EPISCOPAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

Project/Thesis

LITURGICAL CHANGE: OF LIFE, LIBERTY, PURSUIT

BY

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What do you seek?
You mean, what am I looking for?

What do you seek?
Ah, I get it. You’re asking a church question.
Church questions usually have church answers.
So what’s the answer?

Life in Christ.
Right.

OK, so why don’t you ask the questions for a while.
How come you have to fancy up the language?
What’s wrong with simple: What are you looking for?

There’s nothing wrong with it, especially if I’m expecting answers like: my car keys. When you heard “seek” you knew it wasn’t a question about car keys, didn’t you?

I knew it was a fancy question of some sort.

A deeper question, like: What are you really looking for in life?
An official question from a book, where the answer is also supplied.

Hmmm. Well, I did come across it in a book, that’s true, in The Book of Occasional Services. It’s the first exchange between the teacher and the catechumen who’s starting to prepare for baptism.
And we could get off into a long, long discussion of the historical roots and exigencies of that liturgical exchange, the history of the text, the costumes, the revivals... Infant baptism should be good for about twenty volumes, or years...

Is that what you want to do? We have about a hundred pages.
We could rewrite the book. Q: What do you seek? A: Who wants to know?

What do you seek?
Forsooth, the car keys? A D.Min degree? Life in Christ?

And what is that?
No fair.
Fair. Life is quick. What do you seek?
What I want is to live a fearless life, a compassionate life, actually practicing justice, mercy, humor, kindness, welcome, harmony. You remember: *Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways...* I heard that growing up, every first Sunday in those days, and I believed it.

“I don’t understand why you go to church.
It doesn’t change your behavior or your disposition one bit!”
(Mother, Sunday afternoon, c.1949)

Oh, that’s great. You mean anybody who wants a voice in this conversation can just quack right up and get in? My mother!

So why did you go to church?
Because my father took me. And because people were nice to me there and friendly, and I had a place. It was a little church, in the country. Sunday school was in the basement, with flannel boards. The church bell was in a wooden scaffold thing, and Papa James would take one or two kids out to help him ring it. I got to sing in the choir, where the big boys made jokes like “The saints of God are just folk like me, and I mean to be one, too, three, four...” And then I got to sing alto in the real choir — four sopranos, four altos, two bases and a tenor, maybe — and I loved it all. Marinated in Morning Prayer. I saved the white Necco wafers to play Communion in the orchard with the 1928 BCP.

So going to church didn’t have anything to do with changing your behavior or disposition?
But I’ve always believed it did. Ought to. Maybe “always” just goes back as far as my mother’s Sunday afternoon commentary. Or maybe it has to do with the moral content of the liturgy — the Commandments, the Summary of the Law, the miserable offenders, the henceforth...

I know I thought of church as having something to do with changing your life. Because my mother didn’t have much use for any kind of church she didn’t want me baptized until I could
choose it for myself. The story is that when I came home from church complaining, “You don’t care if I go to hell,” she capitulated, and I was baptized not long before I was confirmed, at 11 or 12 years old. I remember expecting that since baptism made people not only totally new but altogether right, I’d soon turn into a boy. If baptism could undo original sin it would surely get me out of this uncongenial female life. When it didn’t happen at baptism I figured maybe there’d be a delay until confirmation, then maybe first communion.

And when it didn’t happen?
That I don’t remember. A year or so later I was almost killed in a car accident, and I remember telling the hospital nurse to tell the rector (who had driven 20 miles to visit me) that I was asleep and couldn’t have any visitors. The year after that I went to a boarding school run by Anglican nuns, where we all spent a lot of time in chapel, including a weekly sung mass where only the priest communicated. After three years of that I was through with the church for about 15 years.

Why?
I thought that either the church was full of hypocrites who didn’t practice what they said they believed, or nobody actually believed what they were saying anyhow. I was a righteous adolescent, an aspiring beatnik, who didn’t want anything to do with either option. I concluded that the gospel was something you grew out of, that the Incarnation and Santa Claus were the same stuff, elaborate and ultimately painful lies.

When was this?
Well, I graduated from high school in 1957.

And you entered seminary in 1973.
Right.

So, what happened?
“The sixties,” for one thing, which were my twenties. The civil rights movement. The peace movement. Then the women’s movement. Opportunities all over the place to live out moral commitments, with friends even.

The year the Episcopal Church’s General Convention met in Seattle I was cleaning offices at the Seattle Center. (That was a civil service job, by the way — General Laborer — that paid better than anything I’d done so far.) It was hard to ignore the swarming Episcopalians, and the
night John Hines spoke to everybody I asked a man I worked with — a black man who worried a lot about his activist children “just going to get their feelings hurt, that’s what” — to go with me to hear what he had to say. Which was, what? more Santa Claus talk? or the church finally hearing the world it lived in? Walking back to the Food Circus, where we worked, my companion said, “I’ll wait and see what he’s actually going to be able to do.”

That was when you got back into the Episcopal Church? No, I was attending the University Friends Meeting. In the meantime, I had written to the bishop of the diocese in which I was baptized asking to be excommunicated. (That’s a whole other story — the bishop was Bob DeWitt, and he wouldn’t do it.) I got back to the church as a result of some friends asking me to be godmother to their daughter. I asked, “Do you expect me to believe this stuff, or is it a social thing?” and in the course of figuring out what I did believe I wound up back in the church.

How?

How. I ‘already’ or ‘still’ believed that the source of the living universe is a compassionate, creative harmony. What I had trouble believing, and still do in many respects, is that this whatever-you-call-it is a personal being, especially the kind of personal being described in much of the bible.

“The bible” being the Old and New Testaments... Let’s see... Here it is, in the declaration you signed at your ordination, didn’t you?

and I solemnly declare that I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation;3

That’s it.

And on page 552 in the Additional Directions part, where it says

At the Presentation of the Ordinand, the Declaration “I do believe the Holy Scriptures . . .” is to be provided as a separate
All right, all right!

You signed that?
   Yep.

How?
   With a mental footnote. I believe the scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation and then some.

You call that honest?
   Not particularly.

So you got back to the church by deciding you could be a hypocrite along with everybody else.
   That’s one way to put it. The Episcopal Church, as I experienced it at that time, had the same sort of don’t-ask-don’t-tell policy about theology that it had about sexuality. It still does.

I still don’t understand why you did it?
   It was a conversion experience, really. (I remember a historian who wrote her doctoral thesis on the ordination movement in the 70s saying that the two things people were reluctant to talk to her about were sexuality and conversion.) Somehow, in the course of figuring out what I could believe, I allowed that it was possible that this compassionate-creative/etc. could come into human life, and Jesus — at least the synoptic Jesus — sounded to me like a convicting answer to the question: If God were to live a human life in such a time, in those circumstances, what would it be like?

Also, in a period of deciding what to do with my life (social work or writing/teaching were what I thought I was choosing between) I got a sort of teletype-across-the-mind message that said: Go to seminary and seek ordination. I was surprised (my friends said more like deranged) but convinced. Since then it’s been sort of one step in the dark after another, not really understanding what I’m doing or why, but repeatedly delighted, and assured that it’s the right path for this lifetime.
This lifetime? Are you one of those Episcobuddhists? Probably. Consider — I was born in 1940. The big technological advance in my childhood was the ball point pen. And hiding under school desks for when we saw the atomic flash of light, of course. TV when I was around 13. My parents are hardworking ordinary American Republicans. The older siblings of my school friends had gone to the same schools before they were racially integrated — this is 20 miles outside of Philadelphia. My religious options were Episcopalian and Quaker. I barely knew any Jews, let alone Buddhists, Muslims... Maybe I would have chosen something other than Christianity if there had been other options anywhere outside of books, but as it was, every spiritual inclination I had was poured into the Christian form.

