

Ecumenism and the Study of Liturgy: What Shall We Do Now?

Maxwell E. Johnson

Like all reputable journals in the field of liturgical study, *Liturgical Ministry* has had from its inception a decidedly ecumenical orientation, authorship, and audience. This may be seen most easily in the fact that the entire Summer 2010 issue was about this relationship precisely,¹ as well as the fact that over the past nineteen years several articles have appeared which have been explicitly ecumenical in nature or touched upon ecumenical liturgical matters. These articles, together with book reviews, include but are not limited to the following (listed in alphabetical order by author):

Barth, Samuel. "Symbols in Jewish Worship: Continuity and Change in a Self-Conscious Era." *Liturgical Ministry* 2 (1993): 138-48.

Bronstein, Lester. "Theology and Ritual of Jewish Marriage Rites." *Liturgical Ministry* 5 (1996): 37-41.

Butler, David. "Mary in 'Re-Reformed' Tradition." *Liturgical Ministry* 6 (1997): 31-36.

Del Colle, Ralph. "Ecumenical Dialogues: State of the Question." *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (2010): 105-14.

Duba, Arlo D. "Liturgy of the Hours : The Perspective of the Reformed Tradition." *Liturgical Ministry* 2 (1993): 89-97.

Fink, Peter E. "Eucharist as a Call to Unity." *Liturgical Ministry* 17 (2008): 105-13.

Flanagan, Brian P. "A Cry to the Spirit that Unity May Come': Liturgy, Ecumenism, and the Theology of Jean-Marie Tallard, OP." *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (2010): 115-22.

Galadza, Peter. "Marriage Rites in the Byzantine Tradition." *Liturgical Ministry* 5 (1996): 27-33.

Johnson, Maxwell E. "Tempus per annum: Celebrating the Mystery of Christ in All Its Fullness." *Liturgical Ministry* 17 (2008): 153-63.

Leaver, Robin A. "Hymnody in Reformation Churches: An Overview of the Primary Historical Contours." *Liturgical Ministry* 4 (1995): 152-64.

Maxwell E. Johnson is professor of liturgy in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame and an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He has written widely in the area of early Christian Liturgy and on ecumenical-liturgical topics.

- Moore-Keish, Martha L. "The Grace and Ambiguity of Worship: What Can Catholics Learn from Protestant Liturgy?" *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (2010): 123-27.
- Nitschke, Beverley A. "Eucharist: Forgiveness of Sins or Reconciliation?" *Liturgical Ministry* 1 (1992): 85-92.
- Pecklers, Keith F. "Is Liturgy Truly Being Prophetic?" *Liturgical Ministry* 17 (2008): 14-18.
- Petras, David M. "Eschatology and the Byzantine Liturgy." *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (2010): 29-35.
- Petras, David M. "Mary in Eastern Liturgical Tradition." *Liturgical Ministry* 6 (1997): 11-20.
- Power, David Noel. "Eucharistic Celebration: Action, Word, Sight." *Liturgical Ministry* 1 (1992): 78-84.
- Smith, Susan Marie. "Bridging Death and Life: An Alaskan Athabaskan Funeral Experience." *Liturgical Ministry* 7 (1998): 9-22.
- Smith, Susan Marie. "Confirmation as Perlocutionary Response to Infant Baptism in the Episcopal Church: a Suggestion from Liturgical Hermeneutics." *Liturgical Ministry* 9 (2000): 72-83.
- Stancliffe, David, Bp. "Liturgy and Ecumenism." *Liturgical Ministry* 17 (2008): 114-26.
- Thompson, Thomas A. "Mary in Western Liturgical Tradition." *Liturgical Ministry* 6 (1997): 1-10.
- Truemper, David G. "Intercessory Prayer in the Churches of the Augsburg Confession: From the 1520s to the Book of Concord (1580)." *Liturgical Ministry* 2 (1993): 15-21.
- Vogel, Dwight W. "Pressing On: Recollections on the Form of Protestant Spirituality for a Midwestern Youth of the Mid-twentieth Century." *Liturgical Ministry* 10 (2001): 215-16.
- West, Fritz. "The German Lutheran and Roman Catholic Lectionaries: A Historical Comparative Study." *Liturgical Ministry* 13 (2004): 181-91.
- Weiss, Joseph E. "Marriage Rites." *Liturgical Ministry* 5 (1996): 1-9.
- Witvliet, John D. "Learning about Ecumenical Relationships; Personal Reflections after Thirteen Years of Work at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship." *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (2010): 128-33.
- Zimmerman, Joyce Ann. "Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications." *Liturgical Ministry* 18 (2009): 46.
- Zimmerman, Joyce Ann. "Do this in Remembrance of Me: a Ritual Approach to Reformed Eucharistic Theology." *Liturgical Ministry* 18 (2009): 44.
- Zimmerman, Joyce Ann. "One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism." *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (2010): 45.

