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Dr Carmel Pilcher rsj, chair of the Planning Committee, welcomes the Societas Congress to Sydney; our President, Dr David Pitman, looks pleased.

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**Where is your God?
Luther on God's self-localisation**

John Kleinig¹

Luther occupied the chair in the Holy Scriptures at the University of Wittenberg for most of his working life. Professionally, then, he worked as an exegete and lectured on various books of the Bible. In the last part of his life he concentrated mainly on the Old Testament. As he reworked his Catholic heritage evangelically in these lectures, he repeatedly reflected on the apparent localisation by God of himself at the temple in Jerusalem. He, as it were, took up the ancient taunt of the pagan idolaters against the Israelites for their lack of idols and asked himself: 'Where is your God?' His answer was that the process of divine self-localisation which had begun in the Old Testament, culminated in the incarnation of our Lord.² In the man Jesus God localised Himself once and for all far more physically and completely than any pagan god in any statue.³

In this paper I would like to explore how Luther deals with the self-localisation of God at the tabernacle and the temple in the Old Testament.⁴ My interest in

¹ This essay first appeared in Dean O. Wenthe and others (eds.), *All Theology Is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press: Fort Wayne, 2000, 117-31. It is published here by permission of the author.

² The main texts in which Luther develops the theme of God's self-localisation are found in the American Edition of *Luther's Works* (Fortress: Philadelphia, and Concordia: St. Louis, 1955-), 1, 94f, 248-250, 309, 330; 2, 284-286; 3, 108f, 163f; 168f; 4, 178-183; 5, 241-251; 6, 127-129, 265f; 12, 352; 13, 33-37; 19, 44f, 79f; 23, 120-125; 37, 68f, henceforth cited as *LW*, and in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Herman Böhlhaus Nachfolger: Weimar, 1912-1921), 16.530f; 25.94; 25.236f; 40.III.51-57, 335-339, 399-443, henceforth cited as *WA*. See also Luther's rather helpful discussion on three possible modes of presence in *LW* 37, 214-230, parts of which are quoted in the *Formula of Concord*, Solid Declaration, VII, 93-103 (*The Book of Concord*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert [Fortress: Philadelphia, 1959], 586f.

³ Partial treatments of this theme can be found in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, tr. Robert C. Schultz, Fortress: Philadelphia, 1966, 20-24, 35-42 and in Jonathon D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, Brill: Leiden, 1994, 20-60. The two most discerning explorations of God's localisation in terms of Luther's liturgical understanding of the incarnation are by David S. Yeago, 'The Catholic Luther,' *First Things* 61 (1996): 37-41, and Adam G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2008, 108-130.

⁴ The most significant general monographs by Old Testament scholars on the nature of God's presence with Israel are: R. E. Clements, *God and Temple. The Idea of the Divine Presence in Ancient Israel*, Blackwell: Oxford, 1965; and S. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*, Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1978. See also the Biblical overview provided by G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A*

this is threefold. First, I am interested in Luther's understanding of the continuity between Israelite and Christian worship. Secondly, since much of Luther's teaching on this topic was forged in response to the enthusiasts, I would like to ascertain how Luther can help us as we develop a Biblical liturgical theology in response to the challenge of the Pentecostal movement. A translation of three important texts, in which Luther deals with God's self-localisation, is also given as an appendix to this essay.

1. The Place where God wills to be found

In a sermon on John 6:51 from 1531 Luther said: 'If you want to have God, then mark where He resides and where He wants to be found'.⁵ In that remark we have the foundation for Luther's theology of worship and God's self-localisation in worship.

It is, of course, true that God was naturally present⁶ everywhere in all his creation.⁷ Yet, even though God was present everywhere, he was present in an elusive, hidden way, masked and concealed from human sight. He did not make Himself accessible and available everywhere for everybody, but only for His people in certain appointed places.⁸ There He was present *for* them.⁹ God then had chosen where He would meet with His people. There where He chose to meet with His people He opened Himself to them; there He revealed Himself to them and gave them access to Himself. There He was present in grace rather than wrath.¹⁰ There He heard the prayers of His people, accepted their offerings, and blessed them.¹¹ God chose these meeting places; His people did not choose them and establish them where they willed.¹² Since God willed to dwell in these places and to reveal Himself there, the people could take hold of God there. If they sought God there, they could be sure that they would find Him. It was as if God had said:

Biblical Theology of The Dwelling Place of God, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17, Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois, 2004.

⁵ LW 23, 121.

⁶ In LW 19, 44f, Luther distinguishes between the natural and spiritual modes of God's presence. While God is naturally present as creator and judge everywhere in everything, he is spiritually present only where he reveals himself through the Holy Spirit in his word to the faithful in divine worship.

⁷ LW 37, 57-63; cf. 6, 127; 23, 121; 36, 342.

⁸ In LW 3, 163f; 4, 178 and 6, 266 Luther illustrates this teaching linguistically by explaining the theological significance of the tabernacle as a *mo'ed*, i.e. a definite and specified place of worship.

⁹ LW 37, 68f.

¹⁰ LW 2, 286.

¹¹ LW 2, 284, 285; 4, 178; 6, 128; 23, 121; WA 40.III, 52-54, 336-337.

¹² LW 6, 127-129.

'I will not let myself be found, I will not hear (prayers) or be worshipped, at the places of your choice.¹³ Cities, forests, meadows, hill and vale are all Mine, to be sure; but I do not want to be worshipped, honoured, or acknowledged there; I insist that you worship Me in the place and in the manner which I shall prescribe for you'.¹⁴

Luther traces this theme of God's self-localisation right through the Old Testament. Already in the garden God gave our primeval parents the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as their 'temple'. Luther understood it as a sacred grove. There they as physical beings could worship God physically.¹⁵ It was 'Adam's church, altar and pulpit'.¹⁶

The fall resulted in the radical displacement of human beings. Luther develops this theme of spiritual dislocation graphically in connection with the curse on Cain.¹⁷ Cain was turned loose without any definitive word of God.¹⁸ Like a bird which is free to roam the open air, he is simply sent out to any indefinite place and work, without a word of promise or command from God. Suspended between heaven and earth and at home in neither realm, he becomes a restless wanderer who cannot settle permanently anywhere, an anxious spiritual fugitive who has no security and stability anywhere. Since he is without God's word, he is displaced and left without any given location; he does 'not know what to believe, hope, or endure'; he has 'no certainty as to the outcome of anything' that he does or undertakes to do.¹⁹ In contrast to Cain, Seth 'had a definite promise, definite places, definite ceremonies for the worship of God'.²⁰

¹³ Here Luther contrasts those places that humans chose to worship God, even though they have no divine sanction to do so, with those places that God chooses to meet with his people. In this he recalls Jereboam's self-devised liturgical innovations in 1 Kings 12:25-33 and Paul's warning against self-chosen piety in Colossians 2:23.

¹⁴ *LW* 23, 121.

¹⁵ *LW* 1, 94f; cf. 1, 130, 131.

¹⁶ *LW* 1, 95.

¹⁷ *LW* 1, 293-295, 298-301, 306.

¹⁸ At first glance this seems to be a rather far-fetched exegetical assertion, since God does, in fact, protect Cain from vengeance by putting his mark on him. Yet this assertion needs to be understood in the light of Luther's understanding of the blessing given to the primeval couple in Gen 1:28 and the mandate given to Adam in Gen 2:15-17. Unlike God's dislocating judgment on Cain in Gen 4:10-12, they provide Adam and Eve with their God-given location and vocation.

¹⁹ *LW* 1, 300.

²⁰ *LW* 1, 301. Here Luther alludes to Genesis 4:26 which he later interprets in this way: 'Here a most excellent definition is given of what it means to worship God, namely, to call

After the fall God gave the dislocated primeval couple the sacrifices as a sign of His gracious presence with them²¹ and as a place where they could call on His name.²² God carried this one step further with Abraham and the patriarchs by appearing to them at particular places in the land of Canaan and designating them as holy places.²³ They built altars at these places where their descendants later served the Lord. Luther explains the significance of this in his discussion on Abraham's erection of his first altar at Shechem:

'Abraham did not arbitrarily select this place for an altar. The Lord Himself, who appeared to Abraham there, selected it; for the Lord is its first founder. He shows Himself there because He wants to be worshipped there and have His promises proclaimed (there)'.²⁴

Yet despite the establishment of these altars, the worship of the patriarchs was not restricted to any single 'special place', nor was it conducted in any 'fixed form'.²⁵ That came later!

The most decisive step in God's self-localisation in the Old Testament came with the establishment of the tabernacle at Mt Sinai and its eventual location in Jerusalem. In the law of Moses God determined where, when, how, and by whom He was to be worshipped.²⁶ After the lawgiving at Sinai, the tabernacle was the place which God appointed for the Israelites to 'gather there, and perform the sacred rites there'.²⁷ After locating the tabernacle first at Shiloh and then at Gibeon, God eventually chose Jerusalem as His dwelling place.²⁸ God commanded Solomon to build a temple there for Him as a place of sacrifice and prayer. There He resided with his glory hidden in a cloud. There the infinite God chose to be enthroned on the mercy seat and to dwell between the cherubim. There He 'was enclosed in the mercy seat, to which He had bound

upon the name of the Lord, a work or act of worship in the First Table, which contains the commandments about the true worship of God...a small church is formed in which Adam, as high priest, rules everything by the Word and sound doctrine...God gave her this added spiritual blessing, that they could meet in a definite place, preach, pray, sacrifice...' (*LW* 1:327)

²¹ *LW* 1, 249; cf. 3, 106

²² *LW* 1, 327-330.

²³ *LW* 2, 284, 286f; 5, 78; 6, 225f, 250.

²⁴ *LW* 2, 284.

²⁵ *LW* 4, 183

²⁶ *WA* 4.125.36.35f.

²⁷ *LW* 2, 285.

²⁸ *WA* 40.III.54.1-3.

Himself'.²⁹ He promised that 'He would speak from the mercy seat to draw the people' to Himself there.³⁰ He promised that He 'would dwell there, be present, and hear the invocations and prayers of those who called upon Him'.³¹

Since Jerusalem was the only place which God had designated for Israel's worship, the people who lived far from Jerusalem, or even in exile like Daniel in Babylon, turned bodily to Jerusalem and directed their prayers to that place, for 'God did not will to hear prayers anywhere else except in that one place'.³² Luther went even further than that in stressing the localisation of God there. He maintained that whenever the prophets and psalmist spoke about God, they always referred to the God who dwelt in Jerusalem and so was, as it were, contained there.³³

In all this Luther was working out the implications of Christ's incarnation exegetically and liturgically. His basic conviction was that God dealt with us physical beings physically. Human beings do not find God by climbing up self-made ladders into heaven. The ladder to heaven, as is shown in the story of Jacob's dream, comes down to earth. This is how he describes it:

'God governs us in such a way that wherever He speaks with us here on earth, the approach to the kingdom of heaven in open ... But where is that place found? On *earth*, where the ladder which touches heaven stands, where the angels descend and ascend, where Jacob sleeps. It is a *physical place (locus corporalis)*, but here there is an ascent into heaven without physical ladders, without wings and feathers'.³⁴

Luther then understands God's liturgical self-localisation in the tabernacle and temple incarnationally. Hence he has this to say about the presence of God in Jerusalem:

'God ... dwelt *bodily* (there). The people of Israel were enjoined to pray nowhere but at God's dwelling place, which He had chosen and designated ... Therefore all who lived in the land were obligated to address their prayers and fix their hearts to the place where God sojourned *bodily* through His word, to assure that they

²⁹ WA 40.III.336.16.

³⁰ LW 6, 127.

³¹ LW 4, 178.

³² WA 40.III.52.35.

³³ WA 40.III.335-338; cf. LW 12, 352.

