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WW '72: CHAPTER 5 (CONCLUDED) SOME RAW MATERIALS FOR WORSHIP

IV. ACTION

Perhaps the most **CRUCIAL** reforms in our worship concern our understanding of action in worship. I use the word “action” here in two senses.



First, action in its broadest sense refers to what it is we are doing in Christian worship, and to the fact that liturgy is something **WE DO**. It is not so much something we listen to as something we do, with its corresponding meanings for liturgy and for life. Jesus said at the Supper, “Do this.”

Action in this first sense includes what I have called “**RITUAL CONTRACT**”. What’s happening here? What can we expect to be invited into, as worshippers, when we walk in the door of a Christian church? See [Essay 13](#) above.

Secondly, in its narrower sense, the term action can refer to the actual actions used in worship (what the liturgists call “**CEREMONY**”) as distinct from the words used in worship (what the liturgists call “rite”).

Gordon Lathrop and others suggest the term **ORDO** for the basic shape of the Holy Communion —what I have described in [Essay 13](#) as “ritual contract”. That *ordo* includes

- 1) an act of Gathering the assembly with song and prayer...
- 2) an act of hearing and responding to the Word in scripture reading and sermon and prayer...
- 3) an act of participation with prayer in eating and drinking at the Lord’s Table. The Holy

Meal...

- 4) an act of Sending the assembly with prayer into the world to serve...

In considering act number 3, above, it would be helpful to remind worshipers with some regularity of the four **BASIC ACTIONS** of the Holy Communion:

- 1) the Bread and Wine, like the life of Christ (and like our own lives!) is taken into the embrace of God;
- 2) blessed there;
- 3) broken and poured out;
- 4) and shared, given out for the life of the world.

In the historic tradition, at Holy Communion the ordained minister presides over the basic action, with a key lay person or persons fulfilling other major roles of assistance. In too many parishes, week after week, worship leadership is a solo performance! We simply must recapture the primitive understanding of the **PRIESTHOOD** of All Believers, in the action of our worship as well as in our theology.

As worship leader, the ordained clergy is traditionally chief "**PRESIDER**" or "president". (Not "celebrant", please note —the whole assembly celebrates!).

As for sharing the action of worship leadership, I'd want to protect at least four parts of the Eucharistic action historically belonging to the **ORDAINED**:

- 1) the Absolution after Confession
- 2) the Sermon
- 3) the Great Thanksgiving (with the Words of Institution) and
- 4) the Benediction.

There are six places, however, where **LAYPEOPLE** have a rightful role, even in the most traditional forms of Eucharist:

- 1) A layperson may say or sing the bids of the *Kyrie*...
- 2) ...may read the Old Testament Lesson, Epistle and Gospel...
- 3) ...may preside at the action of the Offering at the Offertory (Bread, Wine and money gifts).
- 4) ...may lead the peoples' Intercessions or Prayers of the Church...
- 5) ...may distribute either Bread or Cup at The Communion...
- 6) ...may lead the Benedicamus ("Let us bless the Lord") and Dismissal at the end of the Service...

There is no good reason why laypeople should not be used **REGULARLY** in every parish at each of these moments in The Holy Communion.

The President may preside at Holy Communion from at least **THREE** possible positions.



A) **ORIENTING** (literally “facing east”), involves the minister facing both “east” and “west” —toward the altar or toward the people— depending on a mutual understanding of the leader’s role at a given moment. Are you speaking to the people? Or with the people on their behalf?. When this practice is explained and interpreted with grace and patience, it is easily understood and accepted.

B) *Versus populum* —literally meaning “**ACROSS FROM THE PEOPLE**”. This position makes use of a free-standing altar, with the leader taking a position behind it and facing the people across the table, much as a parent in a household will “preside” at the head of a family meal. We are speaking of the Holy Communion here, remember, not of Morning Prayer or other non-Eucharistic services. The altar is not utilized at all in non-Eucharistic worship.



C) **COMBINING** A) and B), it would be possible for the leader to orient through the Office of the Word, and for the Office of the Meal take a position *versus populum*. This has the advantage of illustrating the distinction between the first part of our worship, based on reading and explicating the Written Word, and the second part, based on experiencing and participating in the Enacted Word, the Communion. See [Essay 5](#) above on “Ritual Clarity”.

