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Owning the Liturgy: The foundation for any ecclesiology of worship

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It is now sixty years since the opening of the Second Vatican Council on 11 October 1962. While this is the benchmark against which the study of liturgy – from whatever quarter – within the Catholic Church takes place, it is also to be noted that some of the basic ambitions contained in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* have had but very limited effect within the understanding of worshippers. The reforms instituted were not viewed as fundamental, nor the actual changes in practice seen touching the very depths of what we do when we gather as the People of God. Rather, they were perceived as simply another moment in the constant rubrical evolution of 'what was there' albeit far more involved than the steady drip of rubrical change that had been experienced since 1950. The result of this rubrical incremental approach has not only been the failure to grasp the potential within Vatican II, but the notion – inherent in what the present pope terms 'restorationism' – that it was just one more practical step that can be viewed as a fixed 'change' and which can be simply reversed or viewed as optional.¹

Rather than dwell on the historical problem of why the reception of Vatican II was so limited, if not superficial, it is the task of liturgical theology to re-examine some of the basic issues that animated the framers of the liturgy constitution as still pressing theological concerns for us today. We must revisit the issues as live issues, not merely analyse them as part of the recent history of liturgy. None of those issues is more fundamental than the issue of alienation in the liturgy, both at a pastoral level of the experience of individual members of the People of God and at the level of the whole Church fulfilling its vocation of being the community that is called into existence 'to offer worship in Spirit and truth'² to the Father through the Christ.

A problem solved?

In 1972 Cyrille Vogel wrote:

Liturgy, which ought not to be anything other than the authentic expression of the community (lest it deny its very nature), has gradually been detached from the community throughout the centuries.³

When Vogel uttered these words, he had high hopes that our public action as the People of God would soon, once again, become an expression of who we

¹ See T. O'Loughlin, 'Vatican II – Looking Back at its Diamond Jubilee,' *The Pastoral Review* 18/4(2022)6-9.

² See Jn 4:23-4.

³ C. Vogel, 'An Alienated Liturgy,' *Concilium* 2,8(1972)11-25.

are in all the variety and depths of our humanity. This state of affairs was in contrast to liturgy he met day after day that was not an expression of who he was, and who his community was, as the People of God. Liturgy, or performing the liturgy, was rather an imposed task of worship carried out from a sense of duty, devotion, or piety using a medium – the rites – that were just imposed by law from without. The notion that the liturgy was a profoundly human expression of ourselves as the creation of a loving Creator was a theological abstraction – true but remote from experience. Equally, at the time, the liturgy was seen as imposed by ‘the tradition’ in the sense of something from the past that was simply there to be accepted today in the same manner one might accept the imposed parameters of a language’s grammar. After four centuries of stagnation with a rite that was never really fit for purpose as a liturgy for communities, as distinct from a rite intended for the personal piety of monks and friars (and, accidentally, clergy more generally),⁴ Vogel saw the reforms of Vatican II as the beginnings of a new era of liturgical creativity. Our skills, our creativity, our fears and needs, as human beings and as Christians, would become part of the new liturgy when we sought to encounter the Paschal Mystery. The community would pray in its own language, sing its own music, bring its needs and hopes as a priestly people before the Father in the Prayer of the Faithful,⁵ and then join in the supper of the Lord, knowing that sharing his food and drink as our ‘bread of life’ and ‘cup of salvation’ entailed a commitment towards sharing all the goods of creation with all in need.

Vogel could just glimpse a sunrise – an authentic liturgy in the sense of it being *our* celebration as the People of God – and hoped that we would press further down the road towards a time when the baptised would want to join in the liturgy out of an awareness that it was part and parcel of their lives as disciples and human beings. It would not simply be the means of allowing people ‘to get Mass,’ or of their fulfilling their ‘obligations’ by being present as if God was an accountant collecting spiritual revenues from reluctant tenants. Moreover, the liturgy would be the action of the people, their expression of who they were in the Anointed One; it would not be attendance at something done on their behalf by an intermediary (tacitly confusing the Christian presbyter with an Old Covenant priest). Likewise, it would be a refreshment in the Spirit through our being with one another and the Lord, and would not be confused with somehow benefiting from the action of the ritual expert whose powers of intercession could be disposed towards them.⁶ It is easy for those with short memories to romanticise the period before the Second Vatican

⁴ It was Anton Baumstark who identified the period between Trent and the early twentieth century as exceptional in the history of liturgy (*On the Historical Development of the Liturgy*, (Collegeville, MN 2011): ET by F. West of *Vom geschichtlichen Werden der Liturgie* (Freiburg, 1923)). Karl Rahner and Angelus Häussling (*The Celebration of the Eucharist* (New York, NY, 1968)) studied that liturgy’s character as an event in clerical spirituality. See also my ‘Treating the ‘Private Mass’ as Normal: Some Unnoticed Evidence from Adomnán’s *De locis sanctis*,’ *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 51(2009)334-44 on some of its problematic theological assumptions.

