

MOVING BETWEEN LITURGICAL THEOLOGY AND LITURGICAL PASTORAL¹

On Theology, Liturgy, and Christian Life

Until this day, the Liturgical Movement has remained an abundant source for liturgical studies. The main protagonists of this twentieth century movement in the churches have provided us with many inspiring concepts, reflections, and realizations. The purpose of this contribution is twofold. First, I will outline the emergence and development of two important approaches in the study of liturgy: liturgical theology and liturgical pastoral. I will show how they have their roots in the Liturgical Movement. One of the themes of the Liturgical Movement was the closer involvement of theological reflection and pastoral practice within the field of liturgical studies. It is also my conviction that liturgical studies should not and cannot be an ivory tower theological discipline. Nevertheless, today the chasm between theological reflection and concrete pastoral liturgical practice seems deep and wide. Therefore, the second purpose of my research is to find new perspectives on the relationship between theology, liturgy, and Christian practice using insights from both liturgical theology and pastoral liturgical reflections. I start with a brief overview of what (1) liturgical theology and (2) liturgical pastoral is, focusing on their roots in the Liturgical Movement and the relationship between theological reflection and practice. From certain convergences between the two I try in (3) to take a step forward in the relationship between theological reflection and Christian practice.

1. In English, using pastoral as a noun is rather uncommon and may seem to some as somewhat awkward. This is not the case in other languages. I endeavor here to recover the use and meaning of it as explained by Vagaggini, see further in this article.

1. Liturgical Theology²

1.1. Guardini: Systematic Liturgical Study

Romano Guardini (1885-1965) wrote a short but interesting article on the method of liturgical studies in the first volume of the *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*.³ He argues for the study of liturgy as an independent theological discipline, not as an application science, subordinate to canon law, dogmatic theology or pastoral theology. According to Guardini, liturgical studies as a theological discipline must examine the theological meaning contained in the liturgy, following its own methods and limits. He makes a plea for the development of the study of liturgy as a theological discipline in addition to the historical research into the liturgy that prevailed in his day, and of which neither he nor I deny the importance. In his argumentation, he refers to the well-known adage *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which assumes that the liturgy has a theological content (*lex credendi*), albeit according to its own laws (*lex orandi*).⁴ The research object of this liturgical theology is very concrete for Guardini: it must be the liturgical books, both Roman-Catholic and those of other Christian traditions. According to him, it is important not to study these books and texts on their own, but in close connection with the “living practice” (*lebendige Übung*).⁵ The experience, the actual celebration, must be brought into the liturgical-theological research. Guardini writes it this way:

The object of the systematic liturgical study is thus the living, sacrificing, praying Church that performs the merciful mysteries in its actual worship practice, and all the forms that are involved in and connected with it.⁶

For Guardini, studying liturgy is not primarily studying a relic of the past or the specific liturgical precepts of a certain ritual. As I understand Guardini, systematic liturgical study deeply concerns the Church as *ecclesia orans*, God's own people celebrating and praying to the Father, through the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Long before Schmemmann, who is usually associated with the beginnings of liturgical theology, this article provides basic tools and insights for anyone who wants to focus on

2. For a more elaborate discussion on Liturgical Theology see Joris Geldhof, “Liturgical Theology,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (2015). DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.14.

3. Romano Guardini, “Über die systematische Methode in der Liturgiewissenschaft,” in *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 1 (1921) 97-108.

4. *Ibid.*, 104.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

the theological and systematic study of the liturgy. It is interesting to see how Guardini repeatedly points out that liturgical studies must remain ‘in close connection’ with human practice without, however, going into more detail on how this should be done.⁷

1.2. *Beauduin: Mutual Indebtedness*

In his article, Guardini refers to several allies from the early Liturgical Movement such as Fernand Cabrol (1855-1937), Kamiel Callewaert (1866-1943), Maurice Festugière (1870-1950), and of course Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960). With his lecture in Mechelen in 1909, Beauduin heralded the beginning of the Liturgical Movement, and his booklet *La piété de l'Église* became the manifesto of the movement.⁸ It is to this 1914 book that Guardini refers. In it, Beauduin also states that liturgical studies is an independent science, not subordinate to canonical law or dogmatics, but with its own place within the practice of theology, having its own object, procedures, methods and its own auxiliary sciences. Beauduin elaborates on the relationship between liturgy and dogma: according to him, they are indebted to each other. To the extent that dogmatics are indebted to liturgy, he also refers to the text by Prosper of Aquitaine (fifth century) but quotes it in its original form ‘*legem credendi statuat lex supplicandi*’.⁹ Beauduin explains this by stating that “tradition handed down by the organ of public prayer is thus unanimous, universal, hierarchical, and official – so many qualities that give to a theological source all its value.”¹⁰

1.3. *Further Developments in the Twentieth Century*

Beauduin’s translation of this adage offers in a nutshell what liturgical theology stands for: unlocking the meaning of the liturgy, starting with the liturgy itself and looking from there at the contents of the faith. This is how it was appropriated later in the twentieth century by the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983). He studied in Paris at the time of the Liturgical Movement but later lived and worked mainly in the United States. With his book *Liturgical Theology* (1966), Schmemmann set the

7. *Ibid.*, 107.

