

Liturgy in the Context of Religious Pluralism

Lessons from History and Future Challenges

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1. Introduction

In his keynote address at the Tenrikyo-Christian Dialogue held five years ago at Tenri University in Japan, the then President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, noted the extent to which religious pluralism is changing the face of urban life around the world:¹

One can meet Buddhists in Birmingham, U.K., Christians in Calcutta, Hindus in Helsinki, Muslims in Marseille, France, and Tenrikyo in Los Angeles and Paris, and even in Rome. Dialogue and cooperation would seem to be the way forward in the contemporary world.²

Forty-five years after the Second Vatican Council, in a new century and a new millennium, this postmodern world has become a multi-religious world more than ever before, and the task of interreligious dialogue especially within the context of inculturation can no longer be treated as one pastoral option among many.³ I am aware of the extent to which Amsterdam has become one of the most multi-religious cities in Europe, but even in Rome, it is significant that the largest mosque in Europe is found there, built by Iraqi and Italian architects in 1995. Moreover, near the Pantheon at the Oratorio of San Francesco Saverio 'del Caravita' where I serve on the Pastoral Staff, the Church of Scientology occupies the building immediately next to ours. Clearly, the religious face of human society is changing and we need to attend to that shifting landscape so that we not be left behind. First and foremost, this necessitates a greater level of intentionality on the ecumenical front so that we Christians can find a common voice as the Body of Christ within the world, lest our Christian voice be reduced to a cacophony of disparate voices in our dialogue with other religions.⁴

¹ This text was originally presented as a lecture at the expert meeting *Religious Pluralism* at the University of Tilburg, December 10th, 2007.

² M.L. FITZGERALD: 'Religious and Interreligious Education in the Contemporary World', in T. HASHIMOTO: *Tenrikyo-Christian Dialogue II* (Tenri 1999) 14-15.

³ See P.C. PHAN: 'Liturgical Inculturation: Unity in Diversity in the Postmodern Age', in K. PECKLERS, S.J. (ed.): *Liturgy in a Postmodern World* (London 2003) 55-86.

⁴ We read in the recently published Agreed Statement of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission: 'We recommend working more closely together in our relations with adherents of other religions. We are particularly

In this essay, I wish to affirm the fundamental importance of the interreligious dialogue as we discern a way forward, and therefore to posit religious pluralism as a cultural and theological issue. Secondly, I will address the subject of liturgy as offering the context for an ‘exchange of gifts’ along interreligious lines, facilitating mutual respect and understanding among ‘all those who seek God with a sincere heart’.

Just fifty years ago, the title of this article would have been confusing, at best. The Christian observance of Lent would have had nothing in common with the Muslim season of Ramadan; most Catholics, in fact, would have never even heard the word *Ramadan*. The Catholic Mass had nothing in common with the Hindu temple service of *pūjā* or the *Tenrikyō* ritual of *Teodori*. But the opening up of the field of Ritual Studies has enabled us to understand that liturgy can never simply be examined in terms of its doctrinal or rubrical content. Rather, we only begin to grasp liturgy’s import – its depth and capacity to transform human behavior – when it is examined in the light of Anthropology and Semiotics, Cultural Studies, Sociology and Psychology. In other words, we only begin to glimpse the multivalent dimensions of worship when we look at what Jewish liturgist Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman speaks of as that which lies ‘beyond the text’.⁵ Thus, when I speak about ‘Liturgy in the Context of Religious Pluralism’, I do so in its broader interpretation which enables the sort of dialogue across religious boundaries that is so crucial as we consider the future of our planet.

2. Religious Pluralism as a Cultural and Theological Issue

The Gambian Theologian Lamin Sanneh who is Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut, has written extensively on the subject of religious pluralism and particularly its implications for worship and mission. In an article published almost twenty years ago entitled ‘Pluralism and Christian Commitment’; he wrote:

In much of the literature on religious pluralism, Christians are presented from the start with an uncompromising choice: *either* they accept pluralism as the way of being religious and so cast doubt on the uniqueness of Christianity, *or* they reject pluralism as the price for continuing to hold to some form of Christian orthodoxy. The choice, thus framed, suggests a relentless conflict between Christian commitment and the wider demands of pluralism. The issue of pluralism, however, may be approached from a different position in which Christian commitment is seen as

mindful of the value of speaking with a common voice as Christians amidst situations of conflict, misunderstanding and mistrust, especially when Christians or those of other faith communities live as vulnerable minorities.’ in *Growing Together in Unity and Mission: Building on 40 years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue* (London 2007) 58, no. 125.

5 L.A. HOFFMAN: *Beyond The Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington 1989).

compatible with genuine pluralism, at least in such a way that it is not necessary or even helpful to bargain away Christian commitment lest there result a diminution of the full potential of religious pluralism.

