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# Introduction to the Study of Liturgy

Albert Gerhards

Benedikt Kranemann

*Translated by*

Linda M. Maloney

**A PUEBLO BOOK**

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## Introduction

Liturgical studies (liturgics), as a theological discipline, concerns itself with the history, theology, and pastoral practice of liturgy. It investigates the multifaceted celebrations of different Christian liturgies. The forms of faith expression that are the object of scholarly interest include the whole spectrum of linguistic and nonlinguistic liturgical sign-actions throughout history and in the present, in various confessions and cultures. In this introductory work, that breadth of content is confronted with the requirement of brevity. Therefore we can address only certain basic themes, placing accents here and there, and giving pointers and encouragement for the reader's own further reading. Though this book can treat many subjects in only fragmentary fashion, it still intends to offer a critical picture of Christian worship and to awaken interest in liturgics.

The book begins with a sketch of the function and interpretation of liturgy within its social context. A second chapter introduces liturgics as a discipline and is followed by a longer chapter (still merely a survey) on the history of the Roman liturgy. Here again, the brevity of the presentation requires us to concentrate on basic information. The history of liturgy is a field that is as central to liturgics as the theology of liturgy, some basic themes of which will be developed. On the basis of history and theology, then, elements and expressions of worship can be described: Sacred Scripture in liturgy, prayer as the central liturgical language-act, the language of worship, hymnody and music, as well as the signs and symbolic character of the liturgy. We will deal with fundamentals, because it is against that background that an active event like liturgy must be understood.

An appendix with a few textual examples and schemata, as well as an extensive bibliography, will be an aid to the use of this book as a textbook.

This introductory work is addressed to readers interested in theology and cultural studies; therefore less attention is paid to pastoral liturgy than to theological and historical questions. Besides, those who are familiar with the history and theology of the liturgy will be able to develop their own criteria for pastoral use.

Finally, we should point to the confessional limitations of the book. This introduction is written from the perspective of Roman Catholic theology in Germany. Liturgics has been ecumenical for many decades; consequently, voices from the scholarly tradition in other confessions must be heard as a matter of course. The authors are aware of their obligation to an ecumenical liturgics, but for this brief publication they have been forced to restrict themselves to a presentation of their own tradition.

We are indebted to our colleagues in the chairs of liturgics at the Catholic theological faculties of Bonn and Erfurt, especially Dipl. theol. Birgit Hosselmann, Annika Bender, Christopher Tschorn, and Dr. Stephan Wahle, for ideas and redactional assistance.

Albert Gerhards  
Benedikt Kranemann

## CHAPTER 1

# Liturgy in Its Social Context

### 1.1 Christian Liturgy and the Multiplicity of Liturgical Celebrations

The simple word “liturgy” covers a multitude of forms of celebration that are associated in a broad variety of ways with the life of the church, society, and individuals, and are given a great many different interpretations. “Liturgy” is a concept that in the abstract and at a distance is illuminating to analysis and knowledge, but at the same time always demands to be enriched with the specifics and differences of concrete liturgical celebrations. Our introduction to liturgics proceeds accordingly: it collects the statements and insights about the phenomenon of “liturgy” that can be formulated in general terms and applies them to concrete liturgical actions.

Here we offer a quick summary of examples of the multiform liturgical life of the church.

*First example: Liturgy responsible to the church*

Central to a Catholic congregation is the Sunday Eucharist, the celebration of Christ’s resurrection: a liturgy with a clear reason and purpose (the weekly celebration of the Easter mystery as the center of Christian existence) on a fixed day (Sunday) and usually in a particular place (parish church), with, as far as the participants are concerned, a relatively clearly constituted and confessionally limited group of attendees and a division of offices and roles determined by church rules. This liturgy must follow the guidelines and texts (readings, orations, canon, etc.) of liturgical books—lectionaries, gospel

books, missals. It is thus a church-determined liturgy, even though there is broad latitude in its presentation. The reasons for the church's prescribed order are related to the necessary structuring of a human gathering, to the effort to preserve orthodoxy in the liturgy, which is the expression of the church's faith, and to the incorporation of the liturgy within the church and the securing of its theological and cultural level.<sup>1</sup> Additional variations among the liturgies of various local churches derive either from inculturation (the interaction of different cultures) or self-chosen freedom in presentation. Liturgy is subject to the duty to constitute the church, which ought to be constantly renewed by the Eucharist. Thus the liturgy has a powerful significance within the church but is also accepted and tolerated within society as the action of a social group.

If we look solely at the multitude of expressions of such a church-regulated liturgy we will encounter a great many "liturgies." These include such different celebrations as the Mass, with Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist; the Liturgy of the Hours (Lauds, Vespers, Compline, Matins, and the lesser hours), with songs and readings drawn from the Old and New Testaments as well as prayers; the Easter liturgy with its complex structure (a vigil with celebration of light, Liturgy of the Word, baptism, and Eucharist); a simple Benediction (blessing) with Scripture reading, prayer of blessing, petitions, and closing prayer; or a burial liturgy in which through readings, prayer, and symbolic actions we take leave of and express hope for the dead. This catalogue could be expanded to include many other forms of celebration, traditional and contemporary, most certainly if we expand our view to include the ecumenical world and the numerous ways in which we can celebrate ecumenical worship. Thus today "liturgy" is not limited to the Mass but includes all forms of church-sanctioned worship services, with their differing theological significance and varied ritual *habitus*.

<sup>1</sup>Martin Klöckener, "Freiheit und Ordnung im Gottesdienst: ein altes Problem mit neuer Brisanz," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 43 (1996): 368–419.

*Second example: Worship services occasioned by community events*

A very different type of liturgy is constituted by worship services occasioned by events within the community: for example, those connected with catastrophes.<sup>2</sup> They are celebrated because of certain events and are usually organized jointly by church and state institutions and based on certain ritual repertoires. Such celebrations are not “church” events but have an explicitly public character. Ultimately there are no clear guidelines for who may participate, even though, for example, mourning over the victims of the catastrophe unites the participants. The celebration functions as an aid to articulation of and dealing with sorrow and to holding the community together. Some groups will interpret the event as confessionally religious, others more as an act of civil religion. The role-players vary and in German-speaking regions are not determined altogether by ecclesial-theological specifications. As a rule such celebrations are interconfessional, more and more often interreligious. The shape of the celebration also varies, although certain elements (biblical texts, instrumental music, blessings, etc.) commonly appear. The place for such worship services depends on the circumstances: churches, public plazas, even sports stadiums. These celebrations attract a large media presence; as a result, various forms of participation are possible, either through personal presence or via the media. Depending on whether a confession of God is uttered in such a service, and whether there is explicit recognition of God as a partner in contact with humans, one may speak of liturgy or more generally of a religious service. This brings to light a differentiation within the Christian culture of celebrations, something that grows whenever the church acts beyond its own circle of members through new rituals performed in society. The expanding number and variety of forms of celebration, and ultimately of liturgy as well, constitutes an especially urgent demand on a church that understands itself as part of a pluralistic society.

