INTRODUCTION
Karl Rahner purportedly once commented that all people living at the same time are not necessarily contemporaries. Few situations in today’s Roman Catholic Church demonstrate the truth of that statement as much as the debate swirling around worship. At virtually every level of ecclesial discourse—from parish liturgy committees to international commissions—the divergence of opinion about the how and why of worship makes us question not only if we are in the same Church but whether we are even on the same planet. Given the enormous diversity within the Church, such disparity of opinion is understandable. What is less explicable, however, is the ferocity and mean-spiritedness that sometimes marks the exchange of these opinions.

Disagreements over liturgy and liturgical reform are not new to the U.S. Church. In his richly documented history of the U.S. liturgical movement, for example, Keith Pecklers notes that the use of the vernacular in Roman Catholic worship was one of the most highly contested issues of the 30s and 40s. While ordinarily civil, that struggle was occasionally marked by the undiplomatic. Thus Pecklers recalls the story of John Ross-Duggan, one of the founders of the Vernacular Society. After a papal audience, in which Pius XII reaffirmed the permanent place of Latin in the liturgy, Ross-Duggan shouted to the Pope as he was being carried from the audience, “Take him away . . . He’ll never do us any good. Take him away!” (Pecklers: 64).

While shocking, this breach in etiquette seems mild compared to the sometimes odious and insulting tone of the current debate. Personal attacks in the press, on the airwaves and even in the pulpit and vestibule are no longer uncommon. The gloves have come off, and whether you are a cardinal archbishop or an aging woman religious, neither position nor seniority can shield you from verbal abuse or indignity.

The reasons for the disagreements over liturgical style and structure are manifold. They include differences in spirituality and the images for achieving union with the divine which characterize varying spiritualities. Thus, some seek a form of worship which emphasizes the other-worldly and leads them into a ritual sphere completely different from the one they ordinarily inhabit. There is an accent on the transcendence of God and the mystical core of worship. The aesthetic view which un-
dergirds such worship is often grounded in the fine arts rather than the folk arts, as the former seems to provide more dignity to worship and more distance from the ordinary. The theological icon for this perspective is the celebrated Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar.

On the other hand, there are some who seek a form of worship which emphasizes God’s self-communication through the everyday. Here the emphasis on God’s immanence supports a less mysterious, more accessible body of symbols. Thus there is a preference for vessels crafted from pottery rather than precious metals, and for music that sounds more like Broadway or the top forty rather than opera or the concert hall. The theological icon for this perspective might be the German Jesuit from the last century, Karl Rahner.

Besides varying spiritualities, differences between Roman Catholics over things liturgical can also be traced to other factors. Some of these are theological, such as varying images of God or different perceptions of the role of the Church in the world. Other factors are more sociological, such as differences in age, ethnicity and economic or social status. Yet, while it may be possible to identify some of the spiritual, theological, and social factors which influence different preferences in worship styles and structure, it is more difficult to explain why such differences have escalated to the level of the derisive. Must passion for things godly necessarily translate into the vitriolic or oppressive? But translate it has.

Stories of liturgical terrorism abound at virtually all points across the theological spectrum. Presiders, for example, are routinely chas-tised and reported to the bishop for substituting a profound bow for one of the three required genuflections at Mass or inviting people to stand through the Eucharistic Prayer. At the same time other presiders are belittled by so-called “progressive” liturgists for introducing anything even remotely identified as devotional in official worship, or for failing to exploit every ritual symbol to its fullness throughout the RCIA process. Similarly, the laity are oppressed on one side of the liturgical equation when they or their children are routinely refused the sacraments without mandatory, sometimes inane preparatory programs. On the other side they are battered by exclusive language and moralistic preaching which effectively reduces them to ecclesial second-class citizens.

What is often shocking about this terrorism is not simply its authoritarianism, but its condemnatory overtones. Thus, a favored liturgical perspective is often accompanied by threats and judgments—often totally disproportionate to the issue. A few years ago, for example, one author felt free enough to employ the explosive language of anathema against those who advocated standing during the Eucharistic Prayer (Scanlon).
NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT OR NEW VERNACULAR?