Sanneh continues:

Christian pluralism in its uncompromising, rigorous form is not only a committed state of mind with respect to God's undivided sovereignty but a committed style of living with respect to culture's pluralist and accountable status, and in that convergence we may find remedy for the conflict in our time between religion and contending cultural ideologies.⁶

The Second Vatican Council recovered that sense of God's spirit permeating the world in its many diverse cultures and peoples long before the advent of Christianity. Indeed, in the Council's 'Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions', we read:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. It has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women.⁷

In the years since the Council, many theologians have taken up the challenge offered in *Nostra Aetate* to 'enter into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions', acknowledging, preserving, and encouraging 'the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians'.⁸ Taking the lead have largely been Asian theologians whose engagement in interreligious dialogue has taught them that followers of other religions are saved in and through them, not in spite of them, understanding, of course, that it is always God who saves.⁹

This is not to deny the complexity of diverse religious structures and theologies which appropriately correspond to diverse religious traditions. In other words, an Islamic theology is quite distinct from a Buddhist world view or a Christian approach to theological inquiry,¹⁰ and it would be futile to ever attempt to speak of a generic sort of 'world theology'. Indeed, in many respects, Christianity appears to be the least complex when compared with Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam.

⁶ L. SANNEH: 'Pluralism and Christian Commitment', in *Theology Today* 45,1 (April 1988) 21-33, here 21, 27, 33.

⁷ Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (promulgated on October 28, 1965, by Pope Paul VI) 2.

⁸ Declaration *Nostra Aetate* 2.

⁹ See PHAN: 'Liturgical Inculturation' 79-82.

¹⁰ M.L. FITZGERALD & J. BORELLI: *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View* (New York 2006) 38-39.

The same, of course is true in terms of our liturgical life. Our ways of praying across religious lines are quite distinct. Yet there is an underlying universality to religious pluralism that needs to be embraced even as we acknowledge that distinct theologies always remain just that: distinct and particular. Within the liturgical context underlying all our interreligious ritual diversity is what Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels has called ‘the *homo liturgicus*’. He writes: ‘The *homo liturgicus* does not manipulate, nor is his or her action restricted to self-expression or auto-realization. It is an attitude of orientation towards God, readiness to listen, obedience, grateful reception, wonder, adoration and praise.’¹¹ Thus, as we reflect on liturgy within the context of religious pluralism, we must admit from the outset that whether one is Christian or Muslim, Jewish or Hindu, the natural inclination of the human person is to offer liturgical, cultic expression to belief in the Transcendent.¹²

3. Lessons from History

History is always a great teacher and this is certainly the case regarding the topic of worship in the context of religious pluralism. Both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures make it abundantly clear that God is not dependant upon any single instrument. Unlike Islam which offers a single shrine in Mecca and a single language – Arabic – and a closed culture established by the Qur’an and fixed in heaven, Christian worship only thrives to the extent that the Word takes on flesh and is translated. And as most cultures are constantly evolving, the translation process is endless.¹³

Professor Andrew Walls of the University of Edinburgh speaks of this as ‘the Ephesians moment’ in which first-century Christianity was faced almost immediately with the challenge of how to worship and live the Christian gospel in the context of religious pluralism. It would be enough to consider the tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians as evidenced in Acts 15 but we know of the many other examples from the same period: the Jewish and Greek calculation of time – when one day began and another ended – the problem of 14 Nisan and the dating of Easter – how to deal with heretics and schismatics and whether or not they could or should ever be re-admitted into the Church. Walls writes:

In the Ephesian picture, the wall between the two cultures is broken down. It is not that they become one culture; it is not that they are assimilated one way to the

¹¹ Cardinal G. DANNEELS: ‘Liturgy Forty Years After the Second Vatican Council: High Point or Recession’, in K.F. PECKLERS, S.J. (ed.): *Liturgy in a Postmodern World* (London 2003) 10.

¹² FITZGERALD & BORELLI: *Interfaith Dialogue* 39.

¹³ A.F. WALLS: *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (New York 2002) 13.

other. That way was explicitly rejected by the Jerusalem Council. Jewish and ex-Gentile believers, each group converted but differently converted lifestyles, were brought into the same structure: a new Temple that existed for God's worship, the abode of the Spirit (...) Believers with converted lifestyles were the bricks that built the Temple, and both sets of bricks were needed.¹⁴

A. The Cult of Mithra

Within the Roman Empire – especially in the period between about the year 170 and the Peace of Constantine – the extraordinary mix of different cults living side by side, borrowing ritual practices one from another offers yet further testimony.¹⁵ How was it possible that Christian Baptism and Initiation into the Mystery Cults of Isis or Mithra, for example, bore an extraordinary resemblance with a common vocabulary, a catechumenate and mystagogical period, initiating the naked candidate by submerging the individual in water, using oil for anointing, and a similar ritual meal which completed the initiation?