<sup>2</sup>*Disaster Ritual: Explorations of an Emerging Ritual Repertoire*, ed. Paul Post, Liturgia condenda 15 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003).

*Third example: Church liturgies with plural meanings*

Infant baptism remains the most frequent form of initiation for Roman Catholics in Western societies. Baptism (in combination with confirmation and Eucharist) means that the baptized are made participants in the death and resurrection of Christ and members of the church. The liturgy of baptism is given a clear interpretation in ecclesiology and sacramental theology. As a liturgy of initiation, that is, as a rite of passage in the religious sense<sup>3</sup> or a rite of transition from the status of unbaptized to that of baptized, it acquires a different significance within the church than that of Eucharist, for example, which presupposes that status. But at present these liturgies are assigned other meanings by their participants, meanings that apparently are considered essential, and this is important for our understanding of the many perceptions of liturgy. Infant baptism, in particular, is widely interpreted as a ritual that affirms and sacralizes the religious identity of the family. Baptism is understood as a private matter and the connection to church and congregation is minimized. In the foreground<sup>4</sup> stands the affirmation, interpretation, and exaltation of an everyday reality. But at the same time baptism is conducted according to a church-sanctioned liturgical book and involves an assignment of roles. The parents make a deliberate decision to accept this church liturgy but interpret it in the context of family. The maintenance of tradition in the ritual goes hand in hand with the break with tradition in its interpretation.

It is evident from this example—something similar could be said for marriage and burial—that a number of very different pointers for interpretation may be concealed within the liturgy, and it is important to reflect theologically on the legitimacy and relationship of those signals. Thus the concept of “liturgy” is associated with a great variety not only of forms but also of interpretations, so that one and

<sup>3</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960 [first pub. 1909]); Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> According to Michael N. Ebertz, “Einseitige und zweiseitige liturgische Handlungen. Gottes-Dienst in der entfalteten Moderne,” in *Heute Gott feiern. Liturgiefähigkeit des Menschen und Menschenfähigkeit der Liturgie*, ed. Benedikt Kranemann, Eduard Nagel, and Elmar Nübold, et al., *Pastoralliturgische Reihe in Verbindung mit der Zeitschrift “Gottesdienst”* (Freiburg: Herder, 1999), 89.

the same celebration is interpreted very differently.<sup>5</sup> The history of liturgy is filled with such pointers to interpretation of theological meaning, but in the modern situation of religious pluralism they acquire greater relevance and plausibility.

### *Secularization*

The variety of worship experiences today<sup>6</sup> must be seen in the context of the development of religion, and thus of Christianity, in western Europe. What follows refers primarily to western Europe, and Germany in particular. Religions are taking a different course of development in other parts of the world. The current paradigm is "secularization." The role of religion in the secularization of western European societies is characterized, with reference to the work of the American sociologist José Casanova,<sup>7</sup> by three factors that may be regarded "in matters of religious development as the great exception in need of explanation."<sup>8</sup>

1. The secularization that characterizes the development of modern society is marked by a separation between the secular and religious spheres. Politics, economics, science, and religion have become autonomous; society has distinguished them. Religion has not lost its function thereby, but that function has changed.

2. In addition, in western Europe secularization means that the traditions and practices of religion have been eroded. This is evident in

<sup>5</sup>Lawrence A. Hoffman, "How Ritual Means: Ritual Circumcision in Rabbinic Culture and Today," *Studia Liturgica* 23 (1993): 78–97; Stephan Winter, "Wir übergeben den Leib der Erde . . . ' Überlegungen zu mystagogischer Bestattungsliturgie," *Arbeitsstelle Gottesdienst* 16 (2002): 12–25.

<sup>6</sup>On this see also Winfried Haunerland, "Authentische Liturgie. Der Gottesdienst der Kirche zwischen Universalität und Individualität," *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 52 (2002): 135–57, at 141–50.

<sup>7</sup>José Casanova, "Religion und Öffentlichkeit. Ein Ost-/Westvergleich," in *Religion und Gesellschaft. Texte zur Religionssoziologie*, ed. Karl Gabriel and Hans-Richard Reuter, UTB 2510 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 271–93; see his *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup>Karl Gabriel, "Säkularisierung und öffentliche Religion. Religionssoziologische Anmerkungen mit Blick auf den europäischen Kontext," *Jahrbuch für christliche Sozialwissenschaften* 44 (2003): 13–36, at 16.

regard to liturgy: in recent decades the worship practices of German Catholics have changed markedly. According to statistics provided by the Conference of German Bishops, the percentage of attendees at Roman Catholic Sunday services fell from 44.7% (in West Germany) in 1962 to 10.4% in 2015. There are declining numbers especially of baptisms and marriages. The number of burials, on the other hand, has remained constant over the decades. In contrast, the number of baptisms of school-age children and of adults has risen. Erosion can be observed also in regard to familiarity with different liturgical rites and pious practices.<sup>9</sup>

3. Finally, a third aspect of secularization is the privatization of religion. This tendency is constant in Europe, as can be empirically proven, even though the shift of religion from the public to the private sphere is not a necessary consequence of modern social development.

These data on the relationship between religion and the public sphere also affect the celebration of liturgy. The differentiation of forms and interpretations of liturgy is connected with the radically changed role of religion; that change also influences what liturgy means in detail and how it is perceived.

## 1.2 “Liturgy”—History of an Idea

Ultimately, the diversifications we have noted are reflected in history and reveal the plurality of liturgical traditions even within the Catholic Church. The names for the many kinds of worship celebrations have a very complex conceptual history, within which the concept of “liturgy” came into use quite late.

### *Terms for the “katabatic” and “anabatic” dimensions*

Thus we encounter terms referring to functions within the service, such as *ministerium*, *munus*, *officium*, *opus*—from the Latin *opus Dei*, hence the English term “service”—although it remains an open question whether this refers to God’s service to humankind or human service for God or both. The case is clearer with equally common

<sup>9</sup>See “Zahlen und Fakten” on the home page of the Conference of German Bishops, [www.dbk.de](http://www.dbk.de).

terms such as *mysterium* or *sacramentum*, which echo God's offer of salvation (the soteriological dimension or *katabasis*, from Greek καταβαίνειν, descend), emphasizing God's action toward humankind, or concepts such as *cultus*, *devotio*, or *religio*, which foreground reverence toward God or the worship humans owe to God (*latreia* dimension or *anabasis*, from Greek ἀναβαίνειν, ascend). Besides these there are terms that point more directly to the external forms of worship, such as *ceremoniae* and *ritus*.

