Implications for a Liturgical Spirituality

By Alexander Peck

This article is a response to the statement below and includes implications for a liturgical spirituality:

Being one with God is the primary goal of all spirituality. Sacramental Eucharist is part of spirituality; but spirituality reaches deep into the Eucharist of the world and the Eucharist of our heart and conscience.

…the book of Creation is not a priestly book; the book of the gospels is not a priestly book; the book of one’s experience is not a priestly book. We are first and foremost human beings, and these are all human books. We are also Christians, and from our Christian standpoint we can be nourished by these three books. We are sacramental and Eucharistic, but we are also part of the book of Creation itself, living day by day as we listen to the word of God, and spending moments of aloneness in our heart. In and through all of this, God can be united to us and we to God: this unitive way is the goal of all spirituality.¹

Christ Is the Eucharist of the World, Heart, and Conscience – And We are Eucharistic

To begin with, this response draws on Schmemann’s understanding of the expression, “Eucharist of the world”, as being the Christ. He states:

In Him alone all that God has given man was fulfilled and brought back to heaven. He alone is the perfect Eucharist Being. He is the Eucharist of the world. In and through this Eucharist the whole creation becomes what it always was to be and yet failed to be [emphasis mine].²

From Schmemann’s statement that Christ is the Eucharist of the world, one can conclude that the Eucharist of the heart and conscience is also Christ, since each human being exists in the world.

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Furthermore, Eucharist (thanksgiving) can be the only response of humans to God's creation, redemption, and gift of heaven. In other words, thanksgiving (and praise) is the nature of the new life that God granted humans when in Christ He reconciled humankind with Himself. Consequently, we are Eucharistic.

**Human Beings Are Sacramental – As Is the World**

The understanding of sacrament begins with the concept of making the invisible visible. The prime example is evidenced through the invisible God, whom no one has seen, being seen in the humanity of Jesus. One can conclude, then, that Jesus himself is our sacrament – the visible sign of the invisible God. Moreover, those who are baptized into the risen Christ become sacrament – and the Church, Christ’s body, is “the universal sacrament of salvation”.

In that we are sacrament, we are instruments of grace – and become the way God graces today’s world.

Further, Richstatter writes that “sacraments [of the Church] proclaim the mysterious, hidden plan of God to bring all things together in Christ . . . [they] are the celebration of the presence of Christ in our midst.” From this, one can argue that material things (including our bodies)

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3 Ibid., 34-39.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Thomas Richstatter, “Sacraments: It All Starts with Jesus”, accessed 3 April 2010. Available from http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0893.asp; Internet. He states further that “God, whose wonder and love are beyond our imagination, wished to become visible and close to us.” Moreover, Augustine (who died in 430 A.D.) called sacraments “visible signs of invisible grace.”
7 Richstatter, “Sacraments: It All Starts With Jesus”. Note: Scripture states that “God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen” (1 Tim 6:15-16 NIV).
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid. Note: The Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation, is stated in The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #48.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
are good, and that the sacraments celebrate the goodness of all creation. In fact, the creation draws one into the life of the Creator. Finally, as the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (#61) states,

“for well-disposed members of the faithful, the effect of the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals is that almost every event in their lives is made holy by divine grace that flows from the paschal mystery of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection, the font from which all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. The liturgy means also that there is hardly any proper use of material things that cannot thus be directed toward human sanctification and the praise of God.”

In other words, the world itself could be considered a sacrament and God is received through every material reality. As Mitchell expresses it, “the world itself is always and everywhere permeated, possessed at its roots, by God’s redeeming grace (that is, by God’s presence).” Also, the Spirit of God is present at the heart of all reality, including material reality.

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If Christ is the Eucharist of the world, heart, and conscience (and we are Eucharistic), and if as human beings, we are sacramental (as is the world), then one can draw four implications for liturgical spirituality. The overarching theme of these implications is that liturgical spirituality involves far more than the confines of liturgical celebration in an official Church setting. It involves all of life in the world, including being nourished by the books of creation, the

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12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
16 N. Mitchell, “The Worship that Prepares Us for Worship”, Praying (January-February 1995): 7. Mitchell writes further that “God’s grace – so theologian Karl Rahner once wrote – creates salvation at the very roots of human existence: The world is constantly possessed by grace . . . by God’s self-besowment . . . Grace proceeds from the innermost heart of the world and of humankind . . . [this grace] is quite simply the ultimate depths and the radical dimension of everything that we spiritual creatures experience, achieve and suffer . . . in our laughter and tears, our taking responsibility, our loving, living and dying – whenever we keep faith with the truth, break through egoism in our relationships . . .”
17 Ibid., 8.
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gospels, and one’s personal experiences. The premise for this is that God is always present as Holy Mystery\(^{18}\) – whereby the holy can be seen in the daily, “the rare in the routine”.\(^{19}\) Or, as Mitchell elaborates, “... the miracle unfolding always and everywhere in us, among us, around us ... [perceiving] the remarkable in unremarkable events”.\(^{20}\)

