

## The Scandal of Particularity Writ Small: Principles for Indigenizing Liturgy in the Local Context

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*This article proposes an extension of the liturgical flexibility offered in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. First, it suggests that much-needed ritual competence could be developed through generating ritualizations in small groups to meet pastoral-liturgical needs by leaders who understand these local contexts from the inside (a strategy called indigenization). Second, it proposes four principles for the development of such rites. It ends with a call for intentional work toward developing ritual competence in the church. The York Statement on liturgical inculturation of the 1989 International Anglican Liturgical Consultation called for liturgical scholars to support the process of God's continuing self-inculturation in the world in liturgy, and to enable the creativity and expertise of leaders and teachers to this end. This article is offered toward the hopes and in the spirit of the York Statement and the resolutions of the 1988 Lambeth Conference that inspired it.*

### I

My brother, you are familiar with the usage of the Roman Church, in which you were brought up. But if you have found customs, whether in the Church of Rome or of Gaul or any other that may be more acceptable to God, I wish you to make a careful selection of them, and teach the Church of the English. . . .

Therefore select from each of the Churches whatever things are devout, religious, and right; and when you have bound them, as it

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were, into a sheaf, let the minds of the English grow accustomed to it.

Pope Gregory the Great<sup>1</sup>

The “Church of the English” was born of indigenized liturgy. The twenty-first-century interest in enabling non-Anglo Episcopalians in the U.S. to adapt liturgy to their own cultures hearkens to a parallel—and foundational—interest fourteen centuries ago. Incorporating “customs . . . that may be more acceptable to God” was part of the very mandate for bringing Christianity from Rome to Canterbury—a legacy of liturgical freedom to make worship fitting to the worshippers.

At the time, Pope Gregory was actually not so radical in his instructions to his fellow Benedictine, given that baptismal and eucharistic liturgies were naturally adapted to the places and people whose liturgies they were. Not only the church of the English, but also the church of the Gallicans (who, for example, baptized throughout the year, not just at Easter and Pentecost) and the church of the Milanese (who conducted foot-washing as part of the baptismal service) had initiated Christians and made Holy Communion in ways grounded in catholic tradition, but also fitting to the particular worshiping cultures and communities.

Such liturgical variation was common before the printing press, when there was no standardized rite in the Western church.<sup>2</sup> However, in response to the Reformation, the Council of Trent used the printing press to counter the Reformation and establish the rite of Rome to be the “canon” or standard throughout the then-identified *Roman Catholic Church*. By 1570 the Roman missal, including rite and rubric,<sup>3</sup> was imposed upon all non-Reformation Western church

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Gregory the Great, OSB, to Augustine of Canterbury, OSB, 601 C.E., *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, book 1, chap. 27, translated by Leo Sherley-Price, revised by R. E. Latham (New York: Penguin Books, 1955, 1990), 78-79.

<sup>2</sup> The manuscripts extant indicate regional patterns in liturgy, but cannot reveal the extent of their use nor the license taken or not in the texts’ employment. See Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1986). Louis Weil points out that in modern times, the first document we have imposing the uniform use of a prayer text occurred before the Council of Trent, in 1549 with the Act of Uniformity in England requiring all churches in the domain to use the Book of Common Prayer. Personal conversation, June 4, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> The publication of the Roman Missal of Pius V which “led to a Romanization of the Western Church . . . a liturgical uniformity hitherto unknown” was effected by the common language of the liturgy (Latin, the language of Rome), common practice,

communities. Yet the tension so radically expressed in Trent's universalization of a local rite will always remain a tug and pull in Christ's one catholic church. The pull toward standardization, on the one hand, which identifies the *ecclesia* as one and universal through normative signs and rhythms, enables us to recognize each other from one place and time to another. The opposing pull toward particularization of worship for specific people in local places, on the other, enables us to live into the scandal of particularity, that Jesus was God incarnate as a *particular* human being in a *specific* historic place and culture—as must be his Body, and his liturgy. As Trent pulled strongly toward the universal, asserting the Latin language and clerical dominance for the sake of clearly perceivable identity, there is an increasing counterpull in the direction of particular, inculturated liturgies, such as African, Hispanic, First Nations. As worship enacts both our identity and our particularity, should not worship justly mediate Christ's incarnation among *us*, for *us*, as gathered church? Both our unity, identified in common practice and symbols, and our diversity, incarnate in different forms of worship, are central and necessary to our Christian faith and identity.

But it is not an obvious or simple task to enable particularity without challenging our identity and unity. How do we continue the work begun by Augustine of Canterbury 1,400 years ago, without creating liturgy Augustine himself would not recognize? How can we coach worship leaders to create and keep this tensile balance?

A revealing metaphor for this tension may open the question. This tug is like the lunar pull upon the earth which results in tidal rhythms, enabling life to flourish on land, in the sea, and along the coasts where the rhythm is most obvious. This gravitational tension is not experienced as “negative” or “positive,” but rather as rhythmic. The results of ebb and flow are both “good” as long as the tension continues and rhythmic balance is retained. We might view the universal/particular tension in liturgical worship similarly, noting whether rites represent the ebb of standardization or the flow of creativity, or whether they address the tide pools in between.