### *The term "liturgy"*

"Liturgy" is derived from Greek λειτουργία, a composite of ἔργον (work) and λαός (people). In its original meaning it described services performed by citizens for public and social purposes, that is, service for the common good and so for the people as a whole (donations for feeding the poor, financing of cultural and athletic events). The word first appears in a cultic context in the second century BCE. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, λειτουργία described service in the Jerusalem temple (representing עבדה). In the New Testament the word group has a variety of meanings, sometimes referring to the Old Testament priesthood (Luke 1:23; Heb 9:21; 10:11), but it also has the old meaning of taxes (Rom 13:6) and caritative service (Rom 15:27; 2 Cor 9:12; Phil 2:30) and is used in reference to sacrificial service for the apostles (Rom 15:16; Phil 2:17). Only Acts 13:2 uses it to refer to a Christian worship assembly ("while they were worshipping the Lord [λειτουργούντων] and fasting"). This last meaning, with reference to worship and liturgical offices, became dominant in the post-apostolic period (1 Clem. 41.1; Did. 15.1; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.13.4; *Apost. Const.* II, 25.5, 7; VIII, 4.5; 18.3; 47.15, 28, 36). As early as the *Euchologion* (11.3), a collection of prayers handed down under the name of Serapion of Thmuis (d. after 362), the term is used only for the Eucharist. This constriction prevailed in both East and West. It is only since the age of Humanism that the word "liturgy" has been used in the West; in 1540 the Humanist Beatus Rhenanus wrote "liturgia" in an edition of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. A year later Georg Witzel used the Greek term in German, speaking of "liturgy." At first it was applied only in the narrower sense, to the Mass, but since the eighteenth century it has been more broadly used

for all worship services. Today the concept is current in a variety of Christian churches.<sup>10</sup>

*Preconciliar ideas of liturgy*

We have already named the two essential aspects of the act-event of liturgy: “katabasis” and “anabasis.” There were phases in the history of liturgy in which anabasis, and thus the cultic dimension of worship, was placed very prominently in the foreground. Two older definitions of liturgy that are very important for Vatican II’s understanding make this clear. The Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC) of 1917 defines (in canons 1256–57) that the worship is called “public” that is “carried on in the name of the Church by persons legitimately deputed for this and through acts instituted by the church.” Otherwise it is “private.” It is said to be solely a matter for the Apostolic See both to order the sacred liturgy and to approve liturgical books. The concept of *cultus* (from Latin *colere*, “cultivate,” “venerate”), here used in place of the word “liturgy,” emphasizes only the worship of God. Cult is part of the *habitus* of religion. The actualization of salvation history in worship, the action of God on human beings, and thus above all their sanctification (cp. chap. 4), as an event believed to be present in divine worship, remain unspoken or recede into the background. In addition, public cult is only what church authority has instituted with regard to the acting persons and the actions to be performed. Ludwig Eisenhofer, in his important *Handbuch der katholischen Liturgik*, wrote: “Catholic liturgy is the external, public cult whose basis was given by Christ and the details of whose performance are regulated by the church.”<sup>11</sup> Here we can observe a further refinement: the prescribed course of the liturgy is regulated in detail. Only a liturgy performed in this way is regarded as valid and as a cult appropriate to God. One consequence of such a clear definition

<sup>10</sup> Emil Joseph Lengeling, “Liturgie,” *Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe* 3 (1970): 77–100 (first pub. 1962); idem, “Liturgie/Liturgiewissenschaft,” *Neues Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe* 3 (1991): 279–305; Albert Gerhards, “Liturgie,” *Neues Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe* 3 (2005): 7–22.

<sup>11</sup> Ludwig Eisenhofer, *Handbuch der katholischen Liturgik*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1941), 1:6.

was the attempt to set public and private cult, liturgy, para-liturgy, and “pious exercises” (*pia exercitia*) apart from one another. The idea of a cult owed to God also demanded the presumption that the sacrifice of the Mass in particular was to be offered by the priest alone, and while it made sense to have participation by the community, that was not absolutely necessary. “The priest alone suffices for a valid celebration without any requirement that the community of the faithful be present.” All that was needful was “that the one who performs the worship service must be truly regarded as a legitimate representative of a body, here the church.”<sup>12</sup>

### *The concept of liturgy in the conciliar tradition*

Current liturgical theology begins from a different angle. It has developed out of the Liturgical Movement and is expressed primarily in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), the definitive document for Roman Catholic liturgy in the present time (see appendix 4). The concept of “liturgy,” which combines katabasis and anabasis, is therefore programmatic. The third paragraph of SC 7 describes the event of liturgy as follows:

It involves the presentation of [human] sanctification [*sanctificatio hominis*] under the guise of signs perceptible by the senses and its accomplishment in ways appropriate to each of these signs. In it full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members.

Primarily, the liturgy—as interpreted by the Liturgy Constitution—is God’s action toward human beings, the immediate consequence of which is worship of God, the cultic dimension of liturgy. Glorification of God is the response to the new reality opened to human beings by God. In SC 7 the Constitution links this to the presence of Christ in the worship service. It makes it clear how both katabasis and anabasis in worship form an event that happens through and with Christ. Liturgy is thus in a special way a place of the presence of Christ. The council names the paschal mystery, and in particular the passion,

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:18.

death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ, as the center of the liturgy that gives it its meaning.

*Liturgy as communication event between God and humans*

To come closer to language that describes what is celebrated, one might characterize the basic event of liturgy as a “dialogue between God and the human,”<sup>13</sup> a communication event or encounter. It is important that this is about an event that takes place between God and the human whose fundamental ritual features are listening to God’s word and responding to it. Hence the basic structures of the liturgy are said to be the reading, as a sign of the presence of Christ, and the prayer, as a sign of the listening and responding community.<sup>14</sup> As complex as liturgy seems, at its heart some very fundamental and simple actions can be seen as “elementary.”

*Agents of the liturgy*

The Liturgy Constitution emphasizes that liturgy is an event affecting the whole church and enacted by it. Thus in the fourth paragraph of SC 7 it says:

From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree.

It is no longer only the priests, but all the baptized who cooperate in producing the liturgy. This corresponds to the axiom of “active participation,” which today is essential for the liturgy and appears repeatedly in the Liturgy Constitution as a sustained theme: the baptized are to cooperate in celebrating the liturgy and so experience their dignity as such.

<sup>13</sup> See Emil Joseph Lengeling, *Liturgie: Dialog zwischen Gott und Mensch*, ed. Klemens Richter (Altenberge: Telos, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> Angelus A. Häussling, “Gottesdienst III. Liturgiegeschichte IV. Liturgisch-theologisch,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 4 (1995): 891–903, at 902.

## *Sensible signs*

The Constitution also emphasizes that the liturgy is essentially an event by means of signs that not only serve as pointers but also, and primarily, have an effective, actualizing character. SC 7 speaks of sensible signs. These correspond to the sense-nature of human perception. The postconciliar liturgical reform focused especially on the renewal of the sign-dimension of liturgy and gave a new weight to the nonverbal aspects alongside the verbal.

### **1.3 The Rediscovery of the Ritual Dimension of Liturgy**

Especially in German-language discussions over recent decades there has been little attention paid to an aspect that emerges in descriptions of the phenomenon of liturgy: that liturgy is ritual.<sup>15</sup> For liturgics, whether applied to theology, history, or pastoral questions, attention to the ritual nature of worship services is indispensable if an essential dimension of these celebrations is not to be ignored.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, rituals within society are attracting new interest, and that also should be a subject of reflection for liturgists.

