

AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF LITURGY

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## Editorial

**T**he papers in this issue invite us to consider different perspectives in thinking about liturgical practice and its symbolic meanings.

Gerard Moore suggests a rapprochement in what have been called, infelicitously, the “worship wars” between lovers of more ancient liturgical styles and those who consider the charismatic model more “spirit-filled”. He offers a way of better understanding each other’s emphases, and gaining appreciation of each other’s styles.

Garry Deverall engages readers in some evocative “Derridean reflections” on the meaning/s of baptism and the transformative power of this sacrament of Christian identity.

Finally, I commend to you the 2007 conference of the Academy, which will be held in Adelaide from 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> January, under the theme “Liturgy, Creation and Theology”. More information is available from the website, [www.liturgy.org.au/conference\\_2007.htm](http://www.liturgy.org.au/conference_2007.htm)

As always, I look forward to receiving your contributions for future issues of *AJL*.

Inari Thiel  
Logan City

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# ***Appreciating worship in all its variety***

*Gerard Moore*

This essay is in part an exploration, and in part a response to frustration<sup>1</sup>. First can I deal with the presenting question, my particular frustration? The issue revolves around the way that many liturgists immediately frame in negative terms their discussions of Pentecostal worship, particularly the mega churches. In the conflagration that occasionally engulfs me about the mega churches, their services, music, preaching and massive attendance, there is a strong degree of criticism of many aspects. However, as we in liturgy come to grips with this phenomenon, are we not being forced to ask some searching questions about the frames of reference we employ when discussing worship?

## **The engagement of the worshipper: three focal points in an act of worship**

There is quite a lot of fascinating discussion around the different forms and types of worship. These enable us to identify the variety of approaches so that we can examine the way these both affect the nature of the service and the types of texts, music, postures and the like that are utilized<sup>2</sup>. Without losing touch with these issues my concern is not so much with a church or tradition but rather with how an individual worshipper approaches and participates in a service,

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Andrew Doohan, Michael Joncas, Paul Mason, Anita Monro, Nathan Nettleton, Tanya Riches and Kit Smith for their helpful comments on the various drafts. Responsibility for the final text lies with the author alone.

<sup>2</sup> For an Australian contribution see Nathan Nettleton, "In Search of a Taxonomy of Liturgical Styles", *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 7 (2000): 211-223.

with the hope that this will enable an appreciation of quite diverse and entrenched points of view about worship. It may also shed some light on why there are such differences of opinion between worshippers who are attending the same service.

I would like to posit that participation in a liturgy involves the worshipper engaging with three focal points: 'experience', 'teaching' and 'ritual'. Admittedly there is something overwhelmingly obvious about these. Every act of worship ought to be an experience of the holy, both facilitating and leaving room for the workings of the Holy Spirit. As well, worship should be marked by sound teaching, involving both the teaching of Jesus, and being taught by Jesus in the worship service itself. While this involves ecumenical doctrines and denominationally flavoured approaches, it is more readily identified with the Spirit enlivened presence in the liturgy of Christ the teacher. The third is that every worship service is a ritual act, and is governed by the rules of ritual performance. What is important is that all three, as essential ingredients of every act of worship, are present and operative in each worshipper<sup>3</sup>.

Yet it seems that we do not and indeed cannot approach worship from the stand point of all three. Rather, and this is the crux of the issue, we tend to reflect upon liturgy using one of these three as the primary lens or horizon through which we view the other two. For some Christians the understanding of worship is mediated through their

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<sup>3</sup> Nathan Nettleton proposes that there is a fourth focal point, that of 'community'. While there is a lot to be said for this, my current preference is to see the desire for community as an expression of 'experience'.

experience in the worship, for others through the teaching they receive in the service, and for the third group through the enactment of the ritual as they participate in it. How does this apply?

**An application to music in worship**

The particularity of these three categories first emerged in reflection upon liturgical music, an area in which I am far from home. Yet discussions about music with students in the Assembly of God church drove home the gulf between my thinking and theirs. For these students music conjured up thoughts of a band, slow songs, fast songs, four or seven songs per service, periods of quiet, and being taken up by the music into the silence and the moment. They sought quality music with high production values and a distinctly contemporary, 'pop' feel. It did not matter whether the music was ephemeral, or easily replicated in smaller gatherings with lesser musicians, or theologically rich. Rather the music enabled them to achieve what was for them the key ingredient of good worship, an experience of the freedom of the Spirit. All other aspects of the service, then, were understood through the lens of this type of experience, and their success or otherwise measured by the nature of the experience they generated. It becomes clearer why music, with its companion silence, is important to those who attend worship in the mega-churches since it is a primary vehicle for enabling participants in the service to be moved into an experience of the Lord. In this approach it is by feelings that a worshipper judges the effectiveness of a service. The teaching in the service and the ritual structure of the



event are appreciated through the lens of this experience, particularly its musical component.