³⁴ LW 5, 247

would worship no other God than Him who sat enthroned over the cherubim on the mercy seat'.³⁵

2. The place where God dwells through his Word

How could God's people know where God was to be found? Luther answered this question most simply: 'our theology ... teaches that God wills to hear (prayers), be served, sought and prayed to, according to His word rather than our fancies'.³⁶ Here we have a fundamental principle in Luther's theology of worship, so fundamental that he, rather surprisingly, speaks of two categories of worship - right worship with God's word and idolatry without God's word.³⁷

By His word God instituted and established the place of worship which was acceptable to him and the manner of worship which was pleasing to Him. By His commands God designated certain places where He willed to be found and certain modes of worship which pleased Him. By His promises he 'bound Himself' to those places, so that His people could approach Him there and meet with Him there.³⁸ Since He had made His will known to them in His word, they could be sure that He would receive their sacrifices and hear their prayers at the place which He had chosen; they could be sure that He would be pleased with them and would accept them there; they could be sure that He would be graciously present with them and bless them there. God's word which had established these places also consecrated them and everything done there in obedience to it.³⁹ So, since God had instituted their worship at a particular place, the Israelites could be certain that God was pleased with them and their worship at this place. Luther says:

'God wants our conscience to be certain and sure that it is pleasing to Him. This cannot be done if the conscience is led by its own feeling, but only if it relies on the Word of God. Therefore if they should worship God in a place chosen by themselves, even if they pleased themselves thereby, nevertheless they would not be sure that they were pleasing God. They were sure that they were pleasing Him only if they made offerings in a place set apart through the Word of God'.⁴⁰

³⁵ *LW* 19, 80f

³⁶ *WA* 40.III.52.19-21

³⁷ See *LW* 35, 268-273.

³⁸ *WA* 15.94.7, 12; 40.III.336.16

³⁹ *LW* 2, 284f; cf. *WA* 40.III.56.26-29.

⁴⁰ *LW* 9, 123

Through His word God not only revealed where he had localised Himself for his people; He also localised Himself for them there in and through His word.⁴¹ In this way the God who was invisibly present everywhere and visibly available nowhere became present for His people, so that they take hold of Him by faith and love him. Those, then, who had God's word had God by faith in His word.⁴² God dwelt in Jerusalem through His word.⁴³ Since He had revealed Himself verbally to his people there, they had access to Him through His word and the name revealed in His word.⁴⁴

God's word, however, was always accompanied by outward, visible signs of his gracious presence and approval of them.⁴⁵ These showed the people where God was to be found and gave them access to him. The people 'took hold of God' through these signs which made God locally available and spatially accessible to them.⁴⁶ Such ritual signs included the sacrifices, by which God revealed His grace to them and His approval of them,⁴⁷ and the rite of circumcision.⁴⁸

God, then, localised Himself physically for his people through His word and the signs which He had instituted for them. He, as it were, enclosed Himself in them and created a ritual place for Himself with them. Luther put it thus:

'the God of the children of Israel ... had revealed Himself in a certain Word, in certain miracles and in a certain place, in Jerusalem ... This God is not a vague god, like the god whom the Turks worship. He is a God revealed and, so to speak, sealed. He has circumscribed Himself with a certain place, word, and signs, so that He might be acknowledged and grasped'.⁴⁹

Luther based this understanding on God's self-localisation through his word on two sets of related texts in the Old Testament. The first of these is Exodus 20:24 where God says: 'In whatever place I make a memorial of my name, I will come to you and bless you'.⁵⁰ By this Luther understood that God was to be found in

⁴¹ *LW* 36, 342f.

⁴² *LW* 37, 18.

⁴³ *WA* 40.III.57.16f.

⁴⁴ *LW* 3, 117; *WA* 40.III.335-336.

⁴⁵ *LW* 3, 117.

⁴⁶ *LW* 3, 108.

⁴⁷ *LW* 1, 249f; 3, 106.

⁴⁸ *LW* 3, 145f, 106-109. In addition to these, Luther adds the following signs of grace in *LW* 1, 248: the burning incense, the glory cloud, the Red Sea, the manna, the brazen serpent, the tabernacle, the temple of Solomon, and the temple cloud.

⁴⁹ *LW* 12, 352.

⁵⁰ See *LW* 3, 146, 163f; 6, 128, 265; 19.80; *WA* 25.94.10f; 40.III.52.21f.

the place where He had commanded that His name and His word were to be proclaimed. The second of these consists of those passages in Deuteronomy where God commands the centralisation of Israel's worship at the place which he has chosen to set His name: Deuteronomy 12:5;⁵¹ Deuteronomy 12:13f,⁵² and Deuteronomy 16:5f.⁵³ Luther's interpretation of these passages was that the Israelites were to worship God at the place and in the manner which He had prescribed for them, for by His word God had localised Himself in a particular place through His holy name.⁵⁴ Ritually speaking, God replaced the pagan idols with His holy name as the instrument for His self-localisation.⁵⁵

Now, if God had instituted the worship of His people at Jerusalem through His word, any form of worship which He had not instituted was idolatry. Luther therefore maintains: 'it is idolatry to establish worship as a result of one's own choosing and not as a result of a command of God'.⁵⁶ God does not wish us 'to teach Him how he is to be served', since He has prescribed how we are to worship Him. Without God's word 'all is idolatry', no matter how devout and relevant it may appear.⁵⁷ Because idolaters despised God's word, they set up their own places of worship apart from His word⁵⁸ and devised their own service of God.⁵⁹ Jereboam was the prime example of this.⁶⁰ He offered the right sacrifices to God; he may even have prayed more fervently than the people in Jerusalem. Yet his sacrifices and prayers did not please God because they were offered at a place which God had not authorised⁶¹ and in a manner which God had forbidden.⁶² Those then, who sought God where they pleased, apart from His word, were guilty of idolatry.⁶³

⁵¹ LW 4, 128; 6, 127; 35, 269.

⁵² LW 4, 128; 6, 127; 17, 378; 13, 121; 35, 269.

⁵³ LW 2, 285.

⁵⁴ The best study in English of the formula for the centralisation of worship and its significance in Deuteronomy is by J. G. McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy*, JSOT Sup 33, JSOT Press: Sheffield, 1984, 21-38.

⁵⁵ For a discussion on the replacement of the idol by the divine name in Israel, see John W. Kleing, *The Lord's Song: The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles*, JSOT Sup 156, JSOT Press: Sheffield, 1993, 64-66.

⁵⁶ LW 2, 284.

⁵⁷ LW 35, 270.

⁵⁸ LW 4, 178f

⁵⁹ LW 2, 284f, 355; 5, 241f; 35, 269.

⁶⁰ LW 5, 241; 12, 352.

⁶¹ WA 40.III.52.27-35.

⁶² LW 5, 241f.

⁶³ LW 6, 127; 35, 269-273.

Luther holds that the living God localised Himself for the people of Israel at the temple in Jerusalem. He localised Himself there ritually through the words spoken by human beings and the acts performed by them in the service there. In this way God, as it were, made Himself physically accessible and available to His people. Luther concludes:

'God in His divine wisdom arranges to manifest Himself to human beings by some definite and visible form which can be seen with the eyes and touched with the hands, in short, within the scope of the five senses.⁶⁴ So near to us does the Divine Majesty place Itself'.⁶⁵

3. Jesus our Sanctuary

In his early years Luther taught that, with the ascension of Jesus, the worship of God was not confined to one place in Jerusalem but could be conducted anywhere on earth.⁶⁶ But, after his bruising battles with the enthusiasts, he frequently spoke about the ascension of Jesus as the culmination of his self-localisation. Thus in 1532-33 he says:

'In the New Testament we have been freed from attachment to external places ... Our spiritual place is Jesus Christ, because God has determined that He will hear nothing except through this place Christ ... Christ is our one and only place, our time and everything else required for prayer. Just as the Jews had no other sanctuary than the one in Jerusalem, so we have no other sanctuary than this one: Jesus, Son of Mary'.⁶⁷

He developed this in two ways, christologically by reference to the humanity of Jesus as the place of God's presence, and liturgically by reference to the word and the sacraments as the means of access to His presence.

First then, Luther understood Christ as the culmination of God's self-localisation. The living God 'dwells bodily in the Man Christ Jesus'.⁶⁸ Jesus therefore is our place of worship and prayer.⁶⁹ He is our one and only

⁶⁴ The Latin of this is most graphic: *'in summa, quae quinque sensibus exposita sunt'*, i.e. 'in sum, which have been exposed to the five senses'.

⁶⁵ *LW* 3, 109.

⁶⁶ E.g. *LW* 13, 33-36.

⁶⁷ *WA* 40.III.53.19-35.

⁶⁸ *LW* 19, 80. See Col 1:19; 2:9

⁶⁹ *WA* 16.576.17.

'sanctuary',⁷⁰ our 'temple' where God 'wills to be sought, adored and served'.⁷¹ He is our 'altar' where we present our sacrifices of prayer and praise to God.⁷² He is our 'mercy seat' where God speaks graciously with us and we speak confidently to him.⁷³

Outside Christ 'there is no God',⁷⁴ and God is nowhere to be found.⁷⁵ Outside Christ 'no other god is to be worshipped or sought',⁷⁶ because there is nothing for us to believe, hope or obtain apart from Him.⁷⁷ Everything that God has in store for us is found in Christ.⁷⁸ Where Christ is 'the Father and the Holy Spirit are found'.⁷⁹ We therefore find God only in the man Christ 'who was in Mary's womb and sucked at her breasts'.⁸⁰ In fact, Luther goes so far as to assert: 'I know nowhere to find God, either in heaven or on earth, except in the flesh of Christ'.⁸¹ Whoever takes hold of Christ the man 'has' God.⁸²

Secondly, Luther argues that the God who dwells in the human body of Jesus now localises Himself for His people in the church through the physical word and the physical signs of baptism, the eucharist, and the absolution.⁸³ The ministry of the word creates a ritual place where God has willed 'to be found, to hear, and to bless' his people.⁸⁴ He has appointed this 'place where the church should come together to hear the Word of God, offer prayers, praise God, and bring sacrifices to God'.⁸⁵ In fact, Luther maintains that the ministry of the word is our fixed place of worship, for 'where the Word resounds and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution, there is the true tabernacle of

⁷⁰ *WA* 40.III.53.35.

⁷¹ *WA* 40.III.336.12; 337, 32.

⁷² *WA* 16.530.22; 531.16.

⁷³ *LW* 19, 80; *WA* 40.III.336.3f, 11; 337.15f; 399.16f.

⁷⁴ *WA* 40.III.337.21.

⁷⁵ *WA* 40.III.339.14.

⁷⁶ *LW* 12, 352.

⁷⁷ *WA* 40.III.53.24f.

⁷⁸ *WA* 40.III.57.21.

⁷⁹ *WA* 40.III.338.36; cf. *LW* 23; 54-56.

⁸⁰ *WA* 40.III.338.34f; cf. *LW* 23, 123.

⁸¹ *LW* 23, 123.

⁸² *WA* 40.III.400.21.

⁸³ *LW* 1, 248-251; 2, 286; 3, 108f, 111; 5, 244, 247; 6, 128f; 23, 123; *WA* 40.III.54.23-25.

Many of Luther's contemporaries, such as Zwingli and his followers, did not agree with Luther's teaching on the location of Christ as man with his body and blood in the sacrament, since they held that no finite thing could contain what is infinite. To the present day that is still one of the most obvious differences between the Lutheran and the Reformed traditions.

⁸⁴ *LW* 3, 164.

⁸⁵ *LW* 2, 284.

God'.⁸⁶ Christ then is to be found in the church which He builds with His word as His 'new dwelling, a new Jerusalem'.⁸⁷ The church is His castle and chamber, the place where 'the entire Trinity dwells'.⁸⁸

People should therefore 'look in faith to the place where the Word and sacraments are'.⁸⁹ There God is audible to human ears, visible to human eyes, and tangible to human touch. Thus Luther understands the word of God and the sacraments locally as places of a kind where 'God is present and gracious'.⁹⁰ He says:

'Christ must be sought where He has manifested Himself and wants to be known, as in the Word, in Baptism and in the Supper; there He is certainly found, for the Word cannot deceive us'.⁹¹

4. Conclusion

Since the Enlightenment it has become increasingly unfashionable to speak locally about God's presence with His people and spatially about His dealings with the church. Scholars feel most comfortable in regarding worship and piety in one of three ways, mentally in terms of ideas or subjective experiences of God, historically in terms of events or interactions between God and his people, existentially in terms of a personal I-Thou relationship with God or of an act of commitment to Him. They are often then intensely embarrassed by the apparent self-localisation of God in the Old Testament and overlook any mention of it in the New Testament.

Luther, however, did not hesitate to speak locally about God. He obviously had a very robust sense of place and was well aware of the importance of place for most people, physically, socially, psychologically and spiritually. He used local categories to counteract the excesses of the spiritualists. He developed the notion of station as part of his doctrine of vocation and spoke about the relocation of believers into their rightful position before God the Father and their proper position in His created order through faith in Jesus Christ. In his maturity he came back again and again to the wonder of God's gracious self-localisation for His people.

⁸⁶ *LW* 4, 179.

⁸⁷ *LW* 51, 304.

⁸⁸ *LW* 51, 305.

⁸⁹ *LW* 5, 247.

⁹⁰ *LW* 2, 286.