#### *What is a ritual?*

The concept of “ritual” is used in such an inflated manner today that some aspects must be emphasized: in liturgics, “ritual” means a structured, usually repeatable and stylized action sanctioned by a group. Rituals are actions authorized by a community for use in key life situations, especially at transition points (transition rituals), in crises (crisis rituals), and at fixed points in the calendar (calendared rituals). Individually, they enable individuals and groups to carry out a life transition, to deal with a crisis, and to ground and renew

<sup>15</sup>Nathan Mitchell, *Liturgy and the Social Sciences*, American Essays in Liturgy (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999); Paul Post, “Ritual Studies: Einführung und Ortsbestimmung im Hinblick auf die Liturgiewissenschaft,” *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 45 (2003): 21–45.

<sup>16</sup>Andreas Odenthal, *Liturgie als Ritual. Theologische und psychoanalytische Überlegungen zu einer praktisch-theologischen Theorie des Gottesdienstes als Symbolgeschehen*, *Praktische Theologie heute* 60 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002).

collective identity. In addition, rituals give symbolic expression to experiences that cannot otherwise be adequately articulated; still more, “rituals are . . . the active mode of symbols.”<sup>17</sup> In particular they are a primary medium of religious expression. What is crucial from the point of the reception of liturgy is that they place a special accent on the nonverbal dimension of action and thus on sensibility and physicality. Without wanting to diminish the significance of verbal elements in rituals, we should say that here the essential element is the expressive act-event. In baptism, such crucial rites are the pouring of water or immersion, anointing with chrism, clothing with the baptismal garment, and presentation of the baptismal candle. While the transition to the new status of Christian is stated in the texts, it is received by the senses in the baptismal actions. In the burial liturgy we find impressive biblical texts and prayers, but the farewell to the dead and hope for her or him is expressed emotionally in thick action: the lowering of the coffin into the grave, sprinkling with water (aspersion) or censuring, casting earth on the coffin, and the sign of the cross over the grave. Language contributes primarily by interpreting the ritual for the congregation’s understanding. Thus the pouring of baptismal water is not primarily an act of cleansing or refreshment; rather, it is an event within the framework of salvation history as interpreted by Christians, as the blessing of the water and the baptismal formula articulate. The burial of a dead person is not only interment and farewell but the expression of a faithful hope for resurrection, something that can be identified in the accompanying texts. Consequently, rituals such as we find in the liturgy are about complex actions with very different internal structures and meanings.

#### *Significance of tradition and formalization*

A number of different characteristics of religious ritual contribute to this complexity.<sup>18</sup> As a rule such rituals are designed as group ac-

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Luckmann, *Die unsichtbare Religion*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996), 177; a version of this book is available in English as *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>18</sup>Bernhard Lang, “Ritual/Ritus,” *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* 4 (1998): 442–58.

tions and thus have a collective character. They are strongly influenced by tradition and regulations. The link to tradition guarantees that the rituals are tied to the central traditions of the religious group in question. Catholic theology today gives the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ as the center of all liturgy, thus making it clear that all liturgical celebrations are linked to the passion, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ; that is, in the broad sense they are bound up in salvation history from creation to consummation of which the Old and New Testaments speak. These rituals are thus about symbolic action that cannot be described solely in functional terms but contains a “more,” a “surplus,” and participates in another reality. The church regulates the form and content of these celebrations by means of a set of rules, some broad and some more strictly defined. The liturgical rituals are formalized: thus, for example, certain models of action and speech occur frequently while roles and the sequence of actions are fixed. This makes the rituals repeatable—an essential feature of liturgy as such, though it does not exclude variations and different types of presentation.

Association, emotion, and intuition, among other things, play a major role in rituals. They thus possess qualities not necessarily found in other expressions of religion. Hence rituals always remain polysemous and ultimately inaccessible to a fully fixed order and interpretation. Their surplus of signs opens them to associations and connotations that make these rituals dynamic and accessible to ever-new perceptions.

### *Functions of rituals*

The liturgy also participates in a series of different functions of such rituals, though some liturgies must be distinguished from others. We may mention coping with life transitions through the rites of passage, with their three aspects of separation, transition, and incorporation.<sup>19</sup> One of those life transitions is inclusion in the church and the Christ-event, carried out in baptism; other such transitions are marriage, celebrated in the wedding, or dying and death, for which prayers for the dying, viaticum, and burial offer help, fulfilling a function of release. Rituals can distill complex realities, as in the case

<sup>19</sup> Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (see n. 3 above), 11.

of the Eucharist or in the Easter celebration of the Christ-event. At the same time, they enact beliefs, for example, in processions whereby a faith conviction of the church community is given public expression. This presentation of beliefs can at the same time have a reverse effect on human actions and so influence behavior, so that one can attribute an ethical function to rituals.

### *Tendency to immutability*

The consistently shaped action supports the development of these functions, and thus the effectiveness of rituals. It enables people to surrender themselves to the ritual and trust it, for ritual is not newly created every time but appears as traditional and unchangeable; the extent to which that is really the case for individual rituals must be judged in each instance. In general, rituals have a tendency to present themselves as inalterable. But a glance at the changes and upheavals that have taken place in the course of the history of liturgy and at “invented,” that is, new rituals in the present time should warn us to be cautious here.

### *Multiplicity*

On the whole, one may speak of rituals as symbolic actions with their own rationale, functioning according to their own grammar and, as complex processes, in need of both critical scientific-theological reflection and pastoral prudence. There are different rituals corresponding to the multiple situations and needs in the lives of groups and communities, as in those of individuals. This multiplicity of rituals corresponds to the manifold liturgical celebrations.

### *Introduction of new rituals*

At the same time, increasing interest in liturgical rituals corresponds to the rediscovery of rituals in the larger society. It seems that rituals are coming to play a new role in the public realm and also in individual lives. Instability in relationships, feelings of emptiness, lack of order within one’s life—such things as these have led to a rebirth of traditional rituals (sometimes in new contexts and with altered content and form) but also call for the creation of entirely new ones.

These are characterized especially by individuality and creativity—individuals create rituals for themselves—and independence of institutions. Describing such rituals already shows how clearly they are different from “traditional” ones in their form. They are different in their functions as well, which include not only spiritual growth but the ordering of life and its environment, as well as overcoming crises and gaining self-knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Such rituals can be flexibly shaped and may be combined with a variety of religious ideas.

Such phenomena are of interest to liturgists for two reasons: first, they document an increased interest in symbolic actions, something that for a long time was satisfied by liturgy in all its variety. Devotions, blessings, processions, and pilgrimages were essential expressions of Catholic faith. The loss of such a variety of forms is problematic, all the more so when nowadays people seek something in new rituals that was originally provided by the rituals of the church.

