completely from the result that it presupposes.

These anxieties might be quickly disposed of as problems of literary convention rather than liturgical force. In Austin's terms, for example, projecting an action or a mode of life from a linguistic sign amounts to a non-serious or abnormal use of language :

There are etiologies, parasitic uses, etc., various 'not serious' and 'not full normal' uses. The normal conditions of reference may be suspended, or no attempt made at a standard perlocutionary act, no attempt to make you do anything, as Walt Whitman does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar.  
(HDTW 104)

The liturgical situation is not as clearcut as an Austinian view would wish it to be, for there are two issues at stake. The first of these relates to the military metaphor, which is, at face value, non-serious. It is patently ludicrous to think that receiving the sign of the cross makes the baptized infant a soldier in the army of the Church Militant in any literal sense. Especially in modern times, baptism is far more a sign that makes the candidate part of a peaceful order, than a licence to participate in religious warfare. Detaching the metaphor from its validating sign nevertheless sacrifices the notion of Christian baptism as a process which consecrates and actually *marks* the candidate for a special vocation in Christ's service.

This draws upon the second of the issues involved in seeing liturgical signs as complex speech acts, and relies on Austin's distinction between *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* acts. Where an illocutionary act is to some extent self-referential, pointing out the event which the utterance is effecting, a perlocutionary act points beyond itself to some further result, which comes about as a consequence of the utterance in question.

The BCP orders impose an inescapable obligation on the child. Once signed, "in token that hereafter [he or she] shall not be ashamed to confesse the fayth of Christ crucified" (ER II 741-743 : 1552), the candidate has no choice about his or her later career in the life of the Church. Thus here, the signing is a perlocutionary act with eschatological consequences for the baptized infant. In contrast to this, the ASB makes the signing an illocutionary act ("I sign you with the cross, the sign of Christ" ASB 245) followed by an implicit performative instruction to "[f]ight valiantly under the banner of Christ . . . "16.

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16. A similar situation arises in the ASB's custom of giving a lighted candle to one of the child's parents or godparents after the baptism, with the words : "Receive this light". After the priest has given the candle, the following statement and response are made :

This is to show that you have passed  
from darkness to light.

**All Shine as a light in the world  
to the glory of God the Father.**

(ASB 248)

### 5.10 Conclusion

This last reflection on the use of signs in the administration of baptism is once again bound up in what has been said about liturgical risks. The tendency, in the ASB signs, is to endorse the existing condition of life within the community, rather than to set the baptismal candidate aside from the world. This does take account of the importance of a witnessing baptized community but, as ever, reduces the eschatological urgency of baptism.

In the end, baptism asks for sweeping changes in the individual's state of being. But if the rite is to make far-reaching demands, it must meet them with a situation that gives meaning and value to the changes. Instead of reconfirming the existing *status quo*, even if this is by making it a tool for understanding the Kingdom, it must risk all on the expectation of the Kingdom itself. For we are not engaged in a process of which we can confidently say we know a great deal. Baptism is about the unknown, and it is that leap of faith that the language of the rite is commissioned to reflect.

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Again, the action is divided into two illocutionary acts, rather than a single perlocutionary act.

I began by suggesting that the BCP rite was a radical approach to baptism, while the ASB favoured a relativising technique. In the light of the comparison of both services, this broad conceptual distinction can be rendered more exact with reference to what the analysis has discovered about the language of baptism in each case. Thiselton's work on the differences between the linguistic modes of *promise* and *assertion* is useful in showing how baptismal language can reverse or endorse the poles of ordinary existence :

When texts transform readers, situations, or reality, this force and function, as John Searle has pointed out, is characteristically that of *promise or pledge, or sometimes that of authorization or command*. The speaking of the words constitutes an act which shapes a state of affairs, provided that certain inter-personal states of affairs also hold . . . . On the other hand, the declaration that a particular state of affairs is true (. . .) has an *assertive* force in which the *state of affairs* to be reported *determines the word* that is spoken. Characteristically *promise* shapes *world-to-word*, *assertion* shapes *word-to-world*.<sup>17</sup>

The promise in baptism must, ideally, entail shaping the world of the Kingdom to the word of faith that stakes every human reassurance, everything that is objectively certain in mortal terms, on the chance of eternal life. Applying Thiselton's terms, the BCP demands promises that use impossible words to inaugurate the Kingdom, while the ASB asserts a comfortable world to which all verbal claims of faith must conform.

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17. op. cit 298



There is practical caveat to be made here. Even given the ideal situation which always stretches beyond familiar securities towards the Kingdom, the Church, the congregation, or the family of God, depending on the chosen description, remains necessary for the performance of liturgical rites. Thiselton shows how Searle reasons out the necessity of institutions to the significance of speech acts:

Searle underlines the importance of the institutional and extra-linguistic factors which were noted and expounded by Austin and Evans, but with special reference to *directives* (cf. Austin's *exercitives*). He declares, "It is only given such institutions as the church, the law, private property, the state, and the special position of the speaker and hearer within these institutions that we can excommunicate, appoint, give and bequeath . . . ."18

Part of the mandate of liturgical hermeneutics is to recognise the enabling role of the worshipping community, which is the Church in action, without allowing the ecclesiastical institution to become a destination in itself. The Church must administer the promises of the Kingdom in the lively consciousness that the fulfilment of the promise is also the end of its usefulness. Always, we have to be alive to the threat of complacency lying at the root of any earthly paradise which is not constantly recommitting itself to the promise of God's Kingdom.

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18. op. cit 296

Membership of the Christian family is not an end, but a new beginning, and the struggle against sin, the world, and the devil goes on, until our lives' end. This is a struggle which never quite comes into focus in the ASB rite, while perhaps it is so sharply focused in the BCP order that baptism seems as much a threat as a blessing.

Baptism in the BCP and the ASB appears to offer two broad possibilities for understanding. Either the community can step aside from mystery by reinterpreting their known situation, or they can move more and more deeply into the unfamiliar territory of the life of faith. Once more, Sheila Briggs's remarks on the worship of the early Church have bearing on the discussion :

Human beings cannot escape the erasure of their identity, but this occurs in two distinct and thoroughly opposed ways, either through the death of baptism or the death of sin.<sup>19</sup>

It is self-deluding to think that baptism is a safe place in a hostile world. For, to be most effective, the rite itself like its symbols of water and the sign of the cross, must be erased in the performance. Baptism initiates the process of reconfiguring the individual's identity towards the appropriation of the Kingdom, but it cannot protect either the individual's identity or its own without stopping the process in its tracks. Like the signs which disappear,

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19. op. cit 297

leaving faith to appropriate their efficacy for the newly baptized, baptism too is a form of faithful recklessness.

**CHAPTER SIX : PRAYER BOOK FUNERAL RITES AND THE HERMENEUTICS  
OF APPROPRIATION**

**6.1 Liturgical Hermeneutics and the Ritual Response to Death**

The Prayer Book funeral services present unique difficulties for what has become the anticipated process of appropriating the promise of the Kingdom in forms of liturgical practice. In the eucharistic and baptismal examples taken from the BCP and the ASB in previous chapters, the emerging pattern has shown how the rites place their performers in threshold positions with respect to the Kingdom in the course of making a proposal of the Kingdom through the statements of the Faith. From these positions, and with the support of the existing bonds between individuals which Ricoeur has called the "tacit or virtual social contract" (TN III 235), the worshippers can make their own act of faith in taking the risk of appropriating the assurances of the Faith as their own. The earlier analyses have noted certain practical problems which sometimes disrupt this smooth progress. Essentially, though, the order as I have proposed it has provided a working model for investigating the power of liturgical rites to address the situations of their participants.

In burial, there are new constraints to be taken into account in considering the act of appropriation. No longer

does the hermeneutic process involve the movement of an undifferentiated living community towards its hope of salvation. The fact of death raises the specific issue of the deceased, who has reached the point of actually making a claim on the proposal of the Kingdom. If the promises made in baptism and reconfirmed at each celebration of the eucharist are to be made good, the deceased must now be positively identified as someone who has come into his or her inheritance.

This chapter proposes that the response to the event of death in the worshipping community, embodied in the funeral offices of 1549, 1552 and 1662, falls short of these demands. The BCP rites do not risk confidently invoking the promise of the Kingdom on behalf of the deceased. In this way, they dispose of the basic responsibility in liturgical hermeneutics, which is that the rite should propose a world which can be appropriated by the worshippers. As the comparative reading of the three BCP versions goes on to show, this is not tantamount to saying that Prayer Book funeral services fail to propose a world altogether. Only, they do not offer a world to a liturgical community in the hermeneutical sense in which that statement has been understood up to now.

To leave the discussion there would be a barren gesture, and one which made little contribution to any understanding of

these rites. Chapter Six is intended, therefore, to be read as the first part of a double chapter, completed by Chapter Seven's address to the ASB funeral office. The findings in the later chapter are generally far more encouraging. They reveal a hermeneutic process that actively involves the bereaved and contributes to their recovery after the loss of the deceased. In short, the ASB's approach to death makes liturgically accessible what is always latent in the BCP.

## **6.2 Deviations from the Normative Model**

My treatment of baptism and the eucharist has followed a normative pattern based, to a large extent, on Ricoeur's explanation of the project of textual and especially biblical hermeneutics. Already, adjustments have been required to account for those modes of operation that are unique to particular liturgical forms. So far, though, these adjustments have not had to query the founding proposition of Ricoeur's model. To summarise, Ricoeur holds to a theory of *mediation* of the proposed world of the text to the receiver, made possible by the resources of hermeneutics (PHBH 95-96). This is closely tied to his notion of the distanciation of the text from its original conditions of production. It follows that the later receivers of the text are not affected by any originating design on the part of the producer. The world of the text, Ricoeur argues, "is not presented immediately through psychological intentions but

mediately through the structures of the work" (PHBH 96). He points especially to the "projected" nature of the "'world of the text'" or "'thing' of the text" (PHBH 95) :

Does not this new being make its way through the world of ordinary experience, despite the closedness of this experience ? Is not the power of projection belonging to this world the power to make a break and a new beginning ? And if this is so, must we not accord a poetic dimension to this world projection . . . .  
(PHBH 96-97)

Ricoeur's position assumes that no human experience is so intractably resistant to outside influences that it cannot respond to the world proposed by the text. In this way, the mediating structure of the text, can convey a world without actually constructing it. It never imposes conditions which might restrict or prescribe the scope of the *imaginative* act of appropriating that world.

In the course of examining Ricoeur's assumption "that a mythico-poetic nucleus of meaning resides at the center of human experience"<sup>1</sup>, Pamela Anderson has concluded that "[a]ccording to Ricoeur, the narrative configurations by which we shape our lives have real cognitive power"<sup>2</sup>. The

1. Pamela S. Anderson "Narrative Identity and the Mythico-Poetic Imagination" in *Meanings in Texts and Actions : Questioning Paul Ricoeur* ed. David Klemm & William Schweiker Charlottesville & London : University Press of Virginia, 1993 196

2. *ibid* 202 For discussions of other instances of idealism in Ricoeur, see essays Fred Dallmayr and William Schweiker, and James McCue's reply to all three papers, in the same volume.

text then remains unchallenged, always willing to offer its world, provided that its audience is receptive to the proposal.

The application of these principles to Prayer Book funeral liturgy discovers strong grounds for criticism of such a serenely confident depiction of the hermeneutics of appropriation. Consistently, Ricoeur asserts the power of the text to make its proposal against all odds. In other words, appropriation is a foolproof procedure. This is, of course, to idealise the text, by loading all the variables on the side of "ordinary [human] experience". In the present case, as I will show in analytical readings of the services, the rites are not open structures, appealing to the imaginations of bereaved communities. In this meeting, there is no distanciation in the true sense, because the worshippers are, in fact, already part of the proposal which they ostensibly receive. In opposition to the scenario Ricoeur sketches, the three BCP rites suggest an undetermined, and therefore unclosed human situation, looking for reconfiguration in the face of a closed liturgical world.

1549 gives the appearance of being a rite that can reach out to the specific needs of the deceased, while at the same time recognising the needs of the living. Its committal prayer speaks personally to the dead, and its post-committal



prayers for the resurrection of the deceased to eternal life, and in thanksgiving for his or her release from mortal life, are spoken in the name of the bereaved. Yet, as more detailed analysis will discover, these are all, in fact, extremely exclusive actions. Close attention shows that the service focuses on the deceased by separating the burial from the mourners' act of appropriation. The post-committal gives the bereaved only a cosmetic role, while the psalms turn away from the deceased altogether, as the living reflect on their own existential condition. Although the 1549 rite does admit prayer for the dead, it leaves a great deal of the work of appropriation and reconstruction to the eucharist which follows the burial. Only here does the collect's specific prayer that both the deceased and the mourners will rise again to join the communion of saints take on contextual relevance to the shared memorial of salvation, offered by the living, and recalling the dead, in the common hope of the Kingdom.

Where the 1549 order tends, at times, to ignore the living in its concentration on the dead, 1552 and 1662 manage to exclude the dead altogether from any direct consideration. No longer does the committal address the deceased. There are no inclusive post-committal prayers, nor are there any versicles and responses. As in 1549, the 1662 psalms articulate needs and questions which are more apt for the living than the dead, while in 1552 and 1662 the penultimate

prayer of the burial section in 1549 becomes a prayer of thanksgiving for the delivery of the deceased from mortal life, without the added petition for his or her safe passage to heaven. The closing collect, which is substantially the collect from the 1549 funeral communion, likewise avoids mentioning the dead in voicing its hope of hearing God's invitation to the Kingdom.

### **6.3 Disrupting the Hermeneutics of Appropriation**

The disruption of the hermeneutics of appropriation runs parallel to the physical disruption suffered by the community. Where the eucharist and baptism can contain their appropriators in one position *vis-à-vis* their presentations of the Kingdom, burial services self-evidently straddle the divide between two communities : the living and the dead. Burial, therefore, has the primary duty of identifying the community to which it makes its proposal of a world. If it assumes that the deceased has entered into the world to be proposed, this short-circuits the act of appropriation. On the other hand, if it considers the deceased as a continuing participant in the expectation of the living for practical purposes, this seems to deny every act of faith that baptismal and eucharistic involvement have underwritten during the earthly life of the deceased.

The BCP burial offices deal with the dilemma by resorting to an unsatisfactory compromise : they include the community, or a certain prior construction of the community, *within* their proposed world. In 1549 and 1552 this proposed community is more often implied than openly defined. The "faithful" and the "elect" are useful locutions for drawing the boundaries around a body of worshippers who can reasonably expect a place in the Kingdom after their deaths. By 1662, on the other hand, the subtly assumed congregation of suitable inheritors of the Kingdom has given way to an overt and alarming set of proscriptions against those who are judged to lie beyond the pale of salvation :

Here is to be noted, that the Office ensuing is not to be used for any that die unbaptized, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves.

(ER II 849 : 1662)

This last statement makes it clear that the people's ability to appropriate the promise of the rite, and the rite's capacity to propose the Kingdom, are no longer part of the question. The world of these rites has been determined long before they engage with their performers, and the necessary leap of faith between the proposal of the Faith and the response of the congregation has consequently been forestalled. In these services, therefore, the risk attached

to acts of personal faith disappears. In its place there arises the far more terrible risk that one might have been excluded from the proposed congregation all along. The BCP burial services have no answer for such a discovery of impotence on the part of their users.

The impasse is exacerbated by a restriction in Reformation doctrine which, by 1552, made it liturgically impossible to pray for the dead<sup>3</sup>. This decision breaks the "virtual social contract" which governs the entire communion of saints, and has the liturgical effect of forcing the claims of the prayers in the later versions into an especially conservative mould. The BCP funeral services make no address

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3. The German theologian, Martin Bucer, singled out the lingering traces of medieval prayer for the dead in the 1549 rite for criticism in his *Censura*, soon after the publication of *The First Book of Common Prayer*. See *Martin Bucer and The Book of Common Prayer* ed. E.C. Whitaker Essex: Alcuin Club/Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1974. The social historian Julian Litten argues convincingly, however, that the effects of the rapid textual changes in the liturgy of burial are unlikely to have been felt by congregations until some time after 1552 :

Within a comparatively short period, 1549 to 1559, England had experienced four prayer books. To the common man, it must have been confusing, possibly fatal during Queen Mary's time, to have picked up the wrong book. One is left wondering how these changes affected the more distant parts of the realm. For example, are we really to understand that all of the old countryside customs were swept away with the introduction of the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI in 1552, only to be brought back in 1553 on the accession of Queen Mary ? Probably not. The chance to adopt real change came with the introduction of Queen Elizabeth's Prayer Book [1559] which enjoyed a span of at least ninety years.

*The English Way of Death* London : Robert Hale, 1991 153

to death as the occasion for grief or a sense of loss. Instead, they present a structure centred on the hope of eternal life, which refuses to acknowledge the situation of the mourners. They propose death as a lucky escape from the "miseries of this sinful world" in an effort to justify it, where the liturgy might be more consoling were it to deal with the logical *injustice* of death. They can announce the hope of the bereaved that all the faithful will eventually be numbered among the elect, but cannot risk appropriating such a possibility, either for the living or for the deceased. The result is a structural limitation so severe, that even where isolated sections of the rite demonstrably touch an aspect of grief, or offer a brief prospect of resolution, the whole order does not sustain the process of restoration in any of the three versions. This, in turn, restricts possible opportunities for the reconfiguration of the community after the experience of loss, for the worshippers' right to a subjective response to death has been subsumed into the referential objective of the promised Kingdom.

In the course of reading the services, I shall suggest that the psalms of 1549 and 1662 are alone in acting as a counterforce to the prevailing trend. In situations which provide only a descriptive account of the present uncertainty of the bereaved as they consider the fact of mortality, the psalms recognise the need for *existential*

reflection in the face of death. Here, it is tempting to digress and offer a Heideggerian argument for their importance. Indeed, a persuasive case could be made for treating their meditations on the inevitability of all our deaths as close applications of the analysis of Dasein as being-towards-death<sup>4</sup>. This is cogently summarised in *The Concept of Time* :

The self-interpretation of Dasein which towers over every statement of certainty and authenticity is its interpretation with respect to its death, the indeterminate certainty of its ownmost possibility of being at an end.<sup>5</sup>

However, the existential view that, since Dasein is being-towards-death, it can never be totally understood except as fulfilling its most extreme possibility in death (a moment when it will also cease to be Dasein), does not look beyond death to a promised but unrevealed life to come. It is here that a Christian liturgical view would have to construct its own terms, reflecting the mode of being-in-the-world which is the life of faith. Thus, where Heidegger sees the care-structure as "Being towards one's ownmost potentiality-for-Being" and hence "Dasein's 'Being-ahead-of-itself'", faith includes an eschatological dimension. Faith, as a form of care (especially in the sense of 'solicitude') is a projection of oneself and others into a promised future

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4. See esp. *Being and Time* II §§231-267 274-311

5. Martin Heidegger *The Concept of Time* tr. William McNeill Oxford & Cambridge, Mass. : Blackwell, 1992 11E

situation which is always greater and better than the present state. For this reason, faith means a mode of being-in-the-world which is always under revision with respect to one's eventual being-in-the-Kingdom.

Although this study of BCP funeral liturgy will maintain that it falls short of the final development (viz. the effective proposal of a structure for appropriating the Kingdom), it is not sufficient simply to accept this as a conclusion. It would be foolhardy, however, to dismiss the whole genre of funeral liturgy as being incapable of functioning in a way that enables the bereaved community to interpret their own experience of death, and to interpret the world that the rite is proposing to them. This only leads away from the resources of liturgy, towards other sources of consolation. In this regard, Ricoeur's study of narrative is both seductive and dangerous. It shows that channels of consolation in the face of death are available, yet returns us to the text-reader model which is inimical to the vitality of a liturgical community :

As for death, do not the narratives provided by literature serve to soften the sting of anguish in the face of the unknown, of nothingness, by giving it in imagination the shape of this or that death, exemplary in one way or another? Thus fiction has a role to play in the apprenticeship of dying. The meditation on the Passion of Christ has accompanied in this way more than one believer to the last threshold. When F. Kermode or W. Benjamin utter the word "consolation" in this regard, one must not cry self-delusion too hastily. As a form of counterdesolation, consolation can be a lucid

manner - just as lucid as Aristotelian *katharsis* - of mourning for oneself. Here, too, a fruitful exchange can be established between literature and being-toward-death.<sup>6</sup>

In exploring the problem, therefore, I shall also be bearing in mind the possible recuperation of the rite. For the BCP, this remains a matter of unfulfilled guesses at the way the liturgical process might have succeeded in answering the grief of its users. The study of the ASB rite in Chapter Seven will show at least one way in which these guesses can be creatively validated.