And all of this is with good reason. Liturgical scholarship has been and clearly is an ecumenical endeavor with multiple liturgical pastoral implications. Even in those several essays not directly concerned with specific ecumenical examples, situations, or contexts the fact of the matter is that most liturgical topics having to do with Christian initiation, the Eucharist, daily prayer, the liturgical year, and otherwise, all have ecumenical resonances because almost all Christians are dealing with the same or similar issues.

This essay, however, actually a synthesis and update of several of my essays on liturgy and ecumenism over the past several years,² is not directly concerned with providing an overview of the relevant articles in *Liturgical Ministry*. Rather, in grateful recognition for the ecumenical role that *Liturgical Ministry* has played and continues to play, I offer here an overview of where we have been, what the current situation is, and where we might go from here from within a shared ecumenical-liturgical vision.

1. Where We Have Been

Viewed from this side of the liturgical reforms and renewal of the Second Vatican Council and the similar reforms that took place in so many churches since the 1960s and 70s, we are the recipients of a rich liturgical-ecumenical heritage and treasure that has shaped all of us, both directly and indirectly. Indeed, this heritage might be summarized by pointing to the following now common characteristics or goals of what is generally agreed across denominational boundaries should take place in Christian worship, namely, that the focus of our identity and mission is our common baptism into Christ, both for infants and for those adults formed by the restored catechumenate; that the word of God is to be proclaimed clearly, audibly, intelligibly, and with dignity by carefully prepared readers; that ministers, presiding and otherwise, know their particular roles in the assembly and might carry them out in a manner befitting the worship of the trinitarian God; that bread which looks, smells, feels, and tastes like (and, of course, *is*) real bread is broken and shared, and where wine, rich and good wine, is shared in common; that the other sacraments or "sacramental rites" are seen as corporate and communal events with the rich and abundant use of the sacramental signs of water and oil and the healing and benedictory gestures of hand-laying and touch; that the Liturgy of the Hours is the church being itself in its constant, prayerful, eschatological, intercessory, and expectant vigil; that the Paschal Triduum, especially the Great Vigil of Easter, prepared for by a renewing, baptismal in orientation, forty-day Lent

and an ensuing fifty-day period of paschal joy are seen as the pulsating center and heartbeat not only of the liturgical year but of life in Christ; and that the community itself, both in assembling to do *leitourgia* and in scattering for its missions of *martyria* and *diakonia* knows itself—“fully, actively, and consciously”—as that Body of Christ it receives and celebrates so that it may itself be broken for the life of the world.

Further, within this received ecumenical vision of liturgy, even the very style of how many of us “do” worship has also changed dramatically, so dramatically, in fact, that contemporary eucharistic celebrations among Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and several others often look (architecture and vestments), sound (shared musical and other texts), and are, essentially, the same.

There is no question, of course, but that the greatest ecumenical-liturgical gift has been the three-year Lectionary, the Roman Catholic *Ordo Lectionum Missae* of 1969, which since then has been adapted and used in various versions, the most recent being the *Revised Common Lectionary* of 1992, by “some 70 percent of Protestant churches in the English-speaking world.”³ With regard to the *Revised Common Lectionary* Horace Allen wrote that: “... it ... marks the first time since the Reformation that Catholics and Protestants find themselves reading the scriptures together Sunday by Sunday. ... Who would have thought that 450 years after the Reformation, Catholics would be teaching Protestants how to read scripture in worship?”⁴

In fact, it is precisely the use and preaching of the Lectionary in these 70 percent of Protestant churches in the English-speaking world that has led as well to the recovery and introduction of the liturgical year itself, even, somewhat ironically, in those churches known historically for their rejection of the calendar of feasts and seasons.⁵ And, at the same time, this ecumenical-liturgical consensus, in part, has brought about within Protestantism a reassessment of the place of Mary and the saints in liturgical calendars and feasts among Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, and others that in previous generations would have been impossible.⁶

