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## “Branches of that Good Olive Tree:” 21st Century Liturgical Challenges and Possibilities

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## Introduction

On October 28, 1965 when Vatican Council II – through the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* – began the process of addressing the Church’s relationship with Jews and Judaism, the Council Fathers recognized the importance of the declaration and the depths to which this new teaching would reach. When they began section §4 on Jews and Judaism by remembering “the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham’s stock,” they spoke of this remembering as a searching into the *mystery* of the Church.<sup>1</sup> Aware that the Church and its liturgy are inseparably linked within the *mystery* of God and revelation, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, in its 1974 and 1985 documents, began expanding *Nostra Aetate*’s immediate liturgical concern for care “in the preaching of the word of God.” They directed the Church’s attention to the links between Christian and Jewish liturgy, demanded caution in dealing with liturgical explanations and with translations of and commentaries on biblical texts, and began addressing problematic liturgical expressions and representations of Jews and Judaism in greater detail.<sup>2</sup> Various national Episcopal conferences developed related documents to apply these directives in their local contexts.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, as a member of the Catholic Christian community, my primary focus is on liturgy as experienced in Roman Catholic Christianity. However, I also occasionally simply refer to Christianity and Christian liturgy as a way of acknowledging that similar liturgical problems are being faced and efforts made by a majority of mainline Christian denominations, as the paper by E. Byron Anderson in this volume attests.

<sup>2</sup> See *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration, Nostra Aetate (§4)*, 1974, II, and *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*, 1985, V, 23.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: “Jewish Roots of Christian Teaching and Worship,” “Jewish Prayer and Liturgy,” “Presentation of Jesus’ Passion,” and

These documents acknowledged the need for theological reparation for the injustices and violence done to the people and faith of Judaism. They recognized as well the injustice Christianity had done to itself – to its inner spiritual and psychological health – by incorporating into its collective self-identity the denigration of a people and a faith, while depriving itself of a full appreciation of the richness of its ancient roots. Aware of the power of the Church’s liturgical expressions to educate, form and transform, Church leaders knew that it is primarily through liturgy that the faith identity of Christians is shaped, nurtured and affirmed – for better or for worse – with an innate capacity for inclusion of and reverence for the “other” or with an innate propensity for exclusion and triumphalism.

The Church marks the fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* at a time when the confluence of religious, political, intellectual and cultural movements are rendering the early years of the new Christian millennium a time of unparalleled “density.”<sup>4</sup> David N. Power warns about the liturgical temptation during times like this:

The greatest danger threatening liturgical reform is that of a retreat into the past, or a retreat into abstract universalism. It is one to which churches succumb when

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“Catechesis and Liturgy” in *Within Context: Guidelines for the Catechetical Presentation of Jews and Judaism in the New Testament* (1986), jointly developed by the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the USA National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Adult Education Department of the USA Catechetical Conference, and the Interfaith Affairs Department of the Anti-Defamation League; and *God’s Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching* (1988), by the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Liturgy.

<sup>4</sup> In this paper I consider a historical moment “dense” if it is a period in which there is a significant confluence of events and changes, whether negatively conflictual or positively inspiring and challenging.

they find themselves doomed to silence by the inability even to face, let alone make any sense of, current reality.<sup>5</sup>

Given the density of the present historical moment and the gravity of Power's warning, it behooves the Church, during this next post-*Nostra Aetate* decade, to take a more comprehensive overview of recent developments in liturgical theology and liturgical history and consider their implications for the liturgical life of the Church in the 21st century.

Therefore, this paper is in two parts. Part One serves as a prefatory foundation to underpin and inform the observations and liturgical explorations that follow. It begins with some representative voices informing us about today's understanding of the richly pluriform action of liturgy. Then, after briefly tracing the effects of the Church's attention or inattention to both *continuity* and *change* in its liturgical expression during four significantly dense historical times, it proceeds to identify four events or movements that I consider major contributors to the density of the present historical moment. Part Two begins by outlining a three-point focus for 21st century liturgical transformation. This serves as the lens through which I explore new liturgical possibilities relating mainly to the Liturgical Year and to the Advent-Christmas cycle.

## Part One

### The Pluriform Action of Liturgy

In their communal liturgical moments Christians are most uniquely themselves before God and the world. Here their

<sup>5</sup> See David N. Power, "Response: Liturgy, Memory and the Absence of God" in *Worship* 57 (1983): 328 for this message Power presented at the 1983 meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy.

manner of singing the songs and telling the stories of the central mysteries of their faith both profoundly shapes and is shaped by their *theology*, their *spirituality*, and their *moral/ethical* views and actions. It is through the liturgy, the primary collective praxis of their belief, that Christians commit themselves to these stances and declare them publicly to the world. Nothing else in the life of the Church so vividly expresses its ecclesial identity.

Though it is first and foremost a living ritual directed toward the experience and glorification of God and the sanctification of humanity, the pluriform liturgical action also expresses the Church's *theology* – not through speculative abstraction, but by gesturing to God and the world through communal symbol, ritual and cultic acts how Christians know God and the world.<sup>6</sup> Already in the fifth century, Prosper of Aquitaine expressed the reciprocal relationship between liturgy and theology through which they mutually derive from and shape each other with his saying, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the Church believes as she prays). Literature from the Patristic era – particularly about mystagogic catechesis<sup>7</sup> which derived theological understanding of the sacraments directly from what was spoken, symbolized and enacted through the liturgy – illustrates that liturgy as enacted rites served as the primary source for theology.<sup>8</sup> Today's

<sup>6</sup> See E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill, eds., *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch Before God* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), ix.

<sup>7</sup> The term "mystagogy," derived from the language of the mysteries (*mysterion*), refers to the introduction of the uninitiated to the knowledge and effective celebration of the mysteries. "Mystagogic catechesis" is a continued reflection with the newly initiated Christians fostering a deeper understanding of their salvation in Christ. The teaching leads from their new sacramental experience to a fuller comprehension of the meaning of now being an integral part of the church.

<sup>8</sup> See Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 3-10.

conversations between theologians and liturgists not merely affirm this tradition, but increasingly emphasize the need for the Church to acknowledge this vital interactivity whereby liturgy serves as a “locus of theology.” It is a living means whereby revelation is transmitted.<sup>9</sup>

Though it would do violence to liturgy to reduce it to a didactic act, it is nevertheless the case that, since the beginning of the Christian era, liturgy and learning as *catechesis* have together formed the praxis (reflective action) through which the faith of the community is informed, reflected upon and nurtured. Kennedy Neville and Westerhoff affirm this when they state:

Liturgy nurtures the community of faith through celebrative symbolic acts of faith. Catechesis nurtures the community of faith through mindful attempts to communicate and reflect upon the story (myth) which underlies and informs these acts of faith....the life of faith and the community of faith cannot exist without both. And faithful life implies their integration.<sup>10</sup>

Also intrinsically interrelated at the heart of Christian life are liturgy and *spirituality*. Kevin W. Irwin observes:

Spiritually implies how one views all of life from the perspective of Christian revelation and faith and how one's life values and actual daily living are shaped by that revelation, enacted in the celebration of the liturgy.

<sup>9</sup> See A. Stenzel, “Les Modes de transmission de la Révélation” *Mysterium Salutis, L'Église et la transmission de la Révélation*, vol. 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1969), 161.

<sup>10</sup> Gwen Kennedy Neville and John H. Westerhoff, *Learning through Education* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 91.

Spirituality thus relies on and is nurtured by both liturgy and prayer.<sup>11</sup>

This interrelationship is integrally related to the formation of Christian affections as understood by Don Saliers. He speaks of “deep affection” as “a basic attunement which lies at the heart of a person's way of being and acting.”<sup>12</sup> Uniting prayer, belief and ethical action, he sees liturgical practice as cultivating these deep affections, orienting the Christian's praise and gratitude to God toward an overflow in love and care of neighbor. Like Irwin, Saliers introduces a third term into the *lex orandi, lex credendi* relationship. Irwin speaks of it as *lex vivendi* (law of living), and Saliers as *lex agendi* (law of ethical action). Both imply an internal, conceptual link between liturgy and ethics indicating that liturgical practice profoundly influences the *moral and ethical transformation* of persons and society.<sup>13</sup>

### Historical Expressions of Liturgical Continuity and Change

This multi-dimensional breadth of Catholic liturgical life is due, at least in part, to the Church's ability – beginning in its foundational period – to simultaneously incorporate both *continuity* and *change* in its ritual and cult. Throughout its history, the Church's identity-consciousness and its concern for efficacy have provoked it to value the conservation of memory and the *maintenance of tradition* while simultaneously nurturing vision and *incarnating new liturgical expressions* as inspired or demanded by changing

<sup>11</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 312.