With all three of these possibilities for presiding at Holy Communion, a **PREPARATORY** rite —a confessional rite, a rite for remembrance of Baptism— can be conducted elsewhere, for example, at the font in a baptistery, in a narthex or in the center aisle of the nave.

And there is a long history in the church of **STATIONAL** worship —worship which literally moves from place to place, station to station. There is no reason, for example, why the Word could not be celebrated in one space and the Meal in another, with a congregational procession at the Offertory.

A procession at the **OFFERTORY** is, in any event, a good idea; It is the action which links Word and world *par excellence*. Bringing forward the Bread and Wine with the money offerings should be a basic action in Eucharistic worship each time we gather.

As for the appropriateness of **PROCESSIONS** in worship, remember: Any Church procession has the character of a protest march. Our Citizenship is not of this world. So wherever you want to mark a place or an occasion with the sign of the cross, a procession is more than appropriate: It is all but mandatory. See below on Banners.

It is good news to note the re-introduction of some tactile form of the **PEACE** into our worship. We are invited, in this gesture, to touch, to embrace, what we have just prayed for. If the gesture seems exotic to your people, I’d suggest you begin with a handshake and let nature take its course!

In an earlier era, I'd have taught my children the old **ANGLICAN** rule of thumb about "church manners" —stand to praise, kneel to pray and sit to receive instruction. But these days I'd want to note the Orthodox rule that celebration means standing, not kneeling, and allow both postures at prayers and at reception of Bread and Cup at The Communion.

Remember: Worshippers **STAND** in Christian worship, for almost everything: Stand for prayers. For hymns. For liturgical responses. For the reception of Bread and Cup. Never —well, almost never— should a worshipper in a Christian assembly be found slouching in the pew like a couch potato. See [Essay 7](#), above. One qualification: There are indeed three occasions when sitting is appropriate: At the reading of scripture and the sermon, when we're listening, and at the psalm or psalm paraphrase, when we're meditating. At all other moments in worship, we should be on our feet, not on our gluteals. (It goes without saying that the injunction to stand in worship applies to those who are able. And as a friend points out, we are, all of us, only temporarily able-bodied. Gravity gets us all, sooner or later!)



Why this insistence on standing? There are five good reasons ([Essay 7](#) again). I'll cite here only the best one: Because when we stand we are modeling the **RESURRECTION** posture of the Risen Christ. "Resurrection" in Greek is "the standing up again" of Christ. So also in German, in Scandinavian languages, and other tongues as well.

And I anticipate the day when worshipping assemblies will join their leader in a grand corporate **ORANS** —lifting hands and head and eyes to heaven— during prayer. Certainly a corporate *orans* would be appropriate during the Great Thanksgiving, or at least during the Lord's Prayer.

Some kind of sensitivity to the notion that "form follows function" would help immensely in our training of **ACOLYTES**. Why, in the typical Protestant service, is the most elaborate ceremonial reserved for, of all things, lighting and extinguishing the candles?

There are other actions, **OTHER** things people do, which we should lay on the table as raw material for renewal in worship. I leave them to you to consider their relationship, if any, to our worship: 1) eating (and fasting!), 2) drinking, 3) walking and running, 4) applauding, 5) hugging and kissing, 6) shaking hands, 7) washing and bathing, 8) dressing and undressing, 9) taking off shoes, 10) waking and going to sleep, 11) dancing, 12) playing games and sports, 13) play-acting, 14) exploring with touch, 15) listening to reading, to records, to radio, 16) watching movies, plays, TV, dance, sports events. Who knows where the list can end?

VI) WORDS

The language of words is certainly the **PRIORITY** language of human communication. The words in our worship interpret our actions and provide commentary for them. Action alone

is ambiguous —it can be misinterpreted. If action is the most universal and elemental language of humankind, as I believe it is, then the language of words is the most specific, the clearest and least ambiguous. It is significant that in Hebrew the one word, *dabar*, denotes both word and action, action and word. *Dabar* —word issuing in action and interpreting it. And action, illustrating word, giving flesh to it.