⁹¹ *LW* 3, 108.

Luther taught that the process of divine self-localisation, begun with Israel in the Old Testament, culminated in the incarnation of Christ and His ongoing presence as God and man in the church. By relocating us in the man Jesus and in the church through his word and sacraments, God the Father reverses our primeval dislocation and becomes available to us space-bound creatures. We who had lost our place with God and had ceased to be at home even in our own bodies now have our place with God in Jesus and His body. We find our home with Him in His word, His name and His flesh.

Luther, then, leads us away from a disincarnate, individualistic spirituality to a spirituality which is corporate in both senses of the word. He sums up his teaching on the self-localisation of God for us well in the following way:

'By His almighty power God could save the human race without Christ, without Baptism, and without the Word of the Gospel. He could have illuminated men's hearts inwardly through the Holy Spirit and forgiven their sins without the ministry of the Word and of ministers. But it was not His will to do so. And God very strictly prohibited all erring forms of devotion and worship (*cultus*)... God abominates and condemns all erring thoughts outside the one and only revelation made in the Word and sacraments, in which He willed to gather and include us ... He wants us to be gathered in the Word and Baptism as a sure and infallible sign that He wills to save and help us, just as He promised He would listen at the mercy seat among the people of Israel'.⁹²

Translation Of Passages On God's Self-Localisation

1. Luther on Isaiah 1:12 from *WA* 25.94.5-19

'When you come before my face' properly refers to the priests who enter the Holy of Holies where God had promised that He would be publicly present and would hear the prayers of the faithful. Since God had bound Himself to that place by His word, they are said to see the face of the Lord. It was a great privilege that God had bound Himself to that physical place (*corporali loco*) so that human beings would know for sure where they might find and take hold of God. For this is what Exodus 20:24 says: 'Wherever I make a memorial of my name, I will be there'. This is why God could never be found nor could he be sought in any other place than where He had bound himself by the word. In the

⁹² *LW* 6, 128. The translation of this passage has been corrected in a number of places.

law he willed that a physical place (*corporalem locum*) be established as the only place in the whole world for the service (*cultus*) of God. It was idolatry to perform a sacred rite anywhere else. That is why the Jews in foreign lands would turn their faces to the temple when they prayed. But in the New Testament no other single definite place has been established. Since God has granted us Christ as our redeemer, wherever the word of the gospel is taught and believed our prayers and all our works are pleasing to God on account of Christ. But whatever is prayed, taught, and lived outside Christ is idolatry before God, and a sin.

2. Luther on Psalm 121:1 from WA 40.III, pp 51-57

The question arises, first, why does David say: 'to the hills' and not: 'to God', and, secondly, why does he speak of many hills rather than one hill, since plurality seems to support idolatry. My answer to the first question is that this and similar passages, such as: 'May He send help from his sanctuary' (Ps 20:3), are relevant to our theology which teaches that God wills to hear, be served (*coli*), sought, addressed in prayer, according to His word rather than our fancies. Thus He says in Exodus 20:24: 'In whatever place I make a memorial of my name, I will come to you and bless you'. Hence all Jews, no matter in what place or region they were, were bound to the temple in Jerusalem, so that even if they prayed at home, they turned their eyes to Zion. Indeed, the prayer of the good people in Babylon, far from the temple and Jerusalem, only pleased God because they sang and prayed to the God who dwelt in Mount Zion and had set his tabernacle there. This was the reason why the prophets condemned the sacrifices and the rest of the services (*cultus*) which were instituted and performed in other places. It was not even enough to say: 'O God, you who have brought your people from Egypt' (1 Kings 12:28), for thus Jereboam too used to address God in the proper way and prayed perhaps even more fervently than those who were in Jerusalem and at the temple. Indeed hypocrisy and idolatry are usually much more fervent than true piety. Why then did such prayers not please God? It was because the other 'hills' had not been chosen and so did not have God's word. God therefore did not will to hear prayers anywhere else except in that one place. They then should at least turn themselves with their eyes and heart to Jerusalem, even though they could not be bodily there. Thus, when Daniel prayed in Babylon he turned to Jerusalem, not only because Solomon had prayed in his prayer that, if those who had been sent into exile would turn to that place when they prayed, God would hear them and bring them back to the land (cf. 1 Kings 8:48), but also because God simply willed to be addressed in prayer in the place which He Himself had chosen so as to prevent all self-chosen and wayward acts of devotion.

In the New Testament we have been freed from attachment to external places, as Christ says: 'The time will come when they will adore neither on this nor on that mountain' (John 4:21). Our spiritual place is Jesus Christ, because God has determined that He will hear nothing except through this place, Christ. He says: 'Whatever you ask the Father in my name (He will give it to you)' (John 16:23), and (Hebrews 13:5 says): 'through Him then let us offer to God the sacrifices of our lips'. Outside Christ there is nothing for us to believe, hope or obtain. This is the chief part of our teaching which must therefore be firmly held. There are many who wish to please God outside Christ. So Arius, even though he robbed Christ of His divinity, still wished it to appear that he had the right God. Our monks believe that they please God with their vows and monastic observances. All these do not lift their eyes to the 'hills' to which David looked; they do not look to Christ alone. Nevertheless it must be established that Christ is our one and only place, our time and everything else required for prayer. Just as the Jews had no other sanctuary than the one in Jerusalem, so we have no other sanctuary than this one: Jesus, son of Mary.

This is how I usually answer the first question. David directs his prayer to the holy place set up in Jerusalem where there was the remembrance of God's name which God had made for Himself. Before then it was at Shiloh and Gibeon where the tabernacle had been. In these places He used to hear prayers and accept sacrifices. He did not however accept prayers and sacrifices in any other places, for in those places there was no remembrance of the Lord's name which He had created for Himself, but the remembrance of the name of idolatry which the faithless Jews had set up for themselves. But now in the New Testament the name of God dwells in Christ and the church which is one body with Christ. There we have the word of God, baptism, the Lord's supper and the exercise of obedience to God.

My answer to the second question is that, even though David seems to prophesy about the church of the New Testament, in which there are many 'hills' rather than just one, for God in Christ hears the prayers of the faithful everywhere, and neither prayer nor the services (*cultus*) of the one God are bound to a particular external place, nevertheless it may be that the prophet uses the plural as a plural of majesty or else as a reference to the two mountains in the city of Jerusalem - Mount Zion towards the south and Mount Moriah, the site of the temple. Yet, as I have said previously, the plural draws a contrast, as if it were saying: 'Idolaters run to their mountains, but I will remain close to my hills, that is, in that unique temple hill which replaces all of them for me'.

I speak about the 'hills' which the eyes of the flesh do not see. For who can be so discerning and wise as to see that Mount Moriah is a holy mountain? The

eyes see a pile of earth, but they do not see the holiness set in it because the Lord's word is there, because God has said that He wills to dwell there, because He has made a remembrance of His name in that place, because He wills to be found there and not in heaven. For whoever wanders away from that place will not even be able to discover and take hold of God in heaven. In the same way, after God has revealed Himself in the man Christ, we rightly believe and say that those who do not take hold of this man born of Mary cannot take hold of God simply. Even though they say they believe in God the creator of heaven and earth, they nevertheless, in reality, believe in an idol of their own hearts, since outside Christ there is no true God. Therefore David does not gaze at those hills of Jerusalem with the eyes of flesh, like a cow at its stable, but with the eyes of the Spirit, since God dwells there through His word. Hence these hills may not be physically large, but they are the Lord's hills, so full of divinity that nothing of God can be found apart from these mountains and from the God who dwells there, just as we believe that Christ is 'the throne of grace' (Hebrews 4:16). Everything is found in Him; outside Him nothing is found.

3. Luther on Psalm 130 from *WA* 40.III, p 335-339

Right from the beginning you are reminded, as you have heard elsewhere from me, that the prophets, when they speak of God and address God, speak about their own God whose promises and service (*cultus*) they have. Otherwise you may think that access to God is open to us through our thoughts which we have of God apart from His word, just as the Turks (Muslims), Jews and papists speculate about God, either entirely without His word, or by changing His word from its true meaning to something imaginary or speculative which they themselves have devised. The prophets knew that, even though the true God was infinite in his nature, He nevertheless was enclosed in the mercy seat, to which He had bound Himself by His word. So, even if they spoke of the God of heaven and creator of all things, they nevertheless had this even nearer, more certain sign of the true God, because they knew that He dwelt in Zion. Therefore those who prayed to God or preached about God did so as God had revealed Himself to them in His word and promises. So, even if David seems to speak simply to God without any mention of the tabernacle or the promises, this must mean that he speaks to the kind of God who is present in His word and His service (*cultus*), just as we today should not think or speak of God otherwise than as the one who is in our true mercy seat, Christ. That is how Christ speaks to Philip: 'He who sees me sees my Father' (John 14:9). Also: 'No-one comes to the Father but through me' (John 14:6). When this is acknowledged, God can safely be adored and certainly be taken hold of as maker of heaven and earth. For, although his nature is incomprehensible and infinite apart from this revelation, it is finite and comprehensible in His word and the promises in which He has wrapped Himself.

Thus, when the Jews bowed down (*adorantes*) to the ark, they adored the true God of heaven and earth, for by His word God indicated that He would be there and would hear the prayers of his people there. Likewise, when we look to Christ and adore him, we adore the true God, for God has revealed Himself in Christ. So Christ too says: 'Whatever you ask the Father in my name, He will give to you' (John 16:23). Those, therefore, who pray to God, without fixing their eyes and hearts on Christ, go astray; they do not come to God but are idolaters who adore the fancies of their own hearts rather than the true God, for God does not will to be sought and found, nor does He hear anyone, except in our mercy seat, Christ. If we then wish to discover God truly, know God rightly, and come certainly to Him, we must look to Christ according to the proposition: 'He who has seen me sees the Father' (John 14:9), and: 'If you have known me, you have known the Father also' (John 14:7). Thus the word gathers up the wayward fancies of our hearts and fixes them on that one person who is the Christ, God and man, so that we realise that outside Christ there is no God, nor can he be found apart from Christ. He asks: 'Do you not believe that the Father is in me and I am in the Father?' (John 14:10).

It was ordained that the holy Jews also prayed in this way to the God who dwelt in Zion. Those who neglected that place, even if they used the same sacred things and the same words in prayer, committed idolatry for no other reason than that they acted contrary to this prescription, because God had commanded that He willed to be adored in Jerusalem. This then is the general rule which must be observed in all the psalms and the entire Scriptures: in the Old Testament there was no God except in Zion or at the site of the tabernacle, and all prayers were to be made to the God who was enthroned and dwelt between the cherubim. But when this temple was destroyed, God set up another temple which is Christ, where He wills to be sought, adored, and served (*coli*). Outside this temple there is no God, but the devil is sought and found. There the minds of people either fall into despair, if they approach with a bad conscience, or fall into presumption through hypocrisy, like the idolatrous Jews and our own papists who presume much about their righteousness and God's favour.

The following and similar sentences from the psalms and the prophets are relevant here. David says: 'I have lifted my eyes to the hills' (Psalm 121:1) and: 'God bless you from Zion' (Psalm 128:5). Other verses which do not add an obvious reference to the place (of worship) or the temple should be taken in this sense, such as the verse: 'Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord' (Psalm 130:1). David does not simply call on the Lord as the creator of heaven and earth, as the Turks also do, but on Him who dwells in Zion. God's people have His promises and word that He wills to receive their votive offerings and hear (prayers) there... God does not will to be sought in our thoughts. If we could do

that, what would be the use of the word? Why then would God have revealed and designated the place (of worship) in the law (of Moses) and the person of Christ in the New Testament? Note what happens with our adversaries, the papists. They pray much, recite the psalms, and say the Lord's Prayer, but because they despise the word of Christ and even persecute it by force, their rank idolatry is hidden under the most beautiful words which they recite from the psalms. The same also happens with the Jews and Turks when they say they adore the living God, the creator of heaven and earth.

I therefore emphasise frequently and joyfully that outside Christ you should close your eyes and ears. You should say that you know no God except the one who was in Mary's womb and sucked at her breasts. Wherever that God Jesus Christ is, the whole of God is there with all divinity; there the Father and the Holy Spirit are found. Outside this Christ, God is nowhere and is not found anywhere. I know many monks who, since they believed that God could be grasped with human speculations, have fallen into the most serious dangers. Unless God had by a singular act of grace freed me from that temptation, I would have run headlong into destruction. It is, however, useful for life to learn caution from the dangers of others.