A different dynamic can be discerned in worshippers whose affinity is for churches with a robust hymn singing orientation. The quickest route to an ecclesial dispute amongst these believers is to try to change the hymnal. Hymn singing communities have a deep sense of the experience of music in the liturgy, yet it appears to be viewed by the participants through the prior principle that a hymn is a carrier of teaching. In some cases the hymnal is the main authorised ritual book precisely because of its doctrinal quality. The hymn, through its combination of musical form, text and communal singing, has power to convert wayward hearts, to persuade of truth, and impart vigour and energy to the body of Christ. Though the experience of hymn singing is of the greatest importance, the key to whether a hymn is of value to the worshipper is whether it teaches Christ. For these believers teaching is the touchstone of authentic worship. However if the above supposition is correct, we can see here a close correlation in the worshipper between 'teaching' and 'experience', which offers a more integrated approach to worship itself.

Something else is at play amongst Christians who approach worship through the lens of ritual. In terms of music, there is more appreciation of chants (e.g. the *kyrie*) and set hymns (such as the Gloria), than of hymns themselves. Songs are not chosen for their own texts or musical qualities so much as their contribution to the rite.

For example, processional songs are to aid the entrance rite and are not meant to continue overly long after that rite has concluded. The music is to be chosen so that the participants have an authentic experience of worship music, and the texts are expected to be strong on biblical, doctrinal and spiritual teaching, yet the first principle is whether the choice and performance of the music is attentive to its place in the rite.

It seems to me that it now becomes clearer why there is such misapprehension between worshippers in these three categories. Music is paramount in the 'experience' approach since it is the key to experience, and consequently there is little patience with musical forms which do not immediately rouse the worshipper to an experience of freedom in the Spirit. Those whose first movement is through 'teaching' and 'ritual' may well hold music in the highest esteem, however there it is primarily as a service to something else. Followers of these two approaches are not comfortable with music whose strength is only in the experiential and which may have little to offer by way of theological depth or ritual involvement. Worshippers who value teaching have a lesser sense of ritual music, and participants who value ritual can be at a loss to know what to do with the hymn in all its glory, especially when the expectation of the hymn form is that the work is sung in its entirety whether the procession has been completed or not.

**A note of clarification**

Before continuing it is worth adding a clarification. It is quite easy to see how these three lenses could be used to characterise the understanding of worship within different traditions. The lens of 'experience' suits Pentecostal worship, that of 'teaching' applies to many mainstream Protestant denominations, and 'ritual' is easily seen as the key to Roman Catholic and Orthodox liturgy. While there is some validity to this, it strays into territory covered by discussions of the typology of worship rather than exploring the lenses employed by individual believers. The clarification, then, is that we are attempting to deal with the worshipper rather than the worship tradition as such.

**Application to the broader liturgical canvas**

It is worth venturing beyond music to explore the impact of these three lenses on the way we as worshippers view objects and approaches across the broader liturgical canvas. One area of interest is architecture. When the key to worship is experience mediated through music, then the worshipper will be at ease with a liturgical space that is open and has a highly visible performance area. Liturgical furnishings can be minimal, but important. The worshipper must be comfortable, able to sit and reflect, able to stand and move, able to engage as fully as possible with the rhythm and flow of the service. No worshipper wants to be too removed from the centre stage. In practical terms the auditorium is the preferred building. At the symbolic level the auditorium is apt as it is a place that an

individual enters only when in search of an experience. To enter the building is to seek an experience.

Church buildings where the worshipper is first seeking instruction have different features. The pulpit is central, the seating arranged not for experience but for hearing and learning. Any decoration has the purpose of bringing the mind of the believer back to the lesson, or rather the Word. In terms of symbol, the building is marked as a place of teaching. To enter the building is to seek instruction.