Closely related to this common ecumenical approach to the reading and proclamation of Scripture in liturgy has been also a common liturgical language, at least, throughout the English-speaking world. Thanks to the liturgical texts produced by the now much maligned, misinterpreted,⁷ and demolished International Commission on English in the Liturgy (better known by its abbreviation, ICEL), together with the International Commission on English Texts and the English Language Liturgical Consultation, English-speaking Christians throughout the world have been using essentially the same texts for

*Within this received
ecumenical vision of liturgy,
even the very style of how
many of us “do” worship
has also changed dramatically.*

what we used to call the “Ordinary of the Mass” (*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei*) together with the dialogical responses and/or other acclamations of the liturgy. This, of course, has meant that Christians from one tradition might easily worship in another even without the need to have a text in their hands!

Common theologies of worship or rationales to undergird contemporary changes have been articulated as well. If in the 1960s and early 1970s there is no question but that base was provided by Gregory Dix’s fourfold *Shape of the Liturgy*, which he took as stemming from rubrical directions based on the biblical accounts of the Last Supper (“taking,” “thanking,” “breaking,” and “sharing”), that “shape” has now been largely abandoned as a hermeneutical or ordering principle. Here too, of course, must be added the significant 1982 Faith and Order document of the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*, which showed at that time a remarkable ecumenical convergence in rite and theological interpretation. In his highly influential books, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*⁸ and *What Are the Essentials of Christian Worship?*⁹ Gordon Lathrop has suggested that what is essential and, therefore, central and “normative” for Christian worship is a liturgical *ordo* or overall “pattern” for the scheduled ritual of Christian worship which is both ecumenical and trans-cultural. This *ordo*, in part, is based on the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in the New Testament (especially the Emmaus account in Luke 24), the

description of baptismal and Sunday worship provided by Justin Martyr in his *First Apology*, as well as traditional confessional documents and current ecumenical convergence in liturgical practice and interpretation within a variety of churches. According to Lathrop, this *ordo* is easily discernible as the very common “core” of Christian worship throughout the ages.¹⁰ Hence, ecumenical liturgists are increasingly asserting that the very *ordo* or core of Christian liturgy is constituted by the *Sunday* assembly of the *baptized*, who *Gather*, hear the *Word*, share the *Meal*, and are *Sent* on mission in the world. Together with the concept of the *ordo* it is also important to note that the writings of liturgical theologians like Russian Orthodox Alexander Schmemmann, British Methodist Geoffrey Wainwright, Roman Catholics Aidan Kavanagh, Ed Kilmartin, and, more recently, Louis-Marie Chauvet are read and discussed by everyone in the field.

In the past ten years or so, however, this common ecumenical vision has come under not only contemporary critique by some but also outright hostility by others. To that I now turn.

2. The Current Situation

James White once asked what seemed then to have a rather obvious answer: “Why teach ecumenism when I can teach liturgy?”¹¹ But, unfortunately, this approach is becoming less likely or possible today and certainly the answer is much less obvious. The most serious ideological challenge to the above ecumenical–liturgical consensus and vision, in fact, was certainly the 2001 Vatican document on translation, *Liturgiam authenticam*, a source of frustration to so many both within and outside the Roman Catholic Church which is resulting in the new English translation of the third edition of the *Missal* of Paul VI, now slated for liturgical use beginning on the First Sunday of Advent, 2011. In what is taken as a clear repudiation of the work of the former ICEL and English-speaking ecumenical cooperation in general, the following statement in *Liturgiam authenticam* makes the relationship rather clear from Rome’s perspective: “Great caution is to be taken to avoid a wording or style that the Catholic faithful would confuse with the manner of speech of non-Catholic ecclesial communities or of other religions, so that such a factor will not cause them confusion or discomfort.”¹²

Now, just what might this be? If the now approved translation of the *Ordo Missae* is any indication, then “the manner of speech of non-Catholic ecclesial communities” must be that of liturgical greeting and response (e.g., “And also with you” as the response to “The Lord be with you”) as well as the English texts of the *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei* since these are now being rendered in a word for word equivalent translation. But these very texts in their earlier

form appeared in the still approved English translation of the *Missal* of Paul VI in 1970 and in subsequent editions. The *Lutheran Book of Worship*, which employs the similar texts, did not appear until 1978 and the American Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* (which also employs similar texts) in 1979, with other churches preparing their worship books either at the same time or subsequent to these publications. More recent books such as *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* in 2006 contain the most recent on those common texts. That is, “the manner of speech of non-Catholic ecclesial communities” in their liturgical language is based directly on the manner of *Catholic* liturgical speech because it is adapted directly *from* already existing Catholic liturgical speech! It is not and simply could not have been the other way around, even if for Roman Catholics ecumenical consultation had been a part of the process.