One of the greatest problems in worship today concerns the use of **WORDS**. How can we invent a liturgy which is simple, intelligible and easily appropriated by all, and, at the same time, poetic, numinous and allusive to the Mystery we can never quite define in dogma or doxology? It is an enormously complex and difficult problem, and I am sure we will never solve it satisfactorily in our lifetime, assuming our continuing contemporary cultural chaos. Perhaps it can never be resolved, period, simply given the enormity of the challenge.

But we cannot remain silent. Hence, words, language, verbalizing will always be **NECESSARY** in Christian worship: In prayers, in hymns, in liturgical forms and in sermons, in personal witness.

A. Preaching: In my understanding of the **SERMON** in Reformation theology, it is the property of the whole Church, but in the custody of the pastor. Both qualifiers are important.



In reviewing preaching, I find it helpful to recall those **FOUR STANDARDS** by which we were taught to judge sermons in Seminary. With some modification, these same standards could be useful when applied to other forms of “proclamation” in worship, such as architecture or vestments.

- 1) Content. What is being said here? This is the question of basic **MESSAGE** or import. Is the message, for example, Biblical? Catholic? Confessional? Relevant? Important? True? New or pioneering in any way? Exciting? Appropriate?
- 2) Structure: How is the message **ORGANIZED**? Is it easy to follow? Clear in its development? Organically related to its own parts? Did it have a proper beginning, a climax, a fit conclusion?
- 3) Diction or language: Is the choice of words good or bad? (In architecture, perhaps this standard could apply to the execution of details.) Are transitions smooth? How about introduction and conclusion? Questions of **“STYLE”** are considered here. Is the “style” appropriate to the message? To the person? To the occasion?
- 4) Delivery: This refers to the actual “live” **PRESENTATION** of the message. Did the “messenger” appear to be at ease, or nervous? Confident? Sincere? (The word derives, incidentally, from classical architecture and sculpture. In Latin: “*sine-cere*” literally means “without wax.”) Could the message be heard? Loud enough? Clear enough? Did

gestures help or hinder? What is the general impression of the speaker's "presence?" Did a manuscript or notes get in the way?

B. Prayer. Anyone who wants to write new liturgies might first try a hand at constructing a **COLLECT**, one of those brief, classic prayers meant to "collect" the thoughts of the people for the occasion. It has an historic shape: (See the Collect for Pentecost 6.)

- 1) An address or invocation (O God, ...")
- 2) The "antecedent reason": the basis for presuming to pray ("You have prepared for those who love you...")
- 3) The petition itself ("Pour into our hearts such love...")
- 4) Sometimes, the results desired (".... that wemay obtain your promises...")
- 5) The concluding doxology or oblation ("through your son, Jesus Christ Amen.")

C. The Prayers of the Church (the **INTERCESSIONS**) normally cover some important territory. They are, importantly, not a rehash of the sermon. Here's an outline of the classic Prayer of the Church:



- 1) A prayer of thanksgiving and praise
- 2) A prayer for the church, including its ministries and mission, and the coming of God's Kingdom, God's Rule and Reign
- 3) A prayer for the state, including petitions for both peace and justice
- 4) A prayer for our commerce and industry, our systems of production and distribution, and for our capitol and labour
- 5) A prayer for our arts and culture, for our science and technology and medicine, and for our wounded world
- 6) A prayer for our schools, those who teach and those who learn
- 7) A prayer for our homes, including parents and children
- 8) A prayer or intercessions for those in sickness, need, bereavement
- 9) Most often, prayers of commemoration for the life and witness of those who have gone before us in faith
- 10) Concluding doxology

Whatever **FORM** it takes —brief or extended, composed or *ex corde*, responsive or a series of collect— the Prayers of the Church each Sunday should cover the same territory suggested above.

D. The classic pattern of the Prayer of Thanksgiving —or Eucharistic Prayer, or **CANON** or Great Thanksgiving— reveals the "shape" of its action and will be useful for you to know if you want to construct your own model. See [Essay 82](#) for further models.