The Mithraists shared a daily ritual meal of bread and a cup of water and probably also a cup of wine (we know that they drank it) – objects that were consecrated and offered to Mithra. That was preceded by a session of instruction not unlike the Christian Liturgy of the Word. In his *Prescription against Heretics*,¹⁶ Tertullian, whose father was apparently a follower of the cult, denounced the 'oblation of bread' among the Mithraists. And of course, *oblatio* was the exact term used by the Christians to speak of the Eucharist.¹⁷

On the walls of the first-century Mithraic room for the instruction of catechumens found underneath the Basilica of San Clemente in Rome, were inscribed the words: 'You have saved us, O Mithra, through your most precious blood.' Obviously, it would be enough to change the name 'Mithra' to 'Christ' and it would read perfectly as a Christian invocation. But this was not a Christian text. Clearly, the early centuries of the Christian era registered a significant amount of ritual borrowing for cult – Christian and non-Christian alike. There appears to have been an ease in such borrowing, learning from the other religious tradition, and even borrowing a symbol, practice, or vocabulary that would be appropriately reinterpreted for the particular religion in question.

¹⁴ A.F. WALLS: 'The Ephesians Movement in Worldwide Worship', in CH.E. FARHADIAN (ed.): *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices* (Grand Rapids 2007) 31.

¹⁵ P. BROWN: *The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750* (London 1976) 51-52. See also D. ULANSEY: *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford 1989).

¹⁶ TERTULLIAN: *The Prescription against Heretics*, transl. P. HOLMES (Ante-Nicene Fathers III) caput 40,4.

¹⁷ R. TURCAN: *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1996) 233-234.

B. The Chinese Rites of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

Much later in the sixteenth century when Christian missionaries followed the seafaring traders from Lisbon into the open port of Macao, later entering the Ming Empire, they were faced with another challenge: whether or not to allow the newly baptized to continue participating in the customary Chinese rites of the dead. A number of these converts to Christianity, for example, were members of the scholarly elite *shén-shih* class who were expected to take part in rituals in honor of Confucius. Given the Christian dogma that forbade superstition and the worship of idols, questions were immediately raised as to the appropriateness of such ritual behavior on the part of these newcomers to the Church.¹⁸

Confucianism was essentially a ‘this-worldly’ way of life without a distinctive priesthood, supernatural dogma, or pantheon of gods. Nonetheless, it gradually took on religious elements and practices, such as the cult of the dead. The notion of filial piety that was constitutive of Confucian thought came to permeate Chinese life and culture, extending, in fact, beyond the narrow confines of one’s obligations to parents and grandparents. It came to influence relations among siblings and relatives, friends and business partners and went beyond the boundaries of this world. The Chinese family comprised not only the living but also the dead – not unlike the Christian understanding of the communion of saints – and the obedient child was to render service to parents and ancestors in death as in life. Within the family residence, the altar dedicated to the ancestors with burning smoke and a flickering candle bore testimony to this intimate relationship between the living and the dead.¹⁹

At the moment of death, a symbol of the deceased was localized in some material substance. An object with the name of the deceased written on was placed near the corpse and accompanied the body to the burial site. After burial, that object was then returned to home where it was revered on the family altar with prayers for the deceased. Eventually, that make-shift object was replaced with something more permanent – a memorial called the ‘spirit tablet’ usually made of wood and bearing the name of the deceased, the family status, and the individual’s rank in society. The deceased’s date of birth and death were written on the back.²⁰

The more public figures of ancient Chinese society who had died were revered with ‘spirit tablets’ that were installed in public gathering places. This was especially the case with rites in honor of Confucius himself which first began as domestic liturgies but eventually grew into a full state cult. We can imagine the dilemma of those sixteenth-century missionaries as they observed these rituals for the first time. First, there was the wooden tablet and the various ceremonies

¹⁸ G. MINAMIKI, S.J.: *The Chinese Rites Controversy: From its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago 1985) 2-3.

¹⁹ MINAMIKI: *The Chinese Rites Controversy* 4-5.