Yet as in tides, so in liturgy: the stakes for balance are high. If too much ebb of universality, if the tide goes out too far, the clams, birds,

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and “the Tridentine concern for rubrical precision in the doing of the liturgy, demonstrated by the printing of rubrics in the Roman Missal and Ritual.” Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994), 17.

and myriad life-forms in the sand at the liminal coastland will die. If too much flow of particularity, if the tide comes in too high or stays too long, the flooded trees in salt water and landed life-forms will also die. Worship must be recognizably Christian, across ever-changing cultures, across 2,000 years of history. Worship must be recognizably human to the diverse peoples worshipping in these various societies and centuries.

How do we do this competently? The intent of this article is to put the “how” question within the context of *local liturgical indigenization*, by seeking specific guidelines: Are there principles or criteria we might apply in this rhythmic tension, in order to hold the church steady, while also nourishing life on the side of creative adaptation?

### *Liturgical Indigenization*

My first claim is that the purpose or intention for creating guidelines for creative liturgical adaptation is that they be used in the mode of indigenization, and arise out of the church’s study of liturgical indigenization or inculturation. Definitionally, the body of literature about accommodating worship to cultural contexts uses the general term *inculturation*,<sup>4</sup> but distinguishes among *acculturation*, *inculturation*, *adaptation*, *indigenization*, *internalization*,<sup>5</sup> and *contextualization*. *Inculturation* and *indigenization*<sup>6</sup> typically refer to the work of a missionary who knows the liturgy and tries to accommodate it to the

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<sup>4</sup> *Inculturation* is the term commonly used by liturgical scholars, and was employed by the third International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (York, 1989) in its statement “‘Down to Earth Worship’: Liturgical Inculturation and the Anglican Communion.” See David R. Holeton, ed., *Liturgical Inculturation in the Anglican Communion*, Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study 15 (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1990). Because this term commonly refers to liturgical adaptation in world cultural groups, I distinguish the call here for subcultural adaptation by using the alternative term *indigenization*.

<sup>5</sup> The anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan, writing about western Alaska, suggests a view of encounter which does not involve cultural “winners” and “losers.” She suggests the term “internalization” to imply forms that have taken root in deep structures of thought and affective orientations to life such that one lives the gospel in one’s own setting. The goal, then, of any mission or particularization of liturgy would be its *internalization* or *indigenization*.

<sup>6</sup> This is the term used by Elisha Mbonigaba in his essay “Indigenization of the Liturgy” in *A Kingdom of Priests: Liturgical Formation of the People of God. Papers read at the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation [in] Brixen, North Italy, 24-25 August 1987*, ed. Thomas J. Talley (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1988), 39-47.

people as one from outside their culture—like Pope Gregory’s instruction to Augustine of Canterbury. However, when the liturgist is generating a rite in her or his own primary culture, which is the subject of this article, the process is considered “pastoral adaptation” for which the criteria tend to be more restrictive. For example, it would generally be considered fitting for a missionary to provide dynamic equivalence in metaphoric language for Christ among people of another cultural system, such as the Athabaskans or Eskimo, where there are no lambs: “baby caribou of God” or “seal of God.”<sup>7</sup> However, it would not necessarily be equally acceptable for a pastor in a subculture within one’s own cultural system to provide dynamic equivalence in the metaphoric language for God among people who cannot relate to God as Father: “Holy One of Israel,” or “Source of all Being.”<sup>8</sup>

The greater restriction may arise from the reduced critical distance between oneself and the pastoral community, the inability to be “objective.” However, for a pastor with ritual competence and self-knowledge, this factor is overcome by the deeper intuitive understanding of the pastoral situation and the ways liturgy might effectively function within it. What finally is distinct in adapting liturgy to a subculture of one’s own rather than another cultural system is not actually the nature of the work, but rather the perspective and self-knowledge of the liturgist.

By considering any pastoral liturgical adaptation, whether one’s own or that of another culture, as part of the genre “indigenization,” there are three advantages. The first is insider advantage—a deeper insight into the subtleties of pastoral ritual need. The second is a broader perspective on implications of liturgical adaptation. When liturgical challenges arise, some will be recognized as issues of theological normativity; however, it may be more fitting to consider others as cultural adaptations, or ways of indigenizing practice in the local community. And the third advantage in thinking of liturgical

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<sup>7</sup> “Baby caribou of God” is the translation generated by Canadian Anglicans in the Northern Territories for the (formerly nomadic) Athabaskan people who would never have experienced a sheep. “Seal of God” is a dynamically equivalent metaphor suggested by Barbara Flaherty who noted that for Eskimos, the fur seal provides clothing, oil for lamplight, meat for eating, and ocean buoys for marking the way home in the kayak or badarka. (Personal conversation, Anchorage, Alaska, ca. 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Gail Ramshaw, *Christ in Sacred Speech: The Meaning of Liturgical Language* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1986), reprinted as *Reviving Sacred Speech* (Akron, Ohio: OSL Publications, 2000).

adaptation as part of the broader category “cultural indigenization” is that the liturgist’s focus can remain on the liturgical patterns, the pastoral need, and one’s own growing liturgical sensitivity, without also having to learn another whole culture or language. In other words, living within a cultural particularity writ small, one may better develop one’s own ritual competence, as well as better come to understand the very process of adapting liturgy for the sake of pastoral cultural indigenization.

A challenge related to this first claim, then, is to recognize the subgroups within the broad culture to which we belong, that our “insider” knowledge may bring wisdom and empathy to liturgies we offer for the care of our people. The histories and experiences which form us in subcommunities also give us strengths and weaknesses from which we may minister quite specifically and incarnationally to those whose situations we uniquely understand. My own interest and sub-cultural experience in rites of healing and bridging informs the two healing liturgies which exemplify the generative principles in this article.