<sup>12</sup> Don E. Saliers, *The Soul in Paraphrase: Prayer and Religious Affections* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 4-9.

<sup>13</sup> See Anderson and Morrill, *Liturgy and the Moral Self*, 4-13.

theological understandings, political/social realities and cultural practices.<sup>14</sup>

The Church's originating period – during which the earliest Christian communities searched for vocabulary and ritual to express in public worship the newness accomplished in Jesus – was dense with competing Jewish movements and an emerging diversity of opinions regarding the relationship between the followers of Jesus and Judaism. The sociological forces related to identity, membership and boundaries became even more complex as the newly-forming community was affected by the Jewish rebellion against Rome, the destruction of the Temple, a growing diaspora of Jews and Christians, and an increasing Gentile presence within the Christian community. Although there was a great diversity of practices as these communities searched for an identity in new times and places, the "christologization" of the community's worship remained closely related to Jewish patterns of worship – be it the Sabbath, baptism, prayer or the meal – while also expressing radically new content through the creation of new texts and the improvisation or adaptation of prayers, symbols and rituals.<sup>15</sup> This pattern of continuity and improvisation also marked the patristic era, a dense period during which Christianity struggled for survival, respectability, and, ultimately, political power while also engaged in intense internal theological disputes, especially in relation to christological doctrine. Kevin Irwin speaks of this period as

the era during which "we learn that it is liturgy as enacted rites that serves as the primary source for theology." While ensuring that the liturgy continued in conformity with apostolic tradition, textual or ritual fixity gave way as contemporary controversies and local circumstances demanded change, evolution and development. "[T]he *lex orandi* reflected a living theology and supported a response to liturgy in Christian living... [It was] an era during which variety in liturgical ritual and in theological meaning flourished."<sup>16</sup>

However, it has been when the Church's liturgical expression either lost essential elements of the tradition or failed to dynamically evolve and develop that its liturgy has fostered decline and decay rather than vitality and development in the life of the Church. This was apparent particularly during medieval times and in the post-Tridentine era. The medieval period, fertile with ecclesiastical, intellectual, social, political and artistic movements, saw the rise of great religious orders and movements. Yet, many of its liturgical accretions and practices failed to express a living theology, its emphasis on systematizing theology to a great extent divorced theology from the Church's liturgical rites. The conception of the Eucharist was individualized, the validity of the sacraments was restricted to a minimum of matter and form, and the official ministers of the socially constituted Church largely displaced the congregation in its liturgical role. The liturgy was rendered an action done *for* the community rather than the community's expression and celebration of its faith. Consequently, at the time of the Reformation, a liturgy lacking authenticity and theological accuracy was in great need of reform. Unfortunately, the Roman Catholic world's defensive concern to counteract the reformers and to unify the Church blinded it to its liturgical need for both continuity with tradition and creative response.

<sup>14</sup> In 1963 the Second Vatican Council expressed this in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §4 as follows: "This Council also desires that...the rites be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times."

<sup>15</sup> See Charles Perrot, "Worship in the Primitive Church," 1-9, and Pedro Fames Scherer, "Creative Improvisation, Oral and Written, in the First Centuries of the Church," 22-23, in Mary Collins and David Power, eds., *Concilium – Liturgy: A Creative Tradition* (New York: The Seabury Press: Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Irwin, *Context and Text*, 7-10.

The concern for liturgical uniformity and rubrical precision, bolstered by tenacious legalism, served to divorce *lex orandi* from *lex credendi* in the post-Tridentine Church. Some of the effects of this divorce are still apparent in the life of the Church today.

### The Density of the Present Historical Moment

Viewed in relation to effective ecclesial liturgical expression, the density of the present time can be attributed to four main events or movements: the *Shoah* and the Church's theological and pastoral response to this tragedy; an increasing pluralist sensibility within the Christian community; the increasingly dangerous potential of the alliance between religion and violence; and expressions of ecclesial compassion gradually transforming a stance of triumphalism.

*The Shoah and Nostra Aetate, §4.* The magnitude of the horror of the *Shoah* and the challenge it presents to liturgical expression is effectively expressed in the thought of Johann Baptist Metz, for whom:

Auschwitz is the paradigmatic case of an interruption in history, a meaningless surd which cannot be encompassed by any system of thought...It can be brought within the horizon of Christian faith and hope only by means of narratives which transform us as they irritate our present horizon of understanding and hope, as they call us to hope with and for those without hope...Nurturing this hope...also moves us toward more radical action.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> James Matthew Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 126.

This tragic failure of humanity compelled the Church's most courageous voices, prior to and during Vatican Council II, to acknowledge the danger and sinfulness of its supersessionist under-belly and its triumphalist, absolutist path. Driven by a moral imperative, their repentant search into this moral and theological failure resulted in the articulation of *Nostra Aetate, §4*. On March 13, 2005 Cardinal Walter Kasper referred to this Declaration as *revolutionary*. Its two epoch-making resolutions – which recalled the Church to its Jewish roots, and which affirmed God's unrevoked covenant with the Jewish people – renounced theological anti-Judaism and the supersessionist substitution theory that had been current since the second century. Since then, ecclesial and scholarly dialogues focusing on history and theology, and new exegetical approaches to scriptural scholarship, have radically diminished the anti-Judaic interpretations of previous influential scholarship. Yet, Kasper indicated that the Church is only “at the beginning of the beginning” in these efforts to re-read Scripture and history in light of the *Shoah* and in the theological reformulations needed, especially in the areas of Christology, soteriology and evangelization.<sup>18</sup>

*The Encounter with Pluralism.* The 21st century finds the Church part of a religiously and culturally diverse global community, vastly different from the more circumscribed experiences of previous centuries when faiths were ritualized in smaller worlds with a homogenous vision and common values. This increasing historical and pluralist consciousness, while presupposing a larger unity (e.g., of species, historical interaction, national identity, etc.), acknowledges that real persistent differences prevail

<sup>18</sup> Cardinal Kasper's remarks were part of his keynote address on “The Need for Theological Discussion in the Catholic-Jewish Dialogue” at *A Celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Nostra Aetate: Catholic-Jewish Relations in Theological Dialogue*, March 13, 2005, Washington, DC.

between people, their views of life, and their ways of acting. At Vatican Council II the Church anticipated this encounter with pluralism, not only in *Nostra Aetate*, but also in its Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*) and in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*).<sup>19</sup> This new world, polycentric in its horizons of interpretation, is compelling the Church to find ways to present anew the grand narrative of its faith. While remaining faithfully rooted in the past, this new retelling of the Christian story must transcend the past and include the 'other' in a manner that values without marginalizing or denigrating. This challenge can be perceived negatively through the lens of *relativism*, or it can be construed positively as, for example, in current efforts in Comparative Theology,<sup>20</sup> which encourages theologians rooted in their own traditions to receive light and insight from that "ray of Truth which enlightens all" that may be found in the religion, way of conduct and life of the "other" (cf., *NA*, §4). In this challenge the Church can look to the vision exemplified by the late Pope John Paul II. In October 1986, in observance of the International Year of Peace, and again in January 2002, in the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks and the war and tensions in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, he called the heads of the great religions to gather in Assisi to pray together for peace, each according to its own creed. To people throughout the world these initiatives spoke of spiritual courage, implicit respect for each religion, and the message that religion must never be used to incite hatred and violence.

<sup>19</sup> See *Dignitatis Humanae*, §15 and *Gaudium et Spes*, §2.