8. Lambert Beauduin, *La piété de l'Église: Principes et faits* (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont-César [etc.], 1914) 91. For the English translation I refer to: *Liturgy: The Life of the Church* (Hampshire: Saint Michael’s Abbey Press, 2002).

9. Also compare the very interesting study by Julia Knop, *Ecclesia Orans: Liturgie als Herausforderung für die Dogmatik* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2012) 139-180.

10. Beauduin, *Liturgy*, 92.

course for liturgical theology up to this day.¹¹ He advocates for both the historical and the theological study of the liturgy with the single goal of making “the liturgical experience of the Church again one of the life-giving sources of knowledge of God.”¹² For Schmemmann, theological liturgical reflection is paramount, but this is not a pure intellectual endeavor. Clearly resonating with Guardini’s plea above, on actual worship practice being central, also Schmemmann states: “What is needed is not so much the intellectual apprehension of worship, as its apprehension through experience and prayer.”¹³

Beyond the Liturgical Movement, liturgical theology and in particular the work of Schmemmann, has been taken up and built upon by the Benedictine scholar Aidan Kavanagh who, with his book *On Liturgical Theology*, definitively introduces liturgical theology into academic theological studies.¹⁴ Today, Kavanagh’s thinking is continued by his pupil David Fagerberg, professor of liturgy at Notre Dame University in Indiana, but also by scholars such as Dwight Vogel, Gordon W. Lathrop, Andrea Grillo, Joris Geldhof, and Kevin Irwin.

Time and again, these authors are concerned with unlocking the theological and religious meaning of the liturgy itself, from the liturgy itself. Fagerberg, following Kavanagh’s example, stresses the liturgy as *theologia prima*.¹⁵ To these authors, the actual liturgical celebration is the first form of theology. The first theologian for Kavanagh and Fagerberg is the so-called ‘Miss Murphy’: the ordinary believer who celebrates the liturgy and actually has, or should have, all the liturgical-theological wisdom at her disposal.¹⁶ However, the work of Kavanagh and Fagerberg does not clearly show how this can be taken into account scientifically and methodologically. The fact that within liturgical theology, the theological reflection and liturgical practice are mutually relevant to each other and have to be in conversation is beyond dispute. This was already very clear in 1921 with Guardini. At the same time, it also appears that since Guardini, liturgical theology has had difficulties in developing a clear methodology to act out Prosper’s adage. As Joris Geldhof states: “it is one thing to maintain

11. Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, Repr. of 1966 ed. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003).

12. *Ibid.*, 23.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology: The Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary 1981* (New York: Pueblo, 1981).

15. David W. Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What Is Liturgical Theology?*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: Hillenbrand, 2004).

16. Aidan Kavanagh, “Primary Theology and Liturgical Act: Response,” in *Worship* 57, no. 4 (1983) 321-324, at 323; Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima*, 133-159, 226.

that real liturgies are theology par excellence; it is quite another thing to effectively employ these liturgies in theological research and reflection.”¹⁷

1.4. Kevin Irwin: *Text and Context*

In his recently completely revised work *Text and Context: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, Kevin Irwin also tries to develop a way of thinking that does justice to both theology and liturgical practice. This is the reason why I conclude this part on liturgical theology by briefly recalling his work. The starting point for Irwin is the continuous dialectical relationship between text and context.¹⁸ By ‘text’ he means the celebrated liturgy, in which it is not only about texts but about the whole of texts and rites, symbols, gestures, actions, etc. In this dialectical relationship, Irwin describes two movements. The first he calls ‘context is text’. Here he develops a theology of liturgy that focuses on the constitutive elements of liturgy. This mainly concerns the theological interpretation of the celebrated liturgy. The context produces a certain ‘text’ that can be studied. By context Irwin means first of all the historical development and the components of a particular liturgical rite. Secondly, for him, as a Roman Catholic, context is the current, reformed liturgy and its meaning, wealth, and the way in which it is celebrated. This not only concerns the specific rite, but also the community, architecture, music, etcetera. Thirdly, for Irwin the context is the critical function of liturgical theology, in which the current rites and certainly also their performance, the *ars celebrandi*, are placed under constructive criticism. In short, this first movement – context is text – consists of a liturgical theology that studies the whole of the liturgy, past and present.

The second movement within the dialectic relationship is called ‘text shapes context’. Here the focus is on the theological and spiritual implications of liturgy: what are the constitutive consequences of liturgy for theology and Christian life? In other words, this second movement examines the way in which celebrating the liturgy influences and transforms theology, ecumenical dialogue, the moral and the spiritual life. Irwin refers to the relationship between the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi* but adds the *lex vivendi*. What is celebrated and believed is also expressed in how the church lives the faith. According to Irwin, the theological opening up of the ‘text’, the first movement – which is necessary in order to gain an in-

17. Geldhof, *Liturgical Theology*.

18. Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text. A Method for Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018²) 85-93.

sight into its implications – also implies a unique and essential methodological component for theological and spiritual matters, the context, which in turn determines the text, that is the dialectic. Irwin himself writes:

On the one hand, the ecclesial and cultural settings in which the liturgy takes place – *context* – influence the way we experience and interpret the liturgy – *text*. On the other hand, and just as *context* influences how the *text* of liturgy is interpreted, that data that we call *text* necessarily influences the church's theology, spirituality and life – *context*.¹⁹

This seems to be a very promising way of involving theological reflection and liturgical practice, in which the interdependence between what Irwin calls text and context is particularly decisive, but within which certain themes, whether more historical, theological, or practical, can nevertheless be delineated.

