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Book Review: Liturgical Lockdown: Covid and the Absence of the Laity, a New Zealand Perspective

Reviewed by Angela McCarthy

Grayland, Joseph P. *Liturgical Lockdown: Covid and the Absence of the Laity, a New Zealand Perspective*. Palmerston North NZ: Te Heparā Pai, 2021.

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In this 60th year anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, it is very refreshing to read something that is completely in tune with *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) and that offers new thoughts and questions about what the future could or should hold. Grayland's book gives a very sound understanding of the current liturgical life of the Church in his context of New Zealand and poses profound questions about the future of the priesthood and the laity as we understand it now.

Grayland's exploration of "liturgical lockdown", a new term arising among others from the pandemic experience of 2020-2021, is within the context of a combined parish that has two metropolitan parishes and one rural parish in Aotearoa, New Zealand. As with Australia, island nations could more easily isolate and hence the impact of the pandemic was lessened. As the author outlines in his introduction, the patterns of worship and interaction were brought to an abrupt halt and the response of the People of God is well worth assessing. There was a wide variety of responses among worshipping communities and so it is valuable that Grayland chose to examine the community in which he works, prays and celebrates liturgy as well as providing wider responses through surveys of laity and clergy.

The framework of disruption and innovation is used to hold aspects of the narrative in place and is taken from Clayton Christensen's term from his 1997 book *The Innovator's Dilemma* (pg. 5). Grayland uses this framework in Part One to describe how COVID-19 impacted the laity, the priesthood and the church. He acknowledges that the main force of disruption has not come from the responses which include the virtual Mass but has been the 'limiting of physical gatherings and social distancing because these are seen as high-risk activities' (pg. 15). Through the loss of physical sacramental mediation, the pastoral, sacramental and liturgical lives of the People of God have been changed. The loss of the Sunday Mass showed that the essential means of communicating with parish members was through that particular gathering and without it there was an exhausting pastoral activism and a fear of losing everyone (pg. 21). The disruption of the pandemic showed that the parish's top-down enfeebled decision making was not working and hence the need to change to a more relevant and productive pattern that could meet the parish demands. The aged demographic of the parish was also recognised as the social outreach group which was very engaged pre-pandemic was unable to work because only four of the twenty members were under 70 years of age (pg. 26). A deep concern emerged around the 'falsehood that those watching an online Mass were actually participating in it was

never challenged' (pg. 29). For further exploration Grayland used two surveys, one being parish based and one sent out nationally.

To explore the disrupted and innovated priesthood, Grayland also used a survey as well as 'professional conversations, one focus group, and a large variety of internationally published material on the clergy response to the pandemic' (pg. 43). Through the responses of the clergy Grayland discovered a 'disconnect between a *theology of the liturgy* and a *theological praxis in the liturgy* but also a disconnect between the roles of presider and laity as presences of Christ in the liturgical act' (pg. 51). Functionalism proved to be one of the major motivators of the liturgical response by the clergy and Grayland offers some disquieting reflections and questions.

In Part Two Grayland presents a theology of liturgy based on the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium, SC)*. This is very refreshing as there are increasing amounts of liturgical writing, particularly online, that make no reference to this foundational document. The summary of the theology of liturgy is only short (pp 76-85) but is profoundly rich and completely accessible. It is followed by a theology of praxis which again is well formulated and profoundly anchored in Vatican II teachings. 'The worship of the Church is humankind's response to the presence and action of God in the world, saving us in Christ' (pg. 94). In the next section discussing the priesthood's operative theology during the lockdowns, Grayland refers to the 'Decree in Time of Covid-19' which was published by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (pg. 97). This document, Grayland maintains, implies that the 'Mass is said *for the people*, but not *with the people*' (pg. 97) with an underlying assumption that the laity are not necessary for the celebration of liturgy. This is followed by a discussion around the profound understanding that the liturgy is the work of Christ, the Priest who has died, risen and ascended and that the liturgy of the Church calls this to mind through anamnesis, the actual remembering that draws us all to the Father through the sacrifice of the Son in the power of the Spirit.

In Part Three Grayland examines virtual presence. The arguments continue around the difference between virtual presence and real presence and what it exposes is the lack of understanding about the act of anamnesis and the nature of presence. Christ is truly present in the person of the priest, the consecrated bread and wine, the Word, and in the people as they pray and sing (SC, 7). There is a unity between the 'originating event and every subsequent remembrance of that event' (pg. 117). This discussion must be ongoing to clearly help our Church to truly understand and express in our liturgy how we understand the salvific action of God.

In Part Four Grayland looks at the impact of technology on our understanding of presence. The pandemic has changed us and changed our patterns. We only have to look at the impact on the CBDs of many cities with the exodus of workers and the catastrophic effect it has had on industries such as hospitality. We can be present in a technological sense, but can we be present in a liturgical sense? Grayland stresses that it is not technology that is at fault as it has many benefits, but the 'operative, transactional theology' (pg. 135) that drove the use of such technology to

help us view the Mass rather than being present through sign and symbol in a tangible sense where we have a proximate physical relationship. The issue of spiritual communion emerges throughout the book as an unrealistic participation that has been acknowledged and promoted which has increased a lack of true understanding of liturgical reality.

Part Five concentrates on the mediated sacramental system and what alternatives are present when the priest, not considered an essential worker, cannot enter aged care homes, or hospitals, or churches, and is therefore unable to offer the sacraments in time of need. He particularly refers to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. He concludes with comments on Home-Eucharists.

In Part Six Grayland offers some models of liturgy with excellent discussion and development of those models. If the model followed does not function as a participative experience of salvation, then it cannot express who we are in the redemptive action of Christ. This is followed by seven considerations for both questioning and reflection and a concluding chapter that is not a conclusion! The experience of this pandemic is not over yet, and we are still in the throes of trying to understand what we need to do and how best to do it. The questions around sacramental mediation by an ordained clergy are very challenging and need to be considered by all of us. This book is invaluable in the way the complex issues are presented and the solid background of Vatican II is used to support solutions and theological realities.