Fr Christopher Willcock sj rehearsing the Societas choir in Parramatta Cathedral

Chinese New Year and Lent: Reflections from the Perspective of the Lutheran World Federation Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture

Jeffrey Truscott

Introduction: An Overview of Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year (*Chun Jie*) or Lunar New year is probably the most important celebration in traditional Chinese culture. Chinese communities the world over observe *Chun Jie* for the first fifteen days of the Lunar New Year, which normally takes place during the months of January or February in the western calendar. Literally meaning ‘spring festival’ *Chun Jie* connotes new beginnings (in relationships and business), new growth, and the hope for happiness and prosperity in the year ahead. Additionally, Chinese New Year (CNY) is a time to remember and re-affirm one’s family origins. Accordingly, reunion dinners with family, either in homes or in restaurants, are a central feature, and individuals and families will make significant efforts to return to their home towns.

The origins of CNY are ancient. One strand of the history is harvest celebrations dating back to the Western Zhou period (12th century BCE). These observances focused on thanksgiving for wealth and material abundance – a theme that will become increasingly important. Another strand is the development of celebrations marking the New Year. After years of being in flux, the date of the first day of the first month was fixed during the reign of emperor Han Wu Di (140-87 BCE). The New Year came to be a time for celebrating the wealth and power of the state, especially at peaceful and prosperous times, as during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE).

But domestic observances of the New Year, by far, have come to take centre stage. Usually one month before the beginning of the festival, families undertake a thorough cleaning of the home in preparation for the visits of family and friends. Couplets known as *chun lian* are often posted at doorways. Written in either black or gold ink on red paper, the most popular *chun lian* mean roughly “may wealth increase” or “may prosperity and good luck fill the house.”¹

Family reunion dinners – normally at the parental home of the male spouse – take place on the eve of the New Year.

¹ *Chinese Customs and Festivals in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, 1989), 33.

The family being the cornerstone of the Chinese society, this [dinner] is an annual demonstration of the love and respect that binds family members together. For the head of the family, the gathering provides personal comfort and satisfaction because it is visible proof that his care and concern for his children has not been wasted. For the younger members of the family, the reunion dinner represents an opportunity to show their appreciation of their parents.²

Adherents of traditional Chinese religion (Confucianism) pay respects to their ancestors by offering food and flowers. Following the reunion dinner, the house receives its final cleaning, because it is considered inappropriate to clean on New Year's day itself.

Interestingly, in the Chinese reckoning of the hours of the day, 11 pm marks the beginning of the new day, so the celebrations begin at the stroke of 11 on the eve of the New Year. In places that are influenced by western customs, such as Singapore, Chinese communities begin their New Year's celebration at midnight rather than at 11.00 pm. As in western countries, the celebration in the home simply involves staying up with the family and then wishing each other 'Happy New Year' at midnight. It is also customary to offer incense in the form of joss sticks to the God of Prosperity (*Cai Shen*) at the beginning of the New Year, as well as to pray in (Buddhist) temples.

On New Year's Day it is traditional to greet the heads of households of one's family (parents). In earlier times, this usually involved bowing before one's parents. More recently in Singapore and other southeast Asian countries, the practice has been to offer two mandarin oranges (with one in each hand) to the parents during the New Year's greeting. Notably the Cantonese (southern Chinese) pronunciation of 'orange' (*gam*) sounds similar to the word 'gold.' Usually, an even number of oranges are offered because even numbers signify happy occasions while odd numbers denote sad, tragic occasions. As a way of wishing luck, the head of the household will present two oranges to the guest upon his/her departure. This exchange underscores the value of 'reciprocity in all human relationships' (*li shang wang lai*).

The visits to family members, especially on New Year's Day, are considered an opportunity for reconciliation among family members. It is thought that the conviviality of the gathering will enable the overcoming of old disputes, thus allowing family life to begin anew.

² *Chinese Customs*, 37.

It is also customary at CNY for older persons to present gifts of money to younger persons, usually in red envelopes known as *hongbao*. To the Chinese, the colour red is symbolic of life, happiness, and luck. The gesture represents the transfer of luck and good fortune, rather than the actual giving of financial support to the recipient. Accordingly, the *hongbao* are never opened in front of the giver.

The fifteenth day of CNY celebrates the first full moon of the new year (*yuan xiao*). As the moon is associated with love and romance, it is a special day for couples.³ *Yuan xiao* literally means ‘lantern festival,’ and usually involves large displays of colourful lanterns.

For many if not most Christians of Chinese ancestry, observing CNY and its customs is a foregone conclusion – that is, to an extent that doing so does not undermine or compromise their Christian faith. Indeed, on the first day of CNY in Singapore, many Chinese-speaking Protestant churches will hold services and some Roman Catholic churches will celebrate a special mass. But what are the theological and pastoral implications of CNY for churches made up primarily of Chinese-ancestry people? What does this aspect of Chinese culture mean especially for the worship life of such churches?

The purpose of this article is to explore Chinese New Year from the perspective of the Lutheran World Federation’s Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture in the hope that Chinese churches (and churches in areas dominated by Chinese culture) might be inspired to utilize certain CNY customs and motifs for expressing the gospel. At the same time, this paper will suggest ways for churches to offer critique of certain aspects of CNY. Particular attention will be given to the liturgical and pastoral implications of the occasional overlap of CNY and Lent.

The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture

In 1996 the Lutheran World Federation’s Study Team on Worship and Culture met in Nairobi, Kenya, and produced a statement on the relationship between worship and culture. The ‘Nairobi Statement,’ as it is commonly called, identifies four ways in which Christian worship relates to culture.

First, [worship] is *transcultural*, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture. Second, it is *contextual*, varying according to the local situation (both nature and culture). Third, it

³ In Singapore, it is customary among young people to throw the oranges into the Singapore River while wishing for a lover or for the greater commitment of a current love interest!

is *counter-cultural*, challenging what is contrary to the gospel in a given culture. Fourth, it is *cross-cultural*, making possible sharing between different local cultures.⁴ (emphasis added)

These principles were not meant to foster a negative attitude toward culture, but rather to help worshipping assemblies achieve a balanced view of the relationship between worship and culture. Accordingly, then, the document is subtitled ‘Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities.’ The statement implies that while worship can expose what is evil and corrupt in culture, worship can also be shaped by what is good and healthy in a culture.

Cultural Challenges and Possibilities in CNY

When viewed through the lens of the Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture, CNY holds both challenges and possibilities for Christian worshipping assemblies. In what follows, I will attempt to describe these with reference to five issues: (1) the scheduling of Ash Wednesday services, (2) CNY feasting versus Lenten fasting, (3) affirmation of elders, (4) wishing prosperity, and (5) the offering of gifts. Issues (1) and (2) are specifically related to the ‘problem’ that arises when CNY and Lent occur on the same calendar date or in close proximity, while issues (3), (4) and (5) have pastoral and theological relevance even when CNY and Lent do not overlap.

Issue 1: The Scheduling of Ash Wednesday Services

As mentioned earlier in this paper, CNY usually falls sometime between late January and mid-February, which means that it occasionally coincides with Ash Wednesday and/or that the 15-day period of CNY can overlap with the Forty Days, as the following table indicates:

Year	Lunar New Year	Ash Wednesday	Implication
2010	February 14	February 17	Overlap
2011	February 3	March 9	No overlap
2012	January 23	February 22	No overlap
2013	February 10	February 13	Overlap
2014	January 31	March 5	No overlap
2015	February 19	February 18	Overlap
2016	February 8	February 10	Overlap
2017	January 28	March 1	No overlap
2018	February 16	February 14	Overlap
2019	February 5	March 6	No overlap
2020	January 25	February 26	No overlap

⁴ http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html.

This concurrence of CNY and Ash Wednesday/Lent raises important pastoral questions for the church. If Ash Wednesday takes place on the eve of CNY (as in 2015) or on the first day (as in 2005), can we expect the faithful to attend the liturgy of Ash Wednesday when they are busy preparing for CNY? In reality, many families would find this difficult.

One “solution” to this problem has been the postponing of Ash Wednesday services until *after* the eve/first day of CNY. In 2005, when Ash Wednesday and the first day of CNY both fell on February 9, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore rescheduled the imposition of ashes from February 9 to the masses celebrated on the follow Friday (February 11).⁵ Such a postponement avoids the pastoral problem of expecting people to worship on a day when they are also expected to be with their families and/or to be opening their homes to family members. Also avoided is the problem of Christians wearing ashes at a time when the wider culture is engaging in joyful celebrations to which people are encouraged to wear red, gold, or orange-coloured garments. But even if Ash Wednesday rites are delayed, the entire CNY period will be a busy time for people of Chinese ancestry. Furthermore, tension may arise because Christians traditionally are to be quiet, reflective, and meditative in Lent while CNY involves lively festivities, most notably the lion dances.⁶

Yet this tension need not be viewed as entirely negative. The challenges posed by the apparent ‘clash’ of CNY and Lent remind us of two important truths: first, that the church, as an incarnational reality, is ‘in the world,’ and must necessarily deal with the customs and culture sensibilities of the local population. It is not unlike how early Roman Christians had to deal with the challenges posed by winter solstice celebrations. Second, the tension here highlights the eschatological truth that the church awaits a new heaven and a new earth where all tensions and conflicts will be replaced by God’s perfect *shalom* and all people will live under the gentle rule of Christ.

Furthermore, the CNY-Lent coincidence is an opportunity for the church to practice faithfulness to vital Christian truths amid countervailing forces. The church’s observing Lent (albeit with modifications) during CNY festivities can

⁵ ‘February 9, 2005: Ash Wednesday and Lunar New Year Fall on the Same Day. So How?’ *Catholic News: Official Newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore*, Sunday February 6, 2005.

⁶ Members of martial arts schools dressed as a lion will attempt to retrieve a red packet filled with money, that has been tied to a head of lettuce suspended above the front door of a business. Because the ‘dance’ performed by the lion supposedly brings luck to the business, the activity is an expression of reciprocity.

witness to its belief that the soul finds its true rebirth or springtime in the risen Lord Jesus and that by being reconciled to God through him one is freed to be reconciled to others. In observing Lent during CNY, arguably, the church upholds what is transcultural in the Christian faith (Nairobi principle 1).

So, in sum, this ‘clash’ actually offers the church the opportunity to highlight important theological points while challenging it to learn the way of faithfulness.

Issue 2: CNY Feasting versus Lenten Fasting

As mentioned, a family ‘reunion’ dinner occurs on the eve of CNY. When Ash Wednesday falls on the eve or first day of CNY, the faithful are faced with having to abstain from meat at important family functions,⁷ a move that could be taken as quite unsociable. In the past, however, special ecclesiastical dispensations from Lenten fasting and abstinence have been granted,⁸ thus allowing the faithful to partake fully of family celebrations and avoid alienating themselves from their families. Arguably, such a tack represents a legitimate adaptation or contextualizing of Lenten observance (Nairobi 2); for the gospel is not compromised on the basis of whether or not Christians fast/abstain from meat.

Yet Chinese Christians who do strive to fast and abstain from meat during CNY offer a countercultural witness to the world (Nairobi 3). Fasting and abstaining – or even doing a substitute penance for these – suggests that one’s primary allegiance is to Christ and that one seeks to avoid conformity to the world (Romans 12). In that case, then, the practices of fasting and abstaining should not be set aside entirely. Indeed, rather than being a point of alienation, they might actually prove to be a point of positive engagement. Specifically, if a Christian is questioned about why he/she fasts/abstains when others feast, it is an opportunity for the Christian to share the faith and possibly invite others to explore that faith. Accordingly, churches might welcome the pastoral ‘problem’ presented when Lenten fasting/abstaining is juxtaposed to cultural feasting!

Issue 3: Affirmation of Elder Family Members

A possible challenge posed by CNY customs that affirm elder family members (e.g., the reunion dinner) is the possibility of absolutizing the *biological* family as the one and only group to whom one has moral responsibilities. For Christians, such a view would conflict with the gospel call to recognize one’s

⁷ A festive meal in traditional Chinese culture might include beef and pork dishes.

⁸ Archbishop Nicholas Chia of Singapore granted such a dispensation in 2005. ‘Ash Wednesday and Lunar New Year,’ *Catholic News*, Sunday, February 6, 2005.

