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WW '72: CHAPTER 5 SOME RAW MATERIALS FOR WORSHIP

I ADIAPHORA? OR MEDIA OF MEANING?

“Everything is either holy, or not yet holy.” The axiom is Martin Buber’s. He claims this is the Scripture’s insight as to the redemptive purposes of our God, active in creation and in culture. We are concerned in these pages with the “raw material” for liturgy and life — nothing less than the totality of **HUMAN CULTURAL EXPRESSION**: all the arts and activities that have engaged the human imagination through the ages.



- And because human beings cannot help but express themselves and communicate in their culture, we are concerned in these paragraphs not simply with *adiaphora* — matters of theological indifference, neither commanded nor condemned by our Gospel — but with **MEDIA OF MEANING**. An understanding and appreciation of human arts and acts, in other words, is not simply something nice to do if you have the time. It is an essential part of our hermeneutic homework as Christians..

In the following paragraphs, we deal with the stuff of human life — all the things people do and make — as the stuff for human liturgy. This “**RAW MATERIAL**” comes to us from our Tradition and from our times. It involves searching through what we have been handed from the past, and what we today find meaningful and important. Our central concern will be indigenization — making the Gospel real, alive, vital for modern men and women.

II. TIMES AND SEASONS

The first of the cultural resources available in our work of worship renewal is **TIME** itself.

In common with other religions, the Christian faith has had to deal with time. One of the really creative contributions of the early Church was its freedom in dealing with traditional rhythms of holy times, holy days and holy seasons. For Christians, for example, history does not follow the cyclical rhythms of nature. History is linear, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Time in the Christian view is not simply *chronos*,— one undifferentiated moment after another. It can also be *kairos* — the time for decision, the time for action.

It is also significant that **LUTHER**, in his explanation of the Third Commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” does not even mention a day of the week, but focuses instead on the priority of the Word.

The Christian tradition, following its Jewish precedents, has seen the Sunday Resurrection as the promise of a potential **SANCTIFICATION** of all times and seasons. The day, the week, the year have all been elaborated in the Christian tradition into a complex pattern of rhythms of work and worship, gathering and scattering, rest and renewal, acting and being acted upon.

A. THE WEEK

Very early in the history of the church, Sunday became The Lord’s Day, a **LITTLE EASTER**. Later, other days came to be significant: for instance, Friday as weekly remembrance of the Crucifixion. This weekly rhythm has been elaborated into patterns that have exercised an enormous influence over the lives of most of us in the West. We in North America can hardly conceive of a week without a Sunday holiday, a Sabbath rest. So important has been the Sabbath (a “little Easter”) in Christian Tradition that Easter itself has been called a “big Sabbath”.



But the old traditional rhythm of the week is under **CHALLENGE** today: for example, a shorter work week promises longer and longer weekends.

Some kind of **COOPERATION** among churches in planning worship opportunities for a given community is, therefore, long overdue. No cinema distributor in his right mind would schedule the same feature on the same day of the week at the same hour in a dozen different locations without any possibility for another until next week! Is it too much to hope that congregations in a major metropolitan area might begin to coordinate their schedules, with some creative attention to the changing rhythms of our lives?

B. THE DAY

Christian Monastic experience has left us with a priceless inheritance in the so-called **DAILY OFFICE**— eight brief opportunities for corporate or private worship throughout the day, each with its own flavor. We’ve seen in recent years a wide-ranging renewal of

interest in this cycle of daily prayer. As a result, you may find the texts and even music for all of them in various contemporary sources.

- MATINS (“morning”) - traditionally said at midnight and frequently combined with Lauds
- LAUDS (“praise”) - at three in the morning or upon arising
- PRIME (“the first [hour]”) - at six, to begin the day’s work
- TERCE (“the third...”) - at nine, in the middle of the morning’s work (a “prayer break”?)
- SEXT (“the sixth...”) - at noon
- NONE (“the ninth...”) - at three in the afternoon
- VESPERS (“evening”) - at six in the evening, to end the day’s work
- COMPLINE (related to our word “complete”) - at nine pm or before retiring, the beautiful bedtime prayer of the church

As anyone who has ever tried it will be willing to testify, every Christian, at least once during a lifetime, will profit from the experience of trying to maintain some fairly rigorous **DAILY DISCIPLINE** of prayer for an extended period of time. As for some personal minimum, regular prayers at mealtimes and at bedtime have the recommendation of centuries of use.