<sup>20</sup> I refer to the work of such scholars as Francis X. Clooney, SJ, former professor of Comparative Theology at Boston College and recently appointed Parkman Professor of Divinity and Professor of Comparative Theology at Harvard University; and James L. Fredericks of Loyola Marymount University. See, for example, J.L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and the Non-Christian Religions* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999).

*The Alliance between Religion and Violence.* These positive efforts for interfaith relationship and understanding acknowledge the potential, in all religions, for a dangerous, dark alliance between religion and violence. The recent profusion of serious academic publications addressing this reality<sup>21</sup> witnesses to the global dimension of this alliance, which underlies the current escalation of religious extremism, the interaction between religion and state-organized murder in the twentieth century, and the continuing appeal and potential for using religion to incite war. This danger is evident not only in the very overt global rise of religious terrorism, but also in the more subtle, often undeclared reliance on religion to provide political identities and give license to vengeful ideologies. The ability of religion to demand passionate and exclusive allegiance and to forge collective identity over against the "other" demands that serious attention be given to the national conflicts, racial hatreds, and ethnic divisions marking the current historical moment.

*An Ecclesial Turn from Triumphalism to Compassion.* Pope John Paul II's Jubilee Year call for a "purification of memory" in the Church and his Lent 2000 prayer for

<sup>21</sup> Examples include: Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2000); Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2002); Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack, eds., *In God's Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001); Leo D. Lefebure, *Revelation, the Religions and Violence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Willard M. Swartley, ed., *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies and Peacemaking* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., 2000); Joseph H. Ehrenkranz and David L. Coppola, *Religion, and Violence and Peace* (Fairfield, CT: Sacred Heart University Press, 2000); Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1995).

forgiveness at the foot of the cross add a significant element to the present confluence of events. Never in the history of Christianity has the leader of the Church so publicly and comprehensively acknowledged the sins of its past and its need for expiation and forgiveness. His very demeanor at the Western Wall in Jerusalem when he placed in a crevice of the wall the prayer asking for forgiveness from the “God of our fathers” and expressing a new commitment “with the people of the Covenant,” declared a turning point in the Church – a turn away from a stance of power and triumphalism to a humble following of the Gospel call to compassion, reconciliation, justice, and peace.

The density of the current historical moment confronts the present life and the future of the Church with challenges and possibilities of unprecedented proportions. It behooves the Church to recall the 1980 words of Pope John Paul II, which he repeated again in 1989 on the 25th anniversary of the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy: “A very close and organic bond exists between the renewal of the liturgy and the renewal of the whole life of the Church.”<sup>22</sup> To remain true to its tradition and to maintain spiritual credibility and vitality, the Church must look seriously at its liturgy and consciously opt for responsible and creative development and change. The Church neglects this challenge at its own peril.

## Part Two

### Focus for 21st Century Liturgical Transformation

In the immediate post-*Nostra Aetate* years, liturgical attention focused mainly on much-needed problem solving, liturgical pruning and damage control – especially in relation

<sup>22</sup> Pope John Paul II, Letter: “Dominicae Cenae,” 13: AAS 72 (1980): 146; Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, “Vicesimus Quintus Annus,” *Origins* 19 (1989/90): 17ff.

to the problematic use of scriptural texts and preaching, rituals and prayers during the Lenten and Paschal seasons. These efforts need continued attention. However, if our newly-developing theological, spiritual and moral-ethical understandings – as informed by the theological dialogue as well as by the events of 21st century life – are not to remain mere intellectual abstractions or vague intuitions and aspirations, the Church needs to expand its liturgical vision and imagination. Hence, the latter part of this essay will begin to explore new liturgical possibilities in response to three specific challenges: 1. Lessons Christianity is learning from the *Shoah*; 2. A renewed appreciation of Jesus’ incarnation as *true man* within a specific people and culture; and 3. A call to exegetical responsibility in the Christian use of prophetic material from the Hebrew Scriptures.

#### 1. Lessons from the *Shoah*

In a June 9, 2005 address to Jewish delegates, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed the ongoing need to be attentive to the profound implications of the *Shoah*:

[R]emembrance of the past remains for both communities a moral imperative and a source of purification in our efforts to pray and work for reconciliation, justice, respect for human dignity and for that peace which is ultimately a gift from the Lord himself. Of its very nature this imperative must include a continued reflection on the profound historical, moral and theological questions presented by the experience of the *Shoah*.<sup>23</sup>

A brief exploration of three implications of the *Shoah* follows.

<sup>23</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, June 9, 2005, “Address to Delegates of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations.”



a. The Need for an Ethics of Biblical Interpretation

While still Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, in his 2001 Preface to the Pontifical Biblical Commission's *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, Pope Benedict highlighted the fact that "[I]n its work the Biblical Commission could not ignore the contemporary context, where the shock of the *Shoah* has put the whole question under a new light." Observing that a new respect needs to emerge, he drew attention to the study's declaration "that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scripture from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion" (§22). He went on to say that "[the study] adds that Christians can learn a great deal from a Jewish exegesis practiced for more than two thousand years," concluding that "this analysis will prove useful for...the interior formation of Christian consciousness."<sup>24</sup>

These words from the Church's newly-elected leader indicate that, in face of the *Shoah*, a retreat into abstract universalism – the caution signaled earlier in the words of David Power<sup>25</sup> – is not a liturgical option. The Pope's statement about "the interior formation of Christian consciousness" benefiting from Jewish exegesis calls for concretizing the lessons learned. The need for ongoing vigilance regarding supersessionism, anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism is a given in our preaching, prayer and use of scripture. But this affirmation of the continuing validity of Jewish interpretation calls the Church further with regard to its respect for and use of this primary interpretation.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Preface" to *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, Pontifical Biblical Commission, Feast of the Ascension, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> See footnote 5.

b. The Need for a More Comprehensive Understanding of Our Universe of Moral Obligation

Pope John Paul II's post-*Shoah* words and actions, which depicted anti-Semitism as a violation of human dignity and a person's inalienable human rights, were frequently universalized and extended to all human beings. His constant message that each human being possesses an infinite dignity that commands unconditional respect is considered by many a prime characteristic of his papacy. It extends the Christian's universe of moral obligation beyond national boundaries, beyond race, and beyond religion. That this message was universally understood and taken to heart was amply proven by the manner in which the "people of the world" were present and paid tribute to Karol Wojtyła at the time of his death.

Ongoing post-Holocaust study and reflection on the divine-human relationship is extending this universe of moral obligation by insisting that no aspect of creation lies outside its parameters. An increasing number of systematic and moral theologians are expressing convictions about a self-limiting, vulnerable God becoming more dependent on a human community entrusted with co-creational responsibility and power. They find solid ground in Church statements such as Pope John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* and numerous national episcopal social documents that highlight this co-creatorship theme. John Pawlikowski, the Holocaust scholar and moral theologian who has addressed this at greatest length, speaks of a compelling rather than a commanding God who, in the process of creational salvation, is utterly dependent upon the human community. Pawlikowski holds that "[t]he Holocaust and...succeeding genocides have taught us that God will not, perhaps even cannot, effect the full redemption of that part of divine power he has graciously shared with humankind unless human beings assume their appointed role of co-creators."

However, it is imperative that the strength of this conviction be heard against the backdrop of his equally strong caution that unless this understanding of co-creatorship is accompanied by a heightened sense of dependence and humility, “the potential for goodness and love inherent in the new consciousness will become a reality that is one long nightmare of hate and destruction.”<sup>26</sup> Christian-Jewish study and dialogue on the themes of messiah and messianic era also contribute to this increasing emphasis on the responsibility of co-creatorship. Works such as Jonathan Sacks’ recent publication on ethics of responsibility extend to all of humanity the *tikkun olam* obligation to heal the world’s fractures and the messianist obligation to help realize the prophetic ideal of justice and peace.<sup>27</sup>

c. The Need for a Deeper Understanding of the Power of Symbolism and its Effective Use in Public Ritual

Any student of the Third Reich is aware of the important role symbolism and public ritual played in the implementation of the Nazi systematic plan of action. Their public liturgies were an essential part of the Nazi effort to forge social cohesion, determine public values, and ensure impassioned commitment and support. An alienated and frustrated Weimar Germany was effectively revitalized, not merely by rational ideologies, but by the presentation of new symbols capable of releasing the vitalistic energies of the people – albeit in a destructive rather than a constructive moral manner.