#### **6.4 Configurations of Funeral Action**

The rubrics attached to the three offices under consideration produce at least two permutations for 1549 and 1662, depending on the position of the burial itself in the proceedings. Geoffrey Rowell's apparently simple four-part summary of the 1549 version suggests still further possibilities, depending on whether or not the funeral included the eucharist. His scheme identifies :

a procession to the church or grave; the burial proper; a brief office of the dead; and a funeral eucharist. The burial could apparently either precede or follow the office for the dead (and the eucharist, if it was celebrated), for the initial rubric states that after the body has been met at 'the Church style', the funeral procession shall

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6. *Oneself as Another* tr. Kathleen Blamey Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992 162



'goe either into the Church, or towards the grave'.<sup>7</sup>

According to the initial rubric, all three versions of the rite begin with a procession of the priest and clerks to the graveside, or into the church. The apparently optional opening movements had a firm basis in practical social conditions. As Rowell explains,

[t]he distinction was made, it has been suggested, from the necessity of burying those who died of infectious diseases immediately, with the minimum of risk to others.<sup>8</sup>

The oft-quoted objection of the Presbyterian party at the Savoy Conference of 1661 to the protracted periods at the graveside suggests, however, that the service did not usually move into the church until after the burial<sup>9</sup>.

It is clearly impractical to attempt a reading which encompasses all the performative variations on the three

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7. Geoffrey Rowell *The Liturgy of Christian Burial* London : Alcuin Club/SPCK, 1977 84

8. *ibid* 84

9. The Presbyterians wished the conduct of the service to be left to the minister's "discretion", so that officiants could hold the entire funeral in the church "for the preventing of those inconveniences which many times both ministers and people are exposed unto by standing in the open air." The Bishops answered as follows : "It is not fit so much should be left to the discretion of every minister; and the desire that all may be said in the church, being not pretended to be for the ease of tender consciences, but of tender heads, may be helped by a cap better than a rubric." J. Parker *An Introduction to the History of the Successive Revisions of the Book of Common Prayer* Oxford & London : James Parker & Co., 1877 ccxciv

textual models. For working purposes, therefore, I shall adhere closely to the principle of an ideal shape for each of the rites, despite the artificiality of this assumption. As a method of analysis, this demands a slightly looser notion of chronological development than I have used in previous comparative analyses. For example, the 1549 and 1662 services can be conducted so that their shape is identical, up to the point where the 1549 eucharist begins. Again, with the exception of the psalms in the 1549 service, its text follows the same pattern as that of 1552.

Although I shall refer to the three *forms* as '1549', '1552' and '1662', the overlaps should always be borne in mind. The chapter falls into sections that respond to the need to consider these points of coincidence carefully. Thus it begins with a general account of the introit section that is common to all three versions. From there it moves to a broadly comparative reading of the 1549 and 1552 rites, followed by some discussion of the psalms in 1549 and 1662. It concludes by treating the implications of the 1662 form's highly conscious re-reading of its predecessors.

**Comparison of the 1549, 1552 & 1662 Funeral Services**

1549	1552	1662
Introit	Introit	Introit
		pss 39 & 90
		Epistle
Antiphon : "Man that is born of a Woman . . . ."		
Media vita : "In the mids of life we are in death"		
Committal	Committal	Committal
Anthem : "I heard a voice from heaven . . . ."		
Post-committal prayers		
pss 116, 139 & 146		
Epistle	Epistle	
Kyrie eleison	Kyrie eleison	Kyrie eleison
Lord's Prayer	Lord's Prayer	Lord's Prayer
Versicles & responses		
Final prayer	Final prayer	Final prayer
Eucharist :		
ps 42		
Collect	Collect	Collect
etc.		Grace

### 6.5 The Procession to the Grave

All three versions of the rite begin with a series of introit sentences. These are said by the priest alone, or sung by the priest and clerks, during the movement of the procession to the graveside. The people follow the coffin in silence, assuming no voice in the performance.

The example of baptismal procedure might encourage one to expect some initial recognition of all the parties engaged in this process, most especially those who have been bereaved. Where baptism reminds parents and godparents of their obligations towards the child, and enjoins them to recall their own baptismal promises, burial surely requires some statement of the duty of the living towards the dead. Instead, the service begins *in medias res*, with the aphoristic announcement :

[St John 11. 25.26.]  
 I am the resurrection and the life [sayth the  
 Lord: ] he that believeth in me, though he were  
 dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and  
 believeth in me, shall never die.

Initially, the rite posits no authoritative presence. Although it becomes clear that Jesus's own words are being quoted, this always has to be part of a second glance. It adds to this disorientation and confusion by posing a logical contradiction, i.e., that those who live and believe

in God "shall never die". Such a claim becomes clear after some reflection, aided by comprehensive knowledge of the scriptural promises of salvation. In the immediate situation, however, the congregation is face to face with the unambiguous evidence of a coffin. Their faith that the individual it contains will be resurrected has been assumed, but they have not yet received any assistance in maintaining that faith in their immediate situation.

The second sentence appropriates the underlying promise of the first, but this is once more to present the mourners, who should be making the act of appropriation, with a *fait accompli* :

[Job. 19. 25. 26. 27.]

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the Earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body; yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for my self, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.

In performative terms, and given that they follow one another in rapid succession, the two sentences appear at first to belong to one speaker. Both, after all, begin with the first person singular pronoun. This assumption closes the necessary space between the promiser (Jesus) and recipients of the promise in the mediating voice of the priest. Where the promissory space closes, a new space opens between the mourners and their own grief, since the priestly voice usurps their right to claim the certainty of

resurrection to eternal life. Pointing forward to the eventual deaths of the bereaved, rather than to the present death of the deceased, the first two sentences actually deny the community their right to confront grief and loss. The kind of consolation they offer is also the kind which the bereaved are not equipped to appropriate at this moment in the rite.

The third sentence appears to redress the balance grammatically, with its opening first person plural pronoun:

[I. Tim. 6. 7.]

We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain, we can carry nothing out. The [Job. 1. 21.] Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.  
(ER II 849 : 1662)

Nevertheless, it remains, fundamentally, a completed act of appropriation imposed upon the bereaved. The components of the utterance come from widely disjunct contexts (an address to the general condition of mortal life in the Epistle to Timothy, and a specific instance of loss in the case of the Book of Job). While such juxtapositions can achieve powerful and moving effects, this is always under contextual conditions which support their action upon the worshippers. In this instance, the finitude of human life and the justice of God have been forced into proximity without adequate preparation. Furthermore, the fatalistic style of the composite utterance makes an assumption that the event of

death has been accepted, and thus abrogates responsibility for working out the condition of bereavement.

What the first stage of the rite fails to do, therefore, is to open a space for negotiation between God, the priest, the bereaved, and the deceased. As I have already suggested, it neglects the opportunity to engage the congregation in a promissory relationship with God. This has repercussions which will influence the whole of the funeral rite, since the vital characteristics of that "recapitulation of the present" which Ricoeur identifies in the promise are absent. The promise distinctively embodies "personal commitment, interpersonal trust, and the tacit or virtual social pact that confers on the dialogical relation itself the cosmopolitan dimension of a public space" (TN III 259). The BCP funeral rite begins by discarding the "dialogical relation", so that the "public space" of grief contracts to exclude its central occupants.

The words of the antiphon which, in 1549 and 1552, follow immediately upon the arrival of the procession at the graveside, continue the third sentence's fatalistic acceptance of the condition of mortality :

Manne that is borne of a woman, hath but a shorte tyme to lyve, and is full of misery : he cummeth up and is cut down lyke a floure, he flyeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one staye.

In the dramatic context at the edge of an open grave, this seems nothing short of grotesque. Human uncertainty in the face of death is, however, permitted in the *media vita*, which is the first occasion of direct appeal from the bereaved to God in the rite. Even so, all that humanity has to cling to is the fragile paradox of the mercy of a God who is characterised as being by nature angry with his fallible creation :

In the midst of lyfe we be in death, of whome may we seke for succour but of thee, O Lorde, whiche for our sinnes iustlye art *moved*<sup>10</sup> : - yet O Lorde God moste holy, O Lorde moste mightie, O holy and most mercifull saviour, delyver us not into the bytter paynes of eternall deathe.

- Thou knoweste, Lorde, the secretes of our heartes, shutte not up thy mercifull eyes<sup>11</sup> to oure prayers : But spare us Lorde moste holy, O God moste mightye, O holye and mercifull saviour, thou most woorthie iudge eternall, suffre us not at our last houre for any paynes of death, to fall from thee.

(ER II 858 : 1549 my italics)

The *media vita* does, however, provide a brief but necessary moment of reflection on the terrors of death. It acknowledges that even the strongest faith is still subject to doubt and fear of the unknown.

## 6.6 The 1549 and 1552 Committals

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10. "displeased" in 1552 and 1662.

11. 1662 corrects this mistranslation of *noli claudere aures tuas* to "shut not thy mercifull **Eares** ".



At this point 1549 diverges significantly from the 1552 and 1662 rites over the wording of the committal prayer. 1549 adopts a narrow focus on the relationship between the priest and the deceased, disregarding the mourners. The priest says, apparently only for himself :

I commende thy soul to God the father almyghtie,  
and thy body to the grounde, earth to earth,  
asshes to asshes, dust to dust, *in sure and  
certayne hope of resurreccion to eternal lyfe,  
through our Lord Iesus Christ, who shall chaunge  
oure vyle bodye, that it may be lyke to hys  
glorious bodye, accordyng to the mightie working  
wherby he is hable to subdue all thinges to  
himselpe.*

(ER II 858 : 1549)

This action receives endorsement from the sentence which follows, the first person pronoun again grammatically allowing the priest special powers of communication with the voice of God :

I Heard a voyce from heaven, saying unto me :  
Write blessed are the dead which dye in the Lord.  
Even so sayeth the spirite, that they rest from  
theyr labours.

(ER II 858-860 : 1549)

The quotation from the Book of Revelation vindicates the priestly action for the deceased in a way that preempts the possibility of a congregational act of faith that God has indeed received their dead. The terms of the committal and anthem restrict the act to the priest's "sure and certayne hope". In brief, the sequence produces an untenable

situation in which the bereaved are no more than spectators, while the priest, as mediator between them and God, is the only true participant in the performance.

Only after this are the mourners drawn into the sphere of responsibility for the dead. The first post-communion prayer begins with a repetition of the words of the committal, which might appear to rectify the lapse of congregational involvement. But since the actual burial has already taken place, the speech act is empty - a verbal gesture with no accompanying physical action :

We commend into thy handes of mercy (most mercifull father) the soule of thys oure brother departed. N And hys body we commit to the earth, besechyng thyne infinite goodnesse, to geve us grace to lyve in thy feare and love, and to dye in thy favour: that when the iudgmente shall come whiche thou haste committed to thy welbeloved sonne, both thys oure brother, and we, may be found acceptable in thy sight, and receyve that blessing, which thy welbeloved sonne shall then pronounce to all that love and feare thee, saying: Come ye blessed children of my father : Receyve the kyngdome prepared for you before the begynnyng of the worlde. Graunte thys, mercifull father, for the honour of Iesu Christe our onely saviour, mediator, and advocate. Amen.

(ER II 860 : 1549)

As well as being an invalid performative utterance because they are spoken by the priest on behalf of the people, these words are completely lacking in illocutionary or perlocutionary force<sup>12</sup>. The act is not illocutionary,

12. Austin explains his classification of performative speech acts in this way :

because the committal has already taken place. Equally, it is not perlocutionary, because the congregation can do no more than voice their wish that the deceased should inherit the Kingdom. The only genuine speech act, then, is the congregational expression of their common hope of Christ's final welcome at the general resurrection.

If we are to adopt Austin's definition of the category, this is a truly *non-serious* use of liturgical language. Although, as Derrida has shown in the essay "Signature Event Context", Austin's own examples of utterances spoken by actors on the stage, or quoted in poetry, or used in soliloquies (HDTW 22) are open to challenge, the liturgical case fulfils all the conditions for failed speech acts. The congregation are manifestly *not* doing what the performative utterance alleges they are doing, namely, committing the dead to the ground, since this action has already been completed by the priest. It cannot even be stated with certainty that they are commending the soul of the deceased to God. Apart from the obvious fact that the priest speaks the words of commendation, the prayer of thanksgiving which follows suggests that the deceased has already negotiated the passage of his or her soul into God's keeping :

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Thus we distinguished the locutionary act (and within it the phonetic, the phatic and the rhetic acts) which has a meaning; the illocutionary act which has a certain force in saying something; the perlocutionary act which is the achieving of certain effects by saying something.

(HDTW 121)

Almyghtie God we geve thee heartie thankes for this thy servaunt, whome thou hast delivered from the miseries of this wretched worlde, from the bodye of death and all temptacion. And, as we trust, hast brought hys soule, *whiche he commytted into thy holy handes,* into sure consolacion and reste : Graunt we beseche thee, that at the day of iudgemente, hys soule and all the soules of thy electe, departed out of thys lyfe, may with us and we with them, fully receyve thy promysse, and bee made perfect altogether, thorowe the glorious resurreccion of thy sonne Iesus Christe our Lorde.  
(ER II 860 : 1549 my italics)

The invalid performatives are really mechanisms for bringing the prospects of the living into parity with those of the deceased, so that the echo of the priest's words leads into a statement that amplifies the "sure and certayne hope of resurreccion to eternal lyfe". Many of the same remarks could be made about the next prayer, where the bereaved give thanks for the deliverance of the deceased from mortal existence, acknowledge his or her active role in the rite, and look forward to the eventual unity of the whole communion of saints.

The use of the performative in the name of the whole assembly is justified in 1552 where, according to the rubric, some representative members of the congregation cast earth on the grave. Yet this symbolic covering of the coffin is their only true involvement. If anything, it serves to redirect the focus away from the state of the dead, and towards the living, so that the 1552 revision (and likewise

the rite of 1662) pushes the deceased to the peripheries at the graveside. The committal bears out all that has been said about the interdiction on prayer for the dead, and the concern to emphasise the doctrine of election :

*Forasmuche as it hath pleased almightie god of his great mercy to take unto hymselfe the soule of our dere brother here departed, we therfore committe his body to the grounde, earth to earth, asshes to asshes, dust to dust, in sure and certaine hope of resurreccyon to eternal lyfe, through our lorde Iesus Chryst: who shall chaunge our vile body that it maye be lyke to hys gloryous body, accordyng to the myghtie workyng whereby he is able to subdue all thynges to himselfe.*  
(ER II 859 : 1552 my italics)

The prayer describes what is very much a subsequent action. God has, it assumes, dealt conclusively with the soul before the burial ever occurs, so that the ritual at the graveside is merely a matter of disposing reverently of the body. In the careful balancing of the first clauses of the committal, God and the bereaved, soul and body, fall into different dimensions of time, and the deceased seems to disintegrate in the firmly separational action of the prayer. The polarised destinations of earth and heaven receive the body and the soul, and the actual connection between the living community and their dead member dissolves.

The 1552 service pursues its separational course by dispensing altogether with the 1549 psalms (which, unlike the prayers that preface them, do provide for a reflective

congregational involvement). The rite of burial is also detached from the eucharist. An imposed world, where the dead are not prayed for, and the non-elect not saved, thus emerges patently through the sparse liturgical form<sup>13</sup>.

### 6.7 Funeral Psalms and Existential Reflection

Between the post-committal prayers and the epistle, the 1549 rite includes three psalms. All of them come from the original Sarum offices of the dead : psalms 116 and 146 from the vespers at the vigil of the dead ; psalm 139 from the commendation of souls. Their original contexts mark the stages along a journey within a larger rite of passage. Each of the medieval offices of the dead advances a stage further along the path that conducts the dead out of the last moments of mortal life and into eternal life. Most importantly, at the same time that the offices allow the mourners an active part in the process of consigning the

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13. Eamon Duffy sees this trend at work throughout the 1552 service, and projects its consequences beyond burial, to the prevailing liturgical attitude in the 1552 BCP :

. . . the burial rite of 1552 spoke only of the elect : those who died in 'sure and certain hope'. Of the openly sinful or merely mediocre majority it said nothing at all . . . . This was to make the most universal of all popular rituals, burial, into a rite not of inclusion, but of separation, and the logical working out of this drastic redrawing and limiting of the Christian community to the elect was the fenced communion table and, ultimately, separation.

"Cranmer and Popular Religion" in *Thomas Cranmer : Churchman and Scholar* ed. Paul Ayris & David Selwyn Woodbridge, Suffolk : Boydell Press, 1993 215

deceased to God, they provide a space in which the living community can begin to rebuild itself after the loss of a member.

When the BCP lapsed from use under the Cromwellian Protectorate, the then Bishop of Lincoln, Robert Sanderson, and Jeremy Taylor each produced burial offices for private use. Both writers replaced the 1549 psalms with psalms 39 and 90. These continued to provide the psalmodic content of the funeral liturgy when the Prayer Book was restored in its 1662 form.

Like the interpolations which Ricoeur has hailed as crucial personal meditations in the narrative genre, the psalms occupy a place in the BCP liturgy of burial that none of its other components could adequately fill :

It is noteworthy that monologues and dialogues open, within the purely narrative framework of feigned action, breaches that allow for the embedding of short meditations, even ample speculations about the misery of humanity handed over to the erosion of time. . . . It is not for the narrative art to deplore the brevity of life, the conflict between love and death, the vastness of a universe that pays no attention to our lament.

(TN III 272-273)

The psalms are complete traditional texts with their own power to make sense, and to propose worlds. This gives them a special significance within the 1549 and 1662 funeral

rites, which, though not narrative, are at the same time not suitable media for reflection. The voices of the psalms can be appropriated even under the restrictive liturgical conditions which permit the bereaved only the most passive of interests in the burial process. They can thus be read as regenerative meditations, speaking to the immediate situation of the living, in the 1549 and 1662 services.

In the 1549 burial rite, the psalms move through their own pattern for reconfiguring existence. From the initial fear of death, the speaker advances through the awestruck realisation that God is eternally present, to an act of praise which rejoices in the gift of utterance that makes God accessible to the living. Psalm 116 begins to reconstruct the experience of death. It traces a progression from the fear of death, with no apparent prospect of salvation, until the distressed speaker remembers God. As the psalm advances, so the speaker's conviction that God's mercy is ever-present increases. Yet he remains beset by nagging doubts, since he finds himself a faithful believer among a community of liars. His question concerning the kind of "rewarde" he might offer to God "for all the benefites that he hath done unto [him]" determines the speaker on a course of devotion, witnessed by the living community :

I will paye my vowes now in the presece of al his  
people : right dere in the sight of y<sup>e</sup> lorde is  
the death of his saintes.



In the next psalm, 139, the speaker meditates on the presence of God. This presence is prior to the speaker's existence. It fills the whole world, yet also concerns itself with the most trivial activities. No distance is too great, no place so remote, that God will not find and protect the individual. The speaker marvels, therefore, at the deep, primordial divine knowledge which stands eternally before any form of self-knowledge :

My bones are not hid from thee : though I be made secretly, and fashioned beneath in the earth. Thyne eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfected : and in thy booke were all my membres written.