²⁰ MINAMIKI: *The Chinese Rites Controversy* 5-6.

that were enacted in front of it. Then there were the gestures of reverence such as the *kontow* in which the Chinese people knelt and bowed their foreheads until they touched the ground. As the ceremony had evolved from when it had first introduced, it also came to include the burning of incense and paper money, along with the offering of food and wine. In the more solemn rites of the Confucian cult, there was also the sacrificial offering of an animal.²¹

With the arrival of Matteo Ricci in 1601 after eighteen years in Macao, and the subsequent arrival of other Italian Jesuit missionaries, the Confucian cult of the dead was judged not to be in conflict with Christian principles. Two years after his arrival, Ricci issued a series of directives regarding the Chinese Rites. Speaking of filial piety and the offerings which Chinese made to their ancestors, Ricci wrote:

(...) In this act they make the fulfillment of their duty to their relatives, namely, 'to serve them in death as though they were alive.' Nor do they think in this matter that the dead will come to eat the things mentioned or that they might need them; but they say they do this because they know of no other way to show their love and grateful spirit toward [the dead] (...) And since they do not recognize any divinity in these dead ones, nor do they ask for hope for anything from them, all this stands outside of idolatry (...)²²

Those directives, consistent with the Jesuit missionary strategy of the day appears to offer a balanced approach to these diverse rites with an underlying respect for the cultural and religious pluralism of sixteenth-century China. On the one hand, they forbade the converts to say prayers or offer petitions to the dead as if they were divinities, and the burning of paper money was also forbidden as it carried undertones of superstition. On the other hand, however, the use of flowers, candles, and incense were permitted at the funeral, along with the continued use of the spirit tablets, the wearing of the special garment in mourning the dead, and the performance of the *kontow* ritual. For Ricci and his Jesuit colleagues, those rites were part of the Chinese way of life, more civil and social than religious in nature, and hardly detrimental to the Christian mission in that country.²³

With the arrival of Dominican and Franciscan missionaries in the 1630s the situation changed dramatically. They sharply rebuked the Jesuits for an improper blending of religious and liturgical traditions than risked syncretism, and they appealed to the Holy Office. In 1645, after significant debate, Pope Innocent X issued a decree which forbade Chinese Catholics to continue the practice of the veneration of ancestors and the Cult of Confucius. The controversy raged on for a century until in 1742 Pope Benedict XIV decreed that all Chris-

²¹ MINAMIKI: *The Chinese Rites Controversy* 10-12.

²² As quoted in MINAMIKI: *The Chinese Rites Controversy* 17-18.

²³ MINAMIKI: *The Chinese Rites Controversy* 19-21.

tian missionaries were obliged to take an oath against the Chinese rites and those non-Christian rites were to be definitively abolished. Two hundred years later, in 1939, the oath was rescinded but it was too late. Christianity had proven itself to be a foreign enterprise with no room to embrace rituals and traditions that were inherent within Chinese culture, and the rest is history.

4. Post-Conciliar Worship in the Context of Religious Pluralism

There has been much ‘water under the bridge’ since the days of the Chinese Rites Controversy. Happily, the Second Vatican Council (1962-’65) recovered the dynamic of being a ‘world Church’ as Karl Rahner spoke of it, that must consistently open to that world and be in dialogue within its cultural and religiously pluralistic structures. Forty-five years after that Council we are more aware than ever that religious pluralism is a growing reality within our world. In his paper entitled ‘Methodology in the Liturgical Discipline as Practical Theology’ delivered to the International *Societas Liturgica* gathered at Palermo, August 2007, Edward Foley gave an extraordinary example of this reality: ‘The Admission sheet for incoming patients to Stanford University Hospital in Palo Alto, California, offers a choice of 42 religious preferences along with an additional box for ‘other’.’²⁴

Our question, of course, is the role that liturgy plays within such pluralistic structures. What can Christian ritual learn from other ritual patterns? In what ways can Christian worship reach out to embrace the diverse cultures, peoples, and religious traditions wherein the Church dwells? Architectural history reveals a certain religious complementarity and interreligious harmony. We know, for example, of the third-century house-church of *Dura Europas* in Syria, existing on the same city block as a synagogue without any apparent difficulty. Similarly, it has been striking in so many parts of Japan to see the numerous Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines built one next to the other on the same street.

But in these post-Conciliar years, we need to be seeking more than simply dwelling side by side in a harmonious relationship. The interreligious dialogue demands a greater attention to ‘liturgical plurality’, and a much more profound and dynamic liturgical collaboration with other religious traditions. This is espe-

²⁴ T. WALTHER: ‘Interfaith Chaplaincy: Pastoral Care for all Religions’, paper presented at the *International Academy of Practical Theology* (3 April 2007) as quoted by Edward Foley in his paper, read at the *Societas Liturgica* meeting in Palermo 2008, published as: E. FOLEY: ‘Der Gottesdienst als öffentliche Theologie’, in *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 57 (2007) 160-186; ‘Une Liturgie Tournée vers le Monde: La Liturgie comme Théologie Publique’, in *La Maison-Dieu* 254 (2008) 7-43; ‘Methodology in the Liturgical Discipline as Practical Theology’ in *Studia Liturgica* 38 (2008, in print).

cially important as we consider precisely where the Church is growing: in Asia and Africa. Allow me to offer two examples from Asia: one, a Christian example from India, and the other, a non-Christian example from Japan. Both examples demonstrate very well what Christian ritual can learn from other religious contexts and offer the Church a challenge as we consider the future of Christian liturgy within the realm of religious pluralism.