With regard to these and other sorts of claims in *Liturgiam authenticam*, Presbyterian ecumenist and liturgist Horace Allen of Boston University has said,

The politics of this document are quite obvious. The emphasis on required Vatican approval, the insistence on decisions by conferences of bishops, as opposed to the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, and the dismissive references to “Protestant ecclesial communities” and their representatives is clear. It signals the effective termination of the longstanding international partnership between the Catholic International Commission on English in the Liturgy on the one hand, and the Consultation on Common Texts and the English Language Liturgical Consultation on the other. Toward the end of this sad reversal of many years of happy and fruitful ecumenical collaboration, it is stated with what must be an extraordinarily sardonic note, “From the day on which this instruction is published, a new period begins” for the liturgical use of vernacular languages. It adds that the norms established apply to previous translations, “and any further delay in making such emendations is to be avoided.” As a committed ecumenical liturgist of at least three decades, I can only say in response to *Liturgiam Authenticam*: No! And how sad.¹³

And he is quoted elsewhere as saying that as a result of this document, “the entire ecumenical liturgical conversation and dialogue is over—finished, dead, done.”¹⁴

Until only quite recently, I had considered Allen’s response to be an exaggeration based on his personal frustrations over the apparent end of years of the ecumenical-liturgical work he himself had done. But this anti-ecumenical sentiment, which he so strongly deplores, had clearly been in the works prior to *Liturgiam authenticam* itself in 2001. In his recent book, *It’s The Eucharist, Thank God*, Bishop Maurice Taylor (former member of ICEL) describes in detail the demolition of

the former ICEL and its replacement under the direct control of Rome rather than under the conferences of bishops that make it up. In reference to a statement in a 1999 letter to ICEL by then head of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Cardinal Medina, “ICEL was forbidden to provide any more original texts and *was ordered to cease having contacts ‘with bodies pertaining to non-Catholic ecclesial communities.’*”¹⁵ Taylor writes,

... [O]ur contacts with non-Catholic liturgical agencies had resulted in a number of agreed common texts for prayers etc. used by other Christians as well as Catholics; this ecumenical initiative was appreciated by non-Catholics and its prohibition by the Congregation for Divine Worship (*contrary to the founding conferences’ instructions*) was a great disappointment to many non-Catholics and, in fact, also to the Holy See’s Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.¹⁶

With this, therefore, it could not be clearer that the new translation of the *Roman Missal* has, as part of its operating principles and make-up, a decidedly anti-ecumenical agenda! And this, no matter how one might evaluate the merits or demerits of the translation itself, constitutes a scandal in light of the past forty plus years of common ecumenical liturgical work. At least at the level of shared liturgical texts Allen is completely correct: “the entire ecumenical liturgical conversation and dialogue is over—finished, dead, done.”¹⁷ As such, *Liturgiam authenticam* and the forthcoming translation of the *Missal* find their logical place in connection to the 2000 Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, which, unlike previous statements, not only defines what constitutes a “church,” and which faith communities actually can be called churches (in distinction to the ambiguous term, “ecclesial communities”) it boldly goes where no document had gone before and redefines *Lumen gentium* 15, which stated that *the church of Jesus Christ fully subsists in the Catholic Church, with the pre-Conciliar theology that the church exists fully in the Catholic Church.* It would be difficult not to view Benedict XVI’s 2007 *motu proprio Summorum pontificum* (especially the rather revisionist sounding claim that the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass had never been abrogated) as belonging to the same kind of reinterpretation currently in vogue and expressed by the “sound bytes” or “talking points” of a hermeneutics of “continuity versus rupture” and a somewhat restorationist agenda called the “reform of the reform,” according to the *real* meaning of Vatican II, as though the bishops who had both approved and implemented the liturgical reforms and had celebrated the Mass, Office, and other sacraments in Latin throughout their lives did not know

*In the past ten years or so,
however, this common
ecumenical vision has come
under not only contemporary critique
by some but also outright
hostility by others.*

and could not have possibly known or understood what they were doing. The issue appears, at some level at least, to be one of maintaining a specific and particular kind of *Catholic* identity over and against not only the world but other forms of Christianity as well. In such a view the ecumenical goal, as witnessed perhaps in the recent Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum coetibus*, aimed at forming an Anglican Ordinariate within the Roman Catholic Church, seems no longer to be the full communion of *churches* based on several years of bi-lateral dialogues as much as it is again a process of return to or entry into the Roman Catholic Church of individuals or groups, a “home to Rome” mentality, where the one church of Christ continues to “exist fully.”