An outburst of loathing from the lone speaker in the midst of a wicked and unbelieving nation follows, expressing anger that this sense of God's creative and protective power is not universally recognised. But the speaker admits that he or she, too, will need correction.

Completing this section of the 1549 office, psalm 146 is an expression of praise. It reminds its audience to put their trust in God, not in mortality. God, on the other hand, helps the persecuted, feeds the hungry, releases the prisoner, and restores the sight of the blind. He raises the fallen, protects the righteous, and cares for the stranger, the widow, and the orphan. But

as for the waye of the ungodlye, he turneth it  
 upside down.  
 (ER II 860-866 : 1549)

The psalm has escaped an original context of religious and political oppression to propose the possibility of pure thanks and praise. It is also a life-affirming celebration which praises God in the immediate present of human existence :

. . . whyle I lyve will I prayse the Lorde :  
 yea as long as I have any being, I will sing  
 prayses unto my God . . . .  
 For when the breath of man goeth furth, he shall  
 turne agayne to his earth : and then all his  
 thoughtes perishe.  
 (ER II 866 : 1549)

1662's inclusion of psalms 39 and 90 is a carefully controlled meditation for the living on the brevity of human existence. Consistently, the stress is on the importance of being ready to die. The voice of the psalmist in this instance is not so much a guide through the journeys of bereavement and death, as a warning to the mourners to set their spiritual affairs in order in the face of their own inevitable deaths.

The speaker of psalm 39 takes up this obligation by attending to the folly of unwise speech :

I said, I will take heed to my wayes : that I  
 offend not in my tongue.

But this practical resolve cannot entirely dispel the fear and uncertainty of the time of death :

My heart was hot within me, and while I was thus musing, the fire kindled : and (at the last) I spake with my tongue.

Lord, let me know mine end, and the number of my dayes : that I may be certified, how long I have to live.

The last verse comes out of sheer desperation, as the speaker confronts the possibility that it may, after all, be too late to repair his estranged relationship with God :

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and with thine ears consider my calling : hold not thy peace at my tears.

For I am a stranger with thee : and a sojourner as all my Fathers were.

O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength : before I go hence, and be no more seene.

Psalm 90 puts the pact of fidelity between God and humanity on a sure footing, although it does not initially guarantee God's continuing mercy to his creation :

Lord thou hast been our refuge : from one generation to another . . . .

Thou turnest man to destruction : again thou sayst, Come again ye children of men.

In fact, knowing that God sits in judgment on the sins he would have liked to conceal, the speaker seems to slacken his grip on God's merciful nature altogether :

Thou hast sett our misdeeds before thee : and our  
 secret sins in the sight of thy countenance.  
 For when thou art angry, all our dayes are gon :  
 we bring our years to an end, as it were a tale  
 that is told.  
 The dayes of our Age are three-score years, and  
 ten, and though men be so strong that they come to  
 fourescore years; yet is their strength then but  
 labour and sorrow, so soon passeth it away, and we  
 are gon.

Recovering his equilibrium, however, the speaker looks  
 towards a revised way of life, where a proper apprehension  
 of mortality promotes wiser use of time. The closing note  
 recalls that "logic of superabundance" (Specificity 138)  
 which Ricoeur celebrates as part of the divine nature. For  
 this reason, the speaker trusts that God will be merciful  
 before it is too late :

O satisfie us with thy mercy, and that soon : so  
 shall we rejoyce and be glad all the dayes of our  
 life.  
 Comfort us again, now after the time that thou  
 hast plagued us : and for the years wherein we  
 have suffered, adversity.  
 Shew thy servaunts thy work : and their children  
 thy Glory.  
 And the glorious Majestie of the Lord our God be  
 upon us : prosper thou the work of our hands upon  
 us, O prosper thou our handy work.  
 (ER II 849-853 : 1662)

Robert Alter has spoken particularly of psalm 139 in  
 considering the capacity of the whole psalmodic genre to  
 enable reflection on the relationship between God and  
 humanity. This comes about in unexpected ways, often  
 bursting through the ostensible socio-political context of

the psalm, which may be war or exile and the despair which accompanies them, to allow the personal voice to prevail :

It goes without saying that whatever themes the various psalms treat are caught in the heavily charged field of relationship between man and God. Thus, longing, dependence, desperation, exultation become elements in a series of remarkable love poems - once more, cutting across psalmodic genre - addressed by man to God. Religious experience attains a new contemplative and emotive inwardness in these poems. The radically new monotheistic idea that God is everywhere is rendered as the most immediately existential fact :

If I soar to heaven, you are there,  
 if I make my bed in Sheol, again you're there.  
 If I take wing with the dawn,  
 dwell at the end of the West,  
 there, too, your hand guides me,  
 your right hand holds me fast. (139:8-10)<sup>14</sup>

With special reference to psalms 39 and 90, Alter writes that "[t]he most intriguing instances of the expansion of the limits of genre in Psalms involve a displacement or reordering of the expected themes"<sup>15</sup>. He shows how the ostensible occasion which the psalm addresses often gives way to a new emerging emphasis. Thus, in psalm 39, a plea for healing in sickness becomes "an evocation of the speaker's own imminent end, the final word in the Hebrew being 'I-am-not'." In the case of psalm 90, "the psalm is manifestly one of the great biblical evocations of the

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14. Robert Alter "Psalms" in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* ed. Robert Alter & Frank Kermode London : Fontana, 1987 244-262 260

15. Once again, there is a comparison to be made with what Ricoeur calls "reorientation through disorientation" (Specificity 114).

ephemerality of mere human existence against the backdrop of God's eternity"<sup>16</sup>.

The great crests and troughs of love and desperation that mirror the magnitude of God pitched against unworthy humanity, terrified that death will forestall their chance of reconciliation with their Creator, emerge most movingly from Alter's exposition of the psalms of praise and supplication. In these forms (of which psalms 39 and 146 are splendid examples), he sees "[o]ne of the most ubiquitous themes in the various genres of Psalms", namely "language", reaching its zenith :

[M]any of the thanksgiving psalms begin and end with the declared intention of praising, extolling, thanking God, and many of the supplications begin and end by entreating God to hear the plea, pay heed, and rescue. But the poets very often proceed from these formulas of inception and conclusion to ponder the uses and power of the language they employ. The supplication often quite explicitly raises questions about the efficacy of man's speech to God, the possibility of an answering speech from God to man, the tension between speech and silence, the different functions of language for crying out in anguish and for exploring the enduring enigmas of man's creaturely condition. (Psalm 39 . . . unites all these conditions.) The thanksgiving psalm stresses speech / song as the distinctive human gift that God in some sense seems almost to need . . . . The common psalmodic theme that the dead cannot praise God is given special conviction [in psalm 30, as in psalm 146]: to be humanly alive is to celebrate God's bounties, which is what God has enabled [the] speaker [in psalm 30] to do by rescuing him from the underworld.<sup>17</sup>

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16. *ibid* 250

17. *ibid* 260-261

The psalms, therefore, mark an almost subversive internal force, working against the overriding attempt to silence the congregation by denying them any effective form of utterance. They insist on God's attention, and upon the relationship between God and the living. Above all, they operate at the very threshold between humankind and God. In this respect, Alter's remarks on language are crucial. The relationships of supplication and answer, of desperate cry and anticipated help, of love given and love returned in greater measure, of articulate speech and the terror of not having speech to praise God, are all figures of the joys, obstacles and expectations on the route to the Kingdom.

#### **6.8 Retrospective Appropriation : The Epistle in 1549 and 1552**

The meditation on mortality promoted by bereavement shows how, in becoming so easily the congregation's own, the psalms assist the growth of faith at the very moment that they represent the Faith in the form of traditional scriptural texts. In their 1549 position, the psalms express a faith which the rite has not yet formally predicated in the form of a statement of the Faith, as it is to be understood by bereaved communities. The epistle (1 Corinthians 15) offers such a statement, but also participates in an inverted hermeneutic of appropriation.

That is to say, it tenders the promise of a world where the dead will be gloriously and eternally restored to life in Christ only *after* the faithful living have taken the risk of committing the deceased that needs this foundation in the Faith itself.

Stylistically, the epistle creates a stark contrast to the psalmodic technique of melting the proposal of the Faith into the act of faith. Beginning with the words, "Christe is rysen from the dead", it affirmatively recalls the the first introit sentence, "I am the resurreccion and the lyfe." The third person form of the epistle has the authority of instructional conviction, However, applying it retrospectively to the event of burial considerably reduces its force. The comfort of its propositions remains undeniable nevertheless, for it allays fears about the way that the final resurrection will be effected. Its promise that Christ will gather all the faithful to himself is also a guarantee that the living and the dead will be united in their glorious resurrection bodies.

Judged as part of a ritual action, on the other hand, the epistle is cumbersome. It is too long to be properly internalised, and too general to be personally attached either to the living or to the dead. The committal prayer has given a foretaste of the rich array of promises that the epistle will offer, but the density of the Pauline argument



swallows up the scriptural guarantee for the prayer. This means that the epistle does not offer anything that the living could appropriate on behalf of the dead. Certainly, it empowers them to hope that their loved ones will rise again, but believing in the resurrection is a prospective matter, and its power to influence the committal at this distance in the rite stands open to question.

1549 takes up the terms of the epistle in the final prayer of the burial section, in order to assert the resurrection of the body :

O Lorde, with whome do live the spirites of them that be dead : and in whome the soules of them that be elected, after they be delyvered from the burden of the fleshe, be in ioye and felicitie : Graunte unto this thy servaunt, that the sinnes whiche he committed in thys world be not imputed unto hym, but that he, escapyng the gates of hell, & paynes of eternal darckenes, may ever dwell in the region of light, with Abraham, Isaac, and Iacob, in the place where is no wepyng, sorowe, nor heavynes : *and when that dredfull day of the generall resurreccion shall come, make hym to ryse also with the iust and ryghteous, and receive this bodye againe to glory, then made pure and incorruptible* : set him on the ryght hand of thy sonne Iesus Christ, among thy holy and elect, that then he maye heare with them these most swete and comfortable wordes : come to me ye blessed of my father, possesse the kyngdome whyche hath bene prepared for you from the begynning of the worlde: Graunte this we beseche thee, o mercyfull father, through Iesus Christe our mediatour and redemer. Amen.

(ER II 872-874 : 1549 my italics)

Sadly, the comfort of the Pauline reference to the resurrection of the body is denied to 1552 mourners, since

in the tussle between personal faith and Church doctrine, the interdiction on prayer for the dead wins the day. 1552's final prayer concentrates instead on the prospects of the elect, denigrating mortal life (as in 1549's second post-committal prayer) in order to justify its non-committal presentation of eternal life :

Almightye God, wyth whom doe lyve the spyrytes of them that departe hence in the lord, and in whome the soules of them that bee elected, after they be delyvered from the burthen of the fleshe, be in ioye and felycitie : We geve thee heartye thanckes, for that it hathe pleased thee to delyver thys N. our brother *out of the myseries of this synnefull worlde* : besechinge thee that it maye please thee of thy gracious goodnesse, shortelye to accomplysse the noubre of thyne electe, and to haste thy kyngdome, that we wyth thys oure brother, and all other departed in the true faythe of thy holye name, maye have *our perfecte consummacion and blysse, bothe in body and soule, in thy eternal and everlastyng glory.* Amen.

(ER II 873-875 : 1552 my italics)

### 6.9 Structural Closure in the Collect

1549 has concluded its dealings with the dead once its version of the final prayer has been said. Pivoting on the collect, the service then moves forward to the eucharist. This is a traditional affirmation of the life of a community united in the common hope of resurrection. Previous examinations of the eucharistic form itself have shown how it unfolds towards the profound sense of being on the threshold of the Kingdom, in the presence of God. If

anything, the funeral eucharist gains significance by making this affirmation of the hope of resurrection as the response of faith after the real experience of death. The collect's words proclaim the belief that has been sustained, even though the progress of the deceased beyond the grave has not yet been well considered :

. . . We mekelye beseche thee (o father) to raise us from the death of sin, unto the life of righteousnes, that when we shal departe this lyfe, we maye slepe in him (as our hope is this our brother doeth) and at the general resurreccion in the laste daie, both we and this oure brother departed, receyving agayne our bodies, and risinge againe in thy moste gracious favoure : maye with all thine elect Saintes, obtaine eternal ioye. Graunt this, O Lord god, by the meanes of our advocate Iesus Christ : whiche with thee and the holy ghoste, liveth and reigneth one God for ever. Amen  
(ER II 876 : 1549)

Thus in 1549, the collect serves a binary purpose, summing up what can be extracted from burial, but also relying heavily on the eucharistic epistle (1 Thessalonians 4) :

I would not brethren that ye shoulde bee ignoraunt concernyng them whiche are fallen a slepe, that ye sorowe not as other doe, which have no hope. For if wee beleve that Iesus dyed, and rose agayne: even so them also whiche slepe by Iesus, wyl God brynge againe with him . . . .  
(ER II 876-878 : 1549)

In the case of 1552, the collect is decisively a terminating device. The phrase which Robert Alter uses to describe how several psalms return to their original theme, with the last

verse echoing the first, is applicable here, since the rite too conforms to an "envelope structure"<sup>18</sup>. The collect in 1552, and in 1662, concludes the office of burial by returning to the concerns of the introit. This is, ironically, the first real act of appropriation in the service :

O Mercyfull God, the father of oure Lorde Iesus Christe, who is the resurrection and the lyfe, in whome whosoever beleveth shall lyve though he dye. And whosoever lyveth and beleveth in hym, shall not dye eternally, who also taughte us (by hys holy Apostle Paule) not to be sory, as men without hope, for them that slepe in hym : We mekely beseche thee (O Father) to rayse us from the death of synne, unto the lyfe of ryghteousnes, that when we shal depart this lyfe, we may rest in him, as our hope is this our brother doth, and that at the general resurreccion in the last day, we maye be founde acceptable in thy syghte, and receyve that blessing which thy welbeloved sonne shall then pronounce, to al that love and feare thee, saying. *Come ye blessed children of my father, receyve the kingdome prepared for you, from the beginning of the world.* Graunt this we beseche thee O mercyfull father, through Iesus Chryste our mediatour & redemer.  
Amen.

(ER II 877 : 1552/1662 my italics)

The opening lines in all three versions reshape the words :

I am the resurrection and the lyfe (sayth the Lord) he that beleveth in me, yea, though he were dead, yet shall he lyve. And whosoever lyveth and beleveth in me : shall not dye for ever  
(ER II 870 : 1552)

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18. *ibid* 255

in a brilliant play of paradox, moulded to the collect-form's convention of starting with a divine attribution. The epistle from the 1549 eucharist is echoed in the reminder that the bereaved are not to be "sory", but to regard the dead as secure in the salvation of Christ. The real death, attested to in the course of the rite, now undergoes a further stage of interpretation. For the collect turns the human event into a metaphor that translates mortal time into eternity, through the mediation of liturgical time:

We mekely beseche thee (O Father) to rayse us from  
the death of synne, unto the lyfe of ryghteousnes

The modesty of the request belies the daring of the chiasmus, where mortality itself seems susceptible to a literary conjuring trick, the same trick, in effect, as the funeral epistle has performed earlier :

. . . We shal not all slepe , but we shall al be  
chaunged, and that in a momente, in the twynklyng  
of an iye by the laste trumpe. For the trumpe shal  
blowe, & the dead shal rise incorruptible : and we  
shalbe chaunged . . . .  
(ER II 870 : 1549)

In its 1549 position, the collect is not obliged to carry concluding weight, and can rely on the epistle and gospel in the eucharist to give substance to its request that the living and the dead may receive their bodies once more, and rise to "eternal ioye" with all God's "electe Sainctes". In

1552 and 1662, however, where the collect cannot stake a claim on the resurrection of the body, it risks all on Jesus's invitation to the living to receive the Kingdom he has prepared for them.

The invitation to the Kingdom (adopted from the first of the 1549 post-committal prayers) is a poetically fine note on which to close, and in an optimistic reading, this would have to receive credit. But as we have seen, the phenomenon of the Kingdom has not been explored far enough in the rite (if it has been explored at all) to make this last promise credible or accessible. Thus the collect is not a closure, but the illusion of a closure. Making the convenient assumption that the bereaved have appropriated a world in the course of the service, it now presents that world back to them. But this is no less than an act of deception. The trend throughout the service has been to emphasise just how inaccessible the world of the Kingdom is. Its membership is confined to the elect, and in 1662, the business of election begins even before divine judgment, in human discrimination.

#### **6.10 Fabricating a Structure of Appropriation : The 1662 Rite**

It seems inconsistent to question 1662's liturgical effectiveness when it explicitly rejects the shape of its predecessors. I shall therefore suggest that the instinct

behind 1662, which mistrusts the structure that commits the dead in the hope of the Kingdom, without having produced any evidence for that hope, gratifies the hermeneutic argument. At the same time, application of the principles of liturgical hermeneutics to its revision of the 1552 rite indicates that it does not succeed in proposing an acceptable or better alternative.

1662 looks back to a 'classical' normative structure whose attempted shape is as follows :

1. Proposal of the Faith in the epistle.
2. Reflection on one's own death in the psalms.
2. Appropriation of the Faith in the act of burial in faith.
3. Proposal of personal faith in the final prayer and collect.

The result is an emphatically didactic opening for the new service, so that a way of interpreting death has already been determined by the time that the committal occurs. The event of death is now far more mediated, and far less a primary event, experienced without due preparation, in the linear syntax of the whole rite. The rite is, in turn, far more open to criticism on account of its dogmatic terms.

Since the emphasis in this order is on preliminary instruction immediately following the introit, the actual

interment takes place in the light of self-examination prompted by the set psalms and the epistle's exposition of a theology of resurrection. Thereafter, the uncertainty of the antiphon ("Man that is born of a Woman"), the bleakness of the *media vita*, the firm vindication of faith in the committal, and the subsequent anthem ("I heard a voice from heaven") constitute a choric interlude within the whole service. On the anthem's note of affirmation, the focus shifts briskly to the living as members of the elect, in the thanksgiving, collect and grace. This neat quadripartite division of introit, scripture, action and prayer must be rigorously interrogated as a specimen of that idealisation of the text that makes the appropriation of a proposed world a certainty, despite the apparent closedness of the human situation that is being addressed. This is not to say that the proposed structure of interpretation in the 1662 rite is misleading, or inherently 'worse' than either 1549 or 1552. More seriously, though, the 1662 burial rite's anxiety to give the impression of appropriation in the textual order, even though the whole rite is fettered by restrictions, limits the capacity of the service to propose a world yet further.

The epistle is strategically placed between the psalms and the interment. It builds on to the psalms' dawning conviction that a life lived in obedience to God will be duly rewarded the absolute certainty of the resurrection,



and has much to offer the bereaved as they approach the moment of burial. For this reason, it is to be regretted that the order of the rite places the antiphon and *media vita* immediately after the epistle. In 1549 and 1552, these words confront an uninstructed fear of mortality, death, and divine judgment, and their bleak and uncertain cry speaks eloquently of the state of mind of the bereaved. In 1662, the developing tissue of confidence and hope woven out of the psalms and the epistle is greatly weakened, as the rite lapses back into despair.

The committal differs from 1552 in one significant feature : the definite article that changes "sure and certaine hope of resurreccyon to eternal lyfe" to "sure and certein hope of the resurrection to eternal life." This answer to the scruples of the Presbyterian party at the Savoy Conference of 1661 over the possible inclusion of "persons living and dying in open and notorious sins"<sup>19</sup> in the promises of salvation compromises by asserting the *general* resurrection, without promising it to individuals. It therefore sits uneasily with the universal certainty recently proclaimed in

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19. This time, the Bishops did not have their way, although they were in favour of reopening the possibility of prayer for the dead : "We see not why these words may not be said of any person whom we dare not say is damned, and it were a breach of charity to say so even of those whose repentance we do not see : for whether they do not inwardly and heartily repent, even at the last act, who knows ? and that God will not even then pardon them upon such repentance, who dares say ? It is better to be charitable, and hope the best, than rashly to condemn." J. Parker op. cit ccxcv

the epistle, and makes nothing of its remarkable promises, especially :

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a Mystery, We shall not all sleep; but we shall *all* be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump (for the trumpet shall sound) and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.  
(ER II 857 : 1662 *my italics*)

It is left to the anthem to restore hope and confidence before the rite moves rapidly to an illusion of closure in the thanksgiving, collect and grace.