<sup>26</sup> See Pawlikowski, “Liturgy and the Holocaust,” 171-175.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005). See also my review essay, “Nostra Aetate, §4, the Rabbis, and the Messianic Age” in this volume.

People and societies need symbols and rituals. Drawing attention to Western society’s gradual separation of vitalistic creativity from religion, Pawlikowski addresses the danger of this growing one-dimensionality. He stresses the urgent need for a new moral sensitivity engendered by a symbolic encounter with a loving God. He insists that the “ritual containment” or inherent power of worship can set out a new overarching moral framework for a society which presently lacks the symbolic bonding needed to effectively realize its co-creational responsibilities. The potent religious symbolism currently being generated by religious fanaticism has created an even more urgent need for new symbols of transcendence to release the vitalistic energy of communities seeking effective moral commitment.<sup>28</sup>

The *Shoah* confronts us with new inscrutable questions of theodicy and the mystery of human suffering. The observations of theologians and spiritual masters on these immense questions vary. However, there is considerable consensus about the need to provide sacred rituals which release the ability to mourn, to express grief, and to lament. To simply console or silence with conceptual solutions is a dangerous option. Referring to the need for healing and controlling emotions in times of mass human destruction, Pawlikowski observes: “Uncontrolled vitalistic energies in such settings can easily lead to further death and destruction through retaliation. Yet, the pain of the experience must be released. Lament can play a crucial role in releasing, yet containing, such energies.”<sup>29</sup> Johann Baptist Metz insists that our suffering and the suffering of others should turn us toward God, crying out, complaining, calling God to account,

<sup>28</sup> See John T. Pawlikowski, “Liturgy and the Holocaust: How Do We Worship in an Age of Genocide?” in *Christian Responses to the Holocaust: Moral and Ethical Issues*, ed. Donald J. Dietrich (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 168-176.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

and expecting a response. It is the spirituality of suffering unto God – “which exposes us to the full force of suffering in history but does so in the light of the good news of a God who has promised to hear and respond compassionately to the cries of those who suffer – that bursts our theological systems and ignites our questions anew, but now directed most primordially toward God, in the language of prayer.” This “poverty of spirit,” especially when effectively ritualized within the believing community, empowers the suffering worshipper with apocalyptic hope and expectation.<sup>30</sup>

In the shadow of the history of Jewish suffering it is imperative that inappropriate liturgical martial imagery and triumphalistic expressions of power about Jesus the Christ be carefully critiqued. This observation applies also to ecclesial imagery and symbolism. Post-Holocaust christological reflection, informed by the perception of a God participating in human suffering and depending on the human community for co-creation, perceives vulnerability as a mark of “godliness.” This modified perception of an omnipotent God applies also to God incarnate. In the shadow of the Holocaust, Jesus the Christ is more appropriately perceived through the imagery of vulnerability and compassion, than through symbols of triumph and power.<sup>31</sup> His life and teaching, as reflected in the Gospels, affirm this modified depiction. Peter C. Phan, in “Jesus as the Universal Savior,” elaborating on the fact that words are unavoidably embedded in socio-political and cultural contexts, also questions the appropriateness of the continued use of words such as “unique,” “absolute,” and “universal” in relation to Jesus as savior. Emphasizing today’s need for a Christian message of humble service and compassionate love, he cautions about the Church’s

<sup>30</sup> See Ashley, *Interruptions*, 126-128.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

continued use of words about Christ which connote to others “arrogance, exclusiveness, and self-absorption.”<sup>32</sup>

## 2. Incarnation: Jesus as *True Man*

The doctrine of the Incarnation is one of Christianity’s central foundational beliefs. Downplaying this aspect of the Christian tradition – an extension of the Jewish belief that the God of creation is personally involved in human history – would destroy what has constituted for centuries the very heart of Christianity. From its earliest beginnings, one of Christianity’s major challenges was its attempt to harmonize a diversity of christological formulations. The basic issue regarding the transcendent immanent God being fully God and fully human attained its classical expression, after five centuries of passionate debate, at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE: “Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, true God and *true man*.”<sup>33</sup> This doctrine asserts the real humanity of Jesus: that as *true man* he was a particular man, part of a particular people, at a particular time and place. God incarnated, not simply *in* a human being, but truly as man.

However, as the historical development of Christian Creeds illustrates, an early de-Judaization of the dogmatic content of Christian belief, keeping pace with an increasingly supersessionist Christian self-definition, progressively distanced Jesus from his real humanity within a specific

<sup>32</sup> See Peter C. Phan, “Jesus as the Universal Savior,” in *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity’s Sacred Obligation*, ed. Mary C. Boys (New York/Toronto/Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 134.

<sup>33</sup> Emphasis added.

people, history and culture.<sup>34</sup> Coupled with the fact that Greek philosophy was the privileged form of reflection on Incarnation, ahistorical categories and an ontological focus on divine and human natures shifted away from the concrete person, Jesus of Nazareth, to an impersonal or pre-personal Jesus whose ground of existence was not in himself as man, but in the Logos. The result has been a Christology tinged with docetism, with Jesus' divinity getting in the way of his being recognized as thoroughly human. Perceptions of Jesus' manhood – perhaps predominantly though not exclusively on the popular level – have mainly been as an outward form only or as a superhuman being incarnated in generic human nature. To the question: “Was Jesus of Nazareth really human (i.e., *true man*)?” the typical Christian response continues to be prefaced with a hesitant “Yes, but...” Time-honored interpretations of Chalcedon's teaching put a dimmer on Jesus' real humanity, removing him from his people, culture and time.

In a similar manner Mary the mother of Jesus – her dignity enhanced by being proclaimed Mother of God – is exalted as *virgin* mother according to the flesh. Following Nicea she is honored in terms primarily related to divinity, messianism and salvation. After Chalcedon, the woman who as mother of *true man* must surely be *true woman*, is presented within a robust theology through increasingly refined language. Abstract nouns and metaphors define the nature of her being as light, tabernacle, temple, etc., and the real humanity of Mary, like the real humanity of Jesus, is increasingly alienated from her people, time and culture.

With *Nostra Aetate*, §4 – and Vatican documents that have further developed its teaching – the Church has begun to reinsert Jesus into his historical, social and cultural

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Kendall R. Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 32-33, 49-52.

context. Addressing the Jewish roots of Christianity, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews stated in 1985: “Jesus was and always remained a Jew...Jesus is fully a man of his time, and of his environment – the Jewish Palestinian one of the first century, the anxieties and hopes of which he shared. This cannot but underline...the reality of the incarnation....”<sup>35</sup> At a 1997 Vatican symposium, while reaffirming that the Jewish people “are the people of the Covenant,” Pope John Paul II declared:

The Scriptures cannot be separated from the people and its history...That is why those who regard the fact that Jesus was a Jew and that his milieu was the Jewish world as mere cultural accidents, for which one could substitute another religious tradition from which the Lord's person could be separated without losing its identity, not only ignore the meaning of salvation history, but more *radically challenge the very truth of the Incarnation* and make a genuine concept of inculturation impossible.<sup>36</sup>

After 1500 years the *true man* of Chalcedon is being allowed to emerge in this *anamnesis* of the Church which recalls Jesus as *true man* within his people, time and culture. At the same time the Church is understanding and valuing, as an integral part of its history and identity, Abraham, Moses and the Prophets and the spiritual patrimony it shares with the people and faith of Judaism. This was most recently reaffirmed by the newly-elected Pope Benedict XVI:

<sup>35</sup> *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*, III, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address to a Vatican symposium on The Roots of Anti-Judaism in the Christian Milieu, October 31, 1997. (Emphasis has been added.)

