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Worship: Its Public Face

Clearly ritual has not lost its force in contemporary public life. But just as clearly many, especially in Western societies, are turning away from formal religious rituals. The process is more advanced in many parts of Europe than in North America, but that is little reason for comfort. Many recent statistics suggest that commitment to established religious rituals, even in more modern guise, is on a significant downturn here as well. The challenge facing pastoral leaders is how to respond to this reality. One choice would be to move in the direction of a "remnant" Church, whether of a more conservative or more liberal bent. In such a model the celebration of the established religious ritual will be done only by a select few as a harbinger of the Messianic age to come. The remnant Church cares little for outreach, preferring purity to efforts at enhanced participation.

The mainstream Catholic perspective, however, has never been that of the remnant Church. It should not assume dominance in Catholicism today, whether out of principle or out of frustration with the challenges of contemporary society. The good news is that people still want to, and know how to, celebrate. Experience has underscored what the late theological ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr always emphasized, namely, that an adequate anthropology requires a balance between human rationality and human vitality. Society today remains highly appreciative of human vitality. If anything, it may be in danger of losing respect for the rational aspects of the human person. But for most that appreciation remains underdeveloped, rooted primarily or even exclusively in the world of popular culture. The challenge before us is whether a reconnection can be made between a renewed Christian ritual tradition and the present reality. The task is daunting, but not impossible.

The theme articles in this issue on public worship look at several important dimensions of the challenge before us. Professor Frederic Roberts of Michigan State University shares some insight he has

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gained as a professional anthropologist working on a concrete parish-based project dealing with liturgical renewal in the Archdiocese of Detroit. His article, based in part on the research conducted for this project, raises some serious questions about the approaches used by some liturgists in pursuing liturgical renewal.

In our second essay, NTR Associate Editor James Wallace explores possibilities for preaching to “divided” congregations, which may in fact be the predominant situation in contemporary Catholicism. He remains convinced that effective preaching—preaching that touches the vitalistic dimensions of people—can in fact help bridge the current divisions. It will not be easy, but Wallace believes we should give it a determined try. And to assist the reader he presents a sample homily he believes will help us toward this goal.

Patricia Ann Lamoureux of St. Mary’s Seminary and University in Baltimore, and Jean Flannelly, S.C., of the Washington Theological Union focus their attention on two dimensions of our Catholic ritual tradition: the Liturgy of the Hours and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Lamoureux is convinced that the Liturgy of the Hours can be developed more extensively as a ritual action for the entire Church, which would help in the development of virtue in the life of the participants. And Flannelly suggests ways in which people whom she feels have a sense of community can begin to better connect that perception with the celebration of the Eucharist.

In our non-thematic contribution Paul J. Philibert, O.P., examines ways in which the distinct charisms of religious orders might contribute to the overall work of pastoral renewal. While he does not focus specifically on liturgy, his suggestion that the “prayer” dimensions of these charisms may prove to have some of the greatest potential certainly ties in with the suggestions put forth by Flannelly and Lamoureux.

Two of our columns also focus on our stated theme. Carole D. Goodwin of the Archdiocese of Louisville looks at ways in which young people can be better integrated into liturgical celebration. And in my essay I take up the specific issue of making the vision of Vatican II’s *Nostra aetate* come alive in the liturgy of Holy Week/Easter, convinced that the reception of this Vatican II document (or any such document) will remain incomplete until it is ritualized.

Finally, this issue marks the beginning of our tenth year of publishing. The editorial board would like to express its thanks to our loyal readers over the past decade. We certainly enjoy hearing from you. We are also grateful to the administrations of the Washington Theological Union and the Catholic Theological Union, Mr. Michael Glazier, The

Liturgical Press, and the Lilly Endowment, all of whom have been instrumental in keeping our voice alive in the Church and beyond. We look forward to a second decade of bridging sound theology and pastoral practice.