It’s your karma to be Christian.
Yes, and Episcopalian, and ordained. And female and white and a US citizen and gay and all the rest.

All what rest?
That’s enough for an introduction. Oh, except for AA.

Alcoholics Anonymous.
Exactly — the most widely known demonstration in our time of a principle I believe without reservation — that the root source of harmonious life is in the spiritual dimension.

As distinguished from other “dimensions” like economic, or social.
Or emotional, or sensory...

Jeeks. How does that work?
Remember the ‘first commandment’?

Thou shalt love the Lord
thy God with all thy heart,
and with all thy soul, and
with all thy mind.

Looks like page 319.
Where, you notice, it says Matthew 22:37-40
When I heard that as a child I thought: what’s left to love anything else with? This God wipes you out! (Which, by the way, is underlined in Rite Two’s version — page 351.

Jesus said, “The first commandment is this:
Hear, O Israel: The Lord
our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength...

Mark 12:29-31

But now...
Now I realize that basing everything on right relation in the spiritual dimension enables everything else. And what I’m looking for is the how of it, how get into harmony with (as some people say in AA) “that which I choose to call God” most effectively.

How does this tie in with Christianity, or does it? For me it does, because of the circumstances of my life you’ve so patiently been listening to. At the same time I believe that our true nature — buddha nature, created nature — participates in the divine harmony, I’ve also screwed up enough in my life to want salvation. The central, functional redeeming gospel, for me, is that a door of possibility exists, that we’re not genetically or systemically or ontologically or anyhow doomed to trudge around the same rat rut for always. According to John, Jesus says “I am the door,” and I say, “Weird. Thank you.”

So how does this work in practice?
That’s what I seek. Want. Look for. Am doing this thesis/project about.
**Feminist questions**

I am profoundly moved by this occasion as I am also by the depth and subtlety of the panelists whose lives and focus have for the most part been so different from mine. Whereas these monks and nuns have pursued the spiritual path of the via negativa, the simplification of life, joined to meditative practices that empty consciousness, my path has been the via positiva, a life of mythic complexity and a pursuit of ultimate reality through bringing more and more content into consciousness — an attempt to develop sufficient hooks and eyes to catch the pluriverse. Plerosis (filling) rather than kenosis (emptying) has been my spiritual practice.

Jean Houston, *A Mythic Life*

What’s the occasion?
The Parliament of World’s Religions in 1993. I’m including this quotation from Jean Houston’s autobiographical book both because I admire the vigorous way she has shaped her life around her spiritual search, and because in this observation she touches on a question that I’ve found vexing for all these years. (See, for instance, the first — goldenrod colored — pages in Appendix A, from the first publication of Mother Thunder Mission, a woman-church I instigated in 1976.) My approach to language reform at that time was grounded in this tension between the negative and positive ‘ways.’ Or maybe just in my own temperament.

How’s that?
Bluntly put, I’d rather call God *It* than *She*.

Still? I thought you were on one of the writing teams for the Episcopal Church’s Supplemental Materials — which progressed from ‘inclusive’ to ‘expansive’ language.

I was on the second writing team, and we can talk about politics later. Elizabeth Johnson’s *She Who Is* makes the best case for gendered God-talk I’ve found.

The mystery of God transcends all images but can be spoken about equally well and poorly in concepts taken from male or female reality. The approach advocated here
proceeds with the insight that only if God is so named, only if the full reality of women as well as men enters into the symbolization of God along with symbols from the natural world, can the idolatrous fixation on one image be broken and the truth of the mystery of God, in tandem with the liberation of all human beings and the whole earth, emerge for our time.5

That’s hard to argue against.
Yes, which is why I’m muttering about temperament. One of the reasons a vocation to priesthood seemed odd to me was a lifelong predilection for solitary rather than group experience. I’m an only child, an introvert, socially queasy in default mode ... not the obvious choice for a liturgical leader. I feel much more like one of those monks or nuns than Jean Houston.

But let’s follow the language stream for the moment. The work I did in cleaning up the language of worship in the Episcopal Church came out of the notion that sexist language was blocking our experience of God. I’m standing in a dry stream bed thinking that once the rocks are out of the way we’ll be afloat in living water.

No luck, eh?
An experience at EDS really put the cap on it for me. One Tuesday in the Week of 6 Easter I was on the office rota to officiate; Katharine Black was reader. I had thought about changing the God language, and putting a note sheet including the above quotation from Johnson on the book table. However, I hadn’t done the notes so I just stuck to the prayer book, and when I heard the first reading was glad I had. Leviticus 26:1-20, in part

But if you will not obey me, and do not observe all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and abhor my ordinances, so that you will not observe all my commandments, and you break my covenant, I in turn will do
this to you: I will bring
terror on you; consump-
tion and fever that waste
the eyes and cause life to
pine away.... (14-16)

Ouch. If that’s She Who Is, who wants Her?6
Exactly. Changing pronouns doesn’t begin to fix
that picture, and what kind of image would you
suggest for balance? Practically speaking, as the
reader scheduled for the next day, when it was
more of the same,

But if, despite this, you
disobey me, and continue
hostile to me, I will
continue hostile to you in
fury; I in turn will punish
you myself sevenfold for
your sins. You shall eat
the flesh of your sons, and
you shall eat the flesh of
your daughters. I will
destroy your high places
and cut down your in-
cense altars; I will heap
your carcasses on the
carcasses of your idols. I
will abhor you. ... (26:27-30)

I was in a fix. In class we might be reading

a hermeneutics of procla-
mation insists that texts
which reinscribe patriar-
chal relations of domina-
tion and exploitation must
not be affirmed and
appropriated. In theologi-
cal terms, they should not
be proclaimed as the word
of G-d but must be
exposed as the words of
men.7

but in chapel we were supposed to be good
moderate Anglicans. What I did was read Alice
Walker8 and move back to New Jersey pretty
quick.

Where things are completely different, no doubt.
You bet. No Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza.

So, the point of your story is that when you get the
rocks cleared out you discover boulders? or a dam? or that you’re in the wrong river after all? What happened to the water?

I thought the point of the image was going to be that clearing away the obstacles wouldn’t produce water because another process altogether was required for that. But in the meantime the rocks got bigger. Is the bedrock imagery of scripture so antagonistic to the mystery I mean by “God” that no amount of landscaping will fix it?

Is that the question this thesis/project is asking?

You bet my good, moderate, Anglican britches it isn’t. I’m trying to ask how I, and everybody else who comes to an Episcopal Church liturgy looking for bread can have it, and not these rocks.

Suppose you were to read good stuff and only use language that people can say without lying and ideas they don’t find ludicrous or abhorrent...

It’s a start. When I started this D.Min. work I said I’d be writing hymns, because the music of worship seemed to be at the heart of whatever happened there. I thought that writing words for singing, words that feminist christians could sing without our tongues in our cheeks would be a useful project. As it may be, but what this thesis/project is groping toward isn’t words that fit in with feminist doctrine whether set to music or not, but — where’s that living water?

Maybe you’re right about temperament. Maybe you should go meditate in a cave for thirty years and see if enlightenment makes the changes you’re looking for. Maybe liturgy isn’t the place to look, at least not for you. Even Mother Teresa says her sisters have to pray and meditate four hours every day in order to be able to do the kind of work they do every day.

Maybe so, but I doubt I still have thirty years left to live. And I do believe that there’s a point to that two or three gathered together business. Besides, those monks and nuns say they go for refuge to the Buddha, the teaching, and the community — not the cave.