#### *Christian questions to secular rites*

A second point of interest is the way in which ritual phenomena have mutual effects. What is sought in the new rituals at the same time poses a challenge to traditional liturgy and influences both its form and its interpretation. It is all the more necessary, then, for students of liturgy to analyze the revived rituals and the different perceptions of them. This demands a critical view of rituals, no matter their provenance. It would constitute a misunderstanding to view them primarily under aspects such as therapy, healing, or aids to living. Likewise, the suggestive and manipulative power of rituals in the service of all kinds of ideologies must not be overlooked. The image of the human in different rituals must be examined. In the social context, the *proprium* of Christian rituals must be acknowledged: Christian ritual makes present the truth that human beings are involved with God in a history of salvation and are called to the freedom to share in that history. That God-given freedom is proclaimed to humanity in solemn forms; they are encouraged to accept their freedom and make it the basis for their

<sup>20</sup> Dorothea Lüddeckens, “Neue Rituale für alle Lebenslagen. Beobachtungen zur Popularisierung des Ritualdiskurses,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 56 (2004): 37–53.

own existence. Christian ritual cannot exist without this reference to salvation history; it would lose its very center.<sup>21</sup> This is an essential difference from secular rituals in pluralist society that must be kept in mind when discussing rituals. Theology makes a contribution to pluralism by making the *proprium* of its own liturgy a challenge to ritual forms and content that contradict Christian convictions and the idea of an enlightenment rooted in what is Christian.<sup>22</sup>

*Reverse effects of secular and church rituals*

At the same time, the new rituals lead to a refinement of the church's culture of celebration and an expansion of its repertoire. These new forms of ecclesial celebration attempt to respond to changes in society and altered ideas about faith, value systems, and ways of life. We encounter rites of blessing for infants, blessings for the children of unbaptized parents, rituals for life's turning points instead of the dedication of youth,<sup>23</sup> different rites for mourning and remembering the dead, new forms of the Liturgy of the Word as well as Christian festivals that have to be re-created or adapted for celebration in cities or a secular milieu, and many other such things.<sup>24</sup> These are attempts to perceive religious pluralism as a possible mode of authentic faith, even in the church's forms of celebration. Ties to the community of faith are altogether voluntary. "Pluralism does not weaken faith . . . but can even strengthen it under certain conditions."<sup>25</sup> It must be accepted as a challenge for liturgy as well.

<sup>21</sup> Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, "Einladung zum Mitspielen? Riten-Diakonie und Ritualtheorie: Anregungen und Einwürfe," in *Die diakonale Dimension der Liturgie*, ed. Benedikt Kranemann, Thomas Sternberg, and Walter Zahner, *Quaestiones disputatae* 218 (Freiburg: Herder, 2006), 284–304.

<sup>22</sup> Benedikt Kranemann, "Die Wiederentdeckung des Rituals. Ein kulturelles Phänomen in liturgiewissenschaftlicher Perspektive," *Religionsunterricht an höheren Schulen* 48 (2005): 24–35.

<sup>23</sup> Reinhard Hauke, "Die Feier der Lebenswende. Eine christliche Hilfe zur Sinnfindung für Ungetaufte," in *Gott feiern in nachchristlicher Gesellschaft. Die missionarische Dimension der Liturgie*, ed. Benedikt Kranemann, Klemens Richter, and Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000), 2:32–48.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Hans Joas, "Glaube und Moral im Zeitalter der Kontingenz," in *idem, Braucht der Mensch Religion? Über Erfahrungen der Selbsttranszendenz* (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 32–49, at 45.

## 1.4 The Complex Field of Liturgy as the Subject of Liturgics

At the present time also, the concept of “liturgy” designates a highly complex field. A simple glance at the characteristics of rituals helps us to see the specifics of different liturgical celebrations whose investigation in light of the religious sociological conditions of the present is indispensable for liturgical analysis. Thus there are various liturgical celebrations that differ not only in their individual rites but also in their significance and their importance for the life of the church and for individuals. Liturgy is not a uniform fabric but is itself pluriform. Correspondingly, quite different interpretations are given to particular liturgical celebrations, and their number and variety is increasing in a plural and religiously open society and a church with plural forms for living the Christian life. These interpretations correspond to different possibilities for participation—from active involvement through common prayer and song in worship services, but also by the assumption of roles (altar servers, lectors, ministers of communion, cantors), and by simple forms of presence characterized by a fundamental openness to worship but not expressed in any visible form of participation. At the same time, very different expectations are attached to liturgy, from one extreme that demands creativity and a centering on groups and themes to the other that insists on traditionalism and preservation of the cultural treasure of the liturgy.

Liturgics must acknowledge, reflect on, and give theological evaluation to both the different interpretations and possibilities for participation and the expectations placed on liturgy. In addition, a partly different understanding of religion,<sup>26</sup> in this case of Christianity and its lived expressions, leaves its mark on the perception of liturgy. Those who are more strongly influenced by a functional idea of religion will also judge Christian liturgy according to its functions for the individual, church, or society. Others, who see religion more in substantive terms, that is, who look to God or the Holy as the fundamentals of religion<sup>27</sup> and thus its essential content, will expect above all that the central statements of faith will be articulated in the

<sup>26</sup> Klaus Hock, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, 4th ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2011), 10–21.

<sup>27</sup> Fritz Stolz, *Grundzüge der Religionswissenschaft*, 3rd ed., UTB 1980 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 13–22.

liturgy. In a society that displays a great variety of attitudes toward religion, liturgics encounters a no less varied field of worship celebrations and rites.

Hence the determination of the nature of liturgy is altogether more complex as soon as one leaves the internal sphere of theology or church and seeks that determination in society and culture. But since liturgy itself is also shaped by society and culture both past and future, liturgics cannot be blind to that context when reflecting on the liturgy (see chap. 2). This is true in particular of worship in the Roman Catholic Church, which—for example, in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council—has opened itself to the world and emphasized the necessity of dialogue between the church and the world: “Thus the Church, at once ‘a visible association and a spiritual community,’ goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God’s family” (GS 40).

Accordingly, dialogue and openness require knowledge of one’s own center as well as a readiness to question one’s own worship practice within the social environment. Corresponding to this, liturgics must develop standards to be applied in judging the legitimacy of the different forms of worship life and their place in church and society. It formulates these criteria primarily with reference to the history and theology of the liturgy.

## CHAPTER 2

# History, Outline, and Methods of Liturgics

### 2.1 Liturgics from Within

#### *In Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox theology*

Liturgics is the discipline within the field of theology that concerns itself with the expression of Christian faith in the various forms and traditions of public worship. It is an independent discipline within Catholic theology, with its own research methods and corresponding responsibilities for teaching. In Protestant theology, liturgical theology is the province of the department of practical theology. Orthodox theology also has a liturgics, but it regards liturgical experience as much more important than is the case in Western theology; for the Orthodox, liturgy is the norm and source of all theology.<sup>1</sup> These different scholarly cultures express the traditions and characteristics of the various Christian traditions.