The 1662 rite is always overshadowed by its opening rubrics which ensure that the dead belong to law-abiding categories within the Church, and within society. It only acknowledges or reaches out to a conforming population, and in so doing, proposes a world which also prescribes an appropriate community.

### **6.11 Conclusion**

This experiment with permutations of ritual action begins to define the fundamental impossibility of demonstrating the consolatory power of the BCP funeral orders from the shape of the service. The findings of these readings indicate a barren situation, where the congregation can never

participate, and therefore never go through their own necessary rite of passage from grief to consolation. Prayer Book funeral liturgy is most painfully and seriously restricted here. Where it might have channelled the mourners' faith, or their own "sure and certain hope of [the] resurrection to eternal life", through the statements of the Faith in the psalms and the epistle, finally bringing them back to a stronger apprehension of personal faith, it tends merely to bring them to the end of a formal process.

What the impasse suggests, at least in a realistic interpretation which allows that these rites are not useless liturgical artefacts, and that, in some way, they have given consolation over almost four hundred years, is that there is more to reconfiguring subjectivity than a text-reader encounter allows. Again and again, the experience of death puts subjectivity at risk, and asks existential questions which deserve to be explored, rather than marginalised or idealised. As the discussion of the ASB rite will show, I do not propose a perfect funeral, but a funeral that can address the needs of the individual, and the needs of the community, without legislating against either. This envisages a rite that embraces the death of the individual, and appropriates it with due sensitivity to the fact that while we will all die, death in the immediate sense continues to belong to the person who has died. What the mourners are entitled to take from the experience is an

acknowledgement of their own pain, grief and loss, through the comfort of a structure which denies none of these aspects of death. It is in such a recognition that we move closer to that fullness of being, both as individuals and as communities, that accepts and celebrates death as part of a whole life in its journey towards the Kingdom.

CHAPTER SEVEN : CREATIVE RECONFIGURATION IN THE FUNERAL RITE  
OF THE ALTERNATIVE SERVICE BOOK

7.1 From The Book of Common Prayer to The Alternative  
Service Book

Modern Anglican funeral liturgy differs from its predecessors in the *Books of Common Prayer* in emphasis and in the flexibility of its content, largely because it has been consciously built around the theology of Easter. This has the dual effect of connecting the funeral office to the office of baptism through their shared language of death and resurrection, and of emphasising the hopeful aspect of Christian death in the face of grief and bereavement. Thus the cycle of Christian life, from birth, to death, and extended beyond death to full completion in eternal life, is made explicit.

Geoffrey Rowell has singled out the American Episcopal Church for the lucid development of this progression in its burial liturgy, and has suggested that the Church of England could profitably follow its example :

The recently revised burial offices of the Church of England, now published under the title of 'Funeral Services', are still considerably influenced by the Prayer Book tradition, and the sombre notes in general continue to predominate. By contrast the new burial services of the Episcopal Church in America draw on a wider range of traditional liturgy and are much more clearly

marked by the Easter joy that characterized the funeral liturgies of the early church.<sup>1</sup>

Rowell demonstrates that

[t]here is . . . a clear structure in [the Episcopal] order with the body being brought into church, or the funeral service beginning, with the series of sentences expressing both Christian hope and human need and sorrow in death, and ending, after the reading of scripture, and prayer, and possibly the celebration of the Eucharist, with Easter affirmations. That note is muted in the English revisions, though if some of the additional prayers are used it would sound more clearly.<sup>2</sup>

His preference for a rite consisting of a plainly demarcated sequence of explicit proclamations, and ending with an affirmation of belief in the resurrection of Christ is entirely valid. It is, nevertheless, not the only way, but only the simplest way, of describing the possible effect of the funeral service on the bereaved. The well-ordered and

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1. Geoffrey Rowell *The Liturgy of Christian Burial* London : Alcuin Club/SPCK, 1977 102 Rowell bases his discussion on the Series III proposals for funerals, authorised for use in 1975. These were adopted as they stood in *The Alternative Service Book 1980*.

2. *ibid* 109 The same principle has governed reform in Roman Catholic funeral rites. Thus Richard Rutherford comments :

It was with great wisdom that the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* . . . established the paschal character of Christian death as the principle of reforming the Catholic rite of burial. The Church confesses in faith and practice that Christian life is life born of the paschal mystery - life that proclaims the message and the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is through living out in practice its faith in the paschal mystery that the Church bears witness to the Kingdom of God, both present and to come.

*The Death of a Christian : The Rite of Funerals* New York : Pueblo Publ. Co., 1980 115-116

precisely articulated pattern assumes that consolation can be provided, and resurrection asserted, only as the result of the completed process of the funeral. In other words, it operates on the premise of a seamless progression from grief to hope, a restitution of order, and a recovery of faith in the face of death.

Against this rather idealistic approach to pastoral liturgy, the present chapter will suggest that the funeral is a complex form of consolation, which depends as much on the stages in the linear movement as on the final accomplishment of the rite. The signs and promises of consolation must take root in the consciousness of the bereaved as the service unfolds, even if a fuller grasp of their powerful address to the bereaved *and* to the deceased has to await the completion of the service. This view of the whole action as the gradual appropriation of a proposed world of salvation and assurance also allows the congregation to find itself built into the structure of proposition and, if only subconsciously, to consider its future life as a reconfigured community from an early stage in the service.

This mode of reconstruction in the moment of grief has a great deal in common with Eric Smith's reflections on the secular form of elegy :

. . . at the heart of elegy is a duality. The very process of ordering grief, whether real or

imaginary, into a work of art may be the consolation the search for which is the ostensible subject of the poem. The finding of form coincides with the defeat of grief and the finished work is in some sense a triumph over Time.<sup>3</sup>

Smith is quick to defend the "artistic whole" in a climate where solidly reified content seems all-important :

. . . a monument is in origin merely something which reminds, a memorial, not necessarily an unwieldy statue. It is essentially an object, a unity, and it is the paradox of art, and the core of personal elegy, that a sequence of communicating words, produced by self-expression and able to influence the reader by example, may become a monument, a symbol which, though it is read as a sequence, is nevertheless more than a sequence.

Thus the elegy which arrives at a consolation does not leave us with consolation and say that the problem is solved. It presents us with the quest, inseparable from its ending in the work of art.<sup>4</sup>

The approach I shall be making towards the ASB's funeral liturgy in this chapter stands on the same hermeneutic ground that implicitly supports Smith's argument. Just as the elegiac monument is both the result of an effort to express grief, and the reminder that grief is acknowledged, so the funeral is the liturgical monument to grief at the death of a member of the community, and the process that takes the community forward to discover consolation.

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3. Eric Smith *By Mourning Tongues : Studies in English Elegy* Ipswich : Boydell Press; New Jersey : Rowan & Littlefield, 1977 21

4. *ibid* 21



It would be irresponsible in the extreme to claim that the funeral cures grief, and concludes its work with the bereaved as soon as the committal has been said and the final prayers finished. It is the task of funeral liturgy to join itself to the condition of bereavement in a progressive rather than in a static way, perhaps offering promises which seem alien or unrecognisable to the mourners in their grief, but nevertheless asserting an indissoluble connection between human agony and the promise of eternal life. The assignment is more difficult than it appears, since, unlike other Christian rites of passage (notably baptism and marriage), the funeral has its starting point in termination and separation, not welcome, inclusion and celebration. Its responsibility is to draw grief, shock and loss (the emotional consequences of severed human bonds) into the recontextualizing process as a necessary foundation for the restoration and reaffirmation of the disrupted relationship under new conditions. Thus, while we think of funerals in monumental terms, as entities attached to particular individuals, the liturgical rite is only ever completed in a formal sense.

The appropriation of a proposed world of assurance cannot be completed within the space of the burial service, for two reasons. Negatively speaking, appropriation, in this case, is subject to a great many difficulties, including anger, grief, remorse, and the failure of belief. In total, these

factors come to represent a contra-flow which constantly threatens to impede the sequential liturgical process. On the positive side, the kind of assurance offered - nothing less than the resurrection of the dead to eternal life - is by its nature beyond the chronological terminus of the liturgical act which proposes it.

All that we can say of appropriation in this case, is that it embodies and represents the community's quest for reconfiguration after the rupture caused by death. Far from ignoring the paschal theology of resurrection, the ASB funeral recognises, in a tightly condensed version, the lengthy adjustments that the congregation will have to perform in order to get back into full relationship with the deceased. By giving a more prominent place to grief, uncertainty, anger, and a sense of sin, in sum, all those negative forces which afflict the protagonists in the Gospel accounts of the passion and resurrection of Jesus, it presents a healthy challenge to the received terms of the paschal framework<sup>5</sup>. In this way, the linear sequence of the funeral reveals breaks and disruptions that disturb a sense

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5. Richard Rutherford has said that "[t]here is no greater threat to faith in the paschal mystery than the phenomenon of death" op. cit 116. This begins, of course, with the assumption that the funeral rite is dealing with believers. A broader model would take into account the possibility of a congregation which included atheists, agnostics, and those (believers and non-believers alike) who feel angry and betrayed as a consequence of death.

of orderly progression, but give effective and necessary recognition to human doubt and fear in the face of death.

Structural interruptions of the kind I have described adumbrate a more general condition in the experience of bereavement. The living have to confront their own grief and frustrating separation from the deceased, knowing that these states are answered in the eternal promise of God, although their earthly solution in the present is not precisely mapped out. The dual situation in the service itself bears this out, given its coherent linear structure of farewell (moving from the introit and sentences of consolation, through the psalmody, the readings which offer instruction about death, the prayers for the bereaved and for the deceased, the committal, and the closing prayers), coupled with a set of individually complex propositions which do not offer any final solutions to the mystery of death and eternal life. In the end, the liturgy almost seems to be working against itself. Its structure proposes a Christian ideology of death, founded on a credal position, in tandem with, or pitched against, a number of gestures at the horizon of the Kingdom of God that express both the conviction that such an horizon exists and deep anxiety over the way it is to be reached.

It is these internal propositions that present challenges to the promissory structure of liturgy<sup>6</sup>, often by exposing doubt, fear, and weakness in the very moment that they offer consolation. This is why the modern rite should retain the *media vita*<sup>7</sup>, and why we have to remember the dark places and reminders of sin and mortality in the psalms. It also explains why the readings admit questions and uncertainties, and prompt self-examination on the part of the bereaved. For they are, in fact, the signs of the Kingdom, appearing in the very absence of the Kingdom. As Tony Walter shows in discussing the strain placed on belief at the time of death:

. . . most people, and especially the bereaved, both believe and don't believe. Only sectarians and atheists claim to know with certainty what happens when we die.

One wise Anglican deacon I know never says at a funeral 'This is what I believe . . .', or 'This is what we believe . . .', but 'This is the Christian belief . . .'. Her own faith is challenged by death and is not strong enough for the pain facing her; she understands that it is not her own faith that carries the congregation, but the faith of the church. She understands that at this point she is playing not herself but the role of the priest representing the Christian faith.<sup>8</sup>

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6. The exploration of liturgical promises in Chapter Five's discussion of baptism extends readily to address the promise of the Kingdom, which is the bedrock of the eucharist and the rite of burial in an equally urgent sense.

7. R.C.D. Jasper & Paul F. Bradshaw regard this as a gloomy hangover from the medieval rite, retained only out of deference to tradition. *A Companion to The Alternative Service Book* 403

8. Tony Walter *Funerals and How to Improve Them* London : Hodder & Stoughton, 1990 241

This in turn sheds light on what has become a central problem : liturgy's definitive appropriation of the hermeneutic circle in the relationship between the personal faith of worshippers, and the professed Faith of the Church. Where a smooth transition from grief to consolation will speak of the promises of the Faith, each moment of the process makes demands on the personal faith of mourners. Indeed the *status quo* of belief, which is the Faith, has to be fractured along its fault lines in order for the leap of faith towards the appropriation of the scriptural promises embedded in the liturgy to occur.

What we have to determine is how, on any terms, the frequently repeated phrases of the funeral service perform their task, and achieve their impact under often aggressive conditions. Geoffrey Rowell quotes Alasdair MacIntyre who, speaking in the late 1960's, lamented the inadequacy of contemporary Christianity's response to death :

I am not talking now about a simple intellectual ability to produce formulas in which we can say what we believe about death. I am talking about those situations in which we are forced to ask ourselves if in the face of actual deaths we can go on repeating these formulas. This is one of the great cultural and social gaps in our lives, but it is quite clear that in face of this particular crisis Christians have been in the same difficulty as everyone else . . . . The fact is that contemporary Christianity says *nothing* about death.<sup>9</sup>

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9. op. cit 112. Rowell quotes Alasdair MacIntyre *Secularization and Moral Change* London, 1967 60-70

Rowell points out that MacIntyre's concern is with the gap between real experience and professed belief. Christianity, in his view, offers no privileged insights into the subject of death. Liturgy, on the other hand, can provide a response, or at least a programme for response, by taking up what Rowell terms the "pastoral challenge" to promote reflection on the part of Christians, both on "their own death and the deaths of others." This challenge must also help believers to discover and use "the resources of the Christian tradition." In short, "[a]ny Christian burial liturgy must reflect the fullness of that tradition, and use it creatively to minister to the needs of the bereaved"<sup>10</sup>.

The "pastoral challenge" nevertheless remains a somewhat evanescent concept, unless it can be shown to be answerable to the kinds of critical questions which can be directed at the language and structure of liturgy itself. This is particularly important in view of the resistances which, as I have argued, hermeneutical analysis encounters in the BCP burial rites. If the ASB service, which includes many of the same scriptural quotations and traditional prayers as its BCP ancestors, is an advance on the earlier forms in terms of its pastoral efficacy, we will need to consider the factors which invest them with the power to console, by constructing a response to death, and hence save them from

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10. *ibid* 112

sounding trite and hollow in the face of the raw human grief they confront.

Thus a kind of tension develops between the recognizable repeated utterance, and the one-off, never-to-be-repeated utterance, linked uniquely to this person and this congregation. What we need is a mode for addressing Death, and a mode for dealing with N's death at this particular time : an act of repetition, and a highly specific act of remembrance that dignifies the well-worn speech act with its own originality.

## **7.2 Addressing the Living**

For the purposes of exploring the ASB rite of burial as a potential world of consolation, remembrance and assurance, and a last leave-taking which the mourners can make distinctively their own, I will distinguish three forms in the rites for the funerals of adults :

ASB I : The funeral service without Holy Communion, with the introit sentences, psalms, readings, sermon, and prayers following in order, and leading up to the committal and closing prayer.

ASB II : The service without holy communion, with the committal following the sermon, but preceding the prayers.

ASB III : The service with holy communion with the committal placed at the end of the entire service, after the administration of communion and post-communion prayers.

ASB II is the model about which I shall have least to say, except to note that its organisation makes it closer to the BCP form of 1662 than either ASB I or ASB III. I shall begin, therefore, with a detailed survey of ASB I, bearing in mind the proposals it makes to the congregation about the world to which they commit the deceased, their own continuing relationship to the deceased; their relationship to their present situation, and to the life to come.

In the course of discussing the Prayer Book burial offices, I have commented on the disorientating effect of the introit sentences. The ASB goes some way towards improving this situation in the compulsory first sentence, by explicitly positing Jesus as the author of the promise that will be the founding proposition of the burial rite :

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and I am the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. *John 11.25, 26*  
(ASB 307)

The carefully chosen statements, one or more of which may follow the first sentence, function primarily to remind the community of the promises made by God throughout history.



They also have the analytical task of exposing the Faith that constitutes the integrity of the believing community, and hence mine the biblical resources for evidence of the promise of resurrection and eternal life. The community's stance toward God, and toward the grounds of their own belief in the resurrection of the dead, is thus identified before they address their relationship to the deceased :

We brought nothing into the world, and we take nothing out. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away : blessed be the name of the Lord. *1 Timothy 6.7; Job 1.21*

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. *Deuteronomy 33.27*

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his compassion never fails : every morning they are renewed. *Lamentations 3.22, 23*

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. *Matthew 5.4*

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. *John 3.16*

I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Romans 8.38, 39*

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him. *1 Corinthians 2.9*

We believe that Jesus died and rose again; and so it will be for those who died as Christians; God will bring them to life with Jesus. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Comfort one another with these words. *1 Thessalonians 4.14, 18*

(ASB 307-308)

Although the substance of the opening quotations sharpens the focus of the BCP model, the curiosity of this early section is the total absence of explicitly performative speech acts. Essentially, neither the utterances nor the mourners have a context at this stage, except for the tacit consensus that 'this is N's funeral', so that the mourners are disempowered. Greater precision can be achieved if we use the Austinian categories of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts once again.

The opening sentences of the funeral service belong to the category of locutionary acts, since no results are posited as ensuing from their performance. While in *meaning* they convey the rich assurance of God's promise of eternal life to all believers, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, there is as yet no indication of the kind of *force* they will be able to produce in the service. This is an instance of the sort of liturgical interruption noticed earlier. In a bleak way, as the prospect of promises that lack the means of fulfilment, they present what de Man would call an *aporia*. With greater optimism, however, we could think of this first part of the rite in terms of the "disorientation" offered by Ricoeur, whose eventual consequence is always "reorientation" (Specificity 114). Thus the world being proposed is not offered with a statement of the impossibility of appropriating it :

instead, the congregation is asked to wait upon the promise, and not to give up in despair.

The strongly petitionary and credal response of the first congregational prayer celebrates the fact that the community has an anchor to stabilise the responsibility they will assume for the dead. But it does not hide certain doubts as to the adequacy of this early proposition to sustain belief:

Heavenly Father,  
in your Son Jesus Christ  
you have given us a true faith and  
a sure hope.  
Strengthen this faith and hope in us  
all our days,  
that we may live as those who believe in  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
and the resurrection to eternal life;  
through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.  
(ASB 308)

Yet the prayer also refers to the initial series of locutionary acts ("you have given us a true faith and a sure hope") in an important revisionary way. This time, it begins to claim, as a context and an orientation for the utterances, that God has offered these promises so that the mourners might indeed believe in the three credal propositions : "the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection to eternal life." Thus, in making demands on the semantic content of the quoted material, it

focuses the energies of the authoritative, but undirected biblical material.

### 7.3 Meeting the Dead

Up to this point, neither the deceased nor the fact of his or her death has been mentioned in so many words. Two arguments can be advanced for this delay. In the first place, the context is pre-given, established by consensus on the part of the mourners and the minister, since funerals are always thought of as 'N's funeral'. In the second place, the rationale of the opening sections of the service seeks to present the congregation with the foundations or possible foundations of *their* belief, based on the promises of God. This is the precursor to any commitments they will subsequently make on behalf of the deceased. The psalms which follow the opening prayer appear, then, on first inspection, to continue the grounding process. Their inclusion pursues the now familiar method of biblical quotation, and it is a vital part of their function that they should allow the bereaved to begin actively appropriating the comfort of communication with God, as they repeat the psalmist's words for themselves. But this account by no means exhausts their liturgical function at the present stage of the rite, for they are also vehicles which carry the congregation forward into an encounter with the dead, as they trace the course of their sorrow in words at

once as close and as far away from their own experience as they choose to make them.