2. Liturgical Pastoral

My first encounter with pastoral liturgy or liturgical pastoral was through the study of Cipriano Vagaggini (1909-1999) whom, with his book *Il senso teologico della liturgia*, also made an important contribution to liturgical theology.²⁰ At the end of his magnum opus, Vagaggini writes two chapters on liturgy and pastoral. Evidentially, Vagaggini was not the only one at the time talking about pastoral liturgy. In the course of the twentieth century many different meanings and interpretations were given to 'liturgical pastoral', 'pastoral liturgy' and 'pastoral liturgical studies'.²¹

2.1. *The Liturgical Movement and Pastoral Liturgy*

In 1956, during the international pastoral liturgical congress of Assisi when Pius XII embraced the Liturgical Movement, Josef Jungmann gave a remarkable lecture on the relationship between liturgy and pastoral theology

19. Irwin, *Context and Text*, 92-93.

20. Cipriano Vagaggini, *Il senso teologico della liturgia: Saggio di liturgia teologica generale* (Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1957). For this article, I use: Cipriano Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy: A General Treatise on the Theology of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1976), which is a translation of the fourth Italian, reworked edition.

21. Also compare Domenico Sartore, "Pastoral Liturgy," in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*. Vol. 2: *Fundamental Liturgy*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungco (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998) 65-95.

throughout the centuries.²² From its beginnings, pastoral action and liturgical-theological reflection were closely related in the Liturgical Movement. Apart from Beauduin and the Benedictine pastoral zeal, mention should be made particularly of the Dominican Aimon-Marie Roguet (1906-1991), co-founder of the *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique* in Paris in 1943. Roguet sees pastoral liturgy as that part of pastoral work that “enables them [the faithful people] to participate actively and consciously in the celebration of worship, so that it may be for them a source of the true Christian spirit.”²³ Although necessary and with evidently good intentions, ultimately, this is a limited and rather hierarchical teaching or (more positively formulated) catechetical approach to pastoral liturgy. Very specifically, it aims at leading people towards a correct way of celebrating the liturgy. This focus on liturgical formation remains characteristic for this approach, especially after *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (hereafter: SC).²⁴ At the end of the 1960s, however, the famous Jesuit liturgist Joseph Gelineau (1920-2008) explicitly added another important dimension to pastoral liturgy. In addition to educating the faithful, Gelineau aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the liturgical sign language.²⁵ Starting from the double liturgical movement, that is the liturgy as anabatic (the movement from humanity to God) and catabatic (the movement from God to humanity), Gelineau distinguishes a similar double movement in pastoral liturgics. On the one hand, there is still the need for formation and catechesis: to introduce all the faithful, non-ordained and ordained to the liturgy, and to encourage all those present to participate actively, consciously and fully in the celebrations. On the other hand, with Gelineau, more than with Roguet, the emphasis is simultaneously placed on ‘forming’ the liturgy: the adaptation of the liturgical forms. Liturgy must become pastoral liturgy, which reaches and touches people.

22. Josef Andreas Jungmann, *Liturgisches Erbe und pastorale Gegenwart: Studien und Vorträge* (Innsbruck – Wien – München: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1960) 479-494.

23. A. M. Roguet, “La pastorale liturgique,” in *L’Église en prière: Introduction à la liturgie*, ed. A. G. Martimort (Paris: Desclée, 1961) 231.

24. Compare SC 14-19. See http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html. Sartore also has to be situated in this French-Italian, catechetical interpretation of pastoral liturgy, see Sartore, “Pastoral Liturgy,” 72-93. Based on the thought of Guardini, Sartore presents his own model of liturgical formation with a very strong emphasis on catechesis, see Domenico Sartore, “Catechesis and Liturgy,” in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, vol. 2, 96-109.

25. Joseph Gelineau, “La pastorale liturgique,” in *Dans vos assemblées: Sens et pratique de la célébration liturgique*, ed. Joseph Gelineau (Paris: Desclée, 1971).

2.2. Pastoral Liturgical Studies

Apart from the more action-based approach to the field of pastoral liturgy, also the more fundamental reflection on the concept of pastoral liturgical studies has to be situated in the first half of the twentieth century. Several German-speaking theologians had a fierce discussion about the status and method of *Pastoral Liturgik*, which could be translated as pastoral liturgical studies.²⁶ Athanasius Wintersig (1900-1942), a Benedictine monk from Maria Laach, writes in 1924 – three years after the article of Guardini discussed above – that pastoral liturgy is a proper theological discipline, besides the historical and theological study of the liturgy.²⁷ He explains the sources, methods and purpose of pastoral liturgy in a very methodical way. In doing so, he tries on the one hand to uphold the scholarly nature of the discipline and on the other hand the practical relevance of pastoral liturgy. Concisely put, his method comes down to what can be called a descriptive-normative method. First, liturgical practice has to be thoroughly mapped, using social and empirical methods. This should then be tested against an ideal theoretical model based on tradition and theology.