### *Ritual Competence*

My second claim is that ritual competence is needed for the wider indigenization of liturgy into the needs and lives of our people. It will be an ongoing challenge for us who know and love liturgy to learn its language so well, to identify its deep structures and principles so familiarly, that we become competent to bend its principles to the love of God’s people, enabling them to worship God. This requires intentional study and practice so that a certain expertise may develop. Richard Selzer, in his book *Mortal Lessons*, tells the story of a wife coming out of surgery in which the tumor in her jaw was successfully removed, but a nerve accidentally had been severed so that her mouth drooped. Her husband came into the recovery room and saw concern in her eyes. “Did the surgery work?” she whispered. “Yes,” he assured her, and tenderly twisted his own mouth so that their lips met, to show her that her kiss still worked. Good liturgy with such a pastoral twist is, I contend, a manifestation of the radical particularization in which God came to earth as one particular (Middle Eastern male) human being, bending Godself to our finitude. To do prayer book rites well requires knowledge of the rite, love of the people, focused presence. To create such indigenization requires these, as well as a yet deeper

art and skill of ritual competence,<sup>9</sup> and an indigenous knowledge and love of the subcultural group one is serving.

### *Principles*

The standards or principles which follow are intended to bring to consciousness operating criteria in order to guide generative liturgical indigenization and enable ritual competence. To keep balance in the ebb of universal theology which keeps the church one and holy, and the flow of pastoral healing indigenization, criteria are needed for indigenizing liturgy. Such guidelines, I believe, will offer immense confidence and help as persons dare to risk thinking pastorally and culturally as well as theologically about indigenizing liturgy.

In what follows I will set the context by giving an example of one pastoral healing ritual prepared for a particular group of women. I will then draw from this example some principles of pastoral liturgical development which we can then observe in a second example of a public rite of healing to see how these principles may be operative in another context.

## II

It was an Episcopal priest who first awakened me to a different way of thinking about indigenization through ritualizations she created for specific groups in her congregation. Susan Lehman has a gift for educating through liturgy and for making rituals which bridge from the secular to the sacred. A woman in Susan's congregation was engaged to be married, but there was tension and difficulty already surrounding this prospective marriage. The woman was joyous one moment and in despair the next as she attempted to adjust to an isolated man whom she loved but who was quite troubled. In other circles of my life, people would have "wished they could help," expressed sympathy to each other but not to the woman, and helped her celebrate in the traditional way, putting the "best face" on an uncertain situation. But Susan did something which appeared actually, tangibly to help this woman by grounding her in a reality deeper than marriage,

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<sup>9</sup> Roland Delattre, "Ritual Resourcefulness and Cultural Pluralism," *Soundings* 61 (1978): 281-301.



giving her a standpoint from which to face the problems, and enlarging her worldview to include wider sources of power and love and wholeness which she could then bring to bear not only on wedding preparations, but into daily marriage situations as well. And the way Susan did this was by creating a pastoral liturgy, a ritualization<sup>10</sup> for this woman and other women of the church: for a subgroup which we might label “middle-class married women who are members of an Episcopal congregation.”

It was a context appropriate to the group: a luncheon in honor of the fiancée, whom we will call Linda. The other women were invited to bring photographs of their weddings. The women knew each other, and conversation was comfortable from the start. As they gathered in the living room, Susan welcomed them, served something to drink, and invited the married women to show their wedding pictures. As she retreated to the kitchen to complete luncheon preparations, the women shared stories with each other and the soon-to-be-married Linda. However, one of the women, “Kathy,” had no wedding pictures. “None were taken,” was all she said.

Soon all were called to the table. Thanksgiving was offered and all were seated. The setting was elegant: china, silver, cloth napkins. After the main dish was passed around and proclaimed delicious, Susan invited the women to answer for Linda the first of three questions, about their experience of their wedding day. The stories were lively. Women remembered feeling scared, elated, stressed. But Kathy’s story was the most poignant. It was a religiously mixed marriage, and neither family had approved. One set of parents refused even to attend the small ceremony at the college chapel; the other set attended but sat in the back and left quietly after it was over. The clergyman also had to leave right away. The only redemptive part of a difficult and bittersweet day, Kathy recounted, was that the witnessing couple had invited the newlyweds over for dinner afterwards and had given them a gift. No

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<sup>10</sup> I acknowledge with gratitude the seminal work of Professor Catherine Bell in shifting the approach to the study of ritual from a category of action which social scientists observe and categorize to an examination of “ritualization” which is a strategic way of acting through differentiation which privileges some actions and ways of “seeing” over others and renegotiates power relations. Ritualization in Bell’s sense can be studied by a participant as much as by an outside observer. See *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), viii-xi, 88-93, 197. “When analyzed as ritualization, acting ritually emerges as a particular cultural strategy of differentiation linked to particular social effects and rooted in a distinctive interplay of a socialized body and the environment it structures” (7-8).



photographs were taken at the chapel—it had hardly seemed like a celebration at all. Linda listened intently, absorbing all the stories.

When the salad was served, Susan posed a second question: Can you remember and describe your fifth wedding anniversary? Again the stories were varied. Kathy's account was in dramatic contrast to the painful memory of her wedding day. By the fifth anniversary, there was a grandchild, and the four grandparents had reconciled themselves with the union, the couple, and each other. There was a big family anniversary party—and this time, there were photographs taken. The joy so starkly missing at the wedding had been present on the fifth anniversary. Linda took all this in.