#### *Methodology*

Liturgics is characterized by an engagement with Christian worship as an action-event. Its interest is thus not solely in speech-acts but equally in symbols and symbolic actions; at the same time it encompasses such aspects as space, vestments, sounds, colors, etc.

<sup>1</sup>For Catholic and Protestant theology see *Liturgie lernen und lehren. Aufsätze zur Liturgiedidaktik*, ed. Jörg Neijenhuis, Beiträge zu Liturgie und Spiritualität 6 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlags-Anstalt, 2001); for Orthodoxy see Karl Christian Felmy, *Einführung in die orthodoxe Theologie der Gegenwart*, Lehr- und Studienbücher zur Theologie 5 (Münster: LIT, 2011).

It investigates a complex ritual in which Christians exercise their faith in expressive fashion. The methodological approach of liturgics is very strikingly distinguished from those of other theological disciplines by the fact that it investigates Christian faith in terms of its ritual, thereby incorporating the sense-aspect of the faith. This is clear when we examine, for example, the center of the eucharistic celebration, the Eucharistic Prayer (see appendix 2.2). In order to rightly interpret such a prayer and its basic structure, grounded in liturgical theology, one must inquire about its genesis, its present function in connection with the eucharistic celebration and the Mass as a whole, the accompanying symbolic actions, and the pragmatics of the prayer text. We may list the relevant questions and the methods that address them: How did the text originate? (history of liturgy); What theological statements do we find there? (liturgical theology); What criteria should be applied in shaping and celebrating the liturgy today? (pastoral liturgy).

German-speaking liturgiologists formulated their own scholarly profile in a position paper prepared in 1991. According to this, liturgics is a discipline reflecting the anthropology and theology of divine worship; its essential aspects are tradition, ecumenism, and inculturation. Alongside the traditional historical, systematic theological, and pastoral methodologies, the paper mentions those of the humanities that deal with human beings and their forms of expression.<sup>2</sup> These must be expanded today to include the cultural sciences as well.

## 2.2 Historical Development of the Study of Liturgics

Interpretations of Christian worship and critical reflection on its history are not a modern invention; even in Christian antiquity there were theological discussions of individual aspects of worship and interpretations of whole services. Scholars of the Middle Ages devoted themselves intensively to a spiritual analysis of the liturgy. In the modern period, since 1800, we find a number of very different approaches to the pastoral aspect of liturgy. The establishment of professorships devoted partly or exclusively to liturgics did not originate in the twentieth century,

<sup>2</sup> Albert Gerhards and Birgit Osterholt-Kootz, "Kommentar zur 'Standortbestimmung der Liturgiewissenschaft,'" *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 42 (1992): 122–38.

certainly not since Vatican Council II, but is attested here and there as early as the eighteenth century. Even the distinction of fields of study that is common today—theology, history, pastoral liturgy—was shaped by a centuries-long history, even though the decisive implementation took place only in the early twentieth century.

### *Overlap with other disciplines*

The following brief introduction to the history of the subject and its predecessors points to the multitude of approaches by means of which divine worship can be observed according to its forms and expressions. There are a number of reasons for this multiplicity: hermeneutical and methodological renewals in theology also influence reflection on liturgy and its instruments. Thus, for example, the medieval allegorical explanation of liturgy cannot be understood apart from Neoplatonism; the development of scholarship interested in practical questions of worship around 1800 was influenced by the late phase of the Enlightenment; the approaches to liturgy influenced by the human sciences in the twentieth century would have been unthinkable apart from the “anthropological turn” in theology. Changes in associated disciplines, especially psychological and cultural studies, also affect liturgics. This involves such subjects as music, theater, art, and also religious studies, disciplines whose fields of study overlap with that of liturgics. In recent years liturgics has developed paradigms of investigation, in discussion with “ritual studies,” that lead to a different and sharper perception of liturgy itself in its ritual nature.<sup>3</sup>

### *Ritual dynamics*

Liturgy, as a celebratory event, is a cultural artifact shaped by anthropology, theology, art, music, etc., that, despite its ties to tradition, changes constantly. We speak of ritual dynamics. The changing liturgy

<sup>3</sup>Paul Post, “Liturgical Movements and Feast Culture: A Dutch Research Program,” in *Christian Feast and Festival: The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture*, ed. idem, Gerard Rouwhorst, Louis van Tongeren, and Anton Scheer, *Liturgia condenda* 12 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 3–43; *Modern Ritual Studies as a Challenge for Liturgical Studies*, ed. Benedikt Kranemann and Paul Post, *Liturgia condenda* 20 (Leuven: Peeters, 2009); see also chap. 1.2 above.

poses ever-new tasks to liturgics. The spectrum of tasks for liturgics shifts according to whether the liturgy is regulated, as something formalized and rubricized, or is seen as something to be shaped according to certain conditions; the same is true for innovations and radical changes in liturgical theology, attitudes, and piety, the division of roles between laity and clerics, changes in individual elements, etc. Knowledge of different interpretive models for liturgy contributes to a better understanding of the stages in the history of liturgy and of individual phenomena.

### *Cult and liturgy in the Bible*

In terms of its past, liturgics looks back over a long prehistory. Hints of an engagement with cult and liturgy can be found even in the Bible. According to the Old and New Testaments, prayer, cult, and worship were not only carried out and celebrated but also subjected to theological reflection and critique. The Old Testament formulates a long series of cultic regulations, especially in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The prophetic critique of the cult in Amos 5:21-24; Isaiah 1:10-17; Jeremiah 6:20, and elsewhere names the presuppositions and consequences of a cult that could exist and endure before God. The New Testament critique of cult takes as one of its starting points the double commandment of love of God and neighbor. John 4:20-24 speaks of prayer in spirit and truth as the goal of true prayer. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul criticizes the practice of the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian congregation and describes an order for the Supper that corresponds to Christ's command. The letter to the Hebrews interprets divine worship as "service of the word" in the sense of an event of address and answer.<sup>4</sup>

### *Survey: History of liturgics*

Thus divine worship has been the subject of thorough reflection, but—at least in the early Christian communities—it did not need to be

<sup>4</sup> Claus-Peter März, "Das 'Wort vom Kult' und der 'Kult des Wortes.' Der Hebräerbrief und die rechte Feier des Gottesdienstes," in *Wie das Wort Gottes feiern? Der Wortgottesdienst als theologische Herausforderung*, ed. Benedikt Kranemann and Thomas Sternberg, *Quaestiones disputatae* 194 (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 82–98, at 98.

legitimated because its social milieu did not question it. Moreover, the relationships between contemporary culture of celebration and daily life and that of worship were so close that individual worship events spoke for themselves. There had not yet been any far-reaching revolution in cultural interpretation to make liturgy opaque and in need of explanation. That happened only when Christian liturgy, shaped primarily in the Mediterranean region, took root in other cultural spaces. While at first mystagogy, as the interpretation of liturgy as celebrated, was in the foreground (see 2.2.1.1), since the Middle Ages it has been allegoresis, a hermeneutics interested primarily in spiritual interpretation (chap. 2.2.1.2). Only with the advent of Humanism was a basis developed for sustaining a broad interest in the historical sources of worship (chap. 2.2.2). The rubricism of the late Middle Ages and early modern era described the legal regulation of liturgical rites that, if followed, promised a safe ritual certitude (chap. 2.2.3). With the eighteenth century and the Catholic Enlightenment there was a stronger engagement with pastoral liturgy; the critically reflective potential of “liturgics” was growing (chap. 2.2.4.1). The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced a series of instructional handbooks (chap. 2.2.4.2). The division of labor into history, theology, and practice/reflection, whose fundamentals are still accepted today, was formulated in the early twentieth century (chap. 2.2.5). Catholic liturgics, now elevated to a major theological subject, also received a special shape from the Second Vatican Council (chap. 2.2.6). In the second half of the twentieth century the subject continued to develop its methodology and the objects of its study (chap. 2.2.7).