The ideas of Wintersig are adopted and further elaborated by various scientists in the twentieth century. Someone who does this very explicitly is Birgit Jeggle-Merz, professor of liturgy in Luzern. From a critical re-reading of Wintersig, she formulates the mission of pastoral liturgical studies more generally as “the question how liturgy and the real life of people can be connected, so that liturgy can be experienced as meaningful and enriching.”²⁸ In her opinion, this should be done methodically from a theological (and not just a purely socio-empirical) situation analysis. Nevertheless, in the elaboration of her method there is a strong emphasis on pastoral liturgy as a practical science, with an important role for the empirical studies as practiced in the social sciences.

Also in the 1980s, Mark Searle (1941-1992) developed his vision on pastoral liturgical studies. Similar to my own research on the matter at hand, he was confronted with the confusion of tongues regarding the different names and meanings given to pastoral liturgy, liturgical pastoral, and liturgical pastoral studies. Searle clearly wants to set a course for pastoral liturgy as the scientific and critical approach of worship. For Searle,

26. On the German field and this discussion, see Birgit Jeggle-Merz, “‘Pastoralliturgik’: Eigenberechtigter Zweig oder Anwendungsdisziplin der Liturgiewissenschaft? Relecture eines Grundsatzbeitrages von Athanasius Wintersig aus dem Jahre 1924,” in *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 29 (1987) 352-370.

27. Athanasius Wintersig, “Pastoralliturgik: Ein Versuch über Wesen, Weg, Einteilung und Abgrenzung einer seelsorgwissenschaftlichen Behandlung der Liturgie,” in *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 4 (1924) 153-167, at 157.

28. Jeggle-Merz, “‘Pastoralliturgik,’” 366.

the latter is primarily the “actual liturgical life of contemporary (American) churches.”²⁹ Starting from a synchronous approach to liturgy, he sees a threefold task for pastoral liturgical studies: an empirical, a hermeneutical, and a critical one. Summarized, the first task is the empirical, merely describing what happens in liturgy. This is methodologically very much in line with what Jeggle-Merz describes. Searle refers both to sociology – for the empirical method – and to anthropology – for the study of liturgy as a ritual. For the hermeneutical task of pastoral liturgy, Searle focuses on the way in which the symbolic words and actions of the liturgy function. This mainly concerns the effectiveness of liturgical symbols to communicate the mystery of God’s grace on the one hand and about the capacity of contemporary humanity to be open to this kind of communication on the other. According to Searle, this kind of study can form a basis for improving the ritual itself and especially its execution, but also for developing evangelization and catechesis. The third task, the critical one, is to examine the results of the two preceding ones, the empirical and the hermeneutical, in the light of tradition and theology. According to Searle, recognizing the normativity of the theological tradition is therefore not only what distinguishes pastoral liturgy from its auxiliary disciplines, such as sociology, but is also conditional in view of the sacramental character of the economy of salvation. It is this last task that makes pastoral liturgy a true theological discipline. Thus described, pastoral liturgy requires a high degree of interdisciplinary work, of which Searle is well aware. Because of this triple task (empirical, hermeneutical, and critical), Searle believes that pastoral liturgy deserves its place alongside the historical study of liturgy and liturgical theology. According to Searle, the latter does not succeed in giving sufficient place to the current liturgical experience of the faithful. In addition, in Searle’s view liturgical theology is too textually oriented and pays too little attention to non-textual elements. The latter is a criticism that I do not share, especially regarding more recent contributions in liturgical theology, as referred to above. Following these three steps, according to Searle, pastoral liturgy can help to overcome “the separation between theological claims about liturgy and liturgical experience.”³⁰ Unfortunately, Searle himself died too early (at the age of 54) in order to more fully develop and apply his model of pastoral liturgical studies.

It is clear that there are valuable elements both in the rather catechetical approaches of the French theologians mentioned above and in the more recent, rather empirical approaches, like Jeggle-Merz and Searle. It is also

29. Mark Searle, “New Tasks, New Methods: The Emergence of Pastoral Liturgical Studies,” in *Worship* 57, no. 4 (1983) 291-308, at 296.

30. *Ibid.*, 307.

clear that both approaches present undeveloped opportunities for contemporary liturgical studies. There is, even among ‘weekly Sunday attendees’, an undeniable alienation from the liturgical life of the church, a great need for liturgical catechesis and an increase in awareness of the *ars celebrandi* of the entire community. In addition, the current situation must be duly taken into account, using empirical data, within theological reflection. Whereas the catechetical approach is rather top down, paternalistic, or even clerical, the more empirical approach is not always clear how exactly the empirical study ultimately relates to theological reflection, or in some cases even completely lacks theological conclusions.

