SACRED AND SECULAR

By JOHN GALLEN

WHERE DOES LITURGY come from? Is liturgical worship the provocative reminder of sacred possibilities for secular experience? Does the success of liturgical community prayer depend directly on its ability to articulate what are the pressing concerns of contemporary man? It is possible to reformulate this last question by suggesting that the challenge of our time is to fashion a secular liturgy that will respond to and mirror the secularity of our religious engagement. Many, however, will immediately answer this question negatively; others will object to its formulation as a premature elimination of options which rests on a mistaken bias concerning the character of contemporary experience. In fact, a sizeable percentage of opinion is convinced of the unassailably sacred nature of liturgy, and concludes with haste that its origin and direction are properly and safely found to rest in the hands of ecclesiastical authorities as custodians of man's religious life and worship. There is a whole spectrum of views about the sacred or secular quality of liturgy.

Two questions lie beneath the ones already mentioned. They are more fundamental, and the line of direction taken in the process of their solution will cast light on the theoretical and pastoral question, whether liturgy, in the order of reality, is to be considered (and celebrated) as sacred or secular.

The first question touches the nature of liturgy itself, and asks quite simply, what is the liturgy? The second question raises the problem of sacred and profane in the largest sense, and seeks to know whether or how to choose between them. Our way of proceeding here will be to take each question in its turn, and then, finally, to offer some commentary on how sacred and divine worship is celebrated in the *saeculum*.

The liturgical renewal within the churches during the past several years has served very well to focus our attention on this aspect of our religious lives and has, at the same time, raised a series of problems that are often very difficult and even a little tortuous to solve. Of all the questions prompted by this newly awakened experience of ours with liturgy, I believe the most central and most

radical has been to ask what *is* the liturgy. What do we celebrate when we celebrate liturgy? The most basic problem of liturgy is (at least as it has touched us for some time and, presumably, will continue to do) this problem of identifying liturgy for what it is. All of the various secondary problems which the liturgical renewal has helped to create must give way before this radical problem of self-identification.

Everyone remembers Daniel Callahan's provoking article which appeared in the United States in *The National Catholic Reporter*, in August, 1967. Callahan's article is a good example of a point which is very well worth making. He attacks the somewhat common tendency (especially in the full flush of Vatican II) to take for granted the proposition that in the scale of values which constitute the christian life, liturgy holds the primacy. On this point and on several others, Callahan feels that a basic lack of clarity in premises has led to unavoidable confusion in the conclusions that are formulated from them. The premises are crucial. There is no intention of suggesting here that it is not possible to conceive of liturgy's possessing a final priority in and for the community's religious experience. The Council itself suggested that this was the case. But everything depends on what one *means* by 'liturgy'. Meaning by liturgy such and so, for example, one can (with the official support of magisterial documents, at least as a claim) elaborate really stunning claims for the spiritual value of liturgical celebration. But suppose that the premises are wrong. Suppose, for example, that the understanding of liturgy on which one operates is wide enough to include the picture of a priest reciting his breviary (even a reformed breviary!) in the driveway of the parish house on a sunny afternoon. As we consider this scene, can we really produce at this point our copy of the constitution of the sacred liturgy and, using the very words of the document, announce that 'this liturgical celebration is a sacred action surpassing all others?'[1]

Such frivolous appeal for textual support has, as we will suggest, several sources of impetus behind it. One of the obvious things that it indicates, however, is a problem about understanding liturgy itself. Imagination can suggest parallel situations and examples. Callahan's point, then, must be well taken, because it directs our attention to a basic lack of clarity in premises, a basic lack of clarity about the reality of liturgy. There are many pastoral, academic,

[1] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

experiential and historical reasons that make such a confusion understandable. But the christian community is not relieved of its responsibility to unravel the complexity of a matter that so touches the heart of its existence.