## *2.2.1 Explanations of Liturgy in the Ancient Church and in the Middle Ages*

### ***2.2.1.1 Early Christian Examples of Reflection on Christian Worship***

#### *Postbaptismal catechesis*

One medium of early Christian explanation of liturgy was the catecheses. Mystagogical catecheses given after the celebration of initiation with baptism in water, anointing by the bishop, and first Eucharist were intended to disclose the content of the mysteries at

## CHAPTER 4

# Theology of the Liturgy

Liturgy articulates Christian faith convictions and communicates them in ritual form. It is a celebratory event in which the church's faith is on display. This is indicated by the axiom *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (see chap. 2.2.7.2). At the same time it requires a continually renewed theological reflection if it is not to lose its meaningful center in the thicket of the multiple interpretations applied to it. That is the task of the theology of liturgy, which this chapter addresses. Its starting point is the celebration of liturgy as a human assembly that knows itself called by God and subject to some very specific preconditions (4.1). It works out the liturgy's dynamic image of God, corresponding to worship as an event of encounter between God and the human (4.2). The liturgy is interpreted as a celebration of Christ's paschal mystery (4.3), one of the central statements of today's liturgical theology, and as an event that is always effected by the Spirit (4.4). Hence the theology, Christology, and pneumatology of worship celebrations must be addressed. The liturgy's participation in the divine economy of salvation (4.5) and the relationship between earthly and heavenly liturgy (4.6) will be presented. Liturgy is glorifying God, but at the same time it is also the healing of the human being. Therefore the liturgy's image of the human is also a subject of liturgical theology (4.7). Finally, we must inquire into the relationship between liturgy and the Christian life (4.8).

### 4.1 Liturgy as Assembly in the Presence of God

#### 4.1.1 *Assembly as an Anthropological Phenomenon*

##### *Religious assemblies in general*

The basic event of Christian liturgy is described in the anthropological phenomenon of "assembly," which is understood first of all as

the coming together of human beings for a particular purpose. Such an assembly will have different compositions, depending on group, occasion, and purpose. It acts according to certain rules; that is, it is standardized and repeatable. It is characterized by an order of roles and forms. Finally, it is necessary as a communicative action of the group and thus points beyond what is immediately evident. Religious assemblies in particular frequently reveal stereotypical features of speech and symbol, signs of formalization. We may mention the possibility of repetition, the use of fixed linguistic expressions and formulae and established symbols and actions, among other things.<sup>1</sup> A community assembly is possible only if there is a basic set of rules for the course of action and a known purpose. Religious assemblies necessarily tend toward ritualization; they are repeatable, and in their repetition they may represent and enable particular content on the basis of a recurring ritual involving participation, in some form, on the part of the particular group.

*Special character of the Christian liturgical assembly*

This gives us a basis for explaining the distribution of liturgical roles, the assignment of texts, symbols, and actions to those playing particular parts, the constitution of church community through the liturgical celebration, and the communication of social relationships and a specific worldview through the liturgical assembly. However, essential features of the Christian liturgy—for example, that God is its initiator, that Christ is active as subject of the assembly, and that human beings experience transformation through the liturgy—cannot be derived altogether from anthropology; they require a theological basis, as we will show. It will become clear that in the liturgical assembly, in which persons know themselves to be called by God through Christ and in which they respond to God's call with and through Christ, anthropology and theology work hand in hand.

<sup>1</sup>Bernhard Lang, "Ritual/Ritus," *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* 4 (1998): 442–58.

#### 4.1.2 *Liturgy as an Assembly Summoned by God*

##### *Relationship to Christ*

We encounter assemblies with the character of worship in the Old and New Testaments. Thus the latter gives frequent accounts of gatherings for prayer and worship (Acts 4:5; 12:12; 1 Cor 5:4; 14:23) and especially for Eucharist (Acts 20:7-8; 1 Cor 11:17-18, 33; 14:26). The nature, place of assembly, and situation may vary, but one thing remains recognizably the same: these assemblies are always oriented to Christ. This is especially evident in the Eucharist, which is celebrated in awareness of Christ's presence, something that is narrated with great emphasis in the Emmaus pericope (Luke 24:13-35). The assurance of Christ's presence is a background to the various gatherings: "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matt 18:20). When it is said of baptism that it takes place in the name of Jesus (Acts 10:47) and thus unfolds its purifying effect (1 Cor 6:11), the association with Christ is obvious. According to the New Testament, liturgy always takes place in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The value of what happens in the liturgical actions is measured against God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This connection is very clear in 1 Corinthians 11:27 regarding the Lord's Supper. Anyone who eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily becomes guilty of the body and blood of Christ and thus of the Christ who gave himself on the cross. Hence liturgical assembly cannot be separated from the Christ-event. Gathering in the name of Jesus, as well as constant praise and prayer, is constitutive for the *ekklēsia* of Christians.<sup>2</sup>

##### *Assemblies in the Old Testament: God's initiative*

The Christian assembly thus falls in line with assemblies described in the Old Testament (קדל ירוה), which God calls; this is especially clear in God's order to Moses according to Deuteronomy 4:10: "Assemble

<sup>2</sup>Helmut Huckle and Heinrich Rennings, *Die gottesdienstlichen Versammlungen der Gemeinde*, Pastorale 2 (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1973); Klaus Berger, "Volksversammlung und Gemeinde Gottes. Zu den Anfängen der christlichen Verwendung von 'ekklesia,'" *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 73 (1976): 167-207.

the people for me.” Exodus 19:7 tells how the elders of the people came together at God’s command. The people themselves assembled at the command of God, conveyed through Moses, to hear God’s word. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 5:1 Moses calls the people together so that he may give them the commandments God had handed him. According to Nehemiah 8:3 the assembled people listen to God’s law proclaimed by Ezra. Here, then, we find a kind of assembly that follows the usual pattern of human gatherings with regard to its form, the distribution of roles, ritualization, etc., but whose specific characteristic is the divine initiative.