- 1) The Prayer usually follows the *Sanctus* ("Holy, holy, holy..."). It can also include the *Sanctus* as congregational hymn or response at or near the very beginning, continuing the mood of solemn exuberance in the *Sanctus*.

2) It usually includes a recitation of the salvation history, a recollection of God's mighty acts in creation and in the history of Israel.

3) It usually moves on to include the Words of Institution of this supper in the Upper room on the night Jesus was betrayed. This is also known as the Warrant or *Verba*.

4) It usually includes an *anamnesis*, an act of remembering or recalling the significance of God's victories in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

5) It usually includes an *epiclesis*, an act of invocation of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

6) It usually includes an expression of the unity of those who worship here with one another, with Christ and with the whole church, and a looking forward to the fulness of God's Reign, a *prolepsis*.

7) And it usually concludes with a brief doxology or prayer of praise, The Lord's Prayer regularly follows, here as table prayer.

Not all Great Thanksgivings are **EXTENDED** or elaborate. You could compose one in less than 300 words.

VI. MUSIC

Certainly one of the richest **GIFTS** from the Sixteenth Century Reformation has been our inheritance of music in worship. Music in the Reformation tradition serves three functions for Christians.

1) Within the service of worship itself, music functions as a means for worship, a vehicle of **SUPPORT** for our words and a commentary upon them. The music of our hymns, psalms, and chants is of this type.

2) Also within service of worship itself, music can serve as an **AID** to worship. The gifts of organ and choir, in prelude, postlude, offertory, voluntary or anthem are of this type.

3) Apart from its context in a service of worship, music can function to **EDIFY** the human spirit. Special musical presentations such as concerts, cantatas and recitals have this character.

So-called secular standards of musical **EXCELLENCE** should certainly apply as well to music used in worship. Music in worship should be as worthy as we can produce and at least as worthy as the music we hear every day out there in the world.



A word about the **CHOIR**: Our local Roman Catholic chaplain says the day of the choir is over, but he speaks from a tradition where the choir has done all the people's work for 400 years or longer. In that context, he's probably right. And if that condition pertains in Protestant churches as well (and I'm sure it does in some), then the days of the choir should be numbered there too. The choir's rightful place is not to usurp the people's responsibilities but to support them (in 1) above) and to enrich and enliven congregational worship in hymn-alternation, psalm or anthem (under rubric 2) above). In our liturgical tradition, the assembly's principal choir is the assembly itself.

But it will be refreshing to note that a choir is not absolutely **NECESSARY**. Neither is organ or any kind of music. "Less is more." As a pedagogical device to illustrate this, congregations might make it a point each year to schedule at least some services without any music except hymns—the austerity of the Lenten season suggests that Lent or Passiontide is a good time. My preference, furthermore, would be that all forms for confession might regularly be said rather than sung, to give them an appropriate austerity also.



There are some fine collections of contemporary **HYMNS** now available. So-called pop hymns vary in quality, as I have noted, but sometimes make up in vitality what they lack in lasting worth. It does present problems, however, to sing the Lord's Prayer to the *Colonel Bogey's March* or the Doxology to *Hernando's Hideaway!* (Try it; it works!) You have to admire the ingenuity, for example, that is able to combine the text of the *Gloria* with the music of *Michael, Row the Boat Ashore*, but somehow that kind of combination does violence to both words and music. Perhaps these are permissible at a campfire, but not in the Sunday Service.

Hymn **ALTERNATION** has become greatly popular in Europe, and it is becoming more and more familiar here too. It's the simple method of enriching the congregational song by having the women's voices, men's voices, children, choir or organ take different stanzas. The great *Gloria in Excelsis*, for example, is basically a three-stanza hymn with a kind of antiphon introduction.

Remember: The assembly's principle choir is the assembly itself. So **PSALMS** should never be read or spoken in worship: always sung.

As for the music of the liturgy, I would plead the case for some kind of **CONSISTENCY** in idiom. That is, pastor and people both sing, or pastor and people both speak. Once a congregation becomes used to pastor and people both singing their roles, there is no question whatever about artificiality; it becomes second nature. In the words of respected teacher: People sing when they have something to sing about!