Among the various approaches that might be undertaken to understand and make more precise our notion of the meaning of community worship, one of the most instructive will be to consider some of the ways in which academic science has sought to study liturgy. Thus we will deal here, in the first instance, not with liturgy as event, not with the celebration itself of liturgy, but rather with some of the principal efforts that academic discipline has employed to render liturgical celebration intelligible. Liturgy-as-event is hardly excluded from such a survey, since it is presumably the starting point of each of the approaches that will be described. The purpose of this survey of academic approaches to liturgy is to indicate how much of an effect they have had on our thinking about worship (including the thinking of those who have been actively engaged in the present reform), and also to show what inadequacies might be connected with each approach. Finally, we will attempt to indicate lines of thought towards a more pertinent and more helpful theology of worship. Hopefully, the suggestions which are advanced can have an effect not only within the confines of the academic science of liturgy but likewise in the celebration itself, which is the joy and task of the christian community.

In the first place, there was the tendency to identify liturgy with rubrical law, and a kind of semi-science was evolved in these terms in the attempt to organize and understand liturgy and to teach it to others, mostly students preparing for ordination to the ministry. The reform of the Church's worship fostered by the Council of Trent and Pius V, in reaction both to the low ebb of liturgical life which characterized the late middle ages and also to the objections raised by the reformers, was largely responsible for the so-called 'era of rubricism'. Reform was required, and the codification of the principles of reform, together with their implications, was a normal development. Understandably enough, every effort was made during the years that followed the publication of the first reforms to ensure that the norms set down by the Church would be followed without deviation. The Congregation of Rites was instituted in 1588 and added its own authority and influence to the task. The result, of course, was double. Many abuses were indeed cleared away. At the same time, it was almost inescapable that such zealous

intentions of reform should generate an attitude of mind that began to regard the liturgical celebration more or less as the proper implementation of the rules of the game (to put the matter crudely). The rubric began to assume a certain supremacy, even apart from the well-spring of the spirit of worship, with the result that it became less and less possible to discern the meaning of the celebration. Even such a bewildering spectacle as the baroque mass adhered rather faithfully to the prescribed laws. In such a way of thinking, it is possible to conclude that *lege observata,* true doctrine is preserved and proper worship given to God. Such a fixation of attitude and even of the celebration itself led ultimately to the mechanism that was so much a part (not the entirety) of catholic liturgy up to the time of its current reform.

Rubricism was certainly not the only cause of liturgical malaise during the past four hundred years. In fact, rubricism itself may more properly be regarded as symptomatic of a more general preoccupation with the role of authority, especially when considered within the context of reformation pressures and defensiveness. It is not the first time that the phenomenon of liturgical defensiveness may be observed within the history of christian worship. The antiarian texts of eucharistic prayers and other formularies provide abundant examples of guarded reaction to the threat raised against spirituality and the prayer life of the community by heterodox opinion. Jesus himself showed a considerable disinclination to be identified with certain aspects of the cultic priesthood and liturgy of his time, preferring to transform the priestly role in terms of service (as deutero-Isaiah had done). At any rate, reformation troubles goaded the catholic community into an exaggerated view of authority's prerogatives. To say this is not to exclude from the liturgy the role of authority. What was needed during the last four centuries, and what is still needed today, is that authority find its proper work of service for the community in the matter of worship.

A second approach that was developing during the same period of time was the growing tendency to identify the science of liturgy with the history of the liturgy. Of all the different attempts to organize a science for liturgy, this is the one that has received most attention and still commands the attention of many today, especially in the academic world. The discovery and study of the sacramentaries and other liturgical books had a determining influence on this approach. The wealth of information gathered from these books concerning the structure and the nature of liturgical celebration

was a revelation. Added to this scientific criticism of the liturgical books was an increasing interest in other documents which gave witness to the Church's tradition in the early centuries of her life. These documents also contained information which helped to clarify more and more the picture of an evolving, developing liturgy. Thus, a progressively more impressive stock-pile of facts and historical inter-connections helped to reveal the community's understanding of worship over many centuries. Moreover, in the search for a more satisfying organization of scientific liturgy in terms of an academic discipline, if the choice were to be between rubrical law and the science of history as possible approaches, it is clear that history would have the upper hand. History, at least, yields facts and the possibility of their interpretation. It is, furthermore, not possible to see how academic liturgy could ever dispense with the resources of historical studies. On the other hand, since the interest of churchmen in rubrics had very little to do with an anthropological-sociological understanding of authentic human ritual, preoccupation with rubrics could cease at any moment without loss to anyone.