⁵ See the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* [2011], n. 69.

⁶ See Rahner and Häussling, 1968, on these problems of the Eucharist being viewed as a spiritual *quantum* which could be disposed of by the will of the priest – this is the underlying ‘theology’ behind Mass stipends.

Council. Indeed it has gained in popularity among younger clergy as a vision bolstering their own fragile sense of identity, so the comments of those who remember it more clearly can serve as a reality check. For instance, Bishop Maurice Taylor in 2009 reminded us:

I recall also the bizarre teaching, before the Council, that, to avoid the mortal sin of missing Mass on Sundays, one need only be present for the offertory, the consecration and the priest's communion.⁷

Living and acting in a manner where *one* principal driver (but not necessarily the only driver) is the threat of punishment is almost a definition of 'alienation.' This is not 'my' thing, but simply something external to me with which I must engage because 'they' say so. 'They make me do it.' And every word in that simple sentence is about as far as one can be from the spirit of Christian liturgy which we affirm theologically. Moreover, one does not have to be a theologian to appreciate that any system that can act and present itself in this way is hardly an expression of a religion that must give love a higher standing than even its own religious observances.

Our liturgy

But what does the 'liturgy as an expression of who we are' mean? At one level, any liturgy could be seen – simply because it takes place with our participation, however minimally – as an expression of who we are. However, such a passive notion of 'expression' does not do justice to the dynamic nature of any genuine expression of human identity. Simply to take 'what is there' or 'what happens' as expressing 'who I am' or 'who we are' is to colonise me/us, reducing me/us to the status of an object. But because, as a human being, I am an agent who seeks to express who I am as an instance of my inherent freedom and dignity, then that expression must be mine, owned, and be an 'owned' statement of who I am and who we are. I must take part in the expression because this tells the world, in which I exist, about me and about the group within which I exist as a member of a community. Authentic self-expression is, in practice, inseparable from a sense of freedom, personal dignity, and an accepting ownership of my actions as my choices. This might seem a very far-fetched notion of identity: but this is what is happening in any gathering of the fans of a particular football team. The individual is expressed in the community by common attire, common anthems and sentiments, in common purpose, at a significant event, at a specific cultic location. Whether it is a local football team in a rural setting or a TV-mediated event of a global soccer brand, here we have authentic public expressions of identity in ritualised forms. Moreover, the challenge of taking inculturation into the very heart of our worship is still not on the agenda of most who have a directing function in liturgy.⁸

⁷ M. Taylor, *It's the Eucharist, Thank God* (Brandon 2009), 31.

⁸ See C. Pilcher, 'A missed opportunity: recent papal liturgies in Canada,' *La Croix International* 16 August 2022. Accessed at <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/a-missed-opportunity-recent-papal-liturgies-in-canada/16497>. On the need to see inculturation as part of the unfulfilled agenda of Vatican II, see T. O'Loughlin, 'Liturgy, Inculturation, and the Reception of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37-40: An on-going project for those who preside?' *New Blackfriars* 102/1102(2021)967-78 [https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12614].

But the challenge of creating a liturgy that is an authentic expression of a community is not the work of a moment, nor can it be accomplished by the act of promulgating a set of liturgical books which may themselves be seen as impositions from an authority that is not 'owned.'⁹ Rather, this task is an on-going commitment that we become a people who desire to stand before God, and in union with the Christ, bless the Father for his goodness and ask him for our needs. So, are there any obvious steps that we, as real local communities, can take towards a liturgy that expresses us, as the actual people who are authentically enlivened by the Spirit?

Declare who we actually are!