By dessert and coffee, Susan had asked each one to share a low moment in their marriage and whether (and how) they had come through that. The responses included financial difficulties, suicide of a husband, and being told their husbands no longer loved them. The stories of how they came through such devastating pain were empowering tales of strong character, support of family and friends, loving church communities, faithful endurance.

When the stories were finished, Linda was invited to share anything she liked about her own wedding plans or her response to the women. You could tell how deeply moved she was as Linda expressed the power and intimacy the stories had for her, the solidarity of not being alone in her pain, the hope that her marriage would not be defined by the present problems, and the awareness that such a group of women could be available again for her and for others at any stage of anguish or joy. There was animation in the group as they left Susan's home.

It would have been much more "efficient" to have merely said to Linda, "There are many things which seem to be missing in your partnership now, and your pre-wedding experiences include sadness and anxiety. But remember that the wedding is only a moment, and the marriage is a lifetime. Trust in God's redemption; have hope for the future." But Linda could not have heard such words in a way that would have shifted her orientation away from uneasiness toward confidence and hope. In contrast to spoken words, this enacted gathering of women on her behalf, in the nurturing context of beauty and elegance, the intimacy of shared stories, and the witness of women who had lived them, all seated in this moment around the same table, had an empowering and hope-filling effect on Linda which apparently sustained her through the beginning and the length of her marriage. The women could have hosted a wedding shower for Linda with traditional gifts,

silly games, jovial conversation. But this gathering of women around a meal with structured storytelling communicated not only the solidarity and care of the women's community for Linda, but the promise that they would "be there" for her through her own downs and ups. It was a priceless gift that signified and effected the truth of the gospel superimposed upon the truth of Linda's situation. And it was accomplished in the indigenous cultural idiom: an elegant luncheon.

### III

We have just witnessed a specific ritualization designed by a pastoral liturgist to meet a specific need of a woman in a subgroup she understood. In these women's cultural "language," the Christian story of salvation, of creation-alienation-redemption, was told in the context of a celebrative meal such that the Good News was implanted in a common cultural pattern. What principles were operative in this ritualization? I here suggest four principles for indigenizing the gospel in Christian pastoral liturgy, recognizing that these are the first of probably several principles which might emerge as the study of pastoral liturgy continues.

#### *Principle 1: Care for Focal Person(s)*

The motivational and intentional starting point for the pastoral liturgist is the focal person or people. This starting point is distinct from the "ebb" or universalizing pole of liturgy which begins with the text of a prescribed rite (for example, Eucharist, the daily office).<sup>11</sup> In planning or generating a ritualization, however, a key to pastoral liturgy is to begin with the experience and/or felt need of the focal person. The scheduling and planning of a pastoral liturgy are oriented around the person(s) for whom compassion or celebration is felt, for whom ritualized care is offered. This love is the purpose of the ritual-

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<sup>11</sup> In *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987), Lawrence A. Hoffman points out that traditional liturgical (historical and philological) studies begin with the text and end with the text: "Of course research must begin with the literature in which the evidence is embedded; that indeed is necessary. But both philology and form-criticism end with that literature as well; and that is not necessary at all" (5). Rather, he asserts that the *telos* of the study is the people: "We might reverse the process itself: rather than arguing from the people [we assume were praying] to the[ir] texts, we should be going the other way around . . . from the texts to the people" (8).

ization; and this love expressed (done, enacted) at a point of pain or crisis is what implants it in the focal person. In the example above, Linda's tension and pain over her wedding were the motivating force for the ritualization; care for her was the luncheon's initiating intention. People, plans, affective orientation, even the symbols used were oriented toward the goal.

The first principle for generating indigenous pastoral liturgy, then, is to begin empathically with the particular person or persons, tuning in to their affective disposition, need, and experience, and "hearing" their longing for wholeness, for being in a different state.<sup>12</sup>

To begin with the person instead of a rite may raise a concern for some who would do pastoral liturgy: If the rite is not authorized or given in a prayer book, how can we assure that it belongs within the Christian credo and ethos? The next three principles address this issue.

*Principle 2: Engagement of Christian Worship Patterns and Symbols*

Pastoral liturgy brings Christian ritual patterns and symbols and engages them strategically<sup>13</sup> and sensitively in structuring the event. In this example, the foundational liturgical structure of Gather, Word, Table, and Send was apparent in Susan Lehman's designing of the luncheon. She greeted the guests at the door, welcomed them into the living room, offered them something to drink, and invited them to share their wedding pictures (Gather). As she prepared the table, the women shared stories of their wedding days, illustrating the stories with photographs, and re-remembering themselves and each other to the earlier ritual events which had changed their roles and relationships. The stories were at once common and individual (Word). Then, around the table, the luncheon banquet beautifully set, stories of brokenness and healing were shared. As the literal bread was broken and shared, so the stories of brokenness and reconciliation were told in a multivalent communion. There was a welcoming of Linda, the stranger to marriage, who both received stories and whose own story of anticipation and anxiety

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<sup>12</sup> This first principle coincides with one of the principles of "feminist liturgy," but should not be limited to women's ritualizations. For more on feminist liturgy, see Teresa Berger, *Women's Ways of Worship: Gender Analysis and Liturgical History* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> This is one of four attributes of ritualizing activity which Catherine Bell identifies in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Ritualizations are situated, are strategic, misrecognize how they operate, and employ "redemptive hegemony" in the renegotiation of power relationships (pp. 81-85).

was accepted and affirmed (Table). Constituted as a community of women in which both vulnerability and strength were shared, the nurtured and empowered women embraced, gave thanks, and took their leave (Send).