I see that we’ve danced back into the constricted corner of either/or dualism. Isn’t it much more likely that contemplative and liturgical experience complement each other than that you’d have to choose between them?

Damn. How’d that happen? Who’s leading?

Leading?

And then, as soon as I dismiss mere words as
too insignificant a task I remember words like Janet Moreley’s *All Desires Known*, so ripe, acute, abundant. Words do move. We can dance to words like that, with no tune at all.

So it’s about dancing?

“Yes. But it’s very difficult,” Shan said, “to live without the notion that there is, somewhere, if one could just find it, a fact.”

“Only fiction,” said Forest, unrelenting. “Fact is one of our finest fictions.”

“But music comes first,” Shan said. “And dancing is people being music. I think what Dalzul sees is that we can ... we can dance to Ganam.”

Ursula K. Le Guin

Ah — could we look around somewhere a little more local for a bit?

Like?
Let’s say that we’re standing in a parking lot next to a church, some Episcopal church, on Sunday morning, and the church is full of people — well, probably not full — but the people inside are midway through the main Sunday liturgy. And outside, here, is a friendly inquiring scholar asking passersby to characterize what’s going on in the church from their points of view. For instance, Marty Marxist might say: They’re in there getting their weekly fix of opiate. Somebody else might say: People who read English are reading and singing from books. Or: enjoying an organ recital. Or: worshiping, but unfortunately for them, not the right God.

We’re in luck. Here comes Mary Collins, the Benedictine liturgical scholar.

Ritual assemblies have been and continue to be the point of sustained contact with mystery for most people within most religious traditions. They are a prime, if neglected, theological source.

Baloney.

Oh?

That’s what religious institutions claim, but I don’t believe it. Remember all that complaining about the people who insisted on worshiping in the hilltops and trees.

Those could have been unauthorized assemblies rather than solitary worship.

Could be, true. But I think people who are at all aware in their lives are bumping into “mystery” all the time, not just in the official times and places.

All right. But could we maybe consider that question in another thesis/project and use this one to talk about what happens when people do liturgy together? When they are in church what’s going on? What do people expect and/or experience, and what difference does it make in their lives? Mary Collins says that liturgical events are assemblies for the pur-
pose of the engagement of the believing community with the mystery at the heart of its life ... liturgical celebration [is] the event in which the expectation of saving grace is expressed, surrendered to, and appropriated to life.12

And here comes Annie Dillard

In the high churches they saunter through the liturgy like Mohawks along a strand of scaffolding who have long since forgotten their danger.13

Seriously, what Mary Collins describes sounds great, but does it happen? And how do I know, if I’m part of that community, that it happens.

I believe the standard answer from sacramental theologians is that something happens whether you know it or not. You notice that Collins says “the believing community.” (And think of all the believers who died and killed because of the arguments about transubstantiation.)

Here comes Richard Norris.

The church’s liturgies are public enactments in word and deed of the new life with God that is conferred on us in Christ through the power of the Spirit.14

That is such an unsatisfying answer. It’s not that I couldn’t say I believe all that, it’s more, So what? If I can’t trace any change in my ‘disposition or behavior’ to what I did inside that church this morning ... why not? I want more patently effective liturgy.

You want magic? I want some of what I can expect down the street at the local coven where people expect to raise energy, they do specific things to do it, and the participants can tell whether it happened or not. That seems a minimum expectation. I don’t think witches are in the habit of saying, ‘The ritual was powerful whether you noticed it or not.’15
Aidan Kavanagh, another Benedictine liturgical theologian, writes about how liturgy contributed to the change in Augustine’s belief and life.

Having said that Christians do not worship because they believe, I must also say that Christians do not believe because they worship, at least in the sense that liturgy is a machine which can be counted on to produce a product called faith on any and all occasions. This would be a sort of liturgical Pelagianism. Augustine had for years thought long and hard about pressing philosophical issues, but it was not until the church’s lex supplicandi threw flashes of light, coherence, and congruence into the total life of Augustine the thinker that Augustine the human being was able to see that he had been in the presence of God all along, walking with him and even sitting at his table. The Church’s discipline of worship did not produce Augustine’s faith, but it does seem to have prodded its emergence, given it its foundation in the real order of the time, and shaped it to the point that it became recognizable to Augustine himself and accessible to others. ...

The worship and belief of Christians converge, meet, entwine, and meld in their liturgical act. This act is not reducible to conceptual propositions, for what is the creed without baptism? This act, so viewed, is not reducible to prayer, for
many important elements native to the act itself are demonstrably not prayers. This act, so viewed, is not even reducible to worship, for many of its elements are not worship acts in themselves but elements which can be said to be at best preparatory for worship in public, as distinct from worship in the privacy of one’s own closet. A liturgical act is not simply a creed, a prayer, or worship without qualification. A liturgical act which is the convergence, meeting, entwining, and melding of Christian worship and belief — in other words an enactment of that lex supplicandi which forms and constitutes but does not “produce” the lex credendi — is a fourth thing. It is rite.

Rite involves creeds and prayers and worship, but it is not any one of these things, nor all of these things together, and it orchestrates more than these things. Rite can be called a whole style of Christian living found in the myriad particularities of worship, of laws called “canonical,” of ascetical and monastic structures, of evangelical and catechetical endeavors, and in particular ways of doing secondary theological reflection. A liturgical act concretizes all these and in doing so makes them accessible to the community assembled in a given time and place before the living God for the life of the world. Rite in this Christian sense is generated and sustained in
this regular meeting of
faithful people in whose
presence and through
whose deeds the vertigi-
rous Source of the
cosmos itself is pleased to
settle down freely and
abide as among friends.16

Wow. And here comes Flannery O’Connor, who
said, somewhere,

Either it’s the body of
Christ, or the hell with it.

Are we at an impasse here?
No, not really. Let’s walk on down the street
here to the rapidly growing School of Ritual
Studies and see what they have to say.
Except, before we do that, let me grope around
again towards saying where I’m trying to get
with this investigation. And I’d like to show you
the kind of accomplishment I admire and would
like to be able to do.

OK, fine. What are we talking about, again?
How I can live a life in harmony with God and
my neighbor. How spiritual practice enables that
life. How I can find and share, as a practitioner
in the Episcopal Church, liturgy that has power
to transform me/us into that harmony.

Sounds like Kavanagh’s “liturgical Pelagianism.”
What does Kavanagh’s

“liturgical act concretizes
all these and in doing so
makes them accessible to
the community assembled
in a given time and place
before the living God for
the life of the world.”

sound like? What does “accessible” mean? I’m
not willing to write it off as Santa Claus talk. If
it’s possible, I want to know how to do it in the
Episcopal Church more obviously than I see it
happening now.

What about your example?
Deforia Lane is a music therapist. I first saw her
at work in a videotape, Of Sound Mind and
Body: Music and Vibrational Healing17 which
surveys the work of 20+ people who use sound/mus
ic in healing practices. Then I read her book,
Music as Medicine, which is an account of her life and work, very much in terms of ministry.

So, how does she fit in this thesis/project? Is she an academic? theologian? feminist theoretician? ritual studies expert?

Whoa. This work we’re doing is in service of ministry, remember? A D.Min. process is for ministers to develop capacity for ministry by going to school; it’s a professional, not an academic, degree. This woman is an example of the kind of ministry I admire, want to understand and emulate. There’s so much in her that I identify with — the centrality of music for her life, for instance, and breast cancer — as well as a lot I can’t — she’s African American, at home with ‘traditional’ religious and social configurations (Her husband, she writes is “my greatest hero ... the man who most clearly shows me the unconditional love of the Father.”)18 The open-hearted caniness with which she approaches music therapy is the way I want to make liturgy.