The Catholic Common Ground Initiative by the late Cardinal Bernardin is an important, even essential strategy for maintaining Church unity and growing in Christian charity. Thus, apart from a few battle-happy diehards, the question of liturgical common ground seems much less a matter of “if” than of “how.” To this stage the “how” has mainly been addressed through respectful conversation. Structured dialogues around a number of contentious ecclesial issues have provided representatives of various sides an opportunity to articulate their positions in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

One meeting, to date, has addressed the troublesome topic of liturgy. From March 5–7, 1999, forty representatives of various perspectives gathered in Malibu, California, to discuss liturgy under the sponsorship of the Common Ground Initiative. The meeting consisted of a series of four papers by Los Angeles’ Cardinal Mahony, CREDO’s founder Fr. Jerry Pokorsky, Nathan Mitchell of the Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy, and Fr. Juan Sosa of the Archdiocese of Miami. These papers were followed by a series of panels and broad ranging discussions. The meeting concluded with three presentations which attempted to summarize where the group agreed (e.g., liturgy has to be transformative), what issues remained grievous (e.g., the attitude regarding women’s ministry) and what was left undone (e.g., addressing the controversy over the translation of liturgical books).

The Malibu meeting was a good beginning. Here was an opportunity for key representatives of differing perspectives to note points of agreement, disagreement, and the unfinished agenda which lies ahead. The challenge to this common ground effort, however, is unquestionably the next stage. Staking out the terrain is an essential first step. What is going to be more difficult, however, is negotiating the obvious boundaries in the liturgical landscape so that the area of common ground expands. It is insufficient simply to create a kind of liturgical Maginot Line in the hopes of attaining some design for mutual containment or even de-escalation. Rather, if true common ground is to be established, it is essential that some new ritual domain be jointly cultivated.

Practically, this suggests that authentic common ground is not going to be achieved by the liturgical equivalent of horse-trading. It is insufficient to adopt the “tit-for-tat” approach that often is detectable when believers with differing views try to plan worship. In such situations one side agrees to more Latin music in the Mass if the other side agrees that this music can be accompanied by guitar and bass. Common
ground, however, is not achieved with “I’ll give you three genuflec-
tions and put the hand-washing back in the liturgy if you let the people
stand during the Eucharistic Prayer.” While a crass characterization,
this type of ritual bartering is relatively common. It is especially appar-
ent in the building or renovation of worship spaces. Agreement on the
floor plan, materials for the altar, proportion of pews to chairs and the
placement of the tabernacle are often achieved through a kind of bro-
kering that would make the United Auto Workers and General Motors
blush. Unfortunately, however, the building that results from this kind
of negotiated settlement seldom achieves the quality of integration or
even artistic merit of a new GM mini-van.

One alternative to a type of common ground achieved through re-
negotiating artistic, theological or legal boundaries, is to discover if
there is some other shared lens which can be adopted by all sides in the
liturgical debate. Is there some prism that all sides can employ for
viewing the worship event which, at the same time, allows for the mul-
tiple refractions of that worship necessary in this very diverse Church?
Is there some new optic, apart from law, or history, or the new ritual
books—an optic yet unclaimed by either side and untarnished by pre-
vious skirmishes, whose ownership from the start could be shared.

Moving from a visual to linguistic analogy, we might ask, can the
varying sides in the liturgy debate acquire a new vernacular which can
both anchor and further the common ground discussion? One defini-
tion of a vernacular is that it is a “nonstandard” language or dialect of
a place, different from the native, everyday speech of an area. In this
sense, vernaculars are sometimes employed to achieve linguistic com-
mon ground amongst peoples divided by many native dialects or lan-
guages. In India today, for example, while Hindi is the official language
of the country, the foreign or “nonstandard” English language is an ef-
ectic vernacular across the country enabling economic, political and
social discourse.