Ronald Jasper and Paul Bradshaw have demonstrated the thinking behind the choice of psalms 23, 90, 121, and 130 as principal options (the ASB rubric suggests that one or more of these be used, and provides several further alternatives): psalm 23 is a psalm of consolation; psalm 90 is a traditional lament; psalm 121 is a form of blessing for someone going on a journey; psalm 130 is a form of penance<sup>11</sup>. Constraints of time will, of course, dictate the selection made at a 'real' funeral, but given this persuasive logic, there is good reason to make all four mandatory in the 'ideal' funeral. Assuming such a situation, however, it is essential to remember that the four psalms are printed in ascending numerical order in the ASB, and not in the logical order which would surely run as follows : 130, 90, 121, 23, i.e. penance, lament, farewell, consolation. In the revised order, these well-known formulae systematically prepare the living to reflect on their present condition and that of the deceased, before the act of committal. They place the bereaved gently in communication with their own desolation, beginning with the terrible distance between humanity and God engendered by sin, as envisaged in psalm 130. Here, the starting point is

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11. *A Companion to The Alternative Service Book* 399

an abyss of desolation and fear, which creates its own dramatic terms :

1. Out of the depths have I called to you O Lord:  
Lord hear my voice;
2. O let your ears consider well:  
the voice of my supplication.
3. If you Lord should note what we do wrong:  
who then O Lord could stand ?

Although the speaker is in terror before God, it seems that any attention would be preferable to the oblivion of the depths from which the disembodied voice comes. Yet, as the note of terrified despair gives way to a recollection of the whole nature of God, fear is counterbalanced by the conviction of a mercy so undeserved that it is itself a cause for fear :

4. But there is forgiveness with you:  
so that you shall be feared.

Finally, the speaker's longing for the generosity of God's promised redemption triumphs over all fear :

5. I wait for the Lord my soul waits for him:  
and in his word is my hope.
6. My soul looks for the Lord:  
more than watchmen for the morning  
more I say than watchmen for the morning.
7. O Israel trust in the Lord for with the  
Lord there is mercy:  
and with him is ample redemption.

8. He will redeem Israel:  
     from the multitude of his sins.  
 (ASB 311)

The verses from psalm 90 turn from human sin to human mortality. Now God's mercy is invoked to make the best use of the limits of human life. Even so, the address is full of ambiguity. God is constant :

- 1 . Lord you have been our refuge:  
     from one generation to another.
- 2 . Before the mountains were born  
     or the earth and the world were brought to be:  
     from eternity to eternity you are God.

But against his constancy, the life of creation appears almost negligible, and subject to the whim of its maker :

- 3 . You turn man back into dust:  
     saying 'Return to dust you sons of Adam.'
- 4 . For a thousand years in your sight  
     are like yesterday passing:  
     or like one watch of the night.
- 5 . You cut them short like a dream:  
     like the fresh grass of the morning;
- 6 . in the morning it is green and flourishes:  
     at evening it is withered and dried up.

The point of this is to remind humanity of practical considerations, and to encourage the consciousness of mercy and grace, even in the short time available :

10. The days of our life are three score years and ten  
     or if we have strength four score:

the pride of our labours is but toil and sorrow  
for it passes quickly away and we are gone.

12. Teach us so to number our days:  
that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.
14. O satisfy us early with your mercy:  
that all our days we may rejoice and sing.
16. Show your servants your work:  
and let their children see your glory.
17. May the gracious favour of the Lord our  
God be upon us:  
prosper the work of our hands  
O prosper the work of our hands!  
(ASB 309-310)

Both psalms apply as much to the dead as to the living. Present reality for the one is also the prospect of the other, so that the anguished pleading of the psalms looks towards appropriating a common heritage of mercy and forgiveness. Even at this early stage, the speaker's dramatised position as an expectant soul (ps 90 vv. 5-6) suggests the expectation of the deceased, and following from this, the deep longing binding the whole human creation to God.

Psalm 121 goes beyond shared heritage to embark on a direct and immediate act of communication between living and dead. As I mentioned, it is a valedictory composition of the kind which would, in classical poetry, be called a *propemptikon*. The first two verses differ from the remaining six in their first-person subject :

1. I lift up my eyes to the hills :



but where shall I find help ?

2. My help comes from the Lord :  
     who has made heaven and earth.

This sets in motion a dialogue between the departing traveller's questioning uncertainty, and the responsive assurance of those remaining behind that God is the desired source of help, marked by the change to a second-person form of address :

3. He will not suffer your foot to stumble :  
     and he who watches over you will not sleep.
4. Be sure he who has charge of Israel :  
     will neither slumber nor sleep.
5. The Lord himself is your keeper :  
     the Lord is your defence upon your right hand.
6. The sun shall not strike you by day :  
     nor shall the moon by night.
7. The Lord will defend you from all evil :  
     it is he who will guard your life.
8. The Lord will defend your going out and your  
     coming in :  
     from this time forward for ever more.  
 (ASB 310)

It is worth dwelling on the anxiety of the initial voice in the psalm as indicative of a completely legitimate uncertainty, even on the part of the most unswerving believers, as to their eventual destination. As a dialogue between the dead and the living, and an imaginative outreach to the loneliness of the person who has died, but not yet, in liturgical terms, completed the transition from mortality

to eternity, the double application of the psalm bridges the representation of the living community's grief and its object, the deceased.

Finally, psalm 23 proclaims all the aspects of the divine nature which confound the fear of death. After assuring the deceased of God's eternal care and protection in psalm 121, the congregation make the more difficult claim of faith for themselves :

1. The Lord is my shepherd:  
therefore can I lack nothing.
  2. He will make me lie down in green pastures:  
and lead me beside still waters.
  3. He will refresh my soul:  
and guide me in right pathways for his name's sake.
  4. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow  
of death I will fear no evil:  
for you are with me  
your rod and your staff comfort me.
  5. You spread a table before me  
in the face of those who trouble me:  
you have anointed my head with oil and my  
cup will be full.
  6. Surely your goodness and loving-kindness  
will follow me all the days of my life:  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
for ever.
- (ASB 308-309)

The psalms precariously hold the breach between words of comfort spoken from the security of a liturgical community rooted in tradition, and the demands made on belief by the

event of death. The rite has now arrived at a moment when it must consider the alternatives to the present mortal condition, and its honesty in recognising that this is not automatically settled by recourse to the biblical promises of God is one of its most admirable features. To turn once more to Geoffrey Rowell, we should remember that

[m]ourning is important, for Christians as well as for non-Christians. There is plenty of evidence of the psychological damage caused by suppressed grief. Any burial liturgy must be framed to help this process. It must neither be death-denying, nor death-defying, for both are in the end escape-routes from the reality of death and separation which must be recognized and lived through.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the suggested readings also accept the right of the mourners to question, and to be 'put in the picture' about death, as far as possible. The passages printed in the ASB sometimes answer a question directly, for example the disciples' questions to Jesus about the place he had promised to prepare for them :

Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way ?'  
(John 14)

Alternatively, they presuppose a question, and on that basis, provide an answer. This is true of Paul's anticipation of the Corinthians' wish to know more about the nature of the resurrection of the dead :

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12. op. cit 110-111

But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised ?  
With what kind of body do they come ?'  
(I Cor. 15)

as well as of his words to the Thessalonians :

We would not have you ignorant, brethren,  
concerning those who are asleep, that you may not  
grieve as others do who have no hope.  
(I Thess. 4)

and Jesus's assurance to the disciples :

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God  
still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my  
Father's house; if there were not I should have  
told you.  
(John 14)  
(ASB 311-313)

The very questionableness of the promise of eternal life,  
expressed and appropriated through these readings, requires  
special tact from the element least under the control of the  
liturgical structure, namely, the funeral sermon. It would  
be a serious abuse of the vulnerability of a bereaved  
community, were the sermon to prey upon uncertainty, or  
construct an inaccurately hagiographical picture of the  
deceased as temporary comfort for the living.

#### 7.4 Focusing on the Deceased

The psalms and readings therapeutically open up areas of doubt and fear in ways that allow the living to imagine both their own needs and the needs of the dead under a set of shared conditions. We could even call this a brief *ars moriendi* without undue extravagance. This follows the trend of the rite up to this stage, in showing deep sensitivity to the needs of the bereaved in the immediate context of their loss. At the same time, the rite has not yet confronted the fact that N. is dead in so many words.

It is the work of the prayers (sections 50-60, ASB 334-336) to increase the force of the ritual by making the focus more explicit. Building upon the careful preliminary process of education, they provide the congregation with the verbal means of assuming responsibility, both for the deceased and for themselves, on the strength of the hope offered by the rite at this point. This defines the threshold position which the mourners will have to assume, preparatory to taking the risk of appropriating the assurance of everything they have assented in so far both for themselves and for the deceased. A few examples will indicate how the prayers address the needs and prospects of the living and the dead on this occasion :

Hear, Lord, the prayers of your people, as we remember before you *N our brother* : and grant that we who confess your name on earth may with *him* be made perfect in the kingdom of your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**  
(ASB 334, no. 52)

as well as those who have died previously :

Remember, O Lord, this your servant, who has gone before us with the sign of faith, and now rests in the sleep of peace. According to your promises, grant to *him* and to all who rest in Christ, refreshment, light, and peace; through the same Christ our Lord. **Amen.**  
(ASB 334, no.53)

and those who mourn :

Almighty God, Father of all mercies and giver of all comfort: deal graciously, we pray, with those who mourn, that casting all their care on you, they may know the consolation of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**  
(ASB 335, no. 57)

Following the prayers the service arrives at a turning point, which strikes a note of resolution, and effectively brings to a close the ministry to the living, before the living themselves participate in the final ministry to the dead. The position of the prayer takes note of the fact that wisdom and grace, repentance and a new determination to follow Christ, cannot come without the reassurance of the promissory structure lying behind them :

Grant us, Lord, the wisdom and the grace to use aright the time that is left to us here on earth. Lead us to repent of our sins, the evil we have

done and the good we have not done; and strengthen us to follow the steps of your Son, in the way that leads to the fullness of eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ~~Amen~~.  
(ASB 314)

Thereafter, the priest prepares for the committal by commending the deceased to God in what is, significantly, the first *explicitly performative* speech act in the burial office :

Let us commend our *brother N* to the mercy of God our Maker and Redeemer.  
(ASB 315)

The words constitute an exhortation to the living to share responsibility for the dead with the priest. Moreover, they actually *mark* the threshold from which the leap of faith will be taken, so that the mourners are ready to assume their role. In the prayers which follow it, the nature of the proposed action gains more precise outlines. Thus the first stage gives the responsibility - and the risk - of transferring the deceased to God's mercy to the people :

Heavenly Father, by your mighty *power* you gave us *life*, and in your *love* you have given us *new life* in Christ Jesus. We entrust *N* to your merciful keeping, in the faith of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who died and rose again to save us, and is now alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit in glory for ever. ~~Amen~~.  
(ASB 315 my italics)

The pain of their physical separation from the deceased is carefully modulated by replacing the stark contrast of life

and death with death's connection to the gift of superabundant life, as the prayer lays upon "life" the added gift of "new life". Where the fact of our existence is the sign of the "power" of God the Creator, this "new life" signifies the "love" of God the Redeemer, incarnated in Christ, who assumes the burden of death on our behalf. This is grammatically reinforced by the change from the aorist "gave" to the perfect "have given". The former has the force of an event that occurred once and was completed in the past, but the latter implies that the action, though it occurred in the past, has ongoing consequences. Not only this : the order of the service goes on to include the whole body of believers in the rich promise to the dead :

May God in his infinite love and mercy bring the whole Church, living and departed in the Lord Jesus, to a joyful resurrection and the fulfilment of his eternal kingdom. **Amen.**

(ASB 315)

Does the formulation of the prayer take too positivistic, too death-denying a view ? Seen in the context of the rite's teaching about death, this does not seem to be a cause for concern. The bereaved know that the service is being conducted according to belief in the "joyful resurrection" (ASB 315, no. 13) of the dead to eternal life, and are likewise in a state of preparation that will give credence to the proposition from *Revelation* that follows :



I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write this: "Happy are the dead who die in the faith of Christ! Henceforth", says the Spirit, "they may rest from their labours; for they take with them the record of their deeds."' *Revelation 14.13*  
(ASB 315)

This intriguing piece of the funeral liturgy is well worth careful attention. Although the first person form automatically ties the authority of the utterance to the presiding presence of the minister, the utterance is also the testimony of a primary receiver, who can actually witness to God's providential plan for the dead<sup>13</sup>. The injunction that the 'speaker' reports ("Write this . . . .") is in effect commissioning the general epitaph of all believers ("Happy are the dead who die in the faith of Christ !") which, as "the record of their deeds" (i.e. the keeping of the faith), is also their passport into the Kingdom. In other words, it is a documentation of the threshold of appropriation between life and death, and between the general promise to Christians and the individual act of dying "in the faith of Christ".

Both psalm 103 and the *media vita* (the alternative passages for introducing the words of committal) place human finitude against "the merciful goodness of the Lord" which "endures

13. Comparison with the post-committal position of this quotation in the BCP shows a considerable difference of force. There, the sentence is used to endorse the act of burial, and to guarantee the salvation of the deceased, as far as the BCP rites will permit. In the ASB service, the sentence is a preparation for burial, so that the act rests upon the deep assurance that God will receive the dead.

for ever and ever" (ps. 103, ASB 316). To recapitulate, this penultimate section acknowledges death, but on the strength of all the promises and assurances which have been adduced to underpin it. Thus it is not a piece of clumsy composition that puts the apparently gloomiest reflections last, signally :

In the midst of life we are in death; to whom can we turn for help, but to you, Lord, who are justly angered by our sins?

Lord God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us from the bitter pains of eternal death. You know the secrets of our hearts: in your mercy hear our prayer, forgive us our sins, and at our last hour let us not fall away from you.  
(ASB 316)

It is, paradoxically, only now that the bereaved are ready to deal with the awesome proportions of death and mortality. The interment of the body comes, therefore, as an appropriate act of faith and a visible symbol of all the claims which precede it. It is also a healthy corrective to the BCP's placing of the committal, especially in the 1549 and 1552 versions :

We have entrusted our *brother N* to God's merciful keeping, and we now commit his body to the ground (or to be cremated) : [earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust;] in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died, was buried, and rose again for us. To him be glory for ever and ever.  
(ASB 316)

The physical action of burial makes a profound change in the force of the prayers that follow it. Where the note of hope prior to the burial is distinct, yet not totally confident, certainty resounds in the post-committal prayers. Thus the last note is one of celebration, optimism, and homecoming :

God will show us the path of life;  
 in his presence is the fullness of joy:  
 and at his right hand  
 there is pleasure for evermore. *Psalm 16.1*  
 (ASB 316)

Unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.  
*Jude 24,25*

(ASB 317)

The congregation praises God, not because death has been elided in the salvific affirmations of the funeral service, but because it has been recontextualized as a condition rich in the anterior promises of a God who has always anticipated the fear of his people, and richer still in its promise of a life lived in eternity.

### **7.5 Paradox as a Mode of Reconfiguration**

This brief consideration will have shown, amongst other things, that the funeral is built upon paradoxes that progressively intensify the force of the proposals it offers to the mourners. Through the analysis, it emerges that each

component in the rite has to be accepted *on the basis* of what has preceded it. Thus, for example, there would be meaning, but very little force, in the words of committal without the promises of the psalms, or the passage from Revelation, while the last two acts of praise would seem platitudinous and inane, and not the powerful and evocative cohabitation of mourning and joy, had the earlier assurances of life and salvation not been appropriated by the bereaved.

Ricoeur has isolated paradox as one of the favourite devices of religious language. In an examination of some of the forms this language takes, he shows the kind of effect which it is likely to produce on its receivers :

The transmutation of worldly existence, which Robert Funk (. . .) speaks of with respect to the parables, is accomplished in the proverb by the strange strategy which I will call *re-orientation by disorientation*. The parable takes the round-about way of fiction; the proverb takes that of an impossible possibility. But both presuppose a field of common experience, "a basis from which to respond to the challenge" (. . .), hence, a field of intensification which has already been oriented by traditional wisdom.

(Specificity 114)

Taking the paradox as a means of effecting "re-orientation by disorientation", demands a reevaluation of its power. It is not to be regarded, in the case of the funeral rite, as a linguistic evasion of the harshness of death, but as a stern challenge, in addition to the challenge of meeting death which is imposed on the bereaved. Thus to revisit the

opening words of the service is also to realise that the citation of Jesus's words is a paradoxical leap of faith, taken without any preparation, and to some extent delaying responsive action, into a process which may not become any simpler as it pursues its course. The sentence 'breaks in', rather than formally beginning a liturgical dialogue, demanding attention, and setting up two apparently contradictory propositions :

Jesus said, I am the resurrection, and I am the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.  
(John 11)

In a similarly paradoxical way, the words of the *media vita* follow up the frightening discovery of death as a part of, rather than a codicil to life by presenting as our sole source of help the very God we have angered, so that we have no choice but to turn to the being we would most choose to avoid :

In the midst of life we are in death; to whom can we turn for help, but to you, Lord, who are justly angered by our sins ?  
(ASB 316)

Again, if the funeral is combined with Holy Communion, then the collect derived from the Book of Common Prayer retains the central chiasmic paradox of its original. Life as we know it on earth is death because of its sinful character,

while physical death is the gateway to eternal life. Our task in mortal life is to seek an interim resurrection from sin to righteousness. Indeed this is the collect's petition, making for a complicated double paradox :

Merciful God,  
 whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection  
 and the life of all the faithful:  
 raise us from the death of sin  
 to the life of righteousness,  
 that at the last we, with our *brother N*,  
 may come to your eternal joy;  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**  
 (ASB 331)

In each of these examples, a *relationship*, albeit of a perplexing kind, can be identified. Jesus's promise of life works across the distance between life and death to set the faithful believer in a new, and undying relationship with God. The *media vita* insists on the relationship of the bereaved to God, even though it acknowledges that God has legitimate cause to reject humanity. The collect considers the contradictions implicit in setting conventional mortal life in relation to eternal life, which springs from what is conventionally held to be death.

Situations like these become clearer if their paradoxical claims are simply allowed, rather than subjected to scrupulously logical methods of untangling. To borrow the word that Derrida applies to the question of otherness (*altérité*) in the discussion recorded in *Altérités*, it is

necessary to honour otherness<sup>14</sup>. Derrida shows the need for patience and sensitivity in contemplating the relationship to what is other. Above all, he endorses that the relationship to what is absolutely other is nonetheless a relationship, even though such a relationship might lack a basis in immediate sympathetic understanding :

Le rapport au tout autre comme tel est un rapport. La relation au tout autre est une relation. C'est une relation, évidemment, sans rapport avec aucun autre rapport, c'est la relation avec quelqu'un qui, en raison de son altérité et de sa transcendance, rend la relation impossible; c'est le paradoxe; c'est un rapport sans rapport dirait-on, à la manière de Blanchot<sup>15</sup>. Pour entrer en rapport avec l'autre, il faut que l'interruption soit possible; il faut que le rapport soit un rapport d'interruption. Et l'interruption, ici, n'intrompt pas le rapport à l'autre, elle ouvre le rapport à l'autre.<sup>16</sup>

[The relationship to the wholly other as such is a relationship. The way of relating to the wholly other is a way of relating. It is, clearly, a way of relating that has no relationship to any other relationship, it is the way of relating to someone who, because of his otherness and his transcendence, makes the way of relating impossible; it is the paradox; it is a relationship, one might say, in Blanchot's sense of the word. To enter into relationship with the other, interruption must be possible; the relationship must be a relationship of interruption. And interruption, here, does not interrupt the relationship with the other, it opens the relationship with the other.]  
(my translation)

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14. Jacques Derrida & Pierre-Jean Labarrière *Altérités* Paris : Éditions Osiris, 1986 81

15. see Maurice Blanchot *L'Entretien Infini* Paris : Gallimard, 1969 esp. part I, "La Parole Plurielle" 106-112 ("L'Interruption").