I usually choke on high notes, try too hard, crack the words in my pinched throat. Not on this night. The note soared, walked through the air on its own ... we were all caught up in that note: singer, audience, instrumentalists, musicians, all of us. ... I was, in the best sense of the word, used. Used like the banks of a river are used by water, By an arrangement of grace.19

They never seemed to last, these transcendent moments, and I was left to calculate why. ... I was hooked on the idea of transformation. It is why, as a child, I dreamed of being a healer. At the conservatory, I began to see in music the power to transform at deeper levels, to touch hearts and souls. I had tasted of the power of music to captivate, mesmerize, and change. I was hooked on the pure grace of it.
My job involves science: technique, measurement, research, calculation. My job is to solve the puzzle of the whole by the technical and competent management of the pieces. Science is all about breaking things down, a necessary movement from totality to parts. A body becomes a collection of systems, a system a collection of organs, an organ a collection of tissues, tissues a collection of cells, etc.

In music therapy, too, a song is composed of certain vibrations, which activate in the ear certain neurological responses, which trigger the release of certain hormones, which result in certain types of behaviors. The therapist must diagnose each situation carefully, determine and apply the appropriate method, monitor and evaluate results, adjust treatment to reaction, and so on.

... For me, science has been a means to the end, not an end in itself. Music, that great invisible force, has taught me that the most concrete, powerful, and transforming elements of humanity are invisible, irreducible, and immune to jargon. I think of the words of 2 Corinthians 4:18, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

The movement of the
unseen into the seen, of
what is felt into what is
known, of what could be
into what is, of the seem-
ingly impossible into the
possible, is what I call art.
Those of us who anchor
ourselves in God would
also call that movement
faith. ...

Art and faith — the
transcendent touches in
the routine — provide us
with the best that life has
to offer, not in a continual
stream of bliss, but in the
waking of hope, the
desire to love, and the
occasional reminder that
some things in life are
worth pursuing. These
moments, these breaks in
the wall allow us to peer
through to the other side:
they are timeless and
anchored in time; the
fleeting stuff of eternity;
the power of hope, joy,
and love in the most
hopeless situation.20

So where does she go to church?
 Doesn’t say, though she mentions tithing and
Sunday School, and there’s an endorsement from
the Presiding Bishop of the Christian Methodist
Episcopal Church in the book.

Sounds like the kinds of ‘traditional’ church life a loud
component of the Episcopal Church will tell you we
ought not to mess with: The Tradition ain’t broke, and
you ain’t fixing it with all this change. Just get back to
those 19th century basics, listen to father, and life will
have purpose, power, etc.
  Yep, and if I don’t

I will continue hostile to
you in fury; I in turn will
punish you myself seven-
fold for your sins.

and so forth. And those folks are, like it or not,
part of the people I’m bound to serve. Curiouser
and curiouser.
I want you to hear Kavanagh again. Talking about the source of theology, he says that
the very first result of an assembly’s being brought by liturgical experience to the edge of chaos ... is deep change in the very lives of those who participate in the liturgical act.21

He even says that the assembly is always changed, and that

One learns to recognize the signals an assembly of faithful people gives off when, in a liturgical event, it begins to change palpably into something it was not when the event began. These signals are not wholly dissimilar from those given off by people involved in a great act of making music.22

And, since we both read the same books, you know he doesn’t actually describe what he’s talking about. What are those signals? and then he goes on to say quite a bit about the sadly deteriorated state of text-bound liturgy since printing.

Will you go around another time with these folks?
You’re leading.

OK. Listen to what Kavanagh says about the source of theology in liturgy.

[Liturgies’] growth is a function of adjustment to deep change caused in the assembly by its being brought regularly to the brink of chaos in the presence of the living God. It is the adjustment which is theological in all this. I hold that it is theology being born, theology in the first instance.23
Now, Deforia Lane. Wouldn’t you say that the ‘bottom line’ for her is the presence of God?

Yes. At the end of her book she writes,

For me, it often comes down to this: What can I do in this moment to develop the presence of Jesus Christ *in* me and *for* others? ... My demand for systematic theology, like Job’s, was blown away in the whirlwind that is God. I learned ... that God’s only sure answer was his presence.24

Where does she encounter this presence? in church?
With people, with them in their suffering, in struggle with her own suffering ...

So, what can you and liturgy and the Episcopal Church offer ministers like Deforia Lane?

That’s the hardest question I’ve been asked in this whole 5 years.

**Ritual studies**

Ritual Studies — which has really emerged as a field of studies since the book of Kavanagh’s we’ve been hearing — would be more likely than he to describe worship with the thoroughness of anthropology, from whence it emerged.

Where do I find ritual studies?
For the purposes of this conversation, start with Tom Driver’s 1991 book *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform Our Lives and Our Communities*. You know the list of books you wish, if you were a writer of books, you’d written? This one’s on my list.

You agree with all of it?
Well, no, of course not, but it’s a wonderful work of scholarship in service of ministry. He presents the territory of anthropology and ritual studies in a very productive way. You’ll save lots of time by reading his book.

And you’ll save lots of paper by not going over the
same ground here, is that it? 
That’s it. One hesitation I have in the way of complete agreement concerns the way Driver puts everything in terms of liberation. The gospel is about freedom. Period.

Hence a Christian sacrament may be defined as 
an action of God together 
with the people of God, 
ritually performed to 
celebrate freedom and to 
 hasten the liberation of 
the whole world.  

You think that’s mistaken? 
In the same way the Solemn Declaration about Old and New Testaments is — it’s too hasty about drawing boundaries. Draw the circle bigger and say: liberation is one necessary component of reconciliation. Draw it bigger again and say — what?

Temperament again? 
Could be.

Transformation

Under the section head “Ritual’s Social Gifts” Driver discusses ritual as the agent of order, community, and transformation. He’s most interested in the latter, making the point that modern thought might grant ritual power for personal transformation, but not social.

To reach from the declarative to the imperative requires a technique. The carpenter, aiming to let it be the case that the nail goes into the wood, uses a technique of hammering. For magic, the technique is ritual: What the act of hammering is to the carpenter, the performance of ritual is to the worker of magic. ... Using the term magico-religious, Van Gennep expressed the conjunction of religious practice and
theory. His point is excellent, for it reminds us that religion cannot be religion without performance, in all the sense of “performance” that we have earlier elaborated. The aim of religion is not simply intellectual understanding; it is also, and primarily, transformative action, for which the principal technique is “ceremonies, rites, and services.” Ritual-making may not be a religion’s first or last word but is surely its most essential. A religion is a praxis, a certain way of acting or attempting to act in the world, and this is established through a certain way of acting ritually.26

Now we’re getting somewhere. ‘Transformation’ is such a buzz word at this point it’s hard to be sure where. What do you mean by ‘transformation?’

Change from something to something else, said fancy. I guess there’s the sense of suddenness as well — shazamm! poof! Make me a milkshake; OK. Zap! You’re a milkshake.

Yes, although I wouldn’t have trouble with understanding: Over the course of half a century the country’s population was transformed from rural to city people.

Isn’t there also a sense of permanence? or at least that it’s not a regular back-and-forth change. And that it’s for the better?

There’s another book I’ve found helpful on this crucial point: James Loder’s The Transforming Moment. He says the change is like, is, a “figure-ground shift.” You know, the kind of drawing that looks one way until you see it differently and then — poof — it’s different. About the eucharist he writes

The intersection between four-dimensional transformation and the Eucharist as image, symbol, and celebration becomes the turning point at which a
massive figure-ground shift can take place for the participant like that which occurred for the two men [sic] at Emmaus.