A. The Indian Experiment

The first example, then, comes from the Christian Ashram at Shantivanam in India, made famous by the writings of late British Benedictine monk Bede Griffiths. Several years ago now, Shirley du Boulay recounted the curious blending of Hindu and Christian elements at Shantivanam:

The impression of a visitor arriving for the first time, glimpsing the colourful temple through palm trees, palmyras and coconuts, seeing the saffron robes and the cross-legged postures, hearing the Sanskrit chants, may well be that they have wandered into a Hindu ashram by mistake. Explore the grounds and find, under the neem trees by the river Cavery, a statue of Christ sitting in the lotus position with the cobra, a sacred symbol of Hinduism, protectively curved over him; approach the temple and see the *Om* sign in the centre of the cross, and the newcomer might become a little confused. But come closer, look and see the Christian figures on the dome of the temple, attend the '*pūja*' and find out that it is a Christian Mass, (...) and those impressions need to be reassessed. Even in externals it is indeed a Christian ashram, blending the symbols and life-style of both traditions.²⁵

Within that same Christian ashram the experimental 'Indian Rite of the Eucharist' was introduced in the 1970s. Like the monastery itself, that Indian liturgy incorporated both Hindu and Christian elements into the ritual as celebrated within the context of religious pluralism. Just as *pūja* – the ordinary Hindu worship in the temple – involves the offering of the elements to God as a sign of the offering of all creation, using the primordial symbols of earth, water, air, and fire, architects of the experimental 'Indian rite' attempted to incorporate some Hindu elements into the Christian Eucharist celebrated at Shantivanam. Bede Griffiths wrote:

In the Mass of the Indian Rite which we celebrate in our ashram we try to adapt ourselves to this form of sacrifice. At the offertory we first sprinkle water around the gifts and the altar. Then we sprinkle water on the people, and then the priest takes a sip of water to purify himself within. Thus we begin with the offering of water. Then we take the fruits of the earth, bread and wine (...) and the work of human hands to the Divine. Then we take eight flowers and place them around the

²⁵ S. DU BOULAY: *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths* (Winchester, U.K. 2003) 179.

gifts in the eight directions of space, to signify that the sacrifice we offer is at the center of the universe. Every sacrifice in the ancient world was conceived as being offered at the center of the universe. They always related themselves to the whole cosmos. Then we take incense and wave it over the gifts, and in the same way we wave the fire, the flame of burning camphor over them.²⁶

The fourfold offering of the elements is to signify that the Mass is a cosmic sacrifice. Christ has assumed the whole creation. He is offering it in and through himself to the Father. He has not only taken us up into himself; he has taken up the whole of creation.²⁷

B. Ritual in Tenrikyo Communities

A second example is a personal one which comes from my experience of one of Japan's new religions. Since 1998 I have been involved with the unofficial dialogue between the Catholic Church and *Tenrikyo* – founded from Buddhism and Shintoism in the first half of the nineteenth century. I have now been to the religion's world headquarters at Tenri near Kyoto on several occasions but my liturgical experience there during my first visit back in 1999 stands in vivid memory.

I arrived in the evening and early the next morning I was taken to the sunrise service. In that early morning quiet as light began to color the buildings and streets near the university, the scene was striking: hundreds of parents walking with their children from all directions toward the four open entrances to the temple – taking them by the hand to common morning prayer with other believers.

Inside the worship hall the scene was equally moving as several thousand parents modeled for their children the prayerful hand-movements that invoke the divine and assist in purification from sinfulness which they refer to as 'dust on the mind'. Children joined in as they watched and imitated their parents in that bodily prayer expressed through movement and gesture. As a western Christian, I learned much from that worship, especially regarding the ways in which our non-verbal gestures and our symbolic language convey meaning – express what we believe.

What I experienced at that Morning Service is even more vivid and apparent in the *Teodori* – the ritual dance with hand movements performed at the monthly service in Tenrikyo churches and missions throughout the world, a monthly memorial of the death of the foundress. Commenting on the *Teodori* and the *Kagura* Service which precedes it, *Tenrikyo* leaders observed:

In this way, symbolic action in ritual form depicts a community of believers in the contemporary world dancing and singing to the joyful tunes of the song-

²⁶ B. GRIFFITHS: *Selected Writings*, ed. Th. MATUS (New York 2004) 57.