16. op. cit 81-82

In the context of the discussion there is no call for Derrida to project the eschatological consequences of the relationship with the other, which he himself calls a "crazy relation " :

c'est un rapport fou, un rapport sans rapport, qui comprend l'autre comme autre dans un certain rapport d'incompréhension.<sup>17</sup>

[. . . a crazy relation [rapport fou], a relation [rapport] without relation, which understands the other as other in a certain relation of incomprehension.]<sup>18</sup>

Transferred to the setting of the funeral, the notion can, however, be validly extended to address the separation-in-community represented by the rite of burial. In fact, *interruption*, understood as a way of opening the relationship to the other, serves a precise critical purpose in funeral liturgy. This demands that we admit two interrupted relationships, rather than one, in the event of death : a permanent interruption, which effectively severs communication between the living and the dead until they are united in eternity, and a creative interruption - another instance of the Derridean *rapport fou* - in which the non-relation in mortal terms becomes the new relation in eschatological terms. Thus the living can support the dead; commit him or her to God; pray for his or her soul; and pray for themselves, all through the event of death. In this way,

17. *ibid* 82

18. tr. David Wood *Philosophy at the Limit* London : Unwin Hyman, 1990 126-127



death becomes a mediator, a channel of communication that sets the living and the dead in a new relation, and not a removal.

The relation that keeps the bereaved connected to the person they mourn, despite the physical realities of loss, and the unremitting absence of any tangible assurance that the deceased has indeed come into the promises which the rite recalls, is not only incomprehensible. It is an act of faith that the deceased has crossed the threshold of the Kingdom. It is an act of faith because it honours the otherness of a condition that cannot be understood within the limits of human existence.

#### **7.6 The Funeral Eucharist**

As the setting for the funeral (ASB model III), the eucharist itself may well appear to present a paradox. Its life-affirming, nourishing ministry to the living does not at first glance have much to offer the dead. But this reading fails to recall that the eucharist has its roots in remembrance and thanksgiving, two conditions which it shares with the funeral. In combination, the rites should have the mutually reinforcing effect of a double act of memory, and a double thanksgiving. The eucharistic anamnesis, "Do this in remembrance of me", creates a frame in which the bereaved commit their dead to the merciful keeping of God in memory

of the promise of the resurrection. The physical presence of the deceased at the eucharist is therefore a tangible reminder in a general way of the communion of saints, and in a specific way, of the promise of resurrection to *this* individual. Similarly, the act of giving thanks for Christ's sacrifice, and for the salvation that it wins for believers, implies a poignant thanksgiving for the right of the dead to claim that salvation. This is a graphic illustration of the interrupted relationship : the deceased is there, but not there; directly present in the funeral liturgy, yet also indirectly present in the eucharistic liturgy; in communion with the living, but also incommunicado.

The presence of the body of the deceased in the assembly of the living calls for more than just memory and thanksgiving on the part of the worshippers. Nicholas Harvey makes this clear in his discussion of the pairing of the two rites :

In my experience the most real eucharist so far has been a requiem mass followed by a burial. This is hardly surprising, for life through death is what the eucharist is about. Immediately before his ordeal Jesus affirms that which is to be destroyed : his body. He affirms it in the sign of bread. His body is to flower in sacrament and community, and not in a merely idealistic way. He is not only to be with his own, but in them, and they in him. Here the theme of the incorporation of the person who has died acquires an extended sense. Something material, bread, is to be the means of incorporation into Jesus. His living presence is to be embodied in this sign and shared

with us so that we may become more and more the effective embodiment of his spirit.<sup>19</sup>

The words spoken during the breaking of the bread may in fact gain new clarity, as the living body of Christ, represented by the Church at worship, renews its identity at a moment which requires special insistence on the undying resurrection body :

We break this bread  
to share in the body of Christ.  
**All** **Though we are many, we are one body,**  
**because we all share in one bread.**  
(ASB 142)

Such alterations and expansions of perception also make the eucharist a containing shape for grief. This is not to imply either that it is undignified to express grief in church, or that uncontrolled displays can be prevented by using the eucharist as a location for burial. Rather, grief in this context can be acknowledged and presented under double guarantees of consolation. In addition, the pain of a last parting is moderated by the presence of the body. Harvey writes :

. . . the potentially overwhelming effects of tragic loss can be kept within appropriate bounds by truthful worship, which does not short-circuit what has to be endured but offers other and complementary perspectives intended to shape a renewed heart and mind.  
These reflections on the eucharistic aspect of resurrection faith point us back to the bed-rock

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19. Nicholas Peter Harvey *Death's Gift* London : Epworth Press, 1985 142

fact that in the story of Jesus and his disciples we are touching on things which, if they are to be assimilated, must break our 'normal' categories of reality. This story speaks of possibilities strangely recognizable and yet otherwise uncharted.<sup>20</sup>

### **7.7 Conclusion : Appropriation and Reconfiguration**

Initially, I referred to the gap between experience and belief in the face of death, offering funeral liturgy as a way to bridge the gap, without necessarily demanding belief as a pre-condition for successful performance. This sets the scene for two communicative possibilities. The first, and more conservative application starts at the near side of the 'gap', with the experience of death. Judged from this perspective, the rite puts forward a number of promises, admits that doubt will arise over the future of the dead, yet offers the bereaved the kinds of resources that will enable them to profess hope for the person they entrust to God. The bereaved thus find themselves addressed by the means of comfort, and whether or not they respond to the historical tradition of the promise, the unfolding of the rite is able to present them with a strategy for encountering the questions raised by their position, or even to raise issues which have hitherto not been probed. This describes a proposed world which the bereaved and the deceased can effectively appropriate, as the Faith steadily grows into faith in step with the movement of the liturgy.

20. *ibid* 144

Departing from the further side of the 'gap', the more daring alternative requires a measure of sublime deviousness. Its presupposition is that the bereaved find, on entering into this liturgical communication, that they have been part of the proposed world from its inception. The world that they appropriate, as the biblical tradition rises up out of history to meet them, is therefore a world which has already appropriated them. Their journey forward in hope towards their own eternal salvation is also a journey backward to the origins of the promise. And in its circular movement, it rejoins faith to the terms of the Faith. If there is any omission to be regretted, therefore, in the ASB's departure from the BCP order of funerals, it is the invitation from the 1552 and 1662 collects. For, in the modern order, Matthew's rendition of Jesus's words is deeply affirmed in its sustained proposal of the Kingdom :

Come ye blessed children of my father, receyve the kingdome prepared for you from the beginning of the world.

(ER II 877 : 1552)

This inevitably advances versions of appropriation which seem more pertinent to the living than the dead. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that funerals are, after all, for the benefit of the mourners rather than the deceased. Certainly there is nothing that the living can do for the person they mourn, at least in the crude sense which led to

the sixteenth-century Protestant reformers' interdiction on prayers for the dead, and to this extent the funeral is an impossible act. But impossibility has its own poignant importance in a rite where, as I have tried to show, faith makes its individual claim on the promises of the Faith only by facing paradox and doubt. Even knowing that there is nothing, in any practical sense, that they can do for the deceased, the bereaved have gathered in N's name, made the ritual contract on N's behalf, and remembered the promises which refer to their common stake in the Kingdom of God.

At the heart of all these examples, there is a wrenching of the mourners' perception of their present situation, forcing them to consider the strangeness of Christian belief in the face of mortality, and proposing the radical alternative from which there can be no return. To recall Harvey's assessment, their "'normal' categories of reality" break down. They are interrupted in mid-stream, finding themselves in a graphic way in death, though they are in the midst of life.

Yet we have claimed that interruption is ultimately a creative notion in funeral practice. If it unsettles the congregation, shaking their secure foundations loose, this is always as a prelude to the offer of something better than their present state. The funeral rite assembles an armoury of assurances and counterposes them to the unresolved grief

of the mourners, attacking the logic of mortality, which would argue that the deceased has been separated from them for ever, and providing the confidence of divine mercy in a manner analogous to what Ricoeur, speaking of the parity between the 'logic' of the parables and the 'logic' of justification by faith, has called the "logic of superabundance" :

Is not that logic of superabundance the conceptual counterpart of the element of surprise and of extravagance in the parable that we stressed earlier ? In both places, an ordinary 'logic' collapses and the 'logic' of God - which is not the logic of identity, but the logic of the 'something more' - blows up.  
(Specificity 138)

The "'something more'" is certainly not heaven on earth : rather, it is an eschatological possibility, the prospect of which has the power to re-orient lives which have been disoriented by the event of death. Thus it acts as a mediator between the mourners' present condition and their hope. Instead of offering a conclusion to an earthly relationship, the funeral rite is a form of ongoing communication, conducted among the members of the communion of saints in a way that transgresses all rational spatio-temporal boundaries.

CHAPTER EIGHT : LITURGICAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE PRACTICE OF  
LITURGY

8.1 Not a Conclusion

By the nature of the activity that it seeks to illuminate, liturgical hermeneutics is always provisional. At the same time that acts of worship are grounded in the promise of the Kingdom, they ask for an interpretative enterprise which is ready to acknowledge that the Kingdom remains an eschatological prospect. Possible ways of taking up a position in that world (i.e. *threshold positions*) are available to be discovered by the worshippers as the rite conducts them towards an act of *appropriation*. But this is not appropriation in the exact sense in which it is used in general hermeneutics since, by definition, the Kingdom lies beyond the temporal experience of the worshipping community. The act of appropriation through liturgical participation is a matter of the worshippers' own personal *faith* in the promises contained in the public proclamation of *the Faith*.

For this reason, the final chapter chooses to avoid concluding with a definition of what liturgical hermeneutics is. Instead, it undertakes to reflect on what liturgical hermeneutics does. There are two parts to the exercise. The first is retrospective. It reviews the course that the thesis has taken in developing a methodological vocabulary,



and brings together the analyses of various forms of liturgy in which this vocabulary has been used. The second projects some of the consequences of formulating a liturgical hermeneutics. In particular, it shows how an understanding of liturgy as a *practice* can be brought to bear upon questions that affect secular as well as religious life.

## **8.2 Review of a Provisional Liturgical Hermeneutics**

In recognising that liturgy is at once text and performance, the argument of this thesis has shifted from its origins in general hermeneutics. One significant consequence has been a move away from the emphasis on the individual interpreter in the text-reader relationship, to a position which considers the act of worship as the experience of the individual in community. As extended treatments of three liturgical rites have shown, the two entities are in constant dialogue. While the rites are charged with proposing the inheritance of the Kingdom of God to the whole worshipping community at each occasion of performance, they have an equal responsibility to make this world available to particular individuals. As the individual finds a way towards a new self-understanding within the community, so the community itself experiences reconfiguration. This might be conditioned, for example, by the arrival of a new member in its midst through baptism, or by the altered status of a member that is recognised in burial.

Always, though, reconfiguration is to be understood as a process, not as an event. It begins in ritual action, but its ending lies in the faith that the whole community - both the living and the dead - will be finally unified at the end of time. There is thus a *risk* built into every liturgical act. For all appropriation, all interpretation, and all professions of faith can only reach ultimate completion and vindication in the extinction of liturgy itself at the coming of the Kingdom.

All these issues in liturgical hermeneutics have emerged through chapters on the eucharist, baptism and burial, which have also given value to the contribution that the shape and language of ritual action make towards reconfiguring the lives of its users.

Initially, I investigated structural divisions in liturgy with special reference to the three versions of the eucharist in *The Book of Common Prayer*. This took the form of comparing changes in the order of components. Its results revealed different ways of imagining the presence of God, and different ways in which the worshippers could offer themselves to the reconfiguring power of liturgical performance, according to the sequence of events in the rite, and to its use of space and gesture. The significance of the 1552/1662 comparison in particular was to show that

two almost identical *texts* could offer rather different invocations of presence and reconfigurations of subjectivity, because their dynamics of *performance* were carrying much of the propositional content of the rite.

Moving to *The Alternative Service Book's* eucharistic liturgy, I introduced the concepts of the *threshold* and *threshold positions*. These go beyond structural divisions, to consider how worshippers take up a stance towards the world proposed by the rite, preparatory to appropriating the promises of that world for themselves by an act of faith. This is not, however, a linear development, since the act of faith is engaged in a continuing hermeneutic transaction with the language that makes it articulate.

An extended reflection on the ways in which the language of the Faith, and preeminently the language of the Bible, supports the liturgical proposal of the Kingdom of God followed this statement of the relationship between faith and language. Here, I concentrated particularly on the choices of biblical texts represented in the eucharistic lectionary of the ASB. The findings showed creative juxtapositions of scriptural passages, allowing worshippers new insights through new contextual placings of familiar material, and offering possibilities for liturgical communities to identify in various ways with particular interests revealed in the biblical material incorporated in

liturgy. Thus, for example, the experiences of the disciples who met Jesus after his resurrection, Paul's later accounts of the resurrection addressed to the early churches, and the personal encounters between Jesus and the individuals who appealed to him for help are all cases for appropriation by present-day worshippers.

The issues of the community and the individual became more clearly focused as the discussion moved on to treat baptism. In this example, the problem diverged into two areas of difficulty for the appropriation of a proposed world. Where the BCP services seemed, under analysis, to dismiss or even denigrate mortal experience in order to claim the eschatological hope of the Kingdom for the individual, the ASB rite chose a path of domestication. In the first instance, the leap of faith involved appeared inadequately supported and guided by the operation of the service. In the second, the element of domestication that I have mentioned rendered any leap of faith almost immaterial, since the Kingdom of the modern rite is configured according to the comfortably accessible community of the human family.

The antepenultimate and penultimate chapters again considered the individual and the community, this time through the order of burial. What emerged from each of the three BCP situations was a proposed world that included stringent proposals for the nature of the community which

was to appropriate it. This restriction precluded the process of reconfiguration, replacing it with something akin to a dogmatic preconfiguration of experience. Doctrinally, the difficulty is closely aligned with the matter of election. Enmeshed in the convolutions of the debate on predestination to salvation or damnation, the versions of burial in the BCP use linguistic and structural means to elect a suitable community of inheritors for the Kingdom. This does not leave room for participants to *become* suitable candidates for salvation through their own act of appropriation, under the guidance of the liturgical experience.

Close attention to the progressive unfolding of the ASB funeral rite showed how this limitation could be redressed. By treating the grief of the living as a condition equally deserving of recognition in a liturgical rite of passage as death itself, the service produces a means for exploring bereavement and for setting the community in a new relationship to the deceased. Thus a double reconfiguration occurs, as the deceased is committed to the inheritance of the Kingdom, and the living consider their own inheritance in the light of their loss, and of their faithful committal of the dead to God's keeping. Where the BCP orders *demand* a faith which the rites do not predicate satisfactorily, the ASB version *rewards* the faith which it has nurtured in its address to the pain and loss of the bereaved.

### 8.3 Against a Completely Normative Liturgical Hermeneutics

To sum up the findings of Chapters Two to Seven, the ASB eucharistic and burial rites have shown themselves to be receptive to interpretation under categories such as *threshold*, *appropriation*, and *risk*. On the negative side, the BCP funeral and baptismal orders, and the ASB baptismal rite have proved resistant to the application of a similar interpretative strategy. This tells us something about the ease or difficulty involved in reading a liturgical rite, but gives us no help in understanding how liturgy works, independently of the evaluative language of 'good' or 'bad' liturgy, or 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' liturgy.

From the outset, I have fought against a too evaluative approach to liturgy in performance. Liturgical hermeneutics is, of course, normative, to the extent that it makes the practice of worship answerable to the obligation of proposing the Kingdom. In the end, though, it is just as important to know that liturgy can appear *not* to operate effectively. Liturgical hermeneutics has to take the risk, therefore, of a non-result or impasse in applying its procedures. It must offer terms that embrace both the delight of moving through the ever-nearer approaches to the presence of God in the communion of the ASB Rite A

eucharist, and the frustrations and denials of the BCP funeral services.

Not only must liturgical hermeneutics take risks : it is itself a risk, because it is only partly controllable or evaluative as a methodology. This has to do with its interest in the end result of any liturgical rite, namely, that it should make available to its participants a way of appropriating the Kingdom it proposes. In the course of making the evaluation, however, an indeterminable number of discoveries (*threshold positions*) are possible. There are always surprises involved in these modes of finding oneself situated in relation to the Kingdom, and liturgical hermeneutics cannot prescribe them, though it can attempt to describe and locate some of them.

Derrida's remarks on those elements in Austin's theory of speech acts which betray normative trends have much to say to the case against establishing firm rules for the success of liturgical action. Concentrating on Austin's treatment of the possible "infelicities" which occur in conventional speech acts, Derrida notes that Austin "set[s] aside the grammatical criterion" in order to concentrate on the *circumstances* of the utterances he investigates. In the course of fixing "conditions for success" in various exemplary acts of language, Austin also sets more general conditions that must always obtain if a speech act is to

succeed. Derrida lists these as "an exhaustively definable context", "a free consciousness present for the totality of the operation", and "an absolutely full meaning that is master of itself". He shows that, while Austin "[recognizes] that the possibility of the negative (. . .) is certainly a structural possibility, that failure is an essential risk in the operations under consideration", he nevertheless manages to relegate the contingency of failure to the realm of accident. Thus Austin makes failure an "exterior" possibility "that teaches us nothing about the language phenomenon under consideration" (SEC 323).

For the purposes of liturgical hermeneutics, two areas of interest arise at once. One of these is the status of liturgy as an operation conducted in language, and hence subject to the grammatical rules and conventions of all language. This is not so much a condition that is prior to the 'grammar' of the ritual procedure itself, as the basic unit of all ritual. For, as Derrida goes on to explain, ritual is that property which permits an utterance to be repeated, even in the absence of its original addressee. In this sense, Derrida's specialised use of the word contributes to a grasp of its liturgical force. "Ritual [he says] is not an eventuality, but, as iterability, is a structural characteristic of every mark" (SEC 324). The further ramifications of this assertion take us into the



territory which liturgy shares with secular language, and will be the concern of the the next section of this chapter.

The other area of interest relates to the requirements that Austin imposes on the circumstances of successful performative speech acts. These fall away one by one under liturgical conditions, for the crucial reason that there is now an eschatological dimension to be accommodated. So, because of the essentially *promissory* nature of liturgical meaning, there is no "exhaustively definable context" for acts of worship. There is always an element of incompleteness, in that the Kingdom will come, but not yet. Liturgical action is therefore provisional, conducted on that threshold which marks its responsibility to the demands of the present, and to the demands of an order which must still come into being. Since the rite can be repeated, and indeed must be repeated "in memory of [Christ]" and "until his coming again", it is never total. Thus there can be no "free consciousness present for the totality of the operation", and fully in possession of an intention for that operation. Finally, the "full meaning" of the rite cannot be achieved until rites themselves are no longer performed.

This is surely the essence of a hermeneutical understanding of liturgy. Worshippers enter into ritual action equipped with a certain pre-understanding which includes *some* knowledge of the propositions of the Faith, a grasp of the

reasons for performing the rite, and a sense of the liturgical community as part of, yet also distinct from, the secular community. Once the worshippers have entered the liturgical process, however, it can act upon them to produce an event of understanding that is not confined by the structure of pre-understanding which they bring with them. As Richard Bernstein has written, "[t]he meaning of a text or of tradition is only realized through the happening (*pathos*) of understanding"<sup>1</sup>.

Ritual action can never abandon its vigilance in the face of the promise of the Kingdom in favour of finite 'successes'. Each occasion of performance, therefore, is a renewed commitment, on the part of a worshipping and interpreting community, to create new opportunities to appropriate the Kingdom, and to accept the risks such commitment entails. As Dieter Misgeld has argued in an essay on Gadamer's hermeneutics :

a philosophical reflection on the humanities will not look for invariant standards determining when an interpretation is really 'correct' . . . . It attempts to show that 'a text is understood only if it is understood in a different way everytime' (1975, p.276)<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Richard J. Bernstein "From Hermeneutics to Praxis" in *Hermeneutics and Praxis* ed. Robert Hollinger Notre Dame : University of Notre Dame Press, 1985 272-296 276

2. Dieter Misgeld "On Gadamer's Hermeneutics" in *Hermeneutics and Praxis* 143-170 152. The reference to *Truth and Method* corresponds to p.309 in the translation I have used throughout.