For worshippers with a predominant ritual proclivity, a different sort of liturgical space may be required. A variety of shapes is possible since the important features of the building are designed to suit the ritual action. There is need for movement and processions. The required furnishings are concerned with the rites: altar, ambo, presider's chair and the like. The participants need to be able to be take up their roles and usually have a clear view of the altar and ambo. In a sense, the building is active in the rite itself, and so is treated with the reverence that is due participants in sacred actions. To enter the building is to submit to the rite.

It is possible to see how each of these lenses offers a different view of liturgical staples such as ministries, preaching, ritual structure, authority, ritual books and technology, along with personal testimonies, enthusiasm, prophecy and manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit. Further it is clear that within each of the three frameworks the lens will have a different focus for worshipper, liturgical minister

and worship leader. Here we come to the interaction of the three focal points within a service of worship.

**The interaction of the three focal points**

The foundational conviction of this paper is that liturgy comprises experience, teaching and rite. All three are necessary, and an integrated approach allows a worshipper to engage with all three effectively. However the contention of this paper is that a different approach to liturgy ensues depending on which one the individual worshipper holds as the primary lens through which he or she understands worship. Admirers of mega-church worship are left uncomprehending of how many Christians and some liturgists cannot recognize the workings of the Spirit in their services. Nor do they readily understand the hostility of congregations more attuned to teaching and rite who are finding that their members, especially the young, are drifting off to ‘contemporary’ worship events. We should recognize that the differences between teaching and ritual communities themselves linger across history, and only in recent decades has real progress been made in ecumenical liturgical understanding.

By remaining with the individual worshipper herself or himself we have the opportunity to open up a further area of complexity within a liturgical event. For example it is clear within the Pentecostal movement that while the worshipper is attentive to experience, the worship leader is highly attuned to structure and ritual form. These

rituals, more so perhaps than many liturgical rites in other churches, are highly orchestrated, with a lot of attention paid to structure, timing, pace, lighting and creating effects that match or change the mood of the participants. Here it can be said that the primary lens of the leader is the rite with close attention paid to the participant's experience of the rite, while in the same service the primary lens of the individual worshipper is experience with little attentiveness to the ritual form. This is not confined to Pentecostal worship, as a similar approach can be found in so named 'traditional' Latin Mass Catholics who cling to the Tridentine liturgy. There the priest is totally absorbed in the production of the rite. Yet those in attendance are taken up with a religious experience that is attached to the proper performance of the rubrics, the rendition of the chants by the choir, and the quality of the furnishings and vestments. If this analysis rings true, then it is important to recognise that while all in attendance hold to the three focal points, some view the worship through one lens while at the same time others are operating out of a different one. This can lead to a varied but harmonious experience of worship.

There are also occasions where the same type of event can be viewed quite favourably when examined through different lenses. We can see this with the appreciation for Taizé style chants found amongst worshippers of the 'experience' lens and those of the 'ritual' lens since the chants have a mantra-like quality that effectively rouses the participants to an experience, while at the same time being closely

suiting to the rite. However those who view the same music through the lens of teaching may find them to be theologically poor fare<sup>4</sup>.

On another tack, different approaches can cause discomfort within each of the three groups. The addition of a piece of 'contemporary' music within a Catholic Mass may not be greeted well by liturgically minded worshippers attentive to the ritual structure. While the desire to add such a piece may result from ritual confusion by the planning team it may well also be a sign that the experience of the rite is deadening and unspiritual. Similarly worshippers in Pentecostal congregations who feel worn by the constant enthusiasm or uninspired by unrelenting upbeat preaching are in a situation of modifying their interpretative lenses, with a reorientation of their primary sensibility. Perhaps what is needed most by liturgists working in these situations is the understanding that the three approaches are legitimate, arise from different starting points, and meet different needs.

In all this there is the problem of balance, yet a balance between all three is most probably unattainable and even unwanted. There can be only one primary lens, nevertheless an integrated approach is necessary. Any attempt to force a balance between all three risks losing the particularity of each, and could well result in even more bland and lacklustre liturgy. Rather, what is needed is that the

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<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Nathan Nettleton for pointing out this possibility.

primary position, whether experience, teaching or rite, be complemented by the others.