The ethos of hospitality, the symbol of a shared meal, the creative engaging of story, the place for the stranger at the table, all these were operating in nuanced ways at this luncheon, but un-self-consciously,<sup>14</sup> and thus powerfully. The second principle, then, is to employ the deep semiotic structures, patterns, and symbols of Christian life and faith in any pastoral liturgy. The worship pattern in the next example is the rhythm of “call and response,” hearing God’s Word and responding in praise and lament, song and prayer.

### *Principle 3: Incarnation of the Paschal Mystery*

In speaking about Native American peoples, Steven Charleston has said that not just the Hebrew people but all people have a story, a history, an “Old Testament,” within which the love and redemption of Christ may be incarnated and celebrated, and he has claimed the right for First Nations (and, by extrapolation, all peoples) to announce the “New Testament” in their midst.<sup>15</sup> This is no less true in small, sub-cultural groups than it is in major world cultures. Two implications of this are that no situation is too “far out” to be embraced by the grace of God-in-Christ, and that in conducting a pastoral liturgy, none of the factors, however painful, should be left out of the liturgy. As Gordon Lathrop has said,

The Christian liturgy . . . embraces contraries: life and death, thanksgiving and beseeching, this community and the wide world, the order expressed here and the disorder and chaos we call by name, the strength of these signs and the insignificance of ritual, one text next to another text that is in a very different voice. . . .

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<sup>14</sup> Bell borrows from Pierre Bourdieu the term “misrecognition,” the un-self-consciousness of ritual operation which is central to its effectiveness. Participants are free to “suspend disbelief” and engage fully, letting the inner observer/monitor be at rest. They do not “see” how the ritual operates. See *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, esp. 108-110.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Charleston, “The Old Testament of Native America,” in Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds., *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperCollins, 1990), 49-61. “I am announcing the privilege of my own People to interpret the Christian canon in the light of Israel’s experience, but also in the light of their own experience” (59).

The mystery of God is the mystery of life conjoined with death for the sake of life. The name of this mystery revealed among us is Jesus Christ. The contraries of the liturgy are for the sake of speaking that mystery. It is by the presence of these contraries in the juxtapositions of the *ordo* that Christians avoid the false alternatives so easily proposed to us today.<sup>16</sup>

In our example, the deep irony of Linda's troubled anxiety at the approach of her wedding (which is expected to be a joyous occasion) might have been overlooked by friends who would not have known how to include feelings and worries that did not belong in their paradigm. Susan Lehman, the ritually competent and sensitive pastoral liturgist, however, was able to walk toward the pain and imagine a ritualization in which both the angst and the longing could be included in the larger redemptive pattern of the Paschal Mystery. The contraries were included. In a rhythm which could be characterized as A-B-A, the luncheon began in an ethos of welcome and celebration, enabled the sharing of pain as well as joy, and ended in hope. The sharing of photographs at the beginning was festive and engendered delight; but the lack of photographs from Kathy introduced early the shadow side of marital joy. The incorporation of "death," of the elements of alienation, uncertainty, and disharmony, occurred in the storytelling in response to the questions asked. The questions allowed but did not assume positive answers: What was your experience on your wedding day? What happened on your fifth wedding anniversary? What has been a low point in your marriage?

As is common to the human condition, Linda was experiencing "affective liminality," a confusion as to how to approach what was supposed to be a joyous event when her own anxious feelings loomed large and, to her, inappropriate. Through the luncheon, her own contrary feelings were placed in the larger context of the cross and the resurrection. The result for Linda was an experience of integration. The luncheon liturgy effected a bridge for Linda from brokenness to wholeness, from confusion to integration, from chaos to meaning.

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<sup>16</sup> Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993), 176. The "major oppositions of the *ordo*" are called to "lively presence in the local assembly." Lathrop is speaking in the more specific context of Eucharist and baptism, for which the oppositions are "meeting and week, word and table, thanksgiving and beseeching, teaching and bath, *pascha* and year" (179).

The principle, then, is the essential inclusion of the whole truth, the embracing of the contraries of the particular situation, by the skill of the pastoral liturgist in seeing the Paschal Mystery already present even in the painful circumstances of the situation. The third principle in the creation of a pastoral liturgy is to allow and enable the incarnation of the fullness of the Paschal Mystery including both the cross and the resurrection.

*The Ultimate Christian Paradigm: Death Gives Way to Resurrection*

The human life as understood and lived by Christians is a life drawn toward the reign of God. It is God-in-Christ who mends over and over worlds breaking apart;<sup>17</sup> and it is a principle of Christian ritualization that this movement toward life, toward the heavenly banquet, be made manifest. There is a rhythm, an energetic thrust or attraction (perhaps both) of liturgical action, as of life itself, toward fulfillment and hope, toward freedom and resurrection. If the juxtaposition of contraries and the inclusion of lament and pain are present in Christian ritualization, the vector of the liturgy is such that it ends at the eschaton.

In our example, the movement of the luncheon ritualization began in welcome and celebration. Like a river, it continued to flow in nurture and lament, tragedy and redemption, carrying the pain and alienation of the stories with it, even as it ended in hope. The solidarity and intimacy, the faithfulness of the community, and the tender loving care of Susan for all the women was a “doing” of love, a kind of incarnation of God’s *hesed* which was itself the redemption at the end of the event.