For those of us formed and reared in the ecumenical-liturgical vision and spirit of the past forty plus years, it becomes rather easy to despair and lament this current situation and to be tempted even to give up the liturgical-ecumenical task entirely. Indeed, what Peter Jeffrey writes in his commentary on *Liturgiam authenticam* seems to be coming truer with each passing day: “On the basis of documents like LA [*Liturgiam authenticam*] we could never bring back the Counter Reformation Church ... But we could erect a cruel caricature of it, vastly more impoverished and repressive than the original ever was. There are

none-to-subtle indications that this is just what LA's talk of a 'new era' [of liturgical renewal] really means."¹⁸

How, then, shall we respond to these developments without despairing? Where, indeed, shall we go from here regarding the relationship between ecumenism and liturgy? What shall we do? This is addressed in the following section.

3. What Shall We Do Now?

The good news is that there is no turning back. The ecumenical spirit (Spirit?) unleashed by the World Council of Churches, the Second Vatican Council, and the modern liturgical reforms will not easily be silenced. Things are not as they were before the documents *Lumen gentium*, *Unitatis redintegratio*, and *Ut unum sint* as well as others (e.g., *Nostrae aetate*) concerned with various facets of ecumenism within the Roman Catholic Church in relationship with other Christian churches and other world religions. Indeed, although there are several who claim that ecumenism and the ecumenical movement have largely disappeared or, at least, have been put on the back burner, there have been signs of great progress in recent years both between East and West,¹⁹ and in the West between Rome and certain Reformation traditions.²⁰ One might claim, in fact, that ecumenism is no longer the exception but the rule, that it has actually deepened and become simply a part of the way most contemporary Christians live in the world and in their churches today, in spite of what appear to be official steps leading away from this. Certainly it is in an ecumenical manner that reputable Christian scholars continue to work, especially in the field of liturgical studies. The words of Robert Taft, on the occasion of his receiving the *Berakah* award from the North American Academy of Liturgy in 1985 remain true:

Ecumenism is not just a movement. It is a new way of being Christian. It is also a new way of being a scholar. Ecumenical scholarship means much more than scholarly objectivity, goes much further than just being honest and fair. It attempts to work disinterestedly, serving no cause but the truth wherever it is to be found. It seeks to see things from the other's point of view, to take seriously the other's critique of one's own communion and its historic errors and failings. ... In short, it seeks to move Christian love into the realm of scholarship, and it is the implacable enemy of all forms of bigotry, intolerance, unfairness, selective reporting, and oblique comparisons that contrast the unrealized ideal of one's own church with the less-than-ideal reality of someone else's.²¹

Indeed, the continued study of liturgy, as the title of this essay notes, will remain and must remain ecumenical in its approach. It was such ecumenical study of the sources East and West that brought about the contemporary liturgical reform and renewal in the first place. Various elements of that reform and renewal might be criticized today in the light of more recent scholarship (e.g., the hegemony of the so-called *Apostolic Tradition*, ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome, ca. 215, in modern reform, but which is probably not Roman, Hippolytan, third century, or apostolic²²), but this is nothing other than the result of the same kind of historical-critical-theological scholarship that has marked and will continue to mark the ecumenical endeavor. We abandon such a critical-ecumenical approach to liturgical study to our own peril and replace history and theology with ideology and mythology.