The third approach was the methodology which chose to take the magisterial documents of the Church's tradition as its point of departure. This was a system, however, which laboured under the relatively serious difficulty of finding that magisterial statements about the nature of liturgy were not very fully developed. Consequently, the door was opened to a pair of closely related problems. First, it is normal that a scarcity of textual evidence inclines one to make the best of what he has, and so a sort of magisterial fundamentalism began to manifest itself. Reading documents out of context easily leads to exaggerated claims for their contents (Callahan, again, is a vigorous critic of this approach to liturgy). Single-minded infatuation with this approach, for example, might have given the impression at one point that the most important thing about liturgy was gregorian chant, since the texts spent so many words on this lovely music. Secondly, often connected with this sheerly magisterial approach is the readiness to think in terms of 'liturgy by *fiat*'. In this view, all liturgy comes *from above*, in the sense that authority views its role as being able to constitute a particular species of celebration as officially 'liturgical'. On one day, for example, benediction is not liturgy, and on the next it is, because it has been so constituted. This view, of course, raises serious difficulties about the nature of prayer and prayer in community, and

gives some substance to some of the questioning and complaints of sincere and good-hearted people of our own time, who feel that their liturgical prayer has been fashioned in an atmosphere of naiveté, without sufficient understanding of their needs. It is only one short step from this view to the conclusion that any authoritarian imposition of the 'rules' for prayer betrays great problems about an understanding of the work of the Spirit in the experience of prayer,[2] and appears to be, with appropriate change of names, merely a new form of rubricism. It is unfortunate, for example, but entirely understandable, that liturgical reform has been undertaken by so many pastors out of a sense of 'duty' to legally constituted authority, but without any sense of the meaning of religious experience and the contemplative vocation of all christians.

There have been other attempts to arrive at a proper understanding of the work of liturgical science than the ones that have been mentioned here. These, however, have been the three principal lines of thought. When they are taken in their turn, the rubrical, the historical or the magisterial approach, or even when they are added together and marshalled as one single force for a comprehensive study of liturgy, they do not appear to be adequate to the task. There is a growing feeling today, in academic as well as pastoral circles, that a more essential, more penetrating approach is required. Why is this so? Why is it not enough simply to expound the history of the liturgy, or to discuss the laws that regulate liturgical celebration, or to review the texts of the *magisterium* which deal with the liturgy? More and more, the feeling is that these are good things to do, but that more than these things must be done. The directive force of this suggestion has its origin in a clearer idea of worship, one that is beginning to become common property.

The jewish background of christian worship, the New Testament evidence, the continued experience of the Church over the centuries of her history, and the contemporary emerging consciousness she has of her life and activity: all these factors collaborate to offer the description of liturgy which we present here. *Liturgy is the prayer of the community*, the prayer of the christian community, precisely as a community. All the elements in this description are important and operative. Prayer must be taken as the initiative gesture of the Lord himself in the first instance, in which he speaks his word of love and to which man then responds in his turn. Next, there is the question

[2] Rom 8, 26–27.

of community, of the community of believers who are made one by the common faith-experience which they share. There is question here of the Lord's word spoken to a concrete assembly of people who occupy historical moments of time, a word to which they, as a community of believers, respond. In this sense, liturgy is the community's prayer-meeting. Everything about liturgy depends first of all on the dynamic and powerful call of the Lord who summons his people to belief and to assembly. They are gathered in his name and he is present in their midst. The word is spoken to them in time, and when the people come, they come in all the temporal glory, in all the temporal dimensions, of their own faith-experience of Christ in this world. Men come as they are because they are called to do so. They come as members of a world-community and as members of a communion of saints; but they come likewise as men of this time and not of another time, as men of this place and not of another place, even though they can and must look beyond the boundaries of time and of place by reason of their shared humanity, and also because of the one unifying Spirit poured forth in their hearts. Both the word spoken to men and the tangibly expressed response of their hearts are culturally and historically defined realities. The Lord speaks his enabling word as temporal event and forms his community as historical phenomenon.