In this figure-ground shift the complex of meaning focused on Christ no longer resides outside oneself as doctrine, nor does the participant any longer view the elements, the celebration, and their meaning as usual. Rather the meaning of the Eucharist (Christ) becomes itself the lens through which one's own being, and being-itself, is viewed. 27

That’s just the kind of transformation you’re hoping for, as the buddhist hopes for enlightenment.

Yes and no. Yes and more. I’d like to think that once having been changed and moved into a new sense of reality my behavior would change, too. Having seen the configurations of justice, I’d always act justly. Having tasted compassion, I’d always act compassionately. I have had such moments, but, as Deforia Lane said, “They never seemed to last, these transcendent moments ...”

A real cynic could point out that we don’t know what happened to those two people at Emmaus, either.

Go right ahead. Meanwhile, here’s Tom Driver again:

The business of religions and their rituals, then, is to effect transformations, not only of persons’ individual subjectivities but also transformations of society and the natural world. In a religious perspective, the personal, societal, and physical realms are not isolated from each other but participate together in a single field of divine power.

Let me catch up. You’re looking for, in the church’s eucharistic liturgy, an experience that will transform you
into an effectively compassionate, just, human being. Yep, that’s what I want. Or I’d be happy to go along with the society and natural world when they’re transformed. If we’re celebrating something that is already accomplished, already present (which I believe) then I want to know it in my life. If the emperor has two shirts then I want one; if the emperor is naked then I’m with Flannery O’Connor.

But you believe in the clothes. I do. Even on Sundays when I’m draped in polyester satin, handing out coin size chips of “bread” and watered port to strangers...

Here’s some bad news from Juan Segundo.

The sacraments will be valid and efficacious, as Christ intended, to the extent that they are a consciousness-raising and motivating celebration of man’s liberative action in history. That does not reduce them to a merely human gesture. God is operative in them, but his activity consists in working through the praxis of man. Hence it condenses in the sacramental celebration where man intensifies his conscious awareness of the impact and liberative force of his action. Where this does not happen, there efficacious truth and true efficacy will be missing — no matter how perfect the rite is.28

That’s like telling an alcoholic all she needs to do is stop drinking. If my manly praxis were fit for the new creation I wouldn’t be so interested in transformation. And don’t tell me not to get distracted by the language.

Keep going with the alcoholic. AA says that a new, free way of life comes about because of a spiritual experience which is the result of living a way of life outlined in the 12 steps, and not drinking with the help of God and people in the fellowship. Even if you’re instantly transformed from someone with a compulsion to drink to someone without that compulsion, you still need to
incorporate that change into a new life. Which sounds like the dynamic Segundo is describing.

Ah.

Another thing from AA that fits is this: they say that you don’t have to make the changes, all you have to be is genuinely willing to change.

I know this stuff. I know this stuff. Why don’t I do it? let alone, what would it play like in liturgy?

Are you kidding? It’s dying, that’s why. You have so much privilege, so much pride, so many habits of domination. What conversion will make you willing to die to all that day by every day?

In the Episcopal Church?

Performance

In the second section in Tom Driver’s book — Modalities of Performance — he considers “three different yet related modes of performance ... the ritual, the confessional, and the ethical.” All share the defining characteristics of performance, i.e., they are actions, “the kind of doing in which the observation of the deed is an essential part of its doing, even if the observer be invisible or is the performer herself.”

Invoking Richard Schechner’s proposal “that we think of all performances as existing within a continuum that runs from a pole of efficacy on the one hand to that of entertainment on the other,” and picking up Schechner’s term “‘transformances,’ meaning performances that are ‘the means of transformation from one status, identity, or situation to another’” Driver comments on the eucharist and prayer as “kinds of transformatance not usually thought of as rites of passage.”

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, the Mass accomplishes the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. It also repeats and perpetuates the efficacious sacrifice of Christ for the remission of sins. In some
Lutheran and Anglican theologies, the efficacy of the Eucharist is retained, even without the doctrine of transubstantiation; but for most Protestants the rite is interpreted simply as a service of commemoration, its efficacy lost: Communion becomes solely an act of communication rather than a transformation. To the extent that this happens, the rite moves away from the pole of efficacy toward that of entertainment, even though it may be rather dull to watch or take part in. Although my Protestant theology does not include a doctrine of transubstantiation, and I do not hold to a hierarchical sacramentality, I believe that a rite that has lost its power to transform runs a strong risk of becoming mere show. We shall look at this again when we come to the possible rejuvenation of Christian sacraments toward the end of the book.

As for prayer, its character as transformance may be considered in two different ways. The most familiar version of “the efficacy of prayer” is the idea that the deity, prompted by prayer, grants the express wish of the petitioner ... [In another sense] the act of prayer may establish, or reestablish, relationships — between the people or groups who pray, the deity to whom they pray, and the people or circumstances for which they pray. ...through intensifying the “presence” of one
being to another. Hence prayer may transform isolation into community, emptiness into fullness, despair into hope, and so on. I am suggesting that it is not the mere thought of deity that accomplishes this, but rather such thought in conjunction with the physical enactment of prayer in speech or body language — that is, in performance.31

We’ve established that you’re sticking to the middle ground — that the eucharist is more than commemoration. And that you remember Segundo’s evaluation. Yes. It’s real water, even if the horse won’t drink.

Because the horse might drink? Are we into probability here?

Just Because, OK? Remember that one? Just because.

What I want to explore is how performance, that is physical as well as verbal action, can make a difference between what seems to be happening in the churches I go to on Sundays, and what it could be like.

You want it to be more than people just going through the motions.

They’re going through the motions they’re asked to do, like a drill team. Sit, stand, sit, kneel. For the most part they stir around at the peace, and like it. About half of them don’t sing, but half of those hold the hymnal obediently.

So you think there should be different motions?

Suppose God started yet another religion to try another route to get through to us. Suppose a cave in Patagonia turned up with pictures on the walls and interpretive footnotes on the rocks that explained that there are a few gestures, just a few, that will create harmony and well-being when used regularly in human interaction. Everybody who wants to be part of this religion gets together every week to practice these motions. They dance them. They have a wonderful time. They dance them over and over, so that they can do them easily wherever they are.

And pretty soon the left-footers won’t dance with the
right-footers. The schismatic Singing Only sect is anathematizing the Boomboxers, and ... you are both probably right and a pig before pearls. Actually, that story was a little off the point.

The point ...

About the power of motion, action, performance. I’m remembering something that happened to me at the General Convention in Indianapolis. I had heard that Integrity was having a eucharist in the evening, and went over to their office. I met somebody in the elevator carrying food, and helped him with the doors. And then I was sitting at a table with some people I didn’t know and some I did when a woman came up behind me, tapped my on the shoulder and asked if I’d come out into the hall. There, she explained that this was a private liturgy for Integrity volunteers and I’d have to leave. I could stay for the meal, but I couldn’t come to the eucharist.

The point is that if I’d seen “Private Integrity Eucharist” on a sign I think I would have made some comments about “No outcasts, huh?” and maybe written a letter about lousy theology with my membership renewal, but basically it wouldn’t have gotten under my skin. What I did that day was creep away and cry for half an hour, feeling utterly shamed and punished, and then, of course, furious. Going through the actions made the difference.

So, sitting, standing, kneeling, eating

Did you remember little girl tea parties, with tiny special plates and tiny special food?

Come on, you know it’s not always like that. Pita bread, at least some of the time

Not very often.

OK. Let’s go on and look at two projects in which I was trying to open the possibility of doing something different in liturgy, something in which all aspects of peoples’ lives could be involved.
Through the generosity of Episcopal Divinity School’s curriculum flexibility I was able to offer a “module” — an 8-week long course — in the Spring term in 1994. Title as above. The syllabus and schedule are on the next couple of pages; the course readings are in Appendix B.