### **Reflections on metaphor and theology**

Throughout the paper I have had recourse to two metaphors, one around focal points and the other the lens. These need a little explanation. In mathematics a circle is a shape with a single focal point; i.e. once you have chosen a point, you can pull out a compass and draw a circle. However to draw an oval shape you need to choose not one but two focal points; i.e. every oval requires two points of reference. The use of the imagery of focal points is inspired by the mathematics of the oval. Metaphorically, to engage in worship each worshipper needs three focal points, just as the oval requires two and the circle one. Consequently the premise that every act of worship has all three. Yet the reality is that during worship we are often more aware of one than the others, and in fact we cannot hold all three at once but at different times in different services rely on one as the basis for engagement in the liturgical event. A second metaphor was required to capture this, and so recourse to the lens. We cannot look through three lenses at once, but the mind's eye can see through one lens at a time, and it can even look through one lens through another more primary one. It would be difficult to see much, but it is not impossible. The key to this metaphor is that it forces us to ask which is the primary lens (the single focal point) through which we are interpreting the others.



There is a danger that professional liturgists and liturgically trained members of the community can rely too heavily on the focal point of the 'rite', and pay less attention to the 'experience' or the 'teaching' element. Similarly the choice for one lens over another may be governed by the theological tradition in which the worshipper has been formed and which comes to the fore, often unconsciously, when the person engages with communal prayer. On the other hand, constant positive or negative experiences in worship, particularly around leadership, may make one lens more attractive than the others, and so shape how a worshipper perceives her or his participation in worship. However, though we may all have an instinctual appreciation of one focal point, our worship requires that attention be given to all three.

#### **Further directions**

My hope is that this excursion is helpful in disentangling some of the various approaches and reactions to worship across churches and also within churches, in particular the more Pentecostal experiences and worship events. If it proves to be a feasible hypothesis then it would be worth considering what motivates worshippers to chose one lens over another, how the three reflect individualistic and corporate attitudes to worship, their coincidence with postmodern, modern and pre-modern patterns of thought, their relationship to culture, and their implications for liturgical theology and ecumenical worship.

# ***The work of mourning: Derridean reflections upon the waters***

*Garry J Deverall*

## **The holy ambiguity of baptism**

There is an holy ambiguity to the sacrament of baptism. On the one hand, the waters represent an original wounding, trauma, and loss — surely the source and wellspring of all that we might refer to, with Jacques Derrida, as ‘the work of mourning’.<sup>1</sup> Yet, on the other hand, the waters are also the power of God to inaugurate a new world, a world that may *appear to be* patterned upon the old, yet is not. For now this world is looked at as if from another person or place, such that our former experience of the world is transfigured into some kind of ‘new experience with experience’, as Jüngel has said.<sup>2</sup> This because we ourselves have become different or, more strictly speaking, we have finally come to ourselves, our true selves, by becoming another self, the self who is Christ. As St. Paul says in Galatians: ‘Now I live, yet not I; it is Christ who lives within me.’ So there is something, I suggest, of the oft-neglected themes of Holy Saturday in the story or memory of baptism. Only by mourning, by visiting the world of the dead, is Jesus able to gain the power to overcome death. Only by mourning and pining for a world that has

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, trans. Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001)

<sup>2</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983)p 32

*not yet arrived*, only by being prepared to die in the midst of life, do the baptised come face to face with the Christ who can raise them from death into the strange new world of the kingdom of God. In baptism we mourn. Not for the loss of an Eden that has been devastated through sin, flood and fire. In baptism we mourn for a world that has not yet arrived, and can only arrive as we do the work of mourning, that is, speak and act as the material presence of an absent Christ, who died and rose again, and is coming to our world in glory to transform it utterly.

**Water is dangerous: it can take one's life away**

One should understand that, in the ancient world, water was not so benign as we regard it today, flowing purely and freely from our taps as it does. In the ancient world, water very often symbolised chaos and evil. On the waves of the sea, many ancient people lost their lives. With the flooding of the rivers, they lost their harvests. In the ancient world, people knew that water was both necessary to life but also the bringer of death. "Fear death by water" said the Buddha in T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. What that meant for Eliot, as it means for us, is that the waters of baptism should not be regarded as tame, given only to feed and sustain life as we already know it. The waters of baptism are dangerous: they are designed to take our lives away. Without doing so, they cannot give us a new life. Consider that icon of Jesus' baptism in the traditions of the Eastern Church. Under Christ's feet is Leviathan, an ancient symbol of water's power to kill and destroy. In order to be baptised, Jesus had to be willing to submit

himself to the chaotic power of Leviathan. For that is the only way to overcome Leviathan's power. Perhaps we moderns, stuck in the Enlightenment categories of control and safety, may only get in touch with the unsettling *force* of that ancient sensibility when something like a tsunami comes along to confront the heterogeneity of our mythologies.