It was not that every story had a “happy ending” or that Susan “fixed” the afternoon to end happily. Rather, incorporated into the structure was a hopefulness, a certainty of loving communion, a deep trust in the Holy One, an embodied realization that in pain are the seeds of redemption, that in the variegated life of wedding-marriage-being women, there is meaning and newness of life. The fourth principle of Christian ritualization is to enact from beginning to end the movement or rhythm toward the reign of God.

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<sup>17</sup> Roy Rappaport, “Liturgies and Lies,” in *International Yearbook for Sociology of Knowledge and Religion* 10 (1976): 75-104. “[T]he relation of entire liturgical orders to what lies outside them” is “that they mend over and over again worlds that are forever breaking apart” (82).

## IV

Turning now to our second example, let us explore ways in which these principles for creating pastoral liturgy may or may not be operative. This second example of a pastoral liturgy is different from the first, both in size and in foundational structure. Here, the general structure of evening prayer was used as the basic pattern for a service of lamentations which took place in March 1998 at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California.

It had been a difficult semester for the seminary community. One student had collapsed in the coffee shop, and was later discovered to have an inoperable brain tumor. The community winced at the implications. Another student's daughter collapsed with no warning and was rushed to the emergency room paralyzed and unable to speak, due (it was thought) to a blood clot at the base of the skull. Week after week she remained immobile and unable to communicate, while family and friends struggled to care for the daughter's two teenaged children. These two shocks brought the community to its knees in prayer.

Then, a second-year student received a call out of the blue that her father had died. The grief in the community began to mount, and a heaviness lay on students, faculty, and staff. The father's name and the student's were added to the prayer list which was read twice a day at the noon eucharist and at evening prayer, even as she was ministered to night and day by others in the dorm.

One evening a student of a neighboring (non-liturgical) seminary living in CDSP campus housing was mugged at the base of the steps right outside the CDSP chapel on her way home from the library. She was leveled by a blow to her head, which required several stitches. The perpetrators were never apprehended. While the other tragedies were emotionally close to home, this violent incident was physically *at home* and invited fear among all the students. Again, students rallied to minister to her, but by now there was an exhaustion in the seminary spirit, and the beginnings of depression set in. It seemed an excessively oppressive Lent.

At this point, the student whose father had died cried out in the kitchen one day in a burst of passion, "I think we are being visited upon! There's too much grief here. We need to be *lamenting* together, like the Jews used to, praying and crying out at the wailing wall. God, this is too much!"



The idea rang true. The pall which had fallen over the school seemed to grow thicker, unmitigated by hope or energy. Hearts were heavy. Mere knowledge that God is Lord, that perfect love casts out fear, and that life is stronger than death: platitudes were insufficient to lift the community to a new level, or to open its heart to the healing grace of the Spirit. What words could not say, perhaps a liturgy could *do*.

The motivation, then, was to mediate to the seminary community the freeing love of God-in-Christ. There was chaos in the conflicting feelings of affective helplessness on the one hand yet longing to trust a powerful God on the other. It was hoped that placing all the fear and grief along with faith and longing within the ritual container of the sovereignty of Christ would enable the community to receive from the Holy Spirit order and meaning—and, it was hoped, peace—out of the rampant chaos and anomie. The intention was to enable the seminarians to receive grace and freedom for the comfort of their hearts and the strengthening of the community.

It seemed appropriate to act quickly following the physical assault for the sake of attenuating the effects of sustained fear and of turning the community spirit toward hope. Perhaps a ritualization which was true might be an agent in healing, and a factor in the reconfiguring of meaning and worldview that always happens in the course of interpreting or “making sense” of life’s happenings. Spring break was a week away: planning would have to be swift to conduct the service before the community dispersed. A service on the Friday before spring break would enable the liturgy to mark the end of an “era,” with the promise of a new beginning when students returned. The tighter structure of the noon Eucharist with a homily, perhaps already prepared, would need more than the few days available in order to adapt to the purpose of a community lament. Therefore, it was decided to propose an adaptation of Friday’s evening prayer service.

A team of two liturgists, the seminary chaplain (an artist), and the officiant scheduled for Friday’s evening prayer met to discuss the idea of a service of lamentations and how it might work. The first challenge was to attempt to begin with the spirit of what was needed. “Text first” is a strong bias in our tradition. Eventually, however, we began to see together what incarnating the chaos of lamentation in juxtaposition with the familiarity of evening prayer with its rhythm of reading and prayer, song and silence, might feel or look or sound like.

The chaplain offered to make a “C DSP book of lamentations” in which members of the community could write their thoughts and feelings, concerns and fears, prayers and longings. It was agreed that the north end of the chapel would be unlocked Wednesday through Friday and the door opened, so that a quiet devotional prayer space with a vigil light would be made available for anyone to pray and write and keep watch. A schedule was made with time slots for which prayers might sign up to pray for the community. The book of lamentations with pens would be open on a stand for entries.

The order of service was adapted. Music was to include Taizé chants such as, “O Lord, hear my prayer. When I cry, answer me.” It was agreed to begin the service outside the usual door for evening prayer, and to process around the whole perimeter of the campus with incense, walking right over the very sidewalk where the mugging had occurred. The procession was to end in the courtyard where a prayer would be offered over the lighting of a fire. The reading for the day was to be from Job. Then each page of lamentation would be ripped out and read by the presider. Holding it up, she would end each reading with, “Over this affliction . . .” and the congregation would respond, “Jesus is Lord!” as the lament was placed on the fire. The service would end in silence. Assignments for preparation of the service were made, and the planning group dispersed.