The Council confirmed the Church's conviction that, in the mystery of the divine election, the beginnings of her faith are already found in Abraham, Moses and the Prophets... At the very beginning of my Pontificate, I wish to assure you that the Church remains firmly committed, in her catechesis and in every aspect of her life, to implementing this decisive teaching... I am convinced that the "spiritual patrimony" treasured by Christians and Jews is itself the source of wisdom and inspiration capable of guiding us toward 'a future of hope' in accordance with the divine plan (cf. Jer 29:11).<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Prophets and Prophecy: Ethically Responsible Scriptural Exegesis

Unlike the Jewish canon in which the prophetic writings rank second to the centrality of the Torah, the Christian canon has since its beginning attributed greater importance to the prophetic texts. The current Sunday lectionary illustrates this hermeneutical perspective with its very disproportionate use of prophetic passages in comparison to its use of other Hebrew Scripture texts.<sup>38</sup> As it draws attention to this distinction between the Jewish and Christian ranking of the prophetic writings, the 2001 Pontifical Biblical Commission document, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, makes four major observations that call for serious consideration when decisions are made regarding the Church's liturgical use of Scripture. Given the importance of these observations, along with the fact that present-day Christian liturgical practice frequently reflects a lack of awareness of or inattentiveness

<sup>37</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Delegates of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, June 9, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> The study of the Sunday Lectionary by Michael Peppard in "Do We Share a Book? The Sunday Lectionary and Jewish-Christian Relations" in this volume clearly bears out this observation.

to the principles and cautions expressed, I choose to quote them in detail:

- a. regarding the Christian conviction that the fulfillment of the eschatological prophetic promises has already begun in Jesus the Christ:

What distinguishes early Christianity...is the conviction that the eschatological prophetic promises are no longer considered simply as an object of future hope, since their fulfillment had already begun in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. It is about him that the Jewish Scriptures speak, in their whole extension, and it is in light of him that they are to be fully comprehended (§ 11).

- b. regarding the validity and primacy of the Jewish reading of the Bible:

[Some New Testament texts: e.g., Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 10:6; Heb 9:24; 1 Pt 3:21] speak of typology and of reading in the light of the Spirit (2 Co 3:14-17). These suggest a twofold manner of reading, in its original meaning at the time of writing, and a subsequent interpretation in the light of Christ (§ 19)... Although the Christian reader is aware that the internal dynamism of the Old Testament finds its goal in Jesus, this is a retrospective perception whose point of departure is not in the text as such, but in the event of the New Testament proclaimed by the apostolic preaching. It cannot be said, therefore, that Jews do not see what has been proclaimed in the text, but that the Christian, in the light of Christ and in the Spirit, discovers in the text an additional meaning that was hidden there (§ 21)... Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading

which developed in parallel fashion. Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible (§ 22)... [Christian efforts to address problematic allegorical and typological interpretations of the Old Testament] gave rise in contemporary theology, without as yet any consensus, to different ways of reestablishing a Christian interpretation of the Old Testament that would avoid arbitrariness and respect the original meaning... (§ 20).

- c. regarding the notion that Old Testament prophecies are foretelling future events relating to Jesus:

It would be wrong to consider the prophecies of the Old Testament as some kind of photographic anticipations of future events. All the texts, including those which later were read as messianic prophecies already had an immediate import and meaning for their contemporaries before attaining a fuller meaning for future hearers.... The original task of the prophet was to help his contemporaries understand the events and the times they lived in from God's viewpoint. Accordingly, excessive insistence, characteristic of a certain apologetic, on the probative value attributed to the fulfillment of prophecy must be discarded. This insistence has contributed to harsh judgments by Christians of Jews and their reading of the Old Testament: the more reference to Christ is found in Old Testament texts, the more the incredulity of the Jews is considered inexcusable and obstinate (§ 21).

- d. regarding Jewish messianic expectation:

What has already been accomplished in Christ must yet be accomplished in us and in the world. The definitive fulfillment will be at the end with the resurrection of the

dead, a new heaven and a new earth. Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain. It can become for us Christians a powerful stimulant to keep alive the eschatological dimension of our faith. Like the Jews, we too live in expectation. The difference is that for us the One who is to come will have the traits of the Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us (§ 21).

Though the notion of messianic prophecy is acknowledged as historically and theologically complex and ambiguous, it continues to be indiscriminately supported and used in a dubious manner even by clergy and liturgists committed to the new teachings developing from *Nostra Aetate*, §4. This is particularly apparent during the Advent season when the choice of lectionary readings, their interpretation in homilies and homiletic guides, the content of euchological prayers,<sup>39</sup> and the lyrics of hymns combine to present two critically problematic claims: that the prophets pointed out Jewish failure as the people of God, and that they foretold the coming of Jesus as Messiah in response to this failure. In the process the prophets are inadvertently transmuted into proto-Christians. Patricia K. Tull, in "Isaiah 'Twas Foretold It': Helping the Church Interpret the Prophets," outlines how the B cycle choice of lectionary readings for the four Sundays immediately before Christmas illustrates this pattern, which is both unbiblical and unfortunate for the Jewish-Christian relationship. The radical cut and paste approach to the Isaiah passages, the lack of ordering by canonical or historical sequence, the arbitrary juxtaposition of genres and historical periods, the manner of pairing the prophetic passages with New Testament texts all

<sup>39</sup> Euchology is the term frequently used to refer to the liturgical prayers led or recited by the presider.

combine to present a sinful and depressed Israel repentantly wishing and waiting for Jesus to come and save it.<sup>40</sup>

Making ethical and principled liturgical decisions in its use of the texts it shares with Jews and Judaism demands a three-fold attentiveness on the part of the Church: 1. to the meaning of the text in the light of Christ; 2. to the text's meaning and message in its historical context; and 3. to the use and meaning of the text for Jews and living Judaism today. In this effort the observations of Daniel Patte in *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation* can serve as a guide.<sup>41</sup> Patte respects the polysemic, multi-dimensional nature of the Scriptural text, the observation that the reinterpetive impulse is inherent in the prophetic books themselves, and the fact that the inexhaustible potential of Scripture has enabled it to adapt and support simultaneous diverse interpretations for successive generations. He warns about and rejects the kind of dogmatic exclusivity which absolutizes the claims of any one interpretation. He urges respect for multiplicity in interpretation, while remaining mindful of both the richness and the dangers of reinterpetation. Commenting on Patte's call for interpretive tolerance, Tull further testifies to the importance of this inclusive approach and notes its reciprocal demands:

[A]ttention to the originating setting enables readers to approximate more closely the impact of a text on its first audience, to understand better the issues the text was made to address, and to avoid anachronisms. Yet the insistence that the text be read *only* in terms of its original context easily falls prey to...the assumption that there is

<sup>40</sup> Patricia K. Tull, "Isaiah 'Twas Foretold It': Helping the church Interpret the Prophets" in ed. Tod Linefelt, *Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust* (New York: New University Press, 2000), 195-199.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: A Reevaluation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

only one "best" interpretation of a biblical text, that the validity of one reading strategy necessarily cancels out the validity of all others. In that sense, those who discredit Jewish interpretation because it does not see Jesus in the Hebrew Scriptures, and those who discredit Christological interpretation because it does, have more in common with one another than one might at first think, since both fail to take seriously, in their own terms, competing interpretations.<sup>42</sup>

### Exploring New Liturgical Possibilities

These challenges and possibilities facing the Church forty years after the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* present new possibilities for its liturgical life – particularly in its efforts to probe the depths of its *mystery* in relation to the "good olive tree" of Biblical Judaism and its "sibling branch." The following outline of questions and suggestions is a beginning effort to stimulate conversations regarding possible creative responses to the liturgical challenges outlined above. It is proposed, not simply for the sake of novelty via shallow or superficial innovations, but in an attempt to be faithful to the Church's tradition which calls, particularly during dense moments of history, for the revitalization of its liturgy through the two-pronged process of *conserving memory* and *nurturing new vision*. This limited effort focuses primarily on considerations about the Church's liturgical cycle and the Advent-Christmas period within that cycle.