**Derrida: mourning as the work of any life lived before the Other**

Jacques Derrida died just over two years ago. In his last published book, Derrida spoke of mourning as a work (or, in my designation, a liturgy) that is inaugurated at the beginning of life, at the naming of a new life, not at its end with the funeral. For in naming someone we secretly acknowledge that the substance of that person is as much absent to us as it is present. The name can be present where the person is not. The name stands in for a person who is never entirely here with us in the now. The name signifies that the personhood of an/other is able to permanently elude our instinct for presence, still arriving, as it were, from an immemorial past or unimagined future. There is a paradox, therefore, in speaking to, for, or about the other, whether in life or in death. Such speech 'comes to tear itself toward that which, or the one who, can no longer receive it; it rushes toward the impossible'. Still, the impossible sometimes, 'by chance' says Derrida, becomes possible, when the one we name is the one in me, in you, in us.<sup>3</sup> As in death, a person whom we regard as very much alive is only ever present to us insofar as he or she works *in* us, in our

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<sup>3</sup> Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, p 45

*interiority*, as a name. So, there is death, and a life that is made possible by death, even from the very first naming.<sup>4</sup>

In Derrida-speak, this paradox is signified by the relationship between two ancient terms, the *punctum*, the prick or wound of the absolutely unique and singular, and the *stadium*, that mythological network of meanings by which we render the world habitable:

The heterogeneity of the *punctum* is rigorous; its originality can bear neither contamination nor concession ... This absolute other composes with the same, with its absolute other that is thus not its opposite, with the locus of the same and of the *stadium* ... If the *punctum* is more or less that itself, dissymmetrical — to everything and in itself — then it can invade the field of the *stadium*, to which, strictly speaking, it does not belong.<sup>5</sup>

This means that the *punctum* can ‘induce’ a metonymy. ‘As soon as it allows itself to be drawn into a network of substitutions, it can invade everything, objects as well as affects. This singularity that is nowhere in the field mobilizes everything everywhere; it pluralizes itself.’ This is the force, power, or *dynamis* of the *punctum*.<sup>6</sup> It is this metonymic force of the *punctum* that allows us to speak of the unique other, to speak of and to it. It makes possible a ‘relation without relation’.<sup>7</sup> The absent living resist and address our exteriorisations in a way that differs from the non-responsibility of a corpse only, perhaps, as a matter of degree.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, p 46

<sup>5</sup> Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, p 57

<sup>6</sup> Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, p 57

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, p 58

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, p 47

Mourning is therefore something that happens everyday. It is a recognition, in the midst of life, that the other who faces me is not one who can be finally be appropriated into my own agenda for life. The other is mysterious, a particularity who resists my rendering of the world by a kind of absence-in-presence. The other, we might say, is like a parable that is able to question my personal mythologies, and in questioning to reconfigure, or reinvigorate, or make the same seem somehow different. Or, in the speech of Derrida, the other may be like a *punctum*, a prick of conscience or a wounding, which makes the lore of the tribe seem completely inadequate. Love, for example, is singular. For Derrida, love is not the love of a universal figure, but the singularity of a relation; 'it disorganises all studied discourses, all theoretical systems and philosophies.' The singular other can only appear by disappearing. Such love is, as Blanchot said, an 'absence-as-presence'. The other who appears this ways is like the Referent in a photo. The Referent is not a real or a present. It is another who appears by not appearing.<sup>9</sup>

That should not be taken to imply, however, that the Christic other encountered in baptism — baptism as a mourning in and with Christ — may be taken as the quasi-transcendental legitimisation of any Nietzschean-styled permissiveness, where individuals may do whatever they want by way of flouting the law of the tribe. There are some, the most radically 'postmodern' amongst us, who would perhaps like it to be that way. For isn't it frankly true that most of us

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<sup>9</sup> Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, p 48

feel legitimately *exempt* from what is socially acceptable? Each of us has a sense of the “higher law” in whose name we regularly break the law or contravene what our tribe would expect of us. Indeed, confessing such transgressions has today become passé. When slightly drunk at dinner parties, we will all put our hands up to confess. Speeding tickets, tax evasion, even sexual misdemeanours, these are ‘no big deal’. If the television show *Seinfeld* is about anything, it is about watching other people actually do what most of us still baulk at doing, even though we have no real reason not to. *Seinfeld* is about the ‘higher law’ to which many of us subscribe today, the Nietzschean law of the will to power which says: I can do anything I like because, in the end, all that matters is what *I* make of myself.