VII. VESTMENTS, PARAMENTS AND COLOUR

I think a good case can be made for no special **VESTMENTS** at all in worship. After all,

the clerical collar is a kind of vestment, and in some situations so is a suit and tie! As a case in point, I'd often use no vestments at all for all the Daily Office, such as Matins and Vespers —except on festival occasions— and no vestments at house-communions or other small-group communions occurring at informal retreats and conferences. It's good to remember, on occasion, what is most essential and strip away everything else.

Apart from no vestments at all, I see almost no other rational alternative at The Communion than some simple modern form of the **TRADITIONAL** communion vestments - alb, stole and chasuble. As I have already indicated, whatever we wear ought to be explained and explainable. And in most parishes, where every Sunday we are faced with strangers and visitors from either a wide variety of church backgrounds or none at all, I find anything else than the historic vestments difficult to justify. There is really no rational precedent for cassock and surplice at The Communion —these are choir vestments and belong at the choir services (Matins and Vespers). Likewise, there is no rational precedent for a black robe at The Communion. This is an academic garment and properly belongs in a teaching situation.



And please, no hoods, yokes or stoles for the **CHOIR**, servers or acolytes. Historically, the hood is the symbol of an academic degree, the yoke has no precedence whatever, and the stole has been the symbol of the preaching and teaching authority of the ordained minister. Many in our congregations will be sensitive to these traditions and will want to see them honoured.

Baptismal vestments —a type of **ALB**— at baptism have a long history and might be rediscovered, along with the ancient practice of immersion rather than sprinkling.

You can have a marvelous time designing and making processional **BANNERS**. They're greatly useful for a variety of other purposes — peace demonstrations, civil rights marches, Christmas and Easter caroling.

As for **COLOUR**, is there value in loosening the traditional colour-code associated with the seasons of the church year? Why can't some creative imagination be applied to the colours of our calendar: A variety of blues for Advent, of violets or purples for Lent? Yellow, gold or pink for Easter? Grey or russet for Passiontide?

VIII) SYMBOLS

The best symbols will always also perform a **FUNCTION**. Please, no unused Bible on the altar; no plastic weekday dust covers; no national flags. No unused anything anywhere; and nothing permanently placed, but only "for a season," while it is actually being used. You could use a handsome chalice or paten of silver, but there's nothing to prevent using a ceramic cup or plate; or a glass one; or, for the bread, a basket. I wish the common loaf would find the champions the common cup has found: They're both fine symbols of unity in Christ.

By the way, we've made it a point in our home to serve wine at almost every evening **MEAL**, especially with guests. It adds to the spirit of celebration and also serves as a reminder to ourselves and to them that what goes on around this table in our home ought to have some continuity and congruence with what goes on around the Table of the Lord on Sunday. This approach to bringing liturgy to life makes much more sense than the opposite one—that is, the rather un-historical suggestion that we serve beer and pretzels or coffee and donuts, rather than bread and wine, during The Communion on Sunday morning. Real bread and real alcoholic wine are ritual irreplaceables. Along with the signals of celebration they send, they connect us with our cousins the Jews in faith and practice. Again, in spirit of “form follows function,” there seems to be no rational, functional or symbolic reason for serving the wine in any more exotic container than a bottle, **FLAGON** or decanter. To serve wine at the Table, for example, in a coffeepot or in a chemistry retort seems to betray a misunderstanding of the relationship between form and function, in table-manners as well as in worship.



The list of other symbols is **ENDLESS**. An Advent wreath may be used for the weeks before Christmas and an Easter (“paschal”) candle from Easter Eve until Pentecost. The Taize community uses a seven-branched candelabra for all services on a Friday night and Saturday, to show solidarity with Judaism. Some kind of hanging candle-lamp might be appropriate at Pentecost in church or home. We have much to learn from the Orthodox about their use of symbols, including icons, which stand in a half-way position between a word and a picture.

Symbols are as **VARIED** as human imagination: Easter eggs; the harvest cornucopia with fruit and nuts; basin and water; flowers, seeds and soils; festival foods, cakes and cookies; toys and tools. Perhaps you can find occasion for the use of any of the substances of human life as raw material for human liturgy. *Nihil humanum alien est.* (See [Essay 102](#) above, page 5.)