Thus, while religious experience transcends the context of time and place, it takes place within it and partakes fully of every rich aspect that belongs to it. It is the religious vocation of contemporary man to be quiet and still and hear the word which the Lord speaks, to read the signs of the time which are his word to us, to recognize him in the breaking of the bread and in every other sign which he makes of his presence.

Liturgy reflects and feeds the community's faith-experience. The point of our suggestion is this: there is, or at least there ought to be, a direct relationship between the spirituality (religious experience) of a culturally, historically defined people, their continual experience of Christ in history, and the liturgy, which not only manifests and expresses this experience but deepens it as well. This is the sense in which liturgy is the community's *sacramentum fidei:* it expresses their whole Christ-experience and is itself an encounter with Christ, an experience of Christ which transforms and enlivens. *Liturgy is the sacrament of the community's faith.* This is, in both understanding and formulation, the most faithful representation of the christian tradition of worship which we possess. It affirms (and

points the way towards a methodology for the academic discipline of scientific liturgy as well), in the correlation that is emphasized between the religious experience of a people and their liturgy, that community prayer gathers together and crystallizes, in one special community event, the moments of religious experience that have gone before; it deepens them in this experience, and looks forward with hope to their further flowering.

Such a theory and practice of worship is endorsed by Paul's exhortation: 'Therefore, my brothers, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him: a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for his acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart'.[3] Paul refers to the sacrifice of our whole lives and, in doing so, makes use of the term 'worship' to describe, not a particular prayer-service or meeting, but rather the entire scope of the christian experience as the surrender of ourselves in response to the Lord's loving invitation. Our worship is our life. Liturgy brings our life of worship to moments of crystallized worship, in which are as it were encapsulated and brought to new levels of reality in the community celebration all the moments of faith which have already been the Lord's gracious gift.

This inter-relationship of liturgy and life is not, everyone knows, a new idea. But the requirement is upon us at the present time to give serious attention to the task of trying to discover the religious experiences of the christian communities of our age, and of attempting to fashion creatively liturgies that will express and deepen these experiences. Faith is the content of worship. Without belief, and without the community that rises from and is made one by belief, liturgy is not possible. Concretely, for example, for those of us who live in the United States, the task is to learn what are the dimensions of the american religious experience and to create liturgy that will be its sacrament. The same task awaits each community of God's people.

A word of qualification, not retrenchment, should be added to what has been said. There is a certain view, current at the present time, which does indeed insist that liturgy should be the reflection of the people's life, and thus appears to agree that liturgical prayer, as we have suggested, mirrors the *fides* of the people. The conclusion is therefore drawn that it is enough to create liturgies of ecology or revolution or social justice.[4]

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[3] Rom 12, 1.

[4] This view, as it is caricatured here, may be a little

When it is affirmed that liturgy is the prayer of the community, we mean to say that this particular (sometimes local) community's prayer is truly expressive of *this community as Church*, that is, of this community as representative of the entire Church as such. In other words such community prayer, to be liturgy, would have to be the *Church's* prayer and thus would have to deal with the constant, basic, central and distinguishing elements of the Church's life. In this way, it would be prayer expressive of the central reality of the Church, and, in this sense, would clearly be *the* 'prayer of the Church' (as the Church herself describes the liturgy). Thus, whether the community in question at any particular time is an ecumenical gathering of bishops in council, or a typical parish mass, or a handful of students with their chaplain, in each case, if the community prayer is expressive of the distinguishing and central reality of the Church's life, then it is, quite literally, the prayer of the Church.