C. THE YEAR

The rhythms of a yearly calendar now include at least the **SEASONS** of the Church Year, with other smaller sub-seasons. And for generations there’s been a sequence of colour change associated with each season, expressed in vestments, paraments and banners.



- ADVENT (“coming”) - a four-week season of preparation for the coming of Christ. The major colour of Advent vestments, paraments and banners is blue, interpreted as the colour of hope, of anticipation.
- CHRISTMAS (“mass of Christ”) - a season of twelve days in which we recall the Incarnation. The colour for the Christmas season is white.
- EPIPHANY (“manifestation”) - a season of variable length in which we recall Christ’s being made known as Lord of creation and of history. The colour for the Day of Epiphany itself, January 6, is white, and for the season following, green.
- LENT (related to “length”), referring to the lengthening of daylight in Spring) - a forty-day season of preparation for Easter, especially for the Easter baptisms. The colour is purple.

- PASSION WEEK (passion = “suffering”) - the five days including and following Palm Sunday and preceding Easter. The colour is scarlet, a dark blood red. Note that for Good Friday and the Saturday before Easter, there is no colour whatsoever. Colour returns with Easter Day and its Vigil (the Saturday night before Easter Sunday).
- EASTER - a forty-day season in which we remember the Resurrection. The colour is white. From the first, Easter was a weekly festival, but it soon became a yearly one also. It should be noted that for Easter Day, alone among all days in the year, the colour may be gold.
- THE DAY OF PENTECOST (“fifty days”, a Jewish harvest festival) - we remember the gift of the Spirit and the birth of the church. Colour: the bright red of fire and of the blood of martyrs.
- PENTECOST SEASON - of variable length, in which we recall our own maturation in grace. The colour is once again the green of nature’s growth.

The **VALUE** of the Church Year is that it provides some kind of guarantee that we will not be hearing a Mother’s Day sermon on Easter. (I am not even sure I would want to hear a Mother’s Day sermon on Mother’s Day!) The Church’s year gives shape to our days and weeks. It reminds us that Kingdom Time is not simply one day after another, all alike.



But the Church Year poses its own **PROBLEMS** too. For one thing, there is a real danger in its repeated rhythms that Christians begin to think of history as cyclical rather than linear. Perhaps we can guard against cyclical thinking in our congregations by making sure in our worship that each new Season is different from the last. Perhaps we can provide a Lent that is actually different from Easter, and an Easter which is different this year from the one last year. Our Christ is the Lord of history. Messiah has promised to make all things new!

D. OCCASIONAL TIMES AND SEASONS

The experiences of birth, baptism, confirmation, death, marriage and ordination provide occasions for celebrating the Gospel “in, with and under” some important events in **HUMAN LIFE**. But there are still other Orders of Worship: For the Visitation of the Sick; for Private Confession and Absolution; for the Commendation of the Dying; for the Induction of Office Bearers; for the Thanksgiving of Parents after Childbirth; for the Blessing of a Home; for the Blessing of the Fields.



In each of these, the original purpose was the **GATHERING** of all of life into the concern of the people of God. The classic dictum *Nihil humanum alien est* — “Nothing human is alien” — might have been good slogan for the liturgists who prepared these Orders of Worship long ago. And although some of them sound rather bizarre today, it is amazing how deeply these simple rites and ceremonies can probe into human experience.

There are also **OTHER RHYTHMS** of human life. The seasons of nature (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter); the agrarian rhythms of planting and harvesting; the academic calendar with its occasions and seasons of work and rest, matriculation and graduation, semesters and holidays, recesses and vacations. There are the rhythms of politics : the time to register, the time to vote, the time to demonstrate for civil rights, for urban renewal or for peace in the Middle East. There are the rhythms of economics: the time to sell, the time to buy, the season of production, the season of distribution. We have not yet begun to understand these rhythms or appropriate them into our liturgy. But we should.



All these are grist for our mill, waiting only for some creative imagination to unlock them, in terms of both revelation and “ religion”. That is, to discover, on the one hand, how human beings may understand and respond to what is deepest and most authentic in their own experience, and, on the other hand, to find ways to press that understanding and response into a vehicle for the Gospel.

Next time: III. Space / Architectural Environment. Then in subsequent Essays IV. Action, V. Words, VI. Music, VII. Colour, Vestments, Paraments and Banners, and VIII. Symbols...