**The Rite of Baptism today: legitimisation or subversion of the *status quo*?**

Today the church celebrates baptism within a social and cultural environment where baptism has been largely sanitised of its dangerous and subversive qualities. In the paedobaptist churches the rite is all-too-often reduced to a quaint and pleasant little naming ceremony. Friends and relatives gather in their finery on a bright Sunday morning; the child’s forehead is wetted with a few tiny drops of water while his or her godparents are content to make promises they can neither comprehend nor keep. In the so-called ‘baptist’ churches, the rite is often reduced to its pre-Christian tribal meanings, i.e. baptism as a rite of passage into responsible adult membership of the tribe or congregation. Unfortunately, neither of these practices is

adequate to the baptism undergone by Jesus, the baptism that is paradigmatic for Christians. For while the baptisms of the tribe pander to social and anthropological needs, the baptism of Jesus models the rather anti-social action of God, by which the baptised person is torn away from his or her 'natural' tribal roles in favour of a way of life which actually subverts and fractures what is commonly done. Christian baptism, then, is far more than a capitulation to the symbolic 'lore' of the tribe, such that the *commonplace commonsense* is owned and internalised.

The mourning that makes us genuinely *Christian* in the sacrament of baptism is infinitely more difficult than the choice for either the lore of the tribe or the higher law of the will-to-power. Why? Because in baptism we confess a profounder and more painful truth: that *neither the 'symbolic' law of the tribe, nor the 'higher' law of the will-to-power* are able to accomplish a self that is capable of that freedom we call *joy*. The law of the tribe can only ever accomplish our guilt, while the higher law is simply a *fetish we have made for ourselves* in a desperate attempt to escape the horror of subject-less anonymity of which Emmanuel Lévinas wrote so profoundly.<sup>10</sup> In theological perspective, the impossible journey towards joy (or, in Lacanian terms, *jouissance*) goes by no other way than by a literally *unbearable* encounter with God who was in Christ. In this perspective, we can never really become ourselves apart from the traumatic interventions

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<sup>10</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), p. 61.



that the Bible calls creation and redemption. Christian baptism is therefore painful in the extreme because here we admit that it is not ourselves but another, God, who gives our life and livelihood; that we are not the masters of our destiny or the makers of our own salvation; that our fetishized lives therefore have no more substance than a house of cards.

To confess or avow the truth which comes from another, rather than from ourselves alone, is painful in the extreme, for here we touch the raw wound of that founding *trauma* that most of us spend our whole lives running from. *The founding trauma who is God*. "In the beginning," says the Book of Genesis, the universe was a void and formless waste. It was a watery Nothing. But over this dark Nothingness the Spirit of God brooded, and that Spirit spoke. "Let there be light!" and there was. This is a story about the making of the world, certainly, but it is also about the making of the human self. It tells us that the Self is never itself without the traumatic intervention or presence of another. The call or voice of this other summons us from the womb-like Nothing of infinite solipsism into the real world of consciousness, inter-dependence and relationship. Thus, we are called to ourselves by an intervention, a creation, an interrupting trauma that leaves its mark on us forever.

In this, says Slavoj Žižek, Christianity and psychoanalysis are agreed: that the first event is the traumatic arrival of another, and that most of us spend our lives running away from this event, pretending that we

can found ourselves, or make our own salvation.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, the way to healing is to return to the founding trauma, and find there a God who is irrevocably *for* us, who longs for and promises our liberation. For Christians, this constitutes a return to the violence of the cross, that sacrifice to end all sacrifices in which is revealed, as René Girard has said, a God who asks for the worship of mercy rather than sacrificial appeasement.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that a return to the founding trauma can be accomplished by human beings in and of themselves. For a trauma is exactly that archaic or eschatological event which *cannot* be in/corporated or re/membered. Yet, God is one who makes the return possible from the side of divinity. In the Spirit, God makes of Christ the *traverse* between the founding event and the event of baptism, such that baptism becomes a precisely *real* submersion of the self in the *yet more real* selfhood of Christ in his accomplished humanity, a humanity finally competent to perform the unique mercy of God. Here the human self is both lost and recovered more wholly than ever before; trauma is transfigured into joy. Joy, of course, is a vocative language, a language of prayer. Its primary motivation is neither to constitute the other as a version of the same, nor to reduce the transcendence of the other to a particular appearance. Joy simply *celebrates* the always-already-accomplished fact of the other as the salvific centre of the self.