The book of lamentations appeared the next day. It was beautiful—a work of artistic genius. We had agreed to burn it. And yet I, who had made that suggestion, was challenged at the idea of taking this handmade paper book with silk ribbon and the silver-and-black cut-paper word “lamentations” on the front, this elegant work, and consigning it to the flames. Already in the preparation for the liturgy we were juxtaposing contraries: beauty and pain, creation and destruction, the eternal and the finite. Even in ritual preparation, the Paschal Mystery in which letting go is hard and necessary and holiness is fierce was being enacted in miniature.<sup>18</sup>

The energetic thrust of this service toward hope also began in advance of the event as the whole community anticipated its collective lamentation in a Benedictine antiphony of preparatory work and

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<sup>18</sup> This experience was not planned for, and I only recognized it in writing about this ritual—a corroboration of Bell’s third trait of ritualization in which she uses Pierre Bourdieu’s term “misrecognition.”

prayer. Preparations were completed: fire kettle was reserved, the fire prayer written; music was selected. Invitatory flyers were posted. Many students signed up for the prayer vigil. And then on Wednesday, the chapel door was opened, the candle lit, the lamentations book opened; and formal prayer began. Many pages in the book were filled, some with anguish, some with thanksgiving for the support and presence of the community during the pain and loss. As the contraries of thanksgiving and lament<sup>19</sup> were made manifest within the pre-ritual context, the down-spirited rhythm of the community was already being transposed. It was almost as if the heavens of anguish were caught up short, and the community held its breath.

On Friday at 5:30 in the afternoon, folks gathered outside the chapel door, the worship and procession leaders vested. One of the liturgists welcomed everyone and described how the service would proceed. Because there were only some fifteen participants, the procession leader suggested not walking all around the campus, but taking the short cut down the stairs right to the courtyard. It was the student who had been assaulted who spoke up and asked that the procession go all around the campus as agreed. The leader acquiesced, perhaps not making the healing connection that the one physical place which needed to be purified, to be reclaimed as the Lord's through the feet and prayers of the community, was the place on the sidewalk at the edge of campus where the student had been frightfully attacked.

The sacristan led the procession with incense. The leader chanted from the biblical book of Lamentations and the community responded responsorially. The CDSP book of the community's lamentations was carried high by the woman with the brain tumor, and the cross by the woman whose father had died. In this movement, this public procession juxtaposing signs of lament with the proclamation of the Lordship of Christ, circling the buildings where students live and study and dine and pray, already powerful effects were felt.

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<sup>19</sup> Lathrop refers to the rhythm of the contraries "thanksgiving and lament," and acknowledges his dependence upon "an unpublished paper of Don Saliers, presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in November 1979. Saliers speaks of the interweaving of praise and beseeching as the 'double helix' of Christian prayer." Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 57, n. 2.

When we arrived at the courtyard, the fire was lit and a prayer was said, asking that it be a sign of our liberation in Christ. The reading was from Job; the chant followed the reading.

At the time of the prayers, the officiant read each page of community lamentations, lifted it up as the community proclaimed that over even this, Jesus is Lord. The page was laid on the fire, and burned as the next page was read. One participant said afterwards how liberating it had been, and how intimate, that the authentic cares and concerns of persons in this community were offered and received as they were written, without censorship or hedging. The beauty and the pain together were burned in the fire of passion and purification. After the closing words, the liturgical leaders departed, and others left or stayed in silence.

In the weeks following the event, I noticed a release, as though the community had begun to breathe strongly again. When the lamentations service was discussed, it was the enacted symbols which were most mentioned. The procession around the campus. The public identification of the procession with Christ through the vested leaders. The cross, the chanting. The carrying of the incense across the place of assault, reclaiming it for other purposes. The gathering in a circle around the fire kettle. The lighting of and prayer over the fire. The reading of the pages of thanksgiving and lament written by community members. The burning of the pages. The holy silence at the end.

The student whose father had died who had first said, “We need to *lament!*” said that she felt an ease, a peace for the first time in months. There seemed to be an opening of comfort. The student from a non-liturgical tradition was able to enter fully into the event, she said, because it was so personal—arising organically out of the authentic experience of the community. When she walked into the refectory that night, she realized that she, the group, had “been somewhere”—had experienced somewhere “other,” some “where” real or holy. It made a difference. And the officiant still hears comments like, “Remember when we did that service of lamentations?” or “That time we processed and offered our laments—we should do that again.” “That experience is in our collective memory,” the officiant noted. Apparently, the intent of this variation on evening prayer had been fulfilled.

## V

The more I considered Christianity, the more I have found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.