Editorial

The long-awaited XXII Congress of the international body for the study and renewal of the liturgy, *Societas Liturgica*, took place in Sydney (St Joseph's, Baulkham Hills) from 10-15 August. Australians have been going to *Societas* congresses regularly, and in increasing numbers, since its foundation in the early 1960s; indeed the first three Australian members were the Most Rev. Guilford Young, Catholic Archbishop of Hobart (and a *peritus* at Vatican II), the Rev. Dr Harold Leatherland, Principal of the Congregationalist Theological College in Melbourne and founder and Director of the Ecumenical Liturgical Centre, a founder-body of this Academy, and myself (then Methodist). Since then our presence has been observed amongst the regular attendees, who regularly note 'how far we have come' to be wherever the Congress has met in the northern hemisphere. Now over a hundred fellow-members have discovered how far it is from their home country to this Great Southern Land, and there is no doubt that the invitation was fruitfully accepted by them and worthwhile for us. Our President, David Pitman, gives his report in this issue. Photographs appear in *AJL* for the first time.

We publish an article by the Australian biblical and liturgical scholar, Dr John Kleinig of Adelaide. This has appeared elsewhere, but has almost certainly not been read by many, and provides an example of Lutheran study of Luther on a theological topic related to worship.

The Congress also provides some of the content here. Dr Jeffrey Truscott, who teaches at Trinity Theological College in Singapore, gave permission to publish a version of his 'case study' at Sydney on the issues for Chinese Christians when Lent coincides with Chinese New Year. This is not only interesting because all our capital cities and some provincial ones have a significant Chinese community; it also raises the general question of how the Christian community deals with festivals of non-Christian origin which rival their own. Fr Richard Rutherford csc, well-known for his studies in the funeral liturgy and more recently on ancient baptismal fonts gave seminars on the former in both Perth and Melbourne, and has generously combined them in a dialogue between Australian and American voices on what makes a funeral 'Catholic' (which we assume can be used in two senses).

Three books involving Australian authors are here reviewed, an encouraging sign. Material for the first issue of Volume 12 is in hand for its May publication, but the editorial door is wide open!

Robert Gribben

self as part of the ‘family’ made up of brothers and sisters in Christ. In that case, worship and preaching, especially around CNY time, must counter-culturally challenge the faithful to love members of their Christian family – and the whole human family – with the same kind of love they have for their biological families (Nairobi 3).

Yet this aspect of CNY gives the church another opportunity to offer a counter-cultural witness to the world (Nairobi 3) with respect to the youth culture. In both east and west, the latter exerts a strong influence on attitudes and undoubtedly leads to the devaluation of older members of society and their contributions. The church, however, could take advantage of the familial emphasis at CNY by drawing attention to the drawbacks of the youth culture and by affirming the elderly. Specifically, worship leaders could craft rites of confession and absolution in which the assembly confesses society’s neglect of the elderly. Preaching could point out the positive aspect of CNY, namely, that it helps Christians to avoid idolizing the youth culture. Finally, the intercessions could both pray for the needs of the elderly, while giving thanks for their wisdom and roles in church and society.

Issue 4: Prosperity

If wishing prosperity to people means no more than suggesting that they have ample provision of food, clothing, and shelter for the coming year, such is not problematic for Christians. But if ‘prosperity’ is understood as super-abundance and riches beyond the imagination, then the motif is quite problematic for Christians. While ‘wealth’ is not viewed as inherently evil in the Gospels, it is understood to be a potential encumbrance to faithful Christians discipleship (Matthew 6.24, Luke 8.14). Additionally, the wealthy are viewed as standing in need of repentance (Luke 16.19-31, 18.18-25). Striving for prosperity or material abundance when one is already adequately supplied is antithetical to Christian holiness. Especially during Lent, when many Christians seek to recover a simpler life-style with less dependence on possessions, the prosperity theme of Chinese New Year could be somewhat discordant.

Yet Christians do have a strong tradition of seeking to relieve the material need and deprivation of the poor, as reflected in the gospel teaching about almsgiving (Matthew 6.1-4, Luke 18.22). The CNY prosperity theme might therefore prompt churches to remind the faithful about the church’s commitment to seeking the ‘prosperity’ of the poor, thereby transforming this cultural theme in a way that reflects the gospel (Nairobi 3).

Issue 5: Offering of Gifts

Although apparently innocuous on the surface, the *hongbao* custom arguably represents yet another challenge to the church. In some Chinese communities there is a tendency to think that one should avoid sharing wealth outside of one's biological family. Consequently, upon death people leave money and property only to their children. The giving of *hongbao* could to some extent reinforce the perception that possessions are only to be shared within the biological family. The church, by contrast, encourages a sharing of wealth and resources beyond the biological family or even beyond the local community (cf. 2 Cor. 8 and 9).

Yet, the church, using the method of creative assimilation (Nairobi 2),⁹ could find in *hongbao* an opportunity to share its alternative vision of the stewardship of wealth. Especially during those years when CNY and Lent overlap, church members could be encouraged to give their charitable contributions (alms) using the traditional red packets. Because the giving of *hangbao* is primarily between family members, using them in a Christian context would suggest to Christians that the needy of the world are their family members. Thus, the definition of family would be expanded, in accordance with gospel teaching (cf. Matthew 12.48-50, 25.31-46). Furthermore, utilizing *hongbao* for almsgiving could potentially transform the way people think of wealth, namely, to view it as more than a family heirloom, but rather as a gift from God to be shared freely rather than restrictively. In that case, the church's using *hangbao* could become a counter-cultural gesture (Nairobi 3).

Conclusion

The intersection of worship and cultural has long been an issue for the Christian church, and this has certainly been true in its work to embrace people of Asian and Chinese cultures. The intersection of Chinese New Year and Lent, for sure, presents challenges to churches that want to maintain the observance of Lent, especially through the disciplines of fasting and abstinence from meat. Yet, as we have demonstrated above, CNY contains within it raw materials that can be used for meaningfully expressing the gospel. It is hoped that churches in Asia, through their reflection on the Nairobi statement, will come to recognize both the possibilities and challenges in CNY.

⁹For a full explanation of "creative assimilation," see Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Enculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 44-47.



Fr Richard Rutherford csc in full flight at Societas

**From 'Marking Mortality' to 'Ashes' -
Where Australia and America Converge
Richard Rutherford**

For decades I have studied funeral liturgy as we experience it in Europe and North America. Now, with gratitude to the many friends and colleagues in Australia who have allowed me to engage them on the topic as they experience it, I share some random thoughts on 'What Makes a Christian Funeral *Catholic*?' I hope to do this in the ecumenical spirit of this land, as Brian Doyle, a fellow Portlander, described it in a recent collection of similar conversations. Set appropriately in Sydney's famous Rookwood Cemetery, he writes,

I wander around counting religions.
In an hour I count more than fifty.
Each the one and only true faith.

A dapper man tells me that this cemetery
is the biggest in the southern hemisphere....
More than a million people are buried here.
each with his or her own kind, he says to me.
Wander around for a while and you will see.

So I do, passing gardens filled with Muslims,
and hills of Catholics, and groves of Hindus,
and whole vast meadows of Presbyterians,
and more Anglicans than you could count,
and little villages of Jews and Shintoists,
and a field just for the Salvation Army...¹⁰

¹⁰ Doyle, Brian, *Thirsty for the Joy, Australian and American Voices*, Camberwell (Vic): One Day Hill, 2008, 74.

What follows emerged from thoughts old and new that took shape during my recent journey, with its frequent funeral chats, across the continent from Melbourne and the AAL colloquium ‘Marking Mortality’ to Western Australia with ‘Cremation – Why the Fiery Debate?’, which coincided appropriately with another more famous ‘Ashes.’

Recent so-called celebrity funerals point up the rapid changes taking place in how we in western cultures care for our dead and our bereaved. Not only do such funerals reflect current popular practice; they also contribute to shaping the expectations people bring to church funerals. Furthermore, the increasing rise of the choice for cremation both as alternative to final disposition of the deceased and also as alternative to the funeral itself is a fact of the modern funeral. These two factors and many more, such as the fast pace of daily life, the mobility within families – even across continents, ever newer and innovative ways cyber technology has transformed opportunities for memorial, and the like, lead the Roman Catholic pastoral liturgist in me to ask, ‘What makes a Christian funeral Catholic?’

The question, of course, implies that we know what makes a funeral ‘Christian.’ The long answer has been explored thoroughly in a remarkably comprehensive new book by the American Presbyterian Thomas Long.¹¹ Here the short answer must suffice:

- *To proclaim our absolute faith in the transforming reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the midst of a world of others who may, or may not believe;*
- *To provide a concrete way for the living to begin the painful process of continuing life in the midst of grief, supported by the church and her members;*
- *To bless and sanctify the passing of one of our own to the fulfillment of the Scriptural promise of eternal life, in the midst of the worship life of the community of believers.*

With this profession of Christian faith as starting point, I believe that a Christian funeral is Catholic when, underlying all its other qualities, three marks come together: the Church, the liturgy, and the role of the cemetery.

¹¹ Long, Thomas, *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral*, Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009.

After exploring briefly the current context through the lens of celebrity and cyber funerals, I will touch on each of these marks of the Catholic funeral. Our guide throughout will be the official Roman Catholic ritual book for the celebration of funerals, the *Order of Christian Funerals* (OCF)¹², a universal Catholic *editio typica* adapted appropriately by national conferences of bishops across the world. In this context I restrict my attention to those editions of the OCF in use in Australia, Canada, and the USA.

Celebrity ‘funerals’ and cyber memorials

Briefly the so-called celebrity funerals, whether the most recent TV extravaganzas or the more simple yet widely publicized private farewells, present themselves as ‘celebrations of the life’ of the deceased – pure and simple. A few examples of contrast suffice to illustrate the point. Who among us over 20 does not recall the death of Princess Diana and her royally choreographed farewell, perhaps as much a memorial as a funeral – or a month later the death and funeral of Mother Teresa of Calcutta? Today who can forget the weeks’ long TV spectaculars celebrating the King of Pop, Michael Jackson, or the star studded goodbyes following the widely followed deaths of actors like Heath Ledger or Farrah Fawcett. Those ‘celebrations of life,’ as they were universally described, with their seemingly interminable ‘eulogies’ are having an impact on what Christian people today bring with them to arrange funerals for their deceased family members. Funerals become memorials become celebrations of life.

The following from an editorial reviewer of the *New York Times*¹³ summarizes well one of the attractions of yet ‘A New Kind of Memorial for the Internet Age.’

I got a Facebook friend request a while back from [a friend], who had attended law school with me. After [he] died, his Facebook page became an online gathering place for his hundreds of Facebook friends. They exchanged updates on his Wall — including news about his wife’s condition — reminiscences, photographs and a poem by Rilke. There was a report on his cremation ceremony in Uganda. The post said [he] was sent off with Madagascar chocolate, root beer and a small ‘environmental justice’ note tucked in his pocket.

¹² National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1989, including Appendix on Cremation.

¹³ 25 July 2009.

There is something not entirely satisfying about an online memorial. Those of us who visit [my friend's] page are not physically coming together to remember him — and we are not making the effort and expending the time that it takes to gather in person.

Still, [my friend's] Wall works, often in ways that an offline memorial cannot....

Where does all this fit into the pattern of the Catholic funeral? Culturally, of course, such approaches to farewells at death are not new or unique. Both history and even a cursory scan across the cultural diversity of the world we live in demonstrate this. So, what is the difference today?

Perhaps something of the difference lies in the different way cultures and faith relate today. Without projecting a utopian view onto the past or being anachronistic, it is safe to say that the Christian funeral was born in a spirit of transforming existing cultural practices in a way that recognizable and valued rituals could express the new faith and hope of the early Church. Throughout the centuries in both East and West those Christianized rituals were the culture. From the dawn of modernity, however, different cultural values in the so-called first world as well as the emerging influence of cultures hitherto familiar often only within their own geographic worlds begin to establish themselves in ever greater contrast to the established ritual ways of the Church. For Christians generally in the 20th century, recognizing the need for dialogue with the modern world and tapping a maturing theology of mission in the 'third world' led to an appreciation of the phenomenon called 'inculturation.' For Catholics, a unique openness to cultural awareness in worship took shape in the liturgical reforms following Vatican Council II. For example, chapter one of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy devotes a specific section to '*Norms for adapting the Liturgy to the culture and traditions of peoples*' (37-40). As both the 'norms' themselves and now the experience in the pastoral trenches during the nearly five decades since the Vatican Council demonstrate, inculturation is subtly complex. Nevertheless, of all the revised rites of the Catholic liturgy, the *Order of Christian Funerals* has responded best to adaptation to the 'culture and traditions of peoples.'