I still think that it is much too soon to make a generalization about the future of ecumenical-liturgical dialogue and conversation based on this. Although, after the First Sunday in Advent, 2011, we might no longer have common liturgical texts in English, churches of a similar liturgical-sacramental tradition will still be talking about that shared, ecumenical *ordo* of liturgy, a common *pattern* of worship, which, for many traditions is not necessarily bound to specific editions or books. That has not changed and, for that matter, we are not even talking about a *new Roman Missal* in this case; it is still the *Missal* of Pope Paul VI. The Latin texts of that *Missal* have not changed other than, of course, the inclusion of more recent feasts. Further, we *are* all still singing and/or praying the same basic texts as we always have, the same basic Western eucharistic liturgy with slightly different language (maybe just enough to trip us up in each other's churches now). Indeed, everything I stated above about contemporary liturgy remains an accurate description with the lone exception of a common language. Reputable graduate programs in liturgical studies will remain ecumenical in terms of faculty and student makeup. Liturgical organizations like the North American Academy of Liturgy, the international *Societas Liturgica*, and the more recently formed international Society of Oriental Liturgy, together with the standard English journals in the field like *Worship*, *Studia Liturgica*, and, of course, *Liturgical Ministry*, will remain ecumenical in their leadership, membership, editorial boards, and contributors. No, the loss of a common liturgical language for the Ordinary of the Mass may be a (temporary?) ecumenical setback and an end to some forms of convergence, but it is surely not yet the end of "ecumenical liturgical conversation and dialogue." If anything, it may well spark the beginnings of an even increased conversa-

tion, perhaps even the beginning of joint work on new and shared common liturgical texts.

It is, of course, true that the ecumenical-liturgical movement, in spite of the best intentions and hard work, has not produced the sort of new ecclesial-communal *persona* that so many of us hoped it would. But what it has contributed toward is the ecumenical formation and identity of those in the field of liturgical studies itself as well as in related fields of study (especially in Scripture and church history). As the 1982 “Methodist-Catholic Statement: The Eucharist and the Churches,” says, “... in respect to biblical theological and liturgical matters we may share more in common with our dialogue partners than we do with many persons within our own communions.”²³ This is a rather common phenomenon especially among liturgical scholars and students, constituting, as it were, a core following within various churches whose Christian identity, through academic study and liturgical participation, tends to transcend those ecclesial boundaries into situations of greater communion. Several years ago Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner urged theologians to take more seriously what he termed “actual faith” rather than “official faith” in the pursuit of Christian unity. At the level of the “actual faith” of Christians within differing traditions, Rahner said that

... their sense of faith ... is identical with that of Christians belonging to another denomination. They believe in God; they entrust their lives to this living God of grace and forgiveness; they pray; they are baptized and celebrate the Lord's Supper; they recognize Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, as the definitive guarantor of God's saving bestowal of himself on them; they live the gospel; they know, too, that to be a Christian in this sense obliges them to participate in a corresponding *community* of faith, the Church. The traditional points of controversy between the Churches ... are unknown to them, or are unimportant, or are at most noted and accepted as part of [a] provisional and relative character ..., and which is accepted nowadays as belonging naturally to the historical contingency of the human situation.²⁴

Elsewhere Rahner referred to this unity at the level of the “actual faith” of Christians as constituting a kind of “Third Church,” that is, not a new denomination separate from the churches, but as constituting a common Christian ground *within* the churches seeking and moving toward greater realization in a greater Christian unity.²⁵ This is, precisely, an apt description of those of who study and are formed by the ecumenical nature of the liturgy.

So what are we to do now? I would suggest that there is nothing new to do other than what we have been doing already. That is, we who have been formed by the

*The good news is that
there is no turning back.
The ecumenical spirit (Spirit?) ...
will not easily be silenced.*

ecumenical vision and spirit of liturgical study dare not let go of that vision and spirit since the full and visible unity of Christianity has not yet been accomplished. Shortly after his recent retirement, Walter Cardinal Kasper (former president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity), while expressing his thanks for the progress made between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, nonetheless lamented the fact that at the end of his tenure the official sharing of the Eucharist together between Protestants and Catholics had not yet become a reality. And, in pointing toward this unfinished ecumenical agenda, he said, “We can no longer afford to stick to our differences.”²⁶ And, indeed, it was Kasper himself who as recently as February, 2010, suggested the possibility of even an official ecumenical catechism, affirming “our common foundation in Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity as expressed in our common creed and in the doctrine of the first ecumenical councils.”²⁷

4. Conclusion

In *Ut unum sint* Pope John Paul II asked *the* ecumenical question, when he wrote, “How is it possible to remain divided if we have been ‘buried’ through baptism in the Lord’s death, in the very act by which God, through the death of his Son, has broken down the walls of division? Division openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature.”²⁸ How is it possible, indeed? But before *Ut unum sint* Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians Karl Rahner and Heinrich Fries developed a series of the-

*We who have been formed
by the ecumenical vision
and spirit of liturgical study
dare not let go of that vision
and spirit since the full and visible
unity of Christianity has
not yet been accomplished.*

ses articulating how possible it would be to establish full visible Christian unity in our age based on various theses emerging from the ecumenical dialogues on Creed, Baptism, Eucharist, and even the office of Petrine ministry in the church. At the same time these theologians were realistic enough to state that they did not think such would happen. Why? The answer then and now remains rather frustrating, though not without hope:

We think that all the churches act with too much tactical caution in the quest for actual unity. They do not really come out courageously with declarations as to what the conditions are under which they are really prepared to unite with other churches, even with sacrifice. Each church waits for the other church to take the initiative and to express very clearly what it could not truly relinquish without, in its own religious conscience, incurring guilt before God. Nor do they express what does not belong thereto and can, therefore, be relinquished in order to fulfill Jesus' commandment. . . . We ourselves are pessimistic with regard to the question of whether the officials of all these churches can bring about unity in the near future . . . But we are convinced—and to that extent

optimistic—that there is an objective possibility today for creating a satisfactory and speedy church unity.²⁹

And in the conclusion of their study Rahner and Fries issued a challenge that must be taken still today with the utmost seriousness, especially in light of recent ecumenical setbacks:

People can deny and close their minds to the call of grace and to the hour, to the signs of the times. People—expressed in human terms—have caused the separation of the Church into confessions. People can alter history and renew it; and they must do so if what happened was not good and if it brought harm or scandal. . . . The indispensable prayer to the Lord of the Church for the unity of Christians and of the churches must not be an alibi for human sloth and lack of imagination; instead, it must be the ever-new motivation to an attitude and mind-set which is expressed in the rule of Taizé: "Never be content with the scandal of separated Christendom. Have the passion for the unity of the body of Christ."³⁰

Such passion for the unity of the Body of Christ, indeed, for the ecumenical formation of all Christians, is well expressed in the litany prayed at Saint John's Abbey each year during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, from which the following is adapted:

Let us pray that Christians everywhere may heed God's call to become one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as we say: Lord, make us one.

- Lord, bless our brothers and sisters in the church of Rome; may their preservation of the catholic substance of the faith, their commitment to the historical continuity of the church, and their love for the Eucharist enrich and challenge all Christians.

- Lord, bless our brothers and sisters in the churches of the East; may they continue to enrich your church by their faith in the Holy Spirit, their love for the Divine Liturgy, and their respect for ecclesiastical tradition.

- Look especially on our brothers and sisters in the Armenian Apostolic Church; may their suffering bear witness to the forgiving love, which you have shown us in Christ Jesus.

- Bless our brothers and sisters of the Anglican Communion; may their respect for diversity and individual conscience challenge the whole church, and their treasures of language and music never cease to magnify your holy Name.

- Bless our Lutheran brothers and sisters; may their love for the Scriptures and their faith in your all-sufficient

grace help us all to receive your salvation as purest gift.

- Bless our brothers and sisters of the Reformed Tradition; may they continue to edify the church with their preaching and inspire us all by their dedicated work for your kingdom.

- Bless our brothers and sisters of the Free Church Tradition; may their warmth and enthusiasm bring new life to the work and prayer of your Church.

- Bless us and all Christians; may we come to that perfect oneness which you have with your Son in the unifying love of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray the prayer given by Jesus to all who believe in him: Our Father . . .

Concluding Prayer: Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic Church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord.³¹

Amen. May it truly be so that our individual ecclesial identities be shaped by this kind of formation.