One of the characteristics of political utterances is that they do not tell it as it is, but as the speakers believe it should be, ought to be, or 'really is deep down.' Here the fractured nature of humanity, society, or some system (it might just be the state of the local roads) is not openly acknowledged, but we are invited to imagine that the problems are just a bit of grit in the system or that 'the fix' has already been applied and will soon take effect. Only the 'opposition' think otherwise, and they are 'invited' not to present that view to outsiders: we must all 'keep up a good front.' This means that many statements about 'the community' belong to the world of spin, persuasion, and illusion linked with power. We all collude with this sort of deception partly because we are so familiar with political rhetoric, partly because we like to 'look on the bright side,' and partly because we like to hope that others will only see what is best about us. These same attitudes and forces that operate within the Church are made clear through the seemingly endless series of reports into child-abuse and cover-ups of child abuse. These scandals should remind us that the holiness of the Church – upon which we ask the Christ to look during the liturgy¹⁰ – is not an existential quality of the Church but a reference to its eschatological potential.

But this phenomenon of presenting only 'our good side' means that we can easily create the impression that liturgy is not really engaged with the real us but is part of the world of spin and illusion. This is no small matter for if we are ever to be real, to flee sham, then it must be when we are in the presence of God. To acknowledge that God sees us through and through (Mt 6:4, 6, and 18), and then to play games is to negate the whole purpose of not only the liturgy, but of the Church as a witness to the truth revealed in Jesus (Jn 18:37). So, if liturgy, as our public expression does not have a profound authenticity, it would be better that we left it alone. Again, this may seem little more than a theological abstraction, but it is something that can be grasped in an instant. After seeing sham 'candles' in use in the liturgy, a woman who was not familiar with the long-standing dodges of sacristans for whom liturgy is a job, remarked to me; 'you would not use this sort of stuff if you were having anyone really important around!' Here was a statement that what we use 'for

⁹ Here lies the real problem of the 2011 translation of the Roman liturgy, quite apart from its linguistic failings: it has created a sense that the liturgy is something 'out there' which comes from elsewhere, and so has heightened the sense of liturgical alienation.

¹⁰ See the president's prayer, addressed to the Christ, at the Eucharist just before the Kiss of Peace in the Roman Rite.

best' would always be 'the real thing' – our basic sense of the real – but when she saw the liturgical use of sham, she jumped to the immediate inference: it is a matter of smoke and mirrors rather than a significant encounter with the fundamentals of life and living.

But liturgy can have a different quality and it can be an expression of ourselves, who we are, what we are about, before God. The task is to see the liturgy as that which emerges from within us, rather than as a package we simply adopt off the shelf. At this point, many voices will be raised in horror: but the liturgy, the Roman Rite, is a *datum*, a *datum* that comes with the authority of the Church and it is to be accepted as such! This view cannot be argued with from within its own assumption: it is the shrill absolute voice of those who imagine that humanity runs along pre-programmed lines or else simply breaks down. Reality is otherwise! In effect, that which does not emerge out of a community's own self-perception is – in a world where faith itself is seen as an option – simply ignored. One can argue that the Roman Rite is 'a given'; but one should observe the vast numbers of redundant church buildings, the empty pews, the grey congregations, and the popularity of alternative liturgies, and then conclude that the given is not taken!

But before we lose heart we should note that *the* fundamental element of our liturgy, our gathering for the Eucharist, is rooted in a community meal at which, in the Christ, we bless the Father. Shorn of its trappings, our fundamental liturgical action is rooted in a basic element of our humanity – our desire to share food and celebrate meals together¹¹ - and this basic element of humanity is as strong as ever. One can see this at every level of our society – a group of teenagers sharing pizza, meals to mark events, or in this, deeply ironic situation: the Alpha Course (which originates from within the Evangelical wing of Anglicanism) has no fixed element of eucharistic doctrine (they just by-pass it) yet eating together (so that they have a real sense of belonging and community) is *not* optional. Having ignored the historic edifice of the theology of the Eucharist, they have discovered the basic human reality of community being formed around sharing meals that is at the Eucharist's heart (but probably the weight of memory prevents them from recognising this). If some of the Alpha Course people could reflect theologically about why meals are important to them (as they were to Jesus¹²), and some of the Roman advocates of the Eucharist as 'a given' could reflect that its form is what is left when a real meal was abandoned due to social difficulties in a stratified society,¹³ we might be on course for a real ecumenical encounter.

¹¹ See M. Jones, *Feast: Why Humans Share Food* (Oxford 2007).

¹² See D.E. Smith and H. Taussig, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (London 1990); and H. Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis, MN, 2009).

¹³ See R.S. Ascough, 'Translocal Relationships Among Voluntary Associations and Early Christianity,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5(1997)223-41; and idem, 'Forms of Commensality in Greco-Roman Associations,' *The Classical World* 102(2008)33-45.