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<sup>11</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London/New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 210.

### **Mourning and hope**

In this we catch a glimpse of the absurdly paradoxical *hope* inscribed in Christian baptism. For baptism is not only a letting-go of the fantasy-self, the lie of a self that is its own law and judge, but also the arrival of another self, a truer self given in love by God. Such arrivals are inscribed everywhere in Mark's story of Jesus' baptism, literally everywhere. The river in which Jesus is baptised is the Jordan. It is the river that, in the memory of Israel, marks their exodus from the land of slavery into the land of promise, their transformation from a loose collection of tribal nomads into a federated nation with a land and a holy vocation given by Yahweh. The baptism therefore recalls that God is one who liberates, who takes a broken people to his breast and gives them both a new name, and a new purpose. Note, also, that the baptism of Jesus is placed by Mark alongside a memory of the exile in Babylon. Isaiah interpreted that event as an intervention by God to change the people's hearts. The city's nobles had become obsessed with their own power and prestige. They had forgotten the claims of charity and mercy, and so God destroyed the city. In that context, the baptism of Jesus can be read as a renewal of the work of God in human society: after destruction and exile comes forgiveness and a new covenant, the advent of a new relationship between God and the people of God's affection.

Still, the most potent trace of arriving hope, in Mark's story, is when the heavens are ripped open as Jesus comes out of the water, and the Spirit of God descends upon him like a dove. Again, one does not

necessarily understand these symbols unless one knows the stories of the Hebrew Bible. There one reads of a God who dwells in a holy of holies, an ark that is placed behind a curtain in the innermost chamber of the temple. Only the High Priest, or some specially appointed leader like Moses, may approach God there, and usually only once per year at *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. To my mind, the theatre of these Jewish rituals is about the irreducible otherness of God, the danger of assuming too close a familiarity with God. God is in heaven, hidden behind a veil that we may not open from our side. Yet, here in the baptism of Jesus, the veil that separates God from ourselves is not simply put aside, but *ripped to pieces*. Furthermore, it is done by *God*, from God's 'side,' if you like. In the Spirit, God actually *leaves* the holy of holies in heaven, and comes to dwell within the heart and spirit of one who is not simply a prophet, but a Son, a beloved one. No longer is God to be understood as the other beyond us, beyond our being in the heavens. From now on God is to be understood as the *other who is Christ*, a human being who walks amongst us, who speaks our language, who shows us what God is like as a child reveals the form and character of his or her parent. That is to renounce a religion of the 'sublime' in favour of what Žižek calls a radical religion of 'desublimation':

not desublimation in the sense of a simple reduction of God to man, but desublimation in the sense of the descendance of the sublime Beyond to the everyday level. Christ is a "ready-made God" (as Boris Groys put it), he is fully human, inherently indistinguishable from other humans in exactly the same way Judy is indistinguishable from Madeleine in [Hitchcock's] *Vertigo* ... it is only the imperceptible "something," a pure

appearance which cannot ever be grounded in a substantial property, that makes him divine.<sup>13</sup>

To put all this another way, what Mark proclaims about what happened to Christ is also something that may happen to all of us. After the collapse and breakdown of the false self that is part of a genuinely baptismal avowal, God promises to come to us with the gift of a new self: a self forged within by the cruciform activity of the Spirit who was in Christ and now bears, forever, Christ's form and character. In the Spirit, Christ himself comes to us as the love and vitality that empowers us to put off the old and embrace the gift of the new and truer self. Galatians again: 'Now I live, and yet not I; it is Christ who lives within me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me' (2.20).