Generosity mean they paid you?
Generosity means they let me do it. And I guess now means let me talk about what I learned from it as part of this thesis project.

Fair enough. Anybody take it?
There were fifteen by the end; eighteen started out.

Liked it that much!
Some people really liked it, some really hated it. Just recently I read a teacher’s description of a writing class that recalled this module to me.

My students stare at me for a moment. “How do we find an agent?” they ask.

I sigh. When you are ready, there are books that list agents....However, in the meantime, we are going to concentrate on writing itself, on how to become a better writer, because, for one thing, becoming a better writer is going to help you become a better reader, and that is the real payoff.

But my students don’t believe me. They want agents, and to be published. And they also want refunds.32

What were you hoping for?
I was looking for the same thing I came to EDS for at all — some companions in search of a way of worship that is part of, a contributing part of, a life of justice and compassion. And that’s what I found. I’m grateful to the partici-
pants for their wholeheartedness and care. And, of course, the misunderstandings were some of the most instructive elements of the experience.

For instance?
Well, I think what a couple of the students really wanted was a few interesting new pages for their prayer books, not a radical reworking of the process. I thought I’d accounted for that by asking people to arrange themselves in project groups depending on whether they wanted to adapt existing liturgy or start from some other point. Those folks did write some new pages to take home and benefited from the group’s participation, but otherwise I think they thought we were wasting time.

The biggest “instructive misunderstanding” for me came about when the faculty decided to take up the question of changes to the chapel worship in what amounted to executive session. I hadn’t planned to deal with “who decides” questions in this module. (John Hooker’s Liturgical Music and Practicum adroitly makes that question part of the theology of church music each student is expected to articulate in the course of the class work.) However, I was torrentially taken up by the question.

What was the big deal?
Probably the Santa Claus question yet again. I believed the descriptions of the school as a community of adult learners, etc.

And you learned?
EDS is an academic institution.

Surprise?
OK, so I’m credulous. An emperor is an emperor, whatever outfits he may be trying on.

Do as I say, not as I do.
(Mother, 1940-present)

That never worked when you heard it from her!
Yep, I know. Basic power analysis learned at, or over, my mother’s knee. But the talk at EDS is wonderful stuff — how do communities of adult learners conduct theological education? where is an authentic locus for doing feminist liberation theology? let’s make power analysis one of the basic skills of the curriculum!

That’s what they say.
What they were doing that winter was acting like an academic institution in which the faculty is the priesthood and everybody else is laity, in the Father Knows Best model of church. I hadn’t been a lay person for fifteen years or so and I hated it. What an education!

When the student is ready, the teacher will come. They say.

Who say?

You know. Those buddhists.

Thanks to the long memory of my computer, I can include some of what I wrote in connection with this unforseen but productive part of the module (in Appendix C.)

What did people do in the class? what were rituals “about?”

Each class began with something that was more exercise than ritual. Some examples — a sort of tag game the point of which was deliberate and enthusiastic welcome to people coming into the room; a procession, to various kinds of recorded music, with people carrying the construction each had prepared as a form of self-representation. There are video tapes of these classes, by the way, if you want to see and hear what went on. There was an exercise in which participants moved money around on tables until a signal, whereupon each kept what they had at the moment. The point of these exercises was to demonstrate the impact of performance, to experience the quickness with which people can really learn what’s going on among, and within them, in the course of doing something.

Rather than just listening.

Right. There were four group projects:

> A eucharist intended to be part of a sort of progressive dinner in a parish. It was called A Festival of Feasts.
> A “Ritual of healing: healing of memories.”
> ”A Circle of Friends,” which celebrated friends both present and not.
> ”Re-Imaging the Divine,” a ritual which used wax, music, silence, and opportunity for spoken input.

Was there any sort of theme to what you said in class?

It kept coming back to something like Don’t Dam the River. Responsible plumbing. If you’re going to invoke spirit, if we’re going to put ourselves into the stream of divine presence, we
mustn’t try to hold onto it for our own benefit, but let it flow though, or carry us along, for the benefit of what’s downstream. Living water won’t be contained. Trying to divert it into a private lake, or gulp it all up in a private party, is only going to make you sick. Nothing new. Keep asking, in and about any ritual, What’s going on here? and What does it have to do with life?

Sounds like Paul talking to the Corinthians. You know, the ‘I don’t know what you think you’re doing when you get together and some rich people eat all the food and ignore others, but it’s not the Lord’s meal.” That, and connecting what’s being done in the ritual with what’s being done in everyday life.

Do you feel you conveyed that successfully?
Not very. One student wrote quite an extensive eucharistic play, intended for an intergenerational educational event, around the gospel of Jesus’ feeding the five thousand. The next day he did a presentation (at an AGE lunch) about life in Brazil in which poverty, poor children, were barely mentioned, taken for granted.

Discouraging.
Yes. That felt like a real failure. I remember during the ‘should women be ordained’ days people would say: the eucharist isn’t about sex, it’s about eating. It’s not about eating; it’s about how we’re related. I want to be part of liturgy that makes it impossible not to get that point, get it so we live it.

What about Segundo’s point, that people who aren’t trying to live it aren’t going to be able to celebrate it. Let’s look at that again.

The sacraments will be valid and efficacious, as Christ intended, to the extent that they are a consciousness-raising and motivating celebration of man’s liberative action in history. That does not reduce them to a merely human gesture. God is operative in them, but his activity consists in working through the praxis of man. Hence it condenses in the sacramental celebration where man intensifies his conscious awareness of the impact
and liberative force of his action. Where this does not happen, there efficacious truth and true efficacy will be missing — no matter how perfect the rite is.33

In another place he says simply

Magic is a matter of looking for divine efficacy in certain procedures without any relation to historical efficacy.34

And again:

The only thing is that this renewal is not and cannot be the result of any “liturgical reform.” It must come from the transformation of the entire Christian community.35

Which tells me that if I’m looking to liturgy for an experience that will transform me into an individual capable of just and compassionate living it’s not going to happen. Which is — discouraging doesn’t begin to say it.

Because you hear “the entire Christian community” and your heart fails?

Maybe.

Or maybe because you’re still looking for something that can happen to you alone, like enlightenment coming to the buddha under the tree?

Maybe that, too.

Consider. Segundo is writing out of, and for, christian base communities, not parishes. Practically speaking, if you were part of a real community of accountability, truly living for justice and compassion in every dimension of your life together, would that be enough transformed “Christian community” for you? Even if it were a very small group?

Of course.

And what about the fact that you don’t do liturgy alone? Or, better, you can’t do liturgy alone.

I suppose you wouldn’t count all the company of heaven, and Jesus, and everybody...
You want to do liturgy “about how we’re related” without any body there?
   I don’t even want you here, at the moment, and you’re just a margin setting.

Because you’re scared, right?

   If what we have been saying is true, [writes Segunda] the Christian community as a whole is a sign. And the content of that sign is at once an historical event and the structure of any and all human progress: i.e., the paschal mystery of Christ. That is the fundamental dialectic that underlies the whole process of evolving love between human beings.

   What is more, this dialectic does not simply take place in us; it is also shown to us by the signs we call sacraments. And it is shown to us so that the ecclesial community may contribute what is specifically its own to the construction of human society: i.e., what it knows, what has been signified to it.

   Hence the sacrament is dialogic. It prepares the Christian community to speak its liberative word in the history of mankind. Obviously enough each generation of human beings faces different problems. But our faith tells us that they share a common denominator: a death and a resurrection, a death for a resurrection.36
OK, back in New Jersey, in a mainstream parish,

Mainstream parish! Trinity, Princeton is mainstream like the Queen Mary is a boat. (Was a boat?) It’s by far the largest and richest parish in the Diocese of New Jersey, firmly embedded in the intellectual and social sediment. Why did you choose such a place for a liturgy project?