#### 1. Viewing the Liturgical Year

Throughout its history the Church's annual liturgical cycle has never been static or set in stone. Its historical evolution has expressed the progressive development of its understanding of the mystery of Christ – the central event

<sup>42</sup> Tull, "Isaiah 'Twas Foretold It,'" 204.

represented in the Church's celebration of seasons and feasts. The liturgical year is a living spiral progression which, unlike a static repetitive cycle, propels the Church towards the future in expectation of the fullness of the Kingdom of God. This *parousia*, or awaiting and expectation of newness, was already at the heart of the early Christians' cry of *marana tha*, Come Lord Jesus. In view of the challenges of the 21st century, an attentive and expectant Church might ask itself the following questions regarding its feasts and liturgical seasons.

- a. Concerning Triumphalism, Co-creation, Theodicy and Suffering
  - Do any of the Church's current feasts honoring Christ and/or the Trinity<sup>43</sup> still include expressions of triumphalism and power, or inappropriate martial imagery which might inspire or condone violence?
  - As it marks these feasts, what is the nature of the artwork and the lyrics of hymns used in its liturgical and paraliturgical expressions?
  - Does the Church perhaps need to reconsider the appropriateness of celebrating Christ as *King* as the

<sup>43</sup> According to liturgical studies such as *The Church at Prayer*, edited by Aimé Georges Martimort (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), the seven feasts of Our Lord currently observed in Ordinary Time were instituted at various points in history – from the feast of the Triumph of the Cross, which originated in the 4th or 5th century, to the feast of Christ the King, which was established in 1925 by Pope Pius XI as a vehicle for his spiritual teaching in the Encyclical *Quas Primas*. The feast of the Trinity evolved from the 7th through the 12th centuries in response to efforts to expound Trinitarian theology. The feasts of Corpus Christi (1247) and the Sacred Heart (second half of the 17th century) were established in response to veneration generated by the visions of two nuns, Juliana of Mont-Cornillon and Margaret Mary Alacoque. See pp. 97-107 in Martimort.

cyclical spiral of the Church year prepares to lead its people into a new Advent season? In view of having faithfully come to the end of one cycle and in anticipation of the newness the spiral promises, would a celebration of the *Faithful God of the Covenant* perhaps be more consistent with the Church's new emphasis on "the Covenant never revoked"?

- Or, at the end of the liturgical year, in place of a primary focus on the judgment of humanity by God at the end of time, might the Church's liturgy help humanity grasp the magnitude of the consequences of its call to co-creatorship – i.e., that it has the capacity to either responsibly embrace and nurture creation, or to totally destroy creation and annihilate humanity itself? Could an annual feast focusing on Creator and Creation incorporate into its ritual the three-fold call: to value all of creation as gift entrusted to our use and care; to claim our power as co-creator and to use it responsibly; and, to humbly acknowledge our human dependence upon God? Perhaps, following a century of genocides, a focus on *Wisdom Active in Creation* could help inspire appropriate liturgical expressions in face of this awesome capacity and responsibility.
- How and at what points in the liturgical cycle might we appropriately present a self-limiting God, or a God whose Incarnation speaks of vulnerability and compassion?
- How adequately do the Church's feasts (and seasons) respond to today's complex questions of theodicy and the mystery of (mass) human suffering? Can we perhaps find new depictions of God and/or



Jesus that would help us probe this mystery? These new depictions could serve as a basis for liturgical rituals to be used at times of serious loss and intense suffering in a manner which would allow overt expressions of sorrow, lamentation and grief. This would demand the creation of appropriate symbols, rituals and prayers, and would also encourage the Church to recover strands from its biblical tradition which it has either ignored or whose full message and range of emotion have been effectively contained within “safe” parameters. Books such as *Lamentation and Job*, and select passages from the prophets and the psalms come to mind.

- How appropriate are our expressions and depictions of the suffering of Jesus in his passion? Do they convey the self-limitation and vulnerability of a suffering God, or do they at times come uncomfortably close to a Gibsonesque expression of a super-man, able to bear unrealistic torture and loss of blood, or a macho depiction of the warrior Jesus portrayed in today’s increasingly popular apocalyptic novels?<sup>44</sup>

Are we prepared to critique our feasts in this manner, and perhaps modify their symbolism or create new more appropriate expressions? What criteria does the Church need to establish to determine the intelligibility, both within its tradition and within the reality of the 21st century world, of such new or modified liturgical expressions?

<sup>44</sup> This recent trend is attested to by such news columns as: David D. Kirkpatrick, “The Return of the Warrior Jesus” in *New York Times*, April 4, 2004; Nicholas D. Kristof, “Jesus and Jihad” in *New York Times*, July 17, 2004.

#### b. Concerning Jesus’ Jewish Humanity

- In view of the Church’s post-Vatican II acknowledgment of Jesus as *true man*: i.e., that he “was and always remained a Jew...fully a man of his time, and of his environment – the Jewish Palestinian one of the first century, the anxieties and hopes of which he shared;”<sup>45</sup> and in view of its acknowledgement and new appreciation of the spiritual patrimony it shares with the people and faith of Judaism, is the Church prepared to assess how effectively its liturgical cycle reflects the Jewishness of Jesus and this shared patrimony?
- The heritage we share – through Jesus – with Jews and Judaism, includes the heritage of *holiness*. Might we embrace the ancestors of Jesus, who are also our ancestors, by including them among the *holy ones* who in the context of our liturgical calendar witness to the overarching *mystery* of Jesus? Finding the way to do this with integrity and respect for the Jewish concept and expression of holiness would help restore continuity with a liturgical practice that has been part of the Church for centuries. In his apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* Pope John Paul II expressed his desire that the new *Roman Martyrology*, as revised and updated by Vatican Council II, be published as part of the Great Jubilee of 2000.<sup>46</sup> It is still a little known fact that the new *Roman Martyrology* contains many names – of patriarchs, prophets and kings – familiar to us from the Scriptures we share with Judaism. Murray Watson, a Canadian

<sup>45</sup> *Notes*, III, 12.

<sup>46</sup> It would appear that this was not unrelated to his year 2000 pilgrimage during which he visited, to the extent that he was able, the holy places of Jesus’ and our ancestors.

priest and doctoral candidate in Scripture Studies, has recently brought this to the attention of the Canadian Church in his essay, "Figures from the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Roman Martyrology." He notes that the *Roman Martyrology* is the descendent of many local martyrologies dating back to the first centuries of Christianity. The Byzantine and Coptic Martyrologies have also long numbered the great figures of the Hebrew Scriptures among the men and women of exemplary holiness now believed to be with God. Commenting on the 2001 publication of the new Roman Martyrology, Watson says:

Celebrating the lives and deeds of our Jewish ancestors in faith is no longer a "fringe" concept, reserved for a few groups involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue – it is shown to be eminently orthodox and mainstream. It is in keeping with a very ancient instinct in Christianity, which recognizes that Christianity cannot be artificially severed from Judaism, but is organically and necessarily joined to the faith of our "elder brothers and sisters," during whose long history God consistently raised up many people of profound holiness. The example of their lives remains relevant, and their heavenly intercession remains tremendously valuable.<sup>47</sup>

It is, of course, imperative that our efforts to "embrace the ancestors" through our Liturgical Calendar be done in a manner which does not impose the Christian category of Sainthood on them, but which celebrates them precisely as holy women and men of Judaism who through their faithfulness testified

to the faithfulness, holiness and unity of the Creator. Aware of the need for appropriate eucharistical prayers to effectively celebrate the Jewish ancestors of our faith, Watson prepared and offered to the Canadian Church, for its consideration, the following draft of a preface which would acknowledge the Jewish holy figures:

Father, all powerful and ever-living God,  
 we do well always and everywhere to give you praise  
 and thanks.  
 In ancient times, you formed a Chosen People for  
 yourself,  
 to be the sign and instrument of your loving providence.  
 Through Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah,  
 Jacob and Rachel,  
 through all the prophets and holy ones of Israel,  
 You revealed your glory and justice,  
 and called all people to embrace your covenant of life.  
 As we honor ..... today,  
 we gratefully recall that fruitful olive tree  
 which in the fullness of time bore Jesus Christ our  
 Savior,  
 a child of Israel and the fulfillment of your promises.  
 We praise you, Lord, for these holy ancestors and their  
 witness of faith.  
 Together with those who longed for his coming and  
 heralded his presence<sup>48</sup>  
 We sing forever to your glory ...<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Murray Watson, "Figures from the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Roman Martyrology," *National Bulletin on Liturgy*, 35, No. 171, 225-231.