Engaging local talent

A liturgy that is authentically owned by the community is not one with ‘a job for everyone,’ but rather where the needs of the liturgy are, to the maximum extent, supplied from within the resources of the group *and* which gives expression to the gifts that are inherent in the group. So, for example, if there are skills in music in the community, then these should be utilised in the liturgy. Likewise, if the community has a rich tradition of language and poetry that expresses who that group is, then this should have a place in that community’s actions before God. This is not just ‘local colour’ that might give or attract some additional local interest – that is an idea that smacks of the liturgy as a product being marketed – but because all inspiration to beauty, wisdom and creativity is from above (Sir 1:1 and Jas 3:15), and for us as Christians is a manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who inspires us when we are creative, and part of the priestly work of the Christ is to gather that creativity and present it to the Father. But that assumes that it has a place in our liturgical gatherings.

Think of the creativity that is inherent in all cooking – and cooking is an essential preparation for meals at which we affirm our human identity – and cooking is basic to the Eucharist: no loaf, no Eucharist. Yet when does all the creativity, skill, and human building-up that cooking facilitates get expressed in the liturgy? Is there not something bizarre that ‘altar bread’ is mass-produced, while in every community there are skilled bakers? Is it not perverse that elegant restaurants boast special hand-made bread, yet the skills of the community are not celebrated by being used to provide the common loaf? Is it not a pity to hear someone who does not have the gift of teaching struggling through a homily (making all the basic mistakes in communication week-in and week-out) when there may be excellent communicators in the community who have never brought this talent – a word derived from Mt 25 – to the service of the community?

There is an assumption running through Christian theology which is rarely articulated that the Spirit is providing all we need, but the question is whether or not we are making use of those gifts. The list of the skills in any community is endless, if these are brought into the liturgy they are being ordered towards their true finality.

Linking words and deeds

Nothing is more alienating than the persistent undercurrent that words really do not mean what they say. We get this hint all the time in marketing and in politics. We may not live in the world of George Orwell where ‘peace’ means war – but we hear enough of this sort of thing to live our lives with the suspicion we are being deceived. By contrast, there is something refreshing when someone calls a spade, ‘a spade.’ This was brought home to me recently when a good priest I know told me that when his superior says to him that ‘he is saying something for his [the priest’s] own good,’ he knows he should reach for a flak-jacket! Likewise, someone went to see the act of washing the feet in a cathedral on Holy Thursday and when he saw the token

amount of water and the assistant giving the bishop a towel each time and bowing as he took it, while other minions took away the basin and jug while the president sat down, he felt cheated: the whole thing was just a sham.¹⁴

But with talk about 'gathering around the table' – yet we do not do so, people sit in pews as if at a performance put on for them. We talk about sharing a broken loaf – but we have hundreds of pre-cut round wafers, the very opposite of a shared, broken, real loaf. We invite all present to take and drink, yet few places do anything of the sort. We use words, words, and more words, but the actions tell a different story. It was possible to get away with this breakdown between words and actions when the liturgy was in Latin, in silence, and in the distance. Now, people see and hear for themselves, and they all too easily conclude that words here are false friends.¹⁵ From this point to the sense that they are being deceived is but a short step – and mid-way between these points is alienation.

Making basic symbols clear

It is the nature of human communication that we add layers to layers to layers of meaning in all interactions. It even happens in the most simple of linguistic communication when a word spreads out to have more and more meanings – all less clear and less precise. It is known as Zipf's Law. So, for example, the Eucharist has so many layers of inherited meaning that many leave theology courses without a clear grasp of how all the 'bits' can be reconciled. Yet when we take part in any activity we take meanings one at a time. The result in some cases is that those who take part in liturgy cannot see the wood for the trees – and when we feel overloaded with information we tend to shut down. This too is a form of alienation.

So, is it clear that we have just one loaf, one cup, one table, and that we are gathering in the presence of the Risen One to offer thanks to the Father? For many, this is just so simple that it appears meaningless under all the layers – but if this is not the core of our celebration (as we see by looking at any Eucharistic Prayer), then we have a case of the tail [all the added layers] wagging the dog. Making this basic activity – and celebrating Eucharist is the *activity* of thanking the Father – is a challenge facing every president.

Express particularities

One of the features of human communities is that they all have their unique particularities: this group is different to that group; this community is 'shaped' in a way that is not the same at the other group. These differences do not mean that distinctive groups cannot share in a greater unity, but it does mean that the individuality of human beings, what makes them 'them,' finds full expression. If you want to see this sense of particularity within a greater unity one has only to observe the way that two religious orders, for example the

¹⁴ A. Howells, 'Foot Washing for the Sole,' *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 17(2012)128-31.