How can acknowledging cultural diversity and the successful inculturation enjoyed by Catholic funeral rites thus far help us in a world where celebrations of life and cyber memorials are the context? The only realistic approach, I submit, is to take seriously that death with all its many rituals is a much bigger phenomenon than the religious dimension can express. Like the rites of

Christian Initiation mark the process of conversion and becoming a Christian, the rites of the OCF are part of a larger process. As such they can only mark stages in that process. They do so by enfolding them, as it were, in the consolation of the faith of the deceased and the bereaved – that is, the faith of the Church. For Catholics this happens when funeral rites faithfully embody Church, Catholic liturgy, and the Catholic role of cemetery.

The Church – Mark of the Catholic Funeral

To say ‘Catholic Funeral’ is to say ‘Church,’ for funeral rites to be truly Catholic liturgy they are ‘of the Church, by the Church, and for the Church.’

Of the Church

A genuinely Catholic funeral is an experience that is ‘of the Church’ because it expresses the faith, the beliefs, the perspective, and the values of the Catholic Church. It is recognizable as Catholic. Always present is an aspect of worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for this person and the life lived in faith, the person’s commitment to God, the promise of resurrection – all aspects of the faith as a source of consolation for the mourners. Furthermore, the Catholic funeral is characterized by the incarnational anthropology of the Church. That is, the body of the deceased as the quasi sacrament of a life lived in the faith is the central symbol of the Catholic funeral. It enjoys final respect as once the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, as the body plunged into the waters of Baptism and anointed with chrism at Confirmation, as the body that dined at the very table of the Lord’s Supper in Holy Communion, as the body that together with another body consummated the sacrament of Marriage, and so on. Thus the body of the deceased is welcomed one last time into the midst of the assembly celebrating the sacrifice of the Mass, the paschal mystery, the gift of redemption won for this deceased Christian and for us.

Cremation too can be ‘of the Church.’ From the time the Holy See lifted the canonical prohibition for Catholics to choose cremation in 1963 it has been the intention that the body *and* the cremated remains of the deceased be accorded the same respect. Thus, the same incarnational anthropology governs the manner of cremation and the disposition of the ashes. In Australia, as elsewhere in western cultures outside North America, with few exceptions cremation follows the Catholic funeral simply as a step in the final disposition of the deceased. In North America, where cremation became popular in modern times precisely as an alternative to the American style funeral itself, an increasing percentage of Catholics follow the secular impetus to cremate immediately following the death. In these situations, therefore, there is no body to be present for the traditional Catholic funeral. Catholic bishops in the USA and Canada as well as the North American editions of the OCF urge as preference the full

funeral to be celebrated with the body present before cremation. Yet, given the pastoral need to address the matter of immediate cremation, in 1997 the conferences of Bishops received an 'indult' from the Holy See to permits the sequence to be reversed. My point here is simply: even when a person's body is cremated immediately following death, the principle that the funeral be 'of the Church' expresses itself unmistakably that the cremated remains are to be accorded the same respect as the body.

The appendix inserted in the US edition of the OCF states clearly, 'The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition.'¹⁴

By the Church

The Catholic funeral is also 'by the church.' It is something that the Church does – not just something that funeral directors do, and the church plays a big role in what it does. 'By the church' implies also that it is not just by the priest. Official documents on Catholic funerals are clear. Proper care of the dead is the responsibility of the people. Of course, priests and deacons and lay leaders have a primary role to play, and they are the usual ministers in the service of the faithful when a death occurs. Yet, if there were no priests and no deacons and no lay ministers and someone dies, the Catholic people have the responsibility to see to it that this person is treated in his/her death as a Catholic would be treated. All this illustrates well that the Catholic funeral is 'by the church.'

For the Church

Finally, it is also important that we think of the Catholic funeral as 'for the church.' A funeral or cremation that is Catholic is not just 'for the family'. Everyone dealing with funerals knows the 'family' is a great amorphous, collection of folks. You may have the disenfranchised second or third spouse present; you may have the lesbian or gay partner who is sitting in the back corner because the 'family' doesn't recognize the person's presence. You may have children from different marriages scattered all over the place in the church. In other words, the persons sitting in the 'family' row are not necessarily the only immediately bereaved. Furthermore, this death and this funeral are something that involves not only the immediately bereaved, but the whole church. For the funeral director, the immediately bereaved are the primary clients. They have to satisfy their desires and wishes. But the Catholic funeral is bigger than that. It is pastorally helpful that we appreciate the difference. This

¹⁴ OCF 417.

doesn't mean the funeral director should be doing anything differently; what is different is the perspective from which we approach the Catholic funeral. There is simply more going on than just a good professional funeral. A funeral that is 'for the church' is a profession of faith and a school of our Catholic faith in the conviction that death – not this death, not any death can have the last word. In the Catholic way of death, one sees and hears, 'I am the resurrection and the life! – I am a God of the living!'

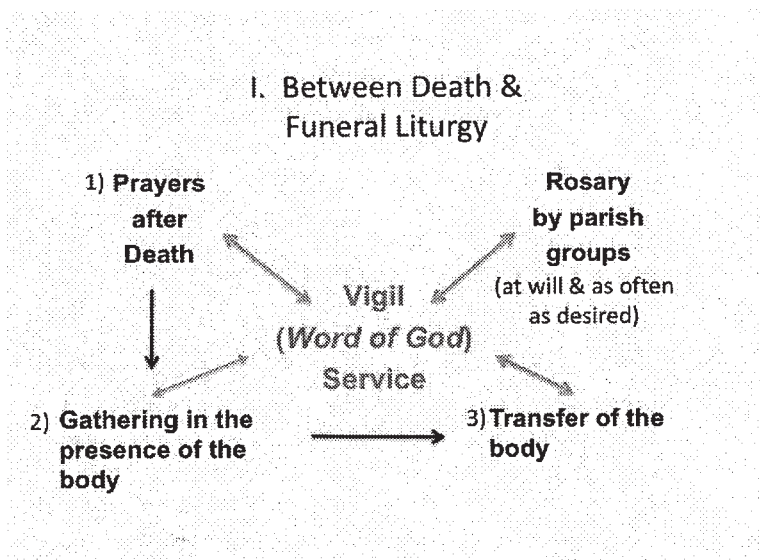
The Liturgy – Mark of the Catholic Funeral

To say that the Liturgy of the Church is one of the marks of a Catholic funeral implies that we take the whole OCF seriously. That is, the full Catholic funeral functions in three time frames and shapes the mind set of what Catholics do when death occurs.

The first of those time frames is the *time between death and the funeral*. This is the time that I'm told is 'lost' presently in the Australian experience, as it is certainly underused in North America too. There is not much done by way of 'waking,' spending prayerful time with the dead, praying in the presence of the body, making time for God at such a turning point. In some Australian and American parishes, people will gather for rosary but even that is not always the case anymore. In any case, the centrality of God's effective Word is scarcely experienced. Of course, there are lots of reasons for this, such as the size of Australia, people travelling across the world for the funeral, complex family and work schedules, and the like. In North America the reasons for not utilizing the time following death liturgically are very similar, albeit complicated by the rush to 'get the funeral over with and move on.' But, as pastoral liturgists we are aware of the process surrounding death and ask what aspects of that process deserve to be marked by the liturgy of the Church. Even if not all who wish can be there, the Church will be there.

Again, it is important to educate our people that one of the primary ways the Church stands with them at the time of a death is through the liturgy – a liturgy that is far richer than only the climactic funeral Mass itself. The time frame between the dying and the formal farewell at Mass involves the beginning of a journey into life without the deceased – often a troubling if busy time during which the effective Word of God deserves a place. With the Vigil of the Word of God as centre piece, the OCF includes still other shorter opportunities for prayer at specific moments in that journey. The following overview may be helpful.¹⁵

¹⁵ For some further insights gleaned from parish priests and pastoral workers across the U.S., see my short article, 'The Vigil: Making Room for God', *Rite*, Chicago, IL: Liturgy



The next movement in the Catholic OCF is, of course, *the Funeral Liturgy itself*, preferably including the Funeral Mass. Much has been written about the Funeral Liturgy, and there is no need to rehearse that here. Suffice it to say that no other liturgy surpasses the Mass as the occasion *par excellence* for bringing the death of this Christian into the context of the paschal mystery. Everything we do pastorally to make each funeral in the parish truly the best liturgy we can provide, the more will our people experience the transforming power of the paschal mystery in their lives and, indeed, when a death occurs in other families, they will know the meaning of the consolation of the faith. They will know that this is the Catholic way – this is what we do when someone dies.

How does the choice for cremation affect funeral liturgy as a mark of the Catholic funeral? Here too the text of the cremation appendix to the OCF in the US is helpful. ‘This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition.’¹⁶ When cremation follows the funeral as part of final disposition, local church custom guides respectful care for the ashes. In North America minor adaptations have been introduced to

Training Publications, 2007, vol. 38, 9-12. *Rite* magazine changed its name to *Pastoral Liturgy* in 2008.

¹⁶ OCF 417.

accommodate celebrating a Catholic funeral in the presence of ashes in place of the body. They are spelled out in the cremation appendix under the title:

Funeral Liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains.¹⁷

First, preparing funeral rites in situations of cremation requires special attention to language. The cremation appendix adjusts the language of the OCF so that '[p]rayers which do not make reference to the honouring or burying of the body of the deceased should be chosen instead of those which have these themes'.¹⁸

The second adjustment pertains to ritual actions. In the first place, '[t]he cremated remains of the body are to be placed in a worthy vessel' and 'a small table or stand is to be prepared for them in the place normally occupied by the coffin'.¹⁹

But how do they get there? 'The vessel containing the cremated remains may be carried to its place in the entrance procession or may be placed on this table or stand sometime before the liturgy begins'.²⁰ The latter option requires no further explanation. However, when the rite of reception and entrance procession are celebrated with ashes, different pastoral liturgical questions arise. For example, what does a liturgical procession with an urn or other container look like? Who carries them? What are appropriate ways to sprinkle or incense vessels holding ashes? What happens to them at the end of the liturgy? How are they cared for during periods of reception immediately following the liturgy? Who will be responsible for their reverent burial or entombment?

These are some of the questions North American liturgists addressed when adapting traditional funeral liturgy for celebration with ashes. Also of interest to Australians, however, is the question, 'What is a 'worthy vessel'? Like in so many other instances, it is easier to suggest what is not a 'worthy vessel.' The principle of respect for cremated remains and directives regarding final disposition do give a good sense of the kind of containers to avoid. Thus, jewellery and dishes, statuary and space capsules (to mention only a few examples), are identified as unacceptable in the present adaptations of Catholic funerary custom to cremation.

For North Americans, and I suspect for Australians as well – sooner or later – the issue here is the commercialization of cremation. What began as a

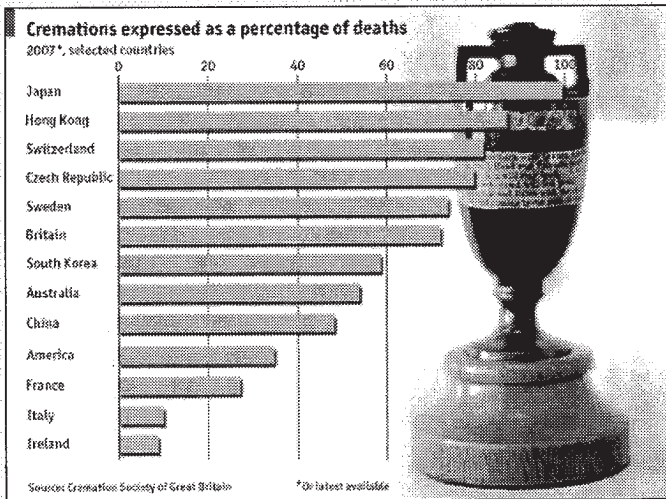
¹⁷ OCF, 426-431.

¹⁸ OCF, 423 and 428.

¹⁹ OCF, 427.

²⁰ OCF, 427.

movement toward simplicity has spawned ostentatious offspring in the new cremation industry. Will Catholics, whose desire for simplicity and cost effective funerals created the demand for funeral liturgy in the presence of ashes, become the consumers of these cremation goods and services? Will religious designer urns, quickly taking their place side by side with the casket in the marketing strategies and status symbols of the American way of death, impact the Catholic spirit of noble simplicity in the revised OCF?



“Since the Catholic church lifted a ban on cremations in 1963 it has also become an easier choice for some Christians to make.”