My partner and I are trying to live together in two places, 50 miles apart. Princeton is the community she has lived in for most of her adult life, raised kids, has good old friends, and Trinity is the parish from which she was ordained. Getting involved there was one way I thought of starting to be in the community as more than a visitor. Also, the Rector is, as he says with a big grin, one of my successors as Archdeacon for Communication in the Diocese of Newark, and supportive of my proposal. (See Appendix D.)

So what did you learn from this one?

Something I could have learned years ago from Jan Pierce, a laywoman whose ministry was church journalism and feminist educating and organizing. When I once asked her to do something in a liturgy she said, “No thanks. When it comes to liturgy I’m a consumer.”

Huh?

I thought everybody who goes to church wants to ‘create’ what goes on there. It didn’t occur to me that testing this notion with seminary students (or in a church like St.Clement’s in New York which is also a theater) is not exactly playing on a level field.

How did you learn this astounding fact?

Well, the people who said they thought this Saturday liturgy was a great idea, just what they needed for their own spiritual life, were women so overinvolved in regular church work they never had time to actually show up on Saturday night. No one who came was interested in ‘creating’ a liturgy.

Who came?

People from the Sunday congregations (of which
there are three) for the most part. The biggest attendance was nine or ten. Eventually it boiled down to Emily Bennett and me. And all the invisible, of course.

What did you do?
While waiting for people who wanted to make their ‘own’ liturgy we followed the BCP outline (p.400. See Appendix D for sample order of service) in a very low-key style, talked about the readings in some real depth, prayed in a well-mannered way, went home.

Emily was nostalgic for ‘the old Saturday night eucharist’ which had flourished for a while fifteen years ago. It was the smells and bells contingent in an otherwise low church parish, a sort of proto-Integrity event. There still may be use for that, actually, but I’m not up for it.

Now what?
Thank them kindly for allowing the experience, and move on.
InConclusions

When I begin to work on a play, I start with a deep, formless hunch which is like a smell, a color, a shadow. That’s the basis of my job, my role — that’s my preparation for rehearsals with any play I do. There’s a formless hunch that is my relationship with the play. It’s my conviction that this play must be done today, and without that conviction I can’t do it. I have no technique.

Peter Brook, The Shifting Point 37

I suppose you want to know what I’ve learned from this project?

What did you learn? And what’s that stuff from Peter Brook? Are you suggesting that being a priest doing liturgy is like directing a play?

One of the illustrations in Elizabeth Johnson’s book is a post card (of a Mexican woman spinning) from a friend of hers, which says:

I am working in a little town on the Isthmus. We have about 40,000 people to encourage to form Basic Christian Communities. The bishop is excellent, a wild man determined to turn the church over to lay people. The poverty is horrible, grinding, demeaning; the people lively, warm, suffering. I will be here for at least two years and think I will learn a lot. This is a wonderful image of God, no? I think we are neither in the raw cotton or the thread, but in the twirling...

— from a postcard sent from Mexico
by Michael Siefert, S.M. 38
I’ve thought about that a good deal. What would it be like? What attitude can I imagine myself having in that priest’s place?

Peter Brook writes about going across Africa with thirty actors, for three months in 1972.

And we found immediately that the more we took the total risk, and went into villages prepared for everything but having no idea at all of what we were going to do, the freer, in fact, we got from any sort of structure or idea, the better the result always was...

Somebody would start, and everything developed from the fact that one person got up and walked. Or somebody started singing. It’s very frightening, really, to take that risk. But the more that risk was taken, the better the results. Something always created itself, that really was influenced, second by second, by the presence of the people, the place, the light...

And in another place, talking about how his sense of what he’s doing differs from Grotowski’s, Brook says:

For me, the way of the theatre goes the opposite way, leading out of loneliness to a perception that is heightened because it is shared. A strong presence of actors and a strong presence of spectators can produce a circle of unique intensity in which barriers can be broken and the invisible become real. Then public truth and private truth become inseparable parts
of the same essential experience.40

What? No Segundo?
Of course.

Grace has countless signs, countless efficacious signs. But a community recognizes its unity and commitment in those signs that turn it back to its origins.41

As well as

...the sacraments are means to form and set in motion an ecclesial community, since its liberative influence constitutes its true end.42

Are you going to be adding this up any time soon?
OK, I’ll try. When we began I was looking for an experience in liturgy that would transform me into someone capable of living justly and compassionately. And I was an Episcopal priest with responsibility to see that sacraments happen.

And now?
The same. With a blind, formless, sniffing hunch that there is a way of acting, a performance, a gesture? that can turn us to the death and resurrection that creates every possibility for a life restored.

Say what?
Exhale.

What?
Exhale. Breathe out. All the way.

Now, if you don’t breathe in again you’ll be dead very shortly. If you don’t breathe in again, all your possibilities, all your choices — nothing doing, over, done. Feeling it yet? Wanting that breath? With some sense of urgency? ...

Ghhssssahhhhhppp!! [i.e., a spirited inhalation] Whew!
Exactly.

The point? The point? The point!
That we’re that close, all the time, to some vivid,
performable experience of the emptying and being filled of dying and being raised anew. In Segundo’s terms, “the paschal mystery of Christ. That is the fundamental dialectic that underlies the whole process of evolving love between human beings.”

So, your next project is to find, or found, base communities of breath holders.

Give me a break, here, will you? I’m groping towards some way that ... Let’s try an analogy. Remember how, in all the resurrection stories, nobody recognized who they were talking to right away? Whatever it means to live in the realm of resurrection, it’s not obvious until you get there. You get there by doing something with other people — talking, eating, touching — in the way Peter Brook is talking about approaching performance.

OK, so far.

So doing liturgy with people, like that, increases the odds that we will ‘get’ what’s going on. (Segundo: “What is more, this dialectic does not simply take place in us; it is also shown to us by the signs we call sacraments.”)

And if we practice this basic gesture in liturgy we’re more likely to do it elsewhere. Is that what you’re hoping?

That’s just it. Look at the BCP outline of the eucharist and imagine doing those things ‘to the tune of’ that dialectic. Gathering in Jesus name would mean not just being in the same place waiting for something to happen, but knowing that to step into that gathering means leaving behind every distinction of domination.

You mean just for the period of time of the gathering.

Yes. The body of Christ being constituted by the gathered community. The same people could gather as the Supreme Court or anything else at some other time, but while they are the church there are no effective social distinctions of power among them.

So slaveowner and slave would have to figure out how to relate to each other on equal terms ‘in Christ.’ Which might make it harder to hold onto the old pattern elsewhere.

Grace does the figuring. All we have to do is the dying.

That’s all.
it’s the desire to enact
metaphor,
for flesh to make known
to intellect (as uttered
song

makes
known to voice,
as image to
eye )
make known in bone and
breath
(and not die) God’s
agony.43

Denise
Levertov

To keep emptying, letting go, allowing... having
no preconceptions at all about anyone, or about
what to do next.

That’s the point of the offertory, isn’t it? Your
money and your life!

“One wise preacher has noted that the trouble with a
living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar!”44
Well, sure. But the invitation is there. The
opportunity to practice, together, is there when-
ever the eucharistic liturgy happens. Isn’t it?