²⁷ GRIFFITHS: *Selected Writings* 57.

text. It is through this shared activity that the main thrust of the Foundress' teachings are portrayed through the human body.²⁸

That reference is striking: Church teachings 'portrayed through the human body' and performed together as a community of believers – 'dancing the truth' in the words of the Foundress Oyásama. I contend that those of us in the Christian West who are liturgical scholars and pastors have much to learn from the East and in particular, from Tenrikyo worship and its Spirit.

A particular western problem is that we have the tendency to view catechesis – liturgical formation – as something cerebral – limited to intellect and will. Thus liturgy which is fundamentally a symbolic action – an art form, really – runs the risk of being reduced to solely an intellectual exercise of professing our Christian faith in word and sacrament while forgetting that worship necessarily involves the language of the whole body. Such an intellectual approach to Christian worship and to the formative value of liturgy presents significant problems for our living symbolically as a liturgical community – liturgy as 'public theology' as Edward Foley's paper discusses – and presents significant challenges for liturgy's capacity to encounter the numinous and to teach and form Christians 'beyond the text'.²⁹ Here the Japanese term *kóko* which refers both to heart and mind is instructive as we seek to live a balance between those two realities. Indeed, I would suggest that this gift of the language of the body employed within worship is a gift which Christians of the West can receive from Eastern religions like *Tenrikyo*.

5. Religious Pluralism in Postmodern Society and Implications for Worship

Those two examples from a Christian Ashram in India and a non-Christian religion in Japan remind us that what is needed is a greater realization of the fact that God's spirit pervades all life and culture, and that the Holy Spirit is at work everywhere in the world, even before the Christian economy.³⁰ Thus, within the pluralism of religious traditions that is increasingly common in twenty-first-century life, lies both an invitation and a challenge: to allow our own rituals to assist us in transcending the fragmentation and limits of our own particular contexts so that we might better reach out to embrace the whole of God's world, as Christ would have us to. That, I think, is what Bede Griffiths

²⁸ Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department, *Tenrikyo: The Path to Joyousness* (Tenri 1998)

40. I am also indebted to Saburo Shawn Morishita for his work on Teodori as presented in his doctoral thesis *Teodori: Meaning and Dynamics of a Ritual Dance* (Rome 1996).

²⁹ See L.A. HOFFMAN: *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington 1987).

³⁰ JOHN PAUL II: *Dominum et Vivificantem* 53.

meant when he spoke of the Eucharist as a ‘cosmic sacrifice’ and that remains the challenge in our own day.

If we are to take this challenge seriously, then it means that any discussion about the role that liturgy plays within the interreligious dialogue or within the context of religious pluralism, necessarily recognizes that liturgy is not unidirectional. It is always an ‘exchange of gifts’ where both partners bring their riches to the table, giving and receiving, and recognizing in humility, that there are gifts to be received from the other tradition. In Buddhism – especially in Tibetan Buddhism – the place of chanting and the instruments which sustain the chant or mark periods of silence offer one example of a gift that western Christian worship might learn from. We might also think of meditation in the various forms of Buddhism – *mantras*, *mudras* (hand gestures), prayer wheels, use of begging bowls and offerings, incense, and posture. All of these symbols and images become instructive as we consider our post-Conciliar Catholic Liturgy which is often bereft of silence and the non-verbal.

It will be a very long time before we forget that powerful image of ten thousand Buddhist monks and nuns marching quietly through the streets of Yangon and Mandalay last year to protest the anti-democratic and repressive regime of the Myanmar government. As the highest moral authority in Burmese culture, those religious men and women performed and celebrated a most eloquent liturgy – essentially without words – a sort of stational, processional liturgy – where the cities of Yangon and Mandalay became ‘sacred space’. Such an example, I believe, offers a non-Christian ‘variation on a theme’ of what Karl Rahner referred to as ‘the liturgy of the world’³¹ – that cosmic liturgy celebrated where the official ritual of the temple or church flows into the streets in service of and solidarity with the poor and oppressed. In the Myanmar case, the monks and nuns walked ‘in pilgrimage’ as a ritual act of solidarity with the detained pro-democracy leader and 1991 Nobel laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi who had not been seen in public for four years.³²

If ritual action bears a prophetic dimension and if Christian worship is to be embodied and prophetic in character, then it would seem that we have much to learn from the witness of those Buddhists whose ritual behavior bore witness to a far greater reality than what was apparent at face value. In a statement by the All Burma Monks Alliance calling for a wider protests, it read:

In order to banish the ‘common enemy’ evil regime from Burmese soil forever, united masses of people need to join hands with united clergy forces. We pronounce the evil military despotism, which is impoverishing and pauperizing our

³¹ See M. SKELLEY, S.J.: *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship* (Collegeville 1991).