2.3. Liturgical Pastoral and Vagaggini

To conclude this section on pastoral liturgy, I turn to Vagaggini, also writing on the various meanings of what he calls ‘liturgical pastoral’ (*pastorale liturgica*), thus presenting yet another way of coining the discipline. According to him, liturgical pastoral can mean three things:

- 1) the stratagems of the pastoral art [arte] for efficaciously inducing the people to live the liturgy intensely; 2) the value of the liturgy for achieving the general aim of pastoral, which is to lead and guide the people to Christ and Christ to the people. 3) The general way of conceiving and putting pastoral into practice by consciously centering it in the liturgy. All three of these meanings are justified, but the third is the fullest; and it is the one which we mean when we speak next of liturgical pastoral.³¹

Next, Vagaggini mentions different important aspects of liturgical pastoral work, namely: plenary participation (external and internal), active, communitarian, hierarchically structured, public, and convergent to the local church.³² In discussing these themes, he constantly moves back and forth between liturgy and church life. In these liturgical pastoral reflections, ecclesiology comes to the fore, but also the individual human being. For example, active participation is not exclusively about the participation in the liturgy but also about the participation of the inner self of people in Christ. In the next chapter of the book, in which Vagaggini elaborates on the methods of liturgical pastoral, he is strongly focused on preaching and catechesis, similar to the catechetical approach already described.³³ One gets the impression that apart from the third, also the second meaning of liturgical pastoral is very central to him: liturgical pastoral as the realization of the encounter between Christ and the people, especially in the liturgy, very

31. Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions*, 838.

32. *Ibid.*, 838-847.

33. *Ibid.*, 855-898.

similar to the position of Gelineau described above. The idea of liturgical pastoral work, however, as the general way of understanding and putting pastoral into practice by *consciously centering it in the liturgy*, seems thought provoking. What can this mean and especially: how can this be done?

3. Between Liturgical Pastoral and Liturgical Theology

In this third part, I will not so much elaborate on the interpretation and use of Vagaggini's liturgical pastoral, but rather start from the third meaning he presents in the quotation above, combining it with the premises of liturgical theology. In my opinion, this offers new perspectives on the relationship between theology, liturgy, and Christian practice. It is not my intention to limit Christian practice to liturgy alone. After all, the liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the church, as SC 9 states. Nor will I argue for a consideration of the liturgy as a pastoral straitjacket and not even, or at least not in the first instance, as the ultimate goal to which all pastoral activity of the church leads. To me the liturgy is rather a horizon of pastoral understanding and practice (Vagaggini) and eventually a horizon of understanding for the entire Christian life. After all, in the liturgy the encounter between God and the faithful is celebrated and realized in a unique way and it is ultimately also this encounter between God and humanity that characterizes and sets into motion the whole pastoral and Christian life. The movement I want to make is, with the words of Irwin, that of text shaping context. As such, it is my conviction that the liturgy presents a kind of blueprint for church action and Christian life. The question is how to read and use this blueprint.

In his book *Consecrating the World: On a Mundane Liturgical Theology*, David Fagerberg talks about a liturgical lens. For him, this is not so much 'to look at liturgy', but rather 'to look through liturgy'.³⁴ Fagerberg even uses this as a universal horizon of understanding when he writes: "Liturgical insight is necessary to have insight into the cosmos, history, the polis, humanity, the earth, the heavenly realm, man and woman as cosmic priests – everything."³⁵ This is closely related to his definition of liturgy as: "the Trinity's perichoresis kenotically extended to invite our synergistic ascent into deification."³⁶ Fagerberg touches here, in my opinion, on an

34. David W. Fagerberg, *Consecrating the World: On Mundane Liturgical Theology* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2016) 5.

35. *Ibid.*

36. David W. Fagerberg, *On Liturgical Asceticism* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013) 9.

essential dimension of liturgy, a dimension that is often neglected, for instance when we speak – although not incorrectly – of liturgy as the whole of symbols, words, and forms of Christian worship. Fagerberg’s definition, however, taps into a deeper level of understanding the liturgy. The liturgy is about the extension of the Trinitarian love that leads humans to unity with God, at least if they want to cooperate (synergetically). This approach to liturgy and Fagerberg’s liturgical lens undoubtedly provides valuable theological ideas: the theological perspectives set out by Fagerberg in *Consecrating the World* are particularly fascinating and, in my opinion, of interest for any theologian. My question is what specific perspectives arise in view of pastoral care and Christian practice as a whole, using this liturgical lens. In addition, this can be seen as an attempt to further explore SC 10 about the liturgy as *fons et culmen*, the source and the summit of Christian life.

As Vagaggini did, I will also develop my thinking from three essential dimensions or characteristics of Christian liturgy, each time proceeding to a deeper layer: the physical dimension, the relational dimension, and ultimately the sacrificial dimension. These three dimensions are all aspects of the liturgy, which were important during the Liturgical Movement and which today are quite generally accepted as belonging to the core of what liturgy is. In addition, according to my understanding, these dimensions engage the person of the liturgical participant each time on a deeper level. The physical is situated on a rather individual and personal level, first and foremost that of one’s own body. The relational dimension is inter-personal, the connection between individuals, as an outgrowth of their primary connection with the personal God. This dimension eventually leads to the third dimension, that of sacrifice, in which the individual transcends what they were into a new position in relation to him/herself, God, and others.