¹⁵ See T. O'Loughlin, 'Eucharistic Celebrations: the Chasm between Idea and Reality,' *New Blackfriars* 91(2010)423-38.

Dominicans and the Jesuits, are so completely distinct in identity – though to an outsider they would appear to be just different names on the same product! Particularity and variety is a hallmark of creation, and can be seen in human affairs as the work of the Spirit bringing the gifts of each out in specific ways. By contrast, human organisation likes uniformity and standardisation. Let any manager free with human beings, and they will see particularity as a problem and standardisation – fitting individuals into systems – as the solution. We have had this management approach to liturgy since the Council of Trent – the greater the uniformity the better – and it is a controlling instinct that is by no means extinct among those who believe they ‘control’ and ‘manage’ the liturgy. The effect is a liturgy that suits their particular needs being imposed on the wider church – and it just does not meet the needs of people. The officers in a Roman dicastery may think they are managing the liturgy, but, in fact, people simply vote with their feet and produce worship that expresses who they are. The sadness is that these spontaneous expressions are often very poorly thought through in terms of their implicit theological expressions while they bear very little relationship to the riches of Christian tradition.

Uniformity in practice is not a desirable aim in worship. Rather, we should strive to be united in a desire to serve God in the tradition of Jesus, and then recognise the variety that this produces in practice, acknowledge each other, and be willing to learn from each other. This may seem utopian, but the alternative is to assume that there is nothing we can do but be resigned to continual fracturing and constant inter-Christian bickering. It is always worth recalling that *there never was a golden age of uniformity in liturgy* from which variety was a decline. All the evidence – even our meagre evidence from the first century – points to variety as different churches expressed the basic practices in their particular ways, and the unity was created by the links between these groups¹⁶ and their willingness to accept these differences.¹⁷ It is the cult of ritual uniformity that is the newcomer to our tradition,¹⁸ and one that has not served the churches well.

When we see a thousand different liturgical flowers, we need to be rejoicing and thankful for the infinite creativity of the Spirit forming praise out of the mind-boggling variety of humanity – a scene encapsulated in Acts 2:1-11.¹⁹ Regrettably, we are so dazzled by ordered uniformity that we are apt to dismiss the Spirit’s garden of many colours as a jungle. But when the particularities of human beings do not find an outlet in the Church’s liturgy, they still find an outlet, and the ‘official’ liturgy becomes alien to them.

¹⁶ This can be seen clearly in the regulations for visitors from other churches laid out in the *Didache* 10:7-13:6 (on which see: A. Milavec, ‘Distinguishing True from False Prophets: The Protective Wisdom of the *Didache*,’ *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2(1994)117-36).

¹⁷ See my ‘The ecumenical meal of mission: a re-reading of Acts 10-11:18,’ *The Japan Mission Journal* 67/2(2013)118-127 – this demonstrates that the regulations of the *Didache* were an assumed background for Luke when he wrote.

¹⁸ This was one of the key conclusions of Baumstark’s 1923 book, cited above.

¹⁹ See my ‘Preaching at Pentecost: The Diversifying Spirit,’ *Scripture in Church* 42 [#166] (2012)125-7.

Avoiding a 'fast food' culture

If one wants to find the exact opposite of genuine deep involvement in human ritual, then the 'fast food' industry supplies it. Here that most characteristically human aspect of any culture, its habits for sharing meals, is reduced to products and patterns to which we are then asked to conform. We become another moment in a factory process – and we are transiently satisfied by the experience through sensory manipulation that we go along with it! The fast food industry is not there to serve our needs, or us, but to transform those needs into an opportunity for them to provide a product that can have maximum value to them as the producers, and not to us as the consumers. The fast food industry is, in effect, a factory production line and we are expected to slot into it – and if we express our uniqueness in that process we will be ejected as defective elements. Once one reflects on this, one becomes alienated from it – I might trade off my individuality for a milkshake right now, but in the larger picture of my life I want something more human, more respectful of me as an individual, and, ideally, I want my exchanges to be interactions between human beings. I may never get to this level of human interchange – and human economic oppression is part of the sin of the world we as Christians need to challenge; but in the liturgy we should be modelling an ideal of human relationships because we are doing our modelling in the heavenly courtyard (Heb 9:24).