<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately this still reflects an expression of fulfillment tinged with supersessionism. My suggestion would be to simply replace "those who longed for his coming and heralded his presence" with "them".

- As we seek ways to celebrate, with integrity, our shared heritage by including the holy ones among our Jewish ancestors in our Liturgical Calendar, we are also confronted with the question of whether the Jewish identity of Jesus, Mary and Jesus' earliest followers is adequately and respectfully reflected through our Liturgical Calendar, whether that be through feast days such as Jesus' circumcision and his presentation in the Temple, or through a portion of or an entire liturgical season which is specifically attentive to this aspect of our heritage.

## 2. Attending to the Advent-Christmas Cycle

The Advent-Christmas cycle is a critical liturgical period for a Christianity intent on a serious reformation of its theological self-definition and its relationship with Jews and Judaism. The central theological themes of this cycle – Incarnation, eschatology, messiah, messianic era and messianic prophecy – are among the most prominent themes in the Christian-Jewish dialogue. They have both overtly and subtly played a dominant role in shaping the Christian supersessionist mindset.

The Church's post-Vatican II renewed emphasis on Jesus' incarnation as *true man* – i.e., as a Jewish man, at a specific time, within a specific people, environment and culture – has opened a new window on the Advent (and perhaps the immediate pre-Advent) season. This would appear to be an appropriate time to focus back on the heritage of Jesus (recalling that it is our heritage as well): his ancestry, the Judaism which shaped his life and teachings, the cultural and political context which impacted his personal

<sup>49</sup> Included in a January 19, 2004 letter from Murray Watson 2004 to Sr. Mary Jane Goulet, CSC, Episcopal Commission for Liturgy, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

destiny and the destiny of Judaism itself, including an increased diaspora and two new sibling branches emerging from the ruins of a destroyed temple.

### a. Concerning the Image of Darkness and Supersessionist Fulfillment

- Might the Church reconsider the nature of its Advent emphasis on *a people walking in darkness* in order to allow its liturgical expressions help us to understand what it meant that Jesus incarnated as a child of second-temple Israel, that he was a Jewish-Palestinian child of “the first century, the anxieties and hopes of which he shared?”<sup>50</sup> How might the Church more accurately and fittingly convey the “darkness” of that time and its effect on the patrimony of Jesus?
- Could the Church benefit from a brief liturgical period preceding Advent which would call it to focus on the holy time and patrimony it shares with Rabbinic Judaism? The annual liturgical cycles of both Judaism and Christianity enable their “faithful” to walk their *holy time* together. These annual cycles have the potential to help us more adequately affirm our belief that Jews and Christians live in the same *holy time* which begins with the “original blessing” in creation and ends in the fullness of God's reign. Christianity's pre-Advent season, falling between Rosh Hashanah and the beginning of Advent could conveniently lend itself to some shared *holy time* with our Jewish brothers and sisters.<sup>51</sup> If we were to begin our

<sup>50</sup> *Notes*, III, 12.

<sup>51</sup> A liturgical period such as this was first suggested by Dr. Peter A. Pettit, Director of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding, Muhlenberg College, at the 16th National Workshop on Jewish-Christian Relations, Houston, TX, October, 1999.

liturgical year (or preface its beginning) in this manner, would we not be acknowledging liturgically what we are trying to say theologically? If our pre-Advent catechesis, liturgical guidelines and homiletic notes challenged us to find ways to preach and teach about the meaning of this shared time, would this not profoundly instill the realization that this is the same *holy time* which Jesus himself walked – the *holy time* which creates our intrinsic bond with the people and faith of Judaism? This liturgical acknowledgment of a covenanting living Judaism, while underscoring our close relationship within the covenant, would also guard against a supersessionist tainting of our Advent message of fulfillment.

- Is the Church prepared to critique and modify as needed its beautiful and popular paraliturgical practices, which in many places and cultures have become integrated into its liturgical year and practice? These include the much-loved advent wreath practice (in which a lit candle is added on each of the four Advent Sundays culminating in the lighting of the Christ Candle), the colorful Jesse Tree (on which images of Hebrew Scripture personages prefiguring and preparing for God's ultimate manifestation in Jesus are progressively hung during the four Advent weeks), and the popular Advent windows which are used in a similar manner. Each practice can very readily, though not necessarily, convey the message that the light (of Jesus) replaced the darkness (of the Jews), and that the Jews served merely as a prefiguration and preparation for the new People of God. The lyrics of many traditional Advent hymns contribute to these familiar supersessionist Advent overtones and – given the appeal this season has for children – subtly and deeply begin to shape

understandings and attitudes at a very young, impressionable age. Is the Church prepared to critique and modify these practices and hymns, and in doing so effectively bring into the pew, home and school its new theological teachings?

b. Concerning the Hebrew Prophets

- The Advent use of the prophetic writings could provide the Church with an exceptional opportunity to begin putting this teaching into practice. This would imply a firm intent to avoid using the prophetic readings in a manner which presents the prophets as proto-Christians who excoriate the sinful Jews and foretell the coming of the light of Jesus to redeem them from their darkness. The Church's Advent Liturgies of the Word would be considerably enriched if the worshipping community would consistently hear – in tandem with the Christian concept of messianic prophecy which informs its theology of fulfillment – the original and current Jewish understanding of prophecy. Also a valid and prime Christian interpretation, this concept of prophecy focuses on the formation of a social conscience, sensitizing its hearers to the injustices and sufferings of the time, and calling them to responsible action. At times the Church could consider receiving this interpretation during its liturgies directly from a representative of the Jewish faith.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Post-Vatican II efforts by liturgists and scholars include commendable efforts to provide a variety of homiletic helps aimed at presenting a more accurate understanding of prophets and prophecy. Most draw on effective exegesis and also attempt to contextualize the prophetic messages historically. Unfortunately these publications, which mainly follow the selections and pattern imposed by the lectionary, provide too

- Expanding its understanding of prophecy in this manner would add a robust dimension to the Advent message. This is true particularly for the Advent eschatological theme which calls the Church to anticipate and prepare for the Age to Come. This anticipation of the fullness of the Kingdom demands active preparation for it – a preparation which the prophetic message can effectively inspire and direct. The prophets' critiques of the practices, values and attitudes of their time are still valid today and they can continue to direct and energize the ecclesial community in its efforts to be a responsible co-creator of a just and peaceful world. The recent statement by the Pontifical Biblical Commission that the "Jewish messianic expectation...can become for us Christians a powerful stimulant to keep alive the eschatological dimension of our faith,"<sup>53</sup> can inspire the Church to consider Advent as an opportune time to join hands with members of our sibling Jewish faith who are waiting, praying and working with similar hopes and expectations. It is surely not mere coincidence that, beginning with the message of *Nostra Aetate*, §4, both Christian and Jewish efforts toward a reconciled and transformed relationship inevitably end up voicing the hope that we actively join in this waiting and that we work together for *tikkun olam* (to heal/mend the world).<sup>54</sup>
- In such joint Christian-Jewish Advent efforts and reflections the Church could also benefit from work currently being done by Jewish scholars on the theme of *tikkun olam*,, such as Jonathan Sacks' *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility*. Sacks speaks of God inviting human beings to become his partners in the work of redemption by helping to build a just society – "a human world, without hubris (the attempt to be more than human) or nemesis (a descent into the less-than-human)." Distinguishing between *prophetic peace of religious unity* (which will be achieved in the Age to Come) and *rabbinic peace of religious diversity*, he introduces the concept of *darkhei shalom*, "the ways of peace." An active mandate rooted in "the threads of our common humanity" and in our present religiously and culturally pluralist reality, it is a call to together transcend injustice and violence in view of a here-and-now civic peace that goes beyond mere tolerance. The message of *darkhei shalom* can help concretize the prophetic message in the present "crooked timber of humanity" while living in hopeful anticipation of the Messianic Age.<sup>55</sup> Dare we begin to imagine how such a concrete grounding of the Church's Advent expectation and hope could help restore the full meaning of Incarnation and help rescue the annual celebration of its mystery from the secular and materialistic captivity in which it is increasingly held captive?
- Such an active joint engagement with the prophetic message during Advent could also provide the opportunity to engage in dialogue regarding the understanding and experience of *sacrament*. While refraining from imposing the Christian concept of

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fragmented and incomplete an overview of prophetic history and of the theology of prophetic literature to be of sufficient help in this regard.