I will first briefly introduce these three aspects of the liturgical celebration from a rather elementary liturgical-theological perspective (context is text), and then explore how these dimensions relate to pastoral action and Christian life (text shapes context). My explorations here are tentative, both starting from elementary ideas of the liturgy and trying to develop from them a spiritual and pastoral view on Christian life and faith. Of course, other aspects of the liturgy can be dealt with when applying this liturgical-theological method, for example the eschatological character of the liturgy, liturgy as prayer, or liturgy from its ritual dimension. This, however, shows the multiplicity of perspectives and the richness of the method and of the liturgy, rather than a deficit of the method I apply. Finally, no major strategies or grand pastoral plans of action are developed here: first and foremost liturgy forms and shapes attitudes, very concrete attitudes of prayer, thanksgiving and praise. But also on a deeper level, the

liturgy – as a blueprint – makes us aware of attitudes (not strategies) that are important for theology, for pastoral practice, and for Christian life. Using this method, I want to claim that liturgy expresses the basic stance of Christian life, as Robert Taft puts it.³⁷ In the end, the Christian life is a liturgical life.

3.1. *Physical Dimension*

First of all, the liturgy involves people as human beings: not only the mind, ratio, or the spirit, but also and very prominently the body, emotions, and feelings. In other words, the subject of the liturgy is the entire human person: mind and body. Liturgy is not only about words and texts, but also and maybe primarily about acts, gestures, and bodily experiences. This is clearly an insight that was (re)gained thanks to the Liturgical Movement.³⁸ When people think of baptism, they refer to water, when the Eucharist is celebrated, those present eat and drink. These are extremely basic bodily human actions. The liturgy uses oil, incense, colors, robes, music, gestures, and so on. Liturgy in its entirety is a bodily experience, God meets his people on their own terms, as created beings of flesh and bone, with mind and spirit but with respect to the physical way of being. We should be very much aware of this, certainly in a western context where the word and rational thought have in a certain way suppressed the body, what the philosopher Charles Taylor calls *excarnation*, moving away from the *carnus*, the flesh.³⁹ The liturgy goes radically against this, being a continuation of incarnation, of Christ's unceasing descending and ascending movement in the Spirit between the world and his Father. This bodily aspect of the liturgy also shows us that liturgy is in the first place a series of actions. Liturgy, as its etymology shows, is a work, *ergon* in Greek. It means doing something. Liturgy has a very practical side and is much more than using the correct texts and formulas.

Using this dimension as a primary liturgical lens and looking at Christian practice, it becomes clear that Christian life involves the entire human

37. Robert Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1984) 32: "the purpose of all Christian liturgy is to express in a ritual moment that which should be the basic stance of every moment of our lives."

38. Exemplarily, we can refer to Guardini's writings on liturgy and symbols. Compare Romano Guardini, *Vom Geist der Liturgie* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1918); *Liturgische Bildung: Versuche* (Rothenfels am Main: Verlag Deutsches Quickbornhaus, 1923).

39. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) 554; 613-615; 771. See also Samuel Goyvaerts, "De excarnatie voorbij: over de blijvende relevantie van de lichamelijke dimensie van de liturgie," in *Over de hardnekkige aanwezigheid van het christendom*, ed. Samuel Goyvaerts, Kees de Groot and Jos Pieper, Utrechtse Studies, 23 (Almere: Parthenon, 2020) 66-82.

person. Christian life does not only consist of intellectual choices based on a particular doctrine or creed, it is much more radical. If you consider Christian life as a liturgical life in which the body and actions are of primary importance, this has far-reaching consequences. I will mention a few of them.

First of all, it is impossible to state, when using this liturgical lens, that the body, and by extension the world is something evil. God himself takes on flesh and even today uses His own material creation to confer grace to us through the sacraments. The fact that the world cannot be evil for a Christian is a fundamental insight provided by the liturgy. Moreover, the liturgy is an invitation to use all we have at hand to do good, to use everything as much as possible in a liberating and graceful way. The liturgy also teaches us that God is aware of our limits, our confinements to time and space. In this light, one could also read Paul's words: "No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength" (1 Cor 10:13).⁴⁰ Christians do not have to live up to unattainable expectations but have to be attentive and accepting towards their limits. Mildness (*clementia*) is a virtue, but mildness towards ourselves is maybe the hardest form of this virtue for many contemporary people.

Secondly, this physical dimension of the liturgy adds up to the etymology of the term, referring to the liturgy as *ergon*, already mentioned. This recalls another famous biblical quote "So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jas 2:17). Exploring the meaning of the liturgy for Christian life, or as I would phrase it: living a liturgical life means first and foremost to live life to its fullest material and bodily extent. This urges us to act! There cannot be a contradiction or an exclusion between liturgical prayer and acting in the world. Liturgy is not limited to closing oneself off inside the ritual encounter with God, but also encompasses being sent out and acting accordingly.