One of the values of this “vernacular paradigm” is that it allows for
the shared without requiring the abandonment of the individual or
particular. People from Kerela in India, for example, still speak their
native Malayalam among themselves, but through the employment of
the nonstandard language of English they are able to converse outside
their geographic, linguistic and cultural subgroup.

It seems that since the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholics
have lost their vernacular at many levels. Theologians, for example, for-
merly shared a common theological method called Neo-scholasticism.
Now, as evidenced in the various theological debates, we not only have
abandoned this common language, we often can not even recognize it
when it is being spoken. Roman Catholics in the U.S. formerly shared a
devoational vernacular, e.g., everyone knew how to say the Rosary, was
familiar with Benediction, and could sing at least the first verse of “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name” by heart. Our familiarity with the Tridentine Mass, “fiddle-back” vestments, and some Latin chant was also a kind of ritual vernacular, shared not only throughout this country but around the world.

Ritual vernaculars can be achieved by sharing a common musical vocabulary, a common legal framework, and even a common symbol system. These once shared vernaculars, however, have collapsed in the Catholic Church of the U.S. Furthermore, there has been so much critique and hostility over music, language, law and symbol that it seems unlikely that we will soon forge some common ground in any one of these areas. If common ground is to be achieved by establishing a shared vernacular which can at the same time respect the particularity of the various liturgical polarities, it will have to be in some arena where the stakes have not been set nor a line in the sand drawn.

One wonders, then, if common ground might be achieved through some shared vision of the basic purposes of worship. In particular, could common ground be broached if conversation partners were willing to think of worship as an act of pastoral care?

PASTORAL CARE SPOKEN HERE

In a recent article Andrew Greeley lamented some of the liturgical abuses laity must endure at the hands of untrained, authoritarian and enthusiastic parish staff members. As an antidote to these situations, Greeley proposed a reform of authority at the local level. He suggests that instead of imposing rules and demanding compliance by the laity as they approach the sacraments, the directors of music, liturgy, the RCIA and all the rest should invite, charm and enchant the laity (Greeley: 11). The result of this reform, according to Greeley, would be sacramental preparation and worship as rich and glorious celebrations of the presence of grace, reflected in the gracefulness of the parish staff.

The theological foundation for Greeley’s turn to charm is an image of God that is inviting, attracting, and calling rather than controlling, directing and regulating. Citing von Balthasar, Greeley believes that the first step in contemporary American Catholicism is to apprehend the beautiful and perceive that it is good and then finally that it is true. Thus worship and sacraments need to be presented as elegant, moving, joyous, and memorable. Greeley concludes that beauty is the strongest and only really effective weapon for drawing the faithful closer to God and the Church (Greeley: 13).

The liturgical proposals of Greeley are almost always challenging and seldom without keen insight. Here, however, I do not believe Greeley has gone far enough. Charm or emphasis on the beautiful is not a sufficient basis for constructing liturgical common ground. One of the
many difficulties of this approach is demonstrated in the current debate around liturgical aesthetics, capsulated in the basic question, is beauty according to whom? Charm, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder and part of our current division is precisely over our differences in this beholding. Furthermore, while turning ministerial training programs into “charm schools” has some real appeal, the alluring does not insure that the real needs of the people will be respected. Politicians and entrepreneurs by the score have demonstrated that charm can be very self-serving. Believers do not need to be enticed into worship by the pleasant; rather, they need to be honored and respected in that worship. Thus, rather than charming liturgical leadership we need a sense of worship as pastoral care.

Pastoral care can be defined as the Church’s response to the personal, relational and spiritual needs of persons in the context and through the agency of the local community. Pastoral care from this perspective is an activity which focuses on the believer, in the hopes of bringing her or him to a quality of personal wholeness which is both life-giving and sanctifying. Suggesting pastoral care as a paradigm for liturgical common ground is not to suggest that liturgy can simply be reduced to an act of pastoral care. The “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” for example, teaches that liturgy is for the sanctification of people in Christ and the glorification of God (n. 10). Clearly, from this definition, liturgy cannot be reduced simply to an act of pastoral care. On the other hand, it would be difficult to consider liturgy authentically Christian without such care.