<sup>53</sup> Cited above in §3, "Prophets and Prophecy: Ethically Responsible Scriptural Exegesis."

<sup>54</sup> For examples of a series of statements which bear out this observation see my Review Essay, "*Nostra Aetate*, §4, the Rabbis, and the Messianic Age" in this volume.

<sup>55</sup> Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, 17-29, 71-83, 97-112.

sacrament on Jewish experience and understanding, joint reflection on the experience of two peoples – reconciled after centuries of intense alienation and animosity – working together in partnership to help bring healing and reconciliation to the world, can help break open the “sacramental” sense of an incarnate symbol which has the potential of effecting what it signifies. In this context a comparative theological conversation could engage the Christian incarnational and transformative understandings of sacrament with the Jewish understanding of a God acting within and through a history transformed through *tikkun olam* and *darkhei shalom*. The Church’s sacramental theology could only be enriched through such an engagement with its sibling branch rooted in the same biblical tradition of “that good olive tree.”

## Conclusion

A creative and courageous liturgical imagination faithful to our rich liturgical heritage is needed to help recast Christianity’s foundational story as it is informed by the Church’s post-Vatican II theological understandings. In this effort the 21st century Church has the advantage of having learned from the liturgical renewal that rapidly sprang to life immediately after the last Council. This precipitous response by a Church, which had been trapped for too long in a concept of liturgy as a static set of detailed rules applied to a universal Church,<sup>56</sup> frequently lacked the guidance needed

<sup>56</sup> This is not to deny the forward thrust contained in Pius XII’s liturgical encyclical *Mediator Dei* (November 20, 1947), and the universal efforts of the more than century-long modern liturgical movement which significantly contributed to shaping the schema for the liturgy presented to the Vatican II Council Fathers. In spite of also benefiting from the biblical movement, which helped provide depth and authenticity, the Church’s pre-Vatican II liturgy still retained much of the circumscribed rubrical mentality stemming back to the 16th century. See, for example:

to help balance the claims of received tradition with the creativity inherent in a believing and worshipping Church. Reaction to what was perceived as a “cult of spontaneity” resulted in experts writing books and prescribing rituals to serve as starting points for liturgical change. The 21st century Church has now had the opportunity to step back and reaffirm the need to have descriptions and codifications of worship celebrations grow out of the practice of believing communities, while faithfully drawing on the wealth of memory preserved in the received tradition. Such attention to communal *kairos*<sup>57</sup> moments of grace generates liturgies which both faithfully convey that which is remembered and effectively express that which needs to be new. It distinguishes between what is merely an ideology of creativity, mirroring a consumer culture’s taste for the novel, and what is a mature social process of change through which individual creative acts are responsibly integrated into the public tradition as expressions of worship and celebrations of the revealing and saving actions of God.<sup>58</sup>

To symbolically ritualize a *mystery* which transcends our ability to fully comprehend yet invites our sustained reflection on its profound depth calls for engaging the broad spectrum of gifts with which a faith community is blessed. Renewal efforts can benefit from the wisdom expressed by such voices as those of John Henry Newman and Pope John Paul

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R. Kevin Seasoltz, *New Liturgy, New Laws* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1980), 6-16.

<sup>57</sup> *Kairos* is an ancient Greek word for a time of grace or salvation, a right or opportune moment. In the New Testament it refers to ‘the appointed time’ in the purpose of God, and in theology it implies the soteriological dimension of time in which Christians experience the presence and saving power of Christ.

<sup>58</sup> See Joseph Gelineau, “Tradition – Invention – Culture”, 10-18, and Mary Collins, “Obstacles to Liturgical Creativity”, 19-26, in eds. Mary Collins and David Power, *Concilium – Liturgy: A Creative Tradition* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd; New York: the Seabury Press, 1983).

II. Both had an innate sense of the role artists play in the interpretation and expression of *mystery*. Newman, insisting that “the eye of the soul [must] be formed in us,” was aware that before faith is credible to reason, it must be credible to the imagination. His many sermons and writings emphasized that faith begins, not in the work and the concept, but in the image and the symbol.<sup>59</sup> More than a century later, Pope John Paul II in his 1999 “Letter to Artists” spoke of the artistic vocation as a “divine spark” not to be wasted but to be developed and “put...at the service of their neighbor and humanity as a whole.” His words evoke the Church’s tradition of *sensus fidelium* as he speaks of the contribution artistic service makes to the renewal of a people:

There is therefore an ethic, even a “spirituality” of artistic service, which contributes in its way to the life and renewal of a people...This prime epiphany of “God who is Mystery” is both an encouragement and a challenge to Christians, also at the level of artistic creativity. From it has come a flowering of beauty which has drawn its sap precisely from the mystery of the Incarnation...Every genuine artistic intuition goes beyond what the senses perceive and, reaching beneath reality’s surface, strives to interpret its hidden mystery. The intuition itself springs from the depths of the human soul, where the desire to give meaning to one’s own life is joined by the fleeting vision of beauty and of the mysterious unity of things...Every genuine art form in its own way is a path to the inmost reality of man and of the world. It is therefore a wholly valid approach to the realm of faith, which gives human experience its ultimate meaning.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> See especially Newman’s various essays on the idea of the university.

<sup>60</sup> Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists, Easter Sunday, April 4, 1999, §3,4,5,6.

The Church’s effort to creatively transform and renew its liturgical expressions calls for a concerted effort to incorporate in its rituals and symbols the intuitive expressions of its artists.

Post-Vatican II developments in the Church’s theology and praxis, along with the complex challenges inherent in global society today, also call for earnest attention to the total *sensus fidelium* – the sense of the total body of the faithful, which is seeking more adequate responses to the cognitive dissonances generated by the realities of the present time. New questions and understandings arising from a fundamental level are disrupting previous states of cognitive equilibrium and are seeking to be expressed through new and more adequate responses to the world. History has shown that the Church’s *ortho-praxis* often precedes its *ortho-doxy* – that the body of the faithful often finds itself *acting truly* long before it knows how to formulate *how* or *why* it is *acting truly*. This intuitive pre-formulated insight into the mysteries of God and of life finds its most effective means of expression through our liturgical symbols and rituals. It is therefore important that this voice of the faithful is provided with liturgical opportunities to focus and to speak. This recalls Cardinal Walter Kasper’s observations about Pope John XXIII at Vatican Council II: “[H]e had an instinctive sense for what was in ferment and in a state of flux in the Church, and he had the courage to officially assist these concerns to achieve a breakthrough.”<sup>61</sup> A like instinct and courage is required in the Church today to assist the voice of its *sensus fidelium* to help break through the present ferment and state of flux and help carry our rich liturgical tradition into the future with authenticity and integrity. This will ensure fidelity as well to the goal so explicitly stated in the Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy:

<sup>61</sup> Kasper, “The Need for Theological Discussion,” 2005.

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1 Pet 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.<sup>62</sup>

This limited effort to help generate new conversations has been an exercise of hope for the 21st century Church in its need for living liturgical expressions charged with the significance of Christ – liturgies which also provide a fuller revelation and realization of the *mystery* of the Church’s relationship with “that good olive tree.” The hope is that the church during this complex and challenging time will not be *inhibited by fear of error* which resorts to rigid authoritative planning and a premature setting of limits, but that it will seek to be *creatively energized by the grace of truth* gestating in the present historical moment waiting to be brought to communal liturgical expression.

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<sup>62</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1964), §14.