Liturgical hermeneutics, as it has developed through this investigation, makes a double movement. It is *normative* with respect to proposing the Kingdom, and this provides a methodology for approaching the workings of liturgical forms. At the level of actual performative situations, however, it is *descriptive*. This gives it profound implications as an aid to the worshipping community in its efforts to understand its practice, but does not license it to prescribe exact terms for the act of understanding. On this reading, difficult or intractable liturgy has as much to teach us as liturgy which is easily described.

#### **8.4 Liturgy and Language**

In structural terms, liturgical language and secular language share fundamental grammatical conventions, as well as the characteristic of ritual or iterability. They also share a considerable verbal resource, as a rapid survey of Austin's lists of "explicit performative verbs" will indicate. The basic building blocks of performative liturgical language can be found under the five categories into which Austin divides illocutionary speech acts. From these, the compiler of a liturgical list would extract the following :

dismiss; excommunicate; name; grant; give; pardon;  
 pray; entreat; proclaim; announce; dedicate;  
 promise; am determined to; intend; pledge myself;  
 vow; dedicate myself to; oppose

(HDTW 155-158)

The overlap in usage that unites secular and religious behaviour makes it an easy step for the liturgical community to apply the speech conventions of their secular relationships to their acts of worship. Reciprocally, the use of verbs like "pray", "entreat", "grant" and "pardon" in real liturgical situations can inform their use in secular communication. At the same time, though, the relationship would seem to deny any real or significant difference that marks liturgical language as somehow set apart from its secular counterpart for an activity whose referent is beyond ordinary existence.

There is no need to play at false naiveté, and to pretend that worshippers are lured into a serious contract through acts of language that look safe and familiar. As we have seen (especially through the example of the promise), worshippers who understand certain linguistic obligations in secular life come to the ritual action with at least some sense of what they are undertaking. The real risk in liturgical language is not that it is different, but that it is indeed the same. Only, it engages its users in qualitatively more profound commitments than they will have experienced when making similar verbal contracts in the extra-liturgical context.

Once again, Derrida's reading of Austin assists the task of exploring the liturgical speech act. I have already commented on Austin's statement that all utterances are subject to parasitic acts of language, in which they are repeated under conditions which render them invalid. Derrida has shown how the possibility of repetition, and therefore of 'failure' in Austin's terms, is part of the structure of all utterance. This leads him to ask whether language as a phenomenon is always surrounded by the dangers of misappropriation into invalid performative utterances. The logical result of such a situation would be that language could only safeguard its integrity "by remaining at home, in itself, sheltered by its essence or *telos*."

Derrida offers a way of reversing this state of fear, when he asks whether the risk to which language is always exposed might in fact be "its internal and positive condition of possibility" ; whether "this outside" might be "its inside [] the very force and law of its emergence." Only by taking the risk, and moving outside of its integral purity, can language truly be said to be "ordinary language." Derrida points out that, while Austin "pretends to describe the facts and events of ordinary language", he consistently defines it by "the very law of language", and so subjects it to a "teleological and ethical determination" (SEC 325). In an essay on psychoanalysis and language, Derrida celebrates

the strange partnership of certainty and instability, or "randomness and code"<sup>3</sup>, that is part of all language :

. . . the effects of chance are at once multiplied and limited (that is, relatively tempered or neutralized) by the multiplicity of languages and codes that, while they are engaged in intense translational activity, overlap at each instant. Such activity transforms not only words, a lexicon, or a syntax (for example, from French into English) but also nonlinguistic marks, mobilizing thus the near totality of the present context and even that which might already exceed it.<sup>4</sup>

The healthy possibility which all this can hold out to liturgical language is that its transformation of ordinary language need not entail a separation from the familiar and secure conventions of secular communication. Much of the importance of liturgical activity is invested in its connectedness to a world outside of the rite. The ritual process always has an eye on the life of its participants outside of the church. Their experiences in the ecclesiastical context are not terminated, but continued as they return to the world. Thus, in the eucharist (and especially in the ASB Rite A form) we have seen how the experience of approaching divine presence also has a return movement towards the everyday world where the communicants can "love and serve the Lord" in an extension of their act

3. Jacques Derrida "My Chances/*Mes Chances* : A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies" in *Taking Chances : Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature* ed. Joseph H. Smith & William Kerrigan Baltimore & London : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984 1-32 2

4. *ibid* 3

of worship. Baptism expects that the promises made for the child will exercise their effect on his or her secular existence, and that the parents and godparents will inculcate a proper sense of how to live in the world, as a citizen of heaven. Burial restores the bereaved to a condition where they can continue to live in the world, without the deceased.

More than any of these examples, marriage sustains the possibility of living a secular life under the rules of another order. In consequence, it presents a powerful double vision of the world and the Kingdom. German Martinez has used this double vision to argue for the analogy between marriage and worship. He shows the urgency of recognising marriage as a supremely human, secular bond, with a "divine dimension" conferred through the humanity of Christ :

Worship is, therefore, analogously applied to marriage only under this assumption. In its broad sense it embraces all the secular values, the day-to-day experience and the totality of the challenges of becoming one, if lived as a symbol and reality of the transcendent presence of God-agape. The mystery of life embodied in the mystery of Christ is the background and source of an inclusive spirituality of marriage which demands to be celebrated in the mystery of worship. This divine dimension of the secular sphere of marriage is neither mythical sacralization nor mystical idealization . . . . Since marriage is foremost secular value, Christian spirituality rejects the false dichotomy between sacred and profane and views the presence of the holy in that secular value. Worship, with its secular

character, provides the prism of a larger supernatural context.<sup>5</sup>

In all these examples, the meeting of the holy and the mundane may have the effect of deepening the commitment of the secular bond, by revaluating its terms through the bonds of liturgy. At a different level - that of language itself - and at a time in history which has been called the post-Christian era, we might take comfort from the fact that secular language is capable of preserving the language of liturgy, not as the fossil relic of an extinct practice, but as the evidence that liturgical life has perhaps found a valid existence in that risky area outside of its conventional boundaries. The survival of words like 'pray', 'bless', 'thank you' and 'love', even in the most platitudinous instances like sneezing and thoughtless endearments, nevertheless preserves the traces of the sense of the sacred origin of humanity, and the notion of ultimate worth defined by something beyond the human sphere.

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5. German Martinez "Marriage as Worship : A Theological Analogy" in *Perspectives on Marriage : A Reader* ed. Kieran Scott & Michael Warren New York & Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1993 82-98 85. See also Kenneth Stevenson *To Join Together* New York : Pueblo Publishing Company, 1987. Stevenson shows that marriage is better understood as "covenant" than as "contract", since this "emphasizes both the 'objective' side of marriage as an act of God in the Christian assembly by two people, as well as the 'subjective' side of marriage as a mystery of life in which the partners, their friends, and relatives have to grow in a life-long union" 118.



The analogy between liturgical and secular language is only the first stage of a movement that projects liturgy outwards into other areas of involvement. In general terms, it shows how the bonds implicit in secular and religious language can clarify and support one another across the two regions. If this preliminary association is to bear fruit, it must now be extended to the ethical and political consequences of liturgical language and practice. To make such an extension, however, it is first of all necessary to reconsider the whole basis of liturgical hermeneutics.

### **8.5 Restating the Terms of the Inquiry**

My initial terms of departure included reference to studies of liturgy which raised central concerns, without actually developing a procedure for the project of liturgical interpretation. The discussion began by attending to Dom Gregory Dix's assertion of the pivotal connection between the ordinary lives of worshippers and their understanding of liturgical worship. Moving on almost fifty years, it then studied Martin Stringer's awareness of the same connection in his assessment of the task facing present day liturgists. An essential part of their responsibility, he notes, is the provision of liturgical texts which draw on the ordinary experience of their users. As he points out, however, this objective carries within it the assumption that liturgy has an inherent meaning. In composing contemporary versions of

rites whose meaning is already predetermined, the danger is that one of two 'meanings' will dominate : that of the compilers, or that of the worshippers<sup>6</sup>.

Weighing up the linguistic and symbolic elements in religious rites, Stringer argues for a scripturally based narrative language of worship that has the force of a symbol in the lives of liturgical communities. He rejects the contention of biblical scholars that a considerable array of knowledge has to be brought to the understanding of a biblical text as missing the whole point of "understanding". This is

primarily because the kind of 'meaning' that the stories are expected to contain is not of the strict dictionary definition. The meaning of a story is found primarily in its associations with our own particular stories and resides at an emotive, rather than a strictly intellectual level. Such a meaning is more akin to the meaning of symbols than to that of academic texts.<sup>7</sup>

Stringer's solution focuses on the use of liturgical symbols as part of a larger narrative that can be offered to communities at worship. Thus he sees it as the duty of liturgists both to "[enable and encourage]" and to "[restrain and limit] the potential meanings within an existing framework"<sup>8</sup>. The idea of using symbolic narrative

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6. Martin Stringer "Situating Meaning in the Liturgical Text" 193

7. *ibid* 188

8. *ibid* 194

to *liberate* the imagination is, of course, consonant with the general hermeneutical emphasis on the proposed world of a text. In a specifically religious context, Ricoeur's work on the role of biblical narrative in the lives of its receivers is exemplary :

For my part, in line with a hermeneutics starting from the text and the "thing" of the text, I shall say that the text first speaks to my imagination, proposing to it the "figures" of my liberation.  
(PHBH 101)

One would have to admit, nevertheless, that the undeniably attractive idea of a liberated imagination achieved through the appropriation of the proposed world of the text has no clear practical implications. The movement from the ego to the *self* is only a first step, and a recovered self has still to take up its place amid the urgencies of 'real life'. It is also the case that neither this view, nor Stringer's balance between liberation and restraint, entirely escapes the essentially logocentric view that texts have inherent and extractable meaning.

My belief is, therefore, that liturgical hermeneutics has to ask a new question that moves away from the pitfalls involved in debating how secular life can be addressed in liturgical practice. This need not be as crudely radical as simply reversing the terms, to ask what effect liturgical

life has on secular life. In worship, the horizons of ordinary contemporary experience are continually encountering the horizons of Christian tradition, so that ordinary life is newly evaluated under the proposals of ritual action, while the terms of Christian tradition are carried out into the everyday world at each liturgical gathering. Thus each new access to understanding in the performance of liturgy is, at the same time, a new appropriation of the Faith. David Tracy has put the matter in a framework which is sensitive to both conditions. Expanding this encounter into a programme for what he terms a "revisionist theology", he characterises the revisionist theologian as being :

committed to what seems clearly to be the central task of contemporary Christian theology : the dramatic confrontation, the mutual illumination and corrections, the possible basic reconciliation between the principle values, cognitive claims, and existential faiths of both a reinterpreted post-modern consciousness and a reinterpreted Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

This carries with it a movement away from an isolated, introspective mode of Christian life as "the mere self-expression of a faith community", towards that genuinely Christian mode of being-in-the-world which is "self-expression[] deeply influenced by the orthodox reactions to the challenge of liberalism". Furthermore, it means "a commitment to both that critique of modern liberalism

present in contemporary secular thought and that radical secular affirmation of our common human faith in the worthwhileness of our struggle for liberation"<sup>10</sup>. The revisionist theologian believes, therefore :

that only a radical continuation of critical theory, symbolic reinterpretation, and responsible social and personal *praxis* can provide the hope for a fundamental revision of both the modern and the traditional Christian self-understandings<sup>11</sup>.

This allows a summary and definition of the whole revisionist project as "philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in common human experience and the meanings present in the Christian tradition"<sup>12</sup>.

It is here, in the dramatic encounter between "post-modern consciousness" and Christianity, that both the practical implications and the risks of liturgy arise. Nevertheless, as the discussion of language has begun to illustrate, the risk is necessary and life-giving to the practice of liturgy.

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10. *ibid* 32-33 Tracy relies heavily on the work of B.M.G. Reardon in *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century* New York : Cambridge University Press, 1966 at this point in his argument.

11. *ibid* 33

12. *ibid* 34

### 8.6 Liturgy, Ethics and Politics

I have argued that the shared territory of liturgical and secular existence is far more provocative than their differences. At this stage, I shall add to that claim that underneath the shared language, there runs a set of shared concerns. Hence liturgy's right to a voice in the discourse of ethics originates in its concern for the integrity of the individual within the life of the community. This begins with a recognition of our responsibility to the other, and grows into an understanding our own obligation to fulfil the law, and honour the bonds of community, as a result of our promissory relationship to the other. An account of this kind makes no clear distinction, however, between liturgical and secular life. To demarcate the differences, we have to underline the fact that the secular interpretation of the ethical bond between human beings does not have any necessary connection to an eschatological continuity : the whole secular ethical obligation can be fulfilled within the confines of mortality.

The uniqueness of the liturgical situation comes about because the members of the worshipping community are committed to one another as *fellow members of the Kingdom*. This maintains the identity of the individual as part of the process of affirming the coming of the Kingdom for all

believers. It follows that liturgical action must nurture the individual towards that hope<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, liturgical action must strive to recognise all our hopes, all our expectations of promise, as simultaneously and uniquely given to each one of us. Hence each member of the community has the potential to remind the whole body of its promise to the individual. Reciprocally, the whole community is bound to support the individual member in appropriating the promise for him- or herself.

In the same way that the ethical relation between the individual and the community in liturgy adds an important eschatological parameter to its secular counterpart, the political dimension of liturgical life is also powerfully conditioned by its allegiance to the Kingdom. The issues of justice, obedience to the law, specific attention to the keeping of obligations, and freedom under the law thus refer

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13. This is to differ from the position Simon Critchley adopts in his work on ethics in Levinas and Derrida :

[O]n the Levinasian view for which I shall be arguing, ethics is not immediately derived from a consciousness of respect for the universal law - a position that is always open to Hegel's critique of Kant's formalism. Rather, ethics is first and foremost a respect for the concrete particularity of the other person in his or her singularity, a person who is not merely an example of the law . . . but rather the condition of possibility for an experience of the law. Ethics begins as a relation with a singular, other person who calls me into question and then, and only then, calls me to the universal discourse of reason and justice. Politics begins as ethics.

*The Ethics of Deconstruction : Derrida and Levinas* Oxford & Cambridge, Mass. : Blackwell, 1992 48

to the secular life of the worshipping body here and now, and to that extent provide a model that brings secular life into conformity with the world that liturgy proposes as its eventual destination. Unlike the law of the Kingdom, however, the secular law makes no eschatological promise. It is at best a model which enables liturgical communities to grasp the law of the Kingdom. But secular law is not propositional, or promissory, so much as impositional. It exists to enforce a *status quo*, rather than to prepare its adherents for a time beyond that *status quo*. It aims to ensure a 'good life' for the whole community in the present. Yet while it protects individual freedoms, individuals are not invited to appropriate its code. The code can only exist if it has already included its adherents.

According to the law of the Kingdom, on the other hand, justice is addressed through the special liturgical means of repentance and forgiveness that include the promise of eternal life. Obedience to the law starts with obedience to the law of the Kingdom, which is to love God and one's neighbour and reject all forms of evil. In meeting these conditions fully, the liturgical community automatically upholds the integrity of the individual and hence obeys the law within human society at large. To this basic law, it adds a sense of the individual as a citizen of the Kingdom. This results in an enriched understanding of the legal obligation, as the notion of freedom under the law implies.



It is the duty of the worshipping community to provide the creative environment in which that freedom can be exercised<sup>14</sup>.

I have already offered a sketch of the role of marriage as a relationship which, understood liturgically, constantly acknowledges both the secular reality and the divine dimension in the faithful commitment of the partners to one another. Marriage is perhaps liturgy's most compelling figure of the ethico-political bond. Its discussion in the New Testament gives it supreme metaphorical weight as the icon of Christ's utterly self-giving love for the Church, while the Old Testament uses the analogy of marriage to characterise the covenant between God and his chosen people. Thus scripturally, there is a precedent for both a legal and an ethical significance in the marital bond.

Marriage is potentially the most visible context for living the Christian life in the secular world. It is undertaken in the presence of a witnessing community, who are invited to declare any legal reasons (i.e. secular offences such as

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14. There are obvious cases in which members of Christian communities can only remain faithful to the law of the Kingdom by contravening the laws of secular society. Amongst these, one might include conscientious objection to conscription laws, as well as the defiance of racialistic legislation at an earlier stage in the constitutional history of South Africa. This is not the place to conduct a satisfying investigation into the topic. I have chosen, therefore, to state the basic condition of the law in a Christian community whose *milieu* is that of secular society.

bigamy) which might make the marriage invalid. But it is finally answerable to the authority of God, "who is judge of all and who knows all the secrets of our hearts" (ASB 289). Its explicit purpose is to create an environment where two people can "comfort and help each other" in all circumstances; where their love can be enhanced and completed in a committed sexual relationship; and where children can be brought up in security and love (ASB 288)<sup>15</sup>.

Marriage is also the public context in which that "total validation of the other in the devotion and service, celebration and mystery of a relationship"<sup>16</sup> can be publicly declared. Thus the vows recognise the contingencies of human life at the same time that they place these under the law of God :

I, N, take you, N,  
to be my husband / wife,  
to have and to hold

15. The BCP sets out the purposes of marriage in the reverse order :

First, it was ordeined for the procreation of children to be brought up in the fear, and nurture of the Lord, and to the prayse of his holy Name.

Secondly, it was ordeined for a remedy against Sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christs body.

Thirdly, it was ordeyned for the mutuall Society, help, and Comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity, and Adversity.

(ER II 1662 801-803)

Modern liturgical practice places a much higher value on the husband-wife bond, and does not assume that children will necessarily be part of a marriage.

16. Martinez "Marriage as Worship" 83

from this day forward;  
 for better, for worse,  
 for richer, for poorer,  
 in sickness and in health,  
 to love and to cherish,  
 till death us do part,  
 according to God's holy law;  
 and this is my solemn vow.  
 (ASB 290)

The giving of the secular symbol of the ring again calls on the implications of the commitment it symbolises :

I give you this ring  
 as a sign of our marriage.  
 With my body I honour you,  
 all that I am I give to you,  
 and all that I have I share with you,  
 within the love of God,  
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
 (ASB 292)

These words anchor the marriage firmly in a set of human realities that are themselves the vehicles for acknowledging and worshipping God. In this way, they fight against what Martinez calls the "ruinous cleavage between faith and life" which rejects the role of the body in contributing to a better understanding of spirituality. Martinez insists upon a theology :

which presents marriage as the natural sign and milieu of God's saving and healing love. The lifelong process of initiation in an intimate communion of marital life should thus be seen within the perspective of worship . . . . The spouses, in acknowledging God's intimate presence in each other, accept each other as his permanent gift and perfect each other in their own path of spirituality. This intimacy with God empowers them

to a life of holiness, in liturgical terms, to be the "memory" of the Lord.<sup>17</sup>

In a vital and dynamic way, then, marriage enacts the reciprocity between human practice and divine engagement in human life. Martinez compares the marital relationship to the special communication that exists between God and his creation :

Spouses turn to each other and to God. In fact, God takes the initiative in calling husband and wife to dialogue, since both the spouses and God speak the language of lovers. Like worship, where God and his people engage in dialogue, the spouses "gift" one another in an oblation dialogue.