*New Testament: the presence of Christ and his saving action*

This strand of traditional assembly for worship continues in the New Testament, but now it is Christ at whose command the people assemble (see 1 Cor 11:24-25), or Christ’s name that marks each assembly and its actions. Still more: according to Matthew 18:20, Christ himself is present in this assembly (see also Matt 28:20). That alone gives it its proper quality: the presence of Christ means the presence of the Risen One and his saving action. This names the reason and content as well as the primary subject of the act of worship. What happens at worship, in its particulars as well, happens as an actualization of the suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ. We can see how close the connection between liturgy and assembly is from the fact that as late as the early Middle Ages the Eucharist was still called *σύναξις* (assembly).<sup>3</sup> That concept reappears in two documents of Vatican II: the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* (LG 28) and the decree on the ministry and life of priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO 5).

*Continuing Christ’s saving work*

The Liturgy Constitution says that the church has never ceased to gather for the celebration of the paschal mystery (SC 6). This assembly is interpreted as the continuation of Christ’s saving work, rooted in

<sup>3</sup>Hans Bernhard Meyer, *Eucharistie. Geschichte, Theologie, Pastoral*, with an introduction by Irmgard Pahl, vol. 4 in *Gottesdienst der Kirche. Handbuch der Liturgiewissenschaft*, ed. Hans Bernhard Meyer, et al. (Regensburg: Pustet, 1989), 39.

the sending of the Son by the Father—that is, having its origins in God. The proclamation of the Good News and the accomplishment of God’s saving work “through sacrifice and sacrament” have their place in the assembly. Like Pius XII’s 1947 encyclical *Mediator Dei* (par. 20) on questions regarding the liturgy, the Constitution points to the presence of Christ in the assembly (SC 7) and describes liturgy as the work of Christ and his body. The baptized assemble for liturgy as the source and summit of the church’s action (SC 10; LG 11).

*Liturgy as dialogue: at the beginning of worship . . .*

Along these lines, for example, we find the opening elements and corresponding rubrics of a number of today’s liturgical celebrations, which interpret the actions to follow and the assembly itself in the opening words and actions of the celebration. The Missal regards the gathering of the congregation, the entry of the priest and his assistants, with accompanying song, and the honoring of the altar (as symbol of Christ) as symbolic actions. Already here there is a realization that people are gathering around Christ. The sign of the cross that follows then expresses this in word and gesture. All those present join in making this sign, which, with its accompanying words, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” recalls the baptismal formula, and as they join in the celebration they place themselves under the sign of Christ.

The shortest of the prescribed greeting formulae, spoken by the priest with arms outstretched in a gesture of welcome and responded to by the congregation, is “The Lord be with you . . . and with your spirit.” Other such formulae are “Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you,” or “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (see John 20:21, 26, etc., as well as 1 Cor 1:3, etc.). The greeting and response express the action involving God/Christ and the people that constitute this assembly.

*. . . and in the Liturgy of the Hours*

Something similar can be said, in different ways, of other liturgical celebrations, for example, the Liturgy of the Hours. On the level of actions, the coming together and assembling of people for liturgy has a

sign-character, but the sequence of prayers that opens this liturgy also indicates that this is an assembly in the presence of God. The first Hour begins with the invitatory from Psalm 51(50):17: "O Lord, open my lips . . . that my mouth may proclaim your praise." Those who begin the day with this verse consider themselves and their lives in the presence of God, make present to themselves their own distance from God, and affirm that they are dependent on God's grace. Even though the opening elements of the Liturgy of the Hours differ from those of the Mass, they have a common purpose: to orient the assembly toward God.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.1.3 *Celebration of Liturgy in a Structured Assembly*

##### *Participatio and hierarchical structure*

In the New Testament sources the liturgical assembly is described as a familial gathering, and yet it is structured according to duties and ministries.<sup>5</sup> However, the ministry of leadership and an action of the believers present are by no means exclusive, since the umbrella for everything is assembly in the name of Jesus Christ. Christ himself accomplishes his saving work for the people and celebrates with the congregation. The people who act in the liturgy participate in the work of Jesus Christ. This participation can take very different forms, but it must always be located within the mission of Christ and legitimated by it. This is true especially of the ministry of liturgical leadership, which the New Testament associates with a leading role in the congregation: the action is done for and with the congregation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Angelus A. Häussling, "Wie beginnt Gottesdienst? Beobachtungen an den Horen der Tagzeitenliturgie" (1991), in idem, *Christliche Identität aus der Liturgie. Theologische und historische Studien zum Gottesdienst der Kirche*, ed. Martin Klöckener, Benedikt Kranemann, and Michael B. Merz, *Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen* 79 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1997), 257–70.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Kirchschräger, "Die liturgische Versammlung. Eine neutestamentliche Bestandsaufnahme," *Heiliger Dienst* 52 (1998): 11–24; Martin Klöckener and Klemens Richter, eds., *Wie weit trägt das gemeinsame Priestertum? Liturgischer Leitungsdienst zwischen Ordination und Beauftragung*, *Quaestiones disputatae* 171 (Freiburg: Herder, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Walter Kirchschräger, "Begründung und Formen des liturgischen Leitungsdienstes in den Schriften des Neuen Testaments," in *Wie weit trägt das gemeinsame Priestertum?*, 20–45.

By contrast, within the congregation celebrating liturgy, more precisely in the celebration of the sacraments, a distinction is made today between the leadership role in the congregation, the liturgical ministries, and the remaining members of the congregation. The basis for full and complete participation in the liturgy is initiation. The liturgical actions are “celebrations of the church which is ‘the sacrament of unity,’ namely, the holy people united and organized under their bishops” (SC 26). Every believer is “called into service,” with her or his charisms; ordination, assignment of duties, and cooperation in the celebration are different ways in which, and with what degree of obligation, the various charisms are called for. At the same time, SC 26 opens up the possibility that laypersons may carry out liturgical actions without a priest, as exemplified by the Liturgy of the Hours (SC 84; 100), sacramentals (SC 79), and the Liturgy of the Word (SC 35.4). It is true of every liturgical celebration, whether led by the ordained or by laity, that “all taking part in liturgical celebrations, whether ministers or members of the congregation, should do all that pertains to them, and no more, taking into account the rite and the liturgical norms” (SC 28).

#### *4.1.4 Listening and Responding as Fundamental Human Actions in the Liturgical Assembly*

While the initiative for the liturgical assembly comes from God, the human participants are called to listen and respond to what God has promised. Thus the human person (initiated by baptism) is included in the liturgy as an active subject. The liturgical assembly neither exists for itself nor is concentrated on itself; it is directed to God, who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Therefore listening and responding are basic human actions in the liturgical assembly. The Sunday Eucharist, as a form of liturgy, makes clear in its opening what is to be central to it. The introduction is followed—after the confession of sin—by the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, and collect of the day. The *Kyrie* and *Gloria* are closely connected: they are an expression of the glorification of *Kyrios Christos*, made audible and visible in, among other things, the congregation’s standing and singing. These are some of the first things that bring the whole congregation into action in this liturgy. The fact that this takes place formally, in part, in the liturgy should not obscure the personal event that underlies it. Formulaic

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