One implication for liturgical spirituality is, as Ostdiek states, to create within the daily, often tawdry world in which we live, “an awareness of the world as a spiritual place in which the human spirit can find the fulfillment of its ultimate purpose [emphasis mine].”\(^{21}\) Such awareness, adds Gaillardetz, includes knowing that “God is the absolute depth and infinite horizon of any truly human experience.”\(^{22}\) Recognizing the graced character of every aspect of human existence, and appreciating the presence of mystery in daily living, is an awareness that needs to be cultivated.\(^{23}\) In sum, liturgical spirituality should foster a deep recognition of the presence of God as Holy Mystery within the “warp and woof of our daily lives”.\(^{24}\) It is a spirituality, as Dallen summarizes, “that helps us discover God manifesting and disclosing self in all of life.”\(^{25}\)

A second implication for liturgical spirituality is that it includes, in addition to the official liturgies of the Church, the liturgy of life, especially in view of spirituality being understood as a way of life.\(^{26}\) When the bread and wine, for example, are presented in the liturgical celebration, it can also be understood as being symbolic of daily struggles and the joys of

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\(^{19}\) Ibid., “The Worship that Prepares Us for Worship”, 5.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 6. Later Mitchell adds that “the mystical is thoroughly worldly”.


\(^{22}\) Gaillardetz, “The Life of Grace”, 63.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 64.


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living.27 This liturgy of life, then, is also “placed on the altar with the bread and wine, to be identified with these gifts.”28 In other words, in liturgical spirituality, there is a connection between life and liturgy.29 What is celebrated in the liturgy is intended to be lived out in the rest of life.30 Expressed in another way,

Liturgical spirituality, as derived from the experience of liturgy, offers a way of looking at all of creation, at all the events of our lives, and at all of humanity through the perspective of the paschal mystery of Jesus – which is the center of Christian worship (“Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again”). The fundamentally incarnational view of life that is so evident in liturgy is extended beyond the cult to how one prays, reflects, and acts outside the experience of liturgy.31

Third, as part of the Church’s liturgical celebrations, the intent for the faithful is hearing God’s call in life.32 Listening for God’s voice – as well as enlivening and deepening one’s response to God’s call33 – is a part of liturgical spirituality. It involves listening for the different kinds of things God could be saying and “to receive different kinds of gifts from God: comfort, challenge, nourishment, and calling.”34 However, while the liturgical celebration involves being “schooled in the art of listening”, as Bernardin writes, the challenge is to “be good listeners to one another, to the Lord, to the world with all its needs”.35 In other words, liturgical spirituality – or, the life of communion – requires an attitude of attentiveness, as well as active engagement with the world and its people.36 Its foundation is faith – whereby God’s call to us is heard and responded to with the same resoluteness as Abraham’s response.37

27 Ibid., 213.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 213-214.
31 Ibid.
33 Irwin, Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality, 14.
36 Gaillardetz, “The Life of Grace”, 60.
37 Irwin, Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality, 21.
Finally, a liturgical spirituality involves parishioners themselves becoming the “bread of life” and “cup of blessing” for the world – or, as Bernardin expresses, “we are scattered, broken, poured out for the life of the world”. The purpose of liturgical spirituality, then, is to be able to express a fully lived liturgy – where the liturgy becomes the basic stance of every moment of our lives. Fink states it simply: “We become what we do.” There is an emptying of the self for the sake of others that occurs in the loving service of God’s reign – that is, a life of self-giving, lived patterned after Christ. The gracious presence of God blesses others through us. In sum, the sacraments are signs or landmarks that point, according to Mitchell, “to the limitlessness of God’s grace and compassion at work in the world . . . happening now within us, among us, around us.” In other words, liturgical spirituality “stretches us to be for others.”

In understanding that all humans are Eucharistic and that all of life is sacramental, then indeed in and through all of life (by implication including the books of creation, the gospels, and one’s experiences) God can be united to us and we to God. Such union with God is the essence of all spirituality. Four implications for liturgical spirituality are (1) having an awareness of the world as a spiritual place, (2) appreciating the liturgy of life, (3) hearing and responding to God’s call in life, and (4) becoming the “bread of life” and the “cup of blessing” for the life of the world.

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42 Fagerberg, “A Theology of Liturgy”, 179.
45 Dallen, “Liturgical Spirituality”, 54. Dallen is quoting Peter E. Fink from his article entitled “Liturgy and Spirituality: A Timely Intersection”.

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Bibliography


A Conversation with Archimandrite Methodius (Markovich), the Abbot of Hilandar Monastery.

The youngest abbot on Mt. Athos, Archimandrite Methodius (Markovic) of the Serbian Hilandar Monastery, speaks on life as Liturgy, which is incomparably higher than any divisions that are now imposed upon Orthodox peoples. Fr. Methodius, how did you wind up on Mt. Athos?

Once during Great Lent I saw something that upended my entire life. It was a monastic tonsuring. It was the first time I saw it firsthand. I understood that it was the way for me. I bowed and saw myself just like the one cra

The Liturgy and liturgical life of the Church are undoubtedly the foundation and source of the spiritual life for the faithful, whereas the further ascetical effort and life of the faithful is the result, fruit, and continuation of that same and unique life of the Christ among the Faithful, and of the Faithful in Christ.

Without the experience of grace of that and that sort of spiritual life, it is difficult for an Orthodox theologian to escape being like many which corrupt the word of God; for in that case he does not theologize like the Holy Apostle "as of God, in the sight of God in Christ," (II Cor.