But consider the Sunday eucharistic liturgy: there is a system which produces a liturgy in a fixed amount of time; there is an act of eating, but it is a pre-packaged product designed for high speed distribution, and there is a sameness such that any deviation is indicative of a problem with the consumer of the liturgy – an individual human being loved by God – rather than the system that can generate the liturgy to be consumed. So, if anyone has a personal history relating to the identity, relationships, or faith journey that does not fit the system, they can be set aside as a problem. Moreover, it is them who have the problem, not the liturgy. But perhaps the table to which we are invited in the eucharistic banquet is not like the gaudy tables in a fast food outlet, designed so that you do not linger and talk, but rather is an open, more welcoming table that anticipates people coming 'from east and west, and from north and south, [to] sit at table in the kingdom of God (Lk 13:29).²⁰ We experience both tables in life, which do we take as the model for our eucharistic table?

The poor

If we are concerned that the liturgy should be an authentic expression of who we are as redeemed creatures, then the liturgy must have a real engagement with those who are alienated in our society in one way or another: the poor. 'The poor' are not just those who are suffering economic hardship, but all those who for a variety of reasons are marginalised, suffering, and not enjoying the gifts that God wills all of us to share. And a concern with the poor

²⁰ See J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh, 1991), *passim*, who presents commensality as one of the characteristic and distinguishing features of Jesus' ministry.

has been an important part of our liturgy from the beginning when Christian gatherings cut right across the social stratification of Greco-Roman society. However, it was one thing to share religious ideas with one's slaves, it was quite another to share one's food and one's table. It is this concern with the poor that lies behind Paul's critique of what is happening at the eucharistic meals of the Corinthians: if they want to have a true act of thanksgiving, then the rich must wait on the poor (1 Cor 11:33).²¹ Similarly, the powerful must not be seeking the places of honour, as if the Christian gathering retained the social stratification of the larger society – something that is highlighted in both the gospels (Lk 14:10)²² and in the letter of James.²³ And this concern takes a visibly practical form in the collection for the poor which was a fixed part of the liturgy as recounted by Justin around 150 A.D.. And we should note that this was a collection *for the poor* and not for the maintenance of the structures or the ordained ministers and appeals to Justin to validate the modern practice of collections are wide of the mark.

So, an authentic liturgy within a community demands that the community take positive steps to do two things. First, it must reflect on its own community practice: are there sub-groups within the community that are marginalised in terms of their participation in the liturgy? Are there, for example, groups in a community that are not represented among the pool of readers or the pool of eucharistic ministers? If that is the case it is, in Paul's terms, a blemish on the gathering which must be addressed. Second, the liturgical gathering is a rejoicing in the goodness of God who offers us from his infinite bounty, and in response we offer thanks in union with the Christ. But if we are rejoicing in God's sharing with us, we must be taking practical, concrete steps for sharing our bounty with the poor. That must be no mere token matter, but material assistance to those who are deprived through collections, collaborating in food banks, and facilitating those suffering alongside us. We have a long history of arguing over what in ritual terms constitutes a 'valid' liturgy, it is time that we spend, at least, equal effort seeing what constitutes an authentic liturgy: and a *sine qua non* of such authenticity is that all who celebrate together have a commitment, not just as individuals but as a Church, to working with the poor.

The future

Vogel back in 1972 pointed out the problem of the unreformed liturgy: it tended to deny its own nature as authentic human action. Today, his observation is as relevant as it was then. In the interim there has grown up an uncritical romanticism about the unreformed rites as if it is simply an alternative – and there are some who even think it superior to the rite of 1969. That in the last two years, Pope Francis has become far more vocal in his criticisms of this group – and those who use liturgy as a basis for a more

²¹ See H.W. Hollander, 'The Idea of Fellowship in 1 Corinthians 10.14-22,' *New Testament Studies* 55(2009) 456-70.

²² See D.E. Smith, 'Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106(1987) 613-6.

²³ See P.-B. Smit, 'A Symposiastic Background to James?' *New Testament Studies* 58(2011) 105-22.

widespread rejection of Vatican II – is indicative that the renewal envisaged by the Council is still far from being realised. But even for those who have embraced the reforms of the Second Vatican Council as the work of the Spirit, there is far more to a true reform of our worship than simply the adoption of new ritual texts.

A true renewal of the liturgy only takes place when a community has evolved a manner of being and celebrating that is an authentic expression of who they are as a human community, who they see themselves as being in union with the Father's Anointed One, and how they see themselves as acting within the larger human society.