Mark's story confronts the commonplace understanding and practice of baptism in two ways. First, it tells us that there is no such thing as a Christian baptism without the hard and soul-destroying work of what I have been calling mourning. In the first centuries of the Christian church, this was taken very seriously. Several years were given over to the catechumenal learning of the faith. Through a process of action and reflection, the catechumens wrestled against the demons of both self and tribe; and they did so in the power of a newly arriving self, figured for them in the mentor or sponsor who was, themselves, a figure of Christ. Second, the story tells us that baptism will bear its human fruit not because of our own will or determination,

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<sup>13</sup> Žižek, *On Belief*, p. 90.

but because *God is faithful*. The Father sends the Spirit, the Spirit of his son Jesus, to hollow out the old self from the inside out, and replace it with a selfhood of God's own making and design. In this sense, baptism is not simply about the ceremonial occasion itself. It is rather a cipher and a ritual performance of the Christian life as a whole: a calling and a pledge to leave the false self behind, and to wrestle always to find the truth about things which is God's gift to everyone who asks for it. This second movement confronts our fantasies about either absorption into the tribe *or* the will-to-power. For here we learn the difficult and liberating truth that we have never been on our own, that even the breath that we take this moment is possible only because *God* has made it possible.

Baptism, then, is a mourning and a building, it is mourning *as* building. It is the Christian life. It is a promise from *God* that may only be received and performed by means of a *human* promising: to walk the way of the cross by which trauma is transfigured into joy. All of which is to say that it is perhaps the memory in me, in my body, of the encounter with Christ in baptism that gives me the courage to live responsibly. For what is my life if not a response and a metonymic substitution for these memories, memories so powerful and present that they make for me, and for all they love in me, a future?

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## Book Review

Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (eds), *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey* (Oxford: OUP, 2006) 978-0-19-529756-0, 0-19-529756-3 h/b pp xvi + 614 RRP: US\$45

From its endpaper maps of the Anglican Communion to its boxed-text excerpts from Prayer Books early and recent, *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer* lives up to its subtitle: 'A Worldwide Survey.' Its contributors represent a 'Who's Who' of liturgical scholarship around the Anglican world, including three Australians: Charles Sherlock writing on twentieth century Australian revisions, Ron Dowling on Eucharistic theologies and Gillian Varcoe on the evolution of Marriage services.

In its early sections, the *Guide* is organized historically, with an overview of 'The Birth of the Classical Prayer Book' and accompanying chapters on the social and cultural life of the Prayer Book, including music, architecture, typography and early translations. But it is far from being just another historical overview of how 1549 and 1552 led to 1662 and thence to the diversity of twentieth century revisions. After the first hundred and fifty pages, the focus changes to geography. How did the Prayer Book get to Africa, North America, Ireland and Scotland? And what became of it there, amongst Methodists, Unitarians, Lutherans, and even 'Continuing Anglicans'?



The idea of a ‘family resemblance’ between Prayer Books as we know them today informs the next two hundred pages of the *Guide*. Seven writers from all over Africa provide ‘family portraits’ of the Prayer Books they are now using. The Pacific, the Americas, Asia and Europe follow. This provides both a crash course in the history of Anglican missions, and also a valuable resource for clergy in multi-cultural Australia who have in our care people whose Anglican experience may have begun in Ghana or Myanmar (Burma), Fiji or Canada, Southern Africa, the Philippines or New Zealand.


Then follow a hundred pages of contemporary liturgical theology, organized according to the tables of contents of classic Prayer Books, from the Daily Office through the Eucharist, Calendar, Initiation, Catechisms, Marriage, Funerals and Ordination. This theological section offers another essential entry point to understanding Anglicanism, through the lens of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, discerning what Anglicans believe through discovering how we pray.

A final section on ‘The Future of the Book of Common Prayer’ touches on technology, the internet, and ongoing problems with translation and enculturation. Appendices include a helpful Chronology of Anglican liturgical developments and a splendid Glossary running from ‘ablution’ to ‘words of institution’ via ‘Ornaments rubric’ and ‘suffrages.’ A Select Bibliography includes

scholarly works and Prayer Books currently and formerly authorized in all provinces of the Anglican Communion.

*The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer* is an astonishing feat of historical, geographical and theological sampling, analysis and synthesis. It will become an indispensable reference for both scholars and practitioners of liturgy. It is good that it has been published now, as the last of the twentieth century revisions has been authorised, and before a new round of controversy, based more on biblical hermeneutics than on liturgical forms, begins to re-shape the Anglican Communion in the twenty-first century.

— Rev'd Dr Elizabeth J Smith



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