The ministry of pastoral care grows out of a profound respect for the particularity of the stories of individuals and communities. From its inception in the early Church, a central aim of pastoral care has been to attend to the human story in all its complexity. For many centuries, careful listening in the care of souls became a prelude to the application of the gospel through admonition, advice, or judgment. The modern practice of pastoral care, in an effort to avoid old moralistic patterns of ministry, attends to the emotional and social world of a person (Anderson and Foley: 44–45).

Listening carefully and responding accurately to the story of another is a true ministry. To be understood and accepted by another person is a treasured dimension of human living. It is also the first movement of any kind of care. We listen carefully in order to get another’s story straight. We listen attentively to another so that our response connects with their understanding of their story. Too often, even in conversations with people we know and love, because we do not take the time to listen carefully, we are too quick to ignore or eager to advise. Empathy is in short supply. It takes time and careful listening to get another’s story straight and be able to communicate that understanding accurately and compassionately.
Reconsider liturgical terrorism from the viewpoint of pastoral care. What has so often been missing from the current debates is not concern about things divine, but about attention to the stories and religious imaginations of worshippers in their quest for the divine. In most liturgy wars the various sides are relatively good about “standing up for God”; what we are less good at is caring for people in their pursuit of God. Yet, if the first purpose of the liturgy—if you believe the chronology of purposes outlined in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy—is focused on the sanctification of people, does that not require that we need to know and honor something of those people? And should we not respect that people know at least something of what is needed in their worship for their own sanctification?

Worship and worship preparation as an exercise in empathy and attentiveness to the human narrative translates into wedding preparation which does not begin with the rules. How often this preparation begins with musicians enumerating musical titles which cannot be used, wedding coordinators forbidding the use of rice, and presiders grilling the couple on their record of Mass attendance. How the situation changes when the preparation begins with musicians asking the couple what kind of music moves them, wedding coordinators asking the couple to describe their hopes for the ritual, and the presiders learning how the couple met and got engaged.

The “Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy” teaches that the liturgy is an action of Christ the priest and the body of Christ, the Church (n. 7). This means that the assembly is one of the subjects, one of the “doers” of the liturgy at the invitation and initiation of Christ. Too often, however, we turn the assembly, couples to be married, or other sacramental candidates into the object or consumer of the liturgy. We make liturgy the action of Christ and the ministers . . . or sometimes the ministers and Christ. Often liturgy becomes divisive because it begins with whatever liturgical paradigm the minister or leadership group has chosen to acquire, propagate and defend.

What would happen if we equipped both the liturgical assembly and liturgical leaders with the skills and desire to hear the stories of the other rather than hurl disjunctive bits of history or law at each other? How would our perceptions of that history and law be transformed when we learn of contemporary conversation and growth in faith through popular devotions, Latin motets or assembly-centered worship spaces? Specialists are very good about speaking of the needs of the assembly. How many of us, however, ever bother to ask them about their needs, much less take the necessary and demanding time to listen to their formulation of their need. In their classic volume on Method in Ministry, James and Evelyn Whitehead suggest that an effective threefold method for making any pastoral decision is to attend, assert and
then formulate a pastoral response. Too often pastoral ministers in general, and those concerned with liturgical matters in particular, move too quickly to responding without ever listening. In such cases, the result is action without empathy, and worship without care. It was such a situation which moved St. Paul to the brink of apoplexy in 1 Corinthians 11.

We need to help people care for, even love the liturgy. Even more, however, we need to help believers of every stripe love all other believers for whom the primary mode of sanctification is the liturgy. If we care for the people more than the liturgical books, canonical precepts, aesthetic paradigms and historical precedents, maybe we will fulfill the hope of the Council that liturgy will actually be an act of human sanctification. Maybe if we can model pastoral care for each other even in talking about the liturgy, we might already achieve in some antecedent way, an entry into liturgy as an act of pastoral care and source of common ground.

REFERENCES


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