Liturgical prayer is prayer that rises from the community as such. It is distinguished from other forms of prayer because it is not derived from the central realities of the Church nor does it lead towards these central realities. At the same time, it is directly concerned with them, puts focus on them, is their *anamnesis*, celebrates them. In this way, liturgy has a certain *universal* character to it, in as much as it always deals with the essential constants that are responsible for the very life and unity of the Church herself. Liturgy deals directly with the paschal mystery which it celebrates. As the constitution points out, 'Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the 'sacrament of unity'. . . . Therefore liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it . . .'[5] The prayer of the community, then, must do what by definition it proposes to do: it must pertain to the whole body of the Church, it must be a celebration of the whole Church and must manifest the unity of faith-experience which characterizes the community of believers, the Church. This universal pertinence of the liturgy to the entire Church best explains what is meant by the familiar description of liturgy as the 'public' worship of the Church. It is 'public' in the sense that its universal character has reference to the

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simplistic, because it runs the risk of divorcing liturgy (when it is superficially understood or done) from the tradition and also of forgetting what is the nature of liturgical prayer.

[5] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 26.

essential realities of the Church. It is 'public' in as much as it deals with the entire and whole Church as such. Therefore, the celebrated definition of liturgy, recorded by Pius XII as 'public worship' (*Sacra Liturgia cultum publicum constituit*),[6] attempts, in fact, to say that liturgy is the prayer of the community of believers which is the Church.

The constitution on the liturgy has had an eye for this universal pertinence of liturgy to the entire Church. It refers, of course, to other forms of communal prayer as 'devotions' *(sacra exercitia)*, which do indeed take place within the Church, but which do not carry in themselves the heart and therefore the force of the whole Church.[7] So it is not at all inappropriate to create a liturgy whose theme is ecology. The challenge is to do so in such a way that this or some other contemporary preoccupation be seen as bathed in the light of the paschal mystery and the saving work which Christ carries out in history. The preoccupation with this mystery by the community is the source of the special priority that belongs to liturgy.

There is a further, more fundamental, question which concerns the apparent dilemma of sacred *or* secular liturgy. Is there a sense in which some aspects of reality may be described as profane and some as sacred? By way of response to this problem, it seems more accurate to regard profanity as arising from the quality of man's reaction to the reality that he is presented with, rather than impossibly attempting to segregate creation into sacred and profane arenas. As Robert Neale points out in his very interesting theology of celebration,[8] there are three possible modes of response to the experience of (sacred) reality: the profane, the magical and the religious. The profane response is to retreat from the experience and attempt to ignore the sacred by putting it out of one's mind. Neale suggests that modern man has acquired a certain facility in this work of desacralization, and that this process of deliberate turning away is the definition of the profane. But he sees hope in that, almost in spite of himself, modern man has, at the same time, exhibited a 'quasi-religious response to the sacred', because of his continued enthusiasm for festivity: with the suspicion that there is more to authentic human ritual and celebration than may immediately meet the eye.[9]

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[6] *Mediator Dei*, 20.
[7] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 13.
[8] *In Praise of Play* (New York, 1970).
[9] *Ibid.*, p 113.

The magician does not ignore reality's sacred character. He acknowledges it and manifests an anti-religious response to it by attempting to control it.[10] This has, of course, always been a temptation of religious groups such as the Church, and one which has not always been successfully resisted, with the result that magical activity has at times left its onlookers disenchanted and has turned them away from mature and even minimal religion.

The religious response is one of enthusiastic recognition and surrender to the sacred. It is, in reality, what the christian tradition represents as sacrifice, even if that idea has not always been properly clear to some of those who defend it most strongly. The essence of sacrifice is to proclaim, acknowledge and surrender to the sacred character of all reality and the dominion over it which belongs to the Lord. The eucharistic prayers (and other prayers of celebration which belong to the same genre) are the most immediate examples of the way in which the authentic christian tradition of sacrifice has been maintained.

We may conclude that the dilemma which is posed between sacred and secular liturgy is more apparent than real. There is no doubt that men act profanely, but this does not alter the nature of reality or limit, finally, its dimensions. We are invited, as Paul reminds us, to make of our whole lives a sacrifice. We make sacrament of our life of worship in the liturgy. Liturgy, like the reality which it celebrates, is sacred and will continue through the timeless ages of eternity as an *eucharistia* of praise in worship of the mystery of God and Lord.

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[10] *Ibid.*, p 117.