³² S. MYDANS: ‘Challenge to Junta Grows in Myanmar’, in *International Herald Tribune* (Monday, September 24, 2007) 1, 4.

people of all walks, including the clergy, as the common enemy of all our citizens.³³

Appropriately, when the Archdiocese of Naples hosted an International Forum on World Peace last October organized by the Community of Sant' Egidio, one of those Burmese Buddhist monks was invited to come and address that international assembly, which he did in a very moving address. Through their prophetic witness, those poor and powerless monks and nuns – symbolically representing the poor and powerless citizens of Myanmar – had become subjects rather than objects of their own experience. They had found empowerment through their movement as they processed through the streets, thereby challenging the elite and the *status quo*.

On the Christian side, a similar experience is well-demonstrated in the response to the massacre of forty-five Tzotzil Indians in the mountain village of Chenalhó located in the poor and remote southern state of Chiapas, that occurred exactly ten years ago. A revolution begun in Chiapas in 1994 had already killed three hundred people. Indians from Chenalhó had supported the Zapatista National Liberation Army in their desire for liberation from their poverty, more land to farm, equal justice, and the possibility of greater self-rule. An investigation into the Chenalhó massacre pointed to the involvement of government military forces.

Ironically, Chenalhó residents were gathered in the village church praying for peace when the massacre occurred. As a response to the massacre, about one thousand Indian refugees marched together in Chiapas carrying a cracked statue of *La nuestra señora de Guadalupe*. The march was an act of protest against their oppressors, but it was also an act of determination to return from exile to their homes and daily lives. Rather than focusing on mourning, organizers of the march chose hope as its theme.

The procession was led by a wooden cross on which was written: 'It is time to harvest, it is time to build.' As they walked up the mountain road, many marchers carried a single brick weighing about five pounds each, which was used to build a memorial for the dead that would house the repaired statue of Guadalupe. Tzotzil Indians had been killed in a senseless act of violence, but their spirit could not be quenched. Their marching, led by the cross and a cracked image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, liberated and empowered them to rebuild and find hope in the midst of their suffering.³⁴

Liturgical purists would not readily embrace these images of Buddhist monks protesting in Burma, or Tzotzil Indians marching in Chiapas as 'liturgy' or perhaps even as 'ritual action', but those processions – those embodied rituals – remind us in a profound way that the cosmic liturgy of God's reign cannot be

³³ MYDANS: 'Challenge to Junta Grows in Myanmar' 4.

³⁴ I. FISHER: 'Indians in Mexico Go Home to Where Gunmen Killed 45', in *The New York Times* (January 1, 1998) A-8.

confined to church or temple, or even to one religious tradition or another. The cosmic liturgy of God's reign calls us to recognize the complementarity between our various traditions and that 'exchange of gifts'³⁵ which is constitutive of any discussion around the role that liturgy plays within the context of religious pluralism.

Such an 'exchange of gifts', however, requires the letting go of previously held suppositions or inward-looking self-sufficiency. In a recent address to the Canadian Episcopal Conference, Bishop Claude Champagne of Halifax, Nova Scotia, spoke of this phenomenon as a necessary dying to past structures and religious systems:

Today the Church centered on Europe and North America is in the process of dying to this Western reality to give way to a universal church in which the continents of the South are increasingly making their presence felt in ecclesial life. Again today, the Holy Spirit urges the church to go toward this postmodern world that will undoubtedly bring death to a certain way of being church, to a certain identity. A missionary church must not nourish nostalgia for the past.³⁶

6. Conclusion: Future Challenges – Finding a Way Forward

These are challenging times for the liturgical life in the Catholic Church, and with documents like the recently promulgated *Motu Proprio* granting permission for wider usage of the Tridentine Rite,³⁷ it could seem that any discussion of liturgy in the context of religious pluralism would be stillborn before it has ever had a chance to breath or grow. It is important, however, not to lose sight of the progress that has been made these past forty years, not only in what I have been discussing above, but very concretely in the official liturgy of the Catholic Church. In Indonesia, for example, a predominantly Muslim country, the new collection of Votive Masses includes a Mass for the time of Ramadan in which Catholics gathered at the Eucharist pray in solidarity with their Muslim counterparts as they observe that penitential and disciplinary season.

Moreover, the Indonesian Missal translates the word God as 'Allah' thus, even apart from a Votive Mass during Ramadan, Indonesian Catholics and Muslims are using the same term for addressing God.³⁸ This stands in sharp contrast to those who argue that 'Allah' singularly refers to the Muslim 'God'. Such com-

³⁵ This language of 'exchange of gifts' is well-developed in Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint: On Commitment to Ecumenism*.

³⁶ Bishop C. CHAMPAGNE: 'New Evangelization: New Challenges for the Church's Mission', in *Origins* 37,22 (November 8, 2007) 344.

³⁷ *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum* (2007).