From Economist.com: The ashes (July 8th 2009)

Finally, the *time following the Funeral Liturgy* has its pivotal marker, the Rite of Committal. That the liturgy makes room for God here too is important because this is when people begin to have to face the reality of loss and the time ahead without the deceased. It is the time when a new relationship with the deceased – now really dead – begins to take shape. Just as the time between the dying and the Funeral Mass has its liturgy to mark the beginning of the journey, here too when the body is laid to rest in the earth or committed to the elements at cremation, hopefully with committal of the ashes later, the liturgy marks the end of the beginning. It promises nothing less than resurrection hope for the deceased and the healing presence of the risen Savior for the mourners in the new world ahead, when the funeral is history and all the family and friends have returned to their own daily lives. However, it is not an exaggeration that in

many places both in Australia and in North America, liturgy at committal is becoming more and more a private, family rite. Despite the presence of clergy or lay ministers, the committal often feels like a liturgical after-thought. Yet, when we recognize its place in the process surrounding death, especially the way it marks the finality of the grave or columbarium niche or scattering garden, it is not hard to see the need for renewed effort at education here too.

A Cemetery that is Catholic – Mark of the Catholic Funeral

A Catholic Cemetery – one owned, operated, and inspired by the Church through diocesan or parochial auspices – or a cemetery that is Catholic – one where Catholic graves are set aside or at least marked through blessing in the funeral liturgy – is in a very deep theological sense an extension of the parish church. It is not proximity but the liturgical action of the Church that unites church and cemetery and makes a cemetery Catholic. Historically, and still today where churches are still surrounded by their churchyard, a short procession with the body from the church to the place of disposition - together with the prayers, psalms and rituals of committal – functioned/functions primarily to conclude the funeral liturgy. Today the procession with the body *from* the church is the same procession that *enters* the cemetery and proceeds to the grave or mausoleum for the final act of reverence paid to the mortal remains of the deceased. In this recognition of the place of committal the OCF has reclaimed the classic Christian emphasis on the grave as witness of the resurrection, ‘Through this act (of committal) the community of faith proclaims that the grave or place of interment, once a sign of futility and despair, has been transformed by means of Christ’s death and resurrection into a sign of hope and promise’.²¹

What we do in the cemetery, both at committal and at times of memorial such as All Souls Day and other memorial events involving the graves of the dead, is what makes any cemetery Catholic, and what we do there renders the cemetery itself a mark of the Catholic funeral. For Catholics even otherwise purely patriotic memorials, such as Anzac Day in Australia or in the USA Memorial Day, enjoy a special Catholic motive because of the faith-filled character of those graves.

Finally, because the cemetery plays such an important role as mark of the Catholic funeral, is there also a Catholic manner of disposing of ashes? Liturgical tradition and the role church cemeteries have played in preserving the memory of Christians as witness to the promise of resurrection suggest preserving the cremated remains of our loved ones, whether by interment or in a

²¹ OCF 209

tomb or columbarium. Scattering gardens with acknowledgement of the names of the deceased and columbaria in church or churchyard where urns containing ashes are preserved are some of the ways Australian Catholics observe reverence for the mortal remains following cremation. In the USA, the cremation Appendix to the OCF states, 'The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires'.²² Because Catholics in North America are surrounded by a cremation culture that espouses the exact opposite approach, they are often unaware of this directive or find it difficult to understand. Good pastoral practice and continuing education as well as the growing reputation of Catholic cemeteries as leaders in shaping cremation attitudes are hopeful signs that there can be a Catholic way of cremation.²³

Conclusion

Let me close on a personal note with an example of a funeral that I believe illustrates how the Church, the liturgy, and a cemetery that is Catholic are what make a Christian funeral 'Catholic.' When my mother turned 90 a few years ago, to be closer to me she moved to Oregon on the far west coast of the USA. Our family always lived in Pennsylvania, about the distance between Perth and Sydney. And so Mom made a new home in Oregon for about five years. There, in her Catholic retirement home located on grounds surrounding the parish church, she developed a whole family of new friends. She died just days shy of her 95th birthday; the story of her funeral follows, adapted here from an earlier version.²⁴

On a weekday evening about 5:00 funeral directors arrived at the parish church with a simple wooden casket carrying mother's embalmed body. It was placed, open, at the far end of the narthex of the church adjacent to the flowing water of the full immersion baptismal font. During this time of waking, family arranged some photos on a table near the doorway; friends and colleagues gathered to offer condolences and pay their last respects.

²² OCF, 417.

²³ Further Australian sources suggested by Fr Rutherford are Jalland, Patricia: *Changing ways of death in twentieth-century Australia: war, medicine, and the funeral business*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006, and the exhibit at the Australian Museum, Sydney: <http://www.deathonline.net/index.cfm>.

²⁴ Rutherford, Richard, 'To be revised...to be adapted...to be restored...', *The Church's Ritual Books Since the Council...* The Order of Christian Funerals.' *Today's Liturgy*, 2006, vol. 28, no. 4, 8-15.

At 7:00 everyone gathered at the casket to attend prayerfully to the closing and to celebrate the reception of mother's body into the church. Resting now in the space between the font and the doorway into the church mother's casket was sprinkled with living water from the font; her daughter and close family friends spread the white pall elegantly over it. Then the gathered community, singing, processed with mother's body into the church. There, with her casket at its place before the altar near the paschal candle, Evening Prayer for the Dead was celebrated as her Vigil liturgy. Afterwards, the assembly paid final respects and retired, allowing mother, resting in her coffin, to remain in place at the foot of the altar throughout the night. After some moments in prayer the family too left and the church was locked. Had it been personally feasible we would have preferred to invite family members and friends to extend the prayer vigil in private for several hours – perhaps to midnight – or even through the night.

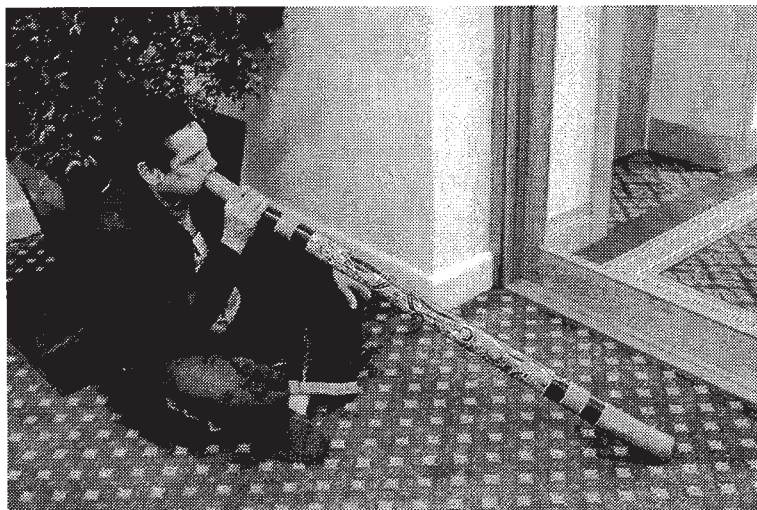
Next morning at the regular parish Mass time we gathered anew, some returning and some who could not come for the Vigil, to celebrate her funeral liturgy. Having celebrated the reception the evening before and with mother's casket still at the foot of the altar, Mass now began as usual. Choosing the regular scheduled hour for daily Mass allowed working and retired parishioners who knew mother to participate in her funeral liturgy without extra burden. After Mass and final commendation mother's body was carried in procession, accompanied by the ancient chant *In paradisum* (May the angels lead you into paradise....) to the waiting hearse and removed for cremation. A reception for all present followed the liturgy in the parish hall.

Within a few days I met with the funeral director to collect mother's ashes, beautifully presented with respect in a velvet bag. We prepared the necessary paperwork to carry them personally on a flight across country to our former home town for burial. There, on Saturday morning at 9:00 family members, who had gathered from various corners of the country the previous day, and old family friends met at the cemetery to celebrate the rite of committal. Next to a small cremation grave sparkling with a light dusting of early winter snow and lined with a colourful afghan²⁵ mother had knitted some 50 years before stood her only grandson reverently holding the urn with her ashes. Following the prayer of committal, together we placed her urn in the grave. After the closing prayer and final blessing I folded the afghan over the urn. Someone thought to bring long stemmed roses and each person present placed a single rose on top of the afghan-wrapped urn. A cemetery workman filled in the small grave. Mother now rested next to her husband who had gone before her 30 years earlier.

²⁵ Australian version: a hand-knitted rug or shawl [Ed.].

Will anyone of those present ever return to visit her grave? Yes, but surely not often. Yet, we left her and my father there with the confidence that the church will gather from time to time and especially on All Soul's Day to remember all those whose graves stand as a worthy witness to our faith in the paschal mystery.

At 11:00 a.m., in the only other parish church she had known since childhood – the church of her wedding and our baptisms, first communions, confirmations, first mass celebrations, we celebrated mother's funeral Mass (or in this case perhaps even appropriately, 'Mass of Christian Burial'). A second funeral Mass? Why not? What makes the funeral Mass so 'magical' that a person would be allowed only one? At the reception in a local restaurant following Mass no one asked. All concerned – both in Oregon and in rural Pennsylvania – knew they had experienced a Catholic funeral.



Call to prayer – by didgeridoo

THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF LITURGY

The XXII Congress of *Societas Liturgica* – A reflection

There was a buzz of excitement and anticipation in the air when I arrived at St Joseph's on the afternoon of August 10th. Participants were arriving and settling in, old friends were getting together, preparations were under way for the welcome ceremony, evening prayer and the first dinner of the Congress. For members of the Academy all this had particular significance...the realization of a dream going back quite some years to host a Congress in Australia.

It was our privilege in the late afternoon to be welcomed by local Indigenous Elders, to hear the Presidential Address from James Puglisi, to share together in worship, and then to enjoy the first of many communal meals and the rich conversations that accompanied them.

A *Societas* Congress offers a wide variety of experiences and opportunities for interaction. There were major presentations by international scholars that addressed the theme (The Liturgical Year) from various perspectives, followed by discussion in small groups. Most days there were opportunities for members to present case studies or short communications indicative of the breadth and depth of research and liturgical practice around the world.

We were also wonderfully entertained. On Tuesday night The Song Company presented a program of Australian Sacred Music. On Wednesday night we were hosted by local Vietnamese, Chinese and Tongan Christians, who provided the evening meal and offered a program of national singing and dancing. On Thursday night we enjoyed a BBQ (including kangaroo meat) to a background of music from an Aussie Bush Band. And on Friday night we ventured out for the Congress Dinner (and superb music and singing from representatives of Opera Australia). During the evening we had to temporarily vacate the Dining Room when the fire alarm went off! However, the festivities continued on the footpath until we were able to return to our meal.

In this brief reflection I want to highlight some of the elements of the Congress that made it special and memorable.

Firstly, the planning and preparation undertaken by the local Organising Committee was meticulous in every way. Consequently, the Congress ran smoothly from start to finish. We have to thank Carmel Pilcher, David Orr, Tom Elich, Cathy Murrowood, Robert Gribben, Christopher Willcock and Anthony Kain for their commitment to the task and the care they took with every aspect of the program. They did us proud and the numerous positive

comments I received indicate how much their work was valued by the Congress participants.

Secondly, the worship life of the Congress was particularly rich. The knowledge, experience and skill of Robert Gribben were apparent in the very fine liturgies with which we celebrated morning and evening prayer. The genius of Christopher Willcock was expressed in the quality of the music, much of it written by Christopher himself, and the choir he formed from Congress participants served us extremely well. All of this came together in the powerful and deeply moving Congress Eucharist, held in St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta, on the Thursday evening - an experience I will never forget.

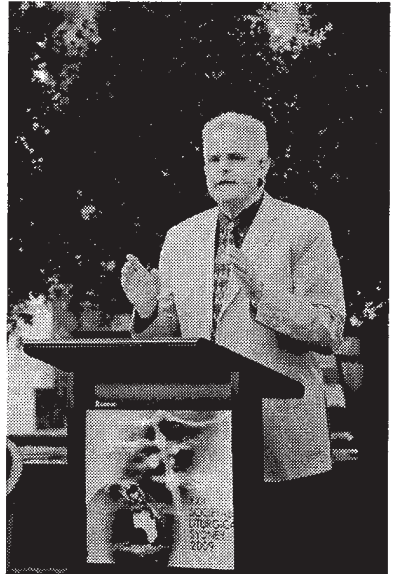
Thirdly, a Congress like this brings together people from many countries and traditions. We were especially pleased, as the host Academy, to be able to sponsor participants who would not otherwise have been able to attend. I met people who had previously been only names on books I have read over the years. I sat at table with others whose life experiences have been very different to my own. These are memories that will also endure.

It was good that so many Australians participated in the Congress. We hope that this might result in some new energy for our own Academy.