Finally, a number of concrete questions and suggestions for pastoral practice could be raised. Is there sufficient awareness of the importance of this physical dimension in our pastoral actions? Is there sufficient attention for the whole person in parishes and in pastoral care? Is the sensory and physical dimension of the human being taken into account in the catechesis and training offered? Or also – back to the liturgy – is the liturgy we celebrate only concerned with texts, or also with actions, the senses and the whole of the *ars celebrandi*? These are questions which emerge and can help shape the concrete Christian life and pastoral action.

40. Biblical quotes are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE).

3.2. Relational Dimension

The event or action which is the liturgy is not without purpose or meaning. Liturgy is a physical action in relation. In this respect, one generally discerns the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of the liturgy, like the two beams of the cross. Liturgy is an action towards God. Worship has a clear focus: giving praise and thanks to God who is honored as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In every moment of the liturgy, the faithful enter into a relationship with the triune God: by making a sign of the cross – remember the bodily aspect –, by listening to Scripture, directing faith and prayers towards the Father, and sacramentally receiving grace through Christ in the Spirit. The liturgy is a relational event. That is the vertical dimension. Of course, the liturgy also has a horizontal dimension: we celebrate liturgy as a *laos*, a people, referring to the other part of the etymological origin of the word *leitourgia*. This is the communal aspect of the liturgy, again brought to the fore by theologians of the Liturgical Movement. The people congregate, that is the first liturgical act, to be gathered at the same hour in the same place with the same goal: to worship the triune God. The liturgy is, in principle, also celebrated by a community without distinction, whether poor or rich, talented or not, lawyer or laborer, young or old: all are made into one people, as children of the one Father, sharing in the one bread which is his Son, and strengthened and sent out again by the one Spirit. But this horizontal dimension extends much further: through its traditional forms, its ritual dimension, its ancient prayers, and its sacred texts, a community is formed which transcends this time and this place. The liturgy is celebrated in a global church and together with the church in the past, the present and the future. Anyone who participates in the liturgical celebration, participates in a relationship with God and with humanity in an unequalled way. This is, briefly, the second lens of liturgical-theological ideas I want to use.

On the horizontal level, this means that Christian praxis is relational praxis. Of course, people live in a relationship with their family, partner, colleagues, friends: this is universal human behavior and shows the universal human and cultural dimension of the liturgy. When viewed through a liturgical lens, however, these ‘normal human’ relationships can be qualified by a number of aspects. For example, the Christian liturgical relationship is characterized as dialogue, with true listening and even silence. In addition, the liturgy is celebrated with people we do not know, maybe together with people we do not even like, and through the time and space bending ‘communion of saints’ even celebrated together with people long dead, or not even born, and with from around the world. The community to which the liturgy invites us, is – ideally – a universal one without distinctions. Being and living as a Christian in this way means to seek unity,

not only with the ones near to us, but with everyone. A nice example of this liturgical invitation to unity can be found in the Eucharistic prayer for Children II (Roman Missal): “Remember, Father, our families and friends (...), and all those we do not love as we should.” Christian practice is also doing what you pray, or as Irwin suggests a *lex vivendi* taking the *lex orandi* as its guiding example.

Of course, Christian practice is also about the relationship and unity with God, the vertical dimension. I strongly believe that, certainly in Western-Europe, this brings us to an enormous pastoral challenge, which is: teaching people anew how to pray, both inside and outside the liturgy. After all, prayer is the way to maintain this relationship with God. This can be done using traditional formulaic prayers, by praying with Scripture, even praying ‘as you go’, like the internationally successful Jesuit app (Pray As You Go), which also shows that there is an enormous need for this kind of support. Over the last sixty years, a lot of the church’s traditional prayer and devotional life has been lost or has not evolved according to the needs of contemporary people. Although I cannot give ‘hard facts’, my own pastoral experiences make clear that very little attention is paid in pastoral practice into teaching people how to pray, which also starts with the prayer life of the pastor her- or himself. In that respect, the catechetical approach of pastoral liturgy promoted before and after Vatican II has not lost any of its relevance. Ultimately, this vertical dimension is the core of Christian life. Living this relationship, not only in the liturgy of the gathered community but always and everywhere, is what Ignatian spirituality calls ‘finding God in all things’. One can find this idea in almost every great spiritual tradition. Living this friendship, this relationship with God, not only during liturgical prayer, but in every moment of life belongs to the core of Christian existence. This is what ultimately transforms the way one lives and acts, also as a pastor. These thoughts, or intuitions, clearly need more research and much can still be written about and from this lens of ‘relationality’, but we still have one last step to take in showing the relation between the liturgy and Christian practice.