³⁸ I am grateful to Fr. I. Ismartono, S.J. of the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia, for this information.

mon language is hardly a form of syncretism, but rather a recognition that the God of Abraham, and the God of Mohammed, and the God of Jesus, is one and the same God.

Similarly, in India, there is an optional Votive Mass to be used at the time of Diwali: the Hindu Festival of Lights that is celebrated on November 9th. Reciprocally, a recent letter of a Hindu leader for Good Friday, and taken by his disciples to the Christian Community bears eloquent testimony to this ‘exchange of gifts’:

Today is a very important day. It is a day to recall the Great Powerful One who sacrificed his life for humanity (...) We, gathered here today, have perhaps sinned. But the greatest sin is to forget God. In this our day, when humanity is straying from the path of morality it is right to recall those who sacrificed their lives to uphold the two great virtues of the human being: faith in God, and faithfulness to God (...) To the one who, during his lifetime, made no discrimination between rich and poor, developed or backward, who taught mutual love, who proposed to humanity the great principle of self-denial and of submission to the Lord, to this venerable person Jesus Christ, let there be eternal obedience!³⁹

Last year on October 27th, Catholic and Muslim leaders met at a prominent Marian shrine in Lebanon and called for ‘prayers for reconciliation, brotherhood, and spiritual solidarity’ in light of the delicate political situation in that country. Together they condemned ‘all violence that threatens unity and peace’. They stated that this ‘unity comes from God, the one, who created us as one soul’. Their statement continued: ‘For unity does not mean melting or fusing, nor does it aim at eliminating specificity of persons or communities.’⁴⁰ That Catholic-Muslim statement offers us a way forward, I believe, as we consider the role that liturgy plays in the wider realm of religious pluralism. I am not speaking here about a syncretistic blending together of various ritual traditions or suggesting that ‘all religions are the same’. Of course, they are not. But I am speaking about a ‘liturgical dialogue’ or a ‘liturgical plurality’⁴¹ across the boundaries of diverse religious traditions, where each particular tradition recognizes that it does not have all the answers and therefore, needs the other for mutual enrichment.

As I stated at the beginning of this essay, such talk would have been unthinkable before the Second Vatican Council, along with the examples just given from Indonesia, India, and Lebanon, but they are demonstrative of just how far we have come in recognizing the role that worship can play within the context

³⁹ Private communication, quoted in FITZGERALD & BORELLI: *Interfaith Dialogue* 225.

⁴⁰ ‘On File’, in *Origins* 37,22 (November 8, 2007) 356.

⁴¹ See C.M. HAWN: ‘Praying Globally: Pitfalls and Possibilities of Cross-Cultural Liturgical Appropriation’, in CH.E. FARHADIAN (ed.): *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practice* (Grand Rapids 2007) 205-229.

of religious pluralism and the interreligious dialogue. And as the demographics of the Church have changed drastically since the 1960s, we can be very grateful for the movement towards dialogue and reconciliation that has been accomplished thus far. As Andrew Walls states very well, the Church's mission is now faced with a dual challenge: 'a post-Christian West' and 'a post-Western Christianity'.⁴²

This reality was articulated very well in a *New York Times* article that was published in July, 2007. The report focused on a professor from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia who wanted to study religious pluralism, and chose not Bangkok or Delhi but Flushing, New York, of all places! *Times* Journalist David Gonzalez wrote: 'As Mr. Walters and his colleagues walked down Bowne Street, they passed a synagogue and a Chinese Christian church and went into an elaborately decorated Hindu temple.' A volunteer at the temple spoke to the visitors about its growth over the past thirty years, how it stands on what used to be the site of a Russian Orthodox church. The temple is not limited to Hindu liturgical celebrations but also hosts a number of social service programs throughout the week.⁴³

Within the context of the Church in the United States, a Mexican American theologian put it well when he entitled one of his recent books: *The Future is Mestizo*.⁴⁴ In this multicultural and diverse postmodern world, the Spirit of Pentecost is alive and well, and something new is being born. As we consider the future of what is increasingly a 'post-Christian society', our liturgical practice offers us a privileged venue for embracing God's world with hope as it 'gives voice to the voiceless, makes the invisible within the community visible'⁴⁵ – and recognizes the unity that we share in God's reign, which is greater than the boundaries that divide our various religious traditions.

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⁴² WALLS: *The Cross Cultural Process in Christian History* 65.

⁴³ D. GONZALEZ: 'For a Master Class in Global Worship, It's Destination Queens', in *The New York Times* (Monday, July 2, 2007) A-18.

⁴⁴ V. ELIZONDO: *The Future is Mestizo* (Boulder, rev. ed. 2000).

⁴⁵ HAWN: 'Praying Globally' 220.