1. *Liturgy and Ecumenism, Liturgical Ministry* 19 (Summer 2010).
2. See "The Loss of a Common Language: The End of Ecumenical-Liturgical Convergence?" The Aidan Kavanagh Lecture, October 10, 2006, *Colloquium: Music, Worship, and the Arts* (New Haven: Yale Institute of Sacred Music, 2010): 27-39 (another version of this essay appeared in *Studia Liturgica* 37 [2007] 55-72); "Building Christian Unity" in Gervase Holdaway, OSB, ed., *The Oblate Life* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008): 231-35; "Not 'Sheep Stealing': Christ Calls Us to Be One/No es Robar Ovejas: Cristo Nos Llama a la Unidad," *Oye! 2008* 4 (August, 2007): 24-5; "'Satis Est': Ecumenical Catalyst or Narrow Reductionism?" *Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers #11: Liturgy in a New Millennium, 2000-2003*, ed. Rhoda Schuler (Valparaiso: Institute of Liturgical Studies, 2006): 158-72; "Liturgy and Ecumenism: Gifts, Challenges, and Hopes for a Renewed Vision," The Godfrey Diekmann Lecture, *Worship* 80, 1 (January 2006): 2-29; "Romans 6 and the Identity of the Church: Towards a Baptismal Ecclesiology," *Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation* 22, 5 (September, 2000): 22-36; "Let's Stop Making 'Converts' at Easter," *Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation* 21, 5 (September, 1999): 10-20; and "Planning and Leading Liturgical Prayer in an Ecumenical Context," *Pro Ecclesia* VIII, 2 (Spring, 1999): 187-200.
3. Horace Allen, as quoted by John Allen, Jr., "Liturgist Says Ecumenical Dialogue is 'Dead,'" *National Catholic Reporter* (May 24, 2002).
4. *Ibid.*
5. On this see James White, "Protestant Public Worship in America: 1935-1995" in *Christian Worship in North America: A Retrospective: 1955-1995* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007) 129.
6. In addition to the official dialogues of the various churches, see David Butler, "Mary in 'Re-Reformed' Tradition," *Liturgical Ministry* 6 (1997): 31-36; David M. Petras, "Mary in Eastern Liturgical Tradition," *Liturgical Ministry* 6 (1997): 11-20; Thomas A. Thompson, "Mary in Western Liturgical Tradition," *Liturgical Ministry* 6 (1997): 1-10;

- and my own "The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary: A Lutheran Reflection," *Worship* 67, 3 (1993): 226-38.
7. No one really has much right to criticize the work of the former ICEL until they have read in detail the 1992 doctoral dissertation, unfortunately not published, of Jeffrey M. Kemper, *Behind the Text: A Study of the Principles and Procedures of Translation, Adaptation, and Composition of Original Texts by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1992).
 8. Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
 9. Gordon Lathrop, *What Are the Essentials of Christian Worship?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1994).
 10. Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 33- 83.
 11. James F. White, "A Protestant Worship Manifesto," *Christian Century* 99, 3 (January 27, 1982) 84.
 12. *Liturgiam authenticam* 40.
 13. Horace T. Allen, Jr., "Ecumenist Calls Rome's Translation Norms Unrealistic, Authoritarian," *National Catholic Reporter* (June 29, 2001).
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. Maurice Taylor, *It's the Eucharist, Thank God* (Brandon, Suffolk, United Kingdom: Decani Books, 2009), 52 [emphasis added].
 16. *Ibid.*, 53 [emphasis added].
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. Peter Jeffrey, *Translating Tradition; A Chant Historian Reads Liturgiam Authenticam* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, A Pueblo Book, 2005) 97.
 19. See Robert Taft, S.J., "Mass without Consecration? The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001," *Worship* 77, 6 (2003): 482-509.
 20. See Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 1999, available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html
 21. Robert Taft, S.J., "Response to the Berakah Award: Anamnesis" in *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 2nd ed. (Rome 1991), 287.
 22. See Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).
 23. *Origins*, 11, 41 (25 March 1982), 651-59, here at 653. See also Gerard Austin, "Identity of a Eucharistic Church in an Ecumenical Age," *Worship* 72, 1 (1998), 26-35. See also my grateful response to him, "A Response to Gerard Austin's 'Identity of a Eucharistic Church in an Ecumenical Age,'" *Worship* 72, 1 (1998), 35-43.
 24. Karl Rahner, "Is Church Union Dogmatically Possible?" in Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XVII: *Jesus, Man, and the Church* (New York; Crossroad, 1981), 209.
 25. Karl Rahner, "Third Church?" in Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XVII: *Jesus, Man, and the Church* (New York; Crossroad, 1981), 215-27.
 26. "Vatican cardinal says lack of shared communion his greatest regret," *Ecumenical News International* (July 22, 2010) at <http://eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=4291>.
 27. "Cardinal Asks Dialogue Partners if an Ecumenical Catechism Might Work?" *Catholic News Service* (Feb. 8, 2010) at <http://www.catholic-news.com/data/stories/cns/1000540.htm>
 28. *Ut unum sint* 6. See also my essay, "Liturgy and Ecumenism: Gifts, Challenges, and Hopes for a Renewed Vision," *Worship* 80, 1 (2006): 2-29.
 29. Karl Rahner and Heinrich Fries, *Unity of the Churches: An Actual Possibility* (Minneapolis and Mahwah: Fortress Press and Paulist Press, 1985), 9-10.
 30. *Ibid.*, 140.
 31. *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson and the Monks of Saint John's Abbey (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 1731-32.