3.3. Sacrificial Dimension

Ultimately, the liturgy as a relational act has its roots in the trinity and in the Christ-event. This Trinitarian awareness directs the understanding of the liturgical relationship as a relationship of sacrificial self-giving, which I will take as a third lens. After all, the starting point of all liturgy is the paschal mystery, the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, another insight that was brought to the fore again thanks to the Liturgical Movement, through – among others – the work of Odo Casel. In the lit-

urgy, the self-giving Trinitarian relationship, the perichoresis of the Trinity, is kenotically extended to us in the figure of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, to use the words of Fagerberg. To save humanity, Christ surrenders himself to human existence to the extreme: he dies on the cross. All liturgy draws from this Trinitarian self-giving of Christ to humankind, by which he brings humanity and God closer to each other than they have ever been. With SC 7, we can state that this sacrificial, self-giving love of God through Christ in the Spirit is present in the entirety of the liturgy, either through the gift of His Word, through the sacraments, and through the assembled church community. In the liturgy, this self-giving love also requires an answer, otherwise one cannot speak of a genuine dialogue or a true relationship. Everything that is done or said in the liturgy, the complete liturgical event, is therefore at the same time a gift from God to the faithful and a gift from the faithful to God, a work for and of the people.

This sacrificial self-gift of God in his Son through the Spirit and the human self-giving love towards the Father through the Son in the Spirit during worship can help people to grasp something of what is meant by the idea of ‘sacrifice’ in Christian tradition. Sacrifice today seems to be an unpopular concept, carrying negative connotations such as destruction, demolition, and death. If one tries to understand sacrifice, which can indeed entail suffering and death, from the perspective of self-giving, in other words from a relational perspective, different meanings can also emerge.⁴¹ The easiest way to speak about this in a liturgical-theological way is by beginning with the Eucharist, where God’s self-giving love is present in the gifts of Christ’s own body and blood. When SC, however, designates the liturgy as the sanctification of humankind, which can be understood as God’s gift of self, the council fathers at Vatican II envisage the liturgy in general, with all its moments of grace, and not exclusively the Eucharist. Additionally, the glorification of God, our sacrifice, is not only what we offer in the collect, but also our songs and prayers, our faith, our time, and in the end our entire being. In the liturgy, we offer everything we have back to God in thanksgiving.

Looking through this liturgical lens of self-giving, the liturgy teaches again something essential about existence itself. In this context, I would like to refer to the Jesuit theologian Michael Himes, who refers to the Bible verse, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 16:25; cf. Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; John 12:25). He explains how he misunderstood and prayed this for many years as a commandment, and later in his life discovered that this might not be a normative but rather a descriptive statement:

41. Compare also the work of Robert Daly, e.g. *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London – New York: T&T Clark, 2009).

Jesus is not telling us how we ought to live, but he tells us how things are. Existence is like this: if you want it you cannot have it, but if you give it away, you cannot run out of it, it becomes everlasting, because being and giving oneself turn out to be exactly the same thing.⁴²

According to Himes, the foundation of existence is self-giving, the gift of the self to another, in other words, love. This resonates with what Pope Francis in his exhortation on holiness, *Gaudete et exultate* (no. 56), says:

Only on the basis of God's gift, freely accepted and humbly received, can we cooperate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation. We must first belong to God, offering ourselves to him who was there first, and entrusting to him our abilities, our efforts, our struggle against evil and our creativity, so that his free gift may grow and develop within us.⁴³

At the very end of the document, he also speaks on the logic of the gift and of the cross, summarizing his, and my point as follows: "God asks everything of us, yet he also gives everything to us" (GE 175). This is why the liturgical lens of self-giving brings us to the core of existence itself.

Again, several questions arise for the pastoral life of the church. In the liturgy, it clearly concerns a self-giving in two directions. The question here is how this takes shape in pastoral counselling. Of course, every good pastor gives her- or himself in many ways, and some pastors even go beyond the 'call of duty' in their dedication. The question arises, however: are pastors aware of and open to the self-giving of the other within the context of their pastoral relationships? If so, in what form does this awareness take place? Is one also creating possibilities to actively receive from those seeking pastoral care, or mostly directed on giving in the pastoral relationship? Does the other person in the pastoral relationship also consciously receive the space and the opportunity in conversations, activities and guiding, to give her- or himself and therefore, according to the gospel and the aforementioned liturgical logic, to receive life? For is that not the ultimate goal? It is my assertion that, the liturgy can pre-eminently help to adopt this kind of attitude, in order that all can kenotically grow into the perichoretic unity with God.

42. M. J. Himes, *The Last Lecture* (18 november 2008), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hs3UCUqy8cg>.

43. Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exultate. On the Call to Holiness in today's World*. 19th of March 2018, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exultate.html, nr. 56. Hereafter: GE.

Conclusion

What I have presented in the last part of this article could be considered a trial in developing a way of connecting liturgical-theological reflection with contemporary Christian life and pastoral action. Following Vagagnini, I started from three specific dimensions of the liturgy to perceive, understand, and direct the pastoral practice of the church. I am convinced that the liturgy has major implications for pastoral life and teaches attitudes that can be extremely fruitful, not only for theological reflection, as liturgical theology argues, but also for pastoral practice and the whole of Christian life. Of course, several questions remain unanswered. Is the liturgy actually experienced and celebrated as a gift from God and from people? Is it still possible for contemporary people, especially in the European late-modern culture, to build up this relationship with God and with each other through liturgical rites, which – being a ritual – has its own symbolic and language system? Questions like these only reinforce the plea to keep the conversation between liturgy, theology, and Christian practice going.

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