This communication deepens into communion, both in worship and in marriage, as the intimacy and commitment of the participants or partners increases. Its result is growth and development that discovers an ever more precious individuality in the total surrender of self :

To establish a relationship marked by the depth of communion of intimacy is a great challenge because it demands total freedom and spiritual nakedness. Furthermore, external pressures and internal ambiguities might compromise that experience of personal freedom . . . . Again, the narrative of God's activity, revelation, provides a model for dialogue of communion. Revelation, in fact, is personal communion in which God re-creates the freedom and value of the person and makes possible the encounter with others and with God himself. The barriers of self-centeredness are overcome and communion becomes an ongoing reality. God is the ultimate possibility of communion for the couple

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17. *ibid* 86

who stand as the most telling metaphor of God's self-donation to his people.<sup>18</sup>

It could be argued that, aside from the insistence on the shared patterns of revelation in marriage and worship at large, there is nothing to distinguish the ethical commitment of liturgically celebrated marriage from marriages conducted in entirely secular circumstances. This is a question that Kenneth Stevenson has confronted. He acknowledges that Christian marriages are as prone to failure as any other marriages. Christians consequently have no business to claim that their marital relationships are "intrinsically superior to anyone else's"<sup>19</sup>. In the end, we have to make a more modest-sounding claim, but one which sums up the reciprocity between liturgical life and secular life :

Christian marriage cannot ensure a better and more lasting relationship than any other religion or ideology can do with its adherents. But it can provide both the context and the safeguards for that relationship to be better and more lasting.<sup>20</sup>

We return from the specific concerns of marriage to the larger issue of ethical liturgical language, therefore, with a clearer and more practical picture of the kinds of demands such language should meet. It must propose a world to a community, not impose a world on a community. It must

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18. *ibid* 92

19. Kenneth W. Stevenson *To Join Together* 232

20. *ibid* 233

recognise that *community* is not just a synonym for an existing congregation, but a classification capable of welcoming anyone who responds to its proposal. It must also recognise the enormity of the leap of faith towards appropriating the proposed world. The liturgical community and the secular community overlap, yet they are not fully identical. Liturgy recognises this best, not by disguising the gap (e.g. domesticating the Kingdom as in ASB baptismal liturgy), but by providing adequately marked threshold positions, from which the leap from ordinary securities towards the Kingdom can be made. Ritual action that responded to these imperatives would no longer be a fragile dream of inheriting the Kingdom, of which real practice is a pale copy, but the actualising of the Kingdom at each celebration. It would, in other words, have found its position between what Ricoeur, following Reinhart Kosselleck, has called the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation". He shows how an imbalance can arise from undue leaning to either of these limits. For we cannot afford to be wholly preoccupied with the present, any more than we can fix our eyes on the future in a way that paralyses present action :

The permanent ethical and political implication of these metahistorical categories of expectation and experience is thus clear. The task is to prevent the tension between these two poles of thinking about history from becoming a schism. This is not the place to spell out this task in more detail, so I will confine myself to two imperatives.

On the one hand, we must resist the seduction of purely utopian expectations. They can only make us despair of all action, for, lacking an anchorage in experience, they are incapable of formulating a practical path directed to the ideals that they situate "elsewhere".  
(TN III 215)

That is why both poles have to be approached quite pragmatically :

Our expectations must be determined, hence finite and relatively modest, if they are to be able to give rise to responsible commitments. We have to keep our horizon of expectation from running away from us. We have to connect it to the present by means of a series of intermediary projects that we may act upon.  
(TN III 215)

### **8.7 Liturgy as a Practical Paradigm**

The emphasis in this reading of the ties between liturgy and the discourses of ethics and politics has been on showing how the secular practices can shed light on aspects of liturgical life. Under the guidance of Ricoeur's practical sense that a realistic expectation of utopia can give rise to productive action, however, there is another possibility to consider. Forms of worship which not only promise the Kingdom, but promise it as a model whose prospects can augment the existing resources of its users, can equally help to interpret secular experience. But if liturgy is going to make a bid for recognition as a cultural practice which can, in its own right, enhance the understanding of

other practices, it has several inherent difficulties to negotiate. Kieran Flanagan describes the challenge which liturgy encounters in making its claims among the many competing discourses or practices of its contemporary situation :

Liturgies are vulnerable in modern culture, as a result of having to compete with so many imitators. Securing their distinctive message is a peculiar sociological and theological accomplishment.

Contemporary modern circumstances conspire to make liturgical acts more incredible than their theological message may justify.<sup>21</sup>

For this reason, liturgy must at all times be rigorously self-examining, and conscientious about eradicating any lapses into sentimentality, nostalgia, or obscurity, even while it holds open the access to mystery whenever it is performed.

Ricoeur has captured this difficulty in a meditation that came out of his visit to the Taizé community in France. Taking on the double role of questioner and answerer, Ricoeur asks whether the Taizé liturgy does not meet with a difficulty that confronts all liturgies, namely, that it attempts to revive a form of symbolism that harks back to a pastoral and agrarian culture, obscured today by industrial civilization. Commodities like bread, wine and oil represent a lost world to those concerned with the conquest of the



universe by technology. He recognises that, on these grounds, liturgy might stand guilty of a certain "cultural exoticism" (my translation) in the same way that we release the exotic by opening a museum of ancient art. To deal with the accusation, he takes up the memorial aspect of the symbol in greater detail :

Le sérieux de l'argument est évident : tout symbolisme est un mémorial. Il est aussi autre chose qu'on dira après. Mais il est d'abord un mémorial : "Faites ceci en mémoire de moi . . ." Et tout mémorial lutte contre l'oubli. Or notre culture, dans la mesure où elle se règle sur un modèle technologique, secrète l'oubli. L'utilisateur de l'outil, de la machine n'a pas de mémoire : l'instrument s'épuise dans sa fonction actuelle; il abolit son passé dans son usage présent. Le symbole au contraire a une mémoire, est mémoire; il reprend d'autres symboles plus vieux qu'il intègre dans le signe présent.<sup>22</sup>

[The gravity of the argument is evident : all symbolism is a memorial. It is also something else as we will have occasion to say afterwards. But it is first of all a memorial : "Do this in memory of me . . ." And every memorial struggles against forgetting. Now our culture, to the extent that it regulates itself according to a technological model, conceals forgetting. The user of the tool, of the machine has no memory : the instrument is exhausted in its actual function; it expunges its past in its present use. The symbol, on the contrary, has a memory, is memory; it recovers other, older symbols, which it integrates into the present sign.]

(my translation)

He is anxious to show that liturgy must never permit forgetfulness, not even to make itself more easily understood by contemporary humanity. Its task is one of

22. Paul Ricoeur "Postface" in Jean-Marie Paupert *Taizé et l'Église de Demain* Paris : Fayard, 1967 248

displacement and rupture, in order to give back to the worshipper in a technological society the riches of a poetic heritage<sup>23</sup>. But the work does not end here. Liturgy is not only a memorial, or an archaeological exercise for the poetically sophisticated, even though in a paradigmatic sense, it shows how a community might preserve its memory of the symbols at the heart of its being. On the contrary, it is constantly recreating itself, always drawing in old and new symbols, always answerable to a precisely defined kerygmatic responsibility. Thus Ricoeur asks :

Une liturgie chrétienne est-elle seulement un mémorial ? Est-ce même d'abord un mémorial ? Si le geste essentiel du christianisme est de donner un signe de ce qui vient, si le christianisme est eschatologique par essence, si "le futur de Dieu" engendre l'envoi de la Communauté . . . alors une liturgie chrétienne n'est pas une "action sacrée". Elle est un "signe des temps". Elle ne reprend une symbolique ancienne que pour la tourner vers l'annonce et vers l'envoi. La liturgie chrétienne est celle qui rassemble pour l'envoi: "Vous annoncez la mort du Seigneur jusqu'à ce qu'il vienne."<sup>24</sup>

[Is Christian liturgy only a memorial ? Is it even primarily a memorial ? If the essential gesture of Christianity is to give a sign of what is to come, if "the future of God" gives rise to the injunction to the Community . . . then a Christian liturgy is not a "sacred action". It is a "sign of the times". It only recovers an ancient symbolism in order to turn it towards proclamation and injunction. Christian liturgy is that which gathers again for the proclamation : "You are to announce the Lord's death until he comes."]  
(my translation]

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23. *ibid* 248

24. *ibid* 249

Ricoeur asserts the rich potential of liturgy in the present day against its undeniable tendencies in the direction of self-indulgence and, finally, obsolescence. Liturgy can address the practices of ordinary life, because such practices have provided its background and its symbolic tissue. By attending to the integrity and value of what it recalls each time it is celebrated, liturgy can give back to these practices a dignity that lifts them above the level of the quaint or the mundane. It can even preserve the sense of a sacred universe where even the most ordinary aspects of life are precious, central, and consecrated in the community's gathering of itself towards the inheritance of salvation.

Hubert Dreyfus has defended the need to

give what Heidegger in *Being and Time* calls a "concrete demonstration" that human beings and the objects they encounter are formed by cultural practices which cannot be objectified. Second, one must give an interpretation of our current cultural situation by finding a cultural paradigm (. . .) which focuses our dominant practices, while at the same time assembling all the evidence in our micro-practices - and this of course includes our linguistic practices - that an alternative understanding of human beings once existed and still continues, although drowned out by our everyday busy concerns. Finally, having done this job, one can only hope that the micro-practices excluded by technology will find a new focus in a new paradigm.<sup>25</sup>

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25. Hubert Dreyfus "Holism and Hermeneutics" in *Hermeneutics and Praxis* 227-247 245

By virtue of its special use of the fundamental bonds in human communities, liturgy actually provides a centre and focus for their expression. It will be my argument that, by creating conditions for the proper understanding of the hermeneutic relationship between ordinary experience and Christian tradition, liturgy can begin to offer itself as a model to the secular world.

This is an important corrective to a problem that Ricoeur has acknowledged in the course of extending the principles of his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* towards questions of liberation theology in his interview with Richard Kearney. This once more opens the dialogue between utopia and history:

The problem today is the apparent impossibility of unifying world politics, of mediating between the polycentricity of our everyday political practice and the utopian horizon of a universally liberated humanity. It is not that we are without utopia, but that we are without *paths* to utopia. And without a path towards it, without concrete and practical mediation in our field of experience, utopia becomes a sickness.<sup>26</sup>

For the contemporary situation this is a gloomy prospect. Ricoeur's answer to the question of whether there is "any place in contemporary politics for genuine utopian discourse" is correspondingly cautious :

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26. Richard Kearney *Dialogues With Contemporary Continental Thinkers* 31

Maybe not in politics itself but rather at the junction between politics and other cultural discourses. Our present disillusionment with the political stems from the fact that we invested it with the totality of our expectancies - until it became a bloated imposture of utopia. We have tended to forget that beside the public realm of politics, there also exists a more private cultural realm (which includes literature, philosophy and religion, etc.) where the utopian horizon can express itself. Modern society seems hostile to this domain of private experience, but the suppression of the private entails the destruction of the public. The vanquishing of the private by the public is a pyrrhic victory.<sup>27</sup>

For liturgy in its role of exemplary discourse, however, the prognosis is optimistic enough to warrant a stronger claim than I have ventured hitherto. It is time to stop treating liturgy as a minor discourse, or a subsidiary area in a large political landscape. Instead, liturgy itself can provide a model for the rehabilitation of the secular order, as it identifies and makes available those threshold positions that conduct worshippers towards the Kingdom in the temporal conditions in which ritual action occurs.

### **8.8 Responsible Liturgy and Responsible Interpretation**

It has been a founding premise of this final chapter that liturgy at its best must operate on two fronts. On the one hand, it has to bring the Kingdom sharply into focus, so that it appears as something that can begin to be appropriated within the limits of human experience. On the

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27. *ibid* 31

other hand, it must address human experience itself. For it is here, in what the BCP calls "all the changes and chances of this mortall life" (ER II 711 : 1662), that worshipping communities are to identify the signs of the Kingdom.

In the course of investigating just how these two ambitions might be achieved in practice, I have refined certain initial assumptions about the propositional role of liturgy, and the interpretational and appropriating role of its practitioners. The result of the exercise has been to show how liturgical hermeneutics illuminates the issues of the proposal and appropriation of the Kingdom at the deeper levels of language, ethics and politics, and in so doing, claims an important and even paradigmatic place for liturgy among other cultural practices. But to stop here, grandiose though such a conclusion might sound, would be to avoid the greatest challenge and the greatest responsibility that liturgical hermeneutics is called upon to confront. That challenge is the question of whether any of the findings that the project has offered can ultimately enhance the faithful practice of worship among ordinary congregations in real situations.

The first part of my reply is, inevitably, something of a disclaimer, for I am not going to suggest that parish priests ought to teach their flocks a critical vocabulary that would add technical sophistication to their

understanding of the liturgical experience. This is not to deprecate the average congregation's grasp of its worship, but rather to suggest that a technical vocabulary which has a place in academic liturgy could inhibit and standardise the spontaneous responses of actual worshippers.

The second part of the reply is that congregations can and should be taught that their participation in worship is exactly that. Liturgy is not so much given to its practitioners, as completed, or even made by them. Every worshipper has a responsibility to watch for the signs of the Kingdom, and to respond to its presentation in the statements of the Faith with reciprocal acts of faith.

This demand does not pretend to be anything other than mysterious. Even Ricoeur rightly places faith beyond the reach of hermeneutics when he discusses the relationship of faith and biblical language in "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics". Ricoeur makes a hermeneutical connection between faith and language, arguing that faith is constituted by the text's proposal of a world ("the 'thing' of the text") rather than that faith precedes our acceptance of the proposal. Although this guards against "the psychologizing reduction of faith", it is also important to defend it against other kinds of reduction :

This is not to say that faith is not authentically an act irreducible to all linguistic treatment; in

this sense, it is indeed the limit of all hermeneutics, while at the same time standing as the nonhermeneutical origin of all interpretation. The endless movement of interpretation begins and ends in the risk of an answer neither engendered nor exhausted by any commentary . . . . [T]he thematics of faith eludes hermeneutics and attests to the fact that the latter has neither the first nor the last word.

Yet this does not absolve hermeneutics from its essential and ongoing interpretative duty towards faith :

Hermeneutics, however, recalls this : biblical faith cannot be separated from the movement of interpretation that raises it to the level of language. The "ultimate care"<sup>28</sup> would remain mute if it did not receive the power of speech from an endlessly renewed interpretation of the signs and symbols that have, so to speak, educated and formed this care throughout the centuries. The feeling of absolute dependence would remain a weak and inarticulated feeling if it were not the response to the proposal of a new being that opened for me new possibilities of existing and acting. Unconditional trust would be empty if it were not based upon the continually renewed interpretation of the sign-events reported by Scripture . . . . These events of deliverance open and uncover the innermost possibility of my own freedom and thus become for me the word of God. Such is the properly hermeneutical constitution of faith itself.  
(PHBH 99-100)

Liturgical language, and especially liturgical language placed at the service of worshippers, has a comparable - and comparably mysterious - responsibility. The shaping task of liturgy is to map out those threshold positions from which

28. The notion of "ultimate care" cannot pass without reference to Heidegger's definition of "care" as the mode of being of Dasein (*Being and Time* I.6. §§191ff). I have discussed the question of faith as a form of care in Chapter Six.



the worshipping community can continue to make the leap towards the presence of God, under the promise of the Kingdom. And even when it has taken its users to a new act of faith, this is no more a completion than a single celebration of the eucharist is the definitive proposal of the liturgical promise. 'Good' liturgy, which has its sights fixed on the Kingdom, does not have to be taught these principles. Of its nature, it includes those "intermediary projects" (TN 215) which we have encountered as threshold positions and which make the practice of worship possible and significant.

In a curious, but liturgically apt way, this recognition brings the mystery of faith very close to the ordinary, and perfectly clear, language of worship. Thus I take it as a positive indication of the willingness and competence of the average congregation to assume their role in the interpretation of liturgical action, when Tony Walter says, in the preface to his work on modern funeral practice :

Funerals will improve only when ordinary people ask for something better, and know what to ask for. That is why I have written this book.<sup>29</sup>

This should be extended across the wider panorama of worship, to a general affirmation of the right of ordinary people to demand better liturgy. Exercising that right,

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29. Tony Walter *Funerals and How to Improve Them* 17

however, places a responsibility on all practitioners of worship to be informed. And making congregations so aware of the significance of what they are doing in church that they will enter actively into the constant renewal and improvement of worship is a duty that the Church cannot afford to ignore.

Jeremy Taylor, writing in 1658, shortly before the Restoration had this to say :

. . . the Liturgy of the Church of England hath advantages so many and so considerable as not onely to raise it self above the devotions of other Churches, but to endear the affections of good people to be in love with liturgy in general.<sup>30</sup>

In a modern world, which has seen the growth of some fine liturgical work in all the major denominations, we must take a wider view than Taylor's, and encourage the love of excellent liturgy wherever it occurs. This means allowing liturgy to address us. More than that, it means accepting the risk that proceeds from believing ourselves to be addressed by liturgy.

Chapter Three went some way towards describing the dramatic encounter between the faith of the worshippers and the

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30. Jeremy Taylor Preface to *Forms of Prayer Publicke and Private together with the Psalter or Psalms of David after the Kings Translation* London : J. Flesher for R. Royston, 1658 A6

divine presence in the context of the eucharist, using the situational model of Derrida's "Telepathy". The scenario of the accident, in which the text or communication falls into the hands of a chance receiver who then becomes its addressee, has powerful implications for liturgy at large. In particular, it suggests an account of how liturgy falls into the hands of its practitioners. It also suggests how, having taken up the liturgical address, the worshipper finds his or her life transformed in ways which he or she can neither foresee nor control. But it is vital to stress the willingness, indeed the desire, of the worshipper to participate. The response comes out of a sense that one is called or chosen, and the act of worship then comes to follow the "programme" of the rite.

"Telepathy" presents the concept of the text in a manner that is particularly helpful to the understanding which has been a key argument in this thesis, namely that the liturgical text and its performance are mutually dependent entities. It remains to negotiate the significant difference between the case Derrida imagines, and its liturgical application. This relates to Derrida's presentation of a text that engenders performance across time and, in a certain sense, has its status or existence retrospectively validated when its "programme" is translated into action. Liturgical texts and their performances, on the other hand, are one and the same. The text initiates action and, when

its invitation is accepted, it constitutes the worshipping community within secular existence. Equally, the community seeks the text. Faithful bodies of worshippers do not stumble across unexpected calls to a recognised form of ritual practice. They are already seriously committed to the purpose which the words of the text can shape and direct. The opening dialogue of the eucharistic prayer makes this abundantly clear :

President Let us give thanks to the Lord our God  
**All It is right to give him thanks and praise**  
 (ASB)

Priest Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God.  
**People It is meet and right so to do.**  
 (BCP)

Yet by itself, this does not seem an adequate evocation of the indeterminable, life-changing consequences of making the serious commitment that must follow if one is to be the addressee of the liturgical communication. Inside the rite, there will always be risks, surprises and accidents which are quite impossible to foresee. Thus accepting the programme of the 'known' liturgical process carries no certainties or guarantees. The same rite will affect the same participants differently each time that they assemble. Again, Derrida's words capture both the momentous nature of the action, and the glorious folly that accepts its risks :

But I am thinking of a single person, of the one and only, the madwoman who would be able to say after the letter 'it is I', it was already I, that

will have been I, and in the night of this wagered  
 certainty commits her life to it without return,  
 takes all possible risks. . . .  
 (Telepathy 7)

It is a happy accident for liturgy that its chance meeting with Derrida here should happen to take the form of an essay whose initial setting is the context of a love letter. Bryan Spinks, writing of the eucharistic prayer, has said that "like all prayer [it] is the language of lovers"<sup>31</sup>. The corollary to this, is that all lovers have to accept a condition of risk. But liturgy participates, above all, in that "logic of superabundance" which Ricoeur finds in the parables (Specificity 138). In fulfilling its obligations and taking its risks, the worshippers always discover "something more", and something better, than they could have anticipated. There could be no happier formulation of the true destiny of all liturgical action than the opening words of the first, second and fourth eucharistic prayers in the ASB :

President    It is indeed right,  
                   *it is our duty and our joy,*  
                   at all times and in all places  
                   to give you thanks and praise,  
                   holy Father, heavenly King,  
                   almighty and eternal God  
 (ASB 130, 133, 139)

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31. Bryan D. Spinks "The Eucharistic Prayer" in *The Identity of Anglican Worship* ed. Kenneth Stevenson & Bryan D. Spinks London : Mowbray, 1991 89-102 99

This is not a paradox. Rather, it is a revelation that the prescriptions of the rite are only the beginning of the performers' own distinctive liturgical encounter with God :

You say 'me' the unique addressee and everything starts between us.  
(Telepathy 6)

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