David Pitman
President – Australian Academy of Liturgy



Dr Anita Munro (Uniting, Armadale NSW)



Dr Tom Elich (Catholic, Brisbane)

News from Chapters

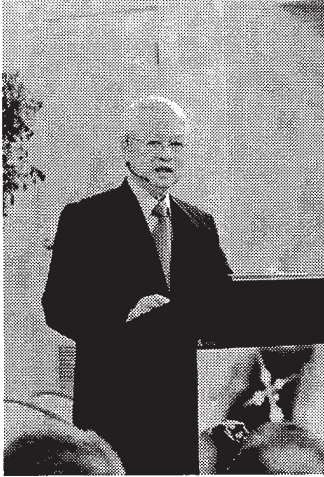
Tasmania

The Tasmanian Chapter lent fine organisational support to the Sydney Congress of Societas Liturgica. All members attended. Highlights this year include the visits of Paul Turner and Mark Francis who presented public lectures in Hobart before and after the Congress.

A number of people have been approached to join the Chapter who will be attending the October meeting.

Western Australia

A number of Chapter members gathered on 8th October at Vivien and Ron Larkin's home in Perth for an informal meal and conversation with Professor Robert Gribben, who was visiting Perth to advise the city churches of the Uniting Church and to give a public lecture on 'Book, Bath and Table: Christian Worship and its Architectural Setting' at Wesley Church. He spoke about his recent book *Uniting in Thanksgiving: the Great Prayers of Thanksgiving of the Uniting Church in Australia* [Melbourne: Uniting Academic Press 2008], and an enjoyable conversation followed. The Rev. Dr Elizabeth Smith was welcomed to the Chapter.



Dr Anscar Chapungco osb (Philippines)



Professor James Puglisi sa (Catholic, Italy,) President of Societas Liturgica

Book Reviews

Ron Browning, *Taking the Plunge – Seeking – Accompanying – Baptising*, Richmond, Vic.: Spectrum Publications, 2008, 167 pp

In *Taking the Plunge* Ron Browning has given us a book that can best be described as ‘a poetic hymn to the Easter Journey’. This is not a book of theory about Christian initiation, though there is theory in this book. This is not a ‘how to’ book for Adult Christian Initiation, though there is information and stories about ‘how to’ in it. This is not a devotional book of inspirational stories of those who have come to faith through the Easter Journey, though there are plenty of such stories and inspirational devotion in it. What Ron Browning has done is to synthesise enough theory, with enough instruction and enough story and devotion to give anyone who is interested in making new Christians enough of a taste of this process to begin.

Because the Initiation of Christians (Easter Journey, Catechumenate) is not a programme, this approach makes perfect sense. Ron Browning himself, as he comments, was mentored into the process in his own Anglican congregation in Williamstown, Victoria, where he first implemented the Easter Journey. Anyone who is inspired by this book needs to do the same; otherwise they will

not fully understand the way that mentoring and companioning really functions in Christian Initiation. This means that books can only take one so far. What needs to happen next is action and reflection on it.

But this book will be a very good companion to those who want to begin working with adults in Christian Initiation. I particularly enjoyed Ron Browning's knowledge of the Early Fathers. It was during their time that conversion from paganism was a real life event. How they write so confidently and lovingly about coming to faith in Christ is mirrored for us in Ron Browning's choice of material, and in his own obvious love for the Fathers, and the process itself.

This is again reflected in the stories of people who have come to faith under his guidance. They give us an insight into the genuine struggles of modern day enquirers and let us see how their questions and doubts can be worked with in a creative way.

Similarly, instead of giving us a 'curriculum' which tells us to cover certain topics, Ron Browning approaches the issues of Justice, Prayer, Sin, Scripture engagement and other religions by telling us the story of how these issues emerged in the process of walking with candidates on their way to the font.

Most significantly, Ron Browning has given us a book that touches on what is for me the fundamental question of our time: the need for the Church to attend once more to the processes of *initiation* into the reign of God through the sacramental and liturgical complex of Baptism-Eucharist. Many critics of the local church presume that 'the glory has left the temple', and so local congregations are not capable of initiating new Christians into the reign of God because God has in fact departed from here. Consequently new places must be found. Ron Browning does not share this view, but has confidence in local existing parishes, that they have the resources be the future of the body of Christ. Increasing attendance is not held up as the ultimate goal either (although that will happen). Instead, Ron Browning accepts that the local congregation has the resources it needs to initiate others into the Reign of God through a recovery of the confidence and approach of the Church in the first four centuries of her life, the Catechumenate (Easter Journey). Now that *is* fresh and mission shaped.

Let me add one correction. Finkenwalde, the seminary set up by Bonhoeffer (p. 17), is not in southern Germany, but in present day Poland near the town of

Stettin¹. This is a small quibble in the light of my overall appreciation of the work Ron Browning has done here, but readers may find this a helpful correction.

Paul Dalzell

Stephen Burns, Nicola Slee and Michael N. Jagessar (eds.), *The Edge of God, New Liturgical Texts and Contexts in Conversation*, London: Epworth, 2008, ISBN 978 0 7162 0641 5, xvi +314 pp.

This highly readable collection of essays emanates from writers connected with The Queen's Foundation (formerly The Queen's College, the ecumenical theological college), Birmingham, but now spread all over the world. One of the co-editors, Stephen Burns, presently works in the United Theological College, Sydney; Rupert Jeffcoat is director of music at St John's Anglican Cathedral in Brisbane.

The authors take us to the 'edges' of liturgical experience, sometimes a long way from where a middle class (white, male), Anglo (and many another) congregation would find itself. They draw on sources rarely touched in classical liturgical discussion: feminist, post-colonial, queer theologies, theologies of disability, of asylum, and so on. Many of the essays push the reader to the edge as well, and the journey is very worthwhile. There are several liturgical texts included, but the issues are, of course, much wider than texts, hence 'contexts' as well. Language, nevertheless is a major focus for all.

There are too many essays to review, but I judged none to be ignored. I select a few for comment, without implications for those I do not. Andy Lyons, a recently-ordained Methodist minister formerly in the business world, traces the evolution of his thinking as he encountered the liturgies in his ecumenical and multi-ethnic college; Donald Eadie (whose biography is omitted) is a senior Methodist minister who reflects interestingly on 'eucharistic living' over a long ministry.

The mood becomes edgier in Part 2, which focuses on 'Culture and Empire(s)'. David Joy (a presbyter of the Church of South India) applies a post-colonial lens to the notion of inculturation and asks 'whether it is another form of

¹ In 1945, under territorial changes demanded by the Soviet Union, the Polish border was moved westward into pre-war Germany, to the Oder-Neisse line, to encompass most of Silesia and Pomerania, including Szczecin (Stettin), on the west side of the Oder, within present-day Poland. (Ed.)

hegemonic control, empire building and colonization?'. His church struggles to retain the noble CSI liturgy, which so set the pattern for the contemporary liturgical and ecumenical movements, while incorporating the totality of the life of 'common people'. He examines four examples of contemporary indigenous liturgy. Michael Jagessar and Stephen Burns turn their attention to the words of hymns, exposing the imperial imagery in familiar hymnbooks; I am of the opinion that most of these challenges have been met in recent Australian examples, but there are salutary warnings. Susanna Snyder asks how a welcoming place for asylum seekers in a congregation might be secured.

In the section on 'Body language', the distinguished theologian Frances Young writes a moving account of her son Arthur, who has profound learning difficulties, and has always been part of worshipping communities. Several other essays deal with various 'dis-abilities' in this context, including a challenging piece by John Hull, well-known for his writing on blind persons in 'able' society, but here drawing the parallels for those of us who are deaf to whatever degree. Think again of hymns: 'Lord, I was blind / dumb / deaf' and their biblical inspiration.

The reflections of feminist and lesbian perspectives, the exploration of silence and of music, on images and liturgical language continue through the collection. Several times I began a chapter with the clear thought I would not like it; in all cases, I found the arguments cogent and worthy of more consideration than I had given them. This is an extraordinary collection of high standard. It will push the reader to edges where God can surprise us afresh.

Robert Gribben

Simon Jones (ed.), *The Sacramental Life: Gregory Dix and His Writings*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007, pp xxiv + 161, pb, ISBN 978-1-85311-717-6 RRP £16.99

Simon Jones, Chaplain and Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, wrote the introduction to the sixtieth anniversary edition of Dix's *The Shape of the Liturgy* (in 2005). He has now (2007) edited this collection of extracts from Dix's published and unpublished sources. Jones is an oblate of Elmore Abbey, the Anglican Benedictine community where the Dix archives are now held.

Archbishop Rowan Williams has been the latest to suggest a 'Dix reader', and written the Foreword to the book (several previous suggestions of such a compilation from Dix's writings failed to come to fruition). Williams

commends Jones's 'excellent job in quarrying Dom Gregory's work ... I hope these pages will send many to the books themselves; more than that, though, I hope that they will do what he would of course have wanted - to send people to the altar, to the place where the journey of the Son of God, the coming of the Messiah to the Father, is opened to us day by day' (pp x-xi).

The present reviewer wonders if such a 'reader' is the best way to introduce Dix to a generation for whom he may be little more than a figure in the past. He was a controversialist as well as a scholar, and *The Sacramental Life* presents his results much more than his methods of reaching them. So the controversial aspect is highlighted and the scholarship is not. This is not the place to revisit the scholarly debates of sixty and more years ago. But it needs to be said that Dix is patronizing towards Protestant scholars, and shows quite an unpleasant streak in his character with his comments on some, particularly in the Anglican Church, with whom he disagreed.

This said, this reviewer shares to the full Dix's conviction of the vital importance of true doctrine for the life of both the Church and the Christian. Given this, I trust that Dix would support the comment that *The Sacramental Life* can only be endorsed in its purpose as a devotional (in its widest sense) book, with the proviso that it be read with one's critical faculties working hard (as, of course, is *always* true of devotional works). The material is arranged in four sections: Shaping the Liturgy (pp 1-35), Shaping the Spiritual Life (pp 37-76), Shaping the Religious Life (pp 77-97), and Shaping the Church's Ministry (pp 99-153).

One of Dix's books does not seem to have received the attention it deserves from New Testament scholars. The one extract from *Jew and Greek* (pp 14-15), because it is selected with the reader's emphasis on the life of Church and Christian, does not show Dix's profound insights. Consider this almost throw-away line (p 20): 'The point in the Gospels seems to be not so much that Jesus *claimed* an earthly kingship, as that an earthly kingship was generally known to be His *by right of inheritance*, and that He never attempted to deny that this was so' (Dix's italics). An extended passage (pp 29-51) shows what was involved in the admission of uncircumcised Gentiles to Israel renewed in the Messiah and in St Paul's confronting St Peter at Antioch (even if some points of detail may be mistaken).

This review will not set out the many places where *The Sacramental Life* has question marks or other indications of dissent by this reviewer, who found himself moved and challenged by Dix's call to more and more whole-hearted submission of the whole of one's life to the Lord God Almighty. Dix's heart was

very much in the right place, even if his head sometimes was not. May *The Sacramental Life* encourage many to strive more for true doctrine, which expresses itself in true devotion of life.

R. Stephen Cherry



Fr Anthony Aarons msr, from Jamaica, leads morning prayer in the chapel.

Contributors

The Rev. **Stephen Cherry**, an Anglican priest, is a former secretary of the Liturgy Committee of the Diocese of Melbourne.

The Rev. Dr **Paul Dalzell** is currently Anglican parish priest in Alexandra, Victoria. Through parish work, teaching, mentoring and research, he has spent the last 18 years active in evangelism through the renewed Catechumenate.

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The Rev. Dr **Richard Rutherford** csc, professor of theology and pastoral liturgy at the University of Portland in Oregon, USA, has studied the Christian funeral and bereavement process for over 30 years. He holds degrees from the University of Notre Dame, the Gregorian University in Rome and the Catholic University of Nijmegen, Netherlands. He is currently President of the North American Academy of Liturgy.

The Rev. Dr **Jeffrey Truscott** is a Lutheran pastor and chaplain at Trinity Theological College, Singapore, where he teaches Liturgy and Worship. He holds a PhD from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, U.S.A. He presented this paper at the recent Societas Liturgica congress in Sydney.

We are delighted to acknowledge the work of **Julie Moran** who took the photographs, the first to be published in AJL.

The Rev. Dr **Robert Gribben** is Editor of AJL, and held the chair of Worship and Mission at the Uniting Church Theological College for the last ten years, and is now Professor Emeritus. He is a former President of the Academy and Council member of Societas Liturgica. His most recent book is *Uniting in Thanksgiving: The Great Prayers of Thanksgiving of the Uniting Church in Australia*, Uniting Academic Press, Melbourne 2008.

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