Isn’t that your thesis? That this can happen, in Episcopal
churches, on Sunday mornings?
That was my thesis.
Notes

1 The Book of Occasional Services (NY: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979) 115.


3 BCP, 526.


6 One example of systematic treatment of this question Rebecca S. Chopp, The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, and God. NY: Crossroad, 1989

...interpreting feminist theologies...as discourses of emancipatory transformation that proclaim the Word to and for the world. Such discourses are the production of Christian witness in the contemporary situation, a witness that makes the good news known through emancipatory transformation in terms of difference, specificity, embodiment, solidarity, anticipation, and transformation. (7)

One place to begin an analysis of how feminism has failed, until recently, to question the ordering, and not merely the effects, of modernity is by looking at what appears, at least in one’s first acquaintance with feminism, to be the most radical contention of feminist theology: the challenge to the metaphor of God the Father and the shift to include new metaphors, including the metaphor of God as Mother. Changing the most basic of all metaphors should have a linchpin effect, since if one alters the key terms of a system, other changes should result necessarily. But because feminist theology has failed, at least in large part, to question how metaphors work, and, correlatively, how any term for God works in the ordering of modernity, the radical contribution is muffled, becoming yet another strategy of inclusive correction in modern Christian discourse.

The analysis is centered around a question: Does God as the Father fundamentally
function as a metaphor in representational language? What is required to answer yes to this question is first an understanding of language where metaphors can be adapted by an act of will, an understanding that views language itself as metaphorical in a particular fashion. This view is dependent upon understanding language as representation, where language represents what the speaker intends or means. Metaphor is doubly useful in representational language, both because it allows multiple meanings, and because its meaning is always determined as a referent of the individual. Thus God is like a father and God is like a mother, but God is still, of course, the referent, the representation of what it is to be fully or authentically human. This understanding of metaphor protects the representational character of our discourse and, naturally in this view, if one intends to image God as mother, one simply needs to shift the metaphors.

... to move to the issue of the social-symbolic ordering, to suggest that language has, not only images, but a certain economy, that it itself is ordered symbolically, and that God the Father is more than a metaphor that can be changed at will. No matter what the images or metaphors are or can be, there is a deep symbolic economy in culture that separates, as it divides, the name of the Father and the order it represents with what is configured as “woman” and the chaos she represents. In this symbolic economy, which regulates and forms subjectivity, the ordering of language is again and again characterized by the name of the Father. Father is thus not only a metaphor but a law and an ordering: Father regulates the law of separation and division, obedience and submission to the governing order. In one sense “Father” is a metaphor but it is a metaphor for God, and God is determined in a fatherly way as the determination of the patriarchal order, fatherly here being defined as that which orders, determines, divides and demands loyalty to a way of representation, reservation, and identity. Feminists can add all the metaphors they want, provided they represent this fatherly configuration of God in language, securing patriarchy, and the fatherly ordering of language, preserving monotheism. (110–112)

April 17, 1984

The universe sends me fabulous dreams! Early this morning I dreamed of a two-headed woman. Literally. A wise woman. Stout, graying, caramel-colored, with blue-gray eyes, wearing a blue flowered dress. Who was giving advice to people. Some white people, too, I think. Her knowledge was for everyone and it was all striking. While one head talked, the other seemed to doze. I was so astonished! For what I realized in the dream is that two-headedness was at one time an actual physical condition and that two-headed people were considered wise. Perhaps this accounts for the adage “Two heads are better than one.” What I think this means is that two-headed people, like blacks, lesbians, Indians, “witches,” have been suppressed, and, in their case, suppressed out of existence. Their very appearance had made them “abnormal” and therefore subject to extermination. For surely two-headed people have existed. And it is only among blacks (to my knowledge) that a trace of their existence is left in the language. Rootworkers, healers, wise people with “second sight” are called “two-headed” people. This two-headed woman was amazing. I asked whether the world would survive, and she said, No; and her expression seemed to say, The way it is going there’s no need for it to. When I asked her what I/we could/should do, she took up her walking stick and walked expressively and purposefully across the room. Dipping a bit from side to side.

She said: Live by the Word and keep walking.

9 Ursula K. LeGuin, I can’t re-find where I found this. One of the short stories, I think.

10 n.b., ‘woman’ will not be passing by; women will.


12 Collins, 117-18.


15 Check Appendix A for a sample of the many written rituals easily acquired from the Internet.


19 Lane, 57-8.

20 Lane, 172-74.

21 Kavanagh, 73.

22 Kavanagh, 76-77

23 Kavanagh, 74.

24 Lane, 215.

25 Driver, 207.

26 Driver, 169.


29 Driver, 80.

30 Driver, 81.

31 Driver, 94-96.


Almost all of them have been writing at least for a little while, some of them all of their lives. Many of them have been told over the years that they are quite good, and they want to know why they feel so crazy when they sit down to work, why they have these wonderful ideas and then
they sit down and write one sentence and see with horror that it is a bad one, and then every major form of mental illness from which they suffer surfaces, leaping out of the water like trout — the delusions, hypochondria, the grandiosity, the self-loathing, the inability to track one thought to completion, even the handwashing fixation, the Howard Hughes germ phobias. And especially, the paranoia.

You can be defeated and disoriented by all these feelings, I tell them, or you can see the paranoia, for instance, as wonderful material. You can use it as the raw clay that you pull out of the river: surely one of your characters is riddled with it, and so in giving that person this particular quality, you get to use it, shape it into something true and funny or frightening. I read them a poem by Phillip Lopate that someone once sent me, that goes:

We who are your closest friends feel the time has come to tell you that every Thursday we have been meeting, as a group, to devise ways to keep you in perpetual uncertainty frustration discontent and torture by neither loving you as much as you want nor cutting you adrift. Your analyst is in on it, plus your boyfriend and you ex-husband; and we have pledged to disappoint you as long as you need us. In announcing our association we realize we have placed in your hands a possible antidote against uncertainty indeed against ourselves. But since our Thursday nights have brought us to a community of purpose
rare in itself
with you as
the natural center,
we feel hopeful you
will continue to make
unreasonable
demands for affection
if not as a consequence
of your disastrous person-
ality
then for the good of the
collective.

They stare at me like the cast of
One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest. Only about
three of them think this poem is funny, or even a
good example of someone taking his own
paranoia and shaping it into something artistic
and true. A few people look haunted. The ones
who most want to be published just think I’m an
extremely angry person. Some of them look
emotionally broken, some look at me with actual
disgust, as if I am standing there naked under
fluorescent lights.

Finally someone will raise his or
her hand. “Can you send your manuscript di-
rectly to a publisher, or do you really need an
agent?”

After a moment or so, I say, You
really need an agent.

33 Quoted in Ann Rowthorn, The Liberation of the Laity

34 Juan Luis Segundo, The Sacraments Today, vol. 4 in A
Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity, trans. John Drury

35 Segundo, Sacraments, 51.

36 Segundo, Sacraments, 68.

37 Peter Brook, The Shifting Point: 1946-1987 (NY: Theatre
Communications Group, 1987) 3.

38 Johnson, opposite page 59.

39 Brook, 116-117.

40 Brook, 41.

41 Segundo, Sacraments, 97.

42 Segundo, Sacraments, 108.


Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D

(No appendices included in the electronic version)
Bibliography


Liberty. That concept was never used before so openly in an official document. In fact, in 1788, the states were not even ready to ratify the Constitution unless the first Congress promised immediately to enshrine the concept of liberty in a set of Amendments that came to be called the Bill of Rights. They wanted no guesswork about what liberty means. It was too important. They wanted it spelled out and guaranteed. 1. The pursuit of happiness. You have to think of change as something that's just a fact of life. One of the things that has happened in the 21st Century is that life-long careers are essentially a thing of the past. When I grew up, the only talk was of life-long careers. They didn't know about liberty and the pursuit of happiness. So for them this was just a big new lease on life.