G. K. Chesterton<sup>20</sup>

We began by identifying the tension inherent in Christian ritual enactment: the pull in the universalizing direction to use normative signs and actions which are recognizable from one place and time to another, and the pull in the particularizing direction to express the gospel in local terms specific to the place and culture of the worshippers. The goal of indigenization is to love and liberate peoples by planting the good news of salvation in their local soil and empowering them to tend its sprouting so that it may bear fruit in that and every time and place. “Success” is measured by the rhythm both of particularization, its rootedness in the local cultural tradition, and of universalization, the recognition that it is truly the gospel of Christ which has taken root. In this essay, the response to this tension has been to honor it: for, as in the flow and ebb of the moon’s tidal pull on the earth, there is life and creativity. We need not be anxious about living within this tension as long as it is a living rhythm. As Catherine Bell has written,

[t]he authority of the ritual expert and the authority of the ritual itself are rooted in tradition—yet tradition is something that exists nowhere but in its flexible embodiment in memory and in current cultural life. Ritual must have both a convincing continuity with remembered rites and a convincing coherence with community life. As one of the most visible and conservative embodiments of tradition in oral societies, ritual ratifies “the traditional” in general even as it recreates and revises it in the specifics of each performance.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time that we bless the tension, we have focused here on the “flow” part of the cycle, the particularization of liturgy through creative ritualizations which free and empower, heal and reconcile, in Christ. Our pastoral liturgical examples were both generated out of

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<sup>20</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), 95.

<sup>21</sup> *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 203.

compassion for the apparent need of small communities, subgroups of the dominant North American culture. Both used Christian semiotic liturgical patterns, although one was based on an authorized prayer book rite (evening prayer) and the other on a non-prayer book yet primordial eucharistic structure (the luncheon). Christian symbols were used in strategic and sensitive ways and contraries were embraced such that the Paschal Mystery was revealed in the particular persons, situations, and ritualizations at hand. And though the pain and chaos in each circumstance was fully embraced in the ritualization, the thrust of each was toward the reign of God: in both cases, participants experienced the truth that beyond the alienation and fear that is death, there is the life and hope of resurrection.

In addition to the four principles identified, there are two more which should not go without discussion. The fifth is that the presence of the church must be symbolized. In both these examples, the church was symbolized by the participants who were Christians and members of the same denominational community, and by the presence of clergy. In lay-led or lay-generated ritualizations, the blessing and authorization of the rector or pastor may signify the presence of the church. Holding the rite in the church building or on sanctified ground, announcing in advance to the congregation, and/or including intercession in the prayers of the people, along with other actions and symbols, make the rite an action *on behalf of the church*, linking these people and their concerns to Christ through the body of the faithful.

And finally: the generation of any Christian ritualization requires a liturgist, a "ritual expert," who is deeply formed cognitively in theology, practically in liturgy, and spiritually in prayer and the cultivation of religious affections.<sup>22</sup> Not everyone can make a work of art out of a stack of paper and a palette of paints. It takes a well-schooled and gifted person to imagine how notes and instruments could fit together to make a four-movement symphony that will be beautiful and liberating. The pastoral liturgists making a rite should have empathy and sensitivity, should have knowledge of the deep structures of Christian liturgy and theology, and should engage in the study of how ritual

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<sup>22</sup> It is Don Saliers who has reawakened the awareness that Christian formation involves the cultivation of particular affective dispositions. Part of ritual's effectiveness is the manifesting and privileging of Christian religious affections. See especially *The Soul in Paraphrase* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980); *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1994); and *Worship Come to Its Senses* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1996).

means. And as pastoral liturgy is work that not only heals but forms, pastoral liturgists should be intentional in their own formation.

Having expressed this warning, however, I also express an invitation to those with such leanings to engage in pastoral liturgy. Systematic examination of rites, how they are or are not effective, and how they were put together has barely begun. Work on naming the core structures of Christian liturgy has also barely begun.<sup>23</sup> The four principles proposed here are a first attempt to identify criteria for the creation of pastoral liturgies.<sup>24</sup> It seems important to self-consciously identify and articulate underlying principles for Christian ritualization in an age of multiplicity of rituals conducted out of need but grounded in no tradition. The current North American cultural context includes anxious liturgists who stick with authorized rites from the book in order to be certain of orthodoxy on the one hand, and unchurched amateurs who generate rites in psychologists' offices and living rooms in order to be able to heal and reconcile on the other. It is critical that those of us whose lives are given over to the mediation of God's grace and salvation to the world enter into the messy middle of inculturating rites that are fully Christian, orthodox and orthoprax, and fully indigenized to the particular peoples whose hurts Christ would heal were he walking the earth. This task calls us to be daring and critical, careful and adventuresome, experimental and theological. Let us take up the challenge.

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<sup>23</sup> Gordon Lathrop's *Holy Things* is an important contribution to this work. See also John Baldovin, "The Changing World of Liturgy," *Anglican Theological Review* 82, no.1 (Winter 2000): 65-81. Exploration of "life cycle rites" can be found in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, eds., *Life Cycles in Jewish and Christian Worship* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996). Elaine Ramshaw's *Ritual and Pastoral Care* is also a significant study (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> The field of "pastoral liturgical studies," so named by Mark Searle ("New Tasks, New Methods: The Emergence of Pastoral Liturgical Studies," *Worship* 57 [1983]: 291-308), is a field for the empirical, hermeneutical, and critical *study* of rites and the meanings participants derive from them. Here we are suggesting the next step, which is the turning of what we have learned in study to the *creating* of Christian ritualizations.



written language, some researchers began to view the differences in terms of a continuum between the spoken and written language (Chafe, 1982; Tannen, 1982). Tannen (1982) supports the concept of such a continuum, and holds that some features of spoken language can appear in written language, and vice versa. Many communication modes have features of both spoken and written language. According to Chafe & Tannen (1987) "There is something typically written about message-focused communication, for it is the innovation of print that made it common to communicate on a large scale with others who are not in one's immediate context. And there is something typically oral about interpersonal involvement."